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Social Media Replacing the Party Manifesto as the Key Factor in Deciding Election Outcomes

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Abstract: In present study researcher will examine role of social media in political campaigning management. In 2014 General elections, social media played a key role in influencing voter's behavior. From 2014 onwards many startups related to the social media came into picture. Due to which major impact has been seen in domestic elections due to this emerging medium of information. The present paper mainly focuses on influence of social media in politics under which researcher covers its role, importance and opportunities. The study will also examine how social media influences voter's behavior and political parties spending on social media for campaign management in various elections. It will also cover related issues such as Facebook–Cambridge Analytica data scandal, Social Media and Indian Politics and its evolution, Voluntary Code of Ethics by social media platforms for 2019 General Election and lastly Ethics, Political Communication, and Security Implications of it.
Keywords: Social media, Indian Politics, Voters, Ethics, Political Communication, Security etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

For over a decade politicians and political parties have taken the help of the web in an attempt to better reach voters in our new media society. At an early stage it was the use of a static webpage to promote campaign goals, promises and information. However, as social media platforms or social networking sites (SNS) began to rise in popularity in the mid-2000, now campaigns began in earnest attempting to harness their power to reach voters. Social media is also facilitating a new way through which people were able to search and share information and increase their awareness. In India also social media shows its power during the anti-corruption movement in 2012, social activist, Anna Hazare used social media to connect with people in New Delhi. Arvind Kejriwal emerged one of the leaders of this movement eventually formed Aam Aadmi Party and won the Vidhan Sabha elections in Delhi, such a feat would have never happened without the impact of the social media footprint that occurred during the movement. Social media activities can be either used to influence or predict the outcome of elections. However, nowadays many companies are trying to use the data which is available from the social media sites such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus and other platforms to manipulate and predict election outcomes.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1) *Research Type:* Descriptive research.
2) *Research Design:* Sample random sampling.
3) *Data Collection:* From various research papers and online articles. (Secondary form of data)

III. ANALYZING THE PROBLEM AND DISCUSSING RELATED ISSUES

A. *Facebook–Cambridge Analytica data scandal*

In the 2010s, personal data belonging to millions of Facebook users was collected without their consent by British consulting firm Cambridge Analytica, predominantly to be used for political advertising. The data was collected through an app called "This Is Your Digital Life", developed by data scientist Aleksandr Kogan and his company Global Science Research in 2013. The app consisted of a series of questions to build psychological profiles on users, and collected the personal data of the users' Facebook friends via Facebook's Open Graph platform.

Cambridge Analytica used the data to provide analytical assistance to the 2016 presidential campaigns of Ted Cruz and Donald Trump.

Cambridge Analytica was also widely accused of interfering with the Brexit referendum, although the official investigation recognised that the company was not involved "beyond some initial enquiries" and that "no significant breaches" took place. Christopher Wylie, a former Cambridge Analytica employee, in interviews with *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* disclosed

Information about the data misuse in 2018. Other advertising agencies have been implementing various forms of psychological targeting for years and Facebook had patented a similar technology in 2012. In October 2021 following Facebook employee Sophie Zhang whistleblowing Facebook activities, NPR revisited the Cambridge Analytica data scandal by observing that Facebook neither took responsibility for their behavior there nor did consumers get any benefit of reform as a result. This era gave birth to a number of so called "Data companies" which work on collecting information about clients worldwide sometimes with consent sometimes by working in the shadows and without knowing influencing every decision and manipulating voters and several other nefarious purposes are there for which the data gets used. Similar situation was seen in India.

B. Social Media and Indian Politics

Major growth of social media is due to the youth as they dedicate most of their time to social media, and everyone including Political parties are very well aware of this fact and try to influence this section. In the 2019 election, our country had 130 million first time voters, out of which more than 15 million voters between 18 to 19 years of age. The Political parties with the help of social media we able to get information regarding voters likes and dislikes; and further manipulate them, especially the 'Swing voters', whose views can be changed by manipulating information. Social media creates an innovative political conversation. Power of political messaging is taken away from the mass media model and firmly placed into the peer-to-peer, public dialogue. The institution of social media has allowed unparalleled empowerment and arrangement of the 'aam aadmi' for expressing political opinions, this comes off as a very positive aspect but one should remember that it is easier said than done, mainly because of the steep volume of information that is generated and disseminated leading to abuse and misuse of this medium and spreading fake news and propaganda by groups to push their narrative and since there aren't sufficent channels to check this disseminated information, it leads to misinformation, political division and hatred towards other groups which are portrayed a certain way. Few examples of successful Social Media campaigns by the Political parties in times of elections - Aam Aadmi Party in 2013 and 2020 assembly election and Bhartiya Janta Party and Indian National Congress in 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections. An interesting report published in April 2013 by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI). The Mumbai-based Iris Knowledge Foundation was also assisted IAMAI in this study. They find out that Facebook users have a huge impact over the results of the polls in 160 of India's 543 constituencies. The biggest reason for this is the youth of India. As per the report, 50% of population is below 25 age group and Secondly 65 % is below 35 age group. This age group is either studying in college or working in various corporate houses. Their busy schedule has created a virtual distance between television and radio. It is especially happens in case of acquiring or sharing information. The youth is tech habitual and hence consume information through online social media platforms.

