INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
B.SC ISM

RESEARCH TOPIC: Impact of Social Media on Indian General Elections

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INTRODUCTION

In the present era of Social media boom, it is very evident that it influences our day to day choices and our mindsets as well. Not only is the gen z being influenced. But the older generations are equally influenced by what they see on social media. The money-makers are using social media as a great opportunity to expand their market and to reach greater masses not only in India, but internationally as well.

The greatest advantage of social media is being observed & used by Political parties to develop strong and direct connections with the public to ensure their winnings & achievements. Social media reaches even to the remotest areas. Each election, whether parliamentary or assembly, stands unique because of the shifting political climate of the country or the states where the Assembly elections are to be held.

Political parties use social media as a digital market to create a digital political marketplace where the parties, candidates & government officials directly get involved in the conversation to form or drive the public opinion in a calculated direction. Through Social Media, the politicians are able to communicate faster and also, can reach citizens in a targeted manner and vice-versa, without the intermediate role of mass media. This makes the public feel more directly involved with the campaign. It not only molds the opinion of Indians but also reaches beyond the country as it allows both mass messaging and micro-targeting, which is another one of social media's extremely powerful advantages.

While silently fighting to develop a positive opinion, the social media is also misused for propaganda, hate speech, and disinformation campaigns, which is in opposition to the actual roots of the formation of Indian democracy.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

It can be generalized that the power of social media is vastly underestimated by a great majority of people. To put that into perspective, the research tries to delve deep into the areas that are to be looked into. Historically, social media has not been able to influence the Indian political scene but it is starting to take a toll on it. With the internet becoming a recurring theme in Indian households, political parties have been known to use it to their advantage. To study this phenomenon, this research tries to take a survey of the Indian population to see what kind of variables impact their decision making.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is of great significance to the people of India, especially the youth of our country .The best way to connect with the youth of a country is through social media platforms .This research will help people to understand more about how elections are conducted and about the political environment in our country. It will encourage people to keep their point of view and how they see elections .Social media has helped people to express their opinions freely as well as to read and understand the political views of other people as well. They can know more about their Election candidates by interacting with them in live sessions and understanding their policies to run the government of the country.

Through different social media accounts the election candidates can reach out to the people of the country and sell their ideas. Social media has changed the way we see elections but people are also made aware that they need to use social media platforms in a healthy manner and avoid spreading hate, violence and misinformation which can manipulate people affect their decisions and misguide them .People need to know that election is an very important element and its necessary for them to know more about it and vote wisely for the future of the country.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

With the increase in the number of social media users in India it has become increasingly obvious that political parties are trying to use this medium to reach the voters. Some might argue that political parties are abusing their power in order to gain further reach and mass propagate. To throw some light on this situation, this research will look into the role of social media in the outcome of the elections. This research is not limited to one specific social media platform and will cover all forms of media that ultimately reaches the target audience being the voters. This study is geographically limited to the Indian subcontinent as the research is done there. It is majorly focused on analyzing the 2014 Indian elections which is a very specific scenario and it would be wrong to generalize it. The study is also limited to the fact that there was no amount of resources allocated to it and will also study the opinions of 15 people of Indian nationality in depth. The selection of these people was done considering two factors: Firstly, the fact that they should be of Indian nationality as that is the primary focus of the study, and secondly, They should have some experience with the way the elections in India function. Furthermore, the study will also delve into how much the people studied felt like social media affected their voting decision. Overall, the study tries to answer the ways social media influences the Indian elections to its maximum capacity.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are some limitations presented in this study as the lack of information available is inadequate and is not reliable. Also, the primary research which was done only represents the views of a very little amount of people and it is a given that the results and outcome would have been different if the sample size would be huge. Another constraint that this has is of time, this study is being done on a timely basis, which restricts us from collecting more precise views and information. The research can be improved if different primary data collection, like Personal Interviews or Group discussions, could be used to cover a larger amount of people but such methods require a high cost which acts as another restriction.

When it comes to the topic, the topic includes every 18+ citizen living in India who lives both in the urban and rural part of India. Many Indians, specifically those residing in a rural area, do not have access to social media; such people cannot contribute to the study but they contribute to the elections in a significant amount. Also, a large number of people are afraid of expressing their opinions on social media because it is a very sensitive topic and such discussions have been a reason for a few riots.

By considering all of these limitations, this study is particularly to find and understand the relationship between Social Media and the elections held in India.

