

Social Media and the Impact of Misinformation on Voters: A study of Assam's Assembly Election 2026

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Abstract

The rapid growth of digital communication technologies has changed the electoral politics across India and Assam is not an exception. Now a days various social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram and X have become central areas for political communication, voter engagements, campaign mobilization and public debates. Although such platforms have democratized access to information and enhanced political participation, but also simultaneously facilitated the rapid spread of misinformation, disinformation, manipulated narratives and other AI generated political content. The recent assembly election of assam also demonstrate the growing significance of digital media in shaping voter perceptions and influencing electoral discourse. Drawing upon various secondary sources, this study explores how digital platforms influence political behavior and democratic participation. The article also investigates the role of political propaganda, identity-based mobilization and emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence in electoral communication. While social media has strengthened political outreach and citizen engagement, it has also increased the vulnerability of voters in misleading information, emotional manipulation and political polarization. The study argues that media literacy, regulatory frameworks, ethical political communication and institutional accountability are essential for preserving democratic integrity in the digital age. This article contributes to the growing literature on digital democracy and electoral communication in Northeast India and highlights the need for continue scholarly attention to the evolving relationship between politics and technology.

Keywords: Social Media, Assam Politics, Electoral Behavior, Misinformation, Political Communication

Introduction

The speedy expansion of the digital communication technologies has changed the nature of political participation and electoral campaigning across the world. Social media platforms have emerged as an important space where political actors, citizens, journalists and organizations interact, exchange information and shape public opinion. In democratic societies, these platforms increasingly influence how voters receive information and engage with electoral

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processes. India also experienced remarkable growth in internet connectivity over the last decade. Internet enabled millions of citizens to access digital platforms. And in this way social media has become a major source of political information, particularly among the young voters and consequently, political parties now invest substantial resources in digital campaigning, online outreach and social media management to influence public perception and mobilize support.

Assam is basically characterized by ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious diversity. Political debates in the state often revolve around issues such as citizenship, migration, development, regional identity, language and governance. These issues frequently become subjects of intense discussion on digital platforms, making social media an important arena of political communication. The social media influence has grown significantly in the recent election cycles. Political parties and the leaders are increasingly use the social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram etc. to disseminate campaign messages, promote political narratives and engage with voters. Unlike traditional media, social media allows direct communication between the political leaders and the common citizens and which enable fast dissemination of information and greater audience engagement.

However, the speedy expansion of social media has also created significant concerns. These social media platforms that facilitate democratic participation can also be used to spread misinformation, disinformation and politically motivated content. During the election time, misleading information often circulates rapidly through digital networks, influencing public perceptions and shaping political attitudes. The problem becomes more serious when misinformation relates to sensitive issues involving identity, ethnicity, religion or citizenship. The emergence of Artificial Intelligence has also complicated the digital political environment. AI technologies can generate realistic images, videos and other audio recordings that may be difficult for common people to verify. Such developments have raised concerns regarding the misuse of technology for electoral manipulation and political propaganda. Consequently, election authorities, policymakers and scholars have increasingly emphasized the importance of digital literacy and responsible political communication. The present article seeks to examine how social media influences electoral politics and the behavior of the voters in Assam. By reviewing existing literature and contemporary developments, the study aims to provide a better understanding of the opportunities and challenges related to the digital political communication in the democratic landscape of Assam.

Statement of the problem:

Social media has become one of the most influential sources of political information in the present electoral politics. In Assam, digital Platform increasingly shape public discussions, political campaigns and voter engagement. While these developments have strengthened political communication and expanded citizen participation, they have also contributed to the rapid circulation of misinformation and politically manipulated content. The widespread use of smartphones and social networking applications has enabled information to travel faster than ever before. During the election periods, political messages, campaign materials, videos and news reports are shared extensively across digital platforms. However, not all of this information is accurate or verified. False claims, misleading narratives, edited videos and

unverified reports can significantly influence voter perceptions and political attitudes. This challenge becomes very important especially in Assam due to its complex socio political environment. Issues related to identity, migration, citizenship, ethnicity and regional interest often generate strong emotional responses among citizens. Misinformation surrounding these issues may contribute to political polarization and distort informed decision making.

