

Social Media and Electoral Politics in India with Special Reference to X (Formerly Twitter)

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Abstract:

In this era of globalization, where digital interconnectedness has become an everyday phenomenon, with the rise and the usage of smartphones and social media, social media now has a huge influence over society and has become an effective tool for political communication. This study investigates the usage and the impact X (formerly Twitter) had on Indian electoral politics, particularly with the focus on its role in terms of managing political campaigns, public discourse, and ultimately shaping public opinion during the 2014 and 2019 general elections. Employing the theories of political communication for this study, such as agenda-setting, framing, and priming, the research attempts to analyze the strategies used by political leaders utilizing social media platforms such as X to engage directly with citizens and to promote narratives that ultimately led to their influence on electoral outcomes. The study highlights the Bhartiya Janta Party's (BJP) innovative and strategic use of X during their election campaigns to promote development and governance themes, counter opposition narratives, and mobilize support through coordinated digital strategies, including mass tweeting campaigns and creating trending hashtags.

And the finding reveals X and its dual nature of usage according to the background and intention of the users. Its duality as a platform that promotes democratic engagement but also as a tool for potential manipulation of public opinion. While it provides the space for direct communication, its misuse for spreading disinformation and also in shaping biased public opinion raises ethical concerns for a democratic dialogic space. The study therefore advocates for the need of media literacy, transparency, and critical evaluation of information to preserve this space and to stop its misuse for some political gain. By addressing these dynamics and issues, the research contributes to the evolving understanding of the relationship between social media and democracy in India.

Keywords: Agenda-setting, framing, Indian elections, political communication, & social media.

Introduction:

In the current age, forces of globalisation have influenced every other sphere in society, and also, interconnectedness between people and nations is an everyday phenomenon due to the rise of smartphones and the internet users, which have become indispensable tools for communication and functionality. Social media, as a result of these developments, has become an integral part of daily life, transforming the whole system of global connectivity by enabling and providing individuals the opportunity to express opinions and form and build connections across the world.

Beyond just the personal interactions between individuals, social media as a platform has emerged as a significant medium, which also provides a space for discussing both everyday and national issues, which helps in bridging relationships through shared interests and virtual communities (Sharma & Ghose, 2020).

And this has resulted in the transformation of democratic processes, particularly elections and the politics that come with them. Political campaigns are now being done through social media as well, using it as a tool for engaging with citizens and influencing public sentiment. Platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube have evolved from being internet innovations to now where opinions are getting influenced by the content they provide, making them powerful opinion-makers, which enables political parties and leaders to shape and influence public discourse and mobilise support through these platforms effectively (Bond et al., 2012; Nahon & Hemsley, 2013).

In India, social media has influenced the way electoral politics take place. With increasing internet access and digitalisation, platforms like X have become an important platform and also a tool for political engagement, especially during elections. X's features, such as hashtags and trending topics, allow for direct interaction and engagement between leaders and the public, which in turn fosters inclusive communication (McGregor et al., 2017). The platform and its significance in India's political landscape became visible and evident during the 2014 General Elections, after which its usage for political ends got intensified, acknowledging its role as a powerful tool for shaping public opinion and forming electoral strategies. This study highlights the transformative impact social media had on Indian politics, with a particular focus on how platforms like X have transformed the usual way of doing political campaigns, public engagement, and the overall electoral process.

The rise in the usage of social media, particularly a platform like X, has given people convenient and easy access to information, news and so on. However, its manipulative usage has also been on the rise, especially during election periods. Political parties and leaders resort to the way of creating trending hashtags, targeting a group of people with customised messages and tweets, and spreading digital propaganda to have electoral gains. These strategies are often employed to foster disinformation with a political agenda behind it. Henceforth, social media fosters a direct interaction and engagement with the public and the political representatives, but also, on the other hand, it compromises the democratic dialogic space that it provides by getting used as a medium through which manipulation and deception are getting spread to secure electoral gain.

Literature Review:

Ahmed, Jaidka, & Cho (2016) highlighted X's significant role and its usage during the 2014 Indian general elections in the form of campaign updates, achievements, and engaging young voters.

Dash, Arya, Kaur & Pal (2022) analysed X's role and the type of anti-Muslim narratives that were propagated during the CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act), NRC (National Register of Citizens) bill, COVID-19 pandemic, etc.

Enli & Moe (2017) provided a holistic perspective on social media's role in political communication, focusing on X and its usage in different societies and by different minor and major political parties.

Jakesch et al. (2021) examined and analysed the coordinated creation of X trends during the 2019 elections via WhatsApp, highlighting the usage and connection of different social media platforms to serve a particular end.

