

Voter Concerns towards Digital Campaigning and Ethical Accountability in Contemporary Political Marketing

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Abstract

Digital campaigning has grown to be an important element of contemporary political marketing because parties and candidates now reach voters through social media advertisements, search platforms, messaging applications, short video networks and data-enabled communication systems. This environment has caused voters new ethical discomfort in respect to political persuasion on the Internet given the uneasiness of personalisation without informed consent, speed without verification and persuasion without sufficient disclosure. The paper reviews concern of voters towards digital campaigning and ethics in responsible politics using a conceptual and methodological perspective. It places the issue of concern with voters at the focus areas of the democratic solution to the various risks associated with misinformation, unclear sponsorship, algorithmic targeting, the manipulation of feelings, intrusion of privacy and limited accountability in the communication of campaigns. The study develops an integrated academic argument that ethical accountability cannot be reduced to legal compliance alone because voters also expect truthfulness, traceability, source clarity, responsible data use and visible corrective mechanisms when campaign messages become misleading. The study sets out with a conceptually focused framework that connects to the issues of digital campaign exposure, ethical risk perception, trust in the political communication sphere, perceived accountability of political campaigns and citizens' evaluations of political campaign legitimacy. It suggests an appropriate empirical design to account for voter perception in metropolitan elections in the event of heavy exposure to digital information and multiple platforms of political communication. The study examines the need for campaign innovation and democracy as well as a balance between the two. The paper concludes that digital campaigning

can support political participation only when voters are protected from concealed influence and when campaign actors are responsible for the informational consequences they create.

Keywords

Digital campaigning; ethical accountability; political marketing; voter concern; misinformation; data driven targeting; transparency

1. Introduction

Contemporary political marketing has moved far beyond the classical practice of public rallies, manifestos, wall posters, television speeches and party symbols. The voters get political pitches before they interact with candidates in their communities and many citizens see elections going on as a continuous series of online videos, sponsored messages, influencer commentary, WhatsApp forwards and platform recommendations. This has expanded the range of campaigns, shortened the gap between campaign managers and voters which has increased the "moral freight" of electoral communication. The political messages may be twisted to appeal for small audiences, posted anonymously and pasted across networks where the fake can spread ahead of the truth. The voter thus is both a citizen co-decider of the fate of the people and a data record that can be used as a tool for a campaign where he serves decision maker. The paper assumes that digital campaigning is not unethical and this is problematic if persuading there is an advantage which is based on concealment, deception, unconsented profiling or unaccountable amplification. These are the tools of a citizen's evaluation of political

claims provided they have the necessary knowledge of who is the source, what is the purpose of targeting the claim and whether the claim is factually sound. The study therefore treats voter concern as a legitimate indicator of democratic quality rather than as a simple dislike of technology.

The data-driven campaigning has taken the centre of gravity in politics where voters are increasingly divided based on attributes similar to those of consumers but with greater stakes and implications than on a consumer marketplace. Misleading commercials can influence a purchase decision and misleading political commercials can influence public mandate, public confidence in citizenship and institutional legitimacy. Bennett (2016) reveals voter databases and micro-targeting enables political actors to bundle together personal data and craft a more precise message to targeted electoral constituencies. Voters may read the final message but they don't often read the profiling process that brought the message to their voters. Ethical responsibility then should look at so much more than the overt elements of the ad campaign and the visual portions of the advertisements. The current paper takes this ethical area as its starting-point and explores the potential ways that voters might experience digital campaigning as persuasion becomes personalised, platform mediated and hard to audit.

Digital campaign content can be transferred to volunteer teams, then to private group chat with non-special voters where it is hard to confirm its source authenticity. Online campaigning is relevant in their work in India too, in that it raises an eyebrow at cynicism about an online campaign being a decisive vote-getter while acknowledging the impact it can have on the voter decision process. It claims that studying ethical accountability is necessary because there is a growing trend of citizens making political judgments within personalised, segmented and unevenly governed communication environments. Technological intensity and ethical visibility presents a gap that gives birth to the research problem. Now campaigns can tailor a message for certain audiences, gauge how each message is received, use tools to edit the message with graphics and distribute messages via paid and unpaid digital channels. The mechanisms of political accountability are

typically designed through public questioning, the media, party responsibility and election law. Aagaard and Marthedal (2023) suggest otherwise predisposing towards a pragmatic approach to political microtargeting based on the idea that questions of public concerns ought to be studied empirically, not using technological myths. This case is significant for the purpose of this paper since voter concern need not be taken for granted or idealized.

The aim of the paper was to provide a high-accuracy academic discussion regarding the concerns of voters about digital campaigning and ethical responsibility for today's political marketing strategies. This specific scope ranges from the ethical implications of digital political communication to the perceptions of voters regarding targeting and misinformation and to the demands placed on the accountability of actors in political campaigns and a methodology of empirical enquiry into digital political communication for the future. It suggests that good campaigning has to be conducted in a fair way where voters can genuinely be able to recognize their political persuasion, assess the credibility to which they are able to appraise, and be held responsible for misleading and intrusive undertakings. The paper adds to the political marketing literature by integrating the perspectives of voters and ethical accountability in a single analytical evaluation.

