Social Media and Political Participation: Indian Youth in Social Media

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Abstract: In recent periods of time, social media has become a focal point of youth around the world. *With affordable access to the internet, its accessibility has increased in India in the last decade. Due to this, the use of social media platforms also increased simultaneously. The popularity and accessibility of the internet in India have drastically changed since 2016, after the launch of 4G in Telecom Services. The competition for providing cheaper and affordable data to consumers has increased, and the price of the internet has decreased. Due to this reason, internet access is becoming more affordable and popular in India. Simultaneously the prices of mobile handsets have also decreased. Consumers can get a high features handset at lower prices. It enhanced Indian youth to start using more internet and social media. They start participating in political discussions and debates over social media platforms. In this context, it is essential to study how the Indian youth take political participation in social media.*

Keywords: Political Participation, Social Media.

I. Introduction:
In a democracy, political communication plays an important role. Traditional media like television and newspaper reports make awareness, cover political activities of the political parties, and inform voters. It works like a watchdog too. With the growing popularity of the internet, social media platforms called new media have emerged as a new mode of communication. Social media, audio-video, and pictures can transfer to a large audience at low cost and within a less period of time. Moreover, the content is recorded and archive able. It can be transferred beyond geographic proximity. Anyone can access the content beyond time and location. The internet has also gradually become accessible to common people. Political parties use the internet, especially social media, to communicate with voters. Therefore it is important to analyse how social media plays a role in political participation.

II. Methodology:
The present study is descriptive and analytical. The sources of data are secondary in nature. The data have been collected from various reports of different authorities and organisations, books, journals and newspapers.

III. What is Social Media:
Social media is a new driver of the convergent media sector. Social media is the websites and applications that enable users to create and share content in electronic form and to participate in social networks. According to the encyclopedia Britannica, social media refers to technologies, platforms and services that enable individuals to engage in communication from one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many. According to American social media scholar Howard Rheingold, social media make it possible for everyone to be simultaneously producer, distributor, and consumer.

IV. What is Social Media Mobilization:
Social media mobilisation is social media marketing of a product. As companies do marking of a product on social media, political parties market their ideologies, opinions etc., and the non-party users are the consumers of those party sellers. Although none take money in return for the view, the purpose of selling is mobilisation.
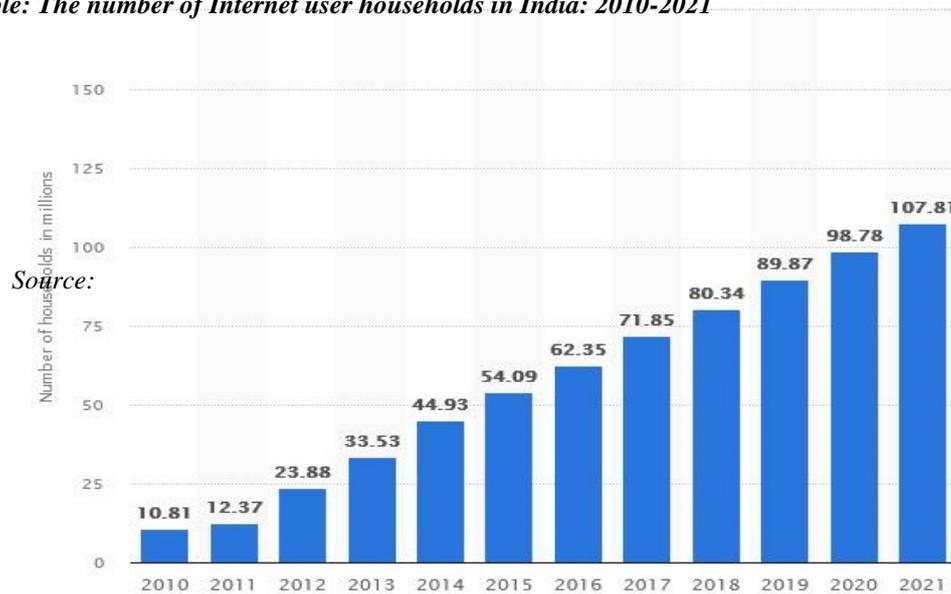
V. Social Media in Political Participation:
Political participation, for this study, is the "actions taken by citizens on an individual or collective basis to identify and address matters of public concern."Political participation is the driving force of democracy and is the core of Civic engagement. The traditional forms of political participation are voting, working for a political party, political demonstration, protests, marches, signing petitions, writing political articles, raising money for charitable causes and helping people in need. In the digital era, especially in social media platforms, the boundaries like linguistic, geographical and national have decreased in the interconnected world, and the exposure of political participation has increased.

