



THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL MEDIA ON GOVERNANCE AND ELECTIONS IN INDIA - A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Digital media has brought up both possibilities and difficulties in India's elections and government. The Unified Payment Interface, MyGov, DigiLocker, and Digital India are just a few of the initiatives that have increased accountability, openness, and public participation. By facilitating direct contact, micro-targeting and advanced voter mobilization techniques, these platforms have also changed the nature of political campaigns. But the spread of deep fakes, misinformation, and disinformation threatens public confidence and election integrity while escalating social division. Cyber security, data privacy, and digital divisions all run the danger of excluding people and eroding democratic principles. Multi-stakeholder cooperation, stronger legal frameworks, and more digital literacy are required to address these problems. While preserving democratic ideals, this will assist in utilizing digital media to its fullest extent.

Key-words: Digital India, Voter, Media, Democratic, Public Participation

1.1 Introduction:

India's relationships with information, services, and political processes have altered dramatically as a result of its shift to the digital age. The introduction of print media in the late 18th century marked the beginning of the nation's mass media history. Radio, film, and television broadcasting all gained popularity in the 20th century. The liberalization of the media sector and the emergence of private media firms in the 1990s, which brought 24-hour news and entertainment channels via satellite television, significantly altered the media landscape after independence.¹

With the quick development of social media and the internet in the twenty-first century, India's media landscape saw a dramatic change. This change was made possible by government programs including INDONET, NICNET, and ERNET in the 1980s. Internet usage was greatly encouraged by the economic changes of 1991. A distinct developmental trajectory is shown by India's quick shift from traditional mass media to a mobile-first digital environment. India has mostly jumped ahead of Western democracies in terms of widespread mobile-first internet usage, which has caused a slower rate of societal and legal adaption. Compared to nations with a longer period of digital acclimatization, this rapid digital advancement without adequate foundational adaptation may make the populace more vulnerable to the negative effects of digital media, such as disinformation and privacy breaches, posing challenges for governance and electoral integrity.²

1.2 Present Condition of Digital Media Penetration and User Demographics

The digital landscape in India is dynamic and growing quickly. An estimated 622 million people used the internet in the previous month as of 2020, and estimates suggest that by 2025, there would be over 900 million internet users. More current statistics from 2025 shows that 491 million people have social media profiles, or 33.7% of the population, while 806 million people utilize the internet, or 55.3% of the overall population.³

- a) **Urban-Rural Dynamics:** India's internet usage has moved from urban to rural regions; in 2020, rural areas had a 13% increase in usage, while urban areas saw a 4% increase. Nonetheless, there is still a sizable digital gap, with

¹ *History of Mass media from National Institute of Mass Communication New Delhi*. www.nimc-india.com. <https://www.nimc-india.com/history-mass-media-india.html>

² *Internet Adoption in India*. (2021). https://images.assettype.com/afaqs/2021-06/b9a3220f-ae2f-43db-a0b4-36a372b243c4/KANTAR_ICUBE_2020_Report_C1.pdf

³ Howe, S. (2025, March 14). *Social Media Statistics for India [Updated 2025]*. Meltwater. <https://www.meltwater.com/en/blog/social-media-statistics-india>



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only 24% of rural families having internet connection, compared to 66% of urban households. According to a 2022 Oxfam research, 67% of people in cities and only 31% of those in rural areas accessed the internet. According to this, even while digital use is growing in rural regions, a sizable section of the rural populace is still not digitally literate, which might exacerbate already-existing disparities if digital platforms take over as the major access method.⁴

- b) **Gender and Age Demographics:** India has a notable gender disparity in digital use, with 42% of active internet users being women and 58% being men. This ratio is the same in both urban and rural regions. This discrepancy is more noticeable on social media, especially among individuals aged 18 to 24 and 25 to 34. India is one of the youngest countries in the world, with Gen Z making up 28.4% of discussions and millennials 52.3%. Facebook continues to be the most popular social network, with the greatest user base being between the ages of 18 and 24, although YouTube is popular with people of all ages.⁵

