

Social Media and its impact in shaping public opinion

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I. INTRODUCTION

India was home to 1.02 billion social media user's identities in September 2025.¹ Social media has changed how people in India express their opinions and connect with public issues. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and X(twitter) are widely used. Especially among age groups from 16 to 50 years of age.² Its importance explodes in a democratic country like India, where any public opinion, like protest, falls one sided etc. Social media can create content and it can share content instantly making it an influential tool for sharing public opinion.

Social media is expanding day by day and influencing the political and social cultural views of people. Information spreads quickly without verification of what is true or false.³ People from rural areas like farmers to the people of the city of Mumbai use social media and exchange their views, ideas, narratives, and news within a second.

False information, often leads to become a breaking news via viral forwards or deepfake videos, exploits human emotions like fear and anger to persuade rapidly. One-sided narratives, amplified by algorithms that prioritize engagement over accuracy, digital bubbles where users encounter only reinforcing views, distorting perceptions on critical issues such as electoral politics, communal harmony, farmer agitation, or public health crises like COVID-19. For instance, during the 2019 and 2024 Lok Sabha elections, doctored clips and partisan memes swayed voter turnout and sentiment, highlighting how platforms can manufacture consent or create division. This act raises legal and ethical questions in India, governed by Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution⁴⁵, which protects free speech but allows reasonable

restrictions under the IT Rules 2021⁶ and the Information Technology Act, 2000.⁷

This research paper aims to examine how social media influences public opinion in India, particularly focusing on how people rely on social media as primary source of political or social information, and how information is not verified and later it turns out to be false or misleading.

The originality of this research lies in combining theoretical understanding with a survey to understand real user behaviour and perceptions. By analysing both positive and negative aspects, the paper attempts to provide a balanced view of social media's role in shaping public opinion in India.

Background and evolution of social media

Social media, a form of mass media communications on the Internet (such as on websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos). Social networking and social media are overlapping concepts, but social networking is usually understood as users building communities among themselves while social media is more about using social networking sites and related platforms to build an audience.⁸ Social media started in the early 2000's with platforms like Myspace, Facebook, Reddit, YouTube etc. But the real boom was during the 2010- 2020, this decade showed the real rise of social media platforms.⁹

Traditional media such as newspapers and television controlled the flow of information in the past but now people have reduced the usage of traditional media and got inclined more towards social media.¹⁰ Social media platforms show you diverse viewpoints and mostly similar opinions of the content you consume. This has also led to increase of political awareness

among citizens. Another important development is the rise of algorithm-driven content. Social media platforms use algorithms to show users content based on their interests and past behaviour. While this improves user experience, it can also create “echo chambers,” where people are exposed only to opinions similar to their own. Echo chambers means where the people of similar opinion come together i.e., social media in this context. Today platforms serve various purposes such as news, political discussion, entertainment, and a lot more. This

Solution leads from personal to public information. In India, social media has played a major role in shaping public discourse on issues such as elections, social justice movements, and legal reforms. Campaigns and hashtags often influence how people see events and form opinions. Thus, the evolution of social media reflects a shift from controlled information to open user-driven communication networks, which have both empowered individuals and created new challenges.

How does social media shape public opinion?

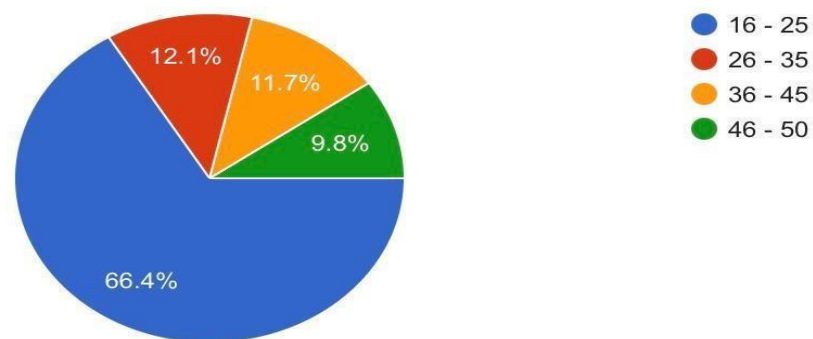
Social media shape’s public opinion through social media apps and sites. People scroll through apps and sites to see what’s trending. News gets spread within a second. In India lack of verification means that false or misleading information spreads just as quickly as accurate information spreads. And as per my survey

