

## **IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON POLITICAL POLARIZATION IN INDIA: A FOCUS ON RELIGIOUS VIEWS**

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### ***Abstract***

Particularly with regard to Indian religious views, study on the impact of social media on political polarisation is essential. On social media platforms, the convergence of political and religious views shapes people's beliefs and actions. A multitude of factors impact the degree and type of polarisation that exists in online public affairs. These elements are regarded as social media-induced polarising factors. The way that social media contributes to political polarisation helps us comprehend how extremism arises, how misinformation spreads, and how religiously motivated group mindsets are formed. In the diverse and multi religious country of India, where social and political contexts are intricately linked to religious identity, this is crucial.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have played a significant role in the dissemination of both united and divided narratives surrounding religious views.

People's perceptions of political parties are influenced by social media, particularly when particular groups are perceived as endorsing particular religions. Online representations of religious majorities, minorities, and conflicts within communities have the power to influence political beliefs. False or misleading information can exacerbate tensions and distort reality since it frequently goes viral.

People can utilize social media more skilfully if they are taught to spot false information and comprehend the effects of biased content. A structured questionnaire was disseminated via Google Forms to a sample of 500 participants, who were selected using snowball sampling and included college students, working professionals, and urban dwellers. The study uses a quantitative descriptive research approach. The poll investigates how misinformation, echo chambers, and algorithms exacerbate political and religious divisions and fuel polarisation. According to research, younger people (those between the ages of 18 and 24) mostly use social media for enjoyment, but they are also greatly impacted by its content. Most respondents believe social media exacerbates religious and political polarisation, especially those from Muslim and Hindu populations. When it came to combating religious misinformation, platforms were criticised for their reactive strategies, inconsistent policy enforcement, and lack of regional sensitivity. Although there have been some achievements with fact-checking partnerships and community reporting systems, these initiatives are still insufficient.

In order to lessen the consequences of polarisation brought on by social media, the study emphasises the urgent need for proactive and transparent policies, critical thinking instruction, and community-driven projects. It comes to the conclusion that tackling these issues is essential to creating a more knowledgeable and inclusive digital environment in India.

Critical thinking abilities can be developed through workshops, campaigns, and educational initiatives. Programs that promote constructive intergroup communication can reduce polarisation. Discussion boards can foster collaboration and understanding across different religious groupings.

**Keywords- Social media polarization, Social media platform, Politics, Religious politics, Cyber Criminology**

## **Introduction**

Social media, as used in virtual communities and networks, refers to online platforms and technology that facilitate the creation, sharing, and exchange of information, ideas, and material. These platforms allow users to connect and communicate in real time while sharing personal experiences, as well as interact with a range of media, such as text, images, videos, and audio. [1].

The word "political polarisation" refers to the growing division of political ideas and opinions into diametrically opposing groups, often with drastic repercussions for each side. More radical or opposing opinions are typically held by more polarised individuals or political parties, which makes public discourse less focused on compromise and more prone to conflict. [2].

aims to determine how social media sites, particularly those that serve religious communities, contribute to the escalation of political divisions in India. The research will examine how political beliefs and actions are influenced by the use and propagation of religious concepts on social media sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter [3].

With an emphasis on religious perspectives, the topic "Impact of Social Media on Political Polarisation in India: A Focus on Religious Views" provides a comprehensive examination of how social media intensifies political polarisation in India. The discussion includes an examination of algorithms and echo chambers, the spread of misleading information, and the role of identity politics [4].

The subject looks at the subtle ways that online platforms highlight religious differences, causing political divisions and often increasing conflict and tension. It also explores how social media is impacting political discourse and decision-making, as well as how it is influencing public opinion on religious matters.

Previous studies have examined the effects of contacts between religious groups on social media during significant events on polarisation [5]. In 2020, researchers examined data from about 700,000 Indian Twitter users who were talking about COVID-19. Based on the content of their tweets, they created a new method to gauge how strongly people adhere to the ideals of their organisation [6].

According to the study, contacts between various groups at social and political gatherings tend to lessen polarisation, however this effect is less pronounced for those who already strongly hold the views of their group [7]. However, these contacts frequently exacerbate polarisation at communal (religion-based) activities, leading individuals to adhere more closely to the opinions of their group.

