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Abstract:

Media and politics are interlinked. From legacy media to new media, media has been acting as a tool to inform, educate and entertain the masses. With the advent of new media technology, it empowers people, turn them into information seekers, opinion makers and then gives them a sense of participation. This participation gives rise to decision making process which ultimately changes the traditional game of legacy media. Social media has given a platform to every individual to comment like and share the information which is present on the screen. This research paper will discuss the importance of new media in the political sphere. It gave new insights into the questions how people on social media communicate, discuss and form decisions. How it was helpful in increasing the vote bank? How it was helpful for politicians to engage the public and attract the attention of the netizens towards the political parties? How it has been proved a platform for free consultancy? What was the level of exposure and usage of Social media during elections? How hypermedia has given a chance to every second individual to express freely? Answer to these and many more such questions are revealed by the researcher in the research paper.

Key Words: Decision Making, Engagement Rate, Online Campaigning, Political Communication & Social Media

1. Introduction:

The changing media trends have given birth to the new innovations which are bringing drastic changes in the society. Be it economic, social or political, the change in every aspect is easily noticeable and perhaps, numbers of manual activities have been replaced by online media. For instance, the concept of going to market and choosing the products has been replaced by the online shopping process; discussing the issues in groups or meetings has been replaced by online forums, social networking sites and blogs. Similar is with the politics, the politicians and the election campaigning process has got another popular platform that is social media. Now election campaigning is not only confined to rallies or door to door communication, it has another source also which is called online campaigning. One to one interaction on social networking sites has made the reach easy and immediate. Gone are the days when the concept of bullet theory was hitting our minds. The participatory approach of people through new media technology is helping a lot in shaping and forming the responsible government and even putting a check on the government by participating, discussing and debating on the burning issues. For this process websites and the social networking sites are playing a major role in expressing free expression which is without any gate-keeping and filtration process.

Social media, which comprises of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Blog, Youtube, Google Plus, MySpace etc. refers to the means of interaction among people in which they exchange and share the information and ideas in virtual space and networks. Now-a-days the political communication strategies to a great extent are technology-driven, which are acting as an important tool for activists to promote freedom and democracy. All the major political parties have their presence on social media and maintain their websites and political page update. Definitely, some are more active and organized than other. These websites have detailed information about the activities and programs of the parties, which ultimately give the common person a clear view about what the party is and what are their activities.¹

As per the records of internet usage by Internet and Mobile Association of India in 2001, there were approximately 7 million Internet users in India. This number has grown by 25 times in the last 12 years at a compounded rate of over 30 percent. In the year 2015, 40 million Indians were going online every day, spending 40-45 hours over the Internet per month. India is the second largest market for social networking giants such as Facebook and LinkedIn. 58,000 new users get connected on to a social network every day. Hence it would not be wrong to say that social media is going to devour the markets of legacy media i.e newspaper, television, radio etc.

Moreover, numbers of reasons are responsible for the growth and participation of people in Social media which are as follows:

Firstly, Social media is open for all and no one can control the text data, whereas print media and television channels are run and owned by the big corporate houses or funded by the political parties, which have their own rules, regulations and policies, framed by the owners or the corporate houses.

The agenda set by the legacy media is set by the political forces and the corporate houses, whereas, the agenda which is carried out on social media is by the common people who have political and social orientation, who are original and creative in nature and unbiased in their thought process as they don't have any profit motives behind it. No doubt the organized teams and organizations have made it as a business but still a common person gets space to express freely.

Secondly, the concept of TRP is the major issue in the legacy media. They present what people want to see or what they want to read in their favorite newspapers. But on social media no such aspect is important. People can bring the revolution as per the demand of the issue.

Thirdly, in TV channels, many of times manufactured reality is shown as per the demand of news. As all news on the channels are breaking news, hence the manufactured aspects are added to the concept which is not real but to make it exclusive. Whereas, the videos and the pictures or the stories which are posted on the social networking sites are to an extent real as no one has any personal benefit or profit motive behind it.

Fourthly, the communication in legacy media is unidirectional, if a newspaper or channel is in the favour of one particular political party, it will follow the same pattern in the rest of the coverage and will never go against or show anything which is negative or can damage the image of political party.

Fifthly, the vertical communication order is being followed in the traditional media, i.e. from top to bottom. News passes through many of stages before it gets published. Hence, number of filtrations takes place. No doubt there is more scope of fake news, misinformation and distortion on social media but no such hierarchy of legacy media is being followed.

Overall, the research paper will focus on political communication - public opinion and the role that social media plays in agenda setting. Thus the research will seek answer to as how conversations existing on social media represents the political agenda set forth by popular media sites.

2. Objectives:

- ✓ To study the participatory approach of people on social media for political communication.
- ✓ To study the popularity of social networking sites among the politicians.
- ✓ To study the impact of social media as a tool of political campaigning.

3. Research Methodology:

Case study of three cases of assembly elections namely Gujarat assembly elections(2002), Delhi assembly elections (2015), Bihar assembly elections (2015) has been taken to analyze the role and effectiveness of social media in political communication and participation of public. Quantitative analysis of the cases has been done. The primary data which was needed for the analysis has been taken from the relevant sources, namely newspapers and the actual analysis of social networking sites, particularly Facebook has been done.

4. Key Findings:

To measure the effectiveness of social media and engagement of politicians and online users, numbers of cases are available in records. These cases not only reveal the data of the online user's participation but also throw light on the strategy followed by the political parties to win the elections. Engaging the people through online conversation and preparing a new vote bank is one among them. Even one of the study conducted by IRIS knowledge foundation and the Internet and Mobile Association of India, claimed that results in the next general elections could be decided by the Facebook users making them the newest vote bank.

