

Beyond Barriers: Digital Activism, Political Branding, and the Identity Among Women Leaders in Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract

Examining the nexus of digital activism, political branding, and identity change by women leaders in Uttar Pradesh, India, with shifting political dynamics via growing internet reach and social media usage, women are using these resources to transcend conventional barriers of caste, patriarchy, and socio-political exclusion. This study analyzes the specific ways in which women leaders employ digital tools to create genuine political identities, communicate with constituents, and confront hegemonic narratives. By analyzing political communication through the intersecting lenses of feminist theory, the study highlights how digital political engagement serves as a transformative mechanism for visibility, advocacy, and reimagining leadership. These leaders are upending political participation in India's largest state, despite challenges that include the gender digital divide, online harassment, and performative pressures. The paper demonstrates the possibilities of digital spaces for inclusive governance and creates a groundwork to consider gender and technology in the South Asian political landscape. This study analyses how digital activism influences women leaders' political identity, image, and empowerment in India's Uttar Pradesh political environment. Semi-structured interviews have been used to examine the ways in which digital media allows women to manage gendered political obstacles. The content analysis findings are that digital activism serves as a significant tool in building identity and as a medium in the construction of an authentic political identity. They were effective in outreach, transparency, advocacy, and management through the utilization of social media to challenge patriarchal discourses and enhance political engagement. Limitations such as a limited sample size and regional specificity are identified while some improvement has been in these lines. Strategic future research needs to be cross-regional in approach and needs to include audience reception and digital literacy as variables to analyse. The study highlights how different digital platforms are redefining women's participation in politics to help them take the lead as politically assertive leaders.

Keywords - *women leaders, Uttar Pradesh, political branding, digital platform, public engagement and digital activism*

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Introduction

1.1 Background Context

In the changing digital landscape, political leadership in India is hugely experiencing a huge transformation, especially in states such as Uttar Pradesh or UP, where political engagement is deeply rooted in regional dynamics, social identity, and grassroots mobilization (citation? . The overall emergence of political branding and digital activism has created new opportunities for the women leaders in the UP to assert their voices and challenges in patriarchal structures (citation). With the increasing accessibility of the internet, smartphones, and wide use of various social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter, women leaders have begun using digital spaces in order to connect with citizens who advocate for social issues and build reliable strategic public persona (Williams *et al.* 2022). Uttar Pradesh is India's most populist state and this has a major player in the national political landscape.

The representation of women in politics remains limited and it is constrained by deep-rooted gender, institutional barriers, and caste hierarchies. In recent times, the rise of digital technology has already begun to shift this as a dynamic (Garg, 2021). Increasing access to internet connectivity and mobile phones, even in rural areas has enabled a huge section of the population including women to engage with the political discourse in meaningful and new ways. Women leaders in UP ranging from the local panchayat representatives to the state level politicians are using social media to assert their political pressure, connect with the constituents as well as advocate for social justice issues including healthcare, education, case discrimination, and gender-based violence. For example, leaders such as Anupriya Patel and independent grassroots activists have used some digital platforms to craft unique political identities, which resonate with rural audiences and urban audiences (Kaur *et al.* 2022). These platforms deliver not only visibility, but also a sense of agency in the landscape where women mostly struggle to be heard.

1.2 Research Gap

While political branding and digital activism have been evaluated in the larger Indian politics, limited research focuses, particularly on their role to shape the identity of the women leaders in Uttar Pradesh. This study mainly addresses the gap through exploring the way that women in UP use digital tools for redefining leadership and challenges in social political norms.

1.3 Research aim and objectives

Aim: The aim of this research is to examine the way that digital activism and political branding influence the construction of the leadership identity among women in Uttar Pradesh.

Objectives:

- To evaluate the use of digital platforms through women leaders in the UP.
- To identify the way that political branding impacts public engagement.
- To understand the way that identity has been shaped online amid regional challenges.

1.4 Research Questions

RQ1: How do the women leaders in UP use digital activism to shape their political identity?

RQ2: What role does political branding play in how these have been perceived by the public?

RQ3: How do the digital platforms support identifying foundations in the context of sociopolitical factors of the UP?

