

# The Internet's Transformative Role in Contemporary Political Dynamics : A Review of Social Media, Algorithms, and AI in Electoral Communication

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**Begram**  
Research Scholar  
Dept Of Political Science  
Maa Shakambari  
University  
Saharanpur, U.P., India

**Parvind Kumar**  
Professor  
Dept Of Political Science  
J.V. Jain Degree College  
Saharanpur, U.P., India

## Abstract

This review synthesizes scholarship on how the internet—particularly social media, algorithmic curation, and emerging artificial intelligence (AI)—has reshaped political communication, participation, and campaigning. We integrate foundational works with recent India-focused evidence on WhatsApp-centric mobilization, ad transparency, microtargeting, and AI-generated content. Findings indicate social media expands participation and narrative framing, while algorithmic personalization and AI intensify persuasive capacity and risks to transparency and accountability. We propose policy recommendations on ad repositories, algorithmic audits, safeguards against synthetic media, and oversight of third-party spending. Limitations include geographic bias and restricted researcher access to platform data.

## Keywords

Social Media; Political Communication; Microtargeting; Algorithmic Personalization; AI In Campaigns; India; Whatsapp; Polarization; Electoral Integrity.

## Introduction

Digital media have fundamentally reshaped political communication by transforming how information is produced, circulated, and interpreted within society. Unlike traditional broadcast models—characterized by centralized control and hierarchical gatekeeping—contemporary digital platforms enable horizontal, networked flows of communication that allow citizens, parties, and interest groups to interact in real time. These shifts have created hybrid media ecologies in which legacy news outlets, social media platforms, datadriven campaign tools, and usergenerated content coexist and influence one another, often accelerating the pace and reach of political messaging.

In the Indian context, the rise of social platforms such as Facebook, X/Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp has reconfigured electoral strategy and voter outreach since 2014. Political actors quickly recognized the persuasive potential of these platforms, leveraging them for agendasetting, micromobilization, narrative amplification, and targeted advertising. WhatsApp, in particular, emerged as a pivotal tool by the 2019 general elections due to its massive user base, endtoend encryption, and the ease with which messages could be distributed across thousands of localized, communityspecific groups. This ecosystem enabled unprecedented forms of grassroots digital coordination, rapid dissemination of political narratives, and the integration of online mobilization with offline party machinery. As a result, digital media have moved from being supplementary channels of communication to becoming central pillars of political strategy in India's electoral landscape.

## Objective of study

The objective of this paper is to study the Internet's transformative role in contemporary political dynamics in terms of Social Media, Algorithms, and AI in Electoral Communication.

## Review of Literature

The paper is based on various reviews which are discussed through out the paper.

## Methodology

We conducted a narrative review of peer-reviewed books, articles, and credible institutional reports (2010–2025), combining foundational literature with recent India-specific analyses on digital campaigning, messaging platforms, algorithmic personalization, and AI.

## The Internet and Political Communication: A Hybrid Media Ecology

Foundational work conceptualizes the internet's role in building decentralized mobilization and hybrid media systems. Empirically, social media afford low-cost expression, multimodal participation, and direct interaction with elites—expanding agenda-setting and narrative contestation.

**Data-Driven Campaigning, Targeting, and the India Case**

Data-intensive campaigning, targeted ads, and social analytics now shape electoral communication. In India, parties invested in social media teams and booth-level segmentation; WhatsApp, Facebook Live, and micro-messaging gained prominence by 2019.

**Algorithmic Personalization, Filter Bubbles, and Polarization: Contested Evidence**

Concerns about algorithmic curation intensifying polarization via echo chambers and filter bubbles coexist with evidence highlighting user agency and mixed effects. Policy and research should focus on measurable harms and auditability rather than deterministic claims.

**Misinformation, Disinformation, and Closed Messaging Platforms**

WhatsApp's scale and closed-group architecture complicate tracing origins of misinformation and hate speech. Investigations document coordinated messaging and "Trend Alerts" that migrate to open platforms, while API restrictions hinder independent scrutiny.

