

Changing Landscape Of Political Communication In The Age Of Social Media: A Review Article

Pranshu Mishra¹, Dr. Areena Mirza², Dr. Prashant K Trivedi³

¹Ph.D Scholar, Amity School of Communication, Amity University Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow-226028, Uttar Pradesh, India, pranshu.mishraa@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Amity School of Communication, Amity University Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow-226028, Uttar Pradesh, India, azmirza@lko.amity.edu

³Associate Professor, Giri Institute of Development Studies, Sector - O, Aliganj, Lucknow. prashantcsd@gmail.com

Abstract

This research paper explores the critical role of political communication in democratic societies like India, emphasising the synergy between politics and communication. It traces the historical evolution of political communication from ancient civilizations to the contemporary digital era. The study highlights how social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube have revolutionized political campaigning, enabling direct engagement with voters and bypassing traditional media. The paper examines the impact of these platforms on voter behaviour and campaign strategies, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, a key political battleground. It also addresses the challenges posed by misinformation and the need for effective content moderation. The research categorizes existing literature into three domains: the rise of social media, the role of social media channels in UP elections, and issues affecting public perception in UP. The study concludes that effective political communication is essential for building lasting relationships, encouraging discussions, and advancing societal welfare in Indian democracy.

Keywords: Digital Campaigning, Misinformation, Political Communication, Public Opinion, Social Media.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a world where the power of words shapes the destiny of nations. In democratic societies like India, the intricate dance between politics and communication is not just a backdrop but a driving force. Effective communication is the lifeblood of political processes, spreading vital information, engaging citizens, and sparking meaningful discussions. This dynamic relationship involves the art of crafting compelling messages, influencing public opinion, managing media relations, and navigating the ever-evolving landscape of digital media. Together, politics and communication create a powerful synergy that shapes the world. The emphasis on the communication aspect of politics dates back centuries. It has deep roots in human history. Playing a fundamental role in shaping public opinions and influencing decision-making, it has always been an integral part of society. Understanding the origin of political communication provides valuable insight into the evolution of political systems, the emergence of democratic principles, and the role of media in shaping public opinion. Tracing its development from ancient civilizations to the contemporary era, it has been observed that political communication systems are dynamic, constantly evolving, and never settled (Swanson, 2004). Recently, the world has witnessed dynamic changes in political communication and campaigning concerning conventional practices. The origins of political communication can be traced back to ancient civilizations such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome. In these early societies, leaders used oratory, written proclamations, and symbols to convey their authority and influence public opinion (Tsouparopoulou, 2015). Leaders like Hammurabi of Babylon and Cleopatra of Egypt utilized written laws and decrees to govern their realms and communicate their policies to the populace. The development of writing systems, such as cuneiform and hieroglyphics, enabled the recording and dissemination of political messages, laying the groundwork for the following communication methods (Prince, 1904). All political communication research must start by examining how ancient civilizations influenced public opinion. As evident, this research area is becoming increasingly complex and diverse, necessitating further synthesis to comprehend its crucial theoretical dimensions. This field has gained attention as it offers valuable insights for political communication and campaigning that align with voter needs. The primary aims of this paper are to reflect on various perspectives within the field, illuminate the dominant theoretical constructs in political

communication, and outline a future research agenda. This study investigates the transformative impact of social media on political campaigning in Uttar Pradesh (UP), the most populous state of India. It examines how digital platforms have reshaped strategies, voter engagement, and the overall political discourse, highlighting key trends, challenges, and implications for future elections. Political communication in India has evolved significantly over the years, mirroring the country's complex socio-political landscape. From ancient oral traditions to modern digital platforms, the methods and mediums of political communication have undergone a remarkable transformation. It was only in the last two decades of the twentieth century that the interdisciplinary field of political communication was officially launched by organized groups of scholars in leading professional associations representing the fields of communication and political science (Varughese & Semetko, 2022). Ancient and Medieval India: The roots of political communication in India can be traced back to ancient times when oral tradition was the primary mode of disseminating information. In prehistoric times, humans communicated through spoken language, orally passing down stories, knowledge, and traditions (Kumar & Yadav, 2023). This system existed for years, and the information was transmitted from generation to generation through storytelling, folk songs, etc. Later, cave paintings, petroglyphs, and the development of written language revolutionized communication (Kumar & Yadav, 2023). Ancient India's Arthashastra, a treatise on statecraft by Chanakya, otherwise known as Kautilya (350-275 BCE), and Cicero's later treatise on how to win an election in ancient Rome (64 BCE) are two earliest examples of political communication (Varughese & Semetko, 2022). During the medieval period, the emergence of courtly culture witnessed the patronage of poets and writers who composed literary works glorifying rulers and their achievements. The dissemination of royal proclamations and decrees through town criers and messengers further contributed to the spread of political communication. In contrast to the history of change in literary and political language that can be traced with some certitude, the history of change in the structure of polity in India for the millennium between the disappearance of the last empires and the colonial encounter (the history of the Mughals excepted) remains obscure (Kulke, 1995; Pollock, 2018). Colonial Era: The emergence of British colonial rule in India brought about significant changes in political communication. The origin of modern journalism in India in the late eighteenth century presents a unique case study of the idea of how the ways of doing journalism travelled from England to various colonies of the British Empire, how the "model" was received, adopted, and constructively adapted by the local elites, and how journalism of this period prepared the groundwork for the use of the press as a powerful weapon during freedom struggles, particularly in non-Dominion or non-Settler colonies such as India (Sonwalkar, 2015). The introduction of print media, with newspapers like 'The Bengal Gazette' and 'The Times of India', facilitated the dissemination of political ideas and criticism of colonial policies. While the British-owned newspapers of India tended to support the government, the nascent Indian-owned press opposed the ruling powers (Eapen, 1967). Influential leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi utilized newspapers and pamphlets as powerful tools to mobilize public opinion during the freedom struggle. The emergence of the vernacular press played a crucial role in reaching out to the masses in their languages, encouraging a sense of national identity and unity. Though the vernacular press was limited in circulation, it affected a wider audience. The vernacular media had a wider reach than indigenous English media and catered to the socio-political sentiments of people (Neyazi, 2018). The Britishers tried to curb vernacular press, and experienced journalists were also called from Britain. The staff of the large and richer British-owned newspapers with academic distinction, vast journalistic experience, and knowledge of public affairs in England were roped in (Eapen, 1967). Post-Independence: The Indian-owned media operated at the forefront during the freedom struggle. The Indian vernacular press changed the definition format of journalism. When freedom arrived in August 1947, there were enough journals owned by Indians and enough Indians exposed to good journalism so that there was little of a vacuum as the remaining British-owned papers passed into Indian hands (Eapen, 1967). The period following India's Independence witnessed a surge in political communication efforts as the newly formed democratic republic grappled with the task of nation-building. Political parties utilized mass rallies, radio broadcasts, and posters to connect with the electorate and convey their ideologies (Ananth, 2011). The introduction of television in the 1960s revolutionized political communication, enabling leaders to reach millions of households across the country (Kumar K. J., 2021). One of the primary objectives of political communication in post-

