

Citizens' Information Gathering on Facebook Regarding Candidates in a Democratic System: An Analytical Study

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Abstract: *A democratic system is fundamentally dependent on an informed and active electorate. Voters must be aware of their aspirations, needs, grievances, and issues of national importance, as well as possess adequate information about electoral candidates. In recent years, the use of digital media-particularly social media-has significantly increased as a source of political information. Among these platforms, Facebook remains one of the most widely used tools for information dissemination, employing algorithms that tailor content to users' interests. During election periods, voters often seek information about candidates, making Facebook a potentially influential medium in shaping political awareness. This study examines whether voters actively use Facebook to gather information about candidates during elections. It further investigates whether demographic factors such as age and gender influence this information-seeking behavior. The study is based on a survey of 400 voters from the districts of Haridwar, Dehradun, and Uttarkashi in Uttarakhand.*

Keywords: Democracy, Voter, Candidate, Social Media, Facebook, Election

1. Introduction

The foundation of a democratic system lies in the active and informed participation of its citizens. Elections serve as the primary mechanism through which individuals exercise their political rights by selecting their representatives. The effectiveness of this process largely depends on the extent of information voters possess about candidates and the ways in which they interpret and evaluate that information [1]. Traditionally, citizens relied on conventional sources such as newspapers, radio, television, public meetings, and interpersonal communication to obtain political information. However, with the rapid advancement of information technology and the widespread penetration of the internet, this information environment has undergone a profound transformation.

In the contemporary digital era, social media platforms have emerged as significant channels of political communication. Among these, Facebook occupies a particularly prominent position. No longer limited to social interaction, Facebook has evolved into a powerful medium for disseminating political information, facilitating the exchange of ideas, shaping public opinion, and enabling political campaigning [2]. Political actors—including candidates, parties, and their supporters—actively utilize Facebook to communicate policies, ideologies, and achievements to the electorate. Simultaneously, citizens increasingly rely on the platform to access information about candidates, engage with political content, view multimedia material, and articulate their opinions through comments and discussions [3].

Within a democratic framework, the use of Facebook for gathering information about candidates represents a relatively new yet significant dimension of political behavior. This practice has implications for voters' political awareness, attitudes, and ultimately their voting decisions. The information available on Facebook not only highlights candidates' formal political positions but also exposes aspects of their personal lives, public engagements, controversies, and public perceptions. As a result, voters are able to access a wider and more immediate range of information compared to traditional media sources [4].

However, the use of Facebook as an information source presents both opportunities and challenges. On the positive side, it enhances citizens' access to information, encourages political participation, and fosters engagement in democratic processes. Conversely, the prevalence of misinformation, rumors, biased content, and algorithm-driven filtering mechanisms can distort the information environment and influence democratic decision-making [5]. Users often encounter content that reinforces their existing beliefs, which may contribute to political polarization and echo chambers. In this context, it becomes essential to examine the nature of information citizens seek about candidates on Facebook, the level of trust they place in such information, and its impact on their political behavior [6].

This study seeks to analyze Facebook as a medium for political information gathering within a democratic context. It aims to explore how Facebook functions as a bridge between citizens and candidates, thereby shaping the dynamics of political communication in contemporary democracy.

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2. Literature Review

Scholarly research has extensively examined the relationship between digital media and democracy. Early studies suggested that the emergence of the internet and social media would make democracy more participatory and inclusive. Dahlgren argues that digital media has expanded the public sphere by creating spaces where citizens can freely discuss political issues. Platforms such as Facebook provide users with immediate access to political information and facilitate active participation in political discourse [7].

Research on political communication indicates that social media is more interactive and participatory than traditional forms of media. Blumler and Katz's [8] Uses and Gratifications Theory explains that individuals actively use media to satisfy specific needs, including information acquisition, identity formation, and social interaction. From this perspective, citizens utilize Facebook to gather information about candidates in order to make more informed and rational electoral choices.

The literature on voting behavior emphasizes that both the availability and quality of information significantly influence voter decision-making. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet's [9] Two-Step Flow of Communication Theory posits that media effects are mediated through opinion leaders rather than being directly transmitted to individuals. In the context of Facebook, this phenomenon is reflected in the prominence of influencers, political activists, and opinion leaders, whose content shapes the political attitudes and perceptions of the wider public.

