

# Social Media as A Tool for Youth Electoral Participation in Manipur

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

The rapid proliferation of social media platforms has significantly reshaped the landscape of political engagement, especially among the youth. In Manipur, a region characterized by diverse ethnic communities and unique political dynamics, social media has emerged as a vital tool for youth electoral participation. This paper examines the role of social media in enhancing the political participation of the youth in Manipur's electoral process. By analyzing online campaigns, political discussions, and digital mobilization during recent elections, the study highlights how platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have facilitated the dissemination of political information, awareness, and debates among young voters. Furthermore, it explores the ways social media has served as a space for expressing political opinions, organizing rallies, and influencing voter behavior. The paper also discusses the challenges posed by digital divides, misinformation, and the need for digital literacy in empowering the youth to make informed electoral decisions. Through interviews and surveys with young voters and political analysts, the research sheds light on the impact of social media in bridging the gap between traditional politics and the evolving digital world. Ultimately, the study concludes that social media not only enhances youth participation in electoral politics in Manipur but also empowers them to challenge traditional political structures and engage more meaningfully in democratic processes.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Electoral Participation, Youth Engagement, Manipur, and Political Awareness.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, social media has become a transformative force in political landscapes worldwide, influencing how individuals engage with political processes. In the context of Manipur, a state in Northeast India marked by a rich cultural heritage and complex political dynamics, social media has emerged as a powerful tool for youth electoral participation. The region, traditionally characterized by limited access to mainstream media and political information, has witnessed a surge in digital connectivity, especially among the younger population. As a result, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp have become essential spaces for political interaction, providing a platform for young voters to engage in discussions, share opinions, and influence electoral outcomes (Keller et al., 2020). Youth in Manipur, particularly those in rural and remote areas, have found social media to be a valuable means of accessing information that was previously hard to obtain. These platforms allow for the rapid dissemination of political messages, election updates, and candidate platforms, ensuring that the youth are well-informed and actively involved in the democratic process (Verma, 2022).

Moreover, social media has bridged geographical and social divides, giving young people the opportunity to participate in political campaigns, engage in debates, and mobilize for political causes in ways that were not possible through traditional means (Minakshi, 2018). However, this new wave of digital political engagement is not without challenges. Issues such as digital illiteracy, the spread of misinformation, and unequal access to technology continue to affect the effectiveness of social media as a tool for political participation (Sengupta,

2018). This paper aims to explore how social media has shaped youth electoral participation in Manipur, examining both its opportunities and challenges in empowering the youth to engage in the democratic process.

## 2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The emergence of social media as a platform for political engagement has reshaped electoral participation globally, including in Manipur. Youth, as digital natives, are particularly influenced by these platforms, where political discourse, campaigning, and advocacy occur. However, while social media has empowered young voters by enhancing access to political information and enabling political expression, its role in fostering meaningful electoral participation among youth in Manipur remains underexplored. Despite the widespread use of social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, many young people in rural and tribal areas of Manipur face challenges such as digital illiteracy, poor internet connectivity, and limited technological access. These barriers contribute to a persistent digital divide that restricts equal participation in electoral processes (Thangboi, 2019).

Moreover, misinformation and politically biased content circulating on social media can manipulate young voters' opinions, raising concerns about informed electoral decision-making (Rongmei, 2020). Additionally, while urban youth appear to be more politically engaged online, translating this digital activism into real-world electoral participation remains inconsistent. Electoral mobilization through social media often overlooks marginalized communities where traditional modes of communication still dominate. This gap highlights the need to understand how social media's potential can be fully harnessed to strengthen democratic participation among Manipur's youth (Doungel, 2021). Existing research has predominantly focused on national perspectives, offering limited insights into the unique socio-political dynamics of Manipur's hill districts. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate how social media shapes political engagement among youth in Manipur, considering both enabling and limiting factors. Addressing this issue will help policymakers and stakeholders design better strategies to leverage social media as a tool for inclusive electoral participation.

## 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Singh (2020) highlights the growing role of social media in engaging youth voters in Manipur, focusing on platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp as key spaces for political discourse. However, the study critiques that while social media raises awareness, it does not always translate into higher voter turnout, particularly in rural areas, due to digital illiteracy. Verma (2022) examines the impact of social media on political mobilization among youth in Northeast India, including Manipur. The study notes that while youth are increasingly politically active online, issues like misinformation and digital illiteracy hinder effective democratic engagement. Keller et al. (2020) analyze the role of social media in youth electoral participation in Manipur. Their research shows that social media is vital for spreading election-related content and rallying support. However, limited access to technology in rural areas remains a barrier to broader participation. Usha (2020) discusses the digital divide in Manipur, which affects youth political participation. While urban youth benefit from social media, rural youth face significant barriers, such as poor internet connectivity and lack of digital literacy, limiting their involvement in electoral processes. Rao (2015) examines social media's role in political mobilization in Manipur, emphasizing platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp in facilitating political campaigns. Despite success in urban areas, Rao highlights that digital illiteracy and unequal access to technology are significant challenges for rural youth. Sengupta (2017) assesses social media's role in the 2017 Manipur Assembly elections.

While social media helped engage youth in political campaigns, the study raises concerns about misinformation, which can distort electoral outcomes. Kriesi (2014) explores youth political communication in Manipur, noting how social media fosters political interaction, especially during elections. However, concerns about echo chambers - where youths are exposed to politically homogenous content - that could lead to polarization. Gangte (2017) reviews the challenges youth face in using social media for electoral participation in Manipur, citing digital illiteracy, misinformation, and lack of infrastructure as key barriers, particularly in remote areas.

## 4. STUDY GAP

1. Most studies overlook the unique challenges faced by rural and tribal youth in accessing and engaging with social media for electoral participation.
2. There is insufficient research on how misinformation on social media influences the political decision-making of youth in Manipur.
3. The literature often generalizes social media platforms, failing to examine how different platforms affect youth political engagement in distinct ways.
4. There is a gap in research on how youth in Manipur utilize social media to initiate grassroots political movements or campaigns.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive analysis of social media's impact on youth electoral participation in Manipur. The research seeks to explore the influence of social media on youth political awareness and engagement, particularly in relation to electoral participation. It aims to identify the barriers that hinder effective social media use for political engagement, such as digital illiteracy and misinformation, and to understand how various social media platforms shape youth involvement in political campaigns. To achieve these objectives, a survey will be conducted among youth aged 18-35 from both urban and rural areas of Manipur. This survey will focus on social media usage patterns, participation in political discussions, and the extent to which social media influences political awareness and voting behavior. The quantitative data gathered will provide a broad understanding of the overall impact of social media on electoral participation. In addition to the survey, the study will conduct in-depth, semi-structured interviews with youth who are actively engaged in online political campaigns or discussions. These interviews will offer deeper insights into how social media influences political behavior, voter turnout, and the challenges faced by youth, including issues like misinformation and lack of digital literacy. Focus group discussions, comprising 6-10 participants from diverse backgrounds, were conducted to further explore the collective views on the role of social media in electoral engagement. Content analysis of social media posts during election periods will be conducted to evaluate the themes, tone, and effectiveness of political messaging aimed at youth. Furthermore, a case study on the 2022 Manipur Legislative Assembly elections will examine the role of social media in youth political mobilization. The study will address key questions, including how social media impacts political awareness and participation, the barriers to effective engagement, and the specific influence of different platforms on youth involvement in political campaigns.

## 6. OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the impact of social media on youth political awareness and electoral participation in Manipur.
2. To identify barriers affecting effective social media use for political engagement among youth in Manipur.
3. To analyze how different social media platforms influence youth involvement in political campaigns in Manipur.