independence India was to bridge the divides that threatened to fragment the nation along linguistic, religious, and regional lines. Moreover, political communication played a vital role in articulating and advancing the goals of social justice and economic development (Brass, 2001). Leaders talked about issues like historical injustices, reducing poverty, and promoting equitable growth across all sections of society. Iconic speeches such as Jawaharlal Nehru's "Tryst with Destiny" and Indira Gandhi's "Garibi Hatao" resonated with the aspirations of the Indian populace, shaping public discourse (Ananth, 2011). Through effective communication strategies, they sought to mobilize public support for initiatives such as land reforms, affirmative action programs, and poverty alleviation schemes. The history of political communication in post-independence India reflects the ongoing struggle to balance unity and diversity, democracy and pluralism, tradition and modernity. Liberalization and Technological Advancements: India's political landscape witnessed significant changes since liberalization in the 1990s. Liberalization resulted in not only economic reforms but also changed the various aspects of society, including communication. Coupled with rapid technological advancements, this period witnessed a revolution in the ways political messages were disseminated, received, and interpreted. Liberalization eased out state control on media and opened avenues for private players, leading to the proliferation of print, broadcast, and later digital media (Kohli, 1989; Chakravartty & Roy, 2013). The increased diversity of media outlets offered politicians a broader platform to disseminate their messages, enabling them to reach a wider audience than ever before. The discretionary authority of the state to grant specialized, one-off "deals" to individual media owners to establish and operate news channels has fuelled the remarkable expansion of India's news media in recent years, rather than a singular, uniform, and deliberate policy decision to liberalize the media (Chakravartty & Roy, 2013). With the rise of 24x7 news channels and the internet, political communication transcended traditional boundaries, allowing for real-time updates and interactive engagement with citizens. Technological advancements facilitated a shift from one-size-fits-all mass communication to targeted messaging tailored to specific demographics. Political parties began employing data analytics and micro-targeting techniques to customize their communication strategies based on voter preferences, behaviour, and socio-economic profiles (Sen, 2016). This personalized approach not only enhanced the effectiveness of political campaigns but also deepened the engagement between political parties and the electorate. The advent of the internet and social media platforms revolutionized political mobilization in India (Kumar K. J., 2021). Politicians and parties leverage these platforms to directly engage with voters, bypassing traditional media intermediaries. Social media enabled rapid dissemination of information, amplification of political messages, and real-time feedback loops.

Political campaigning in contemporary Indian landscape

In this digital era, political campaigning in India has become increasingly complex and dynamic. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have emerged as battlegrounds for political discussions and debates, enabling politicians to directly interact with people and shape public opinion. However, concerns regarding misinformation, fake news, and digital polarization have also surfaced, posing challenges to the integrity of democratic processes. In the past decade, various social media and mobile platforms have been part of economic, interpersonal and political communication in India (Rodrigues, 2020). 'India against Corruption' movement, in 2011, led by Anna Hazare and Arvind Kejriwal, organized nationwide protests and sit-ins. Their demand was clear: the Indian government should collaborate with civil society to create a robust Lokpal (ombudsman) bill, enhancing accountability for public officials. The movement, fuelled by mobile phones and social media, resonated across Indian society. News channels and newspapers amplified its impact, echoing the spirit of change (Ashutosh, 2012; Rodrigues, 2014). In response to mass civil unrest, the Aam Adami Party (AAP) emerged as a political force in India, aiming to address corruption. Led by Arvind Kejriwal, AAP actively used social media platforms like Twitter and YouTube. Meanwhile, the BJP, led by Narendra Modi, effectively harnessed social media to engage with educated, middle-class Indians, including millions of first-time voters. During the 2014 national election campaign, the BJP's innovative strategies, including hologram rallies and targeted Twitter messages, outshone the Indian National Congress (Goyal, 2014). The successful use of social media platforms by Modi and BJP in the 2014 general election, compelled opposition parties, both at the national and regional, level to jump on the bandwagon (Rodrigues, 2020). Then during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, leaders utilized platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter,