VI. How internet uses has changed in India:

The internet can impact the use of the internet of 270 million poor people in India.[1] In India, in 2016, the number of internet users increased by 35% rate.[2] The number of internet-access households increased from 10 million households in the year 2010 to 98 million households in the year 2020.[3]

Table: The number of Internet user households in India: 2010-2021

Source:

The data shows that the scenario of internet users in India has drastically changed in the last decade.

VII. How youth politically participate in the internet:

Internet, especially in social media, Indian youth views recent issues in political spheres and shares viewpoints. There are numerous numbers of groups on social media to discuss political issues. Youth become online members. The membership, in most cases does not require any membership criteria. Only one social media account can join those forums. Therefore it is easy to view and share opinions.

VIII. Social Media and Virtual Campaigning:

Hence social media has gained more popularity in India. There are high chances to reach voters over social media platforms. Sometimes, voters unwillingly come to be exposed to the political party's well-articulated content. The repeated viewing of such content impacts voters, and voters started to be influenced by the content. The frequencies of use of social media are different. Some use it daily, some use it frequently, and others occasionally. The high frequency of using social media increases the probability of exposure to virtual campaigning.

It is easier to reach voters on social media platforms, and therefore, it is easy to conduct virtual campaigning. Therefore, political parties share their opinions about various issues and comments about opponent parties and activities. In recent times, virtual campaign over social media has become more popular among all political parties in India. Several Facebook pages, WhatsApp groups, and virtual campaigns exist for the parties. Over these platforms, volunteers of the parties share information about the parties, and they share new announcements and activities of the parties, jokes, and cartoons about opponent parties. However, it has been observed that the jokes and criticisms about opponent political parties sometimes deteriorate.

IX. Indian Youth in Social Media:

As per the election commission of India report, 75% of youth voters registered voters. According to data, Indian youth are more engaged in non-political issues in social media rather than political matters. Non-Political matters like environmental concerns,

Political Parties, Government Administrative agencies, and NGOs use social media platforms to mobilise, educate and increase voters' awareness.

With the growing demand for the internet and availability, the demand and use of social media have increased in India. Social media plays a role as an alternative to electronic and print media. People find it to use and share their own story or favourite party—political parties use this exposure for their benefit and to mobilise voters. In the recent election in India, it is obvious that some party actively uses social media, forms social media or IT cell to mobile voters.

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[1] https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2016/05/27/india-s-poverty-profile
[2] https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/internet/internet-users-in-india-to-reach-627-million-in-2019-report/articleshow/68288868.cms
[3] https://www.statista.com/forecasts/1143584/internet-households-in-india

In recent periods, social media like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram playing a significant role in mobilising voters. This technique took place before in elections and during elections. Political parties form social media-based groups and pages, and articulate party favour short videos, audio, photos, and song that are published on social media platforms.

There are three kinds of users:

1 Active use and mobilisers: This group consists of party memes supporters. They actively support or oppose an issue and share their viewpoint,

2. Passive participant: these category people are not members of any political party but have a stand on a particular issue.

3 Audience: This category of users reads and views the publicly distributed content as an audience. On an issue, they influence in favour or against.

X. Conclusion:

Engagement of youth in politics can fulfil the essence of democracy. With the growth of social media and happening in social media, hope has emerged that the young generation may reengage in traditional politics. It is a positive sign that youth which comprises the major portion of the population of the world's largest democracy India, has gradually become involved in politics through social media.

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