

## **SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTIONS-A STUDY OF PRESIDENT TRUMP'S AND PM MODI'S VICTORIES**

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### **Abstract**

2014 general election in India was fought with a different methodology and on a different scale. Never ever, at least in the recent history were any elections contested with such enthusiasm and fanfare and observed on such a scale. It was for the first time that an Indian election was fought as presidential election of the United States of America in so far as use of social media is concerned. Narendra Modi's marketing strategy not only created a synergy but also amazed marketing gurus and political pundits around the world. Social media, although not new in American politics but its productive use by someone like Donald Trump- not so favourite among the conventional media, redefined its effectiveness. This research paper is an attempt to highlight the importance of social media in elections, in the light of a study of US presidential election 2016 and Indian parliamentary election 2014.

**Keywords:** Social media, online community, Facebook, Twitter, election results, influence etc.

### **Introduction**

Presently social media has penetrated deep into our lives. Different sections of society use it differently depending on age, education and profession. Some use it in a personal manner for entertainment, time pass and connecting with family and friends. Others use it in a professional manner for spreading and receiving knowledge to keep themselves updated with the latest happening in their respective fields. But in one way or the other people use it and its use and

appeal is widening is widening day by day. To start with social media was used in activities not so important for society like casual chatting with friends to know their whereabouts. As internet became widespread so is the use of social media.

Effectiveness of social media in mobilizing people has increased to such an extent that in the recent past revolutions originated from it, military coups were thwarted through it and elected heads/ presidents are called as social media presidents. Nobody would have thought that in a place like India where religion, caste and region are still subjects on which elections are won and lost, social media could play such a big role in winning the election for a party with such a heavy margin. Had anyone ever thought of casting a shadow of doubt on the predictions of such established conventional media houses like the BBC, the CNN, the Washington post and the New York Times etc., all predicting Hilary Clinton's win. According to Donald Trump himself that social media was his main weapon to fight back.

Nowadays political parties spend hefty amounts on social media publicity and advertising. There is competition among political parties to hire best people for this purpose to put social media to the maximum possible use. Even those who don't use social media get influenced from popularity of politicians on Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites. Posts, tweets, likes and followers of a politician on social media become the topics of news and debates on conventional media, thus affecting also those who don't use social media. Politicians therefore are becoming more and more active on various social media platforms by every passing day to connect with people.

### **Review of literature**

As the literature to be reviewed for writing a research paper depends on the selection of topic. This topic is related completely with internet and very new in nature. Not much material is available in books and other printed sources, I have mostly taken help from the internet. Facebook and Twitter were of special help. The idea for writing on this topic came from our observations of day to day changes happening in the field of social media. As the researcher is a

regular follower of some politicians, TV anchors, analysts and writers on Twitter, the buzz on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube about important political matters encouraged us for this write-up.

### **Research Objectives**

- To understand the role played by social media in wins of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Donald Trump.
- To know how differently social media was helpful in PM Modi's win and Donald Trump's win.
- To know the scope of social media in politics and how it will affect future elections in India.

### **Research Methodology**

This research paper is based on the analysis of secondary sources mostly retrieved from the internet. Social media and its impact on elections is described and then impact of social media on election wins of president Trump in 2016 and PM Modi in 2014 is analysed.

### **Social Media**

Merriam Webster dictionary defines 'Social Media' as 'forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and micro-blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content (such as videos). Social media is the collective of online communication channels dedicated to community based interaction, content sharing and collaboration. Some of the prominent social media sites are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, Wikipedia, Google plus, Instagram, LinkedIn, Skype, Viber, Snapchat, WeChat, QQ and Pinterest.

Social media is the most convenient platform to share your thoughts by way of writing or sharing the videos. It is economical and less time consuming. Social media is considered as a much more vibrant tool for freedom of expression than conventional media. The element of spontaneity

makes it comparatively more transparent. With more and more people using social media its power has increased tremendously in the recent past. Posts, tweets, links and videos shared on it become viral within seconds. We have seen how social media mobilized people to participate in Arab spring revolutions and how president Erdogan of Turkey reached out to his supporters through social media and successfully thwarted military coup against his government.

### How social media influences elections

Of late social media has been used in politics quite extensively. It has been playing an important role in election campaigning worldwide especially Twitter and Facebook. The reasons are quite obvious, until August 2017 there were about 3 billion social media users in the world – about 40% of the total population of world as reported by ‘We are Social’ and Hot suite.



In the United States of America 81% of population had a social media profile in 2017. There will be around 258.27 million social media users in India in 2019, up from close to 168 million in

2016<sup>1</sup>. Countries like the United States where such high percentage of people are on social media, election results are definitely going to be directly influenced by it. And if Brack Obama gets the epithet '1<sup>st</sup> social media President of USA' it should not surprise any one. Even in countries like India where a comparatively very small proportion of population use social media (numbers are rising very fast), social media acts as a trend setter. Although only about 17% people use social media in India but the online community is very influential. They have a command over respective following and hold the potential to influence others. It is the online community that is looked upon when offline discussions happen. Posts, tweets, likes and videos uploaded by politicians and analysts give rise to news and stories in print and electronic media. Debates and discussions are held on viral posts and tweets on TV channels, thus setting the agenda of conventional media which has deeper penetration among the masses. Directly also the online community takes the conversation offline among family, friends and professional circles thereby playing an important role in the formation of opinion about politicians and political parties.