Moreover, the emergence of AI and useful digital communication techniques has increase concerns regarding electoral manipulation. AI generated content, targeted political messaging and algorithms driven information dissemination have created new challenges for electoral integrity and democratic accountability. Although scholars have extensively examined social media and elections in India, relatively limited attention has been given to the specific impact of information on the behavior of the voters in Assam. Ans so, a systematic review of existing literature is necessary to understand how digital communication influences electoral politics within the state's political environment. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the role of social media in shaping political perceptions, voter behavior and democratic participation in assam during the assembly election of 2026.

Review of literature :

McCombs and Shaw in their article “The agenda setting function of mass media (1972)” published in Public Opinion Quarterly, argued that media influences what issues people think about rather than what they think. The study demonstrated that media coverage shapes public priorities during elections. This work remains relevant because social media platforms today perform a similar agenda setting role by determining which political issues gain visibility and public attention.

Wardle and Derakhshan produced “Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and policy making (2017)” this very important report for the council of Europe to explain the growing problem of false information in digital environments. The authors categorized information disorder into misinformation, disinformation and malinformation. They argued that social media has accelerated the spread of misleading information, creating challenges for democratic governance and public trust. Their work is particularly useful for understanding how false political narratives circulate during elections and influence citizens perceptions, attitudes and electoral decisions.

The work “The Spread of true and false news online (2018)” of Vosoughi, S.,Roy,D., and Aral which was published in the Journal Science, this important study examined so many news stories that was shared on X over an eleven-year period. The researchers discovered that false information spread faster, deeper and more widely then truthful and authentic information. They concluded that novelty and emotional appeal make misinformation more attractive to social media users. The study is highly significant for electoral research because political misinformation very often spread speedily during election campaigns and may influence voter behaviour, public opinion and democratic participation.

Banaji and Bhat in there writing “WhatsApp Vigilantes: An Exploration of Citizen Reception and Circulation of WhatsApp Misinformation Linked to Mob Violence In India (2019) ” examined how misinformation spread through various channel particularly through WhatsApp

networks in India. Their study found that many users trust information received from family members, Friends and community groups without verifying its accuracy. This research is important because political misinformation frequently spreads through WhatsApp during election Periods, influencing voter perceptions and political attitudes.

The Disinformation Order : Disruptive Communication and the Decline of Democratic Institutions (2018) written by Bennett and Livingston in the European Journal of Communication examined how digital communication networks have transformed the environment of political information. The authors argued that the rise of social media has weakened traditional institution such as newspapers and professional journalism. As a result, misinformation and disinformation can spread more easily and influence public opinion. The study also emphasized that democratic institutions face serious challenges when citizens are exposed to misleading political information, especially during election campaigns.

In this article “Digital media and the Politics of identity in contemporary India (2021)”, Udupa explored how digital media platforms influence identity politics in India. The author argued that social media often strengthens group identities based on religion, ethnicity, language and culture. These platforms allows political actors to mobilize supporters through emotionally charged narratives. The study is particularly relevant to Assam because political debates frequently involve issues of citizenship, migration, language and other regional identity which are widely discussed on digital platforms.

In the Article “Social media and Election Campaigns : An Analysis of the 2021 Assam Assembly Election ” Sharma & Das specifically examined the role of social media during the assam legislative assembly election of 2021. The study found that political parties increasingly relied on Facebook, X, YouTube and WhatsApp to reach voters and promote campaign messages. The authors concluded that digital platforms had become an essential component of electoral strategy in Assam. Their findings indicate that social media significantly influenced political communication, voter engagements and campaign visibility throughout the election period.

Tucker and his colleagues conducted a comprehensive review of “ Social media, political polarization and political Disinformation (2020) ” that was published in political science Quarterly. The study found that social media can contribute to political polarization by exposing users to highly partisan content. The authors also highlighted the role of online platforms in spreading misinformation and disinformation. Their work provides valuable insight into how digital communication influences political attitudes and electoral decision making in democratic societies.

