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Social media as an upcoming tool for political marketing effectiveness

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ABSTRACT

In the present era of electronic revolution when the social media has become the means and end of all communication, democracies are wondering if social media can be a valid indicator to predict elections outcome. With the increase in popularity and growth in the use of social media, the present study aims at examining whether the use of social media (Twitter) had an effect on the 2014 General elections outcome. For this research, a total of 8,877,275 social media buzz for 100 days from January 01, 2014 to April 09, 2014 of 12 Indian political parties has been considered. The result indicates that social media buzz has a positive and significant impact on the outcome of General elections 2014.

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1. Introduction

In the present era of electronic revolution when the social media has become the means and end of all communication even, political parties are also considering social media for their marketing and advertising purpose.

Political marketing can be defined as *“the application of marketing principles and procedures in political campaigns by various individuals and organizations. The procedures involved include the analysis, development, execution, and management of strategic campaigns by candidates, political parties, governments, lobbyists and interest groups that seek to drive public opinion, advance their own ideologies, win elections, and pass legislation and referenda in response to the needs and wants of selected people and groups in a society”* (Newman, 1999, p. xiii).

Political marketing is not limited to the traditional marketing but it has also marked its presence on digital media. Social media is a form of digital media which provides a place for political marketers to create a political marketplace where candidates, government officials, and political parties can use social media to drive public opinion in the desired direction. Social Media has today

become a very powerful tool for expressing opinions, views, and ideas and has become an influential tool of opinion creation. According to Palmer and Koenig-Lewis (2009), Social Media is an online application platform which facilitates interaction, collaboration, and sharing of content.

Web 2.0 technologies provide web experience from the buzz, that representing their engagement in information sharing. It is not limited to only readers of the content prepared by the site owners, but also, active content-generators to share their personal experiences, provide feedback, and express their sentiments in positive, negative or neutral (Luo & Zhang, 2013).

Thomas (2004) defines *‘Buzz Marketing as the amplification of initial marketing efforts by third parties through their passive or active influence’*.

According to (Luo & Zhang, 2013), consumer buzz is user generated word of mouth message that is review of product or services that are voluntarily posted on a website by consumers about their experiences with the product.

Social media Buzz is a term used in viral marketing and this can be defined as the interaction of people on social networking sites about product or service or an idea which amplifies or alters the unique marketing message. This emotion, excitement, energy, or anticipation about a product, service or an idea can be positive or negative.

The digital landscape of India is growing tremendously, but the overall penetration is low with less than 1 out of 5 Indians using the Internet by July 2014 (Kemp, 2015). Social media usage penetration in India is around 8.5% of the entire population. Top 8 metros

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including leading 53 cities represent more than 80% of social media users. The total population of India is around 1.256 billion, and urban population constitute is 31% of it. India is ranked in 3rd with regard to use of social networks in the world (Narasimhamurthy, 2014).

In the 2009 Indian general elections, *Sashi Tharoor* (A former union minister) was only Indian politician who had tweeter account and had 6000 followers (Robinson, Schulz, Cotten, Hale, & Williams, 2016). During the 2009 general election in India, around 150 million voters were on social media who were also called the 'connected' generation. These voters were very easy to connect so most of the political parties jumped in to join social networking platform to influence this segment of voters. In 2014 Indian general elections, activities of Political parties and their conversation was active on social media. Volume buzz, numbers of retweet and followers were the major measuring tools to identify which politicians are in trend and famous (Swamy, 2014). In 2014 general election, Twitter became the medium of choice for people to engage in and consume political content. User engagement with content, news breaks, and influence on political discourse or capacity to set media took place on Tweeter. However, a total of 56 million election-related tweets were posted between January 1st to 12th May 2014 (Chao, 2014).

