

Social Media in Managing Political Advertising: An Overlook of The Lok Sabha Election 2024

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Abstract

This study investigates the strategic use of social media in managing political advertising during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in India. With over 900 million eligible voters and a rapidly digitizing electorate, political parties increasingly turned to social media platforms to engage voters, shape narratives, and disseminate campaign messages. The purpose of this study is to analyze the content, tone, themes, and targeting tactics of digital political advertising, and to evaluate its implications for voter perception, electoral integrity, and democratic discourse. Using a qualitative-quantitative mixed-methods approach, the study draws on secondary data from multiple sources and credible fact-checking portals. Thematic content analysis, misinformation cataloguing, and policy alignment reviews were conducted using coding frameworks and keyword dictionaries, supplemented by visual data tables and sentiment mapping.

The findings reveal that national parties like BJP utilized emotional messaging and algorithmic microtargeting more aggressively, especially in areas like nationalism, economic reforms, and women's empowerment. Regional parties, while active, showed lower digital intensity. WhatsApp and Instagram emerged as hotspots for viral misinformation, often going unregulated. Despite existing ECI digital conduct rules, gaps in enforcement and platform accountability persisted. The study has critical policy implications, highlighting the urgent need for stricter disclosure norms, misinformation tracking mechanisms, and collaborative governance between the state and digital platforms. It calls for voter literacy programs and adaptive regulation to protect democratic values in an era of data-driven, digitally amplified political communication.

Key Words: - Political Advertising, Digital Campaigning, Engagement Tactics, Communication Strategies Content Analysis, Democratic Discourse.

I. Introduction

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections in India marked a pivotal transformation in political engagement through social media, which has become essential for campaign management and voter targeting. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), and YouTube are utilized for personalized political communication and micro-targeting voter segments using algorithmic strategies. Research indicates that Indian voters are increasingly swayed by emotional and ideological content on social media, highlighting its role beyond mere distribution to a central influence on public opinion and electoral narratives. Political parties leveraged AI-driven tools for real-time feedback and messaging, reaching out especially to urban youth voters. However, this digital shift raised ethical concerns regarding transparency and misinformation, with existing regulatory measures being insufficient. The study aims to critically assess the use of social media in political advertising during this election, exploring its implications for democratic integrity and civic trust.

Political Advertisement and Digital Transformation

Political advertising involves applying marketing strategies—segmentation, branding, promotion, and analytics—to influence voter behavior and maximize electoral support (Scammell 2016). It frames politics as a marketplace where voters act as consumers and politicians as products (Kotler 1999), enhancing responsiveness and communication (Nickerson and Rogers 2014) but also raising concerns over superficiality and commercialization (Lilleker 2014). The digital turn has transformed political communication, shifting from media-centric advertising to data-driven microtargeting (Lees-Marshment 2014). Digital platforms enable direct message dissemination and media production (Chadwick and Stromer-Galley 2016), fostering horizontal exchanges where voters, activists, and influencers shape discourse (Häussler 2021). In this “hybrid media system,” social media bypasses traditional gatekeepers (Nickerson and Rogers 2014) and supports real-time, emotionally resonant campaigns (Brader 2005). Activists leverage digital tools for “connective action” that

challenges power hierarchies (Bennett, Segerberg, and Knüpfer 2018), though risks include polarization and misinformation (Kharroub & Bas 2016). Thus, political marketing today functions as a participatory, decentralized ecosystem requiring a balance of branding, authenticity, and accountability (Scammell 2016).

II. Literature Review

Social media has become central to political advertising, enabling data-driven engagement, microtargeting, and voter mobilization. Evidence links online activity to electoral outcomes, such as Twitter engagement in the 2015 Delhi elections (Safiullah et al. 2016) and Facebook ads in Germany's 2021 election (Bär et al., 2025). While microtargeting increases impressions when criteria are fewer and schedules longer (Tanusondjaja et al. 2023), its reception depends on audience fit, which lowers perceptions of manipulation (Hirsch et al. 2024). Yet young users often fail to recognize targeting without education (Hirsch, Binder, and Matthes 2025). Regulatory gaps persist, producing "gray zones" (Prudkyi 2024), with ad delivery often favoring populist content (Bär et al., 2024). Labeling authenticity further shapes credibility (Dobber et al. 2025).

