

SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL CAMPAIGN: STUDY OF THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN ASSAM

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Abstract:

This paper is an attempt to study the role of social media in shaping and influencing the behaviour of people in elections especially in Assam. In a democratic country like India, Social media become an integral pervasive tool for political communication as well as election campaign. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube etc. has given new ways for political leaders as well as people to interact, share and express their views. These are becoming an easy medium to reach out to so many people at once and making more easy to direct involvement in political process. About 17% of Indian population are experiencing the changes brought by Social Media. In a State like Assam, social media platforms are widely used in political purpose as well as in political campaign. In such way, social media platforms have played a remarkable role in the voting behaviour of people.

Key Words: *Social Media, Voting Behaviour, Election Campaign, Political Communication*

Introduction:

Social Media is a form of internet base communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other contents. While television is believed to have played a major role in India since the last two decades, social media is a 21st century platform and a tool to help people to create, express and exchange their thoughts and ideas widely. By social media we understand the platform like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube etc. However, this paper will address three main platforms of social media i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. Social media has changed the way people communicate with each other. In the contemporary times, the use of social media provides a new space to the political parties to reach out to the masses in every corner of the society.

Using social media networks for political campaigning has now become a global trend. Social media first used as a tool for campaigning during 2014 Loksabha election. In order to reach out their political voters, almost all the major political parties started to establish their own social media term. In 2016, Assam Legislative Assembly Election, it was seen that political leaders were very active in social media platforms and the whole online community was engaged in much political discussion during the campaigning. The leading daily newspaper 'Assam Tribune' stated that social media played a key role in Assam polls. Ankhi Das, the public policy director in India, South and Central Asia has mentioned that using Facebook by political leaders and voters, though not a new phenomena, increased during the Assam polls. In such a scenario, it is necessary to understand how the social networking sites impact the voters and how it has become an important aspect in political participation. Thus this paper is an attempt to answer such questions which holds contemporary relevance.

Meaning of Social Media:

A multitude of websites, services, and programmes that enable users to engage in social behaviours online or on a mobile device are collectively referred to as social media. The goal of online communication channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content sharing, and collaboration is described as social media as well. Among the various forms of social media are websites and programmes devoted to forums, microblogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social durations, and wikis. According to the definition of social media, it is "a collection of web-based apps that expand on the conceptual and technical underpinnings of web 2.0 and that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content." "Websites and programmes that enable users to generate and share content or to participate in social networking" is how the Oxford Dictionary describes social media. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)

2. Statement of the problem:

With the advent of Internet and its recent pervading in every sphere of life including politics; social networks have become an indispensable medium in election campaign worldwide. These social networking sites influenced the voters like any other means of campaigning if not more. However, most of the studies regarding media platforms influencing voting behaviour or political participation are focused on electronic and print media. The dimension of social media is somewhat overlooked. Although, some studies have been done about the use of social media networks for mobilizing people in recent Loksabha election, such studies regarding the Assam Legislative Assembly elections are hard to find. This paper thus, focuses itself on understanding the overlooked dimensions of social media and its implication in voting behaviour.

3. Research Objectives:

- 1) To understand the role and influence of social media in Election Campaign.
- 2) To understand the influences of Social media in the voting behaviour of people.

4. Research Methodology:

Data has been collected purely from the secondary sources like journals, articles, books, research papers, websites etc.

5. Literature Review:

The research offers a narrative review of existing literature. Political Participation can be simply understood as taking part in political activities. M. Rush and P. Althoff in Introduction to Political Sociology, published in 1971, stated that Political participation is "the involvement of individual at various levels in the political

System". In the present times, it has been seen that Political participation is not only taking place through conventional ways but also through unconventional ways. Georg Aichholzer and Doris Alhuter in their paper Online forms of Political Participation and their impact on Democracy, published in 2009, discussed about how unconventional ways of participation such as the online platforms can stimulate increased participation of citizens.

Use of social media for political campaigning has gained prominences in the last decade. Neena Talwar Kanungo's article India's Digital Poll Battle: Political Parties and Social Media in the 16th Loksabha Election, published in studies in Indian Politics in 2005, gives a rich account of the use of social media for political mobilization. Here, she mainly focuses on the use of two prominent social networking sites Facebook and Twitter by the political parties for campaigning in the 2014 Loksabha election.

Aindrila Biswas, Nikhil Ingleand Mousumi Roy's article "Influence of Social Media on Voting Behavior," published in Journal of Power, Politics and Governance in 2014, is another noteworthy account which mainly Focuses on how Facebook, YouTube and especially Twitter has been used to reach out to potential voters in the 16th LokSabha elections. In one of the conference paper uploaded in Research Gate in May, 2014, titled Social Media and Political Participation: Are Facebook, Twitter and YouTube democratizing our Political System? Authors Robin Effing, Josvan Hilegers bergand Theo Huibers presents the results of a literature review in regard to Social Media and its influence on Political Participation.

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While reviewing the literature, it can be seen that studies involving major social networking sites, somewhat overlooked Instagram. In contemporary times, Instagram has emerged as a quite influencing social networking site. The political leaders regularly uploaded picture and videos on this platform and followed by millions. So, in order to have a full understanding of how social media and networking sites influenced the voting behavior, it is essential to take into consideration the study of Instagram as well.

6. Findings:

The number of internet users has grown from ten million in 1993 to three billions in 2004. It affects our all the ways of life and it plays a new role in Indian elections also which provides a platform to political leaders also.

In Indian context, online voter registration and transparency campaign started in 2009 where there has been seen a mass uses of social media. BJP by using social media had changed the entire way of campaigning. The party has decided to make maximum use of social media to reach out to the voters of Assam. Though Assam is a backward state in terms of its technological development, where in many areas internet connectivity and network is still not available fairly, yet in 2016 Assembly Election, the political parties and voters has used social media platform widely.

However, it has been seen that political parties like Congress and BJP indulged in some

interesting fight on social media through videos. In Instagram platform also, BJP uses such slogans like ‘*Ab Ki Bar Modi Sarkar*’, ‘*Poriborton*’ etc and ‘*hastaggs*’ to popular their ideology. And these slogans become so popular among peoples that these slogans become common in everywhere. For Instagram, adoption of this platform might be viewed as an attempt to connect with younger voters. At present, almost all political leaders have Instagram account and they are very much active in the platform.

7. Conclusions:

There is no denying that social media influences political participation as well as a voter’s decision making. Social media has changed the way of political campaigning and influenced all the democratic process. Social media has triggered changes in the campaign strategies of political parties, candidates and political organizations. Because of the quick accessibility of social media, people can reach to the political leaders very easily, they can share, interact about various issues among themselves. The last assembly election is the witness of it as social media was successful platform where political parties found a new way of campaigning. Because of the mass uses of this platform by young generation, it entirely effected the political behavior of youths.

8. References:

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