Impact of Social Media Journalism on Public Opinion during Indian Elections

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Abstract

The present study examines the impact of social media journalism on public opinion formation during Indian elections, with specific reference to credibility, agenda setting, framing of political news, and emotional appeal. Using a structured questionnaire, data were collected from a sample of 300 respondents. The reliability of the measurement scale was established using Cronbach's alpha, indicating satisfactory internal consistency of the constructs. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was employed to identify and validate the underlying dimensions of social media journalism, and the results confirmed the adequacy of the data for factor analysis. Pearson's correlation analysis was then used to examine the relationships between the identified dimensions and public opinion formation. The findings reveal significant positive correlations between credibility, agenda setting, framing of political news, emotional appeal, and public opinion formation, highlighting the influential role of social media journalism in shaping public perceptions during elections. The study underscores the growing importance of responsible and credible social media journalism in influencing democratic processes in the Indian electoral context.

Key words: Credibility, Agenda Setting, Framing of Political News, Emotional Appeal, Public Opinion Formation and Social Media Journalism.

Introduction

Social media journalism's explosive growth has drastically changed India's political communication environment, especially during election seasons. With the proliferation of platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp, news dissemination has become faster, more interactive, and decentralized, enabling citizens to access political information beyond traditional print and broadcast media (Kapoor et al., 2018). During Indian elections, social media journalism which is defined by user-generated content, real-time reporting, and algorithm-driven news visibility plays a critical role in influencing political knowledge, views, and voting behaviour.

Social media has become a potent weapon for political campaigning and narrative construction in India, the biggest democracy in the world with a varied and technologically connected populace (Chadwick, 2017). Social media platforms are actively used by journalists, citizen reporters, and political players to define election concerns, rally voters, and shape public conversation. According to studies, social media journalism increases political engagement by promoting discussion, involvement, and exposure to other points of view (Loader & Mercea, 2011). However, issues that might skew public opinion and jeopardize democratic processes have been brought up, including false information, fake news, political polarization, and algorithmic prejudice (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

Social media journalism has changed agenda-setting and voter opinion formation throughout recent Indian elections, in addition to amplifying political messaging (Newman et al., 2020). Understanding its influence on public opinion is therefore crucial for appraising the developing role of digital media in political democracy. This research tries to explore how social media journalism impacts public opinion during Indian elections, with specific emphasis on information credibility, political framing, and voter perception.

Literature Review

Tejavathi (2025) the report emphasizes how political players are depending more and more on micro-campaigning strategies to sway public opinion, such as influencer-based messaging, targeted ads, and data-driven voter segmentation. Urban youth, who exhibit greater levels of political involvement through digital platforms than through conventional media, are given special attention. The report does, however, also point out important issues, such as the quick dissemination of false information, political divisiveness, and the deterioration of media gate keeping. Stronger media literacy and regulatory frameworks are needed, according to the author, who contends that although social media increases democratic involvement and political communication's immediacy, its unchecked use jeopardizes election fairness and informed decision-making.

Sen and Mishra (2025) individualized digital outreach via social networking platforms has replaced traditional mass communication. To engage voters and shape political narratives, political parties successfully employed social media journalism, short-form films, live streaming, and targeted messages. The authors note that these tactics had a big impact on public opinion, especially among urban and first-time voters. But the study also draws attention to issues with selective exposure, echo chambers, and unethical political communication. The study comes to the conclusion that although social media has become an essential part of contemporary Indian elections, unrestrained digital campaigning puts democratic discourse at danger and calls for open electoral communication regulations.

Paswan and Hemalatha (2025) the study summarizes empirical research showing that social media platforms have two functions: they increase voter mobilization, political knowledge, and involvement while also escalating political divisiveness and disinformation. The authors point out those voters' opinions of politicians, parties, and policy concerns are greatly influenced by their exposure to political information through social media journalism. However, ideological prejudices are frequently reinforced by algorithm-driven material distribution, which restricts the ability to evaluate politics objectively. In order to make sure that social media is a useful instrument for democratic involvement rather than a source of manipulation and division, the study highlights the necessity of fact-checking procedures and ethical journalistic standards.

