

ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SHAPING POLITICAL NARRATIVE IN INDIA

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Abstract

This paper aims to examine the effects social media has had on political campaigns in India, specifically on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Social networking sites have become an essential tool for political parties in India, for mobilizing the masses and extending the coverage space, in the time-bound political campaigning. As a tool of communication that is widely capable of reaching out to the voters, sharing information and influencing public opinion, social media is a powerful force that has modified politicians' interaction with the public and overall management of their campaigns. This paper will, therefore, use a qualitative approach to establish the use of social media in politics, particularly in the Indian context. The qualitative approach enables the opportunity to study social media in the context of political communication and consider some factors, including timeframe, regional variation, and political personalities. The data for this study involves analyzing social media activities from November to December 2023 which is a sample of political activity during election time. As a result, this research seeks to capture all the nuances of social media applications during campaigns, including multiple political parties, regions, and personalities.

This research aims at analysing the role of social media in political campaigning in India particularly looking at how these technologies affect democracy, voters as well as public discussions. The results add to the knowledge of how social media influences voter attitudes and behaviours and to the understanding of whether it facilitates or constrains democratic politics. Thus, this research enhances our understanding of the key strategic function of social media in Indian elections and opens horizons to think about its ability to shape not only the votes of millions of Indians but also the fate of democratic elections on the Indian subcontinent. This study will provide the basis for similar studies on the role of the new media in generating democratic citizenship in India and perhaps in other democracies where social media has emerged as powerful political actors.

Keywords: *Social Media, Political Campaigns, Indian Elections, Voter Turnout, Political Discourse, Digital Communication, Facebook, Twitter, Public Opinion, Democratic Processes.*

Introduction

Today, social networks are considered one of the largest information sources and affect both urban and rural dwellers. It has completely changed how we interact with others and reach out to individuals in other parts of the world. Currently, popular sites such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook have been particularly helpful in realising this change. Nowadays, it can be seen as a main trendsetter in developed and developing countries, including India, for promoting people's opinions through extensive and technological coverage of social networks.

In its essence, social media is an array of discussions, and it is a means for spreading information, reflecting a real-life environment. This has achieved the purpose of having an inviting and engaging digital platform by eliciting users to post comments and content. This interactivity has made social media an important place where people have turned to for them to discuss their small and big issues in the country. Modern social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, formed in the 21st century, have become influential among individuals and key opinion makers. They are important in reaching out to individuals, groups, organizations and business entities irrespective of geographical mileage and cultural and even political differences.

When discussing India specifically, civil society points to the massive revolution that social media has made to the campaigns. General Election presents the social networking sites like Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp as crucial tools for political parties. Some of these platforms include. These platforms have been used throughout campaigns via group chats, live sessions, and hashtags where parties gather to address concerns, talk about achievements, and be associated with citizens. Campaign messages on the internet are more contagious than those on traditional media and have helped transmit campaign messages to the farthest corner of the country.

Thus, the objective of the present research study is to review the literature in the specific area of communication change, with much focus on the use of social media platforms as tools for social and political mobilization. It aims at establishing the unusual relationship in which how political campaigns adopt social media to sway people's views and voting choices. This paper underscores the synchrony of modern communication technologies leveraged through social media and the significant impact of the two on the political system in India in order to enhance the understanding of political interaction in the 21st century.

Research Objectives

1. To examine how political parties use social media during election campaigns.

2. To investigate the effectiveness of various social media strategies in influencing public opinion.
3. To analyze the impact of social media on voting behaviour.

Research Methodology

This research will focus on the impact of social media on political campaigns in India and be done qualitatively. This approach enables one to examine political posts many people share on their social media accounts, particularly Facebook and Twitter. Posts will be collected for analysis from the official representatives of several political parties, key opinion leaders, and regular users to include various opinions.

The gathered data will then be analyzed to look for patterns of how social media influences political campaigns. They will be supplemented with findings from the extant literature to give a fuller picture of social media's place in setting the political agenda. The implications of the findings will then be summarised in relation to Indian democracy, voter' turnout, and the techniques adopted by political parties.