The researcher has discussed the concept of engagement rate in the research paper. The word engagement rate means the efficiency of the politicians to engage the social media users in their communication by updating the status on social networking sites. These status are then liked, shared and even the net users comment on it. Thus all these factors are added along with number of followers a politicians is having on his social page. This engagement ratio is then calculated by a set pattern formula. The formula for measuring Facebook engagement rate:

$$\text{No. of Likes + Comments + Shares} / \text{No. of Followers} * 100$$

Thus this calculation gives the engagement rate of the political party or the politician. More is the engagement rate more will be the popularity of the politician on social media, which even increases the vote bank.

Starting with the case in Gujarat assembly elections (2002), the then chief minister Narendra Modi had effectively used social media to connect with online citizens. Besides being active on Twitter and Facebook, Modi also went to for online live chat on Google Plus with netizens. By doing so he became the first Indian politician who was active in using Internet service to connect and convey message to public online and developed a digital culture. He also connected with youth because of his style of political campaigning and his social media skills².

The second effective case is of Delhi assembly elections (2015), which results in a big win by AAP (Aam Aadmi Party) against BJP. AAP won 67 seats out of 70, despite of being new in the field of politics. This new party gained maximum popularity through social media. In 2014, this party got 1,137,873 likes on Facebook. People donated to the party online and followed its leader on Twitter. In a clear and concise website, AAP listed out its manifesto, explanations about its constitution and decisions. According to the news published in Hindustan Times on January 15, 2015, the statistics available on Facebook pages of all three parties AAP had the highest user engagement rate.³In case of AAP national Facebook page, there were 2.318.115 people who liked the page. The engagement rate was 21.6%. Whereas, 7,300,000 people liked BJP's page, the engagement rate was only 7.6%, while the national congress was liked by 3,597,644 and its engagement rate was 7.2% only.⁴

Thus, the above data clearly describes the power of Social media and people's participation in the electoral system. As the engagement rate of AAP was comparatively very high on Facebook page, was able to sweep the elections.

Considering the third case of Bihar assembly elections of 2015, the same effectiveness of social media was clearly identified. Before and during the elections the analysis of the Facebook pages of the three politicians namely Lalu Prasad Yadav (RJD), Nitish Kumar (JD (U)) and Narendra Modi (BJP) were considered. RJD, JD (U) and congress formed the grand alliance, whereas BJP was fighting the elections on its own. The continuous updates from Nitish Kumar and Lalu Prasad Yadav had acquired the maximum attention of the online users. As per the data available, total number of status updated before and during the elections by Nitish Kumar was -56, Lalu Prasad updated 69 status, whereas Modi updated only 31 status. Thus, more the number of status more were the comments and hence more was the engagement of the people. The concept of live chat was also followed by Nitish Kumar. Out of total 243 constituencies, the grand alliance (RJD, JD (U) and congress) won 190 seats whereas BJP acquire only 53 seats. Thus, it would not be wrong to say that social media has been proved very effective during Bihar assembly elections. No doubt the other media, as well as interpersonal and public communication has played a significant role but social media, a new media has become very effective and powerful tool in the electoral policies in the recent times. As a political party needs a strategy, this strategy has been boosted up by the social media which is working as a tactic to insure more votes than opponents.

Hence, the above three cases clearly depicts that online campaigning and peoples participation on social media is much more effective in conveying the message and engaging the masses in the political battle field.

5. Conclusion:

The case study of three different assembly elections depicts that our politicians are now much more concerned and utilizing the new media technology. They are using it as a tool and as a strategy for online campaigning. Apart from rallies, yatras, functions and political gatherings; online campaigning is more fruitful in engaging the youth where they feel free to join the discussions, forums, and pages of politicians. This concept of open discussion has given chance to common person to openly participate the war of words through which they can express their aspirations and grievances. Despite of having legacy media, the new media has given more freedom of expression which is free from barriers of filtration and gate-keeping. As a result, both positive and negative comments are permanent parts of political discussion today. Thus, from the above three cases it is clear that politicians are making use of technology to reach the masses, which has also opened up new avenues for conducting politics. According to Egyptian Google Executive, "If you want to liberate a society, just give them the Internet".⁵ It would not be wrong to say that social media has become a platform for public to participate and form opinion about politicians, politics and the government. One might question the validity of the findings as majority of people in India are using social media for entertainment. But one must understand that public always become interested if there is any crisis, event or any social issue on social networking sites. For this the good examples are of Delhi gang rape case of 2001, Anna Hazare moment for Lokpal Bill, the Beef eating case and the case of reservation for minorities. All these cases reflect the seriousness of the nation and society. In all these cases people participated on social media and brought a revolution. Similar is with the elections and politics. Instead of using social networking sites for entertainment only or to stay in touch with friends, people are becoming eager to participate in the political discussions to express their thoughts and aspirations before the government. Thus political communication through social media is widely accepted and mainly used by the politicians and by the political parties to gain public support in elections.⁶ Social media or the digital media has become one of the most real time updaters in the whole world which is working without any organizations norms, policies and gate-keeping. This advantage is highly used by the online users to express freely about the working of the politicians and the administrations. Simultaneously it is helping the politicians to know the aspirations of the public to prepare a good and attractive manifesto. Thus overall new media technology is playing an effective role in updating the information by the politicians for the public for better and healthy communication as it is a two-way and instant process.

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