INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT SOCIOLOGY & HUMANITIES



ISSN 2277 – 9809 (online)
ISSN 2348 - 9359 (Print)

An Internationally Indexed Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal

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Published by iSaRa Solutions

A study on use of social media in political campaigning: A case study of Indian Lok Sabha election 2014

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Abstract

Social media developing opportunities to politicians for connecting and managing relationship with new and prospect voters who are actively using this new medium. This paper is based on extensive literature review of previous research paper and reports. The main objective of the paper is to identifying social media promotional characteristics used by political parties and leaders for promoting their election campaign. After analyzing reports and election campaign of different parties, it was found that political parties specially Bhartiya Janta Party more emphasized on social media for election campaigning.

Keywords- Social media, Political campaigning, Social media tools.

Introduction and Purpose

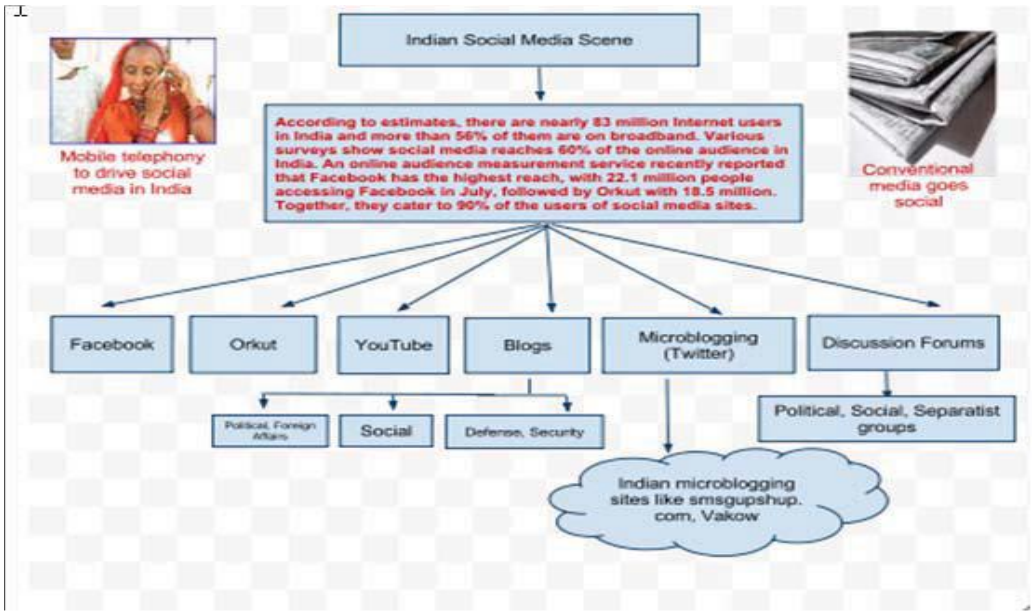
Social media is a popular word in Indian parliament election 2014. Political parties using social media because traditional mass media communication medium are highly regulated by election commission of India. Social media is facilitating a new way by which people are able to search and share information and increasing their awareness **(Akar, 2011).** Social media play an important role in converting street movements into large cities of Romania in **2012 (Antonio Momoc, 2013).** In the same passion during anti-corruption movement 2012 Anna Hazare used social media to connect people in Delhi. Politicians use social media to communicate with their audience and to call them either to protest, or to vote **(Antonio Momoc, 2013).** So, many political parties, social activist, individual leaders are getting attention towards social media.

There is lack of research in use of social media as a promotion mix tool in political campaign. This paper identifies how social media characteristics use for promoting a party or leader.

Literature review

Social media

"Social media constitute the communication channels that common citizens are using in the web 2.0 age to assemble discussion groups, to ensure social or human causes, and to mobilize offline environment" **(Antonio Momoc, 2013).** Social media is an additional marketing channel by which businesses can communicate or interact with their target customers **(Gummerus *et al.*, 2011).** Social media includes an important feature of feed- back function, such as the ''like" feature on Facebook and YouTube **(Haeng-Jin Jang et. Al., 2013).** Social media sites have become an important electronic meeting place for friends and person you want to interact, and their reach has grown exponentially in the last few years **(Halliday and Vrusias, 2011; Harrigan, 2011).** Although, Applications of social media in business has used very well and now applied in political campaigns by different parties. Most of the Political parties and leaders are using social networking sites and managing their accounts like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube for electoral communication. Main objective of Electoral communication is to persuading the voter for voting agreement.



Source: taken from OSC Media Aid 2010

According to **IAMAI (Internet and mobile association of India) report (2013)** facebook is a leading website among social media users in India.

