

Issues on Social Media & Possible effects on voter



Election Commission of India

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Introduction

The Internet is a humongous invention that is ruling over different sectors around the world. This is where the social media sector has evolved or transformed on the basis of how a government organisation communicates through it.

Social media networking emphasises different internet tools that allow us to share community experience, both online and in person. These networking sites go beyond the conventional communication that we can put in terms of communication operated by the



government's websites and someone places a large emphasis on the freedom of speech. These social networking sites are very proactive in terms of audience engagement and participation. This encompasses the considerable amount of inputs and slew of opinions from the audience.

Social media can be innovative as well as disruptive

The power of social media is enormous enough to influence the Governance. It can be innovative as well as disruptive at the same time as the wide influx of information, online content, news coverage effects the overall sentiment and the manner in which individuals process new developments. This can orchestrate a deep influence and can therefore influence campaigning.

Hence, it can be the “control centre” or “the central nervous system” for electoral campaigning as cited by Mindy Finn in one of her quotes.

Using social networking tools such as Facebook, YouTube Twitter, and others. Whether it is raising money or gathering identified supporters, there can be a pivotal role to play on this side of the landscape.


Social media is a mandate to reinvigorate democracy and extend grassroots-activism to governance, however, a tender balance and indeed coherent discipline is needed to ensure free and fair elections.

Increasingly, people are using their personal networks to evaluate the quality of information and decipher important information in the world. Individuals have started to act as pro bono journalists.



Information dissemination and exposure

One of the new ways social media will affect the election is that people are building peer dialogues and electoral process and execution would have to build credibility and representatives would be answerable to all queries and questions. For Example, recently there was a question on the model code of conduct in elections from the Karnataka Elections where the candidate had expressed his displeasure on poster violating the rules and code of conduct.



Existing social networks represents a valuable way to affect national conversations and therefore sentiment.

Educating the citizens and influencing behaviours

Citing the example of a Presidential Election in the United States in 2008 and 2016, we can come up with two different scenarios.

The 2008 presidential campaign that lead Barack Obama as the elected President highlighted how a political campaign on social media can be beneficial. The idea was very direct; the campaign took the message to the supporters through the medium of social media, which helped them towards raising fund, promote align an agenda with the citizens.


Similarly, in 2016 Presidential Election, when Trump took over the stand, massive campaigns were done and the results were for the world to watch.

In both cases, social media served as a benchmark to inform supporters about important issues. These social networking platforms have become significant tools in the political arena to influence the masses to follow a particular agenda.

Like Facebook enables a user to be socially active, with their interactions from one to one, Twitter is known to be more politically inclined; from one to many.

Both social media platforms hold a massive list of subscribers and followers, so one might envisage how imperative it is to bind and circumference it through a guideline.

There are additional players like YouTube which are more educational



in approach and primarily serve as a display channel to the voters about events and major milestones.

India too has seen gigantic changes in the field of social communities gathering up to speak up unanimously.

It was Barack Obama's massive win that influenced and set the stage that ultimately defined the importance of this medium. The first huge social media campaign was noticed in 2011, which was actually a movement spread over a social network and was called India against corruption.

Data Breach and Cyber-attacks in Elections

The famous scandal by Cambridge Analytica has brought about a storm, where it is believed that Data for more than 50 million people was stolen to influence the Donald Trump election and the beliefs of people had been tampered with



and their privacies invaded. The Government of India naturally takes an in-depth view of the situation and asserts that no collateral damage be done to our voting process on account of any such influence basis on any kind of data manipulation.

As per a recent news, update shared in one of the leading dailies:

“Cautioning internet users against online data thieves in the wake of

the recent Facebook data breach revelations, the Indian cyber security agency has advised them to desist from sharing their vote preferences and Aadhaar details on social media platforms.“

Increasing participation in the Voting process

The scenario of social media in the Indian government sectors remains questionable. If channelled in the right direction, the embedment of social networks can orchestrate a far deeper and persuasive influence. Our Voters can be far more informed and engaged about the issues we face like taxes, health care, education and this could increase participation by leaps and bounds.



With over 462 million Internet users, India stands second in the largest online market. Of this, 250 million are Facebook users and approximately 30+ Million users are estimated from Twitter according to the website www.statista.com.

