Social Media Inclusion and Political Participation of Women in Nawanshahr Block of S.B.S Nagar District, Punjab

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Abstract

In a democratic government, every citizen directly or indirectly participates in decision-making. Social media is an effective instrument of political communication and moulding public opinion. Social media have brought changes to traditional campaign strategies of political parties. It provides a platform for politicians and candidates to convey their political policies and programs effectively to a large number of voters in less time. Women's political engagement is an essential criterion for the success of a democratic system. Social media facilitate the inclusion of women in political activities.This study investigates the effect of social media inclusion on women's political participation in the Nawanshahr block of S.B.S Nagar district of Punjab. It is mainly based upon the Primary data collected from 65 respondents consisting of urban and rural females through Google form. This study has revealed that 95.4% of women respondents use various social media platforms, but most of them neither visited the website of any political party nor shared or liked any political information. The majority of female students between the age group of 15-29 years utilize social media and engage in online political activities. 35.5% of female respondents do not have any interest in politics. It was found that social media is an effective tool to measure the performance of political parties.

Keywords: Social Media, Women's Political Participation, Political Campaigning, Voting Behaviour, Punjab

1. INTRODUCTION

The electoral system is the soul of the democratic system of India. The utilization of social media in political campaigning resulted in an important change in the country's electoral system.Social media has become a powerful instrument for political communication and engagement. It has a significant role in forming a public opinion by attracting voters of a different age groups during election campaigning. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and WhatsApp have been widely used by all political parties to mobilize voters during India's 16th Parliamentary general election (Narasimhamurthy, N.,2014).

Social Media can be defined as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan, A. M., &Haenlein, M., 2010). According to "Oxford Dictionary,"

Social media can be described as "websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or participate in social networking."

Electoral politics is dynamic. Observing the political interest of voters is an essential strategy adopted by political parties during elections. Political parties use social media to influence voting behaviour (Singh, M., & Kaur, M. H., 2020).

Social media can mobilize women's empowerment through technology by increasing their representation in the public sphere. It contributes to reducing gender stereotypes by direct or indirect inclusion of women in political activities. The extensive use of social media by women provides significant opportunities to highlight the issues of gender equality and women's right.

The novelty of the research- To the best of my knowledge, this is the first paper to analyze the influence of social media on women's political

engagement in Punjab, with particular reference to the Nawanshahr Block S.B.S Nagar District. It also contributes to the literature on social media involvement of women in political activities in Punjab, which had not been done previously.

Research Objective: The central goal of this research is to investigate the influence of social media inclusion on women's political participation in the Nawanshahr block of S.B.S Nagar, Punjab.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Biswas, A., Ingle, N., & Roy, M. (2014)studied the influence of social media on voting behaviour. It provides a platform for political parties to connect with as many young voters as possible. Their participation influences the voting behaviour of female voters in online political discussions. Content uploaded and published on social media networking sites such as YouTube and Facebook helps in moulding public opinion.

Narasimhamurthy N. (2014)analyzed the role of social media in India during the 2014 general elections. It revealed that social media platforms such as "Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, and YouTube" are used by around 84 percent of internet users. Social media networking sites were used by approximately 52% of male and 48% of female internet users used social media networking sites. It highlighted that political content was posted and shared by 29 million people on Facebook during the election of 2014.

According to **Ravi, B. K., & Priya, V. M. (2015),** social media sites interacted with maximum young voters during Lok Sabha Elections 2014, resulting in a massive increase in polling percentage. Social media had a positive effect on the political engagement of young urban voters. Online campaigning plays a vital role in political awareness. Facebook was extensively used by the majority of youth for political activities.

According to **Kaur M. & Verma R. (2018),** social media was the most important source of political information during the Legislative Assembly Elections 2017 in Punjab. Political activities of males on social media were higher than females in Punjab.

