

Social Media as A Marketing Communication Tool To Influence Voter Evaluation And Affiliations

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze how voter evaluation and voter affiliations are affected with the use of social media for political purpose. The current study measures various factors like political interest, political trust, political participation, the use of social media for political use and their impact on voter evaluation and voter affiliations. The study was carried out during the general elections of Andhra Pradesh, 2019, using an online questionnaire. Statistical analysis reveals that there is significant impact on the voter's evaluation, voter affiliations which are being assessed by political interest and political participation although more such studies are required to promote and perpetuate its potential role in political marketing.

Keywords: Social Media marketing, political marketing, voter evaluation, voter affiliations, political participation.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study outlines a widely discussed issue: the social media impact on politics. There is a lot of buzz about the impact of social media on the political spectrum since Barack Obama's victory in 2008. Politicians are rapidly adopting social media across the world as a new form of political campaigning. While many claims were made, however there has been hardly any scientific study to validate their claims and actions. The suggested positive value has functioned as a stimulus in encouraging politicians to have their presence in various social media platforms as well as using them often to engage the voters, regardless of these absences. In the political world, social media has become a household name, especially in India. In communicating their political message, apps like Twitter, Facebook and You Tube have been most sought after social media platforms by politicians.

The main objective of this research is to examine the role played by social media as a medium for political communication and also to identify whether social media has the ability to alter the

political strategies and switch the direction of political marketing or traditional mass media continue to dominate the world of political campaigning. The following research question resulted from hypotheses on the impact of social media on voter evaluation and affiliations.

How does the use of social media influence voter evaluation and voter affiliations towards political parties in the 2019 Indian general elections? ”

2. Media Influence:

The Obama campaign team successfully incorporated the strategy of using social media for political campaign during the 2008 US Presidential elections (Panagopoulos, 2009) and positioned him far better than the rivalry in the minds of the voters. This isn't the first time where election outcome was decisively predicted by the media. The media has been playing a decisive role in influencing public opinion and voting decisions since its first use.

Mass media has its significant influences on political perceptions and also co-determines the voter's behavior (Campus, Pasquino & Vaccari, 2008; Pabjan & Pekalski, 2008; Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt, 2010). Multiple studies on voting behavior and elections determines the significance of the media precisely mass media in political campaigning (Campus, Pasquino & Vaccari, 2008; Dunn, 2009; Balmas, & Sheaffer, T, 2010; Nesbitt-Larking, 2010). There is no doubt in theorizing that media have significant impact over viewers with their preference about what stories are called newsworthy and by the amount of media attention they are given.

2.1 Political Campaigning in social media: Social Politics

Many researchers attempted to identify, to what degree do political attitudes, participation, Intentions and voting behavior of an individual gets influenced impact by social media? Do the people who were disengaged get mobilized by social media platforms? Hindman (2009) explains in *The Myth of Modern Democracy* that, social media has done nothing to enhance the political dialogue, but was successful in empowering a limited group of intellectuals which is undisputable. But Panagopoulos (2009) argues that with the integration of modern technology into the political marketing campaigns, one can attain the positive results of it. Online media for political campaigns, sharing/ exchanging political information, creating videos and making it viral, social networking and online campaigning is extensively and successfully used in the campaign for the 2008 presidential election. Using social media strategically will not only contribute to party and politician triumph, but also optimize and reinforce good governance (Panagopoulos, 2009).

The new change in the political landscape may thus be social politics, which revolutionized the present system by promoting (online political participation and engagement). Two dependent variables are proposed, taking into consideration of the influence of social media as the

independent variable. Firstly evaluation about the politicians and political parties by the voter on various grounds. Secondly, voter affiliations which largely resembles the voting behavior.

2.2 Voter Evaluation

Voters have little opportunities in modern day politics to see candidates in person those who are contesting in elections. Increasingly, though, voters need to trust media for political knowledge and to frame their impressions of personal characteristics about the candidate. Both political experience and the appearance of politicians play a vital role in the choice made by the votes. Analysis into political communication has found that what people say of political candidates is influenced by both conventional and non-traditional media. During 1970s researches had explored the impact of print and electronic media such as news papers and television on candidate appearance views of voters. For instance, Hoffstetter et.al. (1978) reported that media exposure resulted in enhanced public interest in the candidates' identity during the 1972 presidential campaign. McLeod et.al (1983), however, affirmed that voters those who relay on television, used candidate image data more frequently in making choices for the presidential elections during 1980's than voters who were relay only on newspaper. Numerous studies have also reported the effect of political knowledge that is obtained from various sources such as television interviews, television advertisements, chat shows has its impact on presidential candidate's vote judgments. For example, Benoit et.al.,(2002) argued that viewing debates between contestants of major political parties would change impressions about the character of candidate's among the targeted voters. Often, it is also ascertained that, campaign advertisements are even more crucial. An abundant amount of studies suggests that exposure to television campaign will influence the assessment of candidate photos, including conclusions on their attributes and likeability (Kaid, 2004).

