IJARSCT
International Journal of Advanced Research in Science, Communication and Technology
International Open-Access, Double-Blind, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Multidisciplinary Online Journal
ISSN: 2581-9429
Volume 6, Issue 2, November 2026
Impact Factor: 8.2

Impact of Social Media on Political Participation and Democratic Engagement among Young Adults

Dipendra Nath Subedi[1*], Dr. Rajesh Arora[2], B.K. Shanti Devi Subedi[3]
[1] Ph.D. Scholar, Manipur International University and
Centre for Academic Research, Education Wing, RERF, Mount Abu, Rajasthan, India
[2]Senior Professor, Value Education Department, Manipur International University and
CARE, Brahma kumaris, Abu Road, India.
[3]Researcher, Value Education Department, Rajyoga Education and Research Foundation,
Brahma kumaris, Abu Raj, India.
*Corresponding author(s): dipendranathsubedi@gmail.com
ORCHID:0009-0007-8954-5443

Abstract : *Social media has become an important platform for political communication, public discussion, and democratic participation, particularly among young adults. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and X provide opportunities to access political information, express opinions, interact with political representatives, and participate in public campaigns. The increasing use of these platforms has transformed traditional patterns of political engagement and created new forms of digital participation. This article examines the impact of social media on political participation and democratic engagement among young adults through a narrative review of relevant academic literature. It focuses on political awareness, civic engagement, voting behaviour, online political expression, collective action, and the influence of digital information on democratic processes. The review also considers major challenges, including misinformation, political polarization, online harassment, digital inequality, and declining trust in information sources. Existing research suggests that social media can encourage political involvement by reducing communication barriers and providing accessible spaces for public discussion. However, its influence is not always positive, as the quality of political information and the nature of online interactions can affect democratic attitudes and behaviour. The article concludes that social media can strengthen democratic participation when supported by digital literacy, responsible communication, and inclusive political institutions.*

Keywords: Social Media, Political Participation, Democratic Engagement, Young Adults, Political Awareness, Digital Democracy, Civic Participation

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media has significantly changed the way individuals communicate, exchange information, and participate in public life. The development of digital communication platforms has created new opportunities for citizens to discuss political issues, express their opinions, and remain informed about government activities. Unlike traditional media, social networking platforms allow users not only to receive information but also to produce and distribute political content. This transformation has become particularly important for young adults, who frequently use digital platforms for communication, entertainment, education, and information.

Political participation is an essential component of democratic governance. It includes activities such as voting, political discussion, contacting representatives, participating in campaigns, joining public movements, and expressing opinions on government policies. Traditionally, these activities were mainly organised through political parties, public meetings, newspapers, and other conventional communication channels. However, digital platforms have expanded the

IJARSCT
International Journal of Advanced Research in Science, Communication and Technology
International Open-Access, Double-Blind, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Multidisciplinary Online Journal
ISSN: 2581-9429
Volume 6, Issue 2, November 2026
Impact Factor: 8.2

opportunities available for political involvement. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) explained that digital communication has contributed to new forms of collective action in which individuals can participate through personalised messages and online networks.

Young adults represent an important section of society because their political awareness, attitudes, and participation influence the future development of democratic institutions. Social media provides them with relatively accessible opportunities to follow political developments, understand public issues, and communicate with other citizens. Boulianne (2015), in a meta-analysis of existing research, identified a generally positive relationship between social media use and political participation, although the strength of this relationship depends on the nature of media use.

At the same time, the growing influence of social media has introduced several concerns. Political misinformation, misleading content, ideological divisions, and online manipulation can negatively influence public understanding. Therefore, it is necessary to examine both the opportunities and limitations of social media in promoting democratic engagement among young adults.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major objectives of this article are:

- To examine the role of social media in promoting political awareness among young adults.
- To analyse the influence of social media on political participation and democratic engagement.
- To understand the relationship between digital communication and youth voting behaviour.
- To identify the challenges associated with social media-based political participation.
- To explore future opportunities for strengthening democratic engagement through digital platforms.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present article adopts a narrative literature review approach to examine the relationship between social media, political participation, and democratic engagement among young adults. Relevant academic publications, research articles, review studies, and theoretical contributions from political science, communication studies, and digital media research were considered.

