

Chapter Five

Conclusions and Recommendations

The objective of the study was to understand and analyse the strategy of Indian national political parties to use Facebook for political communication. The study intended to find out if the social media's potential of open and democratic interaction between the people and political parties in the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties is being utilized to its full potential or not. The study also intended to find out the importance of Facebook as a part of social media for political parties in comparison to the traditional means of political communication. In order to get a better understanding of the Indian national political parties' strategy of using Facebook for political communication, the data collected in field study using interview method was compared to the derived data about the actual engagement of Indian national political parties in their Facebook pages. The chapter will conclude and summarize the major results that can be drawn out by comparing the findings from the data collected by both the methods.

Research Questions and Main Findings of the Study

In the literature review section it was discussed that how the political parties all over the world are turning to social media for campaigning and communication with people. It is claimed by various scholars that the social media has made it possible for democracy to be stronger. The study was conducted to fill out the knowledge gap regarding the study of use of Facebook by Indian national political parties in political communication with the people. The research questions and the major findings that came out during the study are summarised below.

Importance of Facebook as a part of social media for Indian national political parties.

During literature review, we found the claims regarding political parties in India turning towards the online election campaigning. Also, the importance of traditional media such as television which

is slowly being replaced by the internet and social media among youth (Bakht, 2009). However, what is the importance do Indian national political parties give to political communication in social media in the present time? Are they really shifting from traditional media campaigning to social media campaigning? From the findings during the interviews, though it is clear that all the Indian national political parties recognise the increased importance of social media in political communication, the importance of traditional means has not reduced. This can be due the diversity in the population in India. Most of the Indian national parties said that they are trying to increase their online presence so that no platform of reaching out to public is left out. The parties also agreed upon the fact that social media can't be ignored in the modern world of internet. The findings from the conducted interviews show that though the importance of social media and Facebook has increased with the growth of internet and social media penetration among the people in India, the importance of traditional means communication has not reduced for the Indian national political parties. The Indian national political parties considered the online as well as on ground political communication important due to the benefits of the both in connecting with the diverse population. According to them, no media can be neglected and both of these need to be taken seriously. It was found that the importance given to the social media and Facebook depends upon the population the party wants to be in contact with the most. For example, BSP though claimed that they are now focussing on connecting with the youth using social media, have always used traditional media for the political communication and campaigning due the reason that they want to connect with the minority people who are mostly poor and many are illiterate who can't use social media.

The fact that the Indian national political parties are increasing their online presence was also clear from the analysis of the Facebook pages of the Indian national political parties. It was

found that all the Indian national political parties have created their Facebook page which has a verified tag following its name except Bahujan Samajwadi party. The later party was not found to have any page which had a tag showing that the page is verified by the Facebook team to be official and not fake. The data also showed that the parties were actively posting on their Facebook page. Implicitly, this means that social media and Facebook has become an important platform for spreading any information or message to the people. So, in the modern times Indian national political parties though have not reduced their importance for the traditional means of political communication, but have increased their focus on social media to a significant extent. It can be said that social media, of which Facebook is a crucial part, is playing an important role in political communication and is being actively used by Indian national political parties.

Facebook strategy of Indian national political parties. The study also intended to find answer of the research questions regarding understanding and analysing the strategy of using Facebook for political communication by the national political parties in India and the manner in which people as well as Indian national political parties are engaged in the Facebook pages of the later. Finding from the interviews show the various strategical reasons for using Facebook by Indian national political parties. The major strategy of Indian national political parties to use Facebook was to share information creatively and reach out a large number of population, connect with youth, bypass gate-keepers in the mass media, direct interactions and dialogue with the people and to take feedback from the people. The parties were of the view that the information shared on Facebook in the form of image and videos can have a powerful impact on the people. Facebook is also very important to connect with the youth as the young population is increasingly using social media and Facebook to connect with one-another and also for many other purposes. According to them, Facebook along with other social media sites are important as they help in bypassing the

gate-keepers present in the mass media. In Facebook the political party can share the information that they want to share and in the way they want it to share. Another important strategical reason to use Facebook was to interact with the people, discuss with them and have their feedbacks on very issues.

Use of Facebook pages by Indian national political parties and people's engagement in these pages. All the Indian national political parties who have the verified Facebook page are well aware of the fact that what content grabs the attention of the people. The Indian national political parties produce content on their page in the form of image, videos, animations and text they have also linked their page to the other social media platforms to make larger impact. It was found that the Facebook pages of the two big parties i.e., Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) and Indian National Congress (INC) are very active. The two actively post in their Facebook pages and people are also actively engaged in the pages. They like share and comment on the posts by the two parties on the page. Other Indian national political parties are also active in their Facebook pages but as far as their popularity and the engagement of people on their pages is concerned, it is relatively very less as compared to the former two parties. All the parties share information and message in the form of image, video and text. The parties have different sections on their Facebook page which makes people to use the page easily. This shows that in social media also, the major political parties grab more attention of the people than the minor political parties. Also, major political parties were found to be more active during the time of elections. This clearly shows that Indian national political parties are not just using Facebook just for communicating politically with the people but also to influence them by online campaigning.

