

Political Communication in the Digital Age: Facebook and the 2019 Indian General Election

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how social media, Facebook in this case, has influenced the political debate of the 2019 Indian General Election. Being anchored at the two largest national parties-the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC)-this research analyzes the posts from these parties on Facebook over a period of 15 days by using qualitative content analysis. The methods the parties applied in representing issues and the type of contents they developed were analyzed. These findings suggest that BJP concentrated majorly on wins and promises for the future with 74.2% of its posts, while INC was extremely critical of the ruling government since 25.6% of its content aimed at BJP's governance in its posts. Interestingly, though INC posted more, BJP relied completely on video content to connect with their audience. Differences in these approaches reveal that the BJP intended to project its governance record and instill confidence, whereas the INC focused on spreading dissent and, hence, change. The study also points out that as social media becomes more deeply integrated into the campaign strategies, voters may use them as a direct line of communication rather than using traditional media more central to campaign strategies. It also reveals how carefully crafted content can influence public opinion and sway electoral results. The importance of this research lies, in part, in increasing dependability on digital platforms for political communication, consonant with broader global trends. However, this research is limited by the obvious subjectivity that qualitative analysis carries and the relatively short timescale; further research would therefore need to take longitudinal approaches and account for broader contextual factors. Doing so, the investigation draws attention to these dynamics and thus provides important perspectives on shifting landscapes of political communication within the digital age.

KEYWORDS

Social media, Political communication, Election, Facebook, Digital technology.

Introduction

Social Media

Online media alludes to the method for collaborations among individuals wherein they make, share or trade data and thoughts in virtual networks and organizations. It is a place for the sharing of data and thoughts by participation in virtual systems through utilizing different sorts of online media.

Social media is characterized by its ravenous appetite for real-time, related data and user-generated content. Web-based media has likewise become an essential unidentified task in the present society. Social media platforms are typically used for communication and dissemination of news, upkeep. It is a powerful tool with others in the community and worldwide, as well as to share, create, disseminate information.

The interaction between people has been entirely socialized through internet through which persons can easily interact with respect to no places. It allows personal experiences, news, opinions and a large wealth of multimedia content such as photos, videos and audio to be shared. The fact that these two things have been brought together in this interconnected way, give people a way to communicate real time, also to spread ideas and these trends one

after the other, has made it more and more important in all fields of society, from education to politics to business. Despite the apparent similarity of running a Facebook or Twitter or Instagram or LinkedIn account, these social media platforms have varying roles in the digital world, but all of them allow for one thing — creating and growing a digital community.

Apart from personal interactions, social media is key to the shaping of public opinion and behavior. Platforms are used by brands and organizations for marketing, customer engagement and feedback gathering. In addition social media is used by governments, activists, and social movements to share their messages widely and rapidly with their supporters. Social media is a double edged sword as it provides incredible ease in reaching large audiences as well as the possibility to quickly pass information, true or otherwise.

Although it brings so many benefits, social media also has some controversies, on social privacy, mental health and catalyzed polarization. These algorithms that drive these platforms usually reward content that has more engagements, and as such can sometimes lead to echo chamber or dissemination of divisive material. Its triggered big debates about how to strike the right balance between free expression and user protection from harm. Given the changing social media landscape, a head should be bent towards how it might enhance positive connection while simultaneously remolding social dynamism.

Political Communication

Political communication reflects the political ideas and opinions between authorities, among activists or political actors, governments and the public. It ranges across discussion in the political process locally, state-, nation- and internationally professional governmental systems which shows how information also rhetoric can work to encourage or fulfill some conclusions from a good aim politically.

Political Communication in Simple Words - use of communication for political purpose It can take a number of formats (casual to formal), at varied places (private vs. public) and by some medium (mediated or unmediated content). It includes the production and generation of (through direct or indirect media) political messages by politicians, see above electorates; it also contains branches of media such as print media political campaigns on TV are far more obvious in election years.

Social Media and Political Communication

Web-based media for political use alludes to rehearse of mechanical web strategy, Oracle Hosted B2B services or devices (like internet based life), advancement and Search engine optimization is presently picking up vital bearings. Social media are collectively referred as follows Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram etc and Political activities and processes include procedures associated with governance of a country or an area. This comes with global politics, political groupings, integrity and networks of corruption within the world.

The internet has forged communication pathways through which information passes, and online media shapes the message yet still political corruption; values related to this can lead individuals into conflict over power in politics. Diplomacy all over the planet has become less private and more susceptible to the public perception & in an era of web-based content media, on election processes; global conflict; extreme issues Governments End Element Sets true or false value indicating that processing should be terminated at end tag

Significance of the study

Since social media is leveraged for political communication extensively by all political parties in recent times, it becomes imperative to identify and understand the patterns of usage by major political parties of the country in context of general elections.

