



# SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL AWARENESS

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**Abstract:** The proliferation of social media platforms has profoundly reshaped the landscape of political awareness and engagement in the 21st century. These online resources, such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and X (previously Twitter), have completely changed people's engagement with politicians, collective action, and receiving political information. This new digital reality, however, has a dual effect on political awareness, posing major threats to democratic discourse while also providing substantial advantages. This paper investigates the multifaceted relationship between different social media platforms and political awareness. First, the significance of these platforms for political information dissemination and for facilitating timely political mobilization for campaigns and social movements is discussed. The ease of use and directness of social media present an opportunity for more engagement and openness, particularly among younger audiences. However, the study also looks at the drawbacks, such as the quick dissemination of false information, the development of party "echo chambers" via algorithms, and the increasing polarization of politics. If we use social media with keeping in mind its weak points, can prove to be a very good tool for political awareness.

**Index Terms** - Social Media, Political Awareness.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, technology is being used in every aspect of life. Social media has revolutionized every field, and no one is untouched by its impact. Social media has provided people with information on various fields and has also made them politically aware. In the current digital age, social media is not just a means of entertainment or personal communication; it has become a powerful platform for political awareness and the exchange of ideas.

Before the advent of social media, traditional media such as newspapers, television, and radio were the only sources of political awareness. In today's modern era, social media has transformed every aspect of life. Political consciousness has developed among ordinary citizens, especially youth, and today's youth are playing an active role in political discussions. The greatest impact of social media is that discussions on political issues are no longer limited to Parliament, but also take place among the public, where individuals from both rural and urban areas can share their views on political issues with millions of people.

Hashtag trends on Twitter, Facebook posts, YouTube videos, and Instagram reels have made the dialogue on political issues simple, easy, attractive, and widespread. Currently, the nature of movements seems to have changed; earlier, where people used to gather at one place and protest, now various political movements and campaigns also get huge support from social media platforms. The recent political movement of *Zen ji* in Nepal is a living example of this. Movements like *#BlackLivesMatter*, *#MeToo* and the farmers' movement in India have proved how social media can transform public consciousness into a movement.

## II. WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

Social media is not just a technological platform, but has become a new social structure today, enabling the public to collectively communicate, create content, and exchange ideas. It differs from traditional media in that it involves the public not only as a consumer but also as a content creator. Social media platform provides long-distance communication, user involvement, and Internet-based information access. Its primary purpose is to link users from different geographical areas.

According to Baruah, social media encompasses internet-based and mobile services that allow users to engage in online exchanges, create content, and participate in communities. (Patty and Noiya, 2023 in Raj, H, 2024)

Through social media, individuals share their identities, thoughts, and expressions, creating a virtual community. These platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, connect people and create new possibilities for communication (Jensen and Halles, 2011). Whereas social communication was once limited—bound by location, time, and resources—today, a single individual, sitting anywhere in the world, can connect with millions of people. This power, once held solely by media houses and power centers, is now in the hands of the public. Social media has created an environment where "digital citizenship" has emerged. Every individual has become a potential journalist, thinker, and activist. This has reshaped freedom of expression, but it also carries the potential for confusion.

Social media has challenged traditional modes of power and communication and has ushered in a hybrid media system where both digital and traditional media interact to influence social and political activities (Chadwick, 2013). Social media is an internet-based platform that allows users to share their own content, either immediately or later, with a large group or a limited audience, and to engage and benefit from the interactive experience (Carr and Hayes, 2015). Social media platforms have transformed political

communication, enabling direct dialogue between leaders and the public. This has helped mobilize mass movements (Haward and Hussain, 2013).

### III. POLITICAL AWARENESS

Political activities in any nation directly impact its education system. Educational policies are shaped by the prevailing political landscape, and policymakers incorporate into education those social and national values that favour the current political landscape. Thus, political awareness is a key pillar of the social and political system (Al-Khaza'leh and Lahiani, 2021). Political awareness is the conscious recognition and understanding of how power, governance, and policy interact with organized and collective life. Political awareness is the degree of understanding and knowledge a citizen has about political institutions, political thinkers, policies, and events affecting society (Dalton, 2014).

### IV. VARIOUS SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND POLITICAL AWARENESS

Each social media platform offers various features like video clips, live content, short video, direct posts, graphics, and trending hashtags for real-time political discourse. Here, investigators analysed multifaceted relationship between different social media platforms and political awareness, and significance of these platforms for political information dissemination and for facilitating timely political mobilization for campaigns and social movements.

