



International Journal of Recent Development in Engineering and Technology
Website: www.ijrdet.com (ISSN 2347-6435 (Online) Volume 15, Issue 04, April 2026)

The Role of Social Media in Shaping Youth Political Participation: Opportunities and Risks

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Abstract-- Social Media (SM), which has changed how younger citizens (youth) participate in their democracy, also has changed how people engage politically in the digital age. This research looks at how SM has affected the way young Indian citizens (youth) participate in their democracy. By using both qualitative and quantitative methods, surveys are conducted among young political leaders and SM influencers to determine how often/how much they use SM, and interviews with young Indians on how SM has affected the way they engage in politics. This research has demonstrated a pattern of SM usage, as well as subsequently the effect that SM has had on youth engagement with politics and youth interacting online about politics. As per the study's outcome, while SM has provided youth with unprecedented levels of access to information about politics and increased opportunities for political participation, there are also many negative aspects associated with SM's use. On the positive side of things, young citizens (youth) are able to use platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Reels, and YouTube to express themselves politically, provide a place for young citizens (youth) to find out about politics, to mobilize others in support of a cause, and provide a platform for youth to share their political views with other users of these platforms. On the negative side, SM has introduced new barriers to Political Engagement (PE), such as misinformation, forcing users to dig through layers of information; SM creates polarization as people interact with others similar to themselves; and SM leads to superficial connections to politics. Grounded on the findings presented, it is evident that SM can positively enhance youth engagement with politics; however, it can also negatively impact a young citizen's engagement with politics, depending on how that young citizen interacts with SM platforms and how those platforms are used by political actors.

Keywords--Social Media, Political Participants, Opportunities, Challenges, Digital Platforms, Political Efficacy, Youths, India.

I. INTRODUCTION

For promoting democracy as well as good governance, all forms of media and their tools are considered as important in the 21st century. Via the media, the people's voice, and their thoughts on political issues, reverberates. Moreover, there is an apparent synergy betwixt the novel media tools accessible today along with people's political life; also, it sets typically the stage for a potent, interactive, as well as virulent version of political communication (Abdulyakeen & Yusuf, 2022). Political communication plays a key role in a democracy. Prevailing media like television, and newspaper reports, raise attentiveness, shield political parties' political actions, as well as inform voters. It functions like a watchdog, too. With the internet's rising status, SM platforms termed novel media have arose as a novel communication mode. SM has assumed a critical role in political communication in the contemporary world. SM, audio-video, and pictures can transfer to a large audience at a low cost and within a shorter period of time. Moreover, the content is recorded and archiveable. It can be transferred beyond geographic proximity. All people can access content at any time or from wherever. The Internet has evolved into an omnipresent medium, and virtually everybody now has access to it. Major political parties now use the internet, particularly for SM, as the most effective means to connect with voters via a direct line of communication. By using SM, candidates can reach specific groups of voters and monitor how well those groups interact with them, allowing for more effective and efficient campaigns than can be possible without employing SM as a tool (Kalita, 2022; Ohaja et al., 2023). The benefits of employing SM as a communication tool for politics are depicted in Figure 1.

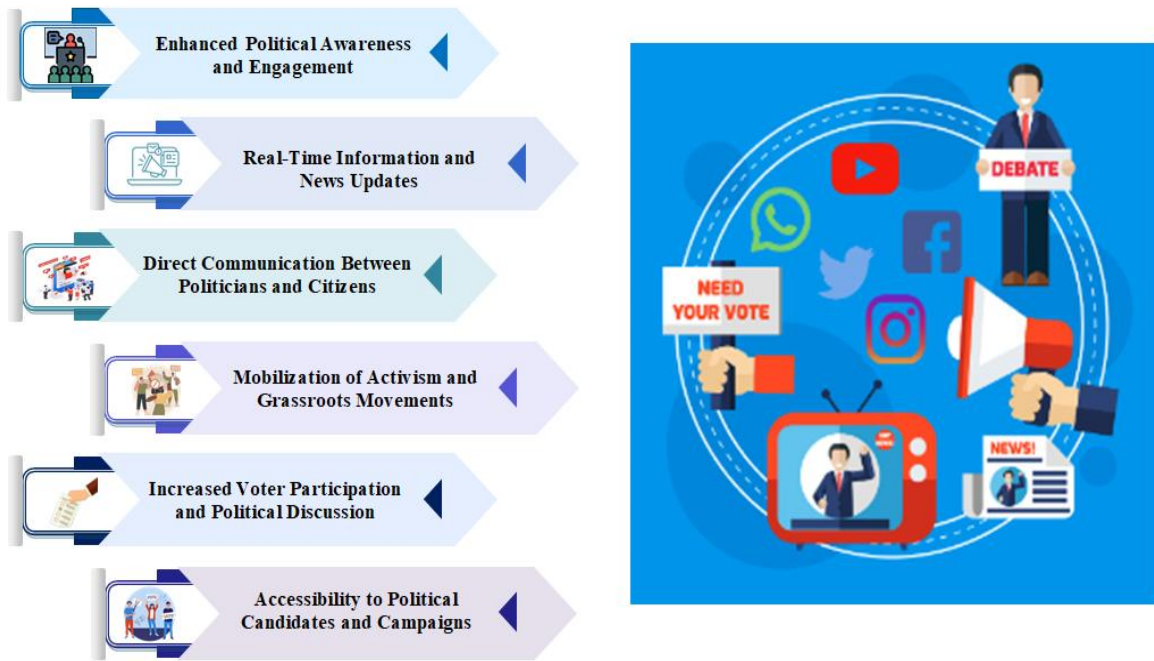


Figure 1: Use of Social Media in Politics

Recent years have seen a dramatic change in the way young people engage politically due to a rapidly growing influencer base of digital technology, which supports new forms of engagement and new ways of sharing information about politics. To fully understand the importance of youth PE in today's democratic society, it is necessary to define youth PE. Youth PE is defined as the engagement with politics of individuals aged approximately 15-24 years, engaging in various types of political activity, such as voting, advocacy, and activism. Youth are typically driven to become politically engaged by their desire to influence political decisions and advance their own interests (Hngokchai, 2025). Youth political participation, a public participation in efforts to report shared problems, is a vital characteristic of democracy. It is controlled doings assumed by the mass public (youths) to effect public policy, either openly or else by affecting person assortment who make policies. Instances of those activities, according to them encompass elective in elections, serving a political campaign, giving money to an applicant or else cause, communicating officials, petitioning, protesting, along with working with other people on matters (Okoli et al., 2025; Huang, 2025).

