



The Use of Social Networks for Political Engagement by Indian Youth

KEYWORDS

Politics, Social Media, Facebook, Indian Youth, Political engagement

Mrs. Rupa P

Assistant Professor at The Oxford College of Arts, Bangalore.

Dr. K. Karnamaharajan

Associate Professor, Centre for Film and Electronic Media Studies, Madurai Kamaraj University.

ABSTRACT *Social Media or Web 2.0 has changed the way we interact and experience the world. Individuals have become active content generators and content purveyors, leading to greater democratization of information.*

Social media sites have also changed the way in which politics is perceived. People are no longer passive recipients of political messages. Instead, they now have the ability to strongly voice their opinions on political scenarios through social media. They can like, comment, share, tweet, re-tweet or forward political views through the click of a mouse or the touch of a phone. Indian youth use social media tools like Facebook and Twitter to connect and express.

This quantitative study seeks to understand how Indian youth use social media to disseminate, discuss and share their opinions on Indian politics. The study sheds more light on the social media habits of Indian youth and their use of social media to understand, review and disseminate information related to Indian politics.

Introduction:

Social media is defined as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan Andreas M., Haenlein Michael, 2010). Social networking technology that allows community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. Social media is varied and the most common types include forums, microblogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social curation, and wikis.

Social network is a mode of communication that has revolutionized the way we interact with the world around us. Communication is easy, fast and instantaneous. Content creation and dissemination is no longer the prerogative of a few elites. The power to create, disseminate and communicate is now in the hands of the masses. There is greater democratization of the media. It has also led to greater freedom of expression among people. People use social networks to express opinions about everything from culture to politics to religion and so on. Everyone who actively uses social media becomes an opinion leader for another. Social network has now gone mobile with the help of smartphones. So, information and opinion are created and circulated round-the-clock, anywhere. Also, cross-platform messaging applications like WhatsApp and Hike, which loosely fall under the realm of social media also play a major role in the information and opinion sharing process.

Young people in India are hooked on to social networking. India, right now, has more than 100 million Facebook users and the numbers are growing by the minute. WhatsApp has registered 70 million active monthly users in India as of November 2014. Most of these users are youngsters and they are using social media to address both serious and trivial issues. Young people are actively using social media as an instrument to rake up social and political issues and address them head on. The success of movements like the Anna Hazare Jan Lok Pal Bill or the more recent Kiss of Love movement owes itself to social networks. Social net-

works were actively used by political parties and politicians alike, to engage during the 2014 General Elections in India as well as the 2015 Delhi Elections. Social networks are still used by youth to create opinions on controversial issues like Love Jihad, GharWapasi and Narendra Modi's dress sense and a lot more. It's the place where youth are hanging out and talking about politics. It's also the place where they connect and engage with one another to address political issues.

Review of Literature

Sauter and Bruns (2013), while studying social media in Australian media report that members of the public are predominantly portrayed as using social media to campaign, fight for their rights, and support particular causes.

According to Hoffman et al. (2013) new modes of online engagement appear to be motivated by realistic perceptions that it is a means of communicating political information to others rather than in directly influencing governments.

Wohn et al. (2011) identified that users employed Facebook to perform a range of social information uses: information-seeking, organizing events, and establishing common ground.

According to Vitak et al. (2010) young Facebook user's political participation in the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election tended to be high on information and low in resource intensity. The study found that youngsters generally felt that Facebook offered appropriate opportunities for political self-expression.

While studying social media and politics in India, Rajput, Himanshu (2014) states that Twitter along with other social media is going to play a vital role in Indian political scenario. However social media cannot be an alternative for traditional media but can be used along with these channels to harness its full potential.

Research Objectives

- To examine the social networking habits of urban Indian youth
- To examine the usage of social networks for political engagement by urban Indian youth
- To identify if social networks are perceived as a viable forum for political engagement by urban Indian youth

Research Methodology

The quantitative study was carried out in Bangalore city with a sample of 200 respondents who were 15 to 25 years of age. The primary data was collected by distributing a questionnaire to the respondents. Convenient sampling method was used in selecting the sample for the study. After eliminating samples that had errors, 184 questionnaires were selected for the final data analysis and interpretation.