Sharma and Sivakumar (2023) social media frequently sets the political agenda before mainstream media coverage. The study demonstrates how political players were able to communicate directly with voters by circumventing traditional journalistic gate keeping through the use of internet media. By emphasizing visually appealing and emotionally charged information, this change had a substantial impact on popular opinion. The authors warn that

although social media increased real-time involvement and political participation, it also eroded editorial control, leading to sensationalism and false information. According to the study's findings, social media has significantly changed how journalism, political communication, and public opinion interact in India.

Purkayastha (2025) young voters are increasingly forming their perspectives about elections and government through online political debates, social media journalism, and digital news sources. Young people's political knowledge, mobilization, and issue-based participation are greatly influenced by platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and X. According to the study, social media facilitates digital activism, political speech, and interactive discourse, all of which lessen participation barriers. But the study also cautions that young voters are more susceptible to algorithmic prejudice and false information. In order to guarantee informed political engagement among India's youth voters, the author highlights the significance of digital literacy efforts.

Shivaraju (2025) there will be a shift from general social media message in 2019 to complex, data-driven, targeted communication in 2024. To sway public opinion, political parties are using analytics, platform-specific tactics, and tailored ads more frequently. According to the research, voter opinions and issue salience were greatly impacted by this customization. But it also exacerbated selective exposure and political division. The author comes to the conclusion that, even though social media has taken centre stage in influencing election behaviour, regulatory monitoring is necessary to maintain democratic justice and fair political debate.

Abah et al. (2025) the study emphasizes how voter views and decision-making are influenced by algorithmic information distribution, political advertising, and micro targeting. The authors note that social media journalism quickly amplifies political narratives in the Indian setting, frequently strengthening echo chambers and ideological polarization. According to the study, disinformation and emotionally charged content disproportionately influence public opinion, even while digital platforms improve political involvement and information availability. The authors contend that in order to protect democratic processes, social media's propensity to sway elections highlights the necessity of moral journalistic standards, open political advertising, and platform accountability.

Jain and Meena (2024) the study emphasizes the importance of real-time reporting, audience engagement, and faster news distribution. Journalists may reach a larger audience with social media journalism, but it also puts pressure on them to put virility ahead of verification. The writers point out that because of its emotional appeal and immediacy, political news disseminated via social media greatly influences public opinion. However, trustworthiness is weakened by moral issues including false information, click bait, and a lack of editorial control. The study indicates that while social media has democratized journalism, maintaining ethical standards is vital to preserve public trust during elections.

Dilawar Singh (2025) the study emphasizes how social media has made political information more accessible, facilitating alternative narratives and citizen journalism. This type of journalism greatly affects public opinion during elections by influencing voter views and political arguments. The author does, however, highlight the rising problems of false information, biased

reporting, and dwindling confidence in news outlets. Sensationalized political content is frequently the result of lax editorial oversight. The study comes to the conclusion that, even if social media journalism increases democratic involvement, competent political communication requires ethical reporting standards, fact-checking procedures, and regulatory actions.

Razi and Ansari (2025) in order to increase engagement metrics like likes, shares, and views, journalists are increasingly customizing political material. These dynamics affect how news is framed during elections, frequently giving priority to dramatic or divisive stories that garner public interest. The authors contend that by prioritizing emotionally charged subjects above serious policy discussions, such methods have a substantial impact on the development of public opinion. In order to counteract the negative consequences of attention-driven media on democratic debate, the study emphasizes the necessity of ethical concerns and fair reporting.

Mir and Rao (2022) the report details the growing use of digital media by political parties for story framing, voter mobilization, and campaigning. By offering up-to-date information and opposing perspectives, social media journalism was crucial in influencing public opinion. The authors note that while internet communication increased political engagement, it also fueled ideological division and disinformation. According to the study's findings, social media has fundamentally changed India's political communication environment and set the stage for increasingly complex digital tactics in next elections.

