

EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS EFFECT ON POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

The recent trends in politics have demonstrated the viable role that social media play in propagating the political actions of the political parties, government and other political institutes. From Political Participation to Political Communication, Political Behaviour impacts all such factors, and social media acts as a catalyst for political behaviour. The 2014 Elections in India that saw for the first time extensive use of Social media in election campaigns, apart from that, the 2009 Iranian revolution, 2012 Arab Spring and the 2016 US Presidential Elections, all these political events demonstrated the reach and impact of social media on politics. With over a billion combined users across the globe, social media is seen as a major platform for political actions. It culminates opinions and influences the reactions of citizens. Its unparalleled reach amongst the youngster has prompted the political agents to resort to social media. In addition to the vast audience that it caters to, social media is the fastest medium to communicate a message at mass level. Its reach across the borders without hassle aids in shaping opinions on International Political subjects. It can be used to create pressure from outside the country or to influence other country's citizens for their support or dissent, as the case may be.

This paper aims at studying the impact of social media on political behaviour. Objectives of this paper were chosen after much deliberation on contemporary political trends and changes that have occurred since the beginning of this century. The primary aim is to understand the various components of political behaviour that are influenced by social media and also to elucidate upon the manner in which such influence is exerted. Further, merits and demerits of social media's impact on politics have been analysed critically to reach a fair and just conclusion. This paper coalesces the analysis of various published researches, surveys and

annals of political events. For the purpose of this paper data has been gathered from authentic secondary sources pertaining to the study of political science and specifically the developments in the theories of political behaviour in post-behaviour revolution era.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades Internet has developed tremendously encompassing a wide array of services. Internet has not only made communications easier but has also opened new ways of trade and commerce. Internet propelled the development of scope in the field of telecommunication and networking. Development of internet has had effects on various subjects. From science to politics every sphere of human knowledge has been revamped. Just as radio and television had an immense impact on elections, internet has had on elections. The 2008 US Presidential Elections have showed unprecedented impact of internet in politics. It not only influenced political participation but also demonstrated how political communication and political knowledge can also be regulated via internet more precisely through Social Networking Sites (SNSs). Dissemination of political knowledge has changed tremendously due to SNSs.

Social networking sites have been used to mobilise individuals to protest all over the world. Some examples are the London youth demonstrations of 2011, due to the high level of unemployment among young adults, the 2009 Iranian protests against the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, or the Egyptian social movements augmented by Twitter and Facebook, when President Mubarak shut down the Internet for five days. Social media has transmuted how communications are done. Social media also provides a larger platform as it has reaches beyond the territorial jurisdiction of a state. Seamless flow of information coupled with fast speed has made internet the ultimate mode of communication. Internet is used to culminate opinion, raise funds, propagation of sociological ideas, discussions and various other activities that influence political behaviour of individual.

Furthermore, to understand the impact of social media on politics it is important to understand its impact on individuals and see how political behaviour is influenced by internet, particularly through social media. This would require an insight into how social media has influenced

political knowledge and political behaviour. Social media has been widely used to culminate political opinions and views and gather support.

Secondary resources have been used in the making of this paper. Previous published surveys and political science papers have also been used to reach the conclusion of this research paper. Information has been gathered from a variety of sources. They are internet articles, newspaper articles, journals and books. The scope of this research was kept limited to studying political behaviour and social media. For the purpose of this paper various factors that influenced political behaviour were studied. The objectives set-out for this paper-

- To briefly study the definition of Political Behaviour and outline its key components.
- To trace the development of Social Media as a tool of Political Communication.
- To analyse the influence of Social Media on Political Behaviour.

POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR AND ITS KEY COMPONENTS

Political behaviour developed as a result of the introduction of Behaviour approach in Study of political science. Political Scientists like David Easton, Karl Deustsch, Theodore Adrono etc., were the key proponents of this school. They based their study of politics on this new approach and criticized the traditional approach. Behavioralist used empirical method to validate their studies.¹ Behavioralism, which was one of the dominant approaches in the 1950s and '60s, is the view that the subject matter of political science should be limited to phenomena that are independently observable and quantifiable. It assumes that political institutions largely reflect underlying social forces and that the study of politics should begin with society, culture, and public opinion. To this end, behavioralists utilize the methodology of the social sciences—primarily psychology—to establish statistical relationships between independent variables (presumed causes) and dependent variables (presumed effects).² For example, a behavioralist might use detailed election data to support his argument that the voter of certain area which is

¹Guy, James John (2000-08-01). *People, Politics and Government: A Canadian Perspective*. Pearson Education Canada.

² Sofroniou, Andrews (2017). *Political System Norms and Laws*.

rural, tend to vote for conservative politician where else that of another area, a rather more urban setting, would vote for a liberal politician. This approach thus not only considered the intuition behind an action but also relied on statistical data to supplement their findings and validate them. One of the notable contribution to behaviorist revolution was made by David Easton. He laid down characteristics of Behaviour revolution:-³

1. Regularities –

That there exist uniformity of behaviour amongst the individuals regarding the proposed subject or idea. It regards that the individuals behave in an uniform manner towards a certain subject.

2. Verification –

It connotes to the ability to verify the generalization. As behaviorist relied upon statistics, they were able to verify their findings with the help of the data collected.

3. Techniques –

Behaviorist use various methods borrowed from other sciences to collect and interpret data in order to eliminate every possible discrepancy in the results. They adopted a more methodological way.

4. Quantification –

Every data is tried to be represented in numbers.

5. Values –

Behaviourists, unlike the trend in earlier days when political behaviour was associated with normative ways ie., - in perspective of values and norms, were cautious while analysing data as they tend to keep values based judgement and empirical judgement different.

6. Systematisation –

It refers to the importance of theory. This speaks of the importance behaviourists gave to structure in their research. Their research aimed at finding the truth or a general principle to form part of a theory.

7. Pure Science –

³ Riemer, Neal (1997). *The New World of Politics: An Introduction to Political Science*. Rowman & Littlefield. ISBN 0-939693-41-0.

Behaviourist adopt the methods of natural science in their research and thus attach great importance and pride to their conclusion and on its efficiency and reliability.

Further Political Behaviour is influenced by Political Participation, Political culture and Political Communication.⁴ To understand how social media exerts its influence on political behaviour it is important to understand what the thrusts of political behaviour are.

- 1. Political Culture** – It refers to the state of political awareness in the society or amongst the citizens. It is the state of awareness of citizens on political issues and stakes.
- 2. Political Participation** – it has to do with the involvement of citizens in the political affairs of the country. Participation can be direct or indirect, or by influencing the composition of the government, or policies that are made and the practices that are instituted.
- 3. Political Communication** – importance of political communication can be shown by the fact that many state tend to regulate the media such as TV, radio, Social media and concerned about the kind of information which is disseminated in their polity regarding them. Political communication influences opinion on issues of politics and has a major influence on political behaviour.

EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS TOOL OF COMMUNICATION IN POLITICS

WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

Social media are computer-related technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks. They are interactive webpages and provides user-generated content. Social media links the profile of users with each other to facilitate the development of online social network.⁵ Social Media has rapidly grown in importance as a forum for political activism in its different forms. Social

⁴ Alan, B. (1965) *Modern' Politics and Government*, London, Macmillan Press.

⁵ Obar, Jonathan A.; Wildman, Steve (2015). "Social media definition and the governance challenge: An introduction to the special issue". *Telecommunications policy*. 39 (9): 745–750.

media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube provide new ways to stimulate citizen engagement in political life, where elections and electoral campaigns have a central role.

Personal communication via social media brings politicians and parties closer to their potential voters. It allows politicians to communicate faster and reach citizens in a more targeted manner and vice versa, without the intermediate role of mass media. Reactions, feedback, conversations and debates are generated online as well as support and participation for offline events. Messages posted to personal networks are multiplied when shared, which allow new audiences to be reached.

