

Social Media and Political Advertising

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Abstract: The term political advertising refers to advertisements that are aimed at motivating voters when voting at referendums or elections, or where it is publicized with the intention of campaigning for a state political party, politician, its member, or political campaign individual as well as their objectives, ideas, or program. There can be the use of any advertising displays, billboards, newspaper ads, signs, brochures, pamphlets, articles, circular, tabloids, letters, flyers, radio or television presentations, an internet website, bumper stickers, or other means of mass communication, used for the intention of appealing, indirectly or directly, for financial support or votes or other support in any election campaign. In this modern age, social media has become an increasingly important tool for motivating and influencing people, especially the younger generation. The paper discusses about the use of social media such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, by political parties or their candidates or one in support of either of them, for votes, spreading their ideas and objectives, increasing popularity, criticizing others, or financial support.

Keywords: Facebook, Instagram, Political advertising, social media, Twitter, YouTube.

1. Introduction

As per Data Reportal's Digital 2022 Global Overview Report, 58.4% of the world's total population uses social media platforms, with an average daily time spent of 2 hours 27 mins on it. From 1482 million users in January 2012, the figures have jumped to 4623 million in January 2022, of which 54.4% fall in the age group of 20-39 years. 35.1%, in the age group of 16 to 64 use social media for reading news stories, 36.3% in filling spare time, 31.6% in finding content, 29.5% in seeing what's being talked about, and 24.5% in sharing and discussing opinions with others. Facebook is the most active platform with 2910 million active users globally, followed by YouTube at 2562 million. Instagram has active users at 1478 million and Twitter at 436 million. 28.9% of internet users, in the age group of 16 to 64, follow entertainment, memes, and parody accounts, 22.6% follow influencers and other experts and 17.5% follow Journalists and News Companies.

Meta reports that 2.11 billion of its audience can be reached with ads on Facebook. YouTube's advertisement reach is 2.56 billion (users aged 18+), Instagram with an advertisement reach of 1.48 billion, of which 61.6% belong to the age group of 18-34, and Twitter's advertisement reach is 436.4 million.

This clearly shows how social media users are growing every year and how the audience likes to spend their time in a variety

of activities. With such a huge reach, political workers and parties have been using social media to influence people whether it is related to votes, spreading ideas and objectives, financial support, or criticizing others.

2. Use of Different Social Media Platforms for Political Advertising

A. Instagram

Instagram is widely used by young people, belonging to the age group of 18-34, when compared to other social media sites. Reels and memes are among the platform's most popular features. Politicians, workers, and parties often become the target of viral memes here. The memes are usually shared by fans or political workers directly.

Kunal Kamra, an Indian standup comedian, is one such example who is often seen sharing memes on political parties, especially Bhartiya Janta Party, a major political party based in India. He has nearly a million followers on his official account.



Fig. 1. "Agle election Gujrath main hai..." reads the caption of the post uploaded on his Instagram handle

With Instagram, users can upload videos that can last up to 60 minutes, and political parties and influencers use it for showcasing their rallies and speeches.

Taking an example of Indian National Congress, with a million followers on their official Instagram handle, uploaded a 49-second clip

(https://www.instagram.com/tv/CgB1QvCJM05/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link) on 15 July 2022, targeting Modi government for Indian rupee's continuous fall against the US

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dollar. “It is absolutely clear that the PM and his army of psycho-fans who used to worry a lot about the rupee when it was at 58, refuse to utter a word when the rupee breached 80.: @supriyashrinat Ji #अबकी_बार_80_पर.” reads the caption of the post.



Fig. 2. Another meme uploaded on his Instagram handle

Additionally, Instagram offers a live option, where rallies and speeches can be broadcast live, and followers are notified when a live video starts.

B. YouTube

YouTube has the highest advertising reach among all the social media platforms. Political parties, influencers, political candidates, news channels, etc. have their channels on YouTube where 12-hour long videos can even be uploaded. Besides, there is no time restriction on live streaming which makes YouTube one of the best social media platforms for political advertising.

All major political parties have their channels and earn good revenue from them. Once channels are monetized, anyone can earn money from the videos. This helps a political party in earning funds through this platform.

