

Influence of Social Media in Indian Election 2014- a Study on Voters in Thrissur

Rekha KG

Management Department, Government Law College
Thrissur, Kerala, India

Abstract-

The assembly election of 2014 in India is different and exciting in various criterions. This was the first time when a whole election campaign was planned on the image and shoulders of a single personality, for the first time a well planned and well executed election campaign found results, this is the first time a new political party emerged with reaction of people and for the first time new media was given ample relevance in political elections. Social media is a revolutionary idea which arrived into the public medium without much hype, but has exploded in the global public communication arena. All other popular mass communication medium like television internet and radio are using social media as a support system to remain updated. Kerala is one of the few states which have a political outlook independent of the national political scenario. The political awareness is considered very high among the youth in Kerala. The study is an effort to identify the impact made by social media communication efforts of candidates in assembly elections 2014 on the population of Thrissur. The author also tries to identify the general factors that lead to the decision making in selecting a candidate to vote.

Voters were asked questions with the help of a questionnaire and the importance of social media site like facebook and twitter as well as instant messenger applications like whatsapp in their choice of a candidate was measured.

Key words: - Social media, Indian Politics, Assembly Elections, Media Influence, Mass communication

I. INTRODUCTION

The 16th assembly elections concluded on may 12th 2014 with the ninth and final phase of a month long endeavor. The election commission foresees the elections headed by election commissioner of India as the main chair of authority. The election was conducted in 543 seats in the 29 states. The state and central government employees were devoted to complete the marathon task of peaceful and proper conduct of assembly elections. Out of a population of 1.2 billion plus, the number people eligible to cast vote this year were 83.5crore. The country witnessed 66.38% polling. It is the highest ever voting rate in the history of Indian elections. With increase in public reaction to corruption and crime it was expected that there is a change in attitude of common man who is too busy with daily life.

The assembly election witnesses change in the attitude and method of operations of political parties. An increased professionalism and planning was given importance over emotional whims and traditions. All the sections of the society was given due consideration. Indian society can be classified on the basis financial capacity into three for the convenience of study, the elite upper class, the struggling middle class and the underprivileged lower class population. A new group identified and nurtured is "upper middle class". It is a group which does not carry any past financial debt or future financial emergency and all the earnings are either consumed or invested. It is a group which is not under pressure to recover from any financial obligations. This is the target group of new business concepts like smart phones, online shopping cartels, and fashion and convenience services. It is the group which is educated and aware. One important feature is access and use of internet and social media for communication. With increases popularity of smart phones internet services like e-mail is changing its official nature and becoming more personal. Various social services like SMS and messengers have made quick and short messages well liked by people.

While political parties still rely on the traditional and old fashioned ways of campaigning such as posters, rallies, cardboard cutouts as well as house-to-house canvassing to win voters, many politicians realized that social media is important to influence the vote.

DEFINITION AND FORMS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Traditionally, a social media such as blog is considered a success or influential through a number of indicators such as inbound links and the number of people subscribed to it. These criteria are however no longer credible and can be misleading as blog nowadays is not just about blogging. In fact, social media is a channel through which people 'connect', collaborate, participate, discuss, and make friends. As such, more criteria should be used to measure its success and influence.

Social media are new information network and information technology using a form of communication utilizing interactive and user-produced content, and interpersonal relationships are created and maintained. Typical social media network services could be content sharing, web communities, and Internet forums. (Sanastokeskus TSK: Sosiaalisen median sanasto. Helsinki 2010.)

FEATURES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

At least five major features are easy to identify :(Eysenbach, G. Medicin 2.0: Social Networking, Collaboration, Participation, Apomediation, and Openness. Journal of Medical Internet Research 2008; 10(3): e22.)

1. Social networking and social interaction
2. Participation
3. The use of different providers (e.g. search engines, blog spaces, etc.)
4. Openness
5. Collaboration (between both users and user groups). 19

Different ways in which social media distributes user content are shown in the following table (Seppälä, P. Kiinnostu & Kiinnosta - Näin markkinoit järjestöasi sosiaalisessa mediassa. SKAF 2011.)

