

Social Media Versus Political Participation In India: An Analysis Of Rural Punjab

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Abstract

Democracy is considered to be the best form of government all over the world. And elections are the pivotal base of democracy. In the representative democracy every political party try its level best to influence the voters in its favour. So enough amounts of efforts, money, and time are devoted for political campaigning in the elections. So various types of tools and techniques such as door to door interaction, rallies, posters, flyers, TV and radio interviews etc. are used to influence the voters. But with the advancement of technology, internet and social networking sites have overcome these traditional methods of political campaigning. The use of social media in the political campaigning brought a revolutionary change in the electoral system. Over the last decade lots of work has done on the role of social media in political campaigning. Role of social media is very much clear in the developed countries but in developing countries like India where majority of people live in villages with the problems like illiteracy, unawareness about technologies and lack of internet sources, situation is some bit different. So to find the effect of social media on the victory of particular political party in Punjab region of India a survey is conducted on people (N=50) that includes rural and urban, male and female, young and senior citizen. All the respondents are selected with selected random sampling technique. For the collection of data online Google form is used. This study explore that how social media engagement affect political participation that directly or indirectly affect political efficacy. So there is strong correlation can be seen between social media engagement and political participation as social media tool provide a bidirectional platform for communication.

Keywords: Social Media, Political Participation, Political Efficacy, Political Campaign, Democracy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Political campaigning always focuses on influence as many people as possible in favour of their party. The main target of political campaign is to approach each and every voter. So various types of tools and techniques are used as a campaign media i.e. electronic media, print media, rallies, door to door interaction. But with the advancement to technology and internet, a revolutionary change can be seen in the political campaigning and marketing. Social media has over taken the traditional media in context to political campaigning. Almost every political party has to establish the social media cell for campaigning. No political party/candidate dare to campaign without using social media. It was the first time in India in 2011 when social media is used for first time in a movement called India against Corruption

(IAC), and the main motive of this movement was to attract and attach people with the movements using social media. This experiment results in amazing mobilization of mass. After seeing this attraction almost every political party and candidate become active user of social media in general and Facebook and Twitter in particular.

Literature Review

According to Houghton, Hamdan, & Marder (2017) social media has played very significant role in the political campaigns in the recent years. Social media provides the bidirectional engagement between politicians and audiences. U.K. election 2015 which is also known as 'Selfie Election' put a great impact on the election outcomes.

Ahmad, Alvi, & Ittefaq (2019) studied the rural Pakistan and found that online participation in the political activities is strongly correlated with political awareness. In Pakistan (Especially rural areas of Pakistan) young generation is very active in political affairs on social media that resulted into too much offline participation in political activities. The study concluded that "Facebook use, and political interest positively correlates with online political participation". In the study most of the respondents were strongly agree with the fact that there is a great positive relationship between political efficacy and online use of social media. Social networking sites and applications are working as best source of political information. One more thing is found in this study is that the age group 24-28 is more active than the age group 18-23 in actively use the online social media. So the online political activities on social media enhance the political efficacy of the citizens.

Rajdeep Sardesai (2015) wrote a book "The Election That Changed India". This book is the complete description of sweeping victory of BJP in 2014 election over the UPA government. In election 2014 BJP won 282 seats, in which 137 seats secured more than half of the votes polled. Near about 73% seats were won with the margin of more than one lakh votes. BJP's this success was mainly against the congress party. BJP won two third of the highly urban seats that are 37/57 and more than half of the rural seats i.e. 178/342. Congress won only 44 seats in 2014 general election. So what is the reason of such a sweeping victory of BJP in this election? Author pointed out many facts that may be the reasons of such victory. Firstly Narendra Modi's popularity was nearly twice that of the congress leaders. Modi was preferred by 36% of voters while Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh collectively preferred by only 17% of the voters. Secondly it is for the first time that more Hindu Dalits and Hindu Tribal voted for BJP. Thirdly about 36% of youngest or first time voters were secured by BJP while Congress got only 17%. As far as Male Female Ratio is concern only 29% of women cast their votes in favour of BJP while male's percentage is 33%. Now what is the reason of this sudden huge mobilization of voters? How BJP remained successful to influence the voters? The answer of these questions can be found in ways of campaigning. The new thing that was occurred this time in the political campaigning is the use of social media in political campaigning by BJP. Use of Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Youtube etc. has changed the way of communication.

Narasimhamurthy N (2014) used 'uses and gratification theory' to explore the significance to social media in 2014 general elections in India. According to the uses and gratification theory audience are active and goal oriented and having the ability to perform and judge the different types of functions. This theory focus on examining 'what people do with media rather than what media do to people'. Most of the scholar argued that the 'uses and gratification theory' is used to examine the motivation of how and why people are using social media. Almost 84% of internet users in India use social media applications. Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and Whatsapp were the most commonly used apps during 2014 general elections in India. Near about 52% male and 48% of total online population of internet users in India used social networking sites and apps. But overall internet penetration is very low. Only 1 out of 5 uses internet in the second most populous country in the world in 2014.