Recent studies have highlighted the growing importance of candidates' online presence in shaping voter perceptions. Activities such as posting updates, sharing live videos, engaging with comments, and maintaining an interactive digital presence contribute to building trust and credibility among voters. Enli and Skogerbø [10] found that candidates who actively engage on social media platforms tend to receive greater support, particularly from younger voters who increasingly rely on Facebook as a primary source of political information.

Within the Indian context, research on social media and democracy demonstrates that Facebook has significantly expanded the scope of political communication. In a diverse and populous country like India—where access to traditional media may be uneven—Facebook serves as an alternative and accessible platform for political information dissemination. Scholars have noted that it enables direct communication between candidates and voters, thereby enhancing political engagement. Kothari [11] observes that Facebook provides visibility to regional issues and local candidates that might otherwise receive limited coverage in mainstream media.

Despite these advantages, the literature also raises serious concerns regarding the negative implications of Facebook use in democratic processes. The spread of fake news and misinformation has emerged as a major challenge. Allcott and Gentzkow [12] demonstrate that false information disseminated

through social media can significantly distort voters' perceptions and influence electoral outcomes. Furthermore, algorithm-driven content curation often reinforces users' pre-existing beliefs, creating "echo chambers" that contribute to political polarization.

Shah et al. [13] argue that information consumption on platforms like Facebook may encourage superficial engagement, where users prioritize attention-grabbing content over substantive policy analysis. However, other studies suggest that when citizens approach social media critically and engage with diverse sources, these platforms can enhance political awareness and democratic participation.

Overall, the literature indicates that Facebook functions as a powerful yet double-edged medium within a democratic framework. While it empowers citizens by facilitating access to information and enabling participation in political processes, it also poses challenges related to misinformation, bias, and polarization. These complexities highlight the need for more context-specific and empirical research to better understand how Facebook-based information-seeking influences democratic behavior, particularly in diverse settings such as India.

Research Objectives

- To examine the extent to which voters use Facebook to gather information about electoral candidates.
- To analyze the influence of demographic factors, specifically age and gender, on voters' information-seeking behavior regarding candidates on Facebook.

Research Questions

- Do voters use Facebook to search for information about electoral candidates?
- To what extent does voters' age influence their information-seeking behavior regarding candidates on Facebook?
- Does gender have a significant impact on voters' information-seeking behavior regarding candidates on Facebook?

Research Hypotheses

- Voters use Facebook to gather information about electoral candidates.
- There is a significant relationship between voters' age and their information-seeking behavior regarding candidates on Facebook.
- There is a significant relationship between voters' gender and their information-seeking behavior regarding candidates on Facebook.

3. Research Methodology

The present study is based on a quantitative research design. The data were collected from a sample of 400 voters aged 18 years and above who actively use Facebook. The respondents were selected from three districts of the Garhwal Division in Uttarakhand—Uttarkashi, Dehradun, and Haridwar. A structured, self-designed questionnaire was administered using

Google Forms to collect primary data. The study employed a random sampling technique to ensure representativeness of the sample. For data analysis, descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used. An interpretive approach was adopted to understand patterns in respondents' behavior. Additionally, the Chi-square test, a non-parametric statistical tool, was applied to examine the association between demographic variables (age and gender) and voters' information-seeking behavior on Facebook.

4. Data Analysis and Results

In a democratic system, it is essential for voters to possess adequate information about candidates in their constituency so that they can make informed electoral decisions. Such information may include candidates' qualifications, assets, criminal records, and public service activities. With the increasing role of digital media, voters can utilize platforms such as Facebook to access this information. Accordingly, the present study sought to examine whether respondents use Facebook to gather information about candidates during elections. The responses were categorized into different frequency levels and are presented in Figure 1.

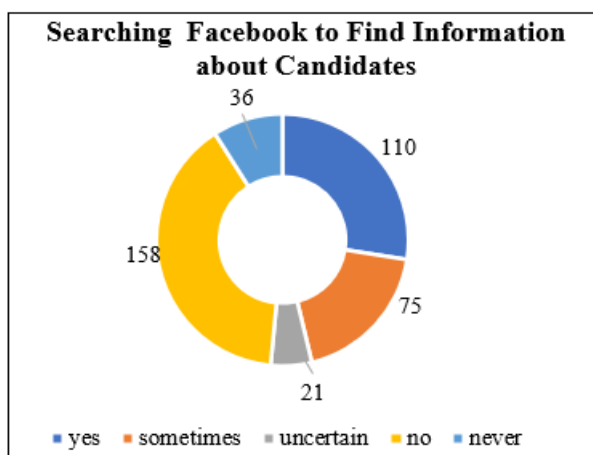


Figure 1

Source- Field survey

The analysis of the data indicates that 27.5 percent of respondents reported that they actively search on Facebook to obtain information about candidates during elections. Additionally, 18.75 percent of respondents indicated that they do so occasionally. Taken together, this suggests that 46.25 percent of respondents use Facebook-either regularly or occasionally-for gathering information about candidates.

