

## **An Exploratory Study On The Influence Of Digital Media On Voting Decision Of Voters (With Special Reference To Social Media Users)**

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### **Abstract**

The study aimed at investigating whether social media is capable of influencing voting decisions. Further to identify the important aspects influencing the voters to believe in social media content. For the study, the descriptive research design was adopted. The data was collected from 388 voters belonging to West Bengal using the convenience sampling technique. A structured questionnaire was used as a data collection instrument for the study. From the analysis performed it was perceived that an equal proportion of male and female voters are present in West Bengal mostly belonging to the age category above 45 Years. Further, it was found that there is no significant difference in the Reasons making Social Media platforms impact the voting decision of the voters belonging to different ages and gender. It was identified that the constant circulation of certain news on social media platforms by my peers and friends and social media news coming from well-known people or personalities make voters unconsciously believe in social media news. It was well understood by the majority of the respondents that social media is influencing the voting decision significantly.

**Keywords:** Voters Behaviour, Voting Decision, West Bengal

### **Introduction**

The development of new technologies that have a significant influence on people's lives is a distinguishing aspect of each period. Whether it's because of the availability of vaccines or because the usual family home now contains a television, technological advancements have a tremendous impact on the majority of people [1]. The average amount of time spent on social media by individuals throughout the globe is 135 minutes per day, a figure that has been steadily rising over the previous several years. It's conceivable that young people, who are more prone to embrace new technology, are stereotyped for spending excessive amounts of time online. People of all ages are increasingly using social media to pass the time and, in some cases, as a news source [2]. More than a quarter of voters were using the internet to collect information about political campaigns as early as 2008. Since the 2008 election, have embraced social media as a way to communicate directly with their followers, as well as collect funds and advertise to millions of people. Free products and services are promoted via social media updates on a daily basis. Whether or not they deliberately seek out political adverts, the great majority of people who use social media are bombarded with them. Young people are quickly embracing social media as a method of participating in a broad range of political engagement activities [3].

For the purposes of this research, the quantity of political information seen or observed on social media sites may be used to evaluate if a person is active or passive in their usage of social media sites. The amount of time individuals spend actively involved in political online activities and the amount of time they spend passively reading material on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are among my dependent variables. Individual voting behaviour is the independent variable that I investigate. Voters' degree of acquaintance with an issue is a critical aspect in forming policy decisions. The rise of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and others has drastically transformed the methods in which information is communicated to voters. Voters are supplied with information via the usage of social media, and they have the choice to share that information with others. Social media platforms have the ability to improve voter awareness by expanding the quantity of information that is easily accessible to them. On the other hand, partisanship among social media users may have unintended effects for them. To begin, some individuals may intentionally choose to hide knowledge that contradicts their ideas, perhaps leading to a change in their viewpoint on the matter. Users may also contribute misleading content in order to influence voter attitudes and the results of policy discussions, according to the third line of argument [4]. In recent years, the latter has gained a large amount of media attention, especially in relation to elections. The authors of this research analyse how voters learn and communicate knowledge in the context of partisanship in a controlled setting such as a laboratory. We'll look at three different ways to communicate knowledge via speaking with one another. To begin with, there is no social media network, making

communication and information sharing with others more difficult. We provide voters the option of responsibly disseminating the information they have purchased by using the social media platform. A third possibility is that voters are permitted to distribute false electoral information on social media [5].

As a consequence, our ability to deal with misleading information appropriately may suffer a significant setback. The environment we've developed in our lab needs to match certain key characteristics of the real world while also allowing us to look into repercussions that aren't always visible in natural data. Individual voters have the ability to acquire costly knowledge on their own, trade and gather information on a social media platform with an endogenous network structure, and do so on a platform where social media information may be inaccurate, among other problems [6]. On a social media platform, all of this is feasible. In order to assess the influence of party preferences on voters, it is necessary to create voter bias. Rather than depending on unobserved changes in native preferences, this should be done. The world, according to our design, is in a state that is both ambiguous and binary, which we shall discuss in further detail later. Regardless of whether the election results represent the genuine state of events, each voter will get a fixed compensation sum. On the other side, each voter will get a political payout based only on the election's result and having no bearing on the present situation of the world. On a regular basis, these political leanings go back and forth between moderate and radical ideologies. In order to cast a ballot in that state, each voter must first educate oneself about the basic state. Voters have the option of choosing which members of the organisation they want to follow on social media before casting their ballots. They may then write a post on what they've learnt and share it with their social media followers [7]. Only the postings produced by members of the group that they are following are visible to voters. A situation that is equivalent to, and acts as a theoretical standard for, learning without direct connection with others. Completing the theoretical analysis gets more difficult when communication is made over a social media site. As previously said, the basis of our project is one of exploration. Finally, rather of concentrating on a model that could be solved quickly, we opted to conduct our study in a setting that accurately mimicked crucial characteristics of the actual world. This enabled us to put the knowledge we obtained to greater use in policy debates on disinformation. This project is the first step toward using the lab as a test bed for future attempts to dispel disinformation, and it is being completed in advance of that use [8].

