ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Media

THE CONCERNS AND EFFECTS OF GROWING DEPENDENCY OF POLITICAL PARTIES ON DIGITAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Digital media have become an important part of individual citizens' political life as an increasing number of people around the world use digital media technology for information and communication. Collectively, digital media has also become an essential medium that citizens can use to organize and mobilize related individuals. Legacy media, made up of existing mass media institutions that predate the Internet, such as newspapers, radio shows and television news programs, coexist with digital media that are the outgrowth of technological innovation. While legacy media retain relatively stable formats, the litany of emerging media, including websites, blogs, video sharing channels, interactive applications, and social media, continues to grow in creative ways. The narrowcast niche outlets have joined the mainstream media, intended to distribute news of general interest to large audiences. The digital media landscape is complex and continues to evolve in fresh, often unanticipated, ways that have significant implications for democratic governance and politics. Digital media has fundamentally changed the way in which government institutions work, the way in which elected officials interact, the way in which elections are fought, and citizen participation.

However, while spreading insightful and mobilizing messages, digital media often promote socio-political factors that pose questions about the propagation of disinformation, the separation of information and political polarization. Digital media have rapidly incorporated various roles and capabilities, thus it is necessary to revisit the different ways in which they have been used to understand how the impact of these different applications will vary across channels, practices and interactions to explore new modalities of political participation and public practice. Digital media may also play a major role in the growth of democracy. There are also beneficial relationships between the use of digital media and the participatory actions of people. Big data generated by digital media usage also provides opportunities and opens up new challenges for the observation of complex relationships in collective action and social movements.

India's 2019 general election was the first national election to be conducted in a fully digital consumer society, where nearly half of the voting population had access to digital platforms, and another one-third had access to social media. The election was also intimately related to India's second paradigm shift between 2016 and 2019. This is the effect of the increase in the digital data-consumption society led by the second-highest penetration of smartphones in the world and the highest average use of data per device, which reached 9.8 gigabytes (GB) per month at the end of 2018. This digital empowerment impacted the election results and campaigning in an unprecedented manner here in India. Digital media became the new medium for politicians to disseminate their ideas and even propaganda.

In this article I have analyzed how social media use leads to hostile media attitudes and the impact caused by the adherents of different political ideas when they use the medium of digital media on the collective conscience and thoughts. This paper discusses the concerns and effects of growing dependency of politicians on social media feeds as a source of campaign information, given that political campaigns can use social media channels to stir up political feelings, which could contribute to perceptions of media bias.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the Internet has generated immense possibilities for the use of digital platforms, including social media, to influence the political sphere. The vision of new age is that this digital media leads to the strengthening of democracy by greater political engagement and distribution of information. This vision has been debated since the Internet was introduced in the mid-1990s. It is argued that new digital technologies would have a positive and potentially strong effect on political participation and awareness, whereas others regarded them as primarily entertainment-oriented and argued that factors other than technology are more important as determinants of political participation and knowledge and employing this media may become dangerous.

Digital media have become an integral part of individual citizens' political life as a growing number of people around the world use digital media technologies for information and communication. Collectively, digital media has also been an important platform that people can use to coordinate and mobilise similar individuals. However, while distributing informative and mobilising messages, digital media also facilitate socio-political factors that raise concerns about the dissemination of misinformation, the division of information and political polarisation.

The Internet has grown since its inception, and its impact on politics has shifted due to the emergence of many new media platforms. From the first Bulletin Board System (BBS)1 to our constant ability to stay connected through social media platforms via mobile phones, the Internet now offers a variety of tools that influence politics. This evolution then produces a number of different effects, to which researchers quickly provide new analyses. The advent of social media further revolutionized the ability of digital platforms to connect people, allow them to interact and cooperate on an ongoing basis, and bring their voices to a wider public.

Without a doubt, the professionalization of modern political communication has made new media a weapon that politicians cannot ignore and need to learn. By way of sophisticated techniques for mapping people's preferences and dislikes, digital media are especially useful for reaching swing voters who may alter the result of an election or help to make a controversial yet necessary political decision.

The Internet and political activism have highlighted the important role of digital media in shaping diverse forms of political participation and mobilising large-scale social protests around the world. Digital media, such as Twitter and Facebook, provide a platform for cognitive, emotional and behavioural connections that enable people to network collaboratively. For example, digital media provide news and information to people and enable them to share their opinions with many others, motivating them to engage in public activities.

