

Social and Digital Media in Political Communication



Political Science

KEYWORDS : Political Communication, Digital Media, Social Media.

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ABSTRACT

Today we are living in the age of democracy and democracy is only possible in the societies where there is freedom of information and discussion. Free media is a pivotal part of the democratic societies. In the free democratic societies media organizations generate political debates and provide a platform for open discussions. New media technologies can flourish in such societies promoting an atmosphere of participation and democracy. In the developed countries of the world, no doubt, new media has played an appreciated role in promoting the independent and democratic values in the societies but the situation is different in other parts of the world. Many of the political leaders have their Face book accounts and they upload their video messages on You Tube. They have their own web sites and blogs where they interact with their voters and supporters and get their feedback. Their supporters, voters and even critics give their feedback through internet and even they can change their policies and priorities in light of the feedback received. Communication is a key tool that political communicators use to understand political environment by focusing on each and every aspect of the political life of a nation. In political sector communication is used to educate and train people to study and analyze the nature and state of specific structures which widely affect all the process of political communications in the society. This paper discusses the role of digital media in Political Communication.

Introduction

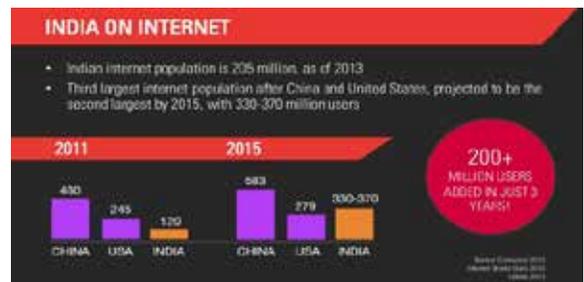
Political Communication is the web of human civilization. Political communications is an interactive process concerning the transmission of information among politicians, the news media and the public. The structure of a political communication system with its more or less well defined channels is in a sense the skeleton of the social body which envelops it. The flow of political communication determines the direction and pace of dynamic social and political development. One can analyze the social and political process of a country in terms of the structure, content and flow of political communication activities prevailing in that country. Political communication is an interactive process regarding the transfer of information between politicians, media and public. Political election campaigns are organized so that they inform, persuade and mobilize. Campaigns in general can be best understood as an organized effort to inform, persuade and mobilize. While the practice of using the Internet in political campaigns goes back to the nineties, only in recent years, with the emergence of new tools and social networks, real strength of this medium is demonstrated. Information technology provides opportunities for the improvement of human activities, including politics. Used the right way, Internet can allow direct communication with voters, either to support or criticize, and can also be one of the tools for public opinion research.

Political communication is the process by which a nation's leadership, media and citizenry exchange and confer meaning upon messages that relate to the conduct of public policy. The distinguishing characteristic of political communication is that messages are concerned broadly with governance, or the conduct of public policy. It is commonly believed that political communication is concerned only with elections, but this is not so. Politics broadly defined, concerns the process by which society reaches consensus on policy issues. Thus political communication occurs when citizens, media and leaders 'dialogue' about issues of broad concern to elites or the public.

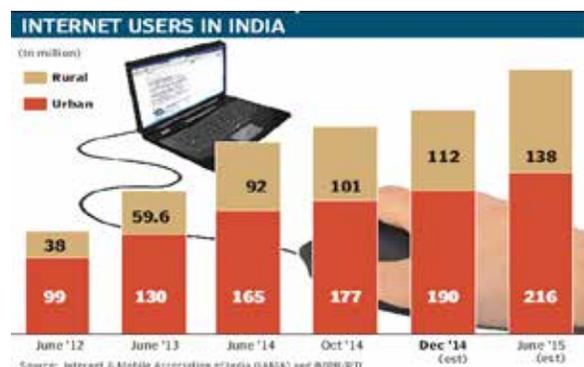
Social Media

Social media has emerged as a vital tool of communication and has created new ways of mobilizing public opinion and encouraging participation in political and civic activities – ranging from joining online petition and social groups, posting short messages on Twitter, expressing supports through blogs and uploading videos on YouTube. The recent Wiki Leaks disclosure online of US foreign policy clearly demonstrates the disruption caused by social media, which is now forcing the mainstream news media to turn to political blogs and citizen users for materials. Such disruption has enabled citizens to discuss and share

political information with friends and networked citizens, and critically monitor the actions of governments and corporate interests. This has also posed a profound challenge to the state about how to regulate social media and face user-generated challenges. At the same time, the uneven level of access of different social groups to new media, a phenomenon known as digital divide, has raised concern about the limitations of its democratic potential.



The e- campaign of the American president Barack Obama is one of the best examples of the use of new media technology in the 21st century. The election campaign of the American president Obama was heavily dependent on the use of new media technologies. It is believed that Obama succeeded to convey his message to at least 30 percent of American citizens through new media. It was a great beginning of the use of digital media which provided not only one-sided propaganda and publicity material for the election campaign but also provided a platform for the political debate and discussion.



Social Media adoption among Internet Users in India is around 84% today. This translates to around 110 million social network

users in India. Social networking sites like Face book, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube are the most commonly used social networking sites in India. Relationship, Conversations and Sharing are key contexts and sub texts around which the social media usage revolves and these are the main usages of social media.

- Governance
- Diplomacy
- Business
- Journalism
- Social change
- Law & Administration
- Individuals

Active Indian Politicians on Social Networking Sites

With more than half of India's young population, politicians have now resorted to the social media to reach out to their young voters. Few politicians update their Face book accounts almost on a daily basis, and also access Twitter and YouTube regularly.