When interactions are confined to being real, it has been seen that using a social media platform improves the quality of decision-making via collaborative effort. On the other hand, the propagation of incorrect information has the potential to negate all of these advantages. When it's easy to spread false information, the group's well-being and the quality of choices made jointly suffer. Since the launch of a social media website, members of a number of political groups have increased their purchases of information units. It is not the fact that individual voters are less educated that causes the quality of judgments made in the face of disinformation to deteriorate [9]. Uninformed voters spend more time attempting to educate themselves, but the quality of their decisions does not improve as a consequence of their lack of knowledge. Members of the group share roughly 90% of the knowledge they have acquired in a fashion that is true to the principle of information sharing. According to the study's results, just half of the information that is bought gets properly shared on social networking sites. These platforms increase the likelihood of material being misinterpreted. Despite the fact that all members of the group have the same amount of knowledge, the fundamental reason for the poor quality of decision-making among group members is that there are relatively few connections at a time when disinformation is likely to spread. This finding is significant because it suggests that social media companies may have a financial incentive to keep people from lying on their sites [10].

This research adds to the field of voting behaviour research in two areas: endogenous information acquisition and communication and exogenous information acquisition and communication. As far as we know, the authors of this work are the first to assess the cost of information gathering and transmission in a controlled scenario with constant partisans inside a group. Homogeneous groups have only been studied in the context of a restricted number of distinct partisan types existing within a group in the area of information acquisition research. We will explore how partisanship effects the quality of information available on social media sites like as Facebook and Twitter with the help of ongoing partisans. There have been reports that information from the group's bulletin board has been leaked, and the bulk of these claims are true. There is a clear link between partisanship and the potential for false information to propagate [11]. Until a person has received a signal, neither the research on information acquisition nor the literature on communication will look at the consistent quality of signals. We add to the corpus of knowledge by taking into account the signal quality variance that occurs within a group of signals. Participants in our research are given the option of selecting the amount of signal accuracy they wish to pay for. As a result, we are able to perform more consistent research on information collection and communication. One notable accomplishment was being the first experts to investigate knowledge aggregation on an endogenous social media network. Incomplete, null, and partisans are the three social networks that people have been compelled to utilise. These are websites where people may share factually accurate information with one another. Even when organisations have diametrically opposing political opinions, we observe that they prefer to build full networks [12].

## Literature overview

Partisanship, communication, and endogenous information acquisition are the three areas of research examined in this study. For the sake of the research, they are all combined into a single structure. They conducted their groundbreaking research in a laboratory environment that was closely observed in order to examine the spectre of the swing voter. When there are no partisan voters in an election, those who are unaware of the issues will typically opt not to vote. According to the idea, when partisan preferences for one of two alternatives are close, bigger groups of individuals will have a higher number of uninformed voters cast votes to counteract partisans' impact on their own group. When there are two options, this will happen. Studying voting behaviour in the context of communication via straw polls with people that have a shared interest in the issue being voted on would be an interesting experiment [13]. Communication enhances both the information-gathering process and the voting rules itself. allows for open communication and the inclusion of a diverse range of members, including moderate and ardent partisans, utilising three separate voting systems (this is an expansion of the framework). Individuals who are exposed to either moderate or intense partisan treatment, according to the study, are more likely to correctly reveal private information. As a result, more information is gathered and the quality of group decision-making improves. Even when the group's political leanings are revealed along with the straw vote results, the researcher still finds a pattern of genuine exchange of private signals along with limited communication in a three-person group. Despite the results of the straw poll, this is the fact [14].

