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Social Media in Relation to Politics in Odisha, India :An Overview

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Abstract

Social media offers innovative opportunities for political actors, political institutions and the public to interact with one another. Most of the prominent political parties are getting attracted toward the use of social media for their election campaigns. Most of the prominent political parties are getting attracted toward the use of social media for their election campaigns. The use of social media by politicians for wooing the younger generation continues. In Odisha, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik who has asked his party men to use social media to woo young voters, who constitute above 40 percent of the total electorate in the state, In an attempt to cash on the popularity of social media among the youths, the Odisha unit of Congress logged into social media by inaugurating social media unit ahead of 2014 Assembly election in Bhubaneswar. In Odisha, many members of parliament (MPs) and members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) have created accounts on popular sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Orkut. The content posted on these sites may relate to policy issues and the official work of politicians or to aspects of their personal lives. We have also seen some candidates also campaign through the popular social network sites like Facebook, Twitter etc. in recent Urban Local Body (ULB) elections. However social media will become an important platform for electoral campaign in future elections. No doubt Social media will a game changing platform in near future.

Key words: social networks, democratic process, online communities

Introduction

Social media offers innovative opportunities for political actors, political institutions and the public to interact with one another. “Tools made available by social media have encouraged alternative voices to enter the political arena, voices that in previous years have been muted. As a result of technology, participation in the political process is accessible and direct engagement is feasible. Through social sharing, social media users have the opportunity to broadcast political messages. By sharing a campaign or candidates’ message, users are becoming advocates of that message. Passing political messages along to friends can have revolutionary effects in enhancing the democratic

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processes.”¹ A social network is a set of people, organizations, or other social entities connected by a set of socially meaningful relationships. When a computer network connects people, it is a social network. It can include and accommodate all types of individuals, in large numbers, who may not have known one another previously. On the other hand, online communities tend to be loosely structured networks with weak identity ties that are difficult to control and have difficulty making decisions .online communities increasing fragmentation in the political system, political elites, institutions and organized groups.²

Social Media in Odisha Politics

Social media are becoming increasingly popular among politicians and their organizations as a means to disseminate political messages, learn about the interests and needs of constituents and the broader public, raise funds, and build networks of support. These activities often take place on privately run social networking sites that allow political figures and institutions to communicate with the public in unmediated, high-profile fora. In Odisha, a State of India, many MPs and MLAs have created accounts on popular sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Orkut.. The content posted on these sites may relate to policy issues and the official work of politicians or to aspects of their personal lives. Most of the prominent political parties are getting attracted toward the use of social media for their election campaigns. The use of social media by politicians for wooing the younger generation continues. The latest to join the band wagon is the Chief Minister of Odisha, Naveen Patnaik who has asked his party men to use social media to woo young voters, who constitute above 40 percent of the total electorate in the state, “The new generation is using social media, which is a powerful media for youth communication programmes. We need to be engaged in the social media to communicate with the youths,” Patnaik said after inaugurating the party website.³ The website (www.bjdodisha.org.in), highlighting the welfare programmes initiated by ruling Biju Janata Dal (BJD) government during the last 12 years,⁴ was inaugurated at a workshop organised by Biju Yuba Sampark Committee at the party office here. Naveen Patnaik asked the party’s youth wing to reach out to the young people and organise programmes to motivate them. While highlighting the State Youth Policy announced by his government, Patnaik said the government had created opportunities for the youth brigade. He urged the youth to avail the benefits of the policy. Stating that the next decade would be an era of excellence for the youth in the state, he said “the government has initiated many developmental programmes in the state during the last 10 years. The coming 10 years will be an era of excellence for the youth of state.”⁵

In an attempt to cash on the popularity of social media among the youths, the Odisha unit of Congress logged into social media by inaugurating social media unit ahead of 2014 Assembly election in Bhubaneswar. The All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary and Odisha in-charge BK Hariprasad inaugurated social media unit of the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee. While inaugurating the new department, AICC general secretary in charge of Odisha, BK Hariprasad shared that the vision of Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) is to link the urban and rural populations through the social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. He also added that AICC vice-president Rahul Gandhi has sought daily progress report of this newly-formed department.

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The social media team would link the urban and rural populations through the social media site like Facebook, Twitter, Linkdin, etc. Speaking on the occasion the OPCC president Jayadev Jena said he has instructed the OPCC media department to train at least 50 youths from each district who would write blogs for the party. The cell would initiate posting on Facebook, tweeting, emailing and text messaging ward level activities to voters and other agencies.⁶ Besides these some MPs and MLAs are using Social network sites for their popularity. We have also seen some candidates also campaign through the popular social network sites like Facebook, Twitter etc. in recent Urban Local Body (ULB) elections. However social media will become an important platform for electoral campaign in future elections. No doubt Social media will be a game changing platform in near future.

Conclusion

At its core, the debate surrounding the political uses of social media centers on the question of what effect, if any, these new technologies have on our system of representative democracy. Proponents argue that these technologies promote accountability, transparency and public engagement with political institutions and figures.⁷ However, social media are quickly becoming standard communications tools for political figures and institutions and the citizens they serve. Only further experience and analysis will resolve the current uncertainty about their benefits and harms for representative democracy. However, it will be interesting to observe the role of social media in Odisha Politics in upcoming 2014 elections.

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