



Popular social media platforms for accessing political news

Vasumati Rao* and A. Subramanian

Madras Christian College, University of Madras, Madras, India
vasumati.rao20@gmail.com

Available online at: www.isca.in, www.isca.me

Received 7th February 2017, revised 8th March 2017, accepted 11th March 2017

Abstract

Social media is unique as it is used by all the stakeholders in the society; the political class, the people and also the media itself. Both electronic and print media employ social media applications for varied purposes. The electronic media has developed a relationship with this source due to the trending 'hashtag' phenomena. And the print media also uses it to upload its print publications online. As there are multitude of media sources available to access political news and information, this study was done to find the reasons for adopting social media by the general population. Each of the social media platforms differ from each other significantly in all respects and so will be its utilization. So it is imperative to find the application which is most favored by the audience. Responses were secured from Indian citizens across the world who are active social media users and access it for political news and information also. And the results were tabulated from the 510 completed questionnaires. The questions were close ended and the sampling was simple random with snowball.

Keywords: Audience, Indian Citizens, Political Class, Political News, Social media.

Introduction

Social media has emerged as an important and indispensable factor in the political arena all over the world. Introduced and experimented by the US politicians early this century, has now gained acceptance all over the world and its role undisputed. From the US Presidential Election of 2008 to the Arab Spring, the role and utility of this new media has been well researched and documented. With time social media has grown in popularity and so has been its various tools. Among various social media platforms; Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, WhatsApp etc. are some of the popular ones. Political parties and politicians have used these and others to reach their electorate, connect with own party men and to communicate to the larger audience. Quick adoption of technology, ease of use and its fairly economical cost has made social media easily adaptable. BJP's success in the election was widely attributed to its effective use of social media. There were almost 50 million Indian election related conversations on Twitter at the end of General Elections in 2014, more than double of conversations in 2013¹.

Social media and political communication: Social media platforms are a group of applications formed due to advancement in technology and ideological changes in the sphere of Internet, according to Kaplan and Haenlein². Academicians have deliberated on the newer idea of politics 2.0 as it has made use of the extraordinary capability of internet. It's a highly economical tool with the potential of unlimited knowledge which is easily accessible. Political communication is an interactive operation which concerns the transmission of information and messages between three players; the media, public and the politicians. The information can flow down vertically from the governing institutions; it can move side-ways

or horizontally between media and the public and finally it can move up in the direction of the authorities from public.

Social media is known to have made a major impact on the US Presidential Election in 2008. Barack Obama, who went on to win the election had significant social media following preceding the election. He had 20.4 million voters on Twitter, 29.1 million on Facebook and 2.3 million followers on You Tube. 2016 Presidential primaries in the US proved that technology, and social media in particular, are directing tools in politics. Although Twitter's user base hasn't grown much compared to other social media sites like Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook, this new media tool still remains one of the most preferred tool of many politicians, various media houses and voters. Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders not just campaigned widely but also raised funds on Twitter to fund their Presidential election. In India, 'India Against Corruption' found instant connect among the social media savvy Indians. The popularity of Aam Admi Party and its success at the Delhi hustings in 2014 not only showed the acceptance by the electorate but also confirmed the position of online media in the sphere of Indian politics.

Review of literature: New media sites such as Facebook and Twitter are growing in popularity among Indians. Facebook users in India touched 142 million in 2016. It totaled 1500 million in the world. WhatsApp had 100 million active users in 2016. An overwhelming 133 million people access Facebook on their smart phone. There are 112 million people among social media users who access Twitter and most of them use it on their smart phone³.

The internet user base in India has seen a steady increase in the past few years. Almost 50 million new users are getting added

every year in India and our country is expected to have 730 million Internet users by 2020. India still lies at the bottom of the table of nations in terms of internet penetration as its only 19%, while in UK its staggering 90%, US not far behind at 86%⁴.

According to a research published in Ipsos Mori, almost 70% of people staying in Britain believe the new media is a boon for people who were earlier hesitant to express their view. This online media has become a medium for the earlier silent population to put forth their opinion. This behavior is more prevalent among the younger age group (88% of 18-34s, its 56% of those aged 55+). People in Britain also feel that social media is breaking down the barrier between voters and politicians⁵.

