

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR POLITICAL MOBILIZATION: A STUDY OF YOUTH IN DELHI

DIVYANI REDHU*

ABSTRACT

From communication to social awareness and from education to political mobilization, it would not be wrong to say that social media has made its foray in all spheres of our lives. Particularly, when we talk of social media and political mobilization, the impact that today social media has on its users and specifically the engagement that its users have with the same is tremendous. It is because of the massive impact of social media on its users that today, be it a local election or the election on a larger scale, the campaigning is not deemed to be complete without taking into account the social media strategy of the same. From analysis of the parties' policies, programmes, candidates to even the performance, every aspect can be tracked and also largely depends on social media. Also, social media allows the politicians and political parties to connect directly with the masses at a lesser cost and greater reach in comparison to the traditional media. The figure itself establishes the reach that social media possess in the present day and needless to say that youth form the majority of social media users in India.

Thus, the paper intends to examine the way youth (15-24 years of age) consume the political issues or political discussion on social media. The study would be quantitative in nature. It would be conducted by survey method, using questionnaire as tool on 100 respondents. Also, the results would primarily focus on the preferred social media platform by respondents, vis-à-vis political communication, their decision making etc.

KEYWORDS: Social Media, Political Mobilization, Political Communication, Political Parties, Youth, Delhi.

INTRODUCTION

Today, it would not be exaggerating to say that internet has made its presence felt in various spheres of our lives. Also, with the advent of time, the time has come when the potential of internet and social media is also being tapped

in the field of politics. Social media is changing the manner in which political communication was traditionally being done and now, politicians and political parties are using social media for new ways of interfacing with voters.

*Research Scholar, University School of Mass Communication, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi, India. **Correspondence E-mail Id:** editor@eurekajournals.com

From the way campaigns were run to the way in which general masses connected with the elected or contesting ministers, social media has brought a dramatic change.

With its foray in numerous aspects of our lives, social media has even changed the way in which political scenario functioned. The pervasiveness of social media in politics has made the elected candidates and parties more accessible and accountable to the masses. It is so because, today masses have numerous platforms available to reach out to the people in power and that too, just by sitting within the confinement of one's home. Furthermore, the capacity of social media to distribute the content to millions within seconds makes it even more crucial for those contesting or are in power to carefully manage their image in the eyes of the masses.

Not only has social media facilitated the political campaigning, but, at the same time, it has also paved way for numerous avenues with the help of which uninterrupted interaction of the people and the party officials of all ranks can be ensured. And when it comes to youth, the potential is exponential as they are the one who are the majority users of social media. According to the Statistics Portal, the number of social media users in 2018 was about 326.1 million (32.61 crore) and is projected to reach about 351.4 million (35.14 crore) in the year 2019.

In recent years, social media has become an integral part of political communications during election campaigns. Since the advent of internet, communication has evolved from social media to chat rooms and instant messaging. Social media is the most recent and rapidly growing phenomenon in the context of Internet Communication. During the 2014 and 2019 general election elections in India, social media was immensely used by almost every political party and candidates on their

individual level as well to reach out to the masses, including out present Prime Minister, Sh. Narendra Modi. Thus, it would not be wrong to say that almost every political party and candidate has extensively utilized social media in order to mobilize voters and social media is now playing a pivotal role when it comes to political mobilization.

The recent explosive growth and popularity in use of social media drew a great deal of attention from political communication researchers. The aspect that needs to be pondered upon here is the use of social media and the political impact that it has for the masses to either obtain new information or interact with those in the political sphere.

From analysis of the parties' policies, programmes, candidates to even the performance, every aspect can be tracked and also largely depends on social media. Also, social media allows the politicians and political parties to connect directly with the masses at a lesser cost and greater reach in comparison to the traditional media.

In today's digital era, undoubtedly, social media plays a pivotal role as far as the public sphere and communication in society is concerned. Particularly, social media has been widely put to use in political context. Social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter which are hugely popular have time and again shown their potential for increasing political participation. On the other hand, micro-blogging site Twitter has facilitated the political institutions to propagate their views via a public platform. This not only helps in spreading the general information, but, at the same time, it facilitates political opinions publicly.

The popularity of social media is not just limited to the youngsters. It has managed to grab users from different walks of life. Particularly, political institutions, politicians, political

foundations, etc. have realized the potential of using social media platforms. Thus, social media pages and community groups are increasingly being used to engage in direct contact with the citizens and to encourage political discussions.

