The use of Social Networking sites in Political Communication: A Case Study of Facebook in Context to Chhattisgarh

Shahid Ali, (Ph.D.), Department of Mass Communication,
K. N. Kishore, Research Scholar, Department of Mass Communication,
Kushabhau Thakre University of Journalism and Mass Communication,
Kathadih, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, INDIA

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Corresponding Authors
Shahid Ali,
Department of Mass Communication,
K. N. Kishore, Research Scholar,
Department of Mass Communication,
Kushabhau Thakre University of Journalism
and Mass Communication, Kathadih, Raipur,
Chhattisgarh, INDIA

shodhsamagam1@gmail.com

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The use of social networking sites in Political Communication: A case study of Facebook in context to Chhattisgarh Abstract The social media and political communication through it is slowly becoming an integral part of the democratic system over the world. This trend has been possible one through the internet and the other through several social media platforms.

Abstract

The social media and political communication through it is slowly becoming an integral part of the democratic system over the world. This trend has been possible one through the internet and the other through several social media platforms. The politicians across the world have been using the platforms to communicate with the prospective electors of their respective countries. Under this context, the India has not been lagging behind even though there is a barrier of digital divide which is slowly picking up the connectivity of internet and also the number of users with availability of cheaper smart phones and slashing of rates of internet.

There is scope of study of social media in Indian context and utilising it a case study has been done regarding the recently held Chhattisgarh State Assembly Election 2018, the 28th state of India on the postings carried out by the national political parties which are more active on social media platforms mainly Facebook and Twitter. The study period is from October 6 to December 31, 2018, the start of election process mainly enforcement of election model code of conduct. The postings carried out by the political study was undertaken during the period on Facebook by the both political parties and what modes they have been using to communicate to their followers and expected voters. Study has found that both parties have carried out postings targeting each other or highlighting party's achievements in government.

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Key words

Social Media, Facebook, political communication, Chhattisgarh Assembly Election 2018, Narendra Modi, Rahul Gandhi.

Connectivity has been made possible by the internet reducing the distance, space and time, where people are connected to social media as more and more people are totally getting engrossed. The situation is that it is leading to addiction also.

Social media has emerged as a vital tool of communication and has created new ways of mobilizing public opinion and encouraging participation in political and civic activities – ranging from joining online petition and social groups, posting short messages on Twitter, expressing supports through blogs and uploading videos on YouTube.

So, social media has been dramatically altering the communication scenario, offering new platforms for individuals to express themselves. The new generation from young to group of 18-29 years old, do not know the world without an internet.

So, as per Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) definition of social media, it is "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content."

Social networking sites have become an integral part and are playing vital role in day to day life of the people. The reason is that it has become a part of day to day communication among the people as it has become more instant with advancement of communication technology. Some of the important networking sites which are popular are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, MySpace and others.

The Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp have recorded tremendous growth. So what is the change that had occurred which brought such a revolution in communication. It is the internet which first became a tool which offered one-way communication but now, with social media is acting as a mode for two-way communication. This is what the political parties and politicians have turned to use it as a medium for their campaigns and targeting the potential voters.

"The growth of social networking sites (SNS) shows a significant change in the social and personal behavior of Internet users. SNS has become an essential medium of communication and entertainment among the young adults. Though it has started to affect the daily activities of normal human beings, the popularity of SNS is not going to reduce in near future." (Das B, Sahoo J) [1]

Thus, it is an era when the public's time and attention is increasingly directed toward platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, there has been research works going on to seek to evaluate the still-emerging relationship between social media use and public engagement.

In context to India, with glaring gap of purchasing powers of different social groups, there is uneven level of access to new media, the phenomenon which is now being termed as 'Digital Divide'. It is raising concern about the limitations which has the potential to create limits on its democratic potential, in one of the world's biggest democracy.