LITREATURE REVIEW

The research conducted aims to find the effects of the use of social media in the outcome of the Indian general elections. The modern society is generally actively engaged in the use of social media and its tools and political parties can use that to their advantage to reach a large proportion of voters in a relatively short period of time (Narasimhamurthy N, 2014). Social Media is an online application platform which facilitates interaction, collaboration and sharing of content (Koening-Lewis, 2009).Social media today has become a very important tool for expressing opinions, views, ideas and has become a powerful tool of opinion creation. Democracies are questioning if social media can be a valid indicator to anticipate election outcomes in the current era of electronic revolution, when social media has become the means and end of all communication. Election candidates, government officials, political parties can use social media to drive public opinion in desired direction

Social media has grown in importance as a tool for election advertising and as a powerful platform for expressing one's opinion around the world. During the 2009 elections around 150 million voters were on social media who were also called the 'connected' generation. It was easy for the political parties to connect with the voters and they jumped in to join social media platforms to influence this segment of voters. Volume buzz, number of re-tweets and followers were the major measuring tools to identify which politicians are in trend and famous(Swamy, 2014) .The extensive use of social media had been noticed in the 2014 Indian general elections , Twitter became the medium of choice for people to engage in and consume political content . Between January 1st and May 12th, 2014, 56 million election-related tweets were sent out (Chao, 2014). Research conducted is pointing toward political parties using social media tools to manipulate the outcome of the election. Manipulation in social media for organizations that seek to influence debates by creating a movement which seemingly arises from the common citizen, commonly termed as Astroturfing (Kiran Garimella et al., 2021) was found to be a very influential tool used by political parties. Research also suggests that social media has become an integral part of the lives of young adults. Social media acts as a medium for people of all areas of life regardless of their caste, religion, or creed to be able to communicate and share their views on valid topics. The new generation has developed a certain level of comfort to develop relationships online further blurring the difference in online and offline activities (Narasimhamurthy N, 2014).

To adapt to these changes, research shows that political parties have adapted rapidly to facilitate them and the relatively recent 2014 Indian parliament election is being called a social media election (Narasimhamurthy N, 2014). Social media has transformed Indian politics. Though Assam is a state where the use of internet and network is not available in all parts of the state yet in the 2016 Assembly Election, the political parties and the voters had used social media such as Facebook, Whatsapp, and Twitter etc. Facebook likes of political parties and votes gained by political parties are correlated (Safiullah et al., 2017). Twitter, YouTube, Google Plus, Facebook, WhatsApp and other media platforms have truly transformed the definition and essence of Indian elections.

Looking at the overall impact of social media on the Indian elections, social media has changed the election pattern all across the world and this new way of campaigning by the political parties has changed the political atmosphere of India. Social media has triggered changes in the campaign strategies of political parties, candidates, and political organizations, at the same time it has changed the people's participation in elections. Through social media, people can meet their leaders very easily and interact very quickly with the help of their cell phone. The following recurring themes seemed to have influenced the election in significant ways.

Astroturfing

It is the practice where organizations manipulate the underlying message to be originating from grass root participants and not from the organisation itself (Maurice Jakesch et al., 2021). Research insinuates that this is a common occurrence in the Indian elections and plays a significant role in it.

Gratification Approach

It is fundamentally dependent on the gratification theory which states that people look toward different media to satisfy different needs. Political parties have been found to use this approach to their advantage in the outcome of the elections (Narasimhamurthy N, 2014)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What effect do social media have on Indian General Elections?
2. How do social media influence the decision making of a voter?
3. Does social media campaign have greater impact on the voter's decision making compared to traditional campaign?
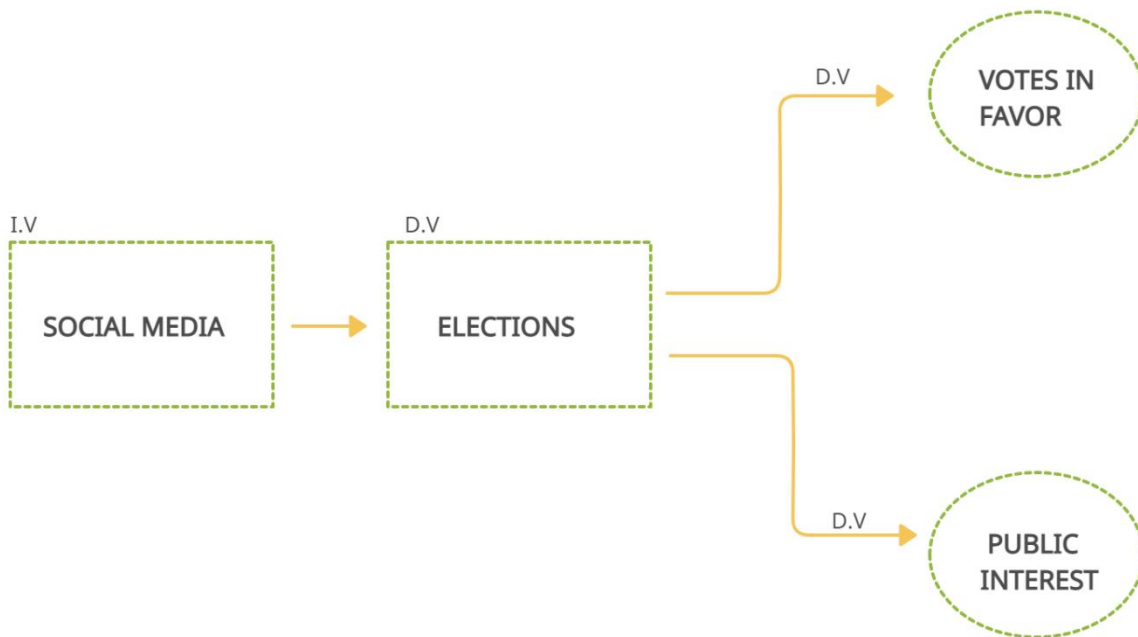
PROBLEM STATEMENT

Impact of Social Media on Indian General Elections

IDENTIFICATION OF THE VARIABLE

- Independent Variable: Social Media
- Dependent Variable: Elections

THEORETICAL STATEMENT

The theoretical framework of this research with the independent (I.V) & dependent variables (D.V) areas shown below.

