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1. Political Marketing and Social Media: A Study of the 2024 General Election in Bihar

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Abstract

Social media is the result of technological advancement that has shaped digital communication. It covers every aspect of our lives and is not limited to connecting with family or friends; it is also used for corporate marketing, and political parties utilise these platforms to connect and disseminate their respective political messages. The political parties believe that new technology would enhance their image and identity, thereby improving electoral participation. In recent years, the use of social media for political marketing has increased significantly. During the 2014 general election, the Bharatiya Janata Party significantly used social media platforms for political marketing in India. The present study seeks to measure the use of social media in political marketing, with special reference to the state of Bihar. The study adopts a technological determinist perspective to understand the use of new technology in political marketing in Bihar, a backward state on many fronts. The study employs qualitative and quantitative methods to analyse the Facebook posts of three major political parties in Bihar that have been in power, i.e., the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Janata Dal United (JD(U)), and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), from 16 March 2024 to 19 April 2024. The study finds a significant relationship between the use of new technology and the outcome of the 2024 general election. The study concludes that relying on social media for political marketing significantly improves engagement and connection between individual electorates and political parties.

Keywords: Political Marketing, Political Communication, Digital Media, Social Media, Technological Determinism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media results from technological advancement that has shaped digital communication worldwide. The present form of social media is an advanced version of earlier forms, a new stage in technological advancement. Social media refers to internet-based platforms where ordinary people can create accounts, connect with friends, and discuss worldly affairs. It has become an inseparable part of human life (Padhiyar, 2019). It allows for the creation and sharing of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). It involves internet-based technologies for creating, exchanging, collaborating, and communicating with individuals or groups (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The technological revolution has made social media the end



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of all communication; political parties and individual leaders are relying on social media for political marketing and advertising purposes (Safiullah et al., 2017).

Political marketing refers to the principles and procedures used in political campaigns by individual leaders or political parties (Newman, 1999). Political marketing posits the selling of abstract, intangible things that are not immediate but promise a better future and a political vision and policy, which are sometimes clear and sometimes unclear (Newman, 1994). Political parties see social media as a new avenue for political marketing, through which political parties, individual leaders, and the government can use it for opinion formation and political mobilisation (Safiullah et al., 2017).

In India, since 2012, there have been signs of increasing use of social media for political purposes. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is the leading political party in the use of social media for political communication and has an edge over other political parties (Rajput, 2014). Political marketing is a relatively new concept in India, and it only gained momentum in the 2019 Lok Sabha election. In the Indian context, political marketing goes back to 1984. When Rajiv Gandhi, for the first time, partially handed over the responsibility of political campaigns to an advertising agency, Rediffusion, and the Party swept the general election in 1984 (Khan, 2019).

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

America has been a trendsetter for developing nations, especially in the use of media and political campaigns (Jethwaney & Kapur, 2019). In 1960, John F. Kennedy, a first-time presidential candidate, used television in his political campaign, a move that paid off (Newman, 1994). In 2008 and 2012, Barack Obama utilised social media to connect with voters and raise funds, setting a trend for the use of social media in political marketing worldwide (Jethwaney & Kapur, 2019). In the Indian context, Prime Ministerial candidate Shri Narendra Modi extensively used social media during the 2014 general election rather than traditional media. Social media is free of communication barriers, enabling him to develop strong relationships with voters and politicians (Khan, 2019, pp. 145-146). Social media played a significant role in the 2014 Lok Sabha election; Ogilvy and Mathur, Soho Square, and Madison World were the instrumental agencies behind the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) 's landslide victory. In the current political landscape, there is a massive demand for professional and social media experts to handle political campaigns. In the current atmosphere, the electorate is considered a consumer, politicians are sellers, and voters must buy politicians in elections (Singh, 2019).

1.2. SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL MARKETING IN BIHAR

Bihar shows the growth trajectory of mobile phone and internet users. There was growth from 42 million in 2014-15 to 62.1 million in 2020 in mobile users, and from 8 million to 39.3 million internet users for the same period. Over 62 per cent of Bihar's population uses mobile phones, and 40 per cent surfs the internet (Manral, 2020). Furthermore, over 37 million people from rural areas use the Internet, the highest in India (Statista, 2023). During the 2015 assembly election, political strategist Prashant Kishor was hired by Nitish Kumar to manage the political campaign of 'Mahagathbandhan', a coalition of Janta Dal United, Rashtriya Janta Dal, and Indian National Congress. Mahagathbandhan won 178 seats, and the BJP won just



fifty-eight seats (Singh, 2019). BJP was the frontrunner in using digital media for the election campaign during the 2020 assembly election. BJP-JDU alliance targeted 15 million users through the Facebook ad manager (Ananth, 2020).