Digital Media and Politics

From year to year, from election campaign to election campaign, country by country, political marketing seems to take on more and more part of political communication. Only a

century ago, political communication tools were no different than centuries ago: speech and meeting skills were still the main asset to win election. Today, politicians still need to excel in these 'traditional' means of expression, while also being able to use a number of new types of media that seem to appear faster and faster.

New political marketing has rapidly evaluated digital media as one of the key methods of political communication. In fact, this trend has followed the development of marketing itself. While 'mass marketing' was born and raised in the 1950s and 1960s, using mass media such as print media and television, marketing techniques have gone through a first step towards the end of the last century by developing 'direct marketing': mass mailing, phoning and the extensive use of surveys.

Digital media helped political marketing specialists reach voters in unprecedented ways. Obviously, it is now possible to clearly analyze the personal preferences of voters with the aid of the news resources that are born on the Internet. In reality, cookies and ISP memorization have been used to establish a detailed knowledge of the behaviors of web users, most of the time, without even making them aware of the operation. The philandering of any person linked to the Web can now be tracked with the utmost accuracy, thanks to the minimalist pieces of software left on the device or the tablet used to enhance navigation.

Narendra Modi's re-election campaign was perhaps the first to use this kind of awareness of the intimacy of individual voters so specifically in India, using Big Data to tell protestors exactly which doors they had to knock on while they were covering and which kind of arguments to use. Here, selling one to one is mastered at the highest level for the sake of political contact. Altogether, it could be argued that digital media have been rapidly taken into account and implemented seamlessly as a political communication tool for three key reasons: speed, flexibility and ease of use.

Firstly speed, as any political message, regardless of its form, text, still or clip, can be uploaded from anywhere in the world and downloaded almost instantly anywhere else without pause, thanks to the enormous capabilities of search engines such as Google, Bing or Yahoo.

Versatility, considering that digital media incorporates most of the types of previous communication means: email, as well as shared on websites or blogs as in tweets, private or public (thanks to social media such as Twitter); still photos, from blogs or social media such as Instagram; video clips from social media such as YouTube.

Ease of usage, ultimately, has fundamentally changed the pattern of political communication. When only politicians and political parties were able to have a voice in the public domain, through conventional media (meetings...) or mass media (newspapers, radio and television...), digital media replaced this kind of top-down contact with bottom-up and horizontal communication available to everyone digitally linked to the cheapest smartphone, thereby becoming an instant means of communication.

The Internet has become an inevitable medium for political communication in most countries holding democratic elections, even though television is still the main way for people to get their political information.

Digital media and Political Awareness

Political awareness can be explained as a key component of empathy, because it is mainly about public policy and government sensitivity. Many accredited scholars see political awareness as a source of increased political participation that is effective for the development of nations. It

is ultimately responsible for increasing public awareness of government agendas that drive policy makers. Political awareness can be effective for policy makers as it triggers a sense of public sensitivity that can strengthen the agenda development process. Knowledge of political legacy will enable citizens to contribute to the integration of improved policies and regulations.

One of the primary functions of the media in a democratic society is to inform its citizens. This function becomes even more crucial during election campaigns when voters need to know the political issues and platforms of competing parties and candidates. Indeed, the question of how the media contribute to political learning is "maybe the central question for the discipline." Digital media is effective in enhancing political social affairs because it helps to build possibilities for general surveys in the cloud. Political surveys are responsible for handling campaigns that have been found to be confusing to the general public. The study of political news and legislation will promote a wide range of dynamics among the legal representatives of society. The effect of political conflicts is important for the growth or harm of society.

The emergence of digital media has given rise to unprecedented empowerment and commitment of the 'aam aadmi' to political views. The positive development of social media has been that young people are talking about political issues. Previously, political debates were confined to those who read newspapers, watched news channels, or engaged in discussions in the village or nukkad. But now, social networking has made India's youth sit down and debate political issues. They spend time studying and debating politics. They now have opinions on the events of political events and they also affect administrative decision-making. But bringing youth together to vote in elections and using social media as a forum to support political parties is still a dream. It may take decades in India to duplicate the USA in the use of social media campaigns and influence the electorate. In the Indian political space, the social media revolution is actual, tangible and accelerating. While it might not bring in major changes overnight, it will also play an important role in generating political consciousness, which in itself is a huge step forward for progress.

Digital media have been able to have a profound effect on the content and manner of consumption of news, engagement, learning and marketing. It has become an important source of news. Various news sources tweet or update important events around the world, and news rapidly travels around the world.