Neyazi (2020) examines the role and the deployment of digital propaganda in terms of shaping public opinion and influencing public sentiment during elections and crises, such as during the Uri attack and surgical strikes.

Palshikar, Kumar, & Lodha (2017) explored the BJP's 2014 victory, which also covers the rise of social media and its contribution towards their electoral success.

Pal & Panda (2019) analysed BJP's presence on X during the 2019 elections, tracing its evolution from the 2014 period and its effects on political dynamics.

Parveen & Safiullah (2021) examined X and radio's influential role during the 2014 election, discussing the role of social media for political advertisement and campaigning.

Rajadesingan, Panda, & Pal (2020) explored X's role during the 2019 elections period, which was focused upon a single personality, that of Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, because of his influence and also because of his larger number of followers than the party itself; thus, it has analysed this influential shift towards personality-centric campaigns that took place during the 2019 election campaigns.

Safiullah et al. (2017) correlated X activities, such as tweets and retweets, and seats won by political parties. It examined social media's marketing potential, its influence in public opinion and potentially leading to electoral success.

Sharma & Ghose (2020) analysed the relation between public sentiment by analysing tweets and its relation with electoral outcome during the 2019 general election.

Research Gap

After going through the existing literature, it reveals that while various studies have been done to analyse the role of social media, particularly platforms like X and their usage during election periods, a comprehensive analysis is something which is lacking in the current time. Specifically, analysing how x and its usage by political leaders relate to digital propaganda and online manipulation compromises the space which democracy claims to provide for its public, through which they can engage in a dialogue with the authorities and political representatives and seek genuine information. Mostly studies have focused upon the short-term analysis of electoral periods, either the 2014 or 2019 elections; however, keeping the current scenario with the rising usage of X in day-to-day life in mind, the present condition seeks a deeper investigation which will explain its ever-growing importance in people's lives and how influential it can be in terms of shaping public opinion. This highlights the gap in terms of understanding x and its long-term impact on Indian electoral politics. While existing studies explore the relation between x and the electoral process, there is a lack of research on how x can influence voting behaviour and how exposure to x could affect public preference, and this could provide valuable insights into the platform's political significance.

Objectives of the Paper:

The study has three main objectives. First it aims to trace the rise of social media and its growing use among the public and its significance in electoral politics, with a particular focus on the Indian context. This will provide a better understanding of how social media platforms, especially X, have become powerful tools in shaping political engagement and discourse in the country. Second, the study also tries to examine the role social media, particularly X, plays in shaping political communication between the citizens and the political representatives. By understanding its usage by political leaders for direct engagement with the citizens, the study will analyse the platforms' influence on shaping voter perceptions and creating political narratives.

Lastly, with the focus on the 2014 and 2019 general elections, the study intends to analyse the use of X during these election periods and provide insights into how, during political campaigns, these platforms are used to mobilise masses and spread political information.

And accordingly to guide the exploration of these objectives, the study will address the following research

questions: What is the role of social media in electoral politics in India? This question will try to understand the broader impact social media has had on electoral politics and its processes in the country. The second question, "How does social media, particularly X, shape political communication between leaders and the citizens in the Indian context?" tries to understand how political leaders utilise X to engage with the public and how it influences political discourse. The final question, "What role did X play and how was it utilised during the campaigns for the general elections in 2014 and 2019?" will try to understand the strategic ways the X was used during these important election periods, analysing its strategic role during the campaign period and to have public engagement and ultimately its impact on electoral outcomes.

Research Methodology:

This research is based upon a mixed-methods approach, which combines both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, to have a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

With the help of a qualitative approach, the study aims to do an in-depth exploration of the issue, which includes human behaviours, public opinion and experiences, which offers a contextual understanding of the issue. With the aim of understanding the why and how behind the events, the qualitative approach will be effective to uncover these phenomena brought up by the rise of social media.

On the other hand, employing a quantitative approach, the research will rely upon data, which mirrors the method of natural science, with the help of objective measurements and numerical analysis. This approach, with the help of polls, surveys, and other data of social media users and hashtag trends, will try to discern the pattern and its implications.

The qualitative research being descriptive in nature will offer valuable insights into the behaviour and the perceptions of the targeted audience, while the quantitative approach involves the analysis of the data to identify patterns and trends of the whole event.

And lastly, a descriptive methodology is employed to analyse and explain the broader impact of social media, and an analytical approach is used for the critical examination of data, especially to identify the ways and its impact by the strategic use of Twitter by the political leaders during election season.

