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Enhancing Public Relationships by the Indian Political Leaders through Social Media Sites

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Abstract:

It has been observed that social media is slowly gearing up and last lokshabha (parliamentary) elections in India could see the phenomenal participation from politicians and political parties. Even those who were not skilled to get into the social media platform took help from consultants whose profession is to highlight that particular political person's image in front of the public. It's a new battleground for the politicians where some political campaigns and speeches went viral of his effortless characteristic to upload either of the atrocities done by the opposition or to sing the vanity of narcissism. With the help of survey method, the research was conducted through online questionnaire. The findings represent that online and social media communications have helped the political leaders in enhancing their image in front of the voters.

Keywords: Social media, public opinion, political communication, political activism.

1. Introduction

Social media is currently regarded as the best medium to reach the public as in comparison to other media within one single click many can be reached. Especially for the politicians it's a big boon to approach to their voters. Initially, social media was most profoundly utilized by those who were denied a mainstream voice. Fanatics and revolutionists shared their opinion through this platform either through pictures, blogs or status quotes to express their idealism or distression towards an individual minister or a political party.

Politicians of current era are trying their best in creating a social media strategy during political campaigns as enormous amount of young people are involved in browsing social network sites daily and it's easy and affordable to approach.

1.1. Background of the Study

U.S. President Barack Obama used social media in 2008 for the presidential election successfully. Just how a brand or products promote themselves for consumer awareness, exactly the same tactic is followed by politicians to create interesting posts and engage followers. Candidates create digest posts that can be easily retweeted or shared. They're using the brand of a Facebook or Twitter to appeal to a young generation (Caouette 2014).

1.2. Objectives of the Study

- To analyse the various strategies used by the Indian Political Leaders.
- To study the ways they motivate their fans/followers on Social Media Sites.
- To find out if the political leader is himself making use of the social media to reach the public or engages a proxy on his behalf.

1.3. Need and Scope of the Study

Indian political leaders are adapting all latest trends to be popular and active within the general people or citizens. This study will try to analyse the various social platforms used by them to maintain cordial public relation and enhance their political image successfully. This study can benefit the uprising political leaders to reach the mass effectively.

1.4. Supporting Literature Reviews

Schuller (2001) had discussed about how political skill helps in building social, cultural and human relationships in society. Whereas social networking sites permit users to create an individual profile and connect with other users (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). The impact of social media and participation by the politicians were on higher end in national election in comparison to the local election that

occurred in 2010 and 2011 in the Netherlands (Effing 2011). They proposed that in order to get the voters, the political parties need to work out on future agendas.

The web offers plentiful chances to represent social change (Elwood 2013). Social media is said to have an impact on the public discourse and communication in the society (Stieglitz and Linh 2012). Even 2008 U.S.A. elections data denotes about ‘citizen-campaigner’ evolving as a new form of web-enabled voter activism (Gibson 2009).

Sauter and Bruns analysed through comparative case studies of cross media agenda setting during election campaigns in Australia, Norway, Sweden and USA. The findings showed empirical insights into the development of hybrid public spheres and contribute to revising theories on political communication in cross-national environments.

1.5. Research Design

Survey method was used through purposive sampling technique to identify the strategies followed by the Indian political leaders. The sample size consisted of 250 respondents and was achieved with the help of an online survey.

1.6. Indian Political Leaders in Social Media

The most active Indian political leaders in social media from national parties were indentified. .

1.7. Top five Indian Political Leaders (National)

- Narendra Modi
- Rahul Gandhi
- Arvind Kejriwal
- Sonia Gandhi
- Manmohan Singh

→ Indian Political Leaders in More Than One Social Networking Sites

Political Leader	Facebook	Twitter
Narendra Modi	✓	✓
Rahul Gandhi		✓
Arvind Kejriwal	✓	✓
Man Mohan Singh		✓
Sonia Gandhi		✓

Table 1: Indian political leaders in more than one social networking site

Indian political leaders are more in twitter than facebook. This is because twitter does not have any spam or virus but when it comes to facebook the security settings is a bit weaker than twitter.

2. Analysis and Interpretation

The statistical representations of as many as 250 respondents are as follows:

2.1. Followers of Political Leaders in Social Media

Around 64% percent of the people agreed that they are following a political leader and have a sight of the news feed and activities on social networking sites. Whereas around 36% of them said they do not follow any of them as described in figure 1.

