

Changing Structures of Contemporary Political Communication: A Review of Literature Related to Social Networking Sites in the Indian Political Context

Darshan B.M, Kalyani Suresh

Department of Mass Communication, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amrita University, Coimbatore – 641112, India.

Abstract— Social media is a highly influential and powerful medium of communication in today's world. The medium has changed the structure and roots of contemporary political communication (Tenhunen & Karvelyte, 2014). Social media gives platform to the politicians and political parties to interact and exchange information to their voters (audience). Social networking sites are upgrading the methods and structures of political communication from traditional to digital. This article reviews various studies conducted by authors on social media use in political communication in the Indian scenario. Research articles were collected by Google search using the key words *social media*, *political communication*, *India*, and *research* and the first ten pages that the search threw up were considered. From that repository, relevant articles published during the time frame of 2014 – 2016 were selected and reviewed.

Index Terms— Social Media, Politics, Communication, India.

1 INTRODUCTION

Social media is a highly influential and powerful medium of communication in today's world. It is the best way to interact with people. Millions of active users online, exchange their ideas in different forms such as posts, tweets, images, videos etc. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and others have opened up channels of communication for people. However, it is to be noted that Social Media clearly has both positive and negative effects on its users (Speechprosody, 2012). Social Media plays a prominent role in political activism in several ways. Social Networking Sites (SNS) provides a platform for the political parties and citizens to engage in the activities related to politics. Politicians' engagement level in social media during elections and electoral campaigns help predict voting behaviour. Politicians and political parties always try to attract the voters in social media through personal communication. Social media has changed the structure and roots of contemporary political communication (Tenhunen & Karvelyte, 2014). This paper attempts to review the political communication scenario in social networking platforms, in the Indian scenario.

2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This article reviews various studies conducted by authors on social media use in political communication in the Indian scenario. Research articles were collected by Google search using

- Darshan B.M is a Doctoral Research Scholar working in the area of Social Media and Political Communication. His research interests include Psycho-Social aspects of media communication.
- Dr. Kalyani Suresh working as an Assistant Professor and her teaching competencies include humanities and core communication courses such as Film, New Media, Research and IMC.

the key words *social media*, *political communication*, *India*, and *research* and the first ten pages that the search threw up were considered. From that repository, relevant articles published during the time frame of 2014 – 2016 were selected and reviewed. Blog articles and news reports were not considered for this study.

Narasimhamurthy (2014) studied the political parties' use of social media as a tool for political communication during the 2014 election campaign. The researcher examined social media's reach over individual voters in India. The 'gratification' approach was used to analyze facebook, twitter, social blogs, search engines and micro blogs. The study found that most social media users enjoy the highest levels of online connectivity and believe that information coming through social networking sites to be reliable. In the 2014 elections, political parties and candidates used social media heavily to engage with voters, recruit campaign volunteers and raise campaign funds. This election campaign brought to the limelight, the importance of social networking sites for political parties for communication. This election also witnessed the effects, use and adoption of social media.

A similar study by Arulchelvan (2014) assessed the strategies and effectiveness of social media for election campaigning during 2014 general election of India. This study used a mixed research approach that included content analysis, survey and in-depth interviews. Findings revealed that large political parties prolifically used almost all social networking sites. Use of new media was greatly beneficial for all political parties during this election. This made campaigning easy.

Malik (2014) studied the social media impact on individual voters in India. The involvement of Social media in Indian politics and political campaigning is found in full strength, yet it has a smaller impact on individual-voter behavior that comes from huge offline political influence from a politician or

his party. Updates regarding political leaders are sought by the active users only.

Rajput (2014) analyzed the twitter usage by Indian politicians. For this study, verified twitter accounts of Indian politicians were considered. He found that twitter is a widely used social media tool in Indian politics but cannot be considered as an alternative for traditional media. The study analyzed how established national political parties such as Bahariya Janata Party (BJP) and Indian National Congress (INC) as well as the (then) newly formed political party Aam Admi Party (AAP) were trying hard to connect to the people, especially the Indian digitalized youth. This study posits that politicians should be very careful while posting something on twitter as negative posts could sometimes lead to controversy.

Ugyal (2014) established that there has been a rapid shift of election campaigning in Indian scenario, veering towards the latest media and social media arena. Social media is barometer to weigh the pros and cons and test the success of the election campaigns on a daily basis, instead of having to wait for the whole campaign period. Social media campaigning has set new standards and benchmark for campaigning of political parties during elections and political communication as a whole.

