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EDITOR'S NOTE

The present issue brings together a range of studies that engage with questions of culture, media, and society from varied analytical perspectives. The opening article by Vishnu and Maggie J revisits the historical interface between Buddhism and Hinduism in Kerala by examining architectural and symbolic continuities in temple traditions. Sinila D.B.S and Dr. M.S. Harikumar turn attention to the contemporary digital landscape, analysing how social media advertising shapes students' aspirations for higher education abroad.

R. S. Varun offers a critical reading of *The Darjeeling Limited*, drawing attention to the persistence of Orientalist tropes and the problematic representation of Indian culture in Hollywood cinema. The study on the adaptation of *Half Girlfriend* reflects on the shifts that occur when a literary text is reworked into film, highlighting the interplay between narrative fidelity and cinematic demands. Nishanth P documents the transformation of electoral campaigning in Kerala during the COVID-19 period, particularly the increasing reliance on digital platforms.

Shilpa Annie Joseph examines the growing use of clickbait in online journalism and its implications for reader trust and media credibility. The issue concludes with the work of Dr. Nayana R and Dr. M.S. Harikumar, who explore how political messaging influences voting behaviour among the electorate. Taken together, these studies contribute to ongoing conversations in media and cultural studies.

Dr. M. S. Harikumar
Editor

Buddhist Traces in Hindu Temple Traditions: A Study of Selected Temples in Kerala

■ VISHNU *
MAGGIE J. #

Abstract

This study presents a descriptive analysis of the architectural similarities between selected Hindu temples in Kerala and earlier Buddhist shrines. Scholarly discussions on the religious history of Kerala frequently highlight the significant presence and influence of Buddhism in the region in earlier centuries. Although Buddhism continues to thrive in several South Asian countries, its presence in India—particularly in Kerala—has considerably diminished over time. Historical evidence suggests that Buddhism maintained a strong cultural and religious foothold in Kerala from approximately the fifth to the twelfth centuries. With the gradual rise of Brahmanical traditions and the spread of the Bhakti movement, Buddhism declined as an organized religious force in the region. However, rather than completely discarding the sacred symbols and deities associated with the earlier tradition, many of these elements appear to have been assimilated into emerging Hindu practices.

Within this context, the study examines the semiotic continuities reflected in temple architecture, ritual symbolism, and iconographic representations that indicate possible Buddhist influences on later Hindu worship spaces. A notable cultural narrative in Kerala associates the deity Ayyappa with Gautama Buddha, as certain aspects of their narratives and symbolic attributes appear to share similarities. In contrast, in many North Indian traditions, Gautama Buddha is regarded as an incarnation of Vishnu, a belief that has not gained similar prominence in the southern regions of India. By examining these symbolic parallels and cultural reinterpretations, the study seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of religious transformation, continuity, and syncretism in the historical landscape of Kerala.

Keywords: *Semiotic analysis, Hindu Temples, Buddhist Architecture, Hindu Architecture*

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Introduction

Religions of the world have long been a subject of scholarly inquiry and public discussion. It is estimated that nearly 10,000 religions exist across the globe, each with its own body of followers and traditions. However, the majority of the world's population adheres to a few major religious traditions, including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, along with various indigenous and folk religions. Each of these faiths possesses a long historical trajectory that spans several centuries and has profoundly shaped cultural, social, and philosophical developments in different regions of the world.

Hinduism is often regarded as one of the oldest continuously practiced religious traditions in the world and has a vast number of adherents. It is among the most widely followed religions globally. Buddhism, another major world religion, also commands a significant global following, with hundreds of millions of adherents. Both traditions originated in the Indian subcontinent and have exercised considerable influence on the philosophical and spiritual history of Asia.

Many scholars have argued that Buddhism emerged within the broader cultural and religious milieu of Hinduism. The founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama Buddha, was born into a Kshatriya royal family and grew up within the socio-religious context of the Indian subcontinent, which was predominantly shaped by early Hindu traditions. In later Hindu theological interpretations, Gautama Buddha is often regarded as an incarnation of Vishnu, one of the principal deities of the Hindu pantheon. Several Hindu texts make references to Buddha, though these references do not always correspond directly to the historical figure revered in Buddhist traditions. While Buddhists revere Buddha primarily as an enlightened teacher who attained spiritual awakening, many Hindus regard him as a divine incarnation within the broader framework of Vishnu's avatars. In historical discourse, the teachings of Buddha and the spread of Buddhism have often been cited as a response to, and critique of, social hierarchies such as the caste system that existed in early Indian society.

Although Buddhism once flourished extensively in India, its presence gradually declined over time. Historians attribute this decline to several factors, including political transformations, the resurgence of Brahmanical traditions, and later socio-religious changes associated with the expansion of other faiths. As a result, Buddhism diminished considerably in the very region where it had originally emerged. Despite this historical shift, Hinduism and Buddhism continue to share certain philosophical ideas, such as concepts related to karma, rebirth, and liberation, while also maintaining significant doctrinal differences. Hinduism encompasses a wide range of beliefs and practices that vary across regions and communities, reflecting its long and complex cultural evolution. Buddhism, on the other hand, has developed several schools and traditions that interpret the teachings of Buddha in different ways, although the core principles of the religion remain broadly consistent.

The region of Kerala in southern India is believed to have possessed a strong Buddhist presence in earlier centuries. Historical narratives suggest that the spread of Brahmanical traditions contributed to a gradual decline in Buddhism within the region. Nevertheless, traces of the Buddhist past of Kerala remain visible through archaeological and cultural evidence, including sculptures of Gautama Buddha discovered in different parts of the state. Several prominent Hindu temples in

Kerala are also believed by some scholars to have originated as Buddhist shrines. Examples

often cited in this context include the Ananthashayaneshwara Temple, Sabarimala, Vadakkunnathan Temple, and Kodungallur Temple.

These sites are often examined for indications of a possible Buddhist past through aspects such as their geographical location, architectural style, iconography, and the sculptural representation of the main deity. Identifying and analysing such features is important for understanding potential historical continuities between earlier Buddhist establishments and later Hindu temples. In this context, it becomes essential to examine whether these structures exhibit semiotic similarities with Buddhist counterparts, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of religious transformation and cultural adaptation in the historical landscape of Kerala.

Buddhism In India

Buddhism is a religion which has followers all across the world but its popularity in South East Asia is unparalleled. It has a huge number of followers in this region and India is one country which has a very strong Buddhist history and has a good number of followers for the religion despite of being home for a lot of other religions including Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Judaism, Jainism etc. Buddhism is the fifth most followed religion in India with 0.7% of the entire population following the religion. The number of followers of the religion has diminished over time but the relevance of the religion in India has always been high.

The founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama was a prince of the Sakhya tribe. At the age of twenty nine he left the comforts of his home to seek answer to the cause of human sufferings. Gautama became the enlightened one, the Buddha, after wandering and meditating for six years. On the full moon of May, with the rising of the morning star, Siddhartha attained knowledge at Bodh Gaya. Gautama Buddha delivered his first sermon at Sarnath, near Varanasi. To preach his religion, Buddha wandered in the North East India for about 40 odd years. His hard work bore fruit and a community or Sangha of monks and nuns developed around him. The Sangha pursued practice and propagation of Buddhism. The Sangha pursued practice and propagation of Buddhism.

The fundamental principle of Buddhism is to follow the middle path. Buddhism teaches its followers to perform good and wholesome actions and to purify and train the mind. These practices are aimed at ending the suffering of cyclic existence. Buddhist emphasizes the principles of harmlessness and moderation. Buddhism does not believe in the existence of supernatural beings but it does not ascribe the power for creation, salvation or judgement to them. Buddhism believes that the supernatural beings have the power to affect only worldly events.

In the 300 BC, one of the great kings, Asoka, became a Buddhist, which helped Buddhism to succeed. Asoka convinced many other Indian people to become Buddhists. Buddhist monks started great monasteries and some of these monasteries developed into centres of scholarship and research like the great University at Nalanda in North-Eastern India. By 200 BC scholars were coming from as far away

as China to study with the Buddhists at Nalanda.

At first Buddhists were first in India, but by 500 AD under the Guptan Empire, travelling Buddhist monks spread Buddhist ideas west to the Sassanian Empire and east to China and other parts of East Asia. Travelling Buddhists also brought other Indian things like sugar with them to China. Chinese Buddhists kept on coming to India to study at the University at Nalanda.

By the 600 AD most of the Buddhists in India had gone back to being Hindus again. They still remembered Buddha, but as one of many Hindu Gods. In West Asia, most of the Buddhists gradually converted to the new religion of Islam.

The University at Nalanda began to be short of money and people, as Buddhism was gradually being wiped out. Instead scholars went to the newer Islamic University of Baghdad(in modern Iraq). By the 1200 AD, Nalanda had closed down. In China on the other hand Buddhism became stronger. Soon most of the Buddhists were in China and not India. In China, most Buddhist people continued to lead more or less ordinary lives, some Buddhist men and women left their jobs and families in order to live in Buddhist monasteries as monks and nuns. Chinese Buddhism was about meditation and action, not about scholarship and research.

Hinduism In India

Hinduism is not a religion in the sense that we might understand Christianity, Islam or Judaism to be. It has no central scripture or body of scriptures comparable to the Bible or the Quran. The term 'Hindu' has a longer history than the term Hinduism. It was used, as far back as the middle of the first millennium BCE, by Persian conquerors to refer to indigenous population living along and beyond the river Sindhu, flowing along the north western frontiers of the Indian subcontinent. The term had no obvious religious significance. It referred to a geographically defined population which over time came to be marked by immense diversity of language and custom. Gradually the indigenous people began to use this term to distinguish themselves from foreigners- for instance, Muslim conquerors and settlers from Central Asia, European traders and explorers and also travellers and merchants visiting India from other parts of the world.

The term Hinduism was coined relatively recently, in the 19th century as the term "Hindu" began to be invested with religious significance. It was used to refer to a diversity of socio-religious beliefs and practices that have long been prevalent in the Indian subcontinent and whose origins date all the way back to the second millennium BCE. This usage followed in large part from British orientalist discovery of ancient Indian liturgical and philosophical traditions in Sanskrit. The term "Hinduism" came to be identified with the religious traditions of Indian people and Indian reformers too in due course came to use this term to refer to the 'religion' of the Hindus.

Comparison of Buddhism and Hinduism

Hinduism is the oldest known religion and is very rich with literally hundreds of Gods, symbolic rituals and [beliefs](#). It is believed to have been established around 1500 B.C.. but one person never founded Hinduism as it evolved over a long period of time.

Buddhism on the otherhand has a definite founder Siddhartha Gautama who is known as the Buddha or Enlightened one who lived from 565 to 483 B.C. Both these religions originated in India.

Siddhartha Gautama was a Hindu who found Hindu theology lacking and after years of searching for truth founded a religion now known as Buddhism. Although there are similarities on the the two religions they differ immensely for many factors.

Hinduism and Buddhism both have numerous Gods and both follow the same paths to ultimately achieve Nirvana. The concepts of a God or Gods in Buddhism are almost void and therefore in the eyes of some not even a religion. Hindus have many Gods governing different aspects of Hindu life. The three main Gods in Hinduism are Vishnu who is the sustainer; Brahma is the creator and Shiva the destroyer. They are referred as Trimurthi. Most Hindu Gods are associated with animals and therefore Hindus feel that being a vegetarian is vital. Cows are sacred in Hinduism and are worshipped as the divine mother and so eating beef taboo.

Buddhism involves meditation and prayer. In Buddhism, one must understand the four noble truths which are the truth of suffering, the truth of the origin of suffering, the truth of cessation and the truth of the path. These all follow the eightfold path, which describes the ways in which one must live. Hindu scriptures advocate the pursuit of many goals in one's life including righteous living, wealth, prosperity, love and happiness. The ultimate goal is to achieve Nirvana.

The concept of suffering and reincarnation is common in both [religions.](#) In Buddhism there is the concept of two extremes, one devoted to pleasure and lust and one devoted to mortification. Both are considered profitless and therefore one should take the middle path, which leads to insight. This means that people should not seek Nirvana too hard but should not seek it too little either. Hindus believe that life has no ultimate significance and is but a small part in a vast unending and essentially meaningless cycle of life and death, and that everything has a soul or atman. Although Buddhism had a whole new meaning without any God and with these new ideals, one could argue that the backbone stems from its original "mother" Hinduism.

Buddhism in Kerala

The Buddhists came to Kerala and established their temples and monasteries in different parts of the country. The following Hindu temples were once Buddhist shrines: the Vadakkumnathan Temple of Trichur, the Kurumba Bhagavathi Temple of Kannur and the Durgga Temple at Paruvasseri near Trichur. A large number of Buddha images have been discovered in the coastal districts of Alaphey and Quilon; the most important Buddha image is the famous Karumatikuttan near Ambalappuzha. Buddhism probably flourished for 200 years (650-850) in Kerala.

The decline of Buddhism started in the eighth century with the arrival of Aryan missionaries and the Brahmanical religion. The Brahmin scholars defeated Buddhist monks in debates and established the superiority of the Hindu religion. Adi Shankaracharya the Hindu revivalist, was also responsible for the fall of Buddhism; he found Hindu monasteries and trained Hindu priest-scholars to combat his Buddhist adversaries. Buddhism faded away gradually and completely disappeared during the reign of Vaishnavite Kulasekhars in the eleventh century. What actually happened was that Buddhism was reabsorbed into Hinduism from which it broke away. Many Keralites, like the Ezhavas, who were most likely Buddhists once gradually became Hindus.

Buddhism has left its impact on Kerala. The images and tall rathas (cars) used in temple processions and utsavams (fairs) are said to be Buddhist legacies. The Ayurveda system of medical treatment is also a gift of Buddhism. Buddhists opened schools (in pallikudam and ezhuthupally). Pally is the Buddhist term for school near their monasteries. Kerala temples show traces of Buddhist art and architecture.

Buddhist Architecture

The three key elements of Buddhist architecture are Stupas, Viharas and Chaityas. A stupa refers to a mound-like structure that contains some relic of Buddha or Buddhist monks. When Buddha died, his remains were cremated and the ashes were divided and buried in eight mounds. The foundation of Buddhist stupas was mainly laid by Asoka. The earliest and largest stupa found in Sanchi is ascribed to Asoka. The best examples of Buddhist stupas are found at Amaravati, Sanchi, Barhut and Gaya.

Early Chaityas and Viharas were made by woods and later stone cut Chaityas and Viharas were made. A chaitya was divided into three parts, and had an apsidal ending i.e., a semicircular rear end, the central part of the hall (also called the nave) was separated from the two aisles by two rows of pillars, Chaityas also had polished interior walls, semicircular roofs and horse-shoe shaped windows called the Chaitya windows. Viharas were the residences of the monks.

Hindu Architecture

According to Hindu theory, Buddhism and Jainism are sects of [Hinduism](#). In the field of Architecture too they have no great disparities from Hindu architecture, making it possible to say that their structural systems and forms of their components are completely the same. Every Hindu temple has one of those Gods enshrined as the main deity. Through the great development of Hindu temple architecture in the medieval period, rivaling stone architecture in Europe and the Middle East, its style was roughly divided into two; the Southern type and Northern [Type](#). It might have reflected the differences of likings between northern Indo-Aryans and South Dravidians, languages of which were in completely different branches.

Review of Literature

A study conducted by W.S. Wong, Stupa Pagoda and Chorten: origin and meaning of Buddhist Architecture, University of Hong Kong discusses the Indian Stupa, the Han Pagoda and the Tibetan Chorten, all three being an important typology of Buddhist Architecture. This study also explores the names, the origin and different symbolic meanings of these stupa, Pagoda and Chorten in the context of the philosophy of Buddhism. Another study by Ashwini Agrawal, common concept of Dharma in Buddhism and Hinduism, Department of Ancient History, Culture & Archeology tries to explain the common elements Buddhism and Hinduism have on the idea Dharma. Dharma is a concept which both the religions account up [on](#). As both Buddhism and Hinduism are strong believers of the idea of Dharma, this study plays a significant role in making the statement that Hinduism and Buddhism have very close links even though they have differences as well.

Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to analyse the semiotic similarities observed in the architecture and symbolic elements of selected Hindu temples and Buddhist shrines. The broader objective of the research is to explore whether certain architectural forms, sculptural features, ritual practices, and symbolic motifs in Hindu temples in Kerala reflect possible continuities with earlier Buddhist traditions. Within this broader framework, the study pursues the following specific objectives:

1. To evaluate the similarities between the sculptures of the principal deity in selected Hindu temples and the iconographic representations of Gautama Buddha or related figures within Buddhism.
2. To assess the historical and cultural processes through which certain Buddhist shrines may have been transformed into Hindu temples.
3. To identify and analyse the relics and symbolic traces of the Buddhist past that may still be present within these Hindu temple structures.

Methodology

The present study employs a qualitative research design using the methods of case study and focus group interviews. Three temples from different regions of Kerala were selected for detailed examination. The selected sites include *Ananthapura Lake Temple* in Kasaragod district, *Vadakkunnathan Temple* in Thrissur district, and *Sabarimala* in Pathanamthitta district.

Field visits were conducted to these temples in order to observe and document aspects such as architectural features, sculptural representations of the main deity, surrounding landscape, ritual practices, and symbolic motifs. These elements were analysed to identify possible parallels with Buddhist architectural and symbolic traditions.

In addition to the case studies, expert opinions were collected through focus group interviews. Scholars and researchers with expertise in history, religion, and the Buddhist heritage of Kerala were selected as respondents. The participants were asked a set of open-ended questions based on their respective areas of expertise, allowing them to provide insights into the historical and semiotic connections between Buddhist shrines and Hindu temples in the region.

Analysis of Case Studies

The three temples selected for the study were visited and closely examined in order to identify architectural and symbolic features that may suggest a possible Buddhist connection. The observations revealed that each of these temples possesses certain

distinctive characteristics in terms of architecture, sculpture, ritual practices, geographical location, or associated myths that have often been interpreted as indicative of a Buddhist past.

Ananthapura Lake Temple

Ananthapura Lake Temple is situated in a relatively secluded location near Kumbla in Kasaragod district. The temple is uniquely positioned within the middle of a lake, and the waters surrounding it are traditionally believed to be inhabited by a crocodile. The spatial setting and architectural structure of the temple differ significantly from many conventional Hindu temples in the region.

The temple's structure bears resemblance to certain Buddhist architectural forms, particularly floating pagodas that are surrounded by water. In this regard, the visual layout of the temple evokes similarities with Buddhist shrines constructed in aquatic settings. The temple is also enclosed by a compound wall locally known as Anamathil, constructed by arranging bricks in a specific pattern. The term Anamathil in Malayalam literally refers to an "elephant-like wall." The elephant is a significant symbolic motif in Buddhism and is often associated with strength of mind and spiritual discipline. Furthermore, one of the sculptural forms on the wall resembles a Bodhisattva figure commonly associated with Mahayana Buddhist iconography.

Vadakkunnathan Temple

The Vadakkunnathan Temple is one of the most prominent temples in Kerala and is located in the city of Thrissur. The temple complex is surrounded by an expansive ground where the famous Thrissur Pooram is conducted annually.

