

THE IMPACT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE LOK SABHA ELECTIONS 2014 AND 2019

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ABSTRACT:

The role of the media as the fourth estate of democracy has been growing stronger in recent times. Digital media serve as an instrument for government and citizens to communicate and share opinions on larger platforms. The combination of optical and speech technologies has resulted in the evolution of social media into a potent tool. It demonstrates how the media as a source of information for common people has altered itself from post-liberalization to the present. This article examines the exceptional impact and utilization of social media during electoral processes, emphasizing its consequences on voter participation, political discourse, and electoral strategy. It looks at the impact of social media on the political landscape, specifically focusing on the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections in India. Although the Internet has made great strides in sharing political information, the threat to democracies cannot be denied since it may be used to spread false information in order to exert more control over people. Moreover, it explores the effects of the widespread utilization of social media on forthcoming democratic procedures, highlighting the necessity for diligent and transparent use of this digital instrument.

Keywords: social media, digital, lok sabha elections, politics, electoral strategy, networking sites

INTRODUCTION:

Since 1952, voters have been reached via door-to-door campaigns, advertisements, and personal interactions, but there has been a change in engaging with people in modern times. Because of technological advancements, social media has the potential to address a

wide range of topics on a single common platform with the involvement of a diverse range of individuals. India is a diverse nation in which numerous political parties have used digital media to attain social and political goals. Political groups are also constantly monitoring the practices of political parties and leaders. The youth, who have been deemed to be the foundation of every country, play a crucial role in rejuvenating democracy in a way that is more productive. According to the report, (Population of India, 2021) 65 percent of the country's population is under the age of 35. In India, young people constitute 27.5% of the total population, but that number will probably climb to 34.3% by the year 2020. In India, young people now make up 27.5% of the total population, but that number will probably climb to 34.3% by the year 2020. The participation of young people helps to ensure that elections are reflective of the whole population, while the active contributions they make bring democratic principles and ideals to life. The use of social media has been described as an interactive platform that may improve communication between people as well as between individuals and businesses via the sharing of ideas, photographs, and videos. In contemporary society, there has been a notable surge in the utilization of social media platforms by individuals and political organizations as a means to enhance the extent of political engagement within the larger population. As a result, the role of digital media has enabled people to make choices that are both informed and empowered.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES:

1. Voter engagement and Political discourse: Traditional means of voter outreach were enhanced and supplemented by the utilization of social media platforms, leading to the development of a pervasive perception of connectivity and engagement among the public. Candidates have the ability to establish direct connections with voters, enabling them to effectively communicate their vision, solve any issues, and cultivate a campaign experience that fits the candidate. Consequently, there was a notable rise in political conversation, with individuals actively engaging in dialogues and expressing their viewpoints, apprehensions, and anticipations. Political parties and candidates skillfully employed social media platforms as a means to distribute

information, exchange policy recommendations, and convey party ideology. Twitter has emerged as a significant venue for engaging in political discourse as political parties and politicians increasingly make use of hashtags to mobilize support and influence public sentiment. This facilitated a political discourse that was more comprehensive and inclusive, therefore appealing to a broader demographic.

2. Campaign Strategies enhanced by social media: In addition to greater levels of voter participation, social media platforms have offered political campaigns innovative ideas and resources. The utilization of targeted advertisement features on platforms like Facebook enabled campaigns to concentrate their efforts on particular demographic groups, therefore optimizing their reach and guaranteeing effective communication with their desired audience. In addition, the utilization of analytics and data-driven methodologies facilitated political campaigns in comprehending public opinion, discerning pivotal concerns, and customizing their campaigns accordingly. The 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections also saw the emergence of citizen journalism, facilitated by social media platforms. The general public, equipped with mobile devices and active social media profiles, assumed the role of primary observers of campaign activities, including linked public addresses and mass gatherings. The content provided by users proved to be a potent instrument in delivering timely updates at the local level, frequently presenting an alternative perspective to the narratives propagated by mainstream media.
3. Mobilization of citizens through social media: The utilization of social media platforms played a significant role in facilitating the mobilization of individuals, namely the younger demographic and other disenfranchised segments of society, during the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Throughout history, certain groups who have been traditionally marginalized, such as women, rural people, and minority communities, have seen an increased ability to express themselves through various social media platforms. Campaigns strategically utilized various platforms to effectively emphasize key topics and pledges that strongly resonated with these specific demographic groups, resulting in a notable surge in their engagement and involvement within the political process. The utilization of social media as a

communication platform facilitated rapid exchange of information, streamlined networking capabilities, and effective mobilization of volunteers and followers. Party workers and supporters played a vital role in facilitating campaign operations, establishing grassroots movements, and coordinating rallies and events. The utilization of social media platforms greatly facilitated the coordination efforts, hence playing a vital role in the successful execution of several campaigns during the elections at the grassroots level.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE INDIAN LOK SABHA ELECTIONS OF 2014 AND 2019:

Social media has transformed the politics of India in recent years. It has enabled leaders and political parties to connect with the younger generation through social media. The changing patterns of media had transformed the way citizens communicated with the government and politicians. The impact of social media was first highlighted in the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks and later on in the 2009 elections, encouraging voter registration and online campaigns. Further, young people have been seen involved in movements protesting against social inequalities and issues vibrant in the country. Social movements such as the anti-reservation movement, the anti-corruption movement, the Nirbhaya movement, and the pro-Jallikattu movement gained popularity through the internet to draw the attention of the government to changing policies (Baruah, 2018)

This made the BJP the first party in 2014 to use social media as a strategy to influence youth towards its ideologies and manifestos when casting their vote. Among 150 million young voters, it was the highest number of first-time voters in India who voted in the political process. The rise of Twitter and Facebook users constantly becomes an alarming sign of the usage of social media. Digital media has given strength to social activism and paved the way for a new form of governance that is open, consultative, and inclusive. During the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the involvement of India's youth transformed and shaped the elections. The political debates, street dharnas, and social media conversations had a big impact on the elections.

In 2014, the BJP party aims at showcasing Narendra Modi's inclined towards Hindu ideology and the image of a tea seller. This helped them promote religion and backward caste appeals to get votes. Prime Minister Modi interacted with youth on Chai pe Charcha, Mann ki baat, and through different slogans on networking sites. Saffron Warriors by the BJP was used by youngsters to imbibe Hindutva ideology. The agenda of reform, performance, and transformation, conveying a message of development, resulted in election results. The BJP won 282 seats, and with the NDA, it became the ruling government. Digital media proved the finest strategy for the party's electoral success with a historic victory. Later on, the Aam Admi Party, in order to win elections, used social media to mobilise the youth. His politics revolved around the common man, and images of mufflers and caps were used to identify the party's ideologies. A completely different picture was found when one compared the top leaders. The direct battle was seen between Kejriwal and Modi, as they are the most popular faces on Facebook. They are using online social networking sites and political organisations to connect, express their voices, and campaign for social good.

In 2019, the BJP moved towards an app-based campaign approach with the help of the RSS to win elections. The use of WhatsApp groups and the NaMo app using different languages as a medium paved the way for the party to connect with voters. It helped them with opinion polls and getting feedback from people. The road shows and meetings were addressed through digital media, and youth were invited to recruit themselves as volunteers for the party. BJP won 303 seats with a thumping majority in India. Among digital media, Twitter has been found to be mostly used by political leaders to provide short and quick information, with 80 percent of news being consumed via social media.

Congress has taken initiatives to disengage it from social media after these elections. Political parties are also realising that social media reach is another level for playing field, allowing new political parties and their leaders to create an identity for themselves faster in a young India. Not only parliamentary elections, but states like Gujrat, Uttar Pradesh, the North-East, etc. throughout India used social media in legislative assembly elections.

Apart from this, some of the young leaders were seen in the Indian elections using social media to express their thoughts, talking about the different ideologies and means to influence the youth to participate in the political arena. The visions and aims of our young leaders in politics on Section 377, women's safety, and corruption have taken a turn in bringing youth closer to the real picture of politics.

Therefore, it has been identified that there has been voter mobilisation and more online interaction during elections through social media by making videos, blogs, and images, which has encouraged youth to come forward. The success of the Internet has influenced youth in casting their votes and even in bringing about changes in policymaking. The rise of civic engagement among people has been an open eye these days for the government to transform their actions in a better way.

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN POLITICS:

In established democracies, there has been a discernible decrease in the participation of young individuals in electoral processes subsequent to the last elections. The voter turnout rate within the demographic of 18 to 25 remains consistently lower in comparison to other age groups. While in the past, political engagement among youth was encouraged through activism in political parties and membership by analysing voluntary work done, now political parties are struggling to attract new members, particularly young people.

With the advent of technology, the use of social media has become a trend. Politics is not left behind in influencing the behaviour of electorates, particularly youngsters. Social media has helped political parties build political will and collective identities. Politicians motivate their followers through messages, tweets, videos, and live chat sessions, keeping themselves intertwined. Now a political post or tweet can change a youngster's mood with a single click. It helps to exert youth in mobilising opinions, setting policy agendas, and discrediting opponents in contemporary times. It acts as a barometer of mood, which judges the instant way people see any political, social, or economic development.