Throughout the literature on individual voter's political behavior, the underlying assumption is that voters have a depository of political knowledge that they can make decisions based on the informed political behavior, whether it is during filling response to a survey, political debates, or in the polling station. Moy et.al. (2006) discovered that viewing comedy shows on political spheres during late nights affected the assessment of the candidates by the voters those who contested during 2000 presidential race. Baumgartner and Morris (2006) found that in the 2004 campaign, millennial voters rated both George W. Bush and John Kerry more negatively when they were exposed to memes about the candidates on the Daily Shows.

Baumgartner (2007) discovered that reading political jokes online has negative effect on the perceptions millennial voters about of The President George W. Bush. Nevertheless, watching online videos (Jib Jab) which utilized political satires had a positive influence on the assessments on President Bush's candidature. Johnson et.al. (1999) affirms that, worldwide web and exposure to blogs that were created and operated for political use had a major impact on the image of Bill Clinton during the 1996 presidential race. Likewise, Eveland et.al. (1996) has revealed that new

age media significantly affects the opinions of voters on the integrity and appearance of candidates. Although the candidate's role and his/her appearance in political campaigns have been explored by various surveys, there is no consensus on which characteristics were most significant to the voters. Benoit and McHale (2004) grouped different characteristics listed in the literature into ability in ability to lead, policy focus, and individual qualities such as integrity, intellect, Grieve, and popularity. Hence, we encourage the hypothesis mentioned below:

Hypothesis 1: Social media for political use significantly influence voter evaluations about image of the politicians.

1a: Social media for political use significantly influence voter evaluations about candidate's honesty and Integrity

1b: Social media for political use significantly influence voter evaluations about candidates intellectual ability and

1c: Social media for political use significantly influence voter evaluations about candidate's ability to lead.

2.3 Voter Affiliation

Previous studies have not established the relationship between the political party affiliations of a person the use of social media for political purpose. However, there are different factors that can impact individual political party affiliation. Numerous factors such as demographics, political knowledge, usage of social media, political interest and religious values could play prominent role in the affiliation of political parties. (Adamic and Glance, 2005; Bimber and Davis, 2003; Kushin and Kitchener, 2009; Mutz and Martin, 2001; Stroud, 2010) argued that social media consumers' segregate and polarize one-sided news that suits their views or beliefs. People preferred to select social media content based on their preferences and likes. This phenomenon of 'selective exposure' and 'cognitive dissonance' has been taken into account long back (Sear and Freedman, 1971) and (Festinger, 1957). The advent of social media, however, has heightened concern about the division of views and the destabilization of politics, all of which are perceived to be counterproductive to democratic progress. Social media use for social purpose made emotionally interactive, that contributed to political conviction. The current research has established the following theory, based on relevant literature:

Hypothesis 2: Party affiliation would be strongly correlated to greater political use of social media.

Political affiliation with any political party, such as Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), Telugu Desam Party (TDP), YSRCP, Janasena Party (JSP), Indian National Congress (INC) and other political parties. The purpose of this research is to evaluate whether the use of social media for political purpose impacts one's political party affiliation.

2.4 Independent Variable

For the purpose of the study four important sets of independent variables were used. First set relates to demographic elements of the voters which comprises of female (49.9%) with a mean age of 41.8 years (S.D = 15.16) whose age falls between 18 to 65 years. Education qualification was measured by grouping under five categories such as Un educated, Primary education, Secondary education, Under Graduate, postgraduate and Doctorate wherein (M = 2.21, S.D = 1.04. Most respondent's i.e. 31.2% acquired secondary education. Income (M = 2.94, S.D = 1.22) also divided into five categories such as less than INR.1,00,000, INR.1,00,001 to 2,00,000, INR.2,00,001 to 5,00,000, INR.5,00,001 to 10,00,000, and more than INR.10,00,001. The majority i.e. (26.7%) of the respondents fall under the category of whose income lies in between INR.1, 00,001 to 2, 00,000.

