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Social media as an upcoming tool for political marketing effectiveness

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ABSTRACT

In the present era of electronic revolution when the social media has become the means and end of all communication, democracies are wondering if social media can be a valid indicator to predict elections outcome. With the increase in popularity and growth in the use of social media, the present study aims at examining whether the use of social media (Twitter) had an effect on the 2014 General elections outcome. For this research, a total of 8,877,275 social media buzz for 100 days from January 01, 2014 to April 09, 2014 of 12 Indian political parties has been considered. The result indicates that social media buzz has a positive and significant impact on the outcome of General elections 2014.

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1. Introduction

In the present era of electronic revolution when the social media has become the means and end of all communication even, political parties are also considering social media for their marketing and advertising purpose.

Political marketing can be defined as *“the application of marketing principles and procedures in political campaigns by various individuals and organizations. The procedures involved include the analysis, development, execution, and management of strategic campaigns by candidates, political parties, governments, lobbyists and interest groups that seek to drive public opinion, advance their own ideologies, win elections, and pass legislation and referenda in response to the needs and wants of selected people and groups in a society”* (Newman, 1999, p. xiii).

Political marketing is not limited to the traditional marketing but it has also marked its presence on digital media. Social media is a form of digital media which provides a place for political marketers to create a political marketplace where candidates, government officials, and political parties can use social media to drive public opinion in the desired direction. Social Media has today

become a very powerful tool for expressing opinions, views, and ideas and has become an influential tool of opinion creation. According to Palmer and Koenig-Lewis (2009), Social Media is an online application platform which facilitates interaction, collaboration, and sharing of content.

Web 2.0 technologies provide web experience from the buzz, that representing their engagement in information sharing. It is not limited to only readers of the content prepared by the site owners, but also, active content-generators to share their personal experiences, provide feedback, and express their sentiments in positive, negative or neutral (Luo & Zhang, 2013).

Thomas (2004) defines ‘Buzz Marketing as the amplification of initial marketing efforts by third parties through their passive or active influence’.

According to (Luo & Zhang, 2013), consumer buzz is user generated word of mouth message that is review of product or services that are voluntarily posted on a website by consumers about their experiences with the product.

Social media Buzz is a term used in viral marketing and this can be defined as the interaction of people on social networking sites about product or service or an idea which amplifies or alters the unique marketing message. This emotion, excitement, energy, or anticipation about a product, service or an idea can be positive or negative.

The digital landscape of India is growing tremendously, but the overall penetration is low with less than 1 out of 5 Indians using the Internet by July 2014 (Kemp, 2015). Social media usage penetration in India is around 8.5% of the entire population. Top 8 metros

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including leading 53 cities represent more than 80% of social media users. The total population of India is around 1.256 billion, and urban population constitute is 31% of it. India is ranked in 3rd with regard to use of social networks in the world (Narasimhamurthy, 2014).

In the 2009 Indian general elections, Sashi Tharoor (A former union minister) was only Indian politician who had tweeter account and had 6000 followers (Robinson, Schulz, Cotten, Hale, & Williams, 2016). During the 2009 general election in India, around 150 million voters were on social media who were also called the 'connected' generation. These voters were very easy to connect so most of the political parties jumped in to join social networking platform to influence this segment of voters. In 2014 Indian general elections, activities of Political parties and their conversation was active on social media. Volume buzz, numbers of retweet and followers were the major measuring tools to identify which politicians are in trend and famous (Swamy, 2014). In 2014 general election, Twitter became the medium of choice for people to engage in and consume political content. User engagement with content, news breaks, and influence on political discourse or capacity to set media took place on Tweeter. However, a total of 56 million election-related tweets were posted between January 1st to 12th May 2014 (Chao, 2014).

According to the Facebook data, 29 million people made 227 million poll-related interactions (posts, comments, shares, and likes). In addition to this, 13 million people made 75 million interactions regarding Narendra Modi (The Prime Minister of India) from the day elections was announced until the counting day (Team, 2016). Narendra Modi has over four million followers on Twitter. And over 14 million "Likes" are attributed to him on Facebook. There are nearly 2 million people included in his circle on Google +, making him the most-liked Indian politician on social media. The fan base of leading political leaders increased with the onset of their digital campaign during the elections (Singh, 2014). Political surveillance and information-seeking, convenience, entertainment, and social utility are consistent with the past usage and gratification research on the Internet and its interactive applications (Narasimhamurthy, 2014). Twitter had its own 'Tweeter Election' for general election 2014. A total of 56 million election-related Tweets were accounted till the end of the general election. Each poll day of general elections 2014 witnessed tweets ranging from 5.4 lakhs to 8.2 lakhs (Verma, 2015). The tweeter results indicate that the most popular parties and candidates were Aam Aadmi Party's (Delhi-based regional political party) Arvind Kejriwal, Leader of Aam Admi Party and Chief Minister of New Delhi, BJP4India's (Official tweeter account of Bharatiya Janta Party) Narendra Modi and Rahul Gandhi (Vice President of Indian National Congress) from Indian National Congress India (National Political Party). Mr. Narendra Modi led with 3.97 million followers growing from his base by 21% as compared to his status on January 1st, 2014. Mr. Arvind Kejriwal raised to 1.97 million he made an amazing growth of 79% as compared from the beginning of the year. Indian National Congress India who entered late on tweeter had 178k followers but showed an incredible growth of 376% as compared to 37,357 followers what it accounted January 1st, 2014 (Wani & Alone, 2014).