#### 4.1 WhatsApp and Political Awareness

WhatsApp is the world's most popular internet messaging app, and its influence in political communication is rapidly growing. In a democratic country like India, WhatsApp is widely used to spread political awareness and connect with voters. Its influence in political communication and awareness is growing day by day. Leaders, parties, and activists communicate directly with voters, and WhatsApp groups facilitate local political discussions, information sharing, and voter awareness campaigns. Important messages such as election dates, polling station information, and updates on government schemes are shared instantly. Election campaigns, candidate image building, and political messages are effectively disseminated through videos, photos, and audio. For example, in India's 2019 Lok Sabha elections, all major parties used WhatsApp extensively for booth management campaigns and voter contact.

In the 2018 West Bengal Panchayat elections, local activists rapidly disseminated political information in rural areas through WhatsApp groups (Kiran and Kanchan, 2021). Even in the 2018 Brazilian elections, information circulating on WhatsApp influenced voter voting behaviour (Arnaudo, 2017).

#### 4.2 Facebook and Political Awareness

In recent years, Facebook use among youth has expanded beyond social networking; it has also emerged as an effective political tool. Today's younger generation uses the platform not only to gain political information but also to connect with like-minded individuals, share their views, and promote social change. There is also a growing trend of participating in political campaigns and protests through Facebook. This shift indicates that social media, especially Facebook, can connect people with politics who have traditionally avoided political activities. This platform makes political participation more accessible and practical. According to Theocharis and Quintelier (2016), platforms like Facebook provide young people with easy access to politics, freedom of expression, and new opportunities for political participation (Theocharis and Quintelier, 2016).

#### 4.3 YouTube and Political Awareness

In the digital age, YouTube has become a powerful medium for influencing public opinion and political understanding. YouTube, with over two billion monthly users globally, enables widespread sharing of political content and provides audiences with access to a variety of news, ideas, and conversations (Statista, 2023). This has fundamentally changed the way people, especially younger generations, consume political information (Haridakis et al., 2010). YouTube is one of the most widely used social media platforms today, with learning-related content viewed approximately 500 million times every day. As of September 2024, YouTube had 2.49 billion monthly active users, meaning nearly half of the global online population is YouTube users (Singh and Raj, 2025).

Making political information more accessible is one of YouTube's key functions. Political parties, public servants, journalists, and activists use the platform to post speeches, advertisements, debates, and policy discussions. This eliminates the filters of traditional media, where editors and reporters filter information to their own discretion. Social media enables users to interact directly with political content (Loader et al., 2014).

YouTube is not just a video platform, but an algorithmic information environment that directs users to political topics based on their viewing habits. When a viewer watches a video on social or political issues, YouTube's recommendation system begins to show them more content with similar ideas. YouTube is a platform where viewers are not only consumers but also active creators and disseminators of political discourse (Burgess and Green, 2018).

#### 4.4 X (previously Twitter) and Political Awareness

Social media has completely transformed the way people interact with politics and obtain political information (Loader and Mercea, 2011). Twitter is unique among these mediums due to its global reach, brevity, and immediacy (Bruns and Highfield, 2016). By 2023, Twitter had over 330 million monthly active users, making it a digital destination for everyone, including the public, journalists, activists, and politicians (Statista, 2023; Parmelee and Bichard, 2012).

Twitter provides users with instant access to breaking news and political updates. Twitter is often used to discuss political events, including election debates and legislative changes, in real time. It fosters instant and continuous conversation and keeps users informed. For example, during the Arab Spring, Twitter played a crucial role in planning protests and providing real-time information on government responses (Papacharissi, 2015; Howard and Hussain, 2013).

Politicians use Twitter to communicate directly with the public, bypassing established media. In addition to increasing the reach of political feedback, it promotes open communication, transparency, and trust (Parmelee and Bichard, 2012). Twitter has mobilized millions of people through hashtags like #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, and #EndSARS, raising awareness about topics often overlooked in the media. Twitter provides a platform for political activism, both online and offline (Freelon et al., 2016).

