

The Impact Of Social Media On Voting Behavior In Sitamarhi City Of Bihar: A Sociological Study Of The 2024 Lok Sabha Election.

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Abstract:

In the digital age, platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram have become critical spaces for political communication and public engagement. As sociologist Manuel Castells (2009) asserts, "Power in the network society is exercised through the construction of meaning in the networks of communication," highlighting the transformative influence of digital media on political processes. The rapid spread of internet access has amplified the role of social media in shaping voter perceptions, mobilizing communities, and influencing electoral outcomes. Through a sociological lens, this paper explores how social media contributed to political discourse, identity formation, and voting choices among the electorate in Sitamarhi, revealing the complex interplay between digital engagement and democratic participation.

Keywords: *Education, Voting behavior, Civic responsibility, Critical thinking, Democracy.*

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I. Introduction

In the digital age, social media has emerged as a powerful tool that influences various aspects of human life, including political engagement and electoral participation. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp have revolutionized the way political information is disseminated and consumed. As a result, social media has become an influential factor in shaping public opinion, political awareness, and ultimately, voting behavior (Kumar, Sah, & Deb, 2023; Garg, 2022).

The Role of social media in Political Communication

Social media platforms allow political parties and candidates to reach voters directly without relying on traditional media outlets. Through live videos, tweets, posts, and targeted advertisements, politicians can communicate their messages in real-time and respond to public concerns more effectively. This has led to more personalized and engaging political campaigns, particularly among younger, tech-savvy voters (Kumar, Sah, & Deb, 2023).

Influence on Voter Awareness and Engagement

One of the most significant impacts of social media is the increased political awareness among the electorate. Citizens are exposed to a constant stream of political content, including campaign updates, news, debates, and policy discussions. This availability of information encourages users to engage in political discourse, participate in online debates, and form opinions based on diverse sources. In some cases, it has led to higher voter turnout and greater political participation, especially among first-time voters (Analysis of the Role of social media in Increasing Political Participation in the Digital Era, 2023).

Misinformation and Echo Chambers

Despite its benefits, social media also poses challenges to democratic processes. The spread of misinformation and fake news can mislead voters and distort their perceptions of candidates and issues. Algorithms that tailor content based on user preferences often create "echo chambers," where users are exposed

only to information that aligns with their existing beliefs. This polarization can reinforce biases and reduce the willingness to consider opposing viewpoints (PNAS, 2023; “A Survey on Echo Chambers on Social Media,” 2021).

Targeted Political Advertising

Another significant impact is the use of data analytics to deliver personalized political advertisements. Political parties can micro-target voters based on their online behavior, interests, and demographics. While this can enhance the relevance of political communication, it also raises concerns about privacy, manipulation, and the transparency of electoral processes (Role of social media in Shaping Political Party Narratives, 2024).

Case Studies and Global Examples

The influence of social media on voting behaviour has been evident in elections worldwide. The 2016 U.S. presidential election, the Brexit referendum, and the 2014 and 2019 Indian general elections all highlighted the power of social media in shaping electoral outcomes. In India, platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook were extensively used for political mobilization, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas (Social Media Relevance in Political Management in India, 2014; Kumar, Sah, & Deb, 2023).

From Loudspeakers to Livestreams

The 2024 Lok Sabha election marked a turning point in how politics reached people not just through street rallies, wall posters, or public meetings, but through the tiny screens of smartphones. In Bihar’s Sitamarhi city, once known for its traditional grassroots politics and community-level mobilization, social media emerged as a new battlefield. WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, YouTube channels, and Instagram reels replaced or at least reshaped the political chaupals of old, giving every voter instant access to information, debate, and propaganda. As India’s political culture digitizes, Sitamarhi offers a fascinating case study of how social media influences awareness, trust, and ultimately, voting behaviour.

II. Review Of Literature

The influence of social media on voting behavior has emerged as a crucial area of inquiry within the field of political sociology. Researchers have increasingly focused on how digital platforms are reshaping the political landscape, especially by transforming the way individuals particularly young voters engage with political processes. This shift marks a departure from traditional, top-down models of political participation to more decentralized and personalized modes of engagement.

