

Importance of New Media Technology in Political Communication– A Case Study of Political Campaigning in India

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Received: 20.09.2019

Accepted: 25.11.2019

ABSTRACT

In future, the survival of any political organizations including winning elections is directly related to use of new media technologies. Recently, elections in US and India have amply demonstrated the political party's dependence on new media technology, particularly use of social media to reach out to the voters. In the recent past, we have seen the fall of governments where social media and new media have played a crucial role in what was later termed as the 'Arab Spring'.

Does anyone think that in 2020-or maybe even in 2015-we'll still have big-money television ad buys, regardless of who's paying for them? The magnitude of technological change over the past 10 years has been astonishing; the next 10 will sure be so. New social media are already changing the way political organizations attract supporters. The recent Lok Sabha elections have demonstrated beyond any doubt that a political party's heavy reliance on new media technologies is necessary to provide a firm platform to form a government. According to Y.L.R Moorthi, Professor of Marketing at the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, there is a difference between a regional brand going national and a politician going national.

Keywords: *New media technology, Political organizations, Political communications.*

INTRODUCTION

Political communication is a sub-field of political science and communication that deals with the production, dissemination, procession and effects of information, both through media and interpersonally, within a political context. This includes the study of the media, the analysis of speeches by politicians and those that are trying to influence the political process, and formal and informal conversations among members of the public, among other aspects. A political campaign is an organized effort which seeks to influence the decision making process within a specific group. In democracies, political campaigns often refer to electoral campaigns, wherein representatives are chosen or referendums are decided. In modern politics, the most high profile political campaigns are focused on candidates for head of state or head of government, often a president or Prime Minister (Wikipedia).¹

Social media has dramatically changed the way in which modern political campaigns are run. with more generation X and Generation Y coming into the voting population, social media is the platform on which the politicians need to establish themselves and engage with the voters. Especially in a digital age, social media will be more important than traditional media, if not already, to the politicians (Wikipedia). 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. Taberez states that Social media has emerged as a vital tool of communication and has

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created new ways of mobilizing public opinion and encouraging participation in political and civic activities – ranging from joining online petition and social groups, posting short messages on Twitter, expressing supports through blogs and uploading videos on YouTube. In the recent assembly election in Gujarat, the chief minister Narendra Modi effectively used the social media to connect with online citizens. Besides being active on Twitter and Face book, Modi also went for a live chat on Google plus with netizens.^{2,3}

In recent years, social media are said to have an impact on the public discourse and communication in the society. In particular, social media are increasingly used in political context. More recently, micro-blogging services (*e.g.*, twitter) and social network sites (*e.g.*, Face book) are believed to have the potential for increasing political participation. While Twitter is an ideal platform for users to spread not only information in general but also political opinions publicly through their networks, political institutions (*e.g.*, politicians, political parties, political foundations, *etc.*) have also begun to use Face book pages or groups for the purpose of entering into direct dialogs with citizens and encouraging more political discussions.⁴⁻⁹

Doug van Spronsen suggests five reasons to use social media networks

- The Amplify Effect
- Create a Personal Connection (100 people at a time)
- Now Tools Make It Easier Than Ever
- Develop an Ability to Respond
- It's Not Only for Communications (Research) (Fundraising)

Lee Rainie and Aaron Smith in their research on user of 'social network sites' (SNS) on political activity have suggested the following categories:

- 36% of SNS users say the sites are “very important” or “somewhat important” to them in keeping up with political news.
- 26% of SNS users say the sites are “very important” or “somewhat important” to them in recruiting people to get involved in political issues that matter to them.
- 25% of SNS users say the sites are “very important” or “somewhat important” to them for debating or discussing political issues with others.
- 25% of SNS users say the sites are “very important” or “somewhat important” to them in finding other people who share their views about important political issues.

Further their research also highlights that SNS impacts people's political views and involvement. The following are their findings:

- 25% of SNS users say they have become more active in a political issue after discussing it or reading posts about it on the sites.
- 16% of SNS users say they have changed their views about a political issue after discussing it or reading posts about it on the sites.
- 9% of SNS users say they have become less involved in a political issue after discussing it or reading posts about it on the sites.

Arulchelvan in his study on New Media Communication Strategies for Election Campaigns: Experiences of Indian Political Parties states that ' Now the political campaigns have set new standards for how successful campaigns are conducted day-to-day. The modern information and communication technologies are now a core element of modern political campaigns.....The utilization of the new media communication tools and strategies gave a new facet and gain to the Indian political parties.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

- To evaluate the use of new media technologies by political parties during election campaigns.
- To study the impact of social media in reaching out to the voters.

METHODOLOGY

The research design for the study is Ex-Post-Facto research, wherein the dependency of political parties on new media technology and its impact on elections is studied. Appropriate tools for data collection and analysis will be applied for the study. As the study is descriptive in nature, no inferences will be drawn beyond the group that is researched upon. A total of 300 respondents were randomly selected and interviewed, of which 268 respondents were able to fulfill the requirements and their responses were complete and acceptable. The data was analyzed using one-way analysis. The survey was conducted in selected up-scale localities of Mysore city.