So, in India also, it is natural that the politics had gained entry into the social networking sites, which has given new opportunities and avenues for the politicians to reach out to maximum people. The basic reasons is at least to those having a smartphone and internet, as both are synonymous, if one has a smartphone, he/she is naturally will be using the internet to link to social networking sites, mainly Facebook and Twitter, or YouTube even many others which are also picking up popularity. The technological advancements have not only helped to converged the link of communication by providing different platforms at same place, with ease but also anywhere on the move (Except where there is network connectivity problem).

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If one goes through the recent examples of Arab Spring[2], use of social media for election campaign in different foreign countries like America[3], New Zealand, UK and others, the politicians had been using the social network platforms to reach out to the people with their view points. The Anna Hazare sit-in-hunger strike (2011)[4] converted into a mass movement just because it was spread through social media and people coming out in open to support the movement. The spread of such movements through social media has been termed as 'viral' in the technical form, as it spreads like wild fire among the network. It is the reason that now government shut down the internet in case of any communal flare or any incident which can spread faster through social media.

In India context, there has been increase use of social networking sites by the political parties in recent years after **Prime Minister Narendra Modi**[5] commenced his election campaign through social media and remaining most active on it. He is using all these social media and even others to interact with larger cross section of party workers, leaders and even Panchayat representatives of remote areas. The situation is such that every party had now established its own website, has a page in Facebook and twitter handle. Any user or follower can communicate using these medium to the leaders and the political party. The situation is such that now parties have come up with separate Apps, to have direct interaction with the party workers.

"Can social media be used for an effective political communication in India where access to Internet is still limited? To what extent political parties and candidates as well as oppositional politics are using social media for political campaign? Is it possible to reach to the non-internet users through social media?" (Taberez Ahmed Neyazi-2013).

If the answers to these questions have to be found, then it is vital to look at some of the latest statistics which speaks volumes of a different picture altogether which may in future fill the existing gaps of 'Digital Divide'.

"The number of internet users in India is expected to reach 500 million by June 2018 said a report by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and Kantar IMRB on Tuesday. The number of Internet users stood at 481 million in December 2017, an increase of 11.34% over December 2016 said the report titled, "Internet in India 2017." [6]

As per the statistics, by 2019, the estimation of social network users in India is likely to reach 258.27 million, which was closed to 168 million in year 2016. 'You Tube and Facebook, followed by the social app WhatsApp have been the most popular social network in India. In India, the users of Facebook are projected to reach around 319 million users by 2021.

"Active internet users' 462 million, active mobile internet users' 430.3, Active social media users 250, active mobile social media users 230 million. This statistic shows the number of social network users in India from 2015 to 2022. Number of social network users in India in year 2016 was 168.1 million, 2017 was 196.02 million, 2018 it rose to 226.06 million and 2019 it is around 258.27 million"[7]

So, the research paper concentrates of the new and exciting area[8] of research which in India is a new arena where as in other foreign countries, major research works have been undertaken, mainly the political communication being undertaken through social media sites. The Chhattisgarh State Assembly general election 2018 became a major fight in social media as first the Bharatiya Janata Party was scoring but later Indian National Congress also countered it in same tone. So, the research paper put forwards the question that as how the national level political parties of Chhattisgarh, the 28th state of India, formed in year 2000 use the social media platform mainly the Facebook to communicate to their electors and what mode was used for communication mainly disseminating their political ideas and ideals.

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The study is being conducted to assess the extent in which the Facebook has helped the local parties as a tool of political communication in State Assembly General Election 2018. So, significance of the study is that with increasing use of internet mainly by mobile (smart phone) users, the research is being conducted to find as which type of content the political parties has been using on their social media official sites mainly Facebook to reach out the prospective voters and party workers mainly mobile users based in state of Chhattisgarh.

The study aims to evaluate the type of posting on the social network mainly Facebook on day to day by the political parties mainly national parties, Bharatiya Janata Party and Indian National Congress in Chhattisgarh. It also wants to determine the online activities of the political parties and the level of use of social media for promotion by comparing the difference between both the political parties.

