

Social networking sites in election campaigns media essay



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Internet is fast growing communication tool these day with numerous social networking sites operating and eminent personalities posting their thoughts on them and communicating with people. It is becoming the medium of election communication as political parties across the world are logging on to the Internet and it is impacting the political system and voting behaviours. An interesting phenomenon in political communication is the use of social networking sites like Facebook, You Tube and Friendster, that are being used as a means of election campaigning.

The study focuses on use of social media in political campaigning and communication in past at different countries and how these can be implemented in Indian scenario and what would be its types and benefits.

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Introduction:

Social networking sites are online services or platforms that focus on building and reflection social relations among people. They proved to be a fundamental communication tool in every aspect and a limitless source of information campaign strategy. Their effectiveness to gather and

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communicate a targeted political message, raising the stakes in strategy and aggressive social media participation helps in election campaigning. The use of social networking sites in political parties spans across increased media exposure, funding, participation and has increased mobilisation and enthusiasm in numerous recent political campaigns.

Social networking sites has become fast and low cost communication tool and enables quick and easy access to political information among potential users. Campaigning managers use these sites as an effective way for recruiting new employees and other campaigning strategies.

From past two decades social networking sites and systems is been used in political campaigning and dialogues. In year 1996 email and social networks was widely used as source of communication among political parties and groups of people. During year 2006 at Belgian elections catchphrase " Think" was circulated among people through Myspace so as to stimulate people in discussions and thought around voting preference and encouraging people to reconsider voting for right party. In the same year a survey was conducted on Myspace users over 18 years of age and it was found that they were three times more likely to take part in an online political discourse than traditional way.

In year 2007 it was found out that 40% of all social networking users had used Myspace and Facebook as a source for political information in the United States (US) and 20% of people used these sites to discover the political interests of their friends. It has been suggested that Myspace is so effective that it should be a key part to any campaign strategy.

Barack Obama has successfully used Twitter, Myspace, Youtube and Facebook as an effective tool in communicating and mobilising people. He spends around \$2 million in election campaigning and building a social networking site known as MyBarackobama.com. Republican Party also used social networking sites in 2008 elections to promote John McCain.

There is great potential for political parties to raise large sums of money in short periods of time using social networking sites through micro-fund-raising. The use of micro-donations not only enable candidates to raise funds rapidly it gives a sense of involvement and

participation to those who have donated, no matter how small the amount.

In the year 2008 US presidential election \$55 million was raised in one month and 80% of which were online donations.

With social networking sites political campaigning add to a visibility to politician's personal and professional life. It leads to accountability and risk. As they can be filmed anywhere and these could be uploaded anytime which goes around like a disease among people and can be used for political gains. These political strategies were used in American politics. Another fact related to same is that some parties even hire people who not only keep track of their accounts but also of competitors account and keeps on uploading and distributing such video content through Youtube. . An example of this high-level of exposure can be seen in the 2006 US election cycle as one senator was filmed making a racial slur, which was uploaded to YouTube and it became the ' most viewed' video. This increased exposure of political

candidates adds another dimension to political campaigning of smear campaigning of opposition candidates with ease.

While political parties may not have the level of control over the content that is distributed but these social networking sites have facilitated an increase in the rate of political participation. As these networking sites create an easily accessible medium for people to find, distribute and absorb. Evidence from a number of studies supports the theory that the Internet has beneficial effects on online political involvement. Internet use encourages higher levels of political participation: for example, forwarding e-mails with political content, online voting, and so forth. And online communications through social networking sites can

aid in political engagement. YouTube and other social media sites allow campaign strategies to easily target limitless voters with great communication power. According to a Pew Internet and American Life study, 46% of American voters have used the Internet, text messaging or email for political mobilisation, discussion and to access political news and information and 35% of people in the US watched political videos on YouTube.

In 2008 presidential elections in US new technologies combined with these social networking sites have been used as to advertise to potential voters and their mobilisation. The demographic for the internet has widened and social networking is no longer just for young people. In year 2006 over 50% of American YouTube and Myspace users were 35 years or older, and the proportion of 12 to 17 year olds were declining. Social networking sites do not just represent a young demographic. Politically engaged people and

political participation is increasing throughout the community through the use of social networking sites.

