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HOW SOCIAL MEDIA MOBILIZES POLITICS IN ELECTION

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Abstract

The current study reveals the areas of change social media brought regarding election campaigns in the two enormous democracies: India and the USA. Social media, which transformed the communication between political parties and the voters, would no longer be hindered by the mainstream media and could be accessed from everywhere, including the rural and the urban youth. Analysing case studies, surveys, and voter behaviour trends, the study focuses on how social media-mediated platforms resulted in and affected the elections, voter turnout, and democratic engagements. However, the rise of social media is also heralding deep concerns around misinformation, polarization, and echo chambers. The arguments also show that there is a responsible way to utilize these insights for encouraging meaningful discourse and responsible political governance through social media.

Keywords

Social Media, Political Mobilization, Elections, Voter Behavior, Misinformation, Polarization, Democratic Engagement, Twitter, Facebook, BJP, AAP, United States, India, Campaign Strategies, Digital Democracy

Research Methodology

The basic quantitative and qualitative methodological approach was used to analyze the influence of social media on political mobilization during elections. Primary data were collected through surveys which aimed to determine how influential Indian voters consider social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Existing literature such as "Political Turbulence" and "The Effect of Social Media on Elections" provides secondary data on the overall impact of analog forms in the political sphere.

Comparative perspectives are taken from the case studies of the 2014 and 2018 Indian General Elections, the 2016 and 2020 U.S. Presidential Elections, and the 2010 Dutch Parliamentary

Elections. Statistical tools like the Social Media Indicator (SMI) were utilized to measure politicians' online activity and its correlation with electoral outcomes. The research also examines the role of algorithms in creating echo chambers and disseminating misinformation, with an emphasis on the implications for voter behaviour and political polarization.

This methodology integrates theoretical considerations with empirical evidence to provide a fuller understanding of how social media globally transforms the dynamics of elections while consulting ethical and pragmatic challenges.

Research Questions

Main Research Question:

What impact do social media have on political mobilization and voter behavior during elections in democratic countries like India and the United States?

Secondary Research Questions:

How does Facebook obviate traditional media restrictions and reach various voter demographics, here using some examples: people who communicate via Twitter and WhatsApp?

How do algorithms shape echo-chamber effects and the spread of misinformation, and thereby affect voter decision-making?

How have Indian political parties, such as BJP and the AAP, used social media to improve voter turnout and drive electoral success at both the national and local levels?

Literature review

In the paper, "**POLITICAL TURBULENCE: HOW SOCIAL MEDIA SHAPES POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND THE DEMOCRATIC LANDSCAPE¹**," The research focuses on unexpected, individual, micro-level political actions that are made by people via social networking sites. But, it fails to describe how social media is systematically employed in systematic political activities especially during election periods. Gap: It is also wishy-washy on how the political parties use social media in a managed manner for structured or campaigns during election, which requires organized operation in order to achieve electoral engagement.

¹ Helen Margetts: *How Social Media Shapes Political Participation and the Democratic Landscape*, in *Digital Technology and Democratic Theory* 197, 211 (Lucy Bernholz, Hélène Landemore & Rob Reich eds., 2019).

Our research: However, our study looks more narrowly at the Indian scenario aiming at exploring how BJP and AAP, for example, politically leveraged the social media platforms for managing effective election campaigns. We demonstrate how these outlets were used to circumvent media regulation and get in touch with millions of voters encouraging political activism, yet in a highly organized and efficient way.

Debate: The one here is between the emergent structures that arise from the literature and the deliberate and institutionalised utilisation of such tools in electoral processes, which is what we present in this paper.

In the paper, **“THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ELECTIONS: EVIDENCE FROM THE UNITED STATES”**² the analysis is conducted on essential national elections, more precisely, the 2016 and 2020 U. S Presidential elections. This points that the nature of Twitter dominated the campaigns of democratic such as Biden though it did not weigh on the congressional elections similarly.

Gap: The study does not examine the nature of the effects that social media have on numbers of voters who go out to vote and those who do not go out to vote in other types of elections including local or non-presidential elections. Further, it does not incorporate algorithm-induced echo chambers and disinformation.

Our research: This expands this by studying ways in which media interaction in India has impacted not only the national level elections incidents but also many levels of elections. For this purpose, Prime BJP and AAP have effectively employed the mentioned platforms to ensure higher turnout in even local elections.

