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Political Campaigns and Social Media: The Lok Sabha Elections 2019

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Abstract: In the 2019 Indian Lok Sabha elections, political campaigns underwent a major transformation due to the widespread use of social media. This research examines the relationship between social media and political campaigns in the 2019 elections, emphasising important trends, challenges, and consequences. Over 900 million eligible voters participated in the 2019 elections, making it the largest democratic election in the world. Political parties and candidates realised the potential of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp to reach voters, influence public opinion, and garner support. The political parties across India, irrespective of national, state or local status, leveraged the social media platforms to their benefit and reaped the most out of their presence on social media. Major differences reflected through the use of social media to campaign and bolster respective parties' election agenda, spreading their words of promise of welfare for the citizens while trying to reach the farthest corner of the country. The larger use of the same could be seen in case of national parties like that of Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and Indian National Congress (INC), while they leveraged the use of social media to strengthen their presence amongst the voters, the smaller parties like the state parties and local parties used the social media but to limited extent as, in most of the cases the presence of the larger parties could be felt more. By using targeted advertising, data analysis, and engaging content, the political parties' social media campaigns could effectively spread their message and connect with larger audiences. With impactful visuals, memorable slogans, and interactive content, the parties successfully promoted their message of welfare of the citizens, nationalism, growth, and cultural heritage, finding support among the voter base throughout India. The political parties in India, including national parties like Indian National Congress, Trinamool Congress faced challenges in competing with the ruling party's digital presence. Despite using social media for outreach, the opposition parties couldn't match the BJP's effective communication and failed to address issues like economic troubles, inequality, and unemployment. The 2019 election was also plagued by fake news, misinformation, and divisive content on social media, which threatened the electoral process. The unchecked spread of misinformation and sensationalist content on social media has intensified societal divisions, eroded trust, and lowered the calibre of public debate. This raises concerns about the detrimental effects of social media on democratic principles and institutions. The 2019 Lok Sabha elections highlight the urgent need for increased transparency, responsibility, and regulation in political campaigns on social media. Combating misinformation, protecting the fairness of elections, and promoting digital understanding are crucial for safeguarding the integrity of democratic processes and fostering informed voter participation.

Keywords: Social media influence, Lok Sabha elections 2019, BJP and Trinamool Congress, Challenges faced, Historical Campaign, Modern Day Campaign, Digital Competition

RATIONALE

The study titled "Political Campaigns and Social Media: The Lok Sabha elections 2019" provides an overview and the importance of social media in shaping the political campaigns during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The Rationale for studying role of social media in Lok Sabha elections 2019 lies in its potential to have a look and study the issues, challenges, competition faced by the Political parties.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

India as a Democratic country, elections and political campaigns are an inseparable and inevitable part. To uphold the democratic values to the truest of its sense it is necessary to have elections from time to time, thus, providing a platform for the citizens to express their opinion and choose their political leaders who would in turn represent them. For the political leaders, an election campaign is a significant instrument to reach to the people of the country, which equally help the citizens to know their leader's way better than any other means can help them to.

This research, while examining the impact of social media on political campaigns, assesses how social media platforms influence the dynamics of political campaigns, shaping public opinion and political discourse. Alongside, investigating the reach and engagement levels of various political messages through various social media channels. The research shall also analyse the strategies employed for political campaigns on social media. This evaluates the effectiveness of various social media strategies adopted for political campaigns and examine the usage of targeted advertising, partnerships/collaborations with influencers and tactics to connect with voters.

The research further evaluates how social media influences voting behaviour/voter decision making process. It analyses the role of online communities in shaping political opinions while exploring the potential for misinformation and its impact on electoral outcomes. The study tries to explore the challenges and opportunities of social media in political campaigns, identifying and analysing the ethical considerations associated with political campaigns on social media, exploring opportunities for enhancing transparencies and civic engagement through social media platforms.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1) To study the relationship between Political Campaigns and social media.
2) How the Political Parties leveraged social media to their benefit?
3) Has social media in any way been proven to be of significant help for the Political Parties?
4) To study the evolution of Political campaigns with the advent of social media.

