



CHANGING PATTERNS OF YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN INDIA: A STRUCTURED NARRATIVE REVIEW STUDY OF SOCIAL MEDIA

¹ASMITA SANADYA

AN INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER

FORMER P.G. STUDENT, CMD COLLEGE BILASPUR, CHHATTISGARH, INDIA

Abstract: Youth political participation in India is shaped by a combination of traditional democratic practices and political activity conducted through digital media. This systematic review brings together existing knowledge on three interconnected areas: social media engagement, political awareness, and electoral behavior. It also examines factors such as political efficacy, trust, information literacy, digital inequality, and offline interactions. The review includes grounded theory, international research on youth participation, studies of Indian elections, and recent work published up to 2026. All studies agree on one key point: social media increases opportunities for political information, voice, debate, and mobilization, but simply engaging with the digital world does not necessarily ensure meaningful participation. The strength and direction of this engagement depend on several factors, including the type of online activity, interest in politics and the potential for influence, the quality of information, social networks, socioeconomic resources, and access to a trustworthy digital environment. Evidence also suggests that less strenuous activities (such as expressing opinions on social media) should not be equated with more strenuous participation or offline electoral activities. Young first-time voters may rely heavily on social media for election campaign information, yet trust, information processing, and pre-existing political attitudes determine their behavior. This review identifies four major shortcomings in Indian studies: a lack of consistency in methods for measuring political participation, an overreliance on limited-time data (cross-sectional samples) from urban and digitally connected populations, a lack of clear distinctions between different platforms and online activities, and a lack of longitudinal evidence demonstrating a link between political information access and electoral outcomes. It proposes a better conceptual approach, in which engagement with the digital world impacts understanding and awareness of political information, which may strengthen interest in politics and the ability to influence. and, under supportive social and institutional conditions, contribute to meaningful online and offline participation. Future Indian research should use multidimensional measures, comparative regional sampling, longitudinal or panel designs, and mixed methods that combine survey data with interviews and platform-level content analysis.

Key words - Youth political participation, India, social media, political awareness, electoral behavior, political efficacy, digital literacy, misinformation, first-time voters, narrative review.

1.INTRODUCTION

Political participation is a fundamental way citizens influence public affairs, express their preferences, hold institutions accountable, and maintain democratic legitimacy. While earlier research focused on voting, party membership, campaigning, and organizational involvement, current research includes a variety of other

forms of participation, such as petitions, protests, online discussions, content sharing, digital campaigns, and mobilizing around a specific issue (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Weiss, 2020). Therefore, the expansion of digital communication is not just a technological change; it also transforms the means by which political information is received, understood, discussed, and translated into action. This change is particularly important in the Indian context because the Indian electorate comprises a large youth population, and electoral institutions have placed considerable emphasis on youth registration and voter education. The voter list for the 2024 general elections included over 18.4 million voters aged 18-19, while the 20-29 age group had approximately 197.4 million registered voters. The Election Commission of India also launched youth-focused digital campaigns, including "Turning 18," to promote participation and counter election-related misinformation (Election Commission of India, 2024). These institutional changes make it increasingly important to examine not only whether young people vote, but also how they access and understand political information before voting.

However, available research does not fully support the view that technology determines everything (the technological-determinist argument). Meta-analytic evidence suggests a generally positive relationship between social media use and political participation, but the effect varies across methods and study designs (Bulian, 2015; Verma, Gardia, & Das, 2026). Longitudinal research also suggests that political engagement on social media takes different forms: information seeking and political conversation are more common than more demanding activities like content creation and collective action (Ekström & Shehata, 2018). First-time voters may receive more campaign information through social media than experienced voters, but this information operates within broader processes of political socialization and preconceived notions (Oehme, 2019). Therefore, the research challenge for India is not to prove that social media is "important," but to explain the conditions under which digital information translates into political awareness, political capacity, online participation, and ultimately, electoral or civic action. Existing studies in India offer important pieces of this puzzle, including research on the 2014 national elections, first-time voters in 2019, political awareness among youth, and recent state-level evidence. However, the evidence is scattered across platforms, regions, variables, and methods. This review addresses this fragmentation by bringing together available information around a single analytical path and differentiating between exposure, cognition, motivation, and action, rather than treating them as synonyms.