1.3 The Pivotal Role of Mobile Connectivity

The way individuals in India consume digital material has been profoundly changed by the country's sharp increase in mobile phone usage. India has grown to become one of the world's greatest mobile-first digital communities, with 96% of its population accessing the internet through mobile devices. The dissemination of complex political discourse may be impacted by this desire for brief, graphic material. Social networking, communication, and entertainment are the main activities of Indian internet users. Initiatives in political messaging and governance must include political communication into captivating formats, employ messaging apps for quick distribution, and utilize social media for face-to-face engagement in order to adjust to current consumption habits. In India, tools like influencer marketing, short films and memes are being used to change the tone and scope of public conversation.⁶

1.4 Objective of the Study

A comprehensive examination of "The Impact of Digital Media on Governance and Elections in India" would normally focus on a number of important topics in order to comprehend the complex impact of digital platforms. Here is a summary of the probable goals based on the search results that were provided:

- (i) To observe the rise in digital media use by Indian citizens, political parties, and candidates—especially during election campaigns—and determine the variables influencing this adoption.
- (ii) To evaluate the tactics used by political players to communicate with voters directly while avoiding the gatekeepers of traditional media.
- (iii) To explore the ways in which digital media encourages citizens—especially young people—to become more politically aware, engage in dialogue, and participate in politics.
- (iv) To study how voter perception and election results are affected by the spread of false information, disinformation, and fake news on digital platforms.

⁴ Bhatt, P. (2025, January 16). *Rural India leads the way in internet news consumption, 90 million more users than urban*.

Storyboard18.com; <https://www.storyboard18.com/digital/rural-india-leads-the-way-in-internet-news-consumption-90-million-more-users-than-urban-53621.htm>

⁵ talkwalker.com. (2019, September 26). *Social media statistics in India*. Talk walker. <https://www.talkwalker.com/blog/social-media-statistics-in-india>

⁶ NIIT Foundation. (2024, June 12). *Bridging the Digital Divide: Empowering Rural India*. NIIT Foundation. <https://niitfoundation.org/bridging-the-digital-divide-empowering-rural-india/>



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(v) To figure out how government agencies are using digital media for citizen feedback, information sharing, and e-governance projects.

1.5 Research Methodology

The research methodology for "The Impact of Digital Media on Governance and Elections in India" should be mixed-methods, incorporating qualitative and quantitative techniques. By incorporating both qualitative and quantitative insights, this method offers a thorough grasp of the intricate phenomenon. Using both quantitative and qualitative data, a convergent parallel design and a sequential explanatory design could be employed to present a comprehensive picture.

1.6 Review of Literature

Digital media, which makes communication and grievance resolution easier, has had a big influence on how the Indian government operates. Nevertheless, research is still ongoing to determine how well these systems work to encourage accountability or policy reforms. The goal of e-governance programs is to decrease corruption and increase efficiency, however obstacles including the digital gap, cybersecurity issues, and change aversion still exist. Though political polarization, manipulation, disinformation, fake news, regulatory concerns, and faith in democratic institutions are obstacles to voting integrity, social movements and public discourse have emerged as crucial weapons for activists.

2.1 Influence of Digital Media on Governance: Improving Efficiency and Engagement

India's government has been greatly influenced by digital media, which has led to several projects that have improved efficiency, transparency, and citizen involvement. The "Digital India" initiative was started on July 1, 2015, with the goal of making the country a knowledge economy and society empowered by technology. Providing digital infrastructure as a basic utility to all citizens, offering government and services whenever needed, and connecting rural regions with high-speed internet networks while promoting digital literacy are all part of its primary objective.⁷

The Government of India's innovative citizen participation program, MyGov, was introduced on July 26, 2014. By facilitating direct citizen participation in administration and policy-making, it primarily seeks to "crowd source governance ideas" and closes the long-standing divide between the executive and the voters. By March 2023, MyGov had grown to over 30 million registered users, demonstrating its significance and growth. With substantial user participation metrics including over 55 lakh comments and 14 lakh task submissions, the site supports a variety of interaction formats, such as conversations, task submissions, quizzes, and pledges.⁸

