



# **Social Media and Election Campaigns: A Study on Twitter Usage in India for Punjab State Assembly Elections in 2022**

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**Abstract:** Social media has grown importance as a campaigning tool in the Indian electoral system after 2014 Lok Sabha Elections. Indian Audience understood the power of Social media in Politics when Narendra Modi was elected as the Prime Minister Twice in 2019. Social media platforms are thought to be crucial in enticing voters, especially the youth. It is inexpensive, facilitates faster and is suitable for running campaigns in simpler form. It is not yet known that how politicians use various social media platforms for political communication, despite the fact that a lot of study has focused on online campaigning, especially on the use of Twitter as a most common platform for political communication. In order to share tweets online, Twitter work closely with media, Indian officials, to ensure that tweets get disseminated well to the users. Political parties and candidates can more quickly and effectively contact a large number of voters through Twitter. This research is based on the use and growth of social media in the political sphere and how it affects popular participation in politics and society at large. It aims to investigate the connection between the social media as a tool for Indian political party's election campaigns.

The use of social media as an instrument for voter outreach will be the first topic of the study. Additionally, it talks about how Indian politicians have used Twitter to run campaigns during the election. This study analytically evaluates recent political events in India that have only been reported on Twitter. The 2022 parliament elections were primarily conducted online. Parties and candidates have been forced to depend more on social media as a result of Election Commission of India (ECI) restrictions on in-person campaigning. So, this study concentrate on how Punjab election candidates and groups utilized Twitter. Only verified Twitter accounts were taken into consideration for this study, and as of the stated date, the relevant information is still accurate.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Twitter, Election Campaign, Punjab, Political Communication

## Social media as an important tool for election campaign

Social media has become a powerful tool in Indian politics, allowing political parties and candidates to reach out to a large number of voters and influence their opinions. The impact of social media has been particularly significant in the political sphere, with political parties and candidates using social media to connect with voters, spread their message, and gain support. With over 700 million internet users in India, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp are highly effective in reaching out to a large number of voters and influencing their opinions.

Political parties and candidates use social media in several ways during election campaigns. They create official social media pages to promote their messages, engage with voters, and communicate their policies and agendas and also to attack opponents and criticize their policies.

However, social media can also be misused in Indian politics. There have been instances of fake news, propaganda, and hate speech being spread through social media during election campaigns. Political parties and candidates often create fake news and false narratives to discredit their opponents and influence voters.

To regulate the use of social media in election campaigns, the Election Commission of India has introduced several guidelines – politicians are prohibited from using social media to spread hate speech, communal or caste-based messages, or any content that violates the code of conduct. Political parties and candidates are required to disclose their social media accounts and their expenditure on social media campaigns.

## Political Engagement of Youth on Social Media

The use of social media by youth in India has increased significantly over the past few years. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp have become an integral part of their daily lives.

One of the most significant advantages of social media in Indian politics is its ability to reach out to young voters. The majority of Indian voters are young, and they are more likely to use social media to access political information and express their opinions. Political parties and candidates use social media to engage with young voters, share their messages, and create a positive image among them.

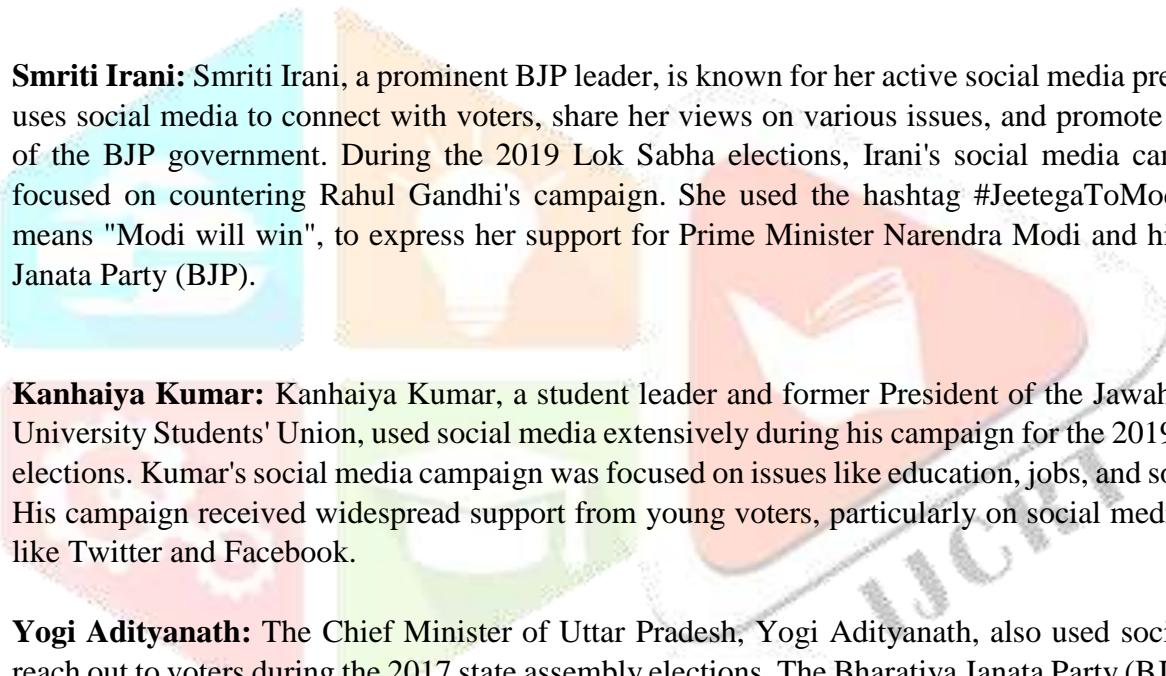
## Use of Social media by Politicians: Popular Election campaigns used during election

