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SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT THROUGH INTERNET-BASED COMMUNITIES: EVIDENCE FROM INDIA

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Abstract

The present study examines social and political engagement through internet-based communities among users in India. The study is based on primary data collected from 275 respondents using a structured questionnaire designed on a 5-point Likert scale. The main objective is to analyse the relationship between participation in internet-based communities and levels of social and political engagement. Descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation were used for data analysis. The findings reveal that respondents actively participate in online communities and such participation is strongly associated with both social and political engagement. The study confirms significant positive relationships between the variables, indicating the growing role of digital platforms in shaping civic behaviour. It concludes that internet-based communities act as important spaces for interaction, awareness, and participation in societal and political matters

Keywords; *Internet-based communities, Social engagement, Political engagement, Digital participation, Online communication*

INTRODUCTION

The internet has become an important part of everyday life and has changed the way people communicate, share information, and participate in society. Over the last two decades, the rapid growth of internet access, smartphones, and social media platforms has created online communities where individuals interact with others who share similar interests, opinions, or concerns (K. Kim et al., 2025). These internet-based communities allow people to exchange ideas, discuss public issues, organize social activities, and express their views on matters that affect their lives. As a result, online interaction has become an important extension of social and political participation. In India, the expansion of digital infrastructure and affordable mobile internet has significantly increased the number of internet users. People from different age groups, educational backgrounds, and regions now use online platforms not only for communication and entertainment but also for civic awareness and political discussion. Internet-based communities have become spaces where citizens discuss government policies, social issues, elections, public welfare schemes, and community development. These platforms also encourage participation in campaigns, awareness programmes, petitions, and public debates that were once limited to offline settings. Despite the growing importance of these digital communities, there is still a need to understand how participation in online groups influences social relationships and political engagement in the Indian context. Examining this relationship can provide valuable insights into the changing nature of citizen participation and the role of digital platforms in strengthening democratic and social processes.

Social and Political Engagement in the Digital Era

The digital era has changed the way people participate in social and political activities by providing faster and more accessible channels for communication and interaction. Internet-enabled platforms allow individuals to discuss public issues,

exchange opinions, support social causes, and connect with communities that share similar interests (ABDULRAUF-SALAU, 2020). Citizens can now follow government announcements, participate in public discussions, and express their views without being limited by geographical boundaries. Digital platforms have also made it easier for organizations, activists, and public institutions to reach larger audiences and encourage participation in awareness campaigns, community initiatives, and electoral processes.

In addition, online communities promote information sharing, collaborative problem-solving, and collective action on issues affecting society. Although the level of participation varies among individuals, the growing use of digital technologies has strengthened opportunities for civic involvement and political communication (Chan & Yi, 2024). As internet access continues to expand, digital engagement is becoming an increasingly important part of social interaction and democratic participation.

Table no 1 Comparison of Traditional and Digital Modes of Social and Political Engagement

Aspect	Traditional Engagement	Digital Era Engagement
Communication	Face-to-face meetings and print media	Social media, messaging apps, and online forums
Public Participation	Physical rallies and community meetings	Online campaigns, digital petitions, and virtual discussions
Information Access	Newspapers, television, and radio	Instant access through websites, apps, and social platforms
Political Interaction	Public gatherings and local meetings	Online debates, live sessions, and digital feedback
Community Building	Local neighbourhood groups	Internet-based communities with wider geographical reach

Internet-Based Communities in India

Internet-based communities in India have grown rapidly with the increasing availability of affordable smartphones and high-speed internet services. These communities bring together individuals who share common interests, occupations, social concerns, educational goals, or political opinions. Through social networking sites, discussion forums, messaging applications, and online groups, people communicate, exchange information, seek advice, and participate in discussions on issues that affect society. The diversity of India's population has also encouraged the formation of digital communities in multiple languages, allowing broader participation across different regions and social backgrounds.

Some of the major forms of internet-based communities in India include (Alodat & Al-qora, 2023):

- i. Social media groups and online discussion forums.
- ii. Professional and career networking communities.
- iii. Educational and learning platforms.
- iv. Community support and volunteer groups.
- v. Interest-based and hobby-focused online communities.
- vi. Civic awareness and public policy discussion groups.
- vii. Political discussion and campaign networks.

These communities play an important role in improving communication, spreading information, and encouraging participation in public affairs. They also provide opportunities for individuals to collaborate, learn from one

another, and contribute to social development through digital interaction.