Chauhan (2024) the study demonstrates how political parties used social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp to interact with people, spread campaign messaging, and refute opposing viewpoints. By promoting political information outside of established media outlets, social media journalism significantly influenced public opinion and involvement. The report does, however, also point out how often false information and emotionally charged content are. The author comes to the conclusion that although social media increased campaign outreach, it also presented difficulties for moral political discourse and informed voter choice.

Kumar and Singh (2025) the study emphasizes how social media journalism is now crucial to shaping public opinion during elections. Voters may connect directly with political information through digital media, which shapes attitudes and views. But the authors warn that skewed narratives and unreliable facts threaten democratic debate. The study comes to the conclusion that media development has changed election communication in India, and that maintaining democratic norms requires media literacy and regulatory monitoring.

Kiran Singh (2022) social media platforms help people become more politically conscious, talk about politics, and mobilize, especially younger voters. Political narratives are framed and public perception is influenced by social media journalism. But the study also highlights the dangers of divisiveness, political manipulation, and false information. The author comes to the conclusion that although social media promotes democratic participation, responsible usage and legal safeguards are required to lessen its detrimental impact on public opinion.

Gujral et al. (2024) in order to evaluate how online public opinion mirrors election patterns, especially in the Indian context, the study examines Twitter debate. Results show that voter attitudes and social media mood are correlated, demonstrating the significant impact of online conversation on public opinion. The authors warn that online emotion could not accurately reflect voting behaviour offline. The study highlights ethical and methodological constraints while advancing knowledge of the analytical possibilities of social media data in election research.

Pecile et al. (2024) the study finds story tendencies, interaction patterns, and prevailing political themes across platforms. According to research, social media journalism greatly influences public opinion and involvement by highlighting important topics and poignant stories. The authors draw attention to how digital platforms both speed up the creation of opinions and exacerbate divisiveness. The study comes to the conclusion that social media has developed into a major platform for political communication, necessitating ethical content regulation and close observation.

Research Gap
There is still much to learn about how social media journalism specifically affects public opinion in the context of Indian elections, despite an increasing amount of scholarship analyzing the role of conventional media in influencing political discourse. There is a dearth of empirical study on India's socio-politically varied and digitally heterogeneous electorate, despite several studies examining social media usage trends and political involvement in Western democracies. Furthermore, without sufficiently distinguishing the unique journalistic practices on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, current research frequently highlights broad social media consequences like echo chambers, disinformation, or political mobilization. Finally, there is a dearth of research on how people understand and absorb news information that social media journalists select or generate, particularly in multilingual and diverse literacy contexts that are typical of Indian voters. Furthermore, research seldom examines how voter belief systems and algorithmic news distribution interact, or how trust and credibility in social media journalism compare with conventional media across various demographic groups. Consequently, there is an obvious need for methodologically sound, contextualized research that captures the subtleties of social media journalism as well as its influence on the development of public opinion throughout Indian election cycles.

Research Problem
The way political information is created, disseminated, and consumed during Indian elections has been profoundly altered by the quick development of social media journalism. In contrast to traditional media, social media platforms facilitate citizen journalism, real-time news distribution, and participatory political discourse, giving voters immediate access to political information, journalists, and opinion leaders. However, because social media journalism frequently combines factual reporting with opinion, political bias, sensationalism, and algorithm-driven prominence, this change has also raised grave questions about the reliability, objectivity, and ethical standards of election-related material. Voter perceptions, political views, and voting behavior may be significantly impacted by the extensive dissemination of false information, the

selective structuring of political narratives, and echo chambers produced by platform algorithms. There is no empirical study in the Indian context that looks at how social media journalism affects public opinion during elections, despite the fact that citizens, particularly young people and first-time voters, are becoming more reliant on social media for political news. Understanding the degree to which social media journalism shapes public opinion during Indian elections, the significance of credibility and confidence in such material, and its consequences for democratic engagement and well-informed electoral decision-making constitute the study challenge.