Literature Review

2.1 Past Scholarship

The evolution of political branding and activism has been granted massive scholarly attention, particularly in global politics. Thus, its implications for women leaders, especially in socially conservative and regional spaces such as Uttar Pradesh, India remain underexplored. In the global discourse, digital platforms are mostly seen as democratizing tools, that facilitate the participation of citizens, enable some new forms of political expression as well as create alternative avenues for marginalized voices to be heard (Sebunya and Gichuki, 2024). These ideas are quite relevant for the women leaders who navigate traditional barriers in patriarchal societies. Early studies of digital activism highlighted that digital technologies have a low cost of participation and enable some decentralized movements. In terms of India, Mehan (2024) has explored the way that ICTs have opened up the public spaces for activism and feminist discourse. They mostly argue that digital media provides women with a platform in order to subvert claim agency and gender norms, particularly in a country where the structural inequalities mostly mute female voices. In addition, some initiatives including "Pink Chaddi Campaign" (2009) and "#MeToo India" have described the power of digital networks to galvanize support for gender justice.

The concept of political branding has evolved to reflect the influences of emotional appeal, personal narratives, and also visual aesthetics in political communication. For women leaders, this entails carefully balancing the expectations of gender while cultivating a brand, which resonates with reliability, competence, and authenticity. Studies have shown that women in politics mostly use community engagement and storytelling as part of their branding strategies (Morgan, 2024). Thus, they face a "double bind" where they should be assertive without appearing aggressive and nurturing without being perceived as weak. In the political landscape in India, especially in UP, political identity is interwoven with religion, caste, and regional loyalties. While national-level leaders such as Mamata Banerjee and Indira Gandhi have received the focus of scholarly and there is some limited research on the regional women leaders that navigate digital political spaces. In this context, MLAs, Panchayat leaders, and independent activists in the UP mostly operate within a highly localized power structure, and digital engagement provides them with a proper avenue to extend their influence beyond traditional limitations. The study of Mukherjee and Shivarama (2024), selected women representatives in rural India who have been using WhatsApp groups in order to coordinate some governance activities highlighting the overall grassroots potential of digital tools.

UP's cultural politics have a very patriarchal logic that gives the symbolism of women's representation but in reality, smothers their voice. The state has seen firm patriarchal

authoritarianism, yet women have often been relegated to ceremonial political roles. Thus, the expansion of digital media is shifting this calculus. Leaders such as Anupriya Patel, and tech-savvy local representatives, are starting to challenge stereotypes by filming themselves on the job, engaging with constituents on social media, and adding their voice to wider policy debates. Wilhelm (2021), highlights precisely how the visibility and performance of gender in politics are mediated by both institutional and digital norms, especially in male political cultures. In addition, studies on political communication have highlighted the ways in which women harness digital platforms for advocacy and identity management. Indian women politicians tend to make use of social media to portray themselves as both leaders and nurturers showcasing development projects while celebrating festivals, posting family pictures, and engaging in cultural dialogues. These two strategies bridge between public and private, to enable women to craft multifaceted identities.

Therefore, this visibility also invites some risks for the women in UP. In this context, scholars including Kar (2022), have evaluated the trolling and harassment faced by women in Indian digital spaces, particularly those who assert some political opinions. The use of threats, misogynistic language, as well as character assassination online, creates a better and more holistic environment for female political expression. This "gendered cyber violence" is not only a deterrent for participation but also a mechanism for exclusion and silencing. Recent studies by the media and NGO shows that most of the women politicians in India are targeted by online abuse and hate speech. For example, the Amnesty International report of 2020 on online abuse in India found that women politicians, especially from marginalized communities, have been harassed on some popular platforms such as Twitter (Dehingia *et al.* 2023). This mainly indicates that while digital activism opens the door, it also exposes women to new forms of vulnerability.

The existing literature has confirmed the transformative potential of political branding and digital activism for women leaders. The overall intersections of caste, class, digital power and gender in the UP provide a rich field to explore and also necessitate a proper understanding of the way that women leaders use various online platforms in order to redefine leadership in the digitally connected ecosystems.

