

# Instagram as New platform for Political Participation among Indian Youth: An Opinion Study of University Students

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## ABSTRACT

In India, comprehensive literature on social media impacts on political engagement in real life has been published over the last decade. Some claim that social media enhances civic engagement online and offline. This research examines how Instagram's political activities influence university students' political performance in India and the actual political participation. This research also illuminates the connection between political and cultural events. An online survey (N=72) of students from the various Indian universities was conducted, including male and female undergraduates, graduates, and doctorate students. The results show that Instagram is used in political consciousness and information by the majority of students. Political efficiency is mostly based on online political involvement.

Furthermore, they believe that Instagram is an emerging platform for political participation. Finally, the study results show that Instagram's political activities strongly connect with political awareness and offline engagement. In India, younger generations are highly involved in online political events on Instagram and other social media platforms. Participants actively share their political content with friends, family and colleagues online. Instagram provides various content-sharing tools, including stories, reels, and live video sharing, which may effectively exploit during political campaigns. Youth and their political aspirants may have engaging associations

through photographs and edited videos through the Instagram platform.

**Keywords :** Instagram, Political engagement, Political effectiveness, Social media, Political participation.

## 1. Introduction

Instagram is the latest platform in political messaging in election campaigns in recent years. The contact between Instagram and chat rooms has grown over the last ten years. Instagram is the newest and fast-growing Internet Networking trend. All the political parties and candidates used Instagram in no small measure to attract young voters during the 2019 general parliamentary elections in India. Political communication analysts have drawn considerable attention to the recent exponential growth and popularity of Instagram use. The political effect of Instagram as a modern way to get politically aware people and connect with people on the web is of particular interest. Users will receive updates and information processing and circulating on Instagram, which is inter-dimensionally linked to multiple web links. Instagram's framework is somewhat different from mainstream media; it encourages news and knowledge to be conveyed differently. Social networking platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube and mass communication systems like mainstream newspapers and radio, and television, have been socially transformed. Hundreds of social media research' (Golan, Arceneaux, & Soule, 2019) were carried out by media and communications researchers, politicians, sociologists, and

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international relations researchers. The Internet in India plays a crucial role in educating the public about political developments, influencing its users, and inspiring them to participate in offline politics. For political debates and civic engagement, the internet has become essential. The internet was initially a one-way platform to educate the public on their websites by political parties. In two-way contact (Emruli & Baca, 2011), however, digital media and technology have altered interaction habits. Millennials are the Internet and Instagram's most active users. Digital democratic initiatives are advantageous to young people who are inspired to participate in political activities (Quintelier & Vissers, 2008). The use of the internet, political understanding, and political commitment are interconnected. This trend plays a crucial role in elections, particularly in developing countries such as India.

The article continues this pattern in the hands of political actors working on researching new media networks. Nevertheless, the focus is drawn to a particular platform, i.e., Instagram. Instagram differs from other social media platforms such as Facebook by emphasizing posting pictures rather than disseminating text-based messages. For political communications, visuals play a vital role. The internet and social media are becoming increasingly important (McAllister, 2015).

Conversely, as seen in the presidential elections in 2016 in the United States and several European countries, it also raises threats to democracy. Social networking is one of the largest sources of knowledge to millions of users, but it can also influence public sentiment through tremendous misinformation. Instagram's usage is common in millennial's developed world and developing countries such as India and Bangladesh. Politicians and Political parties in India have highly active social media platforms to provide information to social media followers and voters. Digital technologies and social media affect political communication both in developing countries and in advanced countries, although the internet's expansion is a significant factor for

developed countries (McNair, 2017).

In India, as opposed to other social networks like Twitter or Facebook, Instagram is the emerging network of young people for political content. According to the general elections report, 2019 stated that Instagram is a highly utilized platform as a tool for the campaign. Till December 2019, India takes over 88 million active Instagram users (Statista Data, 2020). Prime Minister Narendra Modi is one of the politicians who have the most followers on Instagram in India (Statista Data, 2019), and the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) is one of the leading parties has the maximum number of followers on Instagram.