Social Networks sites : Features and Benefits

There are more than seven social networking sites that people are mostly known to, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp and Google Plus. Each of them is adept to communication and build and maintain interpersonal relationships. Typically, social networking sites can deal with interactive content sharing, building



web communities and creating Internet forums.

In the present day scenario, these social networking sites are also used to build awareness and promote business globally.

Benefits of Social Networking Sites

The Internet has been a sensation in itself, and we are much aware than ever that a considerable size of the population rests on the Internet and social media to gather information and to communicate the vision. The Internet has also swapped traditional media sources like television and newspapers because any information related to weather, politics or sports can be easily fetched from the Social Networks.

Internet and its integral part i.e. 'social media' have brought a convenient edge to the community, and with its rapidly growing user base, it is sure to bring a large ecosystem that we would have to nurture whether we opt for it or not.

If we talk about innovation or any newly brought ideation for the government, yes, social networking sites are helping to bring awareness about the same. Through social network, the people around the globe can learn about the primary campaigns, the messaging it bears and awareness can be generated quickly for the benefit of the community.

Most imperatively, a feedback channel can be built to better processes and plugins wherever required.

Let us count down few of the benefits that social networks



can serve the government: -

i. Time and Cost Effective Communication

Social media enables the public to be in direct contact with the government. Many important inputs and quick information can be found online. Also, you can submit forms online without waste of any resource.

ii. Increased Public Participation

Social media brings collective information in a single portal, so it becomes convenient for the people to comprehend and also share their perspective. This makes the Internet community interactive, and with the public interest, the participation enhances with great ideas.

iii. Publicise Meetings

Any upcoming event, activities or hearing can be reached out to the public through social media within no time.

iv. Marketing through Networking (Geo Targeting and Mobile based marketing)

Governments, with the help of social media, can discuss any issues that serve the topmost priority and also put up emergency with ease.

Geo-targeting people on the basis of their location, interests, and constituency to spread a campaign such as “accessible elections” or the “Voters Pledge” is of considerable importance and advantage and can be done quickly. We could also announce election dates or any other formal announcements through this media. Also, campaigns can be created to build awareness around an issue.

Also, another added advantage is to run campaigns to reach an entirely new audience through the help of smartphones and involve them in the political process in a constructive way.

The mobile audience in India is pegged at 340 million. Imagine, the cost of reaching out to each constituency on announcements can be reasonably substantiated, passing on a new campaign input or information.

Hence, there are huge benefits involved in such a medium if we go through closely and focus on equilibrium.

Impact of Social Networking Sites on Indian Youth

Social Networking has changed the perspective of our citizens. All age groups are evident and present in such a medium however based on our recent research currently the most active age group is 15 to 34 years ranging from different cities of India.

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and more, the gestures of enquiring has become anxious and youth have got occupied in the forum. Whether in leisure time or at work, the number is counted to millions when we see the engagement coming from the youth, the perception is very



clear, social networking sites rule the roost when it is Digital India. We cannot evade integration to them in any way but we could

compartmentalize their outreach with a formally drafted process of adherence.

The modern Indian youth in one hand are getting dependent on the convenience lead by the social networks. This convenience also somewhere tends to mislead the younger generation in different sensitive issues. Negating such influence would be a herculean task but can be evaded through a prescribed set of rules and policies to follow.


Importance of Social Networking Sites in Indian Politics

A political system that comes under the world's largest constituency, India stands second in term of Internet users. Earlier it was like



building communities in a public sector through live events and promotion, within a possible range through conventional mediums but since social media has come up, things have been easier and far more decentralised.

However, the political belief in India is evident and has become deep-rooted that social media can influence the voters in a psychological way. More importantly, the fact is that our data is vulnerable. Political rallies and party manifesto today may easily be leveraged online with social media at the centre stage. This has a constructive as well as passive side to it. The sentiments of the public can be altered with a legitimate approach. Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter are playing along, but the question



remains, can it affect the public in a psychological way?

Does digital democracy have the power to influence the political fortunes?

