

Usage of Social Media and Internet in Indian Elections

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Abstract – Nowadays social media is becoming the battlefield for India's political parties. It's becoming a vital part of campaigning. The political parties form their own social media teams and generate content that propagates such as cartoons, memes etc. This field has also become an instrument for ordinary people to voice their concerns. Use of social media is also growing rapidly with the increasing use of smartphones. In a Democracy, media plays the most important role and keeps the Government active. With the advent of social media including Twitter , Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube etc., the way campaigns are run in Politics has dramatically changed. Indians are classified as among the world's most active social media users. In India we saw the new trend in Indian politics during the 16th Lok Sabha election held in 2014. In deciding which party wins the most seats, social media played a proactive part. The Internet in India offers people opportunities to take part in interactive social media campaigns and become political activists. Offensive online behavior on social media pages occasionally poses potential threats to its users. Comments sometimes contain misunderstandings. The use of it as a mere campaign tool won't be very effective. But if used as a platform to share the government's latest decisions and effectively utilized for active citizen engagement, social media will show positive results for future Indian elections. Also, social media has become one of the important tools for almost all the political movements around the world. Spreading one's ideology, or at least getting it to reach more ears, can be a potent weapon. Social media has made democracy more inclusive, nothing to hide from.

Keywords: Internet, Social Media, Political Party, Election, Campaign

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INTRODUCTION

Social media provides opportunities for creating and expanding audiences, increasing geographical reach, responding to news events and issues faster than ever before, and interacting more immediately and directly with news consumers. Development of Information and Communication Technologies has opened the way for social actors to interact and participate in the process of globalisation. Without placing communication at the center of things it is hard to conceive of a strong democracy. The struggle for 'communication rights,' it's activism, and attempts to curb it are not only indicative of the importance that free media acquires in contemporary existence, but are also a measure of the effectiveness of the the nation-state commitment to democracy and its future by social scientists. Recently, social networking sites have gained academic attention for their role in promoting democracy and openness in both developed and developing areas. Unfortunately, this newfound interest in political science has not yet translated into a greater interest in social media as a methodological tool for fieldwork researchers. The

alignment of existing trust relationships with widely used social media platforms gives news media opportunities to engage with their audiences in a variety of ways. Facebook and Twitter are the dominant social media platforms in news communication, though others are also being used, such as Instagram. The 2014 data from the Pew Research Center shows that Facebook is by far the most popular social media platform used by 71 per cent of adults online (Duggan et al . 2015). Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter etc. are now becoming the battleground for India's political parties. It's becoming a vital part of campaigning. These new media, known as social media, circulate viral videos, cartoons, Memes related with politics. In India, juvenile voters are the largest sections of social media users. Thus, through this use of these media, the political parties targeted those youth voters. The political parties form their own social media teams, and generate content like cartoons and memes that propagate. Thus the political parties give users of social media many moments to laugh too. The political parties launched digital campaigns and set up some election war rooms. This field has also become an instrument for

ordinary people to voice their concerns. Political parties can communicate directly with the voters through Social Media platforms. Now the political parties are spending crores of rupees on campaigns on social media and on war rooms. But they declined to give details of the expenses. Use of social media is also growing rapidly with the increasing use of smart phones.

METHODOLOGY

All the information and data used in this paper were gathered from the secondary sources. The secondary sources were the books, newspapers, articles, the internet, brochures and other such media

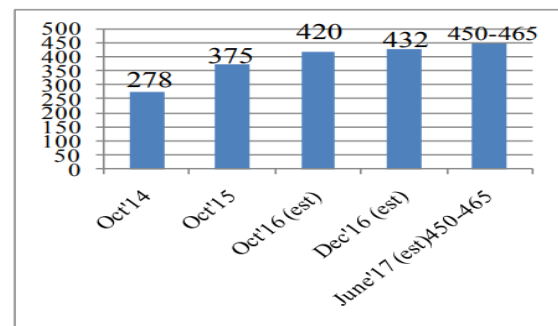
USE OF INTERNET IN INDIA:

In India the use of social media has grown rapidly. The advent of budget smart phones and affordable data packages has given people more scope for voicing their views on social and political issues. While this has led to increased speed of information and news dissemination, it has also vulnerable ordinary people to fake news and exposed them to "hate speech." News has become propaganda and the public now seems even more hungry to consume this kind of news. Traditional media has now taken a backstage. While the TV media still managed to hold on to their own, there is never any doubt that the future lies in content driven by smartphones. And yes, Indians have become flabbergasted consumers. As the fourth pillar of democracy, the press and its allies are crucial to safeguarding people's rights and play a key role as a "political watchdog," informing the public about political issues, schemes, programs and bringing about some degree of ruling class accountability. According to data from the NES time series, media penetration into Indian society has significantly increased in recent years. The study also shows that apart from traditional media, i.e. television printing and radio, the past decade has witnessed the growing influence of internet and social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Google plus, YouTube, and so on.¹ While television is believed to have played a major role in shaping public opinion during Indian elections over the past two decades, there has been an upsurge in public opinion in India.