The ritual practices followed in the temple are distinctive, as worship is offered to more than fifty deities according to a specific sequence prescribed by temple authorities. The four gopurams (temple gateways) of the complex contain numerous sculptures and carvings. Some of these ancient sculptural forms display facial features that resemble traditional representations of the Buddha, including elongated ears and half-closed eyes—characteristic attributes often associated with Buddhist iconography. Due to the age of the structures, many of these sculptures are gradually deteriorating.

The temple also features an Anamathil structure that is connected to the gopurams through formations resembling horses. The horse is another symbolic motif that has been associated with Buddhist narratives, particularly in relation to the life of the Buddha. Interestingly, the sculpture of the principal deity inside the sanctum is not clearly visible, as it is believed to be covered by a large accumulation of ghee offered by devotees over centuries. Some interpretations suggest that an earlier sculptural form might exist within this structure.

Sabarimala

Sabarimala is located in the forested hills of Pathanamthitta district and is one of the most prominent pilgrimage centres in southern India. The principal deity of the temple is Ayyappa, whose idol is depicted in an Ardhaveerasana posture, a seated position that is relatively uncommon among Hindu deities.

The geographical location of the temple—situated on a hill within dense forests—has often been cited by scholars as a factor supporting the argument of a possible Buddhist connection, as many early Buddhist establishments were located in similarly secluded environments conducive to meditation and monastic life. Certain ritual chants associated with the pilgrimage, such as “Swami Saranam,” have been noted for their phonetic similarity to the Buddhist refuge verse “Buddham Saranam Gacchami,” which signifies taking refuge in the Buddha.

The hand gesture (Chinmudra) of the main deity has also been interpreted by some scholars as symbolically reflecting the Three Jewels of Buddhism—Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Additionally, the hill on which the temple is situated has historically been referred to as Pallimala, and the deity is sometimes addressed as Pallimala Vasana. The term palli in Kerala’s historical context has often been associated with Buddhist or Jain religious establishments. The temple is also occasionally referred to as Ponnambalam, meaning “golden shrine,” a phrase that resonates with descriptions of certain Buddhist shrines known for their golden architectural features.

Analysis of Focus Group Interviews

Four individuals with expertise in history and the Buddhist heritage of Kerala were interviewed as part of the focus group discussion. Among the four respondents, three supported the view that the selected temples exhibit elements that could indicate a Buddhist past. These respondents highlighted several semiotic, architectural, and ritual features that they believe connect these temples to earlier Buddhist traditions.

Ajayasekhar, Assistant Professor at Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit and a researcher on the Buddhist history of Kerala, observed that all three temples display features that could be interpreted as remnants of earlier Buddhist structures. According to him, the architectural form of the Ananthapura Lake Temple closely resembles floating pagodas found in certain Buddhist traditions, which may serve as evidence of its historical linkage.

Aju Narayanan, a writer known for his works on Buddhism in Kerala, suggested that Sabarimala exhibits several characteristics indicative of a Buddhist past. He pointed to the Chinmudra hand gesture of the main deity and the distinctive seated posture as features that resemble Buddhist iconographic traditions.

Another researcher, Ratheesh, also noted that the temples studied contain relics and symbolic elements that may support the argument of a Buddhist presence in their earlier history.

However, one respondent expressed a dissenting view, arguing that a careful historical examination might lead to different conclusions. According to this perspective, these temples may have originally been associated with subaltern communities and indigenous tribal groups rather than Buddhist establishments. The respondent suggested that these local traditions may have been later transformed or absorbed into Brahmanical religious practices, leading to the current form of worship observed in these temples.

Hence the findings from both the case studies and the expert interviews indicate that the selected temples contain architectural and symbolic features that invite further scholarly exploration regarding the historical relationship between Buddhist shrines and Hindu temples in Kerala.

Conclusion

The present study attempted to examine the semiotic similarities between selected Hindu temples in Kerala and Buddhist shrines, with particular emphasis on architectural forms, symbolic motifs, spatial settings, and sculptural representations. Through the case studies of Ananthapura Lake Temple, Vadakkunnathan Temple, and Sabarimala, the study sought to identify whether elements within these Hindu temples reflect continuities with earlier Buddhist traditions.

The findings suggest that these temples display several semiotic and architectural features that resemble characteristics commonly associated with Buddhism. These similarities are observable in aspects such as the geographical setting of the temples, architectural layouts, sculptural features, ritual expressions, and symbolic motifs embedded within the temple structures. In particular, elements such as the presence of water-surrounded architecture, iconographic similarities in sculptural forms, meditative postures of the main deity, and the use of symbolic gestures have often been interpreted by scholars as indicators of possible Buddhist influence. The location of these temples in relatively secluded or elevated landscapes further strengthens the argument that such sites may once have functioned as spaces associated with Buddhist religious practices.

Historically, Kerala is believed to have witnessed a gradual transformation in its religious landscape, particularly between the early medieval and later medieval periods. The decline of Buddhism in the region coincided with the growing influence of Brahmanical traditions and the consolidation of devotional movements. The rise of the Bhakti movement and the institutional strengthening of Brahmanism—particularly through the synthesis of Shaivite and Vaishnavite traditions within Hinduism—played a crucial role in reshaping the religious and cultural environment of the region. During this process, several earlier religious sites appear to have undergone reinterpretation and transformation, whereby existing structures were adapted to suit the emerging Hindu religious framework.

The evidence examined in this study suggests that certain architectural structures and symbolic elements associated with earlier Buddhist traditions may have been retained, reinterpreted, or assimilated within the evolving Hindu temple system. In some cases, these transformations may have involved modifications to the shrines and the incorporation of new ritual practices and deities. The persistence of such symbolic

features within the temples strengthens the argument that traces of a Buddhist past may still survive within the religious landscape of Kerala.

At the same time, the differing perspectives expressed by the scholars interviewed in the study highlight the complexity of interpreting historical religious transformations. While several experts acknowledge the possibility of a Buddhist past for these temples, others emphasise the need for more rigorous historical and archaeological evidence before drawing definitive conclusions. These differing interpretations underline the importance of further interdisciplinary research combining history, archaeology, semiotics, and religious studies.

The semiotic elements identified in the selected temples contribute to the broader discourse on religious continuity, transformation, and cultural assimilation in Kerala's history. The presence of such symbolic and architectural parallels invites deeper scholarly exploration into how religious traditions interact, evolve, and reshape sacred spaces over time

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Digital Persuasion and Educational Mobility: Analysing the Impact of Social Media Advertisements on Students' Migration Intentions

■ SINILA.D.B.S *
DR. M.S HARIKUMAR #

Abstract

The rapid expansion of social media has significantly transformed the informational and aspirational landscape of youth, particularly in the context of higher education mobility. This study examines the influence of social media advertisements on students' decisions to pursue higher education in foreign universities. Adopting a mixed-method approach, the research integrates quantitative data from an opinion survey conducted among 147 youth respondents in Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala, with qualitative insights derived from in-depth interviews with ten students studying abroad. The findings reveal that platforms such as Instagram and YouTube function as prominent channels for disseminating migration-related promotional content. Student influencers emerge as key opinion leaders, shaping perceptions and reinforcing migration intentions through experiential narratives. The study further indicates a generally positive attitude among youth toward social media advertisements, reflecting high levels of digital engagement and technological acceptance. The results are interpreted through the theoretical frameworks of Uses and Gratifications Theory, the Technology Acceptance Model, and the Theory of Reasoned Action. The study highlights the growing role of digital persuasion in shaping contemporary educational mobility decisions.

Keywords: *Social media advertising; Student migration; Influencer communication; Educational mobility; Technology Acceptance Model; Uses and Gratifications Theory.*

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Introduction

Social media represents one of the most transformative developments in contemporary digital communication. As an internet-based mode of interaction, it enables users to create, share, exchange, and engage with content in real time across geographical boundaries. Unlike traditional mass media, which functions through one-to-many communication, social media operates within interactive, participatory, and networked frameworks that facilitate multidirectional communication flows. This shift has significantly redefined how information is produced, disseminated, and consumed in the twenty-first century.

Social media platforms encompass a wide range of digital environments, including blogs, microblogs, wikis, social networking sites, photo- and video-sharing platforms, instant messaging applications, podcasts, virtual communities, and live-streaming services. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn have become central to everyday communication practices. These platforms not only enable interpersonal connectivity but also function as spaces for marketing, political engagement, digital activism, education, entertainment, and economic transactions.

Recent global statistics indicate the magnitude of social media's penetration. As of January 2025, there are approximately 5.24 billion social media users worldwide, representing nearly 64 percent of the global population. The user base continues to expand, with an estimated 206 million new users added over the previous year, reflecting an annual growth rate of approximately 4 percent. On average, individuals spend around 2 hours and 24 minutes daily on social media platforms, with younger demographics dedicating even greater time—particularly on short-form video platforms such as TikTok. Among all platforms, Facebook remains the most widely used, with over three billion monthly active users, followed by YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp, each reporting user bases in the billions.

At a personal level, social media facilitates communication with friends and family, fosters community formation, enables knowledge acquisition, and provides avenues for self-expression and entertainment. At a societal level, it shapes public discourse, influences consumer behavior, impacts political communication, and contributes to cultural transformation. The ability of these platforms to enable instantaneous global communication has effectively compressed time and space, allowing individuals to interact across continents within seconds. This immediacy has proven particularly significant during crises and public events, where real-time updates circulate rapidly through digital networks.

The theoretical foundations of social media are closely linked to the evolution of Web 2.0 technologies, which shifted the internet from a “read-only” information repository to a participatory, user-generated ecosystem. Unlike the earlier static web, Web 2.0 encouraged collaborative content creation, interactive feedback mechanisms, and community-based participation. This transformation significantly enhanced user engagement and democratized content production, allowing ordinary users to become active contributors rather than passive consumers of information.

1.1 Emergence of Social Media

The term “social media,” as defined by Merriam-Webster, refers to forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and multimedia content. The emergence of social media can be understood as the convergence of technological innovation and the fundamental human impulse for social interaction. Early networking platforms gradually evolved into complex digital ecosystems characterized by algorithm-driven content distribution, personalized feeds, and integrated commercial functionalities.

Unlike conventional communication systems that require prior knowledge of private contact information, social media platforms enable users to discover, connect with, and interact with both known acquaintances and like-minded strangers. Communities can be broad, addressing global audiences, or niche, catering to specific professional, cultural, or ideological interests. For example, LinkedIn emphasizes professional networking and career development, whereas Instagram prioritizes visual storytelling. Increasingly, platforms are integrating live streaming, e-commerce, and digital retail features, transforming them into hybrid communication–commercial spaces.

Several major platforms have played a pivotal role in shaping the contemporary social media landscape. Facebook was launched in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg. Reddit was founded in 2005 by Steve Huffman and Alexis Ohanian. Twitter (now rebranded as X) emerged in 2006 through the efforts of Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, and Biz Stone. Instagram was founded in 2010 by Kevin Systrom. Snapchat was introduced in 2011 by Evan Spiegel, Reggie Brown, and Bobby Murphy. TikTok was launched internationally in 2016 by the Chinese technology company ByteDance.

1.1.1 Social Media User Statistics and Contemporary Significance

The rapid expansion of social media usage reflects its deep integration into everyday life. Approximately 86 percent of adults aged 18 and above report regular use of social media platforms. The proliferation of smartphones, affordable internet connectivity, and localized content production has further accelerated digital participation, particularly in developing regions.

Beyond interpersonal communication, social media now serves as a critical space for public discourse and civic engagement. In contexts such as India, digital platforms have played a significant role in disseminating information during emergencies and socially sensitive incidents. Events such as the Chooralmala landslide, the Shirur landslide, the Venjaramoodu mass murder case, and the medical student ragging case at Kottayam Medical College illustrate how social media facilitates rapid information diffusion, public mobilization, and real-time updates. The absence of geographical limitations enables these platforms to amplify local incidents to national and international audiences within minutes.

Within this broader communicative ecosystem, social media advertising has emerged as a powerful strategic tool. Unlike traditional advertising, which targets mass audiences, digital advertisements employ algorithmic targeting, behavioral tracking, and data analytics to reach specific demographic groups. Students, in particular, constitute a highly active and digitally engaged segment, making them especially susceptible to persuasive advertising narratives related to education, employment, and migration opportunities.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines the influence of social media advertisements on student migration. By situating the analysis within the broader theoretical and technological evolution of social media, the study seeks to understand

how digital promotional content shapes aspirations, perceptions, and decision-making processes among students in an increasingly globalized and networked world.

1.2 The Rise of Social Media Advertising

Advertising is a strategic communication process that utilizes paid media space to promote a product, service, idea, or cause with the objective of influencing consumer attitudes and behavior. Traditionally disseminated through print, radio, television, and outdoor media, advertising has undergone a significant transformation with the advent of digital technologies. In the contemporary media environment, social media advertising has emerged as one of the most dynamic and rapidly expanding forms of digital marketing.

Social media advertising refers to the practice of delivering paid promotional content to targeted audiences through social networking platforms. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and TikTok have evolved into sophisticated advertising ecosystems that integrate user data, algorithmic targeting, and performance analytics. As global social media usage continues to expand, these platforms have become critical channels for businesses, educational institutions, and organizations seeking to reach segmented and highly engaged audiences.

One of the primary drivers behind the rise of social media advertising is its advanced targeting capability. Unlike traditional mass advertising, social media platforms allow advertisers to segment audiences based on demographic variables (age, gender, location), psychographic characteristics (interests, lifestyle, values), and behavioral data (online activity, purchase patterns, engagement history). This precision targeting enhances message relevance, reduces advertising waste, and increases the likelihood of conversion. Consequently, advertisers can deliver personalized content to users who are most likely to respond positively.

Another significant factor contributing to the growth of social media advertising is measurability. Digital platforms provide comprehensive analytics tools that enable advertisers to track impressions, reach, click-through rates, engagement levels, and conversions in real time. This data-driven environment allows continuous optimization of campaigns, facilitating strategic adjustments based on measurable outcomes. The ability to monitor return on investment (ROI) with precision represents a major advantage over many traditional media formats.

Cost-effectiveness further strengthens the appeal of social media advertising. Compared to television or print advertising, social media campaigns typically require lower financial investment while offering scalable reach. Small and medium enterprises, as well as educational institutions promoting international study programs or migration opportunities, can implement highly targeted campaigns without incurring prohibitive costs. Moreover, the global reach of social media platforms enables advertisers to transcend geographical limitations, making them particularly relevant in the context of transnational mobility and student migration.

The architecture of social media platforms also encourages interactive advertising. Unlike traditional one-way promotional messages, social media advertisements operate within participatory environments where users can comment, share, react, and engage with branded content. This interactivity transforms advertising from a purely persuasive message into a dialogic process, fostering community formation and relational engagement between brands and audiences.

Strategically, effective social media advertising rests upon five foundational pillars: strategy formulation, content creation, audience engagement, analytics-driven optimization, and paid promotion management. Together, these elements enable organizations to build a strong digital presence, cultivate brand awareness, establish credibility, and achieve measurable marketing objectives.

1.2.1 Techniques of Social Media Advertising

The effectiveness of social media advertising depends on the strategic application of platform-specific techniques. One of the most fundamental techniques is targeted audience selection, which ensures that promotional messages reach users whose profiles align with the objectives of the campaign. By leveraging algorithmic insights, advertisers can segment audiences with remarkable precision.

Content creation constitutes another critical dimension. Engaging, platform-tailored content—whether textual, visual, or audiovisual—enhances audience attention and interaction. Compelling visuals, high-quality photography, short-form videos, and persuasive copywriting play a central role in conveying brand narratives and influencing perception. On visually driven platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, video-based storytelling and immersive formats tend to generate higher engagement. Meanwhile, professional networks such as LinkedIn may prioritize informational and career-oriented messaging.

Influencer marketing has also become a prominent technique within social media advertising. By collaborating with content creators who possess established credibility and follower bases, brands can leverage parasocial relationships to enhance message authenticity and trustworthiness. Similarly, user-generated content strategies encourage audiences to participate in brand promotion, thereby increasing organic reach and perceived legitimacy.

Interactive strategies such as contests, giveaways, live-streamed events, and hashtag campaigns further stimulate audience participation. These approaches align with the “Four Cs” framework of social media communication—content, conversation, community, and connection. By responding to comments, messages, and mentions, advertisers foster relational bonds and cultivate digital communities that extend beyond transactional exchanges. The selection of advertising formats is equally important. Social media platforms offer diverse ad formats, including:

Image advertisements: Static visual content accompanied by concise messaging to highlight products or services.

Video advertisements: Dynamic audiovisual content used to narrate stories, demonstrate features, or create emotional resonance.

Carousel advertisements: Multi-panel ads featuring several images or videos within a single unit, allowing detailed product presentation.

Story advertisements: Full-screen vertical ads displayed within “stories” features on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram.

In-stream video advertisements: Promotional videos that appear before, during, or after content on platforms such as YouTube.

Continuous monitoring and performance analysis remain integral to campaign success. Advertisers evaluate key metrics—including impressions, engagement rates, click-through rates, and conversion ratios—to refine targeting strategies and optimize content delivery. This iterative process reflects the data-driven logic that distinguishes digital advertising from traditional mass communication models.

Beyond commercial objectives, social media advertising fulfills broader communicative functions: informing audiences about new offerings, persuading them to adopt specific behaviors, reminding them of existing brands, and reinforcing brand loyalty. Over time, sustained digital engagement contributes to trust-building, brand recognition, and long-term relational capital between organizations and their audiences.

In the context of this study, understanding the mechanisms and techniques of social media advertising is crucial for examining how targeted promotional messages influence student perceptions, aspirations, and migration-related decision-making processes in an increasingly digitalized environment.

1.3 Student Migration Statistics in Kerala

Student migration refers to the movement of individuals who relocate outside their country of birth or citizenship for the purpose of pursuing education for a period of twelve months or more. In the era of globalization, the internationalization of higher education has expanded significantly, transforming global education into a competitive and market-driven sector. Universities and host nations increasingly position international education not merely as an academic opportunity but also as a pathway to employment and, in many cases, permanent residency. Consequently, student mobility has become intertwined with broader economic, demographic, and migration policy frameworks.

Host countries benefit from international students both economically and culturally. Beyond tuition revenue and living expenditures, international students contribute to knowledge economies, skill development, and multicultural enrichment. These benefits have prompted several destination countries to reform visa regulations and post-study work policies to attract and retain international talent. At the same time, shifting immigration regulations in traditional destinations such as the United States and the United Kingdom have influenced student mobility patterns, prompting diversification toward alternative destinations in Europe, Canada, Australia, and emerging education hubs.

Within India, Kerala represents a distinctive case in migration studies due to its historically high levels of international migration and strong educational indicators. According to the Kerala Migration Survey (KMS) conducted by the International Institute of Migration and Development, the total number of emigrants from Kerala is estimated at approximately 2.2 million, closely aligning with the 2.1 million recorded in the 2018 survey. While overall emigration levels have shown relative stability over the past five years, this stability masks significant internal shifts in the composition of migrants.

One of the most notable findings of KMS 2023 is the substantial rise in student emigration. The number of student emigrants increased from 129,763 in 2018 to nearly 250,000 in 2023, effectively doubling within five years. Students now constitute approximately 11.3 percent of total emigrants from Kerala. This increase reflects a demographic shift toward younger migrants, with some students leaving as early as 17 years of age. The survey estimates that nearly 2.5 lakh (250,000) students migrated from Kerala in 2023 alone for higher education abroad. This trend underscores the growing significance of educational mobility within Kerala's broader migration landscape.