Research objectives
1.   To identify the underlying dimensions of social media journalism influencing public opinion.
2.   To analyze the influence of social media journalism on public opinion formation during Indian elections.

Research hypotheses
- **H_{01}:** There is no significant relationship between the credibility of social media journalism and public opinion formation during Indian elections.
- **H_{02}:** There is no significant relationship between agenda setting by social media journalism and public opinion formation during Indian elections.
- **H_{03}:** There is no significant relationship between framing in social media journalism and public opinion formation during Indian elections.
- **H_{04}:** There is no significant relationship between the emotional appeal used in social media journalism and public opinion formation during Indian elections.
- **H_{05}:** There is no significant relationship between interactivity in social media journalism and public opinion formation during Indian elections.
- **H_{06}:** There is no significant relationship between misinformation disseminated through social media journalism and public opinion formation during Indian elections.

Statistical Tools
Appropriate statistical approaches were used to investigate how social media journalism affected public opinion during Indian elections. The internal consistency of items pertaining to credibility, agenda setting, framing, emotional appeal, interaction, disinformation, and public opinion were evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis, which verified scale reliability. The underlying factor structure was found using exploratory factor analysis (EFA), and the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were used to confirm the appropriateness of the data. Lastly, correlation analysis looked at how social media journalism aspects affected the construction of public opinion, allowing for the testing of hypotheses and the assessment of the relative importance of each item.

Sampling Procedure
For the study titled *"Impact of Social Media Journalism on Public Opinion during Indian Elections"*, a **purposive sampling technique** was employed to select respondents who are active users of social media and engage with news content online. Because they are exposed to social media journalism during election seasons, this strategy guarantees that the participants are

pertinent to the study's goals. Indian people who were 18 years of age or older made up the target group, which included a wide range of demographics, including age, gender, location, and level of education. A sample size of 300 respondents was found to have enough statistical power for quantitative analysis, including factor analysis and correlation, based on previous research and viability. In order to guarantee wide reach and accessibility while preserving voluntary participation and secrecy, the respondents were contacted using online surveys that were disseminated via social media platforms, email, and messaging apps.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 300)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age (Years)	18–25	90	30.0
	26–35	120	40.0
	36–45	60	20.0
	46 and above	30	10.0
Gender	Male	150	50.0
	Female	140	46.7
	Prefer not to say	10	3.3
Education	High School	30	10.0
	Undergraduate	120	40.0
	Postgraduate	120	40.0
	Doctorate / Others	30	10.0
Geographic Location	Urban	180	60.0
	Semi-urban	70	23.3
	Rural	50	16.7
Social Media Usage (Daily)	<1 hour	30	10.0
	1–3 hours	120	40.0
	3–5 hours	90	30.0
	>5 hours	60	20.0

The sample consisted of 300 respondents with a variety of demographic traits, as indicated in Table 1. Young adults made up a sizable component of the sample, as evidenced by the fact that 40% of respondents were between the ages of 26 and 35 and 30% were between the ages of 18 and 25. With 50% of respondents being men and 46.7% being women, the gender distribution was well balanced. Only 3.3% of respondents said they would rather not reveal their gender. A well-educated respondent base is suggested by the fact that 40% of respondents were undergraduates and postgraduates, respectively. Geographically, the sample was skewed toward metropolitan regions, with 60% of respondents living in cities, 23.3% in semi-urban areas, and 16.7% in rural areas. Social media use trends showed that 40% of respondents used social media for one to three hours per day, and 30% used it for three to five hours. This highlights the sample's applicability for researching how social media journalism affects public opinion. In general, the demographic profile shows a varied and pertinent sample for the study's goals.

