



SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

Social Media mirrors the real world and is all about conversations. Social media facilitate the interactive web by engaging users to participate in, comment on and create content as means of communicating with social graph, other users and the public. Social media has emerged as a major tool where citizens are able to talk about the issues of day to day life and also of national importance. In 21st century, Facebook, Twitter and You tube are not just innovations in the internet world, but are fast emerging as influencers and opinion creators.

INTRODUCTION

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content." A social networking service is a platform to build social networks. These social network services are web based and these provide means for users to interact over the Internet .Social networking sites allow users to share ideas, pictures, posts, activities, events, and interests with people in their network. Thus, social media is a two-way avenue that doesn't just give you information, but interacts with you while giving you that information and enables interaction with other visitors also. This interaction can be in the form of asking for your comments or letting you vote on an article, or recommending movies to you based on the ratings of other people with similar interests. Social media also allows information and opinions to travel across networks, like ripples in a pond, amplifying ideas and allowing each person to participate as an opinion leader through media production and distribution, not just by passive consumption.

Classification of Social Media Websites

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Social media websites can be grouped as Social Networking sites, Social Bookmarking websites, social news websites, Social Photo and Video Sharing and Wikis. Social Networking sites like Facebook, Hi5 and Last.FM interact by adding friends, commenting on profiles, joining groups and having discussions. Social Bookmarking websites viz., Del.icio.us, Blinklist, Simpyinteract by tagging websites and searching through websites bookmarked by other people. Social News websites Digg, Propeller, Reddit interact by voting for articles and commenting on them. Social Photo and Video Sharing sites YouTube, Flickr etc. interact by sharing photos or videos and commenting on user submissions. Wikis. (Wikipedia, Wikia) interact by adding articles and editing existing articles.

Social media use for political mobilization

Social media are Internet sites where people interact freely, sharing and discussing information about each other and their lives, using a multimedia mix of personal words, pictures, video and audio. At these web sites, individuals and groups create and exchange content and engage in person-to-person conversations. The users of social media will appear in many forms including blogs and micro blogs, forums and message boards, social networks, wikis, virtual worlds, asocial bookmarking, tagging and news. In recent years, we have witness the exponential growth of social media around the world. Today social media such as Facebook, Twitter and other social network sites are driving new forms of social interaction, dialogue, exchange and collaboration. Social media enables users to swap ideas, to post updates and comments, or to participate in activities and events, while sharing their wider interests. Social media are now used for a host of different reasons by various user communities. Social media are increasingly blurring the boundaries between work and play. And the online tracking and dissemination of news and views over social media mean that people may now continue to live in a media world long after the end of their working day.

Social media outlets are essential to politicians and political parties, enabling them to gain support, encourage participation and have an open and continuous dialogue. Most importantly social media allows the highly motivated people to create a context more easily in which the barely motivated people can be effective without having to become activists themselves, creating an environment perfect for politicians to utilize. The emerging social media and its public and political influence have begun to transform the political process and campaign tactics. Politicians are now using social media and the Internet and in turn are permitting a new arena of grassroots politics. Voters no longer make decisions solely based on information available through traditional media and instead seek out additional knowledge and in some cases additional means of activism, using their computers and mobile devices. Some of the studies have also found that mass media use and social media use is positively correlated to an individual's voting behavior. Essentially, the more look to mass media and



social media for information, the more likely citizens are to vote. Ultimately social media simplifies word of mouth and facilitates collaboration in a cost-effective and impactful fashion and as research points out, is reaching individuals who are more likely to be motivated to actively participate in the political process.

Several studies have found that how Internet or social media influences people's political involvement. Many scholars and observers have illustrated political involvement of social media users in comparison to those of the non-users. However, the studies have reported somewhat mixed or inconsistent results. Many studies have found that Internet users are more politically interested and active than average, showed that Internet users report high levels of political efficacy, more politically knowledgeable and more likely to seek out information about politics than non-users. Other studies of the relationship between the Internet and political involvement reports different results, those who visit political websites tend to be interested in campaign news and were likely to vote for interested candidate.

Politicians, political parties and voters alike use social media as a means for disclosure-they post photographs, personal information and leave public messages to their friends in a cyber space/ the benefit of this is that social media removes the barrier between professional and consumer, showing the latter how the former works and allowing the latter to actually contribute immediately to the work of the former. This breaking down of previously existing barriers enables strengthened relationships between voters or advocates and politicians who utilize social media in an effort to reach their voter base. However, the emergence and popularity of social media does not come without a price. The repercussions of the digital explosion means that not only are people able to make personal information available to the public, but that they are encouraged to without considering the lasting effects of doing so. The social media use later on becomes a source of political and civic education for citizens. Just like the use of Internet social media information services have also extensively used to disseminate the messages to the voters.