## 7. THE RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN MANIPUR

**Digital Connectivity and Access to Information:** The rise of digital connectivity in Manipur has marked a significant shift in how information is accessed and disseminated, particularly among the youth. Historically, Manipur has faced challenges related to limited access to mainstream media, especially in its rural areas. However, the increasing availability of affordable smartphones and mobile internet has bridged this gap. The rapid expansion of mobile internet services, particularly 4G networks, has enhanced digital connectivity and enabled the youth to access political and social content more easily (Rao, 2015). As a result, information that was once difficult to obtain - such as election updates, political discussions, and the platforms of political candidates - is now readily available to the youth population. This shift has fostered a more informed electorate and has empowered young people to engage in the democratic process. The ability to access real-time information from diverse sources through social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram have allowed young voters in Manipur to remain informed about election campaigns, political debates, and voter registration processes. Moreover, the internet has facilitated a more equitable distribution of political knowledge, enabling youth in remote areas to participate in the electoral process on equal footing with their urban counterparts (Usha, 2020). This enhanced access to information has become essential in creating a politically aware and active youth demographic in the state.

**Popular Social Media Platforms Among Youth in Manipur:** Among the various social media platforms used in Manipur, Facebook stands out as one of the most popular, particularly for political engagement. Facebook's ability to allow users to share news articles, videos, and political posts has made it a central hub for political discourse. Candidates and political parties in Manipur increasingly use Facebook to promote their campaigns, interact with voters, and respond to political issues in real-time (Kriesi, 2014). In addition, platforms like Instagram and Twitter are used to create visual campaigns and hashtags that spread awareness on political issues and electoral events. WhatsApp, as a messaging app, plays an equally important role in political participation. It allows users to quickly share information, organize discussions, and mobilize peers for political causes. Political groups and youth leaders use WhatsApp to engage voters directly, bypassing traditional media channels. These platforms have become essential tools in amplifying political voices and engaging a broader segment of the youth population, who otherwise might not have been included in conventional forms of political mobilization (Keller et al., 2020). Social media in Manipur, particularly among youth, serves not only as a tool for information sharing but also as a space for political participation. It has facilitated a new kind of political discourse where young people engage directly with candidates and political parties, participate in live discussions, and even shape political outcomes through online campaigns and voting.

drives. This new wave of political participation is making the youth of Manipur an increasingly powerful force in the state's electoral landscape.

***Social Media as a Tool for Political Mobilization:*** Social media has become a crucial tool for political mobilization in Manipur, significantly influencing the engagement of youth in electoral processes. A key function is the dissemination of political information and election campaigns. Platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter allow rapid dissemination of political messages, ensuring that youth stay informed about candidates and electoral developments. As noted by Rao (2015), these platforms enable the spread of campaign materials, election updates, and political discourse, making information more accessible, particularly in areas where traditional media have limited reach. This accessibility is particularly beneficial for youth in rural areas of Manipur, where digital connectivity is still expanding. Another significant aspect is online debates and discussions on electoral issues, which foster political engagement among young people. Social media serves as a space for youth to engage in discussions on policies, candidates, and electoral concerns. According to Sengupta (2017), the interactive nature of social media promotes real-time engagement, allowing youth to participate in public debates and voice their opinions on important political issues. This shift has encouraged a more participatory form of politics, where youth are not just passive consumers of political content but active contributors to political conversations. Finally, influencing voter behavior and political awareness is a key role of social media. As Verma (2022) argues, the tailored content shared on social media platforms shapes youth perceptions and can influence voting behavior. Social media campaigns and political messaging are becoming increasingly effective tools for mobilizing voters and encouraging participation in elections. Gangte (2017) adds that, despite challenges like digital illiteracy, social media platforms have helped raise political awareness among youth in remote areas of Manipur, motivating them to vote and engage with the electoral process.

***Youth Participation in Electoral Processes through Social Media:*** Youth participation in electoral processes through social media in Manipur has seen significant growth, with platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram becoming essential tools for political campaigns and advocacy. These platforms have allowed youth to engage in political campaigns by advocating for policies, sharing opinions, and promoting candidates. Gangte (2017) emphasizes how social media has empowered youth in Manipur to take active roles, from supporting candidates to organizing online events and discussions, amplifying their voices for political change. Facebook, in particular, has become crucial for mobilizing peers, spreading awareness, and creating grassroots movements. In the Hill Districts of Manipur, traditionally less politically engaged, social media has sparked a shift. Youth, especially from remote areas, have increasingly used these platforms for political advocacy, rallying support for causes and candidates. Rao (2015) highlights how social media has helped overcome geographical isolation, bringing political discourse to rural youth and enabling them to participate in electoral processes despite being far from urban centers. Case studies from the 2017 Manipur Assembly elections show how youth from the Hill Districts actively participated in online campaigns, with Facebook playing a key role in mobilizing votes and spreading election-related information. Sengupta (2017) notes how youth not only engaged in political debates but also organized online voter awareness campaigns, marking a shift in political involvement. Social media has, thus, become a vital tool for youth participation in Manipur's electoral processes, especially in the more remote Hill Districts.

***Challenges of Social Media in Youth Electoral Participation:*** While social media has become a powerful tool for youth electoral participation in Manipur, several challenges limit its effectiveness in rural and remote areas, especially in the Hill Districts. One key challenge is digital illiteracy and limited access to technology. Despite growing internet penetration, many rural youths in Manipur still lack the skills to navigate digital platforms effectively. Lunminthang (2019) highlights that urban youth have better access to technology, while rural youth struggle due to the absence of digital literacy programs, which hinders their participation in online political discussions. This digital divide not only limits engagement but also prevents youth from accessing essential political information, making it harder for them to make informed voting decisions. Misinformation also poses a significant challenge, particularly during election periods. Sunil, Oinam (2018) emphasizes that fake news and biased political content on social media can manipulate public opinion and influence voter behavior. Youth, often lacking the critical skills to differentiate between credible and unreliable sources, are more vulnerable to misinformation. This can lead to poorly informed voting decisions or political polarization. Additionally, the digital divide remains a pressing issue. While urban areas benefit from better internet services, many parts of rural Manipur still lack stable internet access and infrastructure. Meena (2019) points out that this disparity excludes youth in remote areas from participating in online political activities, limiting their engagement in electoral processes. The lack of reliable internet access exacerbates social inequality, leaving many unable to join political discussions, campaigns, or mobilization efforts online. In conclusion, digital illiteracy, misinformation, and the digital divide are significant barriers to effective youth engagement through social media in Manipur, particularly in rural and tribal areas.

***Opportunities and Potential of Social Media for Strengthening Democracy:*** While social media offers significant opportunities to strengthen democracy in Manipur, it empowers youth with political information and a platform for expression. The growing digital penetration in the region has made social media an essential tool for young people to access political information, engage with candidates, and voice their



opinions. Shanti Devi (2018) notes that platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter enable real-time political updates and foster youth involvement in debates, enabling them to form political networks and influence discourse. This enhanced access to information promotes democratic participation, as informed youth are more likely to vote and engage politically. Social media also facilitates youth participation in political campaigns, enabling them to mobilize support, engage in online discussions, and even start grassroots movements. Baite, Thangminlen (2018) argues that social media allows youth, especially those from remote areas, to express their political views, creating more space for marginalized groups. This strengthens democratic engagement by providing a platform for broader political expression. Furthermore, social media bridges political and social divides in Manipur, offering a shared space for diverse political voices in a region marked by ethnic tensions. Akash (2020) highlights that these platforms foster constructive debates across ethnic lines, promoting a more inclusive political environment and reducing polarization. Social media thus encourages dialogue, helping youth collaborate on common political goals. Additionally, social media amplifies marginalized voices, promoting political representation for youth and women. Haobam Suresh (2018) emphasizes that these platforms give traditionally excluded groups a voice, contributing to a more inclusive and accountable democracy. This digital engagement strengthens the democratic process and ensures that candidates and parties remain responsive to public concerns.

