Influence of Social Media on Electorate's Perception towards Political Party and Its Brand Building

Dr. Kapil Jain, International Institute of Professional Studies, Devi Ahilya University, Indore, India (kapil.jain@iips.edu.in)

Dr. Milind Bapna, ILVA Commerce and Science College, Indore, India (bapnamilind@gmail.com)

Dr. Amit Garg,, ILVA Commerce and Science College, Indore, India (ilva.amitgarg@gmail.com)

Dr. Jyoti Jain, International Institute of Professional Studies, Devi Ahilya University, Indore, India (jyoti.jain@iips.edu.in)

ABSTRACT

India is one of the world's largest democratic nations, which implies that people get elected to positions of authority via a competitive election process. As a result, politicians must demonstrate to people what they have in store (manifesto) for them and why they should choose/vote for them. Without using the tools of political marketing, it will be challenging task for the political parties to communicate with the electorates. To connect with the electorates, campaigners utilize political marketing using various ways of social media. The present research is aimed to discuss the role of social media in political brand building. Further, the study also examines influence of social media on electorate's perception towards political party considering selected demographic characteristics. . It is observed in the study that there is an important role of social media in the brand building of any political party. In current scenario, political marketing is viewed by theorists as a market in which a product is exchanged between politicians and electorate/ voters. This product might be philosophy, manifestos, or a commitment made by political candidates to enhance the electorate's living conditions. Further, the study also revealed that demographic profile of the electorates plays significant role in most of the cases (gender, occupation, qualification, residential area) except age only, which indicates that the influence of social media on electorate's perception towards political party is not same for all demographic characteristics. Therefore, political parties need to consider the demographic characteristics of the electorates while developing brand building strategies through social media.

INTRODUCTION

Political branding has evolved into a well-established and thriving subfield of political marketing. Indeed, it continues to break new ground by bringing traditional branding concepts and practices to this field. Researches of political branding have recently divided this field into different categories such as corporate branding, Individual branding, Business or political leader branding, local-regional, internal, and external in nature. Despite this progress, studies on alternate or distinct areas of political branding remain scarce especially political branding through social media. Political marketing is an essential component of every successful political campaign. It is hugely common in nations where democracy is practiced. India is one of the world's largest democratic nations, which implies that people get elected to positions of authority via a competitive election process. As a result, politicians must demonstrate to people what they have in store (manifesto) for them and why they should choose/vote for them. Brand is a symbol or design or a symbol that makes a product/service or an organisation stand out from the crowd. All brand has a back-story about how it evolved to be - a set of values, an ethos, and a purpose. A brand makes a series of commitments to its potential customers in order to gain their trust in its offerings. A brand's main objective is to develop a customer base that is faithful and is a long-term beneficiary in the company's journey. Among aspects that nurture and grow political brands are trustworthiness, brand legacy, brand commitment, brand recognition, digital presence and participation, digital marketing (including narratives in messaging and information designs), and promotional strategies goals (Johnson, 2014; Kreiss, 2016; Jain, Pich, Ganesh & Armannsdottir, 2017; Roukanas & Sklias, 2021; Woolley & Howard, 2018).

Political branding is a notion that has been around for a long time. Mrs. Indira Gandhi became known as the "Iron Lady," Mr. Vajpayee as the "Dove," and Dr. Man Mohan Singh as "Mr. Clean." Political marketing refers to the promotion of ideologies on public or political topics, as well as individual politicians. It has to be well-managed in order to produce greater outcomes. According to the creators of the idea of political marketing, there are eight core functionality that make up effective political marketing. Without using the tools of political marketing, it will be challenging task for the political parties to communicate with the electorates. To connect with the electorates, campaigners utilize political marketing using various ways of social media. It

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does, however, need the involvement of a political marketing expert to assist political parties in implementing the most efficient ways and tactics. Political parties in India have taken use of political marketing. Political parties in India employ both conventional and modern methods of campaigning. These methods have sometimes worked in a political party's favour or against it.