2. REVIEW PURPOSE AND GUIDING QUESTIONS

This article is designed as a systematic narrative review study. It does not report any new surveys, experiments, or secondary statistical meta-analyses. Instead, it critically analyzes the existing literature to clarify what information is available, where disagreements remain, and how future empirical research in India can be better designed.

2.1 Review objectives

- Explain the changing meaning of youth political participation in the digital age and how it is measured.
- Bring together evidence on how social media is linked to political information access, political awareness, and participation.
- Examine the pathways linking social media use and electoral behavior, particularly among first-time voters and young voters.
- Identify factors such as political efficacy, trust, information literacy, digital inequality, and offline interactions that influence this process.
- Critically evaluate the methodological gaps in the existing Indian literature and develop a research agenda.

2.2 Guiding review questions

- How has the existing literature understood and measured youth political participation?
- What does the evidence suggest about the relationship between social media use and political participation among youth?
- How does political awareness play a role in the relationship between exposure to digital information and participation?
- Under what conditions does online engagement translate into electoral or offline participation?
- What theoretical, methodological, and contextual gaps remain in the Indian literature?

3. REVIEW APPROACH

A transparent narrative approach was used to identify and aggregate relevant research and information. The search focused on peer-reviewed journal articles, well-known academic books, review articles, recent empirical studies, and credible election-related material. The search was conducted between September 2026 and September 2026 using a combination of concepts such as youth, young voters, political participation, political engagement, social media, political awareness, political efficacy, voting behavior, misinformation, digital literacy, and India. Where possible, publisher and indexing pages were used to verify bibliographic information. The integration process prioritized sources that directly related to youth, digital political participation, political knowledge, or electoral behavior, as well as basic theoretical work needed for interpretation. This review deliberately distinguishes narrative reviews from systematic reviews or meta-analyses. Therefore, it does not claim to perform a PRISMA search across databases or estimate combined effects. Instead, it uses topic-based comparison and critical analysis to integrate diverse literature with varying definitions, samples, platforms, and results. This distinction is essential for transparency in publication and ensures that manuscripts do not overstate the scope of their findings.

Review element	Specification
Review design	Structured narrative literature review
Core population	Youth, adolescents, first-time voters and young adults; Indian context prioritised
Major themes	Political participation; social media; political awareness; political efficacy; electoral behaviour; misinformation; digital inequality
Evidence types	Conceptual papers, theoretical works, empirical studies, systematic/scoping reviews, official election documents
Time coverage	Foundational studies through literature available in 2026
Synthesis method	Thematic comparison, critical appraisal and conceptual integration

4. THE CONCEPT OF YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Youth political participation should be viewed from a multidimensional perspective, rather than as a synonym for voting. Weiss (2020) shows that the literature has progressively expanded its scope to include new forms of participation while maintaining traditional functions. In the digital environment, political participation can include information seeking, interpersonal discussions, political expression, content creation, mobilization, petition signing, contacting representatives, volunteering in campaigns, and voting. These forms vary significantly in effort, political outcomes, and institutional proximity. A useful distinction is made between four levels: information seeking, expression, mobilization, and institutional participation. Information seeking refers to encountering political information; expression includes liking, commenting, sharing, or posting; mobilization involves coordinated action, campaign activity, or organizing; and institutional participation includes registration, voting, and direct contact with political institutions. Treating these four as a single outcome conceals important differences. The literature on youth increasingly suggests that participation can develop across these levels, but movement from one level to the next is neither automatic nor universal.

Level	Examples	Interpretive caution
Exposure	Seeing political news, speeches, candidate posts, election explainers	Exposure is not equivalent to understanding or engagement
Expression	Liking, commenting, sharing, posting opinions	Low-cost expression can be meaningful but may be weak evidence of sustained participation
Mobilisation	Joining digital campaigns, organising groups, coordinating action	Higher-effort behaviour provides stronger evidence of active engagement
Institutional participation	Voter registration, voting, contacting representatives, campaign volunteering	Offline action is shaped by institutional access and social context

5. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

5.1 Citizen volunteerism and the resource perspective

The tradition of civic volunteerism explains participation through resources, mental engagement, and a process of connecting people. Brady, Verba, and Schlozman (1995) cite time, money, and civic skills as resources that create opportunities for political action. For youth, these resources vary based on education, socioeconomic status, employment status, institutional experience, and opportunities for civic learning. This framework also avoids overemphasizing technology: a young person may have extensive access to digital resources, but still lack the civic skills, political confidence, or time necessary for more demanding participation.