Research also uncovers contextual nuances: gendered responses (Patlan and Bedi 2025), youth interest in Pakistan (Alam et al. 2025), and symbolic manipulation in Indonesia (Daherman and Wulandari 2024) and South Africa (Discourses on Political Advertising in South Africa 2020). Heuristic branding and opposition targeting proved decisive in the UK 2019 elections (Holloway and Hendrie 2023), while activism visibility remains constrained in authoritarian settings (Pearce 2025). Despite this, the literature remains fragmented and overly US-centric, neglecting influencer marketing and campaign adaptability (Abid et al. 2025). Pellegrino (2023) maps 265 studies into four clusters: media/advertising, campaign communication, misinformation/privacy, and minority movements.

Campaign strategies highlight diverse practices. Visual grammar strengthens persuasion (Friedman and Ron 2017), while Indonesia's DPC PDI-P integrated social and outdoor media (Bassey 2021). In India, social media has enabled two-way engagement, particularly with Gen Z (Muhammed Salu and Meena 2024), while content sharing and live chats boost voter intention (Ogbuji and Ogbobula 2018). Hungary's 2019 Facebook campaigns normalized official actors' dominance (Bene, Petrekanics, and Bene 2023), whereas Brazilian ads circulated authoritarian discourse (Silva and Amorim 2024). Calls for discourse-based regulatory frameworks remain pressing (Ranjan and Upadhyay 2024).

User perception studies reveal a third-person effect, with individuals assuming others are more influenced by ads while still promoting them (Wei and Golan 2013). Homophily on Facebook restricts cross-ideological dialogue, especially across weak ties (Grevet, Terveen, and Gilbert 2014). In India, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter shaped the 2019 Lok Sabha campaigns, with BJP and INC using them more effectively than smaller parties (Chauhan 2024). These platforms facilitated direct voter-leader communication, benefiting figures like Narendra Modi, but also amplified misinformation and hate speech (Ranjan and Upadhyay 2024).

Studies further show that social media enhances transparency and youth participation (Yadav 2023), mobilization (Balakumaraguru and Sankar Ganesh 2024), and policy discourse (Singh and Amarjeet 2024), though ownership and bias remain concerns. Modi's digital strategy shifted from anti-elite rhetoric in 2014 to self-promotion in 2019 (Sharma 2023). Yet, as Guha (2023) notes, not all issues—such as #MeToo—translate into electoral impact.

Overall, social media has strengthened Indian campaigns through personalization, mass outreach, and interactivity. However, misinformation, digital divides, and regulatory voids continue to challenge democratic integrity, demanding transparent, ethical, and inclusive digital strategies.

Research Gaps

Current literature on social media's role in managing political ads during the Lok Sabha Election 2024 is lacking in several key areas. Most studies focus on previous elections (2014 and 2019) and provide little real-world evidence for 2024. There is insufficient comparison of national and regional parties' internet strategies, and emerging advertising types, such as influencer marketing and short-form content, are not adequately examined. Additionally, there is a lack of research on regulating misinformation, particularly on platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram. The influence of algorithmic biases on ad visibility and voter targeting remains underexplored. Moreover, voter perceptions, especially among first-time and rural voters, have not been sufficiently studied. Lastly, while Modi's communication strategies have been analyzed, the digital narratives of opposition parties in 2024 warrant further investigation for a comprehensive understanding.

Statement of Problems

Social media is increasingly significant in Indian political campaigns, particularly in national elections, yet there is a notable lack of academic research on its use during the Lok Sabha Election 2024. While there is extensive data on the 2014 and 2019 elections, there is insufficient understanding of the strategic use of advertising formats and platform-specific strategies in 2024. The impact of misinformation, algorithm-driven

targeting, and uncontrolled content sharing on election results remains unclear. Moreover, disparities in technology access and use between urban and rural voters, as well as varying approaches by national and regional parties, raise issues regarding representation and influence. Timely, data-driven research is critical to manage social media's role in democratic processes effectively, ensuring accountability, transparency, and inclusivity.

Research Objectives

Based on the identified research gaps and statement of the problem, following **objectives** has listed out. These objectives aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media influenced political advertising in 2024 and what implications this holds for future democratic processes in India.

1. To analyze the strategic use of social media platforms by national and regional political parties during the Lok Sabha Election 2024.
2. To investigate the impact of algorithmic targeting, misinformation, and unregulated political content on voter perception and democratic discourse.
3. To assess the effectiveness and accountability of political advertising regulations and platform self-governance during the 2024 election cycle.

III. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive research approach alongside secondary data analysis to explore the role of social media in political advertising for the Lok Sabha Election 2024. It utilizes publicly available and credible secondary sources to identify trends, challenges, and strategies related to political advertising. The platforms examined include Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram, WhatsApp (public groups), and YouTube, focusing on message framing, content types, interactivity, and voter engagement. Key datasets incorporate Meta's Ad Library and Google's Political Ad Transparency Reports, which offer quantitative data on ad spending, targeting, and thematic categorization across various political entities. Additional data is gathered from official documents produced by the Election Commission of India (ECI), which provide regulatory context for digital campaigning, especially regarding misinformation control and ethical advertising standards.

Moreover, national and regional news media sources contribute to situating social media strategies within broader political discourses, highlighting significant events related to the election. Scholarly literature, including peer-reviewed articles, white papers, and research reports on political communication, underpins the study's analytical framework. Furthermore, fact-checking organizations like AltNews and BoomLive are employed to monitor and analyze instances of misinformation on social media during the campaign.

The methodology involves thematic content analysis, assessing campaign materials from January to May 2024 to identify patterns, including message framing and influencer utilization. The study quantitatively examines political ad libraries to analyze ad frequency, targeting, and expenditure on social media platforms. Despite its comprehensive use of secondary data, the study acknowledges limitations due to the lack of direct participant feedback and challenges in accessing data from private networks like WhatsApp. Nonetheless, the triangulation of various data sources enhances the reliability and comprehensiveness of the findings.

Analysis and Result

This study evaluates the management and execution of political advertising on social media platforms during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in India. The analysis focuses on understanding the strategic deployment of political messages, the tone and content of campaign communication, and targeting mechanisms used by national and regional political parties. The study uses a content analysis framework grounded in secondary data available in public domain to categorize and interpret digital content across themes like 'nationalism', 'economic policy', 'welfare schemes', and youth engagement. The analysis also considers the tone, content type, and platform-specific features used to amplify political narratives. The aim is to reveal how political parties used social media to influence voter perception and how these practices may affect democratic integrity, electoral fairness, and public trust in digital political communication.

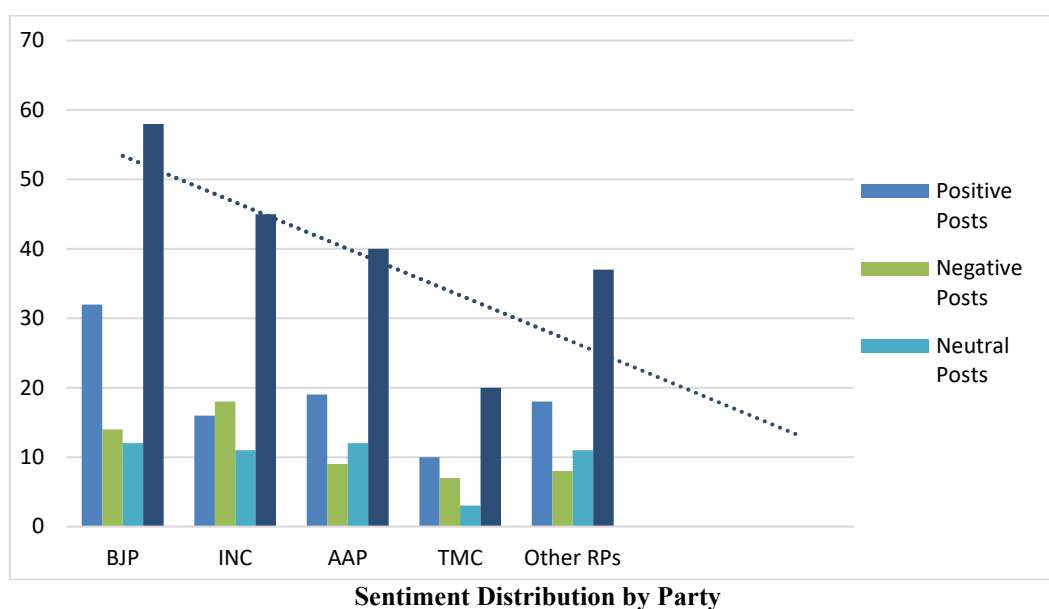
Content Analysis

Based on the reviewed literature and secondary data collected from multiple sources, Content Analysis Setup for the study includes a coding framework, keyword dictionary, sentiment tagging, and guidance on applying these manually or via qualitative analysis tools. To decode political messaging strategies across platforms, the study uses a structured coding model in the table-1