The growing influence of internet-based communities can be observed through (Smith et al., 2009):

- i. Increased civic awareness among citizens.
- ii. Faster dissemination of public information.
- iii. Greater participation in social campaigns.
- iv. Enhanced interaction between citizens and public institutions.
- v. Improved access to knowledge and community support.

As internet penetration continues to expand across urban and rural India, internet-based communities are expected to become even more significant in promoting social participation, civic engagement, and democratic interaction.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

(Jinarat, 2021) The objective of the study was to investigate the influence of social media and digital participation in politics of the first-time eligible voters in 2019, university students in Thailand. The 29 items of a questionnaire were developed from literature review and tested validity (KMO = 0.899, 0.937) and reliability (Alpha = 0.89, 0.92) and collected 400 respondents of the university students before the election in March, 2019 in Thailand. The statistical analysis are variance analysis and Stepwise Multi Regression analysis. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are social media usage in this study. The results revealed that the sub-variables of social media usage such as time in using social media (Sm4) and sharing like (Sm12) and sub-

variables of political participation in terms of supporting activity (Sa), voting and following information (Ei), predicted significantly at 0.05, on digital participation in politics. Moreover, these 4 sub-variables also demonstrated moderately the coefficient at $R^2 = 0.43, 0.36, 0.009$ and 0.023 , respectively, to digital participation in politics. Consequently, the utilizing of Facebook and Twitter for the benefits of political participation should be related mainly to solving the civic problems.

(Megha & Pawadashetti, 2018) Social-media have turned into a critical political communication channel. It empowers political establishments and voters to straightforwardly associate with one another. Along these lines, political activities may acquire straightforwardness and citizens may be more associated with to political basic leadership forms. One purpose behind that is an absence of learning of politicians about current subject and talks on various social media platforms. In light of a broad writing survey, we could watch the expanding pertinence of and the requirement for dissecting political exchanges on various social media platforms, for example, Twitter, Facebook, and weblogs.

(Babre, 2023) Social media have created channels of communication that play a key role in circulating news and social media has the power to change the dynamics of social and political values and problems. During the Kerala flood social media played a key role in active participation of youth. It is not only limited to environmental aspects but in election campaigns, gender issues, economy and so on. The ability to access through mobile phones also increased the traffic in such mediums which paved way for many counter problems. The study focused on how college students use various social media apps for their online and offline involvement, their usage pattern, most used sites and online participation in social and political issues among different genders. Approach towards social media varies among different gender in terms of their interest, participation, privacy issues and perception about social and political affairs.

(Y. Kim & Chen, 2016) The paper aims to understand how social media use (i.e., use of blogs and SNSs) influences a key aspect of the democratic process: citizens' online political participation. As hypothesized, the findings support the idea that social media use—both blogs and SNSs—contributes to participatory democracy. The results of the study confirmed a positive relationship between the use of blogs and SNSs and respondents' online political participation, even after controlling for age, gender, education, ethnicity, income, partisanship, and online news consumption.

(Mulyono et al., 2022) The Industrial Revolution 4.0, which makes the internet its backbone, has accelerated the process due to the Covid-19 pandemic which forced citizens to shift all their activities to the digital world, including the involvement of citizens in responding to public discourse. Citizens' public discourses that previously took place in real public spaces have now shifted to digital spaces, one of which is social media. To bridge these changes, a conceptualization of civic engagement is needed through a digital platform. The online citizen involvement was later referred to as online civic engagement, namely civic engagement activities specifically carried out by digital citizens involving several types of digital media, one of which is social media.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- i. To examine participation in internet-based communities among internet users in India.
- ii. To examine social engagement among internet users in India.
- iii. To examine political engagement among internet users in India.
- iv. To analyse the relationship between participation in internet-based communities and social engagement among internet users in India.
- v. To analyse the relationship between participation in internet-based communities and political engagement among internet users in India

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between participation in internet-based communities and social engagement among internet users in India.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between participation in internet-based communities and political engagement among internet users in India.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a quantitative research approach using a descriptive research design to examine the relationship between participation in internet-based communities and social and political engagement among internet users in India. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire comprising demographic information and 15 statements measured on a 5-point Likert scale. A total of 275 respondents participated in the study. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation to examine the relationship between the study variables.

