Social Media as a Tool for Political Communication: A Case Study of India

Srikanth Bade

Abstract—This paper discusses how the usage of social media has altered certain discourses and communicated with the political institutions for major actions in Indian scenario. The advent of new technology in the form of social media has engrossed the general public to discuss in the open forum. How they promulgated their ideas into action is captured in this study. Moreover, these discourses happening in the social media is analyzed from certain philosophical traditions by adopting a framework. Hence, this paper analyses the role of social media in political communication and change the political discourse. Also, this paper tries to address the issue that whether the deliberation made through social media had indeed communicated the issue of political matters to the decision making authorities.

Keywords—Collective action and social capital, political communication, political discourse, social media.

I. INTRODUCTION

PUBLIC discourse on political issues gained momentum in the recent years with the advent of technology and especially with the usage of social media. It has indeed altered the course of action leading to major changes in the political decision. For instance, micro blogging services like Twitter and social network sites like face book have given scope for the general public to voice out their concern and increase the political participation. They use this as a medium to communicate their political desire and also create a discourse of change. Between April 2018 and April 2019, the social media users grew by 202 million. As per the global report Digital 2019, nearly 3.5 billion people are actively using social media. Every 6.4 seconds a new social media user is adding up to the total [1]. This amazing growth has also created significant impact in the political communication. Hence, this paper traces how social media had created major political change through political communication in India in the last one decade.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Before analyzing the case of India in detail, there are certain theoretical premises under which the argument of this case is built upon. Political communication as said by Habermas has the power to enhance cooperative learning and collective problem solving. By using social media, deliberation can be done quickly, effectively reaching the large number of masses. However, expressing one's opinion through social media or

Srikanth Bade is from Telangana State, India. He is a Research Scholar now with the Department of Mass Communication, Telangana University, Nizamabad, Telanagana State, India (e-mail: srikanth.bade82@gmail.com).

collectively trying to address certain issues circulating from the bottom up and the top down throughout various social media can also take a quite different form in different arena. Qi et al. have come out with a framework describing the use of social media and that framework is applied here to analyse the Indian case study on social media as a tool for political communication [2]. The frame work is explained hereunder in Fig. 1.
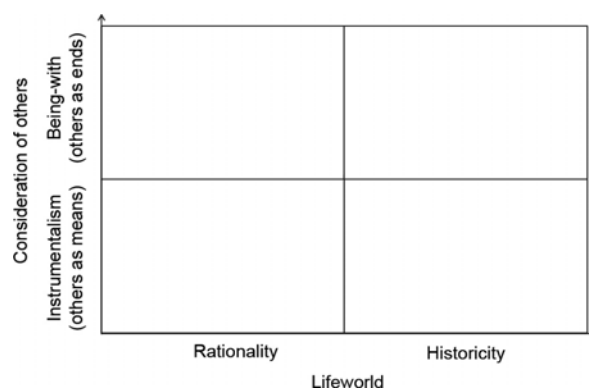

Fig. 1 Framework of Political Communication

The horizontal axis explains about the life world philosophical tradition which is dominated by rationality and historicity whereas the vertical axis explains about the consideration for others. In this, two views are dominant and those are presented in the figure as functionalism and existence with. Instrumentalism considers others as means to achieve or propagate their ideas and being with uses others as ends. In the former others are used as an instrument to achieve the end whereas in the latter others are considered to be the end. Habermas had explained the consideration of others in detail [3].