2. Review of Literature

The literature on digital campaigning has moved from early enthusiasm about online mobilisation towards a more cautious assessment of platform power, targeting capacity and regulatory weakness. The digital political communications field is today seen as a party, consultant, platform, regulatory, civil society and voter-determined space. Borz and De Francesco (2024) concluded that digital political campaigning drives new challenges that call for a multi-level actor approach since these cannot be addressed by a single actor. Their role is important because in the field of ethical responsibility in political marketing there needs to be distributed responsibility as well. The literature asserts that a sense of ethics should not only involve individual and isolated inaccuracies. The review further suggests that digital campaigning engenders

opportunities for participation and democratic risks.

Ethics are already a major concern in today's campaign culture as revealed in political datafication studies. The Cambridge Analytica scandal was the basis for talking about algorithmic opaqueness and voter profiling with data-driven systems (Hu (2020)). The study is important as it presents an illustration of increasing voter concern when the citizens perceive that political actors know more about them than they have been willing themselves. Voters tend to be concerned due to an asymmetry between campaign pros knowing the targeting strategy and voters knowing only an overstated version of it. The study of digital advertisement archives found that transparency tools can uncover a certain amount of campaign activity, but also produce significant accountability gaps. While studying the general elections Dommett and Bakir (2020) examined transparency data within the archives of Facebook and Google advertising, suggesting that digital campaigning posed concerns for regulation and oversight of elections in United Kingdom. Digital campaigns can generate lots of small ads: it's not easy to watch over them when disclosure is limited. A campaign can meet the bare minimum standards of transparency and still fail to fully let voters know who sent the message to them, or it could send another group a conflicting message without informing anyone. Voters' concerns about transparency lie with this difference between formal transparency and meaningful transparency.

The shift of political ads towards digital may highlight outlooks of current electoral rules and an dejection of meaningful democratic dialogue according to Harker (2020). This renders ethical accountability a not-so-narrow compliance matter. Offline campaign regulation is based on the assumption that political messages are visible, traceable and are subject to counter-speech. Digital campaigns are opposing to those concepts as a message can be given to a targeted audience and mostly unknown to the general public. The literature has therefore so far consistently pointed to a concern of voters for an unequal information environment, not just a concern for privacy or misinformation. Mehta and Erickson (2022) analysed data from Facebook Ad Library related to BREXIT ads

to find it lacked ability to detect targeting behaviour. The finding is directly relevant to ethical accountability in so far as how platforms determine which tools to make public such as monitoring those platforms is often the basis of the ability to monitor digital campaigns. There is a marked problem in societies that use volunteer networks to establish a coordinated pattern of unpaid distribution alongside paid advertising. There are individual accountability issues with paid platforms, campaign organisations and informal digital groups.

The recent empirical studies of reactions to targeted political advertising add another layer of concern for voters. Baum et al (2023) identified targeted political advertising, user privacy concerns and digital product acceptance reveals significant levels of caution when it comes to targeted political ads. This study is of value because it addresses privacy concern and behavior of acceptance instead of taking the liberty of abstraction of privacy as a principle. Campaigns targeting based on age, religion, caste, gender or locality will likely generate a more significant ethical issue than an issue campaign which is advertised openly to all viewers. Van Gils (2025) created a theoretical model explaining the detrimental effect of microtargeting and lack of awareness about who the information source is on voter welfare and the possibility of electoral distortion. The degree of factuality combined with the doubtful ethical aspects of a political message depends on its sender, selection of the audience and the communicative intention.

The analysis of specific issue ads indicates that electronic political advertising might influence voters' perceptions of priority in elections. Vrielink, Vliegthart, van Remoortere and Kruikemeier (2025) adopted a mobile experience sampling methodology combined with screenshot donations and content analysis in order to explore exposure to online political ads and issue salience in the context of the Dutch and US elections. Ethical issues emerge when communicated messages for any group continuously raise their emotions towards issues that are excluded from the common conceptualization of overt political messages. When it happens, then voters are not misled by a single but step by step dragged into a narrow emotional pattern. These then suggest a broader definition of misinformation as distortion of emphasis,

omission of context and agenda manipulation which is supported by the literature. Transparency of political advertising has been the focus of European regulatory scholarship as it has related to a broader anti-disinformation agenda. Eskens (2025) analysed the transparency regulation and targeting regulation in the European Union which studied how these rules can work in tandem with other laws concerning disinformation. The new policy focuses on the concept of easy-to-label transactions, transparency of who sponsors the content and information regarding targeting and due diligence requirements for advertising publishers. The more voters can see information on who paid for the message, how the message was targeted, how violations will be addressed, etc., the more likely they are to have their trust boosted. It should be able to regulate false influence with the avoidance of stifling political expression.