As the social media have become a primary source of political news and information, the different gains model offers good offers a good opportunity to examine the democratic potential of the Internet that allows people to obtain a wide range of political information and communicate with other in more effective and efficient ways. The unique nature of the social media is that it integrates several different modes of traditional mass media use and interpersonal communication. In this regard, it is of particular importance to note that the social media can viewed as an effective discussion place in which ordinary people can access a wide range of information and communicate with other people to share the common topics. Several scholars have argued that cyber space can be conceptualized as a discursive of speaking space in which people can freely express their voices. People are using social media to have political information and to talk with others as well.



Social Media and their Effects

Social media have influenced many aspects of our life be it education, culture, administration, marketing, businesses or politics. Social media have been able to make profound impact by means of news, interaction, learning and marketing. Social media has become an important source of news. Various news channels tweet or give updates on significant happenings all over the world and the news quickly gets passed around the networks in ways never experienced before. It allows people to keep in touch more regularly. People in different cities, countries and continents can keep in touch effortlessly and it creates an opportunity to experience different cultures and exchange opinions. Social media have also played a large part in fostering learning. Children who start using the social media platforms develop early communication skills, and generally become more literate. The whole dynamics of marketing have been changed. Companies are becoming more consumer-centered through interactions made over social media. They are able to understand the needs of the market from the market itself.

1. Social Media and C-Governance

Social media has led to the emergence of citizen led governance (*C-governance*) in India. Anti corruption movement by Anna Hazare and protests followed by Nirbhaya gang rape were channelized through the social media. These events garnered enormous national and global support by involving the common man.

2. Anti-corruption Movement

Anna Hazare initiated a Satyagraha (Fasting for a noble cause) movement for passing a stronger anti-corruption Lokpal bill in the Indian Parliament. He started hunger strike when the demand was rejected by Indian government. The movement attracted attention in the media, millions of supporters inside and outside of India. People showed support through social media such as Twitter and Facebook. Online Signature Campaigns like *avaaz* got more than 10 lakh signatures in just 36 hours. This led Government to seriously consider the introduction of Lokpal bill in parliament.

3. Delhi Gang-rape

In December, Delhi gang rape case, which made people's collective anger to blast and come out on streets. Nationwide protests at India Gate area in New Delhi was a people's movement and it was the scruples of the people who made them come out and demand justice for Nirbhaya. Social media played a pivot role in mobilizing people to India Gate. No doubt T.V.



was telecasting all the developments in the case but it was mobile phone which was updating those seating on streets. Every news item was reaching them on their cell phone via Facebook and Twitter etc. People received the reactions of famous people who are respected and hold a special place in society on twitter and got bonded like never before. The massive protests led the government to set up Justice Verma committee to bring changes in Rape law.

Later on the Criminal Law [Amendment] Bill, 2013 was passed by the Lok Sabha on 19th March, 2013, and by the Rajya Sabha on 21st March, 2013. The amendments brought stricter punishments for the rapists.

4. Telangana Movement

The recent development on Telangana issue depicts a clear picture of how the social media is influencing administrative issues. On 30 July 2013, the Congress Working Committee approved recommending a motion for a separate Telangana to the central government accepting the 57 year old demand of people of region. The Telangana movement was bolstered with the active participation of students way back in 1969. Since then, students movement has been a backbone to spread the movement across the 10 districts of Telangana and making it a people's movement. Social Media has played a big role in student movement. Several facebook communities have been set up which helped bring the people together. Facebook status update or twitter update flared up the communication on the state hood issue. It also helped provide feedback on what is going right & what is wrong. You-tube also proved to be a great platform with videos of the protests & movements getting thousands of views.

Social media has also enabled greater political awareness and organization, which has in some cases rewritten entire political landscapes. The impact has been seen both in Indian political scenario and overseas. Before studying the impact of social media on Indian politics, we need to look at its impact in context of developed countries, where there is high literacy and higher prevalence of internet users.

Social Media and Political Parties

In recent times, Indian political landscape has seen two major national parties, Indian National Congress and Bhartiya Janta Party fighting an online political battle. Online propaganda is aggressively used against each other. Each and every medium is used to wage war of words. One tweet leads the other to respond immediately. The most famous tweets from both sides were, BJP calling Rahul Gandhi as 'Pappu' and Congress calling Narinder Modi as 'Feku'. Both the parties try to downplay the achievement and exaggerate the failures of each other. Both sides claim to have large number of followers.



The political parties have their own websites which was not seen some years back and some of them also use other social mediums to interact with people. With every party having its own website and leaders being active on different media it makes the citizens feel that they are within their reach. The need to take appointments or wait for them to talk is no longer required. The leaders are accessible at the click of a button.