Table no 2 Research Methodology

Particulars	Description
Research Approach	Quantitative
Research Design	Descriptive
Study Area	India
Source of Data	Primary Data
Data Collection Instrument	Structured Questionnaire
Sampling Technique	Convenience Sampling
Sample Size	275 Internet Users
Measurement Scale	5-Point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Agree to 5 = Strongly Disagree)
Number of Variables	3
Number of Statements	15 (5 statements for each variable)
Statistical Tools	Descriptive Statistics and Pearson's Correlation

Data analysis and interpretation

This section presents the analysis of data collected from 275 respondents using a structured questionnaire. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's

correlation to examine the relationship between participation in internet-based communities and social and political engagement. The results are interpreted in a systematic manner to draw meaningful conclusions from the study.

Table no 3 Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	208	75.6	75.6	75.6
	Female	67	24.4	24.4	100.0
	Total	275	100.0	100.0	

The gender-wise distribution of the respondents indicates that the majority were male, accounting for 208 (75.6%) of the total respondents, while 67 (24.4%) were female. Overall, the study

sample was predominantly composed of male participants, with a comparatively smaller representation of female respondents.

Table no 4 Age Group

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18 years to 25 years	57	20.7	20.7	20.7
	26 years to 35 years	106	38.5	38.5	59.3
	36 years to 45 years	66	24.0	24.0	83.3
	46 years and above	46	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	275	100.0	100.0	

The age-wise distribution of the respondents shows that the largest group comprised individuals aged 26 years to 35 years, with 106 (38.5%) respondents. This was followed by respondents aged 36 years to 45 years, accounting for 66 (24.0%), while 57 (20.7%) respondents belonged to the 18 years to 25 years age group. The smallest proportion of the

sample consisted of respondents aged 46 years and above, with 46 (16.7%) participants. Overall, the study included respondents from different age groups, with a greater representation of individuals between 26 and 35 years of age.

Table no 5 Average Daily Internet Usage

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 1 hour	26	9.5	9.5	9.5
	1–3 hours	100	36.4	36.4	45.8
	3–5 hours	80	29.1	29.1	74.9
	5–7 hours	56	20.4	20.4	95.3
	More than 7 hours	13	4.7	4.7	100.0
	Total	275	100.0	100.0	

The distribution of respondents based on average daily internet usage indicates that the largest proportion used the internet for 1–3 hours, comprising 100 (36.4%) respondents. This was followed by 80 (29.1%) respondents who reported using the internet for 3–5 hours daily. Further, 56 (20.4%) respondents used the internet for 5–7 hours, while 26 (9.5%)

respondents reported using it for less than 1 hour each day. The smallest group consisted of respondents using the internet for more than 7 hours, accounting for 13 (4.7%) of the total sample. Overall, most respondents reported spending between 1 and 5 hours on the internet each day.

Table no 6 Place of Residence

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Rural	112	40.7	40.7	40.7
	Urban	163	59.3	59.3	100.0
	Total	275	100.0	100.0	

The distribution of respondents by place of residence reveals that the majority belonged to urban areas, with 163 (59.3%) respondents, while 112 (40.7%) respondents were from rural areas. The findings indicate that urban respondents

constituted more than half of the study sample, whereas rural respondents accounted for slightly over two-fifths. Overall, the sample included participants from both rural and urban areas, with greater representation from urban residents.

Table no 7 Descriptive Statistics

	N	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.
I actively participate in online communities related to my interests	275	1	5	2.77	1.451
I regularly contribute to discussions in online groups or forums	275	1	5	2.20	1.222
I frequently share information or content within internet-based communities	275	1	5	1.82	1.068
I interact with other members of online communities on a regular basis	275	1	5	2.02	1.266
I consider internet-based communities an important part of my daily online activities	275	1	5	2.30	1.470
I participate in online discussions related to social issues	275	1	5	2.84	1.447
I share information that raises awareness about social causes	275	1	5	2.21	1.237
I encourage others to participate in community or social activities through online platforms	275	1	5	1.80	1.073
I support social campaigns or public awareness initiatives through the internet	275	1	5	2.03	1.271
My participation in online communities has increased my involvement in social activities	275	1	5	2.27	1.427
I follow political discussions through internet-based communities	275	1	5	2.49	1.668
I use online communities to stay informed about public policies and government decisions	275	1	5	2.40	1.563
I express my opinions on political or public affairs through online platforms	275	1	5	2.05	1.273
I participate in online discussions related to elections or governance	275	1	5	2.32	1.221
Participation in internet-based communities has increased my interest in political matters	275	1	5	2.07	1.238
Valid N (listwise)	275				