The present study shows the influence of Instagram on political engagement, how students engage in online and offline political events, and the topic of debate at social media websites, which is a gap in the literature, particularly the marginalized university students in India. The research also explores the impact of participants' online political activities and their actual political engagement. Research also explored the relationship between the effectiveness of social media and political involvement. In previous studies, traditional and digital media in significant towns and other social sectors such as education, health, and politics were examined. Nevertheless, most scholars neglect disadvantaged regions. However, to analyze Instagram's political spectrum, this work focuses on university students in India.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Political Efficacy and Modern Media

Social media's role in providing a forum for political participation and increasing its political effectiveness was emphasized (Bimber & Copeland, 2013). Digital media and Instagram provide young people with an opportunity for political debate through different online groups, accounts, and pages. (Schulz, 2005) the study indicated that Internet media users are active in political discourse and strategy. The internet has built interest in its user policies and increased the

interviewee's political efficacy, who develop their political commitments online and offline. Online and offline political engagements were explored by (Jiang 2016) on the internet's impact. He also researched the role of the internet in shaping citizens' political perceptions. This strong relationship improves political efficiency and Internet users' involvement in elections and increases their political participation (Jiang, 2016). In addition to increasing the understanding of voting and campaigning, the internet has become the primary source of political engagement and democratic participation. Digital media also improve the ratio of voter turnout amongst apps. It elaborates on the approach that helps to vote and donate political campaigns (Larson, 2004). The effectiveness of users allows them to better understand policy problems by collecting new media political data. (Kahne, Middaugh, & Allen, 2014) studied the youth, new media, and participatory politics. They argued that social media had created insight and networking forums for individuals with large audiences and a way to participate in political action. As stated previously, the experiments were carried out in developing countries, and similar findings were published. Nevertheless, the study area omitted and ignored marginalized young people and university students. Our research focuses on engaged university youth through a new Instagram social media site.

## 2.2 Political Engagement and New Media

Understandably, citizen engagement in social media has several positive personal impacts. Individual engagement in social media significantly contributes to political activism. (Mahmud & Amin, 2017) focused on using electronic media by university students in political engagement. The study findings explain the connection between political involvement online and offline, but email is a small political discussion factor compared to Facebook. Digital review of social and political relations. (Gibson & McAllister, 2013) Examined how online networks improve interaction in politics. Also, online interaction improves linkbacks between unrelated bridging networks, and it has been found that social

contact online promotes participation offline. According to this research field pattern, (Papagiannidis & Manika, 2016) examined political engagement and participation through various online and offline platforms. They find that political participants can freely engage with politics and share their views on social media and online platforms. Person perceptions differ in their use of digital media and political engagement in real life.

Digital use and other e-activities boost political information and encourage civic interaction and involvement by internet users. About one in eight users use social media for public and political ends.

Social media's impact in India and how voting behavior is influenced by social media have been researched by (Biswas, Ingle, & Roy, 2014). Social media has created new political engagement trends and changed political contact patterns. (Siluveru, 2015) has been trying to discover the truth in political discourse surrounding social and digital media and has concluded that social networks are used to inform social relationship users. (Stieglitz, Brockmann, & Dang-Xuan, 2012) we explored social media usage for political media, which formed close links between politicians and social media users.

Furthermore, the Social Network Sites (SNS) has dramatically strengthened the relationship between voters and politicians. (Baek, 2015) has revealed that social media users have used collaborative interventions. (Hellweg, 2011) analyzed social media use by politicians to manipulate constituents and found that voters were more optimistic than their content. Likewise, (Kalsnes 2016) addresses Facebook as a new forum for political and electoral engagement, offering best practices for connecting voters to political participation. As a method for democratic reform, (Raouf, Zaman, Ahmad, & Al-Qaraghuli, 2013) researched social network networks. The results demonstrate clearly that politicians and voters commonly used social media as a contact network. The media encourages engagement and mobilization by presenting government

information, playing a critical role in political education, and popular mobilization in politics (Vaccari, Chadwick, & O'Loughlin, 2015).

As of Q1 2019, 451 million Internet users have been five years and older, according to the Indian Internet and Mobile Association (IAMAI, 2019 <https://cms.iamai.in/>). India has fully embraced the internet, and its digital population, with over 680 million active internet users. What started with necessary email correspondence expanded to a digital universe where giants like Google, Facebook, and Twitter became a part of Indians' daily lives for millions.