Claimed strategy of using Facebook pages versus use of the pages in practice. The study intended to find out how the articulated strategy of using Facebook for political

communication by Indian national political parties is different from the actual practice. It was found that though there is similarity in the articulated strategy and actual practice of using Facebook for political communication in the matters such as what content to produce and what is the target population, there are differences in how Indian national political parties claim open discussion and interaction as a part of their strategy to use Facebook and what they do in practice. Do people have any control over the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties? The Facebook pages mostly have the posts from the parties only. This shows that either people or not interested to post on the Facebook pages or their posts are deleted by the party. Only three among the six Indian national political parties have left posting on the page open for all the users. BJP and BSP the two big parties, have not left posting open for everyone. It is only in the event section that all the users can post. The events are organised after long gaps. However, commenting on the shared information on the Facebook pages is left open for everyone with a twist of filtering out the few comments. It can be explained by the fact that there are large number of comments on the Facebook pages. Also, parties' strategy to restrict people to post on page was defended by the parties by saying that there will be lot of spams and it will destroy the intellectual and rational nature of the content on page. However, it questions the claimed freedom of social media for the open interaction between the elite and common people. The potential of social media to make the voice of common people to have more weight is obviously not being fully utilized by the Indian national political parties on their Facebook page. This can be said in the case of the Facebook pages of those Indian national political parties who allow posts of every user on the page also. This is because negligible number of posts of common people were found on the pages. So, the major purpose of Indian national political parties to use social media is only to broadcast the information for their personal interest and benefits. Also, what is broadcasted by the Indian national political

parties on their Facebook page doesn't always coincides with the real facts. This challenges the rationality of the interactions between the people on the Facebook page of Indian national political parties. Habermas on the other hand emphasised the importance of rationality of the debates in the public sphere. Also, there are comments by the large number of population on post which are not factual. However, such debate can be said to influence the minds of the people to know more about the issue and get well informed which ultimately can facilitate the rational public opinion formation.

It was discussed in the first chapter that the studies show that the social media increases transparency between the voter and the government and political parties (Komal H. Parkh, 2011). Habermas discussed about how commercialisation resulted shaping of public opinion by the mass media instead of earlier process of public opinion formation by undergoing rational public debates reflected in the mass media (Habermas 1991, p. 188). Social media has revived this possibility of public opinion formation not being shaped by mass media but rather be formed by undergoing rational public debates. In a representative form of government, political parties articulate and aggregate the public opinion which are produced before the system as an input (Easton, 1965). So, the role of political parties is very important for making the public opinion to impact the political system by shaping the policies and decision making in the representative form of democratic government. However, political parties can only reflect the real public opinion if they discuss various issues with the people. Social media has made this interaction or debate among people and with political parties possible. Indian national political parties clearly talked about their strategic goal of using Facebook to discuss political issues, policies and agendas with the people and have their feedback on these issue. However, in practice the parties were not found to interact with the people. The Indian national political parties talk idealistically about their strategy to use social

media for discussions with the people and to take their feedback but in practice there was hardly any direct discussion between the people and the parties. Limited resources to reply and respond to the large population on the pages can't be taken as a reason for the lack of interactivity between the people and parties. The findings show that the rate of response or replies to the public comments and posts is almost zero. The parties' intention not to respond to the comments of people can be the only be the reason of such a low amount of response. Clearly, there is disparity between the strategy of Indian national political parties to use Facebook for political communication and what they do in practice. Indian national political parties use Facebook more like a broadcasting media with themselves being in control of what, when and how to share than like a platform where there can be open or democratic interactions between people and the parties. Though some of aspects of the strategy of using Facebook to connect with the people such as sharing information creatively and bypassing broadcasting media was found to match with actual engagement of the Indian national political parties in there Facebook pages, the idealistic claims regarding the strategy to use social media for open interactions with people turned out to be totally different from what they do in practice.

Recommendations

The study analysed the strategy of Indian national political parties for engaging in the political communication using Facebook pages. The findings show the disparity between the Facebook strategies as articulated by Indian national political parties and their actual use of Facebook. However, this may not be true in other social media platforms like twitter and YouTube etc. It is generally accepted that politicians and political parties are more active in twitter than in Facebook. So, the research can be further proceeded to include other social media platforms in the study, particularly twitter. This is due to the reason that all the posts and comments on twitter are

publically accessible and hence analysing them is easier. The other reason is that many politicians are involved in regular tweets and retweets in twitter in modern times.

Also, in the study, mainly the data in the quantitative form was analysed in the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties. This was done due to the paucity of time. The research can be further proceeded to do content analysis and even the sentiment analysis of the data on the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties.

The study was confined to the Indian national political parties only. In order to know the importance of social media among the political parties in different regions of India, the research can further be proceeded to study the social media use by the regional parties. Also, a comparative analysis of the social media use by political parties in urban and rural areas will provide the holistic knowledge about the use of social media by the various political parties of diverse regions in India and not just the national political parties.