Indian Political Parties and Social Media

Abstract

The rise of the internet in the early 1990s, has led to the increase in the world's networked population. Social media revolution in the Indian political scene is real, tangible and accelerating. Social media is also facilitating a new way by which people are able to search and share information and increasing their awareness. It plays a vital role in converting street movements into large scale like during anti-corruption movement 2012; social activist Mr. Anna Hazare used social media to connect people in New Delhi. Social media has become a fact of life for civil society world over, involving many actors, regular citizens, activists, non-governmental organizations, telecommunications firms, software providers and also governments at largekeeping an eye on upcoming LokSabha election in 2019.

Keywords: Indian Political Parties, Social Media, Indian Politics, Political Leaders

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Introduction

Political campaigning has become a major focus in the growing field of social media studies. Researchers across the globe analyze political online communication. This analysis aims to identify how the political parties managed to mobilize social media users by means of the communicating through social networks sites, blogs and YouTube videos. The networked population has greater access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech and a better ability to undertake united action. Voter mobilization during elections, mass mobilization so as to maintain day to day accountability of the elected representatives, debates and discussions on matters of public importance, active involvement of the ordinary citizenry in setting the terms of the debates, protection of the vulnerable communities, ensuring justice to the exploited or discriminated are some of the other aspects involved in healthy functioning of democracy. Social media played a pivotal role in the recently happened Legislative Assembly elections in states and going to play same in the Lok Sabha election 2019 as well. The higher number of Social media users, the bigger is the tendency for the change in the outcome of election results. Therefore, social media is all set towards creating a big political impact in the coming elections. Leaders of various parties are actively taking an effective and full -fledged role towards wooing voters through Twitter, Facebook, You Tube etc.

The future of social media looks highly promising especially considering the historical movement led by Mr. Anna Hazare and Arvind Kejriwal. Their movement really struck the pulse of the people way back in April 2012. The movement gained such a momentum that the government has no other option but to table the anti-corruption bill in the Parliament as well. What started as a movement took the enormous man force and now culminated into "AAM AADMI PARTY". The protagonist Mr. Arvind Kejrival relied heavily on social media for the mass support and the team rightly got the love and affection of one and all as well. However, that reform has met few debacles over the years and somehow, it did suffer few shocks as well.

Aim of the Study

The objective of this article is to study the impact of social media viz. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube on Indian politics. No doubt social media is now being seriously considered by the Indian political parties as a mean to reach out to the electorate. Social media has gained importance with the rise in youth population in India. As they are the one who use internet the most in India. Will this social media & youth change the wave of Indian politics? This article will cover these and some more issues related to Indian politics.

Political Leaders on Social Media

In recent times, Indian political parties are fighting an online political battle especially Congress and Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) which are two major political parties in India. 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. Every party is 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. Mr. Narender Modi 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. Modi also keeps his followers abreast of his daily activities using various other social networking platforms, government websites, his own app (NaMoApp) and publicly funded broadcasters such as Doordarshan and All India Radio. Modi incessantly uses these platforms to push his 'Digital India' agenda; launch initiatives such as the 'Clean India' campaign and 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' (support the rights of girls to live and learn) and promote prime ministerial funding schemes for small businesses and cashless payment systems. The Congress party's 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 Bhartiya Janta Party has his own blog. Mr. Shashi Tharoor of Congress Party, was one of the first politicians to start tweeting. Many politicians have adapted to the norms and culture of social media, per se; Arvind Kejriwal, Suresh Prabhu, Smriti Irani. Their updates and feeds on various social media platform about latest happenings and events keep us informed. Our Foreign minister SushmaSwaraj has also been quite active on twitter and has made her presence felt by replying to the requests by the one's needing help or assistance.

These social media platforms provide political parties with a significant level of data about their supporters as well as their contact details. The INC, BJP and some regional political parties have set up data analytics departments to analyze their voter bases by district and even booth level to tailor their election campaigns. These parties claim that they are mostly dealing with public data or data that followers have readily provided online.

Impact of social Media on Indian Politics

Politicians use social media to communicate with their audience and to call them either to protest, or to vote. So, the use of Web 2.0 technologies has made it incredibly easy for a wide range political parties, social activist, individual leaders are getting attention towards social media.With so much 'buzz' being created about social media and as more youngsters are joining in, the political parties have finally woken up to its importance. Everyone is recognizing this new and powerful medium to interact with the masses and make them participate and thereby enabling better communication.

