

Impact of Social Media on Politics

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Abstract

The rise of the internet in the early 1990s, has led to the increase in the world's networked population. The networked population has greater access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech and a better ability to undertake united action. Social media has become a fact of life for civil society world over, involving many actors -- regular citizens, activists, non-governmental organizations, telecommunications firms, software providers, and also governments at large. Social media revolution in the Indian political scene is real, tangible and accelerating. Keeping an eye on upcoming Lok Sabha elections, the objective of this article is to study the impact of social media viz. *Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and You Tube* on Indian politics. No doubt social media is now being seriously considered by the Indian political parties as a mean to reach out to the electorate, but will it influence the Lok Sabha Elections in the same way as in Obama's Presidential elections? Social media has gained importance with the rise in youth population in India. As they are the one who use internet the most in India. Will this social media & youth change the wave of Indian politics? This article will cover these and some more issues related to Indian politics.

Keywords: Social media, effects of social media, social media and politics, C-Governance

1. Introduction

Social Media mirrors the real world and is all about conversations. Social media facilitate the interactive web by engaging users to participate in, comment on and create content as means of communicating with social graph, other users and the public. Social media has emerged as a major tool where citizens are able to talk about the issues of day to day life and also of national importance. In 21st century, Facebook, Twitter and You tube are not just innovations in the internet world, but are fast emerging as influencers and opinion creators.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content." A social networking service is a platform to build social networks. These social network services are web based and these provide means for users to interact over the Internet. Social networking sites allow users to share ideas, pictures, posts, activities, events, and interests with people in their network. Thus, social media is a two-way avenue that doesn't just give you information, but interacts with you while giving you that information and enables interaction with other visitors also. This interaction can be in the form of asking for your comments or letting you vote on an article, or recommending movies to you based on the ratings of other people with similar interests. Social media also allows information and opinions to travel across networks, like ripples in a pond, amplifying ideas and allowing each person to participate as an opinion leader through media production and distribution, not just by passive consumption.

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2. Classification of Social Media Websites

Social media websites can be grouped as Social Networking sites, Social Bookmarking websites, social news websites, Social Photo and Video Sharing and Wikis. Social Networking sites like Facebook, Hi5 and Last.FM interact by adding friends, commenting on profiles, joining groups and having discussions. Social Bookmarking websites viz., Del.icio.us, Blinklist, Simpyinteract by tagging websites and searching through websites bookmarked by other people. Social News websites Digg, Propeller, Reddit interact by voting for articles and commenting on them. Social Photo and Video Sharing sites YouTube, Flickr etc. interact by sharing photos or videos and commenting on user submissions. Wikis. (Wikipedia, Wikia) interact by adding articles and editing existing articles.

3. Social Media and their Effects

Social media have influenced many aspects of our life be it education, culture, administration, marketing, businesses or politics. Social media have been able to make profound impact by means of news, interaction, learning and marketing. Social media has become an important source of news. Various news channels tweet or give updates on significant happenings all over the world and the news quickly gets passed around the networks in ways never experienced before. It allows people to keep in touch more regularly. People in different cities, countries and continents can keep in touch effortlessly and it creates an opportunity to experience different cultures and exchange opinions.

Social media have also played a large part in fostering learning. Children who start using the social media platforms develop early communication skills, and generally become more literate. The whole dynamics of marketing have been changed. Companies are becoming more consumer-centered through interactions made over social media. They are able to understand the needs of the market from the market itself.

3.1 Social Media and C-Governance

Social media has led to the emergence of citizen led governance (*C-governance*) in India. Anti corruption movement by Anna Hazare and protests followed by Nirbhaya gang rape were channelized through the social media. These events garnered enormous national and global support by involving the common man.

3.2 Anti-corruption Movement

Anna Hazare initiated a Satyagraha (Fasting for a noble cause) movement for passing a stronger anti-corruption Lokpal bill in the Indian Parliament. He started hunger strike when the demand was rejected by Indian government. The movement attracted attention in the media, millions of supporters inside and outside of India. People showed support through social media such as Twitter and Facebook. Online Signature Campaigns like *avaaz* got more than 10 lakh signatures in just 36 hours. This led Government to seriously consider the introduction of Lokpal bill in parliament.