Understanding Social Media

Currently, everyone uses social media as a tool to interact with people from all over the world, rifts the geographic barriers down. This is the modern world. We have numerous friends and contacts in social networks so the number of users can be impressive. Social media can be defined as the tool used for fast and effective sharing of knowledge, experience, ideas, and opinions through blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, among others. Social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have also assumed the world as some of the most efficient means of accessing audiences.

It will, therefore, be a useful starting point to at least define social media and say something about its history before commenting on its developments across different domains. Social networking has brought about a new way of talking that has transformed the face of politics in India, in as much as. Thus, this article will seek to discuss how social/ digital media have activated modern societies on the newly emerged communication patterns and the consequences on the political process. Social media can be defined as "technology that connects computers with internet and supports communication of people, companies, governments or NGOs to view, create and share texts, pictures, videos and other types of messages through graphic interfaces."

Modification of Communication Style

Social networks have changed the nature of the interaction between politicians and potential

voters, parties and electors, thus excluding intermediaries – the mass media. This means that politicians are able to engage with citizens in a much more efficient manner and set up a two-way feedback and critique mechanism, supporting debates as well as face-to-face interactions for events. These messages are often shared in personal circles. When people share such messages, they get viral, hitting new audiences.

The findings showed that all the major political parties in India use social media, which is primarily visible on Facebook and Twitter. These are commonly used by effective politicians, political parties and voters for posting photos, messages, information's and messages to friends and followers. This approach demystifies politicians' lives and allows regular people to see what politicians are doing and respond instantly. Without any doubt, one can state that social media has become an extremely important tool by which political parties communicate with their voters – the latter stay active promoting their programs and displaying their results on social networks. Posts, videos, and tweets offer politicians the opportunity to appeal to the voters and, in doing so, learn their preferences and fears.

Social Media and Politics

Hence, social media has become widely used to promote political parties in the digital society. They hold the benefit in enabling the parties to feed relevant information straight to the voters thereby making a worthy impression on their mind. It is a means used by the political parties to personalise communication with the voters using technologies such as the AI holding technique under political campaigns whereby messages sent out have the voter's name on them to create a one-on-one relationship with a given voter. On the same note, personalized audio broadcasting avoids disruption of the call and holds the party's attention by beginning the messages with the name of the audience. Interactive videos engage voters a notch higher through polls, surveys, and other content that can be shared with a larger number of people. The nature of interaction is also easy since political parties send personalized messages to their target groups through WhatsApp, SMS, and voice calls.

Social media have influenced political communication by creating a way through which political parties can directly communicate with society and even inform this society of what they are doing and their stand. As a result, political campaigns have shifted significantly with the use of social media platforms, particularly Twitter, which has even dominated political campaigns owing to its large coverage and impact on the target voters. Political organizations utilize these platforms with

the purpose of creating the right image given to the public for purposes of influencing their decisions since such campaigns cost many resources. As will be seen, social media is a conduit through which large populations are informed of campaign messages, and hence a necessity in any modern political process. Besides creating awareness, these campaigns enhance the bond between the voters and the political parties, hence the result of the elections.

Positive Impact of Social Media on Politics

Social media has impacted politics in multiple ways, most of which have been positive and have worked to improve the way politics is undertaken in most countries. One main advantage involves creating awareness. Prior to the existence of the Internet, people lacked a full understanding of government policies and politicians' actions. But the social media application employed by the government has opened up the public accessibility. It has therefore been noted that awareness creation through the various social media campaigns has become paramount. For instance, in the course of the COVID-19 outbreak, which occurred when not much information was available to the public in regard to the virus and how it could be managed, social media proved useful in passing knowledge and even updates on medications and preventive measures.

The fourth advantage is narrowing the gap between a citizen and his or her member of parliament. Social network's telecommunication cumbersome hindrances to people's interaction with their leaders have been erased. They now have channels through which they post messages, participate in polls, and occasions through which they keep the public informed. Since the specifics of the political process have become more accessible, ordinary citizens have been able to engage in the processes more actively. Moreover, political communication also found practical use through social media, especially in enhancing diplomatic relations between India and its partners.