Some theorists like Bourdieu has stated that social media helps in the creation of social capital. Social capital in the context of social media can be defined as a collective composition of resources that is linked to the control of a strong network of relationships of mutual social contact and recognition [4]. In other words, it can be said that a membership in a group which has common interest or try to create and arrive at comment interest. This capital provides each of its members with the support of the collectively owned capital, a ''record'' that entitles them to communicate their thoughts and ideas. Therefore, in the realm of political communication, the main purpose of social media can be considered to build a strong social capital which can sustain for a long term or else can be dissolved once the purpose is

World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol:15, No:3, 2021

achieved. In this process each user of the social media will analyze the change of success and they will play collectively towards achieving the success. There will be a sense of the game, because one will often review their own and their relative's postings to determine the communication's distance. The strategies on social media are the internalization of external chances in the subjective hopes and mental schemata. These strategies partially come from the dispositions and are influenced with external conditions. So, the user gets influenced by the intensity of social post shared by the social media. The thing to keep in mind is that what one writes on social media is not individual, but social and collective. It has a social and political determination. It tries to reflect a collective form of morality, social thinking and social motivation. Apart from collective history one's individual history also influences. The preferences in social media are constituted over time by social structures. This gets reflected in the article that is written. Based on these theoretical premises the case is analyzed.

III. CASE STUDY IN INDIA

With the intervention of social media in India several political decisions are made recently. These were broadly based on the issues which try to restore the cultural practices; to provide relief and rehabilitation; to save nature; to address social cause; and also, to dissent with major political decisions. The Jallikattu protest is the best example which had created a ripple in the political communication with the help of social media. Tamilians across the world have united in this expressing their solidarity for the protest happened in Marina beach. The gathering of huge number of people was made possible only through the help of social media. Apart from supporting for a cause, these kind posts also showcase the solidarity among people working for that particular task. Ultimately the government has quickly arrived at the solution favoring the protesters.

The protest attained an important place in the history of Tamil Nadu on so many grounds. It was not only massive but also non-violent, and spontaneous. It has attracted people from all classes of the society. The significant contribution has come from women also protesting in large numbers. The protesters saw the Jallikattu ban as an attack on the culture and identity. Even though many of them might not have watched Jallikattu as a sport in their lifetime they participated in the protest and it has become a symbol of pride. Similarly, during floods in Chennai, Kerala, Orissa etc people have united to save people and also to provide relief and rehabilitation. WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages became sources of information for food, blankets and other such amenities. As a medium for getting news and updates on the situation, social media has become extremely popular. Weather blogging community was there to provide updates periodically. The online relief and rescue operation started doing better jobs than the government machinery. Collective action and social capital were in full swing attending the needy. They have emulated a model which the government can adopt.

Collective action is very much required when there is an issue of environment. Social media has addressed the environmental cause such as preventing pollution, saving tree, river and ecosystem, social media is gearing up to educate people and communicate the political decision makers to take appropriate action collectively. There are several blogs, micro blogs and other social media accounts which can talk, sensitise, educate, deliberate, articulate the issues to people and invite for the collective action. Some of the discourses had yielded positive result and for others the social media is still trying to persuade the government to take appropriate action. In this case noble laureate Elinor Ostram's concept is quite applicable. She has done a detailed analysis on the collective action of commons. She said that commons can bring alternative arrangements to manage any resources and these are possible both in theory and practice [5].

Several other sensitive issues where people differ from the government's decision also is amplified through social media. Sometime it creates the wrath of the government and succumbs to it. Hence social media has become a space to voice out their concern, demand their freedom. Negatively, many people can fall prey to the wrong ideology which might threaten the sovereignty of the nation and supremacy of the constitution. Several terrorist organizations also use social media as their medium of communication and can lure innocent people into their realm of politics. There are many such incidents happened in India and stringent measures have been taken to nail their activity. This is one of the negativities of using social media at large. Religious hatred and community conflict are also induced through social media which should be curbed at the bud.

In some cases, political parties also use social media to communicate and propagate their ideology during and after election. The active participation of politicians in the social media seeks the attention of people. This can also be considered as a political communication intending from the political system to people. Social media became popular in 2014 general election [6]. So, political communications happen in two ways: People to political organizations and the other way around. In both cases the exchange of idea happens and they attempt to sway each other in their favor. The clean India movement and related hast tag have been used widely to gain political mileage as well as for a good cause. Here the political message is made clear by the political party. Various national political parties and regional political parties have started using the social media to gain their vote by highlighting the issue of national and regional importance, on the other hand they also do political campaign.