Two main variables namely dependent variables and independent variables have been identified throughout the research of this project.

The dependent variable in this research is the elections, and Social Media is the independent variable. This refers that social media affects the result obtained in the elections. The more positive popularity increases the chance of winning the elections and whereas, having negative popularity decreases the chances of winning.

The above figure also explains the major factors within elections that get affected through social media are the votes in favor of and the interest of the public.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Sample: 20 Indians from different states, working in different sectors in India and abroad.

Time Period: the data is collected from 2014-2020. 6 years' data is collected.

Type of Data Collection Frame: the frame used in this research article is Cross-sectional secondary data. Data is accumulated for the purpose of better understanding of the topic was done from various online websites and scientific articles. Primary data was collected via questionnaire and online forms.

SAMPLING

Population: 20 Indians both residential and non-residential were surveyed, to accumulate primary data for data analysis.

Non-Probable based sampling: Convenience sampling is implemented in this research article.

DATA ANALYSIS

The following is the visual representation and explanation of the primary data collected through the questionnaire.

1. Age –
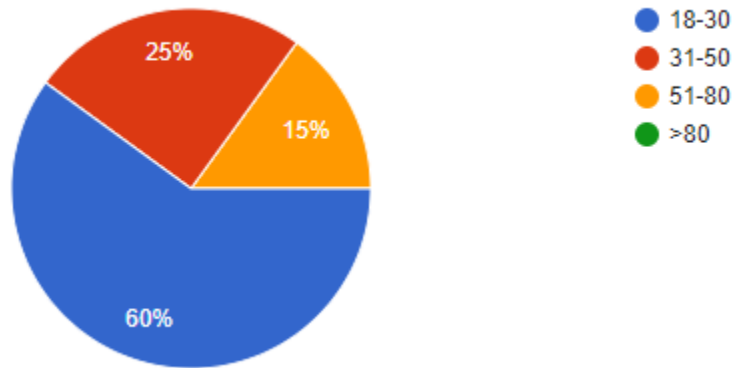
This pie chart represents the ages of the 20 individual that filled the survey.

Out of everyone who filled it; more than half of them, that is, 60% of the people are of age between 18 and 30 which represents higher participation of the younger generation who are comparatively more engaged in social media.

25% of the people are between 31-50 and the rest of the people are between the age 51-80.

2. Which region of India do you belong to?
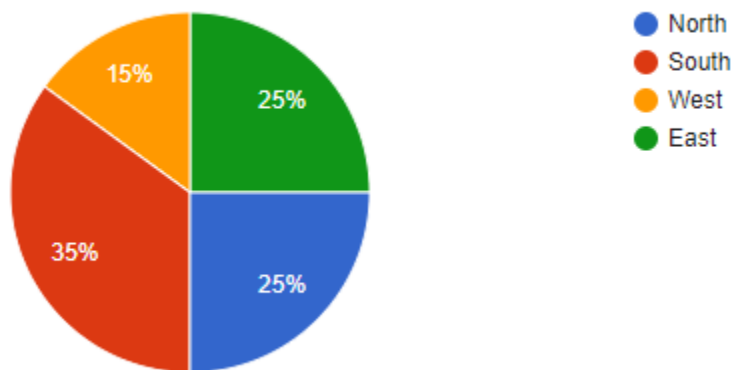
This pie chart represents the region of India that the people belong to. As it is visible in the representation above, we have almost an equal participation of people from all the regions in India.

South contributes the most, that is, 35%.

15% people from the west. And 25% people from both east and north.
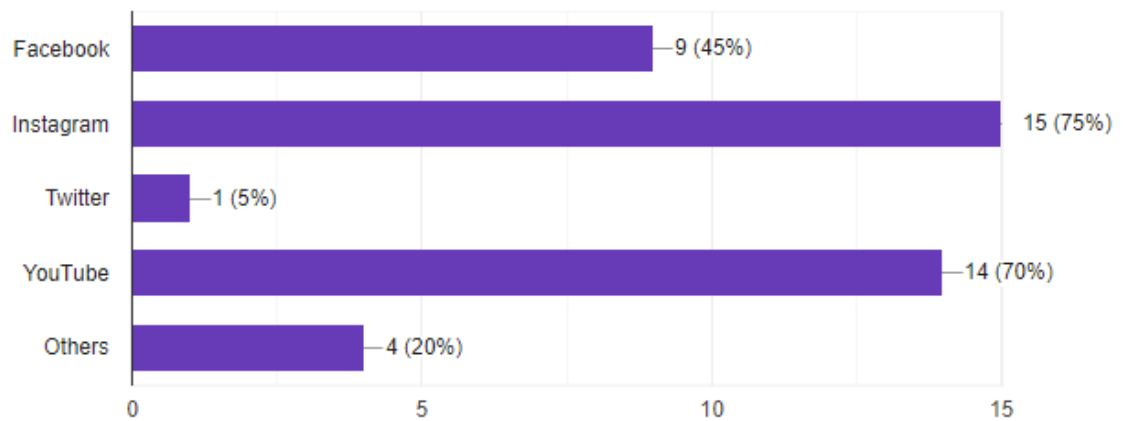
3. Do you use Social Media?
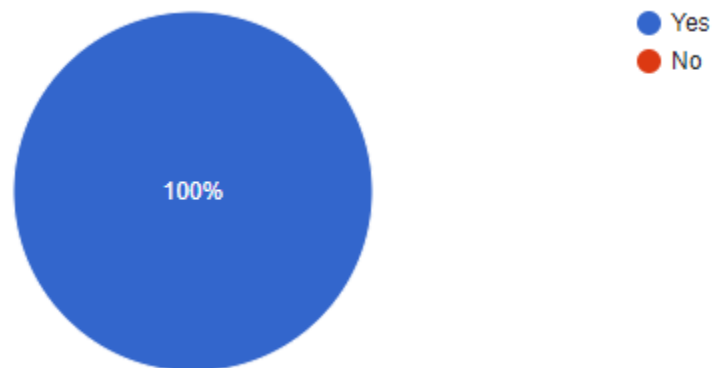
This pie chart shows that all the people who participated in the survey use social media.