Under the Digital India program, the Ministry of Electronics & IT's flagship project, DigiLocker, gives individuals access to a safe, cloud-based digital wallet where they may store and retrieve legitimate digital documents that are legally equivalent to genuine physical papers. The service seeks to provide e-authentication, accomplish paperless governance, and streamline integrated service delivery. With 51.52 crore users and 943.36 crore papers issued by March 2025, the platform was backed by a network of 2,407 requesters and 1,936 active issuers.⁹

By facilitating easy, instantaneous, and affordable digital payments throughout the country, the Unified Payment Interface (UPI), introduced by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) in 2016, has completely transformed financial transactions. India's welfare distribution system was completely redesigned in 2013 with the introduction of the Direct

⁷ What is the digital India initiative? - Truscholar. (2025). Truscholar.io. <https://www.truscholar.io/blog/what-is-the-digital-india-initiative>

⁸ About Us - Digital India | Leading the transformation in India for ease of living and digital economy | MeitY, Government of India. (2025, May 7). Digital India | Leading the Transformation in India for Ease of Living and Digital Economy | MeitY, Government of India. <https://www.digitalindia.gov.in/about-us/>

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/ar5184>. (2025, June 13). MyGov, 2014: A Paradigm of Participatory Governance In India - IMPRI Impact And Policy Research Institute. IMPRI Impact and Policy Research Institute. <https://www.impriindia.com/insights/mygov-participatory-governance-india/>



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Benefit Transfer (DBT) system. The "JAM Trinity"—Jan Dhan bank accounts, Aadhaar authentication, and mobile connectivity—has been used by DBT to transform the welfare distribution system from one that is opaque and prone to leaks to one that is efficient, targeted, and direct.¹⁰

With the success of UPI and DBT, financial inclusion and welfare distribution have undergone a significant transition from an opaque and ineffective system to one that is open, straightforward, and incredibly effective. In addition to lowering corruption, improving government transparency, and promoting financial inclusion for previously unbanked groups, this digital financial infrastructure gives individuals immediate access to conventional banking services and benefits. This illustrates how, when done well, digital transformation can enhance people's lives and maintain the integrity of public finances, increasing public faith in government.¹¹

2.2 Enhanced Accountability and Delivery of Public Services

By making government services available online around-the-clock, the Digital India initiative has transformed the delivery of public services while saving money and time. During the COVID-19 epidemic, this convenience was particularly crucial since it made it possible to continue receiving crucial government assistance. By enabling citizens to monitor their applications and payments online, the digital revolution has improved government operations' openness, decreased corruption, and promoted confidence. Additionally, the government may gather useful information and citizen input through digital platforms, allowing for more responsive policies to the interests and concerns of the general population.¹²

India has put in place strong online grievance resolution procedures to improve communication between the public and the administration. Citizens can file complaints with public officials in all Ministries, Departments, and States using the Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS), a round-the-clock online portal. If the complainant is unhappy with the outcome, this system gives an appeal tool in addition to a unique registration ID for monitoring the grievance process. In a similar vein, investors may file and follow complaints about the securities market online through the SEBI Complaint Redress System (SCORES), which guarantees prompt resolution and feedback channels.¹³

With programs like E. Challan for traffic enforcement, FASTag for electronic toll collection, the UMANG app for integrating government services, and Aarogya Setu and CoWIN for public health management, India's public administration is experiencing a digital revolution. This digital ecosystem also benefits from state-specific initiatives like the Haryana Land Record Information System. The citizen-state relationship is redefined by digital grievance redressal and public service delivery systems like DigiLocker and CPGRAMS, which make it more responsive, transparent, and accessible. However, access and computer literacy are necessary for these processes to function effectively.¹⁴

¹⁰ MyGov India. Congress.crowd.law. <https://congress.crowd.law/case-mygov-india.html>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² rishabh. (2024, December). *The Rise of Digital India: Impact on Governance and UPSC Preparation*. Sleepy Classes IAS. <https://sleepyclasses.com/the-rise-of-digital-india/>

