



The Impact of Social Media on Shaping Voter's Political Opinions: A Study of the 2024 Presidential Election in Sri Lanka

K M V Ravihari ^{1*}, V S Suriyabandara ², K B C Madushan ³

¹ Assistant Lecturer, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka

² Professor, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka

³ Lecturer, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka

* Corresponding Author: **K M V Ravihari**

Article Info

E-ISSN: 3107-7129

Volume: 02

Issue: 01

Received: 25-11-2025

Accepted: 27-12-2025

Published: 29-01-2026

Page No: 10-15

Abstract

Social media has become an important factor influencing voter behavior in modern elections. This study examines the impact of social media on voter behavior in relation to the 2024 presidential election in Sri Lanka. It explores how social media platforms were used for political communication, opinion formation and voter engagement. The research problem is why did social media play a significant role in influencing voter behavior during the 2024 presidential election in Sri Lanka? The main purpose of this writing research paper, critically examine the impact of social media on voter behavior during the 2024 presidential election in Sri Lanka. And also sub purposes are, to identify the role of social media platforms in political communication during the 2024 presidential election in Sri Lanka, to examine how social media influenced voter's political attitudes, to assess the spread of misinformation on social media and its effect on voter behavior and opinions and to analyze the impact of social media on voting decisions, particularly among young voters. The writing of this article used qualitative method. The sample for the study consists of 100 undergraduate students from the university of Sri Jayewardenepura. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. Undergraduate students were chosen because they represent and active voter group that frequently uses social media for political information and communication. Through this study, dissemination of political information, give messages attract attention and quickly through the videos memes and posts, Interactive discussions and feedback such as live debates and comment sections, spread of misinformation easily and also enhanced political engagement and participation daily. Based on the research data, these findings were able to identify how social media influences the shaping of voter's political opinions.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54660/IJHSI.2026.2.1.10-15>

Keywords: Elections, Political Opinions, Shaping Voter's Behavior, Social Media

Introduction

In recent years, social media has become a major platform for political communication, allowing voters to access information, discuss issues, and engage with political campaigns more easily. In Sri Lanka, the 2024 Presidential Election demonstrated the growing influence of platforms such as facebook, you tube, tiktok and whatsapp on voter's political opinions and decision making. Even Sri Lanka, there is a sharp increase in content that incites hatred and violence based on factors such as gender,

nationality, religion, caste or sexual orientation. The use of mobile phones and the internet can be seen as essential part of the human community by the 21st century. Social media allows every user to participate in conversations and social interactions and to use multiple media for that purpose. Sharing knowledge, creating critical conversation and building alternative discourses can all be seen on social media(De Silva.S,2021)

From a political party perspective, social media provides a cost effective medium to reach out to large number of voters, it provides rich two-way engagement with voters and by its nature create interaction. With the announcement of Sri Lankan presidential election 2019, there was increase in social media posts related to political campaigns. The target of these political campaign is social fragmentation and reduce voter's loyalty towards democratic political parties and candidates. These campaign target personal life style values to engage with variety of cases such as human rights, racist violence, economic justice and environmental protection(Bennet, 2012). In a Sri Lankan context, the influence of social media on Sri Lankan politics has brought new dangers. According to the Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe " Sri Lanka continues to face 'New dangers' posed by hate speech, fake news" (Kaluarachchi. C, 2021)

Social media's role in political mobilization became evident during the 2018 constitutional crisis, where social media played a pivotal role in organizing protests and disseminating information about the unfolding events. While social media has democratized political expression, it also presents challenges, such as the spread of misinformation and hate speech. During the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks, misinformation circulated widely on social media, exacerbating tensions between ethnic and religious communities. The Sri Lankan government responded by temporarily blocking access to social media platforms(Sato. S, 2024)

This study aims to explore how social media impacted the political opinions of voters during the 2024 presidential election in Sri Lanka. The presidential election of 2024 in Sri Lanka marked a significant moment in the country's political landscape, taking place during a period of economic recovery, social transformation and heightened public political awareness. On September 21, 2024, Sri Lanka conducted its ninth presidential election. Sri Lanka had been faced big challenges by this time period. Such as covid 19 pandemic, debt crisis and inflation, Security issues, job creations problems and poor power supply. In this context,

criticism and defamatory expressions directed at the ruling government spread rapidly across social media platforms(Imtiyaz A.R.M, 2025) [6] The NPP Party in this situation used social media their public concept and projects to spread among people. Like this welfare programs, community projects, developing public service, introducing transparent recruiting system for public service and reduction of politician's privileges, elimination bribery and corruption. NPP party promote their party and concepts through the social media platform quickly. Therefore, voters deeply rooted with NPP as attraction publicity.