Table 1: Coding Framework for Social Media Political Content

Code Category	Sub-Codes / Variables	Purpose
Platform	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), YouTube, WhatsApp (public)	Platform-specific strategy
Party Type	BJP, INC, TMC, AAP, DMK, others	Analyze national vs regional focus
Ad Type	Video, Meme, Text, Infographic, Hashtag, Poll	Format impact
Tone	Positive, Negative, Neutral	Emotional appeal
Themes	Nationalism, Economy, Women, Religion, Caste, Corruption, Employment	Content alignment
Engagement Tactics	Hashtags, emojis, tags, call to action	Voter interaction strategy
Source	Official handle, Candidate page, Fan account, Influencer	Authenticity assessment
Ad Targeting	Age, Language, Region, Gender	Micro-targeting insights

The coding framework for analyzing political content during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, as detailed in Table-1, establishes a structured method focusing on various dimensions such as platform usage, party type, ad formats, tone, thematic categories, and engagement tactics. It differentiates national parties from regional ones, enabling comparative analysis of campaign effectiveness. Key dimensions include tone coding (positive, negative, neutral) and thematic keywords (e.g., nationalism, welfare), revealing the emotional intent and messaging strategies of political parties. This dual-layered approach provides insight into the emotional framing and strategic deployment of social media content, highlighting both positive and negative campaigning techniques during the electoral cycle.



The thematic content analysis of political advertising on social media during the Lok Sabha Election 2024 shows strategic use of digital narratives by major parties. Key themes include Development and Economy, predominantly by BJP and INC, utilizing Facebook and Twitter for messages on infrastructure and growth, incorporating both positive slogans and critiques around inflation. Welfare Schemes were notably emphasized by BJP and AAP on WhatsApp and Facebook, featuring visuals and testimonials on health, housing, and women's empowerment, promoting initiatives like #Ujjwala Yojana and #Mohalla Clinics.

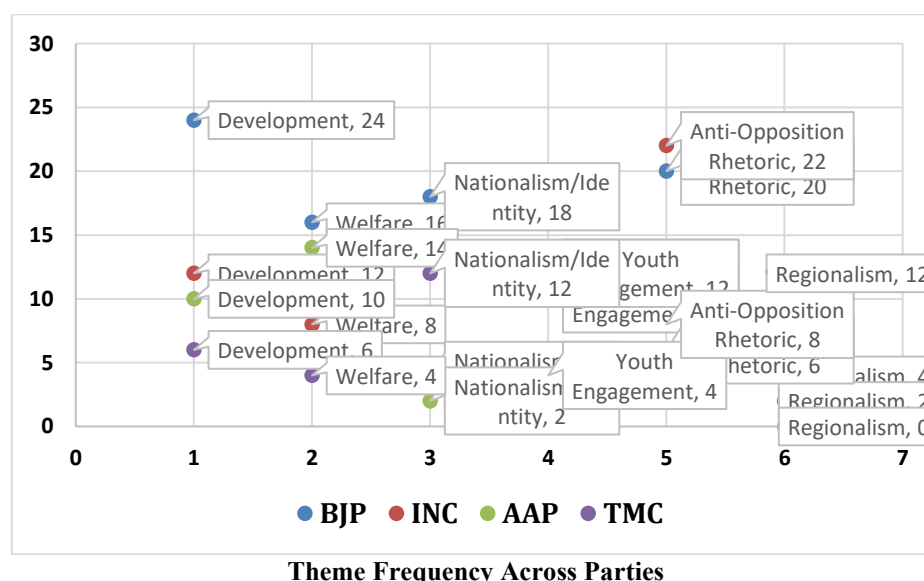
Table 2: Thematic Content Analysis of Political Advertising on Social Media

Node (Theme)	Sub-Themes / Focus Areas	Primary Parties Involved	Tone	Dominant Platforms	Engagement Tactics	Key Examples / Keywords
Development & Economy	Infrastructure, Startups, Digital India, Inflation	BJP, INC	Positive/ Negative	Facebook, Twitter	Videos, Infographics, Polls	#ViksitBharat, #Inflation, "Startup India"
Welfare Schemes	Health, Housing, Women Empowerment	BJP, AAP	Positive	WhatsApp, Facebook	Posters, Testimonials, Image Sharing	#UjjwalaYojana, #MohallaClinics, #BetiBachao