General Profile of Respondents

45.7% respondents were male, while 54.3% of the respondents were female. The majority of the respondents belong to 20-25 years age group (63%), while 32.6% belonged to the 15-20 years age group and 4.4% belonged to 25-30 years age group. Majority of the respondents are students (77.1%) and 65.2% of them were graduates.

Interpretation and Findings:

The data analysis was done using percentiles and the results were interpreted. The findings are stated below:

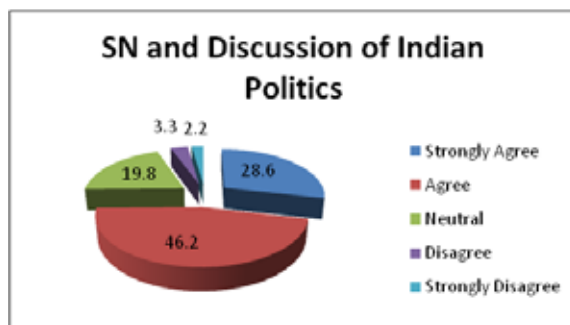
- Almost all young people in the age group of 15-30 years use social networking applications like Facebook , Twitter and Whatsapp.
- Most of them access social networks everyday, and spend less than 30 minutes during each visit. Majority of the users access social networks 2-5 times a day using their smartphones. It is safe to say that social networking is a part of the daily routine of youngsters who access it on the go.
- Social networking allows youth to get connected, express themselves and also keep tabs on their friends' activities. It is an active part of their social life.
- Majority of the youth have not posted content related to politics on social networks, while a smaller percentage have posted content related to politics.
- Most politics related content on social networks like Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp are in the form of status updates/tweets, memes, photos, videos and posters.

Table No. 1: Type of Content Related to Politics Posted on Social Networks

Content Type	Percentage of Respondents (%)
Status Updates/Tweets	24.2
Memes	8.8
Photos	7.7
Videos	5.5
Posters	4.4
Audio recording	0
Others	1.1

- Majority of the youth have liked or approved of content related to politics posted on social networks, while most of them have not shared or commented on politics-related content on social networks. This shows that their engagement is limited to giving 'likes' but there is very less active participation.
- Most youth agree that Indian politics can be discussed on social networks. Majority of the respondents agree that it is good to share content related to Indian politics on social networks.

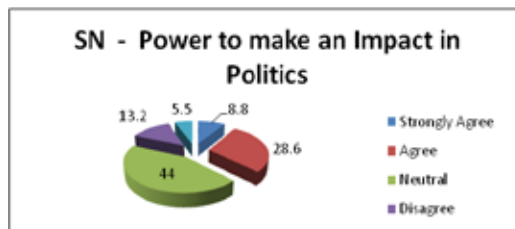
Fig. No. 1: Indian politics can be discussed on Social Networks (SN)



- However, majority of the respondents do not want to express their views on Indian politics using social networks.
- Politics is a controversial topic and youth have had arguments related to politics on social networks.
- Most youth liked to read/watch political content posted by their friends on social networks. However, majority of the respondents do not like to share/comment on politics on social networks. Again, this shows a lack of active political engagement.
- Majority of the respondents do not want to use social networks to support/criticize particular political parties and political causes. Majority of the respondents have not used social networks to spread information about political beliefs.
- Majority of the respondents disagree that social networks can be used to interact with political leaders. Most respondents are not sure if social networks are an effective medium to connect people with politicians and political parties.

- Only a few respondents feel that social networks help the common man take active part in politics and that social networks give the common man the power to make an impact in politics.

Fig. No. 2: SN gives common man the power to make an impact in politics



- 28.6% of the respondents feel that social network gives the common man the power to make an impact in politics, while majority of the respondents (44%) do not have an opinion on the same.

Conclusion:

Social network use is a part of daily routine among urban Indian youth. While they use social networks to connect to people, political engagement is not the primary purpose of this medium. Youth feel that politics can be discussed in social media. However, they limit their political participation to giving likes to others posts/tweets/videos and so on. If and when they post political content, it is mostly in the form of status updates/tweets and memes. Youth, by and large, do not use social networks to propagate political ideologies or support/criticize political parties and movements. They also feel that social networks do not really connect them with political leaders. Very few of the youth feel that social networks are an effective tool for political engagement.

Political engagement by Indian youth using social networks is limited. However, the potential is enormous because youth are hooked on to social networking in a big way. The government, political leaders and political parties can tap into this potential and create effective communication strategies to better engage youth in political activity.

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