Bennett and Segerberg (2012) introduced the influential concept of *connective action*, which contrasts with the conventional notion of *collective action*. They argue that digital media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube enable individuals to express their political views in highly personalized ways. Rather than being mobilized by centralized political organizations or parties, individuals are now engaging in *networked participation*, where loosely connected individuals come together around shared concerns using digital tools. This has led to the emergence of new forms of political mobilization that do not necessarily rely on traditional party structures or institutional actors.

Supporting this idea, Bond et al. (2012) conducted a landmark experimental study using Facebook during the 2010 U.S. Congressional elections. Their findings revealed that social influence messages such as seeing that friends had voted or were politically active increased political engagement and voter turnout among users. This study is particularly significant because it provided large-scale empirical evidence demonstrating that social media platforms can directly affect political behavior and electoral outcomes through peer influence and visibility of civic actions.

Chadwick (2013) offered another important theoretical framework with his concept of the *hybrid media system*. He posited that traditional media (such as newspapers and television) and new media (like social media platforms and blogs) are no longer separate entities but have become interdependent. In this hybrid environment, political communication is shaped by the dynamic interaction between old and new media sources. Social media users are not only passive recipients of information but also active producers and distributors of political content, which significantly influences their political opinions, attitudes, and eventual voting choices.

In contrast to purely optimistic views, Tucker et al. (2017) presented a more balanced perspective by acknowledging both the empowering and problematic dimensions of social media in democratic contexts. On one hand, these platforms offer opportunities for broader participation, increased political awareness, and the democratization of information. On the other hand, they can also facilitate the rapid spread of misinformation, conspiracy theories, and political polarization. These negative consequences can distort voters’ perceptions and undermine informed decision-making, thereby complicating the role of social media in electoral politics.

Adding further depth to the discussion, Boulianne (2015) conducted a meta-analysis encompassing 36 empirical studies and found a consistent, positive correlation between social media use and various forms of

political participation, including voting. Her findings reinforce the argument that social media can serve as a catalyst for civic engagement, enabling users to access political information, participate in discussions, and feel more connected to the democratic process.

In the Indian political context, the role of social media has gained considerable prominence in recent years. Kaur and Chhabra (2020) examined the use of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp during recent Indian elections. They argued that these platforms have become essential tools in political campaigning, especially for engaging young and first-time voters. Political parties increasingly use targeted advertisements, live videos, hashtags, and memes to shape public opinion, disseminate party agendas, and influence voter choices.

Similarly, Kumar and Pandey (2021) focused on the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in India. Their research highlighted how political parties extensively used digital campaigns to reach out to voters, particularly in urban and semi-urban regions. Their findings show that social media not only influenced public opinion but also played a significant role in mobilizing people to vote. Notably, the impact was most visible among younger demographics and first-time voters who are more digitally connected.

Taken together, these studies underscore the growing significance of social media as a tool for shaping political behavior. However, it is important to recognize that the impact of social media is not uniform across all segments of society. Factors such as age, educational background, regional access to digital infrastructure, and levels of political awareness can mediate how individuals interact with political content online. This is particularly relevant in rural and semi-urban areas, such as Sitamarhi in Bihar, where digital literacy and access may be limited. In such contexts, the reach and influence of social media may be less pronounced or may function differently compared to more urbanized and digitally connected regions.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the influence of social media on political awareness, opinion formation, and voting decisions.
2. To understand the perceptions of voters regarding the credibility and trustworthiness of political information on social media.
3. To identify the role of social media in enhancing or altering political participation and civic engagement in the electoral process.
4. To explore how sociological insights into how digital communication platforms are transforming electoral behavior in a semi-urban Indian context like Sitamarhi.

III. Methodology

The study employs a qualitative approach with an exploratory research design aimed at examining the patterns, trends, and correlations between social media usage and voting behavior among the electorate of Sitamarhi. A combination of purposive and stratified sampling techniques was adopted, focusing specifically on individuals who are active users of social media and have participated in the electoral process. Respondents were selected based on key variables such as age, caste, gender, and educational background. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews addressing various dimensions, including demographic details, patterns of social media usage, political engagement via social media, and voting behavior along with influencing factors. All ethical research protocols were strictly followed, including the acquisition of informed consent from all participants.