This combined approach will help us to have a well-covered analysis of the data which provides both descriptive understanding and analytical backing, and the overall study will be based upon secondary sources such as books, articles, academic journals, working papers, etc.

Political Communication: Definitions and Evolution

There have been various scholars who have defined political communication in different ways, keeping in view the process of exchanging information regarding government and political activities. Hence, at its very core, political communication includes the exchange of information about political events, policies, decisions, actions and so on and so forth, as well as receiving the feedback from the public as well. This whole process is very essential in terms of fostering a culture of exchanging dialogue and also in terms of making citizens informed and enabling a reciprocal flow of information between government and the citizens and the representatives. Some of the key definitions have been highlighted below:

Kaid (2004) defines political communication theory as "the role of communication in the political process". Kenski and Jamieson (2017), describe political communication as "making sense of symbolic exchanges about the shared exercise of power" and "the presentation and interpretation of information, messages, or signals with potential consequences for the exercise of shared power". In addition, Norris

(2001) has explained political communication as “an interactive process concerning the transmission of information among politicians, the news media, and the public.”

Historical Context and Theoretical Foundations

Since its origin in the early 20th century, the study of political communication has evolved significantly. Initially, the focus was on increased use of print media and radio and their influence on people and their voting behaviour; now it encompasses a broader range of political communication aspects. Figures like Walter Lippmann, Harold Lasswell, and Paul F. Lazarsfeld laid the groundwork for political communication research (Rogers, 2004). Walter Lippmann's "Public Opinion," published in 1922 and Lasswell's propaganda analysis during World War I both highlighted the significant influence mass media had on public opinion. "Who says what to whom via which channels with what effects?" (Kaid, 2004). Through this question, Lasswell articulated his communication model, which remains foundational to the field to this day.

During World War II, scholars such as Lasswell and Lazarsfeld started studying communication and applied their expertise to understand wartime challenges, which was helpful in terms of fostering an interdisciplinary approach to understanding communication, integrating knowledge from sociology, psychology and political science, which influenced the post-war phase of communication studies (ibid, 7-8).

Since its origin to the current times, political communication has gone through a transformative shift due to the development in media and its related technologies, which made access to media a lot easier and faster. Historically, political communication was understood as a one-way directional flow of information from political representatives or from government to citizens through newspapers, radio, and television. But with the rise of the Internet era since the 1990s, the proliferation of digital media has revolutionised and transformed this whole process. Unlike the traditional media, digital media and its various platforms facilitate interaction and empower citizens to engage directly and take part in the larger political discourse.

New media being easy and very accessible in nature is also more inclusive than traditional media. Which encourages two-way directional flow of communication, enabling users (not just audiences) to take part in the political matter and political discussions of the country actively. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and X allow for the widespread sharing and exchange of information and political content, which contributes towards fostering greater engagement and awareness among citizens. Hence, the rise of new media and the proliferation of social media platforms have reshaped political communication by enabling real-time interaction between both ends of the hierarchy of power structure, which is sometimes vertical and sometimes horizontal, which in turn fosters a democratic dialogic space. As Gupta (2014) argues, new media operation speed and the nature of its inclusivity are unmatched, marking a paradigm shift from passive consumption of information through one-way directional communication to the active practice of two-directional communication enabled by digital platforms and social media.

Henceforth, in contemporary times, political communication is defined by its multidisciplinary nature, which encompasses interactions among political actors, media, and citizens. According to Graber and Smith (2005), political communication "encompasses the construction, sending, receiving, and processing of messages that potentially have a significant direct or indirect impact on politics".

Furthermore to the above explanation, political communication can be understood by using other theoretical concepts as well, such as agenda setting, framing and priming.

Agenda Setting: Agenda-setting theory helps us to understand how media prioritises certain topics, policies, and individuals, which helps in shaping public perception by emphasising certain specific issues. Rooted in the initial chapter of Walter Lippmann's 1922 book, *Public Opinion*, which later was formally established by McCombs and Shaw (1972), who showed media's influencing role in influencing voters' opinions. While it can be seen that media directly doesn't dictate people and their opinion, it guides their attention to certain issues by prioritising them, which in result helps in shaping political realities and public perception. This theory has helped researchers to study media and its impact on democracy, politics and public opinion.

Framing: An extension and much deeper level of analysis, like agenda setting, the framing theory emphasised how media and politicians, by strategically framing certain issues, present them with an intention to emphasise their context and put importance to their perspective, which shapes the way audiences see the news and ultimately shapes their perceptions. Introduced by Erving Goffman's 1974 book named *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organisation of Experience*, it examines how certain information by media is intentionally structured in a particular way to guide them to have a certain way of interpretation by the people within the social and political contexts.