The rise of the digital age has completely altered how youths are involved in civic engagement and youth activism.

Civic engagement has always been a vital aspect of participating in a democracy, especially for young people, who are typically the change agents for social change and political reform. However, the digital age has changed this idea of civic engagement to a new way of being involved, with forms of participation that are based on data and that occur through decentralized networks and platforms. Thus, with the emergence of SM, youth now operate within hybrid civic environments that blend offline activism with online mobilization. These include traditional spaces for civic participation as well as less structured options, such as SM hashtags and digital stories. A major benefit of the Internet is that it provides young people with a place in which they can organize globally, quickly share ideas, create communities of interest, and gain increased access to political activity (Nchaga, 2025; Ogunsola, 2024).

1.1 Problem Statement

As India's SM continues to grow in popularity and become more widely wielded by citizens, politicians, along with civil society groups, to share their opinions as well as gather support for their respective causes, candidates, etc., SM will also have an increasing impact on how they engage with political systems.



Political participation by individuals now be facilitated through all of the following: easier access to information; enhanced access to the networking, interaction, and sense of community (shared experience) that come from using these websites; empowering disadvantaged groups by giving them the ability to engage in political processes and activities, even when they are not directly connected to or may not have direct access to these same systems as others (Manuwa, 2022; Abdullah et al., 2024). Yet, there are challenges along with risks associated with SM that increase political participation, including misinformation & propaganda, incitement to violence/hate speech, exacerbation of ethnic/religious divisions, and delegitimization of electoral institutions and processes. Thus, the problem statement is to scrutinize the extent as well as nature of SM's impact on political participation, along with the opportunities and challenges that SM present for augmenting democratic governance along with development in the country.

1.2 Research Questions

This research article tries to find answers to the questions given below,

1. How are young adults using SM to become engaged politically?
2. What role does SM play in a young adult's PE?
3. What are the different means through which young adults are able to engage politically via SM?
4. What challenges do young adults have when utilising SM to become involved in political activities?

1.3 Research Objectives

This project targets to attain the following:

- I. To investigate how young people are employing SM to educate themselves on political social issues.
- II. To investigate the ways in which SM helps to (a) support participating in democracy through interactivity, (b) to check and verify politicians' actions, (c) to raise knowledge of and awareness of the political process, and (d) to combat the spread of disinformation.
- III. To investigate how young people can utilize SM as a tool for educating themselves on political topics through the creation of online platforms to express their own political beliefs and engage with others on those subjects.
- IV. To investigate the challenges that arise for the development of youth PE due to SM.

1.4 Significance of a study

It is beneficial for academia as well as social along with real life. It enhances to the present investigation on digital democracy as well as PE, precisely, students' directing at universities, which is researched when weighed against Western countries. The adapted theoretical components are the employs as well as gratifications theory, political value, along with networked public sphere theory. These are the hypothetical elements wielded to present the holistic approach to the digital platform role.

It causes the discussion of the SM role in their political, helping to disclose online communications' effect on civic values, political participation, along with democratic accountability. Almost, it is pertinent to the diverse stakeholders owing to its findings. Finally, how hazardous online politics could be regarding false news, polarization, along with inert activism is depicted here. Surpassing these difficulties is possible to augment democracy by building it more learned as well as healthier. Thus, the study's rank doesn't just cause theoretical information promotion, but also a few practical plans to augment the democratic participation, which escorts the digital age.

1.5 Contribution of a study

Youth involvement in Indian politics has radically changed owing to the rise of SM as well as digital platforms. These platforms provide access to information, engagement through activism, and participation by a much larger number of young people than previously possible. While SM may increase youth participation in the democratic process, there are also challenges associated with using SM, including misinformation about political candidates and issues, political polarization, and the negative mental health impacts caused by the use of digital technology for political conflicts. As digital literacy evolves and technology continues to advance, youth become increasingly influential in the political future of India. The peculiar rank of SM's potential to donate to the youth's political education for fostering their active participation in the political process was highlighted. It also donates to the position of SM networks' academic understanding in the community as well as social movements' construction. A balanced perspective, which could inform future research, is offered while appraising digital activism's positive as well as negative aspects.

The paper organization is structured as: Section 2 reviews the study's existing literature. Next, the theoretical framework is explained in Section 3.



Later, Section 4 provides the research methodology. Then, Section 5 represents complete results and analyses of the study. Section 6 briefly discusses the interpretation of results with existing studies and explains the implications of the study. Finally, the study's conclusion, limitations, and future scope are summarized in Section 7.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

(Sam et al., 2024) aimed to analyse SM's impact on youth perception regarding the political discourses in India. To comprehend how people perceived SM's impact, an Interpretive Phenomenological technique was wielded. A total of 10 participants were selected through purposive sampling. '4' key emerging themes like polarisation, echo chambers, SM's influence on politics perception, along with strategies to employ SM effectively are detected. Most participants were unaware of echo chambers' internal dynamics consequences, which led to seeing things just as of one point of view; thus causing unipolarity ideas amongst people in them.