In the Indian political landscape, political parties and candidates are adapting their strategies to include digital campaigning on social media sites as a key part of their election strategy. After the 2014 Indian general elections, there has been a significant increase in the use of social media by Indian politicians for election campaigns

Here are some examples of how social media has been used in Indian politics by some famous politicians

- **Narendra Modi:** Narendra Modi, the current Prime Minister of India, always known for his successful use of social media. During the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, Modi's social media campaign was considered to be one of the most effective in the history of Indian politics. During the 2014 general elections, Narendra Modi used Twitter to engage with his followers and spread his message. He used the hashtag #AbKiBaarModiSarkar (this time, Modi government) to connect with voters and promote his agenda. His campaign team used social media to engage with voters, spread their message, and gather support. During the 2019 general elections, Modi's team launched the 'Main Bhi Chowkidar' campaign, which encouraged people to support Modi in his fight against corruption. The campaign went viral on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

- **Arvind Kejriwal:** Arvind Kejriwal, the Chief Minister of Delhi and the leader of the Aam Aadmi Party, has used social media to his advantage. Kejriwal's social media campaign during the 2013 Delhi Assembly elections was instrumental in his party's victory. Kejriwal used social media to connect with voters, gather support, and to raise funds. During the 2020 Delhi assembly elections, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) launched the 'Ache Beete 5 Saal, Lage Raho Kejriwal' campaign, which showcased the party's achievements during its tenure in office. The campaign was widely promoted on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram
- **Rahul Gandhi:** Rahul Gandhi, the former President of the Indian National Congress, has also used social media extensively. During the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Gandhi's social media campaign was focused on highlighting the failures of the Modi government and promoting the Congress party's vision for the country. He used the hashtag #NyayForIndia to promote his party's proposed minimum income guarantee scheme, which aimed to provide financial assistance to the poorest sections of society & #ChowkidarChorHai to highlight his accusations of corruption against the Prime Minister. The campaign included the use of videos, memes, and infographics to engage with voters.



➤ **Smriti Irani:** Smriti Irani, a prominent BJP leader, is known for her active social media presence. Irani uses social media to connect with voters, share her views on various issues, and promote the policies of the BJP government. During the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Irani's social media campaign was focused on countering Rahul Gandhi's campaign. She used the hashtag #JeetegaToModiHi, which means "Modi will win", to express her support for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

- **Kanhaiya Kumar:** Kanhaiya Kumar, a student leader and former President of the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union, used social media extensively during his campaign for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Kumar's social media campaign was focused on issues like education, jobs, and social justice. His campaign received widespread support from young voters, particularly on social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook.
- **Yogi Adityanath:** The Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath, also used social media to reach out to voters during the 2017 state assembly elections. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) launched the 'UP Ke Mann Ki Baat' campaign, which aimed to connect with the people of Uttar Pradesh and understand their concerns. The campaign was promoted on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.
- **Mamata Banerjee:** The Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, also used social media to connect with voters during the 2021 state assembly elections. The Trinamool Congress (TMC) launched the 'Banglar Gorbo Mamata' campaign, which aimed to highlight Banerjee's achievements during her tenure in office. The campaign was promoted on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.
- **Priyanka Gandhi:** a politician and member of the Indian National Congress, has been using Twitter to connect with her followers and spread her message. She has over 7 million followers on Twitter. During the 2019 general elections, Priyanka Gandhi used Twitter to connect with young voters and highlight the issues that mattered to them. She used the hashtag #NayiSochNayiUmeed

These are just a few examples of the many social media election campaigns that have been launched by Indian politicians in recent years

## Twitter usage by Politicians

India being the world's largest democracy, has also seen a significant increase in the use of Twitter for election campaigns. Politicians use Twitter to connect with their followers, to share their vision for the country, provide updates on their campaign, and respond to their opponents' criticisms. Twitter's popularity for election campaigns can be attributed to its ability to provide a direct line of communication between candidates and their constituents. Political candidates can use Twitter to share their views on important issues and engage with voters in real-time. Additionally, Twitter can be used to quickly spread campaign messages and mobilize supporters.