All the above discussed five examples can be considered as a good example to analyse the topic of this paper from the Indian context. Here the issues flagged are different in nature and a brief analysis is given in the following section.

IV. INTEGRATED ANALYSIS

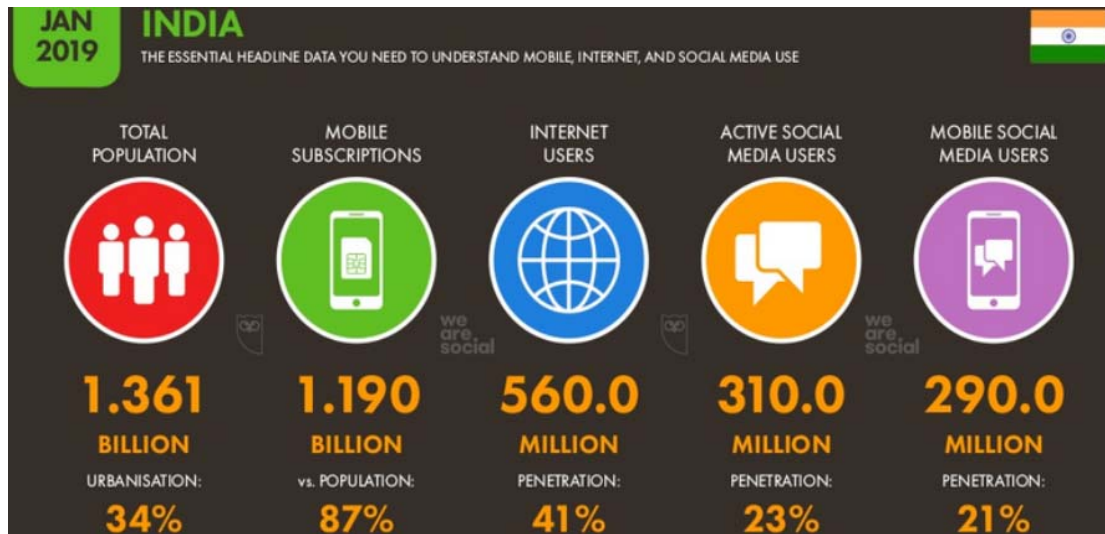Before analyzing the case, some data on the usage of social media are provided [7].