Although the number of emigrants per 100 households has shown a slight decline compared to earlier years, migration continues to be deeply embedded in Kerala's socio-economic structure. Nearly half of surveyed households reported experiencing migration either through emigration or return migration. Of the 20,000 households surveyed, 16.2 percent reported at least one emigrant, compared to 17.3 percent in 2018. The total number of Non-Resident Keralites (NRKs), including both emigrants and return migrants, is estimated at approximately 4 million in 2023, up from 3.41 million in 2018. The survey also identified around 0.4 million cases of entire family migration, with numerous homes found locked during data collection due to overseas relocation.

Regionally, northern Kerala continues to account for the largest share of emigrants. Malappuram district alone contributed approximately 377,647 emigrants in 2023, with Tirur taluk recording the highest number of emigrants statewide. In contrast, Devikulam taluk in Idukki district reported the lowest number. Religious distribution data indicate that Muslims constitute 41.9 percent of emigrants, followed by Hindus (35.2 percent) and Christians (22.3 percent).

Destination preferences have also evolved. While Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

countries remain the dominant corridor, the share of migrants heading to GCC destinations declined from 89.2 percent in 2018 to 80.5 percent in 2023. Simultaneously, migration to non-GCC countries increased from 10.8 percent to 19.5 percent. The surge in student migration, particularly toward Western and European countries, appears to be a significant factor in this shift. Female migration has increased from 15.8 percent in 2018 to 19.1 percent in 2023, with 40.5 percent of female emigrants opting for non-GCC destinations, compared to 14.6 percent of male emigrants. Educational attainment data reveal that 71.5 percent of female migrants possess degree-level qualifications, compared to 34.7 percent of male migrants.

These findings collectively indicate a structural transformation in Kerala's migration pattern—from predominantly labor-oriented migration toward education-driven, youth-centric, and geographically diversified mobility. This shift forms an important empirical context for examining the influence of social media advertising on students' migration aspirations and decisions.

1.4 Theoretical Framework for the Study

The present study is grounded in established theoretical frameworks from mass communication and social psychology that explain media influence, behavioral intention, and technology adoption.

1.4.1 Theory of Reasoned Action

The Theory of Reasoned Action, developed by Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen in the 1970s, posits that an individual's behavior is primarily determined by behavioral intention. This intention is shaped by two core components: (1) attitude toward the behavior and (2) subjective norms. Attitude reflects an individual's evaluation of performing a particular behavior, while subjective norms refer to perceived social pressures from significant others.

In the context of student migration, exposure to persuasive social media advertisements may shape positive attitudes toward overseas education and influence perceived social expectations regarding international mobility. Thus, TRA provides a valuable framework for analyzing how advertising content contributes to migration-related intentions.

1.4.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory, associated with scholars such as Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch, emphasizes the active role of audiences in selecting media to satisfy specific needs. These needs may include information seeking, personal identity formation, social interaction, entertainment, or aspirational fulfillment.

Applied to this study, students may actively engage with social media platforms to gather information about foreign universities, visa procedures, scholarships, and employment prospects. Advertisements embedded within these platforms may align with pre-existing motivations, thereby reinforcing migration aspirations.

1.4.3 Technology Acceptance Model

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), proposed by Fred Davis in 1989, explains how individuals come to adopt and use new technologies. TAM identifies two primary determinants: perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU). These perceptions influence attitudes toward technology, which subsequently shape behavioral intention and actual usage.

Within this research, TAM is relevant in understanding how students perceive social media platforms as useful and accessible sources of information regarding overseas education. The perceived credibility and convenience of digital platforms may enhance the persuasive power of migration-related advertisements.

1.5 Relevance of the Study

The present study seeks to examine the role of social media advertising in shaping migration decisions among students in Kerala. Youth migration for higher education and employment opportunities has significant socio-economic implications for developing countries such as India. While overseas education may enhance individual prospects, large-scale youth outmigration can contribute to brain drain, demographic imbalances, and long-term developmental challenges.

Kerala, recognized as the most literate state in India, presents a unique socio-cultural context characterized by high educational aspirations and a longstanding migration tradition. In this environment, social media advertisements promoting foreign universities, international career prospects, and global lifestyles may play a persuasive role in influencing student perceptions and aspirations.

Given the high penetration of digital media among youth, understanding the mechanisms through which social media advertising shapes migration-related attitudes is both academically and socially relevant. This study identifies the most influential social networking platforms in disseminating migration-related information and critically examines the features and techniques employed in such advertisements. By situating student migration within a communication framework, the research contributes to broader discussions on media influence, digital persuasion, and transnational mobility in the Global South.

2. Review of Past Literature

Advertising is widely recognized as a powerful mass communication tool that informs and persuades the public regarding products, services, and ideas. In the digital era, social media advertising has gained significant prominence, particularly among youth. Numerous studies have examined its influence on consumer decision-making and behavioral intentions. This chapter reviews relevant literature on social media advertising and student migration.

2.1 Social Media Advertising

Advertising is a strategic communication process designed to influence consumer thoughts, emotions, and actions. The Australian Association of National Advertisers (2012) defines advertising as any material published or broadcast through any medium under the control of an advertiser to promote or oppose a product, service, or idea.

Gupta and Chopra (2020), in their study on the impact of social media on consumer behavior, found that social media significantly influences decision-making processes. Their quantitative survey revealed that users who actively engage with brands on social media report greater satisfaction during information search and evaluation stages of purchase decisions. Similarly, Nobre and Silva (2014) observed that social media marketing has enabled small and medium enterprises to compete effectively with larger corporations by enhancing customer acquisition, retention, and branding.

Balakrishnan and Dahnil (2014), studying Generation Y consumers, concluded that social media marketing—particularly electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), online communities, and digital advertisements—positively influences brand loyalty and purchase intention. Their findings highlight the importance of social media as a strategic marketing tool in reaching younger consumers.

Zembik (2014) emphasized that social media platforms serve as interactive spaces where both firms and consumers benefit: customers gain product information and peer recommendations, while firms receive feedback, market insights, and demographic data. Yousef (2021), examining advertising appeals on social media, found that different types of appeals (positive, negative, and coactive) significantly affect engagement and behavioral actions, with negative appeals generating stronger responses in experimental settings.

Jamil (2021) further demonstrated that social media marketing activities significantly influence user intentions, with social identification and satisfaction mediating this relationship. Collectively, these studies confirm that social media advertising is measurable, interactive, and highly influential in shaping consumer attitudes and intentions.

2.2 Student Migration

Student migration has emerged as a growing global phenomenon, particularly in developing regions. Hidayati (2018), in a study of Indonesian students at the University of Groningen, found that social media plays a crucial role in migration decision-making. Students used platforms such as Facebook to gather information about universities, living conditions, and social networks in destination countries.

Gertz (2023) analyzed education-related discussions among Brazilian migrants in Germany through Facebook groups and found that such digital spaces facilitate the activation of “latent ties” that support information exchange regarding educational and migration pathways. These findings demonstrate how online communities function as informal advisory networks.

Robertson (2013) highlighted the complex balance migrant students maintain between transnational ties and host-country aspirations, a dynamic relevant to Kerala students pursuing overseas education. Cairns (2021) similarly noted that youth mobility reflects a broader aspiration for improved quality of life.

In the Kerala context, Skariah (2024) found that students prefer English-speaking destinations such as the UK, New Zealand, and Germany, largely due to perceived educational quality and better employment prospects. Deshmukh and Sankpal (2022) identified quality of education and wage prospects as primary drivers of student migration from India. Weber and Van Mol (2023), applying migration transition theory, observed that international student mobility follows an inverted U-shaped relationship with national development levels.

Migration has historically shaped Kerala’s development trajectory. Earlier waves were dominated by labor migration to the Gulf region, followed by permanent settlement in Western countries. The current phase reflects a surge in student migration, particularly

to developed nations. Studies by the Centre for Development Studies estimate that around 1.5 million Keralites are working or studying abroad, with the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia as preferred destinations. Reports suggest that tens of thousands of students leave Kerala annually for higher education, indicating a growing educational mobility trend.

Overall, the literature suggests that social media functions as a significant informational and persuasive tool in shaping aspirations, decision-making processes, and migration pathways among students. However, limited research directly examines the specific influence of social media advertising on student migration decisions in Kerala, thereby establishing the need for the present study.

3. Study Method

3.1. General Objective

The primary objective of this study is to analyse the influence of social media advertisements on the migration of students from Kerala.

3.2. Specific Objectives

To examine the role of social media advertisements in influencing student migration.

To identify the social media platform that is most effective in disseminating migration-related advertisements.

To analyse the role of student influencers in promoting overseas migration for higher studies.

To identify the key features and persuasive elements used in social media advertisements to attract students.

3.3. Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-method approach comprising an opinion survey and in-depth interviews. The survey was designed to collect quantitative data from young social media users in Thiruvananthapuram district, the capital city of Kerala. In addition, qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with migrated students to explore their perceptions and lived experiences.

According to Creswell (2003), mixed-method research involves the collection, analysis, and integration of both quantitative and qualitative data within a single study or sustained program of inquiry (Roger & Joseph, 2014). This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the research problem by combining numerical trends with detailed personal insights.

Survey research is defined as the systematic collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to structured questions (Check & Schutt, 2012). It is widely used to describe existing conditions, assess needs, analyse trends, and establish baselines for comparison (Isaac & Michael, 1997).

In-depth interviews, as described by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), are research-oriented conversations designed to explore participants' perspectives in depth. Unlike casual conversations, in-depth interviews are guided by a clear research purpose and follow established methodological conventions.

3.4 Opinion Survey

An opinion survey was conducted among youth in Thiruvananthapuram district to assess their perceptions regarding the influence of social media advertisements on migration decisions.

3.4.1 Data Collection Tool

A structured questionnaire was employed to collect data. The instrument gathered information on respondents' awareness of the relationship between social media advertisements and student migration decisions for higher studies. It also collected data on social media usage patterns and socio-demographic characteristics.

3.4.2 Structure of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of three sections:

Section I: Socio-demographic and educational profile of respondents.

Section II: Social media usage patterns and habits.

Section III: Perceptions regarding the effectiveness of social media advertisements in influencing decisions about overseas educational destinations.

3.4.3 Sampling Procedure

The study was conducted in Thiruvananthapuram district, the southernmost district of Kerala. A purposive sampling technique was adopted to select respondents who were active social media users and relevant to the objectives of the study.

3.4.4 Study Variables

The key variables of the study included gender, age, and annual family income.

3.5 In-depth Interview

To complement the quantitative findings, qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with students who had migrated from Kerala for higher studies. This method was employed to validate and enrich the survey findings by capturing experiential and perceptual dimensions of migration decision-making.

3.5.1 Sample Selection

A purposive sampling method was used to select respondents. Ten individuals who had migrated from Kerala for higher education were deliberately chosen based on their relevance to the research objectives.

3.5.2 Data Collection Tool

Data were collected through unstructured telephonic interviews. The interviews explored respondents' exposure to migration-related advertisements, their interest in

such promotional content, factors influencing their choice of university, and their overall migration experiences

4. Analysis and findings

Social media exerts a multifaceted influence on young people, offering both significant opportunities and notable challenges. On the positive side, it facilitates communication, strengthens social connectivity, provides access to diverse sources of information and perspectives, and fosters creativity and self-expression. Conversely, excessive or uncritical engagement with social media may contribute to mental health concerns, expose users to cyberbullying, and accelerate the circulation of misinformation.

Within this broader context, the present study examines the role of advertisements disseminated through various social media platforms in influencing students' decisions to select foreign universities for higher studies. To achieve the stated objectives, a mixed-method approach—comprising an opinion survey and in-depth interviews—was employed, enabling both quantitative assessment and qualitative exploration of the phenomenon.

4.1 Sample Distribution for Opinion Survey

The opinion survey was conducted in Thiruvananthapuram district, the southernmost district of Kerala. Data were collected using a self-administered structured questionnaire. After excluding incomplete and misleading responses, the final sample size for analysis comprised 147 respondents. The study focused specifically on three key variables: gender, educational status, and annual family income. The distribution of the sample according to these variables is presented in Table 4.1

VARIABLES	FREQUENCY (N)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Gender		
Male	76	51.7
Female	71	48.29
Total	147	100
Education		
Up to SSLC	20	13.6
Higher Secondary	56	38.09
Graduation	51	34.69
Postgraduation	17	11.5
Others	3	2.04
Total	147	100
Family Annual Income		
Up to fifty Thousand	18	12.24
Fifty Thousand to One lakh	23	15.64
One lakh to 2 lakhs	62	42.17
Above two lakhs	44	29.93
Total	147	100

Table 4.1. Sample distribution by variables

4.2. Social media usage of the respondents

Social media usage among the respondents were analysed in the opinion survey. Three questions were included in the questionnaire (the questionnaire is attached in appendix) to understand the respondent's exposure to social media and the average time spent daily on various social media.

4.2.1.Exposure to various media

The frequency and percentage analysis of question 5 and 6 reveals that majority of the respondents (97.27 %) use various social media platforms regularly.

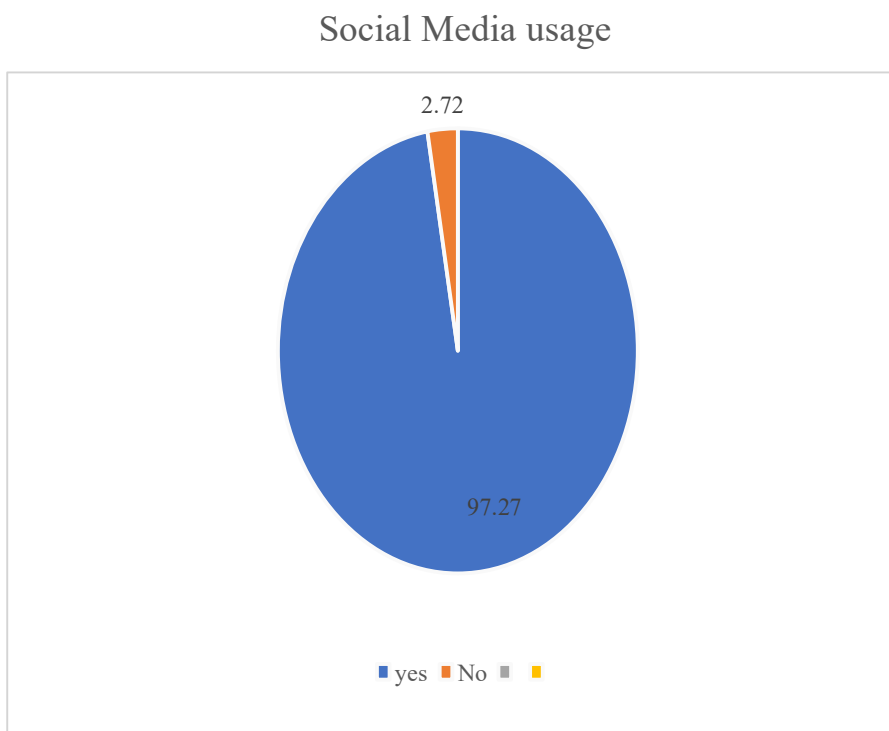


Figure 4.1.

4.2.2.Average Time Spend on Various Media

Analysis of the responses of question number 7 of the questionnaire reveals the average time spend by the respondents daily on various social media. Table 4.2. shows the respondent's social media usage pattern

Media	Less than One hour Frequency (%)	1-2 hours Frequency (%)	2-3 hours Frequency (%)	3-4 hours Frequency (%)	Above 4 hrs Frequency (%)
Websites	123 (83.6%)	17 (11.56%)	7 (4.76%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Youtube	11 (7.4%)	19 (12.92%)	113 (76.87%)	4 (2.72%)	0 (0%)
Facebook	99 (67.34%)	35 (23.80%)	13 (8.84%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Whatsapp	26 (17.68%)	68 (48.57%)	41 (27.89%)	9 (6.12%)	3 (2.04%)
Instagram	30 (20.40%)	104 (70.41%)	9 (6.12%)	3 (2.04%)	1 (0.68%)
Telegram	115 (78.23%)	27 (18.36%)	5 (34.01%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Linkedin	141 (95.91%)	6 (4.08%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Table 4.2. Average Time Spend on Various media

Data shows that majority of the respondents spend more time to watch YouTube daily while considering other social media platforms. The table also shows that the respondents spend very few hours to use LinkedIn.

4.3. Respondent's attitude towards Social Media advertisements

The frequency and percentage analysis of question number 8 to 12 of the questionnaire shows the attitude of respondent's towards social media advertisements in general and advertisements relating to student migration and the feature of advertisement they like the most.

4.3.1. Attitude towards social media advertisement

Two questions were included in the questionnaire to analyse the respondents attitude towards social media advertisements. The percentage analysis of the responses showed that majority of the respondents (95.91%) were interested in watching advertisements displayed through various social media platforms.

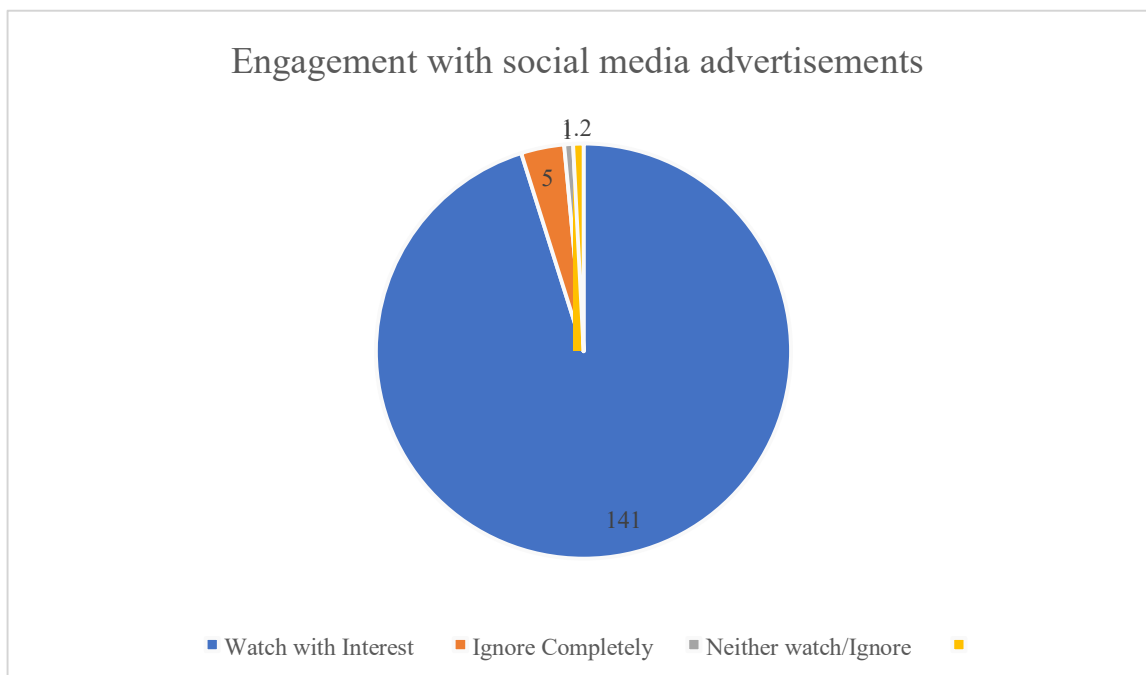


Figure 4.2.

