

# **New Media Exposure and Voter Perception: A Study of the Bihar Election**

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## **Abstract**

*This study addresses the relationship between new media (social media) exposure and voter perception in the context of the Bihar Assembly elections. The study explores the ways how the use of media influences political understanding, affects decision-making processes, and shapes public awareness. A quantitative survey was carried out using an online Google Form, gathering responses from 158 participants representing a variety of socioeconomic, gender, and income groups in Bihar. This investigation assesses how often individuals engage with social media, their interest in political topics, participation in online political discussions, and the influence of digital platforms on their political awareness. The results indicate that social media serves as a key source of political information. A significant number of participants report dedicating two to four hours or more each day to these platforms. A significant proportion of individuals consider political discussions on social media to be beneficial. The findings further suggest that gender and social classifications play an important part in shaping career opportunities, socioeconomic status, and media consumption. The study highlights the increasing impact of social media on voter behaviour and underlines the need for further research into media framing and misinformation in the context of Indian elections. Respondents from marginalized communities (SC/ ST) reported lower income levels, a pattern that significantly shaped their media access and political engagement.*

**Keywords:** Social media, voter perception, Bihar election, political communication, media framing, new media

## **Introduction**

The changing dynamics of political communication in India have transformed citizens' understanding, judgment, and engagement in electoral processes. Bihar, a state marked by significant social diversity, robust caste affiliations, and dynamic political contestations, illustrates this transformation vividly. The rapid expansion of digital technologies has made media exposure a critical factor in shaping voter perception, replacing numerous traditional

methods of political socialization. In the last ten years, platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter) have become central venues for the circulation, debate, and contestation of political messaging. Researchers have discovered that media functions go beyond mere information dissemination; they significantly influence public consciousness. George Gerbner's cultivation theory illustrates how extended exposure to media systematically shapes individuals' perceptions of social and political realities through the construction of consistent narratives over time (Britannica, n.d.). In the context of Indian elections, this theoretical insight is particularly pertinent as digital media ecosystems enhance political frames, moral cues, and ideological appeals through repetitive and emotionally charged content.

At the same time, research studies conducted in Uttar Pradesh show that voters increasingly rely on electronic and digital media to form political opinions, track election developments, and evaluate candidates (Mishra & Yadav, 2023). Research further indicates that access to political information shapes voters' confidence, decision-making, and willingness to participate in politics (Mishra, 2023). This observation is especially relevant in contemporary electoral contexts; media exposure is not merely a contextual element in elections; it has become a primary factor influencing voter perception.

Bihar, defined by its complex political history and a rapidly digitizing electorate, presents a significant context to study these dynamics. Traditional political behaviors influenced by caste networks, local influencers, and interpersonal communication now converge with controlled narratives, online persuasion campaigns, and digital activism. This intersection has resulted in a "hybrid political sphere," characterized by the interaction of online and offline influences that shape voting behavior. Despite the growing importance of digital engagement in Bihar's elections, there is an absence of scholarly research specifically addressing voter perception in this region. Existing research predominantly focuses on national trends, thereby creating a significant gap in understanding the impact of media exposure on voter attitudes in socially diverse states such as Bihar.

### **Review of Literature**

Sharma and Sivakumar (2023) show that the 2019 Indian general elections significantly changed the dynamics of political communication by reducing the traditional gatekeeping power of mainstream media. Their research indicates that digital platforms significantly shape media priorities, emphasizing the effect of online political discourse—such as viral posts, memes, and hashtags—on the visibility of public issues.

Azad (2023) looked at social media campaigning during the COVID-19-restricted Bihar Legislative Assembly election, revealing that political actors rapidly transitioned from physical rallies to online outreach. Social media has emerged as a significant platform for youth to communicate their messages, gain visibility, and contextualize issues.

Daxecker et al. (2025) studied misinformation and campaign narratives in India, showing that watching inaccurate or exaggerated political content profoundly impacts population opinions and voting intentions, especially when such messages align with pre-existing beliefs.

Mishra (2023) notes that despite electoral commitments to equality, structural barriers continue to persist. These barriers significantly shape women's political participation. Her research highlights the critical role of media, particularly digital news platforms and public information initiatives, in promoting political awareness, enhancing civic engagement, and amplifying women's voices.