A simple 20 questionnaire were developed to elicit responses based on the objectives of the study. The questions dealt with respondents' opinion on use of social media networking by political parties, respondents' participation as a response to the political campaigns and the effectiveness of social media networks as a platform for political campaigning.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

1. What kind of internet connection you have?

	Type	Number	Percent
1	Broadband	72	26.87
2	Data card	46	17.16
3	Mobile	150	55.97

N=268

To the question on the **mode of internet connectivity** that is used by the respondents to stay connected, it was notable that a large section of the respondents (56%) stayed connected through their mobile network providers, followed by broadband connectivity (27%) and lastly data card connectivity (17%). Mobile devices are quickly growing to be one of the biggest modes of communication for political parties to reach out to their audience.

2. Where do you have/browse internet connection?

	Place	No	Percent
1	At home	74	27.61
2	At office	123	45.90
3	Browsing center	71	26.49

N=268

To the question about the place which is most commonly used by respondents to access the internet, it can be seen that almost half (46%) of the respondents use their office for accessing the internet, followed by a close competition between home and browsing centers (27% and 26% respectively). It can be observed that close to 25% of the respondents depend on browsing centers for connectivity, indicating that a fixed broadband connection is still not popular or affordable between the masses.

3. What social-media channels are your most popular?

	Channels	No	Percent
1	Face book	216	80.59
2	Twitter	79	29.47
3	Whatsapp	237	88.43
4	Any other	89	33.20

N=268

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To the question about what social media channels are most popular and used commonly amongst the respondents, Whatsapp takes the most distinguishable spot (88%) with Facebook following closely behind at 80%. Twitter does not seem to be as popular (29%) as Facebook and Whatsapp. We can evidently see many political agenda based messages being circulated around our social networks.

4. Do you pay attention or get involved with political campaign messages on social network sites?

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	107	39.93
No	161	60.07

N=268

While political parties and personnel are busy trying to get their message out on online and social media channels, it is surprising to note that 60% of the respondents are actually not excited about the messages they receive! While the reason behind this is debatable, it's interesting to note that more than 50% of the audience DO NOT pay attention to political campaigns on their social media networks.

5. Do you respond to political campaign messages on social media network sites?

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	89	33.21
No	179	66.79

N=268

Similar to the above question, we can again note that 66% of the respondents do not prefer to proactively respond to political messages on their social media channels.

6. Do you share the political campaign messages with your friends/relatives?

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	93	34.70
No	175	65.30

N=268

When asked if respondents share or forward political messages to their friends or relatives, a significant 65% of them answered NO.

7. To what extent do you agree to the use of social media network by the political parties?

	Response	Number	Percent
1	Totally agree	78	29.10
2	Agree to some extent	156	58.21
3	Totally disagree	34	12.69

N=268

On the topic of social media being an agreeable channel of communication, or to say easily, if it's agreeable that political parties use social media for their propaganda messages, a large part of the respondents (58%) were not entirely sure and agreed to some extent that it was okay to approach them with social media channels. It's also important to note here that 30% of the respondents were readily okay with receiving such messages while only a meager 12% were strictly against it.

8. How regularly do you respond to political campaign messages on social media network?

	Response	Number	Percent
1	Always	67	25.00
2	Sometimes	103	38.43
3	Never	98	36.57

N=268

To the question of the frequency in which political campaign messages were

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responded actively, we can note that respondents are quite impartial towards all the choices. While 38% said they sometimes respond to political campaigns, 36% said they never respond and 25% said they always respond.

9. To what extent the political campaign messages have influenced your opinion towards political parties?

	Response	Number	Percent
1	Always	73	27.24
2	Sometimes	162	60.45
3	Never	33	12.31

N=268

To the question on the extent to which campaign messages by political parties on social media channels influence respondents, a majority (60%) of them said they were only sometimes influenced by the messages they see on their social media channels. 27% of the respondents said they were always influenced while only 12% said they were never influenced.

10. Do you think political campaign messages on social media networks can create mass appeal for political parties?

	Response	Number	Percent
1	Yes	98	36.57
2	I can't say	139	51.87
3	No	31	11.56

N=268

To the question if respondents thought that political campaigns on social media channels can create a mass appeal for political parties, 50% of the respondents were not sure (I can't say) if social media was creating an effective mass appeal for parties. While 36% said yes they work in the political party's favour, a minimal 11% said social media played no role in garnering a mass appeal.

11. Do you think the political campaign messages on social media network can influence voting decisions?

	Response	Number	Percent
1	Yes to a large extent	65	24.25
2	To some extent only	80	29.85
3	Never effects decisions	123	45.90

N=268

To the question if political campaign messages on social media channels can influence voting decisions, 45% of the respondents said it never affects their voting decisions while 29% said it affects their voting decisions to some extent only. 25% of the respondents also said that such political campaigns they receive on their social media absolutely do not affect their voting preferences.