Priming: Unlike agenda-setting and framing, which highlights how certain topics are prioritised and framed, priming delves deeper into the issue and do in-depth analysis and help to explain how media and its strategic use, impact the way people see and view and evaluate certain political representatives. Introduced by Iyengar and colleagues in 1982 with the work such as Iyengar & Kinder (1987) (Moy et al., 2016), It helps us to understand how media used in a certain way influence certain influential criteria and thematic areas which people use when they evaluate and consider their leaders, which are often linked to a prominent issue of the society. It explains how politicians are being assessed by voters based on their image on dominant media which highlights their stances or actions, which is actually an intentional establishment of notions which hits people's minds by shaping their beliefs and behaviours, particularly in electoral contexts.

This study examines X's role in Indian elections, using these theoretical concepts. With the help of agenda-setting, framing, and priming theories, it will explain how political leaders strategically create and deploy messages to shape public opinion, which in turn helps them to mobilise support and ultimately to influence electoral outcomes, emphasising the importance of ever-growing dynamics surrounding political communication in the digital age.

Hence, these studies help us to understand how political leaders strategically used X during elections to shape and structure public perception in a certain way and have their influence over them to gain electoral advantage. This offers a comprehensive understanding of social media and its multifaceted impact on political discourse and opinion formation.

Social Media and Electoral Politics in India:

With Orkut in 2005, the rise of social media took place in India, after which a rapid increase in the number of internet users took place. After Orkut there came Facebook, X, Instagram, and Snapchat, and each of these platforms helped in shaping and transforming how Indians communicate and interact with each other. Hence, as said before, social media grew to be a major platform because the users too grew rapidly, with platforms such as Facebook and X seeing significant increases in users and their engagement on these platforms from 2014 to 2018, and similarly WhatsApp emerging as the leading platform by 2019. The number of internet users in India surpassed 820 million by 2023, and that too includes more than half, that

is, 442 million, from rural areas (Roy, 2024). Social media has transformed the mode and nature of communication and, in result, has helped in building a cross-cultural unity. X, in particular, because of its usage by officials of major establishments, has become a reliable and key platform for real-time updates, political discussion, and public engagement and participation in the dialogue in India, especially since its growing rise from 2007 to 2008. With the rising internet penetration in Indian society, X became a powerful tool in terms of its use and importance in politics, especially during elections. In 2009, Sashi Tharoor, was the only first major Indian politician to use X (Robinson et al., 2016). But by 2014, X and the number of users had increased drastically, and its importance too had risen to a very large extent compared to that of 2009.

Social media has helped greatly to reduce the communication gap between people, which has its global impact as well. But every coin has two sides. On the one hand, its easy and affordable access gives people their right to take part in the dialogue with their representative, but similarly there comes the aspect of consumption as well; the content, the posts, and the tweets that people consume from this platform have their own importance. Because these platforms are not neutral but vibrant and fluid political and social spaces where different individuals, different groups and different stakeholders influence the flow of information and the nature of content and the nature of engagement with these platforms. This influence is evident, especially when we consider the fact that the kind of impact traditional media had historically in shaping political outcomes, and similarly, with a larger impact, online social media have similar effects on the political processes of the country.

The 2008 U.S. election was a turning point in the history of social media and their role in politics. The way Barack Obama used platforms like Facebook, X, and YouTube revolutionised the way political processes were done primarily for its digital grassroots mobilisation to engage with voters, share messages, and collect their data (Bimber, 2014). And the later success of Obama's campaign demonstrated and showed the potential social media carries in shaping modern political strategies and the overall process of electoral politics.

Thus, that's how X's relevance increased and it became a crucial tool and a platform during the election process, which helped in providing a space, a medium through which real-time communication between candidates, leaders, and voters took place.

Social media, especially X, in India too has revolutionised the whole political process, especially that in terms of electoral politics, starting from its limited and less usage in the mid-2000s to becoming a major tool and platform in the 2014 elections. India, with its Westminster parliamentary system, gives political parties and people's representatives a huge role to express public opinion in the political matters of the country. It was in the 2014 general elections, which marked a shift in political communication, when social media like X played its role in terms of voter engagement, real-time interaction and campaign strategies. Hence, from the 2014 to 2019 elections, X became an essential platform and a tool for the whole political discourse of the country. By 2019, with the increased internet users, social media became a critical tool in the whole political process.