4. How many hours do you spend on Social Media?
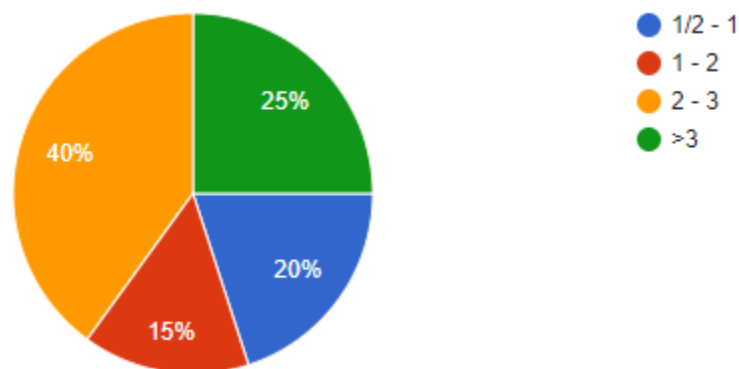
This shows the amount of time the individuals spend on social media.

5. Which Social Media platform you use most actively?

The above chart represents what all platforms are being used by the people.
Most of the people use Instagram, Facebook & YouTube while many also uses platforms which are not as famous.
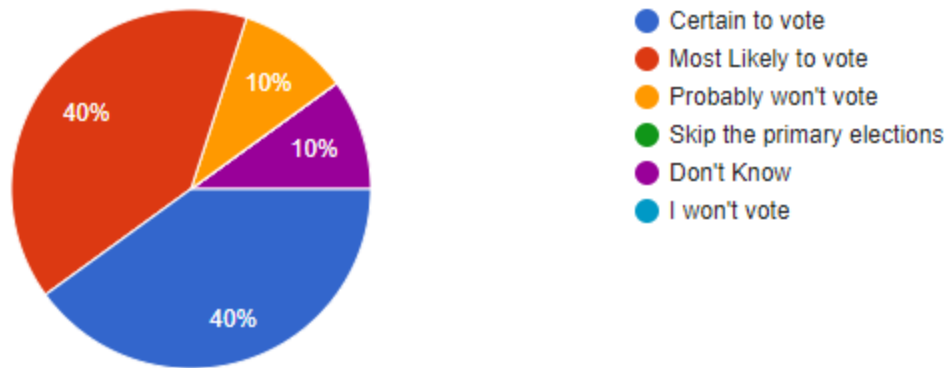
6. Have you ever voted in the elections before?
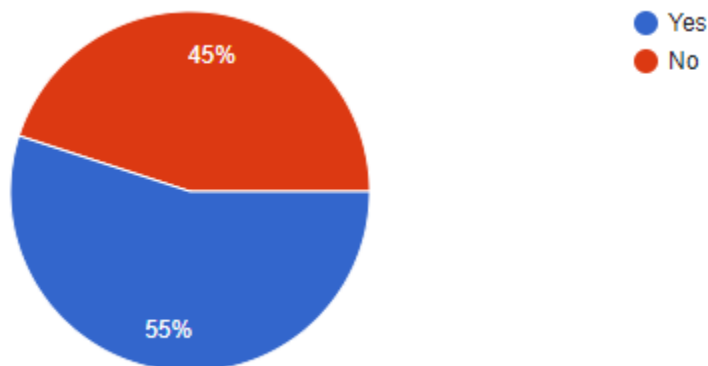
This pie chart shows that out of all the people who participated, 45% of them have not voted in the elections before and on the other hand, 55% have voted before.

The reason for the 45% people could be that maybe they are the first time voters or they were not able to vote for any other possible reason.

