The Influence of Social Media on Electoral Processes

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Abstract

The 2014 Assembly elections in India marked a significant transformation in the nation's political landscape. The incumbent party, Congress, which had held power for a decade, faced a notable defeat, largely attributed to the efforts of Mr. Narendra Modi. It is widely recognized that, for the first time, social media played a pivotal role in the electoral process. Research indicates that Mr. Narendra Modi emerged as the most active and influential figure on Twitter. The utilization of Twitter, alongside other prominent social networking platforms and exit polls from news channels, was instrumental in the success of Mr. Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This paper aims to investigate the influence of social media on Indian politics. Social media serves as a primary resource for information retrieval. Through the application of text mining techniques, vast quantities of unstructured data generated by social media can be analyzed and represented in real-time user relations. Given its widespread use, social media has the potential to function as a powerful conduit for shaping public opinion, encompassing agenda-setting and opinion leadership. The current research paper explores the significance of social media's rise within the context of Indian politics and its broader implications for political engagement among the populace. The study will first assess the emergence of social media as a medium for reaching voters. Secondly, it will evaluate the effects of social media engagement during electoral campaigns on voting outcomes.

Keywords: **Social media, electoral campaigns, Indian politics, Twitter, Facebook.**

Introduction:

Google serves as the solution to any inquiries one may have today. The technological revolution known as the Internet has transformed the world by facilitating global connectivity among individuals. The youth of today increasingly utilize a variety of social platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, blogs, and LinkedIn, as means of communication with friends, family, and colleagues. The rapid development of social media underscores its societal influence and constitutes an essential component of the progress in information and communication technologies.

According to a report by ComScore, India has surpassed Japan to become the world's third-largest Internet user, following China and the United States. As of June 2014, India boasts over 243 million Internet users, according to data from the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), marking a staggering 28% increase compared to June 2013. The complexities

associated with social media usage are significant. Despite the challenges, such as security, privacy, and accuracy, social media presents substantial opportunities for sharing, collaboration, and user engagement. Thus, it is imperative to comprehend how and why these tools can be effectively utilized. Social media has rapidly ascended in significance as a platform for political engagement in its various forms. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube offer innovative avenues for encouraging citizen participation in political life, particularly in the context of elections and electoral campaigns. Eric Qualman, in his work "Socialnomics," asserts that "Social Media is the biggest shift since the industrial revolution." It represents the foremost activity on the internet, with every global brand maintaining a presence in this realm. Social media has emerged as a vital selling point for marketers and serves as one of the fastest means of disseminating product publicity. Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media 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." Now, let us examine some of the most prevalent social media platforms in use today.

A. Facebook

Facebook ranks among the most popular online social networking sites, having been established on February 4, 2004, by Mark Zuckerberg and his college roommates. Its influence on the social lives of individuals is profound. Facebook enables users to maintain connections with friends, relatives, and other acquaintances without the constraints of time or geography, contingent upon internet access. The platform fosters community through groups and pages, uniting individuals based on shared interests, hobbies, and knowledge. Due to its extensive network, Facebook has facilitated reconnections among numerous estranged family members and friends, boasting an estimated 900,000,000 unique monthly visitors.

B. Twitter

Twitter stands as a leading online social networking site that allows users to communicate via short messages, limited to 140 characters, known as "tweets." Conceived by American businessman Jack Dorsey in March 2006, Twitter emerged from the desire to enable individuals to share their status with friends, thereby informing them of their activities.

C. Instagram

Instagram is a mobile application that facilitates the sharing of photographs and videos across multiple social networking platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and numerous others. Its tagline emphasizes the ability to capture an image, modify it according to one's preferences, and share it with friends and family, encapsulating the notion that life is beautiful.

D. WhatsApp

WhatsApp Messenger is an instant messaging service compatible with multiple smartphone platforms. It enables users to send messages without incurring SMS charges, requiring internet connectivity for communication. This service is integrated with smartphones, allowing users to share photos, audio, videos, and their locations via the built-in maps present on their devices. WhatsApp Inc. was established in 2009 by Brian Acton and Jan Koum.