1.3. RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

An Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) survey found that 160 of 543 seats are prone to social media influence (Chopra, 2014, pp. 26-29). According to the 2011 census of India, Bihar is the third most populous and most densely populated state. Fifty-eight per cent of its population is under 25, making it the most youthful state. Social media plays a vital role in youth life and is gaining importance in political activities; it catalyses people to engage in politics and political discourse (Wani & Alone, 2014). According to data released by the state government, Bihar has seen a 15-fold increase in data consumption over the last five years. Average data consumption was only 1.67 gigabytes per month in 2019, then rose to 27 gigabytes per month, while mobile phone users increased from 6 crore to 7.25 crore during the same period (Tewary, 2024).

1.4. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Bihar is considered one of the most politically dynamic states in India, characterised by greater politicisation, which leads to greater political awareness and a strong tendency to form political opinions (Kumar, 2018). According to the 2011 census, Bihar is the third most populous state, with approximately 58 per cent of its population under 25 years old, making it the most youth-populated state in India. A report by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), published in January 2025, stated that Bihar has 37.37 million internet users in rural areas and 17.33 million in urban areas, for a total of 54.70 million. The tele-density in rural areas is 32.9%, and in urban areas, it is 107.75%. The overall tele-density in Bihar is 42.19%, lower than the national average (TRAI, 2025). Data from the Bihar Caste Survey 2023 suggest that poverty, low literacy rates, and a higher proportion of rural residents pose significant barriers to digital inclusion in the state (Bhelari, 2023).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the mid-1990s, political marketing emerged as a field of study, and in 2002, the Journal of Political Marketing began publication ("Political Marketing in Retrospective and Prospective," 2014b). Technology provides various opportunities for political candidates to use innovative and creative methods; the presidential candidate Barack Obama used it effectively in 2008. Political communication through social media is gaining momentum year after year. Political strategists from different regions develop campaign strategies tailored to their parties' and regions' needs (Merlă, 2018). However, the core question is the future of technology in political campaigns and the role of researchers in observing it (Towner & Dulio, 2012).

2.1. SOCIAL MEDIA AS A CONVENIENT TOOL

Internet-based social media play a catalytic role in political communication. It helps individuals and parties communicate effectively with citizens (Karlsen, 2011). These platforms are free from ethnic, religious, or regional constraints (Rani & Singh, 2020). It has become a convenient tool for political communication, helping mobilise and organise political campaigns (Gil de Zuniga et al., 2021). Social media has become a coordinating tool for political parties

worldwide, with only authoritarian governments seeking to limit access to it. In the last decade, social media emerged as a significant campaigning tool for political parties. Political parties can run targeted political campaigns through social media. They can be managed interactively, opening the door for new types of trusted, targeted political dialogues (Hamid et al., 2022). Social media allows candidates to raise awareness of their campaigns. Voters actively participate in political discussions (Shaul & Lev, 2020). It has changed the nature of political campaigns. Serving as a tool for informing and mobilising people in a new way (Nguyen & Sokolovskiy, 2022).

2.2. THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

People were more concerned when news surfaced about the alleged manipulation of the 2016 U.S. presidential election. People are more concerned about the spread of fake news on social media platforms (Nelson & Taneja, 2018). Fake news is also a concern on social media, as a recent survey ranked it among the top problems (Newman & Zhang, 2020). Disinformation can lead to problematic situations in multi-religious countries like India, where video clips, memes, messages, and photographs are circulated to polarise the community. Facebook and WhatsApp are popular sites for spreading fake news (Banerjee & Haque, 2018). The alleged harvesting of data from 87 million Facebook users by Cambridge Analytica to manipulate the U.S. presidential election also raises concerns among users (Isaak & Hanna, 2018).

3. RESEARCH GAP

Political marketing through social media is a relatively new term, but an exciting area to explore and learn about its various aspects. Numerous studies worldwide discuss the use of social media in political marketing and the associated challenges. The present study is different because Bihar's socio-political conditions are distinct. There is a considerable time gap between the previous and the present, and there is also considerable growth in internet penetration, average data use and the number of smartphones.

4. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study's general objective is to analyse the use of social media by selected political parties in Bihar for political marketing, in line with the theory of technological determinism.