World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol:15, No:3, 2021

Fig. 2 Essential data on Mobile, Internet, and Social Media

Fig. 3 Annual Digital Growth

Fig. 4 Device Usage

World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
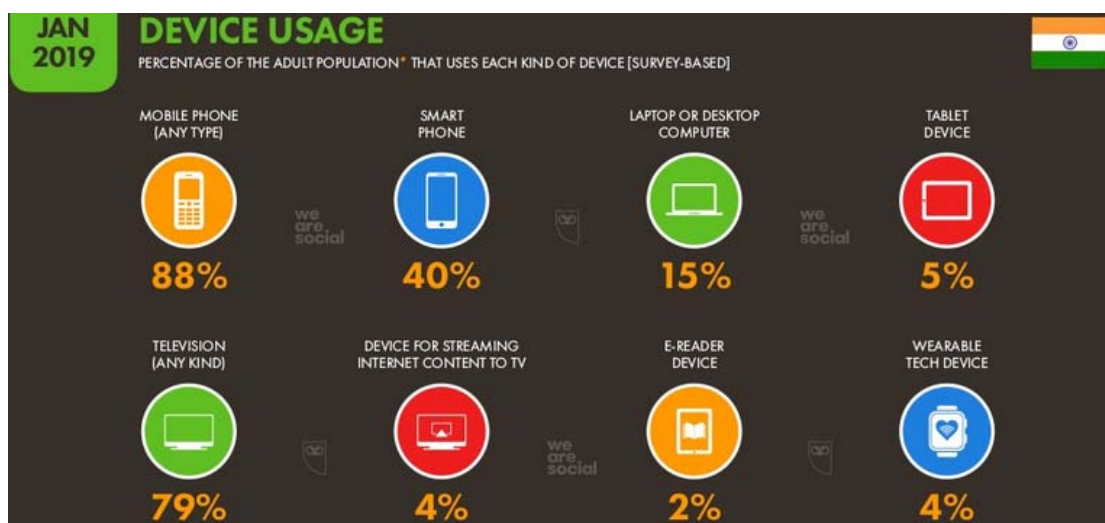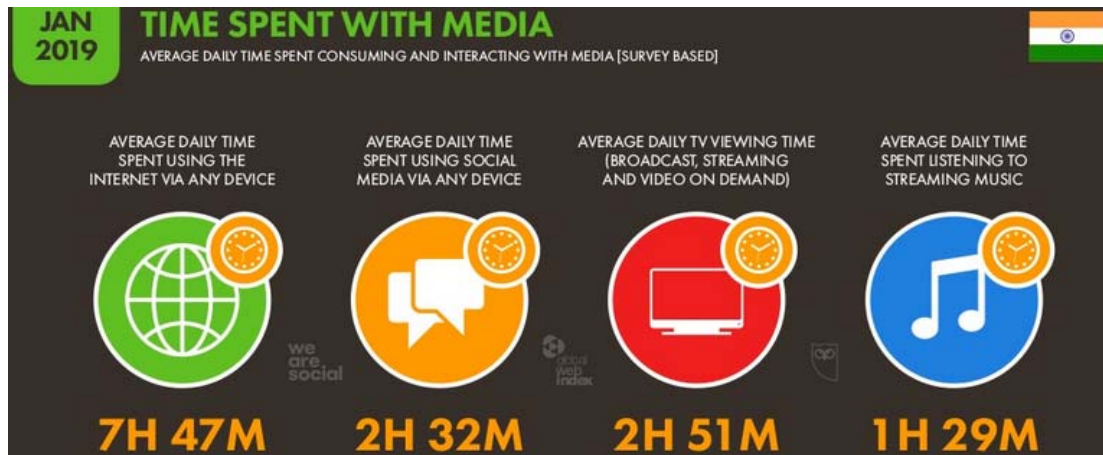International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol:15, No:3, 2021

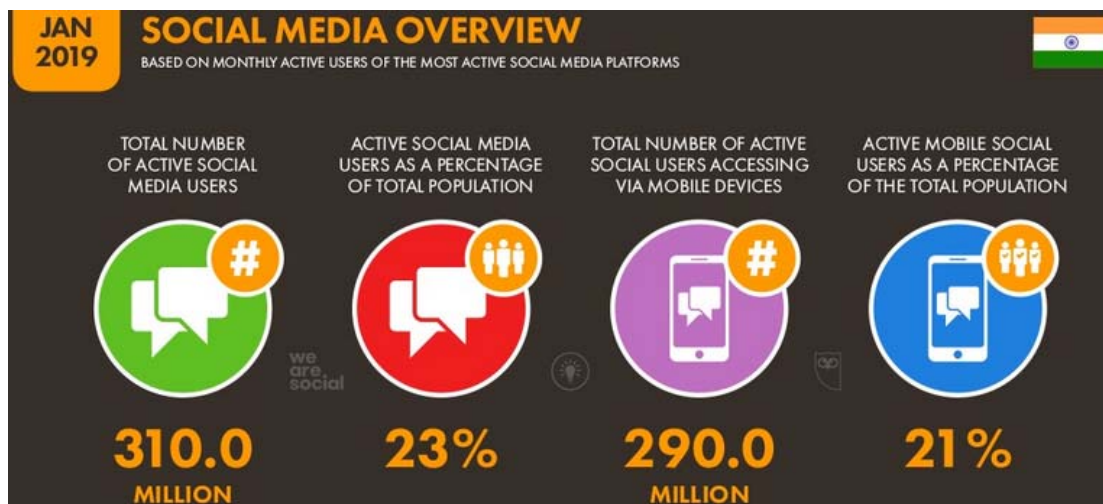Fig. 5 Time Spent with Media

Fig. 6 Content Streaming Activates

Fig. 7 Social Media Overview

The usage of social media has become quite easier to spread message rather than the conventional media. The difference between conventional and social media is given in the following paragraph as adopted from [8] and [9].