7. How likely are you to vote in the coming elections?

Legend:
- ● Certain to vote
- ● Most Likely to vote
- ● Probably won't vote
- ● Skip the primary elections
- ● Don't Know
- ● I won't vote

This pie chart simply represents the participation of the people in the upcoming elections.
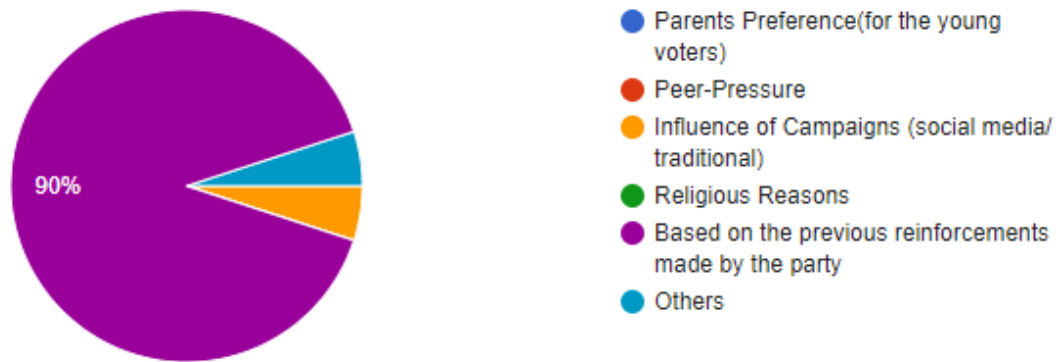
It shows various types of response ranging from will vote to not vote at all.

8. Did you ever change your preference of your supporting political party? (for the ones previously voted in the Indian General Elections)

Legend:
- ● Yes
- ● No
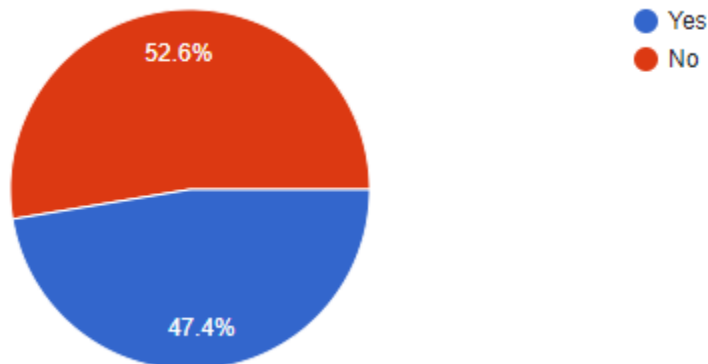
This pie chart represents if the participants ever changed their preference of political party. It shows that 52.6% never changed it but a significant amount of people, that is, 47.4% changed it. And since it's a general question, it does not show the actual reason behind it but even such a small change matters in general voting.

9. On what basis do you choose your political parties?

Legend:
- Parents Preference(for the young voters)
- Peer-Pressure
- Influence of Campaigns (social media/ traditional)
- Religious Reasons
- Based on the previous reinforcements made by the party
- Others

90%

This pie chart represents on what basis the voters actually choose the political parties that they will be voting for.

As it is visible, 90% of the people choices are based on the previous reinforcements that are made by the party. This shows that the majority of people actually looks and observes at the promises that the parties makes and fulfills.

Only 5% of the people got influenced by the campaigns that were done.

And other 5% of the people went with what their parents suggested.

10. How often do you pay attention to what's going on in government and politics?

Legend:
- Always
- Most of the Time
- About half the time
- Sometimes
- Never

40%
30%
15%
15%
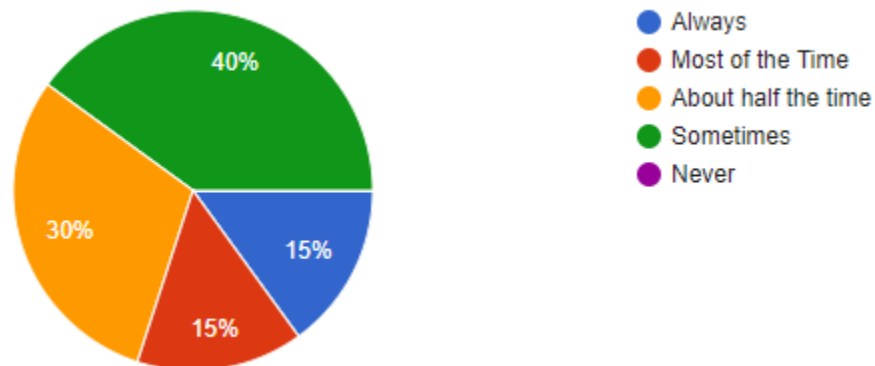
This pie chart shows the participation of people in the governmental and the policies that they announce. And clearly, there's no one who does not pay attention. Most of the people pay attention sometimes which is a very reasonable answer since not all the people are interested or free to learn about each and every new policy.

This involvement is significant because such policies and governmental things makes people choose parties and also this interest also leads to developing a sense of trust towards the preferred party.