3.3 Delhi Gang-rape

In December, Delhi gang rape case, which made people's collective anger to blast and come out on streets. Nationwide protests at India Gate area in New Delhi was a people's movement and it was the scruples of the people who made them come out and demand justice for Nirbhaya. Social media played a pivot role in mobilizing people to India Gate. No doubt T.V. was telecasting all the developments in the case but it was mobile phone which was updating those sitting on streets. Every news item was reaching them on their cell phone via Facebook and Twitter etc. People received the reactions of famous people who are respected and hold a special place in society on twitter and got bonded like never before. The massive protests led the government to set up Justice Verma committee to bring changes in Rape law.

Later on the Criminal Law [Amendment] Bill, 2013 was passed by the Lok Sabha on 19th March, 2013, and by the Rajya Sabha on 21st March, 2013. The amendments brought stricter punishments for the rapists.

3.4 Telangana Movement

The recent development on Telangana issue depicts a clear picture of how the social media is influencing administrative issues. On 30 July 2013, the Congress Working Committee approved recommending a motion for a separate Telangana to the central government accepting the 57 year old demand of people of region. The Telangana movement was bolstered with the active participation of students way back in 1969. Since then, students movement has been a backbone to spread the movement across the 10 districts of Telangana and making it a people's movement. Social Media has played a big role in student movement. Several facebook communities have been set up which helped bring the people together. Facebook status update or twitter update flared up the communication on the state hood issue. It also helped provide feedback on what is going right & what is wrong. You-tube also proved to be a great platform with videos of the protests & movements getting thousands of views.

Social media has also enabled greater political awareness and organization, which has in some cases rewritten entire political landscapes. The impact has been seen both in Indian political scenario and overseas. Before studying the impact of social media on Indian politics, we need to look at its impact in context of developed countries, where there is high literacy and higher prevalence of internet users.

4. Social Media and World Politics

In recent times, world politics have witnessed lot of events, where social media played a significant role. Social media led to major overhauling of the world politics. On one side long standing regimes of dictators got buried under the weight of revolutions, spearheaded by internet connectivity and on the other hand voters got influenced by the campaigns on social media.

4.1 Presidential Election in USA

A closer look at the presidential campaigns of Barack Obama will reveal the role of social media in his elections. The 2008 Obama Presidential campaign made history. Not only was Obama the first African American to be elected president, but he was also the first presidential candidate to effectively use social media as a major campaign strategy. In 2008, his campaign managers used social media effectively by sending voting reminders on Twitter and interacting with people on Facebook. When Obama announced his candidacy in 2007, Twitter had only just started and there wasn't even an iPhone yet. He was quick to pick up an innovative media to make his presence felt and effectively marketed himself.

In 2012, the scenario was totally different in United States of America, with 69 % adult social network users and 66% of social media users actively engage in political activism online. President Obama maintained a significant lead in both Facebook likes and Twitter followers over his rival Governor Romney during his election promotion. At the end of the campaign, Obama had 22.7 million followers and 32.2 million likes, compared to Romney's 1.8 million followers and 12.1 million likes (Foulger,2012). This huge difference in online followers was translated into a historic win for Barack Obama. He won the elections despite bleak economic conditions, weak dollar and high unemployment rate.

4.2 Arab Revolution

In the last three years, the political landscape in the Arab world underwent a sea change. The revolutions sprung up and led to the throwing of long regime of dictators. Many

political observers have credited social media for causing the revolutions. But the fact is that social media did not lead to the revolutions but played an important role in speeding them. In 2010-2011, an intensive campaign of civil resistance, including a series of street demonstrations took place in Tunisia, which led to the ousting of longtime President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Social media played multiple and positive role in this revolution. Initially social media led to awareness and then it led to organization and finally it cleared the clouds of misinformation in Tunisia.