Social media in India has shown tremendous potential and it would not be wrong to say that it has brought the audiences closer to the political parties. It is due to the same reason that today when we use the word 'communication' in terms of the political parties, it is not just about maintaining the standard websites or giving press releases, but, using social media has become an essential requirement, rather more important than other communication strategies. Today, for the politicians, it is not possible to rely on solely the old-fashioned ways to reach out to the masses.

Using the social media communication in order to carry out public relations activity has become highly important. Present day youth, which makes for about 45% of the voters want their views to be given due consideration on every platform, particularly when it comes to the politics. Social media has emerged as a very potent platform for vocalizing their views in front of the politicians. Social media has shown massive expansion in the recent times and is continuing to expand its horizons. Owing to the same and realizing that youths have the power to make and change decisions, politicians are turning to various social media platforms to address and connect to the youth.

There is no doubt about the fact that the reach of traditional media is limited. Thus, to connect with a wider audience across the length and breadth of the nation, social media has to be used in order to facilitate the political communication. Being a two-way channel of communication, users can easily share their views about different candidates and parties on the social media which acts as a highly influential aspect during voting.

As it has already been stated, social media, in recent times has emerged as an effective tool of communication, thus creating avenues of enhancing participation in political and civic activities. From mobilizing voters in joining online petitions, posting short messages on Twitter, expressing supports through blogs and uploading videos on YouTube etc., all the mentioned activities are just a click's task when done via any social platform.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICS

The election of the year 2014 and the recent 2019 elections in India are still remembered for its massive use of social media. During the time of those elections, most of the senior members of major political parties were highly active on the social media.

Looking at the advancement that social media has shown, it is very difficult to realize that it is still very new. Being the same, it has played an effective role in the Indian democracy. In no time, political parties are increasingly shifting to social media with a view to encourage people. Social media can be used as effective political communication tool in numerous ways. Some of them are listed below:

- **A PLATFORM TO PUT FORWARD VIEWS:** It is the social media that lets the politicians present their views freely to the masses without any obstructions by the journalists or other media forms. Also, the speed and access that social media offer is tremendous high.
- **MOBILIZE PUBLIC OPINIONS:** Social media blurs the boundaries of the geographical distances and thus brings the Political parties or politicians and people on the same platform. This facilitates effective and immediate communication.
- **INTERACTION WITH SUPPORTERS:** Social media has given politicians an additional tool to connect with their supporters and

that too without any institutional and bureaucratic hassles.

- **A NEW APPROACH TO CONNECT WITH VOTERS:** Seeing the avenues that social media offers today for the communication, it seems a thing of the past when politicians only relied on posters, cardboard, cut-outs, graffiti, banners and personal canvassing to win over voters. Today, it is very difficult to complete any communication without the use of social media.

With the changing scene of Indian Politics, political parties and politicians have found a new and certainly effective way to connect with a younger population.

ELECTION AND YOUTH VOTERS

With a median age of 27.9 years in 2018, India is a young country. By 2020, youth will make up 34% of the country's population. Forty-five million young people, having become eligible to vote as they turned 18, have been added to India's electoral roll since 2014, according to 2018 data from the Election Commission. This has expanded the voter list by 5% since 2014. After the previous general election in May 2014, India Spend had analysed how states with the highest proportion of young people had voted. Youth had hurled the Bharatiya Janata Party to power in five states with the highest proportion of young voters.

Top Five States That Added Maximum New Voters				
State	2014 Electoral Roll	2018 Electoral Roll	New Voters	Lok Sabha Seats
Bihar	63,800,160	69,934,100	6133940	40
West Bengal	62,833,113	68,335,671	5502558	42
Rajasthan	42994657	47,339,902	4345245	25
Maharashtra	80798823	84,969,764	4170941	48
Uttar Pradesh	138810557	142,784,587	3974030	80
Total In Top Five States	389237310	413,364,024	24126714	235

Source: Election Commission of India, Lok Sabha

Over three-quarters of young Indians extensively research each candidate in their constituency before voting, according to a new survey by the English news app In shorts. According to 2001 Census, out of 1029 million people, 195 million (18.95%) are youths. High illiteracy: 31% of young women and 14% of young men are illiterate.

DEFINING YOUTH

The population from adolescence to middle age is defined as youth. But definitions can vary across policy agencies. The United Nations research reports generally categories the 15-24 years age group as youth. The National Youth Policy in India (2003) defined youth as those between 13-35 years of age.