Regarding politics, social media is also good at managing barriers to political participation. As it will cost low to be utilized, then it means that more people will be able to access political campaigns and their representatives. This ease of access boosts democracy as it brings in. Data Bindings people from all walks of life, anteriority and gives their contribution to political discourses.

Last, a better analytical system has risen, changing political campaigns entirely. Another advantage of social media is that data gathered and analyzed through it does not need as much human intervention as methods which are used to measure public sentiments. Data analysis is no

longer an extra-added advantage but an essential tool that allows election committees to study and respond to the wards' behaviour. These tools help in the saving of time and resources, hence freeing the campaigns to engage the voters and meet other needs in a manner that improves other political processes.

Social Media Key Strategies

Social networks have now emerged as a crucial element of political campaigns. Various strategies that parties and politicians deploy can be easily applied to ensure the easier mobilization of the voters. The most important of those is microtargeting, and it is when political parties use data and algorithms to deliver messages to certain voters. Understanding the users and their characteristics, such as their political affiliations, political preferences and behaviour online, allows the parties to produce appropriately targeted messages to different portions of the electorate, thus increasing the probability of the effectiveness and efficiency of these appeals.

The fourth perspective of the effective use of political communication is the employment of videos, infographics, and memes. Visuals have also been used over time as a compelling tool to reach out to the audience and explain issues comprehensively to capture the audience's attention and interest. Multimedia content supports not only attention but also assists in the better presentation of political messages.

Other important characteristics include real-time involvement as embedded in social media networks. These networks facilitate one-on-one relationships between political leaders and voters via platforms such as town hall meetings, Q&A sessions, and loading and streaming. These platforms enable users to gain more insight into the political process and exercise accountability in order to get an instant response, engage in debates, or address their politicians directly.

Influencer collaboration has also been adopted alongside many political campaigns. Self-generated media content is one of the most important sources of support for shaping political preferences and voting. Public figures are sought out by political parties in an effort to reinforce a party's agenda and appeal to more people. Endorsement brings credibility to the initiations by political leaders, and the publicity of such figures brings an understanding of the programmes by the population.

politician-voter relationship sparked by the use of social media in political campaign has been described as revolutionary. Compared to the main media, which always serves as an intermediary, social networks provide an opportunity for fast and unconditional communication. Web-based

communications provoke discussions, posts, comments, and buying and attending face-to-face activities. Posts posted on personal pages show audiences the continuation of a campaign by reaching out to more people and, in the process, elicit more attention.

Today, almost all political organizations of importance in India also take an active part in social media, leveraging the services of social web platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Currently, citizens, politicians, and political parties use photos, messages, and personal information on social media. This takes the relationship between a professional and a consumer and gives voters a window on the processes going on in the political system and allows the voters to become involved in the political process. The politics becomes open and inclusive between politicians on one side and the public on the other side since social media erases barriers.

Social Media Campaigns Done by BJP

1. "Vote for the G.O.A.T." Rap Campaign

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) started the creative 'Vote for the G.O.A.T.' rap to reach out to young voters for the first time. The 3-minute rap video deployed fashionable Gen Z words, including 'OG' and 'FOMO,' and recapped some of the AAP government achievements that were led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, including the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir and the increase in women's reservation bill to 33%. This one is a perfect example of a campaign that looks like a modern music video with 88,000 likes within 24 hours and reaching millions of new voters. As per the Election Commission, the campaign focused over 1.8 crore new voters intending to vote in the general elections.

2. "Dil Mein Modi, Dilli Mein Modi" Campaign

The most successful marketing campaign of BJP in recent years, with the slogan "Dil Mein Modi, Dilli Mein Modi," aimed at mobilizing the masses in the Lok Sabha elections, became more powerful with the help of micro-influencers. Such influencers usually had 2,000 – 5,000 followers and were rather close to the ground and people vouched for their credibility. The campaign sought to enlighten the voter on the accomplishments of the BJP led central government and the outcome that the people have had to live in those respects. Through these local voices, the BJP increased the voters' participation level, and to an extent, the BJP also succeeded in communicating actions that established the party in the eyes and ears of the urban and semi-urban folks.