In contrast, 39.5 percent of respondents reported that they do not use Facebook for this purpose, while 9 percent stated that they never engage in such searches. A further 5.25 percent of respondents expressed uncertainty. These findings indicate that a slightly higher proportion of respondents (48.5 percent) do not rely on Facebook for candidate-related information compared to those who do.

These findings are consistent with earlier studies. Towner and Dulio [14] argue that exposure to candidates' activities on Facebook enables voters to evaluate not only campaign messages but also the substance and credibility of political communication. Similarly, Skogerbø and Krumsvik [15] observe that voters often rely on candidates' announcements and interactions on social media platforms when forming electoral preferences.

The results suggest that Facebook serves as a significant, though not dominant, source of political information for voters. While a substantial proportion of respondents engage with the platform for candidate-related information, an equally notable segment does not utilize it for this purpose. This variation may be influenced by factors such as reliance on alternative information sources, pre-existing political preferences, or differing levels of digital engagement among voters.

To examine the relationship between age and voters' use of Facebook for gathering information about candidates, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H₀: There is no significant association between a citizen's age and their use of Facebook to search for information about candidates.

H₁: There is a significant association between a citizen's age and their use of Facebook to search for information about candidates.

Table 1: Age-wise Opinions Regarding Obtaining Information about Candidates

Age Category	Yes	Sometimes	Uncertain	No	Never	Total
18-28 years	52	28	11	39	11	141
28-38 years	30	14	07	32	04	87
38-48 years	23	19	03	53	12	110
48-58 years	04	10	00	33	07	54
Above 58 years	01	04	00	01	02	08
total	110	75	21	158	36	400

Source- Field survey

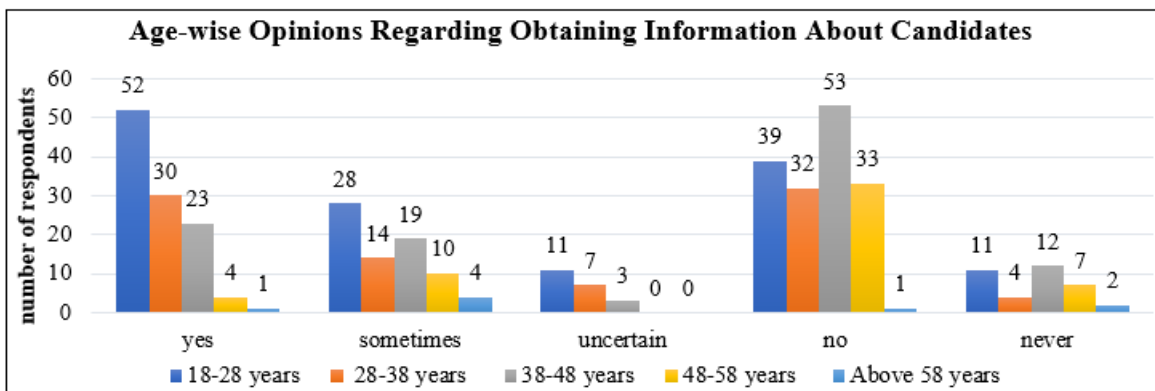


Figure 2

Table 4: The Influence of Age on Opinions Regarding Obtaining Information about Candidates

Tests	Value	Degree of freedom	Significance
Pearson chi-square	49.611	16	0.001

An analysis of the data indicates that the calculated Chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 49.611$) with 16 degrees of freedom is statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($p = 0.001$). Since the p-value is less than the prescribed significance level (0.05), the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant association between age and voters' use of Facebook for obtaining information about candidates during elections.