Examine the impact of media bias on the quality of group decision-making when there are partisans in the group who aren't invested in the result. Members of the group are given the opportunity to express themselves openly and honestly on a social media platform. The researchers experiment with various degrees of bias in media signals as well as different fixed social network topologies in this study [15]. They conclude that communicating via social media leads to higher-quality decision-making than when communication is not done through social media. When biased media signals are present, however, the quality of group judgments has been proven to be adversely influenced. Conduct study on the expenses associated with getting information according to majority and unanimity decision-making standards. They discover low levels of knowledge buy and frequent voting by uninformed voters, even when the ignorant voters have the option of not voting, resulting in much lower-quality group judgments. They emphasise the rule of the majority and contrast voluntary vs compulsory voting; in a similar vein, they emphasise knowledge under-purchase and a propensity to vote without being fully informed [16]. indicates that the signal's precision is a critical component in the information gathering process. When the signals are flawless, that is, when they accurately disclose the status of the world, the theory produces accurate predictions of the facts. Groups, on the other hand, have a tendency to overpurchase signals in relation to the optimal estimate of how many should be acquired. There is a reduced voter participation rate due to a variety of challenging circumstances, including administrative impediments, the country's electoral system, and the majority of individuals who are eligible to vote's political socialisation [17].

The study focused primarily on civic engagement in the widest sense, which was assessed by counting the number of social groups to which each participant belonged at the time of the study. As a result, it seems that increasing one's time spent in front of the television has no effect on the great majority of the many methods in which individuals get active in politics. This is true even if some data shows that television may have a little but negative impact on some political activity. Exposure to different types of political activity via news and other forms of public broadcasting has been demonstrated to raise participation levels across the board. Regardless of whatever show is being watched, the advertising that candidates run will have an impact on the election's outcome. People who watched more television in competitive states were up to ten percent more likely to vote than those who watched less television in competitive areas. People who live in politically competitive television areas, for example, are more likely to be exposed to more presidential campaign advertising on television. Despite the large sums of money spent on television advertising by politicians, it seems that this only accounts for a tiny portion of the disparities in voter engagement that may be found among states [18].

It's feasible that spending time on social media may lead to some individuals being more politically involved, similar to what's occurring in traditional media. [Citation is required] Many individuals in certain political circles believe that the internet and the social media websites that have sprung up as a direct consequence of it would enable citizens to engage in politics more quickly and easily, leading to a rebirth of interest in civic involvement. Politicians now have a forum that is easily accessible to anybody with internet access thanks to social media platforms. Individuals must consider the amount of time they have available to "invest" in a certain activity, according to the rational choice theory. The usage of social media significantly reduces the amount of time required to get political information on a certain topic. If the rational choice theory is correct, an increase in information availability should lead to an increase in the number of individuals who want to know what that knowledge [19].

Some experts feel that social media websites have the potential to have a significant impact on voting participation on a large scale. [Citation is required] If those who watch more political advertising on television are more likely to vote, it seems reasonable to suppose that those who watch more political advertisements online are also more likely to vote. People tend to vote more often when they are surrounded by those who are similar to them in some manner. Through the use of social media services such as online forums, Facebook groups, and shared postings, voters may be able to feel the

same way as those who are geographically surrounded by others who share their opinions. Websites for social networking are among these services. Many people use the internet on a regular basis; however, the kind of internet usage that these corporations participate in is more active than the type of browsing that individuals undertake. One issue that may develop when using social media for research is when academics fail to recognise the many ways in which people spend their time. [Relationship between cause and effect] [Relationship between cause and effect] When using social media networks, it's conceivable that individuals are disengaged, pleasantly browsing through their feeds and absorbing information. On the other hand, there are other users who use social media to actively engage with their friends, start fights, join organisations, and share information. Although active users may have higher levels of political involvement than passive users, passive users are more likely to have lower levels of political participation. On the other hand, the findings of many polls do not distinguish between the many ways in which individuals use social media, thus muddying the waters [20].

