

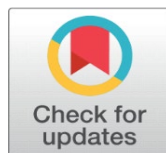
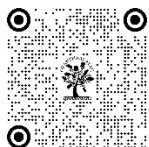
SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR POLITICAL COMMUNICATION: ANALYZING THE USAGE AND MOTIVATIONS OF POLITICAL LEADERS IN BIHAR

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ABSTRACT

The increasing use of social media by politicians in India has emerged as a critical tool for political communication. Platforms such as Twitter, Telegram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram are enabling politicians to overcome traditional communication barriers, facilitating direct engagement with their constituents. These platforms allow politicians to shape their public image, endorse social causes, and address political challenges. Social media promotes heightened public engagement, fosters networking, and supports the organization of ideas, thereby influencing public discourse and inspiring collective action. This study aims to explore the extent of social media usage by political leaders in Bihar, as well as the motivations driving their engagement with these platforms. Data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire completed by 175 politicians from six major political parties in Bihar. The findings indicate that most participants utilize social media not only to access general and political news but also to stay informed about updates from others.

Keywords: Social Media, Political Communication, Politicians, Public Engagement, Political Parties

1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era of digital connectivity, social media platforms have emerged as pivotal tools for communication, networking, and activism. Politicians increasingly harness these platforms—such as Twitter, Facebook, Telegram, WhatsApp, and Instagram—to amplify their messages, engage with constituents, and challenge entrenched power structures. This research investigates how politicians use social media to influence political discourse and their role in driving change within the political landscape. Social media has profoundly transformed traditional power dynamics, allowing politicians to establish direct connections with the public and circumvent conventional communication barriers. This direct engagement facilitates the sharing of personal narratives, advocacy for critical issues, and mobilization of support, thereby enhancing political influence and effectiveness. Despite substantial research on the

global and national use of social media by political parties and leaders for communication and propaganda, there remains a significant gap in understanding these practices at the regional level. This study addresses this gap by focusing on the utilization of social media by politicians in Bihar. The objective is to provide a comprehensive analysis of how political leaders in Bihar employ social media platforms, evaluating their strategies and approaches within the regional political context.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Safiullah et al. (2016) emphasized the importance of social media for political parties in influencing public opinion. Their study on the 2013 Delhi Assembly election found a strong connection between a party's Facebook likes and its electoral triumph. This demonstrated the significant impact of social media on election outcomes and suggested a shift towards using social media for cost-effective campaign advertising.

Verdegem&D'heer (2018) conducted interviews with 19 politicians running in the 2014 federal elections in Belgium, as well as analyzed the content of their Facebook and Twitter accounts, in order to examine the impact of social media on election campaigns. The writers believed that in Belgium, similar to other EU nations, the old-fashioned method of campaign communication still held significance and was noteworthy. Nevertheless, the research also discovered that candidates adjust their behavior in order to attract the interest of reporters from traditional media outlets.

Smith (2011) emphasized social media's impact on political campaigns, noting its role in Obama's 2008 victory. Politicians now use social networking to engage voters, but face challenges in navigating the changing landscape. Success requires adapting strategies.

Metkar A. &Aade A. (2019) investigated the use of social media for political messaging in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections in India. They found that political parties utilized social media to engage with the public and promote their party through various platforms, creating job opportunities for young individuals. Social media played a significant role in increasing political awareness and knowledge among voters, influencing their voting behavior. It also enabled easy dissemination and exchange of political information, increasing political knowledge among individuals. Social media was used for communication, rallying individuals for protests, and forecasting election outcomes. It also encouraged first-time voters to participate in the election process. Political branding and marketing were important investments for parties and leaders on social media, aiding in political mobilization and effective engagement with potential voters. Overall, social media has become a crucial tool in Indian politics for informing the public and influencing political behavior.

Wani and Alone (2014) highlighted the growing influence of social media in India's 2014 Lok Sabha elections, emphasizing its impact on public opinion and voter behavior. Political parties allocated substantial budgets for social media, with the BJP earmarking 2.5% and the Indian National Congress 400 crore rupees. Urbanization led to an increase in social media users, emphasizing the importance of effective social media strategies for campaigning.