**AI in Political Campaigns and Microtargeting: Promise, Risks, and Evidence**

Generative AI can scale microtargeted persuasion, raising ethical concerns around deception, synthetic impersonation, and accountability. Some findings temper hyperbolic expectations, showing diminishing returns beyond simple segmentation.

**Democratic Value, Ethics, and Regulation**

Digital media expand participation and mobilization, but commercialization incentives and opaque systems challenge integrity. Regulatory trajectories converge on ad transparency, algorithmic audits, labeling of synthetic media, and oversight of third-party spending.

Result and Discussion

**Table-1**  
**Comparative Dimensions of Digital Campaigning — BJP, INC, and Regulatory Context**

Dimension	BJP	INC	Regulatory / Structural Context
Scale of Digital Advertising	The BJP deployed a very high volume of microads (~225,700 Google ads), reflecting an extensive, quantitydriven digital advertising strategy (Lokniti–CSDS, 2024).	The INC released ~9,250 Google ads, indicating a strategy centered on fewer but more expensive, highbudget promotions (Lokniti–CSDS, 2024).	Regulatory mechanisms such as ECI precertification and disclosure remain strained, particularly given the scale and velocity of digital ad dissemination (Mozilla Foundation, 2024).
Data Analytics & Targeting	BJP uses highly sophisticated segmentation, distributing thousands of smallbudget microads to optimize reach across voter segments (Lokniti–CSDS, 2024).	INC demonstrates lower diversification, relying on fewer, highimpact ads rather than wide segmentation (Lokniti–CSDS, 2024).	Thirdparty actors and intermediaries complicate monitoring and transparency in targeting (Mozilla Foundation, 2024).

Use of Social Platforms	BJP maintains high crossplatform activity and rapid digital responsiveness, reflected in its dominant presence in Google political advertising (Scroll/Stats via SIASAT, 2024).	INC is active but with lower posting frequency and weaker campaign cohesion, as shown in its smaller ad volume (Lokniti–CSDS, 2024).	Closed messaging networks remain underregulated compared with open platforms, reducing accountability (Mozilla Foundation, 2024).
WhatsApp Mobilization	BJP employs boothlevel WhatsApp groups and coordinated Trend Alertcampaigns to synchronize messaging across platforms (Digital Witness Lab, 2025).	INC's WhatsApp organization tends to be less centralized, limiting the scale of coordinated mobilization (Digital Witness Lab, 2025).	WhatsApp's endtoend encryption and scale hinder external scrutiny, creating transparency gaps (Mozilla Foundation, 2024).
AI & Microtargeting	BJP is strategically positioned to integrate advanced datadriven and Aladjacent microtargeting approaches, as evidenced by its granular microad strategy (Lokniti–CSDS, 2024).	INC shows lower adoption of Aldriven segmentation, consistent with its reliance on fewer, costlier ads (Lokniti–CSDS, 2024).	Digital political campaigns raise ethical concerns involving targeted propaganda, data misuse, and manipulation risks (Mozilla Foundation, 2024).

Table1: Explanation in Comparative Dimensions of Digital Campaigning — BJP, INC, and Regulatory Context

**Scale of Digital Advertising:** BJP’s strategy is characterized by extremely highvolume microads (approximately 225,700 Google ads), reflecting intensive segmentation and realtime optimization. In contrast, INC has fewer but higherbudget ads (~9,250 Google ads), indicating a more selective advertising approach. The regulatory environment—particularly the Election Commission of India’s precertification and disclosure rules—struggles to keep pace with the scale, speed, and opacity of digital advertising.

**Data Analytics & Targeting:** BJP employs sophisticated data analytics frameworks enabling finegrained voter segmentation and message testing, giving it substantial optimization capacity. INC uses digital outreach tools but with a lower degree of diversification and precision. Meanwhile, thirdparty consultancies and informal networks complicate transparency and monitoring for regulators.