To measure the political affiliation of the respondents', researcher included three variables such as political ideology, Discussing politics, and attention to the campaign. A 7-point Likert scale was used to gauge political Ideology ranges from very much conservative to very much liberal (M = 2.31, S.D = 1.11). In connection with discussing politics , respondents have been probed on how frequently they indulge in discussing politics with family members, friends and colleagues, which was measured on a 4-point scale (Never, Hardly ever, often, and regular) (M = 2.2, S.D = 1.13). Also the responses has been collected on how keenly they go monitor the political campaigns in various social media platforms, which was measured on a 4 point scale (ranges from Not at all to very closely)(M=3.29, S.D=.56).The other set of variables gauges the responses related to the level of engagement that a respondent like reading political news online, going through politicians website/blogs/Youtube Channels/Pages, Posting comments and content and forwarding the political related content in social groups.

3. Method

Prior to 2019 general elections in Andhra Pradesh, an online survey was carried out by the researcher by posting the survey link in various social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube and Whatsapp groups . The respondents above 18 years old were the target age group in the state.

In the first attempt, 1,256 voter's responses have been obtained between 1 to 15 December 2018. The researcher posted the link once again in the groups from February 8 to 18, 2019. A total of 940 respondents submitted their response, which results in 74.9% as a rate of response. The data obtained from the second post are used in this study.

Three image evaluations for four key politicians such as Narendra Modi, Chandra Babu Naidu, Jagan Mohan Reddy, and Pawan Kalyan. The traits such as honesty and Integrity, intellect, and ability to lead were tapped in the survey questions. Respondents were informed to give a thought

about a candidate (e.g, Narendra Modi) and then report whether “he is honest” which define modi extremely good, somewhat good, not good, or not good at all. Similar set of questions were asked for each of the candidates like Chandra Babu Naidu, Jagan mohan reddy, and Pawan Kalyan on honesty and other two characteristics such as intellect and ability to lead.

4. Analysis

Hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) is used for the purpose of the study. A collection of demographic variables is used in the first instance, followed by political predisposition variables and digital media usage in the last.

The hypothesis:1 predicts that use of social media for political purpose would greatly influence voter evaluations with regards to political contestants. The Tables 1, 2, and 3 portray that, a very few variations between and across candidate’s trait. To Start with perceptions about honesty of Modi, one can see from Table 1 that none of the social media variables has a significant impact on the honesty of Modi. Age of the respondents shows significant impact ($\beta = .03$, $SD = .00$, $p < .01$), with younger people view Modi as honest. Respondents who watch television ($\beta = .12$, $SD = .04$, $p < .000$) and go through newspapers very frequently ($\beta = .11$, $SD = .03$, $p < .000$) perceive him more honest. Also those who follow him in facebook also treat him as more honest ($\beta = .11$, $SD = .07$, $p < .000$), it was also found that, paying attention to radio news also has prominent impact ($\beta = .06$, $SD = .03$, $p < .01$). For Chandra Babu Naidu, the elements that are vital were perceptions of honesty and ideological orientation ($\beta = -.13$, $SD = .03$, $p < .000$), where in conservative voters perceive him to be more honest. Getting exposed to outdoor advertising ($\beta = .12$, $SD = .03$, $p < .000$) is positively related to perceptions of Chandra Babu Naidu’s honesty. In connection with Jagan, going through news paper has its significant impact on voter evaluations about honesty and integrity ($\beta = .12$, $SD = .03$, $p < .05$), those reading news paper (sakshi) which belongs to Jagan perceive him to be honest. Similarly, Pawan kalyan perceived to be more honest by conservatives ($\beta = .18$, $SD = .03$, $p < .000$) and also those who follow his campaigns closely ($\beta = .11$, $SD = .05$, $p < .05$), watch television ($\beta = .04$, $SD = .03$, $p < .05$), outdoor advertisements ($\beta = .05$, $SD = .03$, $p < .05$) also have a greater impact on his honesty and integrity ratings in positive manner.

Table 1. Impact on Honesty and Integrity Ratings of a candidate (Ordinary Least Squares).