I. INTRODUCTION

Political campaigns are planned people or groups who to get elected or the public opinion. campaigns are critical to democracy because they give candidates chance to share their ideas, gain over voters and get support for their political goals. From town councils to national presidents, political campaigns use a variety of strategies, such as communicating, engaging citizens, and raising fund. In every political campaign, the candidate is at its centre. The candidate's run for office is the main focus of all campaign activities. Candidates usually talk about their goals, plans, and ideas in speeches, debates, and media interviews to connect with voters and stand out from the competition. It's very important to create a clear campaign message that targets certain groups of voters and addresses important issues for them. Communication is a key part of political campaigns because candidates use different ways to get their message out and talk to voters. Despite the rise of digital platforms like social media, websites, and email newsletters, traditional media (TV and radio), are still widely used. Technology has made online campaigning more popular, making it easier for candidates to connect with voters and mobilize supporters. Mobilisation efforts, carried by volunteers, activists and grassroots groups involve activities such as canvassing neighbourhoods, organising, and distributing campaign. Political campaigns employ tactics to engage voters influence the election outcome. These include:

1 Personal interactions: -canvassing and phone allows candidates to connect directly with supporters, concerns, and influences.

2.Events: - Rallies provides a platform for to galvanise their and mobilise voters3. Endorse: - Support from figures or groups can boost a candidate's credibility and attract voters from specific constituencies.

4. Fundraising: - Candidates seeks donations from individuals, organisations, and political action committees to cover campaign expenses and advertising costs, which can significantly impact their viability.

II. HISTORY OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGN

Since **India's independence** in 1947, the country has conducted many general elections that have played a crucial role in its democratic development. The first election was held in 1951-52, a groundbreaking success, involving over **176 million voters**, making it the largest democratic exercise worldwide at that time. This election established India as a parliamentary democracy. **The Indian National Congress** (INC) became the dominant political party till the 1970s. Eventually, **a multi-party** system took over the political dynamics of the country with the origin of parties like Janata Dal. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister, led the Indian National Congress (INC) to victory. In subsequent elections, the INC maintained its dominance for many years, with Indira Gandhi, emerging as a prominent leader in the 1960s and 1970s. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the dominance of the Congress party in Indian politics faced challenges from regional and caste-based parties. Economic liberalisation introduced in 1991 by the finance minister- Manmohan Singh triggered significant shifts. The Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) gained strength, culminating in its victory in the 1998 elections and the establishment of a coalition government headed by Atal Bihari Vajpayee. After decades of Congress dominance, India has experienced a shift in its political landscape.

The alternating rule of Congress and BJP led alliances has become a pattern, with the emergence of regional parties like Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party, and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. These regional parties have significantly influenced coalition politics. Indian general elections have consistently seen high voter turnout and active political discussions. Occasional controversies have also marked these elections, showcasing the multifaceted and vigorous nature of Indian democracy. Over the years, general elections in India have regularly revolved around critical issues such as economic prosperity, fairness for all, safety, and effective government. These debates have influenced the priorities of national politics and policies. India's history with general elections since 1947 showcases the strength of its democratic institutions and the public's commitment to democracy, despite the difficulties and complexities of being the world's largest democracy.

III.   MODERN DAY POLITICAL CAMPAIGN

Technological advancements, particularly social media, have like totally revolutionized political campaigns in India. Parties, now employ this kind of hybrid approach to engage a pretty diverse voter base. Social media giants like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp play such a significant role in campaigns and other activities. Candidates and parties like really leverage these platforms to disseminate messages, engage with voters and garner support. Unlike traditional methods, like, social media enables, like, real time communication, allowing for immediate responses to events and, shaping public perception on key issues. This empowerment enhances parties' abilities to swiftly address emerging situations and sway, like, public opinion, plus, targeted advertising on social media platforms allows political parties to tailor their messages to specific segments of the population. This precision enables them to increase the impact of their messaging by reaching the most relevant audiences.

