



SOCIAL MEDIA, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

The use of social media has been increasing day by day. It is playing important role in mobilizing the consciousness among the citizen as well as enhancing their participation and accountability towards different aspects of the society. In the contemporary word social media has become powerful agent of political change and social inclusion. The active participation in social media has contributed a lot towards political education and inclusion of the citizen. In the present study an attempt has been to analyze the role of social media in the field of political education and social inclusion of the citizen. The paper also makes suggestions to enhance social Media's potential for political education and social inclusion. The analysis was conducted with a sample of 200 educated respondents from three towns of southern Assam i.e Silchar, Sribhumi and Hailakandi. Both primary and secondary data were used to draw conclusion from the study. Primary data was randomly collected using questionnaires and secondary data were collected from Articles, Journals and Internet.

Keywords: *Social Media, Social Inclusion, Political Education, Empowerment*

Introduction

The contribution of citizen in the transformation as well as development of society has been recognized since the early period. The transformations of any society demand the citizen to be engaged and understand their strength and responsibilities. The active participation of citizen plays important role for overall development of nation. In the contemporary world social media has reached larger audiences through its widely popular avenues. Over the past 20 years, internet and social media have become a significant part of our life and made the users articulate and vocal. It has become an integral part of our lives and large section of society is found under the influence of different social media. According to Chen social media serves as a force of promoting advocacy, active source of mobilization and integration of individuals with common interests. (Cohen, 2009) Fuchs observed that social media has become a familiar term that signifies the utilization of Social Networking Sites (SNSs), Blogs, content sharing sites where Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, What's App are the widely acknowledged social media avenues. (Fuchs, 2015). The various social media avenues do not only provide alternative channels for the communication of various institutional thespians in the structured election time period; rather they are seen as a platform in which public opinion is formed by enhancing the array of individuals and institutions (Chen, 2013). The unprecedented utilization of social media by citizen depicts the imperative opportunities to bring issues regarding citizens rights. It has led to the creation of a virtual space where the citizen could have structured and unstructured interactions with the threaded blog posts and application of #Hash tag links through the availability of numerous social media networking avenues such as Blogs, Face book, What's App, YouTube and Twitter The development of infrastructural facilities like Jio Network and other network plans by the telecommunication department have enable the people to have access to the social media. People have also garnered their will to buy smart phones and other gadgets like laptops with the various EMI plans. All these factors have led to the highly intensified use of technology and social media by the people across ages and genders in various areas of the nation for last few years. Therefore, the Social Medias act as a platform to express voice and act over the existing challenges of different spectrums of the society. Social media as a transparent glass makes the citizen well acquainted with the opportunities, commitment and utilization. Moreover, citizen could act as an influencing force of change by harnessing these social media avenues. The present study is an effort to examine the utilization of social media avenues among the citizen over the political aspects and its implications.

Statement of the Problem

The development of any country depends on the active participation of its citizen in the affairs of the state. The process of development demands active participation of the citizens in the decision making process of the state. The level of awareness about the development needs, self-indulgence, efforts for self sustainability, assertive ideas for enabling the other citizen to make decisions by realizing their importance play important role in the development of a country. (Shailashree, 2013). Political empowerment of citizen can effectively contribute towards nation building. Several development paradigms have suggested that

political empowerment of the citizen is indispensable for overall development of the nation. The problem related to citizens political education and social inclusion is a vital aspect in a democratic country like India. Citizen are supposed to be actively engaged in public sphere and participate in the process of decision making in the because the active engagement and inclusion of citizen in the process of decision making creates a conducive environment and opportunities for citizen to empower themselves and other citizen of the society. Social media on the other hand, has become a part and parcel of our daily life. The various social media avenues act as source of political mobilization. It enables the citizen to access the resources of development with adequate exposure, knowledge. Social media enables the citizen to enrich their inner strength by boosting self usage, opinion building and confidence to express them. Social media has led to the beginning of networked public sphere where it is feasible to communicate and link effectively into the public sphere. The citizens are provided with the opportunities to engage and express their consent or dissent with public agendas by expressing their political opinions on blogs, viewing or posting the comments on YouTube or posting a comment in any other platform. The role of social media in the empowerment of citizen in general and political empowerment of citizen in particular is very crucial in a country like India.

Objectives of the Study

- (i) To analyze the utilization of social media by the respondents and their obligation in the field of political decision making process.
- (ii) To examine if the utilization of social media acts as force of political empowerment among the respondents.
- (iii) To suggest measures for harnessing social media avenues to get the maximum benefit.

