Impact of Covid-19 on Promotion of Political Parties in India: Use of Social Media in Political Marketing

Dhruvi Manishkumar Patel

Pandit Deendayal Energy University

ABSTRACT

The Promotion of political parties through social media has become an effective tool for political marketing. With the outbreak of COVID-19, election rallies and postponement of the political election have taken mobilization as means and helped parties reach an audience through social media platforms. The present study aims at the use of various social media platforms for the promotion of parties through party members. The study suggests that social media is becoming a stronger tool for political marketing during the COVID-19 outbreak. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are three majorly used platforms with their benefits and limitations. Social media have increasingly helped individuals share their opinions to the world through comments, pictures, and videos. Political Campaigns on social media have been the new face of political campaigning to get to citizens, urging them to involve themselves with hashtags and question polls online. It has also helped circulate interviews, talk shows, and videos of growth under government for promotion during COVID-19 when gatherings were banned led to luring political parties using social media for promotion and political marketing.

In the following research, I have attempted to know the use and scope of social media in political marketing through interviews of party members of BJP, Congress, and AAP. Case study analysis is carried out in the following research. Primary research methodology is used on an interview basis.

Keywords: COVID-19, social media platforms, promotion, political marketing, qualitative research.

INTRODUCTION

Since limiting physical gatherings and the number of candidates in rallies during elections, political display in towns has seen a decline with the postponed election. With growing cases and adverse situation than 2020 I India political marketing have emphasized on social media marketing through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Whatsaap. Social media have helped gain public participation, which has now considerably become an online political platform for promotion and political marketing (Muhammad Saud, Dima Bassam El Hariri, & Asia Ashfaq,2020).

Political marketing has evolved around the hi-tech population with hi-tech apps which has undoubtedly helped parties for promotion and set perceptions. With the help of social media, parties can influence voters and citizens for participating in campaigns and events. 2014 election is one such example where digital crowdsourcing played important role in speeches and elections. (A. Bhagyaraj 2017).

The higher the social media buzz, the higher the seats were won by the party. Some parties still rely on traditional means of promotion while many parties have started building their social media presence. (Md Safiullah* , Pramod Pathak, Saumya Singh, Ankita Anshul,2017).

The impact of COVID-19 has given more drive to the use of online means for elections. Political parties have also taken their help for general awareness in support of public health, education, and responsibility. US's 2020 election was all about online advertising an analysis provided by Wesleyan Media Project figures $60.9 spent on Facebook and Google ads while in India, data provided by Indian Express signifies spending of Rs220 Crore during 2021 Election by Indian political parties. Political parties have made individuals and voters their opinion leaders on social media platforms engulfing them for political marketing activities. (A. Bhagyaraj,2017). The same thing has been followed during the 2021 election with opinion leaders present online, campaigns, and political marketing activities have seen participation in campaigns and polls.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used here is qualitative research. Data was collected from telephone interviews amongst 1 candidate from each party that is BJP, Congress, and AAP in Gandhinagar between 8-10th March 2021. Data will be used to navigate the preference of social media platforms during Covid-19 for use in political marketing. Candidates are the chief members who are responsible for online campaigning for their respective parties.

- **Setting and Participant**

Due to COVID-19, participants chose to give telephone interviews on basis of convenience and no exposure to their identity but as a member of the party. Participants were selected randomly through a

contact list provided by the party office. All the answers recorded are their opinion, method, and beliefs in the way they execute political marketing. Participants answered all the questions, from which a pattern of data collection was coded for data analysis.

- **Procedure**

Participants were approached during their scheduled time. All the information was provided with the objective of this research. One by one question was asked and their answers were recorded on voice memos app. Interview Script with text on the recorded answer is used for coding similar words, answers, and preferences. Transcription is carried out by the researcher. Later script was used to highlight patterns in answering, selection of words and description. The transcribed script is part of data collection.

- **Data Collection**

An interview guide was used to interview candidates to know their social media platforms preference, social media account status and post frequency for political marketing. The interview was carried out in Gujarati. The voice memos were later translated to English for verbatim transcription. The coding scheme facilitated systematic recognition of answer patterns that became apparent for the data as well. Each participant was well aware of the data provided and the purpose of its use in research. Questions asked are as follows:

1. Do you use social media?
2. Which social media platforms do you use?
3. Any social media platforms preference?
4. Post frequency throughout the day?
5. Do you agree with social media being an effective tool for political marketing during COVID-19?