Social media use in India

The use of social media by Indians was first highlighted during the 2008 Mumbai attacks when information shared through Twitter and Flickr between Indians and the outside world **(Open Source Center media aid 2010).** "The second mass use of social media in India was the May 2009 national elections, when, for the first time, online voter registration and transparency campaigns started" where first time political parties tried to reach out to voters through social networking websites **(Open Source Center media aid 2010).** In 2012 social media getting attention were in jail and share their video through YouTube. But recently in 2013-14 political parties like Bharatiya Janta Party, Indian National Congress, Samajwadi Party etc using social media for connecting to voters. Due to growing advantages of social media **Election Commission of India (October 2013)** gives direction to use this channel which is as follows:

A. **Information to be given by candidates about their social media accounts-** E-mail id, face book account details, etc.
B. **Pre-Certification of Political Advertisements-** apply to Election Commission of India/designated officer for pre-certification of all political advertisements on electronic media before the publication.
C. **Expenditure on campaigning through internet including social media websites-** including expenditure on advertisements on social media, both for maintaining a correct account of expenditure and for submitting the statement of expenditure, payments made to internet companies and websites for carrying advertisements and also campaign related operational expenditure on making of creative development of content, operational expenditure on salaries and wages paid to the team of workers employed by such candidates and political parties to maintain their social media accounts, etc.
D. **Application of Model Code of Conduct to content on internet including social media-** It is clarified that the provisions of model code of conduct and related instructions

of the Commission issued from time to time shall also apply to the content being posted on the internet, including social media websites, by candidates and political parties.

E. As far as the content posted by persons other than candidates and political parties is concerned, the Commission is considering the matter in consultation with the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology on practical ways to deal with the issue, in so far as they relate to, or can be reasonably connected with, the election campaigning of political parties and candidates.

Social media as a promotion tool for political campaigning

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. As discussed earlier, social media has increased the power of person-to-person conversations in digital place in the form of communicating one to many person with very less effort and time **(Mangold and Faulds 2009).** According to **Mangold and Faulds (2009)** social media a better role in promoting organization values and goals in comparison to traditional media and included in integrated marketing communication tools. Political parties are also work in the form of democratic organization which is clear in its purpose and vision and maintaining fairness, transparency, accountability, integrity, etc.

1. **Engaging people through social media tools-** when peoples are able to send feedback than they feel more engaged with organization **(Mangold and Faulds, 2009).** Facebook and YouTube (social media tools) give opportunity to send their feedback in the form of like and dislike on the page and content posted on the page. For example- every party's facebook page give an option of suggest an edit. YouTube engage people through uploading and share videos.
2. **Information sharing-** when people know about organization, they feel more engaged **(Mangold and Faulds, 2009).** For example- Not only Aam Aadmi Party but other parties also share their basic information like mission, location, contact details, their policies, etc. through their facebook page, blogs, etc.

3. **Creating a balance between traditional and internet based promotion tool-** people like to use both word-of-mouth and social media for communicating when they are engage with an idea (**Mangold and Faulds, 2009).** "This engagement comes naturally for supporters of a political candidate" **(Mangold and Faulds, 2009).** In India approximately 60% population live in rural areas, due to this reason political parties using public speaking and road shows for supporting a party or a candidate. Simultaneously due to growing population of internet users and young voters in India political parties also using facebook, twitter, YouTube etc. for political campaign.
4. **Convey messages through videos-** Political parties convey their last five year work and proposed work for next period through videos. For example- Congress convey their message in the video "Her hath Shakti, her hath Tarkki" and Bhartiya Janta Party convey their message by identifying the weak points of present Congress supported UPA government in video "Abki Bar, Modi Sarkar".
5. **Supporting through stories and songs-** political parties supporting their ideas through entertaining story telling videos. For example- BJP prepared their song titled "Main desh nahi mitne doonga, main desh nahi jhukne doonga" in many different Indian languages. These videos are popular on YouTube and facebook.
6. **Branding-** most candidate quickly grasped the need for setting up their facebook and twitter accounts. According to New Politics Institute presence on these social networking sites is a critical branding factor.



Conclusion

On the basis of NDTV news channel report on social media (2014), social media is managed in three broader ways:

1. Each party has an IT cell for managing social media.
2. Parties hiring advertising agencies for managing social media.
3. Individual leaders having their own wing by which they managed social media for party and themselves.

A survey done by **Ipsos Public Affairs (2013)** in 24 countries finds that 76% is actively engaged in public policy, social and political issues out of total population of online users in India. Although social media is a popular communication medium but traditional mode of communication are also used to touch public sentiments. Due to instant reach to public, most of the politician identifies the need of maintaining facebook and twitter accounts. For example- Narendra Modi,Rrahul Ghandi, Arvind Kejrival etc. managing their accounts on daily or weekly basis. Recently (April 2014) election commission of India strengthening voters by giving them the power to upload videos of politician who are misguiding the public and giving wrong statement. Social media facilitating two way communication through which voter react on political leader statements and put forward their messages and thoughts. Having such great advantages, social media has some disadvantages also for example- many leaders illegally purchase liking on social networking sites. Fraud information on social networking site also misguides the voters and influences their decision making for giving vote. Due to lack of trained person for handling social media in India, misuse of social media is a challenge for government. In **Evgeny Morozov** words "democracy is just a tweet away" and social media strengthening Indian democracy.

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