

Social Media and Politics

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Abstract: Information superhighway has triggered a revolution globally. Its impact touches each and every aspect of human life. Especially social media as new media has not only changed but has also created new avenues of communication. Recently social media has also transformed how political news and views disseminate. Its implications can also be seen even in case of politics. Politicians are widely using social media for political campaigns and for propaganda purposes due to its wide reach and enormous impact on participatory democracy. Social media such as Twitter, Facebook have been acting like virtual public place leading to productive political discussion and citizen engagement.

Keywords: social media, politics, political communication, digital propaganda

New media have transformed interpersonal interaction and has altered all kinds of communication on the whole including political communication. Recent times social media has emerged as popular tool of political communication too. The propagation of political messages through social media has gained lots of momentum in recent years. Being a true mass media social media has this great potentiality to reach and impact a large aggregate of people instantaneously.

ICT has not only changed interpersonal interaction but has also revolutionised public and discussion and discourse. New media and technology have changed interpersonal interaction, communication patterns and even socio-political discussion (Admed et al.,2019). Social media as tool of political communication creating communication disseminating political information to the public and conducting two-way interaction with the public.

Mahmud and Amin (2017) explained the role of social media in political discussions and activities and reported that there is a relationship between online activity and offline political participation. Similarly, Schmiemann (2015) investigated the impact of social networking sites on political participation and found that political content on Facebook has a positive impact on political engagement and participation. Gibson and McAllister (2012) studied on online social ties and political discussions and engagement on social

media platforms and concluded that social media platforms increase political interaction. Furthermore, they found that online political interaction enhances real-life political participation. Papagiannidis and Manika (2016) likewise examined through different online and offline channels about the online engagement and political participation. The findings show that media and different other online channels provide opportunity to individuals for involvement and expressing themselves freely. Like individual attitudes, digital media usage and offline political participation too varies

The arrival of the political “Twitterverse” which has become a locus of communication between politicians, citizens and the press has coarsened political discourse, nurtured “rule by tweet and advanced the spread of misinformation. The possibility of new media development is vast and all encompassing.

The power of social media to influence politics is boosted due to its ability to amplify messages quickly through varied media platforms. Social media has become steady news sources of political content for news outlets with large audience. Digital technology first supported platforms where users could browse through manifestos, documents and brochures about political parties, but soon introduced sites with more interactive features. The public gained greater political agency through technological affordances that allowed them to react to political events and issues, communicate directly to candidates and political leaders, contribute original news, images, videos, and political content, and engage in political activities, such as working on behalf of candidates, raising funds, and organizing protests. At the same time, journalists acquired pioneering mechanisms for reporting stories and reaching audiences. Politicians amassed new ways of conveying messages to the public, other elites, and the press, influencing constituents’ opinions, recruiting volunteers and donors, and mobilizing voters (Davis and Owen, 1998; Owen, 2017a).

Social media has grown into massive platform for consuming news and sharing political information. In case of Twitter, over 70% of its users’ report using this platform for news (Shearer and Katerina,2018)

and political debates on Twitter have been shown to substantially impact public opinion, both on national (Gorodnichenko, Pham, & Talavera, 2018). Indeed, the presence of millions of users on social networks has proven valuable. Activity on Twitter has been found to have positive consequences for political candidates (Kruikemeier, 2014), and was even shown to be a powerful predictor of election results (Teran & Yirgu, 2019). Accordingly, the increasing impact of social networks on political discourse has set the stage for the emergence of a new type of marketing: political marketing in social networks (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2013).

Fundamentally Political marketing on social media rests indents to influence and sway public opinion on a debated matter toward a desired direction (Shama, 1975). During elections the trend of promoted debates is pressing priority in recent times. Systematized and hi-tech Digital marketing and advertising get at most importance during elections. This has been true even in 2023 elections in Karnataka. The budget and allocation of digital advertising reflects all-time high in recent years.

The advent of social media such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter led to a modernisation of political communication (Bimber & Davis, 2003; Carpenter, 2010). Politicians around the world have increasingly sought to capitalize on the new opportunities offered by the Web 2.0 applications and they embarked on new campaigning strategies, new modes of fundraising, mobilization and information gathering.

The new media has touched politics to a considerable extent. It has left great impact on participatory democracy. Social media such as twitter, Facebook have been acting like virtual public place leading to productive political discussion and citizen engagement. Despite the flourishing use of ICTs in political campaigning, there are still questions over their substantial capabilities to empower democracy by fostering greater participation, encouraging political conversation and improving interactive information-sharing (Coleman, 2001; Jackson, 2007).

