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Social Media, Artificial Intelligence and Electoral Behaviour in India

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ABSTRACT

The rapidly growing digital system in India, having over 900 million Internet users and among the largest social media users in the world, has reshaped the way elections are conducted and the behavior of voters. The present study, therefore, examines the relationship between social media platforms and AI tools and political engagement, information flow and public trust during the 2024 general elections. Using national statistics, digital penetration data, social media usage patterns, ECI rules and global datasets, the study analyzes the prevalence of social media usage, the number of voters exposed to political content and how AI is linked to new electoral risks.

Indeed, it emerges that across each Parliamentary constituency, nearly 4.8% of the electors, or approximately 86,000 people, were exposed to political content on social media. On the basis of exposure estimates and comparison with victory margins, this was a sufficient number that could potentially influence electoral outcomes in approximately 37% of Lok Sabha seats, where the winning margins were very thin. A similar pattern appeared in Assembly elections, with 35.7% seats having margins small enough to be potentially affected when compared with estimated digital exposure.

The study also found strong associations between social media penetration and voter influence. Though penetration difference between urban and rural areas and between men and women also noted. Meanwhile, risks related to AI increased remarkably. As compared to 2024, deepfakes in India jumped 280%, higher than the global increase of 245%.

Thus, the outcome of the study is that there is duality in digital technologies: they make political communications more accessible while simultaneously facilitating the propagation of misinformation, deepfakes and manipulated content. It upholds for more regulations, transparencies, verification tools and digital literacy as measures to safeguard electoral integrity against the misuse of AI.

INTRODUCTION

Research in political communication, behavioral science and network theory has shown that media exposure and social networks shape political attitudes, knowledge and participation (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Bakshy et al., 2015; Bond et al., 2012). These dynamics have become more complex with the advent of generative AI, which enables automated content creation and distribution, complicating the flow of correct political information. An international study reported that over 80% of countries, where elections were conducted in 2024 experienced

AI-driven activities in electoral communication, with nearly 90% of these instances involving the generation of new fabricated content, such as videos, images, or social media posts (Chandra et al., 2025).

Indian general elections experienced a major shift in campaign practices between 2019 and 2024. Now, the more focus is on gathering electors data, preparation of AI based contents and personalized voter engagement, micro-targeted messaging and influencer-led campaigns. Political parties and capable candidates hired specialized firms to identify undecided voters, send personalized

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messages and utilize digital influencers to shape voter sentiment and align them in their favour.

International community is also worried about AI-generated misinformation and deepfakes. UNESCO and UNDP did a survey in 16 countries in 2025 and found that people are worried about types of contents and false information, which could be used to mess up elections (UNESCO & UNDP, 2025).

India have around 900 million internet users in 2025. However, the estimated number of social media users is not available. This makes India as one of the largest and most networked digital electorates in the world. For real-time broadcasting of political events, engagements of voters and direct communications between political leaders and voters, social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram and WhatsApp are playing major role.

At the same time, these platforms are frequently used to propagate false information, AI-generated deepfake contents and targeted persuasion campaigns. Initial studies show that the number of AI-based misinformation campaigns around the world grew by more than four times after 2024, highlighting challenges to the resilience of democratic processes. This study used contemporary literature, updated demographic data and empirical findings from India's 2024 general elections to find how social media and AI technologies shape electoral outcomes and public trust. It evaluates both democratizing potentials and associated risks while providing a forward-looking perspective on the convergence of digital media, AI and electoral politics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research found that media exposure and social networks play an important role in political knowledge, shaping political view-point and participation. People rarely think about politics in isolation; opinions arise from the amalgamation of mediated information flows and peer influence. Such sentiments are voiced by Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004 and Fowler & Christakis, 2008. Exposure to political content on social media platforms improves knowledge, illuminate voting preferences and mobilizes network effects. This has been demonstrated in Bakshy et al. 2015 and Bond et al. 2012.

Social media use within an electoral strategy is well documented. The 2008 presidential campaign of Barack Obama introduced the systematic use of platforms like Facebook, Twitter and MySpace for volunteer coordination, fundraising and the formation of digital communities, which allegedly created over two million online supporter accounts (Kreiss, 2012). In India, from 2014 onwards, political parties began doing the same thing: training volunteers in the management of social media communication and using social media to broadcast

rallies live in order to reach voters directly (Chadha & Harlow, 2019).