In Egypt, 30 years long regime of Hosni Mubarak came to an end when unprecedented protest took place in Cairo. A 29-year-old Google marketing executive, Mr. Wael Ghonim found a photograph of a young man on the facebook, who had been brutally beaten to death by the Egyptian police. This body was of Khaled Mohamed Saeed, a young man from Alexandria. This prompted an agitated Ghonim to start a page on facebook in name of 'Saeed' to highlight the scenario in Egypt. The followers on his facebook increased from 300 to 2,50,00 in just three month. The online expression of distress spilled on the streets of Egypt, where the historic Tahrir square in Cairo was filled with waves of protesters, each shouting "We are all Khaled Saeed" (Vargas, 2012). President Hosni Mubarak was forced to resign and dissolve National Democratic Party. Social media helped the young Egyptian population to share their frustration, helped them to organize and made Egyptians realize that they all share deep antipathy against the misrule of Hosni Mubarak. President Hosni Mubarak was forced to resign and dissolve National Democratic Party.

4.3 Philippine

One of the earliest impacts of social media on politics was felt in Philippine at the turn of the century, when only through the use of text messaging a president was ousted. On January 17, 2001, during the prosecution trial of Philippine President Joseph Estrada, loyalists in the Philippine Congress voted to set aside proof against him. Within two hours, after the decision was announced, thousands of Filipinos, gathered on crossroads in Manila with the help of forwarded text messages to showcase their anger for their corrupt president. And in the next few days, over a million people arrived in downtown Manila. The country's legislators were startled by immense and speedy reaction from public and they reversed their decision and allowed the evidence to be presented. Estrada's fate was sealed and he had to quit. In this way, social media had helped force out a national leader. Estrada himself blamed "the text-messaging generation" for his downfall (Shirky, 2011).

The above events in the world politics clearly demonstrate the role social media is playing politics. These events are not limited to any one part of the world, but spread over different continents. Social networking is sometimes used by the political parties and their leaders to market themselves and spread their views and opinions. On the hand, the public uses the same media to share their views and use it against undemocratic rule and anarchy.

5. Social Media and Indian Politics

What is the impact of social media in politics of a democratic country like India? With so much 'buzz' being created about social media and as more youngsters are joining in, the political parties have finally woken up to its importance. Everyone is recognizing this new and powerful medium to interact with the masses and make them participate and thereby enabling better communication. Indian politicians, be it young or old have started experiencing the impact of social media in one form or the other. Now, almost every political party used the social media to get their message across the masses.

Political campaigns are in no way just limited to buttons and banners for politicians to reach their constituents. The new political arena is full of commercials, blog posts, and hundreds of tweets. Through social media, politicians are now able to constantly display their message through endless commercials, see direct responses to their actions via Facebook or

Twitter, and connect with public (Foley, 2013). Social media creates a new political dialogue. It takes the power of political messaging away from the mass media model and places it firmly into peer-to-peer, public discourse. The word of mouth advertising—a recommendation from someone you trust—is the most powerful form of persuasion and social media creates multiple levels of trust based on relationships.

5.1 Social Media and Political Parties

In recent times, Indian political landscape has seen two major national parties, Indian National Congress and BhartiyaJanta Party fighting an online political battle. Online propaganda is aggressively used against each other. Each and every medium is used to wage war of words. One tweet leads the other to respond immediately. The most famous tweets from both sides were, BJP calling Rahul Gandhi as ‘Pappu’ and Congress calling NarinderModi as ‘Feku’. Both the parties try to downplay the achievement and exaggerate the failures of each other. Both sides claim to have large number of followers.

The political parties have their own websites which was not seen some years back and some of them also use other social mediums to interact with people. With every party having its own website and leaders being active on different media it makes the citizens feel that they are within their reach. The need to take appointments or wait for them to talk is no longer required. The leaders are accessible at the click of a button.

The Congress party’s new vice president, Rahul Gandhi who is one of the icons of youth in India has used almost every social medium apart from actual communication to interact with the people and especially the youths. He has used social networking websites like Facebook to talk to people and prominent people as well as common man interacts at the same time. He also writes blogs to share his views with people. Mr. L. K. Advani of BharityaJanta Party has his own blog. Mr. Shashi Tharoor of Congress Party, was one of the first politicians to start tweeting. Mr. Narendra Modi, chief minister of Gujarat, has used all media to interact with people. He has been effectively using social media to disseminate information and remain in touch with the young population of India. He has often quoted that power of social media should be harnessed to involve youth in democratic process. The impact of his approach is visible in Gujarat elections.