Role of X in in 2014 and 2019 in general election:

X is a free social media networking platform which has the feature of sharing short messages/tweets which include text, photos, videos or links, and it is accessible via its website or mobile app. It serves as a microblogging service, combining both the features of blogging and instant messaging. While registered users or those who create an account can post, share, like, and reply to tweets, non-registered users or

those who don't create an account can only view them and read them. X is widely used for attaining firsthand information from official handles and to connect with others and follow public figures, organisations, and so forth.

It was launched in July 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Noah Glass, Biz Stone, and Evan Williams, and since then it has emerged as a significant global platform transforming the old traditional way of sharing and receiving information. In India, too, this influence can be seen by the way it has been used by politicians and parties, and it has deeply impacted the overall dynamics of electoral politics.

Role of X During the 2014 General Election:

It was in the 2014 general election that marked a pivotal moment for X and its ever-growing influence on Indian electoral politics. Unlike 2009, this time the scenario was altogether very different in nature, driven by an increased number of internet users and penetration of smartphones in social space. As research shows that between January 1 and May 12, 2014, over 56 million election-related tweets were recorded. Each polling day during the elections saw a huge jump in the volume of tweets, ranging from 540,000 to 820,000 tweets per day (Verma, 2015). This tells something about the changing scenario during that period.

Candidates and parties used both the traditional methods and modern technology, such as rallies and speeches, alongside the timely utilisation of social media platforms. Hence, this phase was significant in terms of establishing new norms for election-related strategy and campaigns. Dubbed as India's "Twitter election" (Safiullah, 2017), the BJP, led by Narendra Modi, effectively utilised X to engage with voters, share updates, and amplify their campaign messages. The first Twitter election (Bajaj, 2017) highlights the growing importance of social media platforms during elections, with the BJP using this opportunity with great, unparalleled efficiency compared to other political parties.

Hence, the utilisation of "traditional" and "mediated" forms of communication, which includes print media, television, and radio, is to have a larger impact and to reach a broader audience with the help of established channels. Additionally, the campaign also resorts to "new", "direct", and unmediated forms of communication with the help of social media platforms and other digital platforms to engage personally and interactively with the voters (Lilleker et al., 2015). And thus, in a developing nation like India, combining "old" and "new" forms of political communication to communicate with people is very much impactful due to the fact that during that period, internet penetration was relatively low.

The so-called "Modi wave" during the 2014 election campaign became a significant force because of Narendra Modi's widespread presence across digital platforms with strong digital campaigns that ensured messages, speeches and activities appeared in front of people, which in return shaped his image in people's minds, which made him omnipotent among people and kept him at the forefront of electoral conversation (Baja, 2017).

As research shows that over a period of five months Narendra Modi's name appeared and was mentioned in 11.1 million tweets, which shows his strong online engagement (Khosla, 2014).

Further research by Bajaj (2017) says that since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) announced in September 2013 that Narendra Modi would be their prime ministerial candidate for the 2014 election and until the conclusion of the election campaign, a total of 496 tweets were identified and categorised and accordingly were analysed and this study came up with a few conclusions.

The analysed 496 campaign-related tweets were categorised as standard campaign tweets (32.7%) and information-control tweets (67.3%); the former relates to a type of tweet which were straightforward

promotional messages of Modi and other BJP leaders and the party themselves, and the latter refers to the tweets aimed at managing and influencing the flow of information to the public, which includes partisan, promotes party, combative toward other parties, and so forth, which were tweeted with the aim of creating a narrative and having a positive impact on people's minds and also on the election outcome. But from that 67.3%, 50.6% of information-control tweets were focused on the theme of development and governance, which projected Modi as a leader and a prominent figure for the nation's economic progress, while there were nuances; only 3.6% mentioned a Hindutva agenda. The party recognised the demographic picture, and keeping in mind the presence of young voters of X and the internet users, hence omitting the pro-Hindu activities, they strategically focused upon the themes of development and governance. This strategic use of x, which balanced appealing to both the groups of core supporters and the larger broader and general public, prioritising themes like infrastructure, progress, and governance through x, the overall conclusion of the study is that with such strategic usage of X the BJP's overall social media campaign was made much more robust, which contributed heavily in terms of their electoral success by reaching out to the public, especially young minds, through X and shaping their image and influencing their opinion in the time of a highly charged election season.

Thus, the BJP's election campaign and the strategies during the 2014 Indian General Elections had a dual approach in terms of setting a narrative; on the one hand, they publicly emphasised development and governance while also subtly invoking Hindutva themes in localised and informal campaigns. Leaders like Amit Shah focused on consolidating Hindu support through informal narratives, while the party avoided overt Hindutva messaging on social media to appeal to urban, younger voters (Bajaj, 2017)

Another study by Safiullah et al. (2016) highlights the positive impact social buzz creates on electoral success – the correlation between social media buzz and electoral success. Their findings conclude that to increase the share in the number of seats, political parties should manage and play an active role in terms of creating social media buzz, and an effective and strategic tweets and retweets can enhance the chance of winning more seats.