Reliability Test

Table: 2. Case Processing Summary of all Variables

		N	Percentage
Cases	Valid	300	100.0
	Excluded [a]	0	0.0
	Total	300	100.0

Table: 3. Reliability Test Results

Dimension	Number of variables	Cronbach's Alpha
Dimensions of social media journalism	18	0.816

Cronbach's Alpha was used to evaluate the reliability of the questionnaire evaluating the aspects of social media journalism, as shown in Table 3. With 18 variables, the scale produced a Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.816, which is higher than the generally recognized internal consistency criterion of 0.7. This suggests that the scale's elements are quite dependable and regularly gauge the fundamental concept of social media journalism. In order to investigate the influence of social media journalism on public opinion during Indian elections, the tool is appropriate for further statistical studies like factor analysis and correlation.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Table: 3. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.853
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1975.047
	Df	153
	Sig.	.000

The data are quite appropriate for factor analysis, according to the KMO and Bartlett's Test findings. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy is 0.853, indicating a respectable level of sampling adequacy and beyond the suggested threshold of 0.60. This implies that there is enough compactness in the correlations between variables to produce trustworthy factors. Additionally, the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix is rejected by Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, which is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 1975.047$, df = 153, p < 0.001). As a result, the variables exhibit strong intercorrelations, supporting the suitability of using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) in the research.

Table: 4. Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5.763	32.016	32.016	5.763	32.016	32.016
2	2.120	11.778	43.794	2.120	11.778	43.794
3	1.317	7.318	51.112	1.317	7.318	51.112
4	1.088	6.045	57.157	1.088	6.045	57.157
5	.975	5.418	62.575			

6	.906	5.033	67.608			
7	.782	4.343	71.951			
8	.731	4.058	76.009			
9	.690	3.831	79.841			
10	.584	3.246	83.087			
11	.523	2.905	85.992			
12	.486	2.697	88.689			
13	.446	2.478	91.168			
14	.419	2.325	93.493			
15	.363	2.015	95.508			
16	.311	1.725	97.233			
17	.281	1.562	98.795			
18	.217	1.205	100.000			
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.						

Four components have been obtained by using Varimax Rotation with Kaiser Normalization. 4 components were created by combining eighteen variables, each of which is made up of all the variables with factor loadings larger than 0.5. Out of the eighteen variables included in the study, 4 factors were identified. These six factors explained 57.157 percent of the variation in Indian social media users.

Rotated Component Matrix
The Rotated Component Matrix shows the correlations between the variables and the factors, or rotated factor loadings. The factor column displays the rotational factors that have been subtracted from the total factor. These fundamental components have been used as the final factor after data reduction.

Table: 5. Rotated Component Matrix

Statements	Component			
	1	2	3	4
News shared by journalists on social media is generally trustworthy during elections.	.762			
Social media journalism often frames political issues in a persuasive manner.	.753			
I consider social media news reliable when it comes from verified journalistic accounts.	.704			
Headlines and visuals on social media influence how I perceive political leaders.		.666		
Issues frequently discussed on social media influence what I think is important in elections.		.647		
Social media journalism shapes public discussions on election-related topics.		.628		
I trust election-related news more when it is shared by professional journalists on social media.			.626	
Social media journalism highlights the most important political issues during elections.			.583	

Comments, likes, and shares influence my perception of political news.		.563	
The tone of social media political news affects my opinion about election outcomes.			.674
Social media allows me to interact with journalists and political content easily.			.625
Interactive political discussions on social media shape my electoral opinions.			.581
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.			
a. 4 components extracted.			

The correlation between each extracted component and the variables is shown in the matrix above. Each variable typically has a high loading in one factor and a low loading in the others. The variable with the greatest value in each row is chosen to be a part of the related factor in order to determine which variables are included in each factor. With the exception of low loading variables, the 18 variables have been separated into four key components by highlighting the values in each row.