¹³ Home - scores.sebi.gov.in. (2024). Scores.sebi.gov.in. <https://scores.sebi.gov.in/>

¹⁴ Sanjay Ruparelia. (2024, July 10). *Digital Flux Has Coarsened the Mediascape of the World's Largest Democracy*. Centre for International Governance Innovation. <https://www.cigionline.org/articles/digital-flux-has-coarsened-the-mediascape-of-the-worlds-largest-democracy/>



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Table-1: Digital India Initiatives and their Governance Impact

Initiative Name	Launch Year	Primary Objective related to Governance	Key Achievements/Impact
Digital India¹⁵	2015	Transform India into a digitally empowered society & knowledge economy; digital infrastructure as utility, services on demand, digital literacy.	Overarching program for digital transformation; improved transparency, efficiency, citizen participation.
MyGov¹⁶	2014	Foster participatory governance; crowd source ideas; bridge gap between electorate & Executive.	Over 30 Mn registered users (Mar 2023); 55 lakh comments, 14 lakh task submissions; played vital role in COVID-19 info dissemination (MyGov Saathi).
DigiLocker	2015	Paperless governance; secure, authentic digital documents; integrated service delivery.	51.52 Cr users, 943.36 Cr documents issued (Mar 2025); reduces admin overheads, enables real-time verification; integrates with education, finance, health, welfare.
Unified Payment Interface (UPI) / Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)¹⁷	UPI: 2016, DBT: 2013	Seamless digital payments; financial inclusion; transparent welfare delivery; eliminate leakages.	UPI: ₹24.77 lakh crore transactions (Mar 2025); DBT: ₹3.48 lakh crore savings (2015-2023), 16-fold beneficiary expansion, reduced subsidies.
CPGRAMS (Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System)¹⁸		24x7 online grievance redressal for citizens across all govt. bodies.	Single portal connected to all Ministries/Departments & States; tracking, appeal facility, feedback mechanism.

3.1 Impact of Digital Media on Electoral Processes: Transforming Campaigns and Voter Behaviour

Digital media's introduction has drastically changed India's election procedures, changing how parties interact with people, how political campaigns are run, and how public opinion is created. The general election of 2024 has been dubbed India's first "Social Media Election," whereas the 2019 election was well known as the "WhatsApp Election." With over half of India's 900 million eligible voters having access to digital platforms in 2019, this transition is fuelled by the significant

¹⁵ Sheikh, M. (2025, February 24). *Social Media Demographics to Inform Your 2025 Strategy*. Sprout Social.

<https://sproutsocial.com/insights/new-social-media-demographics/>

¹⁶ MyGov.in. (2024, April 25). Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MyGov.in>

¹⁷ Mangal, A. (2025). *India's Glorious Success in UPI Adoption: What is Working, What is Not and What Can be Done Better?* <https://doi.org/10.58445/rars.2589>

¹⁸ CPGRAMS-Home. (2019). Pgportal.gov.in. <https://pgportal.gov.in/>



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increase in internet and social media usage.¹⁹ These days, political parties make heavy use of social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Telegram to communicate directly with their voters and get around the gatekeepers of conventional media. Real-time updates, quick message distribution, and instant communication between politicians and citizens are all made possible by this direct involvement. To increase the effectiveness and impact of their campaigns, campaigns are increasingly using data analytics and micro-targeting strategies to provide tailored messaging to particular voter demographics.²⁰

Digital campaigning that is direct, micro-targeted, and AI-powered represents a significant change in political communication from mass influence to individualized impact. Echo chambers and "filter bubbles" are also naturally created by this strategy, when voters are largely exposed to material that supports their own opinions. This has the potential to exacerbate social division and hinder the broad dissemination of thoughtful policy discussions. New political communication channels have also emerged as a result of the digital environment, such as influencer marketing, memes, and short-form video material. In order to engage rural voters and humanize political leaders, political parties are increasingly enlisting influencers on social media sites like YouTube and Instagram to provide hyper local and micro-targeted content.²¹