Mishra and Yadav (2023) found that electronic media, plays a crucial role in shaping political communication in India post-liberalization. Media content, ranging from tele-epics to election polls, provides individuals with cognitive shortcuts that influence their political perspectives.

Mishra (2023) finds a rise in women's political engagement in Uttar Pradesh, linked with their access to political content. The studies highlight the significant relationship between media access, political awareness, and democratic participation, offering essential context for understanding media-voter dynamics.

Tversky and Kahneman's (1981) framing effect shows that the organization of political information significantly influences voters decision-making. Frames affect individual evaluations of risks, policies, and candidates.

Signorielli (2024), applying Gerbner's cultivation theory, argues that consistent exposure to mediated political content strengthens public perceptions of social and political reality.

## Objectives

1. To study the relationship between media exposure and voters' political perception during the Bihar election.
2. To analyze how different media platforms influence voters' decision-making.
3. To explore how media framing and election coverage shape voters' awareness.

## Research Methodology

The study was conducted during the Bihar Assembly election. A purposive sampling method was used to collect responses through an online Google Form. The present study addresses the patterns of media consumption and the trust that voters have in political content. This work contributes to the wider discussions regarding online democracy, controlled political behaviour, and the evolving function of communication within India's electoral systems. This study follows a quantitative approach to understand the influence of media during the Bihar election. Descriptive statistics were applied due to the exploratory nature of the study.

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

**Table 1:** Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	95	60.1%
	Female	63	39.9%

<b>Age Group</b>	18–25 years	72	45.6%
	26–35 years	48	30.4%
	36–45 years	25	15.8%
	46 years & above	13	8.2%
<b>Education Level</b>	Secondary	22	13.9%
	Undergraduate	68	43.0%
	Postgraduate	50	31.6%
	Above Postgraduate	18	11.4%

Among the 158 respondents, 95 were male and 63 were female, indicating a slightly greater participation of males. The majority of responders were young people aged 18 to 25 (46%), followed by individuals aged 26 to 35 (30%). The majority had undergraduate or postgraduate degrees, showing that the sample was relatively educated. The data represents the viewpoints of young, educated voters who are probably active on social media. The gender distribution is relatively balanced to examine differences in media influence.

**Table 2:** Primary Social Media Platform Used for Political Information

<b>Platform</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
WhatsApp	54	34.2%
Facebook	38	24.1%
YouTube	42	26.6%
Instagram	18	11.4%
Twitter/X	6	3.8%

WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook were the predominant mediums for political information sharing. A minimal number of responders use Twitter or Instagram. The rising popularity of WhatsApp underlines the crucial role of 'personal networks' in spreading political information. YouTube and Facebook show the impact of 'visual and interactive content'.

**Table 3:** Daily Time Spent on Social Media

<b>Time Duration</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Less than 1 hour	21	13.3%
1–2 hours	49	31.0%
2–3 hours	58	36.7%
More than 3 hours	30	19.0%

A large number of respondents spent 2–3 hours daily to social media, whereas around 19% spent over 3 hours. A small percentage spent less than one hour. Social media represents a fundamental aspect of daily life, providing voters with wide opportunities for political information, discussions.

**Table 4:** Political Content Consumed on Social Media

<b>Type of Content</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>

News Videos	66	41.8%
Political Memes	30	19.0%
Live Debates	24	15.2%
Party Advertisements	21	13.3%
Opinion Posts (common people/influencers)	17	10.8%

Political news, memes, live debates, and party commercials were all consumed with, news videos being the most favored. Respondents use social media not solely for entertainment but also as a source of political information. Memes and debates represent informal yet captivating methods of collecting information about politics.

**Table 5:** Perceived Credibility of Social Media Political Content

Response Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Highly credible	18	11.4%
Moderately credible	62	39.2%
Neutral	40	25.3%
Slightly credible	27	17.1%
Not credible at all	11	7.0%

The majority of respondents considered social media content 'moderately credible', but a small proportion viewed it as 'highly credible' or 'entirely non-credible'. Voters show cautious behavior about information shared on social media.

**Table 6: Impact** of Social Media on Voting Decision

Impact Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Strong influence	26	16.5%
Moderate influence	54	34.2%
Low influence	48	30.4%
No influence	30	19.0%

Table indicated that Approximately 16% social media had a major influence on their voting, 34% said it had a moderate influence, and 19% stated there was no influence. Social media offers a variety of influence on voting behavior. Even minimal exposure can influence perceptions and enhance political awareness.