81.8 % people have encountered that content on social media later turned out to be false or misleading. Social media plays with emotional biases, so social comparisons pressure others and greater feelings of social isolation after being rejected by others on social media. People post controversial stories to gain views and attract people. These all problems can lead to forming opinions knowing or understanding the facts. Repeated exposure towards the same content can create biasness. This is mostly seen in political discussion. People who have a large following in social media can seriously impact public perception. People trust their opinions even if they are not the right person or experts in something they are talking about. False information manipulates public opinion, people share information without verifying it. Democratic countries like India where digital literacy plays an important role due to its huge population. People may not always understand or have skills to decide what is reliable and unreliable sources. False information persuades via emotions, a deepfake video of a leader can spark riots as seen in political campaigns. Posts affect public perception it hardens on issues like immigration or economy. Social media shape’s public opinion by influencing what people see, how they feel, and how they interact with others. While it provides a platform for expression, it also raises concerns about the quality and accuracy of information.

Analysis of the Survey –

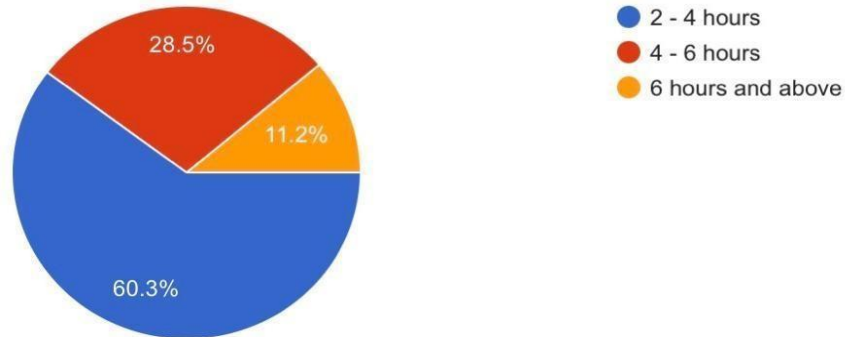
Your age?

214 responses



1. How many hours per day do you spend on social media platforms?

214 responses



The survey results reveal a remarkable level of daily engagement with social media among respondents. A majority of the participants (60.3%) reported spending 2–4 hours per day on social media platforms. This shows that social media occupies a significant portion of individuals' daily routines showing that these platforms have become a part of life deeply by showing information, entertainment and for communication with people.

Additionally, 28.5% of respondents reported spending 4–6 hours daily, which reflects this group likely consumes a large amount of online content which

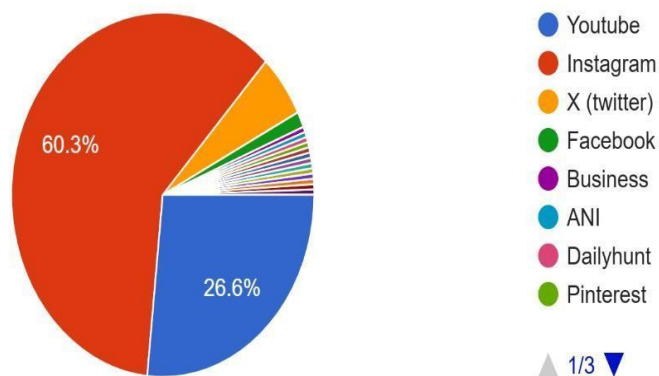
includes news, commentary and discussions related to political and social issues.

Meanwhile 11.2% of respondents indicated spending more than 6 hours per day on social media. Such huge usage suggests that for a smaller but notable segment of the population uses social media more than the average population.

Spending this much amount of time on social media leads to more information and also the risk of receiving misinformation. Thus, social media is highly influential.