Networks in ways that have never been seen before. It helps people to stay in touch more frequently. People in different cities, countries and continents can keep in touch easily and provide an opportunity to explore different cultures and exchange views. Social media have also played a significant part in the promotion of literacy.

Digital media is often considered a source of information since user-generated content acts as a people's discussion forum and provides increased accessibility. User-generated content and easy-to-discuss forums have been shown to enhance knowledgeable communication capabilities for emotional and cognitive means. With some intelligent skills, people are able to make better judgments about political decisions, social media is the leading online community that is considered to exchange thoughts, views and perspectives with the ultimate aim of having an impact. The basic concept of social media surveys is to produce people's ideas and views directly about such political movements.

Digital Media and Indian Politics.

Elections in India have always been the backbone of the country's democratic structure. Each election, whether in

parliament or assemblies, is special due to the evolving political environment of the country or states in which the elections to the Assembly are to be held. As a consequence, the publicity, the involvement and preference of the individual voters continues to shift. India is a democratic country where electoral campaigning is an important part of it, and from time to time the political parties have used various methods for their campaigning. Traditional media played an important part in the political process, and now the evolution of digital technology and the internet has changed the environment and elections are no exception. New technologies have changed India's political environment. Social media have had a transformative impact on our democracy. This is mostly because of the internet and the availability of cheap smartphones on the market. There was no earlier Social networking platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Whatsapp, Orkut, Google+, etc. have now been used by the political parties during the elections.

These methods have broken the divide between the politician and the public, and the people can easily communicate with their representatives of different political parties, Group, Parties. The leaders of the political parties have been using social media platforms to cope with the emerging young voters.

Indian Elections 2019.
The Indian general election of 2019 saw extensive and revolutionary use of digital media and technology. Most political parties have used digital media extensively to campaign and mobilize voters. This widespread use of digital media was due to almost half of India's 900 million eligible voters having access to the Internet and social media. The country has 300 million Facebook users and more than 200 million WhatsApp users, which is more than any other country. Indeed, many called the 'WhatsApp' election in 2019. In addition, millions in India are using other media platforms, such as the regional language platform ShareChat and the world-famous TikTok.

Significant changes occurred between the 2014 Indian general election and 2019. In 2014, 1 in 5 Indians had access to digital media, which has now increased to 1 in 3. Access quality also improved dramatically with low-cost smartphones and low-cost data plans. This digital boom in the country gave the political parties in India a novel and effective method of poltical campaigning and the general elections of 2019 became a digital battleground.

Political campaigns
In 2014, the use of social media helped Narendra Modi rise in popularity, and eventually named the Financial Times 'India's first social media prime minister.' The 2014 election campaign of the BJP used social media to good effect. But by the time 2019 elections came the country had moved to almost complete dgital connectivity. So, the BJP no longer had the first mover advantage in the 2019 election. Most other parties increased their digital campaign efforts and expenditures. For example, the Congress used a research, graphics and professional IT team to counter BJP's social media campaign. Indeed, the social media advantage of the BJP over the Congress and otter opposition parties declined in 2019.

Political parties had the most structured and creative social media campaign now. A core vision and information flow system has been introduced with several layers of communication. The parties relied heavily on WhatsApp using a multi-step distribution model of official networks, state units, middle-layer intermediary's well wishers and local influencers. Individual politicians and ministries have set up their own social media departments, each with a social media coordinator to capture images from protests or activities and post them online.Political parties invested

heavily for their digital campaigns,case in point is the ruling party BJP which invested heavily in political outreach on digital platforms. A total of USD 11 billion (SG$ 15.2 billion) was spent on political advertisements in 2019, and 60% of the ads were made by the BJP. The heavy use of social media by the BJP meant that the party decreased its budget for advertisements on conventional media.

Language
During the 2019 elections, most political parties used regional language platforms to gain more traction among the electorate. In comparison to previous elections, regional languages have been commonly used to communicate with the electorate. Rahul Gandhi on Twitter showed off his skills in Hindi to help against his image of an outsider .In Tamil Nadu, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) launched its own mobile application, which enabled the party to build content in Tamil and share it internally with staff. These workers would then disperse it to those outside the party.

The introduction of Jio greatly reduced the digital divide. As a result, there was a boom in the number of people coming online for the first time, many of whom were searching for a social media network that was operating to their language requirements. This has given rise to new regional content channels such as ShareChat and Helo, which cater to regional languages. Indian language channels, such as ShareChat and Helo, operating in as many as 15 different languages (Hindi, Tamil and Telugu chief among them), were major venues for election propaganda. Both Helo and ShareChat are currently targeting 100 to 150 million mobile Internet users in rural India and Tier 2 and 3 cities, which are populated by native speakers. ShareChat had its highest user base in Tamil Nadu, which was translated to political parties using the app at a broader level. The DMK established ShareChat accounts for each district and state electoral district, totalling a total of 300 accounts.