According to Kapoor & Diwedi (2015) general elections 2014 in India has exposed the fact that it was a downfall of traditional campaigning methods, as there was a rise of well planned social media campaigning. So that's why the general election 2014 is supposedly called the first social media election. Even Team Modi accepted the fact that this campaigning was very much influenced with the Obama's presidential Campaign, especially with the way of analysis. One of the main reasons behind the social media campaign is that it directly connects with people and constantly engaged with the social network users of the country. So with these strategies Modi team remained very much successful in building a huge cyber army that helped the campaign by spreading messages and ideas to the citizens of the country. And it resulted in the formation of approximately 2.2 million volunteers. Modi's social media campaign was managed by a 44 years old electronic engineer Hiren Joshi who was also a PhD from Gwalior's Indian Institute of Technology and Management. He helped the campaign by tailored and filtered the important messages and updated Modi. The head of IT department of BJP has also given the statement that near about 30% to 40% of overall seats were influenced by social media campaigning. Prime ministerial social media campaigning of Modi was directly influenced and associated with USA president Barak Obama's Political Campaigning. As Obama was popularly known as first social media president of USA, Modi was also get the similar title of first social media prime minister of India.

According to Vergeer (2015) Twitter provides a very free and smooth environment to interact with audiences. It is the most popular tool among the politicians. Twitter is also known as micro-blogging service. As far as history of Twitter is concern Twitter's first message was posted on 21 March, 2006. Twitter was officially launched in July 2006. It was used officially in the European Parliamentary election of 2009 first time.

Traditional media v/s Social media

There are various traditional tools and techniques are used to influence the voters such as Door to Door interaction, TV and radio interview and advertisement, Newspaper, Magazine, Rallies, Posters and flyers etc. and many more. But most of the traditional tools of political campaigning are time consuming and costly. But with the advancement of technology social media has overtake the use of such traditional media in political campaigning.

According to PewResearch near about 45% of Indian people uses social media and discuss about political matters. There were more than 150 million users of internet at the end of 2012, and this number is same as of television sets in India. Among the 150 million users of internet there are approximately 65 million Facebook accounts and 35 million Twitter accounts. Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) has given a report in 2014 according to which there were 205 million user of internet in October, 2013 that is expected to be increase to 243 million internet users in June 2014 (Aindrila Biswas, 2014).

Social media and Political Participation

With the advancement of Social Media and internet application a revolutionary change can be seen in the ways of political campaigning. With the time new social media application getting popularize among the people. So with the popularization of such media political participation of people is getting increased.

Bossetta (2018) developed an architecture in which he compared the political campaigning on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat in the 2016 U.S. Election. While developing this architecture author faced two problems. Firstly utilization of social media in political campaign by political candidates is increased with the time. In USA political advertisement had rose from 1.7% in 2012 election to 14.4% in 2016 presidential election. Secondly the popularization of social media among people has been increasing day by day. New social media applications are popularizing with the time such as Snapchat,

Instagram etc. that encroach the market field of preexisting application like Facebook, Twitter etc. So to develop the architecture author framed a typology that consisted four parts: Network Structure, Functionality, Algorithmic Filtering and Datafication.

There is strong correlation can be seen between social media engagement and political participation as social media tool provide a bidirectional platform for communication.

Facebook and Twitter and Political Campaigning

Facebook and Twitter are considered to the main pillar of the political campaign. Now a day almost every politician has Facebook and Twitter accounts. And Special attention is given to the cyber cell of the party not only during the election time but also in the normal situations to remain in touch with people.

Facebook and Twitter has overcome the word of mouth today. The most important thing that is seen in general election 2014 of India is that more than 65% of voters were come under the age group of 18 to 35. And this age group is considered to be the great user of social media applications. It is found that about 85% of 205 million internet users were using social media applications. So this was a very good opportunity for the candidates to dissemination of information about party, candidates and agenda among people. And every candidate wanted to reach as maximum people as he was using social media. A great increase can be seen in the population in age group of 18 to 35 years, that was 353 million in 2001 and it become 430 million in 2011. It is predicted that this steady increase will take the youth population to 464 million by 2021 and suddenly decline to 458 million in 2026 finally. This data show that India become world's leading country with 64% population of youngest working age group. BJP emerged as a leading party in 2014 elections and Narendra Modi became the prime minister of India had more than 16 million "Likes" on Facebook and become the sixth most famous leader on Twitter. He is popularly known as "Facebook Leader". Use of Social media in Political Campaigning is not only providing a good platform to interact with people but also work as a good fundraising tool (Ravi B. K., 2015).

2. METHOD

In this study mixed method i.e. quantitative as well as qualitative method is used. The population is taken in this study includes literate rural people of Doaba region of Punjab (India). We selected a sample of (N=50) respondents that include males and females. A survey is conducted with the help of Google Form to collect the data. To collect the data questionnaire with close ended questions is used. In this study online activities are used as independent variable and political participation is used as dependent variable. The Study Explore the fact that although there is less awareness about internet technology among rural people but still online media provides a strong support to political participation (dependent variable). The study shows that there is strong correlation between internet engagement and political awareness. And Political Awareness is further encourages real life political participation.

Findings

- Polital candidates can interact with voters very easily through social media.
- It provides very economical platform for campaigning as comapare to traditional media.
- New social media applications are popularizing with the time such as Snapchat, Instagram etc.
- Social media is a very good source of political information not only for voters but also for politicians.
- Social media is a great source for news media.

- Social media proves to be very important in women empowerment.
- Now no election campaign can be possible without the use of social media.
- A big amount of party funds are invested on cyber campaigning by political parties.

3. CONCLUSION

So this study concludes that there is a very strong correlation between online social media engagement and real life political participation. When people asked about the percentage ratio of the usage of social media versus overall traditional media 36.8% respondents were of the view that 75% part of the political campaign is conducted on social media while 31.6% think that the ratio of social media and tradition media is 50:50. According to the study 35.1% people are of the view that 50% of political information is received from social media and share the political stuff to their friends and relatives. One more thing that this study reveals that young people are more engaged in social media than senior citizens. So although the rural people are not

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