In today's campaigns, digital tools have totally joined social media. Political parties use these platforms like apps, websites, and portals, to share the candidate info, party goals, and event schedules. They also make it pretty easy to raise money online, letting supporters donate to the cause. Although digital campaigning has become more influential, traditional campaign methods like rallies, roadshows, and door-to-door canvassing continue to play a vital role. Mass rallies, with renowned leaders delivering speeches, attract significant crowds and boost support and stuff. Roadshows, involving candidates touring neighbourhoods enable them to connect personally with voters, like greeting onlookers and speaking at small gatherings. Door-to-door canvassing, allows candidates to interact with voters individually, hear their concerns, and gain their support. In today's election campaigns, political parties rely heavily on technology and they gather voter information (such as preferences, demographics, and history) to build profiles and, like, tailor messages to undecided voters and all that jazz. This data-driven approach allows parties to focus their efforts and resources effectively. Additionally, celebrities and influencers play a significant role by lending their support to parties and candidates and their endorsements, enhance the reach and appeal of political campaigns among certain voter groups.

IV.   LOK SABHA ELECTIONS (2019)

The Indian Lok Sabha elections of 2019 were the longest ever, going on for six from April 11 to May 19 with the Election Commission conducting in seven phases across the country. These were momentous elections, not only because they constituted the largest democratic exercise in the world but also due to the number of competing parties, high stakes involved and many other socio-political determinants. These polls attracted a total of approximately 900 million eligible voters, making it one of the biggest electorates throughout history. India's electorate is made up of different categories including those from rural areas as well as urban centres, youths, women together with marginalised groups who all have their own needs thoughts. The major contests in this election took place between two national parties, Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), and Indian National Congress (INC), alongside many local alliances and parties throughout different states. The BJP was led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi who sought re-election on a platform that promised development nationalism and security while also highlighting its previous achievements such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan Jan Dhan Yojana and Goods & Services Tax (GST). Rahul Gandhi led the Indian National Congress Party (INC) campaigns against economic inequality, agrarian distress and social justice while criticising the Bhartiya Janata Party's policies and governance record. The election campaign was characterised by intense political rallies, roadshows, and public addresses by party leaders across the country. Prime Minister Modi became the face of BJP's campaign using his popularity as well as charisma to speak directly to people in order to generate support for his party. Rahul Gandhi steered INC's campaign focusing on unemployment, farmers' distress and allegations of corruption against the BJP government. Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp among others played a significant role in shaping the narrative of this election with political parties and candidates using these platforms to spread their messages, interact with voters or counter opposition propaganda. Digital technology usage and data analytics for targeting specific demographics that amplified that parties message made BJP's social media strategy spearheaded by its IT cell and volunteers stand out from others.

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The INC also made efforts to leverage social media platforms, albeit with lesser success compared to the BJP. Not only did the use of technology for voter outreach and mobilisation take place during the 2019 election, but there was also a combination of traditional campaigns. This is because the Election Commission introduced transparent and credible Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machines to make it possible for voters to verify their ballots before casting them. The voting procedures were both efficient and secure thanks to electronic voting machines (EVMs) that were used in thousands of polling stations. A high number of Indian citizens turned up to participate in this year's elections many millions cast their votes. Some states like West Bengal Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra played key roles in determining the final outcome through their massive numbers of voters. Consequently, on 23rd May 2019 Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged as clear winners with a landslide victory by securing 303 seats out of 542 contested in the Lok Sabha. On the other hand, Indian National Congress (INC) and its allies barely secured 52 seats while regional parties and other alliances took up the remaining seats available. In other words, a number of factors including strong leadership by Prime Minister Narendra Modi stood behind BJP's sweeping victory with an effective campaign strategy along with the organization capacity building towards National security issues following the (Pulwama terror attack) followed by retaliatory air strikes against Pakistan.