The Bhartiya Janta Party that swept the last elections masterfully employed these new tactics. Modi's very strong perception of how the digital media worked was at the core of victory of the BJP and its preceding campaign. Modi moved between English-language media and regional language media to create a 'us vs them' narrative. The 2019 BJP campaign was largely based on this narrative and led to its eventual victory.

As a result, there is an increasing influence of regional language digital media platforms that are more successful in targeting the local population and helping political parties shape their campaigns accordingly. The improvements to the Top 10 Free Apps in the Playstore from 2017 to 2018 reflected this pattern. Commonly used apps such as Facebook and Messenger were replaced in 2018 with more vernacular language apps such as ShareChat and Helo.

Political Rheoric
The election of 2019 saw the use of an unprecedented form of political rhetoric i.e large-scale insults. Politics has always used name-calling, threatening, sarcasm, and other dramatic elements of political communication but the last Indian elections became almost exclusively all about this new rhetoric. The difference in 2019 was the amplification effect of social media. As cell phones are popular and more people have access to the Internet, this poor standard of public discourse has become commonplace, maybe even a new normal.

This new form of entertaining albeit degrading campaigning was successfully integrated with the digital media and platforms, helping create desired reputations and consequent effects for parties. Political parties leaned toward this modern form of political rhetoric almost exclusively.

The BJP capitalized on this method the most by using satire, wit and sarcasm in their digital campaigns and regularly targeted their opposition. This triggered further deepening of the BJP's emotional infrastructure and day-to-day vocabulary, making it very banal. It has also helped to make debates about Hindu nationalism embedded in the political landscape and debate. The discussions about the 'country' or 'nation' talk stretched the boundaries of what could be said in public, establishing a regular familiarity with nationalist vocabulary. The agility of the BJP and the large volunteer base on the ground meant that their IT cell had a good public sentiment and could turn insults into a party advantage. This was evident in how the BJP turned the Congress' slogan 'Chowkidar chor hai (the watchman is corrupt)' targeting Modi into their favour by coining a new slogan and hashtag, 'Main bhi chowkidar (I am a watchman too).' The BJP was adept at micro-targeting voters and at the grassroots level to incorporate these insights into their social media strategy. This synergy between the online and offline realms was a significant advantage of the BJP vis-à-vis the other parties.

This mode of deepening reach with voter base was bound to have some negative consequences, and these consequences manifested in the form of declining trust in digital media sources for news and facts. A large population of educated Indian youth stopped trusting these sources as authentic sources for information. However, despite this, these platforms had networks that helped perpetuate the brand of a party or a politician to the lowest levels of the country where the largely uninformed population resides. This uneducated population was incapable of separating truth form lies and also happens to form a large chunk of voter population in India thus successfully enabling the politicians to penetrate their mind space. Another effect that this distrust has is that educated and aware social media users limited themselves to their respective networks and only followed groups that were comfortable in perpetuating echo chambers. These networks were very strong and prevented people from expressing their political preferences because they were likely to be bombed by vitriol and abuse.

Fake news

In India, with an increase in Internet connectivity and availibity of digital media platforms brought along a tsunami of fake news and misinformation. This fake news and propaganda was a big player in the 2019 elections.Some might even argue that it was the game decider and the sole reason of Bhartiya Janta Party sweeping the 2019 elections. In the Indian sense, the implications of spreading false news were far from what one could contemplate. According to the Indo-Asian News Service (2018) study, a significant portion of such messages revolves around the basic concept of nationalism and nation-building. In situations like this, where the key concept behind the spread of news is linked to nationalism, the facts become less relevant for users than the emotional urge to reinforce their national identity.

The biggest distributor of fake news in India is WhatsApp, and then comes Facebook or Twitter .WhatsApp, a mobile messaging app, was purchased by the social media giant-Facebook in 2014. The two major parties – the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the opposition Congress – used the power of WhatsApp to try to influence India's 900 million eligible voters.

Fake videos and images were used as means of mass manipulation in the electoral war. Manufacturing false news has never been such an organised industry. The very basis of a political party is to tarnish the reputation of a political figure with false narratives and fictitious tales. Voters seldom go to a history book to verify the statements they receive from the WhatsApp community. Political icons such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Deen Dayal Upadhyay have not only been listed in political rallies, but have also been subjects around which false stories have been thrown out or sometimes repeated during the elections.