The specific objectives of the study are-

- a. To analyse the categorical posts of selected political parties using social media for political marketing.
- b. To analyse their engagement in their posts during the study period for the selected parties.

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To understand the theory of technological determinism, the study seeks to measure the use of social media for political marketing in Bihar.

RQ 1: How are Bihar's political parties utilising new technology for political marketing?

RQ 2: What is the frequency of posts on social media sites?

RQ 3: What amount of engagement are they getting on their social media posts?

6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



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The theory of technological determinism was propounded by Marshal McLuhan in 1964. The theory posits that mass media technology, along with people's attitudes and behaviour, also changes the social system's mode of operation. The emergence of new technology shapes the social fabric of society accordingly. The core idea of the theory is that human survival is moulded according to variations in the human communication system. Technological advancements in mass communication facilitate cultural transmission within society and lead to changes in human behaviour. McLuhan says, "We shape our tools, and they, in turn, shape us" (Jan et al., 2020).

Marshal McLuhan has categorised society into tribal, literate, print, and electronic ages. Society modernised and moved one step forward with the diffusion of communication technology. People from tribal to literate, from literate to print, and so on. According to this theory, the living patterns of people of the same age are modernised in similar ways. If society's modernisation continues as it has, we will enter the digital age. The new technology has brought abrupt changes in human life. Social media has not replaced traditional media but has integrated them, i.e., electronic text, telephone, radio, and television. Social media users can make phone calls free of cost, listen to radio channels from around the world, watch television shows of their choice, and read digital editions of newspapers. It offers a user-generated variety of content. The content ranges from local to national and international, taken from traditional media and uploaded online (Jan et al., 2020).

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To understand technological advancement and its impact on political marketing in Bihar, the present study seeks to measure the use of social media by Bihar's political parties. The study qualitatively and quantitatively analysed Facebook posts; with more than 378 million users, India is the largest Facebook market worldwide (Statista, 2024). The study considered three major political parties in Bihar that have been in power over the last few decades: the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Janata Dal (United), and the Rashtriya Janata Dal. The study categorically analyses the Facebook posts of selected political parties from March 16, 2024, to April 19, 2024. The study has sub-categorised Facebook posts into six significant categories: political messages, political comments, political satire, social messages, historical Days, and religious messages.

8. FINDINGS

The study finds that the three major political parties selected, which have previously or are currently in power in Bihar, have used Facebook for a long time, regularly posted their messages, and even countered opposition through social media posts.

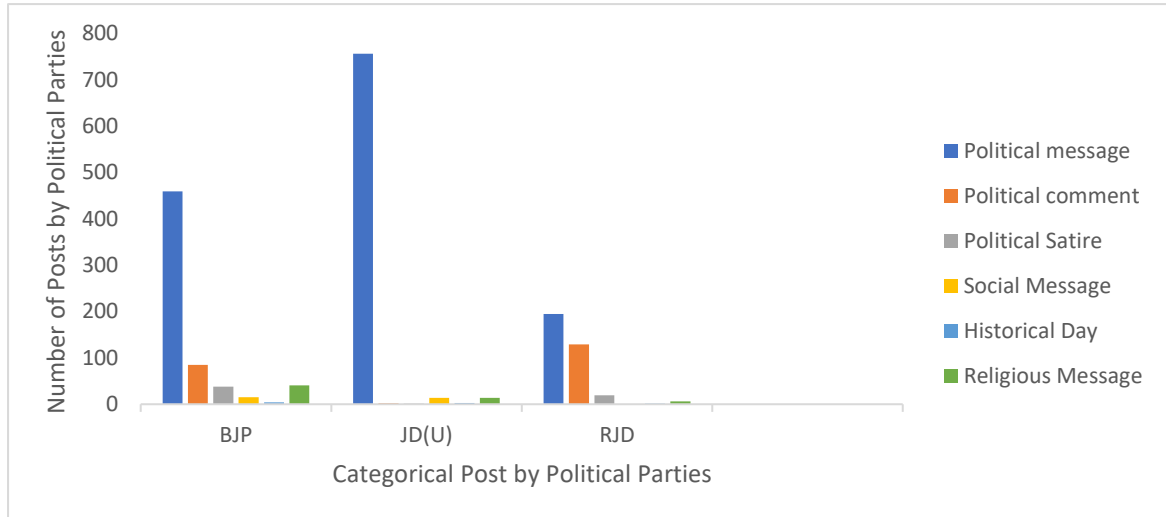
Table 1. Data of Facebook followers of the selected political parties.