2. Which platform do you use most for news or public affairs content?

214 responses



It is observed that people really prefer certain social media platforms. Out of 214 people 60.3% used Instagram and this was a sign that Instagram is their favourite platform. This shows how much people rely on Instagram and it has most unique features like reel, shareable posts and algorithmic feed makes an emotional connection with people and it summarises easily.

YouTube was indicated by 26.6% of the respondents. It leads that people prefer video-based content such as news, debates, interviews, stand-up comedy and other different options available. YouTube engages users

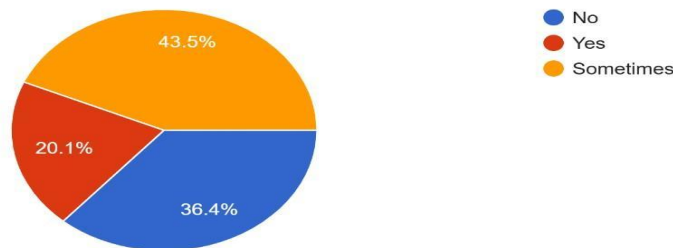
who want to have deep understanding of complex issues.

Other platforms like X, Facebook and various apps were only used by a small portion of people we talked to. This shows us that we are moving from old school to visually engaging videos.

Consequently, the dominance of these platforms highlights the increasing role of digital media ecosystems in influencing political awareness, shaping narratives, and potentially affecting public opinion formation.

3. Do you rely on social media as your primary source of political or social information?

214 responses



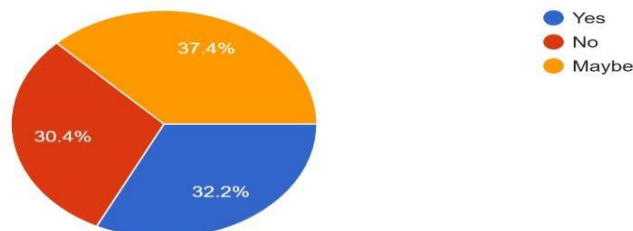
According to the survey conducted, 214 people to see how they really use social media as their primary source of political or social information. 43.5% of the respondents say they sometimes use social media. This sometimes can be 'yes' when there is a campaign going on social media platform or when the people around them give some information which they have sourced from social media. At times when the people around us rely on something and they trust its credibility then they ask other people to use the same i.e., social media here. 20% said they did rely on it and the other 36.4% said they don't use it as a primary

source at all. Social media plays an important role in information but it is not trusted as the main source of political or social information. The large number of people selecting sometimes shows that the mixed pattern of media consumption is also prevailing. From the view of political science, we can see that social media is truly shaping how we get news and the fact that people don't rely on it means that they are aware of the fake news.

This can lead to less spread of misinformation and social media is a major news channel but it's not the only one which people trust.

4. Have you ever changed your opinion on a political or social issue after seeing content on social media?

214 responses

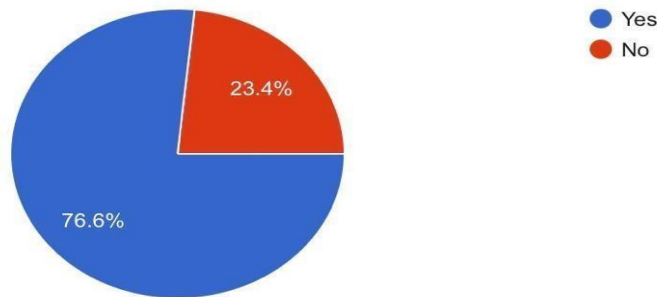


The survey results reveal that social media has influence on modifying individuals' opinions regarding political or social issues. From 214 respondents, 32.2% reported that they have changed their opinion after seeing content on social media while 30.4% stated that they have not changed their opinion and 37.4% selected "maybe" indicating partial influence. This maybe can be 'yes' when the algorithm starts showing what we have liked, it changes when

some persuasive post holding a some sentimental belief which supports our ideology, because of this social media succeeds in shaping public opinion. Social media is more subtle and if you are scrolling through your feed, you see different viewpoints and this exposure leads you to influence how you see things and it questions your belief. People showing who did not change their opinion are seen to be firm on their belief.