#### 4.5 Instagram and Political Awareness

Instagram uses visual content like infographic reels and shorts to raise political awareness. The site is used by youth, NGOs, and political influencers to simplify complex topics into easily shared images. Hashtags like #BlackLivesMatter, #ClimateAction, and #FreePlastic have sparked global conversation and mobilization (Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark, 2018).

#### 4.6 Snapchat and Political Awareness

Snapchat shares news and civic content through its Discover and Spotlight services. It collaborates with groups to discuss political issues and run voter registration drives. Its Gen Z-focused design invites young people to participate in politics in an accessible and intuitive way. For example, Snapchat helped more than 1 million young Americans register to vote in 2020.

#### 4.7 Telegram and Political Awareness

It enables activists to evade surveillance, plan demonstrations, and disseminate uncensored political news. For example, Telegram was a key tool during the anti-government protests in Belarus and the Hong Kong democracy movement.

### V. POSITIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA REGARDING POLITICAL AWARENESS

Social media sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter make it easier for users, especially young people, to participate in political debates, movements, public events, campaigns, demonstrations, and elections (Tufekci, 2017). Through various social media platforms, people are exposed to a greater variety of views than through traditional media, which fosters critical thinking (Shirky, 2011).

Politicians bypass the filters of traditional media by communicating directly with the public through sites like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, ensuring accountability and transparency (Enli, 2017). Social media provides rapid access to news related to elections, legislation, policy changes, and public opinion, eliminating the need for people to rely on television or newspapers for information on political issues (Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux, and Zheng, 2014).

Through social media, marginalized sections of society, such as women and minority tribal groups, can express their views freely (Jackson, Bailey, and Foucault Welles, 2020). Videos, reels, memes, and infographics have made access to information easy and entertaining. This makes it easier for young people and new voters to understand issues, laws, and leaders, encouraging them to learn new things (Boulianne, 2015).

### VI. NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA REGARDING POLITICAL AWARENESS

The algorithmic structure of social media platforms promotes the immediate spread of false and fake information (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). On social media, we often see only what aligns with our perceptions. For example, if a person supports a particular political party, they will see more posts, videos, or news related to that party, leading to political polarization and an echo chamber (Sunstein, 2018). These days, many political parties use social media to influence people's thinking by spreading false news and making videos, posts, and messages containing misinformation viral (Mueller, 2019). People generally share political issues or posts on social media in an emotional manner, which only provides superficial information. Instead of delving deeper, they consider themselves aware by liking, sharing, and commenting (Morozov, 2011).

On social media, people freely express their thoughts, ideas, and opinions, even if they differ from others. Often, these individuals face problems like abuse, threats, and trolling. Generally, women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes face more hate and trolling when they express their views regarding discriminatory treatment meted out to them (Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark, 2018).

Generally, on social media, small political issues like statements by politicians, opposition tweets and memes capture public attention, while larger issues like policy changes and economic reforms are ignored or missed. This means that the flood of micro-political updates distracts people from the bigger political issues.

### VII. CONCLUSION

Today is a digital age, where various platforms have made politics easier for the public. Through social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, people can express their opinions, share their thoughts, and share their ideas. Information about political issues has become readily available to the public through the media. While it used to take time for the public to access political information through traditional media, digital social media platforms provide instant access to political information and allow them to express their opinions on these issues and information. While political information was previously limited to newspapers and television, today everyone participates and engages in election campaigns, government policies, public movements, and policy debates through digital platforms like social media. As a result, the democratic process has become more transparent and accountable.

Political awareness has gained a new direction through social media, but along with this new direction, it has also become equally confusing. While it is commonly believed that social media platforms facilitate the quick and easy dissemination of political issues, it also observed that the public perceives political issues in a more emotional way, grasping only superficial details, without delving into the deeper realities of the issue. Today, even the smallest political issue or incident, such as a leader's statement, a protest, or a meme, instantly becomes a trend on social media. The public reacts quickly, ignoring larger political issues such as policy changes, economic reforms, and long-term impacts. This results in an atmosphere of micropolitical bias. This is a mental trap where the public believes they are politically aware, but they are entangled in fragmented information.

In conclusion, social media has brought everyone together, "from the people to the people." As a result, dialogue between power and society has been fostered. Politics is no longer limited to politicians, but the participation of youth, women, and ordinary citizens has also been ensured. In the future, if social media is used carefully, responsibly, and ethically, it will revolutionize political awareness, good governance, transparency, and accountability.

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