

CONFERENCE THEME: Election Campaign in India

**PAPER TITLE: SOCIAL MEDIA PLAYS PIVOTAL ROLE IN POLITICAL
CAMPAIGNING**

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Abstract

All over the world, Political parties in order to reach the public have been using various methods. The traditional methods of campaigning have undergone drastic changes due to the impact of technology.

What differentiates the Internet from traditional print and broadcast media is that its communication network offers ordinary citizens unrestricted access and ability to voice their political agenda to a worldwide audience. One of the primary reasons that the Internet is so widely appealing to political candidates and political organizations is that this medium offers a source-controlled form of communication. Internet sites are much less expensive than advertisements. Furthermore, the expanse of the Internet offers candidates, citizens, and political groups unlimited space to articulate completely policy positions, biographical information, speech texts, press releases, and a variety of other important political information

This paper seeks to analyse the websites of the two leading political parties in Bihar- Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Janta Dal United (JDU). This paper would also examine the presence of these political parties on the social media and examine how the parties are connecting with the public. Certain important issues during the months of September, October and November 2015 will be taken and the activities of the political parties on the social media will be analysed. This paper would try to bring out the similarities and difference adopted by both the political parties in their communication strategies on the internet.

KEY WORDS: Political Party, BJP, JDU, Facebook, Websites, Political campaigning, Internet

Introduction

The art of political campaigning has undergone drastic changes under the impact of technology. Political campaigning is no longer limited to only persuading the voters to vote for a particular candidate or party it is also about creating awareness among the public on various issues and over a period of time getting them involved in public opinion formations.

The concept of marketing has also pervaded politics. The internet has provided a low-cost platform to the political parties to interact with the public. Internet can be used at any time, for a variety of purposes and has no geographical barrier. The American Presidential elections in 2008 and 2012 have shown the potential of this new medium –the internet to the world. Political parties and candidates are adapting to this medium at a rapid pace all over the world. Even in countries like India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka etc. the political parties have their websites and are doing things in order to engage the public constantly in discussions. With only 22% of internet penetration in India all the major political parties in India have their website but are also present on the social media like Facebook, twitter etc. The social media offers a platform for short, crisp messages and comments from people; it can also be spread quickly without incurring any extra cost.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The key changes in society and media which have shaped the political communication in many democratic countries over post-war period can be described in three stages .The first stage, in which political communication was subordinate relatively strong and stable political institution beliefs. In the second stage, faced with more mobile electorate the parties increasingly adapted their communications to the news values and formats of limited television channels. In the third

stage, still emerging media abundance reshaped political communication in five trends anti-elitist populism, a process of centrifugal diversification imperatives, increased competitive pressures and changes in how people receive politics. (Blumer&Kavang)

The internet contributes in decline of civics life and this technology is primarily used for entertainment. The other uses of the internet are e-mailing, searching for information, following of news and political campaigns. The traditional method such as signing petition, participation in protest, marches rallies have declined over time. On other hand the author is of view that the effect of internet use on engagement is positive but it is not substantial, however online news produces substantial effect. (Boulianne.S.:2009).

According to Gibson and Ward (2003), political parties use the internet in three ways: First, for administration: political parties go online to provide and manage information about themselves, their goals, manifestos, policy proposals and so on. Second, they use the internet for campaigning: to recruit new members and potential voters, to target specific groups for example young people who will go online for information, to try set an agenda for election, bypassing the mass media, but also to retrieve information about visitors to the site, getting an indication of the kind of demographic that they are interested in them Third, political parties use the internet for internal organization: they canvass their members' views on certain topics, they can discuss policies, encourage donations, but also conduct e-ballots or referenda with users and/or members.

Luke March(2004) in his study of the Russian party and internet in Europe thinks that at present internet is not the vital force behind formation of voting behaviour but is of view that in coming time it can play important role.