Buragohain (2019) underlines the importance of social media in contemporary election campaigning. Political parties utilize social media to interact with voters, rally individuals, and boost political involvement. Social media plays a vital role in political branding and marketing, impacting election results and molding public perception. Nevertheless, the dissemination of inaccurate information on social networking platforms presents a significant danger to democracy by creating rifts between different factions and eroding the trustworthiness of political organizations. Even though it has advantages, there is a necessity for controlling the usage of social media to stop the spread of misinformation. Political parties, such as the BJP, have successfully harnessed platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp to connect with voters and influence public opinion. This study underscores the importance of people, particularly those with lower education levels, to carefully assess social media content and differentiate between reality and falsehood.

Bright et al. (2019) examined a new dataset from two elections in Britain to explore three ideas linking social media with electoral outcomes. Their findings help in enhancing theories about how social media impacts campaign and election processes. In recent years, academic interest in gender and political communication has increased, aligning with the current political trend.

Baranowski (2015) examined how Polish politicians utilized Facebook, Twitter, and their websites during the 2014 regional assembly election. The outcome indicated minimal engagement between the candidates and the voters. Conversation on the websites was non-existent and most of the Facebook posts went un-commented. The author's conclusion was that the handles' ineffective operation failed to attract the interest of potential voters.

Kanungo (2015) also contends that the use of interactive tools like online discussion forums and web chat rooms is seldom seen on the websites and social media platforms of parties and candidates. He examined how Twitter and Facebook were used by six Indian political parties in the 16th Lok Sabha election and suggested that social media is just one aspect of the narrative; traditional media, paid advertising, and marketing also play a role in shaping narratives. Political groups predominantly utilized these platforms for rallying volunteers, fundraising, criticizing rivals, showcasing their accomplishments, and engaging with others. The research found that social media may not have been a game changer, but it certainly had a significant impact on the 16th Lok Sabha election.

Brautović, et al. (2013) found that the government did not utilize Facebook for interactive communication purposes, such as engaging and informing, which is the primary purpose of the platform. Researchers analyzed how the Croatian government communicated through its designated Facebook page. The data collected with Nvivo software was analyzed by the researchers using quantitative content analysis methodology. Facebook is a platform where the government could quickly share information and receive feedback from the public, but despite engaging in conversations with citizens, it was discovered that 85% of the posts by the Croatian government were solely photos. It was also discovered that some days had no activity on the Facebook pages, resulting in the pages being inactive. YouTube, a different video sharing platform, was introduced in February 2005. It allows users to upload video content, tag videos, watch, share, and comment on them. It also allows for utilizing videos as a means of political advertisement. Aside from functioning as a substitute for television, it also serves as a political advertising mechanism that influences campaign finances by enabling candidates and parties to convey their message inexpensively or even for free.

Although there is extensive global research on this topic, there is a paucity of studies focused specifically on India, and even less on regions such as Bihar. The existing literature underscores a notable deficiency in research pertaining to Bihar, highlighting a significant gap that this study seeks to address.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are to:

- Find out the usage pattern of social media platforms among the politicians of Bihar.
- Explore the gratifications of using social media platforms.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative cross-sectional survey to explore social media usage among political leaders in Bihar. A sample of 175 leaders from six major parties—Rashtriya Janta Dal (RJD), Indian National Congress (INC), Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM), Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) and Janta Dal-United (JDU)—was selected. Data were collected through a self-administered structured questionnaire, which assessed demographic details, social media usage patterns, and motivations for using social media. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends and motivations. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly observed. This methodology provides a comprehensive overview of how political leaders in Bihar use social media and the underlying motivations driving their engagement.

5. RESULT & DISCUSSION

| Age: * Gender: Crosstabulation | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-------|---------|------|-------|
| Count | | | | |
| | | Gender: | | Total |
| | | Female | Male | |
| Age: | 18-30 | 6 | 27 | 33 |
| | 31-45 | 35 | 20 | 55 |
| | 46-60 | 24 | 42 | 66 |
| | 61+ | 7 | 14 | 21 |
| Total | | 72 | 103 | 175 |

The crosstabulation of age and gender reveals distinct patterns in the demographic composition of political leaders using social media in Bihar. Among the younger age group (18-30), a majority of 27 out of 33 respondents are male, while only 6 are female. In the 31-45 age group, the trend reverses, with more females (35) than males (20). For the 46-60 age group, males are predominant, accounting for 42 out of 66 respondents, while females represent 24. Among those aged 61 and above, males (14) outnumber females (7). Overall, the male respondents (103) outnumber female respondents (72), reflecting a general gender imbalance, particularly in the older and younger age groups.