### **2.3 Instagram and Political Effectiveness in India**

In recent years, Instagram is among the most rapidly growing social media platform. By April 2020, the United States ranks as a country with the highest number of Instagram users, with 120 million people using image sharing or editing software. India ranked second with 88 million Instagram users and an 82 million Brazilian user audience (<https://www.statista.com/>). Instagram is a new forum for politicians and various parties to engage with young people digitally. Instagram is more youthful than Facebook and Twitter. Youth, metropolitan, and first-time millennial voters are the target audiences on Instagram. Instagram is becoming the social media of choice for young Indians to express their views on the party and politics. The 24-hour story loop and bolted highlights on Instagram make this the first airbag for views not subject to work or family scrutinies. At 8.8 crore users in India, Instagram has more than 70% of its users under 35 years of age.

Instagram provides a new forum for political parties that can deliver various substances based on issues that generally occur on Twitter and Facebook, i.e., not so much offensive but more enticing. Today it is a step away from the original cross-release scheme. For example, Congress has been resorting to a method where Instagram offers them a stage to promote "good content" rather than "political" because they are not promoted in political

parties. Instagram is different from other social media websites. The language here is not as relevant as images. If anyone makes an offensive statement, one can block it and move on. It is like a one-sided conversation, a creative dialogue in which people make room for gratitude. Here is no opening for contempt. It is not possible to ignore how hatred could reach this stage of photo-sharing as well. Until now, Instagram remained "safer" than other apps on social media. Instagram's leader in India, Premier Narendra Modi, has become the most popular (Statista Data, 2019). BJP is a leading group that contributes to multiple Instagram followers. However, Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) does not use Instagram exclusively to attract new crowds. Instagram was also focused on Opposition parties such as Indian National Congress (INC), Aam Admi Party (AAP), and Samajwadi Party (S.P.). Instagram is used to cater to and engage the younger crowd by even regional parties like Shiv Sena.

### **2.4 Political Participation in Social media**

The political engagement largely depends upon their interest and participation in social media use. The political interest is instead a motivational component defined as a citizen's willingness to pay attention to political phenomenon at the possible expense of other topics' (Lupia & Philpot, 2005). Over this decade, significant work has been conducted on the internet and social media for online and offline politics. The younger people are more engaged in social media and are more dependent on social media for their political news than older people. On the other hand, older people are more dependent on traditional news resources. (Holt, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Ljungberg, 2013) they are summarised that social media served as a leveler of political interest and offline participation.

Facebook has become a considerable policy discussion for online users and an offline political one of social media platforms forum one of the social media platforms. Facebook has been used for political content and may undermine developed and developing countries' formal political engagement.

(Effing, van Hillegersberg, & Huibers, 2011) expressed the impact of social media in the Netherlands in local and national level elections (2010/11), where significant effect was observed in vote shares at the national level. On the other hand, some authors also argue about the self-centered popularity and participation of individual politicians where social media may threaten the political group (Fenton & Barassi, 2011).

However, Instagram's social media is currently the leading source of social media competition. (Magin, Podschuweit, Haßler, & Russmann, 2017) has explored public expansion and the political relations effect of Facebook. He mixed political engagement approaches with public media growth and considered Facebook a proper forum for bridging public political discourse. Another group of researchers (Sorour & Lal Dey, 2014) found that social media networks and popular movements are closely interrelated. Instagram helped to grasp various political participatory perspectives, for example, the discussion on contentious topics.

Researchers have developed several scales to research the impact of the internet on campaigns and political messages. As the medium is monolithic, it cannot easily quantify the impact of social media on networks. Electoral engagement in Facebook is high throughout elections (Camaj & Santana, 2015). (Borah, 2016) presented his paper on the Annual Facebook Conference of the International Communications Association at the President's Campaign and found that posts endorsing applicants increase people's political engagement whose affiliation with the post is compatible. Facebook's view and political involvement in the 2008 elections were concluded that there might be changes in SNS among candidates and political campaigns (Vitak et al., 2011). The internet is popular among electors, who have learned from various party organizations regarding their political candidates. According to (Borah 2016), Facebook was a communication device used in the 2012 Obama campaign to empower and not encourage Obama's popularity. (Darshan &

Suresh, 2017) reviewed the literature based on SNS and political influence on individuals during 2014-2016. Based on the comprehensive literature on social media and political communication, published work indicates social media opportunities and political challenges in different countries. The following hypotheses in this review are drawn from the literature presented:

Hypothesis 1 (H<sub>1</sub>): The political practices of Instagram contribute significantly to the effectiveness of politics.