Thus, social networking is playing a substantial role in political process in recent years. Not only it has been effectively utilised by political parties of western countries in the campaign cycles, political issues groups and otherwise unrepresented minorities, but also as a means of open and uncensored communication for citizens in countries with oppressive government control over other media conduits. The use of these online tools has seen a shift in the funding models of political parties through the highly effective use of micro-donations. These sites have expanded the reach and accuracy of strategically targeted communications by political parties to potential voters. There is an increase in political participation and people garner a greater sense of contribution through the use of social networking sites and social media, influencing involvement with political parties in the greater community.

Social networking sites have proven to be a powerful political tool and we can only expect that it will grow limitlessly alongside the political machine.

Past Cases of Social Networking Sites as a tool in Election Campaigning:

Kenya Elections:

In Kenya elections in year 2006 these social media such as Myspace, Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, Flickr etc. is been used in mobilising and sharing and gathering of information and raising the money in restricted time. It was also seen social media as a way to get involved in political parties response to

mainstream media. During the Kenya post-election crisis people mobilised a website called Ushahidi for people to collaboratively report where violent clashes has taken place. Perspectives and commentary on the post-2006 election crisis in Kenya were seen in online networking sites as a way to criticise the media and government and it was found that views and discussion topics seen in social networking sites were much more diverse that seen in mainstream media.

Internet and Social Networking Sites in Election Campaigns: Gabriela Women's Party in Philippines wins the 2007 Elections

Philippines also embarked on using Internet, social networking sites and the mobile phones for their 2007 elections. Gabriela Women's Party (GWP), among others, was one of them. Given the limited funds for mass forms of communication, the party made use of new communication technologies, in particular, the Internet and social networking sites like YouTube and Friendster along with its website, to augment traditional campaign techniques. The (GWP) won two seats, making it the first and only women's group in the country to attain such a feat in the party list group contest (Alojamiento, 2007).

Maximizing YouTube

YouTube and Friendster are very popular among young female Internet users in the country. It was only logical for the GWP to turn to these sites to expand their networks and establish their presence among Filipino voters.

Political advertising is an obsession among politicians in the country

especially when it comes to TV advertising. All parties make efforts to be on <https://assignbuster.com/social-networking-sites-in-election-campaigns-media-essay/>

television and spend the maximum amounts on advertising. Television advertising being expensive, the GWP after a few commercials on television, extended this kind of advertising to YouTube by uploading a video endorsement of Angel Locsin, a young local celebrity.

Use of Social Media in US :

Over the past two decades online social networking sites and systems have been effectively used to increase political dialogue. In 1996 email was widely used across social networks as a means of facilitating people and groups for political purposes . In 2007 it was estimated that 40% of all social networking users had used Myspace and Facebook as a source for political information in the United States (US) and 20% of people used these sites to discover the political interests of their friends.

Barack Obama successful used Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, Facebook among others to communicate and mobilise people. He also had a \$2 million dollar custom campaigning and social networking site built called MyBarackobama.com (Walmsley 2008; Crow 2008; Talbot 2008). The Republican party used social networking sites during the 2008 to promote candidate John McCain, even at 71 years of age, which demonstrated their understanding of the importance of its use. Political parties are now actively engaging with social networking sites as part of their campaign strategies.

Political campaign strategies have successfully used social networking sites to increase campaign funding. Howard Dean, in 2004, was the first US politician to explore the financial value in using the Internet as part of his <https://assignbuster.com/social-networking-sites-in-election-campaigns-media-essay/>

campaign strategy. He successfully used the Internet to facilitate small donations online instead of the traditional big fund-raising events. During this same year Democratic Presidential candidate John Kerry raised \$80 million in online donations. Within two months of creating a MySpace page during the US 2006 election cycle one Republican candidate raised donations by 20% The Barack Obama campaign during the 2008 US presidential election raised \$55 million in one month - 80% were online donations and 90% of those were under \$200 each. This was before he had run a single fund-raising event .

Social networking sites create an easily accessible medium for people to find, distribute and absorb political information. YouTube and other social media sites allows campaign strategies to easily target limitless voters with great communication power . According to a Pew Internet and American Life study, 46% of American voters have used the Internet, text messaging or email for political mobilisation, discussion and to access political news and information 35% of people in the US watched political videos on YouTube . This ease of access combined with new technologies enables campaigners to strategically target and customise their marketing approach.