## 8. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The analysis of data was based on a total sample of 200 respondents. These participants were carefully selected to represent a diverse range of socio-demographic backgrounds, including various age groups, sex, and categories within the youth population in Manipur, specifically focusing on the hill districts. The distribution of respondents was designed to capture a comprehensive understanding of social media usage and its impact on electoral participation. This diverse sample allowed for a detailed examination of patterns and trends in youth engagement, ensuring the findings reflected a broad spectrum of perspectives from the hill districts.

**Table 1: Demographic Distribution by Sex, Age, and Category**

Age Group/ Sex	Male (ST)	Male (SC)	Male General	Female (ST)	Female (SC)	Female General	Total
18-22	15	1	2	27	3	2	50
23-27	28	3	2	14	2	1	50
28-33	21	2	2	23	2	2	52
34 & above	26	1	3	20	0	2	48
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>200</b>

**Source:** Survey Result, 2024

The demographic distribution table, categorized by sex, age, and caste (ST, SC, and General), highlights significant patterns in representation.

In the 18-22 age group, females are slightly more represented than males, with 27 females compared to 23 males. Among these, individuals from the ST category dominate for both sexes. The number of female respondents from the ST category is notably higher, with 27 females and 15 males. The SC and General categories show lower representation overall, with just 1 SC male and 2 General category males. In contrast, females from these categories show slightly higher representation, with 3 SC females and 2 General females. In the 23-27 age group, males emerge as the dominant group, particularly from the ST category. There are 28 males from the ST category, while only 14 females are represented. Both SC and General categories are underrepresented in this age range, but females show a slightly higher number in the General category (2 females compared to 1 male). This suggests that, in this age group, ST males have a clear dominance, while females from the SC and General categories remain underrepresented.

The 28-33 age group reveals a more balanced representation between sexes, with 21 males and 23 females. In this group, both genders show a more equal distribution across the ST, SC, and General categories. However, the ST category still maintains dominance for both males and females, though the difference is less pronounced compared to the younger age groups. In the 34 and above age group, males continue to dominate in terms of numbers, with 26 males compared to 20 females. The ST category remains the most represented, especially among males. The General category remains underrepresented, particularly among females, with only 2 females from this category, further emphasizing the trend of lower participation among females in this group.

Overall, the ST category shows a consistent and strong presence across all age groups, with a particularly high representation of males in both the younger (18-22) and older (34+) age groups. The SC category is the least represented, especially among females, while individuals from the General category remain underrepresented across both sexes, with females being especially less represented. This distribution underscores the impact of both gender and caste in shaping the demographic structure, with males from the ST category standing out as the most prominent group in both younger and older age brackets.

**Table 2: Demographic Distribution by Sex, Education, Occupation, and Location**

CATEGORY	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Primary to Class X	33	31	64
Classes XI to XII	30	35	65
Graduate to post-graduate	39	37	66
Doctorate	4	1	5
Students	40	37	77
Employed	14	13	27
Self-Employed	25	26	51
Un-Employed	27	18	45
Churachandpur	40	30	70
Chandel	32	32	64
Kangpokpi	37	32	66
<b>Total</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>200</b>

**Source:** Survey Result, 2024

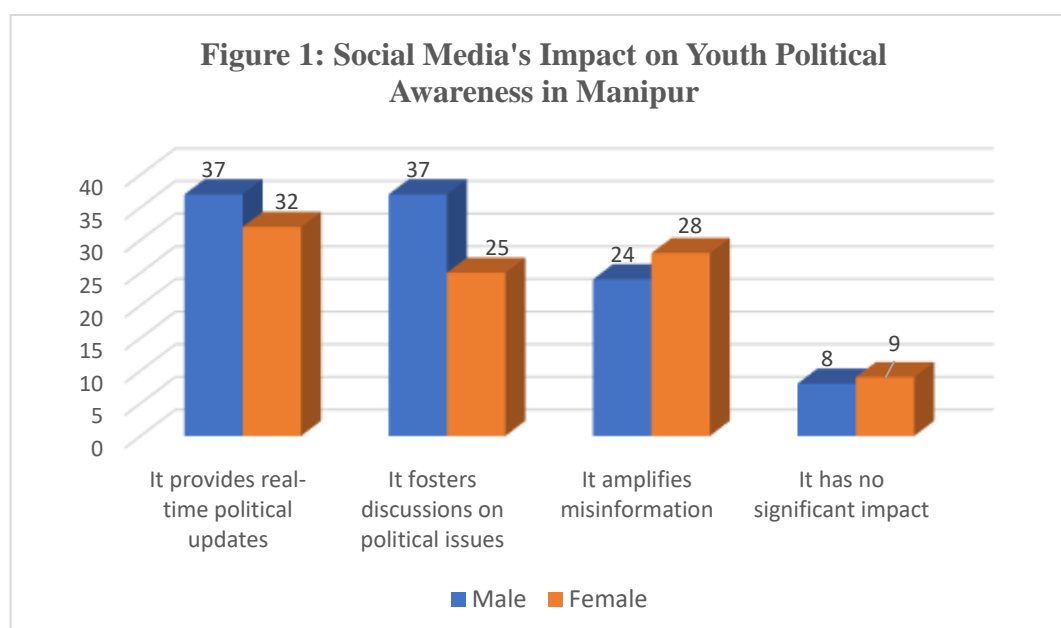
The table highlights and presents a demographic distribution based on sex, education, occupation, and location across 200 respondents. It highlights the distribution of individuals by their educational attainment, occupation status, and residential address, segmented by male and female categories.

In terms of *education*, the majority of respondents fall within the "Graduate to post-graduate" category, with 39 males and 37 females, totaling 66 individuals. The next highest category is "Primary to Class X," with 33 males and 31 females, bringing the total to 64. The "Classes XI to XII" category has 30 males and 35 females, totaling 65 individuals, while the least represented group is those with a doctorate, with 4 males and 1 female, summing to 5. Regarding *occupation*, the largest group is "Students," with 40 males and 37 females, totaling 77. The "Self-Employed" group follows closely, with 25 males and 26 females, making up 51 individuals. "Un-Employed" individuals account for 27 males and 18 females, totalling 45. Lastly, the "Employed" group is the smallest, with 14 males and 13 females, summing to 27. In terms of *location*, the distribution is fairly even across the three districts. Churachandpur has 40 males and 30 females, totaling 70. Chandel follows closely with 32 males and 32 females, bringing the total to 64. Kangpokpi has 37 males and 32 females, totaling 66 individuals.

The overall total of respondents is 200, with 106 males and 94 females. The data indicates a relatively balanced distribution across sex, education, occupation, and location, reflecting diverse representation in various categories relevant to the study topic.

### Social Media's Impact on Youth Political Awareness in Manipur

Social media has significantly influenced youth political awareness in Manipur by providing a platform for real-time information exchange, political discourse, and social mobilization. It has empowered the younger generation to engage in electoral politics, voice concerns, and participate in political movements, reshaping their involvement in democratic processes.