Little more than 50% feel that political debates on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter are creating division in the society. Almost 50% also opine that social media is making debates quite superficial too. While users of social media have more positive opinion about its advantages compared to nonusers. 57% of social media users agree that debates are increasing hostility among people and such debates are cosmetic too unlike the ones conducted offline. Almost 30% of social media users say they comment, discuss or post on political news or governmental action very often or sometimes on one of the social media site. While almost 70% of social media users accept that they have little or no inclination to comment on political issues.

So while social media can be an accompaniment to traditional media, it can't replace it entirely. Only one in five people in Britain trust information accessed on social media more than newspapers but almost 60% disagree. Here again the younger generation belonging to the 18-24 years have more trust in the social media platforms.

But this research anyway proves the importance of social media in elections for young people. Election debate was said to influence the Britons the most while voting followed by newspapers articles and finally social media.

In a study done by Pew Internet Research, it was found that Facebook is the most obvious choice of most of the Americans with 30% users getting political news and information from this site. One fifth of the Americans get their news from You Tube. The reach of Twitter is 16% of Americans and half of those users say they get news there⁶.

41% American voters have cited breaking news as the reason to follow politicians on any social media site. This was just about 22% in 2010. Another 35% of registered voters in America follow politician as it makes them feel connected personally to the politician or the group⁷.

As the electioneering in the US Presidential Election in 2016 picked up pace, all the leading candidates took to social media

platforms to reach the electorate. The candidates included Ted Cruz, Hillary Clinton and Jeb Bush.

Objectives of the study: i. To find reasons for using social media for political news and information. ii. To find popular social media platforms to express political opinion.

Methodology

It was a quantitative research and to collect the data, a multiple choice, close ended questionnaire was circulated among the target population. It consisted only of Indian citizens above 18 years of age staying in India as well as overseas. It was given to both the genders with no restriction on educational qualification, place of stay or professional qualification and also profession. This was circulated through social media and also handed over personally. The target sample was only social media users who are politically conscious. Among social media platforms; Facebook and WhatsApp was used to circulate the questionnaire. Snowball purposive sampling method was used. The tabulation was done on SPSS.

Results and discussion

Following figures and tables display percentage analysis of this study. This includes finding the reasons for accessing social media sites for political news and information. Analysis was also done to find the most popular social media sites to express political opinion.

Table-1: shows the percentage of people using social media for quick and easy access of political news.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	154	30.2	30.2	30.2
	Yes	356	69.8	69.8	100.0
	Total	510	100.0	100.0	

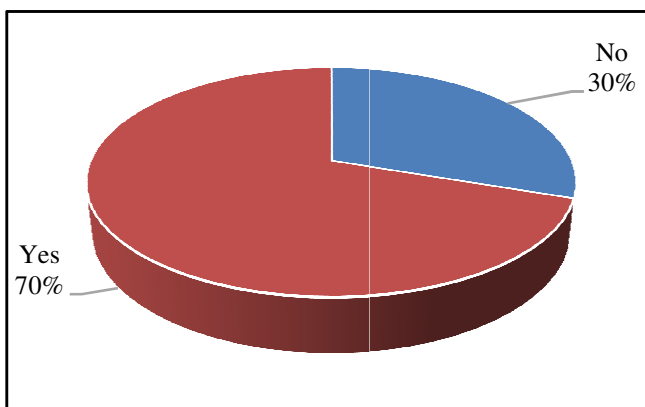


Figure-1: 70% of people use social media for quick and easy access of news.

Table-2: Shows the percentage of people who use social media as it provides live updates of political news.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	132	25.9	25.9	25.9
	Yes	378	74.1	74.1	100.0
	Total	510	100.0	100.0	

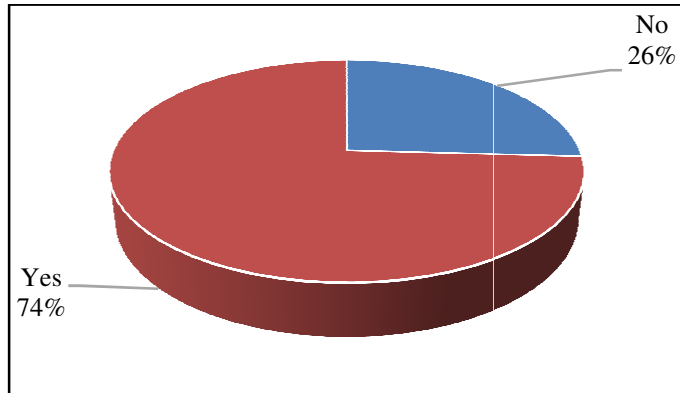


Figure-2: 74% of people use social media as it provides live updates of political news.