Research problem

why did social media play a significant role in influencing voter behavior during the 2024 presidential election in Sri Lanka?

Method

This study adopts a quantitative research design to explore the impact of social media on shaping voter's political opinions: A Study of the 2024 Presidential Election in Sri Lanka. The theoretical framework has been featured with the political socialization theory and political mobilization theory. The quantitative approach is appropriate because it allows measurement of relationships between social media usage, exposure to political content and voters political opinions using numerical data. Population is undergraduate students at the university of Sri Jayewardenepura, who are active social media users and eligible voters. Sample size is 100 students, selected using simple random sampling to ensure generalizability within the university context. The study also employs a comparative analytical framework to examine the impact of social media on shaping voter's political opinions: A Study of the 2024 Presidential Election in Sri Lanka.

Literature Review

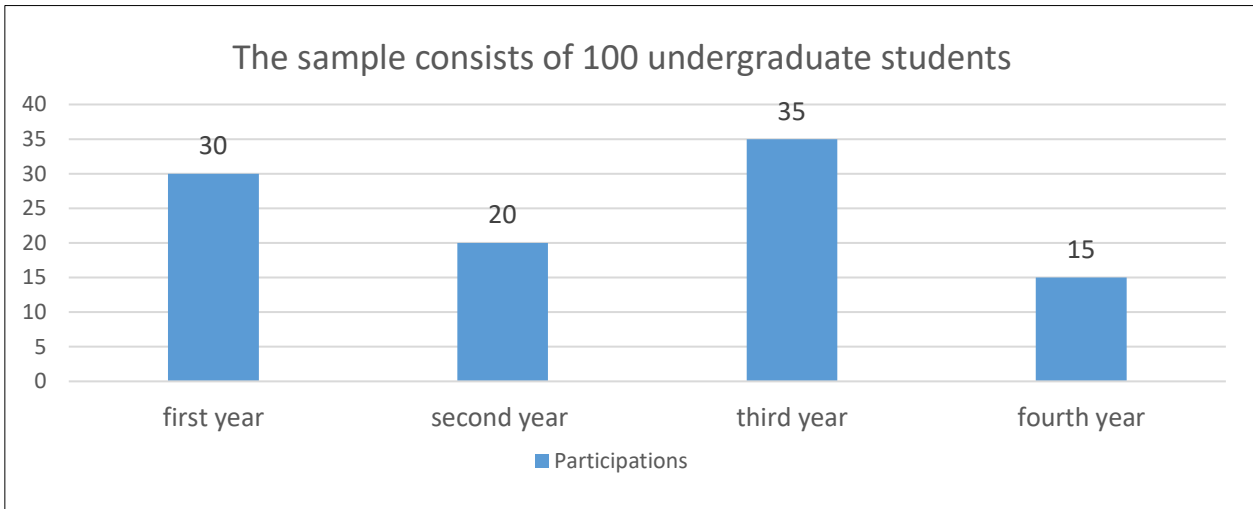
The impact of social media on shaping voter's political opinions: A Study of the 2024 Presidential Election in Sri Lanka This research, which address the question of why did social media play a significant role in influencing voter behavior during the 2024 presidential election in Sri Lanka? Identifies two primary theoretical areas that need to be addressed. Accordingly, the literature review can be conducted based on the theoretical fields of political socialization theory and political mobilization theory.

