

Influence of Social Media on the First Time Voters and Youth In Favour Of Bhartiya Janta Party

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Abstract: In India the general election of 2014 has more often been considered as majorly swayed by the social media. The BJP government has used television, twitter, Facebook etc. very tactically to mobilize its voters. Though there were multiple factors that helped BJP in winning elections but social media was eventually a major factor in assuring the victory of BJP. This paper would try to figure out the impact of social media on the voting behaviour of the youth. Further it would analyse the impact social media exerted on the youth and first time voters for supporting the BJP.

Keywords: Social media, Government, Politics, Congress, BJP, Direct Democracy, Public Discourse

1. INTRODUCTION

The electoral landscape of India is emerging rapidly with the growing electoral participation and contestation. India is termed as the largest democracy in the world with a large number of voters nearly 778 million. In the recent general elections out of the total eligible voters there were nearly 17 million first time voters who have participated in this election. with the advent of internet in the recent years there has been a drastic increase in the number of various social networking sites. India has nearly 92 million active Facebook users out of which around 50 percent belong to the age group of 18-24. Twitter has comparatively low number of users than Facebook but its numbers is still quiet huge with 15.6 million users in 2014.[1]This shows that the Indian youth is much aware about these social media platforms and is using them frequently.

Though in the elections of 2009 political parties switched to the social media platform to reach out to its voters but this move did not yield desired results. But these elections made the parties realise the power of social media in gathering the public support by addressing and connecting with people in various ways. Earlier the political parties in India relied only on mass rallies, in directly meeting people and by distributing the hard copies of their pamphlets and manifestos. With the growing use of social media platforms among the youth the political parties started utilising this as a viable mode of addressing people and making them feel as if they are a part of direct democracy where they can comment on any issue, put forth their problem in public discourse and can access the programs and events the parties are planning for with a click on the screen.

The use of social media in politics has led to a significant shift in altering the political mobilization process and has impacted the voting behaviour of people in many ways. The BJP government has used the media tactically to muster public support. Whereas in the past online electoral strategies had centred on websites, in the 2014 election, political parties focused on the development of effective social media outreach, which was widely identified as key to electoral success (Patel, 2014). In fact, because Indian voters were more likely to access the Internet via mobile devices, political parties not only developed smartphone apps such as the BJP's 272+ mobile app aimed at voters but also made use of existing mobile messaging platforms such as WhatsApp and Line (Khosla & Sharma, 2014).

[2] BJP was constantly engaged with the young voters through these apps. This had an impact over the young voters as such engagements with the voters portrayed BJP as a people-centric party.

The BJP left no stone unturned in “getting the BJP’s message of its economic records and accomplishments out to voters, especially younger, first-time voters.” The urban voters turnout is always low as compared to the rural voters. Moreover, their focus on the elections is non-serious. Indeed, both party functionaries and volunteers were purposefully making the best possible use of media to connect especially the often elusive younger and urban voters, and encourage them to promote the party’s message on their social networks where they were rapidly active.

In order to augment the voter base websites named India272.com, namonumber.com were launched. A page titled “I support Narendra Modi” had become very popular amid people. Apart from it to make sure that large numbers of people come across with Modi’s rallies and speeches a WhatsApp number 07820078200 was also launched to boost up the campaign. In an age where television and mobile phone penetration has been around 74 per cent in India, Modi effectively utilized text messages and phone calls to spread his message even in the most inaccessible heartland of the country [3]

Unsurprisingly, through its targeted campaigning, BJP managed to reap rich dividend from the group of first-time electors. For instance, in a 2013 survey conducted by the India Today Group and C Voter Youth, when first time electors were asked to choose between Narendra Modi and Rahul Gandhi, 47 percent of the 5014 respondents chose Modi and only 34 percent chose Rahul Gandhi (India Today Online, 2013) [4]

In order to reach to the common man who could not afford internet connections BJP launched the chai pe cahrcha campaign. 1,000 tea stall locations identified by BJP in 300 cities across the country. "Of these 1,000 locations, direct interaction will take place with people from 30 locations in which people can share, ask and suggest their views on the ongoing election campaign," BJP spokesperson Harshad Patel had said. [5]

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

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). [6]

Impact of social media on the youth:

Social media is penetrating in every nook and corner India. the youth is especially more curious about new devices and applications that help better connectivity and give them space to share their views, connect with people. Social media is a good role in connecting people. But it is becoming more meaningful when it allow campaigners to know their voters, target a specific audience, splice demographics, mobiles support, and urge people to participate. When some of these people actively engage in political debates, they become a great tool in spreading the word and influencing opinion.