Table-4: Shows the percentage of people who have expressed political opinion by choosing the option - 'like' on Facebook.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	192	37.6	37.6	37.6
	Yes	318	62.4	62.4	100.0
	Total	510	100.0	100.0	

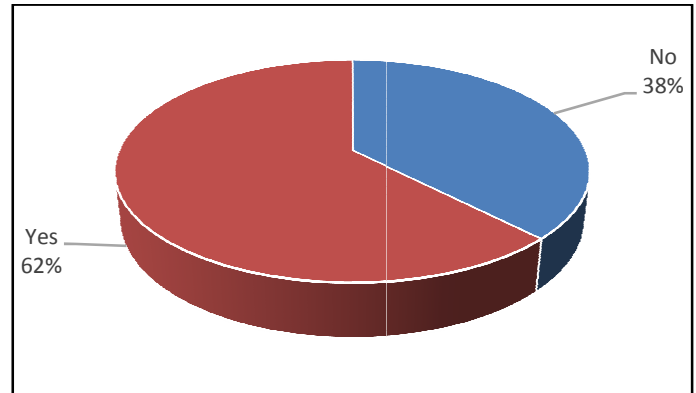


Figure-4: 62% of people have expressed political opinion by choosing the option - 'like' on Facebook.

Table-3: Shows the percentage of people who use social media for multitude of choice and opinion on political news.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	372	72.9	72.9	72.9
	Yes	138	27.1	27.1	100.0
	Total	510	100.0	100.0	

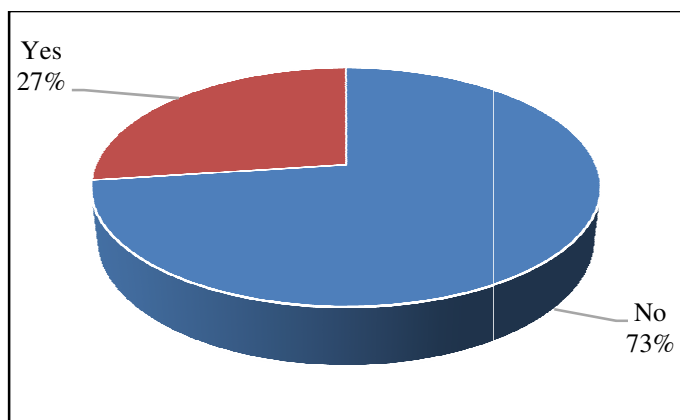


Figure-3: 27% of people use social media for multitude of choice and opinion on political news.

Table-5: Shows the percentage of people who have expressed their opinion by tweeting on twitter.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	467	91.6	91.6	91.6
	Yes	43	8.4	8.4	100.0
	Total	510	100.0	100.0	

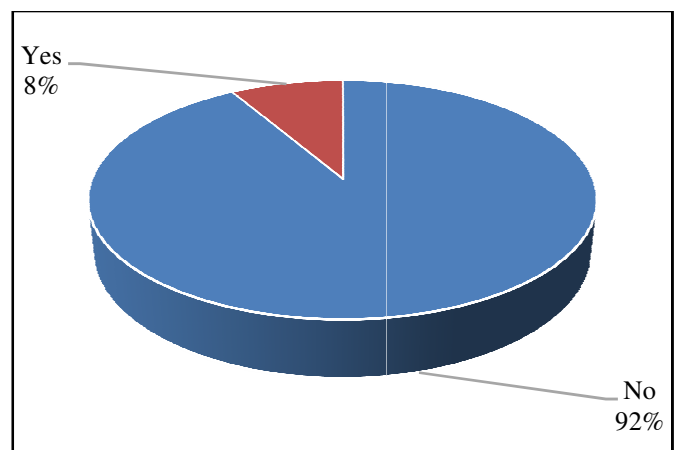


Figure-5: Only 8% of people have expressed their opinion by tweeting on twitter.