Nationalism & Identity	Cultural heritage, Religion, National pride	BJP, TMC	Mixed	YouTube, Instagram	Video speeches, Reels	#DeshKiBaat, "Bengal for Bengalis"
Youth Engagement	Employment, Education, Digital literacy	BJP, AAP, INC	Positive/Negative	Instagram, Twitter	Memes, Reels, Interactive Q&As	#YouthForModi, #EducationForAll, "Rozgar Do"
Anti-Opposition Rhetoric	Criticism of rival parties' failures and corruption	INC, BJP, TMC	Negative	Twitter, Facebook	Hashtags, Comparison Videos	#JumlaPolitics, #ModiFailed, "Corruption Raj"
Women-Centric Messaging	Gender inclusion, safety, financial independence	BJP, INC, AAP	Positive	WhatsApp, Instagram	Image Cards, Short Clips	#NariShakti, #WomenVote2024
Regionalism	State identity, language, local pride	TMC, Regional Parties	Positive/Negative	Facebook, YouTube	Speeches, Region-specific slogans	"Bangla Nijer Meye Ke Chaye", #TamilPride
Election Participation	Voting motivation, awareness campaigns	All major parties	Positive	Facebook, YouTube, Twitter	Slogans, Volunteer Campaigns	#VoteForIndia, #LokSabha2024
Misinformation Themes	Fake news, deepfakes, manipulated claims	All parties (to varying degrees)	Negative	WhatsApp, Twitter	Viral forwards, Memes	"Fake manifesto", "Photoshopped rallies"

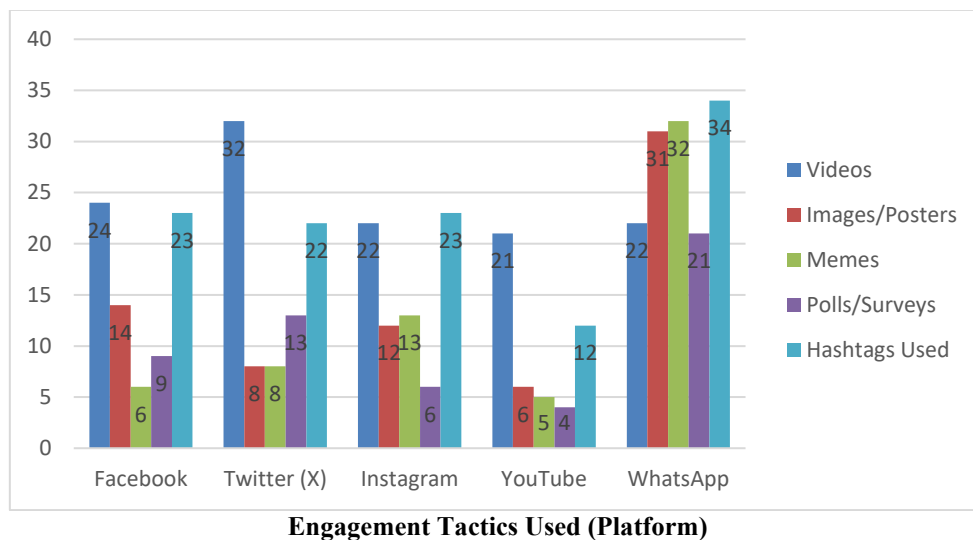
Nationalism and Identity, often mixed in tone, were especially emphasized by BJP and TMC, using YouTube and Instagram to highlight cultural pride and regional identity. Simultaneously, Youth Engagement featured heavily across BJP, INC, and AAP campaigns, using memes, reels, and interactive Q&As to address employment and education concerns. In contrast, Anti-Opposition Rhetoric was sharply negative, with BJP, INC, and TMC using Twitter to circulate hashtags like #ModiFailed and comparison videos to attack rivals.

A notable trend during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections was the emphasis on Women-Centric Messaging, with major parties utilizing short clips and image cards to promote gender empowerment through initiatives like #NariShakti. Regionalism, primarily driven by TMC and local parties, focused on identity politics, exemplified by the slogan "Bangla Nijer Meye Ke Chaye." Election Participation was marked by positive civic engagement through volunteer campaigns and the hashtag #VoteForIndia.