In their study**, Ahmad, T., Alvi, A., &Ittefaq, M. (2019)** founda strong correlation between online participation in political activities and political awareness. The young generation of 24-28 is more active on social media, leading to offline political engagement. It revealed a positive correlation between political effectiveness and the use of

social media. Social networking sites are an essential source of political information in rural Pakistan.

Sarmah, R., & Mohapatra, N. (2020) investigated the impact of social media on the Assam Assembly Election 2016 and found that political parties extensively used social media like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter in Assam Assembly Elections 2016. Political leaders used Facebook to establish contacts with voters.

According to the "**Women, technology and democracy survey**" conducted by National Democratic Institute revealed that around "90 percent of women in Europe, Central Asia and 85 percent of Latin America" use social media for political communication. It also explored digital media used by most female politicians for online discussions and political campaigning.

A study,"**Women in decision-making: the role of the new media for increased political participation,**" conducted by "The European Parliament" in 2013, revealed the positive effect of social media on the empowerment of women by allowing them to "network with other women, build confidence, appeal to other women and peers through styles and issues that are directly relevant and attractive, and provide alternative power basis which might be of interest to mainstream politicians." Political communication through digital media helps female leaders to express their policy initiatives to the public.

A study,"**Social Media: Advancing Women in Politics,**" conducted by "Women in Parliaments Global Forum, Facebook and the Shorenstein Centre on Media, Politics and Public Policy of the Harvard Kennedy School" in 2016 revealed that social media is a valuable platform for female leaders and candidates for political communication with the public in 107 countries. It highlighted that more than 85 percent of female leaders in the study area use digital media during political campaigning. 90 percent of women parliamentarians used Facebook for political communication. Social Media can perform a vital role in encouraging the representation of female parliamentarians in the political arena due to its cost-effectiveness. It helps eliminate barriers to female representation.

3. METHODOLOGY

Study area: S.B.S Nagar district is situated in the eastern part of the Punjab State of India. Geographically, it lies between 31°5′ & 31°15′ north latitude and 75°45′ & 76°30′ east longitude

of the state. It is divided into five blocks. This study mainly deals with the Nawanshahr block.

Study tools: The relevant information is collected from primary and secondary sources. Using the purposive sampling technique, it is an empirical study based on primary data collected from 65 respondents consisting of urban and rural females of the Nawanshahr block of S.B.S Nagar district. Nawanshahr city area is chosen to collect data from urban females. An online survey is conducted to collect information with the help of Google form containing close-ended questions and the "5-point Likert scale" that is, 1= Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3= Cannot say, 4, and 5= Strongly Disagree.
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4. EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of social media inclusion and political participation of women in Nawanshahr Block is done based on socio-economic status and social media involvement of women in political activity.

4.1 Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents

The Socio-Economic profile of female respondents has been studied based on age, education, caste, Marital Status, residential area, and occupation of the respondents in Nawanshahr Block. These factors affect women's social media inclusion of women and their participation in political activities

Table 1: Age-wise distribution of female Respondents

Age (in Years)	Frequency	Percentage
15-29	32	49.2
30-45	23	35.4
46-60	9	13.8
61-75	1	1.5
Above 75	0	0
Total	65	100

Source: Data collected from respondents

Table:1 Provides the age-wise distribution of female respondents of the Nawanshahr block. Out of 65 female respondents, the majority (49.2%) belong to the age group of 15-29 years. About 35.4% of the respondents belong to 30-45 years, and 13.8% are 46-60. Only 1.5% of females are in the 61-75 age group.

Table 2: Educational status of Respondents

Education	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	2	3
Metric	5	7.7
Secondary	3	4.7
Graduate	23	35.4
Post Graduate	32	49.2
Total	65	100

Source: Data collected from respondents

Table:2 depicts the educational status of female respondents of the Nawanshahr block. Education is a significant factor in social media inclusion and females' political participation. The analysis shows that 49.2 % of respondents are Postgraduates, around 35.4% of female respondents are Graduates, 4.7% have completed secondary education, 7.7% are Metric, and 3% have education up to primary level.