There is increased awareness about the impact that digital campaign communication can have on fairness, transparency and voters' faith in the election process in various Indian regulatory developments. The direction issued by the Election Commission of India (2026) through the Press Information Bureau (PIB), highlights the need to proactively address any misleading or unlawful content generated using AI or manipulated content especially as it pertains to social media use. This is an official development which carries significance as it proves that 'accountability expectations' extend to campaign-synthetically generated content and times for responding to content on platforms. Genuine from fake videos, voices and images are not always distinguishable for voters (particularly when high realism). Political marketing now becomes a new ethical level in which the trustworthiness of the evidence of the picture itself is called into question.

3. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this paper is built on the relationship between digital campaign exposure, perceived ethical risk, trust in political communication, perceived accountability and voter evaluation of campaign legitimacy. Digital campaign exposure is the number and variety of times voters are exposed to political messaging through social media, search engines and

messaging apps, as video streamed through any platform. Perceived ethical risk is the voter's assessment that a message may contain inaccuracies, hidden advertisers, invasion of privacy, campaign bias in editing, divisive psycho-demographic targeting or improper handling of personal information. Trust in political communication indicates a confidence in the accuracy of digital campaign communiqués, their identification and availability of higher verification. Perceived Legitimacy of campaigning is the voter's perception of whether electronic campaigning is allowed in the democratic electoral process. These are linked but not the same. The suggested framework is thus neither a straightforward exposure-effect framework but one that focuses on perception, interpretation and accountability expectation instead.

Ethical accountability serves as the middle-level connecting concept that brings people to the center of the system which converts the issue of concern on the part of voters from a subjective anxiety to a democratic standard. While voters may have concerns about misinformation they hold the perception on whether or not institutions can correct the problem becomes politically salient. While people might be wary of being micro-targeted, they're willing to alter their opinions if they believe that the targeting is based on their own participation. Ethical responsibility has four aspects which involves is informational accountability where campaign actors report the identity of the sponsor, purpose and basis for targeting messages. The second is Data accountability in which consent is respected, data collection is minimised and avoids sensitive profiling at the hands of political actors. The third is content accountability which means that political claims are truthful are verifiable and will be corrected if they are found to be false. The fourth institutional accountability, regulators and platforms give opportunities to complain, publicise and enforce quickly. Zuiderveen Borgesius et.al., (2018) state that online political micro-targeting promises and threatens democratic progress due to its potential to enhance the relevance of online communication but also create privacy and manipulation worries. The question is whether the personalisation takes place in a way that respects voters' autonomy and good political judgment.

There is difference between persuading and manipulating voters that influences the voter's concern. Free mandating plays a proper role in democratic campaign provided that the citizens are able to recognize the origin of the claim, evaluate the claim, and vote freely. Manipulation is when campaign agents take advantage of someone's ignorance, emotional susceptibility or misinformation to avoid reflective thinking. Digital campaigning can contrast as a result of the messages is frequently a short period of time extremely graphic and created for instant reaction to emotional level. Deep fake technology only exacerbates this concern since voters might respond to altered visual data prior to its rectification. The study of Dobber et al. (2021) is relevant because it evaluates how technologically manipulated misinformation may impact voter autonomy and is therefore relevant to voters by drawing connections between voters' autonomy and technology manipulation.

The framework acknowledges that people assess political marketing on their personal and group levels. A person asking voter may inquire if his/her personal information was used without authorization. Schaewel, Frener and Trepte (2021) talked about the issues of political micro-targeting and online privacy using social media targeting which they argued was a matter of concern because there was little awareness of these strategies. The concept of awareness does not only refer to factual information about digital platforms. Perceived transparency thus forms an important component of the framework relating to concern. Ethical accountability expectation is the last one of the framework which limits on how much of a good time voters will have while watching candidates provide fake information. The European Commission (2025) stated that transparency rules for political advertising call for showing the credentials, the person or organisation that's paying for the advertising campaign, monetary details and information about audience targeting when targeting techniques are used. This model of regulation contributes to the concept of ethical accountability in practice. Voters need to be given enough information to believe they are being politically branded and by whom but not a complicated understanding of all the technical specifics of an algorithmic

delivery. The framework recommends that this enhances the legitimacy of campaigns whenever voters feel that disclosure, correction and responsibility are more real than symbolic elements of good faith.

4. Methodological Framework

The research follows an empirical research designed to examine voters concerns on the digital campaigning and ethical accountability in modern political marketing. The study empirical character is warranted given that the research relies on primary statements obtained directly from sensitive voters who have been exposed to digital political campaign products through social media, cell communication systems, on-line advertisements and other otherworldly political messages. The research is analytical in nature because it aims to describe the level of exposure of the magazine to digital campaigning and attempts to analyze the issues of ethics in the misinformation of voters, the lack of privacy, the possibility of targeting political messages, lack of transparency and lack of accountability. The analytical component analyzes the differences among voters in their concerns and if voters were aware of issues of ethics whether that awareness was linked to their desire for accountability in political marketing.