1. Social Networks - Facebook, Google+, MySpace, LinkedIn, IRC
2. Mediaproducts community - YouTube, Flickr, Slideshare
3. Blog services - Wordpress, Blogger, Twitter, Posterous
4. Information creation community - Wikipedia, Wikispaces
5. Link sharing services - Digg, Diigo
6. Virtual community - Habbo Hotel, Second Life

TWITTER (Conover, M D et al. Political Polarization on Twitter. Proceedings of the Fifth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media 2011.)

Twitter is a free, Internet-based microblogging service, on which users can send short, 140-character messages to each other. Its use is based on quick exchanges of thoughts and information between friends, acquaintances, and all the users of the Twitter platform. Twitter messages are most commonly called “tweets”. These tweets form a current of messages that are followed in chronological order from a computer screen or some other screen, like that of a cell phone. A sort of keyword called a “hashtag” can be added to tweets to connect the current message to some other message, making it easier to follow the messages. In conversations concerning society, Twitter can be an interesting vessel, because its messaging form is very compact. In short messages, there is no opportunity to justify a point of view or cite sources, and because of this, political messaging and conversation can be more heated and critical here than on other social media platforms.

FACEBOOK (Suomen Toivo Think Tank Runeberginkatu 5 B 00100 Helsinki www.toivoajatuspaja.fi)

Facebook is the Internet’s leading online community. Most consider Facebook as the very image of social media. The basic idea is to offer each registered user the chance to create a user profile with pictures and to keep in touch with their so-called “friends”, or contacts they link to on the site. Facebook wasn’t the first of its kind: similar services already existed in the late 1990s, but the way Harvard university student Mark Zuckerberg linked a person’s photograph and profile to others and created a way to share thoughts, pictures and links was completely new. It was easy for users to adapt to it. Facebook was first available in February 2004 to Harvard students. Within one year, Facebook was used in almost all American schools, and was opened for public use in 2006. Facebook came to Finland in 2007, and at the time of writing, it has 1.5 million Finns registered as users. The worldwide fascination with Facebook is based on the possibility it offers to be in contact with people whose e-mail addresses and phone numbers have changed or become outdated. But an even more important feature of Facebook is the chance to create networks: Facebook’s activity is based solely on communities. Being on Facebook isn’t just limited to information within a group of friends. Through groups, users can form new networks. A user’s posting, in the form of text, pictures or both, can receive feedback from other users in the form of the “Like” button, and the option to make their own comments. They can also forward the posting to their own Facebook contacts using the “Share” option. One popular feature Facebook supports is community pages for common interests. Many political candidates create a page for themselves, and when a user clicks on the “Like” button, that user indicates that they would like to receive updates each time the candidate adds something to Facebook.

USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN ELECTIONS

(Ron Davies, Members' Research Service European Parliamentary Research Service 140709REV1)

1. Micro-targeting- Social media can also assist with much more refined targeting of voter groups.
2. Campaign personalization- Social media reinforce that trend by putting the emphasis on the individual politician and by focusing on personalities and personal relationships
3. Supporting 'offline' events- one of the main changes in campaigning with the advent of the Internet has been the use of social media's online capabilities to communicate and organise events that take place 'offline', i.e. in the real world
4. Multiplier effects- the most important aspect of social media is the 'network' effect produced when someone who has seen a video, visited a page or read a tweet passes on the same message or a reference to all of their friends or followers. These 'second degree' networks (i.e. followers of followers) may represent weak social ties, but can be very large.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A report entitled “Social Media in India – 2012” released by the Internet and Mobile 4 Association of India (IAMAI) in February 2013 throws up interesting findings.

1. The IAMAI report places the number of social media users in Urban India at 62 Million by December 2012. The same report estimates that the number of social media users will top 66 million by June 2013.
2. Facebook is the leading website accessed by all social media users, with as many as 97% of them registering a presence on Facebook.