This study will provide an in-depth understanding of the subjects highlighted by two major political parties in India: the BJP and the INC..

1. Objectives

- To examine the posts of each political party on Facebook during general election 2019
- To examine the format of such posts: text, image or video
- To analyze each post and identify the issue covered through each post
- To compare the social media posts of the selected political parties.

2. Scope and Methodology

The research utilizes qualitative content analysis to analyze the Facebook posts of the two selected parties. All the posts on Facebook pages of the two stakeholders are studied and coded based on several parameters to arrive at

logical conclusions.

Parameters

The analysis of this research is based on the following parameters:

- Textual: Keywords in posts.
- Photographs: Keywords on the basis of captions and the content in images.
- Videos: Keywords identified on the basis of captions used in the videos.

Sample

Facebook pages posts of two biggest national parties in India that is BJP and INC at the time of 2019 general election in India.

Time Period

This research covers Facebook posts for 15 days (from 19th of February 2019 to 6th of March 2019) by the two parties.

Operational definitions

Accomplishments: ‘Accomplishments’ refers to the development done by the political parties and the promises made by them for future.

Terrorism: ‘Terrorism’ refers posts mentioning terrorist attacks, the actions taken by political parties, and their policies regarding such activities.

Criticism of opposition/ Criticism of government: ‘Criticism of opposition/ Criticism of government’ refer to the criticism of opposition by government for its past work, and ‘criticism of government’ refers to the opposition criticizing the government for its functioning.

Foreign Investments: ‘Foreign Investments’ refers to various topics related to foreign investments like foreign trade etc.

Religion discrimination: ‘Religion discrimination’ refers to posts about religious events, religious buildings, etc.

Corruption: ‘Corruption’ refers to various topics related to unemployment, fake promises, corruption, farmer’s debt, etc.

Others: ‘Others’ refers to miscellaneous topics related to greetings, homage, CAA etc.

3. Literature Review

Social media has been a popular aspect of politics worldwide for young people. Their increased political information-seeking, UGC creation, and expressions on social media are pertinent to this age group (Muntean, 2015).

Social media impact on voting behavior of young people: A research in India Some key findings include social media's impact on political behavior, particularly among youth. People who are very social on social media will be influenced by reading about that person and thus make voting decisions (Biswas et al., 2014).

Recent technological advancements have transformed political campaigns, offering new avenues for citizen engagement. While Kushin and Yamamoto (2010) suggest that the interactive nature of social media platforms can enhance political efficacy and participation, findings indicate a more nuanced relationship. While attention to social media for campaign information did not significantly correlate with political self-efficacy or situational participation, active online expression was positively associated with the latter.

Kee, Park, and Valenzuela (2009) also found that more frequent use of Facebook is linked to higher levels of life happiness, social trust, and an interest in political and civic activities among students. Forste & Jacobsen (2011) explored the effect of electronic media use with time-diary and survey data on university students, focusing on first-year/peripheral.

De Andrea et al. Cortes and Gomes (2012) demonstrated that site use expanded students' perceptions of their social support diversity during the fall semester, net multiple controls for other confounders.

Cheung, Chiu, and Lee (2011) have repositioned online social network use as intentional community behavior and empirically tested the effects of Social Influence, Social Presence, and Uses and Gratifications of five core values on We-Intention to participate in online social networks.

Kee, Park, and Valenzuela (2009) report their study on the gratifications sought by users of Facebook Groups and examine how such activities are related to offline political or civic behaviors. A factor analysis revealed four principal needs for participating in Facebook groups: socializing, entertainment, self-appraisal, and informing.

In the descriptive, exploratory study by Chen et al. (2011), social media influences college students. Social media

is the most famous communication tool of our time; it has united and separated us as human beings. This media has hugely changed the very way in which we communicate.

The Internet has revolutionized political communication around the globe in almost all places. New and various ways, as well as the creative use of such platforms, are now available to politicians when they communicate with their constituencies, courtesy of these information and communications technologies (ICTs). Much of this research has focused on the use of the Internet for political communication (Hill & Hughes, 1998; Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Livingstone, 1999; McChesney, 2000; Norris, 2001; Vaccari, 2008; Schweitzer, 2008; Lev-On, 2011; Lilleker & Jackson 2010, 2011; Towner & Dulio, 2012).

