A study on Political-Publicity, Persuasion and, Propaganda through Social-Networking-Sites in India

Sana Absar
Research Scholar
Dept. of Journalism & Mass Communication
Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi
Sana.raja.absar4@gmail.com

Abstract: In a democratic country like India, where the selection of power lies in the hands of the public, Political leaders want to please the public on every political front. Earlier the platforms to reach to the people were limited up to press and television along with public rallies, press conference, etc. but now in the age of digital communication, minute to minute communication with the public has become part and parcel of the political propaganda. Various kinds of social media are being utilized by the political leader of each party to make their presence felt among the public. They are constantly using social media and Social Networking Sites (SNS) for serving their political motives. These SNS such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn are easy to access and handle. They provide instant connectivity and immediate feedback. Social SNS are being used by more than in India. Their features and storytelling techniques such as photo sharing option, tweets, going live make them suitable for instant communication. The easy and quick updating facility provide leaders, a good opportunity to keep the public engaged with whatever they do or pretend to do. Policies and campaign are being launched on the social media platforms, rallies are being planned, issues are being discussed as well as all kinds of propaganda are done with mediatized politics. The messages are becoming effective, encouraging, sensational, personalized and simplified. Political agenda and promotions are also part of this mediated communication. The success of a campaign is evaluated by how many people are connected with the campaign over social media, and in the same way popularity and influence of political leaders are measured in terms of his or her online presence and fan following.

Now in this scenario, when political propaganda can be felt so easily it becomes very important to investigate how the political leaders are using social networking for the propaganda if any. What are the tools that they use for the purpose as well as which networking site is most favourable for the propaganda? The presented research paper tries to find out how the messages are presented in social media and will attempt to determine how politicians are using SNS for political propaganda in India. The social Networking Accounts of two leaders, one each from the ruling and opposition will be analysed to reach the conclusions.
Keywords: Social Networking Sites, Political Propaganda, Political Leaders.

Introduction: Persuasion has always been part and parcel of the political discourse in any democracy. It is the only tool that helps the political leaders to meet their pre-set objectives. Since India became independent and prior to that as well, the persuasion strategies were being implemented for different motives. Earlier it was freedom struggle, cultural movements as well as persuasion of ideologies. Time and again persuasion have been proved to be important factor to influence the major societal, cultural and political movements in India. Persuasion is a key term and it is central to any other power existing in society. For political leaders of all the times, it has been a priority to persuade people in order to get the desired outcome, which is dominantly related to influence the voting behaviour of people for the political benefit. Publicity is although little different from persuasion, it is being served to the people in the same platter along with persuasion. In the new internet-based media environment, new forms of persuasion and influence are manifesting themselves through mechanisms of surveillance, micro-targeting, and digital propaganda. (González 2017), Manipulative and non-manipulative strategies are being implemented by political leaders to change and shift the opinion of people, either pro-them or anti-others. Liberal democracy is providing a platform to the citizens as well to get in touch with political leaders directly via social networking. They create impressions in the mind of public with this network. Microblogging and other SNS are making the job effortless, smooth and serving as a tool of political publicity in India. With the two-way communication and instant feedback facility Internet is being used as a means of consensual persuasion and publicity.

Style of campaigning has changed, strategies are being implemented on Social media. Emphasis is on political publicity rather than actual events and occurrence and this political system is qualitatively different from its predecessors. (Cook, 1998). Under the sphere of the internet, publicity nowadays is being multiplied. They are becoming more diverse in nature. Publicity measures are being intense and deeper and the power relationships are being rearranged through social media.

What is Political Publicity: According to Oxford the term “Publicity” simply relates to the communication strategies of giving out the information about any product, person or company for advertising purpose or promotional purpose. The little difference between advertisement and publicity is that Advertisement in itself is repetitive in nature, whereas all the times' publicity is performed with a fresh outlook. In the case of Political publicity, the messages and information are rather related to political people, political issues, policy making, government
agenda or any other content related to politics. In his work Robert Denton argues that political publicity is the major means by which political leaders and candidate communicate their messages to voters.

Although people and public relation people are employed for doing publicity for a particular cause but publicity carried out by political leaders themselves via their personal social networking accounts are more influential in disseminating information about the candidate. It provides the political leader with a greater extent of opportunity to repeat the message, they want to. Political publicity is intended to persuade and in the persuasion process, it has clear advantages for the political leaders over the news filed by journalists. As Mc Nair writes in his book "Within legal constraints of truth and taste, which vary from one country to another, the producers of political advertisements have the freedom to say what they like; to replace the journalists' agenda with their own; to play to their clients' strengths and highlight the opponents' weaknesses. The advertisement, in short, is the only mass media form over the construction of which the politician has complete control. Or was, until the emergence of Twitter, Facebook and online social networking opened up another, and in some ways more attractive channel for campaigning politicians, and those in government, to communicate their messages 'unmediated', as it were." Now it is quite clear that as with the advent of Social Networking, the freedom of the political leaders to persuade people has increased manifolds and the rise of the internet has substantially expanded the range of alternatives available to the political leaders for their publicity as compared to traditional print and TV available to political actors. The very significant political advertising campaign in India was "India Shining" campaign, carried out by BJP before the 2014 parliamentary election.