The Congress party's new vice president, Rahul Gandhi who is one of the icons of youth in India has used almost every social medium apart from actual communication to interact with the people and especially the youths. He has used social networking websites like Facebook to talk to people and prominent people as well as common man interacts at the same time. He also writes blogs to share his views with people. Mr. L. K. Advani of BharityaJanta Party has his own blog. Mr. Shashi Tharoor of Congress Party, was one of the first politicians to start tweeting. Mr. Narendra Modi, chief minister of Gujarat, has used all media to interact with people. He has been effectively using social media to disseminate information and remain in touch with the young population of India. He has often quoted that power of social media should be harnessed to involve youth in democratic process. The impact of his approach is visible in Gujarat elections.

Social Media and Karnataka Elections

Now the big question is do the online campaigns and followings convert into votes? Do the people who express views online, go to the poll booths and cast votes? Let us analyze the State Legislative elections of 2013 in Karnataka. It is home to silicon valley, i.e, Bangalore, with many people using internet. The total Population of Karnataka is 5.273 crore (52.73 million), with 33.98% people living in urban areas and rural population being 66.01%. Every political party was seen using the social medium to get their message across the masses be it Karnataka Pradesh Congress Party, Bhartiya Janata Party, Karnataka Janta Party, Janta Dal (Secular). The parties had set an IT Cell that is in charge of the official twitter, Facebook accounts, blogs and youtube Videos (Mishra, 2013).

BJP was far ahead in social networking than of its opponents. But the elections saw huge defeat for ruling BJP government. The role and usage of social media in the Karnataka elections, was limited to the urban, tech savvy youth and the social media presence did not camouflage the issues like governance, corruption. Moreover, the real challenge of political leaders was to reach out to the rural population who are the real voters, which constitutes 66.01% of state population and are largely illiterate and very meager number are tech savvy.

Social Media and Loksabha Elections



Now coming to Lok Sabha elections of 2014, will wide spreading social media change the fate of political parties? The analysis of Indian demographics needs to be studied. The internet penetration in India is not very high. But the number of users is increasing very fast. As per the research conducted by IAMAI and IMRB International in June 2013, the Internet usage has gone up drastically, with 190 million active users in June 2013. Out of these 130 million are urban users and 60 million are rural users. Along with it there are considerable number of people using twitter and Facebook. Thirty seven per cent of urban Indian registered voters are online and use internet regularly. NRI population of India is 25 million.

This population is active user of social media. Though they don't have voting rights, but they do influence the voting pattern of their relatives back home. This indicates that the number of people who directly or indirectly use or get influenced by social media is by no means a small number. When talking about age profile of voters, facts indicate that India will be going for polling in 2014 with a younger electorate. The age group of 18-35 yrs now constitutes 31.3% of the population (Census 2011). The Election commission estimates that the number of first time voters will go up to 149.36 million. This group is same as the one which is accessing social media 24*7. India's user base of Facebook between the age group of 18-25 (52.8%) exceeds the average across other top 15 countries (33.7%) (Source: Inside facebook Gold, data from Facebook September 2010) But the ground reality is that these internet users seldom vote.

According to the census of 2011, India's population is 121.01 crore, out of which Urban population is 377,105,760 (31.16%) According to Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) about 74% of all internet users in Urban India use social media. This indicates that social media can play a vital role in influencing urban Indian population. But the rural India population is 833,087,662 or 68.83%. Thus, a large majority of Indians live in rural areas with literacy rate of 68.91%. Previous elections have shown that the rural voter influences the results. Voting by rural people has always been more than by the urbanites. Analysis of the above figures show that since rural population is more but literacy rate is less, they are less likely to be influenced by social media, which not only requires literacy, but also a person should be tech savvy. Moreover, in India there are multiple factors which influence an individual voting decision. Indian voters, both urban and rural, keep caste, religion, community sentiments above all other considerations.

CONCLUSION

With the increased growth and popular use of social media, the present study is aimed to examine the political influences of social media during the 2014 Indian parliament election in India. Known as one of the wired countries in the world, people in India are enjoying the highest level of Internet connection and online information is perceived as more credible and



reliable than traditional media sources. India is ranked in 3rd with regard to use of social networks in the world. Therefore, India is an interesting place where we can examine the political influence of newly emerging communication forms like social media.

The advent of social media has enabled an unprecedented empowerment and engagement of the 'aam aadmi' for expressing political opinions. A positive development of social media emergence has been that the youth is talking about the political issues. Earlier the political discussions were restricted only to those who read newspapers, watched news channels or participated in discussions in nukkad of a village or clubs. But now, social networking has made the youth of India to sit up and discuss political issues. They spend time to analyze and discuss politics. They now have views on the happenings of political events and they also influence the administrative decision making. But getting the youngsters together to vote in elections and using social media as a platform to help political parties is still a pipeline dream. It may take decades in India to replicate USA in the use of social media campaigning and to influence the voters. Social media revolution in the Indian political space is real, tangible and accelerating. Though it may not bring in huge changes immediately, but still it will play an important role in creating political awareness, which in itself is a huge step forward for a developing country like India.

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