Voter participation and mobilization have been greatly impacted by digital media platforms, particularly among India's sizable young population and first-time voters. Over 50% of the 150 million first-time voters in the 2019 general elections were under 25 years old, and approximately one-third of them were swayed by political messaging on social media. A significant percentage of young people (40 percent of those aged 18 to 24) used social media sites including Facebook, Instagram, Share Chat, WhatsApp, and Twitter to keep up with current events. Young voters feel more connected and involved because to these platforms, which offer a venue for conversation, debate, and mobilization.²² Social media has developed into a potent instrument for political mobilization, enabling people to interact, debate, and support a range of causes. Social media is used by political parties to shape public agendas and concerns, so affecting public opinion. However, platforms' emotional appeals and short-form material frequently impact engagement, casting doubt on the caliber of political involvement. The worry is that participation may be more motivated by short-term emotional responses or group identity than by thorough comprehension, which might have an effect on the long-term viability and deliberative ability of democratic processes.²³

4.1 Challenges and Negative Implications of Digital Media

Digital media has the potential to revolutionize India, but it also brings with it serious problems that might jeopardise democratic procedures and social cohesiveness.

¹⁹ Banerjee, D., Dutta, S., & Dutta, S. (2024, June 5). *AI Amplifies Political Reach but Magnifies Disinformation in India Elections*. Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada; Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada. <https://www.asiapacific.ca/publication/indian-election-use-of-ai-political-campaigns-voter-engagement>

²⁰ *Influencer Advertising on Digital Media: An Indian Political Economy of Communications Perspective*. (2025, May 26). Economic and Political Weekly. <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/influencer-advertising-digital-media-indian>

²¹ Aman Xess. (2025, January 2). *AI-driven "war rooms", memes & social media: The new age of political campaigning in India's 2024 elections*. The Times of India; Times Of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/ai-driven-war-rooms-memes-social-media-the-new-age-of-political-campaigning-in-indias-2024-elections/articleshow/116891476.cms>

²² Social media plays key role in influencing first-time voters: Report. (2019, May 12). *The Economic Times*. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/elections/lok-sabha/india/social-media-plays-key-role-in-influencing-first-time-voters-report/articleshow/69295605.cms?from=mdr>

²³ *Global and Indian Perspectives on Digital Media's Impact on Democracy • Journalism University*. (2024, January 3). Journalism & Mass Communication Hub. <https://journalism.university/digital-media/digital-media-impact-on-democracy-global-india/>



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a) Digital Divide's Persistency

With just 24% of rural families having internet connection compared to 66% of urban households, India is experiencing a severe digital divide. Just 57.2% of schools have working computers, and 53.9% have internet connectivity, demonstrating how unequal the educational infrastructure is. Because the digitization of government services can lead to disparities in the provision of benefits, the digital gap exacerbates already-existing socioeconomic inequality. When migrant women workers visit hospitals for prenatal care, biometric authentication fails. Marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by the growing reliance on digital technologies for social welfare programs, such as digital health applications and Aadhaar-linked benefits. The difficulty lies not just in quantifying inequality using conventional measures but also in identifying the ways in which digital systems and algorithms that ignore or exclude millions of people entrench and normalize inequity.²⁴

b) Fake news, misinformation, and disinformation

The proliferation of fake news, deception, and misinformation is endangering India's democratic processes. Being the "disinformation capital of the world," a sizable section of the populace is exposed to misleading information. AI-based technologies, especially deep fakes and misinformation operations, proliferated during the 2024 elections, which marked a watershed as India's first "Social Media Election." While state-sponsored online propaganda, bots, and trolls are used to sway elections, misinformation frequently comes from right-wing influencers and major political parties. The issue is made more difficult by outside intervention, like as Israel's clandestine influence effort. False information has serious negative effects, including as polarization, deterioration of trust, voter behaviour manipulation, and an increase in out-group hostility.²⁵

c) Cyber security and Data Privacy Issues

There have been more demands for privacy protection as a result of India's digital transformation, which has made it harder to distinguish between private and public data. The Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, requires express consent for data processing, gives individuals control over their data, and places stringent requirements on data fiduciaries in an effort to protect personal data and improve individual privacy rights. Although it has not yet been fully implemented, there are worries that it would restrict access to personal information that is kept by public entities, which might impede accountability and openness under the Right to Information (RTI) Act. Cyber attacks are also on the rise in India; between October 2023 and September 2024, over 369 million malware instances were found.²⁶