Methi (2014) states that Political communication methods used in today's digital age, gives a chance to both political parties and voters to interact with one another. Thus, political activities may gain more transparency, giving citizens a chance to engage in political decision-making processes. Political parties reap the benefits of enhancing their image and political messages using social networking sites and enjoy the active participation of their supporters on Facebook.

Baruha (2014) tries to study the significance of social media in democracy. Social media can be used effectively as a pro-democracy tool in our society where democracy is the basic requirement for good governance. He suggests that social media should adopt a country-oriented and issues-based approach. An international consensus needs to be implemented to mitigate threat of cyber terrorism, state policy makers should resolve interstate conflicts that arise due to various cyber laws.

Lakshmikantha (2014) studied the issues and concerns on social media, democracy and political change in Indian scenario. He says there has been a change in scenario of Indian politics with the inclusion of social media. In democratic countries like India, this change is the need of the hour. Social media also has an influence on the political change and process in modern democracies. Social media stimulates new discussions about the possibilities of citizen's engagement and political participation. It influences the habits and willingness of citizens to participate and engage in the democratic process.

Vasundara and Ravi (2014) deliberate on digital democracy, social media and politics in India. Using as case study method to study online campaigning, they found that the voting behavior of youngsters, and their post-election behavior made it evident that the voting campaign had had a positive influence. Online campaigns have been successful to an extent, to educate the young voters with the necessary information needed before the election.

Kumar (2014) carried out a study on SNS and politics. He specially focused on university students of Kerala state. He

founded that SNS enhanced the political parties' campaigning and propaganda mission effectively. A social networking site is a variable of a large public sphere, the politics of this era can be effective with the active participation in this dynamic communication platform.

Vinay, Kumar and Hosurmath's (2014) study attempts to study how social media affects Indian politics. Social media users between the age group of 15-45 are considered in this study. The authors found that frequency of updates and 'content relevancy' determined the perception of value. They found that unlike US, the Indian politics is yet to reach the point where social media can completely swing elections. The truth is that social media is definitely reaching a point where its influence is growing and getting stronger by the day.

Anderson (2015) examined India's gender digital gap in relation to women and politics on twitter. This study tries to conceptualize if women are marginalized and less-involved in political conversations that happen online in India. Analysis of 23,350 tweets over eighty day's period shows an overwhelming under-representation of women in Twitter's political discussions, that mirror the real-world women's marginalization in political process in our country.

Rekha (2015) studied the influence of social media in parliament elections of India in 2014 with reference to Thrissur district of Kerala state. She stated that first time Indian political parties planned well and widely used social networking sites for election campaign. This study is based on a quantitative analysis. Survey was conducted in Thrissur district with the sample size of 60 that included users of smart phones. The sample also consisted the users of more than two social networking sites. This study shows that influence of social media was limited during the 2014 elections. The researcher professes that political orientation in Kerala begins from the family. Politics is a regular topic of discussion among the family members. People in Kerala are surrounded by political activities in their day to day life. The researcher also stated that people in Thrissur considered messages in social media as akin to advertisements and this did not affect the voters' choice.

Pande (2015) reviewed social media's role in political communication with reference to the city of Delhi during 2015 elections. The researcher used a mixed approach in this study to examine multiple political case studies which played a very important role in election. This study revealed that social media played major role in the victory of the Aam Admi Party (AAP). Hybrid environment of new media greatly impacted voter behaviour and proved the exploitation of digital affordances.

Rahul (2016) studied the engagement of socio-political activities in social networking sites. He examined the elements such as social media, content and audience within the communication process in connection to political content. He concludes that new media extends the level of political campaigning by playing a very important role in lending political awareness mainly to youth population.

The following table is a summary of the articles reviewed above in terms of theme and the social media tools used:

Table 1: Summary of Articles reviewed

Author(s)	Year	Theme	Media
Murthy	2014	Politicians	Facebook, Twitter, Social Blogs, Search Engines and Micro Blogs
Arulchelvan	2014	Politicians & Voters (Audience)	
Malik	2014	Voters (audience)	Faebook & Twitter
Rajput	2014	Politicians	Twitter
Lama	2014	Election Campaigns	General
Methi	2014	Politicians	Facebook & Twitter
Baruha	2014	Content of Social Media	General
Lakshmikantha	2014	Content of Social Media	General
Vasundhara and Ravi	2014	Youth	General
Kumar	2014	Students	General
Vinay, Kumar and Hosurmath	2014	Campaigns	General
Anderson	2015	Gender	Twitter
Rekha	2015	General	General
Pande	2015	Content of Social Media	General
Rahul	2016	Content of Social Media and Voters (Audience)	General