Table 3: Caste-wise distribution

CASTE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
GENERAL	33	50.8
SCHEDULED CASTE	27	41.5
OBC	5	7.7
TOTAL	65	100

Source: Data collected from respondents

Table: 3 shows caste-wise distributions of female respondents. The majority of respondents (50.8%) belong to General Caste. The percentage of scheduled caste respondents is 41.5%, and the lowest percentage (7.7%) is for OBC.

Table 4: Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	27	41.5
Unmarried	37	56.9
Divorcee	1	1.5
Total	65	100

Source: Data collected from respondents

Table: 4 shows the marital status of the female respondents of the Nawanshahr block. 41.5% of female respondents are married, 56.9% are unmarried, and one respondent is a divorcee.

Table 5: Residence Area of Respondents

Residence Area	Frequency	Percentage
Urban	33	49.2
Rural	32	50.8
Total	65	100

Source: Data collected from respondents

Table:5describes the residential status of the respondents. 49.2% of females belong to Nawanshahr city, and 50.8% belong to villages of Nawanshahr Block.

Table 6: Occupational Status

| Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Governmental job	15	23.1
Private job	12	18.5
Not working	18	27.7
Students	17	26.2
House wife	2	3.1
Labour	1	1.5
Total	65	100

Source: Data collected from respondents

Table: 6 describes the Occupational Status of the respondents. Out of 65 respondents, 23.1% are government employees, 18.5% work in the private sector, 26.2% are students, 27.7% are unemployed, 3.1% are housewives, and 1.5% are labourers.

4.2 Social Media Inclusion and Political Participation of Women in Nawanshahr Block
Social media plays a vital role in women's inclusion in political activities. Therefore, this section of the paper examines the effect of social media inclusion on women's political participation in Nawanshahr Block of S.B.S Nagar district, Punjab.

Interest in Politics:

Interest in politics impacts women's involvement in political decision-making. Women hesitate to participate in political activities due to low political interest and awareness (Kaur, H.,&Singh, M., 2021).**Figure 1** depicts that 35.4 percent of female respondents do not have any interest in politics, and 64.6 percent have shown interest in political activities consisting of 32.30% females belonging to the general category and 23% belonging to SC. Of 64.6% of females interested in politics, around 38.46% are postgraduate or graduate female students between 15-29 years. 24% of these students belong to the Nawanshahr city area. About 24.61% of females between 30-45 government or private employees are interested in politics.