4.3.2. Attitude towards advertisements relating to student migration

Analysis of the responses of question number 11 showed that majority of the respondents used to share and like the advertisements of foreign universities.

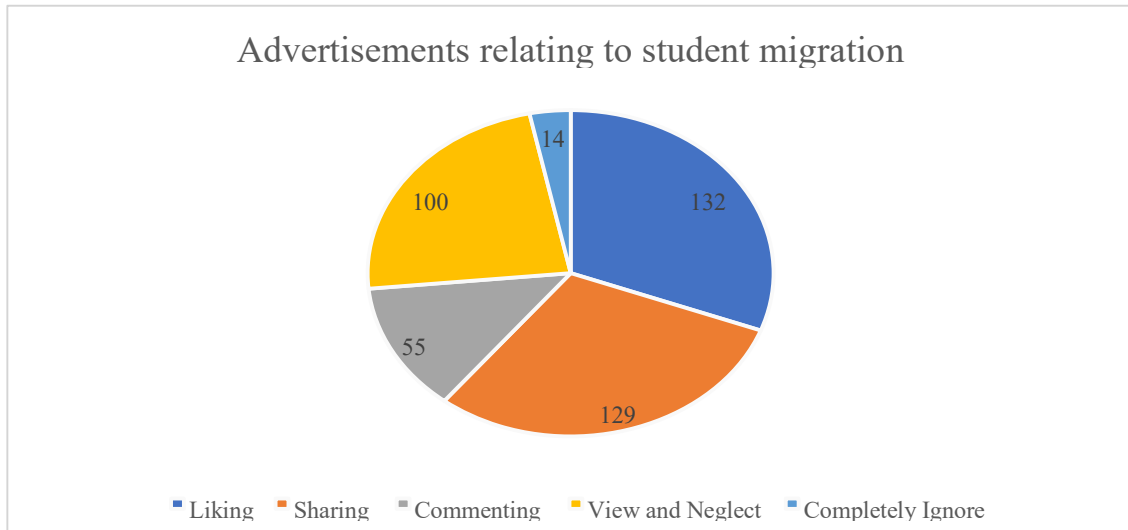


Figure 4.3.

4.3.2. Attitude towards advertisements relating to student migration

The frequency and percentage analysis of question number 12 concludes that the images and texts used in advertisements relating to student migration is more attractive when compared to other ad features.

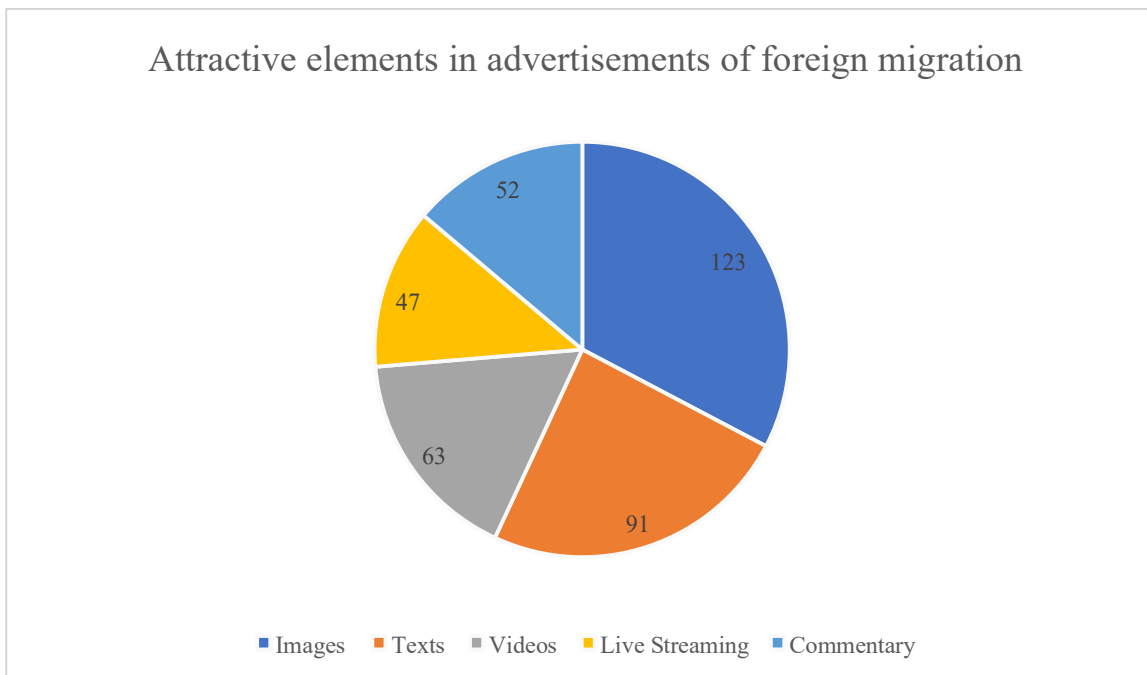


Figure 4.4.

4.4. Effective social media platform for advertisements promoting student migration

By analyzing the responses obtained for the question (question no.14) related to the effective social media platform promoting student migration it was found that a considerable majority (49.65%) opined Instagram. Among the respondents 26.5 % selected YouTube, 17 % selected Facebook and 6.80% selected WhatsApp.

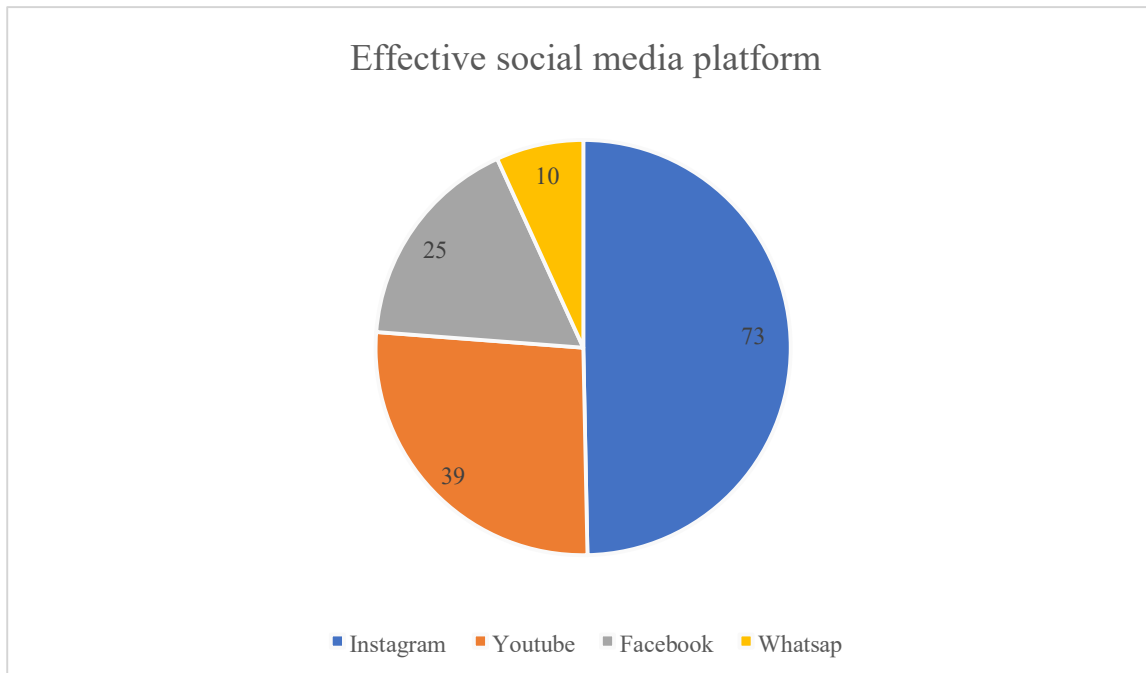


Figure 4.5.

4.5. Role of student influencers in migration decision

Question number 15 in the questionnaire was used to collect data regarding the role of student influencers in promoting student migration. There were three options in the question 'Yes', 'No' and 'Never'. The frequency and percentage analysis showed that a considerable majority (57.14 %) opted the option 'Yes' , 31.97% opted 'No' and a very few percentage opted the option 'Never'. From this it may be concluded that student influencers play a vital role in selecting foreign universities for higher studies.

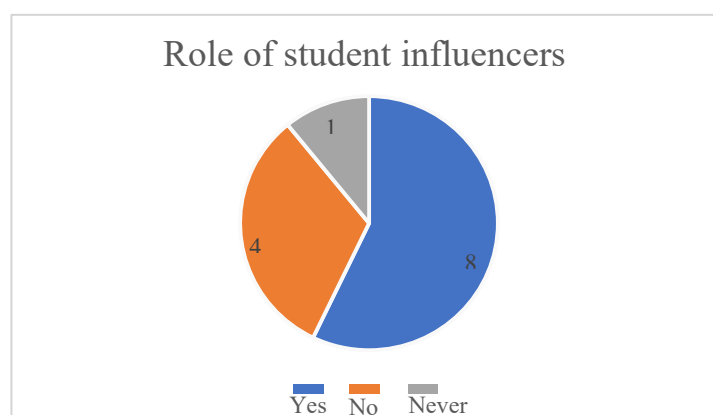


Figure 4.6.

4.6. Factors influenced migration other than advertisements

The frequency and percentage analysis of the data showed that apart from advertisements ‘better education’ and ‘more career opportunities’ attracted them to select foreign universities for higher studies. Among the total 147 respondents 135 chose the option better education a very few respondents (27 respondents) said that migration takes place for maintaining social status. Figure 4.7. shows the responses in detail.

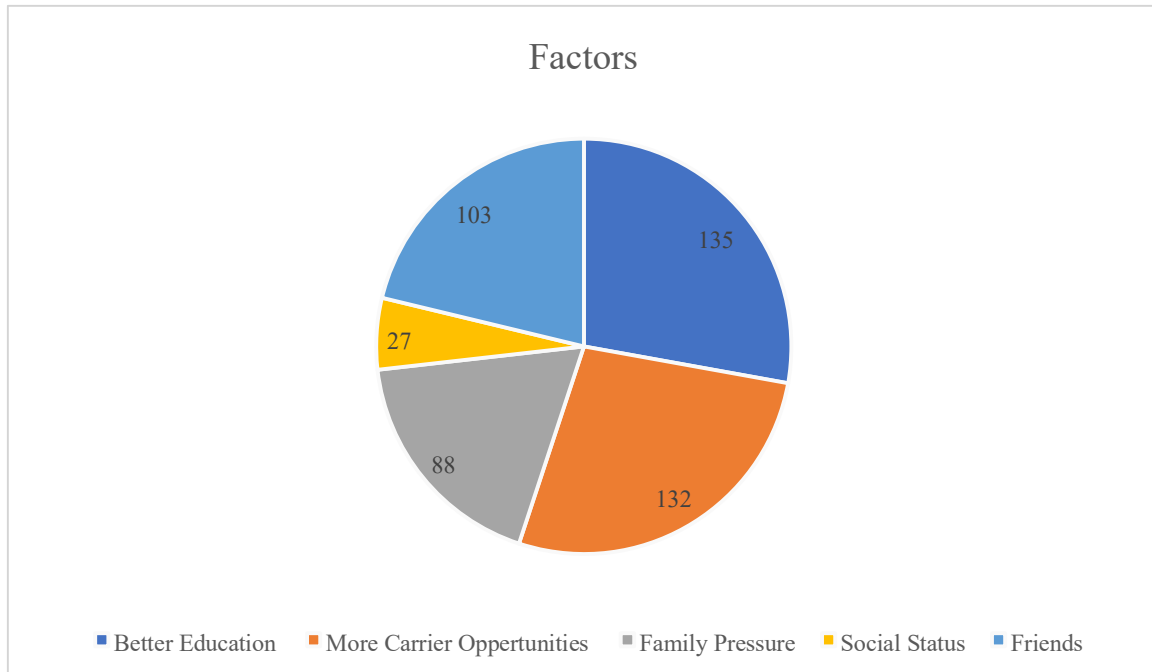


Figure 4.7.

4.7. Observations from in depth interview

To enhance the validity and depth of the study findings, in-depth interviews were conducted with ten students from Kerala who were pursuing higher studies abroad. The sample comprised five male and five female respondents. Data were collected through unstructured telephonic interviews, with questions framed in alignment with the specific objectives of the study. The following key observations emerged from the qualitative analysis:

A majority of the respondents reported that they had frequently encountered advertisements related to student migration—such as those from recruitment agencies, foreign universities, and promotional campaigns for specific academic programmes—across various media platforms prior to making their decision to study abroad.

All participants acknowledged that student influencers played a significant role in shaping their perceptions and decisions regarding overseas education.

Among the various social media platforms, Instagram and YouTube were identified as the most effective channels for disseminating information and promotional content related to migration for higher studies.

In addition to social media advertisements, promotional messages disseminated through other media platforms also contributed to influencing students’ decisions to pursue higher education abroad.

Beyond media influence, factors such as family expectations and the prospect of better career opportunities were found to substantially shape students’ choices in selecting foreign universities.

These qualitative insights complement and substantiate the findings derived from the quantitative survey.

5. Conclusion

In the contemporary digital environment, social media has evolved into a transformative force that significantly shapes how young people communicate, construct identities, access information, and make life decisions. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, X, YouTube, and LinkedIn are no longer merely communication tools; they function as influential spaces of socialization, aspiration-building, and decision-making. While social media fosters creativity, connectivity, and access to global opportunities, it simultaneously presents challenges such as social comparison, misinformation, and excessive screen exposure.

Against this broader backdrop, the present study examined the influence of social media advertisements on students' decisions to pursue higher education in foreign universities. By employing a mixed-method approach integrating an opinion survey and in-depth interviews, the research explored how advertising content, platform preferences, and influencer narratives shape migration-related choices among youth in Kerala. The findings demonstrate that social media operates not only as an informational medium but also as a persuasive environment that meaningfully contributes to students' educational aspirations and migration decisions.

5.1 Effective Social Media Platforms

The findings indicate that social media consumption patterns play a crucial role in shaping exposure to migration-related advertisements. Survey data revealed that respondents spend comparatively more time on YouTube and less time on LinkedIn. Notably, variables such as gender and annual family income did not demonstrate significant correlation with platform preference.

With specific reference to student migration advertisements, a majority of respondents identified Instagram as the most effective medium for receiving and engaging with promotional content. Insights from the in-depth interviews further confirmed that students rely heavily on social media platforms to gather information about the advantages, institutional reputation, and career prospects associated with studying abroad.

These findings may be interpreted through the lens of the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that audiences actively select media to satisfy specific informational and aspirational needs. Additionally, the results align with the Technology Acceptance Model proposed by Fred Davis, which emphasizes perceived usefulness and ease of use as key determinants of technology adoption. Students' reliance on visually rich and interactive platforms suggests a high degree of perceived utility and acceptance of these media in educational decision-making.

5.2 Role of Student Influencers in Migration Decisions

Student influencers—individuals who share personal experiences, academic journeys, and migration-related guidance through digital platforms—emerge as significant opinion leaders in the contemporary media landscape. The transition from traditional media (print, radio, and television) to interactive digital platforms has enhanced the credibility and relatability of peer-generated content.

Survey findings indicate that respondents acknowledge the persuasive impact of influencers' opinions on their decision-making processes. The experiential narratives shared by influencers—particularly regarding campus life, visa procedures, academic

quality, and employment opportunities—create a sense of authenticity and aspirational appeal.

Qualitative evidence from the in-depth interviews further suggests that several participants selected specific educational destinations after being influenced by content produced by student influencers. These findings can be conceptually linked to the Theory of Reasoned Action, which explains how attitudes and subjective norms contribute to behavioral intentions. Influencers, in this context, function as normative referents who shape attitudes toward studying abroad and reinforce migration intentions.

5.3 Attitude Towards Social Media Advertisements

Advertising, defined by the American Marketing Association as a paid form of non-personal communication promoting ideas, goods, or services by an identified sponsor, plays a central role in shaping consumer perceptions. Social media advertisements represent a technologically advanced extension of this persuasive communication process.

The analysis of survey responses indicates that a majority of youth respondents display a positive attitude toward viewing advertisements while using social media. High-quality visuals, compelling textual elements, and interactive features enhance memorability and engagement. In the specific context of student migration, respondents reported liking, sharing, and actively engaging with promotional content related to foreign universities and recruitment agencies.

This favorable orientation toward social media advertisements reflects a broader acceptance of digital media technologies. The findings, therefore, further substantiate the relevance of the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), as students demonstrate both perceived usefulness and behavioral intention in engaging with migration-related promotional content.

In sum, the study emphasizes the growing centrality of social media advertising and influencer-driven communication in shaping students' migration aspirations for higher education. Social media platforms function not merely as channels of information dissemination but as persuasive ecosystems where visual appeal, peer narratives, and algorithm-driven exposure collectively influence educational mobility decisions.

The dual character of social media—as both an empowering and persuasive environment—calls for continued scholarly attention, particularly in the context of global student mobility. Future research may further examine long-term decision outcomes, cross-regional comparisons, and the ethical implications of targeted migration advertising among youth populations

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India Through the Western Eyes: A Study on the Portrayal of India in the Movie 'The Darjeeling Limited'

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Abstract

Hollywood has an incredible ability to spread beliefs, cultures, morals and even political influence on society. It has the power to reach a huge number of people around the world. For a long time, however, the industry has grappled with diversity and inclusivity issues, causing many to criticise Hollywood for not including, portraying and accurately representing the diversity of our planet. This study aims to identify the representation of Indian culture in Hollywood movies by analysing the 2007 Wes Anderson movie *The Darjeeling Limited*. The key areas of the study were to figure out the western concept of the Orient in the movie in general, the portrayal of Indian women, religion as an element to establish orientalism, and how on-screen elements are on par with the actual condition of India in general. The study also takes a look at how colour grading, sound, and other film techniques are used to create an impression about India. Indian society is widely misrepresented in the movie, and Indian women are highly sensualized and pictured in a way of colonial desire. Religion is used as a tool to establish the concept of Orientalism and to impart a notion that Westerners are the saviours of the East in the movie. The cinematic impressions created by lighting, cinematography, and colour grading are far from reality, showcasing India as an uncomfortable and unsafe place to be in. Stark contrasts in the advancement of technology in the West and the East are drawn and its comparison is picturised to show India in a bad light..

Keywords: Hollywood representation, Orientalism, Indian culture, *The Darjeeling Limited*.

Introduction

For many years, scholarly studies of Hollywood cinema were seldom framed through an ethnographic lens. One important reason for this absence was the limited representation of diverse cultures in Hollywood productions, which made such analytical approaches appear largely irrelevant. Traditionally, Hollywood films have tended to foreground American culture and identity, often portraying them as dominant and superior. Within this narrative framework, American characters and values frequently occupied positions of authority and influence, a representation that was rarely questioned, given the global reach and cultural power of the Hollywood film industry.

However, with the rapid advancement of media and communication technologies, the circulation of films expanded significantly beyond national boundaries. Technological innovations in distribution and exhibition enabled Hollywood films to be released and screened across multiple continents and time zones almost simultaneously with their debut in the United States, its primary market. As Hollywood productions began to reach increasingly diverse global audiences, filmmakers gradually recognized the importance of incorporating representations of different cultures within their narratives. This shift was partly motivated by the need to resonate with international viewers and to maintain the commercial viability of films in a wide range of cultural contexts where they were distributed and consumed.

