



INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE POLITICAL REASONING OF TRIBAL PEOPLE (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ALIRAJPUR DISTRICT)

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the influence of social media usage on the development of political reasoning among tribal communities in Alirajpur, Madhya Pradesh. Political reasoning refers to the analytical and reflective process by which individuals understand political events, ideologies, and policies to make informed civic decisions—an essential component for meaningful democratic participation. Tribal populations, often socially and geographically isolated, face persistent challenges in accessing education, information, and political discourse. With the rise of digital platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and YouTube, social media has emerged as a powerful tool for political engagement and awareness, especially for marginalized communities.

Using a survey method, data were collected from 437 tribal respondents categorized based on their level of social media usage: active users, non-active users, and non-users. The study employed ANOVA and Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons to examine differences in political reasoning across these groups.

Findings revealed a statistically significant difference in political reasoning based on social media usage levels. Social media active users demonstrated notably higher political reasoning scores than both non-active and non-users. However, the difference between non-active users and non-users was not statistically significant.

The results suggest that active engagement with social media platforms can meaningfully enhance political reasoning among tribal individuals, thereby contributing to their democratic empowerment.

1. INTRODUCTION WITH RATIONALE

The present research is an empirical investigation aimed at exploring the influence of social media platforms on the political cognition and reasoning abilities of tribal communities. In an age dominated by digital communication, social media has emerged as a powerful tool not only for information dissemination but also for shaping public opinion and political understanding. Tribal communities, often marginalized in mainstream political discourse, face challenges such as geographical isolation, limited infrastructure, and restricted access to formal education, which hinder their political participation and awareness. In this context, the penetration of mobile phones and social media into remote tribal areas opens new avenues for political engagement and cognitive development. This study aims to investigate whether the use of social media platforms helps enhance political reasoning among tribal individuals, thereby contributing to democratic participation and socio-political empowerment.

Political reasoning refers to the structured and logical process through which individuals analyze political issues or events and derive conclusions. It involves critical thinking based on sequential reflection about political concepts, issues, and ideologies, allowing individuals or groups to assess various aspects rationally and make informed decisions. Political reasoning is a vital democratic process that is fact-based, goal-

oriented, and instrumental in resolving issues and influencing public opinion. It strengthens democracy and supports social transformation. **Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson (1996)**, in their book “Democracy and Disagreement,” have clearly stated that “political reasoning plays a significant role in democratic societies, as it makes citizens aware of various policies and decisions and motivates them to participate in public discourse.” According to **David Zarefsky (2014)**, “political reasoning is the process through which individuals and groups involved in public controversies present their perspectives through rational dialogue, evaluate opposing viewpoints, and attempt to build consensus for collective decision-making.”

Social media, under the umbrella of information and communication technology, refers to virtual platforms through which people across the globe communicate and exchange ideas, information, and emotions using electronic devices. Social media is a web-based virtual environment where users interact in real time via computers, laptops, tablets, or smartphones. Prominent platforms include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Telegram, Reddit, Messenger, WeChat, YouTube, Pinterest, and others.

Tribal communities are an indispensable part of India's socio-cultural heritage, known for their distinct traditions, eco-centric lifestyles, and self-sustaining community systems.

Despite their rich cultural identity, these communities have often remained on the fringes of mainstream development due to geographical isolation, limited access to education, healthcare, and communication infrastructure. In this context, ensuring inclusive development while preserving their unique identity poses a significant challenge. Political reasoning—the ability to critically analyze political events, policies, and ideologies—is crucial for democratic participation. For tribal populations, fostering such reasoning is especially important as it equips them to understand their rights, evaluate government initiatives, and actively participate in public discourse. This intellectual engagement not only promotes self-awareness but also strengthens their voice within democratic institutions. The development of political reasoning is as essential as political awareness in strengthening democratic systems. It enables individuals to differentiate between right and wrong, critically assess government policies, and make reasoned decisions. For tribal communities, such reasoning skills are even more significant as they help promote awareness of their rights and encourage active participation in democratic processes. Through political reasoning, these communities can protect their interests, engage with public policy, and work toward socioeconomic empowerment and inclusion in the national mainstream. The advent of digital technology, particularly social media, has revolutionized the landscape of political communication. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube have become major sources of political information, public mobilization, and civic education. They provide spaces where individuals can access real-time updates, engage in political debates, and build collective awareness. For tribal communities, social media holds the potential to transcend traditional barriers, connect with wider political narratives, and empower them to assert their rights and perspectives.

A review of existing literature reveals that scholars—such as Waugh, L. (2010); Valenzuela, S. et al. (2012); Goudas, T. et al. (2014); Bosc, T., Cabrio, E., and Villata, S. (2016); Hong, S. and Kim, S. H. (2016); Dusmanu, M., Cabrio, E., and Villata, S. (2017); Gil de Zúñiga, H., Barnidge, M., and Diehl, T. (2018); Gurevych, I., Lippi, M., and Torroni, P. (2017); Keerthiraj (2018); Vecchi, E. M., Falk, N., Jundi, I., and Lapesa, G. (2021); Scott, A. L. (2023); Zia, C., Rasoolikolamaki, S., and Jalalian Daghigh, A. (2024); and Roy, A. (2024)—have explored the interrelation between political reasoning and social media. However, in India, such studies are limited in number, particularly concerning tribal populations. Although global studies have explored the relationship between social media and political reasoning, there exists a clear research gap within the Indian context—especially concerning tribal populations. This study attempts to address this gap by examining how varying levels of social media usage affect political reasoning among tribal people in the Alirajpur district. Therefore, this research aims to address that gap by exploring the role of social media in shaping political reasoning among tribal communities.