The study also examined the feelings and subjects covered by various religious groups, demonstrating that the impact of polarisation varies depending on the kind of incident. This study advances our knowledge of how social media interactions between groups impact polarisation, particularly during religious, political, and social events [7].

## **Methodology**

### **Design of Research**

In order to investigate We wanted to know whether political polarisation is occurring on social media and what people think about it, this study used a quantitative descriptive design. A Google Forms-distributed online survey was used for the investigation.

### **The population and the sample**

The survey's target population was college students, working professionals, city dwellers, The poll received responses from 500 participants in total. The sample technique that was employed was snowball sampling and social media networks were used to find participants.

### **Instrument for Surveys**

A Google Forms-hosted structured questionnaire was created. The questionnaire was created to collect information on the impact of social media on political polarization in India and included 12 of questions such as multiple-choice, open-ended. Prior to dissemination, the validity and clarity of the questionnaire were examined.

### **Methodology for Gathering Data**

The duration of data collection was two months. Potential participants received the link to the Google Form by Facebook, WhatsApp, email, etc. The goal of the study was explained to the participants, and they received guarantees that their answers would remain anonymous and confidential.

### **Moral Aspects to Take into Account**

Prior to the survey being administered, participants gave their informed consent. They were told that they may stop participating at any time and that it was entirely optional. To ensure anonymity, no personally identifiable information was gathered.

### **Analysis of Data**

The information gathered from Google Forms was exported for analysis by Microsoft Excel. The replies were compiled using descriptive statistics including mean values, percentages, and frequencies.

## Result and Discussion

The survey's objectives were to assess how well social media platforms mitigate the dissemination of false information about religion and their capacity to assist users in differentiating between genuine and untrustworthy sources. The inquiry "Impact of Social Media on Political Polarisation in India: A Focus on Religious Views" investigates the ways in which social media shapes religious and political divides. Due to the skewed age group replies (most respondents were between the ages of 16 and 24), the results will represent the opinions of younger, tech-savvy people who use social media more frequently and are probably exposed to false information and algorithm-driven content. This approach can provide insights on how social media influences religious harmony, polarises people, and influences laws governing digital platforms. Youth are also made more conscious of the consequences of their internet conduct on society.

The gender question adds depth to analyzing social media's impact on political polarization in India, especially regarding religious views. It helps capture diverse perspectives, highlights intersectionality between gender and religion, and uncovers differences in engagement patterns. Including "Prefer not to say" ensures inclusivity and respects privacy. By identifying targeted narratives, collecting a range of religious viewpoints, and emphasising community-specific effects, the religion question aids in the analysis of how social media contributes to political polarisation. In order to approach this complicated subject with inclusion and sensitivity, choices like "Other" and "Prefer not to say" should be included. By identifying trends in how frequently users interact with or are impacted by religious and political narratives, the social media usage question aids in establishing a connection between usage frequency and exposure to divisive content.

By emphasising user choices, audience demographics, and content dynamics, the platform question helps analyse the dissemination of political and religious narratives and identifies the social media platforms that fuel polarisation. The inquiry into the main reason for social media use offers important information about how user intent contributes to political polarisation with respect to religious beliefs. It reveals different degrees of exposure to and involvement with polarising content by differentiating people who are using it for news, political conversations, amusement, or networking. While some people may participate passively, those who use social media for political conversations are probably more engaged in disseminating or consuming divisive messages. This distinction aids in the analysis of how particular user goals shape the dynamics of political and religious content on social media and its overall effect on polarisation [8].