The representation of Indian culture, in the form of showcasing the geography of India as well as placing characters of Indian origin in a western setting has slowly been a trend in some of the Hollywood movies. However, most of these have come at the cost of painting Indian culture as archaic, uncivilised, and very behind the times. This sad state of affairs has to be attributed to the earlier discussed power possession of Hollywood that comes with the privilege of unquestionability. Thus, such misrepresentations never become a subject of study. The 2007 Wes Anderson movie *The Darjeeling Limited* is such a good example of the same, showcasing a small part of India in a way demanded by the storyline, as well as appropriate to the mindset of the filmmaker, who ultimately calls the shots. The study focuses on this aspect of the movie, keeping in light some of the technical aspects as well alongside the cultural detail which are used for such propagations.

The American film industry, often referred to as Hollywood (from the place name of its birth), is the industry leader in the form of artistic expression that came to dominate the twentieth century and continues as a popular art form at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Hollywood has an incredible ability to spread beliefs, cultures, morals and even political influence on society. It has the power to reach a huge number of people around the world. The impact of Hollywood on world film is fundamentally in two viewpoints: ie. culture and economy.

In culture, Hollywood, which assumes a significant part in the social government of the U.S., attempts to extend the American model and values through trading films. In relation to developing countries, cultural imperialism can be defined as the systematic penetration and domination of the cultural life of the popular classes by the ruling class of the west to the values, behaviour, institutions and identity of the oppressed peoples to conform to the interests of the imperial classes.

India has been an integral part of Hollywood releases for a long time, thanks to the popularity of foreign movies in India. The inclusion of Indian cultures in Western

movies came in a need to capture new audiences and sustain them so as to gain more popularity. However, diversity and portrayal issues have come up in these representations as the filmmakers mostly tend to generalise Indians and Indian cultures as something which is backward, archaic, and goofy. While brown-skinned characters from India and its surrounding countries have been featured in English films for a long time, they often end up victim to stereotypes or appropriation. Most Indian actors are roped in to play characters of Indian origins mostly from very normal surroundings or backgrounds.

Indians have mostly been treated as poor, uncivilised, and been placed as someone who's below the western standard. They've chosen to deliberately showcase the lowest strata of Indian societies, particularly those in the North, building a narrative, reinforcing a generalization that every Indian is in deplorable conditions. That's possibly what the majority audience wants to see, and we have no other way other than to accept the fact

Orientalism is an approach to seeing and hence characterizing Middle Eastern and Asian societies as substandard, in reverse, outlandish or needing safeguarding by the western world. However not expressly expressed in such terms, it is a typical or characteristic driver behind generalizations, publicizing, dormant bias, apportionment, and endeavors to "honor" such societies.

The term Orientalism was just begun in 1978, when Edward Said published his seminal work *Orientalism* discussing the same subject matter. His work gave the world a proper clarification of something that had been happening for no less than 2,000 years. The new white-washing of Asian characters in American film has brought the discussion of Orientalism and the hostility to Asian prejudice once more into the spotlight. Similar to how the imperialist nations went on to capture physically the lands of the East as we have seen in the case of British invasions in India, the present-day West are capitalising on the rich diversity and cultural relics of the East for the purpose of filmmaking, and as a result, stereotypes are being created.

Wes Anderson, in full Wesley Wales Anderson, (born May 1, 1969, Houston, Texas, U.S.), is an American director and screenwriter known for the distinctive visual aesthetic of his quirky comedies. He is regarded by some critics as a modern-day example of the work of an auteur.

The Darjeeling Limited is a 2007 American comedy-drama film directed by Wes Anderson. The film stars Owen Wilson, Adrien Brody, and Jason Schwartzman. In the film, Estranged brothers Francis (Owen Wilson), Peter (Adrien Brody), and Jack (Jason Schwartzman) reunite for a train trip across India. It is about three brothers who, following their father's death, take a train journey across India that they hope will provide healing, self-discovery, and enlightenment. The movie is a fine mixture of comedy, drama, emotions, love, and romance with adequate technical detail.

The purpose of the current study is to analyze the representation of Indian culture in Hollywood movies by analyzing the 2007 Wes Anderson movie *The Darjeeling Limited*. The study would analyze the portrayal of Indian culture in this movie with a special emphasis on how the factors of Orientalism, and stereotyping are evident in the making.

Literature Review

Ananda Mitra(1999), who has done an exhaustive study on the representation and portrayal of Indians and the Indian culture in the western screen says the two cultural products quintessentially American are the automobile and cinema. Although the film industry in America was at first located on the east coast it quickly moved to the West coast - the weather and geography of California providing a bath location for shooting pictures- that's identifying itself with Hollywood. Examining depictions of India in the West within the broader context of depictions of so-called third world countries in Western media is possible. As a starting point, it is essential to investigate how the historical and political contexts of power relations between first- and third-world nations impact media content. Gallagher (1989) noted that it is usually third world countries that have to deal with marginalization problems with respect to information flow. There is a greater flow of information from the first to third world countries but very little representation of the third world in the first world (Mowlana & Wilson, 1990).

Westerners are almost always at the center of the story and the third world people, especially women, are given only trivial insignificant roles (Kaplan, 1997). In these narratives, the roles of Western characters are complex, whereas those of third-world characters are simplistic and nearly predictable. Typically, the latter are only present to help define the heroic nature of the Western characters. Shohat (1991) pointed out that even when Hollywood films include third world locations in their plots, typically such locations act as the backdrop for the main narrative such that the focus is on exaggerating socio-religious practices in spectacular ways to act as symbols to signify the place.

Certain films produced in the West have also a tendency to depict India in a dream-like, utopian manner, with India frequently represented as the land of milk and honey, where overindulgences, excesses, and vices are an integral part of the culture. The use of such types of seemingly positive stereotypes has also been referred to as the cultural riches approach that seemed to portray India as a virgin unexplored land waiting to be enjoyed by Westerners without acknowledging any anti-colonial sentiments (Narayan, 1997).

Ramasubramanian (2005), says that when Europeans portrayed themselves as representing liberty, equality, progress, change, and dynamism, India was depicted as unhistorical, caught upn with traditions- static or inert, or in a process of decline.

According to Mitra (1999), the main motivation for the stereotyping of Indian characters in Western films is to create a distinction between Western and non-Western characters. There is an implicit assumption that there are irreconcilable differences between the east and the West and the movies often built the narrative around these differences. These differences are primarily concretised by drawing the distinction between the key members of the narrative. As a result, images of Indians emphasise skin colour, clothing, and physical characteristics that serve to create this contrast.

While the opposition between the natives and the colonizers made up a bulk of movies where the locale was of minimal importance, there were also some movies set in India where the relationship between the protagonists was more important than the place where the relationship was established. (Mitra, 1999)

Mitra (1999) has made another observation about the relationships between the

protagonists as far as Hollywood movies made in India are concerned, which closely relates to our subject of study *The Darjeeling Limited*, :There are many such narratives about the war where the narrative deals with the lives of Westerners as they are stationed in different parts of the world. In this case movies of interest only because it is set in India without that having any particular effect on the narrative

In the combination of religion and geography of the South Asian space and the people are produced around the keen sense of tradition. The history of the region dating back thousands of years with multiple cultural and political influences lends itself to a representation that focus is on the tradition of the place yet The heritage is centre of crisis because the narrative needs to address the tradition and portray the issue of uniqueness of the place as contrast to the West, which represents most of the audience.

The story of the static screen was controlled by authors in positions of authority, who were in charge of the representational symbols and maintained a level of formulaic standardisation in which the represented had no control over how they were shown. The Western author disseminated and exploited images of Indians and India. This is not unusual, as it has been studied by scholars such as Edward Said (1978) in his work *Orientalism* suggested that the powerful west systematically and historically represented the 'Orient' or the East in the manner the West deemed appropriate.

The color palette used in a film can help tell a story. This helps the viewer feel certain emotions, such as the use of red blood in a horror movie, or a shade of green for jealousy. Color can also be used to show the evolution of a character or story. Each color has many different meanings. They can elicit different emotions or shape our concept and reaction to them based on historical and global meanings. Different cultures have different emotions or meanings for each color. These cultural, historical and religious meanings shape our response to color used in film. (Rothstein, 2020)

Study Method

The method of study being used here to study the film is content analysis. Here the method employed for analysis dissects the scene and the character in the movie. A total of 17 characters spread across 76 scenes in the movie *The Darjeeling Limited* were analysed, out of which 3 scenes are shot in the United States of America, and the rest in India. It also comes with an additional set of unnamed supporting characters that supplement the inherent idea of the movie.

The sampling method used in this study is purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is also called judgment sampling. In purposive sampling, a sample is chosen which is thought to be typical of the universe about the characteristics under consideration. Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling, is a form of non-probability sampling in which researchers choose the sample based on their discretion. In addition, the numerous technique options make purposive sampling a flexible research method that can be adapted to increase the effectiveness of a survey. If there are a limited number of primary data sources that can contribute to the survey, purposive sampling may be the only appropriate method.

Analysis and Findings

The idea of opposites forms the basis of the West's understanding of Eastern cultures. East and West are opposed to one another, forming a binary opposition in which each pole defines the other. The East is seen as sensual, irrational, primitive, and despotic, and the West is seen as rational, democratic, progressive, etc. This stark contrast is what is thus reflected in movies, particularly in this movie which opens up the self-realization and self-actualisation of foreign protagonists who visit India in an attempt at spiritual salvation.

In a scene, while watching a few Indian boys play cricket, Francis says "I love it here, these people are beautiful." (Anderson, 2007). Here the boys are playing cricket, a sport left over by the British. The director through this scene tries to imply two things. One is that India is still trying to mimic and survive in the British imperialist legacy that too in their ways, here using a tennis ball- a cheaper alternative to the expensive leather ball, that supplements the image of poverty in India. Francis addressing the Indian boys as "these people" reflects the West's inability to consider the Easterners as someone like them. Rather they've been considered subordinate and a sense of otherness are created, adding to the existing Orientalist perspectives of the film.

The film's depiction of India perpetuates stereotypes about the country and its people and does a disservice to those who have visited or lived there. The movie takes viewers on a ride on a variety of public transportation modes, from the crowded Indian roads to the speeding cabs through the chaotic traffic system and an overcrowded marketplace, and then on to the train, where the luggage car is home to goats and peasants and the general coaches are packed with ordinary citizens. The idea is also emphasized by employing lyrics and music that run parallel to these scenes, which signifies that the characters are in many inferior/ remote places in comparison to the Field full of houses, and endless rows of crowded streets, which essentially refers to India.

It is a very well-known fact that railways made by the British have made India a working and recognisable structure and a political and economic identity at a time when many other forces fought against the unity of India. Fighting against all of it, India established herself as a frontrunner in the economic process despite having been looted by the Britishers for more than a century. Railways remain a part of colonial legacy, and this notion of colonial legacy and colonial influence is in the minds of a large majority of Westerners which makes them believe that the Railways remain integral to India. This led to Wes Anderson locating this particular movie on a fictional train that runs between two points in India.

Even though the railways or the train finds itself as a technological marvel in the movie, It does not forget to criticize the lack of expertise of Indians to operate it. The dysfunctional and unsystematic railway system of India is indicated through various dialogues in the movie, that indicates that the protagonists are lost in a place which is technologically backward to the core in a way that the native Indians are not competent enough to navigate, or properly operate the facilities given to them by the British. It is also a mockery of the public transport system of India.

Even, some of the objects used by the protagonists are employed by the director to draw a stark contrast between the so-called modernised Western world and the archaic East, through a show of decadence and consumerism. The dilapidated box painted with the danger symbol skull and bones, used to store the snake bought from the Indian markets

is used as a sign of pathetic Indian goods. There's also a scene at the beginning where Peter swallows a little yellow medicine where he says a prescription isn't required here, used in a way that mocks the pharmacies in India.

The Indian woman is seen with the eyes of sexuality and eroticism right from the moment she's introduced into the scene. Here the character Rita, the stewardess on the Darjeeling Limited, presents a similar image of a woman. She is portrayed as the ideal voluptuous Indian woman who's desperately waiting for a sexual encounter with a western male. Rita is portrayed as somebody who is already in the shoes of what colonial desire looks like. Orientalist ideas of submissiveness are realised in various scenes, and she has been denied every other trait peculiar to a woman and all these aspects contribute to the reinforcement of an eroticised perception of the Oriental woman. Rita, here, is not a woman of character, rather she merely becomes just another example of the much celebrated sensual, seductive, and chaste Indian woman.

Certain dialogues are also used to objectify and bring out the submissive nature of the Indian woman. The references such as "sweet lime" and "savory snack" are examples of the same. Later in the film, when the brothers are thrown from the train, Jack says to Rita, "Thanks for using me," to which she replies, "You are welcome", which again cements the fact that she's entirely submissive to the White man's desire. And it has to be noted that Jack, who was attracted to the sensual Indian beauty in Rita, saw her merely as an object as he resorts to his ex-girlfriend's perfume soon after their passionate encounter.

On the other hand, the other important female character in the movie, the Whitman brothers' mother, is a nun. She's an evangelist entrusted with the mission of promoting Christianity across India. Here the white woman stands in stark contrast to the sultry Indian woman. This gives the Western woman here, an image of a saviour who has come to protect and civilise the archaic East. The director thus puts forward an idea that legitimises cultural imperialism and thus fuels a determined effort to dominate and subjugate the East, here, in this scene through the woman.

Towards the end of the movie, we could observe that the brothers are boarding another train named Bengal Lancer which again presents before them a female cabin attendant with almost the same character detail as Rita, with the same tags such as "sweet lime". Again the Indian attendant is put as a submissive, at-your-service woman, who again serves as another example of the preconceived notion of an Indian woman.

A true introspection into the spiritual background that the film tries to show reveals the director's idea of an 'othered' space, which is otherworldly. This 'othered' or created space is constructed in India solely for purification of the soul/ spiritual salvation. To put it in psychoanalytical terms, India is merely a site for abreaction, abreaction that comes at the cost of certain rituals. Mostly associated with Hinduism.

Religion again plays a key role in establishing the superiority of the West over the East as we could see the brother's mother Patricia being in India as a nun, as a Christian missionary, on a mission to 'civilize' Indians, which she's trying to achieve through schooling kids in the Himalayan foothills. She asserts that the people here needs her, which is an affirmation of the already established notion that Westerners are saviours of the East.

Camera angles and shots play a prominent role in establishing and emphasizing the

Western characters here. This can be seen in the funeral scene of the young boy, who had been unable to be saved by Peter. The funeral scene is portrayed with a set of camera techniques including the camera tracking the brothers in slow motion, giving no importance to the villagers preparing for the funeral and making or controlling the viewers in a way that makes them travel along with the brothers and empathise with their feelings, rather than being present in the moment of the Indian funeral and feeling for the boy. This technique goes up in the list of examples where Hollywood has purposefully avoided Indians becoming a protagonist. The villagers are depicted with slow and scant movements, becoming mere tools to establish the divinity and mysticism associated with the Orient.

Another prominent film used here is colour grading. The film follows a yellowish / sepia colour pattern right from the beginning until a scene that cuts to the brothers' brief flashback in the US. The film which has been following a warm colour tone gathers a breath of fresh air in the US scenes, to signify the stark contrast between India and the US.

It is a known fact that colours are used to tell a story in movies. The yellow colour tone is usually employed in movies to bring forth a feeling of discomfort in the viewer and is usually associated with an unsafe setting. It is also employed to showcase poverty and the dry state of a place, using the temperature it signifies which may be far away from the original reality. Here in the case of *The Darjeeling Limited*, it holds as India is not just what is represented in the movie. Being a land hosting a variety of temperatures and geographical variations, it has to be noted that the portrayal of the Geography and climate of India is visibly incorrect. The film mostly shows vast geography which is very dry, and hot with a very lesser appearance of greenery. This added with the yellowish colour tone adds up to evoking an emotion which never makes the viewer comfortable during the course of watching the movie.

The colour tones are used also to enforce the manifest destiny myth - which calls to exert dominance and spread capitalism. The filmmakers of the west have used whatever visual signifiers available to them to portray the capitalist perspective of the east, India in this case. This view has reduced experimental scope and here the filmmaker has just become an archetype who showcases India in an idea who has never had a first-hand experience of India.

Conclusion

The *Darjeeling Limited* takes us through a vivid set of intertwined emotions weaved in a backdrop of India, as perceived by the director and the West in general. An honest attempt has been made to study the generalisation and stereotyping of India, its culture, and people by analysing the movie through a set of parameters used by the filmmaker to portray the progress of the nation. A qualitative method of content study was done to analyse the same by employing selected scenes, dialogues, and mise-en-scene out of the movie based on the research questions framed out of the context of this particular study, ie. The portrayal of India.

In the film, India is portrayed as a poor country, with numerous instances referencing poverty in India. Indian women are highly sensualized and portrayed in a way that

reflects colonial desire. The film features an Orientalist eroticist portrayal of East Asian women. Religion is used in the film to establish the concept of Orientalism and to convey the idea that Westerners are the saviours of the East, emphasising on the glorification of Christian evangelism. Here, Indian society is widely misrepresented through generalisation by showcasing only a small portion of India, where the reality in that small portion is compromised for the sake of satisfying the majority global audience. Cinematography, colour grading, soundtracks, and other film techniques are used to create false impressions about India's climate, geography, and society, which are far from reality, presenting India as an uncomfortable and dangerous place to visit.

Although India had been growing in terms of technology and scientific innovations, even at extremely complex areas such as nuclear and space science since her independence itself, the filmmakers have chosen to wilfully ignore all these progress. It has to be specifically seen that the ignorance is prevalent even though women had been a part of this continuously evolving technological progress, and evangelists of scientific temper. There are stark contrasts in the advancement of technology in the West and the East, and the comparison is portrayed to cast India in a negative light.

Based on the analysis, we can only conclude that the movie *The Darjeeling Limited* has been just another archetype of all the movies made with India and Indians as its important characters. The movie represents India from an ethnocentric perspective with inherent oriental beliefs. The movie tries to project India as uncivilised, technologically retrograde, and greatly underdeveloped, hanging on to the clutches of blind faiths of religion and spirituality. The orientalist binary of East and West is again reinforced through the movie through the various parameters mentioned above.

This particular study reinforces the need for how stereotypes and stereotyping must be restructured when it comes to movies. The lack of expertise and basic knowledge regarding how India has transformed post-independence and her freedom from the shackles of colonialism is still projected in the works of Western movies. *The Darjeeling Limited* stands testament to it. The film, albeit a prime example of craftsmanship and a textbook example for the auteur, fails to acknowledge the differences between different cultures, which in turn is a result of ethnocentric perspectives. Showing India in a visibly bad light is not just the case in this movie, rather it's been the issue in many other movies that came after this, even after much more advancements in technology, as we've seen in *Slumdog Millionaire* etc.

The portrayal of India on the western screen will continue to be rooted in the ethnocentric perspective, unless an Indian in the crew has significant control over the film and the flow of the story in general. Perhaps one practical way of getting the marginalized voices heard, and reconstructing their histories is by giving them a direct chance to participate in media productions that showcase their culture. Racial and cultural diversity in film crews could have a significant role to play in it. However, even that could not be possible in all cases owing to the lack of dialogue and participatory action within them.