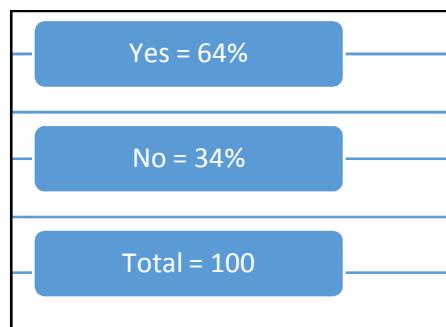


Figure 1: Followers of Political leaders in Social Media

2.2. The Most Popular Indian Political Leader Being Followed

As described in figure 2, around 53% of the people mentioned that they follow Narendra Modi and the 47% follows the other leaders. In that 47% people, 11% were following Arvind Kejriwal and 8% followed Rahul Gandhi. This shows political leaders has the impact over the people on social networking sites.

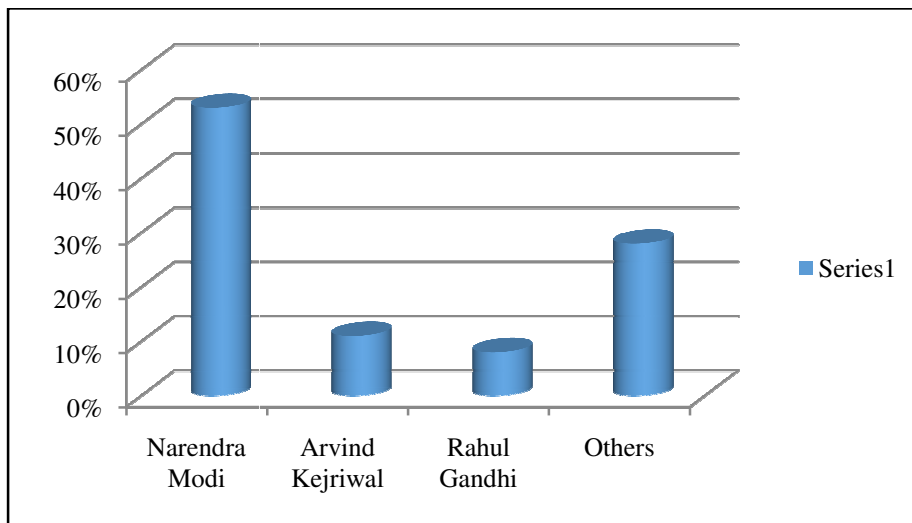


Figure 2: The Most Followed Indian Political Leader

2.3. Awareness about the Political Leaders' Profile

As figure 3 denotes, about 43% of the people have been connected to the political leaders profile by clicking the Facebook advertisements. Almost 23% people came to know through word of mouth and about 15% got personal request from the political leaders itself. Only 11% have come to know from television news and others. The remaining 8% of the people reached them through search engine.

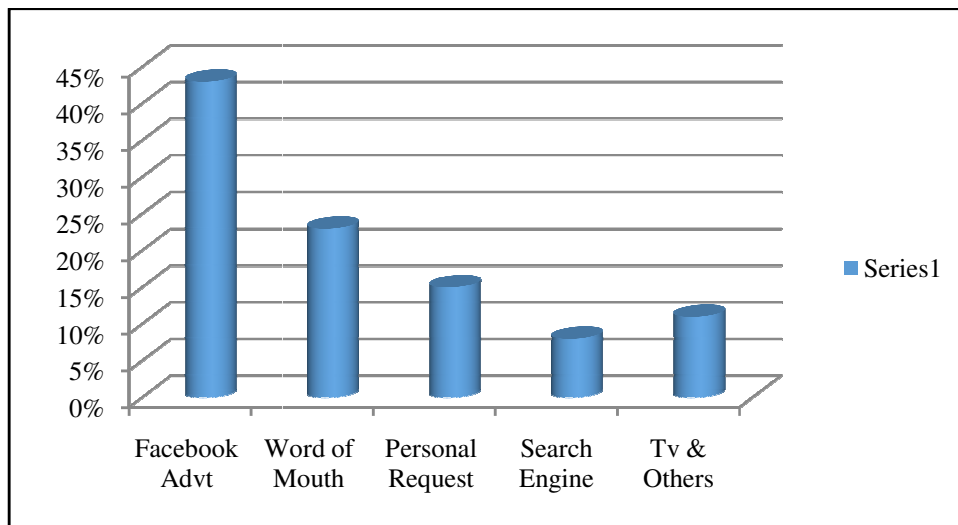


Figure 3: The Way They Reach the Indian Political Leaders Profile

2.4. Personal Message from the Political Leaders

About 98% of the people mentioned that they have not got any personal message from the political leaders, where as only 2% got messages from them as shown in figure 4. The messages were about the details of their campaigns and they have been requested to vote to their party.