**Source:** Survey Result, 2024

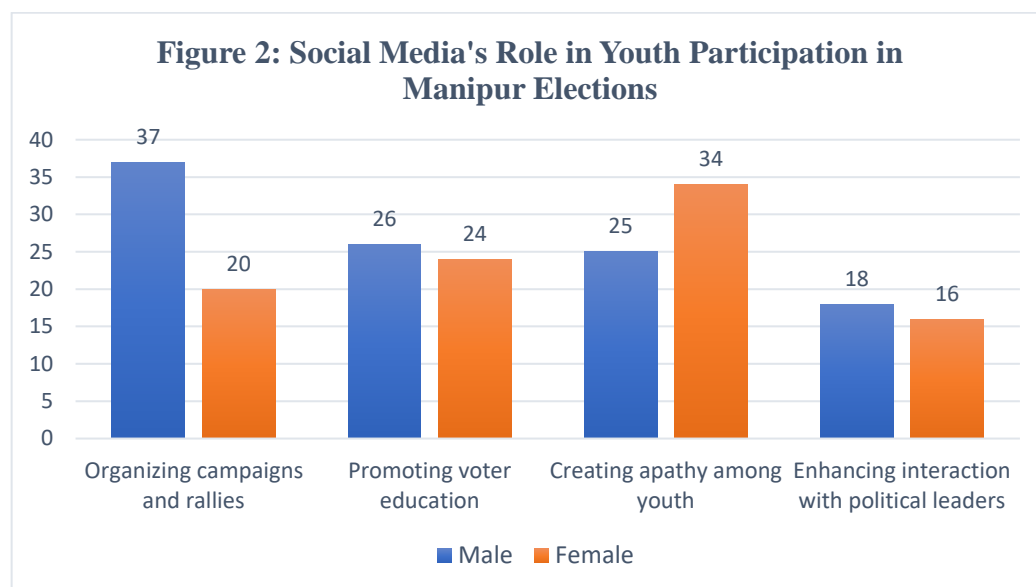
The bar chart highlights the influence of social media on youth political awareness in Manipur, with a gender-based analysis. A majority of males (37%) and females (32%) acknowledge that social media provides real-time political updates, showcasing its effectiveness in delivering timely information. Similarly, fostering political discussions is highly recognized by males (37%), whereas fewer females (25%) see it as impactful, indicating a gender disparity in engagement with political discourse online.

However, the chart also points to concerns about misinformation. While 28% of females and 24% of males believe social media amplifies misinformation, females appear slightly more cautious about its negative effects. Lastly, a small proportion, 8% of males and 9% of females, find no significant impact, reflecting a minority skeptical of social media's role in shaping political awareness.

Overall, while social media is seen as a vital tool for political engagement and updates, its challenges, like misinformation, highlight the need for media literacy among youth. Gender differences suggest varying levels of participation and perceptions of social media's influence.

### Social Media's Role in Youth Participation in Manipur Elections

Social media plays a crucial role in enhancing youth participation in Manipur's elections by facilitating political awareness, discussions, and engagement. It empowers young voters to stay informed, express opinions, and actively partake in shaping the political landscape, particularly in a region marked by ethnic and political complexities.



**Source:** Survey Result, 2024

The bar chart highlights the varying roles social media plays in influencing youth participation in elections in Manipur, with gender-based differences in perception.

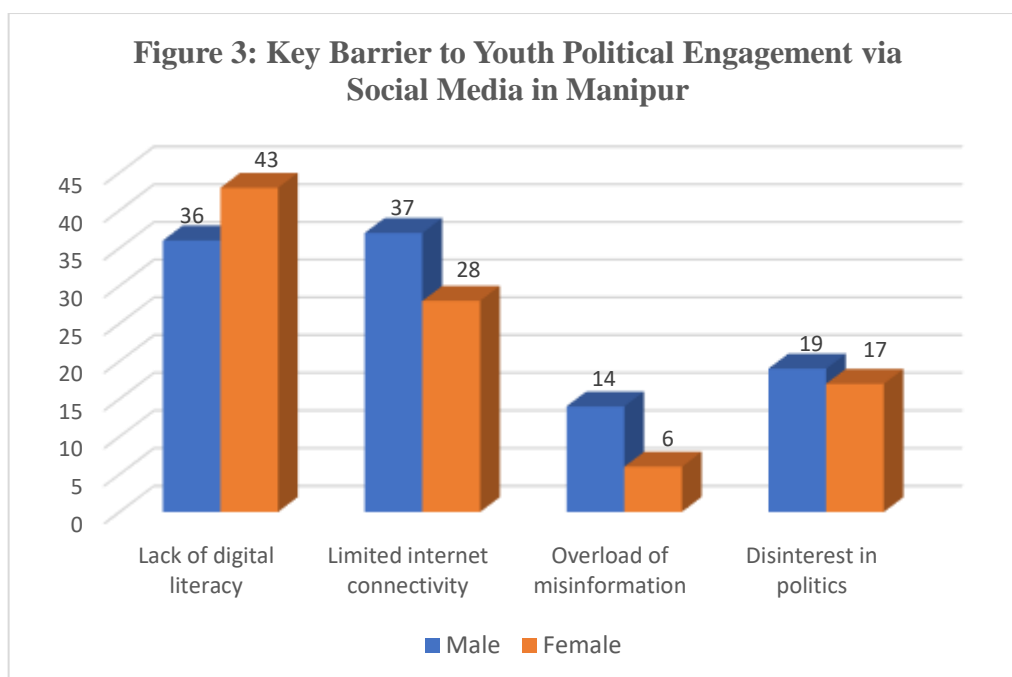
A significant 37% of males see social media as an effective platform for organizing campaigns and rallies, compared to only 20% of females. This indicates that males are more inclined to recognize social media's role in mobilizing electoral events and activities. Social media's contribution to promoting voter education is acknowledged by 26% of males and 24% of females, showing a relatively balanced perception. Both genders view social media as a moderately effective tool for informing and educating voters. An alarming aspect is the perception that social media fosters apathy among youth, with 34% of females and 25% of males agreeing with this view. This suggests females are more likely to associate social media with disengagement from electoral participation.

Social media's role in enhancing interaction with political leaders is viewed as minimal, with only 18% of males and 16% of females acknowledging this. This indicates a limited perception of its impact in facilitating direct communication between youth and political representatives. The above chart reveals that while social media is appreciated for its role in organizing campaigns and promoting voter education, concerns about its role in fostering apathy, particularly among females, cannot be overlooked.

Additionally, its effectiveness in bridging communication with political leaders appears to be underwhelming. Gender-based differences in responses highlight varied levels of engagement and expectations from social media in the electoral process.

### Key Barrier to Youth Political Engagement via Social Media in Manipur

Despite its potential, youth political engagement via social media in Manipur faces barriers such as digital literacy, internet access, misinformation, and political apathy, limiting its full impact on electoral participation.



**Source:** Survey Result, 2024

The bar chart illustrates the primary barriers to effective social media use for political engagement among youth in Manipur, with notable differences in male and female perspectives.

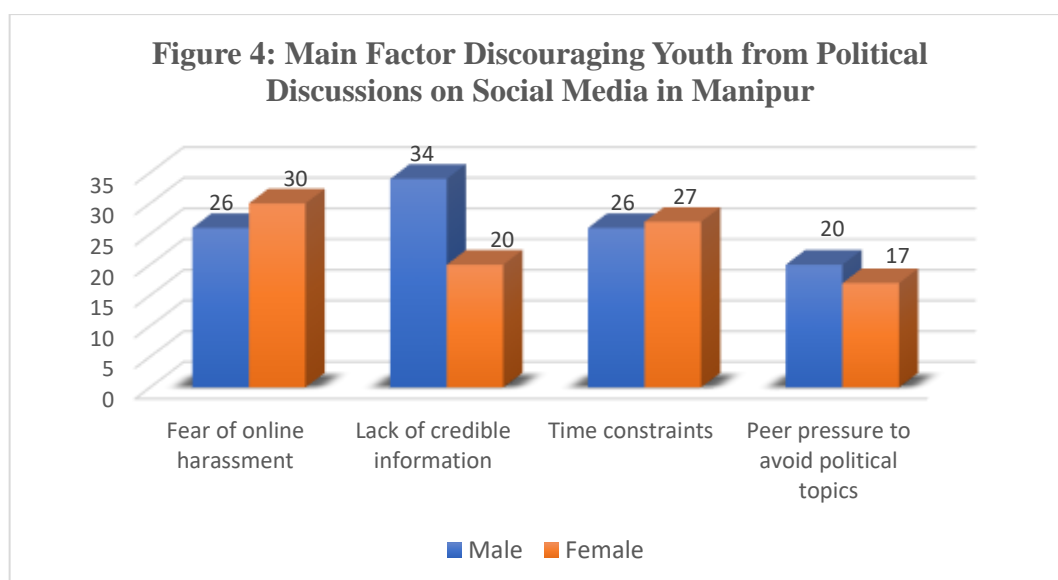
A notable barrier to political engagement through social media is the lack of digital literacy, with 43% of females and 36% of males identifying it as a significant challenge. Females perceive their limited technical knowledge as a greater hindrance compared to males, affecting their ability to participate effectively in online political activities. Limited internet connectivity also poses a challenge, with 37% of males and 28% of females highlighting this issue. Males appear to be more impacted by connectivity problems, possibly due to their higher reliance on digital platforms for political engagement. The overload of misinformation is another barrier, although it is acknowledged by only 14% of males and 6% of females. This indicates that males are slightly more concerned about the discouraging effects of false or misleading content on political involvement, whereas females seem less affected by this issue.