Prior to the advent of technological platforms political actions and politics excluded a large mass of population. Thus there was little or no participation on the part of individuals in politics. With the development of telecommunication and internet people have been included in the political processes, and in the politics of the country. They are now able to discuss, create activist group, and organize demonstration at a larger scale. Social media has enabled them to reach to a wide array of audience in a short duration. This allows for efficient and more spontaneous communication amongst the citizens. Also it makes the state more accountable and its activities more transparent.

Social media has proved to be ubiquitous and most efficient mode of dissemination of information. In the case of Philippine President who was ousted due to mass protest mainly organized through text messaging in 2001 marks one of the earliest interjection of social media and political behaviour, thus affecting the politics. Later in 2004, Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Estrada was forced to quit his office due to mass protest organized swiftly under aegis of social media and text messaging. These were the times when SNSs were still on the rise as the now prominent SNSs like Facebook and Twitter were started in 2004 & 2006 respectively.

It was the 2008 US presidential elections that saw massive usage of SNSs in which Barack Obama was quick to gain an upper hand. It can't be denied that massive popularity of Obama during the elections on internet helped him win the elections. Political institutes have been quick to understand the role that social media can play. That is why in the second decade many nations have reformed their old laws regarding print media and social media. Later on in Iran in 2009, social media played a pivotal role in the Presidential elections that saw the return of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to office for the second consecutive term. Anonymity of identity on

internet played crucial role in its popularity. Platforms such as twitter and blogs coupled with their widespread base and ability to remain anonymous allowed them organize protest and activist groups. Although the protest didn't bear fruit it rather led to more stringent laws on social media in Iran. Similarly Belarus email campaign which was protesting against the second term of President Aleksandr Lukashenko, when the protest were crushed, he adopted a strict policy towards social media. Similarly ill-fated was the 2010 Red Shirt Uprising in Thailand.

SOCIAL MEDIA IN INDIAN POLITICS

Media plays an important role in the democracy, it is often termed as the fourth arm of democracy. It acts as a watchdog and protects against abuse of power. During election campaigns the media provides information and analysis about the political parties' programmes, policies, candidates and performance. In a similar way, social media has also transformed politics in India and globally. Its effect has impacted the way candidate campaign for their election. Social media allows politicians and political parties a method to connect directly with people across the country at a reduced cost and greater reach than traditional media. Social media is not simply the next in a line of communications technologies: it has also changed everyday activities and connected people in a manner never before possible.

General election in 2014 conducted to constitute the 16th lok sabha witnessed a prolific use of social media in the election. Platform like Facebook, twitter, Youtube were used for general awareness both by government and political parties to promote voting, marketing/promotion of their propaganda.⁶

Social media was used for –

1. General Awareness –

Social media platforms were used to make public about party and their candidate, it was used to share their profile manifesto and view. Several NGO's used it to popularize the importance of voting and encouraging voting. Google introduced "Google Election Tracker", and Pledge to Vote campaign. Facebook also started an election tracker "Facebook election tracker" and started a Talk series which featured some famous

⁶ Kemp, Simon (2014). "Social, Digital and Mobile in India".

politicians. Thus, as evident social media was used to promote and spread awareness about elections and political parties.

2. Marketing –

According to ASSOCHAM, less than 10% of total marketing budget of all political parties was utilised in social media based marketing. Also, new innovative methods were used by PR's of Political parties to grasp the advantage via social media sites. Features like real time conversation to many people aided in garnering such popularity of politicians in such a short span. It is estimated that As many as 70% first time voters (12 crore) of the age group between 18-23 years were believed to be using social media platforms.⁷ And hence to capture this significant chunk of the voters, political parties geared up their efforts to fit themselves into the communication habits of such people.