Malaysia since the late 1990s differentiates between news sites, information, blogs and social-networking sites such as the Facebook and Twitter. The availability of the new media to many people has indeed made them expect many political outcomes. More than the old media, the new media spreads the news rapidly which can also shift focus of framing away from the state. The flow of information and news is unfiltered, constant and keeps growing. The result is unlikely to be revolutionary and establishes the existing patterns of politics even more deeply thus making Malaysia more interactive and participatory which will enable more democracy in politics in Malaysia which will indeed give the common public a sense of belongingness i.e. by the people, for the people and of the people.(Weiss:2012)

In the presidential election of Korea in 2002 they used a silent political revolution and the most important was the use of new media of communication extensively like internet , mobile and phone throughout the election process .In the election process Roh Moo-hyun the candidate who gained support through voluntarily organized cyber fans and called it as “Nosamo”. The other candidate gained the support of most of the conservative newspapers which control the nation’s media market. But of the two candidates Nosamo’s active campaign of using extensive mobile phone calling campaign successfully attracted the people’s attention and made them to cast ballots. Finally Roh Moo won the election and was elected as the president and it was clearly accepted that the victory of Roh Moo was because of the use of new media. Rather it was not the case that only Roh knew and used new media but the reason for his success was that Korea is a country with high mobile phone and high internet penetrations and so his election campaign attracted younger generations in particular. So the election victory was due to the wide use of internet and mobile phones medium in the campaign to communicate political information. The young people were to support Roh rather than Lee his opponent who used conservative

newspaper media because young people in the current situation support progressive and reformist leader. Roh's victory is significantly related to the internet use of ordinary voters and mobilization of voters by mobile phones.

The general election of May 2011 has always been the most discussed in Singapore's political history. The government was not strict about the rules of election campaigning on the internet. It was the first time in the history that the opposition party was able to get supporters via social networking media like the Facebook and Twitter. Apart from this, the bloggers used the internet for other political debate and comment. The People's Action Party(PAP) lost the election which made the opposition gain the historical victory. It was quickly referred to as the "Internet Election" by the observers which implied that the media activism in the cyberspace had a great impact on the ballot. There was an information spread to various people telling that the polls were not decided in Singapore's web. The voters' choice was largely influenced by the divergent voices in politics and more control over the government rather than just the usual issues. Even though the online expression has challenged the PAP's authoritarian rule and has changed the entire political scene in Singapore, its impact on the electoral terms so far has been limited. The PAP tries its level best to get the city-state under control, both online and offline, and likely will continue its dominance. It is still an unanswered question if the cyber media activism can actually push the city-state towards an open democracy. (Portmann:2011)

In Pakistan, the media is more or less free but sometime it has to face political heat. Radio is the most important medium of news and with the arrival of mobile radio; it has further strengthened its position. The internet penetration is not very high in the country, as English is the primary language of internet. Internet has its presence mainly in the urban centre. The internet is now being used as a supplement for broadcast and print media. Apart from the internet, cell phone

and SMS are also used as a medium to transmit message. Twitter on the other hand has become important tool for steering debate. Facebook has become a medium to gain support for common cause. In political communication role and effect of media depends on media type and transition stage. In the case of political communication the big media have less impact than the small media. In fact it is small and flexible media which play a role in the initial phase of political transition (Michaelsen:2011)

Political campaigns in India:

In India the usage of mass media in political campaign can be divided into different stages or period. During the freedom struggle the Print media was used to raise voice and built the views of the public. In the Nehru era there was steady growth of the Press and the source of information for the Press was the official hand-outs. The ownership of the media was private but it was in tune with the policies of the government. During the regime of Smt. Indira Gandhi by 1974 the Press became critical of the policies of the government. It was in her tenure that emergency was declared and the freedom of the Press was totally quashed in India. The allotment of news print and advertisement become a tool of government to control press. In this period use of posters, hand outs, signs on walls were used as a major tool for campaign. During the early 80s under the Prime Ministership of Smt.Indira Gandhi and Shri Rajiv Gandhi the Hindi grew in importance and size. It not only mobilized traditional Hindu base of middle class from small towns but also professionals and intellectuals. During this phase the press took the role of advisor and controversial journalism was born. The political scenario of India was also changing it was the time when regional forces came to frontline especially in southern India. . By the year 1984 professional advertising agencies were hired to do political communication.(Kiran Prasad:)

After 1991 was the period of liberalization when many private and international broadcast player came into existence. A distinctive feature of this period was the “rathayatra” as a tool for campaign. The All India radio was used by the government to spread its propaganda. The Doordarshan –the television broadcaster in India was also under government control. AIR And Doordarshan was used for government propaganda. In the Southern part of India many broadcasting channel came into existence and were backed by political Organizations. (Kiran Prasad: 2003). During the early 90s with the advent of TV satellite channels, there was a boom in electronic campaign. During the election of 1998 interactive cable system and internet were used to influence the voter. Apart from jingles, short films and slogan were made to catch the voter attention.