5.2 Connective action

Bennett and Segerberg (2012) describe "connective action" as a form of digitally enabled personal participation that can operate through flexible networks rather than formal organizational membership. This approach is useful for understanding campaign sharing, issue-based hashtags, peer mobilization, and personal political conversations. It helps understand how young citizens can participate politically without joining a party or organization.

5.3 Digital divide perspective

Norris (2001) warns that unequal access to digital technology can exacerbate existing inequalities in information and civic participation. In India, digital inequality can be linked to factors such as device quality, connectivity, geographic location, education, language, gender, and digital literacy. Therefore, the real difference lies not just in who has internet access, but in who has the ability to acquire, interpret, and act on political information.

5.4 Political knowledge and civic learning

Galston (2001) linked political information to democratic thinking and political participation. Recent research on political information literacy extends this argument to the networked information environment: young people need not only political facts, but also the ability to evaluate source credibility, compare claims, recognize misinformation, and make informed decisions (Koren, 2025). This creates a direct conceptual link between social media use and political awareness.

6. SOCIAL MEDIA AS A CHANGING POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Social media has transformed the political information environment by bringing together interactions, political messages, entertainment, news, and mobilization. The "networked young citizen" perspective emphasizes that young people are not merely passive listeners of political messages; they also amplify, interpret, and recreate political content (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014; Vromen, Xenos, & Loader, 2015). This blurring of the political and non-political contexts is significant because most of today's youth political participation occurs during everyday social interactions rather than in specific political settings. Evidence from different countries generally shows a positive relationship between social media use and participation, but this relationship is not consistent across the board. Bouliyan's (2015) meta-analysis of 36 studies found that most reported coefficients were positive, with very few reaching statistically significant levels. A recent meta-analysis of 21 studies on youth also found a moderate positive relationship, but with considerable variation between studies and a stronger effect in the context of online surveys compared to offline surveys (Verma et al., 2026). Overall, these results support a conditional model rather than a fixed outcome model.

Study	Context / design	Main contribution	Relevance to India
Boulianne (2015)	Meta-analysis; 36 studies	Positive association overall, but mixed statistical significance and design differences	Warns against simple causal claims
Loader et al. (2014)	Conceptual scholarship youth	Frames the “networked young citizen” and changing participation repertoires	Supports broader measurement of youth participation
Vissers & Stolle (2014)	Two-wave panel; university students	Examines spill-over between Facebook and online/offline participation	Supports longitudinal designs
Ekström & Shehata (2018)	Five-wave panel; adolescents	Information and interaction more common than production/collective action	Supports disaggregated outcome measures
Ohme (2019)	Diary study; first-time voters	Social media prominent in first-time voters’ campaign media diets	Directly relevant to first-time voter research
Verma et al. (2026)	Meta-analysis; 21 youth studies	Moderate positive relationship with substantial heterogeneity	Highlights methodological and contextual moderators

7. EVIDENCE FROM THE INDIAN CONTEXT

Examples from India suggest that youth online engagement, previously quite limited, is now shifting toward more intense digital political engagement. Ilavarasan (2013) reported that Indian youth were active in community activities, but their online engagement was limited. This suggests that it is wrong to assume that daily internet use automatically leads to political participation. This preliminary finding provides a useful foundation for understanding subsequent research focused on elections. Niazi, Kumar, and Semetko (2016) analyzed the 2014 Indian national elections and demonstrated how digital media became part of a hybrid electoral campaign environment, in which political parties and leaders used online channels alongside traditional media. Their findings are significant because they view youth political engagement within the context of broader changes in election campaign communication, rather than treating social media as an isolated factor. Thakur and Shendurnikar (2020/2021) studied first-time voters in the Vadodara parliamentary constituency during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Their study found that social media was a preferred medium for election news among first-time voters, but they were also wary of the veracity of social media content. This combination of increased use and selective reliance is crucial for understanding political awareness; it is not simply a process of exposure to information, but rather a process of evaluating information.