**Use of Social Platforms:** The BJP maintains high activity across all major platforms with rapid responsiveness, coordinated posting, and integrated influencer ecosystems. INC remains active but exhibits lower frequency and less organizational cohesion. On the regulatory side, closed networks remain comparatively underregulated, creating asymmetry between openplatform oversight and encryptedplatform oversight.

**WhatsApp Mobilization:** BJP’s WhatsApp architecture includes boothlevel groups and structured “Trend Alert” dissemination, enabling synchronized messaging from grassroots to national levels. INC’s WhatsApp usage is less centralized and therefore less capable of rapid scaling. Encryption and groupbased architecture hinder independent scrutiny, posing persistent challenges to accountability.

**AI & Microtargeting:** The BJP is positioned to integrate emerging Aldriven tools into microtargeting, automated content generation, and rapidresponse messaging. INC demonstrates comparatively lower integration of advanced AI systems. Regulators highlight ethical concerns, including synthetic media risks, deceptive impersonation, and unregulated targeting practices—underscoring the need for safeguards.

Figure 1

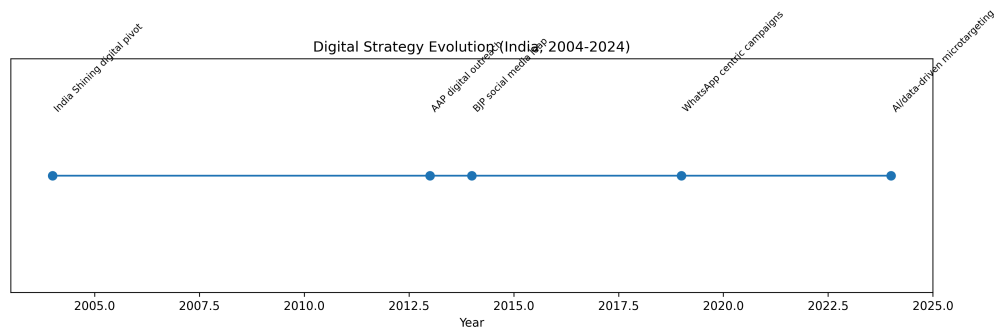


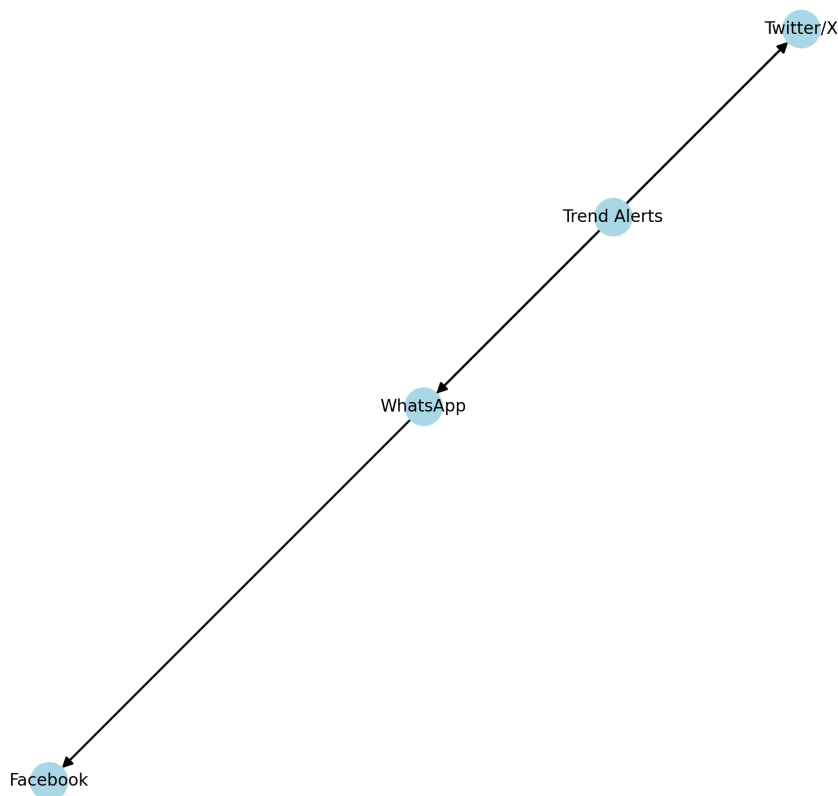
Figure 1. Digital Strategy Evolution in Indian Political Campaigning (2004–2024).