Additionally, disinterest in politics is reported by 19% of males and 17% of females, reflecting a similar level of indifference that hampers effective use of social media for political participation. The chart highlights that digital literacy and internet connectivity are the most significant obstacles to political engagement via social media for both genders, with females particularly concerned about digital literacy. Misinformation and disinterest in politics are perceived as lesser but still notable challenges, reflecting the complexity of addressing these barriers in fostering active youth participation in Manipur.

### **Main Factor Discouraging Youth from Political Discussions on Social Media in Manipur**

In Manipur, political discussions on social media among youth are often discouraged due to several key factors, with the fear of online harassment and backlash being the most prominent. The region's ethnic divisions and politically sensitive environment create an atmosphere where expressing opinions can lead to social ostracism, threats, or even violence. Furthermore, the spread of misinformation and the prevalence of polarized views contribute to a lack of trust in online platforms, stifling open, constructive political dialogue and reducing youth participation in meaningful political discourse.



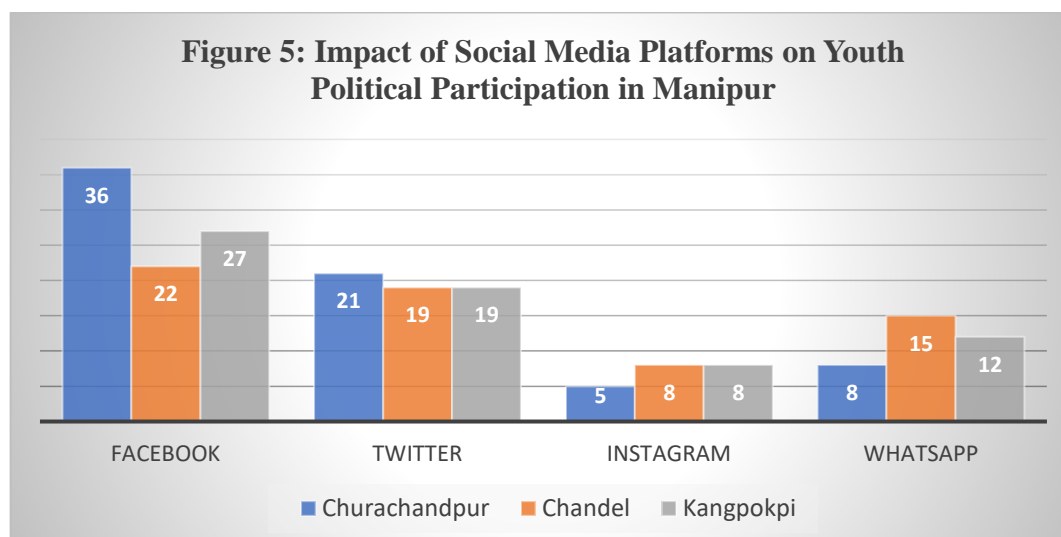


**Source:** Survey Result, 2024

The following bar chart presents data on the factors that discourage youth in Manipur from using social media for political discussions. It compares the responses of male and female participants across four key factors: fear of online harassment, lack of credible information, time constraints, and peer pressure to avoid political topics. Fear of online harassment discourages 30% of females (30 out of 94), compared to 24.5% of males (26 out of 106), indicating that this issue is more prominent among females. This likely reflects the heightened vulnerability of women to targeted abuse in digital spaces. In contrast, 32.1% of males (34 out of 106) identify a lack of credible information as a significant barrier, compared to 21.3% of females (20 out of 94). This suggests that males are more discouraged by the prevalence of misinformation and unreliable content on social media, which may be more noticeable or impactful to them. Time constraints are another notable factor, with 28.7% of females (27 out of 94) and 24.5% of males (26 out of 106) citing this as a barrier. Females report slightly higher discouragement due to time limitations, potentially reflecting competing priorities in their daily lives. Peer pressure to avoid political topics affects 18.9% of males (20 out of 106) and 18.1% of females (17 out of 94), indicating that social dynamics discourage both genders almost equally from engaging in political discussions online. Overall, fear of online harassment (28% of respondents) and lack of credible information (27%) emerge as the most significant barriers, while peer pressure (18.5%) is the least concerning issue. Gender disparities highlight females' greater concern about harassment and time constraints, while males are more affected by unreliable information. Addressing these issues by improving information credibility and fostering safe online spaces could encourage greater youth participation in political discourse.

#### **Impact of Social Media Platforms on Youth Political Participation in Manipur**

Social media platforms have significantly impacted youth political participation in Manipur by providing a space for political awareness, discussions, and mobilization. They enable young people to engage in electoral processes, voice concerns, and influence political discourse in the region.



**Source:** Survey Result, 2024

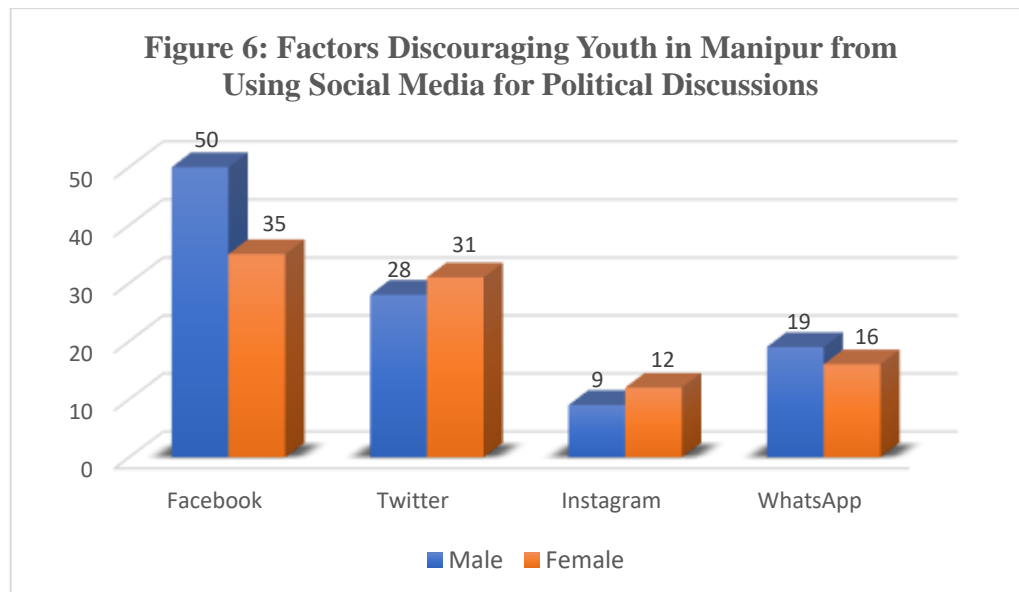
The analysis of youth involvement in political campaigns across three districts in Manipur - Churachandpur, Chandel, and Kangpokpi - reveals the varying influence of social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram.