(Alodat et al., 2023) investigated certain factors' moderating effect on SM's impact on political involvement amongst Jordanian youth. A questionnaire survey of data had been collected from 334 young people, and the data had been appraised via the PLS-SEM. The SM had a favorable as well as considerable influence on political participation. Moreover, gender was exposed to have a sturdy curbing upshot on the relation betwixt SM usage along with the political participation. The focus was just on youth engagement in political activities in Jordan. Thus, simplifying the consequences to other countries or else inhabitants wasn't possible.

(Nyianle, 2025) recognized SM's role in political participation amongst 15 to 35 (age youth) in Sekondi-Takoradi, Ghana. By employing a mixed-techniques approach with 101 survey respondents as well as 6 semi-structured interviews was wielded. As per the survey results, there was a significant association that access to info on SM predicted participation, along with SM influence was allied with opinion change. Political issue awareness, mobilization, along with trust challenges were depicted as important mechanisms, with platforms like Twitter and WhatsApp shaping engagement. Yet, generalizability might be limited by the sample's bias toward males, along with educated persons.

(Aggarwal & Kumar, 2019) aimed to comprehend SM's role and influence on the political efficacy along with political participation of youth. Likewise, this was an effort to detect whether political efficacy was in a direct relation with political participation.

Primary quantitative data were collected from all young people studying in higher learning institutes in Himachal Pradesh by employing the survey technique; also, were appraised by employing descriptive statistics. Campaigning on mass media along with SM was not just to be professed as more vital when weighed against media, but also likely to be effectual in endorsing political participation. SM, with mass media, were likely when weighed against media to effect political value along with political participation amongst the youth.

(Santos et al., 2025) studied the factors driving online political participation amongst young adults by assimilating the Theory of Reasoned Action along with the Civic Voluntarism Model. By employing survey data as of 236 young adults, structural equation modelling was applied to appraise the relation betwixt attitudes, psychological engagement, subjective norms, political interactions, along with resource availability. As per the study, political interest, political efficacy, along with political involvement (attitudes and psychological engagement) was the major motivators for youth to participate in politics online. However, subjective norms (e.g., what others think) and resource availability (e.g., not having the means to participate) had no significant effect, indicating that youth were participating in politics online mainly for themselves or due to self-motivation rather than for social or material reasons. This lack of correlation between subjective norms/resources and political participation suggested that youth were not influenced by social expectations when participating in politics online. As a result, it might be difficult to generalise these findings across different European countries, given how youth political participation rates appeared to differ across Europe.

(Ahmad et al., 2019) established that computer-mediated contacts regarding politics effectuate positive changes for the individual toward increased political efficacy and participation. A web-based survey of 200 male as well as female graduates along with undergraduate students from the University of Narowal, Pakistan, was utilized to collect quantitative data for the research findings. Major students wielded SM for political awareness as well as information. Political efficacy was centered on online political participation. Also, SM was an energetic platform for netizens to contribute in real-life political activities.

(Mir, 2022) examined how Indian students participated in politics on SM. It examined whether or else not SM promoted disconnected political participation along with political consciousness amongst students in India. 153 students (online survey) was done across different universities in India and analysed using a purposive sampling technique.



The survey findings revealed that major students read political content on Facebook, but they didn't share or else express their political opinions on SM. Also, SM hadn't yet evolved into a space meant for political discussion amongst students in India. Also, the limitation concerned the kind of devices wielded for data collection. There could be bias in the kind of young adults attained as the questionnaire was dispersed online.

(Obinna et al., 2024) explored SM's role in shaping youth political participation in Awka Metropolis of Anambra state as of religious institutions' perspectives, precisely Catholic as well as Pentecostal churches. 320 samples were gathered by employing systematic random sampling. By employing descriptive statistics as well as inferential statistics, for example, multiple regressions Analysis, data were analysed. There was a key relation betwixt subjective norms as well as political participation, perceived usefulness, perceived behavioural control, along with political participation. Yet, it just measured the SM usage effect on political participation, but it didn't inspect other factors, which might affect PE, like socio-economic status, education, along with political usefulness.

(Arias & Montalbo, 2024) identified SM's impacts on the adolescents' political awareness, participation, as well as activism. This study used the descriptive-correlational comparative design that employed the survey questionnaire method to collect data from 523 senior high school students by employing a stratified random sampling technique. The adolescents frequently wielded SM as a tool for awarding their political interests, as well as, to a great degree, had trusted online info to get updates on political issues. The adolescents' political participation, awareness, along with activism didn't differ regarding their age, sex, or else religious affiliation. Yet, the study only focused on adolescents from the highest population of students studying in the Schools Division of Batangas.

(Omotayo & Folorunso, 2020) examined SM's usage for political participation amongst youths in Oyo State, Nigeria. Data were composed via a questionnaire as of 322 youths in '3' Nigerian universities. Spearman's rank correlation, along with 1-way ANOVA, was wielded for testing the hypotheses. According to findings, young people were heavily engaged in political activity through social networking sites. Young people primarily used SNSs to advocate for politics, campaign for political candidates, contact political representatives, discuss politics, report or monitor election-related fraud or misconduct, solicit public input on political issues, become a member of an interest

group that advocated for legislation through lobbying, blog about politics, and send letters to government officials.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work is anchored on the political communication theories of uses as well as gratifications, public sphere, and networked society, which are relevant to the study.

3.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory

The study is affixed on the Usages as well as Gratifications theory. The theory, according to (Yüksel et al., 2022), is anxious with what people does with media rather than what media does to people. The supposition is that people effect the possessions the media have on them (uses as well as gratification theory receipts a humanistic technique to media use along with effect). It undertakes audience (members) aren't passive but play a key role in understanding, along with assimilating media into their own lives. People employ media to fulfill specific gratifications. This could inspire actions like voting or else online political discussions. Moreover, agenda-setting theory postulates that the media powers public priorities by emphasizing certain matters (Madueke et al., 2017). Relating to the uses as well as gratification theory, SM's users are deliberate seekers of such messages. They can select as well as employ the technology in ways that outfit their persistence. Therefore, they are active as well as not passive. Likewise, political candidates can select as well as employ media of their choice, along with message content of their choice, in electoral campaigns, together with other electioneering activities.