5. Do you verify information from social media before believing or sharing it?

214 responses



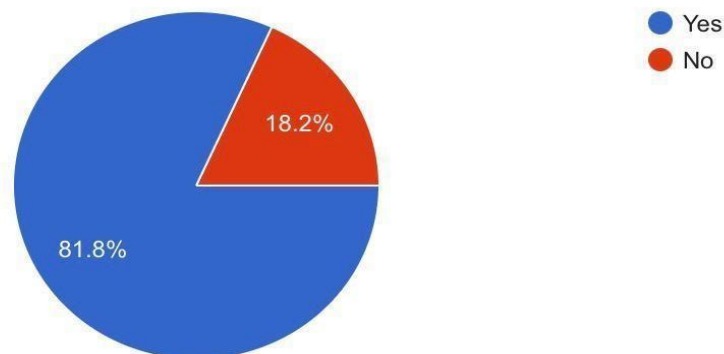
Out of the 214 respondents, 76.6% reported that they confirm their information before believing it true or sharing it. Nearly 3 out of 4 people said yes that they verify the information. Users are aware of misinformation and are aware of fake news spreading. And making sure that what they're seeing is accurate. 18.2% it's almost a quarter of the respondent didn't verify the information before passing it. That is the

vulnerability of the digital word. When unverified information is passed it can create chaos with public opinion.

Overall, the stats suggest that while many individuals recognize the importance of verifying information but awareness and media literacy efforts are necessary to reduce the spread of misinformation in the digital age.

6. Have you ever encountered content on social media that later turned out to be false or misleading?

214 responses



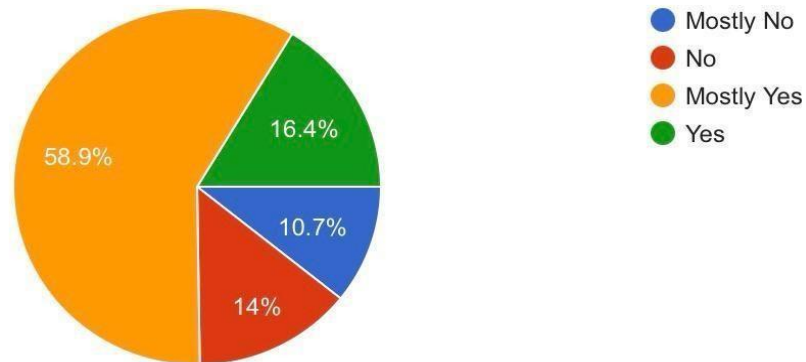
The survey reveals that exposure to false or misleading information on social media is the same among respondents. Out of the 214 participants 81.8% reported that they have seen content that later turned out to be false or misleading. While 18.2% indicated that they have not experienced such situations. This results in the widespread presence of misinformation within the social media environment. This shows that

large numbers of people are being victims of misinformation. This question is social media really a reliable source? When people are repeatedly exposed to misinformation it can shape their opinion in that way.

Even when users later discover that the information was false, the initial exposure can still influence their attitudes and beliefs.

7. Do you feel social media platforms show you diverse viewpoints or mostly similar opinions?

214 responses



The survey provides important information into how users perceive the diversity of opinions presented on social media platforms. Among the 214 respondents the largest proportion 58.9% reported “Mostly Yes,” indicating that they believe social media generally exposes them to diverse viewpoints. The respondents who have answered mostly yes are bit not sure about what kind of information they are watching. According to social media algorithms a social media platform will try to understand an individual’s liking an interest based on how long they watched a particular content and based on their engagement (like, share, save, etc). Thus, social media tries to show different opinions to observe an individual’s interest and serve it better.