Figure 1: Interest in Politics
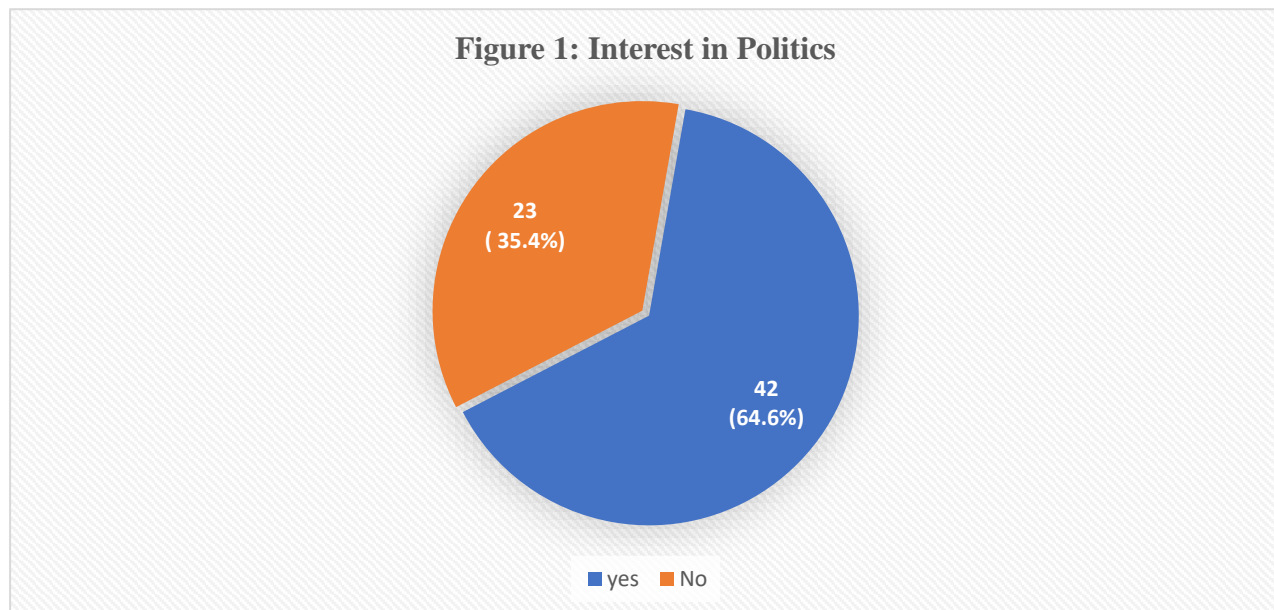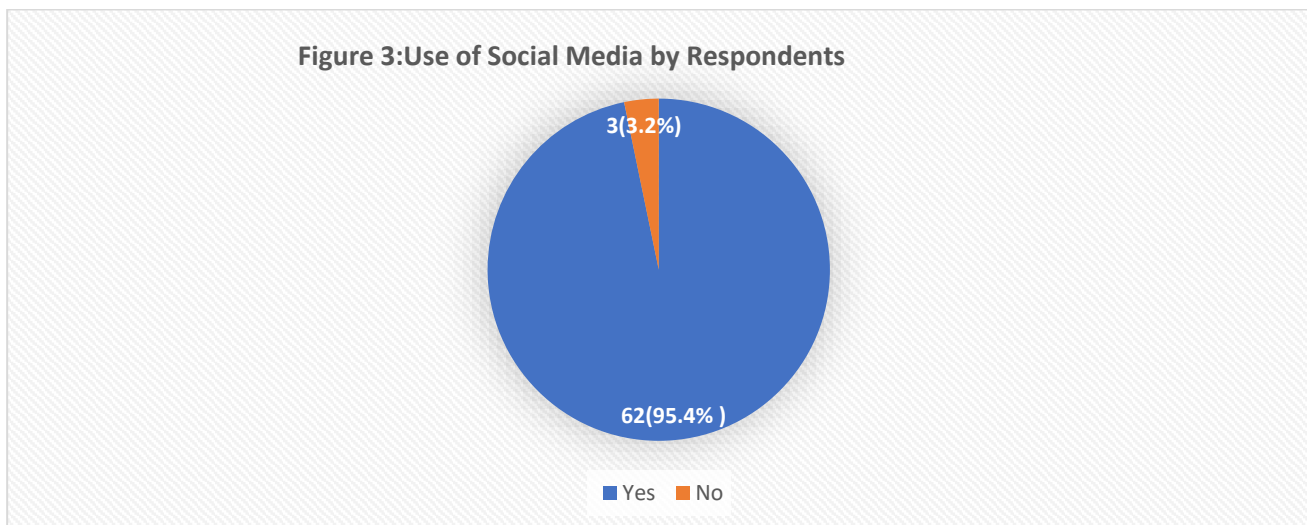
Source: Data collected from the respondent
Casting Votes:
Voting is essential for the success of democracy. Figure 2 shows that around 64.6% of urban and rural female respondents from the Nawanshahr block participate in voting in election.21.5% of respondents said they do not cast their votes, and 13.80% cast their votes sometimes.