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULT

Once the data was transcribed it was then analyzed and verified which helped in an understanding subject more. Keywords are codes that are essential in qualitative research. A pattern in theme could be seen with recurring answers from the candidates. Theme was identified on basis of re-reading interview transcription which led to categorizing similar answers and data. It is known that social media preference has Facebook on wider use for political purposes. Candidates have given Twitter a second preference for political marketing. It is known that 2/3 candidate consider Twitter as opinion-oriented platform with opinion-oriented users which have more political impact for political marketing. A similar pattern in post frequency of all candidates signifies that 2 posts are submitted on social media account every day for political purpose. With election, nearby candidates have higher posting on social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Whatsaap with no particular number of posts per day but comparatively higher than usual days. Consideration of social media in political marketing as an effective tool with its increasing use during COVID-19 can be identified with a positive tone. Social Media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Whatsaap have a presence of each candidate while Sharechat was an exception where BJP candidate is making presence through inviting users. A pattern of complete acceptance over social media platforms for political marketing is identified.

EFECTIVE WAYS FOR PROMOTION OF POLITICAL PARTIES ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS:

1) Information oriented

Any post, video and picture should have correct information in the content provided by the party. Ruling party should be prepared with relevant answers to all the queries and complains posted online. With increasing number of social media users comes responsibility to share right messages. The right information can prevent false rumors online which can be used as a shield to get away with opposition party accusation. During the post lockdown period false messages were received about nationwide lockdown again, people were rush shopping and getting into crowded places. During such time, social media platforms should be used to generate right information from party's account and highly authorized candidates.

2) Factual Data

When a crisis occurs with negative comments and negative sharing of the party member or party's campaign, factual data that is proven data, datasheets and proof of facts breaks the chain of negative sharing and also creates positive effect on users. It helps create credibility and trust in citizen. Once

credibility is gained individual tends to ignore other fake messages since verification of data is already given.

3) Local language

India is a multilingual country, for political marketing language is equally important as party symbol. Congress signifies itself to its national movement, BJP for Nationalism and AAP as the people's party. Parties need to connect to people in different states with people of varying languages. It is necessary that the content provided on social media needs to be in local language for campaigning in a particular State of India. If citizen are able to read and understand than only it can be accounted that content has been reached to public. The Higher authority of states uses local language for the same reason.

4) Social Media Campaign

Social media campaign is the most crucial online marketing tool. BJP's "Mein bhi Chowkidar" campaign, Congress's "VaccineJumla" and AAP's "Kejriwal vs Kaun" are not just for political presence but campaigns can be used as answer to accusation, creating buzz and helping lay more dirt on opposition. Social media campaign is not just new face of political wars and gaining voters but also about staying connected to people. It helps in participation from public, increases involvement and gives drive to campaigning purpose.

5) Appreciation post

People's contribution should never be neglected. During COVID-19 doctors, sweepers, etc. were considered real warriors. Political parties were posting about their contribution, appreciated their toil in tough times, which gave a sense of accomplishment in local heroes of the nation. This should be continued, since appraisal and posting about people's effort help set of perception of public that attention is given to all and local heroes are celebrated just like their election win.

6) Managing social media crisis

Negative, abusive and complaining comments can be seen in the comment box or in replies to the tweets, within a minute any comments or statement can bring social media crisis with negative publicity of the party. It works on either getting silent or making the news silenced through come back and statements. Managing social media crisis should be part of political marketing since it can cause consequences and situation that may get out of hand if some action is not taken. BJP, Congress and AAP have their social media and marketing teams to handle crisis, which can be identified on twitter while BJP have defense shield while Congress and AAP drops bombs with campaigns and hashtags to bring down the party with indictment and charges. Here BJP should manage each crisis with defense strategies while Congress and AAP should be ready to defend themselves from any backfire. Social media crisis can be managed by the growth and improvement bombing with complete truth to prevent further damage.

CONCLUSION

Political Marketing has evolved from door to door marketing, rallies, TV and print to growing influence of digital and social media platforms. It appears that political parties are seen to optimize their resources on social media platforms during COVID-19 which seems to be feasible and well connected to people rather than violating social distancing rules. From this research it can be known that link of social media and political marketing have further grow deeper with the rise in cases and 2nd wave of COVID-19 in India. Result from interview instruct about social media's importance and contribution in political marketing. Facebook and Twitter seems to play a significant part above other social media platforms in context of political marketing. Pre-election months post frequency rises to lure voters and create social media buzz. This research was an attempt to analyze social media use through candidates from BJP, Twitter and APP which led to unanimous consent on social media as a valuable tool. The Study also recommends effective ways to promote in reference to political campaigns and social media presence.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Social media analysis of Twitter and Facebook can be done for 2021 election, while comparing prominent parties, so be it BJP, Congress and AAP. When candidates mentioned that twitter have opinion oriented user, it can be known in what aspects opinion oriented as well as if its consideration is true while considering a higher number of candidates from numerous political parties. A detailed

comparison of the party's promotional strategies for print, TV and social media can be charted. In the context of this research paper, further participation in political campaigns and use of social media platforms for any particular means of promotion can be carried out.

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