Additionally, 16.4% of respondents answered “Yes,” suggesting that they clearly feel that social media platforms present a variety of opinions and perspectives. On the other hand, 14% of participants responded “No,” and 10.7% selected “Mostly No,” indicating that a smaller segment of users perceives

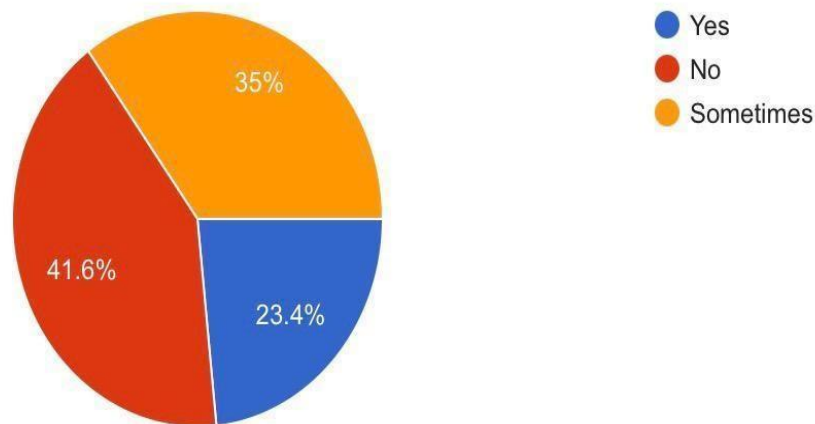
social media as primarily presenting similar or repetitive viewpoints.

These findings suggest that a majority of respondents believe that social media platforms offer exposure to different perspectives on political and social issues. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, X etc. Forums allow users to encounter content from individuals, organizations, journalists, and political commentators with different viewpoints. This diversity of information can contribute to a broader understanding of public issues and encourage political awareness among users. This all can really help us understand the world better and get to know about politics more.

On the other hand, people seeing similar opinions highlight the whole echo chamber problem. You know how algorithms suggest stuff based on what you have already liked who you follow? This can limit our exposure to different ideas, and making it difficult to have a real conversation. Which is important to understand how these platforms work and how our habits shape what we see online.

8. Do influencers or celebrities on social media affect your views on public issues?

214 responses

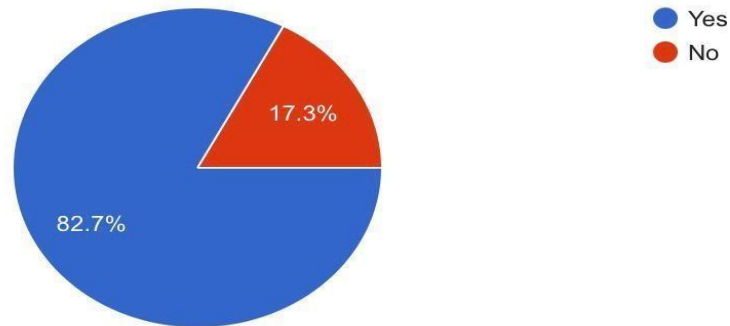


The survey results provide insight into the influence that social media influencers and celebrities may have on individuals' opinions regarding public and political issues. Among the 214 respondents, 23.4% stated that influencers or celebrities do affect their views, while 41.6% reported that they are not influenced by them. Additionally, 35% of respondents selected "sometimes," suggesting that influencer or celebrity opinions may occasionally impact their perspectives depending on the issue or context. This sometimes can be converted into yes because according to psychology this is based on the concept that people tend to follow the people they like. If someone you like or idealize recommends a product you are more likely to buy it. These data shows that although a majority of respondents claim that influencers do not directly shape their views, a considerable proportion at least some level of influence. Influencers and celebrities often have large audiences and high engagement on social media platforms, which allows their opinions on political, social, or public matters to reach a wide audience quickly. At some point of time celebrities get very influential.