Recent Indian studies have examined youth awareness and voting patterns in regions such as Kashmir, Haryana, Delhi, and Karnataka. These studies demonstrate the increasingly strong connection between social media and political discourse, awareness, and voting attitudes, but they also face a common problem: many studies are limited to specific regions and include mostly students or digitally connected youth. While such evidence is useful for understanding a specific context, it cannot be used to establish general patterns for the entire country.

Indian evidence	Sample/context	Key finding	Limitation for generalization
Ilavarasan (2013)	Indian youth; civic engagement	Community engagement existed alongside limited online activism	Older digital environment; not election-specific
Neyazi et al. (2016)	2014 national election	Digital campaigning linked to political engagement in a hybrid media system	Campaign-specific and pre-short-video/platform diversification
Thakur & Shendurnikar (2020/21)	100 first-time voters, Vadodara	Social media preferred for election news; cautious trust in content	Small, single-constituency sample
Gupta & Bhardwaj (2024)	115 Delhi college students	Instagram examined as a source of political awareness	Student and city-specific sample
Loura (2025)	Youth voters, Haryana	Political awareness and voting examined with social and family influences	State-level study; scope for stronger comparative design
Basha et al. (2026)	Cross-national including India	Links social media, efficacy, media literacy and participation	Not India-only and not youth-specific

8. POLITICAL AWARENESS AS THE COGNITIVE LINK

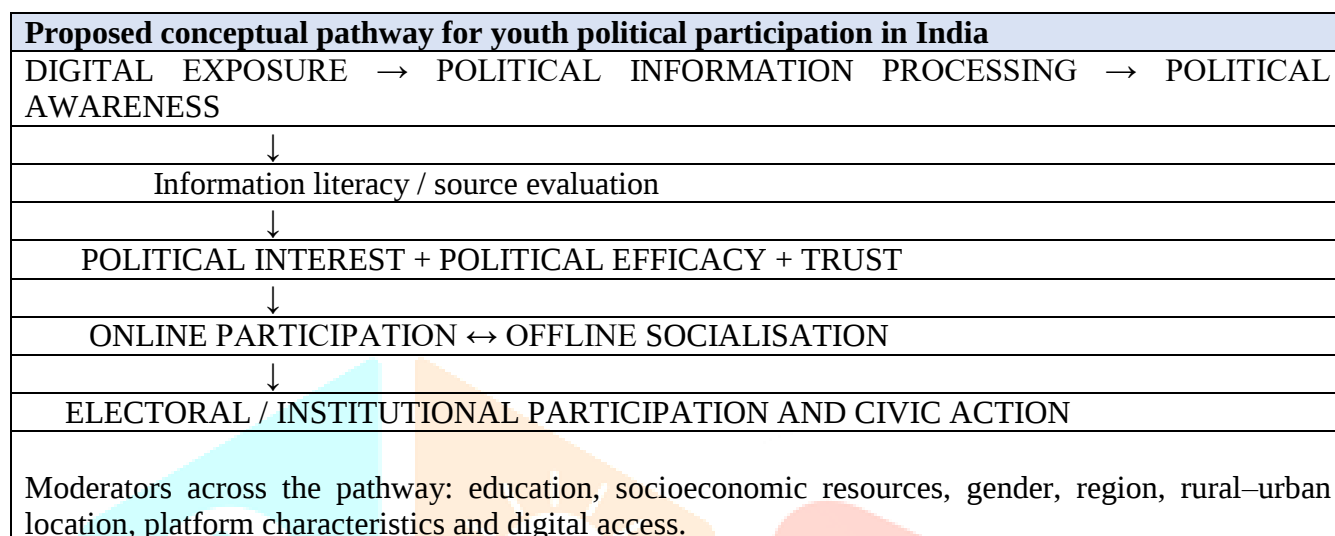
Political awareness occupies an important but often understudied place in the political literature. It can be understood as the mental capacity to recognize political institutions, understand public issues, analyze electoral information, identify key individuals or groups, and distinguish between credible and unreliable political claims. Therefore, political awareness should be distinguished from political interest and frequency of exposure to information. Someone may frequently be exposed to political information but lack accurate political knowledge; another person may possess considerable political knowledge without being actively involved. Coren's (2025) systematic review of political information literacy among youth is particularly relevant. This review suggests that in an environment dominated by misinformation and disinformation, young people need the skills to understand, analyze, and critically evaluate political information. This applies directly to India as political communication today often includes government information, journalism, partisan propaganda, influencer content, satire, and user-made claims all in the same digital feed.

