

Logically.

Summary

How Voters are Misinformed: Tactics Used During the 2023 Assembly Elections

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Context

In 2024, India ranks highest globally for risks caused by misinformation and disinformation. In light of the upcoming Lok Sabha Elections, it is crucial to understand how election-related misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation are disseminated.

Between July and December 2023, Logically studied the five state elections in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Mizoram, and Telangana. It identified particular tactics, techniques, and procedures by which election-related misinformation spreads in India across multiple languages and platforms. It also identified how Generative AI has contributed to political disinformation during the regional elections.

The takeaways from this study are pertinent and essential for relevant stakeholders to understand and mitigate ahead of the 2024 General Elections.

Key Findings

X (formerly Twitter)

Creating/Hijacking Hashtags to Disseminate EVM Narratives: Online accounts amplified existing conspiracy theories and exploited pre-existing notions to promote narratives of EVM tampering. They suggested EVM hacking, and political manipulation and claimed that EVM usage posed a threat to elections. Logically assesses this tactic, including false fact-checking to counter “unfavourable” information, as highly probable in the 2024 general elections campaign.

Influencers Amplify Partisan Narratives: Social media influencers in Telangana, particularly micro-influencers, actively endorsed preferred political parties, utilising impactful hashtags to engage audiences. Logically identified instances included impersonation of news anchors, indicating a growing trend likely to intensify in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Facebook

Use of Marketing Agencies to Outsource Content Creation: Logically identified the emergence of specialised agencies for election campaigns as a trend in political advertising on social media. Despite compliance with the Election Commission of India (ECI) rules for social media ads, these digital marketing, IT solutions, and advertising agencies remained opaque with inauthentic websites and broken pages. Logically identified at least 18 such agencies sponsoring advertisements on Meta for state elections. This tactic poses a potential loophole for political parties to outsource content

creation and obscure spending on political advertising, warranting further scrutiny ahead of the 2024 elections.

Sale of Voter Data: Logically identified instances of agencies offering suspicious election campaigning services, including collection and sale of voter data, posing potential privacy and security risks. Such commercialisation of voter data raises concerns about the legality and ethical implications of selling such data for political purposes, particularly in the context of micro-targeting and societal manipulation in elections.

News Agencies, International Groups and FIMI on EVMs: Logically identified Facebook pages masquerading as news organizations. The pages published content targeting the ECI with sensationalist headlines and misleading information on EVM tampering and garnering significant engagement. Logically noted circulation of these videos on anti-EVM Facebook groups, indicating a potential strategy to further legitimize false claims and influence public opinion.

Logically identified instances of possible Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) with two pages related to the elections run by administrators in Pakistan and Canada, suggesting foreign actors disseminating mis/disinformation narratives around the electoral process in India.

YouTube

Channels Claim Evidence of EVM Tampering: Logically identified nine YouTube channels masquerading as news outlets, consistently publishing videos alleging EVM fraud and targeting the ECI since November 2023. The channels utilized clickbait titles and selective video editing to spread misinformation, leading to speculations and distrust in the electoral process, with some videos garnering millions of views and significant engagement.

Generative AI

Logically observed the use of cheap fakes, deepfakes, and generative AI in spreading political disinformation during recent state elections in India, with a prevalent tactic being audio manipulation, particularly targeting religious minorities. Instances include manipulated audio clips misrepresenting political figures and a national quiz show host, alongside the use of generative AI by politicians for voter mobilization, highlighting the need for continued monitoring of emerging technologies to ensure fair electoral practices, as well as the exploitation of gamification and cheap fakes in political advertisements on social media platforms like Meta.