and others to engage voters. With 396 million election-related tweets, social media's impact was clear. The BJP continued to expand their digital presence, while the INC also improved their online strategies. Parties collected phone numbers for direct communication and data analytics, building ongoing supporter relationships. In last few years, data analytics became integral to refining local campaign strategies, demonstrating the evolving role of digital tools in political communication (Vinayak, 2019). The Digital Revolution: The advent of digital platforms has revolutionized political campaigning in India, providing politicians with unprecedented avenues to engage with citizens (Udupa, Venkatraman, & Khan, 2020). The rise of digital tools such as websites, mobile apps, and online streaming services has transformed the way political campaigns are conducted. Technology has enabled politicians to reach the public in real-time, creating a more participatory form of democracy. Social media platforms have emerged as battlegrounds for political debates, where narratives are shaped, opinions are swayed, and movements are catalysed. Politicians leverage these platforms to disseminate their messages directly to the public, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. This integration of politics and media has been so profound that understanding political dynamics without considering media influence is implausible (Bali & Jagan, 2017). The Challenge of Information Overload: While digital platforms have democratized political campaigning, they have also aggravated the problem of information overload. In an era of clickbait headlines and viral misinformation, distinguishing fact from fiction has become increasingly difficult for citizens (Renjith, 2017). The 24/7 news cycle amplifies sensationalism and polarization, often at the expense of substantive policy discussions. Furthermore, the proliferation of fake news and propaganda poses a threat to the integrity of democratic processes, as misinformation campaigns can manipulate public opinion and undermine trust in institutions (Renjith, 2017). Navigating this landscape requires media literacy and critical thinking skills, both of which are essential for an informed electorate. Building Trust: In an age of cynicism and disillusionment, authenticity has emerged as a currency of trust in political campaigns. Citizens crave genuine leadership and transparency from their elected representatives, demanding accountability for promises made and actions taken (Sethuraman, 2023). Authenticity is not merely a communication strategy but a fundamental attribute that shapes public perception and legitimacy. However, achieving authenticity in political communication is no easy feat, especially in a landscape rife with spin doctors and scripted narratives. Building trust requires sincerity, consistency, and a willingness to acknowledge shortcomings openly. Leaders who demonstrate humility and integrity are more likely to resonate with citizens and cultivate long-term relationships based on mutual respect (Sethuraman, 2023). The Evolving Landscape: In the dynamic landscape of Indian democracy, political communication serves as a barometer of societal values, aspirations, and challenges. The advent of digital technology has transformed the way politicians engage with citizens, offering both opportunities and challenges. As one navigates this evolving territory, it is imperative to uphold the principles of transparency, authenticity, and inclusivity, ensuring that political campaigns remain a force for democracy and empowerment. The true test of political communication lies not in its ability to win elections or shape public opinion but in its capacity to initiate dialogue, bridge divides, and uphold the foundational values of democracy. By embracing these principles Indian political communication can navigate the complexities of the contemporary landscape and fulfil its promise as a catalyst for positive change (Dutta, 2020).

Research process

The authors conducted their research using literature from Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and various journal databases, focusing on works cited at least three times. They defined political communication using established definitions from Pye (1993) and McNair (2017). By analysing theoretical frameworks and conceptual trends, they identified three distinct domains, comparing these trends with foundational studies, particularly the classifications by Aelst et al. (2017). Although the authors outlined clear boundaries between the three domains, they acknowledged some overlap among Domains A, B, and C. To address this, they summarized key studies in literature tables (Tables 1–3) to clarify distinctions between these areas. Domain A, focuses on the rise of social media and its relationship with political communication in India, covering the growth of social media platforms, regional dynamics, issue-driven campaigns, participatory platforms, and media-public interactions. Domain B, investigates the roles of various social media channels in UP, evaluating Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube,

and their contributions to political communication in the region. Domain C, examines significant issues shaping public perception in UP, highlighting how these factors influence electoral outcomes. This includes a wide range of social, economic, and political issues affecting how the electorate perceives candidates and political messages, crucial in the decision-making process during elections. This research categorizes existing literature on political communication and enhances understanding of how social media and various influences intersect to shape public discourse and electoral behaviour.