As on 24 July 2022, known news channels in India like AajTak (52.6 million YouTube subscribers), NDTV (14.6 million subscribers), CNN-News 18 (2.1 million subscribers), India Today (6.22 million subscribers), Republic Bharat (11.4 million subscribers), Times Now (2.48 million subscribers), India TV (31.7 million subscribers), ABP News (33.0 million subscribers), Zee News (26.4 million subscribers), all live stream their TV programs on their YouTube channels, thus making it easy for anyone to watch news anywhere free of cost. Due to biased news channels that favor particular parties, viewers may believe that a particular party has done outstanding work. At the same time, they criticize other parties for their shortcomings and remarks, creating a negative impression of them. This helps political parties to earn votes during elections.

C. Facebook

Facebook is the most active social media platform with nearly 3 billion active users across the world. Maximum video length is up to 240 mins, thus having an advantage over Instagram. Memes targeting political parties and candidates get widely circulated here just like on Instagram. Live streaming is also possible on Facebook and the platform is particularly

popular among elder people. Memes on Donald Trump, negatively portraying him before the 2020 United States Presidential Election, went viral on the platform, which may have contributed to his defeat in the election. A number of meme pages and groups like ‘Best Trump Memes’, ‘Trump God Emperor of Memes’, ‘I Hate Donald Trump 2’, ‘DUMP trump memes’ etc. were created to share memes and criticize him.



Fig. 3. A meme posted by ‘I Regret Voting for Donald Trump in 2016’ on 24 July 2020



Fig. 4. A meme posted by ‘Marilyn Kelly Denoia’ on 25 July 2020



Fig. 5. A meme posted by ‘Craig Williams’ on 26 July 2020

Facebook also allows paid advertisements which allow users to promote their ideas or interests. The advertisements reach people when they are scrolling through posts or stories.

D. Twitter

Twitter has the lowest active user base, but its trending hashtags make it a popular platform. It is often seen how hashtags are used by political parties, their workers, or other citizens for promoting a campaign message or a tweet. “The power of hashtags has not gone unnoticed by politicians and political campaigns either. As more people turn online for information about political candidates, these tags are often employed strategically to reach potential voters through word-of-mouth advertising.”

The hashtags are used by party workers or others to target a particular person, a group, idea, or any objective. It is also used sometimes to promote, share, or make an idea widely known.

In February 2019, a misleading video of Rahul Gandhi, an Indian politician, went viral with the hashtag #RahulGandhiPagalHai trending on Twitter. The video was later debunked, however still created a negative image of the politician.

The hashtags like #ModiHaiTohMumkinHai and #ModiFailsIndia aimed to support or criticize the prime minister were trending. The hashtag #ModiFailsIndia had 15,731 tweets between April 01 and 26, to criticize the Modi government for its failure in handling the second wave of coronavirus pandemic. The hashtag #ModiHaiTohMumkinHai had a total of 3,654 tweets between April 01 and 26, to hail the Modi government for its recent decisions.

Twitter is also used by political parties or their members to share developments, achievements, or progress through tweets. A new feature ‘Twitter Spaces’ allows users to have live audio conversations with an unlimited number of participants. In April 2022, Imran Khan hosted a record-breaking Twitter Space, days after he was removed from the position of the prime minister of Pakistan. The space was attended by more than 160 thousand people at a given time.

3. Conclusion

Social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter are widely used to promote political activities, criticize opposition parties, workers, or government, spread ideas or objectives, increase popularity, for financial support, or influence people.

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Fig. 6. A tweet shared by *Rejimon Kuttappan*, a migrant rights defender and an independent journalist, using the hashtag #ModiFailsIndia

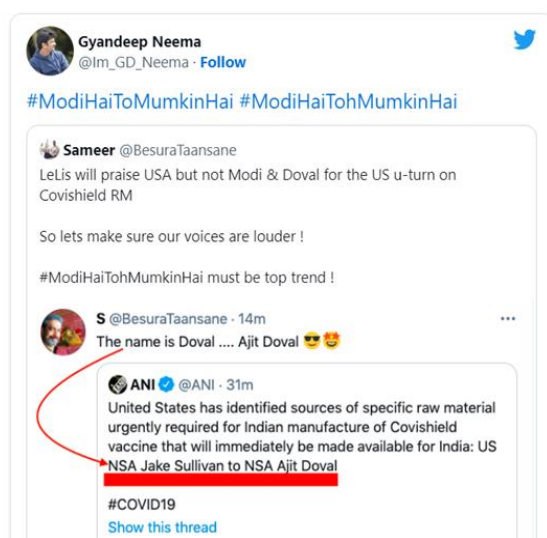


Fig. 7. Tweets shared by citizens in favor of the Modi government, with the hashtag #ModiHaiTohMumkinHai

In April 2021, during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in India, Twitter became awash with Modi hashtags.