Debate: This gave a debate between how social media selectively influences highly visible elections rather than the lower level ones. The actual analysis of about 200 research papers, available in the USA, indicates its impact only on the national races unlike our research done in the Indian context which proves the impact of social network on all kinds of elections including the local ones.

² Thomas Fujiwara, *The Effect of Social Media on Elections: Evidence from the United States*, Nat'l Bureau of Econ. Res., Working Paper No. 28849 (2021).

Hypothesis

Research Gap 1: While the paper “Political Turbulence” specifically looks at individual level and unexpected political actions through the channel of social media the way political parties strategically and systematically coordinate and use social media to facilitate electoral engagement during elections is not revealed.

Hypothesis 1:

This research finds that the political parties in India, for instance, BJP and AAP, use social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter, in a calculated orderly manner to bypass the restrictive media laws and enchants the voters resulting in enhanced political consciousness and efficient and constructive electoral campaigns.

How Our Research Fills the Gap: By examining the 2014 and 2018 Indian general elections, we explain how the BJP and AAP employed social media in an attempt in reaching out the voters, avoiding the constraints of the media and in organizing mass political activity. Through putting in place effective teams to monitor real time responses, these parties enhanced a very efficient digital campaign, which helped in enhancing voters’ turnout. While the study “Political Turbulence” provides up to now the only systematic analysis of the use of social media in political campaigns, our study provides a more specific look at structured, intentional, and strategic uses of social media by political parties.

Research Gap 2:

The paper "The Effect of Social Media on Elections: ”Evidence from the United States” deals with national elections and does not explain how social media influences the voter turnout rate during other elections or in general non-presidential ones. It also disregards the contribution of echo chambers, and disinformation due to social media algorithms.

Hypothesis 2: The several platforms of social media help in determining voter turnout not only during general elections but also during state and local elections in a country like India while, the algorithms that feed users the content they want based on their previous activities and interests keep voters locked in their echo chambers and contribute to the spread of disinformation.

How Our Research Fills the Gap: This discussion is further enriched by our research that

covers the role of social media in national as well as in local elections in India including municipal and state which has seen BJP and AAP utilizing social media, popular platforms like Facebook and Twitter, to promote voter turnout. By exploring the topics such as, ‘Algorithmic echo chambers’ and ‘Disinformation’ we show how these pull the opinions to extremes...and clearly when local political elections are in the picture, create political polarisation. This broadens the analysis to overcome the U.S centred approach by also considering different election types and effects of algorithm in India.

INTRODUCTION

Political mobilization has been one of the most popular platforms for social media in democracies all over the world especially in election years. This process also involves the involvement of individuals or groups in matters relating to politics with an objective of shaping the voters’ decision in a given election. Earlier, only the mass media was used to pass the political information, while the Social Networking Sites have made great revolution in political mobilization especially in the periods of election. These tools or social media platforms as they started as, have become very vital for political parties or their representatives in order to manipulate vote outcomes.

As a result, the social oriented –based sites like Face book, twitter, and the WhatsApp are indispensable tools when it comes to designing election campaigns and mobilizing the electorate. Political parties continue to make use of these platforms as they are uncontrolled and cheap means of reaching to the voters and most importantly during the election campaigns when the media is somehow very restricted. Where the election commission bars a slew of restrictions during elections specifically on the traditional media for instance in the case of India so the political parties have found in social media a formidable tool for canvassing a large number of masses.

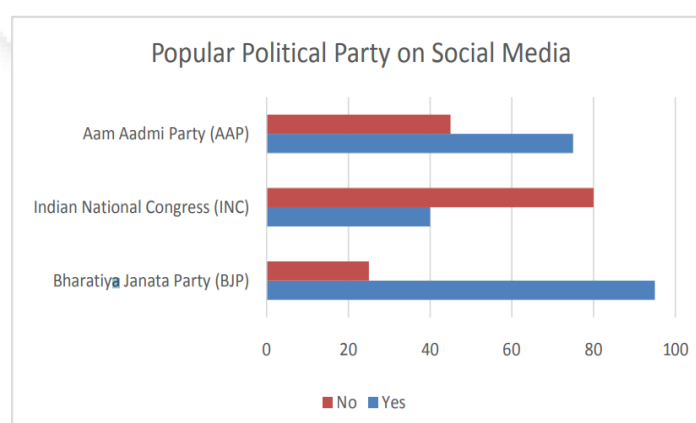
This paper will therefore analyze how the social media is efficiently utilised for the achievement of the intended goals of political parties in affecting voters’ behaviour and turnout during election. It will thus examine through the analysis of such data as well as case studies from India and USA how such platforms as the Face book and twitter influence election campaigns and voters. To illustrate the above, references will be made to the usage of social media by Indian political parties including the BJP and AAP in addition to the impact of Twitter during the U. S presidential votes. In this paper, this study will also consider the possible