3. Focus on Instagram and YouTube

Realizing the social media outreach through fresher and new platforms such as Instagram and

YouTube, the BJP turned to these platforms to target many segments. While, of course, Instagram targets a younger audience, YouTube has an audience that ranges from 18 to 80 years old. At the same time, BJP's IT division focused on the quality of the content they shared and on making the information viral. Currently, BJP has a few millions followers on Instagram and more than 21 million followers on X, which used to be Twitter. The reach of such content is further multiplied by the personal following list of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on major social media platforms, with 85 million followers on Instagram and 96.9 million followers on X.

4. Extensive Use of WhatsApp

Another domain, which has also been highly noted as having been utilized generously by BJP, is WhatsApp. Currently, the party has more than 50 lakh active WhatsApp groups through which voters are fed with regular information and political campaigns. This has been a strategic way as BJP is able to talk to the community and ensure their sustainability at the grass root level.

BJP's Dominance on Social Media

Newspage analysis revealed that BJP is more visible and influential in Indian social media platforms than other political parties. While addressing India Today TV, BJP stands at 23.54 per cent of the total social media majority ahead of Congress, AAP and Trinamool Congress. This substantial lead underlines the BJP's better organization and people-friendly approach to its social media communication plan, which includes the appeal on Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and perhaps, the Smartphone's most vital platform – WhatsApp. These functions make it possible for BJP, with its massive online presence, to reach out to a broader audience than that of other political parties and, as a result of that, stands to shape public opinion to a greater extent.

Congress Party's "Donate for Desh" Initiative

The Congress Party has organized many programmes to collect funds and awareness; among them, "Donate for Desh" is a known programme. Influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's Tilak Swaraj Fund", this crowdfunding campaign intended to collect funds for this party before the 2020 Lok Sabha election. In the next two days, it mobilized over ₹3 crore raised from over 1,13,000 contributions, showing that the people do support them. This campaign did not only source for funding but also brought back Congress's sentimental appeal to the people, which is the strong impact of social media in mobilizing citizens.

Bharat Jodo Yatra: A Landmark Campaign by Congress

The Bharat Jodo Yatra (BJY), led by the Congress party under the leadership of Rahul Gandhi,

can be described as a large outreach programme that aimed at the rejuvenation of the political agenda of the Congress party and bringing the divided nation together. Closely emulating the Anna's Gandhi's Dandi March, the Yatra was from Kanyakumari to Kashmir and was more about directly reaching out to the public. These included strikes, civil disobedience, tax refusal, and numerous contacts with the people, thus exercising massive turnout. Congress successfully used social media to post new information, post interaction of Rahul Gandhi and to present goals of the campaign. Applying social media such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube helped portray Rahul Gandhi as compassionate and directed and helped Congress establish its roots firmly.

Congress's Strong Social Media Presence

The use of social media platforms by the Congress has grown over the years, with the Congress having millions of followers. The party has a Twitter account, Facebook page, Instagram page, and an official YouTube channel where it posts updates on activities, Campaign videos and crucial political messages. Rahul Gandhi himself also has his own active social media presence, which posts content appealing to the young and urban genreluXоже. For instance, Congress has 10.3 million followers on X, which used to be Twitter, 6.7 million followers on Facebook, 3.7 million followers on Instagram and 4.24 K subscribers on YouTube. Personal accounts of Rahul Gandhi further widen this exposure, he has 25..2M followers on X and many more on other platforms.

AAP's Social Media Campaigns

The newly formed Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has also come up as a major player in the social media politics. This is why its campaigns focus on primary areas of governance, including education, health and fighting corruption. Currently, AAP has been actively using social media to convey its performance and its message to the public, especially urban voters and ground-level organizations. Following its consumer-oriented, adept campaign approach, AAP maintains a growing online presence to become an indispensable piece of India's political landscape.