Title	Year	Writer	Research Findings
An Analysis of the 2024 Sri Lankan Presidential Elections and the Country's Evolving Electoral Landscape	2025	Imtiyaz A.R.M	This research explores key areas to identify the electoral base in Sri Lanka's presidential elections. It provides a historical analysis from 1978 to 2024, discussing the executive presidential system, early dominance of UNP/SLFP, J.R. Jayewardene's leadership, presidential powers, and ethnic conflict between Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority. It also analyzes the 2024 election, major candidates, why NPP was rejected by Tamils and Muslims in the North and East, and why NPP captured Rajapaksa's voter base. Mainly focuses on evaluation and nature of presidential elections; does not cover the role of social media.
Media Influence on Youth Political Vote – Shaping in Sri Lanka	2024	Jayathilaka M.P.S	The paper examines the impact of social media on shaping political opinions among youth. It highlights influence from social media, mass media, and family background, showing youth's political knowledge is lacking. Education level affects social media influence. The study details shaping voter behavior but does not cover the 2024 presidential election.
How does social media influence voting behavior?	2024	Iqbal N.	This research highlights why social media is important for shaping political opinions. It covers participation, trust, reliability, and measuring social media use in voting behavior. It shows social media as a powerful tool for political engagement, including usage statistics for Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp. It does not specifically address the 2024 presidential election in Sri Lanka.
The impact of social media on voters' behavior in recent elections	2024	Basak B	Examines social media influence on voter political opinion. Discusses background of social media, importance of voter behavior, evolution of social media in politics, campaign strategies, voter turnout, and comparative analysis with traditional media. Focuses on three main campaign strategy concepts: influence, viral campaigns, and real-time engagement. Does not cover the 2024 presidential election.
The role of traditional media vs social media in political mobilization in South Asia; Case Studies from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh	2024	Sato S	Explores social media's role in political mobilization and compares traditional media vs social media in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Key findings include reach and accessibility, speed and decentralization, government regulation, censorship, misinformation, and public trust. Limited discussion on 2024 presidential election and voter opinion shaping.
The impact of social media on Voters Perception in the 2024 Election	2024	Mulia N	Focuses on social media's effect on voter perception. Highlights fake news, open feedback, increased political participation, and democracy strengthening. Explains how social media shapes voter behavior but does not specifically address the 2024 presidential election in Sri Lanka.
From social media Engagement to Voting Decisions: Influence of social media on Local Election	2024	Nicolas C	Examines how social media engagement affects voting decisions in local elections. Highlights awareness of candidates, information on policies and agendas, public perception influence, and interactive social media activities (likes, shares, comments). Shows social media campaigns significantly impact voting decisions, but does not discuss the 2024 presidential election in Sri Lanka.
The Role of social media in influencing youth political Behavior: A systematic literature Review	2024	Zainurin S	Reviews influence of social media on youth political behavior. Discusses political discussion, information sharing, networking with national leaders, political content impact, youth interest, conversation, advertising, and campaigns. Explains positive and negative effects of social media, but 2024 presidential election in Sri Lanka is only minimally discussed.

Results and Discussions.

This study examines the impact of social media on shaping voters' political opinions, with specific reference to the 2024 presidential election in Sri Lanka. In recent years, social media platforms such as face book, Instagram, you tube, twitter and tik tok have become influential tools for political communication, enabling rapid dissemination of information, political messaging and public discourse. These platforms increasingly shape voters' perceptions of political leaders, policies and electoral choices, particularly among young and educated populations.