negative influences of the social media as the political debates are likely to be polarized and echo chamber is likely to emerge to influence the public opinion during crucial periods like elections.

This research compares the dynamics of social media in election related political mobilisation in India and other countries thereby attempting to demystify the role of social media. It will provide an understanding on how social media is impacting the aspect of democracy while also having a look at the problems in social media concerning informed and effective over electoral process.

Analysis

This has been mainly because the Indian Election Commission has laid down a lot of stringent rules and regulation for parties that want to access the traditional media during the election periods hence forcing parties to turn to social media as the best way to passing their messages directly to the voters. The concerns of voters were effectively catalyzed by the use of social media by Narendra Modi led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) during the general elections of 2014 and 2018. To counter this, Modi's team used a very effective online media campaign, using Facebook, twitter and YouTube as major media that helped touching millions of voters across the country without any restriction imposed by media houses. The BJP's use of social media is evidence of how political parties can avoid conventional media guardians and weave their stories in ways that would resonate with certain voters, especially the millennials with heavy exposure to technology. With 54. Among the 100 respondents, 17% preferred Facebook out of social media and another 25% preferred Twitter and the research infers towards these as being vital to political communication in India³.



³ Adam M. Guess et al., *How Do Social Media Feed Algorithms Affect Attitudes and Behavior in an Election Campaign?*, 381 Science 398 (2023).

Real time response is one of the aspects of relaying campaign messages and responding to events as they happen making social media a precious cog in any election campaigns diligently served by a politician. Conversely, during the Delhi elections also, AAP and its chief ministerial candidate Arvind Kejriwal overcame the barrier posed by L porte and SDs to the newly minted party by employing uses of internet and social media particularly the micro blogging site, Twitter. Part of the AAP's success can be due to its timely utilization of social media to fan the voter's sentiment especially the young urban voter disenchanted with traditional politics. The study also finds how social media interaction foretells the voting pattern since there is usually a correlation between the two. This is well illustrated in aspects such as use of social media by the political parties like the BJP and AAP to mobilize voters whereby the findings from the study revealed that voters with strong social media engagement had a high voter turnout. The activity targeting the 2018 elections in regard to social media presence was maintained by a team of dedicated workers whereby it was instrumental in determination of the election result. Traditional media has also been a great challenge to political parties since it can only reach the urban areas while with social media the political parties are now in a position to reach the rural voters at a cheaper channel and is also effective in mobilizing voters.

In the above figure, the Table shows the social media popularity of the three major political parties, i.e., Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Indian National Congress (INC) and AamAadmi Party (AAP). The table shows the responses in relation to 'Yes' or 'No' to the question in favour of each party.

This infers that the BJP is probably having fairly high percentage of positive stand for them on the social media platform. Looking at the respondents, on the other hand, forty of them responded 'Yes' while eighty responded to the negative view in support of the Indian National Congress (INC). This means that the study participants perceived the INC unfavourably in the social media platforms selected for the study. Out of the respondents, 45 respondents said 'No' to the AamAadmi Party (AAP) and on the other hand, 45 respondents said 'Yes' to the AAP. Based on this, we can propose that more often than not opinions regarding AAP on the social media are positive.

The table displays the level of popularity of different political parties on social media: The AAP is rated slightly positive, the INC is rated slight negative and the BJP is much more

popular. This type of data is useful to have an idea of the political panorama on the web and might shed light on how people regard these parties on it.

International perspective:

From the analysis of how the social media affects the elections in India, it will be relevant to discuss the effects of social media in the election process in other democratic nations especially the United States. Elections in the United States that occurred in the years 2016 and 2020 will be an interesting case to consider while discussing the role of applications such as the Twitter application in political activities and determining election results.