The selected literature was examined thematically, with particular attention to political awareness, online participation, voting behaviour, civic engagement, misinformation, and democratic development. Both theoretical and empirical research findings were considered to develop a broader understanding of the subject. The article is based on previously published research and does not involve the collection of primary survey data or experimental observations.

IV. SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL AWARENESS

Political awareness refers to an individual's understanding of political institutions, government policies, public issues, political representatives, and democratic processes. Social media has become an important source of political information, particularly among young adults who regularly access online platforms.

Through social networking sites, users can follow political developments, watch public discussions, access election-related information, and learn about national and international issues. Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2012) examined the relationship between social media news use, social capital, civic engagement, and political participation. Their research demonstrated the importance of informational uses of social media in understanding public involvement.

Similarly, Feio and Oliveira (2025) reviewed research on young people's news consumption and political participation in new media environments. Their review highlighted the importance of digital platforms as spaces for accessing information and expressing political opinions.

Social media can also increase awareness of issues that may receive limited attention through conventional media. Environmental protection, human rights, education, unemployment, and social equality are among the subjects frequently discussed through digital campaigns and public communication.

IJARSCT
International Journal of Advanced Research in Science, Communication and Technology
International Open-Access, Double-Blind, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Multidisciplinary Online Journal
ISSN: 2581-9429 Volume 6, Issue 2, November 2026 Impact Factor: 8.2

However, the availability of political information does not automatically ensure accurate political understanding. Young adults need the ability to distinguish reliable information from misleading or manipulated content. Therefore, digital literacy is an important requirement for developing informed political awareness.

V. INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

5.1 Online Political Expression

One of the major contributions of social media is the opportunity to express political opinions through digital communication. Young adults can comment on public policies, participate in online discussions, share political information, and communicate their concerns to a wider audience.

Theocharis (2015) explained that digitally networked participation should be recognised as an important form of political participation. Such activities may include sharing political content, participating in online campaigns, and communicating public concerns through digital networks.

Kahne and Bowyer (2018) also examined the political significance of social media activity and social networks, highlighting the importance of online participation in contemporary political life.

These forms of political expression can encourage discussion and provide opportunities for individuals who may have limited access to conventional political platforms.

5.2 Participation in Political Campaigns

Social media has become an important communication tool during political campaigns and elections. Political parties, candidates, and civic organisations use digital platforms to communicate their programmes, distribute campaign messages, and interact with voters.

Young adults can participate by sharing campaign information, attending online discussions, supporting political initiatives, and communicating with candidates. Bond et al. (2012), through a large-scale experiment involving Facebook users, demonstrated that social networking messages can influence political mobilisation and real-world participation.

Digital campaigns can also reduce the cost of communication and allow political organisations to reach individuals across geographical boundaries. However, the effectiveness of such campaigns depends on public interest, message credibility, and the wider political environment.

5.3 Youth Participation in Voting

Voting is one of the most important forms of democratic participation. Social media can influence voting behaviour by providing information about candidates, election programmes, political debates, and public issues.

Young adults may use digital platforms to compare political positions, follow election discussions, and understand the importance of voting. Research by Yahaya et al. (2024) reviewed the influence of social media on youth voting behaviour and discussed its importance in contemporary political participation.

Mendoza et al. (2024) examined online misinformation and voting likelihood among Filipino college students. Their findings highlighted the importance of both information accuracy and individuals' confidence in assessing political information.

Therefore, social media can support informed electoral participation, but misleading political content may also influence voters' perceptions and decisions.

5.4 Civic Engagement and Collective Action

Civic engagement involves participation in activities that contribute to community welfare and public development. Social media provides opportunities for young adults to support social campaigns, participate in community discussions, organise voluntary activities, and raise awareness of public concerns.