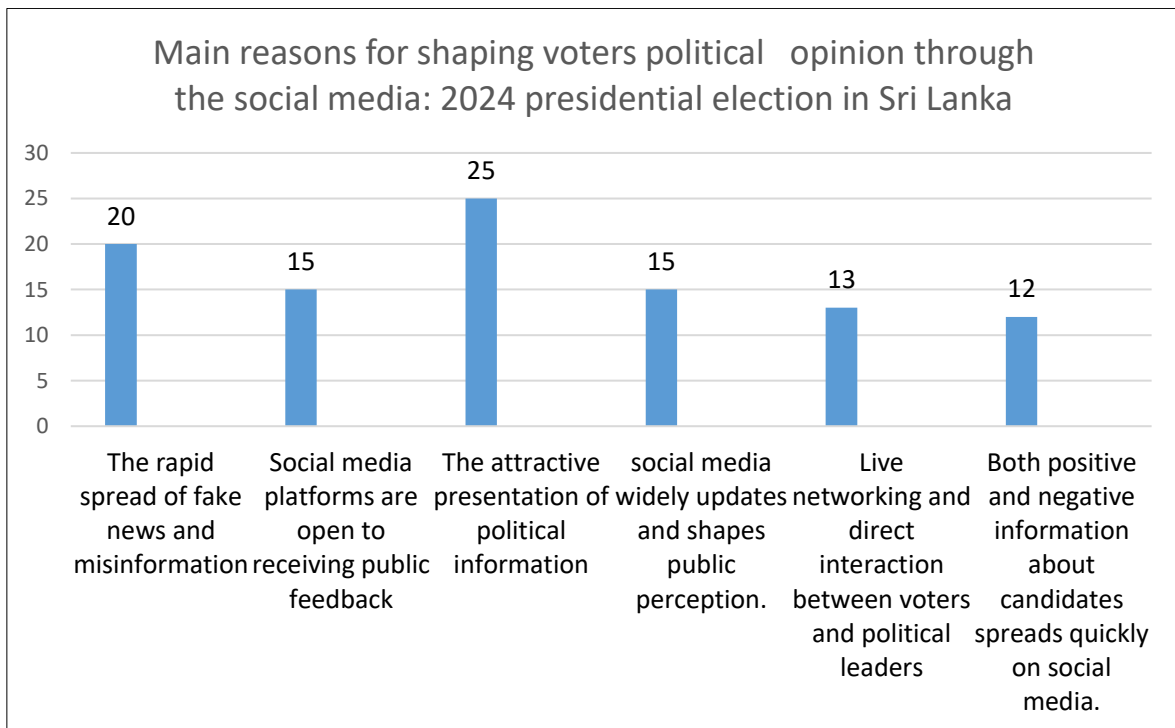
The study adopts a quantitative research approach using a survey method based on a structured questionnaire to collect primary data. The sample consists of 100 undergraduate students, selected to represent different academic years in higher education. The distribution of participants includes 30 – first year students, 20- second year students, 35- third year students and 15- fourth year students. This stratified representation allows for comparative analysis of social media influence across varying levels of academic maturity and political awareness.



Data collected through the questionnaire will be analyzed to identify patterns in social media usage, levels of political engagement, trust in online political content and the extent to which social media influences political opinions and voting decisions. The findings of this study aim to contribute to the understanding of digital political communication in Sri Lanka and provide insights for policy makers, political campaigners and scholars regarding the growing role of social media in shaping democratic participation during national elections. Based on the survey conducted among 100 undergraduate students, this study identifies six major reasons through which social media significantly influenced the shaping of voter’s political opinions during the 2024 presidential election in Sri Lanka. The findings indicate that social media

platforms played a central role in shaping political attitudes, perceptions, and voter behavior among young voters. Mainly six reasons affect for shaping voters’ behavior according the survey.

- 1.The rapid spread of fake news and misinformation.
2. Social media platforms are open to receiving public feedback.
3. The attractive presentation of political information.
- 4.social media widely updates and shapes public perception.
- 5.Live networking and direct interaction between voters and political leaders.
6. Both positive and negative information about candidates spreads quickly on social media.



Data based on survey

According to the survey results, 20 respondents identified, rapid spread of fake news and misinformation is mainly affected for shaping voter behavior. 15 respondents, social media platforms are open to receiving public feedback is

mainly affected for this. As well as 25 respondents identified the attractive presentation of political information through social media including visually appealing content related candidate’s policies, future agendas and party history. As the most influential factor shaping political opinions. Most

students' selection is this as creative visuals, political messages and videos making this factor more impactful than other reasons. Social media widely updates and shapes public perception was identified 15 students. In addition, live networking and direct interaction between voters and political leaders was identified 13 students and both positive and negative information about candidates spreads quickly on social media was identified 12 students according to this.