Here are some ways politicians use Twitter to connect with voters and promote their campaigns:

- **Announcements:** Politicians often use Twitter to make important announcements related to their campaigns, such as new policy positions, endorsements, or upcoming events.
- **Engagement:** Twitter provides a platform for politicians to engage with voters and respond to questions and comments in real-time. This allows them to show their human side and build a personal connection with their audience.
- **Messaging:** Twitter allows politicians to control the narrative around their campaigns by using the platform to promote key messages and counter negative coverage.
- **Fundraising:** Twitter can be used to solicit donations from supporters, both by providing links to fundraising pages and by promoting events or merchandise that can generate revenue.
- **Targeting:** Twitter's advertising platform allows politicians to target specific demographics with their messaging, enabling them to reach voters who are most likely to be receptive to their message.

However, it's worth noting that Twitter can also be a double-edged sword. In addition to the benefits outlined above, it can also expose politicians to negative feedback and criticism, and a poorly crafted tweet can easily backfire and damage a campaign's reputation. As with any communication tool, it's important for politicians to use Twitter strategically and thoughtfully in order to maximize its benefits and minimize its risks.

## Punjab Election 2022: Use of Twitter for Campaign

Most popular social media sites for political information and discussion is Twitter. Running a successful Twitter campaign requires careful planning and execution. Political candidates must first identify their target audience and create a clear message that resonates with that audience. They must then use Twitter to engage with voters and create a sense of community around their campaign.

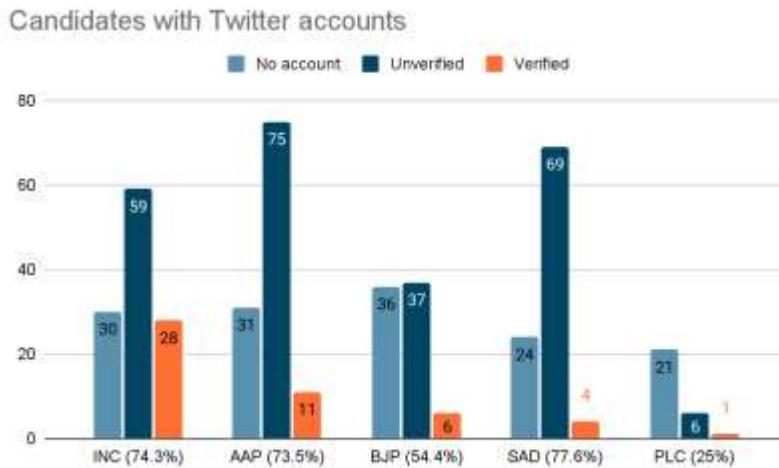
With the use of catchy hashtags and attractive slogans, the major parties in the race, including the incumbent Congress and its main opponents Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), embraced the digitalization of this crucial facet of the electoral process during Punjab election 2022.

Parties tried to use the politicians' online fan bases when they enter virtual campaign mode to win over voters. The political elite of Punjab is among the most popular Indian politicians on Facebook and Twitter. Amarinder Singh, a former chief minister, has more than 14.66 million Facebook fans and 11.5 million Twitter followers.

Sukhbir Singh Badal, the leader of the Shiromani Akali Dal, has 4.12 million and 22 million followers on Twitter, respectively. Bhagwant Mann, the head of AAP Punjab, has more than 5.47 million Twitter followers and over 22.6 million Facebook fans. Navjot Singh Sidhu, the head of the Punjab Congress, has more than 16 lakh Facebook fans and more than 10 lakh Twitter followers.

Overall, INC had the most verified Twitter accounts that were associated to candidates. Its candidates have 87 total Twitter accounts, compared to 86 for the AAP. Only 4 of the 73 candidates for the SAD office have verified Twitter accounts.

INC candidates have the most number of verified Twitter accounts whereas AAP candidates have the most number of Twitter accounts.



Note: % figure in brackets indicates the percentage of candidates with Twitter accounts. Source: Twitter

## Popular Digital Campaigns for Punjab Election on Social Media

Party members used snappy hashtags and posts on Twitter & Facebook.

Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi posted “Lokan da CM” (people’s CM) and “Lokan di sarkaar” (people’s government) to sway voters. The Congress supported Channi by using the hashtag ‘#111CongressDubara’ marking 111 days of channi’s throne to Punjab.



Akali Dal marked 100 years last year in the state, and inspired from the BJP's "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" campaign, it used hashtags like "100 saal vikas de, vishwas de" (100 years of trust and progress).