Electrol System in India

India, recognized as the largest democracy globally, is a secular and socialist nation. The electoral process for the selection of representatives entails the organization of a significant event on an extensive scale. During the general elections of 2014, approximately 0.9 million polling stations were established throughout the country. The electoral roll comprises a comprehensive list of all individuals within a constituency who are registered to vote; only those individuals whose names appear on this list are permitted to cast their votes. India is divided into a total of 543 parliamentary constituencies, and the election process for 2014 unfolded over nine phases, commencing on April 7, 2014, and concluding on May 12, 2014. The Election Commission of India recorded a total of 1,616 registered political parties, which includes six national parties, 47 state parties, and various other unrecognized parties. The 2014 elections witnessed a contest primarily among several major national parties, including the Indian National Congress (INC), commonly referred to as Congress, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), alongside other national parties such as the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which collectively formed a third front. The expenditure incurred by these parties during the elections amounted to approximately ₹30,500 crores, which ranks as the second highest globally, following the U.S. Presidential elections of 2012, totaling around $7 billion.

The impact of social media on Indian politics:

It was particularly significant during the 16th National General Election, conducted in nine phases throughout April and May 2014, marking one of the most anticipated electoral events in recent history amid evolving political dynamics in India. Analysts indicated that social media would play a crucial role in influencing the outcomes of the elections, with a report published in April 2013 by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) in conjunction with the Mumbai-based Iris Knowledge Foundation suggesting that Facebook users could significantly affect the results in 160 of India's 543 constituencies.

Zero percent of the population belongs to the age group below 25 years, while 65 percent is within the age group below 35 years. This demographic is predominantly engaged in either higher education or employment across various sectors, including information technology companies, business process outsourcing firms, research centers, and entrepreneurial ventures.

Their demanding schedules have resulted in a significant disconnection from traditional media, particularly concerning the acquisition and dissemination of information. The youth are adept in technology and prefer staying informed about contemporary trends, utilizing devices such as laptops, desktops, and, notably, internet-connected mobile phones.

Although politicians continue to utilize conventional methods such as posters, cut-outs, flyers, graffiti, and personal rallies to engage voters, the advent of social media has transformed the electoral landscape in urban India. Political parties are increasingly recognizing the necessity of becoming technologically adept in order to connect with this younger demographic. The usage of social media during the 2009 general elections in India was minimal; however, as of now, Facebook boasts 93 million users and Twitter has approximately 33 million accounts within the country. According to the LAMAI report of 2013, the evolving prominence of social media is evident, as every political party participating in the 2014 general election allocated between 2-5% of its election budget toward social media expenditures. The report indicates that prominent parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the National Congress Party have earmarked budgets of 500 crore and 400 crore respectively for this purpose.

From the outset, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has maintained the most substantial presence on social media. The BJP began utilizing social media channels even prior to the 2009 general election. Mr. Narendra Modi, the party's Prime Ministerial candidate, along with other BJP members, have achieved considerable popularity and outreach through social media, surpassing that of other political entities. Narendra Modi himself has the highest number of followers on both Twitter and Facebook.
The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) demonstrates a robust presence on social media platforms. It has been noted that, although AAP and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have engaged in confrontations on social media, the Indian National Congress became aware of its significance rather belatedly.

Facebook has become a pivotal aspect of the Indian electoral landscape, which is a significant event not only for India but also for the global community. With evolving trends, it is anticipated that the youth active on social media will play a decisive role in determining the future of electoral candidates. The continuous growth in urban development correlates with an increase in Facebook followers. It is suggested that Facebook may serve as a new voter base for politicians. Candidates and political parties that effectively make an impression on Facebook are likely to experience favorable outcomes. This underscores the necessity for a well-defined strategy specifically tailored for social media in order to enhance the effectiveness of electoral campaigns. In regard to Twitter, it hosted its own 'Twitter Election' for the 2014 elections, culminating in the collection of 56 million election-related tweets by the

conclusion of the electoral period. On each polling day, the platform witnessed between 540,000 and 820,000 election-related tweets.