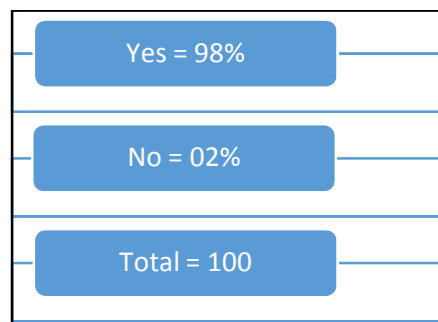


Figure 4: Personal message from the Political leaders

2.5. Interactions Made to Them

Almost 96% of the people said they tried to make an interaction with them and around 4% said that they did not make any attempt like that as figure 5 shows. In that 96% of the people asked about the social development and the growth of the society to the leaders. But they did not receive any reply from them and they posted their comments and views on the political leaders' updates, shares and tweets to show their interaction to them.

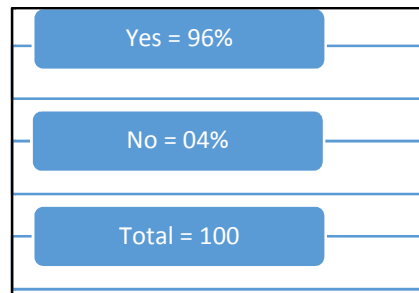


Figure 5: Interactions made with Political leaders

2.6. Participation in Discussion

Almost 91% of the people participated in the discussions created by the Indian political leaders through social networking sites and around 9% have never participated as figure 6 describes. The discussions were like pitching some questions to them about the societal problems. They got the answer either from the other followers available in the same group/page or sometimes the political leaders would reply back them.

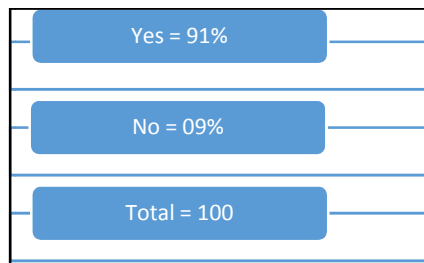


Figure 6: Participation in Discussion

2.7. Fans of Political Leader

Almost 79% of the people said that they are the fans of the political leaders and around 21% of the population said they are not the fans but they just follow them to know about their activities. That 79% said that they keep posting about the vision of their political party. They talk about the corruption free nation and financial context of the country and what are the works they have done for their district or state.

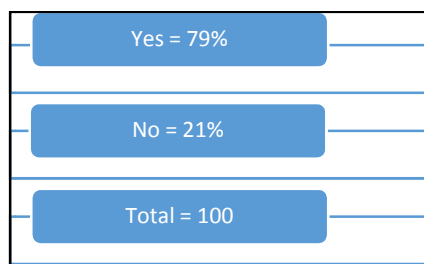


Figure 7: Fans of Political Leader

3. Online Controversy of Any Indian Political Leader

About 82% of the respondents were aware of Shashi Taroor and Sunandha Pushkar's twitter controversy.

4. Major Findings of the Study

- Indian Political leaders give equal importance to the social media campaign.
- They think that they can reach out the literates through social media sites and the rest through traditional campaign.
- They want to be more active in social media sites, but sometimes their schedule would not allow them to be active that is why they use proxy to post the activities of them.

- Social media sites give them a better reach to the mass and help them to showcase their works to the society and it creates awareness among the mass.
- Around 64% of the people follow their favorite political leader. So they can talk about the following political leader's activities to their society
- Almost 98% of the people have made interactions with the political leaders. This show the followers have keen interest towards them.
- Almost 91% of the people participate in the discussions proceeded by the Indian Political leaders to express their views to them.
- Around 79% of the people are the fans of political leaders. So this fan base helps them to get good votes and it encourages their party publicity too.

5. Suggestions

Political leaders are using social media sites to create an individual identity to them and to claim a better position in their party and also in the society. They see this as a way to ensure their vote bank. They should respond to their respective followers. Most of the time they fail to do this. Even the proxy would not reflect their own views. There is a chance of it to get manipulated. So they themselves have to access their profile to know about their followers thoughts.

6. Conclusion

The researcher has identified that the social media campaigns creates a better impact to the people who follow their respective leaders in SNS. Every Indian political leader's strategy is different from the others. But they believe more in the traditional campaigns. Social media campaigns did not ruin the traditional campaigns nor is a threat. It is also a new trend of campaign, which makes them more comfortable to reach the mass.

7. References

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