3.2 Public Sphere

It is a concept, which aids in gauging the alteration or else gap betwixt facts as well as norms in political life, the degree to which people act as per either power along with strategy or else a normative orientation's empirical dictates toward the public good. Since the early 1990s, Habermas has made numerous revisions along with refinements in his public sphere theories (Friedland et al., 2006). Inappropriately, commentary still revolves in early efforts in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. It claims that people employ to deliberate their matters in public spheres, in which the public sphere feeds debates as well as assembles the general masses meant for some specific issues (Ida et al., 2020). In Figure 2, the public sphere's theoretical framework is shown.

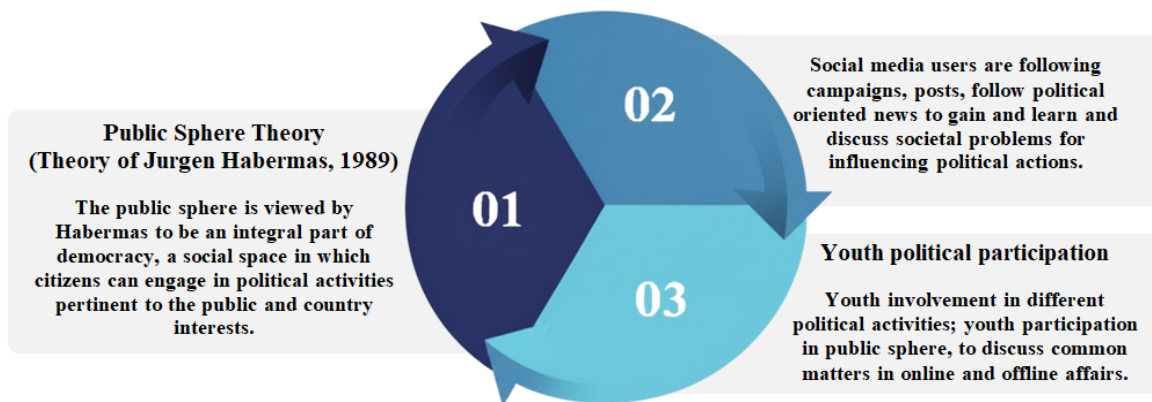


Figure 2: Theory of Public Sphere

3.3 Networked Society

Network Society Theory, originated by Manuel Castells, is a framework through which people can understand contemporary society in terms of digital information networks, changing how people participate in political processes by enabling decentralized, new forms of political activism (e.g., virtual activism), developing international political conversation, and promoting more flexible ways for citizens to engage with one another in politics. As with other advancements in communications technology, how Network Society Theory manifests within different social contexts varies and requires a comprehensive analysis rather than a simple technological determinism argument. Studies show that online networks boost participation intentions, yet real engagement depends on existing socio-political factors, with some arguing networks empower citizens while others warn of weakened agency under technocratic control. Understanding such networks' societal context entails returning to political economy's social transformation of capitalist society. Firstly, Castells emphasizes that the network society is an entrepreneurial society as an evocation of his Marxist roots (August, 2022; Anttiroiko, 2015).

Currently, empirical studies have depicted SM's revolutionary impact on the youth's political participation. (Jain, 2025) explored SM platforms' impact as well as the relation betwixt SM platforms and youth political behavior, concentrating on how platforms like Twitter, Facebook, along with Instagram influence awareness, discussions, as well as participation. SM augments political awareness along with offers a platform for youth to engage in discussions as well as activism. Yet, challenges like misinformation along with echo chambers, are noted. A research in the West exhibited that university students depend on SM as political news' primary source.

As per research in the U.S., students who vigorously cooperated with SM political information can do activities in the real world like protesting or else voting (Quratulain et al., 2025). SM platforms is the integral parts of youth lives in India, posing challenges as well as opportunities, which shape their experiences, behaviors, along with aspirations in the digital age. Misinformation along with fake news is widespread on SM platforms, posturing a noteworthy challenge for Indian youth. False information spreads quickly via viral content as well as echo chambers, resulting in dissemination of rumors, conspiracy theories, along with propaganda. Youth are vulnerable to misinformation owing to their limited critical thinking skills along with susceptibility to peer influence, making them vulnerable to manipulation as well as exploitation by malicious actors (Bommanal, 2024). Also, SM provides various occasions for youth in India to augment their knowledge, awareness, mobilization, along with civic education. Platforms offer access to a wealth of information and educational resources, permitting youth to supplement their formal education, explore new interests, along with connect with experts as well as peers globally. Indian politics are transformed by SM, which provides novel chances for engagement, communication, as well as mobilization. Yet, these opportunities come with key challenges, which must be spoken to defend the democratic process's integrity (Singh et al., 2024).

Research Gap: Whilst preceding research has appraised SM's role in shaping online PE among youth, there remains a critical gap in understanding the broader set of opportunities and challenges that drive participation beyond normative influences. Also, this is positive as well as negative regarding the SM impact. Thus, political effectiveness as well as involvement is enhanced, along with others who assert that it has improved passive involvement or else political apathy.