Hypothesis 2 (H<sub>2</sub>): Instagram's management practices are closely linked to real-life engagements.

Hypothesis 3 (H<sub>3</sub>): The relationship between political participation and political effectiveness is essential.

### 3. Objectives of the Research

This paper's primary purpose is to test, "is Instagram a new player in the Indian political engagements"? However, other specific goals are:

1. To ascertain whether the political practices on Instagram contribute significantly to the effectiveness of politics?
2. To find the relationship between political participation and political effectiveness is essential or not.

### 4. Methodology

In combination with their data collection methods, a quantitative survey approach has been used to obtain better results used in this analysis. This research uses only primary data sources. A self-administered survey questionnaire was used as a method for gathering primary data from respondents. A questionnaire is a researcher's tool for collecting data from a selected sample. The questions included in the survey are closed to ensure that the above objectives can be achieved. The Google application form was distributed to interviewees. The online form followed this time-saving survey procedure. The empirical survey was prepared to give the interested parties the

perception that The Use of Instagram as a New platform on Political Participation among Indian Students. There has been a multi-choice and 5-point Likert scale with strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. The sample size of 71 students and researchers in the present study corresponds to the limitation's central theorem. "A total of 30 respondents were recommended for statistical analysis as a thumb rule"(Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2003).

This research took independent variables from previously published studies, operationalized them, and modified them. Instagram interactions were used as an independent variable, and political efficacy and actual engagement were dependent variables.

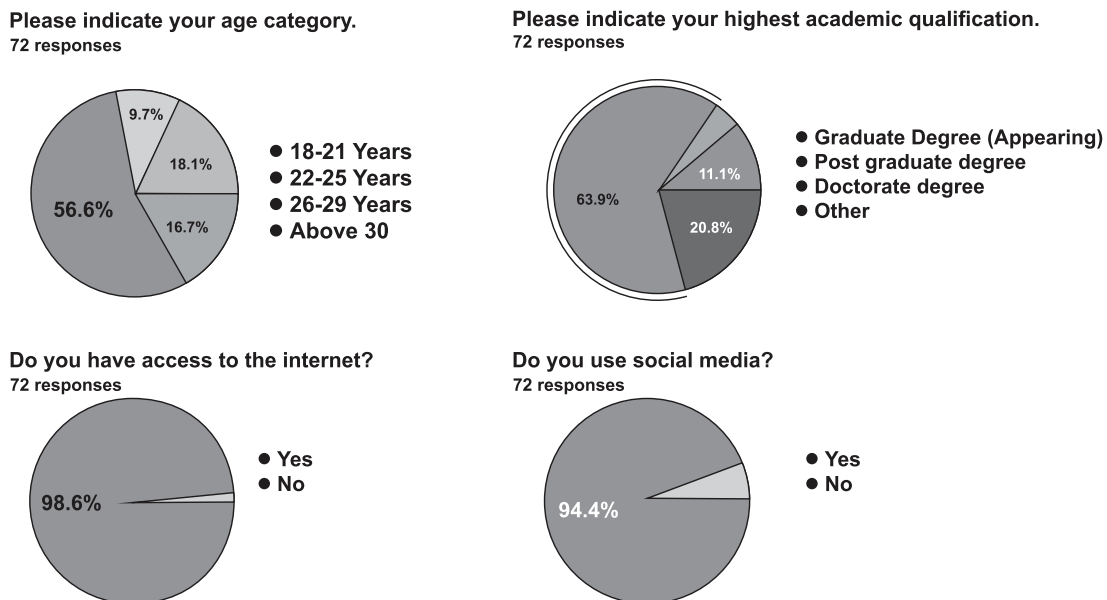
The researcher used the probability of sampling and chose a simple random procedure. (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011)define the mathematical equations in the probability sampling system and population, topic, and random samples. Bachelor, master, and doctoral students are often selected and deemed random samples for young people. A quantitative analysis was carried out. The quantitative study process is explored with different survey methods, according to(Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). "The focus of surveys is on validated

methods of statistical sampling" (Williams, 2003). The method of survey is prevalent in media and communication studies.