As per Facebook Usage Statistics, 2010 <http://www.nickburcher.com/2010/03/facebook-usage-statistics-march-2010.html> [accessed 28 February 2011] there were 1.5 million facebook account users in 2009 which showed a 4005% growth and become 7.8 million in 2010. This shows the popularity of the medium in a country like India, where the majority of population is young (20-50)

As per the research done the function of media on politics is to highlight a particular social issue relevant more than other. (Iyenger & kindell 1987)

Facebook has an incredible influence in India and as per studies of the Mumbai-based Iris Knowledge Foundation, Facebook users will “wield a tremendous influence” over the final results of the election. Facebook has 93 million users and Twitter has 33 million accounts set up in the country, which suggests that the Indian people regard social media as vitally important in the way they move forward as a wider community as on April 3rd 2014.

Twitter data tends to reproduce known biases towards incumbents in the U.S. political system. Any predictive power above and beyond simply predicting that the incumbent will win thus appears to come from over-fitting to ephemeral phenomena unique to single elections. Real success at using social media to forecast general political behaviors thus appears to require much greater effort to detect and account for demographic, political, and other differences between Twitter users and the broader polity; and to do so continuously as both populations evolve and change. Whether, after having done so, Twitter will fulfill its promise as a simpler alternative to traditional polling, remains unclear. (Huberty, Oct. 27–Nov. 1, 2013,)

The founders of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube did not create their products with the intent of starting revolutions and ousting dictators, and though they may feel they have played a role in the process by providing these vehicles for change, these revolutions begin in the minds and imaginations of those driving them. They choose their tools and their mediums for communication, whether it is print, radio, blogging or just word of mouth, but the strength of a movement lies ultimately in the will for activism. (Storck, 2011)

In the evolving realm of social media, local governments must find ways to incorporate this technology into their communication plans in engaging and meaningful ways. Social media’s popularity, low cost, relative ease of use, and ability to reach large audiences make them tools that public relations practitioners in local governments cannot ignore. The responsibility of managing social media for local governments lies on public information and communication officers, who must have the approval and support of government officials—both elected and appointed. (Missy Graham, 2013)

The media play an essential role in the process of democratic consolidation. Media facilitate the circulation of information and opinions so that an informed citizenry can articulate its demands and influence the political decision making process. In addition, the media subject the political elite to critical oversight and highlight social issues. (Michaelsen, 2011)

III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The election conducted in May 2014 was unique in different ways. It was the first election which shows the entire campaign being placed on the shoulders of a single individual being the Prime minister. India has a history of election campaigns based on political parties and the united image of the leading members of the parties. This was also the first election which reflected a well organized and well planned election campaign. The amount of time and effort taken to reach each individual though using social media was really appraisable. The election based on social and mass media marketing created shocking results in some regional election results. The objective of this study is to identify the factors which affect the voting decision of people in Kerala. The researcher aims to understand whether the people Kerala received any social media messages from the candidates and if yes what was the effect on candidate choice while voting.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data is collected by using questionnaire. The sample consisted of 60 members of the Thrissur district in Kerala, India. The state is known for its education level and quality. The sample consisted of smart phone users who have more than 2 social media network account and participated in the 16th assembly elections in India. The selected sample of people voted in all the elections from the age of 18.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the 60 respondents 36 were above the age of 40. The 60% of respondents were residents in the country during at least 5 previous elections excluding 2014 election. That is in the years 2009, 2004, 1999, 1998 & 1996. The awareness about political parties is high among the respondents as 75% of the people are aware about all the parties participating in the elections. The awareness of the political parties has direct relation with selecting a candidate as the 95% of the respondents vote on the basis of political orientation rather than candidates. 18% of the respondents have social media accounts. 98% of the respondents received messages from political parties related to assembly elections.

The analysis of the collected showed that even though there was a surprise element and newness to receive social media messages and SMS from candidates in election the choice of candidate was not very much influenced by it.

This is also shown in the results which did not have any connection with the results of Central Government selected in the elections. The study helped to realize the researcher that the political orientation in Kerala begins from the family. The state politics is a regular topic in family discussions. There are other elements like politics in educational institution from school level which influence the students. Almost all the government offices have political parties. So a person in Kerala is surrounded by influences. The messages on social media are discarded as advertisements. Therefore they don't necessarily affect the voter's choice.

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