### **Social media and President Trump**

In November 2016 Donald Trump in an Interview to CBS News said “the fact that I have such power in terms of numbers with Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc, I think it helped me win all of those races where they (Hillary Clinton’s camp) are spending much more money than I spent<sup>2</sup>”. In the same interview he jabbed at the anchor saying that when mainstream media gives him a bad story or an inaccurate story, social media gives him the method of fighting back. These words of Donald Trump carry much weight given the fact that conventional media had virtually reported/declared him down and out. Conventional media had created such a strong public opinion in favour of Hillary Clinton’s win that her lost came as a shock to the world.

The Hill- a top US political website published an article ‘Trump won thanks to social media’ just after Donald Trump’s win, which said that overlooked amidst this tactical navel gazing is a clear, undebatable win- loss calculation: Donald Trump won social media<sup>3</sup>. Simply put, Trump’s campaign was more engaged with voters. This article was written by Director of the Social

Media Analytics lab, Scripps College of Communication, Ohio University. The writer wrote that he and his team of scientists looked at trends and metrics and observed:

- Overall, online interest in candidate Trump was three times higher than Clinton, according to google trends analysis.
- Trump was the most googled candidate and also the most mentioned on Twitter and Facebook.
- Trump had 4 million more twitter followers than Clinton.

Social media also served as an important medium of fund raising and online advertising during the elections. In this regard also Donald Trump was ahead of Hilary Clinton. According to Donald Trump's digital media Director Brad Parscale, Facebook was massively influential as it helped to generate the bulk of campaign's \$250 million in online fundraising. Over the course of election cycle, Trump's campaign funneled \$90 million to digital advertising particularly to Facebook. The Clinton camp also acknowledged that Trump invested more in social media. President of Bully Pulpit Interactive- a US based communications, market and advertising agency which helped lead Hilary Clinton's digital marketing efforts said " they spent a higher percentage of their spending on digital than we did<sup>4</sup>". According to the media Clinton spent more than \$200 million on television ads in the final months of election while Trump spent less than half of that. Because Trump camp was not spending as much on television all along, they were just doing it online.

### **Social Media and PM Modi**

Election results in India cannot be claimed to have been affected by social media to the degree to which they are in United States of America (USA). But 2014 general election in India was fought on the line of US Presidential elections. If Barack Obama is called 1<sup>st</sup> social media president of USA, judging by the use of social media by any politician in India for campaigning in elections, Narendra Modi can well be called as the 1<sup>st</sup> social media Prime Minister of India. By the time elections were over Narendra Modi had more than 14 million followers on Facebook and about 4 million on Twitter- the highest for any politician in India. And by the time he was

sworn in as Prime Minister he had more than 16 million 'likes' on Facebook- the second most for any politician in the world and was the 6<sup>th</sup> most followed world leader on Twitter<sup>5</sup>. According to Facebook, 'From the day elections were announced to the day polling ended, 29 million people conducted 227 million interactions (posts, comments, shares and likes) regarding the elections on Facebook. In addition, 13 million people conducted 75 million interactions regarding Narendra Modi''.

Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and Iris Knowledge Foundation published a report in April 2013 which said that realizing the importance of social media, political parties set 2-5% of their election budget for spending on social media in 2014 parliament election. Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) kept 500 crores and Indian National Congress 400 crores for social media campaigning<sup>6</sup>. It was observed that BJP and Narendra Modi had started using social media before 2009 general election. Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) started countering BJP on social media well in advance before 2014 elections but Indian National Congress was a late entrant. The report further said that Facebook users will have tremendous impact over the result 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 50% of population in India in 2014 was below 25 age group and 65% below 35 age group. The youth are tech savvy and love being connected with updated trends and topics on internet/social media. Urban middle class youth who out of their busy office schedule use social media to connect with people were particularly moved towards Narendra Modi owing to his active and effective presence on social media. According to another report of IAMAI urban India had 78 million social media users in June 2013, the number rose to 91 million by December 2013. Nilotpal Chakravarty, associate vice president of the Association remarked that Mr. Modi himself reached out through his Twitter/Facebook account to the youth of the country particularly urban youth appealing to what the youth were looking for jobs, security and the use of technology<sup>7</sup>. That was the biggest reason for BJP getting overwhelming support from this segment.

In comparison with others Bhartiya Janata Party's (BJP) social media campaign was well thought out and well planned. Their campaign slogans to woo voters were spread extensively through social media. Advertising gurus like Sam Balsara, Piyush Pandey and Prasoon Joshi were the ones who created catchy slogans like '*chai pai charcha*', '*janta maaf nahi karegi*', '*ache din aane wale hai*' and the one '*ab ki bar modi Sarkar*' which became tagline of BJP during the elections. Facebook page '*I support Narendra Modi*' had got about 8 million 'likes' and slogan '*har har modi ghar ghar modi*' went viral across social media platforms<sup>8</sup>. In order to augment the voter base websites india272.com and namonumber.com were launched by BJP. In addition to this WhatsApp no. 07820078200 was also launched to make it sure that larger number of people attend Modi's rallies and speeches. Then videos of these rallies were uploaded on the party's YouTube channel and Google plus. Therefore their social media strategy outclassed everyone else. They had planned it silently in advance and before congress party- the main rival and others could have come up with a counter strategy the game was out of their hands.

Such was the popularity of Narendra Modi on social media that his tweet '*India has won! Ache din aane wale hai*' proclaiming victory of Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2014 election became, the most retweeted tweet from India in Twitter's history. Till May 15, 2014, it had received 103,147 retweets and 72,836 likes<sup>9</sup>.

## Conclusion

PM Modi said in his victory speech "Due to social media, lies and false promises of several leaders could not go beyond the podiums of their rallies! More power to social media"<sup>10</sup>. Undoubtedly '*power of social media*' has increased and so has the presence and popularity of his rivals on various social media platforms, I am afraid that yes '*lies and false promises of several leaders could not go beyond the podiums of their rallies*'!



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