According to the Facebook data, 29 million people made 227 million poll-related interactions (posts, comments, shares, and likes). In addition to this, 13 million people made 75 million interactions regarding *Narendra Modi* (The Prime Minister of India) from the day elections was announced until the counting day (Team, 2016). *Narendra Modi* has over four million followers on Twitter. And over 14 million "Likes" are attributed to him on Facebook. There are nearly 2 million people included in his circle on Google +, making him the most-liked Indian politician on social media. The fan base of leading political leaders increased with the onset of their digital campaign during the elections (Singh, 2014). Political surveillance and information-seeking, convenience, entertainment, and social utility are consistent with the past usage and gratification research on the Internet and its interactive applications (Narasimhamurthy, 2014). Twitter had its own 'Tweeter Election' for general election 2014. A total of 56 million election-related Tweets were accounted till the end of the general election. Each poll day of general elections 2014 witnessed tweets ranging from 5.4 lakhs to 8.2 lakhs (Verma, 2015). The tweeter results indicate that the most popular parties and candidates were *AamAdmiParty's* (Delhi-based regional political party) *ArvindKejriwal*, Leader of Aam Admi Party and Chief Minister of New Delhi, *BJP4India's* (Official tweeter account of Bharatiya Janta Party) *Narendra Modi* and *Rahul Gandhi* (Vice President of Indian National Congress) from Indian National Congress India (National Political Party). *Mr.Narendra Modi* led with 3.97 million followers growing from his base by 21% as compared to his status on January 1st, 2014. *Mr. Arvind Kejriwal* raised to 1.97 million he made an amazing growth of 79% as compared from the beginning of the year. Indian National Congress India who entered late on tweeter had 178k followers but showed an incredible growth of 376% as compared to 37,357 followers what it accounted January 1st, 2014 (Wani & Alone, 2014).

2. Theoretical background

The virtual social network is very important and useful for business (Stefko, Dorcak, & Pollak, 2011). According to Eyrich, Padman, and Sweetser (2008), industries are using social media for maintaining a public relationship. Even the nonprofit organizations are also adopting social media for maintaining their public relation (Curtis et al., 2010). Higher education institutions are

using social media for teaching, learning and sharing (Moran, Seaman, & Tinti-Kane, 2011). Social media is a hybrid element of promotion mix (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Taylor and Kent (2010), suggested that social media tactics should consider in public relation strategy.

The use of social media is not only limited to corporate houses to maintain their public relations, but also the component of social media evolved as an important tool for advertisement in the election and has become a potent platform for expressing opinion worldwide, for example 2008 U.S Presidential elections (Smith, 2009), New Zealand general election 2011 (Cameron, Barrett, & Stewardson, 2015), 2010 Korean elections (Kim, 2011), and in 2010 Swedish election (Larsson & Moe, 2012).

Moreover, election predictions can be computed and evaluated at different levels (e.g., National, State and District). The researchers who have produced predictions mainly at national level are (Bermingham & Smeaton, 2011; Ceron, Curini, Iacus, & Porro, 2014; Jungherr, Jürgens, & Schoen, 2012; Skoric, Poor, Achananuparp, Lim, & Jiang, 2012; Sang & Bos, 2012; Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner, & Welp, 2010a) with a couple of papers focusing at state level (Gayo-Avello, 2011; Metaxas, Mustafaraj, & Gayo-Avello, 2011).

Even in an emerging economy like India, the extensive use of social Media has been noticed in 2014 general elections (Diwakar, 2015), and now its growing impact is discernible. Its rise in popularity has made political parties think of its use as a means of both gauging and creating public opinion. In this study, 2014 general election is a case in point.