However, the fact that the largest group of respondents reported that they are not influenced by influencers or celebrities suggests that many people still form their political opinions independently. This indicates that individuals are capable of thinking critically and do not always rely on the views of public figures when considering political or social issues. From a political science perspective, this highlights the complex relationship between celebrity culture and political communication on social media. Influencers and celebrities often use their platforms to discuss social or public issues, which can help bring attention to important topics, especially among younger audiences who actively follow them online. However, their influence does not appear to be overwhelming. Instead, people may listen to these voices but ultimately make their own judgments based on personal beliefs, experiences, and other sources of information. Overall, the findings suggest that while influencers and celebrities contribute to discussions in the digital public sphere, their ability to shape political opinions depends largely on how critically individuals engage with the content they consume.

9. Do you believe social media increases political awareness among citizens?

214 responses



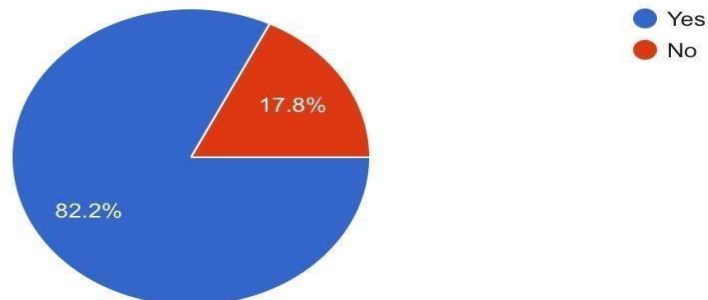
The survey results indicate a strong perception that social media contributes to increasing political awareness among citizens. Out of the 214 respondents, a significant majority answered “Yes,” while only a small proportion, 17.3%, responded “No.” This suggests that most participants believe that social media platforms play an important role in informing people about political issues, public policies, and current events.

Platforms such as video-sharing sites, networking platforms, and discussion forums allow users to access

political news, opinions, debates, and analysis in real time. This constant flow of information can expose individuals to a variety of political topics that they might not encounter through traditional media alone. Users are not only consumers of political information but also contributors who share opinions, comment on issues, and participate in discussions. This interactive environment can encourage greater political engagement and awareness among the public.

10. Do you believe social media increases polarization and division in society?

214 responses



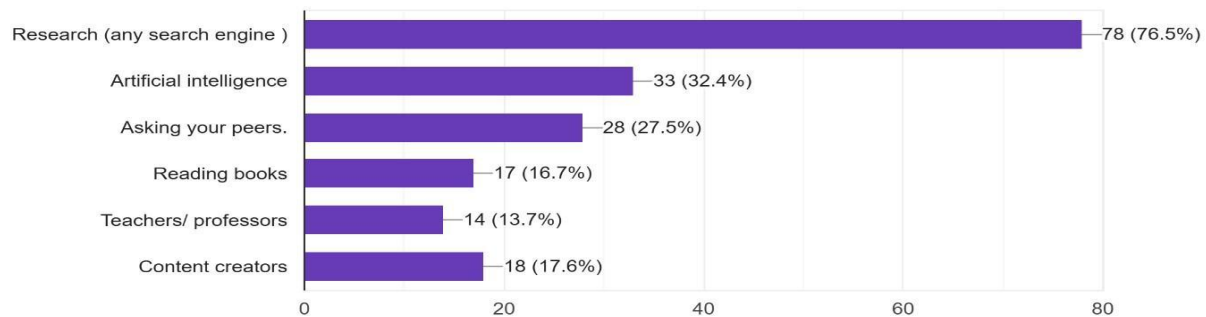
The survey results clearly indicate that a large majority of respondents believe that social media contributes to increasing polarization and division within society. Out of the 214 respondents, 82.2% answered “Yes,” while only 17.8% responded “No.” This overwhelming majority suggests a strong perception that social media platforms play a significant role in shaping divided opinions and reinforcing societal differences.

While social media provides a space for free expression and participation, it can also intensify ideological divides and hinder meaningful dialogue. Overall, the results suggest that although social media connects people digitally, it may simultaneously contribute to social and political fragmentation if not used responsibly.

II. FOLLOW UP STUDY

How do you verify information from social media before believing or sharing it?