In addition to the impact that social media has for campaigns in the traditional sense of expanding the reach of their message to more voters and often younger voters. Social media activities can be either used to predict the outcome of elections. However, many companies have attempted to use the data which is available from the social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and other platforms to predict election outcomes. It is assumed that people visit these social media platforms with their ideas and thoughts regarding their political leaders during the election periods. Political campaigns are in no way just limited to buttons and banners for politicians to reach their constituents. The new political arena is full of commercials, blog posts, and hundreds of tweets. While through careful content and structural network analysis, these platforms will provide similar results to traditional election polling through social media. Politicians are now able to constantly display their messages through endless commercials.

Hence, social media has emerged as an essential tool of communication and has created new ways of political mobilizing and encourage social media users in political activities ranging from joining their political groups by tweeting, status update, expressing supports through blogs and videos on YouTube.

Social media and youth

There is no doubt that youth of this generation is highly interested in politics and the round of ideas around it. Social media is a path to reach out to them. It has become a platform of voiced opinions and changes and even though politicians for their campaigns still use posters, cut-outs, fliers and graffiti for their rally, but becoming digital and being attentive over digital platform has changed the picture or urban India and politics. As per various surveys and reports, over its diversified nature, 40% of their total population constitutes Indian youth and concerning to the popular culture, Indian political parties are holding to internet and social media to connect with youth for their agenda and political events.

Lok Sabha Elections and Social Media

Observing the famous 2014 general elections of India, social media was the battleground of various political campaigns and tremendous flow of varied political opinions. Mr. Narendra Modi's following quickly gained and he was considered as famous and influential as Obama's elector campaign. That particular election saw the rise of leveraging of much youth and their minds over social media for any political campaign and serious notice was found on both the occasions: regional as well as state election.They used social media like never before, the conventional ways of sending messages, recorded calls and public gathering were swept away under the rug.

Social Media played a role in propelling the BJP to power in 2014, but it is set to take on a different dimension altogether in 2019 with the opposition led by the congress getting their arsenal

ready to combat the ruling party's formidable cyber army. Not just BJP and congress but also CPI-M, AAP etc. are providingtraining in data analytics and communication through digital platformsfor theirs volunteers. So, election 2019 will be an intensehigh-stakes tussle for power like all others but with onedifference in a first, it is likely to be as hotlycontested in the virtual world as in the real one with parties already busy getting their social media warriors battle-ready.

Social Media as a Game Changer

This puts the country among the top three Internet markets in the world after the US and China. In fact, on use of Facebook India is on top. Till 2018, 294 million Indians use Facebook, 60 million users are on YouTube and there are approximately 20 million Twitter account holders. Twitter is a wonderful platform for the political organization to broadcast information on a worldwide stream. Political parties in urban areas are increasingly becoming tech-savvy, realizing this is the only way to reach out to the articulate young as this could change the democratic political dialogue. How actively and smartly one party handle their social media change many things. Now days, parties have appointed their smart leaders to handle the social media at priority. Apart from parties take of social media, there are so many YouTubers like Dhruv Rathi to upload the videos on YouTube and create awareness among the peopleregarding political issues, apart from awareness their own views also impact on the viewers and they behave accordingly.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to understand to what extent social media is used to influence political activities, political efficacy, political knowledge, and political participation among people. The study examines the democracy and politics in the process of globalization, development of information and communication technologies and its effect on political participation. It explains relationship between political parties and social media as a part of ICTs and that who is more smartly handling the social media for their party is significantly stronger. Twitter attracts a very peculiar subset of citizens, who differ from the population writ large in terms of demographic characteristics. 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. Social media can also be subject to significant abuse. Some politicians have been accused of boosting their apparent popularity on social media with legions of followers who don't exist and of using social media to smear their opponents. Worse, social media have been used to fan violence against religious and ethnic groups. The Electoral Commission of India has asked social media providers to monitor their sites for fraud in the run-up to the general elections. That would be helpful. But Indian voters must also demand that their government bring transparency and accountability to electronic surveillance.

Thus, social media has emerged as an essential tool of communication and has created new ways of political mobilizing and encouraged social media users in political activities ranging from joining their political groups by tweeting, status update, expressing supports through blogs and videos on Youtube. Social media is used by the political parties to promote their image and political messages, among their supporters and peoples.

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