| Which political party do you belong to: * Years in Politics: Crosstabulation | | | | | | |
|--|-----|--------------------|------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------|
| Count | | | | | | |
| | | Years in Politics: | | | | Total |
| | | 11-20 years | 5-10 years | Less than 5 years | More than 20 years | |
| Which political party do you belong to: | BJP | 7 | 14 | 7 | 7 | 35 |
| | HAM | 0 | 7 | 14 | 0 | 21 |
| | INC | 7 | 10 | 13 | 3 | 33 |
| | JDU | 7 | 7 | 17 | 7 | 38 |
| | LJP | 7 | 7 | 13 | 0 | 27 |
| | RJD | 7 | 7 | 7 | 0 | 21 |
| Total | | 35 | 52 | 71 | 17 | 175 |

The crosstabulation of political party affiliation and years in politics reveals varying levels of experience across the parties, expressed as percentages. Among BJP leaders, 20% have 11-20 years of experience, 40% have 5-10 years, and an equal 20% each have less than 5 years and more than 20 years of experience. HAM leaders are predominantly less experienced, with 66.7% having less than 5 years in politics and 33.3% having 5-10 years of experience, with no representation in the higher experience categories. INC shows a broader distribution, with 39.4% having less than 5 years, 30.3% with 5-10 years, 21.2% with 11-20 years, and 9.1% with over 20 years in politics. JDU is evenly spread, with 44.7% having less than 5 years of experience and 18.4% in each of the remaining categories. LJP follows a similar trend, with 48.1% having less than 5 years of experience and 25.9% each in the 5-10 and 11-20 year categories. RJD leaders are equally distributed, with 33.3% in each of the 11-20, 5-10, and less than 5 years categories, and none with more than 20 years of experience. This data highlights that parties like HAM and RJD are composed largely of less experienced leaders, while parties like BJP, INC, and JDU show a more balanced distribution of political experience.

| Which social media platform do you use the most for political communication? | | | |
|--|-------------|-----------|---------|
| | | Frequency | Percent |
| | Facebook | 71 | 40.6 |
| | Instagram | 45 | 25.7 |
| | Twitter (X) | 24 | 13.7 |
| | WhatsApp | 21 | 12.0 |
| | YouTube | 14 | 8.0 |
| | Total | 175 | 100.0 |

The survey data on the primary social media platforms used for political communication shows that Facebook is the most popular, with 40.6% of leaders using it the most. Instagram follows with 25.7%, while Twitter (X) is used by 13.7% of respondents. WhatsApp and YouTube are less favored, with 12% and 8% respectively. This indicates that Facebook and Instagram are the dominant platforms for political communication among leaders in Bihar.

| How frequently do you use social media platforms for political communication? | | | |
|---|----------------------|------------|--------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent |
| | A few times a week | 27 | 15.4 |
| | Multiple times a day | 86 | 49.1 |
| | Once a day | 14 | 8.0 |
| | Once a week | 14 | 8.0 |
| | Rarely | 34 | 19.4 |
| | Total | 175 | 100.0 |

The survey data on the frequency of social media use for political communication reveals that nearly half of the respondents, 49.1%, use social media multiple times a day. A smaller segment, 15.4%, use it a few times a week. Only 8% use social media once a day or once a week, and 19.4% use it rarely. This suggests that a substantial portion of political leaders are highly active on social media, engaging frequently with their audience.

| For what purpose do you primarily use social media in your political work? | No. of Respondents | % of Respondents |
|--|--------------------|------------------|
| Sharing news and updates | 103 | 58.85714286 |
| Engaging with the public | 148 | 84.57142857 |
| Mobilizing support | 62 | 35.42857143 |
| Promoting campaigns | 78 | 44.57142857 |
| Personal branding | 140 | 80 |
| Responding to opposition | 42 | 24 |
| Total | 175 | |

The survey reveals that political leaders in Bihar use social media for a variety of purposes in their political work. The most common use is engaging with the public, with a significant majority of respondents indicating this as their primary purpose. Personal branding also ranks high, suggesting that leaders see social media as a key tool for shaping their public image. Sharing news and updates is another prominent activity, while promoting campaigns and mobilizing support are moderately popular. Responding to opposition is the least common use, though still utilized by a portion of leaders. Overall, the data reflects a multifaceted approach to social media usage, where public engagement and personal branding take priority.

| How long have you been using social media for political purposes? | | | |
|---|-------------------|------------|--------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent |
| | 1-2 years | 17 | 9.7 |
| | 3-5 years | 86 | 49.1 |
| | Less than a year | 7 | 4.0 |
| | More than 5 years | 65 | 37.1 |
| | Total | 175 | 100.0 |