International Journal of Recent Development in Engineering and Technology
Website: www.ijrdet.com (ISSN 2347-6435 (Online) Volume 15, Issue 04, April 2026)

No matter how general the given area grows, there is a gap in the literature, which aims on developing countries like India, in which SM influences political participation in varying ways when weighed against the West. Thus, SM's impact on youth's the political participation is to be deliberated. Much of the existing literature has focused on SM's influence on youth participation in Western as well as developed countries. However, only new research has explored the SM opportunities and challenges together among youth participation, particularly in developing countries. Thus, exploring this research is vital.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section focuses on research methodologies where SM's effects are examined in youth participants. This study takes a mixed-technique strategy, which assimilates qualitative as well as quantitative research approaches to convey a vital understanding of the subject.

4.1 Research Design

It deploys a mixed-technique approach to develop an in-depth understanding of how SM impacts youth's political participation in India. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches will allow for a comprehensive view of quantitative trends on PE amongst young adults and offer a better understanding of the relation betwixt SM as well as PE in young adults. The first phase of research consists of quantitative data collection from young adults in India, ages 18-30, who engage with politics through SM use. This is accomplished using surveys to measure PE levels. The study's second phase consists of qualitative data collection from in-depth interviews with youth SM influencers, activist leaders, as well as those with an interest in understanding maximum participation within the democratic process of India. Qualitative data consists of SM post data, comment data, share data, and like data harvested during a specified period of time based on keywords and hashtag sampling strategies. The data is then analyzed through content analysis of SM posts, sentiment analysis to measure polarization, and comparative analysis across platforms.

4.2 Population and Sample

As far as research is concerned, samples are defined as subsets of populations that are used in the collection of data (measurement). In this study, the researchers focus on the younger participants (ages 18-24) who are actively engaged with SM platforms to discuss political issues and express their views. To accomplish this goal, researchers are engaged in purposive sampling and ensure they account for important demographic variables of interest, including gender, race, geographic area, and SM usage.

A total of 200 youth of 18-30 as of varied socio-economic, along with geographic backgrounds in India are selected for the study.

Also, In-depth meetings with 18 participants 18-30 years who keenly use SM platforms are done. This age group is selected as they can employ SM as a key source of info, as well as have a key impact on the nation's present along with future political interests. Users of YouTube, X/Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok/Reels, together with Instagram, are chosen in this study as these are vital SM platforms that have become a solid platform meant for political information's dissemination; also, numerous political figures use them as one among their main means of statement with the country's young voters. Primary data is collected via a survey questionnaire, as well as secondary data is collected via literature, publications, websites, along with academic papers.

4.3 Data Collection Methods

Data collection is conducted in two sequential stages to maintain clarity and consistency across methods. The survey consists of a 60-item structured questionnaire with binary (Yes/No) responses organized into 11 thematic categories: SM habits, political awareness, participation and mobilization, slacktivism, misinformation, polarization, digital literacy, mental health, inclusion and voice, institutional trust, and attention checks. Following the codebook methodology, responses are aggregated into an Opportunities Index (29 items) and Risks Index (17 items), along with four subscales: Polarization, Misinformation, Slacktivism, and Mental Health Risk.

Qualitative information is collected by conducting semi-structured virtual interviews using video conference software. Through these interviews, participants are given the opportunity to elaborate on their personal experiences with SM as well as the ways SM has shaped their activism or leadership experiences, as well as to share the barriers they have experienced and their views on how SM can provide opportunities for democratic engagement. All interviews are audio-taped with consent from the participant and transcribed for further review.

4.4 Data Analysis

It is conducted in two phases. In the quantitative phase of analysis, responses are coded along with processed by employing statistical software (e.g., Excel). Descriptive statistics (mean, median, as well as standard deviation) offer a summary of the average. The qualitative analysis involves examining the transcripts of interviews using a thematic approach.



Each transcript is coded as they are examined line-by-line and grouped into larger themes which represent codes with similar characteristics, for example: SM access and habits, political awareness and information searching, participation and mobilization, slacktivism and engagement, misinformation and fact-checking, political polarization, echo-chamber and conflict, digital literacy and algorithms, mental health and well-being, voice, inclusion and civic education, trust in institutions, and focus and consistency checks.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

It follows the ethical criteria meant for research, which comprises human participants. As part of the study procedures, each participant consents to take part in the study by providing their consent to participate through written documentation prior to taking part in any part of the data collection process. The confidentiality and anonymity of study participants are ensured by providing a guarantee of the privacy of the participants and their personal data, and that participants have the ability to remove as of the study at any time, devoid of penalty. The ethical aspects of the study are satisfied through methods to maintain the confidentiality and privacy of users.

V. RESULTS

The results are presented in this section and explain the impact on the questions for research. This section is divided into two main parts: quantitative and qualitative knowledge. The results are presented in the order of research stages explained in section 4 to focus on the logical flow as well as research goals. Via data integration, a comprehensive understanding of how SM affects youth political participation, along with its opportunities and challenges, is offered.

5.1 Quantitative Findings

The study's quantitative phase includes a survey of 200 SM users. Data are analysed by employing descriptions along with inference statistics for revealing a few key trends as well as relationships.

5.1.1 Analysis of demographic data

Five demographic characteristics, namely gender, age, educational level, location, and usage of the SM platform, are identified in this study. The participants' profile on these variables is portrayed in Table 1.

Table 1:
Sample Characteristics (N = 200)

Demographic Information	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	117	58.5
Female	81	40.5
Non-binary	2	1
Age Group		
18-22	136	68
23-26	45	22.5
27-30	19	9.5
Education		
High School	38	19
Undergraduate	76	38
Graduate	56	28
Postgraduate	30	15
Location Type		
Urban	118	59
Semi-Urban	57	28.5
Rural	25	12.5
Primary Platforms		
WhatsApp	72	36

Instagram	47	23.5
Facebook	34	17
YouTube	19	9.5
Twitter/X	16	8
TikTok/Reels	12	6

As shown in Table 1, the respondents in the sample are 58.5% males, 40.5% females, and 1% as non-binary or preferring not to disclose. Regarding the age group, 68% of the participants are between 18 and 22 years, followed by 22.5% of the participants between 23 and 26 years, and 9.5% of the participants are between 27 and 30 years. Table 1 also shows that a high proportion of the respondents are Undergraduate holders, which accounts for 38% or 76 respondents.