11. Do you follow any political figure on Social Media?
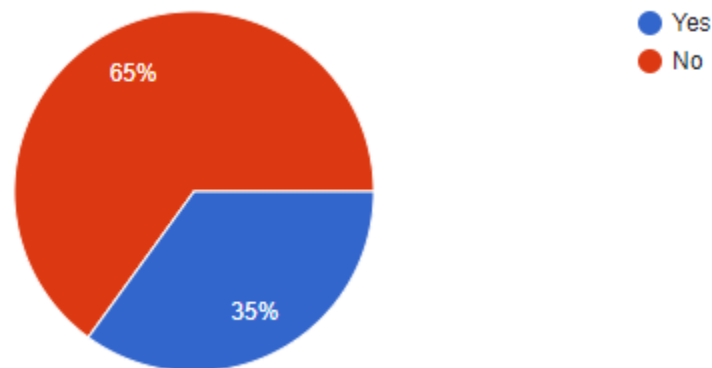
This pie chart simply represents the percentage of people that follow political figures on social media. Again, 65% do not follow but a significant amount of 35% people follow some political figures.

12. Do you get more involved in a political issue after reading and discussing about it on Social Media?
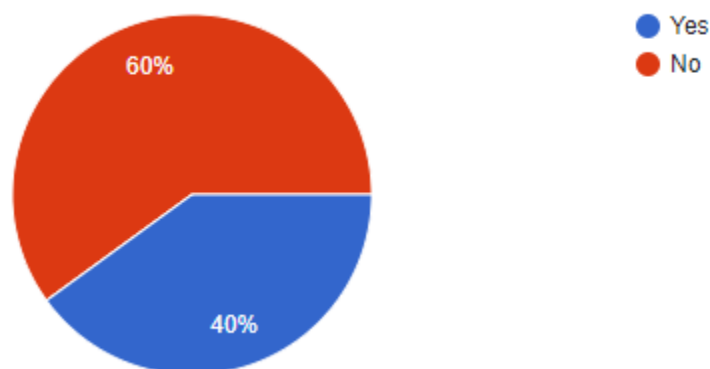
This chart also simply represents how much involvement a social media discussion creates, and how much it intrigues the people. And here, a significant amount of 40% people gets more involved when they read and discuss issues on social media.

13. Do you think Social Media highlights important issues about elections that otherwise may not get a lot of attention?
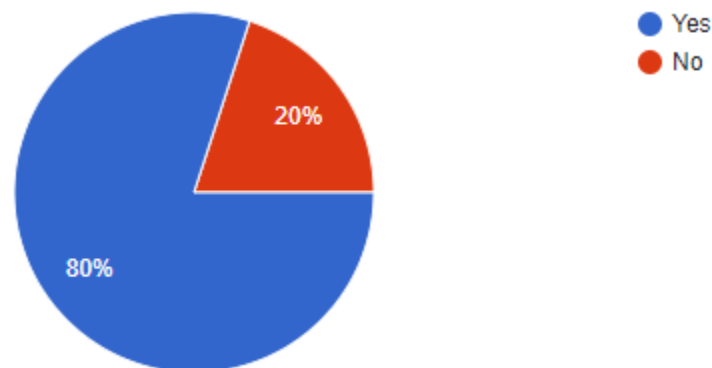
This pie chart is important as it shows that the majority of people believe that such election issues gets huge when discussed on social media. This question shows that even though a lot of people do not read social media discussions but it does makes them aware of what's going on, and also they believe that social media helps to put light on such lost issues.

14. On the scale of 1-5, how comfortable are you to talk about elections on Social Media?
*1 being the least comfortable and 5 being the most comfortable.
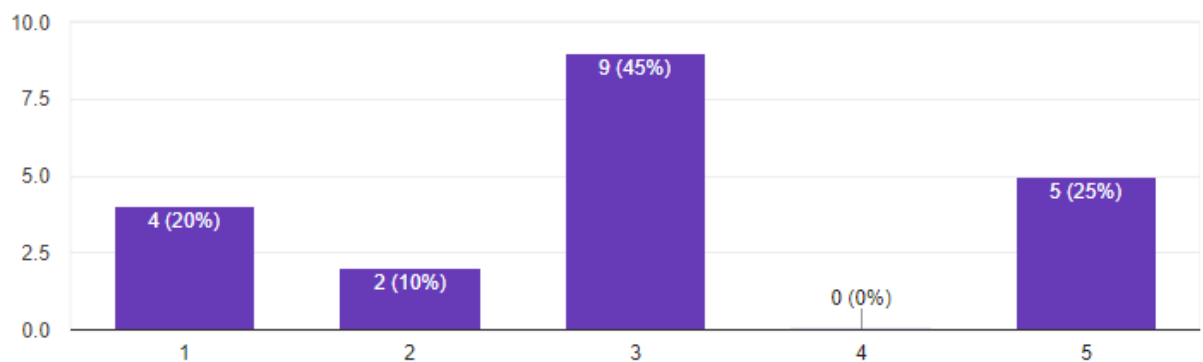
This scale shows that most of the people do not mind talking about elections on social media. And many people are not at all comfortable about opening up on such elections.

The answer to this question gets influenced due to a number of reasons, which can be the backlash they could receive because of their choice or many other reasons.

And comfortableness with such topic is very important because these topics can go pretty big and is read by many people as well. And any wrong assumption can turn the elections around.