A recent study by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and IRIS Knowledge Foundation, has claimed that in 160 constituencies, Facebook could emerge as a tool which could influence people’s voting choices in the 2014 elections. The future of Facebook is in India, as we rank the third overall in number of users. Therefore, it has become essential to study the politicization of new media during campaigning since Narendra Modi is known to have revolutionized the trend in the Indian scenario.

METHODOLOGY:

The websites of the two major state party of Bihar- Janata Dal United and the Bharatiya Janata Party was analyzed. The websites were analyzed for the kind of content they carried as well as their navigation and user-friendliness. The Facebook accounts of these two parties was analyzed for the month of September, October and November 2015 to see what were the kind of content that the leaders were posting and the kind of response (Like, Share and Comment) they received from people. In order to assess the popularity of the Facebook pages the maximum number of

likes, maximum comments and maximum shares were taken into account. In addition the minimum likes, minimum comments and minimum shares were also taken into account. The various posts were categorized and put under broad themes and the broad themes of the posts were compared.

ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATIONS:

The presence of the political parties on the internet is seen in terms of their party's websites as well as their Facebook page.

The Bharatiya Janata Party:

The BJP web page used PHP to develop website. The primary menu consists of the following heads: Home, Leadership, Representatives, Organization, Gallery and contact. The primary menu was in the form of dropdown.

Below primary menu there was a picture slider, which contains messages and photograph of prominent BJP leaders of state and central level. As we scroll down slider we found two heads as state leaders and gallery. State leader contained photographs and details of Sushil Kumar Modi, Mangal Pandey, and Nand Kishore Yadav. The gallery section contained the photographs of different events held in state. Further down we saw a section of press releases. The right side of website contains video; join BJP, sign up for newsletter and upcoming events. The website had five video which are of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP President Mr. Amit Shah.

The mast head of website contained link to official twitter and facebook account of BJP and an option to like Bihar BJP's facebook page. At the bottom of the page, link to BJP central website, Narendra Modi's website, BJP President Website, State President website and Contact were available.

The prominent colour used in website was saffron.

Janta Dal United:

The JDU official website was not functional, in place of it, the party used www.nitishforbihar.com as its website. The website used latest technology to develop its website. The website was in single page format, which is the latest trend in web world.

The primary menu consisted following head: Home, Leadership, Campaign, Post, Resources and contact. When we clicked on primary menu secondary menu option dropped down from primary menu.

The mast head contained link to social media such as instagram, Whatsapp, itunes and android apps and a search option. Just below it we found Facebook, twitter YouTube Goolge plus and linked in links.

Below primary menu there was a picture slider with Nitish Kumar as prominent and only person visible. As we scrolled down we saw options such as नीतीशकुमारकानेतृत्व,बिहार - हमारविज्ञन, अपनीबात - आपकेपास.

When we further moved down we saw options in form of slider which had further option such as: Holistic Approach to Healthcare: Bihar 2015, Roads, Bridges, and Easy Connectivity: Bihar 2015, Safety and Security for All: Bihar 2015, e-Governance: Bihar 2015 and Strides in Primary Education: Bihar 2015.

The slider was continued by letter by Nitish Kumar which talked about current status, future plans. Just below this there was a link to youtube channel, twitter and facebook page.

The last section of website gave information about numbers of voters, numbers of households, volunteers and number of rallies held. It also gave option to register oneself for getting information and being in touch with party apart from option such as facebook, twitter, google plus, you tube and linked in.