During Punjab election, major political used twitter widely for their political outreach campaigns. The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), popular political party of Punjab launched its outreach initiative "Gal Punjab Di" and coordinated it across all over Twitter and Facebook. The name of the outreach program was written on each and every display image of the SAD pages. The cooperation between the party and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) was also openly discussed. The hashtag #SAD\_BSP alliance was used in a number of posts. Famous leader of SAD, Sukhbir Singh Badal, also emphasizes on the coalition in the majority of his posts on Twitter and Facebook.



*SAD's slogan for outreach "Gal Punjab Di" means "Punjab's conversation"* Source: Facebook  
 AAP, being a newcomer to the state, positioned itself as Punjab's "hope" by using the hashtags "Punjab di ummeed" and "KejriwalDiGuarantee"



In an effort to appeal to the meme-addled and trend-savvy youth, the party also created a few reels on Instagram that got popular amongst youth.

Political candidate's pages for the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) appeared to have more cohesive messaging, as the majority of them shared same kind posts on twitter and Facebook in terms of content and appearance.



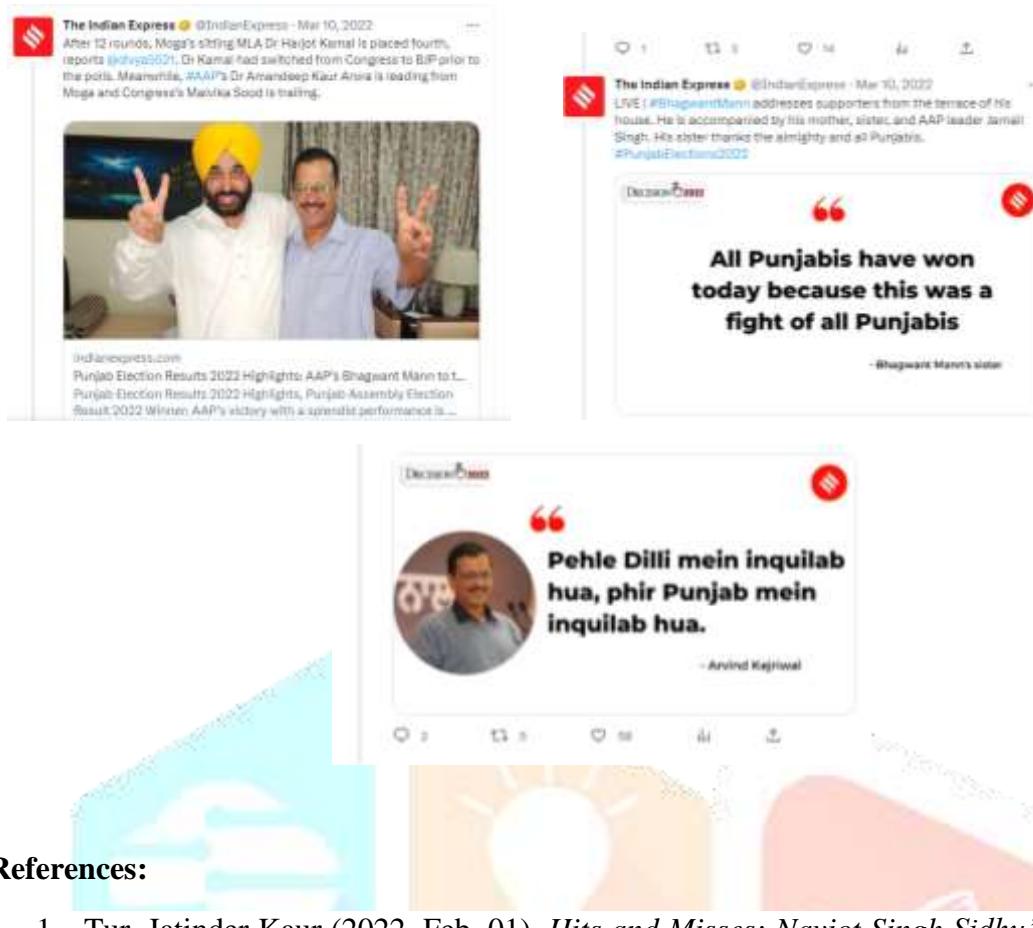
An advertisement for AAP's "Punjab Model"

This poster having Arvind Kejriwal's picture and senior AAP figures like Bhagwant Mann and Harpal Singh Cheema highlight his major campaign pledges for water, energy, education, and health was shared widely on Twitter.

With his new party, Captain Amarinder Singh pledged to retake power. The party's logo features a hockey stick and a ball with the words "Bas hun goal karna baaki."



According to research based on sentiment analysis of Twitter users, AAP was expected to win the elections in Punjab, with an effective positive rate of 22.37%.



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