The study population comprised of eligible voters who have been exposed to digital political campaigning in the study area being in the process of campaigning. The respondents for the study are voters who get or see political information/mobilisation messages via WhatsApp and/or via Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, the other social networks (X), political news websites and online communication spaces used for political mobilisation. The study was based on the current political marketing practices thus the respondent needs to have some exposure to political marketing content availability in a digital medium. The screening condition is important for several reasons which allows voters with no exposure to digital campaigning to respond meaningfully on topics like transparency of online campaign ads, manipulated campaign messages, hidden paid promotions and data-driven targeting which involve moral issues. The abilities of voters whose opinion can be heard on political messages displayed on digital devices are

considered in the scope of study. This population frame allows the research to reflect the views of individual age groups, differing educational, working and political backgrounds.

The number of respondents in this study is predetermined based on Cochran sample size calculator which needs a sample of 385 and the study collected data from 401. The size is appropriate for an empirical voters' perception study as it is enough for the representation of every demographic as well as for the use of statistical techniques. The sample size is appropriate for the conduction of social science study especially for perception analysis. The final sample are found to be sufficient to study the problem of the voter concerns related to ethical issues in digital political campaigning. The feasibility to the sample is also resistant by the principle that the larger the sample the better the precision in a survey-based study, the bigger and more heterogenous the population (Cochran, 1977).

The simple random sampling was used as sampling method because every one of the qualified respondents has the same probability of being chosen for the study. The present research uses simple random sampling because the perception of voters should not be limited to a specific party, a social class or occupational class. The method minimizes selection selection bias while simultaneously allowing the results to be a representative voice of voter opinion. The mapping of the voter population provides a basis for selecting respondents from among the identified individuals according to the screening questions pertaining to eligibility to vote and exposure to digital political campaign materials. The primary data for the present study are gathered by designing a structured questionnaire as per the requirement and need of the study. The questionnaire includes sections on responding party information/background, exposure to digital campaigning, awareness of ethical issues, concerns on digital political campaigning, attitudes towards data-driven targeting, misinformation verification activities, transparency expectations and overall attitudes towards accountability for ethical. The statements on Likert scale are employed primarily to measure concern, agreement, perception of trust and accountability. The

open-ended questions have been used to elicit qualitative data regarding voters' experiences with unethical behaviors in digital political campaigns. The instrument is structured to support quantitative analysis; some open-ended items add depth with context to the interpretation.

The analytical part of the study examines voter exposure to digital political campaigning through a more differentiated quantitative approach. The analysis utilizes Multiple Correspondence Analysis to examine patterns of associations are identified between the multiple categorical responses of voters on the exposure of the digital campaign and on their ethical awareness. The two-step cluster method is used to classify the voters into meaningful concern based groups based on their response tendencies. Discriminant analysis will be employed to analyze those factors that discriminate between voters with above-average ethical concerns and those with moderate or below-average ethical concerns. The selection of the most critical ethical concerns by voters when it comes to digital political campaigning is based on MaxDiff priority scoring. This analytical framework helps the study go beyond percentage-based interpretations and offers more empirical understanding around voter perceptions of digital campaign practices and misinformation threat, privacy concerns, transparency gaps and expectations that campaigns will provide accountability for the use of campaign methods in modern political marketing.

5. Data Evaluation and Interpretations

The analytical part evaluates voter exposure towards ethical awareness campaign, discomfort, misinformation, transparency data in regards to information circulation and overall perception of ethical accountability.

Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) for Ethical Response Mapping

The MCA was performed to determine the placement of the different classes of voters when all of the variables relating to digital campaign exposure, ethical awareness, source verification, reduction in trust in campaigns and support for tighten regulation tests are examined simultaneously. The analysis transforms categorical responses into dimensions which reflect the underlying structure of voter perception.

Table 4.1 Multiple Correspondence Analysis Model Summary

Dimension	Eigenvalue	Inertia	Variance Explained (%)	Cronbach Alpha
Dimension 1: Ethical Risk and Trust Reduction	2.238	0.373	37.30	0.812
Dimension 2: Verification Behaviour and Source Clarity	1.464	0.244	24.40	0.691
Total	3.702	0.617	61.70	0.756

Source: Primary Data

It can be seen from Table 4.1 that the first two MCA dimensions accounted for 61.70 per cent of categorical variation in the responses of voters. The first dimension describes 37.30 per cent of the variance and is associated closely with concern about misinformation and feelings of discomfort associated with personal data usage and loss of trust when there is lack of disclosure in on-line political content which is labelled as ethical risk and trust reduction. Cronbach's α level for this dimension is 0.812, meaning the items under this dimension form a reliable interpretative pattern. The second dimension accounts for 24.40 percent of

the variance and is defined as verification behaviour and source clarity: that is, whether voters verify before deeming credible or sharing campaign information. The overall inertia measure of 0.617 suggests the two-dimensional solution has the explanatory capacity needed for a voter perception study using the categorical responses. It seems that there are two visible aspects of ethical concern in digital campaigning. The distrust that is generated due to the sense of manipulation and on the other hand is the practical approach of checking the sources before accepting political information.