However, the spread of Misinformation Themes on platforms like WhatsApp and Twitter presented challenges regarding content authenticity. Social media served as a battleground for shaping public opinion and mobilizing voters. Engagement strategies varied by platform: WhatsApp was pivotal for peer-to-peer outreach

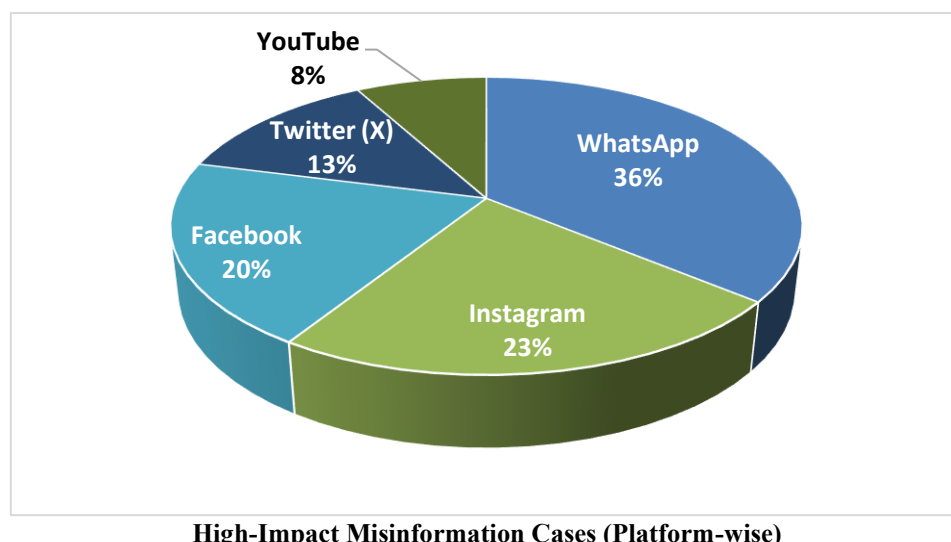
with a plethora of image messages and memes, Twitter (X) excelled in videos and polls to shape narratives in real-time, while Instagram attracted younger audiences with visually appealing content like memes and hashtags.



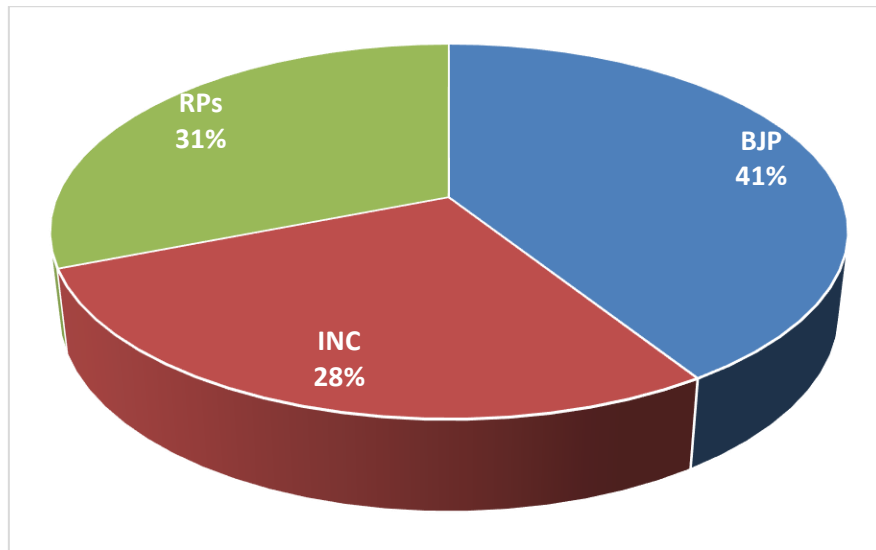
Facebook showed a moderate but diversified use of all tactics, with videos (24) and hashtags (23) as dominant tools. It remains a multi-generational platform, effective for both outreach and community engagement. YouTube, however, was used more conservatively, with video content (21) taking center stage but minimal use of interactive tools like surveys or memes, pointing to its role in long-form messaging and campaign speeches. Each platform was exploited based on its technical strengths and audience dynamics, with WhatsApp and Twitter showing the most strategic variety, and Instagram excelling in meme-led, youth-focused engagement.