Social networking sites enable a more targeted approach to election campaigning. The US Republican 2008 presidential campaign used an internal database, called the Voter Volt, matched with internet searches to advertise to potential voters using social networking sites . These new technologies combined with the use of social networking sites not only increases the accuracy of the campaign message through targeted

advertising, it has also helped to increase the size of the audience. During the 2008 US Election new technologies

allowed The Republican National Committee to increase the number of potential voters on their database by 6-fold compared to their 2004 campaign . The use of these new tools have the added potential to increase mobilisation.

Benefits of Social Networking Sites usage in Political Campaigning:

Mass Coverage:

The biggest advantage that social networking sites provide in an election campaign is of mass coverage with sites such as Myspace, Twitter, Facebook , Youtube, Linkdein , orkut etc.

Data table from i strategy labs generating no of users of facebook between age of 18 and 24 are as follows:

It can be seen youth between age 18 and 24 using facebook accounts for 40. 8% and in middle age group constitute of 16. 6%. So political parties targeting youth and middle age group can be benefited if campaigning through these sites.

Cost Effective :

Political campaigning through these sites is very cost effective methods as the cost involved is very low. And in past micro donations can be arranged easily through these sites only. This has been seen in presidential elections in year 2008 taken place ay US.

Emergence of new political parties:

With social networking sites as a tool used for election campaign emergence of new political parties can be seen. More of individual politicians are encouraged and are emerging out in elections. They are reaching to public with their ideas being communicated well using the videos on Youtube or post on twitter or on Facebook account or through blogs with many followers acting as agents and their promoters.

Environmental and Societal benefits:

The other benefits associated with campaigning through networking sites are of environmental and societal benefits to general public in all. While campaigning through these sites the major tool of campaigning traditionally that is pamphlets is through emails, posts and blogs. Thus reducing the usage of paper and saving trees. Also society is saved from traffic jams, noise pollutions when campaigning is done on these sites. Moreover while campaigning on these sites an add on feature of more visibility leading to accountability is been ensured, giving a right to voters to have all information and then deciding upon the right candidate to vote for.

Presence in India:

Political parties in this day and age are now trying to use web as a medium to gain attention of the masses. Employing internet as a strategy to make an appeal to the masses is also being used a host of NGOs and non-profit organizations, such as the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy and Public

Interest Foundation. These organisations are using internet, alongwith traditional media like radio and television, to launch initiatives geared toward raising awareness among the electorate.

There are nationwide campaign ensuring to increase transparency in Indian elections by combining information about constituencies and candidates. The purpose of these campaigns are:

Provide information regarding the representatives based on the information they have provided through affidavits to the Election Commission

Provide information about a constituency

Give a chance to the public to give feedback on work done by their elected representatives

The media excitement around the election is being generated by the middle-class urban youth, who believe in bringing about a change. Of late, many Indian politicians have begun considering internet as a viable medium for interactive communication and are,

consequently, making their presence felt in the World Wide Web. For instance BJP has launched a website for its prime ministerial candidate and for its chief ministerial candidate as well. Similarly, even the congress party is making use of social networking sites like youtube, facebook, twitter etc. to run social marketing campaigns.

Thus, the presence of social networking sites in the Indian electoral scenario is spellbound as the political parties now are resorting to online campaigning and voting systems.

CONCLUSION :

The present study and other studies cited in this paper mostly point out to both the importance of new media technologies and the trend towards their exploitation in current political settings. Their maximization for political campaigning should be viewed, however, in the context of where these new technologies operate

Though studies have demonstrated that new technologies have been playing significant roles in campaigns in the US, the diffusion of online campaigning in parts of Asia, particularly in the Philippines, is unfolding but at a slower pace.

These do not discount the promises of the Internet for political campaigning. If offline conditions change, it is likely that online uses will follow. In the meantime, it is important to look at the Internet as an integral part of a holistic political campaigning strategy, which can complement the use of traditional media and grassroots campaigning by reaching the growing segment of the population using the Internet. Future studies in this field of political communication would help in understanding how far the applications of the Internet and its contemporaries would go in bringing political actors closer to the public and how politics itself would change in the years to come as these new technologies become more sophisticated at the same time societies around the world evolve and change

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