Dimension of political awareness	Possible indicators for future Indian studies
Factual political knowledge	Recognition of constitutional offices, electoral institutions, major political processes
Issue knowledge	Understanding of current public issues and policy debates
Institutional literacy	Understanding of Parliament, Election Commission, voting procedures and representation
Source evaluation	Ability to compare sources, identify credible publishers and recognize unsupported claims
Misinformation recognition	Ability to identify misleading political posts, manipulated content or false claims
Political self-efficacy	Confidence in understanding politics and believing that participation can matter

9. FROM POLITICAL AWARENESS TO ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR

Electoral behavior shouldn't be limited to simply whether a young person voted. It includes factors such as voter registration, voting intentions, candidate evaluations, issue prioritization, campaign participation, political discussion, and post-election participation. This broad definition is particularly useful for first-time voters, as their political understanding is still developing, and the journey from receiving information to voting can be gradual. Studies on first-time voters show that social media can be an important source of campaign information. Ohm (2019) found that first-time voters in Denmark received more campaign information through social media than experienced voters, and that accessing political information on social media can increase campaign participation. Similarly, a study in Vadodara also found a greater reliance on

social media for election-related news, but cautioned against the reliability of the information (Thakur & Shendurnikar, 2020/2021). These results suggest that information access and trust should be measured together. Voting is also shaped by family, friends, education, the local political environment, and access to institutions. Therefore, the most accurate interpretation of existing studies is not that "social media causes voting," but rather that digital political interactions can influence the information environment and psychological factors that play a role in electoral decisions. This interpretation is consistent with the resource perspective, research on political socialization, and connective-action theory.



10. POSITIVE DEMOCRATIC POTENTIALS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- Lower costs of communication and engagement can make political participation easier.
- Digital platforms can increase opportunities to express political views and discuss them with peers.
- Campaigns can reach first-time voters directly and quickly, including through the use of short visual content.
- Young people can participate through engaging activities without formal membership.
- Online spaces can make it easier to spread and discuss public issues that are typically less visible.
- Digital voter education can help increase awareness about registration, process information, and elections.

However, these possibilities should be evaluated based on the quality of engagement rather than visible metrics such as likes, views, or shares. Research should distinguish symbolic expression from learning, deliberation, mobilization, and institutional interaction. This distinction is important because increased activity on platforms may lead to reduced political knowledge or a reduced desire to participate offline

11. RISKS AND CONSTRAINTS

11.1 Misinformation and disinformation

Recent reviews suggest that young people are overconfident about their ability to identify misinformation, when in fact they have difficulty correctly identifying it. Copes, Schittenhelm, and Vaux (2025) analyzed 151 studies and found that demographic factors, cognitive biases, and social conditions influence young people's responses to misinformation. Such weaknesses are important for political participation because misleading information can erode trust, create confusion, and reduce people's willingness to participate.

11.2 Polarisation and homophily

Political conversations on social media can become skewed toward like-minded individuals, whether due to social or algorithmic reasons. Emerging evidence from India suggests that network homophily and algorithmic suggestions can promote polarization among young voters, especially those living in cities and those who are more connected. In terms of participation analysis, this means that greater political engagement may be accompanied by less exposure to dissenting opinions and misconceptions about consensus.

11.3 Digital inequality

Digital access is not evenly distributed by income, geographic location, education, language, or gender. Even if internet access is widespread, differences in device ownership, bandwidth, platform understanding, and the ability to verify sources can lead to disparities in political leverage. Therefore, future studies on India should consider digital inequality as an explanatory variable rather than simply a demographic control.

11.4 Trust and credibility

The credibility of political information is a crucial intermediary. Social media presents official election information, journalism, propaganda, satire, and fabricated content in a highly attention-grabbing environment. A study of first-time voters in Vadodara is informative as it found widespread use of social media, but also a wariness about the authenticity of information (Thakur & Shendurnikar, 2020/2021).