Narendra Modi is one of the most famous politicians on social media with approximately 1.3 million followers on his Face book page. He joined Face book and Twitter in 2009 and became the first politician to use Google Plus. People are highly responsive towards his updates by liking, commenting and sharing his updates. He also has a YouTube channel which has reached the 15,000 mark of subscribers and has more than 1500 videos.

Rahul Gandhi is very interactive on his Face book page. He has approximately 2.5 lakh fans on his page. Not only face book, he is a very active blog writer too. He writes blogs which get published for people to know his views on issues.

Shashi Tharoor at times, he was also referred to as the "Twitter minister". Tharoor might not have an official page on Face book but to cover that up, he has almost 15 lakh followers on Twitter. That count also makes him the most persuasive politician on Twitter. He tweets on latest happenings in the government, his interviews and incidents taking place in the country.

Sushma Swaraj has made her presence felt on social networking sites very prominently. Although she might not have an official Face book page but her following is such that her community page on Face book has approximately 95,000 likes. Also, she has more than 3 lakh followers on Twitter.

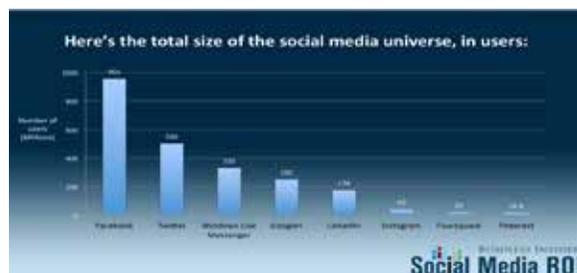
Manmohan Singh has an official page on Face book with more than 3.5 lakh fans. He tweets frequently and has a dedicated website on which one can find his speeches, press releases, photos and videos. His Face book page is updated with latest activities in the government, PM's conferences and functions.

Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping is the process through which information is filtered for dissemination, whether for publication, broadcasting, the Internet, or some other mode of communication. The academic theory of gatekeeping is found in multiple fields of study, including communication studies, journalism, political science, and sociology. It was originally focused on the mass media with its few-to-many dynamic but now gatekeeping theory also addresses face-to-face communication and the many-to-many dynamic inherent in the Internet. The theory was first instituted by social psychologist Kurt Lewin in 1943. Gate keeping occurs at all levels of the media structure from a reporter deciding which sources are chosen to include in a story to editors deciding which stories are printed or covered, and includes media outlet owners and even advertisers. Individuals can also act as gatekeepers, deciding what information to include in an email or in a blog, for example. Gate keeping is a process by which information is filtered to the public by the media.

Nowadays, parties aren't just harping on the good work accomplished by them but are also bringing the opposition's mistakes to light by using social media platforms as their tool. And not to leave any stones unturned their social media strategy also has the shades of guerilla warfare wherein the strategists are now using Crowd sourcing to make their voters more involved and give them a sense of ownership in decision making. The social media strategies very much depend on integration and interconnectedness of campaigns across platforms. Internet, mobiles and text messages are significant promoters of word of mouth, internet especially has a wildfire effect in terms of spreading the message. People at the receiving end quickly become accustomed to communicating with peers or groups of people via text from an electronic device and get engaged in the conversation trail.

Lately social media strategists and Electioneers have picked up this trend and are using applications like Twitter & Whatsapp as one of the favored tools to relay information. The interesting thing to take in account is that more and more of these messages/promotions are laced with either subtle ironical humor which is witty and satirical or in some instances they are in-your-face. Videos, memes, push messages with carefully created content are bombarded to the youth and others. Since the accessibility to social media applications such as Whatsapp and Twitter is so easy thanks to the tablets, smart phones etc. these two are leading the pack as the chosen mediums of promotion with numbers like 18.1Million users and 500Million users respectively. This data is closely followed by Facebook, Instagram (including the latest selfie trend) and other sites.



Outernet

Outernet is a tool/technology which provides the entire world with broadcast data and a two-way Internet access free to everyone. Outernet's Wi-Fi solution works by using hundreds of tiny 10cm cube-shaped satellites called "cubesats", which are cheap to produce and can be towed into space on the back of International Space Station resupply missions, then tossed into space and left to orbit around the earth. Access to knowledge and information is a human right and Outernet will guarantee this right by taking a practical approach to information delivery. By transmitting digital content to mobile devices, simple antennae, and existing satellite dishes, a basic level of news, information, education, and entertainment will be available to all of humanity. Outernet consists of a constellation of low-cost, miniature satellites in Low Earth Orbit. Each satellite receives data streams from a network of ground stations and transmits that data in a continuous loop until new content is received. In order to serve the widest possible audience, the entire constellation utilizes globally-accepted, standards-based protocols, such as DVB, Digital Radio Mondiale, and UDP-based WiFi multicasting. The most noteworthy reason for social media creating a strong ground for political campaigns is because it allows politicians to talk directly and efficiently with voters, this trend is here to stay and grow exponentially. Facebook and Twitter reach thousands of people yet still feel very personal. The conversational tone of social media means politicians can come across with more human touch and closer approach than traditional media or their opponents might portray them, messages are customized as per desired audience.

Conclusion

Gone are the days when social media platforms were only being used for making social circles and forming connections. The reach and impact of social media has now gone a notch up in India. Let's accept it; we are obsessed with social media, especially when it comes to discussing critical or sensitive issues like politics, corruption, poverty and economy. Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) education is basically our society's efforts to teach its current and emerging citizens valuable knowledge and skills around computing and communications devices, software that operates them, applications that run on them and systems that are built with them. ICT has the potential to be used as a supportive Political tool enabling citizens to learn in new, interactive, and engaging ways that may lead their future life in a better way.

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