102 responses

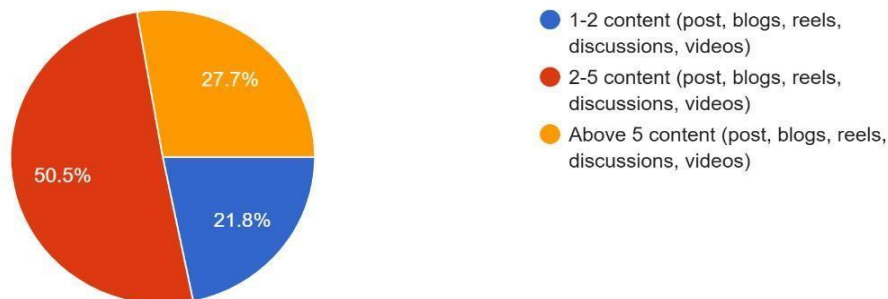


Most respondents [76.5%] use the search engines to verify information, followed by AI tools [32.4%] and consulting friends [27.5%]. Some users verify information through books like [16.75%] or by consulting teachers/professors [13.7%]. Some also rely on content creators for the verification of their information. The text indicates that individuals generally require exposure to multiple pieces of

content before changing their opinions and search engines remain the most dominant tool for verification. Reading books and asking professors about some information is the most reliable source amongst all the above mentioned options. But out of this approx. 5% would be reliable from both these sources.

When do you change the opinion ?

101 responses

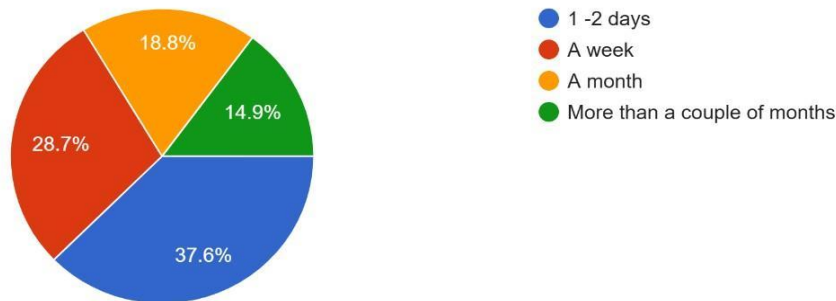


Responses reveal that individuals require exposures to multiple pieces of content before changing their opinions. Most of the people require 2-5 pieces of the content [like post, discussions or videos] before they are willing to change their minds. This suggests that a majority of the people value seeing multiple perspectives rather than relying on a single source. About a quarter of people require more than five

pieces of content. This group is the most sceptical and needs extensive information before reconsidering their beliefs. A smaller group changes their opinion after seeing just 1-2 pieces of content. These individuals may be more easily influenced or more open to persuasive messaging. They may believe in most of the information which comes in front of them or said by any person who they follow or like.

How long does it take to change your opinion based the content you access ?

101 responses

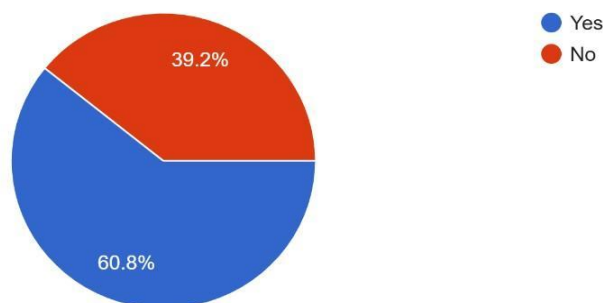


Changing our minds doesn't happen at the same speed for everyone. For the largest group about 38% it only takes a day or two of sitting with new information before their perspective shifts. Roughly one third of people need about a week to really identify things over and talk it out. On the slower side about 19% take a full month to evaluate everything, while a smaller

group 15% is much more cautious often needing months of solid evidence before they are willing to let go of an old belief. Generally speaking, most of us tend to come around to a new way of thinking within a few days or we often start to acknowledge other perspective back of our mind.

Do you verify the information from your favourite content creator?

