

An Analysis on the Strategic Communication of Social Media in Indian Governance: A Review

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Abstract – This paper intends to contextualize the changes occurring in governance and democratic practices around the world as a result of rise of the new information and communication technologies (ICTs). The rise of the social media clearly poses interesting opportunities and dilemmas for modern governments as well as political actors outside the formal structures of power. How well these structures and groups adapt and respond to these new challenges may hold significant consequences for their continuing relevance and ability to function in society.

The social media includes digital devices, such as computers, e-mail, internet, multimedia, video conference, mobile phone, satellites, GPRS Technology, Remote sensing Technology, etc. These have the potential of providing vast amount of relevant information to Rural Population in times; Social media has been considered a tool that can be used to achieve rural development goals in developing countries. In the same time, the majority of people living in developing countries and especially those in rural areas lack access to Social Media. Even if there have been many attempts to introduce social media, they have in general not been long-lasting. Importance of knowledge for development is well recognized.

From e-mailing and e-commerce to e-governance, internet has brought us all at a single platform leaving the constraints of time and space far behind. The social engagement in socio-political activities and people's proactive participation in political agenda is also increased through social media and viral usage of networking. However, our communication process is still in its evolution and in turn its effects can be traced on the socio-economic-political life of the 'Information Society'.

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INTRODUCTION

During the past decades, the media landscape and media culture have undergone major changes. Modern information technology has given rise to a constantly increasing supply of media products through many new channels, and our perceptions of time and space, of the bounds between private and public, central and peripheral, have changed. A good share of the people in this world – albeit far from all – have access to an abundance of information, entertainment and games via television, films, radio, books, periodicals, the Internet and mobile telephones. Convergence, fragmentation, diversification and individualization are characteristics that are frequently in the focus of debate on our contemporary media culture.

Without media and modern information technologies the globalization we speak of would not be possible. Access to a variety of media, telephony and online services are increasingly recognized as vital factors for political, economic and cultural development. Properly designed, a Knowledge Society – with its starting point

in the Declaration of the Human Rights and the principle on Freedom of Expression – has a great potential to support more democratic, just and developed societies.

Communications satellites, digitalization and advances in online services – especially the Internet – have meant an enormous expansion of the global market for media products such as television programs, films, news, computer games and advertising. The categories information, entertainment and advertising are no longer clear-cut; neither are the bounds between hardware and software, and between product and distribution. In the midst of the global development of communication and media are children and youth.

An interactive media society has grown up alongside the traditional mass media society. Young people around the world have already opted into it. These technological changes have made truly global flows

of information possible, while they have also opened up transnational markets for global media companies.

Many parents, teachers and policy-makers are concerned about the negative influence they believe media exert on children and adolescents. Such concerns have been voiced as long as mass media have existed, but the concern has grown in pace with developments in media technology. There is particular concern about depictions of violence in the media and in computer games. Concern is also expressed about pornographic films and images, and other potentially harmful content that is being distributed more widely via satellite/cable television, the Internet, computer games and mobile telephones. The content takes the form of violent and pornographic fiction and non-fiction, offensive advertisements, stereotypical and disrespectful depictions of young people, women and minorities, hatemongering messages, and so forth. Interactive media like the Internet also imply invitations to risky behaviour in real life in connection with media use. 'Safety risks' are much the same wherever we are: at school, at home, or at the café – or on the Internet. But with the Internet and other online technology we cannot see or be seen by the person at the other end of the communication. Thus, the word "violence" is no longer an adequate heading for the cluster of problems in question. Instead, we speak of 'harmful media content' or 'harm and offence in media content'.