Politicians are using social media for presenting their own achievements and proposals, presenting their own pre-electoral activity, appealing to the people, downgrading/accusing Political Rivals.

Based on the original concept of the public sphere (as introduced by Habermas), there are two elements which are important for analysis of Twitter: firstly,

(a) the public sphere entails a ‘forum’ which is accessible to as many people as possible (providing an opportunity for participatory communication), and secondly, (b) the debates taking place should be characterized by rational argumentation.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant (1795/1983) also mentioned public sphere as the space for “public use of reason” (referring here to mutual respect among the interlocutors, ability to negotiate and other principles of reasonable and just public debate). Moreover, Kirk & Schill’s (2011) study about the new communication technologies as a digital agora, further argues that Twitter integrates and synthesizes the essential elements which could possibly constitute this online application as a digital public sphere.

The internet has turned out to be the greatest innovative form of public space ever existed. a digital Agora inclusive of everyone, intends to eliminate all boundaries. the incredible information flow of which its constituted is provided by gigantic number of users, with the data they are deliberately providing as well as metadata which is automatically inherited by their existence. When entering the room, the visitor is confronted to an endless scroll of text, constituted of a real time monitoring of the most trending topics on twitter. The text is transformed in an unreadable flow due to the incredible amount of data created worldwide, making each voice inaudible. Walking towards the screen, the shape of the visitors is materialized by particles emerging from the data flow, modelling the individual from the community. The shape is responding to the movement of the visitor but its structure is constantly changing, reflecting the plurality of the individual components. The visitors of the event can influence their representation by sending a tweet including the hashtag #untaggable. This work aims to reflect on the relationship between the physical world and its virtual depiction, considering the ephemeral quality of the digital world as a crucial aspect for the viewer’s representation. This virtual environment offers a combination between a depiction of the physical space of the installation, responding to the analog paradigm “here and now”, and at the same time, the digital agora represented by the never-ending flow of real time data on social medias.

Kirk & Schill (2011) examine the digital agora created by citizen participation and in this sense “the agora resulted in a discursive space where citizens found voice, directly questioned candidates, and

engaged each other in political discussions.” Up to date, the interactive nature of Twitter has triggered intense debates about whether its employment enhances or not political dialogue and political participation.

Twitter’s uniqueness has been praised by many scholars. Kennedy (2008) contends Twitter has converted into a powerful tool for campaign reporting and mobilizing and Davis (2010) that it is a crucial platform for the dissemination of news and information. Coleman and Blumler (2009) reasoned that social media could offer a more intimate and conversational relationship between politicians and citizens, and Graham, Broersma and Hazelhoffas (2013) devised the term ‘connected representation’ amplifying that Twitter make it possible for representation to be rooted in lasting connections between citizens and politicians and it also generates a sense of proximity, visibility and continuity.

Praising the dynamic of Twitter, Carpenter (2010) claims that “Twitter has proven to be amazingly adept at two things: politically engaging the average citizen and empowering its users to participate as citizen journalists. Twitter is a one-to-one and one-to-many communications’ powerhouse available to anyone with a cell phone or computer. It is a link entitled to real-time constituent consciousness, and it is marketed as a technology that directly taps into this collective consciousness.” Twitter has the potential to contribute to political conversation. First, followers are able to respond to others. This process is known as @replies. Honeycutt & Herring (2009) found that around 30 per cent of tweets were @replies. Another aspect of Twitter that is considered interactive is retweeting. Retweets are the re-posting of the tweets of another sender, similar to e-mail forwarding, therefore a way of maximizing the reach of a certain message. In addition, a retweet is a type of conversation: While retweeting can simply be seen as the act of copying and rebroadcasting, the practice contributes to a conversational ecology in which conversations are composed of a public interplay of voices that give rise to an emotional sense of shared conversational context (Small, 2011, p. 878). Moreover, retweeting particular messages such as party self-promotional tweets could also be seen as a persuasion or propaganda activity employed in order to influence people in a unilateral way.