Methodology

Universe of the Study: The study has been undertaken online in three towns of southern Assam. The towns were Silchar, Karimganj and Hailakandi. Silchar is the second largest town of Assam with educated advanced citizens. Karimganj and Hailakandi are small towns but district Headquarter of Sribhumi and Hailakandi Districts respectively. There are adequate network facilities and sufficient devices with the citizen of these towns. The selected age group is very active in using social media.

Sampling and collection of data: In order to attain the above-mentioned objectives data was collected from the respondents of Silchar, Karimganj and Hailakandi town. The Purposive Random Sampling technique was used to select the respondents. On the basis of population and size of the towns 100 respondents were selected from Silchar 50 respondents from Karimganj and 50 respondents were selected from Hailakandi town. The entire respondent belonged to the age group of 30 to 60 years. The primary data was collected with the help of questionnaire and the same was analyzed to draw conclusion. As per the objective of the study measures have been suggested to utilize various social media avenues to harness the maximum benefit.

Findings

- i. Most of the respondents i.e. 96 percent actively utilize social media to go through the political matters and issues raised by the political leaders.
- ii. The social media like Facebook, Whats App and Twitter were highly preferred by majority of the respondents to get access to the political issues.
- iii. Almost 80 percent of respondent regularly follow some political figures like Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Yogi Aditya Nath, and Dr. Himanta Biswa Sharma Chief Minister of Assam.
- iv. Almost 60 percent of the respondent watches the videos uploaded by the Political leaders and news channels on political matters.
- v. About 70 percent of respondent revealed that the Social Medias enable them to share their opinion. Social Media enable them to express their opinions by writing over the Facebook posts and responding towards the Tweets.
- vi. 60 percent of the respondent astonished with the recent arrest of a college teacher for her post in the Facebook.
- vii. 65 percent of the respondent revealed that they usually watch the style of presentation and statement of Dr. Himanta Biswa Sharma at Facebook Posts shared on his accounts.
- viii. A few respondents admitted that they share the valuable information regarding the political issues raised and discussed in the social media.
- ix. Majority of the respondents held that social media has played crucial role in making them aware and provide a helpful platform where they could participate in the political spheres and communicate their views.
- x. The respondents also disclosed that some people were not using the Social Media in appropriate manner.

Challenges

Many people have started to utilize the social media avenues for political engagement. Their inclusion and position has increased with the active engagement in the social media. But they face some challenges. Firstly, the absence of effective networking facilities and associating opportunities, the citizen are not able to acknowledge and connect to the cross institutional partners such as public figures and decision makers. They get disconnected from the citizen movements at the local level, which negatively influence the success of their online activism. Secondly, the people sometimes wants to take the initiative to participate in the various online discussions and the issues rose by them but they cannot on account of their family and job responsibility. Thirdly, slow network connectivity also hampers their online political activity. Lastly, the fear of suppressive measure by the police and state machinery also appear as a hindrance against online political activity and efforts for social inclusion.

Recommendations

To increase the participation of citizen and strengthen their online political activity the following recommendations have been drawn from the study:

- (i) The first and the foremost initiative for political empowerment and social inclusion are to make them aware about their importance in the process of nation building and development. They must be trained for advocating online campaigns like use of Hashtags (#), filing online petitions and selection of target audiences. The active citizens could act as agent of change and create awareness among citizens.
- (ii) The campaign through different social media platforms is necessary in association with the people at the local level to increase the support and connection with the public figures social activists with the grass root people can play significant role to create the spirit of active participation.
- (iii) It is essential to increase citizen's leadership in the decision making processes which could enable the success of online political activity.
- (iv) Government should take suitable initiatives to ensure equal access to digital technology and various social media networking platforms for all citizens of the state.
- (v) People should utilize their hidden capability to act as a motivating force of change by harnessing social media. The government can provide facilities but it is the will of the citizens which act as a push factor to influence the politics of the state.

Conclusion

Social media plays significant role in integrating the people of different segments of the society. The concept of political empowerment is the way to ensure independence, self-reliance and restoring the dignity of citizen and social media has played a very important role by providing citizen with the platform just with the click of a button raising the political awareness among citizen, which could empower them to lead a happy and dignified life. Social media can act as practical force to create political consciousness among the citizen by providing helpful information. It is also necessary that citizen should participate and use social media as a force for nation building and development.

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