The communication scenario around the world is changing fast. The arrival of new technologies, sophisticated devices and novel concepts has given pace to the process of information flow. Along with the technological advancement, mass media also had also changed a lot in terms of both format and content. Internet enabled communication platforms and the resultant media convergence have evoked debates on social media, democracy, nation-state, citizenship, new age governance and the very role and function of media. Moreover, the politics of globalization which altered the power and functions of the nation-state is also evident before us in many forms. In the midst of this setting, it is relevant to think about the role of media in a democratic space and also the challenging role of the state to govern this new breed of citizen. This paper intends to contextualize the changes occurring in governance and democratic practices around the world as a result of rise of the new information and communication technologies (ICTs). The rise of the social media clearly poses interesting opportunities and dilemmas for modern governments as well as political actors outside the formal structures of power. How well these structures and groups adapt and respond to these new challenges may hold significant consequences for their continuing relevance and ability to function in society. The role played by media in a democracy is complex and varied. At its best, the media operates as an additional check and balance on government, promotes an atmosphere of answerability. It also provides a public forum for debate, and encourages an informed and educated citizenry. Through this, media take part in a crucial

manner in the formation and maintenance of public sphere in a society. A public sphere can be seen as a space distinct from both the state and the market. It is that domain of our social life in which such thing as public opinion is formed. It echoes the concepts of freedom in a democratic society and freedom from commoditization of life. It is a widely accepted notion that the media both strengthens and benefits democracy. But the irresponsible functioning of the mainstream or dominant media can harm the very essence of democracy and can lead to a tainted public sphere. Such a scene can bring media to act as a mouthpiece for a particular interest group—such as the government or large corporations. Eventually, media fails in its role to defend democratic governance by undermining it.

In fast-changing media and communication environments more people are connected than ever before. While most acknowledge that the influence and impact of changing media and communication on governance outcomes is growing, the degree to which social media landscapes are contributing to more informed, peaceful and accountable society's remains in question. For some, increasingly networked young, educated and information-empowered global citizens have the potential to be democratically, socially and economically transformative. For others, increasingly fragmented and co-opted media and communication environments are driving political polarization, extremism and violence.

Access to internet and mobile phones is rising rapidly, not least in fragile states, but radio and TV remain the key sources of information for most people. Over the last couple of decades powerful changes in media markets have had a substantial impact on patterns of information, communication and governance: the number of media stations has rapidly increased (Afghanistan alone is now home to 75 terrestrial TV and 175 FM radio stations); media environments have become increasingly fractured, with more stations catering for specific ethnic, linguistic or religious communities; advertising models are often unable to sustain quality journalism; and, in many countries, it is increasingly hard to see how the market can support inclusive media that reaches across divides. Political, religious, ethnic or other factional actors have stepped in, supporting media outlets to promote their agendas.

For much of modern democratic history, media has been considered one of the most powerful agents of democratic accountability. Extensive empirical research has demonstrated the connection between a free press and good governance, including the association between access to balanced, independent programming and improved knowledge and political participation. However, since the Rwandan genocide and the Balkan wars researchers have devoted increasing attention to the links between media, fragility and violent conflict. More recently, an

emerging evidence base has shown the ability of media interventions to reduce polarisation.

MEDIA AND SOCIETY

Mass media plays a crucial role in shaping and reflecting public opinion, connecting the world to individuals and reproducing the self-image of society. Mass media generates information from a network of relations and influences the public in large. The socio-cultural and political attitudes and preferences of the operating society is thus formed and sustained to a greater level by the mass media. The consequences and ramifications of the mass media relate not merely to the way newsworthy events are perceived, but also to a multitude of cultural and political influences that operate through the media. As discussed in the landmark report on communication, 'Many Voices One World', 'the task of mass communication has become ever more complex and subtle – to contribute to the liberation of mankind from want, oppression and fear and to unite it in community and communion, solidarity and understanding'. The creation, maintenance and development of the community towards a liberating horizon have been the greatest challenge faced by the mass media at all times. Mainstream media was constantly failing in this due to various pressures and interventions from the environment. The evolution and development of social media poses great opportunities in strengthening this community participation. "Of all the promises and prognoses made about old and social media, perhaps the most compelling has been the possibility of regenerating community through mediated forms of communication" (Jankowski, 2006). This rebirth of community platform is the greatest feature of social media communication.

EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

"Social Media are new technologies for representation and communication based on the paradigm of computation – reducing things to their logical 'equivalents', enabling information to be easily transmitted, compared and transformed" (Levinson, 2001). Social media describes any digital media production that is interactive and digitally distributed. Two fundamental features that distinguish 'Social Media' from the preceded media forms, much of which still exists are:

1. Transmission and accessibility – emphasis on the integration of multimedia platforms and the use of social media through Internet as the major channel.
2. Interactivity – the most defining quality of the social media which makes it as the 'future media'.

Internet-enabled technologies like websites, video-audio streaming, chat rooms, various social networking and online community platforms, virtual reality environments, mobile phone technology, internet telephony etc. comes under the category of social media. An important promise of Social Media is the "democratization" of the creation, publishing, distribution and consumption of media content. The digital technology which enables the content to be digitized to bits which makes this as a dynamic platform of content production which can be done in real time.

It was only in the late 1980s, the primary appearance of networked environment and computer-aided design happened. The reliance was much on the traditional media systems till that time. Eventually, with the advent of digital technology and personal computer industry, widespread use of social media technologies became a reality. Web-enabled electronic accessories like mobile phones, laptops, tab PCs, and various interactive devices made social media as a commendable experience of our times. The last twenty-five years have seen the rapid transformation into media which are predicated upon the use of digital computers, such as the Internet and computer games. All other media forms were also transiting during this period by incorporating social media or the social media-enabled features. Noted scientist Russel Newman commented on the blurring inter-personal, mass communication differentiation in this social media age. He also pointed out that the public and private communication has never ever before been intermeshed like this. Newman argues that Social Media will alter the meaning of geographic distance. It will also allow for a huge increase in the volume of communication. Qualities like the massive speed of communication, capacity to overlap and interconnect other forms of communication that were previously separate were regarded by Newman as the groundbreaking features of this futuristic medium.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

The democratic framework of the social media makes it as an appropriate medium for a democratic society. As discussed earlier, democracy should give space for public debate and discussion on issues concerning public life. Social media technologies, especially the most powerful and popular one, Internet is blessed with a number of news groups, discussion lists and websites for debating social, political and cultural issues. The rapid growth of Internet around the globe shows the potential of the media. As it is characterized by open communication, de-centralization of authority, freedom of share and data reusability, it can evoke different planes of radical discourse on democracy. For the last five years, there has been a considerable increase in the Internet population in India. Various websites and

blogs are gaining popularity and playing a major role in recapturing the forum of discussion on various issues. Other than these, there is a considerable growth in the number of online initiatives like quasi-public service sites, specialized search engines, social event calendars, social networking sites and various social media services like podcasts, videocasts and RSS feeds etc. popular social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Orkut, Myspace etc. are very popular nowadays in the social communication sector. We can see the proliferation in the number of websites handling information on environment, social development, social mobilization, literacy, citizen journalism and various issues concerning a pluralistic society. Online encyclopedias like Wikipedia are revolutionizing the information flow.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND GOVERNANCE

Social Media has been used extensively by social movements to educate, organize, share cultural products of movements, communicate, coalition build, and more. The Zapatista Army of National Liberation of Chiapas, Mexico, were the first major movement to make widely recognized and effective use of Social Media for communiqués and organizing in 1994.

Apart from the wide urban user base, Indian social media communication as part of the e-governance initiatives by the central and state governments is revolving around some promising e-governance plans. Considering the Indian scene, the Government of India had started e-governance initiatives with a conception to launch the social media communication as a Government to Citizen Communication plan (G2C). The spirit behind G2C services will encompass all the services that the Government is delivering to its citizens. Services like Transport, Medicine and Education are examples of e-governance sectors. It is important to note now that there are a number of aspects like the policies, infrastructure, Human resources; Technology, infrastructure etc. will be required for the successful operation of e-Governance. Concept of E-Government is the transformation of public sector's internal and external relationship through Internet-enabled operations, information and communication technology in order to optimize government service delivery and governance.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Rural development is need of the hour for a country like India, which is on the old of being a big world power with the capacity to influencing the course of events on our planet. However, this is a dream which we can realize only when we are a country with no internal dissensions and strife, a country with a fair economic system and cohesive social order. In fact the essence of development lies not in a regimented system where none dares to disagree but in an all-inclusive dispensation. Rural development is the most important sector of national development in developing countries. Rural development refers to the

