"CHANGING SCENERIO OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON POLITICAL ATTITUDE, PARTICIPATION AND VOTERS IN RECENT YEARS"

Sorokhaibam Haridas Singh

Research scholar

Department of Political Science

Maharishi University of Information Technology Lucknow.

Abstract

In an electronic democracy, politicians avoid being dependent only on traditional communication channels like TV news media as through the use of the internet, theyremain in control over their political messages. Manyauthors have studied the relationship between media usage and voter's decisions. It is observed that not only the media have impact on decision to vote but also the information in the form of content shared on such media is essential. User gratification theory explains how people use media for their needs. Studies reveal that the presence of political leader on twitter results in attracting large masses through electronic campaigning. Not only the presence but how they present themselves is also vital. Similarly, Hsu and Park. (2012) conducted a study in South Korea to know the user's attitude towards National Assembly members and found that users have negative attitude toward these members. Moreover, the type of content reveals the emotions of the users towards the political candidate or party. Sometimes, the purpose of sharing information on online platform is to showcasethe power or cordial relationship with others. Therefore, in this study an attempt has been made to analyze the information shared on these social media platforms by political parties to communicate has any effect on communication needs accordingto user gratification theory.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The marketing strategies have been explored largely and are growing in different perspectives and implementing marketing theories in political area has been started. Many researchers around the globe have made an attempt to study the management concepts in political scenario and found various factors that may influence the voter's behaviour to make voting decision. From marketing perspective, voters are considered as the market which is further divided into different segments on the basis of age, gender, interest, knowledge etc. that assists the political party candidates to understand the needs, attitude and behaviour of voters. However, voter's decision about choosing a political party or leader has resemblance with decision to choose a product. The concept of marketing management is used for making strategies to influence voters and concept of consumer behaviour is used to study voter's decision about party choice whereas concept of communication is used to exchange the information, news or facts with one another using different media to target voters in order to seek their support and political participation. Therefore, to influence citizens and to convey messages, ideas, and thoughts etc. political parties and their leaders have used different media from timeto time and became successful. For instance, print media in the form of newspaper, posters, magazines, pamphlets were highly used in 19th Century, whereas broadcasting media specifically radio and Television was widely used in 20th century to reach large masses.

In 1932, radio was one of the popular media to convey the political message whereinFranklin D. Rooswelt, an American politician gave a series of 30 evening radio speeches between 1922-1944. Similarly, in 1961, John F. Kennedy became first American President to hold a live televised news for conveying their message to target audience. Prior to United States Presidential Elections 2008, only traditional media such as Television, Newspaper, direct contact with politicians etc. were used but this election transformed the way of communication with the general public by using social media to a great extent. The winning of Barak

Obama was the result credited to the use of social media marketing. Later on, political leaders & parties around the globe have started using social media as a tool of empowerment and oppression. For instance, use of WhatsApp campaign by Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and use of Facebook by Philippines' President Rodrigo Duterte are known for bringing in the desired change. Thus, the new media became popular in 21st Century wherein utilization of social media and specially through mobile phones have shown tremendous growth.

In India, Radio came into existence in the year 1927 and in 1959 the first Television Centre was set up. The Satellite Television Experiment (SITE) was one of the biggest communication experiment of one-year duration carried out from 1975 to 1976. However, in the year 2011 and 2012, social media was initially used by Anna Hazare in his anti-corruption movement in India. The General Election 2014 was thefirst election where political parties have adopted social media to have contact with masses online. Initially, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has focused on social media to a large extent and became politician with highest search on social media after Barak Obama. This further created the buzz about social media, hence, more leaders are now taking help of social media in contacting the masses to convey their strategies. Later on Aam Aadmi Party also realized the importance of social media and laid emphasis on using it to influence citizens. Successful implementation of social media by both the parties has pushed the other parties like Indian National Congress to have its presence on social media and in 2015, Rahul Gandhi, Congress leader made his entry on Twitter. Hence, by and large, all parties have considered social media as powerful marketing tool. However, techno-savvy Bharatiya Janata Party has left Indian National Congress behind by introducing various campaigns on Facebook, creating buzz on twitter, and presenting PM Modi's holographic in remote villages. And from then, social media has become an imperative media andis getting stronger day by day for political campaigning. Modern means of communication, traditional media and inter-personal communication have blended together and complemented each other. Therefore, in order to use new media for online campaigning successfully rigorous marketing strategies are required to influence voters and win elections.