12. GENDER, EDUCATION, REGION AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Youth should not be considered a homogeneous group. Political participation can vary depending on gender, education, socio-economic status, urban-rural location, region, and family political views. Regional comparisons are crucial in the Indian context because language, political culture, party systems, and media environments vary significantly across states. Therefore, national averages may mask systematic differences in how young citizens understand and use digital political information. Education can work in several ways: increasing political knowledge, strengthening the ability to evaluate information sources, creating opportunities for civic discussion, and improving access to digital resources. Family and friend networks can also play a role in shaping political understanding. Consequently, the same level of social media use may yield different outcomes among young people with different social and civic capital.

13. CRITICAL SYNTHESIS OF THE LITERATURE

Existing research suggests five key conclusions. First, young people's political participation is taking on different forms, rather than simply increasing or decreasing. Traditional participation remains important, but digital methods have also become increasingly involved in political discourse and mobilization (Weiss, 2020; Loader et al., 2014). Second, social media use is generally associated with political participation, but this relationship is either very low or moderate, varying depending on how it is measured and the research approach (Boulianne, 2015; Verma et al., 2026). Third, exposure to something does not equal awareness: transforming information into meaningful knowledge requires reliable information, source verification, and an interest in politics (Galston, 2001; Koren, 2025). Fourth, online activities vary. Information and discussion are more common, while more demanding tasks such as organized collective action are less common (Ekström & Shehata, 2018). Fifth, the transformation of online engagement into electoral behavior depends on broader social and institutional conditions, meaning that a mixed online-offline model seems more appropriate than a purely digital model.

14. MAJOR RESEARCH GAPS IN INDIA

Gap	What the literature currently shows	Recommended response
Measurement gap	Participation is defined differently across studies; voting, discussion, sharing and activism are often combined	Use a multidimensional participation scale separating exposure, expression, mobilisation and institutional action
Causal gap	Many studies remain cross-sectional and cannot establish direction of influence	Use panel, longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs where feasible
Platform gap	Platforms are often treated as a single category despite different affordances	Compare WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook and X separately
Sample gap	Urban, student and digitally connected youth are overrepresented	Include rural, semi-urban, non-student and lower-connectivity populations
Regional gap	State-level studies are difficult to compare systematically	Use multicity / multistate comparative sampling
Information-quality gap	Exposure is measured more often than source credibility or verification	Measure misinformation exposure, source evaluation and information literacy
Mechanism gap	Political efficacy, trust and awareness are often examined separately	Test mediation and moderation in an integrated model

Gap	What the literature currently shows	Recommended response
Electoral translation gap	Online engagement does not consistently map onto actual voting or civic action	Measure both online behaviour and verified/behavioural electoral outcomes when possible

15. PROPOSED RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS FOR FUTURE EMPIRICAL STUDIES

These findings are presented not as the conclusions of this review, but as guidelines for future empirical testing based on this analysis.

- P1: Political awareness among youth is positively related to political use of social media, but this relationship is stronger when information literacy skills are high.
- P2: Political awareness is positively related to political interest and internal political efficacy.
- P3: Political efficacy plays a mediating role in the relationship between political awareness and active political participation.
- P4: The relationship between digital political information/exposure and electoral participation is stronger when trust in information sources is high.
- P5: Digital inequality weakens the expected relationship between social media use and meaningful political participation.
- P6: More demanding online activities, such as creating content, coordinating groups, and volunteering in campaigns, are more strongly associated with offline participation than passive or superficial engagement.
- P7: Political socialization through family, peers, and education influences the relationship between digital political information/exposure and electoral behavior.

16. RECOMMENDED METHODOLOGICAL MODEL FOR FUTURE INDIAN RESEARCH

A robust future study could use a mixed-method, multi-state design with young people aged 18-29, including those from urban, semi-urban, and rural areas. The quantitative component should measure political information access across various platforms, political knowledge, ability to understand and use information, interest in politics, political effectiveness, trust, online participation, and electoral behavior. The qualitative component could use interviews or focus groups to examine how young people understand political content, verify claims, respond to misinformation, and decide whether to move from online discussion to offline action. Analytically, structural equation modeling could examine the proposed pathways from digital information access to awareness, effectiveness, and participation, while moderation analysis could examine the effects of digital inequality, gender, region, and education. Where possible, using a panel design during an election is preferable to a one-time cross-sectional survey, as it allows researchers to assess changes in awareness and participation over time. Platform-specific content analysis can enhance self-report data and reduce common-method bias.