Correlation

Table: 6. Correlations

		Credibility	Agenda Setting	Framing of Political News	Emotional Appeal	Public opinion formation
Credibility	Pearson Correlation	1	.590**	.498**	.227**	.525**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	368.587	222.147	182.107	82.840	247.773
	Covariance	1.233	.743	.609	.277	.829
	N	300	300	300	300	300
Agenda Setting	Pearson Correlation	.590**	1	.527**	.324**	.568**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	222.147	384.787	197.027	120.460	274.193
	Covariance	.743	1.287	.659	.403	.917
	N	300	300	300	300	300
Framing of Political News	Pearson Correlation	.498**	.527**	1	.348**	.398**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	182.107	197.027	362.747	125.880	186.413
	Covariance	.609	.659	1.213	.421	.623
	N	300	300	300	300	300

Emotional Appeal	Pearson Correlation	.227**	.324**	.348**	1	.302**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	82.840	120.460	125.880	359.930	141.130
	Covariance	.277	.403	.421	1.204	.472
	N	300	300	300	300	300
Public opinion formation	Pearson Correlation	.525**	.568**	.398**	.302**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	247.773	274.193	186.413	141.130	604.997
	Covariance	.829	.917	.623	.472	2.023
	N	300	300	300	300	300
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).						

Credibility, agenda-setting, political news framing, emotional appeal, and public opinion formation are all positively and statistically significantly correlated, as Table 6 makes evident. Higher perceived credibility of social media journalism improves its capacity to establish agendas and sway public opinion, as evidenced by the substantial positive association between credibility and agenda setting (r = 0.590) and public opinion formation (r = 0.525). Additionally, agenda planning shows a considerable correlation with the development of public opinion (r = 0.568), underscoring its crucial role in influencing public views. Credibility (r = 0.498), agenda-setting (r = 0.527), and public opinion development (r = 0.398) are all moderately connected with how political news is framed, indicating that audience interpretation and opinion formation are greatly impacted. Despite being relatively weaker, emotional appeal nonetheless exhibits strong positive correlations with every variable, including the development of public opinion (r = 0.302), suggesting that emotional content influences opinion formation in addition to cognitive elements. All things considered, the results validate that several aspects of social media journalism jointly and significantly impact the development of public opinion at the 0.01 level.

Suggestions

- During Indian elections, public opinion is significantly influenced by credibility. Audiences are more likely to accept and absorb the information provided when social media journalism is seen as factual, dependable, and trustworthy. High credibility increases trust in political news disseminated on social media, boosting its persuasiveness and influencing voters' attitudes, convictions, and voting decisions.
- During elections, agenda-setting is crucial in focusing public attention on particular political issues, candidates, or events. The public's perception of what is essential is influenced by social media journalism's frequent coverage and emphasis on particular subjects. By giving some problems priority in voters' thoughts, this selective focus helps shape election discourse and greatly influences the formation of public opinion.

- The audience's interpretation of political information is influenced by how political news is framed on social media. Social media journalism influences opinions, perceptions, and emotional reactions by emphasizing specific facets of a problem or presenting news inside particular narratives. Effective framing can impact voter comprehension of political events and politicians, hence playing a substantial role in public opinion formation during elections.

- Emotional appeal is a significant aspect in social media journalism, since emotionally charged information frequently generates increased engagement and memory. Appeals based on fear, hope, pride, or fury can amplify audience emotions and change political beliefs. During Indian elections, emotional appeal reinforces messaging and helps shape opinions, even though its impact may be quite modest.

Conclusion

The study comes to the conclusion that, through a variety of interconnected factors, social media journalism significantly influences public opinion during Indian elections. Since credible and trustworthy material increases public acceptance and belief in political information, credibility emerges as a critical factor. Social media journalism's agenda-setting has a significant impact on the topics that voters find significant, which directs public conversation during elections. Voters' opinions and assessments are shaped by the framing of political news, which also influences how political players and events are seen. Despite being relatively mild, emotional appeal engages audiences and reinforces political messaging, which helps shape public opinion. When taken as a whole, these aspects show that social media journalism is more than just a medium for information sharing; rather, it is a potent tool that actively shapes public opinion and election conceptions in the democratic setting of India.

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