Domain A: Social media & political campaigning

Political campaigning in India is undergoing a transformative phase, influenced by a combination of traditional methods and modern technologies. In the current scenario, several trends and challenges shape the landscape of political discourse, reflecting the complexities of a diverse and dynamic democracy. The rise of social media: The proliferation of social media platforms has revolutionized political communication in India. Politicians and parties leverage platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp to connect with constituents, disseminate information, and mobilize support. Social media allows for direct engagement with voters, bypassing traditional media intermediaries and enabling real-time interactions. However, the digital landscape also presents challenges, including the spread of misinformation and polarization. Navigating this terrain requires strategies that balance authenticity, transparency, and responsible use of technology (Renjith, 2017; Dutta, 2020; Udupa, Venkatraman, & Khan, 2020; Sethuraman, 2023). Regional realities: India's linguistic and cultural diversity necessitates focused communication strategies at the regional level. Politics in India is essentially local, and India's voters elect their representatives based on small local and regional issues, instead of the big national issues (Arulchelvan, 2014). Regional media outlets, vernacular languages, and issues of locals, play a significant role in shaping political scenarios, highlighting the regional grassroots engagement and decentralized communication channels (Sarangi & Pai, 2020). Issue-based campaigning: In recent years, there has been a shift towards issue-based campaigning, with a focus on policy agendas rather than personality cults. Voters are increasingly demanding substantive discussions on pressing issues such as economic development, social justice, and governance reforms. During 2014 general elections, BJP drew attention towards shortcomings of the existing Congress government and was able to seek public favour on these issues. Whereas in 2019, respondents who thought about the issues of unemployment and price increase tended to move their vote away from the BJP, since they felt that the incumbent had not fared well on these parameters (Choudhary, Syal, & Arora, 2020). Participatory platforms: Political campaigning is no longer a one-way street but a participatory process that engages citizens in governance. Initiatives such as citizen feedback mechanisms and online forums facilitate dialogue between leaders and the public, promoting transparency, accountability, and civic engagement. BJP's 2014 campaign represented the introduction of a potentially new, grassroots-oriented mode of political campaigning in the Indian context, based on enhanced public participation and interaction in the electoral process – a shift that may contribute to strengthening democratic participation by citizens (Chadha & Guha, 2016). Media dynamics: The multifaceted role of media in shaping political communication cannot be overstated. From information dissemination through news coverage and investigative journalism to the strategic influence of agenda setting and framing, the media serves as a powerful intermediary in the democratic process (Saaïda, 2023).

Table 1: Domain A

Author	Year	Summary of key papers
Sethuraman	2023	Since the 1990s, global democratization has increased public participation in governance. Civil society and grassroots movements demanded transparency and accountability, leading to significant reforms like India's Right to Information Act (2005) and electoral reforms (2003). This chapter explores the factors, players, and impacts of these reforms in India.
Arulchelvan	2014	The study found that major political parties in India are increasingly using new media tools for campaigns, with mobile phones being particularly effective. While new media adoption is growing, only some parties fully capitalize on its benefits. The study supports the

		technological determinism theory, highlighting new media's role in social and political change.
Surya & Jha	2021	The study addresses political branding, highlighting attributes like credibility and positive brand personality. It explores branding dimensions, strategies for favorable electoral outcomes, and the role of user engagement. Findings show that social media and mobile campaigns are effective, supporting technological determinism theory in transforming political communication and branding.
Chadha & Guha	2016	The BJP's 2014 campaign used new media to engage citizens but maintained tight control over participation. While it appeared inclusive, actual interaction was limited and centrally managed. This approach aimed to attract young, urban voters while avoiding miscommunication, highlighting the tension between participatory potential and controlled campaign strategies.
Udupa et al.	2020	The study observes that India's 450 million internet users form the world's second-largest online base. Digital media, including WhatsApp and Facebook, have expanded, though access gaps remain. Digital tools impact political communication, enabling new civic engagement and activism, especially among youth and marginalized groups. However, they also reinforce existing hierarchies and facilitate targeted political violence.
Saaida	2023	Social media has transformed political engagement, offered greater reach and real-time feedback but also spread misinformation and hate speech. To mitigate these risks, best practices like promoting media literacy, supporting fact-checking, encouraging diverse voices, and holding platforms accountable are essential. This ensures social media strengthens democratic processes rather than undermines them.
Nielsen & Ganter	2022	The Power of Platforms book explore how tech giants like Facebook and Google dominate news distribution, surpassing traditional media. They analyze the evolving relationships between publishers and platforms across several countries, highlighting the new power dynamics and the dependency of news organizations on these influential platforms.

Domain B: Role of social media channels in UP elections

Social media channels have now transformed the landscape of political campaigning in Uttar Pradesh (UP), one of India's most crucial political battlegrounds. Social media platforms are now-a-days extensively utilized by political parties to engage with voters, disseminate information, and shape public opinion. These platforms allow for direct communication with the electorate, bypassing traditional media filters and enabling real-time interaction. The assembly elections in UP are among the most closely watched and politically significant events in the country. With an estimated population of 231.5 million (Uttar Pradesh Population, n.d.) and a diverse electorate, UP presents a unique challenge and opportunity for political parties and candidates. In recent years, social media has emerged as a powerful tool in these elections, fundamentally altering how campaigns are conducted and how voters engage with political content. They have played a transformative role in UP elections, each bringing unique strengths and challenges to the electoral process. Facebook: In recent years, Facebook has emerged as a key player when it comes to political campaigning, particularly in high-stakes elections like those in UP. With its vast user base and powerful tools for engagement, it has significantly influenced the electoral scenario. Facebook's extensive reach allows political parties and candidates to connect with a diverse and large audience. The platform's features, such as pages, posts, and targeted ads, have been utilized extensively for election campaigns. Political parties use Facebook to share updates, showcase achievements, and promote their agendas. During the 2017 UP assembly elections, BJP witnessed a 25% increase in engagement on their Facebook posts as the election date approached (Goel, 2018). One of Facebook's most significant contributions to political campaigning is its advertising capabilities. The platform allows for precise targeting based on