Alternatively, wide-ranging literature identifies that there is considerable hesitation with regard to the potential of Twitter to foster the political dialogue

while several scholars are rather coy regarding the over appraisal surrounding Twitter as a new tool of political communication. Magolis & Resnick (2000), having examined the effects of the Internet on American politics, they argued that the American political system tends to normalize political activity, and thus we witness new media in which old patterns of political behavior and information flows are played out. To further illustrate this case, Larsson & Moe (2011) having examined Twitter users in the 2010 Swedish election campaign stated that their findings indicate that Twitter falls somewhat short of the expectations held by those most optimistic on behalf of the democratic and disruptive potential of new web tools. In the same line, Golbeck, Grimes, and Rogers (2010) coined the term ‘vehicles for self-promotion’ to label the tweets they examined from Members of the US Congress. The term denotes a use of Twitter which resembles.

Social media and American politics

The development of social media, like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, from platforms facilitating networks among friends to influential political tools has been a significant development. The political role of social media in American politics was recognized during the 2008 presidential election.

Xenos & Moy (2007) views “a critical turning point” in the use of social media, have been more optimistic. The innovative and extensive use of social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and MySpace in the 2008 and 2012 U.S. presidential campaigns has been the watershed event for modern political communication. In the 2004 U.S. presidential campaigns, Vermont Governor Howard Dean successfully used the new applications for fundraising and mobilization (Trippi, 2004; Carpenter, 2010; Veneti, 2014).

Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama’s social-media strategy revolutionized campaigning by altering the structure of political organizing. Obama’s campaign took on the characteristics of a social movement with strong digital grassroots mobilization (Bimber, 2014). The campaign exploited the networking, collaborating, and community-building potential of social media. It used social media to make personalized appeals to voters aided by data analytics that guided targeted messaging. Voters created and amplified messages about the candidates without going through formal campaign organizations or political parties (Stromer-Galley, 2016)., In 2008’s Presidential

election campaign the user/voter generated media content such as BarelyPolitical.com's "Obama Girl" and will.i.am's "Yes, We Can," became not only popular but also became viral. Obama's official campaign organisation actually gained by the this unprompted, voters 's voluntary publicity efforts. This also preceded\continued in 2012 presidential election campaign.

Social media's political function in campaigns, government, and political movements, as well as their role in the news media ecosystem, has rapidly broadened in reach, consequence, and complexity. Bruce Bimber points out: "The exercise of power and the configuration of advantage and dominance in democracy are linked to technological change". Who controls, consumes, and distributes information is largely determined by who is best able to navigate digital technology. Social media have emerged as essential intermediaries that political and media actors use to assert influence. Political leaders have appropriated social media effectively to achieve political ends, ever-more frequently pushing the boundaries of discursive action to extremes. Donald Trump's brash, often reckless, use of Twitter had enabled him to communicate directly to the public, stage-manage his political allies and detractors, and control the news agenda. Aided by social media, he had exceeded the ability of his modern-day presidential predecessors to achieve these ends. Social media platforms facilitate the creation and sustenance of ad hoc groups, including those on the alt-right and far left of the political spectrum. These factors have encouraged the ubiquitous spread of false information that threatens to undermine democratic governance that relies on citizens' access to quality information for decision-making.

Social media and European politics: social media are progressively revolutionising the ways in which political communication works, and their importance for engaging citizens in politics and public affairs admired by world political leaders /actors. The role and impact of social media in respect with politics in a range of Central and Eastern European countries, including Ukraine and Russia is immense on people. Social media is widely used by politicians, journalists and civic activists, and its impact on the different social and cultural backgrounds of the countries cannot be ignored. political situations, such as the 2012 protests in Moscow and the 2014 EuroMaidan events in

Ukraine are noteworthy there in social media played an important role. The relationship between social media and politics is likely to develop in near future might affect the still relatively new democracies in the region

Asian political scenario: In Asian political scenario the prevalence of social media is having transformative impact on democracy. During elections Facebook, twitter and Instagram WhatsApp are having radical impact on public discourse. These platforms have the potentiality to immensely increase political participation particularly for marginalised groups. And on the other hand, the other hand they are being used to silence opposition/disagreement, spread misinformation. Easy to access smartphone and usage of social media allows previously excluded people to participate in the public debate and floating elites to take notices. On one hand people are given a voice in public debate and on the other hand the misinformation problem poses the risk of reducing freedom of speech and expression.

Social media and Australian politics

In recent electoral cycles social media has played a pivotal role in Australian political campaigning. Since 2007 social media is being used in politics rapidly. Even then Prime Minister John Howard released several messages on Facebook and YouTube; these were somewhat ineptly produced, but nonetheless demonstrated that such platforms would need to form part of the communicative arsenal of modern election campaigns (**Bruns et al.,2007**) Australian are comparatively early enthusiastic adopters of social media (**Sensis,2017**) and more than half now use social media as a key source of news in recent times.