Hence, we can understand, by the way, the BJP and their leaders used X, and the amount of presence they had, could have been a major advantage in terms of their winning the election seats, in which, as mentioned above, they promote the leadership of Narendra Modi's connection and discredit Rahul Gandhi. Modi being a tea seller and Rahul Gandhi being a "shahzada" (prince) and an elitist figure (Bajaj 2017) – these strategies helped them in a very significant manner compared to other political parties which had less presence in X and other social media platforms. Hence, in this way it can be argued that the way the BJP sophisticatedly used social media to frame Modi as the only viable option and solution to existing India challenges globally and nationally played a major role in securing heavy seats in the 2014 general election, which in depth could be understood because, in a way, it helped them to reach out to the public and to influence and set their opinion in a certain specific manner which was beneficial for the party and the leaders. So, X, though because of the low number of internet users, had a comparatively lesser but deciding influence in the BJP's electoral politics, which contributed towards their historic win in the 2014 election.

Role of X During the 2019 General Election:

With the above-provided discussion on the 2014 election and the X stand during the whole election period, and after the result following the BJP's successful online presence and digital campaign in 2014, also because of the rise of internet users, other political parties and leaders too increasingly adopted social media to reach out to the public and have their say in the 2019 general election period. By then the number

of internet users and X users had increased to a very large extent. Hence X became a vital platform with PM Modi and the BJP dominating this space by having their ever-growing presence since 2014. Modi, with over 44 million followers by 2018, used X to reach out to the public officially and share information regarding national interests, also to highlight achievements, and similarly to critique opponents.

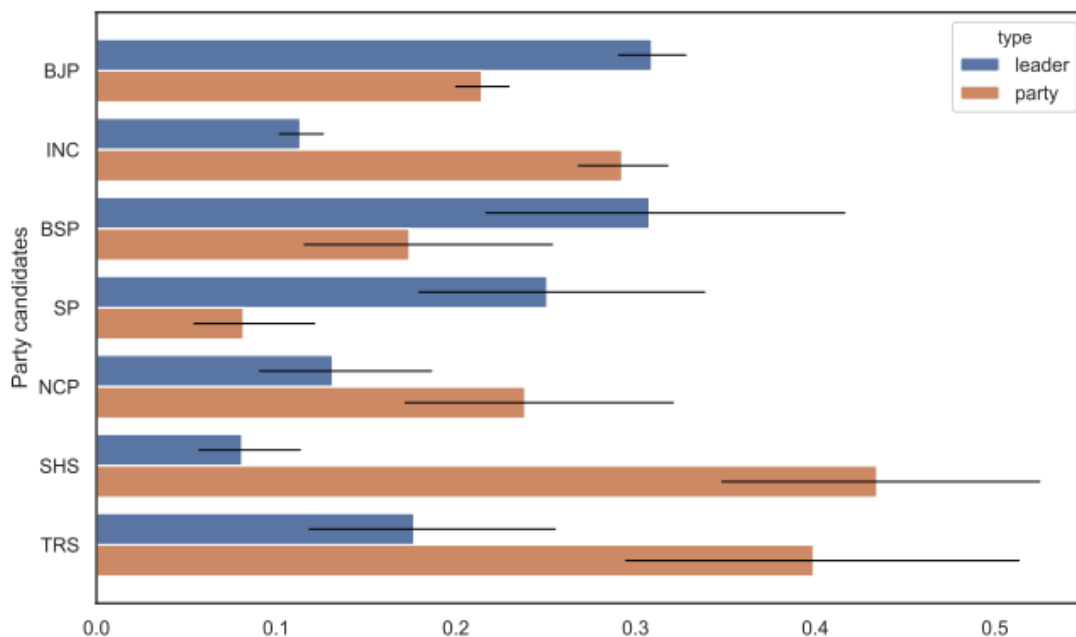
With accounts like @BJP4India posting more than 150 tweets daily. And also X recorded 396 million election-related conversations, which, compared to 2014, was a 600% rise, showing the X and its risen role in political processes of the country (Hendrix, 2021).

And with Modi's charismatic personality and because of his way of speech, his popularity as a leader has grown to a very large extent; hence, Modi's image-driven campaign, which primarily was personality-driven and focused upon leadership qualities, further solidified this shift from party-driven politics to personality-centric politics, as shown by the study such as Rajadesingan et al. (2020), which analysed the significant influence personalised politics surrounding Narendra Modi had on 2019 election discourse on Twitter.