According to a research comparing watching television to using the internet, the majority of internet users explore the different platforms in a way that is significantly more similar to "soft news" than "hard news." Those who do not watch "soft news" on television are more inclined to vote against candidates who reflect their genuine political beliefs than those who do. As a consequence, persons who passively got political information from social media, such as campaign advertisements or political posts from friends, may enhance their ability to vote appropriately, but they may not necessarily increase their chance of voting as a result of their activities. People who are not already actively using social media sites to boost their participation do not seem to be swayed by the fact that others do so in a passive manner. Despite the fact that social networking sites may be a fantastic source of information, this is the case. Not every researcher has been as positive about the influence of social media, or the internet in general, on voters as others have been. People who utilised the internet as a source of political information were found to be less engaged in politics in general and hence less likely to vote, even if they had spent time on the internet specifically seeking for political content. This was true whether or not they had spent time on the internet seeking for political information. Because this research was conducted at a period when a huge percentage of individuals were unfamiliar with the internet and before social media sites as we know them today existed, new internet users may have been seeking for political material largely to test their knowledge of the subject [21].

A more recent research discovered that how much time people spent on Facebook was not as important as what they did while there. The scholars that performed the investigation came to this conclusion. The "intensity" of time spent on Facebook was linked to a higher chance of voting in an election, but the "length" of time spent on Facebook was linked to a lower likelihood of voting in an election. It may be difficult to tell whether those who are already interested in politics are more likely to use social media or if people who already use social media are more likely to vote. This is particularly true when working with grownups. Young people are the most likely population to suffer disproportionately unfavourable consequences as a result of their social media usage. They started using social media at a young age and now believe it to be an integral part of their daily lives [22].

Despite the fact that younger people use social media at considerably greater rates than individuals of older ages, it seems that they are not adopting social media as the form of political participation that it has the potential to be, at least not in terms of voting. The great majority of young people, according to the findings, do not utilise the internet to engage in political activity. However, the study discovered that a tiny percentage of young individuals utilise social media platforms for political purposes. People who are already politically involved may find that social media is a useful tool for discussing current events and expanding their political knowledge, but others who are just getting started in politics will not profit from it [23].

It has been alleged that social media platforms are to blame for spreading political strife on their own platforms. Individuals who spend a substantial amount of time online are more likely than those who do not spend a significant amount of time online to perceive greater conflict among diverse political groupings, according to the results. This is in contrast to individuals who do not spend much time on the internet. On the surface, it seems that one of the bad elements of social media is the increase in the number of interpersonal conflicts. While the benefits of exposing children to political turmoil may be thrilling, the implications are unknown and might be detrimental. According to the results of several research, there is a link between growing up in a battleground state as a child and later in life greater rates of consistent voting among adults. When used on a nationwide basis, social media might mimic similar effects, exposing every adolescent who spends a substantial amount of time online to the same amount of speech as teens who live in states that are still regarded to be in a state of conflict [24].

### Objectives

To investigate whether social media is capable of influencing voting decisions.

To identify the important aspects influencing the voters to believe in social media content.

## Methodology

For the study, the descriptive research design was adopted. The data was collected from 388 voters belonging to West Bengal using the convenience sampling technique. A structured questionnaire was used as a data collection instrument for the study.

## Analysis and Interpretation

Herein percentage analysis was carried out to identify the demographic profile of the respondents considered for the study.

**Table No. 1: Percentage Analysis – Demographic Profile**

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	197	50.8
	Female	191	49.2
	Total	388	100.0
Age	18 - 30 Years	96	24.7
	30 - 45 Years	87	22.4
	45 - 60 Years	100	25.8
	Above 60 Years	105	27.1
	Total	388	100.0

Source: (Primary data)

From the percentage, analysis performed it was perceived that an equal proportion of male and female voters are present in West Bengal mostly belonging to the age category above 45 Years.

Herein analysis was carried out to identify whether there is a significant difference in the Reasons making of Social Media platforms impact the voting decision of the voters belonging to different ages and gender.