d) Deterioration of Polarization and Trust

Political polarization and a decline in public trust can result from digital media. By exposing users to material that supports their preconceived notions, social media algorithms produce "echo chambers" that reinforce prejudices and restrict a range of viewpoints. Voters find it challenging to separate fact from fiction as a result of misinformation and fake news distorting public debate. Increased hate speech, online abuse, and targeted misinformation efforts are the results of continual exposure to sensational and contentious content combined with anonymity. The problem is made worse by the lax regulations governing material on digital media platforms, which enable antisocial elements to propagate damaging messages while

²⁴ Manash Pratim Gohain. (2025, January 2). *Digital divide: Working computers in just 57% of India's schools, internet in 54%*. The Times of India; Times Of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/digital-divide-working-computers-in-just-57-of-indias-schools-internet-in-54/articleshow/116867829.cms>

²⁵ Anadi. (2024, September 11). *Deep Fakes, Deeper Impacts: AI's Role in the 2024 Indian General Election and Beyond - GNET*. GNET. <https://gnet-research.org/2024/09/11/deep-fakes-deeper-impacts-ais-role-in-the-2024-indian-general-election-and-beyond/>

²⁶ Daxecker, U., Fjelde, H., & Prasad, N. (2024). *Misinformation, Narratives, and Intergroup Attitudes Evidence from India*. *The Journal of Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1086/732979>



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remaining anonymous. This poses a serious threat to the pluralistic underpinnings of Indian democracy by eroding public confidence in the media and democratic institutions.²⁷

4.2 Regulatory Reactions and Prospects

The Information Technology Act, 2000 and its further amendments, such as the 2021 IT Rules, regulate India's legal framework for digital communications. These regulations, which strike a balance between freedom of speech and expression and creative freedom, govern social media platforms, digital news media, and over-the-top (OTT) streaming services. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has broad authority under the three-tier grievance redressal framework; however, compliance varies. Opponents contend that these rules could stifle free speech and encourage self-censorship. Protecting personal information and advancing privacy rights are the goals of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act of 2023. The Model Code of Conduct was broadened by the Indian Election Commission in 2019, although effective regulation is severely hampered by the voluntary character of several regulations and the quick advancement of technology.²⁸

A multi-stakeholder strategy including the government, tech corporations, civil society, and individuals is necessary due to the influence of digital media on governance and elections in India. Through programs like the Electronic Citizenship Commission and the Press Information Bureau, the government encourages responsible media use and digital literacy. The success of the promises made by big internet firms like Google, Meta, OpenAI, X, and TikTok to fight deep fakes and election meddling is still up for question because of their ambiguous language and lax enforcement. Strong regulatory frameworks, increased digital knowledge, accountability, transparency, and closing the digital gap are all necessary to promote a resilient digital democracy.²⁹

5.1 Conclusion

India's governance and electoral scene have been profoundly changed by digital media, which has improved transparency, made public service delivery easier, and encouraged financial inclusion. The "Digital India" program has improved interactions between the state and its citizens, decreased bureaucratic friction, and controlled corruption. Rapid digital revolution, however, brings with it risks and complications, especially in the electoral arena, including deep fakes produced by artificial intelligence and misinformation. India has to strike a balance between reducing the hazards associated with digital media and maximizing its possibilities for democratic engagement and effective governance.

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²⁷ *No evidence for online audience fragmentation during Indian election*. (2019). Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/news/no-evidence-online-audience-fragmentation-during-indian-election>

²⁸ *EC Measures to Counter Misinformation in 2024 Elections*. (2024). Cyberpeace.org. <https://www.cyberpeace.org/resources/blogs/ec-measures-to-counter-misinformation-in-2024-elections>

²⁹ *Press Information Bureau*. (2017). Pib.gov.in. <https://www.pib.gov.in/factcheck.aspx>



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