2.2 Limitations

While the previous literature acknowledges the increasing influences of digital platforms in political communication, it tends to focus on large feminist movements or prominent national figures. Regional women leaders, particularly in significant, socially conservative states such as UP are mostly overlooked. Most studies treat political branding and digital activism as separate phenomena instead of interconnected strategies that shape the identity of leadership. The localized nature of digital participation in India has been influenced by religion, caste, and rural-urban divides.

2.3 Theoretical underpinning

The study mainly provides three important and interconnected theories that are important to discuss the overall context of this study. These theories are "feminist media theory", "identity construction theory", and "political communication theory".

Feminist media theory mainly offers a lens through which to understand the way that gender is consented, constructed, and represented in digital spaces. It emphasized that digital media is not neutral, thus, it is embedded in the power structure, which reproduces patriarchal norms. In terms of the UP, this theory allows to explain the way that digital platforms can constrain and empower women leaders relies on the way that generated norms are resisted and internalized in the local contexts. On the other hand, Identity construction theory shows that identity is not fixed, thus, it is reformed and formed through performance, discourse, and interaction. In digital spaces, identity constructions are highly mediated and performative, allowing the leaders to represent curated versions of themselves (Lüders *et al.* 2022). In the context of women in UP, whose leadership is mostly challenged through social expectations and digital spaces, it provides an opportunity for crafting empowerment, which might be possible in conventional public settings.

Apart from that, political communication theory evaluates the way in which political messages are interpreted, disseminated, and constructed (Perloff, 2021). The adaptation of social media into political branding has transformed the focus from top-down messaging to user-generated content and interaction. For the women leaders in UP, this means that branding is not just about the slogans, thus, it is all about building a level of trust, narrating proper experiences, and engaging communities. These theories together frame the entire analysis of the way that branding practices and digital activism function not merely as tools but as the identity-shaped mechanism and dynamic for the women leaders that navigate complex socio-political terrains in UP.

2.5 Digital Political Engagement

Digital political engagement mainly refers to the use of internet-oriented technologies and platforms for participating in expressing opinions, and political processes, engaging in activism, and mobilizing support. For women regions such as UP, this form of engagement presents both a shift in the conventional political practices as well as an expansion of the public sphere. In terms of digital political engagement, it helps with feedback loops and visibility, which were previously inaccessible, particularly for first-time leaders and grassroots. In UP, women leaders are currently implementing social media platforms not just for creating campaigns, but thus, to maintain current relationships with their constituents (Akpuokwe *et al.* 2024). This involves posting some updates regarding the developmental work, addressing local grievances, celebrating cultural events as well as participating in national conversations. For example, MLA and local sarpanch in UP are using WhatsApp groups for organizing panchayat meetings with the citizens that effectively blend offline authority with online outreach.

Because of its participatory nature, digital engagement provides ample room for women to think through how to present themselves as both responsive and connected leaders. Bypassing intermediaries such as media, political brokers, and other gatekeepers, this direct form of engagement gives women greater agency over the way that their stories are told. Thus, in urban areas, access to the tools of the digital age is still unequal, and it is worse in rural UP, where gendered divides in access to the digital economy continue as well. Although smartphone use continues to grow, women face both infrastructural and cultural barriers that inhibit their full participation (Tusińska, 2021). In this context, online visibility also often exposes target

audiences to trolling and reputational attacks, which are often misogynistic or cattiest in nature. In this case, digital political engagement is not just a technical art but also a political one. For the women leaders in UP, engaging online is an important act of identity-making, resistance, and visibility that holds the potential for reshaping the nature of regional politics from the grassroots upwards.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

A significant research design is an adaptable and general approach used to better understand a problem that is poorly defined (Mishra and Alok, 2022). This research seeks to examine participants' motivations, experiences, and perspectives in terms of politician branding. There are different kinds of research designs, and this study has selected an exploratory design. An exploratory design is appropriate as it promotes a critical understanding of the lived experiences of women legislators in Uttar Pradesh. This design supported primary qualitative methodologies such as interviews to generate new patterns and themes as digital activism and identity are emerging and evolving phenomena.