The inquiry regarding how social media affects religious beliefs aids in determining how much social media influences people's beliefs and sheds light on how it contributes to political polarisation. It draws attention to differing degrees of influence, from those who firmly agree to those who disagree, making it easier to see how social media information either supports or contradicts political and religious narratives. This knowledge is essential for examining how social media either exacerbates or lessens political and religious divisions in India. The inquiry aids in evaluating how social media is thought to exacerbate religiously motivated political polarisation. While others who disagree might regard social media as a forum for expression without escalating polarisation, the majority of respondents who agreed suggest that it is perceived as widening religious gaps. It offers important insights into how social media can

either exacerbate or lessen political and religious tensions in India. The inquiry demonstrates how people's opinions on politics and religion are influenced by social media. People who are under pressure to alter their opinions emphasise how social media shapes opinions, whilst others who are not may be less affected. The ambiguity expressed by the "Not Sure" answers reflects the nuanced influence of social media on polarisation.

When asked if social media exacerbates religious polarisation, a sizable percentage of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, indicating that many respondents think it does. This raises questions about how echo chambers and targeted information on social media may exacerbate religious divisions. While the indifferent replies show a lack of clarity on the platform's role in polarisation, those who disagree might see social media as a place for free expression without widening gaps. In general, the issue reveals differing opinions about how social media affects religious polarisation in India.

The topic draws attention to the widespread belief that social media algorithms fuel political and religious polarisation by rewarding content that supports pre-existing opinions. Neutral answers indicate a lack of clarity regarding the algorithms' effects, while those who disagree may downplay or fail to acknowledge their significance. This clarifies how political and religious divisions are shaped by algorithms.

The paper on Individualised Collective Action and Digital Media focuses on how digital platforms have changed social and political participation from customised collective actions to more traditional group-based actions. It emphasises how people can now engage in causes based on their own values—such as human rights, environmental preservation, and economic justice—instead of group identities thanks to digital media. The paper also highlights the need for more investigation into how these changes may affect social movements in the digital era. The study of political polarisation in India, on the other hand, focuses on examining the impact of social media on political divisions. The study uses a quantitative descriptive design to collect data on the perceived influence of social media on political polarisation by administering an online questionnaire to 500 participants, most of whom are working professionals and college students [9]. Snowball sampling is part of the process, which also guarantees participant anonymity. Descriptive statistics such as mean, percentages, and frequencies are used to analyse the data. The research study gathers empirical data to investigate public perceptions of political polarisation in India, while the paper examines theoretical shifts in collective action and the impact of digital media [10].

According to the results, there is broad agreement that these platforms' present actions are mainly insufficient. The platforms were criticised by many respondents for their reactive strategy, which frequently involves taking action only after damaging content has gone viral. The sheer amount of false information and the uneven application of regulations were seen as major problems. Also mentioned were technological limits, especially with regard to AI algorithms that have trouble identifying subtle or regionally unique religious disinformation.

Platforms have also been charged with biased enforcement, promoting or stifling particular religious narratives, and lacking transparency in their moderation procedures, all of which have increased user mistrust.

Platforms have had some success with community reporting tools and partnerships with independent fact-checking groups, but these initiatives are frequently misused or underutilised.

Religion	Percentage of People	Felt influenced	Felt social media promote polarization
Hinduism	50.21%	agree	Strongly agree
Islam	26.59%	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
Christianity	11.4%	neutral	agree
Other	11.8%	disagree	neutral

Although there are educational initiatives to assist consumers in recognising reliable information, they are deemed inadequate. Additionally, respondents identified notable regional and cultural disparities, pointing out that platforms do not adequately reflect the distinct religious dynamics found in various locales. Many people think that because platforms value interaction and ad income more than accuracy, business reasons impede effective action against disinformation [13].

Overall, the poll emphasises the need for more proactive, transparent, and regionally specific initiatives, even though some gains are highlighted. For social media platforms to successfully counteract religious misinformation and promote user trust, they must prioritise comprehensive methods over reactive ones.