**Table 7:** Voters' Awareness Level About Election Issues

Awareness Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
High awareness	42	26.6%
Moderate awareness	76	48.1%
Low awareness	40	25.3%

Table indicated that Approximately 50% of the respondents indicated average awareness of electoral issues while 26% demonstrated high awareness. Digital media helps voters in stay updated; yet, many use it as an addition to other sources of information.

**Table 8:** Relationship Between Media Exposure and Political Perception

Political Perception	High Exposure	Moderate Exposure	Low Exposure	Total
Positive perception	38	22	10	70
Neutral perception	26	28	14	68
Negative perception	12	6	2	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>158</b>

Individuals who had broad social media exposure had favorable political perceptions, whereas those with minimal experience usually remained neutral or negative views. The research indicates that increased exposure correlates with stronger opinions, highlighting the influence of social media in forming political perceptions.

#### Findings and Conclusion

The study of the online survey conducted using 158 participants in Bihar finds important patterns in media exposure and voter perception. The demographic data reveal distinct economic and social differences that influence access to political information. Men appear to be dominant in employment and higher education, whereas women usually handle household responsibilities. This highlights differences in access to digital resources based on gender. This aligns with Mishra's (2023) observation that structural barriers continue to restrict women's political participation, pointing out the importance of digital platforms as an essential tool of political awareness for female voters.

Differences based on caste are also visible. Individuals from SC/ST groups show a higher rate of unemployment and more participation in domestic work when compared to those in the OBC/EBC and General categories. This matches the findings of Azad (2023), who observes that socio-economic disadvantages directly impact the availability of digital media and shape patterns of political engagement.

Income distribution further highlights structural gaps 68% of participants indicate an annual income of less than ₹1 lakh. This pattern was consistently observed across marginalized caste groups.

Table-based findings show clear patterns:

- WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook are the most common sources of political information.
- Most respondents spend 2–3 hours daily on social media.
- News videos and political memes dominate consumption.
- Moderate credibility is the most common perception of online content.
- Moderate and low influence levels are more common than strong influence.
- Moderate awareness is the most frequent awareness level.
- Higher exposure is associated with more positive perceptions, as reflected in Table 8.

Overall, social media functions as a powerful tools where political awareness and opinions are shaped, reinforced, and contested. Socio-economic status influences access and usage, while digital content influences interpretation, perception, and vote-related decisions.

social media has emerged as a central force shaping political understanding, voter awareness, and decision-making during elections in Bihar. The findings show that despite gender-based, caste-based, and income-based inequalities, voters actively consume political information online. However, economic limitations restrict the ability to get regular internet access, needed digital devices, and trustworthy online news outlets. According to Sharma and Sivakumar (2023), these limitations affect the processes how individuals interact with, understand, and participate in political communication. Despite these inequalities, social media usage is high. A large number of respondents spend between two and three hours each day to digital platforms, while about 50% spend more than three hours on these platforms. This indicates the interaction of social media into everyday life. It also reflects the growing importance of social platforms as primary sources of political information during elections. As Azad (2023) argues, digital outreach gained prominence during the COVID-19 period. Survey results indicate a high level of engagement with political content, including news videos, memes, debates, and advertisements from various parties. News videos are the most frequently viewed form of political content, indicating that individuals engage with social media platforms not just for entertainment purposes but also for learning understanding of politics. This finding supports the observation made by Sharma and Sivakumar (2023) that social media limits the gatekeeping authority of mainstream news outlets. Viral posts, memes, and hashtags currently play an important part in affecting issue visibility and developing the central themes of electoral discourse.

The findings indicate risks related to digital political participation. Respondents can have biased opinions, sensational content, and exaggerated political claims. This relates to Daxecker et al. (2025), who highlight similar dynamics that misinformation can strongly influence group attitudes and voting choices, especially when it matches existing beliefs. This connects with Tversky and Kahneman's (1981) framing effect, which explains how the presentation of information shapes perception and decision-making. Repeated exposure to framed narratives, can cultivate specific beliefs about political issues. These findings support cultivation theory, as outlined by Gerbner and later expanded by Signorielli (2024), demonstrating how prolonged exposure to media shapes perceptions of political reality.

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