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Translating Text into Cinema: Narrative Transformation in the Film Adaptation of *Half Girlfriend*

■ HANNA PARVEEN. S *

Abstract

The study applies macro- and micro-level analytical frameworks to evaluate deviations, fidelity, and cinematic strategies adopted to suit audience expectations and commercial demands. Findings suggest that while the film largely adheres to the central narrative, significant alterations—particularly in characterization and sub-plot elimination—reflect the director’s intention to align the narrative with contemporary cinematic sensibilities and audience reception. The research concludes that adaptation is not mere replication but a process of creative reinterpretation shaped by medium-specific constraints and audience reception patterns.

Keywords: *Adaptation, Condensation, Expansion, Bollywood Cinema, Qualitative Content Analysis, Literary Adaptation*

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Introduction

Adaptation from literature to cinema represents one of the most significant intersections between textual and visual storytelling. The process involves more than a mere transfer of narrative from page to screen; it requires transformation, reinterpretation, and restructuring to suit the demands of a different medium. While literature relies on descriptive language, interior monologue, and imaginative engagement, cinema communicates meaning through visuals, performance, sound, editing, and music. This shift in medium inevitably results in structural and thematic modifications.

George Bluestone argued that novels and films are fundamentally different artistic forms, each governed by unique narrative mechanisms. The process of adaptation therefore requires not simple translation but transformation.

This study examines how literary narrative is reshaped within cinematic constraints of time, audience taste, and commercial viability.

Chetan Bhagat's *Half-Girlfriend* (2014) is a contemporary Indian English novel that explores themes of love, linguistic insecurity, class divide, and aspiration within the socio-cultural context of urban India. The narrative follows Madhav Jha, a rural student from Bihar, as he navigates elite educational spaces and complex emotional relationships. The novel achieved widespread popularity among young readers due to its simple language, relatable characters, and contemporary setting.

The novel was adapted into a Bollywood film with the same title in 2017, directed by Mohit Suri. While the film retains the central romantic arc between Madhav and Riya, it introduces notable structural changes, condensation of subplots, and expansion through cinematic elements such as songs and visual dramatization. These modifications highlight the dynamic nature of adaptation, where creative decisions are influenced by commercial viability, audience expectations, censorship considerations, and time constraints.

Mohit Suri's film adaptation retains the central romantic arc but modifies narrative details, removes certain controversial elements, and incorporates musical sequences to suit mainstream Bollywood conventions. The film grossed approximately INR 97.70 crores worldwide, reflecting moderate commercial success.

This study examines the adaptation of *Half-Girlfriend* through a qualitative comparative framework, focusing on narrative structure, characterization, thematic representation, and the techniques of condensation and expansion. By analysing both macro-level elements (such as duration and commercial reception) and micro-level textual changes, the research seeks to understand how literary narratives are reshaped within the conventions of mainstream Bollywood cinema. The study ultimately positions adaptation not as replication, but as a process of creative negotiation between two distinct artistic forms

LITERATURE & FILMS

Novels and most of the films are narratives. Both of them tell stories about characters or what may be called the recounting of a sequence of events where the characters are active participants. The fact which needs to be understood is that screen adaptations are different art form, and they are something independent from the book. A novel is quite long and involved often running to over 250-300 pages or may be even longer. But an average film is around 90-120 minutes. And each minute of screen time on average is one page of screenplay run 90-120 pages, and a lot of that is white space. Another major difference between novels and films is that the author uses words but the filmmaker uses pictures or images (not literary images). A writer uses different literary techniques such as narration, description, dialogues, interior monologues, figurative languages in the form of metaphors, images etc.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Adaptation studies have evolved from fidelity criticism to intertextual reinterpretation frameworks.

Swagat Patel, in his book *Film Studies- Theories and Applications* (2018) discusses the inevitable process of alteration in adaptations, highlighting condensation and expansion techniques. The book had given a clear insight of the relationship between literature and films and especially on the process of adaptation of novels into films. The novels and films selected for analyses are popular and commercially successful ones. It also talks about the techniques of expansion and condensation and relates the discussion to the box office success or failure of the adapted film

Desmond, Hawkes, Peter - *Adaptation: Studying Film and Literature* (2006:2-3) highlights the relationship between literature and film, describes a useful method for studying adaptation, and provides case studies of adaptations of novels, short stories, plays, works of non-fiction is reviewed from this book to analyse the study and emphasized structured comparative models for studying adaptation across media.

In the article "*Half-girlfriend: A Novel of Helplessness, Hardships and Success*" by **Javaid Ahmed Tantry**, the struggles of the characters and how they pass through such hardships to get success with reference to *Half-Girlfriend* is analysed for the study.

In the Research article "*A Study on Screen Adaptations from Literature with Reference to Chetan Bhagat's Novel*" by **Manmeet Kaur, Divya Rastogi Kapoor** which is based on movies made in Bollywood and have been inspired by the writings of novelists. This qualitative research in which Chetan Bhagat's novel 'Five Point Someone' and '2 States' have been taken up by Bollywood film makers to make movies '3 Idiots' and '2 States' respectively is being analysed for the study to see how writer's experience with words can make movie audience fall for it through the adaptations.

An International scholarly open access, peer-viewed and refereed journal and qualitative research study *“From Script to Screen: Journey of Five Point Someone - Vidhi Rajora and Dr. Deepak Mudgal”* is based on the adaptation of “Five Point Someone” by Chetan Bhagat into a film ‘3 Idiots’ by Aamir Khan is analysed for the to analyse the transition of a novel into screen.

Media reports such as *Hindustan Times* (2017) reveal directorial interventions in *Half-Girlfriend*, particularly the removal of Riya’s childhood abuse subplot, indicating conscious condensation. *Hindustan Times* dated March 28, 2017 in its report, *“Why Mohit Suri changed Riya’s backstory in film adaptation of Half Girlfriend”* revealed that director Mohit made a major change in the story in which led character Riya was sexually abused by her father in childhood in the book, Mohit decided to do away with that bit in the onscreen version. He had done so to make the story to deal with more of a story and to deal with contemporary social issues relatable to women. This report is added on the story to show the director’s view for the reason to change the part of a story.

These studies establish that adaptation involves interpretative negotiation rather than literal translation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this study is to examine the process of adaptation of Chetan Bhagat’s *Half-Girlfriend* from literary text to cinematic representation and to analyse how narrative, thematic, and structural elements are transformed in the transition from page to screen.

1. Identify the form of adaptation used in the film.
2. Examine structural changes between novel and film.
3. Analyse application of condensation and expansion employed in the adaptation process.
4. Evaluate characterization shifts, particularly in the portrayal of Madhav Jha and Riya Somani.
5. Examine how socio-cultural themes such as class divide, linguistic insecurity, and gender relations are represented differently in the novel and the film.
6. Assess audience reception and box-office performance.

Study Method

This research employs **Qualitative Content Analysis** using macro- and micro-level frameworks:

Macro-Level Analysis

- Total pages (Novel) v/s running time (Film)
- Box office performance
- Audience ratings comparison

Micro-Level Analysis

- Scene-by-scene comparison
- Identification of condensation
- Identification of expansion
- Character transformation
- Thematic emphasis

The five-step analytical framework used in the dissertation has been retained and reorganized into journal format.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CONDENSATION AND EXPANSION

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in the concepts of condensation and expansion, two fundamental processes that shape cinematic adaptations of literary works. Drawing upon David Bordwell's screen-time rule, which proposes that one page of screenplay generally corresponds to approximately one minute of screen time, it becomes evident that a literal adaptation of a full-length novel presents practical challenges. A novel of around 250 pages would require more than four hours of screen time if transferred directly and comprehensively to film. Since mainstream commercial cinema typically operates within a much shorter duration, filmmakers must inevitably restructure, compress, and reimagine the source material. Adaptation, therefore, becomes a selective and interpretative process rather than a verbatim translation of text to screen.

Condensation emerges as a primary strategy in this transformation. In adapting a novel for cinematic presentation, filmmakers often eliminate secondary subplots, remove or soften controversial themes, and reduce extended descriptive passages that may function effectively in prose but hinder narrative momentum in a filmic format. Literary narratives frequently rely on internal monologues, reflective commentary, and elaborate background details to develop characters and themes. However, such elements may slow down the pacing of a film, where visual storytelling and temporal economy are crucial. As a result, certain narrative layers are streamlined to maintain coherence and engagement within the limited runtime.

A significant example of condensation in the adaptation process is the omission of Riya's traumatic childhood backstory. While the novel devotes space to exploring this dimension of her character, thereby enriching her psychological depth and contextualizing her emotional choices, the film version removes this aspect. This decision reflects the necessity of focusing on the central romantic arc and maintaining

narrative efficiency. By condensing character histories and simplifying motivations, the film achieves tighter pacing but simultaneously alters the thematic complexity and psychological nuance present in the literary text. Such condensation demonstrates how cinematic adaptation prioritizes narrative clarity and audience accessibility over exhaustive character exploration.

Alongside condensation, expansion functions as an equally important mechanism in adaptation. Expansion involves the addition or amplification of elements that may not occupy significant space in the novel but are integral to cinematic storytelling, particularly within the conventions of popular Indian cinema. In this context, expansion often manifests through musical sequences, visual dramatization, and heightened emotional expression supported by background scores and songs. The tradition of song-and-dance numbers in Bollywood is not merely ornamental; it serves as a narrative and emotional device that intensifies audience engagement and reinforces thematic motifs.

In the film adaptation under discussion, the inclusion of seven songs significantly extends the narrative duration, accounting for approximately thirty-eight minutes of screen time. This expansion illustrates how the cinematic form accommodates and even requires elements that diverge from the structure of the novel. Songs function as moments of emotional articulation, romantic visualization, and narrative pause, allowing characters' feelings to be expressed in ways that differ from textual description. Through choreography, music, and scenic montage, the film externalizes internal emotions, transforming introspective prose into audiovisual spectacle. Thus, expansion not only compensates for condensation elsewhere but also redefines the mode of storytelling in accordance with audience expectations and industry norms.

The study further situates these processes within broader adaptation theory, which categorizes film adaptations according to their degree of fidelity to the source text. Adaptations may be described as faithful or literal when they closely replicate the original narrative structure and characterization. Loose adaptations retain the central premise and key characters while modifying plot elements, tone, or thematic emphasis. Free adaptations are more distantly related, drawing inspiration from the source without maintaining substantial narrative continuity. Some scholars also use the term *transposition* to describe adaptations that transfer the text with minimal alteration.

Within this classificatory framework, the film adaptation in question can be characterized as a loose yet close adaptation. The central romantic narrative and principal characters remain intact, ensuring recognizability and intertextual continuity with the novel. However, the condensation of subplots, the removal of controversial themes, and the incorporation of cinematic expansions—particularly musical sequences—signal a departure from strict fidelity. The adaptation thus occupies a middle ground, balancing adherence to the core storyline with creative reinterpretation shaped by medium-specific demands.

Thus the theoretical framework of condensation and expansion clarifies that adaptation is governed by negotiation between textual fidelity and cinematic viability. Constraints of runtime, audience expectations, and cultural conventions compel filmmakers to condense certain aspects while expanding others. Through this dual process, the adapted film emerges as a restructured narrative entity—one that remains connected to its

literary origin yet is transformed by the aesthetic, industrial, and cultural logic of cinema.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The comparative analysis of the novel and its film adaptation reveals the complex dynamics involved in translating a literary narrative into cinematic form. At the level of narrative structure, the most striking difference lies in the mode of storytelling. The novel unfolds through detailed internal monologues, reflective passages, and socio-cultural commentary that allow readers to engage intimately with the protagonist's thoughts and emotional conflicts. Through this introspective technique, the text provides layered insights into issues such as linguistic anxiety, class mobility, and personal aspiration. The reader is granted access to the subjective consciousness of the characters, which deepens emotional identification and broadens thematic interpretation. In contrast, the film restructures this narrative approach to suit visual storytelling. Since cinema relies primarily on external representation rather than interior narration, the adaptation simplifies many of the linguistic and psychological struggles that are extensively elaborated in the novel. The romantic progression between the protagonists becomes the dominant narrative thread, streamlining the plot and reducing extended socio-cultural reflections in favor of emotional immediacy.

Characterization further illustrates the divergence between the two mediums. In the novel, characters are constructed through descriptive detail, internal reflection, and gradual psychological development. The protagonist's linguistic insecurity, for instance, is portrayed not merely as a surface trait but as a deeply embedded element of his identity shaped by regional background, educational disadvantage, and class disparity. Readers witness his vulnerability, embarrassment, determination, and evolving self-perception through sustained narrative attention. Similarly, the female protagonist's personal struggles, including her traumatic experiences and emotional dilemmas, are explored with contextual depth that enhances her complexity. The literary medium thus enables nuanced characterization through interiority and narrative commentary.

In the film adaptation, characterization is reoriented toward visual dramatization and emotional emphasis. Psychological states that are extensively verbalized in the novel must be conveyed through performance, dialogue, facial expression, and cinematic techniques such as music and framing. This shift inevitably alters the texture of character development. Madhav's linguistic insecurity, though present, is toned down to avoid repetitive exposition and to maintain narrative flow. Rather than foregrounding prolonged scenes of linguistic inadequacy, the film touches upon the issue selectively, ensuring that it supports rather than dominates the romantic storyline. Riya's trauma narrative is also softened, aligning the adaptation with mainstream sensibilities and audience expectations. By reducing the intensity of certain darker themes, the film positions itself within the conventions of popular cinema, where emotional engagement often takes precedence over sociological depth.

Subplot modification plays a crucial role in shaping this transformation. The novel contains multiple narrative strands that enrich the thematic landscape and provide contextual grounding. However, the cinematic format, constrained by runtime and pacing considerations, necessitates condensation. Several secondary subplots are either abbreviated or removed entirely to ensure narrative coherence within a limited duration.

This streamlining process enhances the film's accessibility and momentum but inevitably reduces the narrative density that characterizes the literary text. The removal or compression of these subplots demonstrates how adaptation involves selective emphasis rather than comprehensive replication.

At the same time, the film introduces expansion through song sequences and visual spectacle. Musical numbers function as narrative pauses that intensify emotional expression and reinforce romantic motifs. These sequences, which occupy a significant portion of the film's runtime, represent a distinctly cinematic addition rather than a direct translation of the novel's content. Songs allow the film to externalize feelings that might otherwise have been conveyed through introspective prose. Through choreography, scenic transitions, and lyrical composition, the adaptation transforms internal emotional states into shared audiovisual experiences. This expansion balances the earlier condensation of subplots, redistributing narrative weight in accordance with cinematic conventions.

In terms of fidelity, the adaptation may be described as close in its preservation of the central plot and primary characters, yet flexible in its treatment of detail and thematic intensity. The overarching romantic arc remains intact, ensuring continuity between the two versions. Key narrative milestones are retained, allowing audiences familiar with the novel to recognize its structural foundation. However, the alteration of character emphasis, the simplification of linguistic and socio-cultural struggles, and the modulation of controversial elements reveal that fidelity operates at a macro rather than micro level. The adaptation does not seek literal replication but rather aims to recreate the emotional essence of the story within a different medium.

The contrast between literary success and cinematic reception further illuminates the dynamics of adaptation. The novel achieved bestseller status, reflecting strong reader engagement and commercial popularity within the literary market. Its widespread readership suggests that its introspective narrative style and thematic concerns resonated with a substantial audience base. The film, however, received mixed critical responses, with an IMDb rating of approximately 4.5 out of 10 indicating ambivalence among viewers and critics. Despite this critical reception, the film performed moderately well at the box office, collecting approximately INR 97.70 crores. This financial outcome underscores the distinction between critical evaluation and commercial viability. While reviewers may have questioned aspects of narrative execution or characterization, audience turnout and revenue generation demonstrate sustained interest, likely driven by the popularity of the source material and the conventions of mainstream cinema.

Hence the comparative analysis highlights the transformative nature of adaptation. Differences in narrative structure, characterization, subplot organization, and audience reception reflect the inherent distinctions between literary and cinematic forms. The novel privileges introspection and thematic layering, whereas the film emphasizes visual engagement and romantic progression. Fidelity exists in broad narrative continuity, yet significant reinterpretation occurs at the level of detail and tone. The adaptation exemplifies how storytelling evolves across media, reshaping content to align with the expressive capacities and commercial imperatives of cinema while remaining anchored in its literary origin.

Conclusion

The transformation of *Half Girlfriend* from page to screen illustrates Jean Mitry's well-known assertion that a change in form inevitably produces a change in content. When Chetan Bhagat's introspective and linguistically driven narrative is reconfigured into cinematic language, the shift from textual interiority to visual storytelling results in a reorientation of meaning, emphasis, and audience experience. The present study has demonstrated that adaptation is not a linear or mechanical transfer of narrative material; rather, it is a process of reinterpretation shaped by the structural, aesthetic, and industrial conditions of the receiving medium.

The film version operates within the practical constraints of duration, commercial viability, audience expectation, and censorship frameworks that govern mainstream Hindi cinema. These factors inevitably influence narrative restructuring. Subplots are condensed or eliminated to ensure tighter pacing and sustained engagement within a limited runtime. Elements perceived as controversial or potentially disruptive to broad audience appeal are moderated or omitted. At the same time, the cinematic medium expands certain emotional arcs through visual dramatization, song sequences, and heightened romantic spectacle, all of which are integral to popular Bollywood conventions. Consequently, what emerges is not a replica of the novel but a recalibrated narrative that aligns with the demands of visual culture and mass entertainment.

Despite these transformations, the film retains the central romantic trajectory between the protagonists and preserves the primary narrative conflict surrounding love, language, and class aspiration. This continuity ensures a recognizable connection to the source text and sustains a degree of narrative fidelity. However, the adaptation simultaneously reconfigures thematic priorities. The novel's sustained engagement with linguistic insecurity and internal psychological struggle—conveyed through first-person narration and reflective prose—is necessarily externalized in the film through gesture, dialogue, *mise-en-scène*, and performance. The subjective depth afforded by literary narration gives way to a more immediate, emotionally charged representation shaped by camera movement, music, and visual symbolism.

The portrayal of class difference and gender dynamics also undergoes subtle but significant shifts. While the novel explores these issues through introspective commentary and extended dialogue, the film tends to streamline such complexities, foregrounding romance and emotional reconciliation over sociolinguistic critique. The result is a thematic redistribution in which the intensity of personal emotion becomes more central than the layered social commentary found in the literary text. In this sense, the adaptation reflects broader tendencies within commercial Indian cinema to privilege affective engagement and visual appeal.

The study therefore categorizes the adaptation as both close and loose: close in its retention of the primary storyline and characters, yet loose in its treatment of narrative detail, thematic emphasis, and tonal nuance. This duality re affirms the necessity of

evaluating adaptations beyond simplistic binaries of fidelity and betrayal. Measuring cinematic works solely by their faithfulness to literary sources risks overlooking the creative labor involved in translating narrative across media. Adaptation should instead be understood as an interpretative and intertextual act, one that produces a new cultural artifact while remaining dialogically connected to its origin.