Participants are primarily as of urban areas (59%), with the remaining 28.5% from suburban along with 12.5% from rural regions. Various SM accounts operated by the youth are shown in Table 1. Most of the participants use WhatsApp (36%) and Instagram (23.5%), while fewer use YouTube (9.5%), X/Twitter (8%), Instagram (24%), and TikTok/Reels (6%).

5.1.2 Opportunities and Risks: Primary Indices

The primary index scores for both opportunities and risks are identified with low levels, medium levels, and high levels, which are depicted in Table 2 below.

Table 2:
Opportunities & Risks Index Scores

Index	Items	Mean (%)	SD	Range	Low n (%)	Medium n (%)	High n (%)
Opportunities	29	48.8	9.5	24.1 - 72.4	35 (17.5%)	143 (71.5%)	22 (11.0%)
Risks	17	54.4	11.4	23.5 - 82.4	16 (8.0%)	133 (66.5%)	51 (25.5%)

Table 2 shows that compared to the opportunities index, the risk index achieves the highest mean percentage value (54.4%).

The index of opportunities ranges from 24.1 to 72.4, where the risk index ranges from 23.5 to 82.4. Both the opportunities and risk scored the medium level indices more than the low and high level indices (Figure 3).

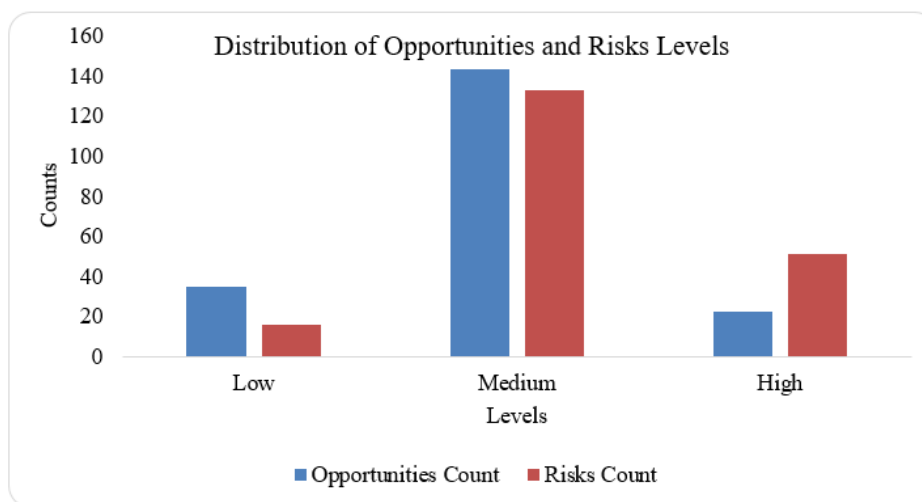


Figure 3: Distribution of Opportunities and Risk Levels

5.1.3 Risk Subscales: Detailed Breakdown

The risk subscales of polarization, misinformation, slacktivism, and mental health risk are taken for the analysis, which is shown in Table 3.

Table 3:
Risk Subscale Analysis

Subscale	Items	Mean (%)	SD	Key Finding 1	Key Finding 2	Key Finding 3
Polarization	4 (Q37-40)	64	25.8	65% in echo chambers (Q37)	74% see hostile discussions (Q40)	55% unfollowed due to politics (Q39)
Misinformation	5 (Q31-36)	57.1	20.6	86% encountered misinfo (Q31)	57% trust forwarded messages (Q36)	42% use fact-checking (Q35)
Slacktivism	4 (Q26-29)	62.9	22.7	79% only like/share (Q26)	63% rarely offline action (Q29)	46% replaced offline with online (Q27)
Mental Health Risk	4 (Q47-50)	49.8	24.4	56% report anxiety (Q47)	51% avoid commenting (Q49)	42% reduced usage (Q48)

As per the findings, polarization is obtained as the highest mean risk (64%), where 74% of participants feel that the online political discussions are often hostile or aggressive (Figure 4). The supper of misinformation, along with disinformation, is one among the topmost priorities. 86% of respondents encounter political misinformation on SM.

Further, 79% of respondents often only like/share political posts without further action. However, SM usage also affects the mental well-being of youths; 56% of participants report that the online political conflict has made them anxious or stressed. Some of the participants avoid commenting on politics to protect their mental well-being, whereas 42% of respondents reduced use of SM due to political toxicity.

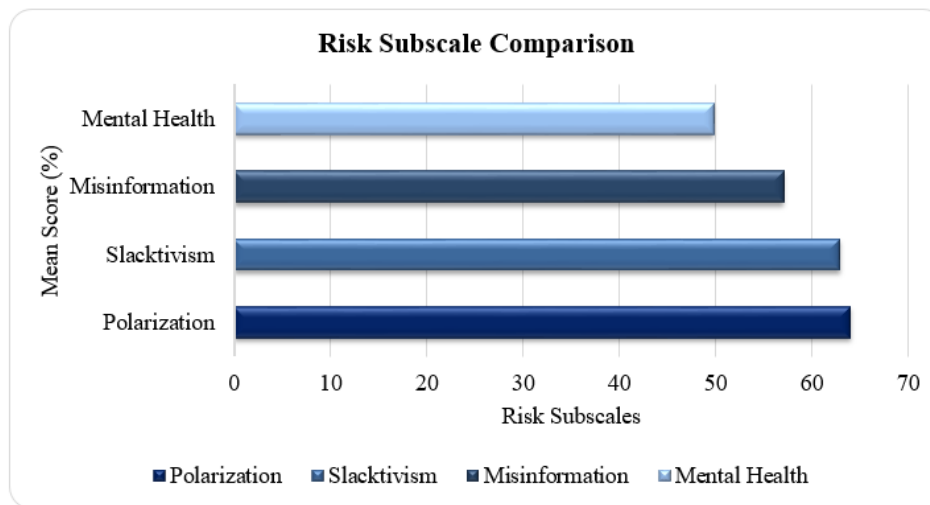


Figure 4: Risk Subscale Comparison

5.1.4 Demographic Variations in Opportunities and Risks

Table 4 (Figure 5) expresses the demographic factors of gender, education, and location of participants' variation in

opportunities and risks of using SM platforms for youth PE and participation.