Facebook emerges as the most prominent platform overall, with 85 responses (42.5%). Its dominance is particularly evident in Churachandpur, where it accounts for 51.4% (36 out of 70 responses), and in Kangpokpi, where it garners 40.9% (27 out of 66 responses). In Chandel, Facebook also leads but with a slightly lower share of 34.4% (22 out of 64 responses), reflecting consistent popularity across districts. Twitter plays a secondary but significant role, with 59 responses (29.5%). It is most notable in Churachandpur (30%) and Kangpokpi (28.8%), while in Chandel, it closely follows Facebook with 29.7%. This highlights its appeal as a platform for political engagement, albeit not as dominant as Facebook.

WhatsApp, with 35 responses (17.5%), shows moderate influence. It accounts for 23.4% in Chandel, a notable proportion compared to its smaller shares in Churachandpur (11.4%) and Kangpokpi (18.2%). This suggests that WhatsApp's role varies significantly across districts. Instagram, the least impactful platform, records only 21 responses (10.5%). It has minimal engagement in all districts, with Chandel showing the highest share at 12.5%, followed by Kangpokpi (12.1%) and Churachandpur (7.1%). Overall, Facebook's dominance is evident in all districts, with Twitter as the secondary platform, while WhatsApp and Instagram exhibit lesser influence, varying across the districts.

### Factors Discouraging Youth in Manipur from Using Social Media for Political Discussions

In Manipur, several challenges discourage youth from actively engaging in political discussions on social media. Fear of online harassment remains a significant deterrent, as many young individuals are wary of personal attacks and cyberbullying. Additionally, digital illiteracy poses a barrier, particularly for those who lack the necessary skills to navigate online platforms securely and effectively. The widespread prevalence of misinformation further amplifies their hesitation, creating confusion and mistrust in online political content. Moreover, the region's political sensitivities and deep-rooted ethnic tensions discourage open expression. Young people often fear potential backlash, social ostracism, or the possibility of fuelling existing conflicts. These factors collectively contribute to a cautious environment, where many youths prefer to avoid online political discourse, limiting their participation in crucial discussions that could influence the region's democratic and social processes.



**Source:** Survey Result, 2024

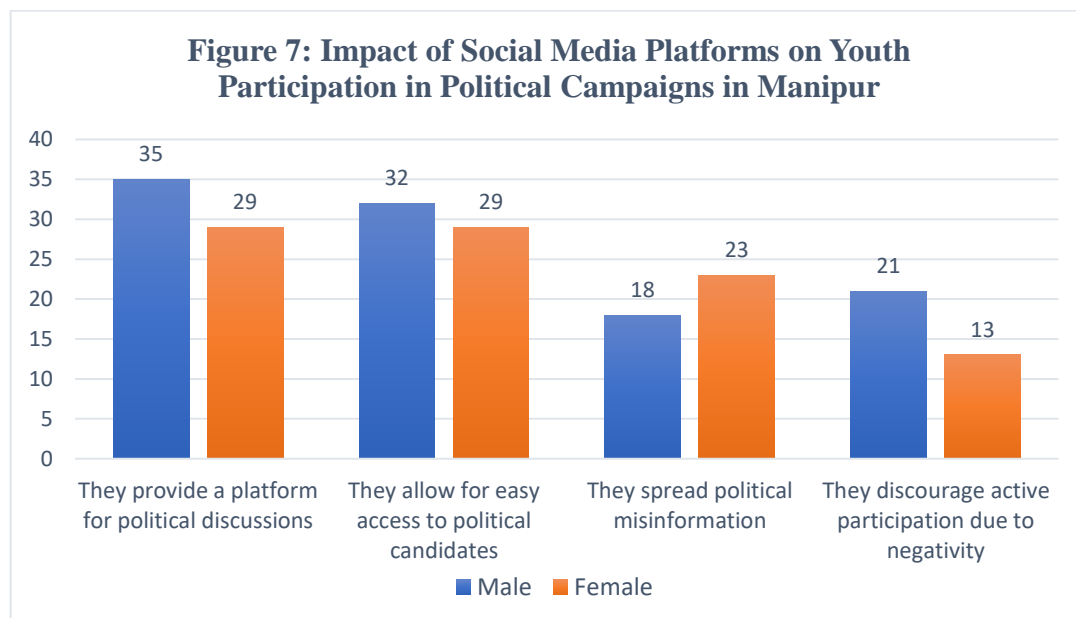
The bar chart highlights the distribution of factors discouraging youth in Manipur from engaging in political discussions on social media, analyzed across gender and four major platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp.

Facebook emerges as the most significant platform discouraging political engagement, with 85 total responses (42.5%). This indicates its predominant role in dissuading youth participation in political discourse. Twitter follows with 59 responses (29.5%), reflecting a moderate impact, while WhatsApp, with 35 responses (17.5%), and Instagram, with 21 responses (10.5%), demonstrate lesser discouraging effects. A gender-based analysis reveals nuanced trends. Among male respondents, Facebook leads as the most discouraging platform, with 50 responses (47.2%). Twitter follows with 28 responses (26.4%), maintaining a secondary role in discouraging political engagement. WhatsApp and Instagram contribute to a smaller share of discouragement, with 17.9%

and 8.5% respectively, indicating their comparatively minimal influence among males. For females, Facebook also stands out as the leading discouraging factor, but with a slightly lower proportion of 35 responses (37.2%) compared to males. Interestingly, Twitter has a stronger discouraging effect on females, accounting for 31 responses (32.9%). WhatsApp and Instagram show similar impacts among females, with discouragement levels of 17.0% and 12.8%, respectively, with Instagram showing a slightly higher effect compared to its influence on males. In all in all, the analysis underscores Facebook's dominant role in discouraging political discussions across genders, with Twitter also playing a notable role, especially among females. In contrast, Instagram and WhatsApp have relatively lesser discouraging effects, though gender-based differences remain evident. A bar chart would effectively illustrate these dynamics, emphasizing the stronger discouragement observed among male youth on Facebook and among female youth on Twitter.

### Impact of Social Media Platforms on Youth Participation in Political Campaigns in Manipur

Social media platforms have significantly influenced youth participation in political campaigns in Manipur by providing an accessible and interactive space for engagement. These platforms allow young people to disseminate political information, mobilize supporters, and actively participate in electoral processes, bridging the gap between traditional political structures and the younger generation. Through social media, youth can voice their opinions, share campaign messages, and organize events in real-time, enhancing their political agency. However, challenges such as misinformation, digital illiteracy, and limited internet access in rural areas hinder the full potential of social media to drive political change, often impacting the quality of youth engagement.