Sunstein in his book “Republic : Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media (2018) ” examined the impact of social media on democratic discourse. He argued that digital platforms often create “Eco chambers”, where individuals primarily encounter information that reinforces their existing beliefs. This limited exposure to alternative viewpoints can increase political polarization and reduce constructive dialogue. The book highlights the challenges social media poses to democratic participation and informed decision making it highly relevant for studies of elections and voter behaviour.

Howard in his book “Lie Machines : How to save democracy from Troll Armies, Deceifful Roots, Junk News Operations and Political Operatives (2020)” has explored how technological tools such as bots, automated accounts and organized misinformation campaigns influence political communication. the author argued that digital technologies can be used to manipulate public opinion and distort democratic processes. The book demonstrate how coordinated online activities may influence election campaigns by spreading misleading information and amplifying political propaganda. Howard emphasized the need for stronger regulations, digital literacy and institutional safeguards to protect democratic system.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) issued some guidelines in response to the growing use of Artificial Intelligence and digital technologies in election campaigns. The guidelines emphasized transparency, accountability and ethical communication practices. It warned against the misuse of deepfakes, manipulated media and misleading political content that could influence voters. The report reflects increasing institutional concern regarding misinformation and highlights the importance of maintaining electoral integrity in this digital era.

The Global Risks Report (2024) identified misinformation and disinformation as among the most significant threats facing societies worldwide. The report argued that the rapid spread of false information through digital platforms can undermine public trust, weaken democratic institutions and increase political instability. It emphasized that elections are particularly vulnerable to misinformation campaigns. The report provides an important global perspective on the challenges posed by social media and reinforces the need for effective strategies to combat digital misinformation.

Research Gap :

All the existing literature that has been studies here shows that social media plays a duel role in politics by promoting political participation and citizen engagement while social media also contributing to misinformation, political polarization and challenges to electoral integrity. Although a number of research has examined social media and electoral politics in India, but most of the studies focus on National level elections and broader discussion of digital democracy. Limited attention has been given to Assam’s context. Moreover, the growing influence of artificial intelligence, digital influencers and algorithm driven communication remains unexplored. Therefore, this study examines how social media and misinformation influence voter behaviour in Assam’s contemporary political environment.

Research Objectives :

1. To examine the role of social media in shaping electoral politics in Assam.
2. To analyse the impact of misinformation on voter behaviour and political perceptions.
3. To assess the influence of digital political communication on democratic participation.
4. To examine the challenges posed by the Artificial intelligence and emerging technologies in electoral campaigns.
5. To suggest measures for strengthening electoral integrity and responsible digital communication.

Research Questions :

1. To examine the role of social media influence electoral politics in Assam ?
2. What challenges do Artificial intelligent generated political contents create for electoral integrity ?
3. What role does misinformation play in shaping voter behaviour ?
4. What measures can help to reduce the impact of misinformation during elections ?
5. How do digital platforms affect democratic participation and political engagement ?

Research Methodology :

This study adopts a qualitative approach and a review-based methodology and also exclusively depends on secondary data. Information has been collected from scholarly journal articles, books, policy reports, Election Commission publications, fact-checking reports and reputable media sources. Relevant literature published between 2018 and 2026 has been reviewed to ensure contemporary relevance. A thematic approach has been employed to analyze the collected material. The literature was categorized into key themes, including social media and political communication, misinformation and voter behaviour, political polarization, digital campaigning, artificial intelligence and electoral integrity. Through the analysis of these themes, the study identifies major trends, challenges and opportunities associated with social media in Assam's political environment. As the research is based on secondary sources, it does not involve surveys, interviews or field investigations. Nevertheless, the review methodology provides a comprehensive understanding of the evolving relationship between digital communication and electoral politics. It also helps to identify gaps in existing literature and suggest direction for future research.