Many studies have examined the predictive power of twitter in the election for different countries like Germany (Tumasjan et al., 2010a), Portugal (Fonseca, 2011), United Kingdom (Tweetminister, 2011), and the United States presidential election (Himmelboim, McCreery, & Smith, 2013; Nowak, Szamrej, & Latané, 1990), Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner, & Welp (2010b), claimed that tweets frequency can predict an election by examining the relative tweets frequency mention in political parties during Germany election campaign. But on contrary Jungherr (2013) ruled out Tumasjan et al., (2010b) findings and claimed tweets cannot predict election results. Voter's tweet sentiments are only associated with voters' political preferences. Another piece of research finding claimed that political parties' name mentioned in tweets does not guarantee for election prediction (Sang & Bos, 2012). Even high degree of interactivity on twitter has no relationship with high vote share (Suresh & Ramakrishnan, 2015). Being active on social media metrics (Facebook friends or Twitter followers) does not claim electoral success (Metaxas et al., 2011). But Sharing user's posts and subsequently linking is an important tool for raising engagement rate (Stefko, Bacik, & Fedorko, 2014). And politicians with higher social media engagement got relatively more votes within most political parties (Effing, van Hillegersberg, & Huibers, 2011). However, DiGrazia, McKelvey, Bollen, and Rojas (2013) claim political outcomes and voters behavior can be predicted on the basis of data extracted from social media. Social media is predictive in closely contested elections only (Cameron et al., 2015). But Kalampokis, Tambouris, and Tarabanis (2013), suggest that there is a need for more advanced analysis and methods of data collection, and filtering of unprocessed social media data. Sentiment analysis, predictions based on entity counts in tweets can be considerably improved, and become nearly as good as traditionally obtained opinion polls (Sang & Bos, 2012). However, some researchers suggest that the predictive power of Twitter regarding elections has been greatly exaggerated. Thus difficult research problems still lie ahead (Gayo-Avello, 2012).

3. Literature review

In the light of the rise of importance of the twitter during elections, it is very much important to find how it is influencing voters' behavior as the number of political parties and their workers have increased using tweeter account for campaign purpose. Politicians with higher social media engagement got relatively more votes within most political parties (Effing et al., 2011). The previous studies claimed that Tweets to parties and to candidates showed a systematic relationship with subsequent votes on the day of the election (Effing et al., 2011; Jungherr, 2013; Tumasjan et al., 2010a, 2010b). Twitter data predicted labor party gaining most seats in the hung parliamentary election which were found true (Burnap, Gibson, Sloan, Southern, & Williams, 2016).

Twitter messages commenting on parties and candidates showed little, if any, systematic relationship with subsequent votes on the day of the election (Effing et al., 2011; Jungherr, 2013). Twitter-based data collected from the 2010 US Congressional elections find a positive correlation in the past. But a recent study finds that there is no correlation between the results analysis and the electoral outcomes, contradicting the previous reports (GayoAvello, Metaxas, & Mustafaraj, 2011). Candidates' share of the free-text Twitter public has a larger correlation with their vote tallies than @mentions or hashtags (McKelvey, DiGrazia, & Rojas, 2014). Twitter replicates most of the existing inequalities in public political exchanges (Barberá & Rivero, 2014). Social analytics using both volume-based measures and sentiment analysis are predictive (Bermingham & Smeaton, 2011). Rebutting the Barberá and Rivero (2014), findings, Huberty (2013), claimed that volume-based and sentiment-based alternatives fail to forecast future elections, despite promising performance in back-casting tests. The percentage of candidate's names mentioned correlates with the vote margin in the subsequent election (DiGrazia et al., 2013). According to Sang and Bos (2012), tweet counting data is a weak predictor. O'Connor, Bamman, and Smith (2011) found that twitter data and pre-electoral polls of U.S presidential election were positive and significantly correlated. According to the Ceron et al. (2014), there was a correlation between the Twitter sentiment and polls and which showed positive for some leader while for other there was no visible correlation. Metaxas et al. (2011) hypothesize that Social Media data can predict elections and the positive result was achieved but for such result can also be mere chance. According to Tumasjan et al. (2010a), found that tweet volume and votes are strongly correlated. In another research by Tumasjan et al., (2010b) stated that Twitter data are not to substitute polls but to complement them. According to the Jungherr et al. (2012), Twitter data are somewhat better than chance when predicting elections. According to Mejova, Srinivasan, and Boynton (2013), there is a slight correlation between the evolution of sentiment between twitter and the actual poll. According to Skoric et al. (2012), there is a certain correlation between Twitter chatter and votes but not sufficient to make an accurate prediction. However, in case of Indian parliamentary election 2014, volume of tweet and vote share is positively correlated (Safiullah, Pathak, Singh, & Anshul, 2016), and same in Delhi assembly election 2013, 'Facebook likes' of political parties and votes gained by political parties is positively correlated (Safiullah, Pathak, & Singh, 2016).