### 5. Analysis and Discussion

The primary data was collected through a critical survey conducted online and analyzed for clarification based on the survey questions—an appropriate diagrammatic representation of the results prepared for easy understanding of responses. A total of nine critically analyzed and contemplative questions were selected for the study and university youth of broad age groups targeted for the survey. The younger people are more involved and tech-savvy toward different social media platforms. On the other hand, students are the backbone of any democratic system and are directly or indirectly associated with the political structure. Different type of questionnaire analysis is represented as follows:

Figure 1 shows the different age groups of the targeted audience along with the accessibility of internet. The data represents that the overwhelming majority (55.6%) of respondents fall within the age range from 18-21, while the other 44.4% of respondents fell above 21.

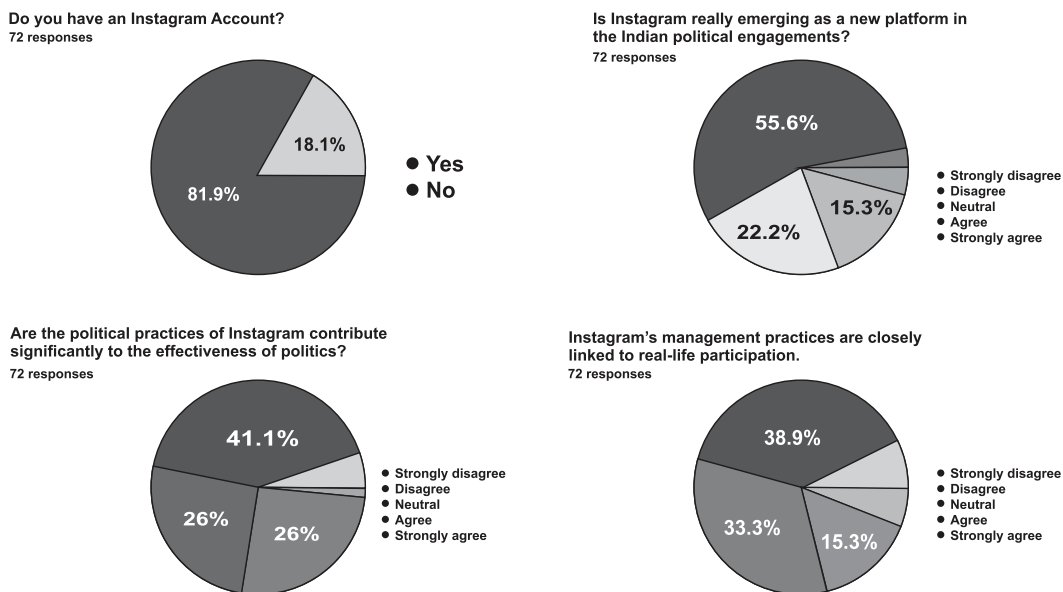


**Figure 1:** Represents the primary data of responses to the various questions asked viz age, academic qualification, access to the internet, and involvement in social media, respectively.

The majority of respondents (63.9%) belong from post-graduation background, and 20.8% has belonged to graduation degree while the remaining respondents possess doctorate and other degrees. It shows that postgraduate and graduate students are more engaged in campaigns. The responses also revealed that many respondents (98.6%) use the internet or use it regularly. It is the first significant step toward the research objectives because it is impossible to access Instagram without the internet.

As seen in the literature review section, a social

media campaign different from a traditional media channel, and both have their significance. So, the figure 1 response elucidated that most respondents (94.6%) use social media accounts. In comparison, only 5.4% of the respondents are not using social media. Access to the internet and possessing a social media handle shows a little gap, which can attribute that a tiny proportion of people are excluded from social media and political appearances. Figure 2 shows another set of results based on selected questions.



**Figure 2:** Represents the primary data of responses to the various questions asked viz possessing Instagram account, emergence of Instagram as a platform in Indian political engagements, and Instagram management practices, respectively.

The most valuable objective of the study is about possessing an Instagram account among various social media handles. The responses presented in figure 2 elucidated that most respondents (81.9%) are using Instagram. In comparison, only 18.1% of the respondents are not using Instagram media. This analysis firmly upholds the study and comprehensively contributes toward political involvement through particular media sources. More than 55.6% of respondents agreed that Instagram is emerging as a new platform in Indian political engagements. 15.3% are not agreed with that statement. It means more than half of the

respondents feel that Instagram is an emerging platform for India's political participation. Figure 2 shows that more than 55.6% of respondents agree that the political practices of Instagram significantly contribute to the effectiveness of politics. Moreover, only 15.3% are not agreed with the above statement. It means more than half of the respondents feel that political engagement on Instagram significantly contributes to politics's effectiveness.