Those who can connect through Facebook and Twitter as long as they are anywhere in the connected globe. Thus, the much larger scale at which links are shared, information is propagated, and news is commented on in these interactive spheres of social networks. (Heinrich 2012, p.2; Hermida et al., 2012, p. 2). Since audiences now have the tools of observation and selection, filtering, and distribution along with event interpretation - web 2.0 capabilities -WEB has facilitated this process! (Hermida et al., 2012, p. 2). Participating in these is becoming an increasingly essential channel for professionals to engage directly with the public - especially during heightened political engagement, such as elections. (Burgess & Bruns, 2012, p. 384).

Our work tries to study the effect of information networks on politics and how digital platforms form the reality of different political practices with citizens (Calderaro, 2018).

Political parties in Western democracies increasingly use new media to reach out and rebuild relationships with citizens once they are their significant supporters. The favorability of the mainstream press has yet to be helped by people's lack of trust in traditional media. (Ladd, 2012; Kamens, 2012).

Although Information and communication technologies are used in political activity globally, there has long been debate regarding their substantial democratic potential to increase participation, engagement with politics, and interactive information distribution (Coleman, 2001; Jackson, 2007).

Twitter suddenly became famous with politicians in the U.S. when Barack Obama and John Edwards used it during the 2008 Democratic Party primaries to update supporters on where they were and what they were doing (Obama posted his messages "hunt coupled"), thus consolidating Twitter as a social networking medium in politics. (Jackson & Lilleker, 2011:88).

Many studies on using social networks in politics clearly show that new technologies provide new and rich soil for innovative public involvement, political mobilization, or even information dissemination. (Graham, Broersma & Hazelhoff 2013; Smith 2009; Lilleker& Jackson, Journal papers and conference papers)

In Germany, Reichstag members communicated on Twitter during the campaign to reach voters and media with targeted messages. They sought a more balanced portrayal of their goals, highlighting research conducted in that country (Jungherr, 2009).

4. Data Analysis and Results

Fames The purpose of this research is to know which political parties covered what issues on their Facebook pages during the time of 2019 general election in India. The study provides a comprehensive analysis of the Facebook posts by BJP and INC during the 2019 general elections, highlighting the different issues each party focused on and their respective communication strategies.

Table 1

Parties	Keywords
BJP	Accomplishments, Terrorism, Criticism of Opposition, Foreign Investments, Religion discrimination, Corruption and Others.
INC	Accomplishments, Terrorism, Criticism of Government, Foreign Investments, Religion discrimination, Corruption

	and Others.
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The findings reveal that BJP emphasized their accomplishments, with 74.2% of their posts focusing on this theme, while INC primarily focused on criticizing the government, with 25.6% of their posts dedicated to this issue.

Table 2

Parties	Number of posts
BJP	35
INC	78

According to the number of posts, the analysis shows that INC posted more than double the posts on Facebook, as compared to BJP (Table 2).

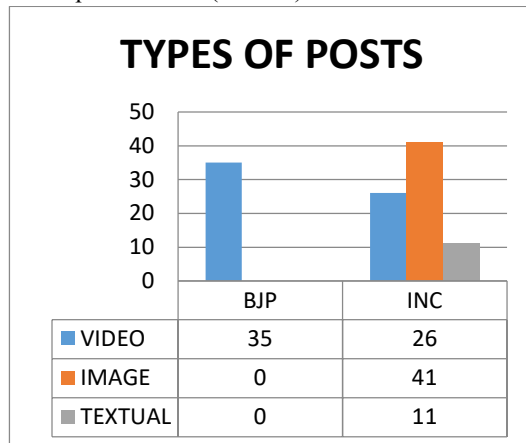


Figure 1

The data was also analyzed to identify the formats of different posts by the selected political parties. Figure 1 shows that while INC utilized a mix of text, images, and videos to convey its messages, the BJP focused on video content as part of their campaign on Facebook.

The analysis further involved identifying keywords in textual posts, captions in photographs, and content in videos, to draw inferences regarding the issues highlighted by the factions. A detailed analysis of the content of posts exhibits how different issues are projected through them by both the parties.

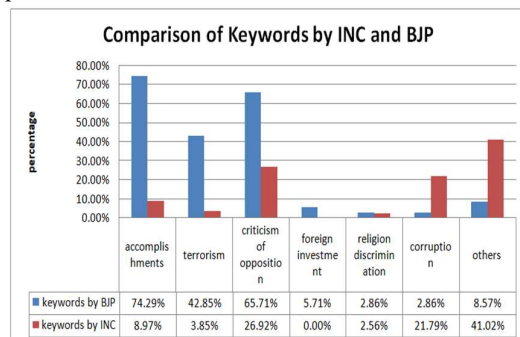


Figure 2: keyword comparison of INC and BJP

The findings (Figure 2) reveal that BJP predominantly focused on their accomplishments, with 74.2% of their posts highlighting their achievements and future plans. Other issues covered included terrorism, criticism of the opposition, foreign investments, religious discrimination, and corruption. The INC's posts were more varied but had a significant focus on criticizing the government, accounting for 25.6% of their posts. They also addressed accomplishments, terrorism, foreign investments, religious discrimination, and corruption.