Table 4.2 Category Coordinates and Discrimination Pattern in MCA

Variable Category	Mass	Dimension 1 Coordinate	Dimension 2 Coordinate	Interpretative Position
High ethical awareness	0.31	1.28	0.42	Concerned and evaluative voter group
Moderate ethical awareness	0.44	0.19	-0.11	Cautious but not fully active group
Low ethical awareness	0.25	-1.06	-0.35	Passive digital receiver group
Frequent source verification	0.29	0.72	1.31	Active validation behaviour
Occasional verification	0.46	0.18	0.04	Selective validation behaviour
Rare verification	0.25	-0.93	-1.04	High exposure with low scrutiny
Trust reduced by unethical content	0.53	1.17	0.26	Ethical accountability demand
Trust partly affected	0.33	0.22	-0.12	Conditional voter response
No change in trust	0.14	-1.35	-0.38	Low sensitivity to campaign ethics
Strong support for digital campaign rules	0.61	1.08	0.57	Regulation-oriented response
Weak support for digital campaign rules	0.12	-1.42	-0.84	Minimal concern response

Source: Primary Data

The results examines category coordinates which reveals presence of positive numbers on Dimension 1 means an increase in ethical sensitivity and trust reduction by digital campaign that is present in the category. Positive numbers on Dimension 1 indicate an increase in the voters' ethical sensitivity and trust reduction towards digital campaign practices that are misleading in the category. High ethics awareness and trust loss over unethical content are situated near each other with support of digital campaign rules

between them. This trend suggests that voters who are aware of the ethical dangers of political marketing are more prone to believe that regulation is needed on political communication online. The mix of low awareness, infrequent rules verification and less support for rules is evident on the negative side of Dimension 1 and reveals a distinct voter profile. The finding was significant because it revealed the potential for voter demand for accountability to diminish when citizens lack ethical awareness. The distinction between voters is made by their method of verification in Dimension 2. The frequent verification has a positive mark, and the rare verification has a negative mark. The study

has found that ethical responsibility transcends caring and depends on voters' routines of accessing political information.

Latent Class Analysis for Voter Segment Identification

A Latent Class Analysis procedure was used to categorize voters into unobserved response groups based on ethical concern profile of voters. This is a new classification compared with simple demographic classification as it does not form classes based on age, gender or income. They are estimated from the response probabilities associated with ethical awareness and privacy concern, verification behavior, reduction in trust and increased accountability.

Table 4.3 Latent Class Model Fit and Segment Size

Model	AIC	BIC	Entropy	Interpretation
Two-class model	3841.92	3966.41	0.76	Broad division but weak detail
Three-class model	3634.38	3822.21	0.84	Best balance of fit and meaning
Four-class model	3607.66	3858.84	0.78	Lower AIC but weaker parsimony
Selected class structure	Class 1: 184 (45.9%)	Class 2: 137 (34.2%)	Class 3: 80 (19.9%)	Three-class solution retained

Source: Computed from primary data.

The three-class model is chosen as it is the most statistically fit and provides an interpretatively clear solution. The entropy value of 0.84 suggests high level of certainty in class classification and it confirms that there is not a significant overlap among the respondents and they can be divided into meaningful classes. The two-class model provides only a coarse classification of whether people feel concerned or less concerned, and doesn't reflect the

heterogeneity within each class. The four-class model slightly reduces the AIC increases the BIC and deteriorates parsimony. The respondents are thus divided into three-class model containing 184 voters in class 1, 137 voters in class 2 and 80 voters in class 3. This distribution suggests almost half of the respondents fall into a high risk group and a slightly but still large share is less sensitive towards ethical breaches in digital political campaigning.

Table 4.4 Conditional Response Probabilities across Latent Voter Classes

Indicator	Class 1: Ethical Safeguard Seekers	Class 2: Selective Digital Validators	Class 3: Passive Campaign Receivers
Probability of high concern about misinformation	0.86	0.58	0.31
Probability of rejecting personal data use without consent	0.91	0.63	0.38
Probability of frequent source verification	0.74	0.49	0.18
Probability of trust reduction after hidden sponsorship	0.82	0.55	0.27
Probability of strong support for campaign regulation	0.88	0.67	0.36
Dominant platform exposure in the class	WhatsApp and YouTube	Instagram and news apps	Forwarded messages and reels

Source: Primary Data

The three latent classes explain the behavioural identity as presented in table 4.4. Class 1 is the name given to the voters who have high probabilities for all the major ethical indicators; it is called the "Ethical Safeguard Seekers". These voters are vigilant over misinformation, strongly oppose personal data collection without consent and likely to call for campaign regulation. The largest group voted the most ethically attentive is this class (45.90 percent). Class 2 – selective digital validators are voters who don't reject all digital campaigning but have taken a drag on it when campaign content is unclear. These probabilities have stayed moderate on all parameters and this indicates their selective approach towards digital campaign messages. This class is classified as Passive Campaign Receivers because the class has more people with a less supportive credentialing comportment and less worry about hidden sponsorship. This class is important because it meant there was a portion of the electorate that

is vulnerable and susceptible to electronic political advertising to which they haven't been held to account. The latent classes outcome suggests that ethical accountability measures should focus on providing them to only the more aware voters. They should work to safeguarding passive recipients with less ability to detect misleading calls or manipulative campaign messages.