2. Theoretical background

The virtual social network is very important and useful for business (Stefko, Dorcak, & Pollak, 2011). According to Eyrych, Padman, and Sweetser (2008), industries are using social media for maintaining a public relationship. Even the nonprofit organizations are also adopting social media for maintaining their public relation (Curtis et al., 2010). Higher education institutions are

using social media for teaching, learning and sharing (Moran, Seaman, & Tinti-Kane, 2011). Social media is a hybrid element of promotion mix (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Taylor and Kent (2010), suggested that social media tactics should consider in public relation strategy.

The use of social media is not only limited to corporate houses to maintain their public relations, but also the component of social media evolved as an important tool for advertisement in the election and has become a potent platform for expressing opinion worldwide, for example 2008 U.S Presidential elections (Smith, 2009), New Zealand general election 2011 (Cameron, Barrett, & Stewardson, 2015), 2010 Korean elections (Kim, 2011), and in 2010 Swedish election (Larsson & Moe, 2012).

Moreover, election predictions can be computed and evaluated at different levels (e.g., National, State and District). The researchers who have produced predictions mainly at national level are (Bermingham & Smeaton, 2011; Ceron, Curini, Iacus, & Porro, 2014; Jungherr, Jürgens, & Schoen, 2012; Skoric, Poor, Achananuparp, Lim, & Jiang, 2012; Sang & Bos, 2012; Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner, & Welp, 2010a) with a couple of papers focusing at state level (Gayo-Avello, 2011; Metaxas, Mustafaraj, & Gayo-Avello, 2011).

Even in an emerging economy like India, the extensive use of social Media has been noticed in 2014 general elections (Diwakar, 2015), and now its growing impact is discernible. Its rise in popularity has made political parties think of its use as a means of both gauging and creating public opinion. In this study, 2014 general election is a case in point.

Many studies have examined the predictive power of twitter in the election for different countries like Germany (Tumasjan et al., 2010a), Portugal (Fonseca, 2011), United Kingdom (Tweetminister, 2011), and the United States presidential election (Himmelboim, McCreery, & Smith, 2013; Nowak, Szamrej, & Latané, 1990), Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner, & Welp (2010b), claimed that tweets frequency can predict an election by examining the relative tweets frequency mention in political parties during Germany election campaign. But on contrary Jungherr (2013) ruled out Tumasjan et al., (2010b) findings and claimed tweets cannot predict election results. Voter's tweet sentiments are only associated with voters' political preferences. Another piece of research finding claimed that political parties' name mentioned in tweets does not guarantee for election prediction (Sang & Bos, 2012). Even high degree of interactivity on twitter has no relationship with high vote share (Suresh & Ramakrishnan, 2015). Being active on social media metrics (Facebook friends or Twitter followers) does not claim electoral success (Metaxas et al., 2011). But Sharing user's posts and subsequently linking is an important tool for raising engagement rate (Stefko, Bacik, & Fedorko, 2014). And politicians with higher social media engagement got relatively more votes within most political parties (Effing, van Hillegersberg, & Huibers, 2011). However, DiGrazia, McKelvey, Bollen, and Rojas (2013) claim political outcomes and voters behavior can be predicted on the basis of data extracted from social media. Social media is predictive in closely contested elections only (Cameron et al., 2015). But Kalampokis, Tambouris, and Tarabanis (2013), suggest that there is a need for more advanced analysis and methods of data collection, and filtering of unprocessed social media data. Sentiment analysis, predictions based on entity counts in tweets can be considerably improved, and become nearly as good as traditionally obtained opinion polls (Sang & Bos, 2012). However, some researchers suggest that the predictive power of Twitter regarding elections has been greatly exaggerated. Thus difficult research problems still lie ahead (Gayo-Avello, 2012).

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