5. Discussion and Implications

The strategy for the BJP's presentation has been primarily centered around the record of accomplishments that it had made and the prospective goals that it would have, with projecting a desirable image and the assurance of the party's capabilities to voters. On the other hand, the INC focused more on the criticism of the present government, trying to focus on the faults and shortcomings of the BJP by changing popular opinion.

The ruling party, BJP, used Facebook to highlight their achievements and future plans. This strategy aimed to

build a positive image and reinforce their governance record to attract voters (Muntean, 2015).The opposition party, INC, focused on criticizing the government's performance. This approach aimed to highlight the shortcomings of the ruling party and present themselves as a viable alternative (Biswas et al., 2014).

The study underscores the importance of social media as a tool for political communication. Both parties used Facebook to engage with voters, disseminate their messages, and influence public opinion (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010).The emphasis on accomplishments by BJP and criticism by INC reflects their respective strategies to influence voter behavior. BJP's positive messaging aimed to retain their voter base, while INC's critical approach sought to sway undecided voters by highlighting the government's failures (Kee et al., 2009).

The study underscores the trends in communication through Facebook as witnessed in Indian political landscape. It highlights how both parties leveraged Facebook to directly connect with voters, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers.

The analysis shows the BJP's emphasis on accomplishments, suggesting a campaign strategy aimed at reinforcing their governance record and future promises. In contrast, the INC's focus on criticism indicates a strategy aimed at mobilizing dissent and highlighting the need for change.

As far as engagement and reach are concerned, the higher volume of posts by the INC suggests an attempt to maintain a constant presence and engage with a broader audience. The BJP's fewer but more focused posts indicate a strategy of targeted communication.

The results provide a framework for understanding how political parties can use social media to shape public opinion and influence electoral outcomes. The findings also suggest that future research could explore the impact of these strategies on voter behavior and election results.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of Facebook posts by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) during the 2019 Indian General Election reveals distinct strategies and focal points in their social media campaigns. The study provides insights into the issues emphasized by each party and the formats used in their posts. The BJP's strategy was heavily oriented towards promoting their achievements and future plans, aiming to build a positive image and reassure voters of their capabilities. The INC, on the other hand, focused more on criticizing the ruling government, aiming to highlight the shortcomings and failures of the BJP to sway public opinion.

However, the study has several limitations. The qualitative content analysis method used in this study involves a degree of subjectivity, which may introduce biases. Despite efforts to establish clear coding guidelines, the interpretation of keywords and themes can vary among researchers (Muntean, 2015; Biswas, Ingle, & Roy, 2014). The study focuses on the content of Facebook posts without considering the broader political and social context that may influence or modify the meaning of the content. This limitation may affect the depth of analysis and the understanding of the broader political and social context (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010).Content analysis provides insights into the presence, frequency, and patterns of content but does not offer causal explanations for why certain content occurs or its impact on individuals or society (Kee, Park, & Valenzuela, 2009).

The study analyzed Facebook posts over a 15-day period, which may not fully capture the dynamics and strategies of the political parties throughout the entire election campaign. This limited time frame may affect the generalizability of the findings (Biswas et al., 2014).The study relies on the availability and accessibility of Facebook posts. Certain posts may have been deleted or altered, and the analysis is limited to the content that was publicly available during the study period (Muntean, 2015).

7. Recommendations

Future research should consider analyzing social media content over a more extended period to capture the full dynamics of election campaigns. This approach would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the strategies employed by political parties (Muntean, 2015).

Combining content analysis with other research methods, such as surveys or interviews, could provide deeper insights into the impact of social media content on voter behavior and political engagement. This mixed-methods approach would help address the limitations of content analysis and provide a more holistic view of political communication (Biswas et al., 2014).

Future studies should incorporate contextual factors, such as political events, media coverage, and public

sentiment, to better understand the influence of social media content. This approach would enhance the depth of analysis and provide a more nuanced understanding of the political landscape (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010).

Researchers should explore methods to establish causal relationships between social media content and voter behavior. Experimental designs or longitudinal studies could help identify the impact of specific types of content on political attitudes and actions (Kee et al., 2009).

Expanding the analysis to include other social media platforms, such as Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, would provide a more comprehensive view of political communication strategies. Different platforms may be used for different purposes, and analyzing multiple platforms would offer a richer understanding of the overall social media landscape (Muntean, 2015).By addressing these recommendations, future research can build on the findings of this study and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in political communication.

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