Further, to consider social media as a marketing tool it cannot be understood withoutdefining a term Web 2.0. Web 2.0 provides "a new way in which end users use the World Wide Web, a place where content is continuously altered by all operators in asharing and collaborative way" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Accordingly, social media allow the user to create and share their content over internet using some websites and applications.

According to World Stat, India has left behind the United States and is able to securesecond position after China in terms of internet users. According to IAMAI (Internet and Mobile Association of India) 2019, India had 451 Million monthly active internet users in the first quarter of the year 2019 where 65 per cent of internet users are between the age of 12 to 29 years and 72 per cent of them use internet on daily basis. Overall 7 per cent growth i.e. from 24 per cent to 31 per cent is projected in terms of access to internet by Indian users from 2018 to 2023. These reports depict internet penetration in India is growing at fast pace and is expected to grow with much faster rate.

Furthermore, India is among top ten in term of number of users for most used social media platform in the world with 200 Million users on WhatsApp, 7.65 Millionusers on Twitter, 300 Million users on Facebook, and on YouTube 41 Million users using on monthly basis. According to Reuters, 52 per cent of Indian social media users use Facebook and 18 per cent use Twitter as a source of news. However, Hootsuite's Digital 2019 report, reported unlike other social media platforms usage of Twitter is decreasing at the rate of 2.2 per cent per quarter. As per Social bakers, official profile of Narendra Modi on Facebook and Twitter are most followed. Moreover, amongst all states of India, Manipur is among top 5 states having highest internet penetration and all political parties in India are trying to leverage this growth in the number of internet users.

The Indian General election, 2014 was recognized as world's largest democratic election till now and is also known as #twitter election (Lu et al., 2014), andcampaigning was primarily conducted online by major political parties like AAP, BJP and INC etc. for engagement and seeking votes. Hence, the use of social media for elections purpose is quite prevalent in India and is followed by all the parties. According to media strategists, during General Election 2019, BJP has spent more than its 50 per cent of their budget on online campaigning including social media as it is inexpensive as compared to traditional media (Roy and Amin, 2019). This inexpensive platform facilitates the citizens participation directly in political process of sharing and disseminating information with each other. However, political parties and leaders can also use it as call to action platform to connect and mobilize supporters by using social media strategically.

Attitude is defined as "psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor". Authors have studied the association of attitude and political participation and one such researcher Lane(1965) emphasizes the importance of political attitudes in a larger segment of attitudes and beliefs. He connects political attitudes of respondents directly to psychological factors. Positive political attitude leads to high political participation and has more probability to vote.

In a highly competitive environment during elections, the primary goal of everyparty is to win the elections. For winning the election, a party is free to design its products or make strategies to market them in the form of political campaigning.The different products such as political candidate, manifesto, political campaigning and so on offered by a party helps the individual to make decision to vote in its favoror against.