The answer may not be an unambiguous yes, but it is certainly not a “no” either. There are different tales rooted in social networking and politics. Social network helps to fetch online information and networking access to find a solution for the desirables. However, it is a mere dilemma when it says what is the perspective of the public in contrast to Indian politics? Because the civil society has gathered a different concept over politicians, and the frustration is at the peak to turn out for change. This is imperative to be understood in a sensitive way and is of foremost importance.

The online revolution may be an effect of the social wave that has engulfed us and voting is just another function, albeit very crucial for the society, however, the dialogue by the masses or the social media participants have become very strong and emphatic technology, but a battle for changing human behaviour stays. There are questions pinpointing at every edge, whether it is a reality or just a myth, the face of politics cannot be trusted on due to the questions posed on their credibility in their past.

The influence of social media is seen more often in the urban areas; the rural areas are still to be permeated as the social media is still to occupy and build a prima facie presence. Here, the traditional promotional process plays a vital role in influencing the population



residing in rural areas.

Social Networking in a way can influence a majority of the voters if the public issues are manipulated and talked about. As the effective demonstration of social media was seen when Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) took over Delhi in December 2014. The party raised more than 100 million rupees from online, also their agenda reached out to 3.5 million people through a Facebook application called 'Thunderclap'.



Social media has been a great medium to share one's sentiments towards a particular topic. These sentiments can become a path for the campaigner to target on as he can leverage the psychological barrier and target people on the basis of what they want. Social networking sites like Facebook enable us to target our desired audience, according to the demographic profile and interests of people. Now, if we target audience who list politics as their interest, we are very likely to determine who and what to target on and likewise, the social network can influence determined public sectors.

The prospect of cyber war has been well acknowledged by trade pundits and cyber experts but today we also have psychological warfare come into play that is far more complicated and disguised.

Indian youth is impressionable and also have peer influence through social media. Hence, the focus and due diligence of this medium in close connection to ECI is of paramount importance.

Role of Social Media

Hon'ble Prime Minister Sh. Narendra Modi ji and his core focus on Digital India movement is ruling over the Internet. According to him, every government sector in the country must have a presence on social networking sites, whether it be Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, or others.

This will help us to reach out to our public easily, and their issues can be solved efficiently and quickly. The audience likes interaction, and with the only motive to make India digitally expert, these steps have been taken to empower the country.

The motive is very clear, to bring awareness towards digital adeptness and help the citizens of the country to be prudent on vital information and facts pertaining to governance and pivotal factors that decide the everyday functioning of the country. Social media also has a considerable influence on traditional media. Newspaper and television media are fetching news from Twitter on a frequent basis. We can refer and cite numerous examples detailing the same.

Social media has become a huge source of influence where one wants to express, engage and be a social journalist. With the efficiency and speed, it has even challenged the news media with its approach.





What can be possible positive and negative impacts of social networking for Indian voters?

There are two side face for everything, the best about integrating social media with voters are-


- Easy approach to the voters
- It is accessible to all
- One on one interactive platform
- Build awareness
- Transparent, and fast

Negative impacts of social media are –

- Campaigns cannot be controlled
- Prone to hacking
- Opinion influenced cannot be altered
- Negative sentiments can affect elections
- Facts can be misled

Examples of positive influence from social media:

Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi very well understood the importance of building a conversation with the youth in the elections. He, therefore, tried to connect to a large audience with the help of social media. And then the 2014 elections which are considered as the largest democratic elections in the world till date came to light showcasing the power of the Internet. Sh. Narendra Modi announced



his victory to his huge fan base on Twitter and also encouraged the voters to tweet their Fingers ('ungli' in Hindi) with the hashtag #selfiewithmodi, most of the selfies received came from the younger crowds which show the greater participation of youth in social media.

Examples of negative influence from social media:

Recently, we witnessed one of the greatest political scandals of Cambridge Analytica in close correlation and context to Facebook. The results pointing a needle onto Donald Trump for winning the United States' President election. According to the reports, it is noted that the Trump election in 2016 was influenced by the use of data mining and targeting. The report says that Facebook in collaboration with Cambridge Analytica (Data mining firm) managed to influence at least 50 million audiences by leveraging its database and impacting the psychological matrix. Social media has an unprecedented power in the form of private data and any lacunae can cause collateral damage.