3. Poll Prediction and Trend analysis –

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is also a quite popular technique that is generally used by the corporate people. In this technique a person or an organization can improve their chances of getting reflected as the top search result in Google. Many times it is done through some algorithm, however in this election paid marketing (known as content marketing) were used more. This method has been used adopted with few modifications to stimulate exit poll results based on the trends. It even involved some running a virtual election and where every user was asked to cast their virtual vote.⁸

Thus, social media has had an intense amount of effect on Indian Politics and has also affected the political culture. This has certainly led to a new age of political communication and for politics in general. Most government now tend to remain active on social media and SNSs to maintain their popularity. Various political institutes use social media to promote their idea and propaganda.

The initial usage of social media in India was demonstrated during the national elections of 2009 when for the first time online voter registration and transparency campaigns started.⁹ Social media has allowed politicians to communicate with the voters uninterrupted. It allows

⁷ Social media and Lok Sabha Elections: A report by IAMAI available on http://www.esocialsciences.org/General/A2013412184534_19.pdf (last visited : 20/1/2018).

⁸ A case study on Strategy and tactics behind creation of brand Narendra Modi by Shamni Pandey, Business Today.

⁹ Open Source centre 2010 (OSC). Media Aid: Overview of Leading Indian Social media.

them to post presumptive political agenda and also it helps in mobilizing public to hold discussions and demonstrations.

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON POLITICS

All these events have demonstrated the far reaching impact of social media on politics. Social media in all these events has been used to achieve Political communication. This is achieved as opinions, views, ideas are shared and propagated around a large audience, thus enables a political issue to reach many people who might participate in that matter. It increases participation in either direct or indirect way. Participation is achieved by allowing individuals to vote which is largely formed on the basis of political culture which is synthesized using political communication thus, social media creates a ripple across various factor that govern the political behaviour.

Social media though important may not really play a decisive role. As many analyst argue that social media did play an important role in communicating but did not play a decisive role. It rather acted as a catalyst.¹⁰ Although later on in a survey by a Dubai government related office, on the basis of the analysis of growth rate on Facebook and Twitter, changes in traffic, and demographic conclusion, it was concluded by the authors of the report that social media played a vital role in mobilization, empowerment, shaping opinions and influencing change during the Arab Spring.¹¹

It can though largely be said that social media is much of a megaphone. Its impact on Political Communication, Political Knowledge and Political Culture is not uniform. It casts a huge influence on Political communication which is then reflected as political behaviour. A study by United States of Peace based on short URL links from Tunasia, Bahrain, Egypt and Libya gathered data which later on showed that social media helped in spreading information outside region and not much else.¹²

¹⁰ Stepanova, Eketerina. (2011) "The role of Information Communication technologies in the "Arab Spring".

¹¹ Salem, Fadi; Mourtada, Racha (May 2011). "Civil Movements: The Impact of Facebook and Twitter".

¹² Aday, Sean, Henry Farrell, Marc Lynch, John Sides, and Deen Freelon. "Blogs and Bullets II: New Media Peaceworks: United States Institute for Peace. July 2012.

On the basis of such events following is a list of the ways in which politics has changed politics; behaviour and politics –

1. Direct Contact –

Social media allows for a direct contact with large audience at a particular time, this allows the political actors to interact by circumventing the traditional paid and print media.

2. Advertising –

Various political institutes use social media to advertise that too without any cost. Especially political parties for the purpose of campaign. This allows them to use the large subscriber base of these established platforms.

3. Fundraising –

Some campaigns use social media for the purpose of raising large amounts. It allows institutes to gather support and seek financial aid in form of fund-raiser.

4. Controversial –

Social media often causes controversy, due to the absence of any nodal regulating authority to filter the content which is published on the social media.

5. Feedback –

Social media allows for receiving feedback, which can be used to form policies, feedback allows for the political institutes to better cater to the needs of the people.

Social media can be something of a double-edged sword for politicians. The EU has plenty of experience in this regard, from the European Commission being accused of racism and sexism in its YouTube videos, to the British Liberal Democrat MEP being reprimanded by his party over a badly-timed tweet last week, to the Flemish MEP who appeared in a decidedly odd video on YouTube in 2006. These kind of gaffes, however, have always been a part of politics. Furthermore, there exists minimal guarantee of authenticity on social media as the content can be easily put up under different identity to circulate false information. In fact, it is more likely that an article on social media might have been wrong and yet would have been promoted amongst the readers. Such acts can't be watched very precisely it becomes to impossible to filter such huge quantity of data. Therefore, reliability of content is always an issue regarding the social media.