15. On the scale of 1-5, how likely would you share a political post to your friends via Social Media platforms?
*1 being very un-likely and 5 being very likely
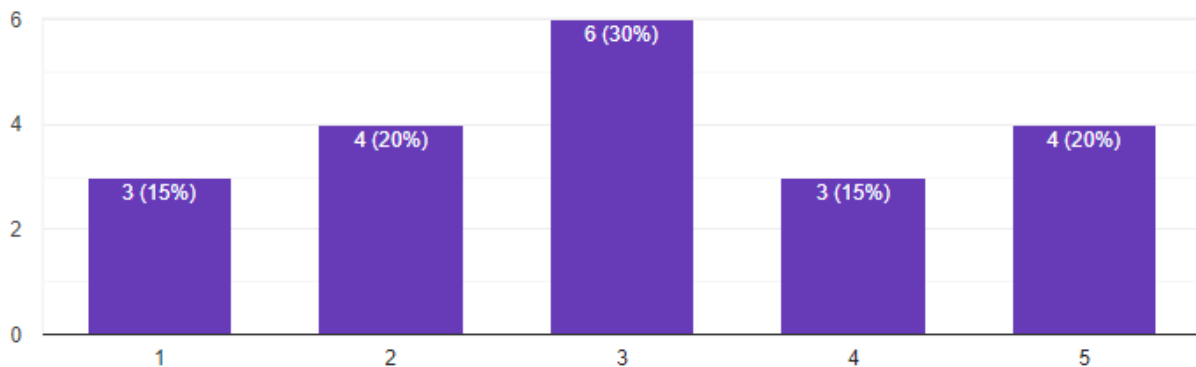
This scale shows that most of the people do not mind sharing political post to friends. From this scale, it can be observed that most of the people fall on the likely side and the reason could be the fact that such sharing between friends could be a joke or a random discussion which is not taken as seriously as it does in a huge crowd.

16. On the scale of 1-5, how much do Social Media campaigns influence your decision-making on choosing the right political party?
*1 being Not at all and 5 being Completely Influences
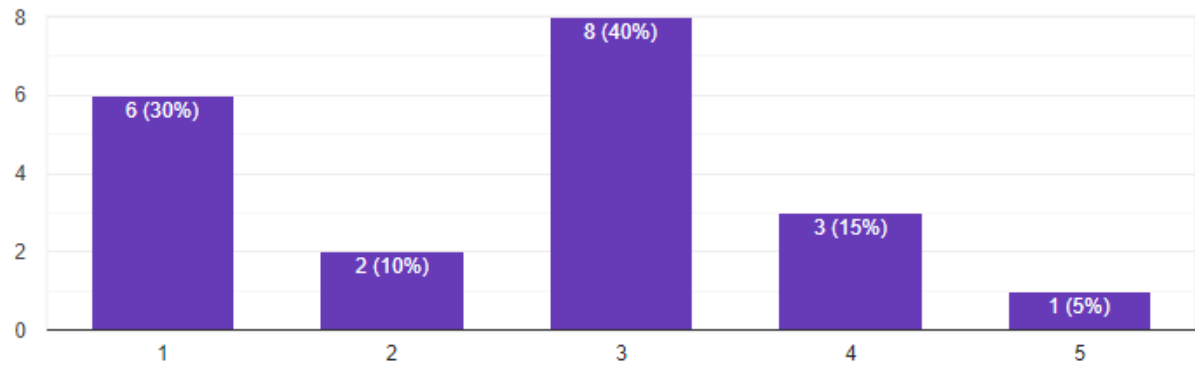
This scale shows the influence of social media campaigns on choosing the right political parties. Majority of people choose neutral, which shows that it might or might not affect based on the weight of the issue.

17. Do you agree that Social Media has helped people to bring new voices into elections discussion?
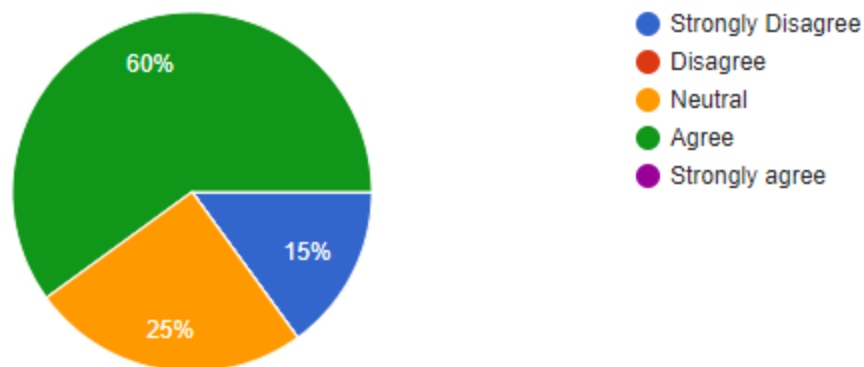
This pie chart shows that most of the people agree that social media has helped people to bring new voices into election discussion. This means that through the social media lot new voices has been given a chance to get into the discussions.

These voices have created both types of impacts, which are negative and positive, and have played a significantly important role in choosing the political parties.