By analyzing macro-level structural changes alongside micro-level thematic and stylistic transformations, this research contributes to ongoing debates within adaptation studies. It shows that cinematic adaptation involves negotiation between artistic vision and industrial practice, between textual loyalty and audience accessibility. The journey of *Half Girlfriend* from novel to film exemplifies the evolving relationship between contemporary Indian popular fiction and mainstream cinema, demonstrating how stories are reshaped to resonate within different cultural and media contexts while continuing to echo their literary roots

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Campaigning amid Crisis: Electoral Strategies of Political Parties during the COVID-19 Period in Kerala

■ NISHANTH.P #

Abstract

This thesis Titled, 'A Study on the role of New Media in the Local Body Elections in Kerala during a Pandemic' was an attempt to dissect the different methods through which the social media platforms were used by different politicians and political parties to voice themselves during the local body elections that in Kerala in the month of December 2020. This study has also enquired as to whether the online election campaigns have influenced the way people have voted in the Local Body Elections happened in Kerala. New Election strategies which were devised during this pandemic and how did they find their place in social media platforms were also studied. A monumental shift from the physical election campaigns to virtual campaigns could be seen during this election. Both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies/tools were used to understand the efficiency of election campaigning done through social media. Social media coordinators of leading political groups in Kerala were interviewed to understand the different election strategies devised during the pandemic period. The study has found out 'WhatsApp' and 'Facebook' as the most used social media platforms by various political parties during the local body elections in Kerala 2020. Innovative strategies were used by almost all political parties through different social media platforms and public were able to recognize and identify such strategies as well.

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Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid-19 as a disease on 11th February 2020 and as a pandemic on March 2020. Covid-19, earlier known as Corona virus was first traced in December 2019 in China after which it saw an exponential growth in all parts of the world. The evolution of Covid 19 from a disease to a pandemic was a result of millions of deaths which happened all over the world. The novel Corona virus had no known cure or vaccine during its inception, making all humans equally gullible to this pandemic.

It is within these parameters that the Election Commission has decided to conduct the local body elections in Kerala. The then political climate anticipated that the two key aspects that would affect the election would be that of the pandemic and the increasing dependence of the public on social media. All the major political parties were aware of these two prospects and the role they would play in the elections. This made them devise plans that would take into account both these factors while preparing themselves for the election. And it was well reflected in the election campaigns which, for the first time in history was mostly virtual in nature.

Election Campaigns exist in all countries where elections play the key role in forming the government. They are conducted to have a free and open discussion about who could represent the public better and in turn, which political party would make the better government. In India, election campaigns take place for a two-week period between the announcement of the final list of the candidates and the day preceding to the polling day. Candidates, political parties and various other political organizations make use of this time to establish contact with their voters in their respective constituencies, mobilize political supporters, arrange meetings with influential groups and organizations etc.

Over the past few years, pandemic or not, a decline in the traditional forms of election campaigning could be traced. Election Campaigning was done earlier through various traditional media like radio, newspaper, television etc. But the advent of social media, high speed internet and affordable smartphones converted all these conventional media users into new media users. Therefore, the politicians and political parties started to dedicate their attention to places where they felt their desired audience were. Eventually, a major chunk of election campaigning began to done through social media.

Campaigning for local body elections in December 2020 strictly adhered to Covid-19 protocol. This prevented the political parties in Kerala to organize grand election campaigns. While outdoor hoardings and public announcements were popular for all political parties, large scale processions were pretty much non-existent in the local body elections. Voters were met with candidates and only a handful of his/her supporters as part of personal interaction. The pandemic might have caused an election which might have had the least physical interaction between the contenders and the voters. The political parties had to overcome this disadvantage somehow and they found their solution in social media.

Political parties and candidates had to work within a lot of limitations created by the pandemic. They used social media as a tool to overcome these limitations. Even though social media had been used widely as a political campaign tool in the recent years, the local body elections was truly a monumental shift as far as campaigning is concerned. All online media resources like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube were used by various political fractions as their customized mouthpiece. These political

updates were then widely circulated by the people who support and oppose them and thereby significantly increasing the visibility of the person who created it.

One significant advantage social media enjoys as a campaign tool is the insane amount of feedback it receives within a short period of time. The new media provides opportunity for the ordinary citizens to take part in these political discussions by reacting to the posts, commenting under them and even share these posts with their opinion on it. All platforms provide this opportunity, but in different ways. Their reactions that they express knowingly or unknowingly could have deep implications as to how that particular news could be received by other people.

Users react to the news or information they come across social media in different ways. If we take the example of the social media application Facebook, its daily users may react using different emojis available in the like button, they might comment under it or they could share them. These reactions are triggered in the users because of the social media's ability to emotionally exploit people. Pressing the like button might be a passive response, but to comment and even share the news are aggressive methods of response from the part of the user. And when these factors are applied to the parameters of an election, these ordinary citizens, themselves are becoming part of the election campaigning knowingly or unknowingly.

Social Significance of the Study

The study has been conducted by acknowledging the increasing influence of social media on the public. This influence is seriously affecting several societal aspects, one of which is the way in which political discussions especially during the time of elections take place. This study could give an insight as to how social media is slowly changing the traditional notions revolving around elections and how it could invariably affect the democratic framework of the country.

Objectives of the Study

- To find whether the online election campaigns has influenced the way people have voted in the Local Body Elections happened in Kerala.
- To find whether prioritizing social media as the major tool for election campaigning during the pandemic has influenced the final results of the local body elections.
- To study the new Election strategies which were devised during this pandemic and how they found their place in social media platforms.

Methodology

The study had adopted a mixed form of methodology to find answers to the objectives associated with it. Both Quantitative and Qualitative methodologies were employed to understand the role of new media in the election that was conducted during the pandemic. The study focused on identifying the prospects of social media that played a significant role in the election campaigns for the local body elections in Kerala which was conducted in the month of December. Survey method as a qualitative mean was conducted among the public to understand the trends and practices with which social

media was used by them. As part of comprehending the role of political parties in the increasing political content in social media, qualitative methodology was employed in the form of an interview. Social media coordinators of the three major political parties, Left Democratic Front (LDF), United Democratic Front (UDF) and Bhartiya Janatha Party (BJP) were interviewed regarding their use of social media platforms as an effective tool for election campaigning in the local body elections.

Analysis and findings

The survey was conducted among 175 participants who uses social media and has voted in the local body elections conducted in Kerala in October 2020. The non-probability sampling method of Purposive sampling was adopted for selecting the sample for the study. Individuals interviewed for this study – Mr. Muhammad Yahiya, Mr. Sreeju Padman and Mr. Earic Stephen were the social media coordinators of the political parties LDF, BJP and UDF respectively.

To comply with the social distancing norms Covid-19 demanded, all sorts of public rallies, large gatherings, mass congregations related to election campaigning were avoided. The pandemic offered a tricky situation to battle both the elections and pandemic at the same time. Politicians and political parties had to overcome the social problems offered by the pandemic to interact with the public. Since physical interactions were impossible, they moved to virtual modes of communications. This resulted in an increased dependence on social media for election campaigning. In the survey conducted as part of this research among 175 participants, it is found that more than 61% of the total respondents depended on social media as their major source of news (Fig- 01). This prompted all the major political parties to divert their attention entirely to different social media applications as part of their efforts to reach out to the public.

Because it was a pandemic and people were forced to stay indoors, obviously the average time a person would spend on these social media platforms also increased. The Ericsson mobility report claims that the mobile usage has increased an average of one hour per day during Covid-19 globally. The survey conducted during the pandemic also yielded results that correlate with this report. The survey results (Figure – 02) shows that about 26.3% of the respondents use social media for about 1-2 hours, 25.7% of respondents use it for 2-3 hours, 21.7% use it for 4-5 hours and about 11% use it for more than 5 hours. From these statistics, it could be understood easily why political parties targeted social media platforms.

Due to the pandemic, almost all parties focused on virtual campaigning. As a result, the political posts during the elections seasons also increased. In the survey conducted, about 65.3% of the total 173 respondents felt an increase in the political posts in their social media feed during the local body elections (Figure – 03). Political posts that appear in the various social media feeds present itself in different ways. They could appear as political updates by various politicians, social media updates by celebrities and critics, edited visuals by party affiliated members or group or by television news clippings. 34.5% of the respondents in the survey feels that political posts in their social media feed appear in all the above-mentioned formats. At the same time about 34% of respondents claims that the major form of political posts they saw come in the form of television news clippings (Figure – 04).

When these political posts repeatedly appeared in their individual social media feed, the user becomes opinionated on certain political issues. These opinions could potentially influence the way people vote in an individual level. But a larger share of respondents felt that these political posts were not able to influence their decision to vote. 64.9% of the survey respondents claim that political posts by different political parties and candidates had no effect on them with regards to which political party or contestant they voted for. 19.5% said that these political might have influenced their decision to vote and 15.5% of respondents firmly believes that social media has indeed influenced their decision to vote (Figure-05).

That being said, majority of the respondents feel that the election campaigns by various political parties through social media during this pandemic have influenced the final local body election results of 2020. About 71% of the respondents positively believes that social media campaigning has influenced the final election results with 12.7% firmly believing that the online campaigning has influenced the final results and 58.4% claiming that social media campaigning has influenced the results to some extent. 20.2% had no opinion on this issue and 8.7% arguing that social media had no effect on the final results of the local body elections (Figure-06).

Even though election campaigning of all major political parties revolved around social media, the strategies adopted by them were different. The Left Democratic Front (LDF) tasted victory in the local body elections by winning the majority of seats in the grama panchayat, block panchayat, district panchayat, municipalities and corporations. Muhammad Yahiya, media coordinator for the chief minister of Kerala, Shri. Pinarayi Vijayan credited the role social media played during the pandemic for their resounding victory in the elections.

Going into the elections, Mr. Yahiya claimed (based on the telephonic interview conducted with Mr. Muhammad Yahiya on 20 March 2021), the LDF was able to throw light to the right things that needed to be discussed in the public domain through social media. Since this was a grassroots level election, the party tried to focus on topics like community kitchens, welfare pensions and road development at panchayat level. He believed that they were able to spread word about these developmental programs through social media, especially through WhatsApp groups. He also acknowledged the recent growth of Instagram among the youth.

As physical interaction was not possible, it pushed the LDF party to make their online communication stronger. Mr. Yahiya believes that the pandemic pushed the party to create numerous WhatsApp groups at booth levels and local committee levels to facilitate the smooth flow of communication during the election time. He also added that, compared to the previous governments, the Pinarayi government were able to efficiently use the government Public Relations Department (PRD).

Since meetings could be arranged, the political leaders were not able to interact directly with the public. In order to counter that, the social media cell of LDF recorded as much 10 speeches of the Kerala chief minister where he is talking about a wide range of issues, and disseminated across various social media platforms. They were shared through WhatsApp groups to different district local committees and booths. From there it was shared to other WhatsApp groups. Along with that they broadcasted theses pre-recorded speeches in different intersections and junctions all throughout the state. These speeches were then released through various party affiliated YouTube channels as well.

Sreeju Padman, the state IT co-convenor for BJP in Kerala was interviewed as part of this research to study the different means by which the BJP used social media as a tool to aid them in their election campaigning for local body elections. According to him, the

major social media platforms BJP used for campaigning were Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter. He felt that all the discussions related to the allegations against the LDF government was carried out through social media. Also, these accusations against the government like the gold scam scandal and life mission scandal were first raised in social media and it was only after that the mainstream television took it up for further discussion.

Mr. Padman said that the IT cell of BJP used wide variety of videos with musical background and other motion pictures to increase the popularity of their candidates. He felt that the move to online platforms were better since candidates often find it difficult to visit very part of their constituency. Online campaigning could solve this problem by saving a lot of time. The ability of social media to disseminate information all around the country within a few seconds was commented upon by Mr. Padman. He felt that this spontaneity associated with a social media has helped a great deal when it came to election campaigning.

He argued that offline or physical campaigning could have only 20-30 spectators for any events or meeting during the local body elections. But if the same meeting is broadcasted live across various social media platforms, it could have more than 2000 spectators at the same time. Mr. Padman claimed that the major social media applications used by them to go live were Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. The BJP felt that as per the pulse of the state, more people use Facebook and therefore priority is given to it. Internal discussions were conducted using meeting platforms like google meet and zoom.

Earic Stephen, National Secretary of National Students' Union of India (NSUI) was interviewed to study the election strategies used by UDF during the local body elections. He was very instrumental in leading the election campaigning in Trivandrum and Kollam districts during the local body polls. Mr. Earic claimed that the pandemic had inversely affected the election campaigning process. Due to the several restrictions related to Covid-19 they were not able to conduct physical meetings and public gatherings. Even though such meetings were steered through online platforms like Zoom and Google meet, he believed that such meetings were not as productive or creative compared to the physical meetings.

Even though Mr. Earic acknowledged the social media has played a huge role in the local body elections, he pointed out the lack of authenticity behind campaigning virtually. He pointed out an example where anyone can take screenshot of a news channel broadcasting online like that of Manorama news and edit the headlines and news lines in it to serve their personal purposes. Several instances like these have happened and it have seriously affected the election results. In that aspect, traditional media, he claimed is more authentic compared to social media.

UDF had used all major social media applications for the election campaigning. He said that since Facebook was more popularly used in Kerala, special focus was given for it during the online campaigning. Along with Facebook, YouTube and Instagram was also popularly used by the party as part of their election campaigning. The policy of UDF is to analyze the popular social media used in a particular region and focus their campaigning through that online platform. This was what that happened in the local body elections as well.

Conclusion

From this study, it could be concluded that all major political parties, due to Covid-19 has shifted their focus to different social media platforms and has actively used various social media platforms as part of their election campaigning process. It is found that the sudden shift to online campaigning came in the light of the Covid-19 protocols. During the pandemic, the public started using different social media platforms heavily due to the lockdown. This has greatly affected the online election campaigning of various political parties. Social media representatives of the three major political parties in Kerala have acknowledged the fact that they placed more importance to online campaigning during the local body elections as compared to the traditional election campaigning process.

As per the study, social media played a significant role in the election campaigning for the local body elections conducted in Kerala during the pandemic of Covid-19 in December 2020. Different social media platforms were used extensively by different political parties to help them in their election campaigning process. Social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram were used widely by these political parties to share political news and information to a large number of people in a short period of time. The pandemic has forced people to spend more time on social media applications as compared to the earlier days. In order to overcome the limitations of the Covid-19 protocols, political parties made use of this heavy dependence of the public on social media during the pandemic to drive their election campaigning. This move by the various political parties did help them to influence the public opinion to some extent.

Due to the pandemic, the political parties were not able to organize traditional forms of election campaigning in the state. Therefore, they used various social media applications like Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram to interact with the public. Digital posters and virtual advertisements were widely shared by these political parties via social media platforms. News clippings, interactive videos, trimmed visuals were some of the tools used by the various political parties to interact with the public. These contents were then widely shared through different WhatsApp and Facebook groups to persuade the public. Webinars and online meetings were conducted as part of election campaigning even up to the booth level. Since public gathering was not allowed, television screens were arranged in junctions which repeatedly played the party messages to the public.

The new election strategies did have some influence in the way people have voted. These strategies devised as part of the virtual election campaigning influenced the opinion of the public on several issues only to a small extent. This might be because of the fact that people were able to identify the sudden surge in political posts in social media was part of the election strategies by different political parties and that they didn't let themselves get swayed by these election tactics. But as per the study, it could be claimed these strategies certainly had a huge influence in the way the final election results of the local body elections conducted in Kerala during the month of December 2020 shaped up.

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Role of Clickbait on the Readership of Online Content: An Empirical Study in the Kerala Context

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital journalism has intensified competition among online news platforms, encouraging the widespread use of attention-grabbing headlines commonly referred to as clickbait. Clickbait typically involves sensationalized or exaggerated headlines designed to stimulate curiosity and drive user engagement, often at the expense of accuracy or contextual clarity. While such strategies may generate immediate traffic, their implications for audience perception, readership behaviour, and the credibility of news platforms remain a matter of scholarly concern. This study explores the role of clickbait in shaping online readership patterns in Kerala. Employing a purposive survey design, data were collected from 150 respondents divided into two age categories: individuals below 30 years and those above 30 years. The research examines patterns of online news consumption, readers' perceptions of sensational or misleading headlines, and demographic variations in responses to clickbait practices. The findings suggest that clickbait headlines are highly effective in capturing initial reader attention. However, a substantial proportion of respondents perceive such headlines as misleading and express dissatisfaction with the content accessed through them, often considering it unworthy of their time. Celebrity-related news was identified as the most frequent domain in which clickbait strategies are employed. Although younger audiences show greater exposure to online news platforms, the influence of clickbait is not confined to a specific age group. The study concludes that while clickbait may function as a short-term engagement strategy in the competitive digital news environment, excessive reliance on such practices risks eroding journalistic credibility and weakening long-term audience trust.

Keywords: Clickbait, Online Journalism, Readership Behavior, Media Credibility, Kerala, Digital News

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Introduction

Digital transformation has redefined journalism by prioritizing immediacy, interactivity, and measurable engagement. In online ecosystems driven by algorithms and advertising revenue, page views have become a crucial performance indicator. As a result, headlines function not merely as summaries but as strategic tools for attracting attention.

Clickbait headlines exploit curiosity gaps, emotional triggers, and sensational framing to encourage users to click. However, such strategies often create a discrepancy between headline promise and actual content. This raises concerns regarding misinformation, credibility erosion, and declining trust in digital news platforms.

Kerala presents a compelling case for examining clickbait due to its high literacy rate and strong newspaper readership tradition, combined with rapid digital media penetration. The present study investigates how online readers in Kerala perceive clickbait and whether age differences influence readership behavior.

Review of Literature

Previous research has examined clickbait primarily from three perspectives: computational detection, linguistic analysis, and credibility effects.

Chakraborty et al. (2016) and Potthast et al. (2016) focused on automated detection systems for clickbait identification. Chen, Conroy, and Rubin (2015) conceptualized clickbait as misleading online content. Hurst (2016) found that sensational headlines reduce perceived credibility. Scacco and Muddiman (2016, 2020) demonstrated that curiosity-driven headlines increase initial engagement but may affect satisfaction levels. Mármol (2019) analyzed linguistic strategies such as suspense, exaggeration, and emotional appeal.

However, empirical readership-based studies in the Indian context remain limited. This study contributes by examining audience perception and behavioral patterns within Kerala.

Objectives and Hypotheses

General Objective

To examine the role of clickbait in shaping online readership behavior in Kerala.

Specific Objectives

1. To identify news categories where clickbait is most prevalent.
2. To examine whether clickbait distracts or misleads readers.
3. To analyze reader perceptions of clickbait.
4. To assess demographic differences in readership behavior.

Hypotheses

1. Clickbait is predominantly used in celebrity and film news.
2. Clickbait distracts and misleads readers.
3. Readers below 30 years are more influenced by clickbait.

Study Method

A descriptive survey method was adopted.

Sample

A purposive sample of 150 respondents was selected.

- ◇ **Table-1**
Distribution of Respondents by Age Group (N = 150)

Age Group	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Below 30 years	100	66.65
Above 30 years	50	33.35
Total	150	100

The predominance of youth respondents reflects higher digital engagement among younger populations.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire (Google Forms), covering:

- Online media usage
- Time spent online
- Portal preference
- Perceptions of headlines
- Identification of clickbait

Limitations

- Limited sample size
- Non-probability sampling
- Short duration
- Self-reported data

Analysis and Findings

Online Media Exposure

◇ **Table 2**

Daily Time Spent on Online Media for News Consumption

Time Spent per Day	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1–3 hours	104	69
3–6 hours	33	22
More than 6 hours	13	9
Total	150	100

A majority (69%) spend 1–3 hours daily consuming online news. Younger respondents reported relatively higher usage intensity, confirming their deeper immersion in digital ecosystems.