3.2 Research philosophy

The term research philosophy refers to the belief or system that influences how research occurs with the choice of approach, design, data collection, and analysis. It contains the assumptions made by the researcher about reality, knowledge, and the approach to studying phenomena (Gamage, 2025). This study adopts a positivist research philosophy associated with objectivity, observable data, and measurable facts. Positivism is an appropriate approach as it helps to find patterns, trends, and correlations in the responses to women legislators in Uttar Pradesh by obtaining qualitative information from interviews. This philosophy aligns with the systematic experience of data analysis which helps to analyse generalizable themes about digital activism, political branding, and identity construction.

3.3 Sampling method

A sampling method is a process for choosing a group of individuals from a more significant population to participate in research. It helps to ensure that the data retrieved are representative and applicable to the aims of the research (Nanjundeswaraswamy and Divakar, 2021). Semi-structured interviews have been selected as the main data generation method for this study. This is appropriate as this method provides a balance between structured questions and open-ended responses to allow women legislators in Uttar Pradesh to elaborate on their personal experiences, thoughts, and beliefs. It also offers a phase for exploring major study themes such as digital activism and identity.

3.4 Population

The study population is all members who share identical features to the research question and for which data will be collected by the researchers (Taherdoost, 2022). The research employs female members within the Uttar Pradesh state as the population of the study. The 5 women politicians target interviews are of significant as this type of exploratory research is all about

gaining rich qualitative meaning in an attempt to make broad generalizations. The selected purposive sampling technique helps study in depth how female legislators experience life while using technology and how their identities transform which helps to advance knowledge about the contemporary political involvement of women.

3.5 Data collection method

Data collection is a method where the needed information is collected from selected sources to answer the stated research questions and study objectives (Mazhar *et al.* 2021). This study has used the primary qualitative method which is a structured interview with women legislators of Uttar Pradesh. It is justified since this method permits to speak immediately with the participants in this study investigation, their narratives, changing these identities and strategies in terms of digital platform usage. The qualitative data possess contextual comprehension of convoluted social ideas which are digital activism and political branding that cannot be explored through secondary sources.

3.6 Data analysis method content

An analysis method of collected data is the technique that must be used in examining, interpreting, and extracting meaningful insight into the collected information. Content analysis has been selected to analyze data gathered through the semi-structured interviews of women legislators in Uttar Pradesh. This method is justified as it permits the systematic capture and categorization of qualitative data under recurring themes, patterns, and meanings in qualitative data. This is appropriate for complex topics such as digital activism, political branding, or identity evolution. Content analysis is significant for exploring them as it allows for objective interpretation of the narratives of the participants and the retention of the depth of their experiences.

3.7 Ethical consideration

This study strictly abides by ethical standards. All participants have been asked to give informed consent mainly to ensure that they understand the study and its purpose. It has been made sure that they are involved in the study on a voluntary basis and they can withdraw at any time. The anonymity of data and protection of the participants' identities have been preserved. The interviews with the women legislators have been conducted respectfully and sensitively as they have other public roles and this needs to be respected. The data has been securely stored and has been used for academic purposes.

4. Result and discussion

4.1 Result

4.1.1 Theme 1: Digital activism as a tool for political empowerment

Women leaders in Uttar Pradesh acquire political empowerment through digital activism that allows them to form personal identities while linking with different voters and eliminating traditional gender norms. According to Heger and Hoffmann (2023), women's political engagement in digital media is influenced by their feminist orientation and political mindset as demonstrated by Participant 1 through her TikTok and Instagram activity. The democratic

attributes of media assist activism and youth outreach (Bansal and Shreelakshmi, 2024). Furthermore, digital campaigns by women leaders permit them to resist gender-based stereotypes and online harassment despite their prevalence. In this context, Participant 4 demonstrates how video storytelling serves as digital space access for challenging representations of leader identity. The digital age has influenced women's political experience in UP to become self-directed and more independently powerful and active (Kamala and Kamalakar, 2024).

4.1.2 Theme 2: Political branding and identity construction

Uttar Pradesh female political leaders build their identity and branding through complex interactions of digital media along with societal requirements and multiple barriers. Websites and social media platforms create double-edged territories through which women leaders encounter possibilities for empowerment and experiences of criticism according to interview data accompanied by relevant research findings. The youth leader participant 1, explained during interviews that digital society mistakenly evaluates strong behavior from women as hostile behavior yet accepts similar behavior differently in men. Banerjee and Memon (2022), studied gendered public expectations that influence women's leadership performance in dual roles as described in their work about Indian women's identity tensions.