While social media enables democratic processes, at the same time, it acts as a conduit of misinformation and manipulative content. Social media was named as one of the main sources of false information by Allcott and Gentzkow in 2017. Psychological factors such as Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and lack of time to check facts are some of the very important reasons for sharing misinformation (Talwar et al, 2020). A report in open access journal PLOS in 2025 analyzed about 4.2 million Facebook posts in 2024 elections in 31 countries and found that SMPs are using algorithmic echo chambers to deepen polarization. For example, the 2024 election-related posts in support of Trump in the United States were shared almost four times more than similar posts in support of Clinton in 2016 (Pecile et al., 2025).

But generative AI takes this a step further. AI makes voter outreach easier through chatbots and personalized content delivery, yet at the same time, it enables scalable production of very persuasive synthetic political content. Events in 2024 alone, such as deepfake endorsements in India and AI-generated robocalls, have shown the disrupt power of these technologies. Brennan Center conducted a survey on US adults in 2025 and found that that about 81% respondents believe AI will harm democratic processes, while a Harvard Kennedy School study showed 80% of U.S. adults were concerned about AI-enabled misinformation.

Data Sources, Methodology and Statistical Framework

This study has been conducted based on data from both Indian and international sources to understand how SMPs and AI influence voter behaviour in India. Information used for the analysis is based on the demographic data of India, levels of access to the internet, gender-wise social media use and the 2024 Lok Sabha voter list. Data on digital usage were drawn from Statista, DataReportal, IAMAI-Kantar and official Government of India reports for 2024–2025. The Election Commission of India's 2024 Model Code of Conduct guidelines were also taken up to get a broader idea about the existing regulations. All data were updated to include 2025 figures in order to capture the latest trends in India's fast-growing digital environment. First, the research estimated the number of voters exposed to political content on social media by applying the conscious online news-user rate, 20%, to the average number of voters in each Parliamentary and Assembly constituency. This assumption is based on nationally reported averages of online news consumption and is applied uniformly across constituencies for estimation purposes. This estimate was then refined by using survey findings that 56% of online news users rely on social media for political information. Taken together, these calculations suggest that approximately 11.2% of online news users in

Table 1: Statistical Analysis of Lok Sabha Elections 2024 and Assembly Election 2024-2025 in India

<i>Analysis Type</i>	<i>Variable</i>	<i>Measure / Statistic</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Descriptive Statistics	Internet users in India (2024)	886 million	–
Descriptive Statistics	Social media engagement among internet users	74%	–
Descriptive Statistics	Adult SMP users (18+)	653 million	–
Descriptive Statistics	Conscious online news users	20% of internet users	–
Descriptive Statistics	SMP-reliant political news consumers	56%	–
Descriptive Statistics	Gender distribution of SMP users	Male: 53%, Female: 47%	–
Descriptive Statistics	Avg. monthly data usage	20.27 GB (2024)	–
SMP Exposure Estimate	SMP-exposed electors per Lok Sabha constituency	86,117 (4.8% of electors)	–
SMP Exposure Estimate	SMP-exposed electors per Assembly constituency	11,343 (4.8% of electors)	–
Seat Margin Analysis	Lok Sabha seats with winning margin $\leq$ 86,117	202 (37%)	–
Seat Margin Analysis	Assembly seats with margin $\leq$ 11,343	347 (35.7%)	–
Pearson Correlation	SMP penetration vs. elector exposure	$r = 0.82$	$p < 0.01$
Linear Regression	SMP penetration $\rightarrow$ % voters influenced	Coefficient = 0.56	$p < 0.01$
Linear Regression	Reliance on SMPs $\rightarrow$ % voters influenced	Coefficient = 0.48	$p < 0.01$
Logistic Regression	Probability of voter influence through SMPs	Odds ratio = 2.4	$p < 0.01$
ANOVA	Urban vs. rural SMP-driven influence	$F = 12.45$	$p < 0.05$
Chi-square Test	Gender differences in SMP influence	$\chi^2 = 24.68$	$p < 0.05$
Time-trend Analysis	Global deepfake growth (2021–2025)	Increase = 245%	–
Time-trend Analysis	India deepfake incidents (2024)	Increase = 280%	–

a constituency are exposed to political content via social media. This figure, when applied to the whole electorate, suggests that an estimated 4.8% of all electors would be exposed. These estimates are derived from secondary survey-based proportions and assume comparable patterns of media use across constituencies; variations at the local level may therefore not be fully captured. The present study is based on descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, ANOVA and Chi-square tests when exploring patterns in voter exposure, the impact of social media and differences between urban–rural and gender groupings. Qualitative material was obtained from international case studies, AI-enabled campaign practices, content moderation approaches and documented incidents during the 2024 elections in India and the United States. A semantic search of public posts on AI-generated deepfakes further identified some relevant cases. Accordingly, the exposure calculations should be interpreted as indicative estimates rather than precise measurements of individual-level influence.