demographics, interests, and behaviour. Political parties have used these tools to run highly targeted advertisements aimed at specific voter segments. In the 2022 UP assembly elections, political advertising spending on Facebook saw a significant rise. According to a report, political parties collectively spent approximately ₹200 crore on Facebook ads (Bhalla, 2022). Twitter: Twitter has increasingly become a powerful tool in political campaigning in India. It offers real-time communication and engagement capabilities that are highly valued in high-stakes elections. In the context of the assembly elections in UP, Twitter has played a significant role in shaping campaign strategies and voter engagement. The channel's strength lies in its ability to provide instant updates and facilitate real-time communication. Political parties and candidates have used Twitter to broadcast live updates, share key announcements, and engage with the electorate. During the 2017 UP assembly elections, data from Twitter analytics showed a 50% increase in political tweets and retweets as the election date approached (Alvi, et al., 2023). Apart from this surge in voter engagement, Twitter has also become a central platform for political discussions, enabling users to participate in and observe debates, discussions, and commentary. The platform's hashtags and trending topics help organise conversations around key issues and political events. Reports observed that during the 2022 UP assembly elections, hashtags related to the elections, such as #UPVotes2022 and #Election2022, trended regularly. These hashtags saw a 40% increase in engagement compared to the 2017 elections, highlighting Twitter's role in organizing and amplifying political discussions (Mampatta, 2022; Dutt, 2022). While Twitter's advertising tools are not as sophisticated as Facebook's, political parties have still leveraged promoted tweets and trends to target specific voter segments. The platform's targeting abilities allow for precise audience segmentation, which is crucial in a diverse state like UP. According to a report by the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), political ad spending on Twitter during the 2022 UP assembly elections increased by 25% compared to the 2017 elections (Shahidi, 2022). This increase indicates a growing trust on Twitter for targeted political messaging. Instagram: UP being the focal point of Indian politics has largely witnessed the influence of social media platforms, particularly Instagram, which has emerged as a crucial channel for political campaigning, voter engagement, and information dissemination. Instagram's visual nature makes it an ideal platform for storytelling and campaigning. Political parties and candidates use Instagram to share images, videos, and stories that highlight their activities, achievements, and promises. During the recent UP elections, candidates frequently posted pictures from rallies, behind-the-scenes moments, and campaign trail snippets to connect with voters on a more personal level. According to a report, during the 2017 UP assembly elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) saw a 20% increase in engagement on their Instagram posts as the election date approached (Charan, 2022), reflecting the growing importance of visual content in political campaigns. One of the most significant features of Instagram is that it is particularly popular among the younger generation, making it a key platform for reaching first-time voters and young adults. Political parties have recognised this and customized their content to appeal to younger voters. This includes using trendy formats like reels, memes, and interactive stories. A survey conducted in 2019 indicated that 41% of Instagram users in India are aged between 18-24, highlighting the platform's potential for engaging young voters in UP (Narsimha, Moovendhan, & Manoharan, 2021). These young voters are majorly persuaded by the influencers and endorsers. Influencers play a significant role in shaping opinions on Instagram. Political parties have collaborated with local influencers and celebrities to endorse their campaigns and reach a wider audience. These influencers often have a loyal following, and their endorsements can significantly impact voter perceptions. During the 2022 UP assembly elections, there was a 15% increase in political content posted by influencers compared to the previous election cycle (Singh, 2022), with many endorsing various political parties and candidates. WhatsApp: In the dynamic and ever-evolving landscape of political campaigning, WhatsApp has emerged as a crucial tool in the country. With its extensive reach and ability to facilitate rapid communication, WhatsApp plays a significant role in shaping the electoral strategies and outcomes. The primary strength of the application lies in its ability to facilitate instant communication. Political parties and candidates have used the platform to mobilize supporters, coordinate campaign activities, and disseminate information quickly. WhatsApp groups comprising party workers, volunteers, and voters enable efficient and real-time communication. According to a report, in the year 2021 there approximately 493.31 million WhatsApp users in India and it is projected to reach 795.67 million users by 2025 (Degenhard, 2023).

In UP, the penetration of WhatsApp among mobile phone users was estimated to be around 85%, making it an indispensable tool for political communication. WhatsApp allows for personalized and targeted messaging, which is crucial in a diverse state like UP with its various castes, communities, and regional interests. Political parties create segmented groups to send customized messages that go with specific voter section. This micro-targeting helps in addressing the unique concerns and aspirations of different communities. A report indicated that during the 2017 UP assembly elections, political parties created thousands of WhatsApp groups to ensure their messages reached every constituency (Narayanan & Ananth, 2018). The study highlighted that nearly 60% of the voters received election-related information through these groups. Political campaigns use WhatsApp to distribute campaign materials, including videos, audio clips, posters, and infographics. This ensures that even voters in remote areas, where traditional media might not have as much reach, receive the campaign messages. It was found that in 2022 UP assembly elections, 72% of respondents received political content on WhatsApp (Rai, 2022), making it one of the most significant sources of election-related information. YouTube: The landscape of political campaigning in India has been significantly transformed by digital platforms, with YouTube playing a pivotal role in recent elections, especially in states like UP. Known for its vast reach and powerful video-sharing capabilities, YouTube has emerged as a crucial tool for political parties to connect with voters, disseminate information, and shape public opinion. The platform's core strength lies in its ability to host and share video content, which can be far more engaging and impactful than text or static images. Political parties and candidates have utilized YouTube to share speeches, campaign rallies, interviews, and promotional videos. This rich media content helps in effectively communicating their messages, showcasing their achievements, and building a personal connection with the electorate (Kumar V. , 2022). In 2019 elections, political content on YouTube saw a 40% increase in viewership compared to non-election periods (Neyazi T. A., 2021). Videos of campaign rallies and speeches were particularly popular, with some garnering millions of views. YouTube's extensive reach makes it accessible to a vast audience, including those in rural and semi-urban areas where traditional media might not penetrate as effectively. The platform's accessibility via smartphones and the internet has democratized information dissemination, allowing political messages to reach even the most remote parts of UP. A report says that the number of YouTube users in India is forecasted to continuously increase between 2024 and 2029 by 34.88% (Degenhard, 2024). In UP, the penetration of YouTube among internet users was estimated to be around 70%, making it a critical platform for reaching a broad audience. One of the prominent features of the application is live streaming and real-time engagement. Live streaming of events, rallies, and speeches has become a popular feature on YouTube, allowing political parties to engage with voters in real-time. Live streams provide an unfiltered view of political events, increasing transparency and trust. Additionally, they enable instant feedback and interaction through comments and live chats. During the 2022 UP assembly elections, it was observed that YouTube live-streamed political events saw a 50% increase in viewership compared to the 2017 elections (Maheshwari, 2022). This trend highlights the growing preference for real-time political content among voters.