Social Media Campaigns Done by Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Which Came into existence only a couple of years before the present assembly polls, has not only used social media as a tool to communicate with the voters But also manipulated the voters. A highly exposed campaign was done at creating a poster like Modi ka Sabse Bada Dar – Kejriwal where along with the picture of Kejriwal behind bars, it was captioned as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's biggest fear is the Delhi chief minister. This image has prompted senior leadership of the AAP to call on all party members and supporters to claim

it as their profile picture across social media platforms. This ad advocated perceived political persecution of the party to voters and sought to coax the electorate to vote Kilroy against Kejriwal. The second effective campaign was ‘Save Democracy, Save Constitution’ People, especially leader Atishi, had called on the people to join the movement to support democracy and constitutional processes.

But still, Arvind Kejriwal has emerged as a key AAP strategist since his aggressive and unique use of social media. Kejriwal has 27.4 million followers on X (earlier, Twitter) and 2.1 million followers on Instagram and is the at the forefront of AAP’s digital publicity. Looper has pointed out that AAP practices meming regularly, employing youth appeal, and making fun of its competitors, be it BJP or Prime Minister Modi. Such strategy, when added to the fact that they barely go for a general message, their campaigns are easily recognizable and appealing.

Social Media Campaigns Done by the Trinamool Congress Party (TMC)

The ‘act of voting’ has changed as most parties use social networks and digital products to communicate with citizens. As the popularity of smartphones rises, internet access broadens, and the dependency on conventional media weakens, political parties interface with voters. These platforms enable parties to assess the population's views while ‘liking’, ‘sharing’ or viewing the content and in return receive real-time performance feedback. The result also shows that social media has increased the audience for political communication and can change voter decisions and behaviour.

This comes from research demonstrating that an individual's vote pattern and participation in social and mass media activities are proportional. Users getting news from these platforms are likelier to vote in an election. Due to the inherent capacity of word-of-mouth talk and cheap communications within social media platforms, political campaigns cannot afford to do so without engaging in S-Media. Through active participation, the digital media thus guarantees that the political parties put into practice mobilization processes in voters and control of the electoral processes.

Modification of Voting Patterns Through Digital Media

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Conclusion

Recently, media has evolved from an informative tool to a debating tool used in society. Traditionally, it was used as one way where the producer only delivered the message, but the social media environment has expanded the media into a multipronged tool. Today, social networks are an open forum where individuals' opinions are present in public, mass discourse, referencing the basic civility standards. Because of the many features that include ease of use, cheapness, and effectiveness in bringing together people from different parts of the world, social media is an effective tool for communication and interaction. These platforms allow users to post their opinions on various social, political, economic and personal issues that affect their lives and, hence, are central to our societies.

Social media has impacted the Indian political system in a big way – both in terms of a political campaign and democratic decision-making processes. Social sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter are various forms of political discourse that provide a one-on-one interaction between political leaders and the masses. These changes have seen social media as an important key communication strategy in politics for mobilizing citizens and encouraging voting.

The most strategic professional use of social networking sites by a political party, competitor, opponent and others include the BJP and its competitors like Congress, AAP, and Trinamool Congress. Examples include BJP's 'Vote for G.O.A.T.', and show BJP's willingness to use technology as a tool for engagement and affording access in the leadership and governance of the country. Although social media gives great opportunities, it offers threats such as fake information distribution and the presence of bubbles. The steps taken by the BJP to fight against fake news show the need for ethical standards and policies in the cyber world.

Therefore, analysing BJP, Congress, AAP, and Trinamool Congress social media reveals that the role of digital platforms is revolutionising Indian politics. In the above context, political communication has been enhanced by social media platforms as interactive, diverse, and Participatory platforms. However, issues such as the spreading of wrong information and encouraging positive use of social media to foster democracy will be dealt with to foster the growth of democracy through social media. Suppose this potential of social media is harnessed to the optimum and intelligently integrated with creating digital literacy. In that case, India can lead a new, informed political discussion in the digital age. The emerging electoral campaigns by the political parties, especially the BJP, clearly show how the digital revolution has impacted Indian Politics.

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