The study revolves around the type of posting uploaded on the Facebook of the two political parties, Bharatiya Janata Party and Indian National Congress (INC) (national parties) as what kind of content is being offered on the Facebook (text, multimedia, news link etc) and do the political parties use other platforms to disseminate same content (text, multimedia, news link etc) (observation with Twitter). Had the same already posted content used again and again. The official Facebook page of Indian National Congress is Indian National Congress – Chhattisgarh @INCChhattisgarh having 1,28558 likes and 1,29,524 Followers while the official Facebook page of Bharatiya Janata Party is Bjp Chhattisgarh @BJP4CGState having 9,34,903 likes and 9,34,554 followers.

The national political parties mainly based in state of Chhattisgarh, which are quite active on the social media has been selected for the study. The two political parties are Bharatiya Janata Party and Indian National Congress. The time period for the study has been taken from October 6 to December 31, 2018. The dates are significant as after the declaration of election schedule by Election Commission of India (ECI), the election model code of conduct has been enforced in the state. All the postings during the period are being taken for the study mainly on the Facebook. The political parties have their own Facebook page where they on regular basis carry out the postings. Both the parties have their own Information Technology cells which operates these pages.

To conduct the study, content analysis methodology is being used. It includes both qualitative and quantitative methods. All the different postings of the Facebook of both the political parties, Indian National Congress (INC-commonly termed as Congress) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are being taken into consideration for the study. The posts have been coded and coding reliability tests were conducted based on the type of posts by political parties.

Both the INC and BJP have been using all the modes to communicate the message to its followers and those visiting their sites.

One is the Visual multimedia source that combines a sequence of images to form a moving picture, is termed as video. It is usually have audio components that correspond with the pictures being shown on the screen. The video transmits a signal to screen and processes the order in which the screen captures should be shown.[9]

So, videos which have been uploaded on the Facebook site of both the Bharatiya Janata Party and Congress can be classified in different categories mainly

Live Video

The political party IT cell have been carrying out Facebook or Twitter live-streaming of the public meetings/press conference/interview of Prime Minister, Chief Minister and party national president and others from the event venue which the users can directly view it, write comment, register likes or share it. Thus, the live video can be further classified on basis of events, (1) Live public

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meeting or public address directly from the venue, (2) Live Press Conference or converted into topic wise and (3) Interview video both live and then shared.

All the categories can be taken separately for the study purpose individually but for the present study, all the different live public meeting/live press conference and interview, complete set of video has been brought under single category.

Whatis.techtarget.com says, "An infographic (information graphic) is a representation of information in a graphic format designed to make the data easily understandable at a glance. People use infographics to quickly communicate a message, to simplify the presentation of large amounts of data, to see data patterns and relationships, and to monitor changes in variables over time."[10]

The political parties have been using the infographic both in Facebook and Twitter but the study is limited on the Facebook posting of infographics. The posting infographics can be further classified in different categories

On Schemes

The political parties in power at Lok Sabha and States, as per the Facebook postings had found highlighting the different schemes rolled out by the governments.

Achievements of Governments: The infographics posted on social media Facebook have been found representing the achievements of central or state governments mainly the period rule during the earlier government and the present ruling government. It has been depicted in different formats on year to year basis or show casing the total difference, then and now.

Highlights of Speeches/Parts

This is one of the common both in the video category and the infographic category. The sections of speech are being highlighted through infographic.

Intimation of public meetings/events

Infographic is also being used by the political parties regarding the upcoming programmes, events or public meetings of the Prime Minister, Chief Minister or any other leader. It has become a trend where as if they are intimating their followers to attend the meeting on specified date, time and venue.

Greetings

This is one of the common infographic which is being used the politicians to greet the people on different occasions mainly festivals both national and local, birth or death anniversary of political leaders, freedom fighters, social reformers, achievements in sports and sports persons and others.

The comments posted have the politicians' view on a particular subject or issue having the Facebook or twitter handle of concerned leaders or rival political parties. Text format is one of the most common forms posts to communicate on the social media site. But adding to the special feature to the text is accompanying video, infographic or photographs. One can find the posting of text in the Facebook.