Table-6: shows the percentage of people who have expressed their opinion by commenting on an article or a blog.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	431	84.5	84.5	84.5
	Yes	79	15.5	15.5	100.0
	Total	510	100.0	100.0	

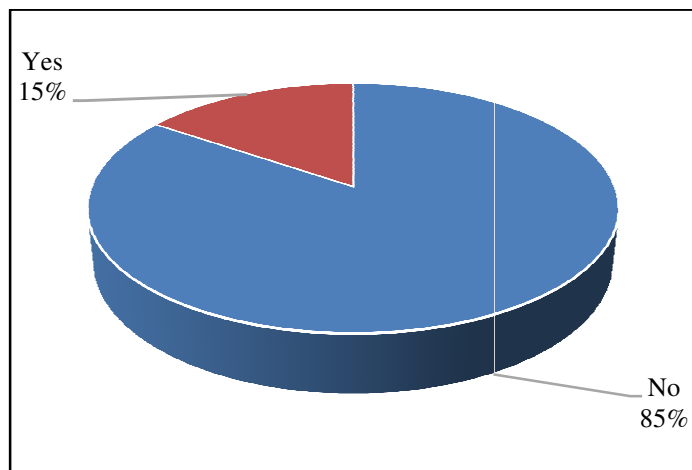


Figure-6: 15% of people have expressed their opinion by commenting on an article or a blog.

Table-7: Shows the percentage of people who have expressed their opinion by commenting on a Facebook post.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	314	61.6	61.6	61.6
	Yes	196	38.4	38.4	100.0
	Total	510	100.0	100.0	

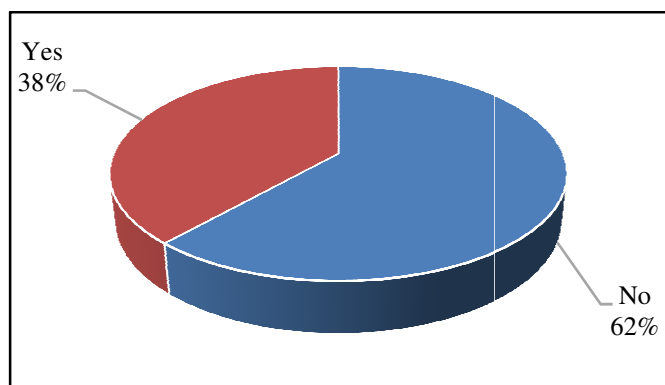


Figure-7: 38% of people have expressed their opinion by commenting on a Facebook post.

Conclusion

Most of the people use social media as it provides live and quick updates of political news and information. This constitutes almost 70% of the respondents. Social media is seen as a platform that offers multiple choice and a common ground to access varied opinion on any political news. Almost 30% of the respondents access social media for reading multitude of opinion and the choice that it gives. So timeliness and getting the information as it breaks anywhere in the world makes social media an attractive tool.

In an analysis of popular social media applications used to express political opinion, Facebook has emerged as the most preferred option. In Facebook, respondents have chosen 'Like' as the most favored tool. After 'like', the electorate prefer to comment on any Facebook post to express their opinion. Almost 39% have chosen this option. Tweeting is least used with just above 8% tweeting on Twitter. Commenting on an article or a blog ranks higher than tweeting with 16% choosing it.

References

1. Press Trust of India (2014). Social Media Changes the Face of Indian Elections. *The Indian Express*. <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/social-media-changes-face-of-indian-general-elections/>
2. Kaplan Andreas and Haenlein Michael (2012). Social Media Back to the Roots and Back to the Future. *Journal of Systems and Information Technology*, 14(2), 101-104.
3. Press Trust of India (2015). Twitter accounts for only 17% of Indian Social Network Users. *The Hindu*, <http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/technology/internet/twitter-accounts-for-only-17-of-indian-social-network-users/article6830300.ece>
4. Vamsi Krishna (2016). 50 Million Yearly Till 2020. *IndianExpress*. <http://indianexpress.com/article/technology/tech-news-technology/internet-users-in-india-to-grow-by-50-million-yearly-till-2020-report>
5. Mori I. (2015). A Third of Young People Think Social Media Will Influence Their Vote. [https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/3539/A-third-of-young-people-think-social-media-will-influence-their-vote.aspxgallery\[m\]/1/](https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/3539/A-third-of-young-people-think-social-media-will-influence-their-vote.aspxgallery[m]/1/). Accessed on 3.2.2017
6. Duggan Maeve and Smith Aaron (2016). The Political Environment of Social Media. *Pew Research Centre*. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/10/25/the-political-environment-on-social-media/>
7. Anderson Monica (2015). More Americans Are Using Social Media to Connect With Politicians. *Pew Research Centre*. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/19/more-americans-are-using-social-media-to-connect-with-politicians/>