The author here, with the help of a table, has shown the analysis, which explains the impact a single leader had during the election campaign and the degree of personalization that took place, and ultimately it shows the significance one individual held for the outcome of the election and the success it brought afterwards.

Diagram

Fig.4.1. Estimated probability of tweets referring to party/leader



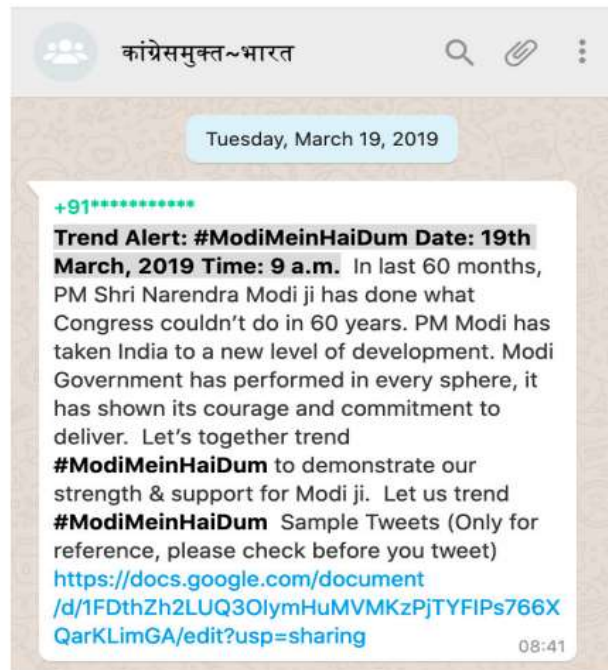
Source: Rajadesingan et al., 2020

The study involved the collection and the analysis of 197,663 tweets from the Twitter accounts of 539 candidates across 397 constituencies, representing 16 major parties, from February 1, 2019, in their respective constituencies until the polling dates

It illustrates the relationship between two factors. First one is the frequency of leader centric tweets and mentions and second the overall mention of party and its related success. Thus it suggest that the

personalization of politics and the campaign related to it in X during the 2019 election period were a dominant factor for 2019 election outcome.

Fig.4.2. A trend alert mobilizes WhatsApp group members for the #ModiMeinHaiDum campaign



(Source: Jakesch et al., 2021)

But apart from the personalisation of the politics on X, another phenomenon that was simultaneously being carried out was the act of strategically coordinated efforts of creating artificial trends on X to set a narrative and keep the headlines on X about a certain specific topic or certain individual. A study done by Jakesch et al. (2021) highlights this case of the BJP and their strategic use of X and coordinated social media campaigns during the 2019 elections to have their influence in people's minds and public opinion, which was primarily being done by creating dominating trends on X. These campaigns, which included well-prepared and pre-written content, a predetermined time for synchronised posting, and also mass tweeting with the help of other social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Google Docs, resulted in 69 successful campaigns creating nationwide trends out of 75 campaigns analysed. Additionally, the study mentioned that 32 out of the 75 campaigns which ended up being a nationwide trend were also picked up and ended up being reported on by various major media outlets such as Quartz India, Financial Express, HuffPost India, The Hindu, and Firstpost. This explains the amount of influence the act of a coordinated online campaign holds, which in return influences the public opinion effectively just because of an online media trend.

Hashtag tweets were over 42,000 tweets on average, and the trends they created used to last for approximately 10 hours. And these efforts from the BJP showed their influence over X, and in this space opposition was undermined, and that's how they won this space in terms of creating a heavy influence. The party's comprehensive media strategy with extensive coverage significantly increased their visibility among the people and the users of X, which contributed to their landslide victory with a 37.36% vote share

and 303 seats. This shows how much social media, particularly X, has become a useful and powerful tool for the BJP during election periods, which helped them to attain electoral gains.

Hence, with the rise of the users of the internet, the ground has been more fertile for people to get influence with the help of social media such as X, such as being done by artificially created trends and mass postings. And with the opposition failing to utilise this space, the BJP maintained investment in time planning, and impactful tactics helped them to dominate this space and ultimately to use X for their electoral success.

Findings and Conclusion:

With the global rise in the number of users and the significance social media holds, it has become a significant source through which one gets easy access to information and through which one can connect with people from all over the world, which, in a way, by providing a space to participate in the exchange of dialogue with leaders, enhances the democratic practices of the country. With the rise in the number of its users, it has made the act of consuming political content an easy act, thereby empowering individuals to stay informed and actively participate in the whole process.