102 responses



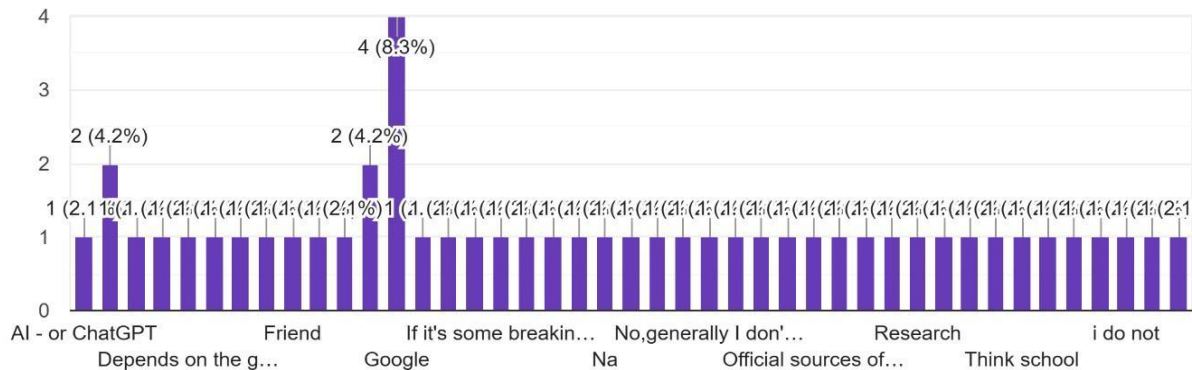
The survey results that a majority of respondents verify information even what it comes out of their favourite content creators. Out of 102 respondents, 60.8% answered 'YES' it shows that they cross check the information provided by content creators and also

shows that they are aware of spread of misinformation and they try to validate the information independently. However, 39.2% of respondents answered 'NO' meaning they tend to trust their favourite content creators without verification. Significant portion still

relies heavily on trust in influencers or content creators.

If you verify the information from a content creator then from whom?

48 responses



Here, only 48 people have answered this question. Each person has a unique answer to this question, but the most repeated names of the content creators are Dhruv Rathee with 4 individuals relying on his channel and 2 individuals relying on Abhi and Niyu. People tend to have their own favourite creators which they trust and also follow them. This is a human tendency that you like someone because of multiple reasons like their journey, relatability with someone, their physical nature, their way of thinking and so on, and you try to follow them just because you like them or any of their traits. Thus, a lot of individuals have their own favourite content creator whom they rely on for the verification of their information.

III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, social media in India has become a powerful force in shaping public opinion, especially among the 16–50 years old population, who rely on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter) for news, political discussion, and entertainment. While it increases political awareness, diversifies viewpoints, and enables wider public participation. It also leads to misinformation and polarization as the survey shows that a large majority of respondents have encountered false or misleading content and perceive social media as deepening societal divisions. Survey findings highlight a paradox that most people spend several hours a day on

social media, often treat it as source of information but they are not always primary source of political or social information, and yet many still verify content before sharing it. At the same time, repeated exposure to unverified or emotionally charged content, including deepfakes and algorithm-driven narratives, can subtly reshape opinions and beliefs even when users later learn the information was false. From a broader political-science perspective, the conclusion is that social media in India is neither purely empowering nor purely dangerous but it is a double-edged tool which should be used carefully.

IV. SUMMARY

Social media has become a major force in shaping public opinion in India, especially among people 16–50. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and X (Twitter) are widely used for news, political discussions, and entertainment. The study highlights both the positive and negative effects of social media. On one hand, it increases political awareness, encourages public participation, and exposes users to diverse view points. On the other hand, misinformation, deepfakes, emotional content, and algorithm driven echo chambers can influence public opinions and create polarization. Survey findings show that most users spend several hours daily on social media and many have encouraged false or misleading information. Although a large number of

respondents verify information. Although a large number of respondents verify information before sharing it, repeated exposure to biased or unverified content still affects public perception. Overall, social media in India acts as a double-edged tool that empowers communication while also posing challenges to democracy, social harmony, and informed decision making.

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