Discriminant Function Analysis for Accountability Expectation Groups

The study used discriminant function analysis to examine selected indicators of ethical concern can differentiate between the voters in three categories: low, moderate and high level of accountability expectation. The overall accountability expectation score was used to create the grouping variable. The respondents who had high scores were grouped into high accountability expectation group, the middle scores as the moderate and low scores as the low group.

Table 4.5 Discriminant Function Summary and Structure Matrix

Component	Function 1	Function 2	Interpretation
Eigenvalue	0.689	0.216	Function 1 carries stronger separation power
Canonical correlation	0.639	0.421	Moderate to strong group differentiation
Wilks Lambda	0.500	0.822	Both functions contribute to classification
Chi-square	273.416	76.834	Significant discrimination across groups
Significance	< 0.001	< 0.001	Null hypothesis rejected
Misinformation seriousness loading	0.74	0.18	Primary separator of accountability demand
Personal data misuse concern loading	0.68	0.26	Strong privacy-based discriminator
Hidden sponsorship concern loading	0.55	0.33	Disclosure sensitivity indicator
Source verification behaviour loading	0.36	0.71	Main behavioural separator on Function 2
Repeated message irritation loading	0.29	0.48	Secondary response-based separator

Source: Primary Data

The outcome suggests that voters' separation by accountability expectation is fairly accurate in first function. The most loaded description of Function 1 is seriousness of misinformation (0.74). The concerns about personal data misuse are included with a loading of 0.68 and the concerns about hidden sponsorship with a loading of 0.55. The results reveal that voters who want more accountability are primarily split along lines of worry about fake information, private

information abuse, and sponsorship transparency. Function 2 has a canonical correlation of 0.421 and it is mainly shaped by source verification behaviour with a loading of 0.71. It implies that a second function may be used to distinguish between the voters, depending on their actions after having received political content. The model fails to accept the null hypothesis because both functions are significant with a p-value < 0.001. The outcome examines that there is no

ambiguity about accountability expectation being a philosophical political stance.

Table 4.6 Discriminant Classification Accuracy Matrix

Actual Group	Predicted Low	Predicted Moderate	Predicted High	Total	Correct Classification (%)
Low accountability expectation	41	13	4	58	70.69
Moderate accountability expectation	15	79	31	125	63.20
High accountability expectation	5	28	185	218	84.86
Total	61	120	220	401	76.06

Source: Primary Data

It is important to note that the best classification performance comes in the high accountability expectation group with 185 respondents correctly classified out of a total of 218. This is a confirmation of the fact that voters having high levels of accountability expectations have more clear-cut ethical concern profiles. Low accountability expectation group: The percentage of correct classification is 70.69 per cent and the separation is reasonable. The moderate group has an acceptable classification rate of 63.20 percent but is somewhat less than the high concern group because voters in the moderate group tend to have characteristics of both the high concern group and the low concern group. The use of the classification matrix adds to the analytical value of the discriminant model because it explains that the ethical indicators that have been selected are not just descriptive items. They possess practical skills in setting up voters in sensible accountability tiers. The study result examines the claim that beside other determinants are ability of misinformation, privacy concern,

understanding of sponsorship and behaviour with regard to verification are crucial for the evaluation of digital political marketing by citizens.

MaxDiff Priority Scoring for Ranking Ethical Concerns

MaxDiff priority scoring was used to identify which ethical issue receives the strongest concern among voters when competing issues are compared. This method is different from a simple ranking table because it evaluates the gap between the number of times an issue is selected as the most serious concern and the number of times it is selected as the least serious concern. The method is useful for the present study because voters may agree that all ethical issues are important but the researcher also needs to know which concern dominates voter thinking. The MaxDiff score therefore gives a sharper priority order among misinformation, personal data misuse, hidden paid advertisements, emotional manipulation and lack of accountability for false content.

Table 4.7 MaxDiff Priority Index for Ethical Concerns in Digital Political Campaigning

Ethical Concern	Most Serious Count	Least Serious Count	MaxDiff Score	Normalised Utility	Priority Rank
Misleading political information	139	26	28.18	1.22	1
Misuse of personal data	102	41	15.21	0.68	2
Lack of accountability for false content	88	53	8.73	0.32	3
Hidden paid advertisements	46	112	-16.46	-0.74	4
Emotional manipulation	26	169	-35.66	-1.48	5

Source: Primary Data

The positive MaxDiff score of 28.18 and the normalised utility value of 1.22 place misinformation at the first priority level. Misuse of personal data occupies the second rank with a positive score of 15.21 and this confirms that privacy is a major ethical concern in data-driven political campaigning. Lack of accountability for false content receives the third rank and this indicates that voters are not concerned only with the existence of false messages. They expect responsibility to be fixed when such content is circulated. Hidden paid advertisements and emotional manipulation receive negative scores because more respondents placed them in the least serious position when forced to choose among the five issues. This does not mean that voters consider these issues unimportant. It means that they treat misinformation and privacy misuse as more immediate threats to democratic choice. The priority order shows that any ethical framework for contemporary political marketing should first address truthfulness in digital content and responsible use of voter data.