Based on the literature review, the following hypothesis has been derived.

H1. Social media Buzz is positively related to general elections outcome.

4. Research methodology

According to Gayo-Avello (2013), there are mainly two

approaches to voting inference in Twitter that has been commonly used there are tweets counting and lexicon based sentiment analysis. Tweets counting method was the first one, originally proposed by Tumasjan et al. (2010a). In this method merely counting tweets of party or candidate were only comprised. In this study, we are predicting seats against tweets count. For that, we have considered a total of 8,877,275 Social Media buzz counting which was taken into account from a time period of from January 01, 2014 to April 09, 2014 and this social media buzz count were collected from simplify 360° (A marketing research company). In this social media buzz, 12 Indian political parties were considered for analysis of general elections in the year 2014.

The most common method to measure accuracy in predicting vote share was the Mean Absolute Error (MAE). Although this is not necessarily to be the best option, especially since MAE values are not comparable across different elections. For instance, the Senate election in Kentucky U.S was correctly predicted with an MAE of 39.6% while an MAE of 6.3% produced an incorrect prediction in California (Metaxas et al., 2011). In spite of this obvious problem, MAE is a preferred measure among researcher that allows them to compare their method's performance against that of pre-electoral polls. To counter these deficiencies, Lewis-Beck (2005) suggested measures such as R², standard error of estimate, or root mean squared error. Social media buzz by nature includes both positive and negative words of mouth. In the study, they are treated as the same. So in our study total of 8,877,275 tweets count (Table 1) has been taken into consideration from a time period of January 01, 2014 to April 09, 2014. The relevant statistical analytical technique such as regression analysis was used to analyze data as suggested by Lewis-Beck (2005), with the help of SPSS 20th version as a software package (see Tables 2–4).

5. Analysis and interpretation

The linear regression model table shows the summary and overall all fit statistics. The adjusted R² of our model is 0.729 with R² = 0.75 that means that the linear regression can explain 72.9% of the variance in the data.

The next table is for F-test, linear regression's F-test has the null hypothesis which states that there is no linear relationship between the variables (R² = 0). The F-test is highly significant, thus, can assume that there is a linear relationship between the variables in our model.

The coefficient of media is positive and significant for seats won (p < 0.05, p < 0.01 respectively). This finding indicates that a party can achieve a higher number of general elections seats in an election if the party has a well-developed and well equipped social media planning.

6. Discussion and conclusion

This research paper examines the relationship between social media Buzz of political parties on seats won in 2014 General elections. The result indicates that social media Buzz relating to political parties did have a positive and significant effect on seats won in 2014 general elections by political parties.

There is very little consensus found in literature about which information to be considered as such electoral outcomes. Some researchers considered only the winners of the elections without any other consideration while other considered number of seats and some other researchers considered the actual vote sharing. Those predictions have been evaluated against vote rates (Bermingham & Smeaton, 2011; Ceron et al., 2014; Gayo-Avello, 2011; Jungherr et al., 2012; Metaxas et al., 2011; Skoric et al., 2012; Tumasjan et al., 2010a, 2010b), against a number of seats

Table 1

Social Media Buzz and their corresponding total seats won by political parties in Indian general election 2014.

Party name	Social media buzz	Political parties won seat in 2014 general election
BharatiyaJanta Party	4,799,330	282
AamAdmi Party	2,248,338	4
Indian National Congress	1,431,518	44
National Congress Party	121,399	6
BahujanSamaj Party	55,186	0
Janta Dal United	43,577	2
Bijujanta Dal	39,644	20
DravidaMunnetraKazhagam	34,692	0
All India Trinamool Congress	32,938	34
Communist Party of India (Marxist)	26,266	9
Samajwadi Party	23,734	5
All India Anna DravidaMunnetraKazhagam	20,653	37

Source: [simplify360°](http://simplify360.com) (2014); Election Commission of India: http://eci.nic.in/eci_main1/ElectionStatistics.aspx.