The production in the conventional mass media involves expensive information selection and content generation by professional journalists according to news values whereas in social media the production is inexpensive information selection and content generation by common users according to their individual preferences and attention maximization. In

World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol:15, No:3, 2021

the mass media the distribution includes content selected by expert/professional gatekeepers – based on established news values – distributed to a paying fixed audience of subscribers. But, in social media the distribution is done by the users who are like intermediaries, distributing popular content, sometimes like a chain letter, within networks of like-minded people. The usage of mass media is bound location based mass audience with limited selective exposure oriented towards passive consumption of information, based on professional selection. On the other hand, in the social media the usage is determined by interest-bound and like-minded peer networks with highly selective exposure oriented towards interaction through practices of updating. Hence, social media has gained sky rocketing momentum and paved way for both positive and negative things. In addition to the content, social media provides lots of information about the political issues. Even politically apathetic people are also some time very active in the social media voicing out their ideas or supporting the set of content under circulation. Recent developments propose a strong relationship between social media use and political assignation that raises questions about the growing for social media to help stem or even overturn patterns of political inequality that have troubled scholars for years [10]. Thus, social media as a tool for political communication has imparted:

- Community building and strengthening Structuration of past;
- Peer-based sociality;
- Sense of belonging to a community that is broader than in real life;
- Collective identity building;
- Strengthening of existing interpersonal relationships;
- Socialization and the consolidation of identity;
- Relationship maintenance;
- Connections with local community; and
- Influencing the political decisions.

V. CONCLUSION

Social media has served as a tool in bringing positive democratic attitude mindset among a more educated and critical population. This can indeed strengthen the participative model of democracy. Through this effective form of networking through social media wide range of political discourses and political actions can happen. This might be for the cause of certain individual unit to a country as whole; from restoring the historicity to rationalizing the modernization [11], [12]. Youths are particularly more active and it has created a new avenue for active political participation. But, caution should be kept in mind that differential capabilities and relations of power are not addressed through this social media. Still certain under privileged sections of the society are left out in the voice of social media and their consideration should not be ignored. If those bottlenecks and drawbacks are paid attention to, social media can used as an effective tool for political communication.

REFERENCES

[1] https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2019-india accessed on 26.12.2019
[2] Jiayin Qi et.al (2018), Theories of Social Media: Philosophical Foundations, Engineering, 4. pp. 94-102.
[3] Habermas J. The theory of communicative action. Volume 1: Reason and the rationalization of society McCarthy T, translator. Boston: Beacon Press; 1984.
[4] Bourdieu P. Outline of a theory of practice Nice R, translator. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1977.
[5] Bennett, W. L., &Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action. Information, Communication & Society, 15(5), pp. 739–768. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661.
[6] Brian D. Loader, Ariadne Vromen& Michael A. Xenos (2014) The networked young citizen: social media, political participation and civic engagement, Information, Communication & Society, 17:2, pp. 143-150, DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2013.871571.
[7] https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2019-india accessed on 26.12.2019
[8] KiranBala (2014), Social Media and Changing Communication Patterns, Global Media Journal, Summer Issue/Vol. 5/No. 1.
[9] Meti et al (2015)., J Mass Communication and Journalism, 5:9 DOI: 10.4172/2165-7912.1000275.
[10] Nahon K, Hemsley J, Walker S, et al. (2011) Fifteen minutes of fame: The power of blogs in the lifecycle of viral political information. Policy & Internet 3(1): pp. 6–33.
[11] Svensson J (2012)., Social media and the disciplining of visibility: Activist participation and relations of power in network societies. European Journal of e-Practice 16: pp. 16–28.
[12] Ulrike Klinger and JakobSvensson (2014), The emergence of network media logic in political communication: A theoretical approach, New Media and Society, DOI: 10.1177/1461444814522952.