Construct	Suggested operationalisation	Recommended evidence source
Digital political exposure	Frequency and type of political content encountered on each platform	Survey + platform diary
Political awareness	Knowledge questions, institutional understanding, current-issue knowledge	Objective knowledge scale
Information literacy	Source credibility, lateral reading, claim verification, misinformation detection	Performance-based items
Political interest	Interest in public affairs and elections	Validated self-report scale
Political efficacy	Internal and external efficacy	Validated political efficacy scale
Online participation	Discussion, commenting, sharing, posting, petition/campaign participation	Behaviour frequency items
Offline participation	Meetings, volunteering, contacting representatives, protest, campaign work	Behavioural checklist
Electoral behaviour	Registration, intention, turnout, candidate evaluation, issue voting	Self-report + electoral context variables
Contextual moderators	Gender, education, region, urban-rural, socioeconomic resources, connectivity	Demographic questionnaire

17. DISCUSSION

The most important contribution of the reviewed literature is not the claim that social media increases youth participation; this has become increasingly commonplace. Much work has concluded that social media transforms the structure of political participation by expanding opportunities for information, expression, and coordination, while also creating new problems such as credibility, polarization, and inequality. Therefore, youth participation should be analyzed not as a "yes" or "no" outcome, but as a process. This process is crucial for India because both the digital environment and the electoral system are undergoing simultaneous changes. The Election Commission has explicitly incorporated social media as a tool to engage youth in voting and counter misinformation. Furthermore, academic studies show that young voters use social media extensively, but selectively consume content. These developments point to a research agenda that considers political awareness and information literacy as connecting elements of the digital environment and democratic behavior, rather than as mere peripheral or less important factors.

The second impact relates to method. Research shows that the content and intensity of digital participation matter more than common metrics like "hours spent on social media." A young person who watches ten minutes of political videos, shares campaign material, creates political content, and forms peer groups can all be considered frequent social media users, yet these actions reflect very different levels of political engagement. Therefore, future research in India should disaggregate behavior and analyze the pathways involved. The third impact relates to equity. Digital democracy cannot be evaluated solely on aggregate connectivity. The democratic value of digital participation depends on whether citizens can access political information, verify its credibility, engage in dialogue despite differences, and translate their preferences into meaningful institutional participation. Consequently, digital inequality, political literacy, and trust are crucial aspects of democracy, not just aspects related to interaction or communication.

18. LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT REVIEW

This article is a structured narrative review, not a formal systematic review or meta-analysis. Therefore, analytical coherence is prioritized over a comprehensive listing of studies. The literature also varies considerably in national context, age range, platform, sample quality, and outcome measures, making direct comparisons difficult. The few recent studies focused on India are primarily available through emerging journals or collections and should be interpreted with appropriate caution regarding indexing and methodological depth. Therefore, the review prioritizes established peer-reviewed theoretical and empirical work when drawing general conclusions, and recent emerging studies are primarily used to identify directions and relevant developments.

19. CONCLUSION

Youth political participation in India is becoming increasingly hybrid: digital platforms are no longer replacing older forms of political awareness, civic education, and electoral participation, but rather complementing them. Research shows that social media can enhance opportunities for political information, voice, and mobilization, but its democratic impact depends on the quality of information, political interest, public efficacy and confidence in making their voices heard, civic resources, and the availability of meaningful participation opportunities. Therefore, the key research question is not whether social media impacts youth participation, but rather, under what conditions, in what ways, and for which groups. For Indian research to build on solid evidence, multiple methods of measuring participation, platform-specific analysis, inclusion of regional and rural areas, longitudinal research designs, and explicit measurement of political literacy and misinformation are needed. A research program based on the proposed sequence of 'digital exposure → awareness → capacity/interest → participation' could move the field beyond general claims about the "impact of social media" and better explain how young citizens learn, deliberate, and act politically.