The survey data on the duration of social media use for political purposes indicates that 49.1% of leaders have been using social media for 3-5 years, making this the most common timeframe. A significant 37.1% have been using it for more than 5 years. In contrast, 9.7% have used it for 1-2 years, and only 4% have been using it for less than a year. This demonstrates a strong engagement among leaders with several years of experience on social media platforms.

| What is your primary motivation for using social media for political communication? | No. of Respondents | % of Respondents |
|---|--------------------|------------------|
| Reaching a wider audience | 119 | 68 |
| Quick dissemination of information | 114 | 65.14285714 |
| Direct interaction with the public | 156 | 89.14285714 |
| Responding to issues in real-time | 106 | 60.57142857 |
| Building a personal political brand | 144 | 82.28571429 |
| Monitoring public opinion | 114 | 65.14285714 |
| Total | 175 | |

The survey reveals that the primary motivation for political leaders in Bihar to use social media is direct interaction with the public, with 89.1% of respondents identifying this as their main reason. Building a personal political brand follows closely, with 82.3% of leaders prioritizing this goal. Reaching a wider audience (68%) and the quick dissemination of information (65.1%) are also important motivators, highlighting the efficiency and broad reach of social media platforms.

Additionally, 65.1% use social media to monitor public opinion, while 60.6% see it as a tool for responding to issues in real-time. These findings indicate that political leaders are primarily focused on engaging with the public and shaping their political image through social media.

| Which gratification do you experience the most from using social media? | No. of Respondents | % of Respondents |
|---|--------------------|------------------|
| Enhanced public visibility | 164 | 93.71428571 |
| Instant feedback from constituents | 148 | 84.57142857 |
| Increased engagement with young voters | 124 | 70.85714286 |
| Positive influence on public perception | 154 | 88 |
| Personal satisfaction from interacting with people | 161 | 92 |
| Total | 175 | |

The survey indicates that the most experienced gratification from using social media among political leaders in Bihar is enhanced public visibility, with 93.7% of respondents acknowledging this benefit. Personal satisfaction from interacting with people is also highly valued, reported by 92% of the leaders. Instant feedback from constituents is experienced by 84.6%, while 88% of respondents feel that social media positively influences public perception. Additionally, 70.9% of leaders noted increased engagement with young voters as a key gratification. Overall, social media significantly enhances visibility, fosters public interaction, and positively shapes leaders' public image.

| How effective do you think social media is in comparison to traditional media (TV, Newspapers, Radio) in political communication? | | | |
|---|-------------------|------------|--------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent |
| | | 7 | 4.0 |
| | Equally effective | 79 | 45.1 |
| | Less effective | 13 | 7.4 |
| | More effective | 76 | 43.4 |
| | Total | 175 | 100.0 |

The survey data on the effectiveness of social media compared to traditional media in political communication shows that 43.4% of respondents find social media more effective, while 45.1% consider it equally effective as traditional media. In contrast, 7.4% believe social media is less effective, and 4% view it as less effective. This indicates a general perception that social media is either more or equally effective compared to traditional media in political communication.

| What is the biggest challenge of using social media for political communication? | No. of Respondents | % of Respondents |
|--|--------------------|------------------|
| Fake news/misinformation | 136 | 77.71428571 |
| Negative comments/criticism | 102 | 58.28571429 |
| Managing multiple platforms | 111 | 63.42857143 |
| Time consumption | 156 | 89.14285714 |
| Privacy concerns | 162 | 92.57142857 |
| Lack of digital literacy among the audience | 114 | 65.14285714 |
| Total | 175 | |

The survey highlights that the biggest challenge political leaders in Bihar face when using social media for political communication is time consumption, with 89.1% of respondents citing this as a significant issue. Privacy concerns closely follow, affecting 92.6% of leaders, reflecting the sensitivity around personal and political data. Fake news and misinformation also pose a considerable challenge, experienced by 77.7% of respondents. Additionally, 63.4% struggle with managing multiple platforms, and 58.3% face negative comments or criticism. A notable 65.1% mention the lack of digital literacy among their audience as a hurdle. These challenges highlight the complexities of navigating social media in the political sphere.

| Do you believe social media has changed the way politics is conducted in Bihar? | | | |
|---|-------------------|------------|--------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent |
| | Agree | 47 | 26.9 |
| | Disagree | 21 | 12.0 |
| | Neutral | 45 | 25.7 |
| | Strongly agree | 35 | 20.0 |
| | Strongly disagree | 27 | 15.4 |
| | Total | 175 | 100.0 |