**Table No. 2: Multivariate Test - Reasons making of Social Media platforms impact the voting decision**

Multivariate Tests						
Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
D1	Pillai's Trace	.008	.635 <sup>b</sup>	5.000	379.000	.673
	Wilks' Lambda	.992	.635 <sup>b</sup>	5.000	379.000	.673
	Hotelling's Trace	.008	.635 <sup>b</sup>	5.000	379.000	.673
	Roy's Largest Root	.008	.635 <sup>b</sup>	5.000	379.000	.673
D2	Pillai's Trace	.049	1.253	15.000	1143.000	.226
	Wilks' Lambda	.952	1.251	15.000	1046.654	.227
	Hotelling's Trace	.050	1.248	15.000	1133.000	.229
	Roy's Largest Root	.029	2.202 <sup>c</sup>	5.000	381.000	.053
a. Design: Intercept + D1 + D2						
b. Exact statistic						
c. The statistic is an upper bound on F that yields a lower bound on the significance level.						
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects						
Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
D1	Unknowingly, the constant circulation of certain news on social media platforms by my peers and friends leads me to believe in news.	.593	1	.593	2.384	.123
	If the news on social media has circumstantial evidence (pictures and videos), I will unknowingly believe the news.	.054	1	.054	.216	.642
	When a knowledgeable person speaks	.090	1	.090	.364	.546

	about a specific piece of news on social media, I unconsciously believe it.					
	My wisdom and reason sometimes lead me to believe in news on social media.	.000	1	.000	.001	.974
	If the social media news comes from well-known people or personality, I will unconsciously believe it.	.002	1	.002	.007	.935
D2	Unknowingly, the constant circulation of certain news on social media platforms by my peers and friends leads me to believe in news.	.711	3	.237	.952	.416
	If the news on social media has circumstantial evidence (pictures and videos), I will unknowingly believe the news.	1.324	3	.441	1.770	.152
	When a knowledgeable person speaks about a specific piece of news on social media, I unconsciously believe it.	1.802	3	.601	2.420	.066
	My wisdom and reason sometimes lead me to believe in news on social media.	.677	3	.226	.897	.443
	If the social media news comes from well-known people or personalities, I will unconsciously believe it.	.128	3	.043	.169	.917

Source: (Primary data)

The estimated significance value is greater than 0.05 for all the cases, meaning the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore there is no significant difference in the Reasons making of Social Media platforms impact the voting decision of the voters belonging to different ages and gender. Herein rank analysis was performed to identify the major Reasons making of Social Media platforms impact the voting decision of the voters belonging to different ages and gender.

**Table No. 2: Rank Analysis - Reasons making of Social Media platforms impact the voting decision**

Rank Analysis			
	N	Mean	Rank
Unknowingly, the constant circulation of certain news on social media platforms by my peers and friends leads me to believe in news.	388	4.6278	1
If the news on social media has circumstantial evidence (pictures and videos), I will unknowingly believe the news.	388	4.4948	5
When a knowledgeable person speaks about a specific piece of news on social media, I unconsciously believe it.	388	4.5206	3
My wisdom and reason sometimes lead me to believe in news on social media.	388	4.5155	4
If the social media news comes from well-known people or personalities, I will unconsciously believe it.	388	4.5948	2

Source: (Primary data)

