



Understanding the Role of new Media in Establishing and Maintaining Political Communication.

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ABSTRACT

We are the citizens of the largest democracy in the world, we enjoy the privilege to elect our own government and that government works for our welfare. A stable and transparent political system forms the very basis of a developing country like ours. As the responsible citizens of the society it is our duty to participate in this political set up. The power lies with the people but it needs to be channelized and one way of doing this is through the use of New Media. The New Media can provide a platform for political communication. At this point it becomes important that we define political communication.

Objectives

- To gather insight into the contribution of the new media in shaping the public opinion.
- To comprehend the potential of the new media during the election campaign of a candidate contesting the elections.
- To examine the role of new media as a facilitator for the implementation of the programme, scheme and policy framed by the government.

Research Methodology

The present study understanding the role of new media in establishing and maintaining political communication was conducted following the content analysis method. The researcher made extensive use of the internet as well as the print media and electronic media to gather insight into the objectives listed above.

KEYWORDS : Social Media, Blogs and Political Communication, New Media and Political Awareness, Social Issues and Internet and New Media Research and Communication and Media Studies.

Introduction

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Political communication may be defined as the exchange of views, ideas and thoughts between the public and their elected representatives. It is desirable that this form of communication is two-way. Since two-way communication can only ensure the expected outcome.

New Media is a broad term in field of media studies, it emerged in the later part of the 20th century. It enables its users to access selective content or material at all times with the help of a digital device. It also ensures active participation, selective groups and community formation.

Before the advent of the New Media an average citizen had very limited ways to communicate with his government. The New Media has opened up several avenues in the form of internet, social networking sites, blogs and micro blogging sites. The New Media is the next big thing in India after cricket and Bollywood, behold! as this is just the beginning. (The facebook has 6,16,99,860 users in India making it the third largest in the world.)

The New Media is now being used as a tool for socio-political movements in not only the developed but also the developing countries. This role of New Media as an agent or catalyst for socio-political change can be traced to 1994. In this year the New Media was used to spread the message of the National liberation force in Mexico. It was for the first time that internet services and features were used to mobilise the supporters.

In the year 1999 during the WTO Ministerial Conference the protesters made proficient use of blogs to create awareness regarding their cause and concerns due to WTO guidelines and it provided the pro-

testers with a platform to share their activities and ensure large turnout at the rallies.

In the Indian context, some of the earliest efforts for political communication mediated through the New Media were made in the year 2002 when an NRI named Shukoor Ahmed launched www.IndiaDemocracy.org. It was a gateway to facilitate two-way communication between the citizens and the political leaders. The site provided e-links and contacts of the politicians. Unfortunately the project was shut down in December 2012.

Collective intelligence may be defined as the phenomenon that is the result of the internet users getting in-touch with each other, engaging in brainstorming sessions and creating something that is much bigger than the knowledge base that each one of them had earlier. Wikipedia is a fitting example for the same.

The basic attributes of collective intelligence are as listed below:

- User's identity.
- User's credibility and reputation.
- User's location.
- User's contacts (friends' lists).
- User's views and arguments.
- User's platform (selected services).

Theories that help us in understanding the tremendous popularity achieved by the social networking sites are as follows:

- **The Reciprocation Theory** means that the virtual community of a user must provide him/her the expected reward so as to ensure future participation and association.
- **The Consistency Theory** states that when a user makes public declaration and commitment as member of a selective group then he/she feels obligated to go all the way.
- **The Social Validation Theory** suggests that people are more inclined to join and participate in a virtual community if they feel that it is socially desirable and popular.

All thanks to the new media that now we have an iPhone app that allows live-streaming video of presidential events in the United States of America.

The photo of the Australian Prime Minister saluting the American President during a summit attended by the leaders from all over the globe.

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Results and analysis

The New Media has emerged as an effective tool for positive political action.

The New Media has fuelled the anti-corruption drive in India.

Philippines

The President Joseph Estrada was facing impeachment trail and he was able to force the Congress to set aside the evidence. When the word got out, the protesters were able to organise a massive protest in the streets of Manila. Over the next few days, 1 million people had turned up to participate in the protest. The Congress was forced to revert its earlier decision as a result Joseph Estrada had to resign on January 2011. Close to 7 million text messages were shared in a week during the protests.

Arab Spring

The Arab spring is a revolutionary wave of demonstrations, protests and war occurring in the Arab world that began on Dec 18, 2013. The new media was used to spread the word regarding the atrocities committed by the government. This helped in the formation of the overwhelming public opinion for the establishment of a liberal and democratic government. The social networking sites like the facebook and twitter provided the much needed public platform for the people's movement to gain momentum. At the same time the social networking sites and the blogs highlighted the movement at the international level and ensured the much needed support from the outside world. The revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia (Jasmine Revolution) are the shining examples of the crucial role that the new media can play in supporting a public movement.

Some of the popular comments associated with the revolution (that were posted on the social networking sites)

If your government shuts your internet, it's time to shut down your government.

We had no freedom of assembly in streets of Cairo, so we assembled in cyberspace instead.

Here we don't really have Internet, we have a national Intranet.

Unfortunately, I have to get out of Egypt, to be able to speak about the plight of the Egyptians.