1.2 Review of Literature

In an electronic democracy, politicians avoid being dependent only on traditional communication channels like TV news media as through the use of the internet, theyremain in control over their political messages (Broersma and Graham, 2012). Manyauthors have studied the relationship between media usage and voter's decisions. It is observed that not only the media have impact on decision to vote but also the information in the form of content shared on such media is essential. User gratification theory explains how people use media for their needs. Studies reveal that the presence of political leader on twitter results in attracting large masses through electronic campaigning. Not only the presence but how they present themselves is also vital. Similarly, Hsu and Park. (2012) conducted a study in South Korea to know the user's attitude towards National Assembly members and found that users have negative attitude toward these members. Moreover, the type of content reveals the emotions of the users towards the political candidate or party. Sometimes, the purpose of sharing information on online platform is to showcasethe power or cordial relationship with others. Therefore, in this study an attempt has been made to analyze the information shared on these social media platforms by political parties to communicate has any effect on communication needs accordingto user gratification theory.Literature deliberates that decision to choose a political party or candidate may vary due to Gender, Education, Income, Marital Status and Occupation. Researchers have tried to study the direct relationship of demographics or social media usage with party choice.

Vageer et al. (2011), in his study, reveals that the presence of a political leader on twitter results in attracting large masses through electronic campaigning. Not only the appearance but how they present themselves is also vital. Woolleya et al. (2010) conducted a study, to explore how a politician portrayed himself on Facebook using content analysis of Facebook, deliberates that Barak Obama was portrayed more positively. Similarly, Hsu and Park (2012) conducted a study in South Korea to know the usage pattern of National Assembly members and posited that users have anegative attitude toward these members. Therefore, the type of content reveals the emotions of the users towards the political candidate or party. The social media platforms help to build specific patterns that are used by the analyst for making strategies.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1) To study the relative influence of different media used for political purpose onpolitical attitude and political participation.
2) To study the influence of political use of social media on political attitude andpolitical participation.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

To remove the bias in choosing a sample, multistage quota sampling was used. Manipur is divided into three regions namely Bishnupur, Senapati and Feizol and to make the sample representative 25% of districts were picked up from each region making a total of 5 districts.

(A)   Use of Media: The first section consists of questions related to different media being used by individuals to get political information. The participants were asked to indicate how frequently they use different media on a five-point scale from 'Never' to 'Frequently'.

(B)   Political Participation: This section of the questionnaire consists of statementsthat are being used to measure political participation on a five-point scale from 'Never' to 'Always'. It includes how often they vote in elections, contacted politicians or public officials, donated money to political parties, signed political petitions, got involved in political groups or campaigns, attended a protest, or attended a political rally, sent emails to politicians, visited campaignor candidate website, participated in an online question and answer sessionwith a politician or public official and so on.

(C)   Political Attitude: Political attitude is a psychological tendency that responds favorably and unfavorably towards political affairs, political candidate, and political party. Political attitude is measured using the three variables political efficacy, political knowledge and political interest.

1.5 COMMUNICATION NEEDS AMONG THE MASS

Social media is widely used phenomenon; many researchers have attempted to observe the impact of social media usage for political participation particularly in western & Arab countries in different perspectives but very few studies have been carried out in India. This study determined the influence of social media usage for political purpose on political attitude, political participation and decision to choose aparty in Punjab, India. The results thus highlighted some critical aspects related to news consumption through different media in Punjab state of India with clear differentiation in media use, political attitude and participation. The major findings of the study are mentioned below:

▪   Most often participation in political process is done only through voting by citizens. Though, sometimes people show their participation by encouraging others to vote and by engaging in a discussion about the political candidate either against or in favour that may influence their voting decision followed by visiting a profile of political candidate on social networking site. On an average people have shown rare political participation in the form of attending political rally or speech, participate in the demonstration, working voluntarily for political party, wearing political symbol public meeting with a politician,be a party member and writing an email to the politician. The least form of participation is providing money (funds) to a politician or political party.

▪   Social media is found as the most frequently and often used media for politicalgetting information, followed by Television whereas attending political rallies, having direct contact with political candidates and radio are observed as least used media.

▪   Undoubtedly, voter's interest in politics is significantly influenced by media use. However, different media have varied influences in terms of relationship and significance wherein, selection and effect of media should be accordingly chosen to arouse voter's interest in politics. New media is found to be most prominent for generating positive interest because nowadays political actors,as well as voters, have started using new media to a great extent specially after the victory of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in General Election, 2014.