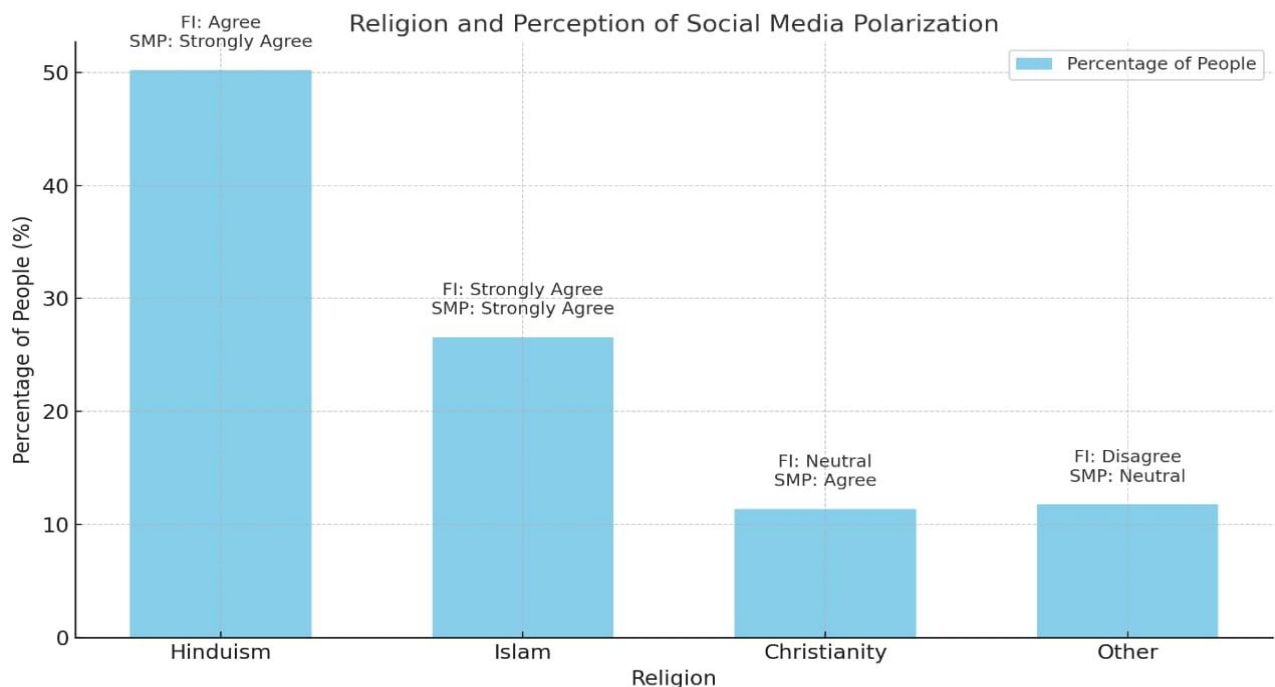


Fig.1.1 Religion and perception chart of social media polarization

Percentage of people	Social media use	Age group	Most use platform
79.7%	daily	18-24	Instagram
9.8%	Several times a week	16-18	Youtube
10.5%	weekly	Above 34	Twitter (X)