The postings have also content which are generally shared and already posted on the timeline of the Facebook (As per the study). The shared content may be a text, video, infographic. Few of the newspapers or websites or an electronic channel have also posted the content or the party has posted it as content to their page. Generally mostly two types of language have been used apart from shared content which can be from the other language. The two main language used in posting is Hindi and English.

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The finding of the study is that Indian National Congress has used maximum number of live videos as their posts which falls to around 36.18% of total posting as content while the text cum photograph content posting is around 35.19% and the infographic is around 28.61 percent.

Indian National Congress

0

28.61   36.18
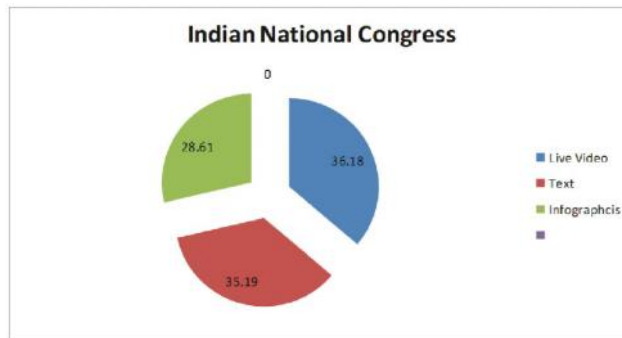
35.19

- Live Video
- Text
- Infographcis

Chart 1: Postings of Indian National Congress on Facebook

Comparatively BJP has used infographic around 44.46% while their text with photograph is 26.78% and 28% is the live video as during the study period from October 6 to December 31, 2018. The BJP has carried out lesser posts when compared to Congress.

BJP

0

44.46   28

26.78
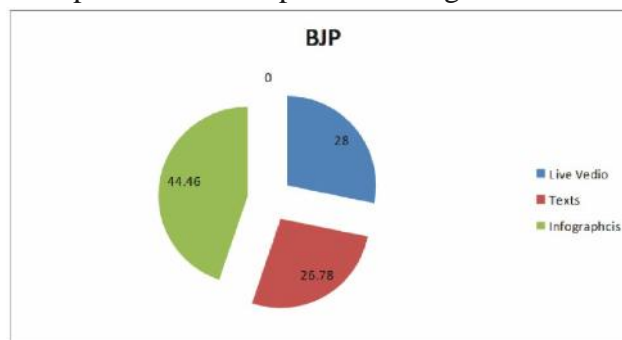
- Live Vedio
- Texts
- Infographcis

Chart 2: Postings of BJP on Facebook

The Congress President Rahul Gandhi's visit Chhattisgarh and his public meetings live video at different places have been widely seen as even cross 10 lakh views. Same is case of Bhupesh Baghel (now Chief Minister) Patan visit had 2.4 likes and more than 57k views while Jayvardhan Bissa live liquor raid received total 37k views while it had 2032 shares. Congress has posted on December 17 around 23 posts having series of events of different party leaders and news. Similarly, on November 13 a total of 14 posts on a single day which coincides with visit of Congress president Rahul Gandhi. Similar large number of postings can be observed on November 16, 17 and 18, 2018.

The infographics used by the Congress is more in form of a series against the BJP's 15 years of rule seeking around 25 questions from Chief Minister Dr Raman Singh while it has also declaring the arrival, venue and time of public meetings. It has more negative sort against the BJP comments or other issue.

When compared to BJP, the posts related to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Amit Shah had more shares, views and comments than the other posts. The infographic used by the BJP are more of the arrival, venue and time of public meetings. But it has also achievements, statements, comparison of different schemes of Modi led government mainly. It is interesting that Chhattisgarh government had not used much infographic regarding their achievements in last 15 years except for the live press conferences of leaders.