Figure 2: Casting vote in elections
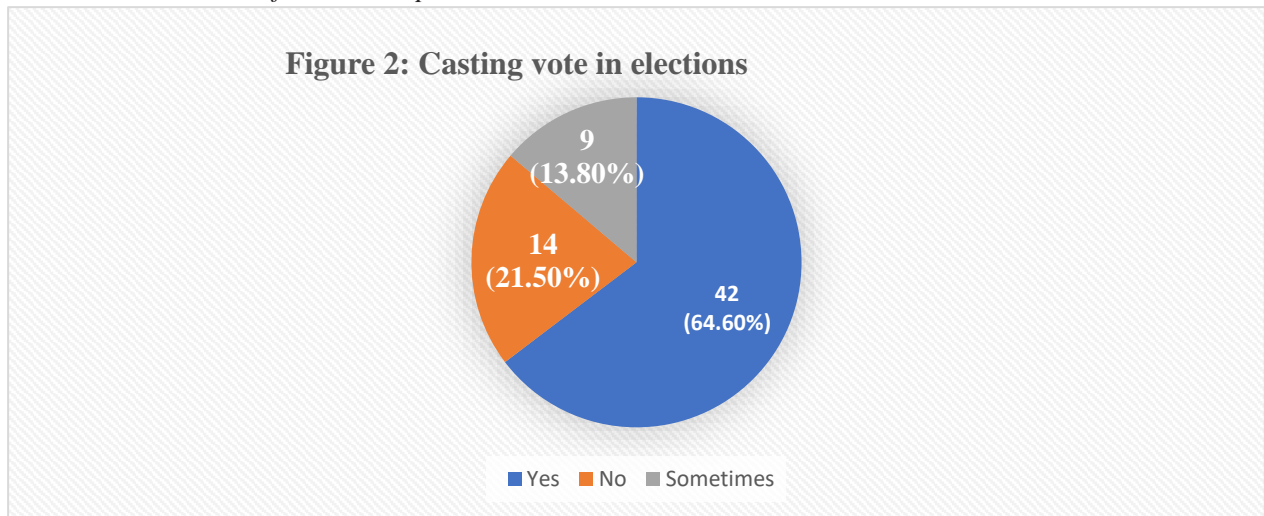
Use of social media: figure 3 depicts that 95.4% of urban and rural female respondents belonging to different age groups of Nawanshahr use various Social media networking sites. The majority of these respondents use social media for entertainment andexchange information.

Figure 3:Use of Social Media by Respondents

Use of Social Media Networking Sites:
figure 4 shows that around 80% of female respondents of Nawanshahr Block use WhatsApp to share information, and 72.30% of respondents use YouTube for entertainment and sharing information. Facebook is used by 44.60% of respondents, Twitter is used by 26.15% of females, and Instagram is used by 33.80% of female respondents. The majority of students and other female respondents aged15-29 use these networking sites to share political information.