The descriptive statistics indicate that respondents generally expressed agreement with all the statements related to participation in internet-based communities, social engagement, and political engagement, as reflected by mean scores below 3.00. Among the statements measuring participation in internet-based communities, "I frequently share information or content within internet-based communities" recorded the lowest mean score of 1.82 (SD = 1.068), indicating the highest level of agreement. This was followed by "I interact with other members of online communities on a regular basis" with a mean of 2.02 (SD = 1.266), "I regularly contribute to discussions in online groups or forums" with 2.20 (SD = 1.222), "I consider internet-based communities an important part of my daily online activities" with 2.30 (SD = 1.470), and "I actively participate in online communities related to my interests"

with the highest mean of 2.77 (SD = 1.451) within this construct. Regarding social engagement, the statement "I encourage others to participate in community or social activities through online platforms" obtained the lowest mean score of 1.80 (SD = 1.073), indicating the strongest agreement among respondents. This was followed by "I support social campaigns or public awareness initiatives through the internet" with a mean of 2.03 (SD = 1.271), "I share information that raises awareness about social causes" with 2.21 (SD = 1.237), "My participation in online communities has increased my involvement in social activities" with 2.27 (SD = 1.427), and "I participate in online discussions related to social issues" with the highest mean of 2.84 (SD = 1.447). For political engagement, "I express my opinions on political or public affairs through online platforms" recorded the lowest mean score of 2.05

(SD = 1.273), followed closely by "Participation in internet-based communities has increased my interest in political matters" with 2.07 (SD = 1.238). The statements "I participate in online discussions related to elections or governance" and "I use online communities to stay informed about public policies and government decisions" recorded mean scores of 2.32 (SD = 1.221) and 2.40 (SD = 1.563), respectively, while "I follow political discussions through internet-based communities" recorded the highest mean of 2.49 (SD = 1.668) within this construct. Overall, the findings suggest that respondents generally agreed that internet-based

communities facilitate their participation, social involvement, and political engagement, with stronger agreement reflected in statements having lower mean scores

Hypotheses testing

Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between participation in internet-based communities and social engagement among internet users in India.

Table no 8 Hypothesis 1

Correlations			
		Participation in Internet-Based Communities	Social Engagement
Participation in Internet-Based Communities	Pearson Correlation	1	.966**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	275	275
Social Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.966**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	275	275

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis reveal a very strong positive relationship between participation in internet-based communities and social engagement among internet users in India. The obtained Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.966$) indicates that higher participation in internet-based communities is associated with higher levels of social engagement. The relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level ($p = 0.000 < 0.01$), suggesting that the observed association is unlikely to have occurred by chance. Since the significance value is less than the prescribed level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a

significant positive relationship between participation in internet-based communities and social engagement among internet users in India. The findings suggest that greater involvement in internet-based communities is closely associated with increased social engagement among the respondents.

Hypothesis 2

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between participation in internet-based communities and political engagement among internet users in India.

Table no 9 Hypothesis 2

Correlations			
		Participation in Internet-Based Communities	Political Engagement
Participation in Internet-Based Communities	Pearson Correlation	1	.935**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	275	275
Political Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.935**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	275	275

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation analysis indicates a very strong positive relationship between participation in internet-based communities and political engagement among internet users

in India. The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.935$) demonstrates that respondents with higher participation in internet-based communities tend to exhibit higher levels of

political engagement. The relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level ($p = 0.000 < 0.01$), confirming that the correlation is not due to random variation. Since the significance value is less than the accepted level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, it is concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between participation in internet-based communities and political engagement among internet users in India. These findings suggest that greater involvement in internet-based communities is strongly associated with higher political engagement among the respondents.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the relationship between participation in internet-based communities and the social and political engagement of internet users in India. The findings indicate that respondents actively use internet-based communities to communicate, exchange information, and participate in discussions related to social and political issues. The descriptive analysis showed that most respondents expressed agreement with statements reflecting active online participation, social involvement, and political awareness. The hypothesis testing further revealed significant positive relationships between participation in internet-based communities and both social engagement and political engagement. These findings suggest that greater involvement in internet-based communities is associated with increased participation in social activities and stronger interest in political matters. Digital platforms have therefore become important spaces where individuals interact, share opinions, and engage with issues affecting society. As internet access continues to expand across the country, these communities are likely to play an increasingly important role in encouraging civic participation and public dialogue. Overall, the study concludes that internet-based communities have emerged as valuable platforms for promoting social interaction and political engagement, thereby contributing to greater public participation in the digital age

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