The survey data on the impact of social media on political practices in Bihar indicates that 26.9% of respondents agree that it has changed the way politics is conducted, while 20% strongly agree. In contrast, 12% disagree and 15.4% strongly disagree. A significant 25.7% remain neutral. This reflects a mixed but generally positive view that social media has influenced political processes, with a notable portion acknowledging its impact.

| Has social media played a positive role in political engagement with the people of Bihar? | | | |
|--|--------------|------------|--------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent |
| | No | 27 | 15.4 |
| | Not Sure | 33 | 18.9 |
| | Yes | 115 | 65.7 |
| | Total | 175 | 100.0 |

The survey data reveals that 65.7% of respondents believe social media has played a positive role in political engagement with the people of Bihar. Conversely, 15.4% think it has not had a positive impact, and 18.9% are unsure. This highlights a strong consensus among political leaders that social media has effectively enhanced their engagement with the public.

| Do you think the youth of Bihar are more engaged with political leaders on social media? | | | |
|---|--------------|------------|--------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent |
| | No | 17 | 9.7 |
| | Not Sure | 76 | 43.4 |
| | Yes | 82 | 46.9 |
| | Total | 175 | 100.0 |

The survey data on the engagement of Bihar's youth with political leaders on social media shows that 46.9% of respondents believe that the youth are more engaged. In contrast, 9.7% think they are not more engaged, while 43.4% are unsure. This indicates a general belief that the youth are actively interacting with political leaders on social media, though a significant portion remains uncertain.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The survey reveals that social media has become a pivotal tool in the political landscape of Bihar. Political leaders predominantly use platforms like Facebook and Instagram for their communications, with a significant number engaging with social media multiple times a day. The majority of leaders have been active on these platforms for several years, demonstrating a strong commitment to leveraging social media for political purposes.

Interestingly, there is a widespread belief that social media has positively influenced political engagement, with many leaders acknowledging its role in fostering greater interaction with the youth. Although opinions vary, a substantial number agree that social media has indeed altered the way politics is conducted in Bihar, reflecting its growing importance in the political arena.

Overall, while there are differing views on the effectiveness of social media compared to traditional media, the consensus leans towards social media being a powerful and often preferred medium for political communication.

7. CONCLUSION

This study investigates the role of social media as a tool for political communication among leaders in Bihar, focusing on their usage patterns and motivations. The findings reveal that social media has become an essential component of political strategy, with leaders predominantly using platforms like Facebook and Instagram. These platforms are favored for their broad reach and engagement capabilities, allowing leaders to connect with constituents effectively.

A substantial number of political leaders are highly active on social media, engaging multiple times a day. This high frequency of use underscores the growing reliance on these platforms to disseminate information, mobilize support, and enhance personal branding. Leaders with varying levels of political experience—ranging from those in politics for less than five years to those with over five years of experience—are actively utilizing social media, indicating its widespread acceptance and integration into political practices.

The study also highlights that a majority of leaders view social media as a positive influence on political engagement, particularly in reaching and interacting with the youth. There is a prevailing belief that social media has significantly transformed political communication, offering a more direct and interactive channel compared to traditional media. Despite some concerns about effectiveness and challenges such as misinformation and privacy issues, the overall sentiment is that social media serves as a powerful and often more effective tool for political communication.

8. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions and recommendations can be made to enhance the effectiveness of social media as a tool for political communication in Bihar:

1. **Strategic Platform Utilization:** Political leaders should strategically leverage the unique features of different social media platforms. While Facebook and Instagram are currently the most popular, leaders should consider diversifying their presence to include platforms like Twitter and YouTube, which can offer additional avenues for engagement and outreach.
2. **Training and Capacity Building:** To address challenges such as misinformation and privacy concerns, political leaders and their teams should undergo training in digital literacy and social media management. This will equip them with the skills needed to effectively navigate the complexities of social media and mitigate potential risks.
3. **Youth Engagement Initiatives:** Given the significant role of social media in engaging the youth, leaders should design targeted campaigns and content that resonate with younger demographics. Initiatives that address youth-centric issues and leverage popular social media trends can foster stronger connections with this key voter segment.

By adopting these recommendations, political leaders in Bihar can maximize the potential of social media to enhance their communication efforts, engage with their audience more effectively, and contribute to a more informed and interactive political environment.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None

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