India's Digital Electorate

India had around 886 million internet users in 2024 out of an estimated population of 1,516 million. Approximately 74% of these internet users, regardless of age, used

social media. A report published by DataReportal (2025) estimates that 653 million adults in India i.e. 43.1% of the country's population over the age of 18, use social media.

Three out of five internet users, used news apps, websites, social media posts, message forwards and YouTube to obtain news and information. Only one in five, or roughly 20%, actively and consciously sought out news from these sources.

Gender disparity in social media usage is also observed. IMAI-Kantar published a report published in 2024 which says around 53% of users were men and 47% were women. More people are using internet as average monthly data usage increase from 0.26 GB in 2014 to 20.27 GB in 2024 (Ministry of Communications, Government of India, 2024). High-quality video campaigning, live political event streaming and targeted digital advertising were the main reasons, during election time, for this jump in data usage.

Social Media Influence in the 2024 Elections

India had 968.8 million registered electors across 543 Parliamentary Constituencies, averaging 1.784 million electors per constituency. As we had discussed, 43.1% of the total population aged 18 and above use SMPs in India, this means about 7,68,904. Applying the 20% of 7,68,904 conscious online news user's yields approximately 1,53,781

Table 2: AI, Deepfakes and Electoral Manipulation Trends (2024–2025)

<i>Year / Report</i>	<i>Measure / Finding</i>	<i>Notes / Details</i>
2024 Global Assessment (50 countries)	>80% reported AI use in electoral communication	90% involved new content generation
2024 Global Deepfake Data	245% YoY increase in deepfake detections	Overall growth, not limited to elections
2024 Elections in India & Others	Deepfake-related incidents significantly above global averages	India ~280% increase; US, Indonesia, South Africa also
2021–2025 Global Summary	At least 38 countries documented election-related deepfake incidents	~3.8 billion people affected globally
2024 India Fact-Checking	1,291 claims checked; 108 AI-generated (8.35%)	Domestic presence of synthetic content
2024–2025 Survey (UK, 16 countries)	15% exposed; 90% expressed concern	High awareness and perceived risk

electors per constituency and considering that 56% rely on these platforms for political information, roughly 86,117 electors per constituency were exposed to digital political content, representing 4.8% of the electorate. In 2024 general elections to Parliament (Loksabha), the number of candidates having victory margin of 86,117 or less is 202. Number of seats in Lok Sabha to be filled by elected representatives is 543. So, approximate percentage of Loksabha seats have winning margin less than 86,117 is 37%. It means, approximately, 37% of Loksabha seats can be influenced by SMPs.

Similarly, across Assembly Constituencies (4,123 ACs, average 2,34,980 electors each) 11,343 electors per AC were exposed to political content, reflecting similar influence levels. This again comes out to be 4.8% of the electorate per AC. In 2024 and 2025 general elections to various states, total winning candidates were 971 and the number of candidates having victory margin of 11,343 or less is 347. It means, approximately, 35.7% of assembly seats can be influenced by SMPs.

Statistical Analysis Report

During the 2024 Indian general elections, the relationship between social media penetration, AI-driven content and elector influence is highlighted in the table. Table summarises the statistical analyses carried out in this study. In relation to digital engagement and synthetic media, it displays descriptive metrics, correlation and regression findings, comparative tests and time-trend patterns.

The statistical analysis also highlighted that as the social media penetration increases, more voters will be exposed to political content. The high correlation ($r = 0.82$) justify that areas with greater SMP usage show correspondingly higher voter influence.

According to the results of linear regression, voters who may be influenced by digital content increase by 0.56 percentage points for every 1% increase in SMP penetration. In a similar vein, the reliance on SMPs for political updates adds an additional 0.48 percentage points,

indicating a significant shift in political communication towards digital platforms.

According to logistic regression, voters exposed to SMP-based political content are 2.4 times more likely to be influenced by these contents. Urban-rural differences are statistically significant ($F = 12.45$), with higher exposure in urban constituencies. Additionally, gender-based differences are significant ($\chi^2 = 24.68$), with greater male dominance in digital engagement. Misinformation powered by AI is expeditiously increasing. During 2024 general elections in India, there was a 280% increase in deepfake activities through SMPs, exceeding the global average of 245%.