**Review of literature:** Political publicity has now reached the highest form of sophistication but since the entry of social media in India, scholars have begun to investigate the use of social media as a device to forecast elections (Tjong and Bos, 2012). They are also researching upon the assess the popularity of politicians (Gloor et al., 2009), and compare the political preferences that citizens express online with those captured using traditional polls (O’Connor et al., 2010). Propaganda is also being analyzed by scholars under the sub-head of political publicity via mediated communication. "**Mediatized politics is politics that has lost its autonomy, has become dependent on its central functions on mass media, and is continuously shaped by interactions with mass media**". (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999)

It is a fact that politics is mediated and that the media is the ‘most important source of information and channel of communication between the citizenry and political institutions and
actors’ (Strömbäck 2008) and mediatization concentrates on a more complex process through which media communication shape and reshape society and politics. Schulz (2004: 88-89).

“Propaganda is a deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist. In the new internet-based media environment, new forms of persuasion and influence are manifesting themselves through mechanisms of surveillance, micro-targeting, and digital propaganda”. (González 2017)

The purpose of publicity may be- to influence people to adopt beliefs and attitudes that correspond to those of the political leader. It is done to engage the public in certain patterns of political behaviour—for example, to vote for a particular party, to contribute money, to join certain political groups, or demonstrate for a cause. Publicity also has its purpose to maintain the legitimacy of the institution or organization it represents and thereby using it as a tool, political leaders try to ensure the legitimacy of their activities. It no doubt, attempts to maintain the positions and interests represented by “officials” who sponsor and sanction the propaganda messages. Mainly, the purpose of publicity is to achieve acceptance of the leader’s ideology by the people. Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels said that propaganda and publicity had no fundamental method, only purpose—the conquest of the masses.

Modern political publicity uses all the media available—press, radio, television, film, the internet, e-mail, telephone, fax machines, direct mail, posters, meetings, door-to-door canvassing, handbills, buttons, billboards, speeches, flags, street names, monuments, coins, stamps, books, plays, comic strips, poetry, music, rituals, museum displays, sporting events, cultural events, company reports, libraries, and awards and prizes. (Propaganda and Persuasion, Jowett 2005). Describing the media usage alone is insufficient in drawing a picture of media utilization, for the analyst must examine the flow of communication from one medium to another and from media to groups and individuals. Evidence of multistep flow and diffusion of ideas should be sought. The relationship among the media themselves and the relationship between the media and the people should be explored. The main focus should be on how the media are used. The propagandist might show a film and hand out leaflets afterward. This type of practice maximizes the potential of the media. (Propaganda and Persuasion, Jowett 2005)

New media and SNS are able to keep these publicity tools in practice without any delay and expenditure. Publicity is associated with the control of information flow. Those who control public opinion and behaviour make maximum and intelligent use of the forms of communication available to them. Certain information is deliberately released in sequence or together with other information.
In their study Bakir, Herring, Miller & Robinson (2018) divided the existing scholarship on “Organizes Persuasive Communication into three groups: PR (and related subfields), propaganda studies and work under the heading of ‘promotional culture’. Under the label of PR (and related subfields), we include the range of persuasive communication activities captured in labels such as advertising and marketing, public relations, organizational communication, influence/information operations, psychological operations, and strategic communication.”

Recently, SNS have also begun to wield substantive effects on real-world politics, they have been used to organize demonstrations and revolts as well. (Cottle, 2011; Ghannam, 2011). It has been seen from a long back that with the help of SNS and with a huge number of fan following, an overdose of emotional appeal is taking place. Although rational appeals are not rejected. Both negative, as well as positive messages, are being formulated and disseminated with one or the other proper political objective. And sometimes this publicity includes major personal or political attack.

**Statement of the problem:** Propaganda is a part and parcel of the politics and contemporary propaganda techniques differ from techniques used in past. Most of the people use SNS for one or the other reasons such as publicity and persuasion. It can also include propaganda. Politicians also have got an alternative and unrestricted medium to directly connect with the public with the help of SNS, So it becomes very important to find out that how politicians are using SNS for political publicity, persuasion and propaganda, or how are they using the tools provided by SNS for the purpose.

**Aim:** The research aims to examine the publicity-messages, floating on SNS initiated by Politicians. It tends to find out which SNS are being used actively by a Politician for political publicity and how these SNS are being utilized.