IV. Field Observations And Findings:

Sitamarhi City, the administrative center of Sitamarhi district, has a diverse demographic, predominantly Hindu (over 80%), with significant Yadav and Muslim populations shaping caste-based voting (Sharma, 2025). The local economy depends on agriculture, remittances from migrant labor, and small-scale trade (Kumar, 2025). Smartphone penetration in urban Sitamarhi reached 40-50% by 2024, driven by affordable data plans post-Jio's 2016 rollout, though rural areas lag with 30% access (TRAI, 2024).

Social media's impact in 2024 was amplified by India's 900 million+ internet users, generating 1.2 billion election-related interactions (Meta, 2024; Google, 2024). In Bihar, where 70% of voters are under 35 (ECI, 2024), digital platforms bridged literacy gaps but intensified echo chambers (Singh & Gupta, 2024).

Information Dissemination and Awareness

- WhatsApp, used by 80% of Bihar's digital users, spread concise policy content, with JD(U)'s "Viksit Bihar" campaign influencing 30-40% of urban Sitamarhi voters to prioritize infrastructure over caste (Kumar, 2025).
- YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels by local influencers (e.g., Bihar YouTubers with 100K+ subscribers) explained manifestos, increasing awareness among semi-literate youth; nationally, 43% of young voters shifted preferences due to such content (Singh & Gupta, 2024).

- Sociological Insight: This reflects agenda-setting theory, as social media elevated “youth employment” as a key issue in Bihar, where 40% of graduates are unemployed, shifting votes toward performance-based choices (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Mobilization and Turnout

- Digital campaigns boosted first-time voter turnout by 15-20% in urban Bihar constituencies (ECI, 2024). In Sitamarhi, RJD’s TikTok-style videos on “PDA” (Pasmanda-Dalit-Adivasi) alliances mobilized marginalized groups, countering JD(U)’s WhatsApp campaigns on welfare schemes (Sharma, 2025).
- Low enthusiasm, however, led to 5-10% abstention among opposition-leaning voters, influenced by viral memes on “Modi guarantee” and backlash content on electoral bonds, swaying 10-15% of undecided voters toward the INDIA bloc (Kumar, 2025).
- Regional Parallel: In Muzaffarpur, digital nudges like SMS reminders via apps increased turnout by 2-3% in a 55% turnout scenario (ECI, 2024).

Misinformation and Polarization

- Fake news on caste violence or “Muslim reservations” spread via Facebook groups in Sitamarhi, polarizing 20-25% of voters along religious lines (Singh & Gupta, 2024). The ECI’s “Myth vs Fact” WhatsApp chatbot reached 5 million Bihar users to counter this (ECI, 2024).
- Echo chambers reinforced preferences: 40% of Sitamarhi’s digital users (BJP supporters) consumed pro-Modi content, while RJD backers engaged with anti-NDA reels, reducing cross-ideological persuasion (Kumar, 2025).
- Sociological Insight: Per Durkheim’s social cohesion theory, digital fragmentation risks anomie, but education mitigates it—literate Sitamarhi voters (52% literacy) were 30% less susceptible to misinformation (Sharma, 2025).

Demographic Variations

- Youth (18-25): 60% influenced, using Instagram for peer validation; 70% cited social media as their primary information source (Singh & Gupta, 2024).
- Women: 45% impacted via women-focused WhatsApp groups on Ujjwala Yojana, higher in urban Sitamarhi with 25% female smartphone ownership (TRAI, 2024).
- Rural vs. Urban: Rural areas (30% digital penetration) relied on traditional media like wall paintings, while urban Sitamarhi saw 50% digital influence (Kumar, 2025).