Firstly, the survey, revealed that the rapid spread of fake news and misinformation was a major factor influencing voters' political opinions. There were reports of local as well as international incidents of social media being used extensively to organize people as well as to spread misinformation on social media (S.De.Silva, 2021). Due to the high speed of information sharing and limited content verification on social media platforms, false or misleading political information easily circulated, which affected voters' perceptions of candidates and political parties.

Secondly, respondents indicated that social media platforms are open to receiving public feedback, enabling users to comment, react and share opinions on political content. In the landscape of recent electoral activities, harnessing social media channels for the purpose of engaging and attracting voters has markedly become essential (Basak.B, 2024)^[4]. This interactive nature allows voters to engage in political discussions, observe others viewpoints, and adjust their own political opinions based on collective responses and public sentiment expressed online.

Thirdly, the study found that the attractive presentation of political information, including candidates' policies, future agendas and party history significantly influenced voters. FB posting was to promote particular presidential candidates, and it may possibly a guided influence (Kaluarachchi.C, 2020)^[8]. Visual content, videos, infographics made political information more accessible and persuasive thereby shaping voters understanding and evaluation of political candidates.

Fourthly, the survey results highlight that social media widely updates and shapes public perception by continuously circulating political news, campaign messages, and public reactions, Frequent exposure to political content reinforces certain narratives and frames political issues in ways that influence voters' attitudes and decision-making processes. Social media has become a powerful tool in disseminating information and influencing public perception, including in the context of elections (Mulia.N, 2024)^[9]

Fifthly, respondents emphasized the importance of live networking and direct interaction between voters and political leaders through social media platforms. Social media interactions tend not to hugely affect how people vote (Nicolas.C, 2024). Features such as live streams, comments, and direct messaging enable voters to feel a sense of closeness and transparency, strengthening trust and influencing political support. Social media also facilitate political discussions, information sharing and networking with national leaders (Zainurin. S, 2024)^[14]

Finally, the survey revealed that both positive and negative information about candidates spreads quickly on social media. The spread of trolling and harassment as significantly influenced the sphere of web – based political engagement, altering the dynamics of digital conversations and movements (Basak.B, 2024)^[4]. The rapid publication of achievements, controversies, criticisms and scandals plays a crucial role in shaping voters' overall evaluation of

candidates often influencing emotional responses and voting intentions.

These six factors demonstrate that social media exerts a substantial influence on voter behavior by shaping political awareness, perceptions and opinions. The findings suggest that social media has become a powerful tool in modern electoral processes in Sri Lanka, particularly among young and educated voters, emphasizing the need for media literacy and responsible political communication.

Conclusion

The study examined the impact of social media on shaping voter's political opinions during the 2024 Presidential Election in Sri Lanka, focusing on the perspective of 100 undergraduate students. The findings confirm that social media plays a significant role in influencing political awareness, attitudes and voting behavior among young voters. The survey results indicate that the attractive presentation of political information through social media is the most influential factor affecting student's political opinions. Visually engaging content, simplified messages and creative digital campaigns helped students better understand candidate's policies and future agendas. The spread of fake news was identified as another major influence, demonstrating how misinformation can shape political perceptions and sometimes mislead voters. In addition, features such as open feedback systems, direct interaction with political leaders and the rapid sharing of positive and negative information also contributed to opinion formation. Thought to a lesser extent. The least influential factor was the both positive and negative information about candidates spreads quickly on social media.

Overall, the study concludes that social media has become a powerful tool in modern electoral processes in Sri Lanka, especially among undergraduate students who are active social media users. While social media offers opportunities for political engagement and information sharing, it also poses challenges such as the spread of misinformation. Therefore, the study highlights the importance of promoting digital media literacy, encouraging responsible political communication and developing effective strategies to minimize the negative impacts of social media on democratic decision – making.

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How to Cite This Article

Ravihari KMV, Suriyabandara VS, Madushan KBC. The Impact of Social Media on Shaping Voter's Political Opinions: A Study of the 2024 Presidential Election in Sri Lanka. Int J Humanit Sustain Innov. 2026;2(1):10–15. doi: 10.54660/IJHSI.2026.2.1.10-15.

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