
POLITICS AND MEDIA
SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT: -NEW FLAVOR OF THE SEASON

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Abstract: *In the fast changing world media too has evolved especially in the last five years and technology undoubtedly has been the driving force that is influencing people's live manifold. Gone are the days when Doordarshan and Radio along with print were the only source of information for the people of India. Internet boom has perpetually changed the media scenario as well as the political landscape. With the advent of Facebook that has been capturing the imagination of the net savvy since its inception has lately been receiving stiff competition from Twitter, WhatsApp and Blogs to name the few. Therefore, needless to say that Indian political class in order to ensure wider reach and simultaneously to keep a tab on the technology driven nation has to go through metamorphosis and hence, no surprise that social media is increasingly becoming the most preferred platform for the Indian politicians to establish unswerving communication with the mango people. Top guns of BJP like Sushma Swaraj and Narendra Modi are the leading torches whose comments on Twitter and Facebook Create ripples and Kapil Sibbal and Shashi Tharoor of INC are also not lagging behind in terms of followers online. Consequently, other regional party leaders have also joined the social media bandwagon. According to the latest estimates the active Internet users in India has already touched 205 million mark; a substantial 40 percent increase from the corresponding year. According to another study, by the end of 2014, Internet user's base in India will reach 243 million marks. Interestingly, in terms of user base rural pockets outshined the Internet users in the urban pockets. The aforesaid figures paint a very rosy picture that people of India are increasingly becoming net junkies and hence, no wonder that why Indian political class is going the Internet route. Unarguably, Print media dominated the Indian political scenario for the longest time but with satellite channels making their foray into the entertainment scene the state of affairs changed and of late social media has been fast becoming the flavor of the season. Indian Politicians who for the longest time were reluctant to adapt to the changes finally succumbed to the changing times to stay relevant in the mainstream politics and moreover to garner votes and trust of the voters who plausibly want to strike direct channel of communication before casting their votes.*

BJP and INC and other national parties acknowledging the potential of the media in reaching out to the youngsters who without commotion is the future of the country have been leaving no stone unturned to grab the attention of the tech savvy voters and therefore, have dedicated teams of technocrats, strategists and content developers who work 24X7 online to keep their respective parties ahead in the game. In the light of the fact, it's not hyperbole to say that in coming years also social media would unequivocally rule the roost.

Keywords: Social Media, Indian Politics.

Introduction- Social media is one of the most revolutionary inventions of the recent times. Narendra Modi was probably the first Indian politician to understand the importance of social media in image building and connecting with the voters. His team began with a website, then moved on to a youtube channel, then Facebook and Twitter accounts, then Google Hangouts and then to live webcasts of his speeches before finally adding Whatsapp as another tool to connect with voters.

Social Media and Indian Electoral Politics

Social media is one of the most revolutionary inventions of the recent times. Social networks like Facebook & Twitter and new messaging apps like Whatsapp have revolutionized the way we communicate. Individuals, businesses, organizations and brands around the world are effectively using social media to connect and communicate with others. Politicians and political parties in India are no exception to this.

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Today, almost all the parties and their candidates are active on social media. With more than 10,00,00,000 new Indian voters added in this year (which means these

voters belong to 18-22 years age group), no party or candidate can afford their absence from social media. Even in small towns like Balaghat in MP, candidates are using Facebook pages to reach out to the voters about why should they be elected. Candidates are also using Facebook to ask voters for their suggestions and problems which can be included in the election manifestos of their respective parties. Twitter is being used mainly to target the voters living in metros.

Whatsapp is another service which is very popular amongst the young crowd. Political parties are also active on whatsapp. There are several groups on whatsapp which consist of the supporters of different parties and/or leaders. They discuss and share their ideas with each other using these groups. Similarly, political parties have also created whatsapp group consisting of their office-bearers. This way, even the leaders at national or state levels can communicate their message simultaneously to the entire team even up to the booth level at one click.

With availability of Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp on mobile phones (Even on basic versions of these phones), the social media has reached up to small towns and even villages. Wherever a mobile network is available, social media is also available there. And it is undoubtedly the cheapest, but quickest medium of communication. And that is the reason why all political parties and candidates are seriously using social media for their campaign.

This is probably the first Indian general election, where social media has

become such an important tool. As per some analysts, social media can affect more than 100 parliamentary seats. Hence, it would be interesting to see who can use social media most effectively.

For the first time in the history of Indian electoral system; social media is likely to play much larger role than previously anticipated; Coming as a stamp of approval all recently held surveys also reciprocate that party with a better backup team online is most likely to out shine the rest and will also eventually have better prospects to perk up the seat tally. BJP's think-tank have ultimately comprehended the power of social media in reaching out to the larger section and hence, no surprise that party has best team of leaders who are scrupulously working day in and day out to gain edge over the others. Even, in the far flung outlying areas in India leaders of different national and regional parties have conceded that social networks will play the vital role and if recent records are anything to go by then social media many years down the line will remain as crucial as it's in present context. Umang Singhar , sitting MLA from Gandhwani Constituency (M.P) won the seat on the back of social networks like WhatsApp , SMS's and facebook. The MLA is also contesting Loksabha election 2014 and no need for guessing that he will again make the optimal use of the social networking sites to his advantage to ensure his victory in the Loksabha election. Almost all top leaders of the various parties are having their own websites to better stay connected with the people of their respective constituencies. It's worth mentioning that regional as well as national

politicians of hindi belts are also capitulating to its charm and the very fact that one can connect with the people at the click of the button has increased the dependency of the political class on the social media. If Shashi Tharor of the Congress party tweets on any crucial issue, then Arun jaitley and NaMo of BJP and left parties also retweet on the same to score brownie points over each other.

Therefore, political fight has been elevated to a whole new level and interesting India with the half of its population under 25 who are also net freak will unfalteringly render their votes to the party which has stronger presence on the social media as now parties are even releasing their manifestos on their official websites and concurrently also spreading awareness about their respective works online. The power of Internet is being felt worldwide. The most powerful president of the world and USA's president Barack Obama also admitted that how better plan and approach online helped him seal the second term in the white house. Other global leaders also publically acknowledged the power of social media in acquiring power. Needless, to say that social media has emerged as one of the most powerful tools and deciding factor in establishing the fact which party will win the hearts of the voters. Now, all leading satellite channels and print media have dedicated pages on the upcoming loksabha election that speak volumes that how with changing times the dynamics of the election have also gone through revolutionary changes.