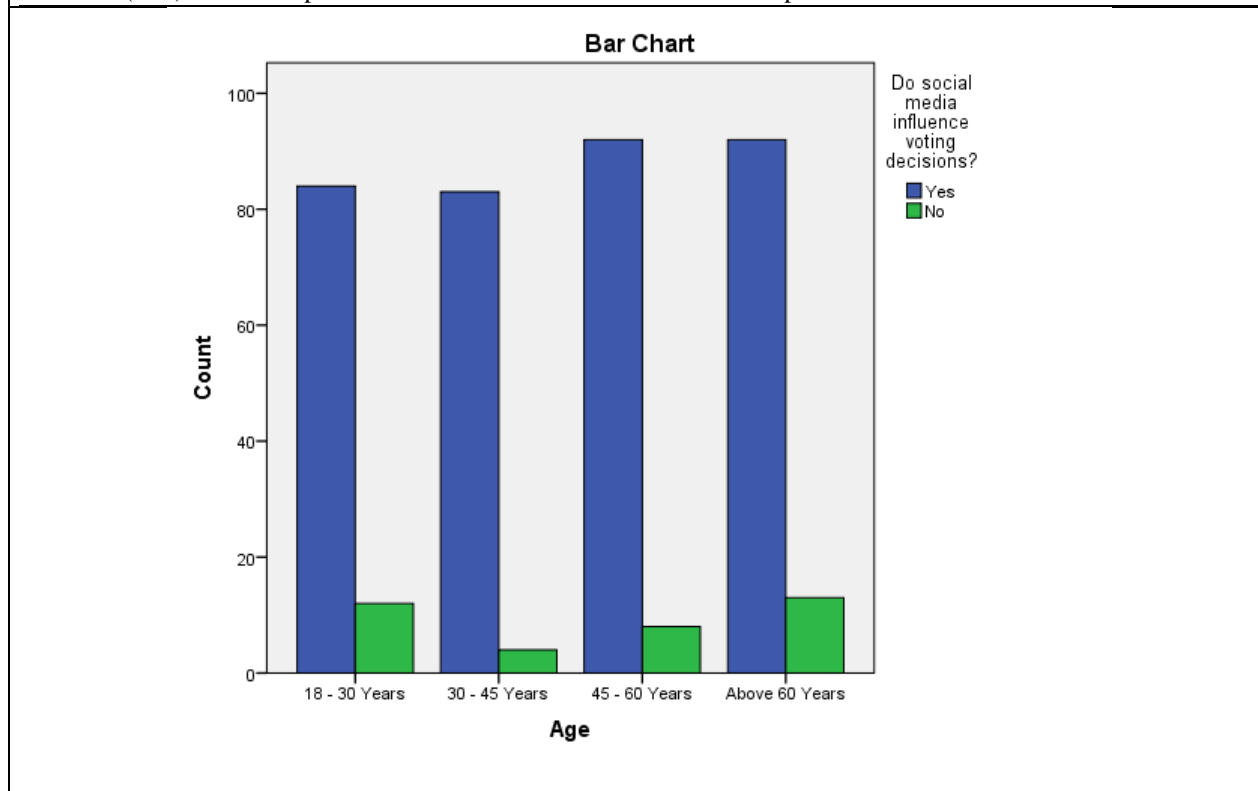
From the rank analysis made using the mean score, it was understood that the constant circulation of certain news on social media platforms by my peers and friends and social media news coming from well-known people or personalities makes voters unconsciously believe in it. Herein analysis was carried out to identify whether there is an association between the social media influence on voting decisions and the demographic profile of the respondents.

**Table No. 3: Chi-Square Test – Do social media influence voting decisions?**

<b>Crosstab</b>				
Count				
		Do social media influence voting decisions?		Total
		Yes	No	
Gender	Male	182	15	197
	Female	169	22	191
Total		351	37	388
<b>Chi-Square Tests</b>				
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.713 <sup>a</sup>	1	.191	
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	1.291	1	.256	
Likelihood Ratio	1.721	1	.190	
Fisher's Exact Test				.227
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.709	1	.191	
N of Valid Cases	388			
a. 0 cells (.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 18.21.				
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table				
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Bar Chart</b></p> <p>Do social media influence voting decisions?</p> <p>■ Yes ■ No</p> <p>Count</p> <p>Gender</p>				
<b>Crosstab</b>				
Count				
		Do social media influence voting decisions?		Total
		Yes	No	
Age	18 - 30 Years	84	12	96
	30 - 45 Years	83	4	87
	45 - 60 Years	92	8	100
	Above 60 Years	92	13	105
Total		351	37	388
<b>Chi-Square Tests</b>				

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.696 <sup>a</sup>	3	.195
Likelihood Ratio	5.083	3	.166
Linear-by-Linear Association	.059	1	.808
N of Valid Cases	388		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.30.



Source: (Primary data)

The estimated chi-square significance value is greater than 0.05, meaning the null hypothesis is accepted. There is no significant association between social media influence on voting decisions and the demographic profile of the respondents. From the cross-tabulation and graph, it was well understood that social media is influencing the voting decision significantly.

### Findings and Conclusion

From the analysis performed it was perceived that an equal proportion of male and female voters are present in West Bengal mostly belonging to the age category above 45 Years. Further, it was found that there is no significant difference in the Reasons making Social Media platforms impact the voting decision of the voters belonging to different ages and gender. It was identified that the constant circulation of certain news on social media platforms by my peers and friends and social media news coming from well-known people or personalities make voters unconsciously believe in social media news. It was well understood by the majority of the respondents that social media is influencing the voting decision significantly.

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