However, with this there comes the other side of social media and its dual nature. Because it has also led to an increase in the numbers of biased and politicised content and information with relation to elections and influencing people's choices and perception.

And now in the current scenario, platforms like Facebook and X have become central to the political process of the country. The public uses them to consume news and get information about certain things, while political leaders use them to strategically deploy intentional content to sway public opinion. And in this, X particularly has become a key medium for one to consume political content directly from officials and for every political engagement, with leaders using X to share information and shape the narrative. This trend gained its momentum from the 2014 election and attained its peak from then onwards, affecting the 2019 elections as well, where X played a pivotal role in terms of influencing narrative and, similarly, people's opinions.

Hence, from 2014 because of social media, especially X, political communication had a profound transformation. This act of integrating digital platforms in the political process of the country marked a new era in Indian democracy where online engagement became very crucial for electoral success and regime change.

Hence, this study, with the help of the theories of political communication such as agenda-setting, framing, and priming, provides a much deeper understanding of X's role in Indian electoral politics.

Thus, conducting the study with the help of these theories, major findings came out that offered a comprehensive understanding of the whole issue. Major findings observed that during the 2014 general election, the BJP significantly contributed their efforts in terms of creating an agenda framing a narrative with the theme on development and governance. The strategically used X and posted tweets were helpful in creating a perception about them being the sole capable party of achieving these goals of developmental and governance themes. The framing of such a narrative with the help of X was very much significant in terms of persuading the people that the BJP was the only sole party with the credibility and capability. Additionally, this framing was pivotal in persuading the public that the BJP was the most suitable option for addressing developmental and governance challenges. And additionally, the BJP also used Twitter, targeting the opposition and discrediting their leaders on the platform, and simultaneously, in contrary terms, placing their image in a very positive manner, which was helpful in terms of creating their image better than other opposition parties whose presences were also absent on the platform. Hence, this strategy

deployed on Twitter helped the BJP to influence the users who were youths, especially, and also the larger public perception that prevailed during that period, which ultimately contributed towards their victory in 2014.

Another major finding came out with this analysis in regard to the 2019 election: the BJP and their leaders had a very large influence on Twitter, and their presence was high, but behind this there were strategically maintained and collaborated efforts which involved various groups of people and individuals. And these collaborative strategies and actions also involved coordinated communication with the help of other social media platforms like WhatsApp and Google Docs, which were helpful in terms of collaborating for the act of mass tweeting campaigns, which was primarily aimed at creating a nationwide artificial trend on X. And this helped them to promote their agenda to a much larger audience, which significantly helped them to influence public opinion. By intentionally framing and priming their agenda with the help of strategically deployed tweets and creating influential narratives, such as creating hashtags trends such as '#ModiMeinHaiDum', they put themselves in a position in which they were much more favourable in people's eyes while discrediting opposition and their leaders. These efforts helped them to reach the public and generated various nationwide trends which were very significant when we consider the BJP and their landslide victory in 2019, because all the action helped them to influence the public opinion.

Since 2014 the use of social media platforms and the number of users using them has drastically increased, which resulted in the growing importance of these platforms in political matters too. Initially because of low internet penetration in India, but by the time the 2019 election came, social media had become a key ground in terms of shaping political discourse and reaching the general public.

Hence, from the above study, it is evident that a political party's presence on X can have a major influence on electoral outcomes. By using these platforms, leaders can easily reach out to the public and shape their perception regarding everything if the leaders are clever enough and deploy their message by framing it strategically. But this leads to the other side of the study, the danger it possesses within the whole democratic process of the country.

The act of politicisation of social media and the space it provides is something which poses a major challenge for the nation and for the citizens. Because it diminishes the role of being a neutral space for democratic discourse, all because of the practice that exists behind the veil, that is, strategic manipulation and deployment of tweets, mass tweeting or retweeting, can undermine the public space by promoting a specific agenda while giving less space for something authentic. This poses a challenge to the openness and neutrality of the platforms like X and also challenges the integrity of such democratic space that social media provides. To confront this and to stay safe from such acts, one must critically examine trending information by referring to other social media platforms as well and by cross-referencing sources and avoid relying solely only on one platform such as X.

Only media literacy and a mindset of critical thinking among people now can save people from such misinformation and being targeted by such agendas, and only then, they can combat such biased narratives which prevails, especially during election periods.

Educating the public about the biasedness and agenda-backed information that prevails in social media is crucial and the need of the hour. Hence, promoting media literacy and also transparency in communication can help people escape the trap of being influenced by political agendas, which in return can preserve the integrity of democratic processes and the dialogic space that social media provides to people, and which can foster more ethically informed and responsible citizens.

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