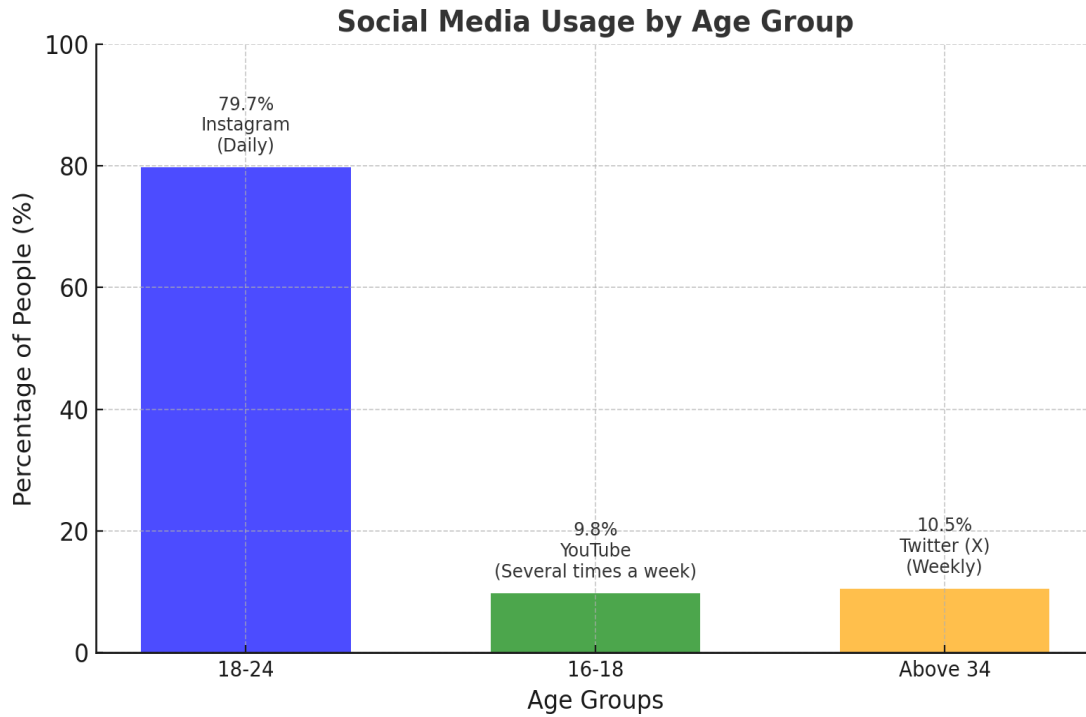


Fig.1.2. Social media usage by age group

No. of people	purpose	pressure
34.9%	entertainment	yes
20.6%	News and update	Not sure
28.6%	Social interaction	no
15.9%	others	neutral

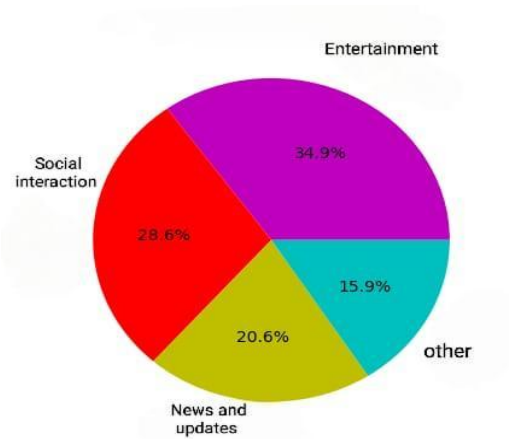


Fig.1.3. Social media usage purpose and pressure

According to poll replies, the majority of participants (34.9%) cite amusement as their main reason for using social media. While 28.6% use it for social connection, a lesser percentage (20.6%) utilises it for news and updates. Notably, respondents did not emphasise political discourse or professional networking as important goals. The responses differed when questioned if they had ever felt under pressure to alter their opinions after interacting with social media content. While 28.6% of respondents claimed not to feel pressure, the majority (34.9%) acknowledged feeling such pressure. 20.6%, however, were unclear about how social media influenced their opinions. These results demonstrate how entertainment dominates social media use and imply that although social media can shape opinions, not all users recognise or experience this influence.

### **Conclusion**

The study emphasises how social media has a significant impact on political polarisation in India, especially when it comes to religious beliefs. Despite providing forums for dialogue and information sharing, social media platforms have grown to be important sources of false information, skewed narratives, and polarisation. According to the study results, most users think social media companies are not doing enough to stop the spread of misleading information about religion, which is causing political tensions to widen. The problem is made worse by a reactive strategy, uneven policy enforcement, and technological constraints that make it difficult to spot subtle religious disinformation.

Political views are greatly influenced by religious factors, and social media sites like Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter exacerbate these differences by using algorithms and echo chambers.

According to the findings, a sizable majority of respondents agreed that social media platforms encourage polarisation, with Hindu and Muslim respondents feeling the greatest influence of social media on their political and religious beliefs. Additionally, the majority of users—especially those in the younger age range of 18 to 24—use social media on a daily basis, mostly for enjoyment, but many of them also mentioned feeling under pressure or influenced by the material they were exposed to.

Even though some programs, including fact-checking partnerships and community reporting tools, have promise, their efficacy is constrained by underuse, abuse, and cultural differences. To combat false information and promote user trust, more proactive, open, and region-specific policies are desperately needed.

Stricter regulations, community involvement initiatives, and education about critical thinking and the negative effects of biased content could all help lessen the effects of social media-induced political polarisation. This study emphasises how critical it is to address these issues in order to build a more knowledgeable and integrated digital environment in India.



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