This finding suggests that age plays an important role in shaping information-seeking behavior on social media platforms. Specifically, younger respondents demonstrate a greater tendency to use Facebook for acquiring political information compared to older respondents. This pattern may be attributed to higher levels of digital literacy, familiarity with social media platforms, and greater engagement with technology among younger individuals.

Conversely, older respondents appear to rely less on Facebook for candidate-related information, possibly due to lower digital

engagement or a continued preference for traditional sources of information such as television, newspapers, and interpersonal communication.

To examine the relationship between gender and voters' use of Facebook for gathering information about candidates, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H_0 : There is no significant association between a citizen's gender and their information-seeking behavior regarding candidates on Facebook.

H_1 : There is a significant association between a citizen's gender and their information-seeking behavior regarding candidates on Facebook.

Table 3: Gender-wise Opinions Regarding Obtaining Information about Candidates

Gender	Yes	Sometimes	Uncertain	No	Never	Total
Male	59	39	12	96	14	220
Female	51	36	09	62	22	180
Total	110	75	21	158	36	400

Source- Field survey

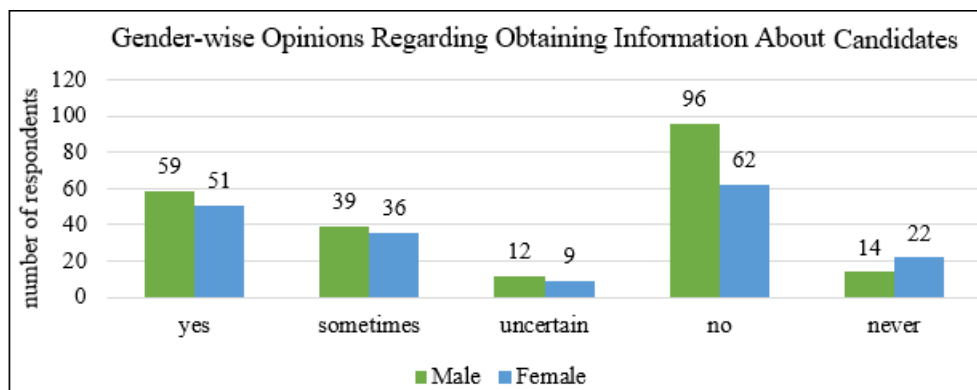


Figure 3

Table 4: The Influence of Gender on Opinions Regarding Obtaining Information about Candidates

Tests	Value	Degree of freedom	Significance
Pearson chi-square	6.287	04	0.179

An examination of Table 4 indicates that the calculated Chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 6.287$) with 4 degrees of freedom is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($p = 0.179$). Since the p-value exceeds the threshold of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) is not rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no statistically significant association between gender and voters' use of Facebook to search for information about candidates during elections.

This finding suggests that gender does not play a decisive role in influencing Facebook-based political information-seeking behavior among respondents. Both male and female voters appear to engage with the platform in a broadly similar manner when it comes to acquiring information about candidates.

One possible explanation for this pattern is the widespread accessibility of Facebook across gender groups. Social media platforms provide flexible and convenient access to information, allowing individuals to engage with political content irrespective of their daily routines or responsibilities. Moreover, increasing levels of political awareness and participation among women may also contribute to minimizing gender-based differences in digital information-seeking behavior.

5. Conclusion

The present study conducted in Uttarakhand highlights the growing role of social media—particularly Facebook—as a source of political information during elections. The findings indicate that a considerable proportion of voters use Facebook to gather information about candidates contesting in their constituencies, reflecting the platform's emerging significance in the electoral information ecosystem.

The study further reveals that age is a significant factor influencing voters' information-seeking behavior on Facebook. Younger voters are more likely to utilize the platform for acquiring candidate-related information, underscoring the role of digital familiarity and engagement among the youth. In contrast, gender does not exhibit a statistically significant influence on such behavior, suggesting that both male and female voters access and use Facebook for political information in a similar manner.

These findings point toward an increasing integration of digital technology within democratic processes in Uttarakhand. Facebook serves as an accessible medium through which voters can enhance their political awareness and engagement. At the same time, the variation in usage patterns across age groups indicates the need to address digital divides and promote inclusive access to reliable political information.

Overall, the study underscores the dual importance of technological advancement and informed citizen participation in strengthening democratic practices. As social media continues to evolve, its role in shaping political awareness and voter behavior is likely to expand, making it essential for future

research to further explore its implications within diverse socio-political contexts.

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