The data indicates that the most prominent political figures and parties included Arvind Kejriwal of the Aam Aadmi Party, Narendra Modi from BJP4India, and Rahul Gandhi representing INC India, generating the most significant discourse surrounding them. Mr. Narendra Modi has amassed a total of 3.97 million followers, reflecting a 28% increase since January 1st. In comparison, Mr. Arvind Kejriwal has accelerated his follower growth to 1.79 million, achieving an impressive 79% rise since the year's commencement. The Aam Aadmi Party has seen its follower count expand to 682,000, marking a substantial 119% increase since the beginning of the year, while the actively engaged BJP4India has reached 491,000 followers, representing a 70% growth. Furthermore, INC India, which joined Twitter later, has experienced remarkable growth from 37,357 followers at the start of the year to 178,000, indicating an extraordinary 376% increase.

Current System:

Social media has emerged as a pivotal component of contemporary society. It is transforming existing information behaviors by providing users with access to real-time online information channels, unencumbered by the limitations of time and space. This phenomenon presents a substantial scope for data analysis challenges for researchers. Previous studies have largely employed broad methodologies, which often result in limited analytical opportunities. Authors Min Song, Meen Chul Kim, and Yoo Kyung Jeong have specifically examined a Twitter dataset by collecting real-time tweets from the 2012 Korean election. They utilized temporal Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) to analyze and validate the correlation between topics extracted from tweets and relevant events. By employing the term co-occurrence retrieval technique, they chronologically traced co-occurring terms and subsequently identified the thematic coherence among user mentions. This approach effectively extracted meaningful data from tweets, filtered out co-occurring terms, and constructed a user-based network through the application of various clustering algorithms. Voting advice applications (VAAs) have gained increased popularity as online tools that ostensibly assist users in determining which party or candidate to support during elections. VAAs facilitate community-based recommendations, allow for the comparison of users' political opinions, and provide a channel for user communication. Various methodologies proposed by VAAs have been assessed concerning predictive accuracy based on five real VAA datasets.

Author Abhilash Bhola employed Twitter as a medium to examine users' orientations towards political parties and candidates in the context of the 2014 general election in India. He scrutinized approximately 17.60 million tweets, correlating them with the timing of peak party activities. Furthermore, a sentiment analysis was conducted to categorize users into pro- and anti-

categories. Various classification techniques were utilized to analyze the tweets, and a live portal was established to facilitate real-time interaction with end users, thereby presenting live tweets and users' orientations.

Lars Kaczmirek and his team from GESIS have investigated various aspects of communication structures within online media, elucidating how such data can provide novel insights in comparison to traditional survey data and media analyses. By acquiring data from both Twitter and Facebook, they have introduced new dimensions to ongoing studies concerning social media usage during elections.

Proposed System

In the proposed system, real-time Twitter messages will be collected utilizing Twitter's streaming APIs. Given that the data is unstructured, it is essential to ascertain the pertinent information through topic modeling techniques and by employing term co-occurrence for data filtration. Subsequently, these messages will undergo semantic analysis using advanced methodologies. The messages will be classified into appropriate topics. Additionally, Twitter messages contain geolocation data, which can be instrumental in identifying trending topics based on geographic location. Current trend analysis of tweets derived from hashtags (e.g., #BJP, #CleanIndia, etc.) will facilitate the classification of tweets. Furthermore, key topics can be analyzed through the clustering of all messages using techniques such as the K-Nearest Neighbors (KNN) algorithm.

Conclusion

In light of the growing prevalence of social media, this paper primarily examines the utilization of social media as an instrument for election campaigning. India, recognized as one of the most digitally connected nations globally, has over 65% of its youth aged 35 and under; consequently, social media assumes a crucial role in the lives of this demographic. The paper provides a concise overview of the most popular social media platforms among Indian youth and explores the various existing systems employed to analyze the impact of social media on global politics. The analysis of user-generated comments provides insights into the substantial volume of unstructured data, prompting scientists to engage in data mining and classification efforts to uncover real-time relationships between user feedback and existing political parties. The Maharashtra state assembly election serves as an appropriate case study for assessing the influence of social media on the political landscape in Maharashtra. This research presents an opportunity to examine shifts in user sentiment before and after the election. Furthermore, the study can be augmented by classifying user gender and correlating it with demographic data, as well as verifying whether users are human or automated accounts. Incorporating a machine learning framework to train a system for automatic classification of tweets and conducting sentiment analysis could further enhance the study's depth and accuracy.

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