REFERENCES

1. Basha, H., Mustafa, S., & Mohammed Mousa, K. M. (2026). Social media and the democratization of political participation: A global perspective. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2026.1719957>
2. Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(5), 739–768. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661>
3. Boulianne, S. (2015). Social media use and participation: A meta-analysis of current research. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(5), 524–538. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1008542>
4. Brady, H. E., Verba, S., & Scholzman, K. L. (1995). Beyond SES: A resource model of political participation. *American Political Science Review*, 89(2), 271–294. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2082425>
5. Ekström, M., & Shehata, A. (2018). Social media, porous boundaries, and the development of online political engagement among young citizens. *New Media & Society*, 20(2), 740–759. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816670325>
6. Election Commission of India. (2024). General Elections 2024: Press notes, electoral roll statistics, and youth engagement initiatives. Election Commission of India.
7. Galston, W. A. (2001). Political knowledge, political engagement, and civic education. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 4, 217–234. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.4.1.217>
8. Gupta, A., & Bhardwaj, S. (2024). Double-tapping into democracy: The role of Instagram on political awareness of students in Delhi colleges. *Vivekananda Journal of Research*. <https://doi.org/10.61081/vjr/14v1i1110>
9. Ilavarasan, P. V. (2013). Community work and limited online activism among India youth. *International Communication Gazette*, 75(3), 284–299. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048512472945>
10. Kahne, J., Lee, N.-J., & Feezell, J. T. (2013). The civic and political significance of online participatory cultures among youth transitioning to adulthood. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 10(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2012.701109>
11. Koren, N. (2025). Conceptualizing political information literacy among young people: A systematized review of the literature. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 20(1), 31–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17461979231189186>
12. Kops, M., Schittenhelm, C., & Wachs, S. (2025). Young people and false information: A scoping review of responses, influential factors, consequences, and prevention programs. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 169, 108650. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2025.108650>
13. Kruikemeier, S. (2014). How political candidates use Twitter and the impact on votes. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 34, 131–139. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.01.025>
14. Loader, B. D., Vromen, A., & Xenos, M. A. (2014). The networked young citizen: Social media, political participation and civic engagement. *Information, Communication & Society*, 17(2), 143–150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2013.871571>
15. Neyazi, T. A., Kumar, A., & Semetko, H. A. (2016). Campaigns, digital media, and mobilization in India. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 21(3), 398–416. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161216645336>
16. Norris, P. (2001). *Digital divide: Civic engagement, information poverty, and the Internet worldwide*. Cambridge University Press.
17. Ohme, J. (2019). When digital natives enter the electorate: Political social media use among first-time voters and its effects on campaign participation. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 16(2), 119–136. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2019.1613279>
18. Stieglitz, S., & Dang-Xuan, L. (2013). Social media and political communication—A social media analytics framework. *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, 3(4), 1277–1291. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13278-012-0079-3>
19. Thakur, D., & Shendurnikar, N. (2020/2021). How social media influences first time voters: A study of the Vadodara parliamentary constituency in Lok Sabha elections 2019. *Journal of Global Communication*, 13(2), 72–88. <https://doi.org/10.5958/0976-2442.2020.00013.0>
20. Theocharis, Y., & Quintelier, E. (2016). Stimulating citizenship or expanding entertainment? The effect of Facebook on adolescent participation. *New Media & Society*, 18(5). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814549006>

21. Verma, S., Gardia, A., & Das, B. (2026). A meta-analytic review of social media usage and political participation among youth. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 137, 102950. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2026.102950>
22. Vissers, S., & Stolle, D. (2014). Spill-over effects between Facebook and on/offline political participation? Evidence from a two-wave panel study. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 11(3), 259–275. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2014.888383>
23. Vromen, A., Xenos, M. A., & Loader, B. (2015). Young people, social media and connective action: From organisational maintenance to everyday political talk. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 18(1), 80–100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2014.933198>
24. Weiss, J. (2020). What is youth political participation? Literature review on youth political participation and political attitudes. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 2, 1. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2020.00001>
25. Xenos, M., Vromen, A., & Loader, B. D. (2014). The great equalizer? Patterns of social media use and youth political engagement in three advanced democracies. *Information, Communication & Society*, 17(2), 151–167. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2013.871318>
26. Agrahari, S. P., & Srivastava, D. (2026). The political demography of Generation Z: Electoral behaviour, digital engagement and the restructuring of democratic participation in India. *Idealistic Journal of Advanced Research in Progressive Spectrums*, 5(6), 81–92. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21451891>
27. Loura, S. K. (2025). Youth voters in Haryana: Political awareness and voting behaviour in present scenario. *International Journal of All Research Education & Scientific Methods*, 13(12). <https://doi.org/10.56025/IJARESM.2025.1312252217>