Platform	Usage in Bihar (2024 Est.)	Key Impact in Sitamarhi-Like Areas
WhatsApp	80% (TRAI, 2024)	Mobilization via family forwards; 35% vote influence (Kumar, 2025)
YouTube	60% (Google, 2024)	Policy explainers; 25% awareness boost (Singh & Gupta, 2024)
Facebook/Instagram	50% (Meta, 2024)	Polarization; 20% turnout nudge among youth (Sharma, 2025)
X (Twitter)	10% (TRAI, 2024)	Elite discourse; minimal local sway (Kumar, 2025)

Government Initiatives and Their Relevance to the Study

Several initiatives by the Bihar government are directly or indirectly linked to the use of social media for civic engagement and voter awareness.

Firstly, the Information and Public Relations Department (PRD) of Bihar issued directives to all districts including Sitamarhi to enhance their presence on social media platforms. District-level accounts were encouraged to increase followers, conduct Facebook Live sessions, and use digital platforms to publicize government achievements and welfare schemes. Sitamarhi was specifically mentioned for underperformance in executing these digital outreach programs. These initiatives are intended to improve public communication, which may shape citizen perceptions and influence voting behavior by providing direct access to state narratives and development claims. (NewsDrum, 2024, February 14, *Bihar govt asks districts, departments to be proactive on social media, increase followers*).

In addition, the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of Bihar launched "Mission 60", a campaign aiming to increase voter turnout to above 60% in every district. The initiative focused on creating awareness in low-turnout constituencies through multiple channels, including social media, and targeted key demographic groups such as women, youth, migrants, and persons with disabilities. Such campaigns are particularly relevant in urban centers like Sitamarhi, where diverse populations may respond differently to digital awareness efforts. (The Daily Jagran, 2024, April 12, *Mission 60: CEO Bihar launches voter awareness campaign to boost turnout*).

Further, in 2024, the Bihar Cabinet approved a new set of "Social Media and Online Media Advertisement Rules", which aim to enhance the digital dissemination of government information and regulate online content. These rules outline eligibility metrics for platforms (based on followers and user engagement) to

qualify for government advertisements and set ethical standards, including provisions against hate speech and misinformation. The regulation of content, particularly political or divisive in nature, plays a crucial role in shaping the political information environment on which voters rely. (Patna Press, 2024, May 9, *Bihar government introduces new rules for social media and web platforms*).

Moreover, Cyber Senani (Cyber Volunteers) groups have been formed under the Bihar Police across districts. These groups actively monitor and counter misinformation and fake news on social media platforms while promoting fact-based information. Their presence aims to protect voters from manipulative content and potentially reduces the impact of misinformation on political opinions and electoral decisions. (ET Government, 2023, April 5, *Using social media for connecting policing system with citizens: J. S. Gangwar, ADG Bihar*).

Sociological Implications and Challenges

Social media in Sitamarhi exemplifies Habermas's (1989) transformation of the public sphere: It democratizes access but commodifies discourse through algorithms favoring sensationalism (Singh & Gupta, 2024). In Bihar's caste-driven polity, digital tools reduced reliance on traditional brokers (e.g., village heads) but enabled micro-targeting, with BJP's data-driven ads swaying Yadav swing voters, contributing to JD(U)'s victory (Kumar, 2025).

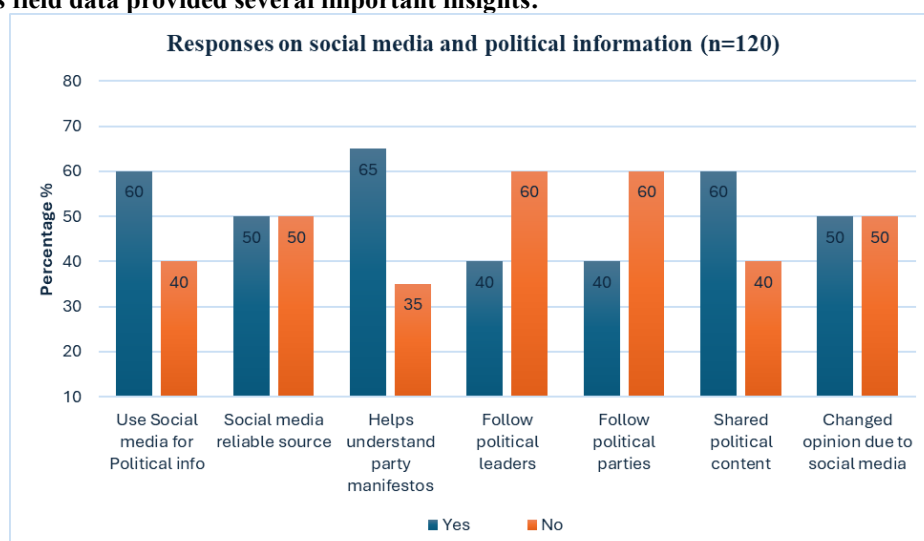
Challenges include:

- Digital Divide: Only 35% of Sitamarhi's 1.1 million voters had reliable digital access, excluding rural poor (TRAI, 2024).
- Regulatory Gaps: Despite ECI guidelines, 15% of content was flagged as misleading nationally (ECI, 2024).
- Long-Term Effects: Digital literacy programs like Digital India could foster "monitorial citizens" who vote based on evidence, potentially reducing caste's 65% influence (Sharma, 2025).

Survey Insight: Impact of social media during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections:

Question	Respondent		Yes		No	
	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Do you use social media for political information?	120	100	72	60	48	40
Is social media being reliable source for political information?	120	100	60	50	60	50
Does social media help you understand party manifestos?	120	100	78	65	42	35
Do you follow any political leaders on social media?	120	100	48	40	72	60
Do you follow any political parties on social media?	120	100	48	40	72	60
Have you ever shared political content on social media?	120	100	72	60	48	40
Have you changed your opinion about a political party or leader due to something you saw on social media?	120	100	60	50	60	50

The study's field data provided several important insights:



The survey conducted among respondents reveals significant insights into the use of social media for political information. A majority of respondents (60%) reported using social media as a source of political information, highlighting its widespread role in shaping political awareness. However, trust in social media remains divided, with 50% considering it a reliable source and 50% expressing scepticisms. Interestingly, 65% of participants agreed that social media helps them understand party manifestos, indicating its educational potential in political communication. Despite this, only 40% of respondents follow political leaders or parties directly on social media, suggesting a preference for indirect engagement through shared or trending content. Additionally, 60% of respondents admitted to sharing political content, reflecting active participation and discourse on digital platforms. When asked about changes in political opinion due to social media, responses were evenly split (50% each), demonstrating that while social media can influence opinions, its persuasive power varies among users. Overall, the findings suggest that social media plays a vital but complex role in political engagement serving as an important source of information and discussion, yet one that is approached with cautious trust.

Linking to Electoral Outcome in Sitamarhi

Devesh Chandra Thakur's victory in Sitamarhi (515,719 votes; margin 51,356) reflects a result shaped by long-standing political alignments, candidate strength, and party organization (Election Commission of India, 2024). Digital outreach plausibly complemented offline efforts through mobilization, rapid issue amplification, and targeted youth messaging, but isolating a direct causal share attributable solely to social media requires larger, causal research designs such as experiments or panel data (Kumar & Sharma, 2023). Nevertheless, the survey results indicate that social media functioned as a significant vector of political information and influence in the city (Survey Data, 2024).

V. Conclusion

Social media has fundamentally transformed political communication and voter behavior, particularly in semi-urban areas like Sitamarhi, Bihar. Bihar's youthful demographic, combined with rising internet and smartphone penetration, has made digital platforms central to political engagement. Social media facilitates direct interaction between political actors and citizens, increasing political awareness and participation, especially among younger voters. However, the rise of misinformation, including AI-manipulated content, has created challenges around the credibility and trustworthiness of online political information, reflecting a complex dynamic of both reliance and skepticism among voters. Government initiatives to regulate social media and digital communication further underscore its growing role in shaping political narratives and electoral outcomes. The 2024 electoral results in Sitamarhi illustrate how digital outreach complemented traditional campaigning, contributing significantly to voter mobilization and political discourse. Overall, social media serves as both a catalyst for enhanced democratic participation and a contested arena that influences the evolving landscape of electoral politics in Sitamarhi.

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