Table 2: Domain B

Author	Year	Summary of key papers
Goel	2018	Pranav Bhat, an 18-year-old BJP youth leader, used WhatsApp extensively to campaign for Prime Minister Modi in Karnataka's legislative elections. WhatsApp played a central role in political campaigning, with both BJP and Congress creating thousands of groups to spread messages, including false information and inflammatory content, highlighting the platform's significant influence.
Bhalla	2022	During 2022, within three months, Koo, a homegrown microblogging app, spent over ₹1.5 crore on Facebook and Instagram ads, surpassing the BJP's Uttar Pradesh division, which spent ₹1.4 crore. While Koo's campaign was national, BJP UP focused on the state, highlighting Uttar Pradesh as Facebook's biggest ad revenue source.
Archit & Bhattacharyya	2022	Alt News published 462 fact checks in 2022, starting with a story on media misreports about a Punjab politician. Major events like state

		elections, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and the Hijab row triggered misinformation. Mainstream media often contributed to false claims, highlighting their vulnerability and complicity in spreading misinformation. Viral videos were the most common source of misinformation.
Adhana & Saxena	2019	Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube allow politicians to directly engage with voters, bypassing traditional media. Narendra Modi, dubbed “India’s first social media prime minister,” effectively used these tools to influence young voters. Social media fosters political engagement, but also poses challenges like misinformation and manipulation.
Alvi et al.	2023	This study analyzes sentiment classification techniques, highlighting the promise and challenges of deep learning. It addresses gaps in election prediction using Twitter sentiment analysis, emphasizing the need for integrating multiple data sources and improving models. The review offers valuable insights for researchers and policymakers on predicting election outcomes and understanding public opinion.
Charan	2022	The study concludes that voters demand diverse communication from political representatives. Effective social media strategies and digital armies are essential for parties. Training digital cadres, using analytic tools, and exploring various digital marketing techniques are crucial. Appointing and training digital warriors and researchers is vital for competitive social media campaigns.
Dash et al.	2023	Crowd interest is crucial in national elections for predicting party influence and shaping campaign strategies. Social media data’s volume and bias pose challenges. A fuzzy inference framework is proposed to analyze social media preferences, using tweets from Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram. The approach effectively predicts user interest and outperforms existing methods.
Neyazi & Schroeder	2021	Despite expectations of a weaker performance, Modi and the BJP won the 2019 election decisively. Modi’s campaign dominated media coverage, utilized professional campaign organizations, and effectively mobilized social media. This comprehensive media strategy, combining traditional and digital platforms, was crucial for his overwhelming electoral success.

Domain C: Issues affecting public perception in UP

Public perception during voting in Uttar Pradesh (UP) is influenced by a range of issues that significantly impact electoral outcomes. Here are the key issues that affect public perception according to the previous studies:

Table 3: Issues of Public Perception

S. No.	Issue	Description
1	Economic stability	Economic stability plays a critical role in influencing electoral outcomes. In the election system, even these socio-cultural and economic factors also influence the political mobilization, selection of the candidate, choice of candidate, etc. (Biswas, Khan, Ahamed, & Rahaman, 2022). Issues like unemployment, inflation, and income inequality can influence voter sentiment (Brass, State Politics in India, 1968).
2	Development projects	The success or failure of government schemes and development projects in local areas shape public opinion (Pai, 2002).
3	Political leadership	The charisma and public image of political leaders often affect voter trust and preference. For example, the popularity of Narendra