Congress has concentrated its posting mainly against the Chhattisgarh BJP related issues in form of infographics, videos, news cuttings and links which falls around 19.73% of total postings which is more or less equivalent to the postings related to Congress president Rahul Gandhi which

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also falls to around 20.39%. The next largest number of posts is concentrated related to Chhattisgarh Pradesh Congress president Bhupesh Baghel, who had later went to become the Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh. His related posts also include infographics, his speeches, press conference or news. The percentage of posts is around 13.48 percent. 6.9% postings are related to greetings, occasions of birth or death anniversary of Great leaders or festivals. Similarly, the 6.9% postings are of news which is related to Congress and favourable to the party of different websites or newspaper cuttings or links.
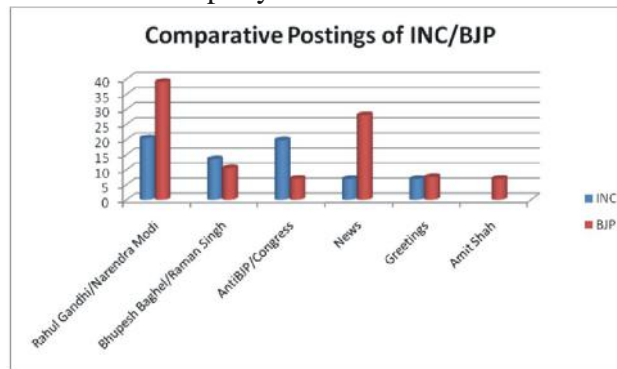

Chart 3: Comparative postings of INC and BJP in Facebook

If postings of BJP are considered, it has also concentrated on mainly related to Prime Minister Narendra Modi which includes his public meetings, Maan ki Baat, schemes and other videos or infographics highlighting the achievements. The BJP Chhattisgarh has posted around 39% related to Modi, while BJP president Amit Shah and the greetings related to different events and recalling the great leaders/scientists is around 7.5%. The news in forms of texts, press conferences, statements of leaders related to an issue is around 28%. The BJP has uniqueness it changes its title page as per event. With Prime Minister or Amit Shah's event, they change the graphic outlay of the title page and then after event return the earlier one. The posts related to Chief Minister Dr. Raman Singh are around 10.52% of total postings. The anti-Congress postings in BJP Facebook page is only just 7 percent when compared to the Congress which has lead the anti-BJP campaign in its page.

The conclusion of study regarding the postings of Indian National Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party Facebook postings is that Congress during the election period had utilised the 15 years rule of Bharatiya Janata Party in Chhattisgarh as point to highlight in the social media mainly raising 25-point questions and the claims of development by posting infographics mainly by raising questions to Chief Minister Dr. Raman Singh. It has also well utilised the programmes and speeches of Rahul Gandhi by ensuring it is viewed by its followers to maximum number. The study also reveals that even though Bharatiya Janata Party has been more active on social networks with good team but it could not score over the Congress mainly in number of postings and related to public issues. It could be seen highlighting the achievements but there had been goof up also. Congress utilised it to its hilt by highlighting it. One such is of regarding the road where BJP had utilised the roads from foreign countries to tell story of achievement of state level but counter checking the source of photograph, Congress came up with countering the claim after which BJP had to backtrack and state that it had used the photographs of roads just for the sake of representation.

BJP had been more laid stress on the Prime Minister like Congress for Rahul Gandhi. The maximum posts were of Prime Minister's event which was followed by Chief Minister Dr. Raman Singh. Prime Minister's posts had been mainly his speeches (live videos), his government's achievements through infographics, governments policies, his expected public meetings announcements among others.

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Conclusion

An observational study of Twitter, another platform used by both the parties also had a similar postings that of Facebook, which can also be taken up for the further study. Both the political parties have used that platform to posts what they had been posting on the Facebook, which is the reason for same postings.

So, as per the trends, if one goes through the Lok Sabha general election held in 2019, postings made by the political parties, the quantum of postings increased manifold. The public meetings of the party leaders, both at state and national level have been made live through social media and videos, in order to reach the maximum followers using the social media. The ruling parties have used the social media platform for highlighting the achievements of the state and central government, its policies, target set and achieved in format of infographics. The opposition used it for highlighting the failures of state-central governments. The Lok Sabha election 2019 trends can also be taken up for future study based on the content of postings.

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