Internet users in India are increasing to 566 million in December 2018, from just 5.5 million in 2000. Among them, there were 250 million rural users, which was the national total at the 2014 election³. Users of social media like Facebook, Twitter, and Whatsapp have seen massive growth, too. India is the leading country overtaking the US⁴ in terms of Facebook users. As of November 2018, 270 million Indians use Facebook in the 18-65 age group monthly⁵. Whatsapp, on the other hand, also takes the lead in the country. Whatsapp actually has India's largest

user market with more than 230 million active monthly users⁶. Similarly India has more than 34 million active users of Twitter. Social media growth has been triggered by the fall in mobile tariffs and handset prices. Thus, the impact of SNS could be seen in various spheres of life that include education, health care, entertainment, politics, and news access. While it has increased the voices of the "space" of peoples, it remains highly unregulated and it has now become a Hercules task for any government to control the same.

Overall numbers India had estimated 432 million internet users as at December 2016. But this doesn't take the impact of demonetisation into account. It has been estimated that Internet users in India will most likely be in a range of 450-465 million by 2017. The report finds that India's total internet penetration currently stands at around 31 per cent. Figure 1: Internet use in India (million chart)



Source: IMRB I-Cube, All India Estimates. December estimates does not account the impact of demonetization

Figure 1: Use of Internet in India (figures in millions)

ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN A DEMOCRACY

According to Abraham Lincoln's words, Democracy is a government "of the people, by the people and for the people." Media came into being around the 1780s with the introduction of newspapers, and it has since matured by leaps and bounds. In a Democracy, media plays the most important role and keeps the Government active. With the advent of social media including Twitter, Facebook, Whatsapp, YouTube etc., the way campaigns are run in Politics has dramatically changed. Social media is seen as a place where public opinion is formed, and where a growing array of institutions and individuals are able to intervene in public opinion. In recent years the term 'social media' has become a popular way of describing a collection of online systems that enable user-generated content to be produced, stored, and distributed. Social media enables the creation of a virtual social space where user groups can join in synchronous and

asynchronous interactions. 5 Social media has increased youth and women's participation in politics day by day. Social media is making the system more democratic. It also acts as a major lobby group in a democratic country. K. Sasikumar, senior media person from India, has said that the emergence of social media has brought more democracy to news coverage. He said the web-based news services of the new generation had the potential to address the vulnerable and marginalized groups in society, mostly ignored by mainstream media. People have already lost faith in mainstream media's objectivity and credibility, as most of them are owned by corporate giants or political powers. The Fourth Estate does not hold anyone accountable constitutionally or institutionally. Now the media became centers of power. Social networking sites play a key role in the current context.⁶ The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism's Digital News Report 2016 found that 51 per cent of their sample is using social media as a news source. According to the first-quarter report for 2017 of the Global Web Index, 94 per cent of digital consumers aged 16-64 say they have an account on at least one social media platform and 98 per cent have visited / used one in the last month; one in every three minutes spent online is devoted to social networking and messaging, with digital consumers engaging for an average of over two hours per day. At least 78 percent of the Internet population aged 16-64 now networks via a mobile.⁷ By influencing the way politicians interact with citizens and each other, it has reshaped the process of contemporary political communication.

EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON INDIAN POLITICS

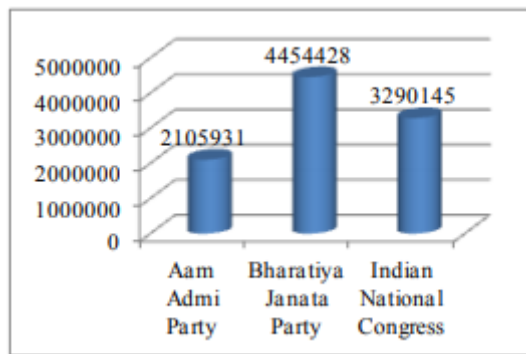
Indians are rated as one of the most active social media users in the world. The Internet's socio-economic impact is becoming more and more visible in India. The Internet is helping people of India in almost all aspects of life such as education, socialization, healthcare, communication, entertainment and development. Now, after transforming many facets of Indian life, the Internet has found new use and is emerging as a tool for political strategists and leaders of political parties.⁸ The political impact and use of new media technologies—the internet, social media and mobile communication—have been subject to specific attention. Over this time, the use of new media has moved from being a novelty for parties, candidates, civil society organisations and established media to becoming an important-if still secondary—aspect of political communication in the electoral process. This new significance is seen in the professionalization of channel management by political actors, heightened risk management by political organisations and increased use of international knowledge transfer and learning. These changes represent an example of the adaptation of wholly new communication technologies into the political environment and the