Thus social media is still hangs in the cross-hair. Due to its efficiency in delivering message and mobilizing mass it has become indispensable for political parties and other various political actors to prevent the usage of social media in politics. Further the ability to disseminate information across nations and reach wider public and gather popularity. Due to the use of social media in politics many politicians have started maintaining public profiles on SNSs. Although, sufficient examples have been presented from time to time to understand the cons of social media, yet it has had an unflinching effect on the rising role of social media in politics. Absence of genuineness is a major drawback. In addition to that the ability to stay anonymous makes it even more difficult to trace the source of an article on social media. Often rumours are circulated by rivals to diminish the popularity amongst public. Such practices make social media a dangerous tool to use in politics. Social media has demonstrated its ability to influence Political Behaviour of individuals by controlling what and individual sees and what an individual reads on internet thus culminating support for their agenda.

CONCLUSION

Although the presence of social media is spreading and media use patterns are changing, online political engagement is largely restricted to people already active in politics and on the Internet. Other audiences are less responsive. For example, television news together with print and online newspapers are still the most important sources of political information in most EU Member States.

Social media has reshaped structures and methods of contemporary political communication by influencing the way politicians interact with citizens and each other. They have enabled them to transmit a wide array of news from multiple subjects at one time. Also the viewers could be from outside the nation also and hence attract foreign support. It was also seen that social media served as forum of discussion on internet which allows people to put forth their view. It allowed people to exchange ideas on political subjects. The large subscriber base offered by these sites play a crucial role. According to Pew research centre there were 2.1 billion monthly active users on Facebook across the globe as of first quarter of 2017.¹³ This gives a slight hint of social media's range and the amount of viewership it offers to political

¹³ Available at www.pewinternet.org/trends/daily_internet_activities_7.22.08.htm (last visited on 20/1/2018).

actors. It allows disseminates various political information and indulge in political communication. Features such live podcast, and live real-time video streaming has allowed politicians to stay close to the public virtually. Although such features seem to have little or no use in rural area, which so happens to be a prominent demographic percentage. In fact, it has been observed that most of the political participation on social media is received from urban area. Political behaviour amongst individuals saw major changes as social media influenced their thoughts on politics and issues of politics.

In spite of all its advantages it does contain some lacunae. Social media offers anonymity which allows miscreants to give effect to mischief without being noticed. This poses insecurity to political participation as the person participating will remain anonymous and might create problem for a political institute. For this reason many nations have adopted a strict policy towards social media. Such nations are China, Iran, N Korea, Brunei, Belarus etc. Secondly, social media fails to filter the content that is published. As social media is a basically network of individuals in virtual space where they interact, more than often content available on social media is a production of an individual may not be true. It is left upon the user to verify the fact.

Social media have become an integral part of public discourse and communication in the contemporary society. The fast development of social media has caused major changes pertaining the way people find groups of individuals with similar interests, the nature of information, the available news sources, or the possibility to require and share ideas¹⁴. It has had major effects on fields such as advertising, public relations, communications, and political communication.¹⁵

More recently, the prominence of social media has been particularly highlighted in politics, given the fact that the use of social networking sites (Facebook) and microblogging services (Twitter) are believed to have the potential of positively influencing political participation.

¹⁴ Stieglitz, S. and Dang-Xuan, L. (2012) "Social media and political communication: a social media analytics framework." Springer-Verlag 2012

¹⁵ Husain, K., Abdullah, A.N, Ishak, M., Kamarudin, M.F., Robani, A., Mohin, M., Hassan, S. (2014). "A Preliminary Study of Effects of Social Media in Crisis Communication from Public Relations Practitioners" Views", p. 223 – 227, Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences.

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