Voter Persuasion and Behavioural Shifts:

Most citizens, especially the moderate state voters, rely on social media, particularly twitter in their political behaviour. The 2016 and 2020 elections showed a 10% increase in twitter users and the country found a 0.21% decrease in the vote share of Donald Trump. This effect was most felt in the counties that had a high Twitter activity; this is the power of social media platforms in swaying voters especially the moderates and the independents. This shows how the use of social media is effective in convincing the middle of the road voters to vote in democrats more than republicans.⁴

It is therefore clear that the information disseminated on 'Twitter' has a Liberal bias, not only in terms of the users connecting but also the tweets written; this means that moderate 'Republicans' and 'Independents' were influenced by this platform the most. The 2016 and 2020 elections showed how Twitter can be used as a strategic tool for the left-leaning political messages to convert the swing voters and therefore realign the political culture.

Campaign Strategies and Direct Voter Engagement:

Social media is one which helps with campaigning and voter engagement. Twitter is one such tool that not only affects the behaviour of the voters but changes the campaign tools. Since political figures are more active in the social platform, engagement and click through rates are high. For instance, Twitter users during the 2020 election had a bias of mentioning Joe Biden and thus the Democratic campaign received more visibility than the other party. This level of connection the candidate had with voters through social platforms enabled them to relay

⁴ John Postill, *Populism and Social Media: A Global Perspective*, 40 *Media, Culture & Society* 754 (2018).

messages directly to them in real time.

It can therefore be seen that Twitter in particular was indeed quite influential in the course of the 2016 election and how the campaigns panned out. Therefore, proving that the use of digital media platforms can greatly influence the success of a campaign.

Polarization and the Echo Chamber Effect:

On one hand social media educates the voters to go out and vote while on the other hand it intensifies political polarisation. This is exacerbated by the algorithmic feeds which expose users to like-minded content thus creating echo chambers. Twitter plays its role in polarizing the voters in terms of their ideologies and makes them more partisan by blocking any chances of encountering the opposite views. Twitters interventions in presidential elections are more pronounced due to its focus on national issues and personalities, compared to local elections. This is most probably due to the fact that the platform does not target local political personalities and local issues which are well understood by the public.

Moderates and Independents as Key Voters:

While the core supporters of the candidates are not really easily swayed, middle of the road voters especially those who are Independent are easily influenced on social media. Analysing the data that was obtained from the Twitter platform, it has been concluded that the platform held a higher impact in countries that neither supported the democratic nor the republican party, in the 2016 and the 2020 elections. These voters who, on average, are less ideologically committed to their party of choice were also influenced most by the content that they found on Twitter. This is in consonance with the Bayesian updating theory hypothesis, which posits that low prior knowledge users are more susceptible to influence.⁵

Impact on Electoral Outcomes:

Twitter's influence on elections is significant, particularly among swing voters and those in the political middle. The empirical results of Twitter's pro-Democratic bias in both the 2016 and the 2020 US presidential elections cut Trump's vote share, demonstrably. Nonetheless, it was not reflected in congressional races categorising the platform to popular high stakes national presidential elections. With social media's growing role in shaping voter decisions, particularly in swing states, it is clear that platforms like Twitter are altering campaign strategies and

⁵ Rasmus A. Harder, Joris Sevenans & Peter Van Aelst, *Intermedia Agenda Setting in the Social Media Age: How Traditional Players Dominate the News Agenda in Election Times*, 22 *Int'l J. Press/Politics* 275 (2017).

contributing to political polarisation. The dynamics of campaigns will only change over time which just means that it becomes important to understand how platforms such as twitter impact on the electoral processes hence the importance of a broader study of social media and electoral mobilization.

Case Study: How Social Media Mobilized the Dutch Election in 2010

This case study presents a research about the impact of the politicians' social media communications during the Dutch parliamentary elections of 2010 and 2011 on the people's vote. As there was no suitable instrument available for the researchers to capture political debate intensity, the researchers developed their own tool called the Social Media Indicator (SMI) wherein they capture the level of activity of the politicians in using the platforms such as Hyves, Twitte, Facebook, YouTube, and blogs. They have then compared it with the number of votes the different politicians commanding them got. They compared the two cases and their result indicated that the politicians were not very active in the use of the social media especially during local elections. But in the national elections, the authors experienced that, here more politicians were active on social media, they come up with the conclusion that there is a direct relationship between social media activity and the number of votes a politician gains. Those candidates who interacted more actively on social networks received more votes but it depended on the parties.⁶

The study also concerned that adopting Social media alone is not a sufficient assurance to leverage the success. Its effectiveness depends on what the manager anticipated to be achieved by its implementation, and further studies need to be conducted to figure out more factors that can be harnessed herein.