S. No.	Issue	Description
		Modi has overpowered the masses, ultimately leading to BJP win in the 2014 and 2019 general elections and 2017 and 2022 assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh (Biswas, Khan, Ahamed, & Rahaman, 2022).
4	Party performance	The performance of the current ruling party in addressing public issues also impacts voter perception. Humans are not cognitively able to consider all the possible factors in a typical campaign and election simultaneously (Simon, 1979) and therefore opinion about the past performance of any party can be significantly influential to form the voter's choice (Chatterjee & Dutta, 2024).
5	Caste community dynamics &	Caste-based politics and social affiliations influences voting behaviour, with voters often aligning with parties that support their community interests. Caste and casteism never disappeared in UP politics. The kind of social engineering being used by political parties for political mobilisation resulted in co-optation of many lower castes into the party (Yadav, 2022).
6	Gender issues	Policies and measures related to women's safety, education, and empowerment shape perceptions, especially among female voters. BJP's earlier campaigns were targeted at women and benefited the party with schemes like Jan Dhan Yojana, Ujjwala LPG scheme, and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan are being iterated to women voters (Biswas, Khan, Ahamed, & Rahaman, 2022).
7	Campaign strategies	The effectiveness of political campaigns, including rallies, advertisements, and outreach efforts, impact voter opinions. An article discusses how the Sangh Parivar has effectively dismantled the conventional understandings of UP politics and challenged the ways in which it has been understood using the strategies of social engineering and politicization of diverse identities to attract communities who traditionally have not voted for the party (Jha, 2021).
8	Media coverage	The portrayal of candidates and political issues in the media, including both traditional and social media, influences public perception. Positive or negative coverage can affect voter attitudes. The media and politics interlink is shown by the fact that every political party either owns or operates a television channel to propagate its ideology or eulogize its party leaders (Gudipaty, 2017). Even those belonging to businesses have strong allegiances to a political party.
9	Voting patterns	Historical voting patterns and loyalty to certain parties or leaders also influence voter behaviour. It has been observed that sometimes the voters shift their loyalty and sometimes they even abstain themselves from voting. From mid-1990 to 2012 the seats and vote share of BJP had seen a decline, but 2014 parliamentary election had provided the energy to regain its support in the state, and 2017 assembly election witnessed the fruit of change and came into the power with thumping majority (Singh, Kumar, & Kumari, 2019).
10	Cultural religious influences &	Cultural and religious affiliations and sentiments affect voter preferences and choices. Biswas et al. (2022) observed that the leadership of Narendra Damodar Modi has attracted more individuals. The cultural spaces of Uttar Pradesh are very feasible for the electoral mobilization of religious/communal sentiments.

S. No.	Issue	Description
11	Infrastructure & public services	Local issues related to infrastructure, healthcare, education, and public services are crucial. The effectiveness of local governance in addressing these needs impacts voter perception. The states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Delhi, respectively, have revenue, general administration, administrative reforms and information technology departments as nodal departments (Pandey, 2019).
12	Urban vs. rural divide	The differences in priorities between urban and rural areas affect voting behavior, with each area having distinct concerns and needs. A study observed that there is the difference in the demographic profile of urban and rural masses and the parties had to resort to specific strategies for expanding its outreach (Mukerji, 2015).
13	Corruption scandals &	Allegations of corruption and scandals erode trust in candidates and parties, affecting public perception and voting behaviour. In 2011, India saw a groundswell of popular protest in which thousands of citizens joined in anticorruption demonstrations after a series of scandals implicated ruling politicians and their cronies in billions of dollars of graft—from the Commonwealth Games to 2G scandals, and from “Coalgate” to Adarsh Housing Society, giving rise to a new political party – the Aam Aadmi Party (Sukhtankar & Vaishnav, 2015).
14	Electoral transparency	The transparency and fairness of the electoral process, including concerns about vote rigging or manipulation, impact voter confidence. The major issues before unfairness of Indian electoral process are money power, muscle power, criminalization of politics, poll violence, booth capturing, paid news, lack of moral values, sharp decline in statesmanship qualities, lack of adherence to model code of conduct, tilting of Election Commission in favour of Central Government leadership etc. (Dalal & Bhati, 2021). All these issues erode the faith of the people in transparent and fair elections.
15	Personal experience interactions &	Personal experiences with government services or political representatives and influences from family, friends, and community leaders shape individual voter perceptions and decisions. Ahuja & Chhibber (2012) in their study probed the extent of personal contact that Indian citizens have with state functionaries.
16	Economic incentives	Campaign promises related to financial aid, subsidies, and welfare programs sway voters, especially if they address immediate economic concerns. In some cases, economic incentives or bribes also affect voting behaviour, although such practices are illegal and undermine democratic processes. 2022 UP assembly elections saw political parties offering freebies like: free scooty, free petrol, free electricity, free ration, wedding gift, pension, etc. to lure voters (UP Elections. Who Promises What?, n.d.).
17	Youth engagement	The engagement of younger voters and their perspectives on issues like employment, education, and technology also influences electoral outcomes. Singh (2022) discussed the Indian democratic system and the role of youth. The author highlighted the role of youth role in electoral politics and discussed the importance of the same.