IJARSCT
International Journal of Advanced Research in Science, Communication and Technology
International Open-Access, Double-Blind, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Multidisciplinary Online Journal
ISSN: 2581-9429 Volume 6, Issue 2, November 2026 Impact Factor: 8.2

Bennett and Segerberg (2012) explained how personalised communication through digital networks can support collective action. Similarly, Margetts et al. (2015) discussed how small online activities can develop into larger collective movements under particular circumstances.

Pang et al. (2021) also found that social media use, especially news consumption and online expression, can be positively associated with civic engagement among young people.

Such participation can strengthen public awareness and encourage young citizens to become more actively involved in community and democratic activities.

VI. SOCIAL MEDIA AND DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT

Democratic engagement refers to citizens' involvement in public discussions, political decision-making, accountability processes, and activities that support democratic institutions. Social media has expanded the communication channels through which citizens can interact with public representatives and discuss government policies.

One important contribution of digital platforms is the possibility of direct communication between citizens and political institutions. People can raise questions, share complaints, discuss public services, and express opinions about government decisions. These interactions may improve public visibility of political issues and encourage greater institutional responsiveness.

Lorenz-Spreen et al. (2023), in their systematic review of worldwide evidence, examined the relationship between digital media and democracy. Their findings indicated that digital media can be associated with increased political participation and information consumption, while also identifying potentially harmful relationships involving political trust and polarization.

Kligler-Vilenchik and Literat (2025) discussed expressive citizenship and the relationship between youth, social media, and democracy. Their work highlights the importance of recognising young people's digital expressions as part of contemporary democratic engagement.

However, online participation should complement rather than replace traditional democratic activities. Public meetings, voting, institutional consultation, and direct communication with representatives remain important elements of democratic governance.

VII. CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Despite its opportunities, social media presents several challenges that can influence political participation and democratic development.

Political Misinformation and Fake News: False or misleading political information can create confusion and influence public opinion. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) examined the role of social media and fake news during the 2016 United States presidential election. Vosoughi et al. (2018) further demonstrated that false information can spread more rapidly and widely than truthful information on online networks.

Political Polarization: Social media users may increasingly interact with individuals who share similar political opinions. This can limit exposure to alternative viewpoints and contribute to ideological divisions. Kubin and von Sikorski (2021) reviewed research on the role of media in political polarization and highlighted the complexity of this relationship.

Online Harassment and Political Intimidation: Political discussions can sometimes involve abusive language, threats, discrimination, and personal attacks. Such experiences may discourage young people from expressing their views, particularly individuals from vulnerable or underrepresented groups.

Digital Inequality: Not all young adults have equal access to smartphones, reliable internet connections, digital education, and quality information. Differences in economic conditions, geographical location, and educational opportunities can influence the level of digital participation.

IJARSCT
International Journal of Advanced Research in Science, Communication and Technology
International Open-Access, Double-Blind, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Multidisciplinary Online Journal
ISSN: 2581-9429 Volume 6, Issue 2, November 2026 Impact Factor: 8.2

Privacy and Data Manipulation: Political communication platforms collect substantial amounts of personal information. The misuse of personal data and targeted political messaging can raise concerns regarding privacy, transparency, and individual freedom.

Superficial Political Engagement: Liking, sharing, or commenting on political posts does not always result in meaningful participation. Democratic engagement requires informed opinions, responsible communication, and, where appropriate, involvement in real-world political activities.

These challenges demonstrate that social media should be used with critical awareness and responsible digital practices.

VIII. ROLE OF DIGITAL LITERACY IN STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT

Digital literacy is an important factor in ensuring meaningful political participation. It involves the ability to access, evaluate, understand, and responsibly communicate digital information.

Young adults need to develop skills for identifying reliable news sources, checking factual claims, recognising manipulated images, and understanding the possible influence of algorithms on the information they receive.