Perception of Misleading Headlines

◇ **Table 3**

Perception of the Misleading Nature of Online Headlines

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes	129	86
No	21	14
Total	150	100

An overwhelming 86% believe that headlines often mislead readers. This strongly supports Hypothesis 2.

News Categories with Maximum Clickbait

◇ **Table 4**

News Categories Identified as Containing Maximum Clickbait

News Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Celebrity News	120	80
Entertainment	15	10
Political News	9	6
Others	6	4
Total	150	100

Celebrity news overwhelmingly dominates clickbait usage (80%), validating Hypothesis 1.

Perceived Worthiness of Clickbait Content

◇ Table 5

Perceived Worthiness of Content Accessed Through Clickbait Headlines

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Not Worthy	114	76
Worthy	36	24
Total	150	100

A majority (76%) felt the content was not worth their time. This indicates dissatisfaction despite initial engagement.

Portal Preference and Clickbait Usage

Among Malayalam portals, *Malayala Manorama* was the most frequently accessed platform. However, respondents identified *Marunadan Malayali* (47%) and *East Coast Daily* (22%) as portals more frequently using clickbait strategies.

This suggests that emerging or independent portals may rely more heavily on sensational strategies to compete with established brands.

Attention and Misleading Nature of Headlines

- 89% agreed that headlines capture their attention.
- 86% stated that headlines often mislead readers.
- 76% felt that content accessed via misleading headlines was not worth their time.

This reveals a paradox: clickbait successfully attracts attention but generates dissatisfaction post-consumption.

News Categories with Clickbait

Celebrity news (80%) was identified as containing the highest proportion of clickbait, followed by entertainment news (10%).

This supports Hypothesis 1 and suggests that curiosity about celebrity life is strategically exploited by news portals.

Identification of Clickbait

Respondents were asked to identify clickbait headlines from a mixed list. The majority correctly identified misleading headlines, demonstrating audience awareness and critical evaluation skills.

This finding is significant because it indicates that while readers may initially click, they are not entirely unaware of the manipulative strategy.

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Clickbait is mostly used in celebrity and film news. Supported (80% identified celebrity news as dominant clickbait category).

Hypothesis 2: Clickbait distracts and misleads readers. Supported (86% agreed headlines mislead; 76% reported wasted time).

Hypothesis 3: Readers below 30 years are more influenced. Not fully supported. Although youth spend more time online, influence was observed across age groups.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that clickbait is a widely recognized strategy among Kerala's online news readers. While it effectively draws initial attention, repeated exposure to misleading headlines may reduce satisfaction and trust.

The high recognition rate of clickbait suggests that readers are not passive recipients. However, curiosity and habit still drive engagement. This reflects a tension between immediate gratification (clicking) and long-term credibility concerns.

Emerging portals appear to use clickbait more aggressively, possibly due to market competition. Established organizations may use it selectively but are perceived as relatively restrained.

The results indicate that clickbait functions as a short-term marketing strategy rather than a sustainable journalistic practice.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of clickbait in shaping online readership behavior in Kerala. The findings reveal:

- Online media usage is extremely high among youth.
- Clickbait is most prevalent in celebrity and entertainment news.
- Readers recognize misleading headlines.
- Clickbait generates attention but reduces perceived content worthiness.
- Influence is not limited to any specific age group.

While clickbait may increase page views, excessive reliance on it risks long-term credibility erosion. Sustainable digital journalism requires balancing engagement strategies with ethical standards. Future research may include larger samples, experimental designs, or comparative state-level studies.

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A Study on the Perception of Political Messages in shaping Voting Behaviour of the Electorates

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Abstract

Voting behaviour in India is shaped by diverse socio cultural factors. This research paper studied the influence of political messages in shaping the voting behaviour of the electorates. In pursuit of the research goal, the voters' perception of the political messages and the probability to vote in the general elections and the voters' decision making process in choosing the candidate were studied and analysed. The study included 600 respondents from four Lok Sabha constituencies who had participated in the General elections of 2019.

Keywords: *Political messages, Perception, Voting Behaviour, Electorates*

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Introduction

The methodical study of voting behaviour was manifested by three major research schools. The sociological model often identified as School of Columbia became operational with the publication of the book *The People's Choice* authored by Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1944), mainly focuses on the influence of social factors. The psychological model also known as School Of Michigan concentrated on the behavioural aspect of the voters and was specified in the *American Voter* by Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes (1960). The economic voting model or the school of Rochester theory surfaced with the landmark work of Anthony Downs. In his book *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957) he sought to emphasize on variables such as rationality, information, choice and ambiguity.

The pivotal research of the Columbia study of the US Presidential elections of 1940 observes that Communication from three sources may change voting behaviour. Communication by candidates and political parties, communication by mass media and communication by close acquaintances shaped the electorates to decide the vote. Except some, the greater part of election communication regarding elections and referenda are disseminated through mass media (Bennet and Entman, 2001).

The term Perception is the perceived process of communication and the output of the process is that how the audience reacts to a situation. The percept is a mental sign of the motivation and perception is the conscious reception, selection and analysis of information that congregated through the senses. So perception is a cognitive process that helps to understand and interpret things according to the experiences and beliefs of the particular individual. So definitely it is a unique personalized experience. It is the process of becoming aware of situations of adding meaningful associations to sensations (Gilmer, 1971).

Stimulation, organization, interpretation-evaluation, memory and recall are the stages in which the perception process transpires through. It relates to psychology as it is the study of actions, deeds and mental process. Perception is also linked with sensation as sensation is the process of information from the world into the brain. So using the senses to spot and identify something and then to process the information and perceiving the emotions. The publics' political decision making process depends upon political cognitions, that is the ability to comprehend and apply the decision making process in an election or choosing the political party or leaders Luskin (1987).

Conceptual framework

Perception has been studied from many diverse points of view. There are many theories about different subjects in perception apart from the thinking that perception is just a person's view point. While coming to psychological point of view two theories that dominate are Self-perception theory of Daryl J Bem (1972) and Cognitive Dissonance theory of Leon Festinger (1957).

Later it was Skinner's analysis which stimulated the current self-perception theory. It emphasizes on people's attitude that develops by observing their own behaviour due to lack of experience and concluding what attitudes must have caused it. It is an individual's ability to react differentially to his own behaviour and its controlling

variable is what transpires through social interaction (Mead, 1934; Ryle, 1949; Skinner, 1953). On the other hand cognitive dissonance theory tries to clarify a chain of findings from experiments on self-justification. Perhaps it is a state of discomfort that arises whenever one individual holds two cognitions that are inconsistent with one another (Festinger, 1957).

The studies on the effect of media communication reveal a much lesser result than expected. Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) recommended a theory of a two-step flow of communication. He states the news reports based on election campaigns may not have a direct influence on the voters but mediated through opinion leaders. They are well informed, trained expert citizens who are having enough influence on the voters.

The idea behind the psychological model of voting behaviour is partisanship, an emotional empathy which is steady and an enduring association with a political party. The concept of partisanship was influenced by the perception of reference group (Hyman and Singer, 1968). It also has similarities with the idea of anticipatory socialisation introduced by Merton (1950) which points out to a reference group in which the voters follow and perceive its rules accordingly.

The theory of rational choices attempt to establish a direct correlation between consumers and voters and between enterprises and political parties. The concept of rationality is the statement that the electorates and the political parties perform directly to their own interest. It put forward the concerns of the voter about the concrete actions of the government and not the party ideologies. The political parties strive to win elections only to achieve reputation and to exist in power.

Study Objective

The objective of the study was to determine the influence of political messages on the voting behaviour of the voters.

Methodology

The researcher studied the general elections of 2019 to achieve the objective. The study's final sample consisted of 600 respondents from the constituencies of Thiruvananthapuram(25.5%), Ernakulam(24.5%), Idukki (24.7%) and Kozhikode(25.3). From each Lok Sabha constituency three assembly constituencies were selected to distribute the sampling questionnaire. The sampling procedure was conducted between polling day and the declaration of results to minimise potential bias. Their responses were coded and analysed using appropriate statistical techniques.

Sample Attributes

The study surveyed 600 voters from four Lok Sabha constituencies who had cast their ballots. The sample attributes was defined by seven key socio economic variables such as age, gender, religion, caste, education, employment and income. The sample had an approximately even distribution across four Lok Sabha constituencies. The sample was designed to have an equal representation of male and female respondents. On analysing

the data, it was found that males constituted 51.8 % and the females 48.2% of the sample.

Analysis

The objective of the study was to ‘determine the influence of political messages / communication on the voting behaviour’. To achieve this objective the following factors were studied. a) Whether the voters’ perception of the political messages influence the probability to vote in the general elections b) Whether the political messages really influence the voters’ thought and decision making process in choosing the candidate. From this viewpoint the data was collected, cross tabulated with the socio economic variables and the statistical significance test was also carried out to know the dependency level.

Perception of political messages and probability to vote in the general elections

This part dealt with the analysis of the data relating to the voter’s perception of the political messages and its influence on the possibility to vote in the general elections. The response choices of the probability to vote were categorised into three as ‘No’, ‘Somewhat’ and ‘Yes’. The data of the respondents were analysed by each socio economic variable and the significance tests were carried out to identify the relationship between the variables.

The analysis indicated that majority (51.1%) of the young age group (18-30) were influenced by the political messages more and accordingly they were likely to vote in the general elections. The age group 31 to 40 (41.9 %) had the second place and the age category above 51 years showed the least probability to vote. The chi square tests proved a significant association existed between the perception of the political messages and the probability to vote as the P value (.021) was statistically significant when tested by the confidence level 0 .05.

In the gender category, the male respondents (42.1%) had the highest share while the female had 40.1%. For the category the influence of the political messages led them to vote in the elections. The significance test showed that there was no relationship between the gender and the probability to vote after being exposed to political messages as the P value (.179) obtained for the variable was greater than the significant level.

Religious wise data revealed Muslims (46.3 %) outdid other categories while Hindus (43.4%) came next .To assess the relevance of religion as a variable, chi square tests was conducted to identify the significance which indicated insignificant relation as the P value was greater than the confidence level at 0.05.

Probability to vote in the general elections

Socio Economic Variables and Categories	No (%)	Somewhat (%)	Yes (%)	Total (%)	Chi Square results
Age					
➤ 18- 30 years	15.6	33.3	51.1	100	X ² =14.886 df=6 Sig=.021
➤ 31-40 years	24.8	33.3	41.9	100	
➤ 41-50 years	22.2	39.8	38.0	100	
➤ Above 51 years	22.6	44.1	33.3	100	
Gender					
➤ Male	20.3	37.6	42.1	100	X ² =.271 df=2 Sig=.873
➤ Female	21.5	38.4	40.1	100	
Religion					
➤ Hindu	20.3	36.2	43.4	100	X ² =10.990 df=6 Sig=.089
➤ Muslim	19.5	34.2	46.3	100	
➤ Christian	20.7	45.7	33.6	100	
➤ Others	38.1	38.1	23.8	100	
Caste					
➤ General	21.2	42.9	35.8	100	X ² =12.077 df=8 Sig=.148
➤ SC	22.4	38.8	38.8	100	
➤ ST	18.6	41.9	39.5	100	
➤ OBC	18.9	32.0	49.1	100	
➤ Others	33.3	37.5	29.2	100	
Education					
➤ Up to SSLC	19.9	45.9	34.2	100	X ² =14.153 df=6 Sig=.028
➤ +2/Pre-degree	28.2	28.2	43.6	100	
➤ Graduation	17.9	38.1	43.9	100	
➤ PG and above	17.1	41.5	41.5	100	
Employment					
➤ Employed	21.2	38.4	40.4	100	X ² =2.273 df=4 Sig=.686
➤ Unemployed	22.3	36.9	40.8	100	
➤ Student	13.5	38.5	48.1	100	
Income					
➤ Less than10000	19.8	54.1	32.4	100	X ² =19.498 df=10 Sig=.034
➤ 10001 - 20000	12.7	53.7	36.6	100	
➤ 20001 - 30000	28.8	56.0	32.8	100	
➤ 30001 - 40000	27.3	47.0	45.5	100	
➤ Above 40001	16.0	40.0	46.0	100	
➤ No income	21.1	61.4	25.4	100	

Caste data evidently validated that the OBC had the highest distribution with 49.1% followed by ST (39.5%) and SC (38.8%) respectively. Caste variable was shown to be in significant when the significance test was applied to know the relationship.

The data in the education category revealed that the Graduation group (43.9 %) had the highest frequency, followed by the second lowest qualification (+2 / pre degree) group with 43.6%. The data as well as the chi square test (0.028) got significance with the variable education.

In the case of employment variable, student (48.1 %) category stayed ahead while the unemployed (40.8%) and the employed (40.4%) category got a slight difference in their share. The data however were not statistically significant when tested at the confidence level 0.05.

Analysis of the data in the income groups specified 'Above 40001' (46%) category was prone to the political messages and likely to vote in the elections accordingly, followed by '30001 to 40000' (45.5%) with a small variation in their distribution. The income groups were significant when tested by chi square (.034) and the association thus remained dependent.

So it can be concluded that understanding or perception of the political messages influenced the voters' probability to vote in the general elections. The young age group was influenced more by the political messages when compared to the other age group. Gender, religion, caste and employment were insignificant variables whereas the other variables such as age, employment and income had significant association.

Influence of political message in the voting behaviour/choosing the candidate

This segment was studied to assess the influence of political messages through different sources in choosing the candidates in general elections. The response choices were categorised into 'No', 'Almost', and 'Yes'. The data of the respondents were analysed by each socio economic variable and the significance tests were carried out to ascertain the relationship of the variables.

Influence of political message in the voting behaviour

Socio Economic variables and categories	No (%)	Almost (%)	Yes (%)	Total (%)	Chi Square results
Age					
➤ 18- 30 years	13.3	34.4	52.2	100	X ² =14. 622 df=6 Sig=.023
➤ 31-40 years	19.7	45.3	35.0	100	
➤ 41-50 years	22.2	42.6	35.2	100	
➤ Above 51 years	22.1	35.4	42.6	100	

Gender					
➤ Male	16.7	38.3	45.0	100	X ² =2.602 df=2 Sig=.272
➤ Female	21.5	38.4	40.1	100	
Religion					
➤ Hindu	17.2	39.0	43.8	100	X ² =2.873 df=6 Sig=.825
➤ Muslim	20.8	34.2	45.0	100	
➤ Christian	20.7	40.7	38.6	100	
➤ Others	19.0	42.9	38.1	100	
Caste					
➤ General	19.9	43.4	36.7	100	X ² =17.324 df=8 Sig=.027
➤ SC	18.8	41.2	40.0	100	
➤ ST	32.6	32.6	34.9	100	
➤ OBC	14.9	33.3	51.8	100	
➤ Others	25.0	37.5	37.5	100	
Education					
➤ Up to SSLC	22.6	32.9	44.5	100	X ² =8.103 df=6 Sig=.231
➤ +2/Pre-degree	18.8	41.6	39.6	100	
➤ Graduation	14.8	39.0	46.2	100	
➤ PG and above	24.4	40.2	35.4	100	
Employment					
➤ Employed	19.2	38.1	42.7	100	X ² =10.240 df=4 Sig=.037
➤ Unemployed	21.0	42.7	36.3	100	
➤ Student	11.5	26.9	61.5	100	
Income					
➤ Less than10000	16.2	39.6	44.1	100	X ² =13.803 df=10 Sig=.182
➤ 10001 - 20000	14.9	40.3	44.8	100	
➤ 20001 - 30000	28.8	38.4	32.8	100	
➤ 30001 - 40000	15.2	40.9	43.9	100	
➤ Above 40001	22.0	34.0	44.0	100	
➤ No income	16.7	35.1	48.2	100	

Analysis of the above data showed that more than half of the younger age group '18 to 30 years' (52.2%) was influenced by political messages from different sources followed by the older group 'Above 51 years'(42.6 %). The statistical analysis showed a significant association existed between the variable age and the influence of political messages that led to choose a particular candidate to vote.

Grounded on the facts delivered, the male category (45%) dominated in the influence of the political messages than the female (40.1%) category. But the female group (38.4%) showed majority than the male group (38.3%) in the 'Almost' category. Gender category had an insignificant bearing when tested with the confidence level 0.5.

Data analysed based on 'religion' revealed that 'Muslims' (45 %) were more influenced by the political messages followed by 'Hindus' (43.8%) and then 'Christians' (38.6%) respectively. However the differences were not statistically significant when tested.

Caste distribution showed 'OBC' category (51.8%) had the highest number of respondents while 'SC' category (40 %) came next in the influence of political messages to vote for a specific candidate. The chi square results proved that an

association existed between the variable caste and influence of political messages in choosing the candidates.

In the case of the variable 'Education', the respondents in the group 'Graduation' (46.2%) attained higher distribution followed by a slight difference in the 'Up to SSLC' (44.5%) category. The lowest distribution was marked by the high education category 'PG and above' (35.4%). But it remained as an independent variable and the statistical test confirmed the insignificance of the variable.

Employment wise analysis of the sample showed that the 'student' (61.5%) group was influenced more by the political messages followed by the 'employed' (42.7%) group. These differences were also statistically significant as the probability value is less than the significant level.

As the data indicated that in the 'Income' category, the 'No income' (48.2%), group comprising of the students had the highest share, followed by the income group '10001-20000' (44.8%). But the association was statistically insignificant.

It can be inferred that the variables age, caste and employment had a significant bearing on the influence of political messages that led them to choose a particular candidate in general elections.

Insights

The objective of the study was to 'determine the influence of political messages /communication on the voting behaviour'. For examining the objective the following factors were studied. a) Whether the voters' perception of the political messages influence the probability to vote in the general elections b) Whether the political messages really influence the voters' thought and decision making process in choosing the candidate or the voting behaviour. The study provides valuable insights into the complex relationship between political messages and voter behaviour.

More than half of the respondents (51.1%) of the young age group (18-30) in the variable 'age' and the 'Graduation' group (43.9 %) in the variable 'education' were influenced by the political messages more and they were likely to vote in the general elections. Analysis of the data in the income groups' specified 'Above 40001' (46%) category was prone to be influenced by the political messages and likely to vote in the elections. Hence it can be concluded that perception of the political messages influenced the voters' probability to vote in the general elections. The young age group was influenced more by the political messages when compared to the other age group. Gender, religion, caste and employment were insignificant variables whereas the other variables such as age, education and income had significant association.

Findings showed that more than half of the younger age group '18 to 30 years' (52.2%) was influenced by political messages from different sources followed by the older group 'Above 51 years' (42.6 %). Employment wise analysis showed that the 'student' (61.5%) group was influenced more by the political messages. In the 'Income' category, the 'No income' (48.2%), group comprising of the students had the highest share, followed by the income group '10001-20000' (44.8%). It can be inferred that the variables age, caste and employment had a significant bearing on the influence of political messages that led them to choose a particular candidate in general elections.

The motivational and cognitive processes of the electorates determine how to perceive

the election campaign messages. The electorates who lack the capability to analyse political information use alternative ways to reach at evaluations about that information. Such heuristic process (Chaiken, 1980) may lead to cognitive biases and systematic judgement errors. (Kahneman, Slovic and Tversky, 1982). So the politically uninformed public may bank on different sources, whether it might be right or wrong to perceive the messages in an effective manner.

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