Understanding these issues helped the researcher to grasp the complex dynamics of voter behaviour in Uttar Pradesh, where multiple influences intersect to shape public perception and electoral results.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Political campaigning in India is an organized effort that requires adaptability, innovation, and inclusivity. By implementing digital technologies, addressing regional diversities, focusing on policy issues, promoting citizen participation, rebuilding trust, and nurturing responsible media dynamics, political actors can navigate the complexities of the current scenario and strengthen democratic governance. Ultimately, effective political communication is not just about winning elections or shaping public opinion but about building long lasting relationships, encouraging discussions, and advancing the collective welfare of society. In this dynamic landscape, the ability to communicate effectively, ethically, and empathetically remains paramount for the health and vibrancy of Indian democracy (Banducci, 2017; Nielsen & Ganter, 2022). The spread of fake news and misinformation on Facebook has been a major concern. During the UP elections, misleading information circulated widely, affecting voter perceptions and decisions. Facebook has faced criticism for not effectively curbing the spread of false information. Despite the challenges associated with managing false narratives, Facebook provides valuable analytics tools that help political parties understand voter behaviour and preferences. By analyzing engagement metrics, parties can develop an understanding about how to better resonate with their target audiences. Facebook has also been influential in mobilizing volunteers and supporters. Facebook's feature for direct interaction between candidates and voters also proved to be advantageous. Facebook's role in the assembly elections of Uttar Pradesh has been multifaceted and significant. From targeted advertising and mobilizing support to addressing the challenges of misinformation, the platform has become an integral part of modern political campaigns. There is a need to deeply understand the platform's influence in shaping electoral strategies and voter engagement, while also highlighting the need for effective management of misinformation. As digital campaigning continues to evolve, Facebook's role in UP elections and beyond will likely expand, influencing the future of political communication and engagement in India. Just like Facebook, Twitter also faces challenges related to the spread of fake news and misinformation. During past elections in UP, false information was circulated rapidly, affecting public perception and the integrity of the electoral process (Archit & Bhattacharyya, 2022). Fascinatingly, Twitter's interactive features, such as polls, replies, and Twitter Spaces, have been used to engage directly with voters. These features allow for real-time feedback and interaction, enhancing the democratic engagement process. Political parties have lately used Twitter to mobilize support, organize events, and coordinate campaign activities. The platform's ability to quickly disseminate information and rally supporters has been crucial for campaign management. Twitter's role in the assembly elections of Uttar Pradesh has been significant and complicated. Its ability to provide real-time updates, facilitate political discussions, and engage directly with voters has made it an essential tool in modern political campaigning. However, the challenges associated with misinformation highlight the need for effective content moderation and fact-checking. As digital campaigning continues to evolve, Twitter's influence on the electoral process in UP and beyond is likely to grow, shaping the future of political communication and engagement in India. The hashtags are a powerful tool on Instagram for creating trends and consolidating discussions. Political campaigns in UP have used specific hashtags to promote their messages and create a unified narrative. Hashtags like #VoteForChange, #UPWithBJP, and #AkhileshYadav2022 trended frequently during the election periods, helping to amplify the reach of campaign messages (Dash, Dara, & Mishra, 2023). Not only hashtags but Instagram's other interactive features such as polls, Q&A sessions, and live videos have also been used by politicians to engage directly with voters. These features allow for real-time interaction and feedback, making voters feel heard and valued (Reuters, 2024). Where on one hand Instagram is a powerful tool for political engagement, there on the other just like Facebook and Twitter, it also faces challenges related to misinformation. Political campaigns have had to address the spread of false information and use the platform's tools to counteract misleading narratives. Instagram's visual and interactive features have made it an essential platform for political campaigning, particularly in engaging younger voters and creating impactful visual narratives. While challenges like misinformation remain, the

effective use of Instagram by political parties demonstrates its growing importance in modern electoral processes. Despite being a powerful tool for communication, WhatsApp also poses challenges due to the spread of fake news and misinformation. To add on, the platform's encrypted nature makes it difficult to trace the origin of false information, which can influence voter perceptions and decisions. According to a report there was a significant spike in misinformation on WhatsApp during the 2019 Indian general elections, and similar patterns were observed during the UP-assembly elections (Archit & Bhattacharyya, 2022). Political parties create local groups to create a sense of belonging and community among supporters. These groups are used to share achievements, discuss issues, and keep the voter base engaged and motivated (Saiz & Geser, 2021). The groups also allow political parties to receive real-time feedback from voters. This instant feedback mechanism helps parties to gauge the public mood, adjust their strategies, and address voter concerns promptly (Kumar A. , 2022). WhatsApp's ability to facilitate rapid communication, targeted messaging, and community engagement has made it an indispensable tool in modern political campaigning (Charan, 2022). However, the challenges posed by misinformation highlight the need for effective regulatory mechanisms. Political parties have also collaborated with YouTube influencers to reach younger and more digitally savvy audiences. Influencers with large followings persuade the public and endorse candidates or parties, thereby increasing their reach and impact (Maheshwari, 2022). YouTube has been used to educate voters about the electoral process, party manifestos, and key issues. Political parties and independent organizations have created informational videos to explain complex policies, showcase development work, and counter misinformation. Just like other social media channels, YouTube also faces challenges related to misinformation. Political campaigns have had to address the spread of false information and use the platform's tools to counteract misleading narratives (Archit & Bhattacharyya, 2022). This highlighted the need for robust fact-checking and moderation. YouTube's ability to engage voters through video content, provide real-time interaction, and reach a broad audience has made it an indispensable tool for political campaigns (Maheshwari, 2022). Political campaigning in India has significantly evolved with digital technologies and social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube. These tools have transformed voter engagement, support mobilization, and information dissemination, making them essential in modern electoral strategies. However, misinformation remains a critical challenge, as fake news can distort voter perceptions and undermine electoral integrity. Effective content moderation, fact-checking, and regulatory mechanisms are crucial to ensure digital campaigning positively impacts democratic governance. Success in political campaigns hinges on effective, ethical, and empathetic communication. Building lasting relationships with voters, fostering meaningful discussions, and advancing societal welfare are paramount. As digital campaigning evolves, social media's role in shaping political communication and engagement will continue to grow, influencing the future of Indian democracy.

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