interplay between technological possibilities and the structural context.⁹ In India the 16th Lok Sabha election held in 2014 we saw the new trend in Indian politics. Social media played a proactive role in deciding which party wins the most seats. Congress was defeated and whole and sole responsible person for it was 'Mr. Narendra Modi'. He used all digital platforms as well as offline channels to reach his audience. For the first time in India social media was used so extensively during elections. A report published in April 2013 by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and the Mumbai-based IRIS Knowledge Foundation, Facebook users will have a tremendous impact over the results of the polls in 160 of India's 543 constituencies and the reason for this is the youth of India. As per India online pages site 2014, shows that the most popular parties and candidates were Aam Aadmi Party's Arvind Kejriwal, from Bharatiya Janata Party's Narendra Modi and Rahul Gandhi from Indian National Congress. Mr. Narendra Modi has reached 3.97 million followers growing his follower base by 28% percent since 1st January. Not to be outdone, where as Mr. Arvind Kejriwal has raced to 1.79 million, an amazing 79% growth from the start of the year.¹⁰ The Internet in India is offering opportunities for people to participate in interactive political social media campaigns and become political activists. It is also helping voters to better know and chose candidates. Metrics such as voter data and candidate details such as attendance in Parliament, criminal records, when available on social media, will change the way the voter sees towards a candidate (IRIS Knowledge Foundation & IAMAI, 2013). As per present circumstances, it can be easily seen that Internet use will shortly bring a paradigm shift to Indian politics. Presently, the Internet is providing new opportunities for political mobilization and participation in India. In fact, changing a lot of things for both leaders and voters. These, however, are still early days for the Internet in Indian politics and one cannot predict with certainty how much Internet will impact Indian elections which are usually designed around sentiments, public rallies and low voter turnouts, television, print or radio ads, popular welfare schemes.¹¹ It will not be very effective using it as a mere campaign tool. But if used as a platform to share the latest decisions made by the Government and used effectively for active citizen engagement, social media will show positive results for future Indian elections.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

On Facebook, BJP has the highest number of fans as compared to its competitors (4.45 million). INC is not far behind, they have 3.2 million fans with 3.6 lakhs talking about this. The party has second highest number of fans on Facebook leading ahead of AAP which has 2.1 million fans. While AAP lags behind in the race for number of fans, they have

the highest engagement as % of fans as opposed to BJP and INC.



Source: www.socialsamosa.com/2014/05

Figure 2: Comparison of three political parties on Facebook (AAP, BJP & INC)

Thus, the role of the social media cannot be overlooked as it has been used in positive and negative ways. The advantages and disadvantages of the use of social media are discussed below

Advantages:

- It gives a stage to talk its clients.
- Through the methods for online media, one can promptly distribute data in close ongoing.
- Citizens' political commitment can be expanded by online political correspondence.
- Easy cycle of exchange with supporters and possible voters.
- One can utilize this medium to speak loudly against social and undemocratic activities causing political out-rest.

Disadvantages:

- It will be difficult to use lack of resources, expertise or need for control for political parties.
- Sometimes offensive online behavior on social media pages poses potential threats to its users.
- There are sometimes misunderstandings in comments. Social media fosters an inclination to speak without thinking things through.
- Social media decreases Face-to-Face Communication Skills.

- Social media can help create something which does not exist or may not be as good as it is presented.

CONCLUSION

Web-based media has at last shown up as a basic component of the contemporary constituent acts of Indian ideological groups, with noticeable and critical effects on the direct of the 2014, 2019 Lok Sabha political race and decisions to come. No government officials can subvert the intensity of online media. It very well may be utilized or has been utilized so far by the ideological groups as a distinct advantage during the hour of decisions. Online media have additionally gotten one of the significant devices for almost the entirety of the world's political developments. It tends to be a powerful weapon to spread one's belief system, or possibly get it to arrive at more ears. Resident ought to know about the idea of data being shared or distributed through web-based media. Since the data shared through web-based media may not be right at unsurpassed. Web-based media made popular government more comprehensive from which nothing can be covered up. Likewise, presently a-days online media is going about as another type of voice for both the residents just as their agents where by making open profiles and open pages, the clients are making individuals mindful of their different plans. Along these lines, ordinary citizens can discuss; contend with no sort of wavering.

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