

Research Article

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON POLITICS - A STUDY

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Abstract

The rise of the internet in the early 1990s, has led to the increase in the world's networked population. The networked population has greater access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech and a better ability to undertake united action. 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 large. Social media revolution in the Indian political scene is real, tangible and accelerating. Keeping an eye on upcoming Lok Sabha elections, In comparison to new media, social media's influence in political campaigns has increased tremendously. Social networks play an increasingly important role in electoral politics In India For this credit goes to internet, each person with marginal views can see that he's not alone. And when these people find one another via social media, they can do things - create memes, publications and entire online worlds that bolster their world- view, and then break into the main- stream. Social media has influenced politics and it has also increased interest of people in politics. The political parties have now taken social media as one of the most important channels for their public relations activities and almost every party has its official pages on Face book and twitter where they post political updates, press releases and news about their cam- paigns. In recent times, social media has been a integral part of politics and its growth seems to be continuous.

Keywords: Social media, Effects of social media, Social media and politics.

1. Introduction

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.

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.

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 Book marking 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.

2. 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

3. 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.

4. 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

5. 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, student's 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.

6. Social Media and World Politics

In recent times, world politics have witnessed lot of events, where social media played a significant role. Social media led to major overhauling of the world politics. On one side long standing regimes of dictators got buried under the weight of revolutions, spearheaded by internet connectivity and on the other hand voters got influenced by the campaigns on social media.

7. Presidential Election in USA

A closer look at the presidential campaigns of Barack Obama will reveal the role of social media in his elections. The 2008 Obama Presidential campaign made history. Not only was Obama the first African American to be elected president, but he was also the first presidential candidate to effectively use social media as a major campaign strategy. In 2008, his campaign managers used social media effectively by sending voting reminders on Twitter and interacting with people on Facebook. When Obama announced his candidacy in 2007, Twitter had only just started and there wasn't even an iPhone yet. He was quick to pick up an innovative media to make his presence felt and effectively marketed himself.

In 2012, the scenario was totally different in United States of America, with 69 % adult social network users and 66% of social media users actively engage in political activism online. President Obama maintained a significant lead in both Facebook likes and Twitter followers over his rival Governor Romney during his election promotion. At the end of the campaign, Obama had 22.7 million followers and 32.2 million likes, compared to Romney's 1.8 million followers and 12.1 million likes. This huge difference in online followers was translated into a historic win for Barack Obama. He won the elections despite bleak economic conditions, weak dollar and high unemployment rate.

8. Social Media and Indian Politics

Use of Social Media in Politics Since that time, use of social media in politics has significantly increased. There are various ways by which people connect, by commenting, creating memes and even trolling. Their news feed is the space which they own and feel more comfortable. They don't have to move out of their room to follow a certain political face or to be a part of campaign. The dependency over print media and electronic media has reduced as people can now be a part of news, express their views with others on this platform. Videos and pictures of sting operation are shared on Facebook, YouTube and other platforms showing the truth without any moderation. The common man participation in politics has increased. The recent use of social media websites by Indian government has been much talked about. Mr. Suresh Prabhu, along with his team, very efficiently used Twitter for helping out the Indian Rail passengers in need. From sending food to school children by taking action on a tweet to helping women who tweeted that she is in distress due to harassment faced in her train journey, he has done everything right so far. Ministry of Railway's heartiest efforts were truly a sweet surprise for the people who got assistance when they needed it the most. HRD Minister Sushma Swaraj has also been quite active on twitter and she also made her presence felt by promptly assisting on request over her twitter handle.

What is the impact of social media in politics of a democratic country like India? 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. Indian politicians, be it young or old have started experiencing the impact of social media in one form or the other. Now, almost every political party used the social media to get their message across the masses.

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. Through social media, politicians are now able to constantly display their message

through endless commercials, see direct responses to their actions via Facebook or Twitter, and connect with public. Social media creates a new political dialogue. It takes the power of political messaging away from the mass media model and places it firmly into peer-to-peer, public discourse.

9. 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.

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.

10. 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.

11. Impact on Indian politics and elections

A Newspaper Report Published in period of elections in India in 2015 says: The three American social media giants - Face book, Twitter and Google - have emerged as a major player in the ongoing general elections in India, with political parties and candidates competing with each other in breaking the news, spreading their message through these outlets in addition to those via the traditional media. While the impact of these social media on the elections could be known only after May 16 when the results are declared or could be a matter of another academic research, all the three major players have seen substantial increase in their India traffic and usage. For instance, Face book has now 100 million users in India - its largest outside the US - while that of Twitter has more than doubled since January this year.

After the 7th round of polling, there were 49 million Indian elections-related conversations on Twitter - more than double the 20 million Indian election-related conversations on Twitter for all of 2013. In 2009, Shaha Throop was the only Indian politician to have a Twitter account and had 6,000 followers.

12. Conclusion

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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Citation: Kummarikuntla Rahul 2025. "IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON POLITICS - A STUDY". International Journal of Academic Research, 12(1): 85-90.

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