Participant 2 defied female-oriented things by creating infographics and videos with presentations of professional experience in the fields of different types of governance to represent professionalism when engaging with digital identities. Online platforms mitigate disinformation and increase public participation. Gupta and Sahu (2024) view social media activism in India as a central type of political movements that transform political legitimacy. Participant 3 shares a digital storyteller to officially reveal the contentious political identity in their campaign against caste discrimination to influence marginalized communities. Biswas *et al.* (2023) research evolving political behavior in UP via media frames. The study found that women lawmakers in UP require visibility in public space yet more importantly, it is all about sustaining their actual identity during difficult times and successful communication strategies to bring their status to a superior position. The online platform can be utilized to develop many different aspects of self that avoid stereotypes and assist women leaders against negative prejudgment and inculcate trust building. They then use this support towards transformation into effective leaders in the field of metropolitan and rural politics.

4.1.3 Theme 3: Gendered challenges and digital resistance

Women leaders in UP experience gender-based challenges in politics. Gendered discrimination against female leaders includes the ingrained stereotypical notions of their compulsory adherence to traditional social norms. Women can use their former limitations in new ways to shift their situations into their own control through their online activism. Party spokesperson participant 5 indicated that she published her open letter to sexist comments on LinkedIn and Twitter and the whole country was brought aware of her gender rights defense with her accumulating gender rights Advocate defense of leadership identity. Ali (2021) affirms, rural women in UP are provided with quiet significant action with clear communication to compel women to rise in masculine-dominated fields.

Digital transparency educates the participants and assists in the rebuilding of the public's trust and that is evident with the councillor (participant 4) who utilized Facebook to refute misinformation regarding her absence from public meetings. In this regard, the BBC (2022) examines the historical barriers that have persisted in UP despite the rising number of female representatives. Independent politician Participant 4 integrates traditional political tactics with digital promotion and emotional cultural digital content. Furthermore, a National Executive Member (participant 5) use LinkedIn to bridge stereotypes and utilizes it to guide other young women. Indian Express (2023) identifies how the use of virtual spaces facilitated more progress in achievement for women as much as the legislative representation of UP was concerned. This article reveals how UP women leaders employ online strategies to deal with gendered issues and the representation of their political identity. Digital activism translates to women taking the lead as women in defiance of patriarchal opinions and as a weapon for shaping new modern leadership patterns.

4.2 Discussion

It is found that the idea of digital activism changes the meaning of political engagement and leadership identity for women politicians in Uttar Pradesh. Women politicians augment their power despite existing gendered barriers through digital platforms for resistance against and reform of traditional power structures. It has been found from the study that digital platforms work as channels for dual processes where users both gain strength and develop strategic messaging practices. Participants have stated that digital activism operates as offensive and defensive mechanisms for gender advocacy work. She discussed that open letter using LinkedIn and Twitter to fight stereotypes demonstrates how digital stories combine fighting traditional gender barriers with promoting female political voices in the public domain. Similarly, Ali (2021) discussed that leadership in traditional conservative regions needs visible communication methods to flourish.

Participants present a different aspect of transparency with credibility building through digital platforms. It has been found that public confidence can be restored through the use of digital platforms by presenting community engagement work while dispelling misconceptions about public service ability. The balancing act Participants perform between traditional customs and modern approaches demonstrates how hard it is to construct identities. It has been discussed that leaders in the modern era use LinkedIn mentoring as a method for linking generations in a comprehensive empowerment program. Therefore, this study discussed that digital activism in Uttar Pradesh functions through two opposite facets by assisting females to break gender stereotypes while providing a platform to reconstruct political voice and personal identity during communal interactions.