**Objectives:** The objectives of the study are to:

- Map out the tools of SNS, that politicians use for political publicity;
- determine how politicians are using SNS for political publicity;
- find out how the messages are presented in the social media; and
- study the content of the messages used for political publicity, persuasion and propaganda.

**Methodology:** As per the nature of the problem stated above, the appropriate research design to meet the objectives is discourse analysis of the content available of SNS being used by politicians for political propaganda. The unit of analysis for the study is the ‘content’ and ‘feed’
on the pages of SNS’s used by politicians. To conduct the study sample is selected from all the politicians using SNS for political discourse. Since India has eight National Level political parties the size of sample is limited to only two political parties and their leaders. Two parties selected for the study are-

- Indian National Congress (INC)
- Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP)

One leader from each party has been selected who has the largest fan following on Social Media. Latest 100 Messages on the SNS, (Twitter) initiated by these two particular politicians, would be analysed.

There are plenty of SNS that are being used by political leaders, but Micro-Blogging Account (Twitter), associated with two political leaders will be considered for analysis. The logic for considering Twitter only is that

- It is a platform that is being used by most of the politicians.
- The length of the messages in the twitter does not exceed the given limit, that compel political actor to state their point precisely.

The political leader of the ruling and opposition party with the largest fan following have been considered for the study.

**Codes:** The pages of SNS of these leaders can be analysed on the basis of following codes-

- The ideology behind the message;
- Tools used in tweets;
- The context of the message;
- Visual symbols used in the message;
- Language usage;
- Arousal of Emotions; and
- Desired effects.

But this particular study has taken into consideration only three codes-

1. Tools used in Tweets;
2. Language usage; and
3. Arousal of Emotions.
Findings: The latest 100 tweets from the Twitter handle of both the political leaders have different kinds of publicity tools. Although technical freedom or restriction provide everyone to use certain kind of tools, yet a difference can be seen in the pattern of tweets and strategy of publicity.

According to the data collected from the Twitter account of both the leaders of political parties it was found that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was having the largest number of fans following on twitter, He joined Twitter in April 2015 and has 9 Million followers. Since the date of his joining he has posted 4,185 tweets.

- It’s quite a normal practice, to share the information about where they appear for an interview and public gathering. Links, as well as videos, are given with the tweets. Such as short video of fisherman’s parliament, showing that exchange of ideas is taking place. Rally in Gujrat is given preference. Information related to the interaction with Delhi booth workers was also tweeted. Meeting with different officials have also been reported.

- The political leader has shared the picture with the huge fan following where he goes for the promotion. Thanks are being given on twitter to the students for the interaction with them. They are constantly making their presence felt by wishing the nation on all the festivals, again and again.

- The portrayal of the opposite party as the negative one with the help of negative tone and words. For this particular purpose references have been given from other local and international news sources such as- Indian Express, Hindu, telegraph, Bhaskar.com, Financial Express, NDTV, Hindustan Times, etc. link of the news published on these websites are shared on the personal profile.

- Policies and plans of other parties are criticised. Election preparedness and strategic meetings are being notified on Twitter. There have been notes of criticism many times.

- Death of famous personalities such as Manohar Parrikar and writer Netwar Singh have been given space with emotional tone.

- Emotional appeal and condolence are stated. Incidents are addressed time and again. Issues related to places and cultures such as Kashmir, Assam, Northeast are addressed with emotional tone and languages. Presence at Adivasi Bhai Abhiyan has also been given highlights with video and photos. Every now and then posts are written in the Hindi language. Even the meetings with small businessmen have been highlighted to
show interest in the business sector as well. Photos and videos related to Yuva Kranti yatra have also been shared.

- There has been an emotional appeal on the death of 40 Martyred, concern has been shown for the missing pilot. When Abhinandan came back, a welcome note is also there on Twitter. Where the political leader went to pay condolence to the Shaheed that was also shared on the twitter. Some of the sentences for the representation of emotions were like- “I strongly condemn all the acts of violence against our Kashmiri brother and sisters”, “This election is a fight for the soul of India”, “everyone was electrifying”, "youths is India's future and India's future is in safe hands", "No sacrifice is too good in this endeavor, no effort too little, this battle will be won".

In the analysis of the other case, the second Political leader " PM Narendra Modi" joined Twitter in 2009 had has a fan following of 46.5 million people so far. As compared with Rahul Gandhi the tweets were largely related to the awareness of voters and addressing the youth.

- In most of the post, he has tweeted about the power of the youth and inspired them to vote and be a part of the voter awareness campaign. He has requested the people from all the fields such as entertainment, sports, media, and politics to encouraging the youngsters to vote.