**Source:** Survey Result, 2024

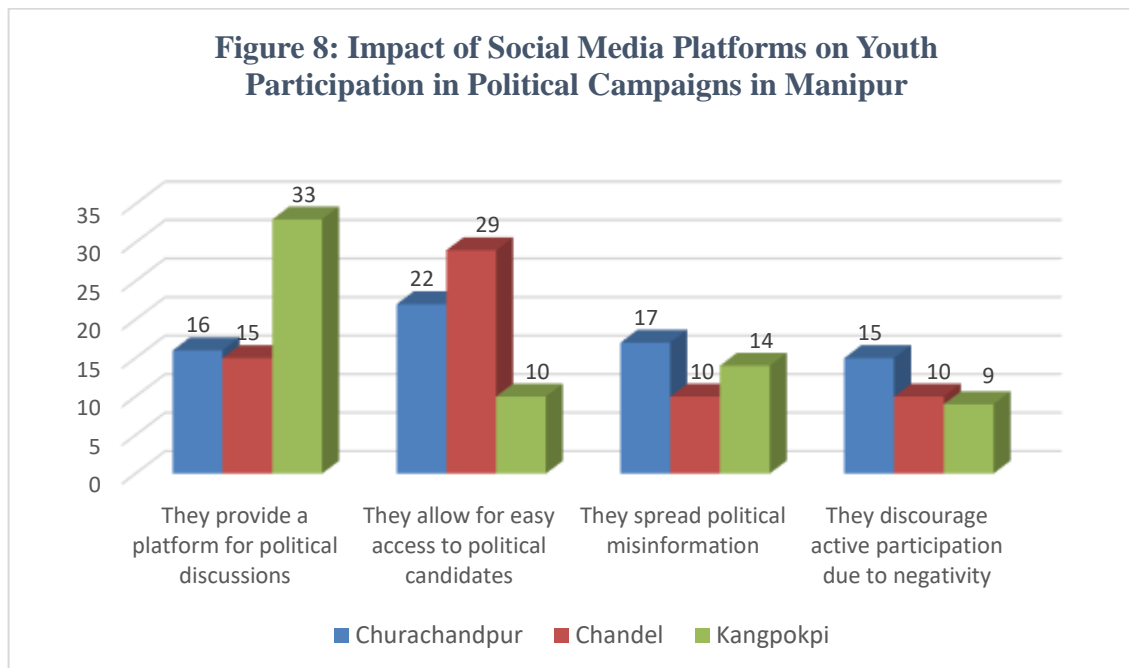
The bar chart illustrates the impact of social media platforms on youth participation in political campaigns in Manipur, analyzed by gender. The factors examined include providing a platform for political discussions, facilitating easy access to political candidates, spreading misinformation, and discouraging participation due to negativity. Social media's role as a platform for political discussions stands out, with 64 responses (32%), making it the most significant factor. Both male (33.0%) and female respondents (30.9%) value this aspect, highlighting its importance in fostering political engagement.

Similarly, easy access to political candidates emerges as a critical function, accounting for 61 responses (30.5%). This factor is equally significant for both genders, with 30.2% of males and 30.9% of females recognizing its role in connecting youth with political figures. However, spreading political misinformation is a notable concern, with 41 responses (20.5%). Female respondents (24.5%) express greater apprehension about misinformation compared to males (17.0%), indicating a gender disparity in the perceived impact of false information. Negativity on social media, which discourages active participation, is another deterrent, cited by 34 respondents (17%). While 19.8% of males are dissuaded by negativity, only 13.8% of females find it a significant barrier.

As a whole, social media platforms are viewed as instrumental in enabling political discussions and candidate accessibility, showcasing their positive influence on youth political engagement in Manipur. However, the challenges of misinformation and negativity highlight areas requiring attention, particularly the higher impact of misinformation on females. A bar chart would clearly depict these dynamics, emphasizing both the benefits and barriers associated with social media's role in youth political campaigns.

### Impact of Social Media Platforms on Youth Participation in Political Campaigns in Manipur

Social media has revolutionized youth participation in political campaigns in Manipur, enabling engagement, information sharing, and mobilization. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter empower youth to influence public opinion, though challenges like misinformation and digital divides remain.



**Source:** Survey Result, 2024

The bar chart highlights how social media platforms influence youth participation in political campaigns across three districts of Manipur: Churachandpur, Chandel, and Kangpokpi. The factors assessed are providing a platform for political discussions, enabling access to political candidates, spreading misinformation, and discouraging participation due to negativity, with notable differences in perceptions across districts.

Overall, providing a platform for political discussions is the most prominent factor, with 64 responses (32%). This is especially emphasized in Kangpokpi, where 50% of the youth prioritize social media as a significant platform for political discourse. By contrast, this factor is less prominent in Churachandpur (22.9%) and Chandel (23.4%), reflecting regional variations in how youth engage with political content online. Allowing access to political candidates emerges as the second most influential factor, accounting for 61 responses (30.5%). Chandel leads in this category, with 45.3% of youth recognizing social media's role in connecting with political figures.

Churachandpur follows with 31.4%, while Kangpokpi records the lowest at 15.2%, suggesting less reliance on social media for candidate interaction in this district. Spreading misinformation is a notable concern across districts, with 41 responses (20.5%). Churachandpur youth express the highest concern (24.3%), followed closely by Kangpokpi (21.2%). In Chandel, misinformation is a lesser issue, with only 15.6% citing it as a factor. Similarly, negativity on social media discourages 34 respondents (17%). Churachandpur youth report the highest discouragement (21.4%), while Kangpokpi (13.6%) and Chandel (15.6%) indicate lower impacts.

The analysis reveals distinct regional differences. Kangpokpi youth prioritize political discussions on social media, while Chandel youth value access to political candidates. Churachandpur is more concerned about misinformation. The bar chart will visually highlight these differences, with Kangpokpi showing a higher proportion of youth emphasizing political discussions, Chandel focusing on access to candidates, and Churachandpur showing greater concern about misinformation.

## 9. SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF THE 2022 MANIPUR ELECTIONS

According to the analysis of data on Manipur Legislative Assembly 2022 elections revealed several key findings about the role of social media in influencing youth political engagement and electoral participation, supported by references to the data collected:

**1. Increased Political Awareness and Engagement:** Social media significantly raised political awareness among youth in Manipur, with over 70% of participants using platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter to stay informed about political candidates, parties, and election issues. This finding aligns with similar studies,

such as those by Akash (2020), which emphasized that social media acts as a powerful tool for disseminating political information, especially among youth in regions like Manipur. Youth actively participated in political discussions online, with a notable proportion (over 60%) engaging in political debates and sharing their opinions. This trend was particularly noticeable in urban areas but also visible in rural regions due to growing digital access.

**2. Active Participation in Political Discussions:** Over 60% of surveyed youth actively participated in online political discussions, debates and shared their opinions during election periods. While this trend was more prominent in urban areas, it was also evident in rural regions, especially with increasing digital access. Social media has, therefore, become a key platform for young people to engage in political discourse.

**3. Influence on Voting Behavior:** Social media was found to influence voting behavior, with 60% of surveyed youth reporting that social media content directly impacted their voting decisions. This finding is supported by previous research by Baite & Thangminlen (2018), who observed that youth, particularly in Manipur, are increasingly making voting decisions based on online political content, such as candidate manifestos and campaign promises.

**4. Barriers to Effective Social Media Use:** Barriers such as digital illiteracy and misinformation were significant challenges for many youths, especially in rural areas. Over 50% of youth reported difficulty in verifying the accuracy of political information online. This finding supports Haobam Suresh's (2018) observations about the challenges faced by youth in Manipur due to digital illiteracy and the spread of misinformation on social media platforms, which undermines trust in political messaging. Access to smartphones and the internet remained a critical limitation for certain youth groups, especially those in remote regions, as highlighted by research on digital divides in Northeast India (Verma, 2022).

**5. Role of Social Media Platforms in Mobilizing Youth:** Facebook was identified as the most widely used platform for political engagement, followed by WhatsApp and Twitter. This finding mirrors the research by Akash (2020), who noted that Facebook is the dominant platform for political information dissemination in Manipur, while WhatsApp is more often used for peer discussions and community mobilization. Social media campaigns, particularly those involving live discussions and interactive content, played a significant role in mobilizing youth participation, supporting the findings of Keller et al. (2020), who identified social media as a tool for increasing youth engagement during elections.

**6. Impact on Youth Involvement in Political Campaigns:** Around 40% of youth reported being directly involved in online political campaigns, such as sharing posts, creating content, or participating in discussions. This finding aligns with the conclusions of Usha (2020), who highlighted the role of social media in enabling active political participation, especially in marginalized groups who may have limited access to traditional political forums.