▪   Media use has a significant impact on building political attitude. Almost all media found to have a positive contribution to political efficacy except for Radio and Television. However, the strength of influence varies wherein,social media followed by the Newspaper have stronger influence among other media used for political information. Although social media has shifted the paradigm of the political sphere, traditional

media still have importance, especially Newspaper has strong influence after social media. Therefore, traditional media cannot be ignored.

- Media use is also found as significant influencer for political knowledge.Nevertheless, each media has varied influence, some have significant, or insignificantly positive influence and others have a negative influence on political knowledge. Thus, among all, political rallies, newspaper, and social media are positively associated with political knowledge.

- Social media has a positive correlation with political interest, efficacy, knowledge, attitude and participation. Specifically, activities regarding politicson WhatsApp are more prominent than any other social media platform.

- The influence of social media use as a whole is found to be more on political participation followed by political attitude. WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook respective have shown positive influence. However, Twitter is found to have an insignificant impact on political interest, efficacy, knowledge, attitude and participation.

- WhatsApp has greater influence followed by YouTube and Facebook for political knowledge, efficacy and participation. Only WhatsApp and YouTube have been found to be having significant positive influencing political interest.

- Study found a positive relationship between social media and party choice. Individually also whether it is Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and YouTube usage have found to be having a positive impact on choosing a particular party.Citizens who are more active on Facebook are more likely to vote in favour of BJP, followed by AAP and INC. On the other hand, AAP has a higher tendency to get votes by citizens who are using Twitter or YouTube more. Likewise, usage of WhatsApp for the political purpose may lead to choosing infavour of INC.

- Demographics such as gender, education, age, income, and profession have notmoderated the relationship between social media use and political party choice. However, for some parties, demographics are found as moderator but itcannot be claimed to have impact on relationship between social media useand political party choice as people change their mind quickly.

- BJP has higher visibility and consistency for sharing information on Twitter aswell as on Instagram to satisfy cognitive needs. Almost all parties have satisfied affective needs on Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. Overall, the content represents positive, anticipation and trust sentiments. Moreover, personal integrative, social integrative and tension released needs are foundless satisfied by content shared on YouTube than Twitter and Instagram.

- In terms of affective needs, the content reflected positive, anticipation and trustsentiments more. Whereas, positive, anticipated and trusted opinions were higher for INC than other parties. While BJP and AAP have satisfied sentiments of anticipation followed by positive and negative respectively.

1.6 Conclusion

Majority of studies focused on single media, either social media or traditional media,as the usage of new media has not been explored much in an Indian context, and minimal literature is available. However, this study considered different media for a political purpose which is a novelty in itself. Results will add on to the literature of media consumption in politics.

Varied media consumption seems to drive variations in a manner citizen participate in politics. This study contributes to the conceptualization of media behaviour while considering multiple media including traditional media and new media for political attitude and political participation. Study suggests that albeit social media is foundto be widely used, traditional media still have its importance. Among social media platforms used for political purpose, majority of studies have used Facebook, Twitter and YouTube only, the present study has considered WhatsApp as new media which is found as significant and most influencing

media platform for political attitude and participation. The study highlighted the activities on the prevailing social media platform for political purpose along with their relationof social media platform in building attitude, interest, knowledge, efficacy and participation. Current findings will assist in making strategic use of media activities to influence voters to arouse interest and motivate to participate in political process. Moreover, the ultimate action in politics is voting by making decision to choose party or candidate like a consumer take decision to buy a product or service. Similarly, literature suggests the decision to choose party is influenced by media useas many authors studied the relationship of traditional media usage and voter's political party choice. The present study has contributed to the literature by measuring the indirect relationship between social media usage and political party choice keeping demographics as moderating variables as the we posited that detail of targeted audience is vital while framing strategies and influence decision.

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