More and younger Indians are getting on the social media bandwagon, and this will increase with time, According to Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and IMRB International, the number of Internet users in India had reached 205 million in October this year. And by June 2014, India will have 243 million internet users, at which point of time, it is expected to overtake the U.S as the second largest Internet base in the world. [7]

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to showcase the impact of social media campaigning on the young voters' turnout the NES survey conducted by CSDS has been taken as a source. Further, a comparison has been made between the results of general election 2009 and 2014 and two major parties congress and BJP are compared for noting the various trends that helped BJP in mobilising the young people through its election campaign.

4. OBSERVATIONS

The following observations have been made after analysing the NES survey data conducted by CSDS after the general election 2009 and 2014

1. The turnout of young voters in the year 2009 was 58% whereas it underwent an increment of 8% and turned to 66% in the year 2014 which shows that the young people are largely mobilised during the election year 2014 which turned them active voters.
2. The other figures related to the popularity of parties among the youth for various parties shows that the popularity of congress has declined considerably whereas the BJP's popularity has risen considerably. Figures shows 28% of youth chose congress in 2009 but there number dropped to 19% in 2014 while that of BJP has risen from 20% to 34%.
3. In case of the young women and men, men (36%)voted comparatively higher than the female(32%) but overall share of both men (from 22 to 36 percent)and women(from 19 to 32 %) voters has increased in favour of BJP.
4. The next figure reveals that the high school pass that are certainly the first time voters have voted for BJP in a higher proportion as compared to other categories of young people. There is an increase of 17% (from 18 to 35%) between the year 2009 and 2014 The graduates too have increasingly voted for BJP as there is an increase of 13% (from 25% to 38%) between the year 2009 and 2014
5. From another figures it is clear that the urban youth voted 1% more than the rural youth for BJP and what we can infer from this is that the use of social media is high among the urban youth because of easy access to internet as compared to the rural youth.
6. From observation 4. And 5 we can infer that social media had played a great role in influencing the youth in favour of BJP as the party became popular through its rigorous use of various social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube etc. Which are highly popular among the youth which is clear from the fact that their usage is especially high among them.
7. A survey conducted by a senior TV Journalist Mr. Kanahiya Sharma has revealed that participation of youth in political discourse has increased after the advent of social media. From his survey we can relate that BJP was the only party during the year 2014 that has made extensive use of the social media which has eventually helped it in mobilizing the young voters in its favour.
8. BJP's leader, Narendra Modi—an early adopter of social media among Indian politicians who joined both Twitter and Facebook in 2009—had, by April 2014, not only racked up 12.46 million Facebook supporters, but had the fastest growing Facebook page of any politician

worldwide. Similarly, on Twitter, Modi had 3.6 million followers. The BJP's social media campaign, which centred on the personality of its leader, Narendra Modi, was thus significantly more extensive in terms of scale than that of congress leaders.

5. CONCLUSION

From the above study made through the analysis of NES survey of election 2014 it is clear that BJP has grown in popularity among the youth. This is possible because of the strong use of social media campaigning that has swayed a large number of youth to vote for BJ. The role of media is clear from the fact that Mr. Narendra Modi used the social media like Facebook, twitter, YouTube to connect with the young people and to discuss various issues like unemployment, corruption, better education system etc. that are of significant interest for the youth. BJP constantly focused on engaging with the youth by posting daily updates about the party's agenda their meetings, their activities etc. There were constant replies to any of the queries of the youth over these platforms which made the youth to trust the government.

Moreover, we inferred that the urban youth supported the BJP government comparatively more than the rural youth and the possible reason could be that BJP's campaign via social media had the urban youth as the most viable targets as compared to the rural youth. Though there were a lot of factor taht helped BJP in winning these elections but the role of campaigning via social media cannot be ignored as it has impacted the voting behaviour of the youth and helped BJP win by absolute majority at the centre.

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