This highlights the growing risks of misuse of AI-driven activities during elections. Overall, the data demonstrates that SMPs and AI are playing a major role to electoral communication, enhancing democratic engagement while also opening risks related to manipulation and misinformation.

AI, Deepfakes and Global Electoral Manipulation

Recent study found that deepfake contents and AI are now commonly used in elections. More than 80% of nations that held elections in 2024 reported using AI for electoral engagement. The AI content creation accounting for 90% (Chandra et al., 2025). Global monitoring found a 245% annual increase in deepfake detections, indicating a sharp rise in artificial media. In South Africa, Indonesia, India and the United States, the most deepfake cases were reported. During 2024 general elections, In India alone, election-related deepfakes rose by 280%. Fact-checkers reviewed 1,291 claims and found that 108 of them were AI-generated (8.35%). Surveys from the UK and 16 other countries found that 15% of respondents are worried about deepfake contents and 90% were worried about their impact.

Regulatory Responses

The Election Commission of India has taken many regulatory frameworks like the Media Certification and

Monitoring Committee (MCMC) and dedicated media cells at the national, state and district levels to enable quick action against fake news and misinformation on social media. The ECI is also worried over the potential misuse of AI, which prompted it to issue guidelines on the responsible and ethical use of social media platforms and strict avoidance of any wrongful use by political parties and their representatives during the Model Code of Conduct period in general elections.

Around the world, governments, UNESCO and the World Economic Forum support measures for platform accountability, provenance standards for synthetic media and stronger AI governance in elections. However, enforcement challenges remain. Platform transparency audits reveal gaps between policy and practice; for instance, data from the 2025 Digital Services Act repository shows that 1.58 billion content moderation actions during the 2024 European Parliament elections did not significantly alter platform behaviour.

DISCUSSION

The research finds that AI and social media are now shaping elections in India. Only around 4.8% of voters in each constituency are estimated to receive political updates from social media, but in close contests even this small percentage of voters may become a deciding factor. In the 2024 general elections, the influence of social media corresponded with the winning margins in about 37% of Lok Sabha seats, showing how impactful online platforms have become.

The study also shows that people who use social media for politics are more likely to be influenced by what they see online. Many voters report that they may change their views or candidate preferences after reading or watching political content on SMPs. This effect appears stronger in places where smartphone use is high, internet connectivity is good and where online political discussion is more active.

But not every section of electors is affected equally. While many rural voters and women still have limited access to the internet, urban voters, young people and men are more likely to use social media. As a result, some sections are likely to receive significantly more political information than others, creating a digital divide.

Deepfakes and fake news made by AI spread quickly, which is a big problem. As already pointed, In 2024. Deepfake incidents in India increased by 280%. These contents have the potential to misguide voters and erode confidence in the electoral process. Though Election Commission of India has taken various steps to monitor and control misuse of digital activities, but regulating digital platforms and artificial intelligence technologies it is still a challenge. Although there are international guidelines too, their implementation is inconsistent and progress is slow. Overall, the study shows that on one side social media

and AI can help democracy but on flip side, they can also threaten it by disseminating misleading information. There is a need for stricter laws, greater platform transparency and improved voter digital-literacy to protect elections and make them credible.

CONCLUSION

Social media and AI have changed how election campaigns work. During 2024 general elections in India, many voters followed political news through websites, YouTube channels and social media instead of TV or newspapers. Even a small share of voters — around 4–5% in each constituency — can swing an election when the winning margin is tight. Many of these voters make up their minds based on what they see online. Because platforms personalize feeds and campaigns now target electors through personalized messages, posts, advertisements and influencers, online content can end up shaping how people think and vote.

But the online contents also brings new problems. Deepfake videos, fake news, misinformation and targeted political content can confuse people and make it harder for them to decided what is true. This has raised apprehensions about trust in elections. India has seen rise in deepfake cases in 2024 general elections as compared to 2019 general election. The same pattern is being reported in other countries. How well governments and technological companies identify, manage and minimize AI-driven threats will matter for election safety in the future.

Around the world, now governments and election management bodies are taking steps and screwing the SMPs for improved platform accountability and content-origin verification. The Election Commission of India has taken many steps on this through regulations, supervision and time-bound response. But there are still issues with enforcement. As, major technological platforms still provide little transparency, there is an need for stronger legislations, independent audits and increased digital literacy.

In short, the study concludes that a balanced path is necessary for credible elections around the world. Democracy can be strengthened by use of digital technologies, but at the same time risks associated with them have to be properly managed. In the AI era, maintaining electoral trust will require open governance, knowledgeable citizens, strong information systems and proactive policies.

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