Figure 4: Use of Social Media Platforms by Respondent
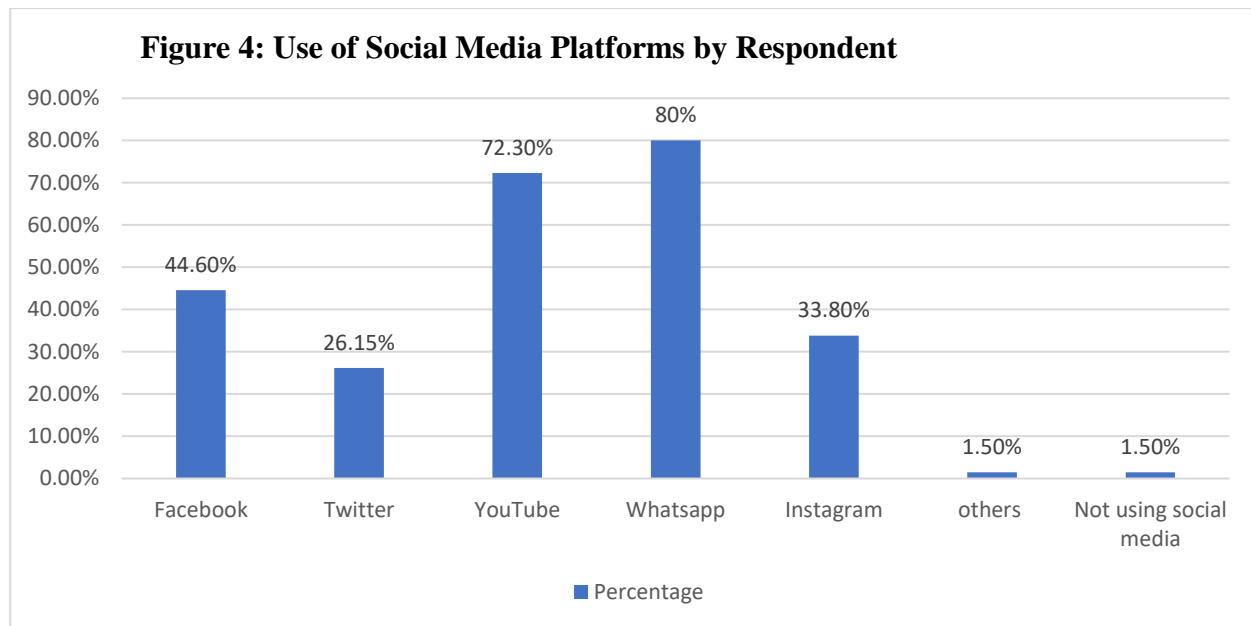
Source: Data collected from the respondent

Sharing Political Information

Figure 5 shows that 36.90% of female respondentsshare political information on various social media networking sites such as "Facebook, Twitter,Whatsapp, and Youtube." In comparison,63.10% of respondents do notshare any political news on social media due to a lack of interest in politics. Around 48 percent of these respondents neither read a blog on politics nor subscribe to any news channel on social media.

Figure 5: Sharing Political Information on Social Media
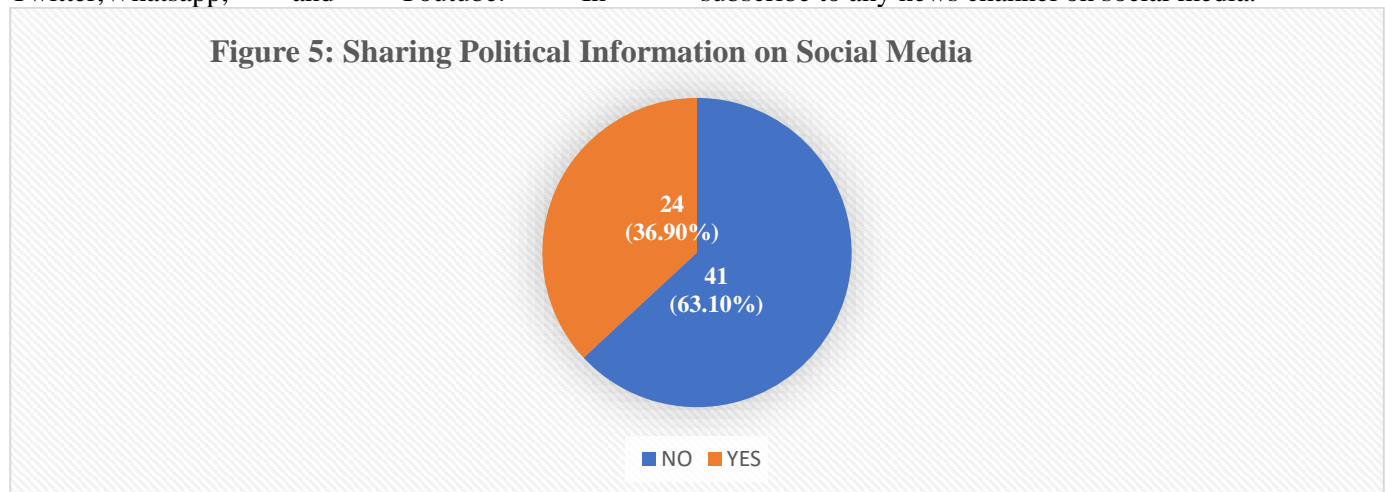
Source: Data collected from the respondent

Following the Social Media Page of a Political Candidate or Political Party

Figure 6 depicts that 73.8% of female respondents never visited a social media page of a political candidate or party. Only 26.20% of respondents, a majority female age group between 15-29, especially students, visited the page of a political candidate or party.