Fake news and hyper-nationalist videos and texts proliferated to unprecedented levels in the aftermath of r tensions between India and Pakistan which happened just before the country was to vote. After the 2019 terrorist attack in Pulwama, in Jammu and Kashmir, and the subsequent Balakot air strike, which occurred months before the general election, the result of which was an increase in fake news across multiple platforms. This indicated that topics that were not initially related to the election campaign, such as national security, were now being used to attract votes via fake news. In the same way, fake news was also circulated in Kashmir, proving to be a matter of local security, security and stability. Fake news gave rise to the perception that the country was under attack and that people needed leadership that would defend them and provide protection. This proved to be extremely advantageous for the ruling party. The digital media platforms were soon bombarded with fake news related to this occurrence, with the hope of evoking the "nationalist" in every citizen. Bharita Janta Party's IT cell set a narrative with these fake pieces of information which eventually won them the elections.

The election of 2019 saw the use of artificial intelligence (AI) methods to tackle the issue of false news. The fact-checking agency, BOOM, had access to a dashboard that flagged information as false and dug deeper into posts that could actually be hazardous. It then hit the post, and Facebook suppressed the dissemination of the post. This has resulted in mass media facing an immediate drop in traffic. However, the use of AI has faced a variety of challenges. Second, political parties have generated content much faster than AI tools can keep up with. Second, AI tools were not very useful for fake news that used visual content. For example, even though the images and videos were actual, the context could be significantly different, and the human researcher needed to dig deeper into the real context. Fourthly, AI was constrained in its comprehension of regional languages. Again, it must be combined with a human interpretation of what was considered essential keywords before they were fed into the computer. WhatsApp's tipline also translated reports from English or Hindi into other regional languages that may deviate from the intended meaning. Fifth, AI was also weak in terms of prediction. This was partially due to the fact that many statistical models developed patterns based on previous assumptions about what voting behaviour was like in previous elections. However, this was not empirical and left out new variables that could have been taken into account, such as shifts in the sentiment of the electorate.

CONCLUSION

India's sheer numbers are remarkable – over 500 million Internet users, 300 million Facebook users, and 200 million WhatApp users. However, this also means that more than half of the Indian population still does not use digital media. Television and newspapers remain the primary source of political news for the majority of voters. Given that millions of new users are projected to have access to the Internet by the next election in 2024, the value of digital media will only increase.

The use of digital media during the 2019 Indian general election campaign was impressive, both in terms of dissemination and content. The highly organised distribution of messages through multiple layers of communication was noteworthy, as was the strategic use by the BJP of a wide variety of platforms. The party used a top-down system to distribute centrally managed messages through social media and messaging services. This also had the effect of setting the agenda. Conventional media has picked up topics explored

in social media.

In this context, the growing use of digital media by political parties, leaders and candidates, digital and network literacy needs to be emphasised. In order to counter the dissemination of false news, it is important to increase awareness among people and celebrities in order to prevent the forwarding of such messages in future campaigns. Political actors, tech firms, fact checkers and civil society organisations need to work together in this area. The 'Study Helpline Checkpoint' initiated by WhatsApp or the partnership of Google and YouTube with Fact Checkers is a significant move in this regard.

There has been a rise in nationalist or exclusionary terminology, mostly by satire and jokes. This 'country speak' stretched the limits of what could be said and could have added to the daily familiarity of nationalist jargon. Moreover, with names calling and insults being very popular, public discourse seems to have embraced this as a 'new standard.'

The effect of digital media campaigns on the actual outcome of the elections in India cannot be quantified. However, election results are not the only barometer: more research is needed on the 'second-order impact' of social media on offline elections, conventional media, public debate and the tracing of political figures. In the future, political parties will depend ever more on the use of social media for campaigning and voter mobilisation. A new multi-stakeholder dialogue is required to counteract the negative impact of false news or low-quality public discourse and to increase the capacity for educating voters. Cooperation between political parties, technology companies and civil society, as well as the participation of the Electoral Commission, is important.

In certain cases, the use of new media must be carefully calibrated in terms of the democratic process. When digital media noise causes a politician to withdraw because of personal attacks based on tiny mishaps or false rumours, when it hinders a government that is attempting to implement its actions, the democratic process can be at risk. This can happen, of course, with the inappropriate or ill-intentioned use of every political messaging tool, but here the new risks are caused by the capacity of digital media to reach so many, so quickly.

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