

Social Media and Political Polarization: A Correlational Study of Indian Youth

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between social media engagement and political polarization among young adults (18–25 years) in India. Recognizing the significant role of digital platforms in shaping the attitudes of this demographic, the research specifically examined how varying patterns of online political engagement correlated with both affective (feelings towards supporters of left-wing and right-wing political groups) and ideological polarization. Social media engagement was defined by the frequency and nature of young adults' interactions with political content, including exposure, active participation, source diversity, and reliance on social media for news. A structured questionnaire was circulated among young adults across India to gather data on their social media habits and political attitudes. Based on the responses, correlation and regression analyses were conducted to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between different dimensions of social media engagement and levels of affective polarization (towards left-wing and right-wing supporters), as well as agreement with strong ideological statements on relevant Indian issues. The findings revealed a positive correlation, providing valuable insights into the psychological dynamics of online political engagement among young Indians and contributing to a deeper understanding of how social media is associated with increasing political divides along the ideological spectrum in the digital age.

Keywords: Affective polarization, Digital natives, Ideological divide, Online behavior, Youth attitudes