Educational institutions can contribute by including media literacy, civic education, and responsible digital communication in learning activities. Governments, civil society organisations, and media institutions can also support public awareness programmes.

Boulianne and Theocharis (2020), through their meta-analysis of research involving young people and digital engagement, highlighted the importance of politically oriented digital activities in connecting online participation with offline civic and political involvement.

Strengthening digital literacy can therefore help young adults become more informed participants and contribute to healthier democratic discussions.

IX. FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

The relationship between social media and democratic engagement is likely to become increasingly important as digital communication continues to develop. Future research should examine the influence of emerging platforms, short-form political videos, artificial intelligence-generated content, and algorithmic recommendations on young people's political attitudes and participation.

Greater attention is also required to understand differences in political engagement across countries, educational backgrounds, income groups, and urban and rural communities. Comparative research involving developing democracies can provide useful insights into the role of digital infrastructure and political institutions.

Future studies should also investigate whether online political expression leads to sustained participation in voting, community activities, and public decision-making. In addition, researchers should examine the long-term effects of misinformation, political polarization, and online harassment on democratic trust.

The development of responsible digital platforms, transparent information systems, and effective media literacy programmes may contribute to more inclusive and informed democratic participation.

X. CONCLUSION

Social media has become an important part of contemporary political communication and democratic engagement. It provides young adults with opportunities to access political information, express opinions, participate in campaigns, discuss public issues, and support collective action. These developments have expanded traditional forms of political participation and created new channels for communication between citizens and political institutions.

Existing research indicates that social media can encourage civic and political involvement, particularly when individuals use digital platforms for political information, discussion, and expression. However, its influence is not uniformly positive. Misinformation, political polarization, online harassment, digital inequality, and privacy concerns can weaken the quality of democratic engagement.

IJARSCT
International Journal of Advanced Research in Science, Communication and Technology
International Open-Access, Double-Blind, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Multidisciplinary Online Journal
ISSN: 2581-9429
Volume 6, Issue 2, November 2026
Impact Factor: 8.2

The review concludes that social media can contribute to stronger democratic participation when supported by digital literacy, reliable information, responsible communication, and inclusive political institutions. Young adults should be encouraged not only to express political opinions online but also to develop informed attitudes and participate responsibly in democratic processes. A balanced relationship between digital participation and conventional civic activities can contribute to a more informed, inclusive, and active democratic society.

REFERENCES

1. Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. (2017). Social media and fake news in the 2016 election. Journal of Economic Perspectives, 31(2), 211–236. https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.2.211
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. Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2013). The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. Cambridge University Press.
4. 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
5. Boulianne, S., & Theocharis, Y. (2020). Young people, digital media, and engagement: A meta-analysis of research. Social Science Computer Review, 38(2), 111–127. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439318814190
6. Bond, R. M., Fariss, C. J., Jones, J. J., Kramer, A. D. I., Marlow, C., Settle, J. E., & Fowler, J. H. (2012). A 61-million-person experiment in social influence and political mobilization. Nature, 489, 295–298. https://doi.org/10.1038/nature11421
7. Borhan-Eddine, A., Fee, L. Y., Adnan, Z. H., & Nor, M. W. M. (2020). The impact of political efficacy, discussion, and expression through social media on youth political participation: A systematic review. International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences. https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v10-i15/8230
8. boyd, d. (2014). It's complicated: The social lives of networked teens. Yale University Press.
9. Campbell, D. E. (2013). Social networks and political participation. Annual Review of Political Science, 16, 33–48. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-033011-201728
10. Castells, M. (2012). Networks of outrage and hope: Social movements in the Internet age. Polity Press.
11. Chadwick, A. (2013). The hybrid media system: Politics and power. Oxford University Press.
12. Dahlgren, P. (2009). Media and political engagement: Citizens, communication, and democracy. Cambridge University Press.
13. Enjolras, B., Steen-Johnsen, K., & Wollebæk, D. (2013). Social media and mobilization to offline demonstrations: Transcending participatory divides? New Media & Society, 15(6), 890–908. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812462844
14. Feio, C., & Oliveira, L. (2025). News consumption and political participation of young people in new media: A narrative literature review. The Communication Review, 28(1), 101–129. https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2024.2419693
15. Gibson, R., & Cantijoch, M. (2013). Conceptualizing and measuring participation in the age of the Internet: Is online political engagement really different to offline? The Journal of Politics, 75(3), 701–716. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381613000431
16. Gil de Zúñiga, H., Jung, N., & Valenzuela, S. (2012). Social media use for news and individuals' social capital, civic engagement and political participation. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 17(3), 319–336. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01574.x
17. Kahne, J., & Bowyer, B. (2018). The political significance of social media activity and social networks. Political Communication, 35(3), 470–493. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2018.1426662