Table 4:
Opportunities and Risks by Demographics (N=200)

Demographic	Category	n	Opportunities Mean (%)	Risks Mean (%)
Gender	Male	117	48.9	54.1
	Female	81	48.8	55
Education	High School	38	45.5	52.8
	Undergraduate	76	47	56
	Graduate	86	51.8	53.8
Location	Urban	118	50.1	54.7
	Semi-Urban	57	47.5	52.9
	Rural	25	45.5	56.5

As shown in Table 4, male participants attain the highest percentage of mean at opportunities in political participation (48.9%) compared to the female category, while female participants are more likely to face the risks of using SM platforms (55%) compared to men (54.1%).

Then, by analysing the education category, the majority of graduate participants get opportunities (51.8%) in the usage of SM on political participation, followed by undergraduate (47%), and high school (45.5%). In contrast, 56% of undergraduate youth face risks arising from SM, followed by graduate degree holders (53.8%) and high school completers (52.8%).

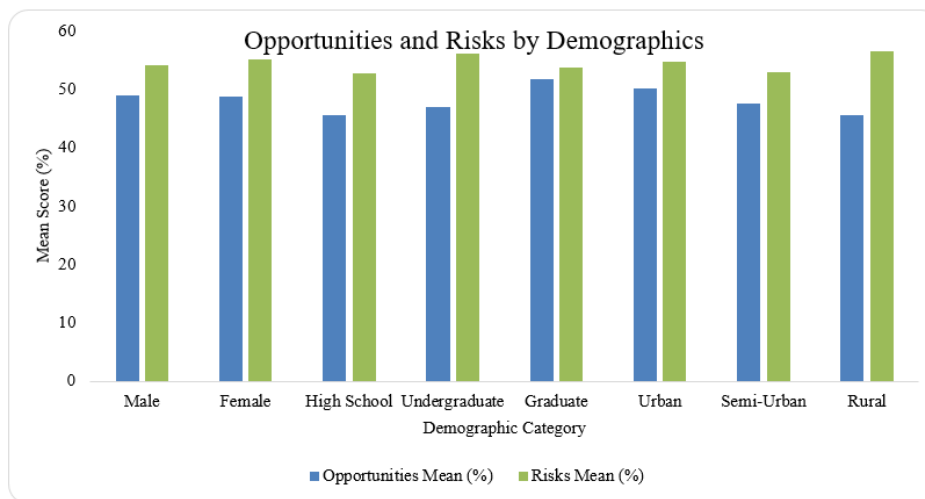


Figure 5: Opportunities and Risks by Demographic Groups

5.1.5 Key Behavioral Patterns

The highest key impact indicators for both opportunities and risks of SM usage of youth participation are analysed, which are represented in Table 5 below.

Table 5:
Selected High-Impact Indicators

Domain	Item	Question	Yes n	Yes %
Opportunities	Q13	Social media increased political awareness	148	74
Opportunities	Q19	Signed online petition	96	48
Opportunities	Q21	Attended event/protest, learned online	40	20
Opportunities	Q51	Amplified marginalized voices	141	70.5
Risks	Q26	Only like/share without action	158	79
Risks	Q31	Encountered misinformation	173	86.5
Risks	Q36	Trust forwarded messages	115	57.5
Risks	Q37	Echo chamber (matching views)	130	65
Risks	Q40	Hostile online discussions	147	73.5
Risks	Q47	Anxiety from political content	113	56.5

From the analysis of opportunities indicators, it is indicated that major respondents agree that SM increases their political awareness (74%), followed by amplified marginalized voices (70.5%), signing online petitions (48%), and 20% gained opportunities to attend events/protests/meetings learned from online platforms. Despite the unmatched chances offered by SM in politics realm, it suffers significant setbacks of risk, such as encountered misinformation (86.5%), only like/share without action (79%), hostile online discussions (73.5%), echo chamber (65%), trust the forwarded messages without verification (57.5), and risk of affecting mental health where participants feel anxiety from political content (56.5%).

5.2 Qualitative Findings: Thematic analysis of Interviews

To understand the motivations behind survey patterns, we interviewed 18 participants from the original sample. Conversations lasted 35-45 minutes and covered their daily experiences with political content online. Three themes emerged that explain the quantitative findings.

Slacktivism as Self-Protection

Most participants who only like or share posts, without commenting or attending events, weren't disengaged. They were protecting themselves. A 24-year-old woman from Mumbai put it simply:

"I care, but posting my opinion means fighting with relatives at the next family gathering. Liking is enough."

A male student from Delhi had tried speaking up once and regretted it:

"I shared something about the farmers' protests and got trolled for three days. Now I just like things quietly."

The gap between awareness and action isn't apathy. It's calculated. People know what they believe, but have learned that saying it publicly costs too much.

WhatsApp Trust and Family Pressure

When we asked why people trust forwarded messages without checking them, the answer was consistent: family relationships trump fact-checking instincts. A postgraduate from Bangalore explained:

"My uncle is a professor. If he forwards something, I assume he verified it. Why would I double-check him?"

A woman from Uttar Pradesh added:

"Fact-checking feels rude when it comes from family. Like I'm calling them a liar."