Result and Discussion :

The review of Literature and contemporary reports expressed that social media has become a central component of electoral politics in Assam. Digital platforms like Facebook, X, WhatsApp etc. are no longer merely tools of communication, they have evolved into influential spaces where political narratives are created, contested and disseminated. Political parties, candidates and supporters are fully dependent on these digital platforms to communicate with voters, promote campaign agendas and mobilize political support. Unlike traditional forms of communication, social media enables direct interaction between political actors and citizens, thereby reducing dependence on conventional media institutions. This transformation has expanded political participation particularly among younger voters who obtain a substantial portion of their political information through digital platforms. Consequently, social media has emerged as a powerful instrument for shaping public opinion, influencing political discourse and determining electoral narratives in Assam. At the same time, digital communication has created a more interactive political environment where citizens actively engage in discussions, share political content and participate in debate concerning governance, development, citizenship, migration and regional identity.

However, the findings also indicate that the growing influence of social media has introduced several challenges to democratic politics and electoral integrity. One of the most significant concerns is the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation during election periods.

False news, manipulated videos, misleading narratives and unverified political claims frequently circulate across digital networks and often reach large audiences within a very short period. Research suggests that the repeated exposure to such information can shape political attitudes and influence voting behaviour, particularly when the content related to emotionally sensitive issues. In Assam, debates surrounding citizenship, migration, ethnicity, language and identity frequently dominate political discussion and therefore become vulnerable to misinformation campaigns. The review also highlights that social media may contribute to political polarization by creating digital echo chambers where individuals are primarily exposed to viewpoints that reinforce their existing beliefs. Such environments can intensify ideological divisions and encourage emotional responses rather than evidence based political discussions. In addition, the increasing use of identity-based narratives by political actors may further strengthen social divisions and reduce opportunities for constructive democratic dialogue. These developments demonstrate that while social media facilitates political engagements, it can simultaneously undermine informed decision making and weaken public trust in democratic institutions.

Another important finding emerging from the review is the growing influence of AI and advanced digital technologies on contemporary electoral communication. AI generated texts, images, videos and audio recordings have transformed political campaigning by enabling faster and more sophisticated communication strategies. Although these technologies offer new opportunities for voter outreach and political engagement, they also create significant risks in the form of deepfakes, synthetic media and digitally manipulated content. Such developments have raised concerns regarding electoral manipulation, transparency and the credibility of political information. Nevertheless, the review also demonstrates that social media continues to provide important democratic benefits by increasing access to information, encouraging citizen participation and amplifying voices that may receive limited representation in traditional media. Therefore, maximizing the democratic potential of digital platforms requires a balanced approach involving governments, election authorities, educational institutions, technology companies, media organization and civil society groups. Strengthening media literacy and digital literacy, promoting fact checking initiatives, ensuring greater transparency in political advertising and encouraging ethical standards in digital campaigning are essential measures for reducing misinformation and protecting electoral integrity. In the context of Assam's contemporary political environment, such efforts are very much important for ensuring that digital technologies contribute positively to democratic participation while safeguarding the fairness, transparency and credibility of electoral processes.

Conclusion :

In the conclusion part we can say that the present study highlights the growing significance of social media in shaping electoral politics in Assam. Digital platforms have transformed political communication by enabling direct interaction between political actors and common citizens, increasing access to information and also encouraging greater democratic participation. At the same time, all these have created new challenges related to misinformation, political polarization and digital manipulation. The study finds that misinformation has become a crucial concern in contemporary electoral politics. The rapid

circulation of false or misleading information can influence voter behaviour, distort public understanding and undermine electoral integrity. These challenges are particularly important in Assam, where political debates often involve sensitive issues related to identity, migration, citizenship and regional interests. The emergence of AI has further complicated the digital political landscape. Although, AI technologies offer innovative opportunities for communication, they also increase the risk of misinformation through deepfakes. As a result, the Policymakers, election Authorities, technology companies and civil society organizations must collaborate to address these emerging challenges.

However the entire study concludes that social media will continue to play a central role in Assam's democratic processes. Ensuring that digital technologies contribute positively to electoral politics and it requires greater media literacy, ethical political communication, effective regulatory frameworks and informed citizen participation. Strengthening all these mechanisms is essential for protecting democratic values and maintaining public confidence in electoral institutions.

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