



The Recent Trends in Social Media and Political Communication

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Abstract: Worldwide media system has undergone momentous transformation since the advent of new media. Social media have turned out to be the most powerful political tool in campaigns and governing. There is a major shift in how and where people get political information nowadays. A significant change is taking place in relation with media habits of audience. The use of social media, the political information and knowledge, and political participation have an association with each other. Social medias such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube are used for political and election campaigns.

Keywords: social media, politics, recent trends, twitter, Facebook

Information and communication technologies has led to creation of networked arena. Now social media platforms are used to get information, in creation of opinion expression, and political and social surveillance too. Social media has emerged as an important platform for political discussion and public discourses. The role of social media news usage and platforms in civic and political engagement has increased tremendously in recent years. The online interaction within new and more diverse social networks increases the flow of political information and exposure to new initiatives such as e-petitions or joining of mass e-mail campaigns. Online interactions that occur within a person's established networks, however, are more likely to link to offline behaviours that increase ties to the local community. (Rodan, 1998) Moreover, different social media platforms played a role in shaping the public opinion and participatory behaviors. Social media not only facilitate in motivating people to share, react to but also comment on news and views. This aspect is very crucial to deepening civic and political engagement.

The political communication being a professional practice is also rich with academic discipline. It is multi-disciplinary subject encompassing theoretical basis in sociology, political science, psychology and marketing. Political communication is interaction between political actors, the media and the citizen. The political communication is a series of communication process, terminologies such as propaganda, electoral marketing, political marketing, political campaigning, political public relation are some of the synonyms with political communication.

Digital media has emerged as new venue of political engagement. Especially social media is considered as new forms of political participation. The Internet makes possible a variety of online political activities such as writing emails to politicians, visiting campaign websites, donating money online, and so forth (Gibson et al., 2005). The Internet has lowered the cost of political participation, helping to level the playing field of political engagement somewhat (Bimber, 2001) The uses of digital media have been positively associated with civic and political engagement. On the other hand, internet use emphasizing news and information results in citizens' increased levels of participation in civic and political activities (Shah et al., 2005).

There has been extensive debated regarding the political effects of media usage, whether media usage will result in positive (Norris, 2000) or negative (Putnam, 2000) political outcomes. The overall consensus is that it is the content that matters when it comes to political participation: empirical findings on traditional or digital media show that consuming news content is positively related to political knowledge and participation (Shah, (2001); Xenos & Moy, (2007)

Kittilson and Dalton (2011), in their study analysed 2005 data from the U.S. and report a strong positive relationship between various types of social interactions in existing and new online networks and democratic behaviours and attitudes. They conclude that "virtual civil society ... represents an extension of the past patterns of social engagement through a new medium". According to Coleman and Putnam, Citizen's interaction through social networks is the key to the formation of social capital. The syndrome of interpersonal ties and trust have identified as central to maintaining healthy community and civic life. Skoric et al. (2009), in their study emphasized on virtual social capital in Singapore which supports these conclusions and extends the analysis to specify types of online social capital. Following Williams (2006), the researchers construct two scales measuring bridging and bonding online social capital, which are found to predict various types of off and online participation. They show a significant effect of bridging virtual social capital on online participation and of bonding on offline political activities. Researchers here argue that online interaction within new and more diverse social networks increases the flow of political information and exposure to new initiatives such as e-petitions or joining of mass e-mail campaigns.

This particular shift is playing a vital part in the elections of developing nations such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh etc. Internet and social media have proven to be critical tools for propagating political information (McAllister, 2015). People are preferring and turning

towards digital media than traditional mass medias such as print media and televisions. Increase in “news deserts” has led to social media to become primary source of information especially in case of politics due to its easy accessibility on smart phone and computers.

Findings of the study

The study states that social media promote the public dialogue. Social media such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube facilitate and informs community about political event or election campaign through image and video sharing. In case of twitter, political tweets and hashtags are used. Facebook promotes political discussion. Facebook posts are shared and commented widely. It helps in political discussion and public discourses.

The study’s finding states that diffusion of political news and views through social media has gained new momentum in recent years. Social media is used to share popular political beliefs and ideologies. During a political campaign, social media potential to reach politically disinterested citizens through the channel they mostly engage with, makes it an interesting mass media. This trend is true especially in the case for youth.

The study states that social media in general facilitates more robust and participatory democracy. Social media’s user-friendly characteristic cultivates political consciousness in users. Thus, some citizens also display their political expression in a more spirited manner.

The study’s finding agrees that social media acts as propaganda tool too. The Politicians can reach the people instantaneously, directly. Social media is used for sharing political information. The finding of the study states that social media do have propagandistic characteristics. And it is proved that social media is being used for political communication by all major political parties for their campaigns, news and views propagation purposes. Politics discussion forum help in public debate and opinion formation.

The study also highlights the role of social media in fostering political efficacy. On the other hand, the study also emphasizes that social media is also used for Political networking by all major political parties, including BJP and Congress. Social media are used as tool to invite citizens to political events too.

The study also highlights democratic nature of social media. Social media provides maximum exposure to news and political views which helps citizens in their political engagements and participation. Furthermore, social media facilitates political expression, a crucial alley for people to get engaged in politics. Interactive feature of social media enables sharing of ideas with large no of user is possible. Instantaneous feature of social media allows people to post and create and user generated media connect at minimal cost and that can be viewed instantaneously by global audience. Social media assists in formation of political fan groups too. By providing users with new space to express themselves social media has potential to foster democratic citizenship.

The study also emphasizes and agrees that social media have made the Internet a more efficient networking tool for interaction between people. Social Media facilitates communication within an organization, along local, national, and transnational lines, and as such it may create or strengthen relations between individuals, organizations, and external actors. The aim of the use of Social Media platforms is to circulate information coming from multiple sources. It is the digital space in which individuals can directly and actively submit and access information, develop their political knowledge, and get involved in political debates, overcoming time lags, geographical distances and often hierarchical dynamics existing in some communities. Social media as a user-friendly platform cultivates political consciousness of users in their daily practice, therefore is believed to display political expression in a more accessible format and spirited condition, ultimately facilitating expression and participation (Gil-de-Zuniga, Molyneux; Zheng,2014)

The study finding has determined the level of risk world faces when actors leverage user data to manipulate public sentiment and effect political outcomes, as proved through the Cambridge Analytica scandal. Cambridge Analytica is a federal data analytics, marketing, and consulting firm based in London, UK, that is accused of illegally obtaining Facebook data and using it to determine a variety of federal crusades. These crusades include those of American Senator Ted Cruz and, to an extent, Donald Trump and the Leave-EU Brexit campaign, which resulted in the UK’s withdrawal from the EU. In 2018, the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data scandal was a major disgrace, with Cambridge Analytica collecting the private data of millions of people’s Facebook profiles without their permission and using it for Political Advertising. It was defined as a watershed flash in the country’s understanding of private data, prompting a seventeen (17) per cent drop in Facebook’s cut-rate and summons for stricter laws governing tech companies’ usage of private data.

The study also states the recent trends in social media in relation to political communication

The recent trends in social media in relation to political communication

Social media have low barriers to entry and offer expanded opportunities for mass political engagement. They have centralized access to information and have made it easier for the online population to monitor politics. Growing numbers of people are using social media to engage in discussions and share messages within their social networks (Owen, 2017).

Elite political actors have increasingly attempted to shape, even restrict, the public’s digital influence in the political sphere. Since 2008, parties and campaign organizations have sought to hyper-manage voters’ digital engagement in elections by channelling their involvement through official Web sites and social-media platforms. They have controlled voters’ access to information by microtargeting

messages based on users' personal data, political proclivities, and consumer preferences derived from their social-media accounts. Further, a small number of companies, notably Google and Facebook, have inordinate power over the way that people spend their time and money online. Their ability to attract and maintain audiences undercuts the ability of small firms, local news outlets, and individuals to stake out their place in the digital market (Hindman, 2018).

Twitter as substitute channel and amplifier: The power of social media to influence politics is boosted due to their ability to amplify messages quickly through diverse media platforms. Social media have become a steady source of political content for news outlets with large audiences. Twitter is a main communication tool for politicians with two latent uses: as a "substitute" channel to avoid constraints from other political arenas, or as an "amplifier" that reinforces party message

Trend of Targeted misinformation /organised misinformation: Misinformation is often targeted at ideological audiences, which contributes the rise in political polarization. According to BuzzFeed News analysis, it was found that three prominent right-wing Facebook pages published misinformation 38% of the time and three major left-wing pages posted false facts 20% of the time (Silverman ,2015). The situation is even more severe for Twitter, where people can be completely anonymous and millions of automated bots and fake accounts have flooded the network with tweets and retweets. These bots have quickly outrun the spam detectors that Twitter has installed (Manjoo, 2017).

Digital propaganda on social media: the use of digital propaganda on social media is directed to manipulate public opinion suppress dissent and diminish activists' voices. This trend is increasing at a fast pace. Digital propaganda is to run publicity campaign on internet, social media. The campaign is designed to deliberately manipulate public opinion during election.

The emergence of social bots in political propaganda: social media are privileged channel for news and information dissimulation and exchange. unexpectedly for many users automated accounts, known as social bots contribute more and more to this process of information diffusion.

Twitter's emergence as source of information: twitter has become the one of the main sources of information for medias, catching breaking news and anticipating more traditional media like radio and television (Bovet, A. & Makse 2019). Twitter being a unique platform not only has option of creation of text/message of 280 character, but it also assists to the proliferation of social accounts governed partly or completely by pieces of software that automatically create, share, and like contents on the platform. Such software, also known as social bots or simply bots can be programmed to automatically post information about news of any kind and even to provide help during emergencies. As amplifiers of messages, bots can simply be considered as a mere technological instrument.

Unfortunately, the online ecosystem is constantly threatened by malicious automated accounts, lately deemed responsible for tampering with online discussions about major political elections in western countries, including the 2016 US presidential elections, and the UK Brexit referendum. Disturbingly, propensity to fall into disinformation has been recently measured in US by Ruth in the study on misinformation in social media. Recent work by Shao et al. demonstrates that automated accounts are particularly efficient in spreading low credibility content and amplifying their visibility.

Social media can free politicians from their party's grip: social media proves to be unrestricted media for the politicians to raise their viewpoints freely. Especially twitter can release politicians from the restraints of their parties.

Social media offer politicians instantaneous and personalized communication opportunities, raising the question whether they use it to amplify existing partisan rhetoric or to appear as unleashed party members offering their own discourse which may be at odds with the party. The study shows strong evidence that while MPs use Twitter to send a strong prejudiced message, some use it to express a broader range of opinions than in parliament.

Recently there has been significant change in the way people consume news, generally people assume themselves, as well-informed citizens without actually following news on mainstream mass medias. This is leading to increase on the reliance on less trustworthy source of information on social media.

Emergence of news finds me perception theory: Researcher have identified this belief as the "News Finds Me" (also called as NFM Perception). Through social media connection and interaction, there is no need to actually seek news and information as news finds the user. the NFM describes the perception that one is well informed without purposely following the news and that important information will "finds one" anyway. Gil-de-zuniga, Weeks,Ardevol-Abreu.(2017)

According to Bimber et al (2015) new media technologies have not proven to be a guarantee to fuel political interest and political engagement instead the new news environment and heavy reliance on the social media for news and information can be considered detrimental for democratic behaviour (interest) and processes(voting). Moreover, the strong reliance on personal network for news consumption might be nucleus for fostering filter bubbles. Pariser (2011) and information cocoons Sunstein (2018) that are characterised by homogeneous political opinion and viewpoints. Instead of seeking news on from various reliable media outlets citizens become dependent on what is shown and presented to them with their social networks, which are further more colonized by a few, influential technological conglomerates

Social media promotes and enhances informed citizenry. The citizens learn and gain political knowledge from the social media. According to Bode (2016) in his study explains that individuals exposed to political information via social media have learned from it. Social media users often get incidentally exposed to news and might also be beneficial for their learning processes. There has been significant increase in usage of online news sources also.

The propagation of political messages through social media has gained lots of momentum in recent years. Being a true mass media, social media has this great potentiality to reach and impact a large aggregate of people instantaneously. it is agreed that social media contributes towards the creation of opinion in public sphere. Fundamentally Political marketing on social media rests indents to influence and sway public opinion on a debated matter toward a desired direction. During elections the trend of promoted debates is

pressing priority. Systematized and hi-tech Digital marketing and advertising get at most importance during elections. Digital advertising on social media have become trend and necessity for political parties. It is also important to check how democratic social media is in reality. Facebook Data Breach and the ways to maintaining a check, such as evaluating account activity, revoking access to illegal applications, and monitoring its settings at regular intervals, is critical to keeping their data safe and being aware of the repercussions of a breach is need of the day. The case of Cambridge Analytica is the example. Countries should come up with a legal framework that will strictly restrict the operations of firms like CA and prevent the globally uncontrolled exploitation of personal data on social media. No one can guarantee that a government would resist the temptation to utilize technology for its ends.

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