improvement of the standard of living of rural backward people. This requires providing productive employment opportunities and access to productive assets like land for those who are with low income in the rural area. Resources and employment alone cannot make them to increase income and to have better standard of living unless the resources are productively utilized. That means, there is a need to improve the resource efficiency, which can be achieved by adoption of improved technology and human capital by knowledge formation. This highlights the importance of human resources or knowledge to perform any activity with maximum returns to scale. Even in case of rural development, therefore, need of the hour is providing right kind of knowledge for rural people and people involved in rural development to make the activities more productive and effective. In this process, role of Social Media, another advanced form of knowledge, would be more relevant.

World has now moved from industrial revolution into the revolution Information and Communication Technology (ICT), has fundamental role of development particularly in the context of friendly approach under the regime of globalization and liberalization. Rural India has always been associated with misery, poverty, lower status of living and lack of opportunities. As per the 2001 census report out of 249 million houses in India.

Million (71%) are in rural area India is witnessing a continuous GDP Growth rate of around 8%, Mukherjee. Contribution of rural area has been depriving. Social media can help in bridging the urban amenities in rural area by encompassing the sector like education, health care, agriculture, e-Governance, communication various services accessibility.

Social media also ensures a great support to education and computer literacy in rural areas along with employment generation. Connectivity in rural area through internet, these areas have got a strong upstart towards fastening growth and development.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT-

Strengthening Rural Governance: Introduction of social media in rural India is expected to bring in changes in the whole process of rural governance by improving transparency, accountability and administrative efficiency of rural institutions, promoting participation of the poor in decision-making processes and improving the efficiency and responsiveness of rural service delivery. It can facilitate speedy, transparent, accountable, efficient and effective interaction between rural citizens this not only promotes better administration but also saves time and transactions costs of government operation. At the same time, social media improves interaction

with and within civil society and encourages civil society participation in the rural governing process.

Enhancing people's participation in nation building process: Importance of communication in mobilizing people and seeking their willing participation in the development process of a country is well recognized. In India, this concern about reaching people, communication with them and equipping them with new skills have been emphasized over and again in successive five year plans which provide the blue print of the country's planned development. In India, around 70% of its total population lives in the rural areas, they all have the right to acquire information. But it is almost impossible to expect that people at grass root level, living in rural areas, and those who have elementary education, to participate actively in the world of information and communication which is solely based on computers and the internet.

Ensuring a better quality of life: Social media has the potential to improve living standards of people in remote and rural areas by providing important commercial-social and educational benefits. By expanding the use of government services- social media strengthens the livelihood opportunities for rural India. Social media can ensure a better quality of life for the rural poor with an improved access to markets, health and education which pushes rural India towards economic development, job creation and poverty alleviation.

Encouraging social transformation: Access to information is fundamental importance to any development process. The recent development of social media is greatly facilitating the flow of information and knowledge, beyond the border of social and economic status. In this context, social media are now widely recognized as a critical tool to tackle development issues in developing countries which ultimately lead to social transformation.

Creating employment opportunities: Two areas of employment opportunities arise from the development of social media. First unemployed people can use internet to discover job opportunities. Second, they can become employed in the new jobs that are created through the employment of social media.

Social media can be helpful to provide online services for job placement through electronic labour exchange in public employment service or other placement Agencies.

Strengthening the information base of Rural Communities: Social media initiatives may be designed to provide support to local governance as well as to reach to the queries generated by local needs of the rural communities. As rural poor are often unaware of their rights, entitlements and the

availability of various government schemes and extension services, social media can also improve their access to the information they need. It has the potential to ensure improved provision of short-term information required by the rural poor for effective livelihood strategies.

Intensifying effort towards implementation of the rural development: Development for ensuring effective implementation of the rural development programmes social media plays a crucial role through demand driven information and communication services. It has the potential to increase the benefits and reduce the opportunity costs of people's participation in the process of rural development. The potential of using ICT to promote rural development lies in addressing the information gaps and blockages by strengthening the decision making capacity of the rural poor as well as the resource institutions of every rural community.