WhatsApp is different from Twitter or Instagram. Political content arrives mixed in with birthday wishes and family photos. Questioning it threatens relationships, not just ideas.

Gender, Harassment, and Silence

Every woman we interviewed has either experienced harassment after posting political views or knew someone who has. A 25-year-old professional describes what happened when she posted about women's reservations:

"Men were in my DMs within minutes, calling me names, questioning my morals. I deleted it and made my account private."

Younger women describe learning from watching others get attacked:

"I see what happens to women who speak up, the trolling, the character attacks. I'd rather stay silent."



Men acknowledge the disparity. One noted that his female friends face attacks he never does. The survey shows that 38% of women feel safe expressing views compared to 55% of men. The interviews showed why harassment is real, frequent, and gendered.

These patterns explain the survey results. Slacktivism isn't laziness; it's risk management. WhatsApp trust isn't gullibility; it's family loyalty. Women's silence isn't disinterest; it's self-preservation. The finding that risks exceed opportunities makes sense when you hear how youth actually navigate these spaces. They're making rational choices in environments that punish political expression more than they reward it.

VI. DISCUSSION

The study's results align with present literature, authorizing SM's momentous role as an average for political participation amongst Indian youth. SM emergence has altered PE's landscape via individuals' input enhancement in political discourse, opinion expression, along with the mobilisation about numerous causes. Also, understanding youth SM practice to substitute correct valuation of various platforms' influence is required. This is in contract with (Rahman et al., 2022) results, where SM endorses political participation amongst the digital natives as they employ the platforms meant for info communication along with consumption, PE, discussion, as well as expression. As per (Lim et al., 2022), youths deploy diverse SM platforms for diverse purposes. X usage is a good illustration for real-time appraises along with political discussions, whilst Instagram as well as TikTok might be wielded for visual storytelling as well as political activism. All these are supported by Jmobile devices along with higher-speed internet have made convenience to SM calmer for youths to surge their political activities.

This study confirms that SM has wedged youth political participation positively and negatively. Its results are, nevertheless, steady with the historical literature. (Jennings et al., 2020) believes that political deliberation, along with participation, is endorsed by platforms like Facebook, and X, which enable youth to connect with those on the same wavelength, access diverse views, together with engage in deliberations that focus on persistent political subjects. Also, (Frimpong et al., 2020) depicted the ease of sharing info on SM permits youth to mobilise in causes that they care about, intensifying their voices as well as exercising influence on political agendas. The digital platforms on which SM functions permit political activism, which could shape voting patterns along with political results of any nation if allowable to thrive.

Numerous challenges delay SM's sustainable impact on youth engagement in democracy despite its transformative potential. As a lack of reliable regulations on misinformation, along with data privacy, can result in injurious results for users, a significant obstacle is posed by Regulatory issues, which results in minimizing trust in SM as a credible source of information. Moreover, as this study highpoints various youth struggle with unique dependable information as of distortion, highlighting education's importance on answerable media consumption media literacy remnants a critical need (Kamau, 2017). Lastly, the digital divide endures to limit access meant for rural youth, who lack the identical chances for engagement as their urban counterparts. Addressing this digital gap along with enhancing media literacy could surpass a few barriers, making SM a more inclusive as well as effectual platform meant for democratic engagement (Sachdeva & Tripathi, 2019).

VII. CONCLUSION

This research studied the PE level of 200 Indian youth between 18 and 30 years old in different geographical and socio-economic backgrounds to determine what role SM played in influencing the way people participated in democratic processes. Quantitative analysis showed that respondents were more likely to see SM as providing risk (M=54.4%) than as providing opportunities (M=48.8%), and they were most concerned about the potential for increased polarization (64.0%), slacktivism (62.9%), and misinformation (57.1%). While 75.0% of respondents reported becoming more politically aware because of SM, only 46.0% of respondents reported having signed an online petition; 35.0% of respondents reported attending an event or demonstration. Thus, there was an enormous gap between the level of political awareness provided through SM and actual PE. In addition, qualitative data on these issues were obtained through a series of interviews with 18 individuals. Superficially engaging was a method of minimizing perceived risk rather than simply ignoring politics. Rather, trusting shared information was representative of familial dynamics. Some of the ways in which women's voices were suppressed was through gendered online harassment in political forums (usually created and managed by men), while an example of coordinated action would be to develop the resources required to enable users of such platforms to hold their providers accountable for user behaviour, or, similar to that, to educate families about how to guide their children as they learn to navigate SM, and finally, resources were developed to protect women and the more vulnerable communities from online abusive behaviour.

Policy recommendations: According to the report, there are several steps that can be taken to enhance young people's understanding of media, including developing new media literacy programs in the schools to teach students how to deconstruct and analyze media, develop an educational plan to help students recognize the truth or falseness of media, share with students how algorithms work - i.e., how SM companies leverage information to filter out the information they send to users. SM companies need to take responsibility for the harassment that happens on their platforms, especially harassment against women. Finally, community organizations and family members need to provide them with those resources. Hence, they can become accustomed to analyzing the information, especially for WhatsApp group messages. Political institutions need to acknowledge that youth political expression now occurs primarily online and develop ways to connect and engage meaningfully (rather than just symbolically) with youth.

Limitations: This study relied heavily on urban youth and used self-reported data. Actual behavior may differ from claims. The cross-sectional design cannot establish causation.

Future Scope: Future research will track individuals over time to observe the evolution of engagement. Comparing platforms, Twitter versus WhatsApp versus Instagram, will reveal which environments help or hurt participation. Experiments testing interventions like fact-checking prompts or literacy training will identify effective solutions.

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International Journal of Recent Development in Engineering and Technology
Website: www.ijrdet.com (ISSN 2347-6435 (Online) Volume 15, Issue 04, April 2026)

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