Later, the National Youth Policy 2014 re-defined this age group as 15-29 years. The NSSO 68th round settled on 15-29 years for labour force participation statistics. In the latest NSSO report on youth released in 2017, the bracket went up to 15-34 years of age.

DISCUSSING THE OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

By using survey method, a study was conducted by the researcher for analysing the role of social media in political mobilization, with specific reference to youth in Delhi. For the purpose of study, the age bracket of 15-24 years has been considered. The tool of the survey was questionnaire. Number of respondents was 100 from Rohini area of Delhi.

THE RESEARCH PAPER ON THE TOPIC HAS BEEN WRITTEN WITH THE FOLLOWING OBJECTIVES IN MIND

- Tounderst and the social media engagement of the respondents
- To understand the role of social media in political decision making by the respondents

KEY FINDINGS

Out of the 100 respondents, the number of males were 52 and the female respondents were 48.

When the respondents were asked about having a social media account, out of 100 respondents, all the respondents replied in affirmative. This was followed by asking the respondents about their frequency of accessing social media. Out of the 100 respondents, a substantial majority of 92 respondents said that their frequency of accessing social media is daily (multiple times), followed by once a day (4 respondents). Only 2 respondents each chose the option of every consecutive day and alternate day respectively.

On being asked about the most used social media platform, Facebook was chosen by a majority of 62 respondents; Twitter was chosen by 18 respondents (11 respondents from 19-22 years), Whatsapp by 9 respondents, and Instagram by 8 respondents. 3 respondents chose Snapchat as the most used social media platform by them.

When asked about the mostly done activity on the respective social media accounts, 48 respondents chose browsing. This was followed by posting videos/ photos (25 respondents), chatting was chosen by 18 respondents, following the social media handles of political leaders/ parties was chosen by 9 respondents

(6 respondents were between the age of 22 -24 years).

On being asked about the number of political leaders/parties being followed by the respondents, 38 respondents chose zero as their option, majorly between the age bracket of 15-17 years. 1-3 was chosen by 16 respondents, out of which 9 were in the age bracket of 19-22 years. 4-6 was chosen by 43 respondents, majorly in the age bracket of 21-24 years. More than 6 was chosen by only 3 respondents.

When the respondents were asked about the frequency of checking the handles of political leaders/ parties being followed by them, a majority of 63 respondents chose weekly as their option, followed by 12 respondents who chose fortnightly. 11 respondents chose monthly as their option, 9 chose every alternate day as their option. Only 5 respondents said that they checked the above mentioned handles daily. All those who checked daily were in the age bracket of 22-24 years.

When asked if the respondents repost or share the content as found on the handles of political leaders/ parties being followed by them, 69 respondents said no, while only 31 respondents replied in affirmative.

On being asked if the content on social media has ever led the respondents to decide in favour or against any party/leader during the elections, surprisingly, only 21 respondents chose yes while the other 79 respondents chose no.

CONCLUSION

With the help of the close ended questionnaire that was given to the respondents, the researchers were able to gather information about aspects like having social media accounts

by the respondents, frequency of accessing the same, following the social media handles of political parties and candidates, etc. Overall, with regards to the information as received by 100 respondents from the age bracket of 15-24 years of Delhi, it can easily be said that all the respondents have their own social media handles with majority of them using Facebook, followed by Twitter and other social media platforms. Also, as per the responses of 100 respondents, it was browsing that was chosen as the mostly done activity on social media platforms. On the flip side, following the social media handles of political leaders/ parties was chosen by merely 9 respondents. However, the small sample size is certainly a limitation of the study.

Strictly on the basis of the responses by 100 respondents, it would not be wrong to say that the respondents who followed and regularly checked the social media handles of political leaders/parties are majorly in the age bracket of 21-24 years. However, the frequency was weekly as per the responses of the majority (63 out of 100).

In addition, it needs to be taken into account that the respondents (79 out of 100) did not think that content on social media has ever led them to decide in favour or against any party/ leader during the elections.

To conclude, it cannot be negated that undoubtedly, social media today has revolutionized communication and even our daily lives, but as far as political mobilization is concerned, it can be said on the basis of this study that a long way is there to go. The potential that social media has is still untapped when it comes particularly to the political communication and mobilization.

Although, the findings of the present study must be considered within its limitations due to the small sample size and use of only close

ended questionnaires. For future research in a related area, the area of research may be expanded beyond only Delhi, with the usage of interviews and focus group discussions to dwell deeper in the subject.

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