12. Do you think political campaign messages have influenced the outcome of elections held recently?

	Response	Number	Percent
1	Yes	102	38.06
2	I can't say	90	33.58
3	Not at all	76	28.36

N=268

When asked if the respondents thought that online presence and social media campaigning has some kind of influence on the outcome of the recently held elections, 38% of the respondents seem to agree with the fact that yes, social media reach and campaigns

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have certainly had a role to play in the election outcome, while 33% did not have anything to say and only 28% said no there was no considerable influence on the election outcome.

13. Have you personally ever been influenced in you voting decisions by the campaign messages on social media networks?

	Response	Number	Percent
1	Yes always	33	12.31
2	Sometimes only	119	44.41
3	No never	116	43.28

N=268

When asked if the respondents had personally ever been influenced from social media campaigns over their voting decisions, 44% of the respondents said they were only sometimes influenced and 43% said they were never personally influenced.

14. According to you, what purpose does the campaign messages by political parties on social media network serve?

	Response	Number	Percent
1	Provides information only	145	54.10
2	Helps in comparing campaigns	90	33.58
3	Influences voting decisions	33	12.32

N=268

To the question on what purpose does social media campaigns by political parties serve, 54% of the respondents thought they were merely providing information while 33% felt such campaigns only helped them to compare with other campaigns and a meager 12% felt that they really helped influence voting decisions.

15. Are you a subscriber to any political party campaigns?

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	73	27.24
No	195	72.76

N=268

When asked of the respondents were subscribed to any political campaigns on social media, a majority 72% of them said no while 27% of them said yes they did subscribe to political campaigns.

16. Do you think the recent increase in voter turnout is due political parties campaigning on social media network?

	Response	Number	Percent
1	Yes	112	41.79
2	May be	111	41.42
3	No	45	16.79

N=268

When asked if the respondents felt that the recent increase in voter turnout is because of political parties campaigning on social media, 41% indicated that yes, social media campaigns helped increase the voter turnout, while 40 percent thought maybe yes and were quite unsure. Only 16% of the respondents thought that such campaigns had no role to play in the increase in voter turnout.

17. There is a feeling that revolutionary changes have taken place due to the use of social media network by political parties?

	Response	Number	Percent
1	Yes to a great extent	106	39.55
2	Yes to some extent only	126	47.01
3	No never	36	13.44

N=268

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When asked what the respondents thought about social media campaigns by political parties brought about some revolutionary changes, 47% agreed to some extent only while 39% thought yes they have bought revolutionary changes.

18. Do you think the use of social media network by political parties is an invasion of cyber space?

	Response	Number	Percent
1	No I don't think so	56	20.90
2	Yes to some extent only	113	42.16
3	No not at all	99	36.94

N=268

When asked if use of social media network by political parties is an invasion of cyber space, 42% of the respondents said yes (to some extent only) and 36% thought not at all, this was no invasion of cyberspace.

19. Do you think political parties are intruding your privacy with their political messages on social media network?

	Response	Number	Percent
1	Yes	67	25.00
2	I can't say	123	45.90
3	No	78	29.10

N=268

When asked if social media campaigns by political parties targeted towards people was invasion of privacy, 45% of the respondents were not sure and couldn't agree while 29% thought they were not intruding in their private life. It is important to note here that a significant number (25%) of respondents did think that political parties reaching out to them via social media was invasion of their privacy.

20. Do you think political parties use social media network as a tool for propaganda?

	Response	Number	Percent
1	Yes to a large extent	131	48.89
2	Yes to some extent	90	33.58
3	No not at all	47	17.53

N=268

When asked if political parties used social media as a propaganda tool, a majority of the respondents thought yes political parties used social media channels as a propaganda tool while 33% of them agreed only to a certain extent. Only 17% said they did not agree with the question.

CONCLUSION

The study has revealed that a majority of the respondents has opined that their involvement, response and sharing of political campaign messages is limited. When enquire about the respondents' agreement to the messages and subsequent response to the campaigns is only to some extent. The respondents also felt that political campaign messages on social media network are capable of creating mass appeal but the ability to influence and affecting voting decision making is limited to some extent only. When enquired about how does political campaigns affect them majority of the respondents said to some extent of never. However, many respondents felt that political campaigns on social media definitely help in informing voter and also provides a comparison between what is being said by various political parties. The respondents were not sure whether political campaigns increase voter turnout as equal number of them said yes to some extent only. Reacting to the revolutionary changes the social media networks can bring about, the respondents felt that it has limited effect. Respondents also felt that political parties' use social media as tool for propaganda and

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to a limited extent intrude their privacy. To conclude in short the study has revealed that political parties' campaigns has limited effect on voters and not necessarily bring about revolutionary changes in voting decisions.

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