5. Conclusion

It can be concluded that there is a transformational role of digital activism in establishing political identity, empowerment, and leadership for women in Uttar Pradesh. It has been found through interviewing and content analysis that digital platforms help to present political expression, identity construction, or resistance against the patriarchal system. Women leaders in UP are actively using platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn to create

personalised political identities to counter the stereotype and connect to a diverse electorate in the rural and urban areas. The research concludes that women leaders are able to transcend women's traditional limitations that are experienced from political image humanization, initiation of social justice campaigns, and promotion of transparency. The visibility, as well as the agency in these platforms, is significant in a socio-political setting where stereotypes are retained. Many women leaders in UP are examples of how it is possible to change the public perception and foster inclusive participation in politics through digital storytelling, targeted efforts, and mentorship initiatives.

The study has certain limitations. There are issues related to the fact that the sample size is relatively small and geographically concentrated which may not be able to fully represent experiences across all regions of Uttar Pradesh. The analysis is based on interview data and consequently has no statistical or large-scale empirical basis to generalize the results broadly. Furthermore, the scene of digital media changes quickly, and the strategies and trends presented in this study may change over time and should be monitored. Therefore, future studies must examine whether online activism has a lasting impact on the outcome of the election and women's policy-making. Intersectional critique is required to analyse how religion, class, education, and opposition influence access to and use of digital tools. Future research of the case study and its applicability to digital political followers among males, media coverage, and institutional reactions can contribute to an improved understanding of the digital political contexts.

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Appendix: Interview

1. How has your use of digital platforms (such as social media) contributed to building your political identity and connecting with your constituents?

Participant	Response
Participant 1 (Young Politician, Urban Area)	Social media has been crucial in shaping my political image. It allows me to speak directly to people without media filters. I use Instagram and TikTok to show behind-the-scenes of my work and humanize politics. It's helped me connect with younger voters who wouldn't attend traditional town halls.
Participant 2 (Mid-career Politician, Rural Focus)	Digital platforms like Facebook help me reach constituents in remote areas. I post updates about local issues and live-stream Q&A sessions. It's a tool for transparency and keeps me accountable. My identity as a grassroots, community-focused leader has grown stronger through consistent engagement.
Participant 3 (Senior Female Leader, Progressive Agenda)	Twitter and LinkedIn have helped me establish a professional yet activist voice. I advocate for gender equity, and digital activism has allowed me to build alliances beyond borders. My political identity as a reformer has been amplified thanks to these platforms.
Participant 4 (Activist-Turned-Politician)	I started as an online activist during a major protest movement. My identity was forged online, and that digital presence transitioned into my political campaign. I use platforms to mobilize support, fundraise, and crowdsource policy ideas. Social media remains my main bridge to the people.

Participant 5 (Minority Representative, Emerging Politician)	Being part of an underrepresented community, digital platforms gave me visibility I wouldn't have had otherwise. Sharing personal stories and engaging with constituents through Instagram and Twitter helped build trust and authenticity. It's not just about politics it's about representation and connection.
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2. What challenges have you faced as a woman leader in UP politics, and how have you addressed these using digital tools or campaigns?

Participant	Response
Participant 1 (First-time MLA, Age 32)	Patriarchy is deeply rooted in UP politics. Many didn't take me seriously at first. I used social media to showcase my work—especially development projects and women's safety drives. Gradually, the narrative shifted. People began seeing me as a capable leader, not just a symbolic candidate.
Participant 2 (Senior Party Leader, Age 55)	I've faced gender bias in decision-making spaces being interrupted, ignored, or dismissed. I launched a digital campaign highlighting successful women leaders and their impact. It wasn't just to fight for space, it was to normalize women's leadership in public perception.
Participant 3 (Youth Leader, Age 28)	Trolling and online harassment were major issues. I turned it into a campaign 'LeadLikeAWoman' encouraging others to speak up. I also collaborated with digital safety groups to educate young women on countering cyberbullying. It helped me reclaim space online.
Participant 4 (Local Panchayat Member, Age 40)	People used to say I was just a proxy for my husband. So I started uploading short Facebook videos explaining my decisions and showing my work in the community. That transparency helped build my own identity. Digital storytelling became my resistance.
Participant 5 (Dalit Leader, Age 35)	Caste and gender bias doubled the challenge. I wasn't invited to many local forums. So I created my own platform—YouTube and WhatsApp groups—to discuss issues affecting marginalized women. My voice reached where traditional structures had closed doors.