C. The Evolution of Social Media in Indian Electoral Politics

The 2014 general elections—regarded as the "First Social Media Election" in India's political history—kickstarted a social media revolution in Indian politics. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s success in mobilizing India's digital generation using social media platforms has forced contending parties to revamp their social media engagement. The BJP reportedly operates around 200,000 to 300,000 WhatsApp groups and controls 18,000 fake Twitter handles. The party has developed an effective IT wing linked to spreading information and propaganda. The Social media campaign has evolved significantly since 2014: then it largely focused on highlighting the leaders, now it seeks to control content citizens consume. Congress' social media spending increased tenfold in 2019 compared to 2014. Even the Communist parties, which have a history of opposing computerization, have begun training their cadres. The BJP's massive victory in 2019, in part, lay in the complementarity of its online and offline campaign strategies, and its robust grassroot support base and organisational structure.

D. Voluntary Code of Ethics by social media platforms for 2019 General Election

Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) in consultation with Election Commission has developed a set of 'Voluntary Code of Ethics' for the General Elections to Lok Sabha 2019 and Legislative Assemblies & Bye- elections scheduled along with the Lok Sabha election. The Code has been developed to ensure free, fair & ethical use of social media platforms and to maintain the integrity of the electoral process. The social media platforms have assured the Commission they will facilitate access to information regarding electoral matters and voluntarily undertake awareness campaigns on electoral laws and other election-related instructions. There will be a high priority dedicated reporting mechanism for these elections to interface and exchange feedback for expeditious action. Platforms have developed a notification mechanism for ECI to notify violations of Section 126 of R.P. Act, 1951 and other applicable electoral laws. Action will be taken by the platforms within three hours for reported violations of Section 126 and other cases will also be acted upon expeditiously.

E. Ethics, Political Communication, and Security Implications

The 2019 general election stands out as the new low in public discourse, the pervasiveness of fake news and misinformation, and a routine flouting of ethical norms relating to political communication. Ethics in political communication, which has always been a complex issue is further complicated by the rise of digital technologies that are weakening traditional ethical constraints among all political actors—politicians, journalists and the mass media, and audiences.

Social media has enabled a style of populist politics that is combative and personal, allowing hate speech and extreme speech to thrive in online spaces that are unregulated, particularly in regional languages and within private WhatsApp group chats. Sahana Udupa examines how hate speech and extreme speech have become routinised in online political communication and participation in India and its gendered implications. Mahapatra and Johannes Plagemann (2019) highlight how fearmongering and the politics of hate propagated by the BJP and the Congress have widened societal fault lines. Both parties and their proxies are also found to have shared large amounts of fake news and misinformation, which proved extremely difficult for fact-checking entities and vigilant citizens to process each case and to bring out truth. An area where unethical use of social media can have severe ramifications is national security and stability, as witnessed with the surge of fake news in the aftermath of the Pulwama attack in February 2019. Primarily, inflamed passions, sensational reporting, and political sloganeering due to the spread of fake news following Pulwama attack brought India and Pakistan to the brink of war. Facing intense public scrutiny online, Modi ordered airstrikes on alleged terror camps in Balakot, Pakistan, precipitating a series of retaliatory actions by both countries, which only ceased after Pakistan's conciliatory gesture of releasing captive Indian Air Force pilot Abhinandan Varthaman. Here, outraged Indian netizens and a barrage of fake news played an instrumental role in triggering unprecedented hostilities between India and Pakistan, with security implications for the region as a whole. Whether deliberate or otherwise, in an election campaign already rife with polarising content, false and misleading social media posts about Pulwama heightened jingoistic nationalism and communal tensions. The rumours and fake news that swirled around Pulwama/Balakot fall into a category of wedge-driving rumours that can have a long-lasting effect on the society, with the propensity to fuel social instability.

IV. CONCLUSION

On the one hand, social media has allowed for the democratisation of politics and re-energised the political landscape. On the other, several ethical dilemmas arise with the involvement of political actors in the non-ethical uses of social media, compounded by the proliferation of social media among a largely digitally illiterate population. Particularly in the area of national security, political actors will have to weigh the political advantages against the very real security and human costs that would accrue from prolonged non-ethical uses of social media. Given the serious implications of unethical political communication, political actors need to introspect further and focus on bringing back ethics to the table. As routinised unethical political communication has grave implications for politics as well as for social resilience and national security, the issue needs to be tackled on a war footing and through a multi-stakeholder approach. Political parties have a key role to play by reining in their proxies and supporters, and working with coalitions comprising of fact-checkers, civil society organisations, academia, think tanks, etc, to put ethical communication principles into practice in a social-media age.

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