INDIAN DEMOGRAPHY, POLITICAL BRANDING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

In recent years, India's demographics have been linked to a number of significant developments. For a number of reasons, that which was once viewed as a problem (population expansion) has now become a benefit for the country. Not only that, but two-thirds of it is under the age of 35 (The New York Times, April 17, 2014). Various political brands have emerged in modern days, plenty of which have a became prominent following while others have been ignored by the voters due to their disconnection with the population (Van Ham, 2002; Smith & Speed, 2011; Omojola, 2008). According to a Business Standard news article from July 2019, Google and Facebook received over Rs.17 crore on account of political advertising between February and July 2019 for the general elections. Other side, PTI cited Facebook's ad library report to highlight that eight of the top ten political advertisers, including government pages, were linked to the BJP and spent nearly Rs 2.3 crore on Facebook ads between February 7 and March 2, 2019, indicating the same trend. The Indian Express Graphic (August 2019) states government ad spending decreased from Rs 247.84 crores in 2014-2015 to 156.52 crores in 2018-2019, other side, ad spending on the internet grew more than four-fold, according to the Indian Expressinfo graphic. Branding, according to Kumar and Dhameja (2017), has emerged to describe numerous aspects of individual's life. Politics isn't exempt from this phenomena. The notion of political branding has had a significant impact on the dynamics of politics. The last general election India, when the 'Modi' brand prevailed over its various competitor political brands, was a prime example of this. The purpose of this research paper is to emphasise the importance of political branding as a modern element of politics.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Despite the advancement in the political branding studies, most of the previous researches, especially in conventional political systems, place a strong emphasis on the leader of a party or political brands of the party (Husted et al. 2018; Meyerrose 2017; Nielsen 2016). Needham and

Smith (2015) reviewed recent developments in the field of political branding and identified specific areas in which more studies are needed. Political branding studies have contributed, with an emphasis on the practical implementation of modern ideas and theories, producing a greater knowledge of unknown settings and contexts, and positioning research from different viewpoints (Billard 2018; Meyerrose 2017; Nai and Martinez 2019; Simons 2016). Furthermore, since Lock and Harris' pioneering work twenty years ago, the conceptualization and examination of political brands has progressed substantially (1996). Many researchers (Ahmed et al. 2015; Billard 2018; Meyerrose 2017; Nai and Martinez 2019; Simons 2016; Speed et al. 2015; Scammell 2015; Smith 2009) advocated that political parties pressure organizations their candidates, and also strategies of campaigns for building strong political brand. Social medias impact on voting a look at the good and the Bad Social media has become a game-changer in politics. Its how people connect, and now its how politicians connect with voters too. This online space lets campaigns speak directly to the public, bypassing traditional media (Chadwick & Vaccari, 2015). Social media can also help voters learn more about elections. They can follow candidates, see news reports, and chat with others about important issues (Stromer-Galley, 2014). This can get more people to vote, especially young people who are online a lot (Jang & Bae, 2018). But there is a flip side. False information, or fake news, can spread quickly online (Stromer-Galley, 2014). This can confuse voters and make it hard for them to know what to believe. Social media can also create echo chambers where people only see things that agree with their views (Barbera et al, 2015). This can make it harder for people to learn about different ideas. Studies like one by Barreto et al. (2009) show that social media can help groups of people work together to get out the vote.

According to Kumar (2020), while the common man may not identify politics with branding, this characteristic of modern democracy has grown associated with branding over a period of time. According to Jevons (2005), branding is robust enough as to cover political spheres. The notion of the consumer-citizen is a step in the same direction. Today's electorate acts like a customer who has to take decision to buy / select any one (read vote) option from the numerous political brands/ options (seeing election manifestos and commitments made during campaigning). Political branding is no exception to the rule that there are two parts to a brand: successful and unsuccessful. What do corporate and political branding have in common? Can democratic parties