3 CONCLUSION

From this review it becomes clear that in today's time and age, one cannot ignore the benefits that an individual politician or a political party can reap by the use of social media (Twitter, Facebook etc). Inclusion of Social Media has become basic need of the hour, to educate the general public, especially youth, about the intentions, plans and purpose of a political party standing for election. This study found that social media gives the individual voter, a better understanding and analysis of the events in India and helps in improving their knowledge of Indian politics, helping them to make an informed choice in the selection of a party or party member. Citizens also use Social Media as a medium to express their voice, to express their gratitude or to express discontent, unhappiness, bringing together a platform for a larger support from the people across the nation. The presence, importance, and use of this newly found medium is here to stay and is certain to bring more transparency, knowledge amongst its users about politics and various other current topics in all over the world, especially in India.

REFERENCES

[1] Anderson, S. (2015, October). India's Gender Digital Divide: Women and Politics on Twitter. Retrieved August 18, 2016, from http://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/ORFIssueBrief_108.pdf

[2] Arulchelvan, S. (2014). New Media Communication Strategies for Election Campaigns: Experiences of Indian Political Parties. Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies, 04(03), 124-142. Retrieved from

[3] Baruah, S. D. (2014). Rethinking Social Media in Democracy. In *Social networking media: Boon or bane?* (pp. 33-36). Ujire, Karnataka: SDM College.

[4] Kumar, T.V.R. (2014). Social Networking Websites and Politics: Focus on the University students of Keraka. In *Social networking media: Boon or bane?* (pp. 33-36). Ujire, Karnataka: SDM College.

[5] Lakshmikantha, A. (2014). Social Media, Democracy and Political Change: Issues and Concerns. In *Social networking media: Boon or bane?* (pp. 33-36). Ujire, Karnataka: SDM College.

[6] Lama, U. T. (2014). Political Communication in India. *International Research Journal of Management Science and Technology*, 05(10), 112-118. Retrieved December 10, 2016.

[7] Mallik, N. (2014). The Effect of Social Media on Individual Voters in India. Retrieved August 18, 2016, from http://esource.dbs.ie/bitstream/handle/10788/2190mba_malik_n_2014.pdf?sequence=1

[8] Methi, V. (2014). Political Communication in Digital Age - Social Media Analysis. In *Social networking media: Boon or bane?* (pp. 33-36). Ujire, Karnataka: SDM College.

[9] Narasimhamurthy, N. (2014). Use and Rise of Social media as Election Campaign medium in India. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies (IJIMS)*, 01(08), 202-209. Retrieved from <http://www.ijims.com/uploads/7f33858cd2c22045d277A27.pdf>

[10] Pande, S. (2015, August 26). Changing Paradigm: Social Media and Political Communication. Retrieved December, 2016, from <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/publication/changing-paradigm-social-media-and-political-communication-0>

[11] Rahul, K. (2016). Use of New Media in Indian Political Campaigning System. *Journal of Political Sciences & Public* 4: 204. doi: 10.4172/2332-0761.1000204

[12] Rajput, H. (2014). Social Media and Politics in India: A Study on Twitter Usage among Indian Political Leaders. *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 02(01), 63-69.

[13] Rekha, K. G. (2015). Influence of Social Media in Indian Election 2014 - a Study on Voters in Thrissur. *International Journal of Emerging Research in Man-*

- agement & Technology, 04(04), 07-10. Retrieved from https://www.ermt.net/docs/papers/Volume_4/4_April2015/V4N4-110.pdf.
- [14] Speechprosody (2012). Social Network Impact on Youth. Retrieved from <http://www.speechprosody2012.org/academic-essay-sample-social-network-impact-on-youth.asp>
- [15] Tenhunen, S. and Karvelyte, V. (2015). The Role Played By Social Media In Political Participation And Electoral Campaigns. Retrieved from <https://epthinktank.eu/2014/02/12/the-role-played-by-social-media-in-political-participation-and-electoral-campaigns/>
- [16] Vasundara M. P., Ravi B. K. (2014). Digital Democracy: Social Media & Politics in India – A study. In *Social networking media: Boon or bane?* (pp. 33-36). Ujire, Karnataka: SDM College.
- [17] Vinay, M., Ravi P. K., & Hosurmath, N. B. (2014). Role of Social Media in Indian Politics. In *Social networking media: Boon or bane?* (pp. 33-36). Ujire, Karnataka: SDM College.

IJSER