6. Discussion

The outcome of the paper suggests Voters' attitudes towards digital campaigning are not a rejection of technology in politics. There are some indication voters do understand the applicability of digital media in promoting transparency on political communication and giving politicians greater reach to their messages. The concern starts when the same communication space loses its understanding in communication source identity and the accountability of public responsibility. Political communication is not simply a question (matter) but one of legitimacy in the face of contemporary political marketing. Digital outreach is a strategy that can spread messages to citizens quickly but becomes less democratic when it relies on false information, or hidden persuasion. The paper examines that even as citizens deal with political communication in platform-based and personalised 'flows' they still expect these interactions to open up for interpretation. The topic is now discussed in terms of the democratic role of political communication as the voter's concern. A campaign's purpose is not just to persuade voters. It should also maintain their capacity of

reasonably evaluating political claims. If digital campaigning fails to fulfil this requirement, voters' confidence is difficult to maintain and the visibility of campaigns results in ethical doubt.

The paper argues that there now exists a new "boundary problem" between legitimate and legitimate political persuasion and private influence stemming from data-driven political communications. In all times and places, political parties have scrutinized voters and created message appeals to them. The ethical issue becomes more acute when political activities start to categorize citizens based on their behaviour and send messages that are not equally accessible to the general populace. People can receive campaign communications because it is part of open space of democratic contestation. When political meaning is constructed from opaquely sourced data practices and ambiguous user segmentation they are uneasy. The concern is part of the bigger discussion on political micro-targeting in which strategic efficiency and informed consent with fair electoral discourse are not always in sync. The privacy is more than just a personal data issue which undermines political communication fairness in that it could draw voters into distinct informational environments in receiving targeted messages.

The misinformation becomes a central issue because misinformation can have an impact on not only on the individual voter's judgement but collective trust in the electoral process as well. Through digital platforms, political claims can spread quickly via informal channels where their source might be hard to identify. This "feature" makes it harder to verify and more easily manipulate, political communication. They are nervous about an overall culture of doubt that builds up when manipulated photographs, false or deliberately misleading videos and aggravated claims recirculate in the run-up to elections. The moral dilemma doesn't stop at correcting the individual messages and the ethical dilemma is not limited to correcting single message. The present paper upholds the importance for early verification processes inside parties and SWAP systems that are more rapid in correcting any inaccuracies. It makes clear the need to look upon voter education as a means to safeguard democracy as a movement and not as a supplementary awareness programme.

The various issues addressed in the paper are clustered around the idea of transparency as the central democratic expectation. While voters may have different political values and party affiliations they tend to indicate a sponsor when they hear campaign ads and take the host's message seriously. The complicated digital ads further complicate voter's ability to learn who is promoting their own opinion and who is promoting organised campaign efforts. The disclosure is a criterion of fair political interpretation and a digital political message is more ethically convincing if the voter knows who produced the message. The position has a close affinity to the one outlining the principles of 'visibility in regulation of political advertising on digital platforms: the need for democratic debate'. Election authorities should facilitate public mechanisms for complaining and for the correction of complaints within a reasonable order of time. These kinds of measures are not constraints on democratic competition. They safeguard competition integrity by creating more correlations between political persuasion and political accountability. They help preserve competition integrity because they make the electorate more truthful and more responsible to political persuasion. Ethical political marketing is not an enemy of electoral strategy is the consequence of the paper written. It's the base for digital strategy to have public legitimacy.

7. Conclusion

The study evaluates that although digital campaigning is now something which has to become part of modern political marketing, if it is successful it will have a democratic dimension that is dependent upon ethical conditions. The concernedness of voters with apparent problems like supply of unspecific supply, information targeted by superior logic, misinformation, hidden sponsorship and weak corrective accountability are impacting the voters perception. These worries have shown that political marketing isn't actually something that can just be examined by number of reaches, and the number of elections won. A campaign that disseminates and gains broad acceptance but diminishes the informational ability of voters cannot be considered a responsible democratic campaign. Digital political communication has to be understood

in this way and have to take voter self-determination and the public gaze into account. It has to provide immediacy of exposure so that there is an assurance that it is directed at citizens and that there is an interest related to that message. The conclusion of the study being that ethical accountability is not some kind of a limitation that is laid on political marketing from the outside is another one that is stated. It's essential for campaign communication to hold its own in an era of speed, volume and a highly personalized strategy for election.

The paper proposes transparency as an organising ideal for ethical digital campaigning. Questionnaires must be disclosed and political parties and campaign agencies held accountable for the information that is released and used for their own support. They should not adopt data practices which classify voters without express consent, and without meaningful awareness. However, with digital messages intended for specific audience and not being seen by many, the ethical obligation of politicians to political actors increases. Political campaigns in these instances can help to divide the public conversation and undermine how clear a democratic choice can be. The study is thus a call for greater disclosure and access to official campaign documents to the public. It promotes voter information to enable citizens to identify sponsored content and unverifiable political information. Platform companies and election authorities have a vital role in ensuring this process as digital communication is transmitted through private networks and algorithmic systems. Etiquette responsibility can only be effective if these actors are responsible rather than putting the entire responsibility on the voters. The end is thus a broader embrace of digital campaign ethics as a shared responsibility of parties, platforms, regulators, campaign professionals and citizens.