- He also talks about voter turnover and tweeted that only voting can bring a "positive difference in society." He has mentioned many people in his tweets such as SD Dhawan, Bhuvi Official, Ashwini, Anil Kapoor, Ajay Devgan, and Madhuri and said that "it’s time to create Total Dhamal at the polling booth". Vikram Chandra, Rajesh Kalra, Abhijit Majumdar, Anupam Kher, Kiran Bedi, and Shekhar Kapoor were among those who were asked to help to spread the voter awareness by saying that "doing so will have a positive impact on the nation's future"

- Another thing that was prominent in the tweets of the leader was "Mai Bhi Chaukidar Campaign". He requested all the followers to join and participate in the campaign. There has been shared Tweets of those people who were becoming part of the campaign via uploading videos on social media. Link of registration was there as well as link related to all the comprehensive links of NDA government works in the various section over the last five years were given with the title "Vikas Yatra".

- Agenda for the upcoming election was also uploaded as a link of Twitter. Attacks were there on other political parties and language was reinforcing the ideology that opposition does not support the Shaheed in India. he also talked about the terrorism,
fake news being disseminated by the opposition against the political party. Links of fake news were also given.

- Political leaders also congratulated the ethylates, sports people in India for their performance and wished people for Holi and Navroz as well. Video of celebration was there. Birthday wishes were also appearing here and there. The thoughtful write-up was attached at the same time he also tweeted about “how bold and futuristic decisions” have been taken place in their tenure as a ruling party.

- The place has been given to media and it is said that "Media makes our democratic spirit stronger". Every now and then the work done has been highlighted such as public transport, metro projects, Ease of living. There have been tweets about "providing doors and opportunity to the 130 crore Indians.” It was written that they are "honoured for getting the opportunity to work for development”.

- Thanked “dabbawalas” for feeding the nation, Jan aushadhi store were discussed. Agenda in several parts was attached with the caption that “A lot has been done and we aim to do much more. There is no place for middle man and no tolerance for corruption.”

**Discussion and Conclusions:** The analysis of latest tweets suggests that there were some tools that are provided in Twitter were used for the publicity. Pictures, as well as videos, are being used to persuade people containing the desired matter and emotion. Political leaders are using plenty of images in just one tweet to support the arguments. They are using videos intermittently to support the argument, they put forward. In order to give weight and direction to the content of their message frequent use of references is seen. For argument or to initiate counter-argument leaders insert some news or data from other references. Link of the tweets of others, who share the same ideologies are also inserted in order to announce and submit the idea of immense support from people. Series of links are given one after another to push it into the mind of Twitter users that not only the concerned political party and leader but also the public is holding the same opinion; and approving or supporting the given cause.

Chunks of every event that relates to the ideology, policy, and agenda of the political leader; that is being attended by leaders are becoming part of their tweets. To provide support other campaign-related videos and complementary similar tweets are tagged. Political agendas are being annex with Tweets, to make them accessible and feasible to the public and hence increasing the publicity. While discussing about the arousal of emotion, it is established that the language used in tweets gets an emotional touch when talking about the achievement of their own and at the same time while criticising others. The policies and plans are being
appreciated in an emotional happy tone and at the same time, the issues related to the crisis are being represented in an emotional tone.

It was found that manipulative and non-manipulative strategies are there. They are being implemented by political leaders to change the opinion of people either pro-them or anti-others. It is quite interesting that political leaders although are talking about the work done in the past, future avenues and the present - but all of the work related to publicity is taking place keeping in mind the audience. There are propaganda with the help of images and video, attempt to persuade with the help of emotional, passionate, and sentimental tone. There has been a larger degree of persuasion attempt with rational choice of words and language. Leaders are aware that the public who is actively engaged on social media has more than one input for the information which is being served by them; that is why the leaders are extremely careful while expressing own achievement and making comment on others. They are providing argument in support of their own comment and tweets with the link of other reputed reports and articles published in national or international media. In order to provide an empirical and powerful persuasive message and propagate their idea, the text content has been given support of audio-visual as well. It can easily be observed that all the social activities on Twitter are taking place to influence the voting pattern of the voter, either positively or negatively. There has been an attempt to give information that can influence the public to adopt the ideology. For propaganda, repetition can be seen, but with a fresh outlook and sophistication. Leaders are demonstrating cause, and trying hard to maintain the legitimacy of their particular ideologies. They want to achieve the acceptance of the public and for this, they are outlining a picture of their hard work in the heads of the public.

So, it can be concluded that these SNS are helping political leaders to be in direct touch with the public, which is next to impossible on other media platforms. They too are finding SNS to be the best venture to communicate without much efforts and expenditure. They get the feedback directly from the follower and keeps on changing the content as per the feedback to ensure the maximum level of publicity possible with a certain level of persuasion and invisible flavour of propaganda.

**Limitation of the study:** The world of social media is huge, and as the political leaders are using SNS for a long time, there will be huge data available on SNS pages. In order to make the study doable within the time constraint, only 100 latest posts have been analysed.
REFERENCES:


