

Original Paper

Role of Social Media in Election Campaigning in India with Special Reference to Assam

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Abstract

This is an attempt to find out the role of social media in election campaigning in India with special reference to Assam. Democratic countries like United States of America, India the social media has become an integral part for political communications during election campaigning. This new way of campaigning during election plays an important role to attract voters. Social media has given a new platform such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Whatsapp, Youtube etc. to the political parties and the voters, these are becoming an easy tool for the political leaders to interact with their voters. Social media allows candidates to share, post, comments, and their views during election and making them more direct involvement to their voters. These new tools or platforms are appeared as new area for research. Firstly to find out the term of social media, secondly, general meaning of political campaigning, thirdly, uses of social media in Indian election campaigning with reference to Assam and lastly conclusions.

Keywords

social media, election campaigning, political communications, voters, assam

1. Introduction

Elections in India have always been the cornerstone of the political system of the country. Each election, whether the parliamentary or assembly, stands unique because of the shifting political climate of the country or the states where the Assembly elections are to be held. Accordingly, the attention, involvement and choice of the individual voters tend to change. India is a democratic country where

election Campaigning is an integral part of it and from time to time the Political Parties have been using different tools for their campaigning. Earlier the Traditional Media has been playing an important role in election and now the evolution of new technologies and the internet has changed the entire world and election is not exception to it. The new technology and the internet have changed the political atmosphere in India. Social media has had a transformative effect on our democracy. This is mainly because internet and the availability of cheap Smartphone in the market. Earlier there was no such tools of social media like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Whatsapp, Orkut, Google+ etc. but now the Political Parties have been using such tools during Election. These tools have break down the gap between the politician and the voters, voters can easily interact with their leaders of various political parties. The leaders of the political parties have been using tools of social media to cope up with the new young voters. Assam is a state which is far from the metropolitan city like Delhi which is the Capital of India where it has seen that the social media has made an impact in the last Assembly election of Delhi in December, 2013. Although Narendra Modi had used social media during Gujrat Assembly elections earlier the atmosphere had remained unchanged. It was the Aam Aadmi Party during the 2013 Delhi Assembly Elections that demonstrated how social media could affect an electorate, and influence elections.

2. Method

Data has been collected purely from secondary sources like journals, books, research papers, news papers, websites etc.

2.1 Objectives

- 1) To understand the general meaning and the term of social media in Election.
- 2) To understand the general meaning of political campaign.
- 3) To understand the role of social media in Elections in India with special reference to Assam.
- 4) Conclusions.

2.1.1 Meaning of Social Media

Social media is broadly defined, “a variety of websites, services and applications that allow users to engage in social behaviors online or on a mobile phone”. Social Media is also defined as, “the objective of online communications channels dedicated to community based input, interaction, content sharing and collaboration. Websites and applications dedicated to forums, micro blogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social durations, and wikis are among the different types of social media”. Social Media, defined as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) and the Oxford Dictionary defines Social Media as “websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking”. For the

purpose of the study the term social media refers to Web 2.0 media platforms and internet sites and services and sites such as Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Google+, YouTube etc. The history of social media is not clear if we are talking about the technologies than the godfather of social media goes to Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis Who invented the world first usernet systems in 1979. Usernet enabled users to read and post messages to various categories, known as newsgroups. At a high level, they can be thought of as a hybrid between email and the web forums of today, and many of the popular group sites of today, such as Google Groups and Yahoo! Groups. If we are taking about who invented the term social media the term become a buzz word in the past 5 years. So who invented the term social media is not 100% clear best information is as follows:

- Darryl Berry who claims he used the term starting in late 1994 while working on Matisse, an online media environment and for a paper in may 1995 on “Social media spaces”, which predicted the evolution of the web into a network engaged users.
- Ted Leonsis who in 1997 is cited using the term in the same manner in which it is used today and claims to have created this term.
- Tina Sharkey who owns the domain SocialMedia.com since 1999 and claims she coined the term during her days working on ivillage, where she was in charge of community building.

(Source: [https:// www.quora.com](https://www.quora.com))

Though the term who invented Social media is not clear yet in general meaning of the social media can be explained that the social media allow the users to interact with each other by logging into a particular website and interact with other users through instant messaging. People can share, post, upload videos, photos, and comments whenever they like. So social media is purely internet based and it can be used by their cell phone, laptop or computer etc. Social media provides open communications not like that of traditional media which have more restrictions than social media. In simple we can say that social media can be considered as the platform where people can find information and inspiration, connect with likeminded people, communities and collaborate with each other towards pursuing common interests or issues. Some of the common and popular sites are Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, etc.

2.1.2 Meaning of Political Campaigning

A Political campaigning is an organized effort which seeks to influence the decision making progress within a specific group. In democracies, political campaigns often refer to electoral campaigns, by which representatives are chosen or referendums are decided. In modern politics, the most high profile political campaigns are focused on general elections and candidates for head of the state or head of the government, often a president or prime minister. So, we can say that the period of time immediately before an election when politicians try to persuade people to vote for them. Election campaigning are the means by which candidates and political parties prepare and present ideas and positions on issues to

the voters in the period preceding election day. Candidates are a variety of techniques to reach voters and deliver their messages, including through traditional and new media, public events, written materials, or other means.

2.1.3 Social Media and its uses in India and Assam Assembly Elections 2016

The uses of social media in election campaigning is not an isolated event occurring in India, throughout the world the social media is being used by the political parties during election campaign to attract voter. The internet has changed the way of life and internet has become an integral part of our political, economic, and social lives now a day people purchase goods from Amazon, Flipkart, Snapdeal etc., whenever we like to know anything we just put our finger on Google and gets it by our Smartphone or laptop. That's why may be the reason the number of internet users have grown from ten million in 1993 to three billions in 2014. People use online social media regularly to stay connected to their family and friends even with their institutions, organizations where they doing their jobs. So, social media has made an important affect to all aspects of our lives. Social media is playing a new role in Indian elections it has created a new atmosphere in election campaigning the political parties have found a new ways to communicate with their voters and the use of social media has given a new platforms to the political leaders as well as the voters during election. Though Assam is a state where the use of internet and the network is not available in all parts of the state yet in the 2016 Assembly Election the political parties and the voters has used the social media such as Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Google+, etc.

The use of social media by Indians was first highlighted during the 2008 Mumbai attacks when information shared through Twitter and Flickr between Indians and the outside. "The second mass use of social media in India was the May 2009 national elections, when, for the first time, online voter registration and transparency campaigns started" where first time political parties tried to reach out to voters through social networking websites. In India the Social Media platforms have been used by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and they changed the way of campaigning. Its rightly mention by Idress Ali in his article for VOA News "The sweeping victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the recent Indian Elections has been attributed to factors ranging from showing economic growth to high levels of corruptions. But for the first time in the country's history, social media played an important role, according to analysts who are calling the vote India's first "*social media elections*". However, this is still in progress in Assam in the last Assembly election the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has decided to make maximum use of social media to reach out to the voters of Assam, as part of the plan, the party has readied an army of 300 odd volunteers to put across its message to the masses, using different platforms of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp and Google+.

There was new trend seen in Assam during election time the political parties mainly the BJP and Congress indulged in some musical fight on social media through videos. It was rightly said by Ankhi

Das of Facebook Public Policy Director for South and Central Asia, “Facebook is the destination for authentic conversation about politics. It’s a place for citizens to learn about candidates, for friends to debate political issues, and for candidates to reach voters. Candidates are using facebook to reach citizens directly and personally. They are having unfiltered conversations about important public policy issues and getting honest feedback from voters”. In social media there were few theory by the BJP as “Last Battle of Saraighat”, “Paribarton”, “Ab ki bar Mudi Sarkar” very popular among the voters. This theory’s has been drafted in such a manner in social media that the people of Assam were discussing these theories everywhere in regular basis. As per the information, by the writer Prabin Kalita, “north eastern states lag behind in internet, mobile connectivity. Still there are areas where internet is not available in Assam. So the impact of social media in election campaigning Assam is not at par with the other states.

3. Result

After examining the entire elements one can safely asserts that the social media has changed the way of political campaigning in the entire world and it has hit the existing process of media and influenced all the democratic political system. The new technologies and the new media have changed the world and which has affected all aspects of our society. This new way of campaigning by the political parties has changed the political atmosphere of a country. Social media have triggered changes in the campaign strategies of political parties, candidates, and political organizations, at the same time it has changed the people’s participations in election. Through social media people can meet their leaders very easily and interact very quickly with the help of their cell phone. India is ranked three with regard to use social networks in the world. So, India is an interesting place where we can examine the role of social media during election. Assam is state where still most people are living in village and still network is not available in all parts of Assam so it is an interesting area where we need to study this new trend of web media use in election campaigning. The last Assembly election is the witness of it as social media was successful platform where political parties found a new way of campaigning. May be Social media will prove its impact on political campaigning in India with much more meaningful way in near future especially in north eastern states.

4. Discussion

In the age of Globalization it is very important to all the political parties to cope up with present climate of the politics. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Google+ etc are the platforms where all the leaders and the voters are now putting their time in internet to get the information or the latest any events took place during election. The political parties and the voters immediately react with the events. They post, share, or comments, twitted immediately after seeing the

events in the social media. So the social media is a platform where they can interact easily to their voters and it's an easy way to reach voters. Social media has given a platform for politicians to post a presumptive agenda. Through social media politicians can mobilize public and invites them to participate in discussion on some issues. In the age of globalization it's very important to all to understand social media role in elections and at the same time election commissions should put their more effort on these sites which has been used by the politicians during elections. Therefore, new effort and more study are required to focus on this new trend of politics in Assam.

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