The prominent colour used in this website was white and green, which is also the official colour of JDU

FACEBOOK ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES

The Facebook posts of the two leaders i.e. Mr Nirish Kumar of JDU and Mr. Susheel Kumar Modi of BJP were analyzed for the month of September, October and November 2015. Posts which were common had been broadly categorised .The maximum and minimum like, share and comments had been noted in order to understand the popularity of the medium.

From the month of September (From 20th) to November (Till 5th) Susheel Modi's Facebook had a total of one hundred forty eight (148) whereas Nitish Kumar had one hundred forty post(140) .

Susheel Modi's posts were related to the following activities:-

- Greetings on anniversary and festival's
- Self-praise
- Election slogans of BJP
- Information related to elections
- Direct attack on Nitish Kumar, Lalu Prasad Yadav and Congress

Nitish Kumar's posts were related to the following activities:-

- Newspaper article written by Nitish Kumar
- Self Defense
- Attack on Narendra Modi
- Campaign Details
- Information related to election
- Greetings on anniversary and festivals
- Cross Media Promotion

Table 1

Likes	September	October	November
BJP Maximum	19000	25000	8800
JDU Maximum	97000	9900	22000
BJP Minimum	4100	397	480
JDU Minimum	2000	1000	5400

From Table 1, we can see that Likes on Nitish Kumar's post is much greater than likes on Susheel Kumar Modi's post. It is evident that number of follower of Nitish Kumar is more than Susheel Kumar Modi, so Kumar had an edge over Susheel Modi in terms of likes. When we talks about the minimum number of likes on a post, here also JDU Nitish Kumar is ahead of Susheel Modi.

Table 2

Share	September	October	November
BJP Maximum	2059	7849	440
JDU Maximum	434	3041	1486
BJP Minimum	104	19	72
JDU Minimum	61	63	157

From Table 2, we can conclude that Susheel Modi's post has more share than Nitish Kumar's post. The same can't be said for minimum share. Here Susheel Modi is lagging behind Nitish Kumar.

Table 3

Comment	September	October	November
BJP Maximum	331	1332	487
JDU Maximum	1033	2712	565
BJP Minimum	40	25	30
JDU Minimum	169	140	327

From Table 3, we can see that Nitish Kumar's post get more comment when compared to Susheel Modi's post. We can thus conclude that Nitish Kumar's post are more interactive and engage people more efficiently and effectively.

CONCLUSION

The internet as a mass medium had been diversifying with various applications. Facebook was started to link up with acquaintances and friends have now grown into an application which can be used for a variety of purposes. One of the uses of new media has been political communication.

Political parties go online to provide and manage information about themselves, their goals, manifestos, policy proposals and so on. They use the internet for campaigning: to recruit new members and potential voters. The use of social media and internet by political parties has happened all over world but the presidential elections of Barack Obama and Narendra Modi in 2014 gave a big boost to the use of social media by political parties.

The BJP website in Bihar is of much inferior quality when compared to the website of Janata Dal. One thing which one need to keep in mind here is that the Janata dal United official website is nonfunctional; it depends fully on the website specially developed for Nitish Kumar.

Nitish Kumar's website uses latest technology to develop its website and uses both in English and Hindi in its website. This may be to show that JDU still have its root in culture but also shows that they are progressive. The website was updated regularly.

Both Nitish Kumar and Susheel Kumar Modi have large number of follower on Facebook. Nitish Kumar however had edge over Susheel Kumar Modi in number of followers. The number of post by Susheel Kumar Modi is slightly higher than Nitish Kumar, but when it comes to number of likes and comment Nitish Kumar leads. It may be due to reason that Nitish Kumar has more number of followers and the posts of Nitish Kumar are more interactive. Susheel Kumar Modi's post gets more shares on average when compared with Nitish Kumar. Here Susheel Kumar has an upper hand. By sharing a post it means that the follower is not only in in track with the post

but also want other people to know that they are in sync with the message and in one or the other way works as opinion influencer for other follower.

In light of recent political development in India it can be concluded that the internet and especially social media plays a big role in promoting ideology and projecting a candidate. The 2014 general elections and now 2015 election had suggested that internet and especially social media is here to stay. And it has supplemented the conventional mode of campaigning and acts as a reinforcement effect on voters.

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