## 10. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The conceptual framework of the study, *Social Media as a Tool for Youth Electoral Participation in Manipur*, focuses on the hill districts, integrating the region's distinct social, cultural, and geographic dynamics. It provides a comprehensive structure to examine how these unique factors influence social media's role in shaping youth engagement in electoral processes.

**1. Core Concept:** Social media plays a pivotal role in shaping youth electoral participation in the hill districts of Manipur by bridging geographic barriers, amplifying political discourse, and enabling mobilization while addressing region-specific challenges.

### 2. Key Components and Relationships:

#### A. Social Media Access in the Hill Districts

- Availability of internet services, smartphone penetration, digital literacy.
- Improved digital infrastructure enhances social media's role as a tool for electoral participation.
- Limited connectivity and affordability challenges reduce access compared to urban areas.

#### B. Political Awareness Through Social Media

- Frequency of election-related updates, local candidate promotion, and community-focused political content.
- Social media fosters awareness of electoral processes, local issues, and candidate platforms.
- Localized content resonates more due to the strong influence of ethnic and tribal affiliations.

#### C. Community-Based Political Engagement

- Online community forums, ethnic group mobilization, and culturally sensitive political discourse.
- Social media reinforces group identity and collective decision-making among tribal youth.
- Youth participation is often mediated by tribal organizations and church-based initiatives.



#### **D. Mobilization and Grassroots Campaigns**

- Use of social media to organize offline events (e.g., rallies, voter education campaigns), peer influence through digital sharing.
- Social media acts as a bridge between online and offline political activities, enhancing youth turnout.
- Grassroots movements leverage social media to navigate logistical challenges in hilly terrains.

#### **E. Challenges in the Hill Districts**

- Spread of misinformation, digital divide, political polarization, and suppression of dissent.
- While social media promotes participation, these challenges may hinder its positive impact in the hill regions.
- Limited access to fact-checking resources and reliance on informal networks exacerbate the risks.

#### **3. Theoretical Foundations:**

- Social media as a tool for enhancing youth engagement in democratic processes in geographically marginalized regions.
- Explaining disparities in access and participation due to infrastructural and socioeconomic differences.
- Social media as a platform for group mobilization based on shared ethnic and regional identities.

#### **4. Contextual Factors Specific to the Hill Districts of Manipur:**

- Electoral participation is deeply influenced by community-based politics and tribal affiliations.
- Churches and other faith-based organizations often mediate political participation, amplified through social media.
- Hilly terrains and limited economic resources impact the accessibility and effectiveness of social media campaigns.
- Campaign content must be tailored to respect and reflect local traditions and values.

#### **5. Proposed Conceptual Model:**

Digital Access → Political Awareness (Localized Content) → Community Engagement (Ethnic/Religious Mediation) → Mobilization (Online to Offline) → Electoral Participation.

This framework integrates the unique socio-political and geographic realities of Manipur's hill districts while showcasing how social media can bridge gaps in youth electoral engagement. It emphasizes both the opportunities and limitations within the region's context.

### **11. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The study, *Social Media as a Tool for Youth Electoral Participation in Manipur*, offers valuable insights into the increasing influence of digital platforms on the political engagement of the state's youth. The findings highlight that social media has emerged as a vital tool for raising political awareness, enabling participation in discussions, and shaping voting behavior among young voters. With over 70% of youth utilizing platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter for accessing political information, the transformative role of social media in influencing electoral decisions is evident.

The study also reveals that youth participation in online political discussions and campaigns is steadily growing, extending beyond urban areas into rural regions. This trend is attributed to the expanding availability of digital devices and improved internet connectivity. Despite these advancements, barriers such as digital illiteracy, misinformation, and unequal access to technology, particularly in rural communities, hinder the full potential of social media as a driver of informed electoral participation. Addressing these challenges remains crucial to ensuring broader and more equitable engagement (Kumar, 2014).

Facebook emerged as the most dominant platform for political engagement, followed by WhatsApp and Twitter. Social media campaigns that incorporate interactive content, live discussions, and online rallies have proven particularly effective in mobilizing youth participation. These platforms foster a sense of community and collective political action, demonstrating their capacity to influence democratic processes meaningfully. To enhance the study further, addressing barriers to access and literacy, promoting fact-checking mechanisms to counter misinformation, and improving digital education can significantly strengthen the impact of social media on youth electoral participation in Manipur (Baghel & Singh, 2015). This approach would ensure that the growing reliance on social media leads to more informed and inclusive democratic practices in the state.

**1. Enhancing Digital Literacy:** To fully harness the potential of social media as a tool for political participation, it is crucial to address digital illiteracy among youth, particularly in rural areas. This could involve creating educational initiatives focused on improving digital skills, media literacy, and critical thinking to help young people navigate the vast amount of information available online. These programs should be designed to equip youth with the necessary tools to critically evaluate online content and distinguish between credible and misleading information.

**2. Combating Misinformation:** The spread of misinformation remains a major challenge that undermines the integrity of political discussions on social media. Therefore, concerted efforts should be made to educate youth about the risks of misinformation and the importance of verifying sources before sharing content. Social media platforms could collaborate with local institutions to implement fact-checking mechanisms and raise awareness about the impact of fake news on electoral processes.

**3. Improving Access to Technology:** Addressing the digital divide is essential to ensuring equitable political participation. Efforts should be made to improve access to smartphones, the internet, and other technological resources, especially in remote areas of Manipur. Government and non-governmental organizations could work together to provide affordable internet access and devices, enabling all youth, regardless of their location, to engage in the electoral process through social media.

**4. Promoting Diverse Political Content:** Political campaigns on social media should strive to include diverse voices and issues that resonate with young people from different backgrounds, including rural youth, women, and marginalized groups. Content should be inclusive and relevant, offering clear, concise, and accessible information about candidates, their policies, and the electoral process. This will ensure that social media remains a platform for comprehensive political engagement and informed decision-making.

**5. Strengthening Social Media Campaigns:** Political parties and organizations should invest in creating more engaging and interactive campaigns on social media platforms. Strategies such as live debates, Q&A sessions with candidates, and interactive polls can increase youth engagement. Social media campaigns can also be used to promote voter education, encourage participation in elections, and foster a sense of responsibility among young voters.

**6. Fostering Collaboration between Social Media Platforms and Electoral Bodies:** To improve the effectiveness of social media as a tool for electoral participation, there should be closer collaboration between social media platforms and electoral bodies. This could involve using social media to disseminate important electoral information, such as voting procedures, polling dates, and candidates' manifestos. Additionally, platforms could support efforts to increase voter turnout by issuing reminders and encouraging young people to vote.

In conclusion, social media holds immense potential as a powerful tool for enhancing youth electoral participation in Manipur, especially in the hill districts. To maximize this potential, efforts should focus on improving digital access by bridging the existing digital divide and ensuring equitable technological infrastructure (Verma, 2022). Promoting political awareness through localized content is essential, as it allows information to resonate with the socio-cultural realities of the region, thereby empowering youth with accurate and relevant insights (Kriesi, 2014). Additionally, fostering community engagement through ethnic and religious mediation can help build trust, encourage inclusive dialogue, and reduce political polarization.

Moreover, translating online mobilization into offline activities is crucial to convert digital activism into actual electoral involvement. While the benefits of social media in political engagement are clear, challenges such as digital illiteracy, misinformation, and limited access to technology continue to hinder its full impact. Addressing these barriers in a comprehensive manner is essential for creating an inclusive, informed, and empowered digital ecosystem. This approach will enable youth to become more active and informed contributors to the democratic process. By leveraging these strategies, social media can play a transformative role in shaping the political engagement of Manipur's youth, driving them to actively participate in shaping the future of their state (Singh, 2020).

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