Technically speaking, no person to be influenced, and no data to be altered from the Facebook database, if it concerns an integral autonomous body like Election Commission of India.

Election Commission of India collaborates with Facebook, however, a model code of conduct to be prescribed on do's and don'ts that under no circumstance such an act be tolerated when it concerns our nation and engagement with the ECI.

India is a democratic country, and the voters here have the right to free and fair election.

Election Commission has cleared their words to Facebook and the

technological world, but feels the need to prescribe a model code of conduct which is already in process.


The factors responsible for the Cambridge Analytica controversy stated that the formula that helped Trump to become the President of the United States may also be an agenda for the political parties for the election in India. There were mentions from few sources that with the help of Indian partner Ovlene Business Intelligence, the Bihar election in 2010 came with 90 percent success rate on the seats for which it provided inputs.

User's behaviour towards Elections : nature and analysis of complaints/process adopted to handle

Social Networking is a prima facie factor in social virtual presence today. It has become the hygiene towards building dialogues, engaging and escalating suggestions, and sometimes expressing strong opinions towards Elections in India. Especially, the youth in India are proactive towards the representation of a leader who can serve the country for good. After analysing 768 queries, complaints and suggestion merged together, we have found that 500+ were complaints, which was mostly regarding Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) and Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT).



There are also complaints where people are exhibiting annoyance and



anger for not receiving their Voter ID card even after months of applying. There are complaints regarding voter ID migration, voter ID card details correction and more.

Most of the queries are followed with a set of standard template that has been prepared by the Election Commission. However, it was enquired that a set of rules are followed to entertain any such queries:

Step 1: Any queries, complaints, or suggestions are consigned to via Facebook

Step 2: Election Commission of India's Facebook page unravel what is the query and check how it can be resolved.




Step 3: The query is then

dealt with the standard response template and in case, the template does not have a resolution, the query is being escalated it to the concerned nodal authorities.

Step 4: After getting the resolution from the Concerned section, the answer is forwarded to the respective Facebook user.

Maximum queries are resolved using this method, however, the remaining which are yet to be responded to lacks input coming from the concerned nodal authorities. There are also ample numbers of suggestions coming from the users to get Election Commission of India enrolled with Twitter, as it is a certain fact, Twitter being a political



arena can reach out the population much faster and easier. There are suggestions regarding EVM and VVPAT, where the people are suggesting to use Aadhar card with the voter ID card.

Research Methodology

The main motive of the survey was to bring into notice the role of social media in Indian politics and its impacts on the Indian youth. It is very clear that as social networking sites have their marked pros, there are also many cons that we must look into. Elections process will never stop, and being a democratic country, we cannot stop the population from using social networking sites.

It is very important that not a single person should be wrongly influenced, and the model code of conduct must be respected. There are many possible ways where Indian youth can get influenced negatively, but it is also their moral responsibility to do what is right. Political parties will try influencing the youth because for them winning is important.

Nevertheless, there has been vigorous participation amongst the young audience regarding any objectionable activity during the elections or after the announcement of the Election date. Model Code of Conduct is not underestimated by the youth and there are rapid complaints if such acts come to light.

Social networking sites are effective marketing tools for the political parties where they can find their target audience. Female being the most influenced which may indirectly affect the voting. There also remains a strong opportunity to make them active participants of the process.

However, the social networking for a general is used to spread

awareness, and it should be pushed in the same direction to build awareness and education amongst people regarding the importance of the vote. Positive impacts of social media must be kept in practice, and we should look forward to how we can make our country proud and at the same time be social media and internet savvy.

Suggestion for better Elections in India

Youths are the rising star, and awareness is the key to bring total democracy in the country. There is a thin-line gap between our youth and the Election's motive which is required to get bridged. Keeping in the mind the prominence of any decision, it is very important to streamline to better connect with the audience.



Open top-to-down communication with the youths can gain their trust on Election Commission of India, and help to escalate an agenda fruitfully regarding voting awareness.

Also, with the help of big data, we can reach out the population to aware them about their role in the upcoming elections. There are many negative aspects been talked about Big Data, however, with the right motive, Big Data can be influential giving a new edge to the Election Commission. The agenda remains “No Voter to be left behind” and will prosper until a benchmark have been set near the world.