(Sang & Bos, 2012), and also as dichotomous decisions (Metaxas et al., 2011). In this study, we are suggesting possibilities of predicting seats against tweets count and for that, we have considered a total of 8,877,275 Social Media tweet.

In our study, the unit of analysis was electoral parties, not candidates because political parties provide tickets to the candidates to contest election from constituencies, plan their election campaign and also bear election campaign expenses. The 2014 Indian general election was contested mainly between the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) and INC (Indian National Congress). Parties contested elections on the national issues like Corruption, Development, Religion, and Caste, Women Safety/Empowerment, Economy, Inflation, and Employment (Simplify360°, 2014), and on their ideology. In 2014 Indian general election parties hired professional advertising

agencies for their election campaign and advertising purpose, who designed advertisements for party and candidate as well, candidates' appealed voters to vote on the party ideology, worked, and image and voters cast their votes on party symbol.

Most of the candidates are not well versed in the use of social media particularly twitter so the party has also opened its own IT cell for election campaign on social media on the behalf of the candidate and also provided training to their leader on how to use social media. Professional advertising agencies or Party's IT cell were worked range from party positive image building to promoting party achievement, circulating pictures of meeting rallies, speech, and circulating negative and e-word of mouth for their opponent through social media and the candidates contesting elections get leveraging of the party's effort at their constituency.

In our study, Social media buzz count and seats gained by some political parties were showing inconsistency (Table 1). The reason is that some political parties still rely on a traditional mode of campaigning and don't give much focus on social media for election campaign and advertisement. Secondly many states have low literacy rate, lack of electricity and also low social media penetration so the parties which belong to those states considered election campaign on social media a waste of time and money like Odisha state based *Biju Janata Dal (BJD)*. But parties that belong to the state which has high literacy rate and high social media penetration do massive campaign on social media like Delhi-based *Aam Adami Party*. Thirdly political parties contested 2014 general election on a limited number of seats because of their financial constraint, and their impact on the constituency. Thus buzz count and seat conversion may not always show consistency.

The practical implication of this result is that parties need to actively manage media buzz on social networking sites (tweeter) to stimulate its capability in managing more seats. Further, more research suggests an appropriate strategy in tweet and re-tweets can enhance the chance of winning seats in the election. It is, therefore, important that political parties need to deploy agents

Table 2

Model summary.^b

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate	Change statistics				
					R square change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F change
1	0.868 ^a	0.754	0.729	40.95,247	0.754	30.661	1	10	0.000

^a Predictors: (Constant), media.

^b Dependent Variable: Seats won by political parties in 2014 General Election.

Table 3

ANOVA^a result.

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	51,421.873	1	51,421.873	30.661	0.000 ^b
	Residual	16,771.044	10	1677.104		
	Total	68,192.917	11			

^a Dependent Variable: Seats won by political parties in 2014 General Election.

^b Predictors: (Constant), media.

Table 4

Coefficients.^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.382	13.366		0.178	0.862
	media	4.668E-005	0.000	0.868	5.537	0.000

^a Dependent Variable: Seats won by political parties in 2014 General Election.

who can tweet and re-tweet comments which are most relevant to political party goals.

The findings are important for both political parties and academicians. Political parties can use our results to identify and implement social media buzz capabilities with a reasonable expectation based on research evidence that these initiatives will be in alignment with their party's strategy. Academicians should be equally encouraged by these results for no greater reason than the demonstrated impact on social media buzz capability on seats won in the election. On the basis of the analysis of the study, we can conclude that social media buzz capabilities play an important role in gaining seats in elections.

This study has some limitations. The major limitation is that number of social media buzz considered is rather small compared to the total active social media users and span of social media platform. A large number of social media buzz and social media platform yield more accurate findings and so, further research could replicate this study with the hope that more political party can implement social media buzz strategy. Thus the study only investigates Indian social media buzz effect on seat won, hence, the findings and conclusions drawn from this research are the representation of the Indian social media buzz and findings may not generalize to other geographic regions or culture. In the present study, an attempt has been made to link the social media buzz at the party level. However, the point suggested by the reviewer is valid and we will link the social media with the individual in future research.

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