V. DIGITAL COMPETITON BETWEEN BJP AND TRINAMOOL CONGRESS (TMC)

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) engaged in fierce competition regarding their digital presence and campaign strategies. Both parties acknowledged the significance of utilizing online tools and social media to connect with voters and influence public opinion as the political landscape increasingly shifted towards digital platforms. The TMC, led by Mamata Banerjee, had already established a strong digital presence before the elections. By focusing on engaging voters through platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, the party aimed to spread its message and interact with voters on a grassroots level. The TMC used these platforms to showcase its governance achievements, advocate for its policies and initiatives, and rally support for its candidates. On the other hand, the BJP, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and party president Amit Shah, posed a strong challenge to the TMC's digital dominance. Drawing from successful digital campaign strategies in previous elections, the BJP adopted a comprehensive approach to harness the power of social media and digital technologies. A key element of the BJP's digital campaign was its effective use of data analytics and targeted advertising to engage with specific voter groups. By conducting thorough data analysis, the party tailored its messaging and outreach efforts to resonate with various segments of the electorate, thereby maximizing its impact and appeal. Furthermore, the BJP's digital campaign was marked by its assertive and proactive approach in utilizing social media platforms to shape the political discourse and counter the TMC's narrative. The party mobilized a large group of social media volunteers and supporters who actively promoted its agenda, participated in online discussions, and refuted criticism and misinformation spread by adversaries.

VI. CHALLENGES FACED BY TRINAMOOL CONGRESS (TMC)

During the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) encountered numerous obstacles in its electoral battle against the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in West Bengal, a state that has traditionally been a stronghold for the TMC. One major challenge was the BJP's assertive expansionist strategy, which aimed to challenge the TMC's dominance in the state. The TMC faced a primary challenge in the form of the BJP's growing popularity and its concerted efforts to make inroads into West Bengal. The BJP capitalized on nationalistic sentiments and positioned itself as a viable alternative to the TMC, leveraging issues such as illegal immigration from Bangladesh and championing Hindu rights.

Additionally, the BJP strategically utilized social media and grassroots campaigning to mobilize support and establish a robust organizational structure across the state. This presented a challenge to the TMC, which had previously enjoyed an uncontested position in West Bengal's political landscape. Furthermore, the TMC grappled with internal challenges, including factionalism and allegations of corruption and nepotism.

Dissent within the party ranks and the emergence of breakaway factions weakened the TMC's organizational coherence and undermined its electoral prospects. Moreover, the TMC had to confront allegations of authoritarianism and intolerance, with critics accusing the party of suppressing dissent and restricting democratic freedoms. Instances of violence and electoral malpractices tarnished the TMC's reputation and provided ammunition to its political adversaries. In the face of these challenges, the TMC had to readjust its electoral strategy and concentrate on consolidating its support base while countering the BJP's aggressive campaign. This involved highlighting its achievements in development and welfare schemes, as well as mobilizing grassroots support through door-to-door campaigns and outreach programs.

A. Why Lok Sabha Elections (2019), were special?

The Lok Sabha elections of 2019 were particularly special due to several key factors that distinguished them from previous electoral contests in India.

First, the 2019 voting had the most people voting ever. Nearly 900 million people were able- to vote. This big event shows how good and inclusive- India's democracy is. It shows how people from all sorts of backgrounds and parts of the country get involved in choosing who runs the country.

Second, the elections had a lot of rivalry. The current party, Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), was hoping to be re-

elected. They were up against a strong opposition the Indian National Congress (INC). Both parties saw the country's future differently. This caused exciting debates. Everyone was interested in the election.

Third, in 2019, elections changed, thanks to the vast use of technology and social media for campaigns. The whole political talk scene was revolutionised as the methods of reaching the voters were altered. Political groups used platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. They spread their messages, interacted with voters, and gathered support. This changed the way political discussions and involvement in India happened.

Fourth, the elections happened at the same time as some big geopolitical events. This includes increased troubles with neighbouring country, Pakistan after the (Pulwama terror attack). After that, India launched airstrikes. National security became part of the campaign talks. Parties shared their views on defence and strategic policy. This made the elections even more important.

Finally, the 2019 elections eventually gave a clear mandate to the incumbent BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) that won by a landslide, taking 303 out of 542 seats in the Lok Sabha. The emphatic win reiterated Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership and authority over national politics as well as the start of a new era in India's political landscape with aggressive governance.