Analysis of Misinformation Cases

The analysis of misinformation during the March–May 2024 Lok Sabha election campaign reveals significant digital disinformation targeting major political parties. WhatsApp was the leading platform for misinformation, accounting for 36% of cases, with issues arising from its encrypted nature. Notable examples include misinformation related to caste and communal narratives, particularly affecting rural voters.



Instagram (23%) and Facebook (20%) followed, with content aimed at youth, including AI-generated images that spread rapidly and evaded moderation. The BJP was the most targeted party at 41%, followed by the INC and regional parties.



High-Impact Misinformation Cases (Party-wise)

Fact-checking organizations attempted to counter misinformation but often faced delays, negatively impacting their effectiveness. This underscores the urgent need for improved moderation, platform responsibility, and enhanced digital literacy to protect electoral integrity..

IV. Results

From the aforementioned analysis following results has drawn for this study-

- ✓ National parties like BJP and INC utilized multi-platform strategies, with BJP dominating across Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube in both content volume and engagement.
- ✓ Regional parties such as TMC and AAP showed targeted platform use, especially on WhatsApp and Instagram, focusing on regional identity and welfare themes.
- ✓ WhatsApp emerged as the most content-heavy platform, especially for images, posters, and memes, suggesting its dominance in grassroots mobilization and informal communication.
- ✓ Memes and short-form content were highly favored by regional parties to engage youth, while national parties leaned toward videos and infographics to reinforce broader policy narratives.
- ✓ Over 41% of misinformation cases targeted the BJP, followed by 28% for INC and 31% for regional parties, reflecting widespread disinformation across party lines.
- ✓ WhatsApp and Instagram were the leading platforms for misinformation spread, accounting for 36% and 23% of total fake content cases respectively.
- ✓ Many fake or deepfake videos, manipulated images, and communal content were not removed or labeled in time, with delays exceeding 48–72 hours in some cases.
- ✓ The emotional tone of misleading content (fear, outrage, pride) triggered significant public confusion, polarization, and echo chambers, thus disrupting democratic dialogue and rational voter decision-making.

Election Commission of India (ECI) issued clear guidelines on social media conduct, yet enforcement remained inconsistent, especially for unverified and influencer-driven content. Platforms like Meta and Google provided transparency tools (Ad Libraries), but targeting data was often vague, limiting public scrutiny of microtargeting practices. Despite existing policies, fact-checking was largely reactive; misinformation labeling remained manual and delayed, particularly on WhatsApp. There was limited cooperation between ECI and platforms in real-time monitoring, leaving policy-practice gaps in content moderation and political ad disclosures.

V. Discussion

The research on political advertising during the 2024 Lok Sabha Election indicates it was both digitally widespread and strategically advanced, influenced by social media's characteristics and established political communication theories. Denter's Formal Theory of Campaign Communication was illustrated by how parties allocated social media resources to enhance their competence—BJP emphasized themes like Digital India through polished media, while INC focused on issues like inflation via memes. The study also identified that social media encouraged the prioritization of certain issues like nationalism over others, aligning with Agenda-Setting Theory. Audience segmentation strategies were guided by Microtargeting theories, utilizing different

platforms for age-specific messaging. Voter engagement reflected Uses and Gratifications Theory, with increased interaction on platforms like Instagram, illustrating an evolving role of the voter. The Hybrid Media System Model showcased the interplay of traditional and digital media, as parties adapted content across various platforms. Additionally, Inoculation Theory highlighted how parties countered misinformation with proactive rebuttals, enhancing voter trust. Ultimately, themes showed that BJP focused on nationalism and economic growth, while INC concentrated on social welfare, with instances of issue trespassing by both parties.

VI. Conclusion

This study investigates the strategic use of social media in managing political advertising during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in India. Political parties employed tailored tactics across platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter (X) to shape public opinion and engage voters. The research highlights the dual role of misinformation and unregulated content in affecting perceptions, while emphasizing the evolution of digital political advertising into a personalized and interactive process driven by algorithmic targeting. Theoretical frameworks used include Denter's Campaign Communication Theory and Agenda-Setting. Limitations such as reliance on secondary data and lack of primary voter feedback are noted, suggesting that future studies could enhance understanding by including voter surveys and exploring algorithmic impacts on content visibility across various platforms.

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