Occupy Wall Street

OWS is the name given to a protest movement that began on Sep 17, 2011 in Zuccotti Park, located in New York City's Wall Street financial district. This public movement aimed at raising the issues that plague the people in the developed countries. The movement spread awareness regarding the social and economic inequality, greed, corruption and the undue influence of the corporate giants on the government. The 99% of the population was affected by these issues.

Delhi's Shame

On the fateful night of Dec 16, 2012 occurred the brutal gangrape of a 23 year old paramedical student in a bus. This unfortunate incident

would have faded from the public memory had it not been highlighted by the social networking sites and the blogs. The youth in particular were able to vent their feelings through the new media. This resulted into nation-wide protest and rallies. The government has been forced to address the sensitive issue of crime against women. There is demand for a speedy trial and stringent punishment for the guilty.

India Against Corruption

In October 2011 Anna Hazare waged a war against corruption and relied on the social media to reach out to the Indians. It was in April 2012 when Anna Hazare demanded a tough bill to combat corruption in the corridors of power, the government was forced to accept the gravity of the political turmoil. The nation stood in firm support of Anna. Nationwide protests and rallies were witnessed and the social media ensured that people were mobilised like never before. Anna has 7,54,000 followers on facebook.

For a socio-political movement to be a success it is desirable that the following elements exist.

- Network of core-groups and organisations.
- Members share the zeal for socio-political goal of the movement.
- Common goal and approach ensures collective identity.
- Mobilising the people and resources towards active participation in the movement.

The potential of the new media during the election campaign of a candidate contesting the elections.

The New Media is a ray of hope for the candidates who are not able to attract the big corporate donors, as it provides them with a platform to reach out to the masses without having to pay heavily for the time-slots on the electronic media.

In order to use that New Media to run a successful election campaign the candidate needs to take care of certain aspects. To start with the candidate needs to **shortlist a few social media sites** so that he/she can ensure **timely updates and proper interaction** with the targeted groups of potential supporters. The candidate must also ensure **uniformity and consistency** in his/her web posts so as to convey a clear opinion regarding various socio-political issues. The candidate must **spread his/her election campaign** over print and electronic media in addition to the New Media.

In the US Barack Obama became a national sensation through the explicit use of New Media to approach the voters. He succeeded in creating history when he became the first African-American President of USA. Hillary Clinton is also uses the New Media to connect with her supporters. She is very vocal about her views regarding critical issues concerning the US government.

The political parties in India have official twitter accounts. Several politicians are very active on the web. Narendra Modi has outdone rest of his political counterparts when it comes to using the New Media so as to connect with the public. He became the first politician to use Google+ Hangout feature. He has his own website that is managed in a professional manner. In 2007 he launched his channel on YouTube. He enjoys a cult status in his state with 8 lakh followers on facebook and 9 lakh followers on twitter. By and large he has managed to avoid major controversies as well. He frequently shares inspiring quotes targeted at the youth and just as the rumour mills had rightfully predicted, Modi has become Prime Minister of India with astounding majority.

Other name that comes close, in terms of popularity enjoyed in the cyber world is that of Shashi Tharoor. He is known for his foot-in-the-mouth tweets. There are several others like Omar Abdulla, Meera Sanjayal, Rahul Gandhi, LK Advani, Varun Gandhi and even Mamta Banerjee has jumped onto the social media bandwagon.

The role of new media as a facilitator for the implementation of the programme, scheme and policy framed by the government.

The central government has realised the importance of New Media as a potent tool for good governance. As a result in August 2012 it issued guidelines regarding the use of social media to its various de-

partments. The highlights of these guidelines were the need for social media, which platforms to be used, the rules of engagement and interactions, confidential information and how it can be accessed.

The Ministry of External Affairs in the year 2011 became the first government department to join the social media. Although the Ministry's facebook page is in a state of neglect but its twitter account **Indian Diplomacy** has 42,451 followers. Apart from explaining India's stand on diplomatic issues the ministry made ample use of the New Media to rescue Indians from Libya. The Indian families were able to return safely to India as the government responded to their appeals on the social media.

It is important to discuss the use of New Media by the Traffic Police in various states cities like New Delhi, Bangalore, Chandigarh and Mumbai. The New Media is being used to encourage people to follow road safety norms. In New Delhi the Traffic Police has encourages people to upload pictures (on facebook) of traffic rules offenders. Nearly 20,000 violators have been nabbed and brought to book.

Conclusion

In the end we may sum up that New Media has the potential to act as a platform for self-expression and at the same time it can enable the voters to reach out to their political leaders. The New Media facilitates political communication in a very cost effective manner. The social media can set the stage for political discourse. The New Media has had its influence on the field of media studies and we come across terms like thin media, citizen journalism and link journalism and collaborative journalism.

Thin media may be defined as a feature or app available over internet that enables communication i.e. many-to-many.

Citizen journalism is the practise of news gathering and reporting by ordinary citizens. It can prosper only with the support of New Media.

Link journalism is a news writing style that has evolved due to the growth of New Media. A news report carries external links that are scattered over the web. These links are meant to complement the original report.

Collaborative journalism is when citizens and journalists work together to highlight an issue.

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