IJARSCT
International Journal of Advanced Research in Science, Communication and Technology
International Open-Access, Double-Blind, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Multidisciplinary Online Journal
ISSN: 2581-9429
Volume 6, Issue 2, November 2026
Impact Factor: 8.2

18. Keating, A., & Melis, G. (2017). Social media and youth political engagement: Preaching to the converted or providing a new voice for youth? The British Journal of Politics and International Relations, 19(4), 877–894. https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148117718461
19. Kligler-Vilenchik, N., & Literat, I. (2025). Expressive citizenship: Youth, social media, and democracy. Journal of Children and Media, 19(1), 46–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2024.2438680
20. Kubin, E., & von Sikorski, C. (2021). The role of (social) media in political polarization: A systematic review. Annals of the International Communication Association, 45(3), 188–206. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2021.1976070
21. Kurniawan, W., Arham, M., & Muluk, H. (2024). Social media's influence on political participation: Insights from a systematic review and meta-analysis in Indonesian psychology. Jurnal Psikologi, 51(3). https://doi.org/10.22146/jpsi.101469
22. Lorenz-Spreen, P., Oswald, L., Lewandowsky, S., & Hertwig, R. (2023). A systematic review of worldwide causal and correlational evidence on digital media and democracy. Nature Human Behaviour, 7, 74–101. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-022-01460-1
23. Margetts, H., John, P., Hale, S., & Yasseri, T. (2015). Political turbulence: How social media shape collective action. Princeton University Press.
24. Mendoza, G. A. S., Ballar, K. J., Yap, J. K., & Deinla, I. B. (2024). Accuracy or confidence? Analyzing the impact of online misinformation on Filipino youth voting likelihood. Media Asia, 51(3), 470–488. https://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.2023.2279343
25. Norris, P. (2001). Digital divide: Civic engagement, information poverty, and the Internet worldwide. Cambridge University Press.
26. Oser, J., & Boulianne, S. (2020). Reinforcement effects between digital media use and political participation: A meta-analysis of repeated-wave panel data. Public Opinion Quarterly, 84(S1), 355–365. https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfaa017
27. Pang, H., Qin, K., & Ji, M. (2021). Can social network sites facilitate civic engagement? Assessing dynamic relationship between social media and civic activities among young people. Online Information Review. https://doi.org/10.1108/OIR-10-2020-0453
28. Papacharissi, Z. (2010). A private sphere: Democracy in a digital age. Polity Press.
29. Putnam, R. D. (2000). Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community. Simon & Schuster.
30. Rojas, H., & Puig-i-Abril, E. (2009). Mobilizers mobilized: Information, expression, mobilization and participation in the digital age. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 14(4), 902–927. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2009.01475.x
31. Theocharis, Y. (2015). The conceptualization of digitally networked participation. Social Media + Society, 1(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115610140
32. Tufekci, Z. (2017). Twitter and tear gas: The power and fragility of networked protest. Yale University Press.
33. Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American politics. Harvard University Press.
34. Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. Science, 359(6380), 1146–1151. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap9559
35. Zhuravskaya, E., Petrova, M., & Enikolopov, R. (2020). Political effects of the Internet and social media. Annual Review of Economics, 12, 415–438. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-081919-050239