The answer is that today's political marketing must shift away from persuasion efficiency toward responsible persuasion. The impact of digital technologies will remain in elections campaigns via social media communication, video-mobilisation and personalised targeted messaging for campaign activities. When designing these media whether for improving access to information about politics or for enabling citizens to

participate in political issues, their potential to enhance democratic engagement can be amplified. The same instruments can be undermining democracy if they spread unverifiable rumors or manipulate personal information without voters understanding. Thus based on this paper a campaign culture is called for in which political communication is competitive but not deceptive. It makes recommended the setting of disclosure and correction where it is made visible to the public as regulated. Future research could expand this study to compare concern of voters in different states and election contexts. Researchers can also study the differences in the ways the younger and the older electorate understand the political information conveyed via online tools. The voter is the best asset for determining ethical political marketing comes back to the principle of voter trust in an election as the yardstick for the determination. Voters must not feel misled, profiled or be denied the clear information they need to receive political messages through digital campaigning if it is to have a democratic impact.

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COMPETING INTERESTS DISCLAIMER:

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests OR non-financial interests OR personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

DECLARATION REGARDING THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Use of artificial intelligence was limited to small-scale language revision and editing. The intellectual content, research design, data analysis, interpretation, arguments and conclusions are all the work of the authors. The authors have seen and approved the final version of the manuscript and take full responsibility for its content, originality and accuracy.

Questionnaire Form

Title: Voter Concerns towards Digital Campaigning and Ethical Accountability in Contemporary Political Marketing

Instruction to Respondents:

This questionnaire is prepared for academic research. Kindly answer the questions based on personal exposure to digital political campaigning. The responses will be used only for research purposes and individual identity will not be disclosed.

Scale for opinion statements:

5 – Strongly Agree | 4 – Agree | 3 – Neutral | 2 – Disagree | 1 – Strongly Disagree

Sl. No.	Question / Statement	Response Options
1	Are you an eligible voter?	Yes / No
2	Have you seen political campaign content through digital media?	Yes / No
3	Gender	Male / Female / Third Gender / Prefer not to say
4	Age group	18–25 / 26–35 / 36–45 / 46–55 / Above 55
5	Educational qualification	School / Undergraduate / Postgraduate / Professional / Others
6	Occupation	Student / Employee / Business / Self-employed / Homemaker / Retired / Others
7	Place of residence	Chennai / Coimbatore / Madurai / Tiruchirappalli / Salem / Others
8	Most used digital source for political information	WhatsApp / YouTube / Facebook / Instagram / X / News apps / Others

Sl. No.	Question / Statement	Response Options
9	Frequency of receiving digital political messages during election time	Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Very often
10	Type of political content mostly noticed online	Short videos / Forwarded messages / Paid ads / Memes / Speeches / Opinion posts
11	I often come across political campaign messages through digital platforms.	5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1
12	Digital campaigning has become a major source of political information for voters.	5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1
13	I can identify whether a political message is genuine or campaign-driven.	5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1
14	Paid political content should be clearly identified to voters.	5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1
15	Digital political messages sometimes hide the real source of information.	5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1
16	Repeated political messages through digital platforms create discomfort among voters.	5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1
17	Emotional political messages can influence voters without proper reasoning.	5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1
18	Online political campaigns often focus more on image creation than public issues.	5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1
19	Political parties should not use voter data without clear consent.	5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1
20	Targeted political messages based on personal data create privacy concerns.	5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1
21	Different political messages sent to different voter groups may reduce fairness in campaigning.	5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1
22	False political information spreads quickly through digital media.	5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1
23	Edited videos and manipulated images can mislead voters.	5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1
24	I try to verify doubtful political messages before believing them.	5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1
25	Digital platforms should act faster against false political content.	5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1
26	Political advertisements should mention the sponsor or party behind them.	5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1
27	Voters should know whether online political content is paid or unpaid.	5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1
28	Election authorities should monitor digital political campaigning more strictly.	5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1
29	Clear accountability rules can improve voter trust in political campaigns.	5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1
30	Unethical digital campaigning reduces my trust in political parties or candidates.	5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1
31	I prefer political campaigns that provide clear information rather than emotional attacks.	5 / 4 / 3 / 2 / 1
32	Rank the most serious ethical concern in digital political campaigning.	Misinformation / Data misuse / Hidden paid ads / Emotional manipulation / Lack of accountability
33	What action is most needed to improve ethical accountability in digital campaigning?	Stronger law / Platform monitoring / Voter awareness / Party-level responsibility / Quick correction of false content
34	In your opinion what is the most unethical practice noticed in digital political campaigning?	Open-ended response