5.2 Social Media and Karnataka Elections

Now the big question is do the online campaigns and followings convert into votes? Do the people who express views online, go to the poll booths and cast votes? Let us analyze the State Legislative elections of 2013 in Karnataka. It is home to silicon valley, i.e, Bangalore, with many people using internet. The total Population of Karnataka is 5.273 crore (52.73 million), with 33.98% people living in urban areas and rural population being 66.01%. Every political party was seen using the social medium to get their message across the masses be it Karnataka Pradesh Congress Party, Bhartiya Janata Party, Karnataka Janta Party, Janta Dal (Secular). The parties had set an IT Cell that is in charge of the official twitter, Facebook accounts, blogs and youtube Videos (Mishra, 2013).

BJP was far ahead in social networking than of its opponents. But the elections saw huge defeat for ruling BJP government. The role and usage of social media in the Karnataka elections, was limited to the urban, tech savvy youth and the social media presence did not camouflage the issues like governance, corruption. Moreover, the real challenge of political leaders was to reach out to the rural population who are the real voters, which constitutes 66.01% of state population and are largely illiterate and very meager number are tech savvy.

5.3 Social Media and Loksabha Elections

Now coming to Lok Sabha elections of 2014, will wide spreading social media change the fate of political parties? The analysis of Indian demographics needs to be studied. The

internet penetration in India is not very high. But the number of users is increasing very fast. As per the research conducted by IAMAI and IMRB International in June 2013, the Internet usage has gone up drastically, with 190 million active users in June 2013. Out of these 130 million are urban users and 60 million are rural users. Along with it there are considerable number of people using twitter and Facebook. Thirty seven per cent of urban Indian registered voters are online and use internet regularly. NRI population of India is 25 million. This population is active user of social media. Though they don't have voting rights, but they do influence the voting pattern of their relatives back home. This indicates that the number of people who directly or indirectly use or get influenced by social media is by no means a small number.

When talking about age profile of voters, facts indicate that India will be going for polling in 2014 with a younger electorate. The age group of 18-35 yrs now constitutes 31.3% of the population (Census 2011). The Election commission estimates that the number of first-time voters will go up to 149.36 million. This group is same as the one which is accessing social media 24*7. India's user base of Facebook between the age group of 18-25 (52.8%) exceeds the average across other top 15 countries (33.7%) (Source: Inside facebook Gold, data from Facebook September 2010) But the ground reality is that these internet users seldom vote.

According to the census of 2011, India's population is 121.01 crore, out of which Urban population is 377,105,760 (31.16%) According to Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) about 74% of all internet users in Urban India use social media. This indicates that social media can play a vital role in influencing urban Indian population. But the rural India population is 833,087,662 or 68.83%. Thus, a large majority of Indians live in rural areas with literacy rate of 68.91%. Previous elections have shown that the rural voter influences the results. Voting by rural people has always been more than by the urbanites. Analysis of the above figures show that since rural population is more but literacy rate is less, they are less likely to be influenced by social media, which not only requires literacy, but also a person should be tech savvy. Moreover, in India there are multiple factors which influence an individual voting decision. Indian voters, both urban and rural, keep caste, religion, community sentiments above all other considerations.

6. Conclusion

The advent of social media has enabled an unprecedented empowerment and engagement of the 'aam aadmi' for expressing political opinions. A positive development of social media emergence has been that the youth is talking about the political issues. Earlier the political discussions were restricted only to those who read newspapers, watched news channels or participated in discussions in nukkad of a village or clubs. But now, social networking has made the youth of India to sit up and discuss political issues. They spend time to analyze and discuss politics. They now have views on the happenings of political events and they also influence the administrative decision making. But getting the youngsters together to vote in elections and using social media as a platform to help political parties is still a pipeline dream. It may take decades in India to replicate USA in the use of social media campaigning and to influence the voters. Social media revolution in the Indian political space is real, tangible and accelerating. Though it may not bring in huge changes immediately, but still it will play an important role in creating political awareness, which in itself is a huge step forward for a developing country like India.

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