reach the same level of branding as business brands? The study presents a conceptual framework of branding in the context of India's political market environment. The study explains how political parties create branding qualities such as trustworthiness, personality, and connections similar to a corporate brand in order to create positive brand image.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research is aimed to examine the role of social media in brand building of political parties. As discussed earlier, brand building ultimately affect the electorate's perception towards political party. Therefore, to examine the impact of social media on brand building of political parties, it is required to examine the influence of social median on the perception of electorates towards political parties. Figure given below depicts the conceptual frame work of the present study;
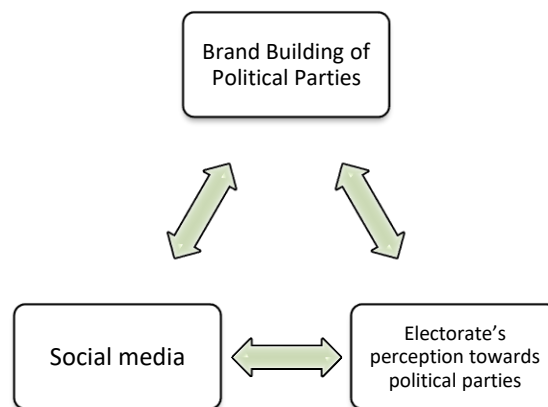
The study is empirical as the primary data were collected using self administered questionnaire, which was divided into two sections. Section 'A' was reserved for demographic characteristics and in section B, Five point Likert Scale was used (1, 'Not influential', 2 Somewhat influential, 3, Cant say, 4 Influential and 5, Vey Influential) to collect data about the influence of social media on electorate perception toward political party. The sample size of 236 electorates is used for the study and the simple random technique of probability sampling method is used to select the sample from the population. Developed hypotheses are tested using Independent t-test and ANOVA using SPSS 23 (trial version).

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULT INTERPRETATION

Independent t test was applied to test the hypothesis where two independent groups were there in the variables. In case of more than two independent groups, ANOVA is applied. Following are the results of the hypotheses testing;

Results of the Hypotheses Testing

Sr. No.	Null Hypotheses	Used Test	Sig. (α=0.05)	Results
1	There is no Gender wise significant difference between the mean scores of level of influence of social media on electorate's perception towards political party.	t Test	0.004	Not accepted
2	There is no Age wise significant difference between the mean scores of level of influence of social media on electorate's perception towards political party.	ANOVA	0.069	Accepted
3	There is no Qualification wise significant difference between the mean scores of level of influence of social media on electorate's perception towards political party.	ANOVA	0.000	Not accepted
4	There is no Occupation wise significant difference between the mean scores of level of influence of social media on electorate's perception towards political party.	ANOVA	0.015	Not accepted
5	There is no Residential area wise significant difference between the mean scores of level of influence of social media on electorate's perception towards political party.	ANOVA	0.042	Not accepted

The table given above depicts the results of the hypotheses testing. The first hypothesis is tested using independent t-test as only two independent groups (male and female) are there in the data set. Since, the p values is 0.004, which is less than 0.05 level of significance, therefore, there is gender wise significant difference between the mean scores of level of influence of social media on electorate's perception towards political party. In case of second hypothesis, there are more than 2 independent groups (18 years -28 years, 29 years -38 years, 39 years -48 years, 49 years - 58 years, above 58 years), therefore, ANOVA is applied. Since the p value is 0.069, which is more than 0.05 level of significance, therefore, there is no age wise significant difference

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between the mean scores of level of influence of social media on electorate's perception towards political party. The hypnoses no 3, 4 and 5 are not accepted as in all these three hypotheses the p value (0.000, 0.015 and 0.042 for 3rd, 4th and 5th hypothesis respectively) is statistically significantly less than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, there is qualification, occupation and residential area wise significant difference between the mean scores of level of influence of social media on electorate's perception towards political party.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In a politics, electorates are indeed the customers. With facts on consumer behaviour, politicians and political parties use a variety of content and promotional campaigns to affect public sentiment in their favour on media platforms. Prior to the election, political consent is forged in a digital environment. The difference between the party's performance and the expectations of potential voters/customers from the brand may be used to determine the success of a political brand. It is observed in the study that there is an important role of social media in the brand building of any political party. In current scenario, political marketing is viewed by theorists as a market in which a product is exchanged between politicians and electorate/ voters. This product might be philosophy, manifestos, or a commitment made by political candidates to enhance the electorate's living conditions. Further, the study also revealed that demographic profile of the electorates plays significant role in most of the cases (gender, occupation, qualification, residential area) except age only, which indicates that the influence of social media on electorate's perception towards political party is not same for all demographic characteristics. Therefore, political parties need to consider the demographic characteristics of the electorates while developing brand building strategies through social media.

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