Positive Impact

The social networking sites of today are no longer only a place to keep in touch with family members and peer groups. Instead, it has transformed into an environment that is influential for political engagement and the creation of new political discussion. The rise in usage of social media apps and mobile phones is making it feasible for political leaders to target the youth. The inclusion of social media has become the need of the hour to make the general public, especially youth, aware of the plans and purposes of a political party standing for election. Youth use social media as a medium to express their voice and actions to express their gratitude or discontent on particular issues, bringing together a platform for a larger support from the people across the nation. Within the environment, social media impacts youngsters directly and indirectly. Directly, it leads to participation in political processes, whereas indirectly, it circulates the tweets and images with friends.

Competition, co-evolution, and the emergence of fragmented media that provide unique material are all produced as a result of the hybridization of the media, which refers to the mixing of conventional media systems with modern media systems. As a result of the fact, that it is challenging to communicate with young people via conventional forms of media, they are now attracted to social media. They have eliminated the need for middlemen by adopting more ICT methods for direct communication, such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs, amongst others. As opposed to their paper and print media, social media platforms often provide continual updates of developing news stories and are not constrained to being published at a certain time. Young people who immerse themselves in internet media run the risk of becoming overwhelmed in a number of possible categories, including political knowledge and leanings.

Negative Impact

Social media is transforming democracy as digital platforms and their governance impact the behaviours of youth. There have been negative premises about youth being careless and inexperienced in taking informed decisions. Sometimes the young blood's temper gets violent, which can be a threat to the security of a nation. They can be easily manipulated by politicians. Apart from bringing a positive change to democracy, youth is often held responsible for electoral violence by political parties. The attention of leaders has shifted from the administrative aspects to the new media technology as a direct result

of the implementation of strategies and the incorporation of social media. The leaders manipulate young people by giving them money, alcohol, weapons, and drugs to cause riots and win seats in elections. Such crimes delegitimize the importance of democratic systems. To preserve the integrity of elections and avoid violence, one should not support violent groups or political parties. During elections, fake news operations carried out by trolls and agendas devised by political parties during election campaigns are used to sway public mood in favour of or in opposition to certain candidates. There is no guarantee of the authenticity of content on social media propagated by political leaders.

The polarising influence of social media, which, on the one hand, helps political leaders interact with one another and, on the other hand, facilitates the propagation of hate speech, disinformation, and communal violence, has emerged as both a blessing and a curse in the world of politics. (Aneez, Z., Neyazi, T. A., Kalogeropoulos, A. and Nielsen, R.K , 2019) discuss two types of news in the political context: general fake news, which is created for political or commercial purposes, and hyper-partisan news, in which reality is altered in order to advance a particular agenda by political parties.

SOCIAL MEDIA APPROACH TO LOOK FORWARD IN POLITICS:

1. To prevent social media from being used as a weapon and to increase transparency, legislation and other forms of disclosure need to be implemented. Since platforms store personal information about citizens, they must incorporate privacy protections for their users.
2. The social media platforms should be made responsible for making informed choices about posting authentic content and not promoting abusive, unlawful content.
3. Regulations should be enforced in order to guarantee that checks conducted on the use of personal data in the context of election campaigns are in accordance with national laws.
4. There should be strict regulations on the spending of election campaigns on social media for political goals.

5. The social media platforms should verify the accounts of public figures and politicians in order to help users distinguish between credible sources of information and fake profiles.
6. The Election Commission of India and its Model Code of Conduct go to considerable efforts to ensure that the party that is currently ruling does not have an unfair advantage over any other party during the conduct of elections just because it is in government.

CONCLUSION:

Undoubtedly, social media has played a crucial role in alternating democracy by increasing the involvement of youth in politics. It has facilitated the public's ability to share their opinions globally and connect with political leaders. It has made the political process more transparent. The use of digital media not only assists the government in the process of policy formation but also inspires an enhanced level of participation on the part of the general public in political processes. Social media has affected both developed and developing countries by shaping public opinions and political exercises. But there is a need for certain initiatives to encourage participation of people in political processes. It becomes the responsibility of organisations and the media to educate people through social media about the issues that need to be solved for the development of the country. No doubt, social media has provided an opportunity for the people to make a purposeful decision to vote on the basis of the candidate's agenda and access their past work. The establishment of equilibrium between the preservation of freedom of speech and the implementation of restrictions on social media will play a pivotal role in effectively using the capabilities of these platforms for forthcoming democratic elections.

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