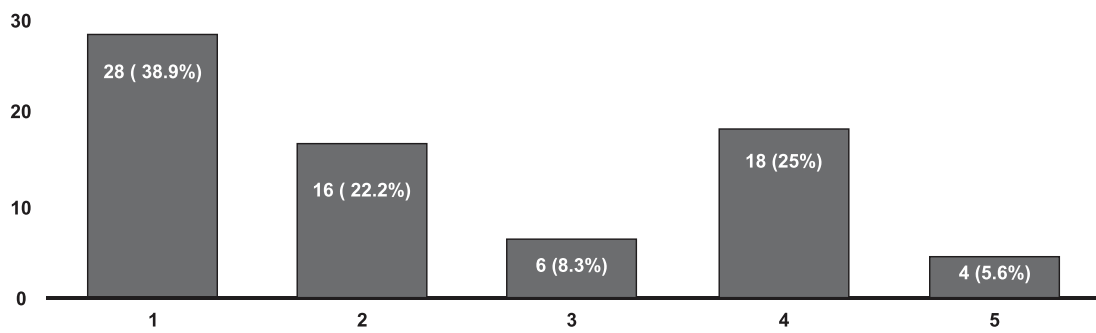
Another section of the question shows that around 38.9% of respondents agree with "Instagram's management practices are closely

linked to real-life participation," and 15.3% disagree with the above statement. However, the exciting point of the responses is around 33.3% are neutral with this statement. This means around equal respondents agree and neutral with the above statements. Nevertheless, many respondents disagree with real-life participation and are using Instagram media only for entertainment purposes.

Figure 3 in the survey report represents the last question asked about political participation and political effectiveness. The bars represent the

agreement or disagreement with the statement where point one means strongly agreeing and point five means strongly disagreeing with the statement. We get a mixed response for the same, which shows that around 38.9% of respondents choose point one that means they feel "The relationship between political participation and political effectiveness is important," and 5.6% goes with the last point, which means they are not satisfied with the above statement. However, many of the respondents are neutral in this point of view.

**The relationship between political participation and political effectiveness is important or not?**  
72 responses



**Figure 3:** Represents the primary data collected on the relationship between political participation and effectiveness.

## 6. Conclusive Remark

Instagram provides a comprehensive platform for majorly sharing visual and video content online. Instagram consists of uploading and sharing options in photo, video, reel, stories, and live video through a very user-friendly interface. The Live feature on Instagram is handy, and record video of more extensive durations exploited to share political rallies or conferences by various political leaders. The younger generation is connected through fascinating photographs of their favorite politicians, which may directly impact their political involvements. It also provides the editing options of videos and photographs to their users, which provides many features such as inserting date, time and locations, and multiple gestures and reactions for a particular post. Stories on Instagram provide very impactful and time-saving options to users to

publish their content which is available for 24 hours span and automatically removed after that. Above all, features are effectively used in political engagement, and this paper represents various findings associated with the use of Instagram media by youth.

The results of Instagram's initial variable political effectiveness and actual involvement indicate that most respondents firmly accept that Instagram is emerging as a new forum for Indian political engagement. Most respondents said they are using Instagram to educate and debate politics. However, education findings indicate that undergraduate and graduate students are deeply engaged and involved in social media. In general, the analysis findings indicate that online policies have a significant impact on politics' performance. The second variable real relationship of participation by the Instagram media results shows that participants



actively share their political content with friends, families, and colleagues online. They are actively involved in political activities in real life. Instagram management activities had been accepted by most of the respondents for their involvement in real life. Finally, the analysis showed that Instagram affects university students significantly concerning their political involvement. It gives all interviewees political effectiveness. Instagram and social media are better informed about government events throughout the selected sample of students active on Instagram. The participants reported online discussion and political content sharing and participated actively in various political activities in real life. A big part of political effectiveness and genuine engagement is played in Instagram media. The study supports our assumption that online political activities play an essential role in politics; Instagram's political activities are significantly connected to real political participation, and that policy efficiency depends mostly on the whole. On the whole, one can say that along with other social media platforms, Instagram is one of the largest emerging platforms for political engagements also represents real-life impacts and political effectiveness. Political parties which may be in power or opposition can use this media to reach and represent their political agendas beneficially and entertainingly.

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