3. Do you think your online presence influences how people perceive you differently compared to your male counterparts? If yes, how?

Participant	Response
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Participant 1 (Youth Leader, Age 30)	Absolutely. While my male colleagues are praised for being assertive online, I’m often called ‘aggressive’ for saying the same things. My online presence is judged more critically—but I’ve also built a strong following by being authentic and engaging on gender issues.
Participant 2 (Independent Candidate, Age 37)	Yes, people expect me to be softer, more emotional, or only speak on ‘women’s issues.’ When I post about infrastructure or governance, some followers question my expertise. But I use infographics and short videos to break stereotypes and show I’m just as capable.
Participant 3 (Senior Leader, Age 52)	Definitely. Men are often seen as authoritative voices online, while women are judged on appearance or tone. I’ve faced comments on how I look rather than what I say. That’s why I keep my posts focused on policy and avoid feeding into those gendered expectations.
Participant 4 (Local Councillor, Age 34)	Yes, and it’s both good and bad. I get more attention online for being a woman in politics, but sometimes that attention isn’t respectful. I’ve learned to set boundaries and use my platform to educate, not just promote. It’s made me a relatable figure to many women.
Participant 5 (Social Media Strategist Turned Politician, Age 29)	Yes, people watch my online activity more closely. If I post a family photo, some say I’m not serious; if I post something bold, I’m called ‘too ambitious.’ It’s a double standard, but I use that visibility to spark conversations on gender bias itself.

4. Can you share an instance where digital media played a critical role in your political journey be it campaigning, advocacy, or public engagement?

Participant	Response
Participant 1 (First-time Candidate, Age 33)	During my first election, I didn’t have the resources for a traditional campaign. So I turned to Instagram and Facebook, sharing short reels about local issues and my proposed solutions. It went viral locally and helped me connect with young voters who became my core supporters.
Participant 2 (Grassroots Activist, Age 39)	When a sanitation crisis hit our district, the mainstream media ignored it. I posted a video thread on Twitter showing the conditions. It gained traction, was picked up by journalists, and forced the local authorities to act. That visibility gave me credibility and boosted my public profile.

Participant 3 (Dalit Youth Leader, Age 28)	I launched a digital campaign called highlighting stories of caste-based discrimination. It not only amplified unheard voices but also caught the attention of national leaders. That moment transformed me from an activist into a political representative.
Participant 4 (Ward Councillor, Age 45)	There was a rumor that I wasn't attending community meetings. I used my Facebook page to post regular updates, pictures, and live videos from those meetings. It became a platform to clear misinformation and directly engage with residents. Trust was rebuilt through digital transparency.
Participant 5 (Party Spokesperson, Age 36)	I once wrote an open letter responding to sexist comments made in a political debate. I published it on LinkedIn and Twitter—it received widespread support and national media coverage. That moment helped position me as a strong voice on gender rights within my party.

5. In what ways do you balance traditional expectations with modern digital strategies in maintaining your political brand and leadership style?

Participant	Response
Participant 1 (Rural Panchayat Leader, Age 42)	In my community, face-to-face interaction is still key. I visit villages regularly, but I also use WhatsApp groups to share updates and get feedback. It shows people I respect tradition but also embrace technology for faster communication.
Participant 2 (Urban MLA, Age 35)	I wear traditional clothing in most of my digital content to reflect cultural values. But my messaging and visuals are modern infographics, live sessions, polls. This balance helps me stay relatable to older voters while engaging the youth online.
Participant 3 (Youth Campaigner, Age 29)	My leadership style combines storytelling from the field with data-driven social media posts. Elders appreciate my ground-level work, while younger audiences engage with my digital campaigns. It's about showing you can be both rooted and forward-thinking.

Participant 4 (Independent Politician, Age 38)	During festivals and community events, I maintain a visible presence offline. But I also run targeted digital ads and host online consultations. My strategy is to blend emotional connect with strategic outreach.
Participant 5 (Party National Executive Member, Age 50)	I've learned that consistency matters. I respect protocol and traditional party structure, but I mentor young women through online webinars and LinkedIn posts. My brand is one of inclusive leadership bridging the generational gap using digital tools.