Politicization of social media in India

In Indian political history the 2014 general elections were regarded as the first social media election. The usage of social media has revolutionised the Indian politics. Prior to 2009 election only few politicians had tweeter account, but by 2014 elections all most all prominent political parties not only started effective IT wing for themselves but also successfully explored and launched social media campaign.

In Indian political scenario political discussion and discourse on social media has reached to next level. In 2009 congress politician Shashi Tharoor

extensively used twitter to connect with social media/online users through tweeting. He showed how politicians can make use of social media for political purpose. His followers increased from 6000 to 2.16 million in 2009. Even Narendra Modi Prime Ministerial candidate of BJP led NDA in 2014 had highest followers on twitter.15 million follower on Facebook. Social media political campaigns were a key reason for BJP's success. Even though this trend started late in India but in recent years it has geared up and today it is thriving. BJP and Narendra Modi have become the pioneer in taping the new media. Modi made use of all social media outlets Dashboards, google Hangouts, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and YouTube to its full potential. Though new media outlets BJP launched digital and branding campaign in a systematic manner. Modi undertook the largest mass outreach in Indian electoral history. Bharathiya Janatha Party (BJP) launched Digital India campaign July 2019 connecting 2,50,000 villages. The drive intended to increase digital presence in India. This was considered as digital political marketing effort of BJP. Almost all major political parties such as BJP, AAP (Aam Admi Party) and Indian National Congress made use of digital political marketing in elections. Online political campaign of CM Naveen Patnaik in Orissa was interesting as he extensively made use of social media in Odisha Politics in 2014 elections. BJP's social media usage in the central elections of 2014 are some prevalent examples in Indian politics. Social media has become hub of political campaigning and activism. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Mann ki Baat' was also live streamed on YouTube and Facebook.

Social media has not only supported the 'Avaaz' campaign for the Anna Hazare's anticorruption Lokpal Bill but also within 36 hours 500000 of people stood with **Anna Hazare** in 2011. There was a call on to endorse the Jan Lokpal bill and act urgently to implement effective measures to tackle corruption. And in later days the Government given in and met his demands. Social media not only supported "**We stand with Anna Hazare**" **movement** but it also led it towards the success. Telangana movement led to the formation of new state. The Telangana movement revitalized with the growth of digital media. it provided a platform for people to interaction and for public debate. These platforms managed to create a sense of betrayal among people of Telangana that their opportunities are being exploited by the Seemandhra people in

Andhra Pradesh state. The most striking feature of Telangana movement in terms of social media usage is that the users employed them as tools to dissent their voice Hundreds of Telangana supporters created Facebook pages highlighting the miserable plight of people in the region. They created Facebook Fan Pages and Groups, popular applications allowing anyone with shared interests to participate in discussion forums and threads. Facebook, Youtube and twitter provided a technical platform to users to interact with each other and generate content together in a virtual community, in contrast to passive viewers of the mass media content. It along with Internet allowed Telangana movement to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and disseminated alternative news/views. Moreover, the Facebook supplemented the Telangana movement by increasing the protesters' activism which is necessary for a prolonged contestation of authority with interactions between the challengers and powerholders. The various interactive Facebook features enabled the proponents of Telangana to launch the online virtual movement and the offline real protests. However, the users of Facebook pointed an accusatory finger at Semmandhra rulers for injustice meted out to Telangana through their comments, posts and videos that subsequently prompted for collective action. The supporters of Telangana movement adopted new technology to unite people for the common cause and rebutted the arguments made by Seemandhra people for the convenience of united Andhra Pradesh. **Kishore Kumar Gadari(2017)** Especially social media such as Youtube, Twitter ,and Facebook were widely used in order to achieve the statehood for Telangana by the netizens.

In Indian political scene there is excessive acceleration of political activity on social media before elections. Major parties other than mainstream media campaign also opt for online campaigns exhibiting manifestos and prevalent promises on social media. social media exit polls have become popular too. Various political activism is telecasted live on social media. Social media is and will continue to become an important platform for electoral campaign in future elections. In current political situation social media will a game changing platform. Time and time again ICT have proved and promoted accountability, transparency and public engagement with political institutions. However, social media are swiftly becoming standard

communications tools for political figures and institutions and the citizens they serve.

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