18. Are Social Media campaign strategies more effective compared to traditional campaigns strategies?
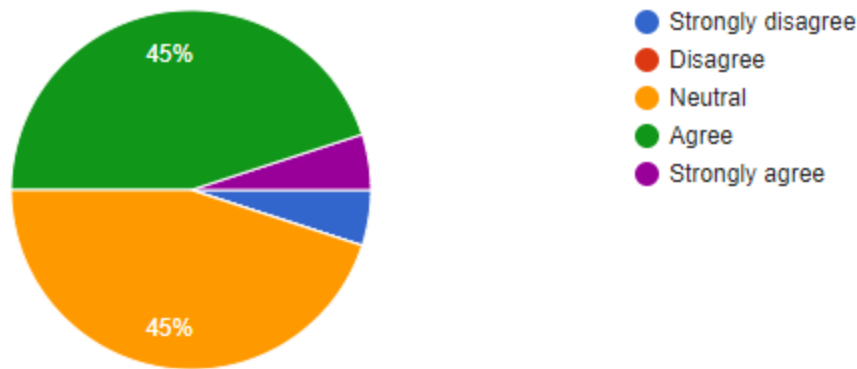
This pie chart represents the number of people who believe that the social media campaigns are more effective compared to traditional campaigns. The majority of people agree that these are more effective.

19. Have you ever followed or un-followed a political figure because of a particular social media post?
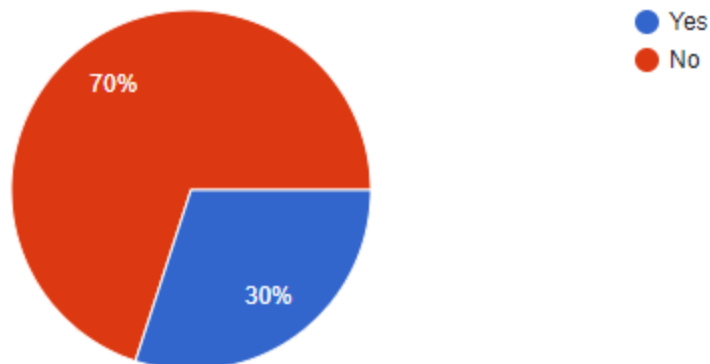
This pie chart shows the view of people on whether or not have people un-followed any political figures based on some posts.

The majority of people says no, which shows two things. First being the strong mentality or trust of people toward a social figure and the second that, the political figure have maintained peace and a good image.

The other 30% of the people who have actually un-followed, which could be because of many reasons.

CONCLUSION

Internet is one of the most dynamic phenomena in modern times. Internet based new forms of communication and information flow has played an important role in advancement of democratic society. In present era of electronic revolution when the social media has become the means and end of all communication even political parties are embracing social media for the marketing and advertising purpose. Social media acts like a link between people across the nation regardless of differences and geographical boundaries.

This research paper examines the relationship between social media campaign and success of political parties in Indian General Elections. The results indicate that social media campaign to political parties did have a positive and significant impact on the number of seats won in 2019 General Elections by political parties.

People follow politicians on social media platforms and are also actively involved in political discussion by sharing their opinions and views. Hence this form of interaction makes them feel more directly involved in the campaign. There are predictions that social media will transform democracy allowing citizens and political communication, connect and interact in ways like never before. Through Social Media, the politicians are able to communicate faster and also, can reach citizens in a targeted manner and vice-versa.

People use social media platform to keep update of political development. Thus technology plays an enormous role in giving first-hand information in less time. This research paper suggests an appropriate strategy in tweet and re-tweet can enhance the chance of winning seats in the election. It is therefore important that political parties need to hire people who can make impactful tweets which are most relevant to political party goals.

The motives for why people use social media during the political campaign and why people use social media during the political campaign and what factor can predict these motivations for using the social media services are examined in this study. There are 3 major drivers are Political surveillance, entertainment and social utility. Increasingly political and elected officials are realizing the power of social media for communicating political information and interacting with citizens.

Social media was incredibly successful in reaching the younger population while helping all population to organize and promote action. Nearly 75% of social media

users in India are under the age of 35 and nearly half of them under 25 years. The pattern of the use shows that expansion, adaptability and future prospects of the new media in India. The previous 2 parliament general elections are witness of the effect of the web media use and adoption and effects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To know more about elections and to participate intensively it would be very helpful to use the traditional campaigning and advertisement methods as well. A large section of the Indian population still do not have access to social media or do not know how to use it .Using traditional strategies and vote contacts it would give them the freedom to know the election candidates better and make a proper decision on voting day .

BENEFICIARIES

This study has been carried out to provide vital information on Social media and its impact on Indian elections.

The study will be of great benefit to the youth of India, Election Candidates, Individual Researchers, and New Voice.

1. Youth of India – Majority of the people on social media are the youth of the country. They play a vital role in the development and future of the country. Social media will make them aware about the election procedures in India and how they can express their views and vote for the candidate whom they think can run the government of the country.

2. Election Candidates- If they want to convey their policies to a larger audience especially the youth of the country then can interact with them through different social media accounts and promote themselves and gain more voters.

3. Individual Researcher – Individual researchers can use this study for reference purposes and to get an Idea about how Social Media affects Elections and how they can carry out their research further.

4. New Voice – This study will help to empower new voices through social media and help the people who still don't have a clear about how important elections are in a country and how much their vote matters.

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