In the Dutch national elections of 9th June 2010 researchers aimed to capture effects of social media on political activities, especially, voting. This period was characterized by growth in the use of the internet as a tool in campaigns where the politicians can talk to the public directly. To analyse this, researchers constructed the 'Social Media Indicator of political candidates (SMI)' which was designed to assess their social media usage on the sites of Twitter, Facebook, youtube, Hyves (a Dutch site of the time) and blogs. Thus, the SMI quantified factors such as

⁶ Marcel Vergeer & Liesbeth Hermans, *Campaigning on Twitter: Microblogging and Online Social Networking as Campaign Tools in the 2010 General Elections in the Netherlands*, 18 *J. Computer-Mediated Comm'n* 399 (2013).

post frequency, retweets, followers, views, and comments, which made for a comparable score of each politician.

Specifically, the study was orientated towards checking the level of politicians' activity in social networks and its impact on the number of votes received. Ethnographic evidence discovered that SMI score of 676 candidates was proportional with the votes they gained and thus identified that social networking played vital role during the national elections. Still, the levels of the effect were lower in local and municipal campaigns where politicians used the platform, in general, much less actively.

In the case of national elections, researchers were able to eliminate the top five names from each party list because the latter has convenient access to other forms of mass media such as television and print media implying that the effect of social media can be uniquely identified. From the rest of the candidates those, who were more active in the social networks, gained more votes per se among the party members. In total, positive correlation was seen in 16 out of 16 parties, and sometimes in large Parties such as the Partij van de Dieren (Party for the Animals) or the Partij van de Arbeid (Labour Party). Solving problems and actively participating on social media was another way to perform well while interacting with the targeted voters helped the candidates to attract more supporters compared to colleagues who were not very active on social networks. However, based on the study done it was seen that the social media alone was not enough sufficient to predict political victory. Party members who were interviewed stated that the use of social media depended with the manner in which it was employed. Of the candidates who had a clear communication strategy and who created a meaningful contact with voters such outcomes could be observed. The same was found to have had off-line connection, thus may have enhanced their presence on digital campaign in their high performance on social media.

In conclusion, this case study shows an increasing role of the social media as one more important factor of political mobilization, showing that constant and aggressive participation in Twitter and Facebook could influence the outcome of elections. And yet, it also serves as an indicator that there is much more work to be done globally on decoding the nature of digital inputs to politics whether offline networks or traditional media.

Conclusion

As the former US president Barack Obama once said “part of what changed in politics is social media and how people received information”. The rise of social media has greatly influenced and transformed the political landscape. Our research paper titled “HOW SOCIAL MEDIA MOBILISES POLITICS IN ELECTION” is trying establish how social media has become an inevitable part in mobilising the elections and election campaigns, and how various platforms like twitter and face book played a role in spreading out the different opinions of the public. Through this paper we see how political parties use social media as an alternative tool for communicating with the voters creating greater outreach to the general public in the rural as well as urban and also to the youth. Because of the significant influence, social media platforms could establish their own space in the political sphere.

We have seen examples of political parties such AAP and BJP using social media influence to gain voters in their election campaigns. a survey conducted on “social media popularity of political parties”. Shows a clear of which all political parties are more known publicly. Later a synthesis with that of international view and perspectives are also shown to understand more like a comparative study.

As demonstrated in the case of India and the United States, social media platforms like Twitter have played a pivotal role in shaping election outcomes, influencing voter behaviour, and reshaping campaign strategies. While social media offers benefits, it also put forward various challenges such as spread of misinformation and the deepening of political polarization between the parties. To harness the potential of social media it is essential for the policymakers to adopt responsible and ethical practices. By leveraging social media effectively, the political parties can foster meaningful engagement with their voter, promote democratic discourse and finally enhance the quality of governance. As the French Philosopher Voltaire said, “those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities”. In the era of social media dominance, it is imperative to scrutinize and evaluate the information we encounter and desist from blindly following partisan narratives. By doing so, we can ensure that social media serves as a force for positive change and as a catalyst for democratic progress.