2. OBJECTIVE

The following is the objective of the study:

To study the influence of social media on the political reasoning of tribal people.

3. HYPOTHESIS

The following is the hypothesis of the study:

There is no significant influence of social media on the political reasoning of tribal people.

4. TYPE OF RESEARCH

This study employs a descriptive survey research design. A total of 437 respondents from the tribal communities of Alirajpur district were surveyed to assess the influence of social media on their political reasoning.

5. VARIABLES OF THE STUDY

In this study, the independent variable is the level of social media usage, categorized into three groups: social media non-users, social media non-active users, and social media active users, while the criterion variable is the political reasoning ability of the tribal people.

6. DELIMITATIONS

The following are the delimitations of the study:

1. The study is limited to the Alirajpur district of Madhya Pradesh.
2. Only tribal communities are included; non-tribal groups are excluded.
3. Only the influence of social media is studied; other media (print, TV, radio) are excluded.
4. The survey was conducted on 437 educated individuals from tribal communities.

7. SAMPLE

The population of this study comprised tribal individuals residing in Alirajpur district of Madhya Pradesh, under Indore Division. A purposive sampling method was employed to select the sample. Respondents were chosen from all five tehsils of the district—Alirajpur, Jobat, Sondwa, Chandra Shekhar Azad Nagar, and Katthiwada. The sample included participants from selected Gram Panchayats, Nagar Panchayats, and Municipal Councils. The sample represented both male (254) and female (183) participants, with age ranging from 15 to 53 years. Respondents came from both rural and urban areas, and included individuals from low, middle, and high socioeconomic backgrounds. All levels of education (primary to higher education) and occupational groups (employed and unemployed) were represented.

8. RESEARCH TOOLS

A “Political Reasoning Test” was constructed by the researcher under expert guidance to assess the political reasoning of the respondents. The test consisted of 30 multiple-choice questions, each comprising two premise statements and four possible conclusions. Only one conclusion was correct per item. Each question carried two marks, making the total score 60. Respondents were given 45 minutes to complete the test.

A “Social Media Usage Scale” was developed to assess the usage of platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, etc., among tribal individuals. The scale included 20 items that measured frequency, duration, purpose, participation, dependency, and habits of usage. Each item

had five response options: “Never,” “Rarely,” “Sometimes,” “Often,” and “Always.” Respondents were asked to mark the most appropriate response. The time allotted for this tool was 20 minutes.

9. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The data collection process was carried out in several phases. After obtaining administrative approval, the researcher established communication with tribal respondents, building rapport and explaining the purpose of the study. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and would only be used for research purposes. Photocopies of all research tools—Political Reasoning Test, and Social Media Usage Scale, were prepared as per sample size. The researcher then visited the selected villages and urban areas of all five tehsils of Alirajpur district to conduct the survey. All tools were administered in an organized manner. After data collection, responses were scored and analyzed based on predetermined criteria and correct answers. The data was then categorized, tabulated, and statistically analyzed using appropriate techniques.

10. DATA ANALYSIS

To analyze the collected data in line with the research objectives, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Bonferroni Pairwise Comparison Test were employed. The results of the analysis are presented below.

Source of Variation	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Sum of Squares (SS)	Mean Sum of Squares (MSS)	F-value	Significance Level
Social Media Usage	2	4052.44	2026.22	44.79	0.00**
Error	431	19497.15	45.24		
Total	433				

Table 1: Summary of ANOVA for ‘Political Reasoning’ with respect to Social Media Usage

** = Significant at 0.01 level.

From Table 1, it is evident that the F-value for ‘Social Media’ is 44.79 with df = 2,431 and a significance level of 0.00, which is less than the 0.01 significance level. Hence, the F-value is statistically significant. This indicates a significant difference in the mean scores of political reasoning among the three groups: social media non-users, social media non-active users, and social media active users. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating “There is no significant influence of social media on the political reasoning of tribal people” is rejected.

To further examine the significance of the differences between the group means, the Bonferroni Pairwise Comparison Test was applied.

Group Pair	Mean Difference	Standard Error	Significance Level
Social media active users – Social media non-users	6.43	0.84	0.00**
Social media active users – Social media non-active users	6.69	0.77	0.00**
Social media non-active users – Social media non-users	0.26	0.81	1.00- NS

Table 2: Bonferroni Pairwise Comparisons for ‘Political Reasoning’ Based on Social Media Usage

** = Significant at 0.01 level.

NS- Not significant at 0.01 level.

Social Media Usage Level	Mean Political Reasoning Score
Social media active users	37.50
Social media non-active users	30.80
Social media non-users	31.07

Table 3: Mean Scores of Political Reasoning Based on Social Media Usage Levels

From Table 2 and 3, it is evident that:

- There is a statistically significant difference in political reasoning between social media active users and both social media non-users and non-active users.
- The mean political reasoning score of social media active users (37.50) is significantly higher than that of non-users (31.07) and non-active users (30.80).
- However, no significant difference is observed between social media non-active users and non-users.

11. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the statistical analysis, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The political reasoning ability of social media active users is significantly higher than that of social media non-users among tribal people.
2. The political reasoning ability of social media active users is also significantly higher than that of social media non-active users.
3. There is no significant difference in political reasoning between social media non-active users and non-users.

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