Figure 1 illustrates the twodecade transformation of digital strategy within Indian political campaigning. The progression shows how parties moved from basic websitebased outreach in the mid2000s to fully integrated, datadriven digital ecosystems by the 2024 general elections. Early adoption cantered on email lists, SMS campaigns, and limited social media presence. By 2014, however, national parties had begun leveraging Facebook, Twitter/X, and YouTube at scale, marking the emergence of digitally coordinated narrative management.

By 2019 and even more prominently by 2024, digital campaigning became structurally embedded in party operations. Strategies increasingly relied on microtargeted messaging, WhatsApp group architectures, live video engagement, and predictive analytics to optimize voter outreach. This evolution reflects a shift from digital media as a supplementary tool to digital media as a core infrastructure of electoral strategy, shaping agendasetting, mobilization, and narrative amplification across the political spectrum.

Figure 2





**Figure 2. Cross-Platform Political Messaging Network (WhatsApp → Twitter/X → Facebook).**

Figure 2 represents the cyclical network through which political messages circulate across platforms, beginning within closed WhatsApp groups and eventually migrating to more public spaces such as Twitter/X and Facebook. WhatsApp acts as the initial point of coordinated dissemination owing to its localized group structure and encrypted environment, which enables rapid, grassroots-level sharing.

These messages then flow to Twitter/X, where party workers, influencers, and coordinated accounts amplify narratives through hashtags, trend manipulation, and rapid response posting. Finally, the content spreads to Facebook, where it reaches mass, demographically varied audiences through shares, comments, public groups, and targeted ads. This cross platform flow demonstrates how closed network mobilization feeds open network visibility, integrating private coordination with public persuasion in a hybrid media environment.

### Discussion of findings

The findings of this review demonstrate that digital media have become deeply embedded in contemporary political communication, reshaping how parties mobilize voters, construct narratives, and deploy persuasion strategies across platforms. Evidence shows that social media significantly expands participation and agenda setting capacity, but the increasing reliance on algorithmic curation and AI driven tools introduces new concerns regarding transparency and accountability. In the Indian context, digital campaigning has become structurally integrated into party operations, with WhatsApp and data driven outreach emerging as central components of electoral strategy. This includes the widespread use of closed group coordination, rapid cross platform amplification, and micro targeted advertising that leverages sophisticated segmentation techniques. However, these developments also intensify risks tied to misinformation, opaque targeting practices, and restricted researcher access to platform data, which collectively challenge democratic integrity. As such, the findings underscore the need for evidence based, proportionate governance frameworks that enhance transparency while preserving citizens' rights.

### Conclusion

### Policy Recommendations

1. Transparent political ad repositories with sponsor identity, targeting parameters, and spend; pre-certification during election periods.
2. Independent algorithmic audits and researcher APIs focusing on exposure diversity and disparate impacts.
3. Proportionate governance for closed messaging platforms—campaign codes of conduct, forward limits, and disclaimers—while protecting encryption.
4. AI safeguards: labels for synthetic political content; bans on deceptive impersonation; logs of generative workflows; disclosure when sensitive attributes are inferred.
5. Regulation of third-party digital spending to curb opaque influence operations.

#### Limitation of the Study

Limitations include geographic bias in datasets, shrinking researcher access to platform data, and under-studied longitudinal effects. Future work should implement cross-platform audits, culturally grounded designs, and evaluations of regulatory pilots.

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