Digital Democracy in Central India: Social Media Usage Trends of MPs from Madhya Pradesh

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Abstract: Digital democracy has emerged as a vital force reshaping political communication in India. This research paper investigates the patterns of social media usage among Members of Parliament (MPs) from Madhya Pradesh, a central Indian state with a diverse political and social landscape. By analyzing quantitative and qualitative data from official MP social media accounts, particularly Twitter and Facebook, the study highlights the extent of digital engagement, content typologies, and the role of social media in constituency outreach and policy communication. Findings suggest a growing but uneven adaptation of digital tools among MPs, with implications for democratic participation and governance. The findings indicate a growing but uneven adoption of digital strategies among MPs, shaped by factors such as party affiliation, age, urban-rural constituency profiles, and digital literacy. While some representatives have embraced social media to enhance transparency and citizen connection, others exhibit minimal or symbolic presence. The paper argues that while digital platforms offer significant potential to deepen democratic participation, structural disparities and inconsistent digital engagement practices limit their transformative impact. The study concludes by highlighting the need for policy-level interventions to promote inclusive digital political participation in emerging democracies like India.

Keywords: Digital Democracy, Social Media, MPs, Madhya Pradesh, Political Communication, Central India.

Introduction - The digital age has transformed democratic participation, offering new avenues for political actors and constituents to interact. In India, with its rapidly increasing internet penetration, social media platforms have become essential tools for political engagement. Madhya Pradesh, being at the heart of India both geographically and politically, provides a unique context to explore these trends. This paper examines how MPs from this region are utilizing social media to engage with constituents, shape narratives, and contribute to the evolving fabric of digital democracy.

Madhya Pradesh, situated in the heart of India, presents a compelling case for examining these developments. With its diverse socio-political fabric and mix of urban and rural constituencies, the state offers valuable insights into how digital engagement is evolving among elected representatives. The rise in smartphone penetration, affordable internet access, and growing digital literacy have created fertile ground for MPs to communicate directly with citizens, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. However, the patterns of social media usage among these representatives vary significantly in terms of frequency, content type, platform preference, and levels of interaction.

Literature Review

The intersection of technology and democracy has been extensively studied globally. Scholars like Coleman and Blumler (2009) argue that digital media can rejuvenate democracy by enabling more direct interaction between politicians and citizens. In India, scholars such as Udupa (2018) have highlighted how social media platforms have transformed political discourse, particularly during elections. Previous studies on Indian MPs' social media usage (e.g., Kumar & Bhardwaj, 2020) have found varying levels of engagement based on factors such as age, education, party affiliation, and constituency type. However, there remains a gap in region-specific studies, particularly in states like Madhya Pradesh, which straddle urban-rural divides and feature diverse socio-economic dynamics.

Methodology: This study employs a mixed-methods approach. Quantitatively, it analyzes the official Twitter and Facebook accounts of all 29 MPs from Madhya Pradesh elected in the 2019 General Elections. Key metrics include frequency of posts, follower count, type of content (e.g., personal updates, constituency work, national issues), and engagement (likes, shares, comments).

Qualitatively, the paper includes content analysis of selected posts to understand thematic patterns and the tone of communication. Interviews with political analysts and

media consultants were conducted to provide contextual understanding. The data was collected over a six-month period (January to June 2024).

Findings and Discussion:

1. Usage Patterns: Most MPs from Madhya Pradesh maintain active Twitter accounts, while Facebook is used more sporadically. On average, MPs post 3–5 times per week on Twitter, primarily sharing updates about their constituency work, party events, and national issues. Urban MPs, such as those from Bhopal and Indore, show higher digital engagement compared to their rural counterparts.

2. Content and Themes: A significant portion of social media content is event-driven, such as festival greetings, political rallies, and budget reactions. However, some MPs use platforms for interactive purposes—responding to citizens' grievances, conducting live Q&A sessions, and promoting government schemes. BJP MPs tend to have a more coordinated digital strategy, often sharing centralized party content, while Congress MPs display more individualistic messaging.

3. Public Engagement and Democratic Impact: Engagement levels vary widely. MPs with a younger demographic of followers and those from urban constituencies receive more likes, shares, and comments. Despite the potential for participatory democracy, many interactions remain one-way, with limited responsiveness to citizen feedback. Nonetheless, social media has enhanced political visibility and accessibility, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when physical campaigning was restricted.

4. Challenges: Barriers include digital literacy, especially in rural areas, uneven internet access, and the risk of misinformation. There is also a growing concern about the performative nature of social media, where visibility may overshadow substantive political work. Additionally, reliance on third-party teams for managing accounts raises questions about authenticity and direct engagement.

Conclusion : The study finds that while social media is increasingly integrated into the political practices of MPs from Madhya Pradesh, its impact on democratic deepening remains limited by structural and contextual factors. Digital platforms have the potential to make politics more participatory and transparent, but their use remains uneven and often symbolic. Future efforts should focus on digital literacy, capacity building for MPs, and creating institutional norms for digital engagement that prioritize responsiveness and accountability.

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