SOCIAL MEDIA IN INDIAN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING SYSTEM

It was more than a decade, when internet marked as a powerful medium of communication globally. However, due to technological reach and access, it was more vocal in the developed countries and developing countries like India. The world witnessed real command of internet during the presidential election campaigning of the year 2000 when in the US the internet provided a new interactivity tool of direct conversation between the candidate and voters. From then it is continuously growing leap and bound and have become an integral part of the communications in political campaign. As public access to the Internet has surged past 70 percent of the US population, the Internet has claimed front-and-centre status and campaign strategies'.

The trend has been followed by Indian political parties during General elections of 2004. The electronic messages were sent on internet and mobile phones created a buzz at that time. The hi-tech political campaigning is portraying grassroots political and social issues. However, it could not turn into being a success at that time. Ahead of the parliamentary elections in India, the political parties are again searching for the prospects in the social media tools for campaigning. On the same, it would be interesting to know the new communication patterns that have emerged and helped in the social mobilization and increasing participation in the political processes in the recent past particularly through the use of social media; Anna Hazare movement, for instance.

Therefore, the present study would involve the recent trends in relation to the use of social media in campaigning and mobilizing the popular sentiments

by political parties. Since, the usage of social media is getting momentum in engaging the public in political debates/moves especially when the previous model of e-campaigning by political parties failed on 'ground', it would be pertinent to make certain observations:

- The social media has provided a virtual platform for political debates.
- It will also provide a new tool of pre-election polls. So far it has been observed that the advent of social media and increased usage of social media has stimulated the practice of voting among the educated class, which used to keep itself aloof from the election process earlier.
- After the extensive use of social media during Anna Hazare Campaign in India and witnessing the success of the same, government and opposition political parties have also started utilizing this tool to register their influence.

In the light of above observations the present study would strive to find out the interrelationship between the socio-political fabric of the country and the communication process initiated by the social media tools. Further the study would also attempt to know the strategic moves of the political parties specially to use social media in political campaign, implications and limitations of social media in the same, whether social media may be an effective tool for it or is it only successful while being a part of a convergent system. Therefore, the study would also look into the question of relevance of traditional media in contrast to the social media (traditional media vs. social media).

To make the study holistic, both, qualitative and quantitative approach has been incorporated. Focused group interview of 10 media personnel, politicians and social-political scientists has been done to find out the above mentioned objectives. The study includes a survey of 500 people (inclusive of men and women with age of 18 or more than 18 years, since they are eligible to cast their vote) to know the effectiveness of the social media as tool for political campaigning from audience perspective. The study also makes an endeavour to find out how social attitudes are being a force in changed designs of political campaigning through including open-ended/non-cued questions in the questionnaire. Along with it, some of the earlier studies on the similar subject had also been examined for the purpose.

Social media is comprehended as a communication platform where it users collect and disseminate information of their choice. It is believed that social media catalyses the process of public empowerment by opening up avenues for masses to freely articulate, share their experiences and to raise concerns creating the possibility of their further enrichment. Therefore, it

is pertinent to know the use of social media in the political process.

CONCLUSION

On the whole, it can be concluded that social media may be used effectively for a plethora of activities ranging from creation of employment of entrepreneurship skills to successful rural development. It has been that social media contribute to poverty reduction, if it is tailored to the needs of the poor and if it is used in the right way for right purpose and complemented with required reforms. Like all technologies, the solution to the problem of rural development are what they have always been : economic growth, enabling infrastructure, the creation of livelihoods, social capital, education and healthcare, and sufficiently democratic government to ensure that economic benefits are not cornered by the powerful elites. By providing cheap and efficient tools for access to information and exchange of ideas and knowledge, social media can become an enabling tool for wider socio economic development.

After examining all the elements i.e. media, content and audience within the communication process in relation to the political content, one can safely assert that if not a change, the social media has certainly brought an extension with its characteristics to the existing patterns of the political campaign.

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