Figure 6: Following the Social Media Page of Political Candidate or Political Party
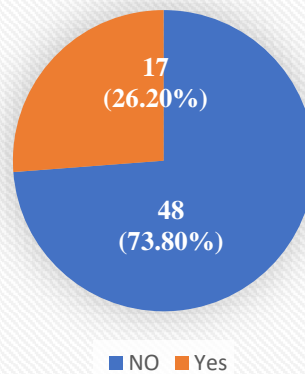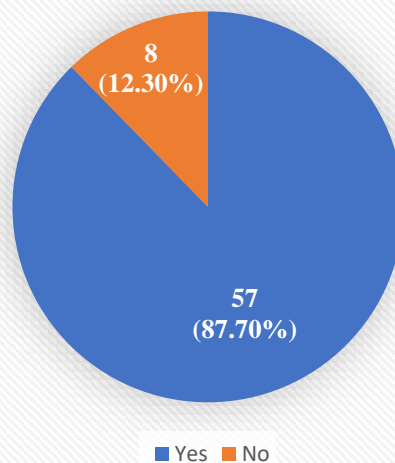

Source: Data collected from the respondent

Posting a comment on the Website or Social media page of a political party

Figure 7 shows that 87.70% of female respondents never commented on a political party's website or social media page due to low interest and awareness regarding politics. Only 12.3% of respondents, including postgraduate or graduate students, and employees in the government and private sector, posted their comments regarding political issues or policies of political parties.

Figure 7: Posting Comments on Website or Social Media Page of Political party

Source: Data collected from the respondent

Table 7: Impact of Social Media on Women's Political Participation

Social Media and Political participation	Strongly agree	Agree	Cannot say	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Social media influence the political awareness of women.	30.8%	27.7%	24.6%	13.8%	3.1%
The use of social mediain political campaigning impactswomen's political participation.	26.2%	32.3%	20%	13.8%	7.7%
Social media influences voting behaviour	29.2%	23.1%	24.6%	10.8%	12.3%

Impact of social media on selection of suitable candidate.	20%	15.4%	29.2%	13.8%	21.5%
Impact of social media on victory or defeat of candidate in election	24.6%	18.5%	32.3%	23.1%	1.5%
Social media can act as a tool to gauge the performance of political parties	27.7%	23.1%	21.5%	18.5%	9.2%

Source: Data collected from the respondent

Table 7 represents the influence of social media on women's political engagement in the Nawanshahr block of S.B.S Nagar district based ona five-point scale from strongly agree to disagree strongly. Around 30.8% of respondents strongly agreed that social media influenceswomen's political awareness and involvement. The majority of female respondents believe social media impactsthe performance of political parties and candidates.About 52% of respondents stated that online political involvement impacts voters' voting behavior.

5. CONCLUSION

Social media is an effective tool for moulding public opinion. In the current scenario, it is a medium by which political parties share their policies and programs with the public. Social media allow both female politicians and female voters to share female-oriented issues. It can help reduce gender disparity in the political arena. Due to its cost-effectiveness, female leaders can establish contact with a large population in a short time. The study's finding has revealed that around 95.4% of female respondents use social media, but around 35.4% do not have any interest in politics. The majority of the Nawanshahr block's urban and rural female respondents never visited any political party or candidate website nor shared any political information on social media. The majority of female respondents believed that social media could influence political awareness and the political inclusion of women. Respondents also believed that social media is an instrument for measuring the performance of political parties and political candidates. It is found that young female students are more politically active than females of other age groups. It revealed a substantial connection between female political participation and their use of social media.

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