Name of the political parties	Date of Creation of the Facebook page	No. of Followers before the 2024 election	No. of Followers During/After the 2024 election
BJP	May 27, 2015	0.735M	0.933M
JD(U)	January 17, 2018	0.670M	0.688M
RJD	January 23, 2012	1M	1.1M

*Source: Data collected by researchers

Findings from Table 1 show that RJD joined Facebook much earlier than BJP, while JD(U) joined Facebook only in 2018. Data shows that Bihar's political parties gained significant followers during the 2024 Lok Sabha election. BJP gained 0.198 million followers, JD(U) gained 0.018 million followers, and RJD gained 0.1 million followers during the 2024 Lok Sabha election. BJP gained the most followers on Facebook during the 2024 Lok Sabha election in Bihar.

Table 2. Categorical Facebook posts of the selected political parties of Bihar.



Findings from Table 2 show the categorical count of Facebook posts by selected political parties in Bihar. JD(U) posts the highest, followed by the BJP and the RJD. All the selected political parties have posted the most in the political message category. BJP has posted the highest number of posts in the Religious Message category, aligned to its political ideology, followed by JD(U) and RJD during the study period.

Table 3. The total number of Text and Video posts on Facebook and their engagements, respectively.

Name of the Party	Total No. of Posts	No. of Text Post	No. of Video Posts	Engagement in Text & Graphic Message	Engagement in Video Message	Overall Engagement
BJP	667	217	450	3,53,782	7,28,055	10,81,837
JD(U)	814	219	595	2,09,800	1,92,329	4,02,129
RJD	364	153	211	1,82,409	6,51,064	8,33,473

*Source: Data collected by researchers

Findings from Table 3 suggest that the BJP leads in Facebook engagement and can attract viewers with a selective agenda, followed by the RJD.

Table 4. The tone and average numbers of Facebook posts from the selected political parties during the study period (March 16, 2024, to April 19, 2024).

Name of the Political Party	Total No. of Posts	Average No. of Posts	Positive Posts	Percentage of Positive Posts	Negative Posts	Percentage of Negative Posts
BJP	667	19	538	80.65	129	19.34
JD(U)	814	23	580	71.25	234	28.74
RJD	364	10	208	57.14	156	42.85

*Source: Data collected by researchers

Findings from (Table 4) show that JD(U) has posted the highest number of Facebook posts during the study, followed by BJP, having the highest percentage of positively framed messages, followed by JD(U), and RJD tops the list when we talk about the negative tone of the message.

Table 5. Facebook engagement and Seats won by political parties of Bihar in the 2024 Lok Sabha Election.

Name of the Political Party	Total Engagement	Seats won in the 2024 Lok Sabha Election in Bihar
BJP	10,81,837	12
JD(U)	4,02,129	12
RJD	8,33,473	4

*Source: Election Commission of India & data collected by researchers

Findings from Table 5. The data reveal that engagement on Facebook posts and seats won in the election are partially related: the BJP received the highest engagement and won 12 seats, whereas the RJD won only 4 seats despite receiving the second-highest engagement on Facebook during the study period.

9. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study tested the theory of technological determinism by examining how political parties in Bihar used social media for political marketing during the 2024 Lok Sabha election. The study finds that all the selected political parties have long adopted new technologies in their political marketing, regularly post their political messages and agendas to connect with prospective voters, and have gained significant numbers of followers during the election period.

All the selected political parties have dedicated teams to manage their social media platforms, and they hire professional experts during the election to do so effectively. They have appointed IT cell officials from their party at various levels to effectively circulate their message. They utilise social media platforms to regularly connect and inform about party activity; they provide updates on every party meeting, press conference, and the party leader's statements on important issues. The number of seats RJD won in the 2024 Lok Sabha election is inconsistent with the engagement its Facebook posts received. During the study period, RJD received the second-highest engagement on its Facebook posts, but this did not translate into votes; it gained only four seats. Whereas BJP and JD(U) won 12 seats each, the engagement on social media platforms and the seats won by the political parties are not always consistent.

The practical implication is that political parties must follow other measures to manage social media platforms more effectively and translate engagement into seats in the election. The findings of this study are important for political parties to formulate effective strategies to translate social media engagement into electoral seats. The present study has some limitations. The study considered only one social media platform, Facebook, to understand the use of new technology for political marketing in Bihar. It has selected only three major political parties of Bihar. Future studies may consider other social media platforms to better understand the use of new technology in political marketing. Future studies may also include additional political parties and geographic areas to explore the new technological advancement and its political uses.

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