B. Impact of Social Media on Lok Sabha Elections (2019)

The 2019 Lok Sabha elections were a critical event in India's voting history, mostly because of how social media changed the game. Key players like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram became tools for guiding conversations, rallying voters, and shifting election results. A major result of social media in these elections. It made political talks louder and reached tons of people instantly. Politicians and the candidates used it to put out their words, show what their campaign is doing, and talk with voters one-on one. This straight to the point engagement built a connection between the candidates and the voters. It made interactions more personal and target specific.

Social media has become a stage for political talk. It lets people voice their thoughts, spread news stories, and join digital groups. It lets regular folks join the political chat and keep leaders in check. Plus, social media makes political news go round really fast, using memes, videos, and hashtags. These trends go viral, they catch the eye of lots of users, make them see things a certain way, and sway votes. Still, the surge of mistaken or fabricated news became a big hurdle. It raised questions about election fairness and how social media sites fight against false info. A crucial effect of social media on the 2019 Lok Sabha elections was boosting voter engagement and presence. Politicians used social media to arrange meetings, events, and to register voters, getting in touch with new voting groups. This specific effort led to more voter involvement, especially with younger and new voters who spend more time on social media.

VII. DARK SIDE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN LOK SABHA ELECTIONS

The Lok Sabha elections in India in 2019 were buzzing with democratic spirit. Yet, there were problems too. The big one was the fake news. It was on social media a lot. Numerous political parties and groups used social media to spread fake stories. The goal is to mislead the public, stir up community conflicts. Misinformation like this hurts the value of the election process. It also causes society to become more polarised and divided.

The 2019 elections had some negative aspects. In particular, the misuse of financial influence and unfair practices were used to shape how people voted. Cases of cash handouts, bribes, and perks were common. This was especially true in places where the vote was neck and neck. These shady money tactics damaged the impartial nature of the election process. Also, we saw too many instances of hate filled speeches, violent words, and societal division. These tainted the overall tone of the election campaign. Politicians and party heads used such language and focused on specific groups to garner support. Unfortunately, this often-disrupted societal peace and unity. Such behaviour not only deepened societal rifts but also damaged democratic values of diversity and inclusion. The 2019 Lok Sabha elections also witnessed instances of electoral violence and intimidation, particularly in regions known for their history of political unrest and conflict. Incidents of voter suppression, booth capturing, and electoral violence were reported in various parts of the country, raising concerns about the safety and security of voters and election officials.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The 2019 Indian Lok Sabha Elections were a significant event in the country's history, marked by aggressive campaigning, record voter participation, and influential results. Over 900 million eligible voters exercised their franchise, reflecting India's dedication to democracy. Notably, the elections saw the rise of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and its leader Narendra Modi as dominant political figures. Riding on a surge of nationalism and promises of economic prosperity, the BJP achieved a historic victory in the Lok Sabha elections, securing a decisive majority. Narendra Modi's personal charisma and leadership skills, combined with the party's robust organisation and effective campaign strategies, were key factors in this electoral triumph. The BJP's election campaign placed a heavy emphasis on national security, economic progress, and Indian cultural heritage. They effectively leveraged Modi's image as a strong leader and highlighted the perceived accomplishments of his government, especially in areas like infrastructure improvements, welfare programs, and foreign policy initiatives. After the Pulwama attack, the BJP gained political advantage from the Balakot airstrikes by portraying itself as a resolute government safeguarding the country. However, the Indian National Congress (INC), the main opposition party, faced challenges in challenging the BJP's narrative and gaining public support. Despite addressing issues like unemployment, rural distress, and social inequality, Congress struggled to present a clear alternative plan or connect with various voter groups. Internal divisions, challenges to leadership, and poor decision-making hindered the party's electoral chances, leading to unsatisfactory results. The 2019 elections also saw regional parties and coalitions becoming important players in Indian politics. Parties like the (Trinamool Congress), (Biju Janata Dal), and (Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party) showed their electoral strength by winning many seats in their states. These regional forces significantly influenced the political scene after the election and voiced their concerns at the national level. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, social media and digital campaigning gained prominence. Political parties and candidates relied heavily on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp to engage with voters, share their views, and refute rivals' claims. However, concerns arose due to the spread of misinformation and divisive content on social media, emphasising the importance of transparency and accountability in online discussions during elections.

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