	Narendra Modi (BJP)	Chandra Babu Naidu (TDP)	Jagan(YSRCP)	Pawan (JSP)
Constant	1.43*** (.27)	2.14*** (.20)	2.47*** (.17)	2.46*** (.19)
Age of the respondent	.03** (.00)	-.00 (.00)	-.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Gender of the	.02 (.06)	.02 (.06)	-.12 (.06)	.07 (.06)

respondent				
Education of the respondent	.05 (.03)	-.01 (.03)	-.02 (.03)	.02 (.03)
Income of the respondent	.04 (.02)	-.01 (.03)	-.01 (.03)	-.01 (.02)
Orientation (Ideology)	-.01 (.03)	-.13*** (.03)	-.18*** (.03)	-.18*** (.03)
Interpersonal discussion	.02 (.03)	-.03 (.03)	-.01 (.03)	.03 (.03)
Follow the campaign	-.01 (.04)	.01 (.05)	-.02 (.05)	.11* (.05)
Television	.12*** (.04)	.03 (.03)	.13*** (.03)	.04* (.03)
Newspapers	.11*** (.03)	-.05 (.03)	.12*** (.03)	.01 (.03)
Radio	.06* (.03)	.05 (.03)	.01 (.03)	.05 (.03)
Outdoor advertisements	.05 (.03)	.12*** (.03)	.05 (.03)	.05* (.03)
Online news website	-.01 (.04)	-.03 (.04)	-.07 (.04)	-.05 (.04)
Party websites	.05** (.04)	-.04 (.05)	.01 (.05)	.03 (.05)
Political blogs	.05** (.04)	.06 (.04)	.08 (.05)	.03 (.04)
Commenting/participating in discussion	.10** (.09)	.03 (.10)	-.08 (.10)	-.03 (.09)
Facebook	.11*** (.07)	.12 (.07)	.09 (.07)	.06 (.07)
Twitter	.10* (.12)	-.01 (.14)	-.11 (.13)	-.11 (.13)
YouTube	.05* (.07)	.18* (.09)	-.10 (.08)	-.09 (.08)
<i>R</i> ²	0.14	0.15	0.14	0.17
<i>N</i>	787	787	787	787

Significance at * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Hypothesis:2 Examines how various source of information obtained especially through online mode can influence the perceptions of intelligence. With reference to Modi, those who were more conservative in their ideology ($\beta = -.06$, $SD = .03$, $p < .000$), follow the campaign thoroughly and closely ($\beta = .16$, $SD = .03$, $p < .01$), and viewing television quiet often ($\beta = .06$, $SD = .02$, $p < .01$) have its impact positively . Social media variables were significant, although the coefficient for Twitter which is significant at $p = .06$. From the above result it was observed that Chandra babu Naidu is perceived to be more intellect ($\beta = -.14$, $SD = .03$, $p < .000$). Outdoor advertisements do have positive impact ($\beta = .14$, $SD = .03$, $p < .000$), similar to utilizing Facebook ($\beta = .15$, $SD = .07$, $p < .05$). For Jagan, conservative ideology ($\beta = -.14$, $SD = .03$, $p < .000$).

.000), follow the campaign closely ($\beta = .12$, $SD = .05$, $p < .000$), and obtaining news from television ($\beta = .11$, $SD = .02$, $p < .000$) also has been positive predictors about the perceptions of contestants intellectual capability. Pawan kalyan's ratings for his intellect is positively affected by the level of conservatism they exhibit ($\beta = -.14$, $SD = .02$, $p < .000$), Following the candidate on YouTube just barely misses statistical significance ($\beta = -.11$, $SD = .05$, $p = .06$).

Table 2. Impact on Intellect Ratings of a candidate (Ordinary Least Squares).

	Narendra Modi (BJP)	Chandra Babu Naidu (TDP)	Jagan(YSRCP)	Pawai
Constant	2.53*** (.23)	3.04*** (.28)	3.21** * (.26)	2.93*** (.27)
Age of the respondent	.00 (.00)	.01* (.00)	-.00 (.00)	.00* (.00)
Gender of the respondent	.03 (.05)	.04 (.06)	-.07 (.05)	.08 (.05)
Education of the respondent	.05 (.03)	-.02 (.03)	.05 (.03)	-.04 (.03)
Income of the respondent	.01 (.02)	-.03 (.02)	.01 (.02)	-.04 (.02)
Orientation (Ideology)	-.06*** (.03)	-.14*** (.03)	-.14*** (.03)	-.14*** (.02)
Interpersonal discussion	-.02 (.02)	.03 (.03)	-.01 (.03)	.00 (.03)
Follow the campaign	.16** (.03)	-.11* (.04)	.12*** (.05)	.06 (.04)
Television	.06** (.02)	.03 (.03)	.11*** (.02)	.06** (.03)
Newspapers	-.01 (.03)	-.00 (.03)	.01 (.03)	-.03 (.03)
Radio	.02 (.02)	-.03 (.03)	.02 (.03)	.02 (.03)
Outdoor advertisements	-.00 (.02)	.03 (.03)	.02 (.02)	.03 (.03)
Online news website	.01 (.02)	.14*** (.03)	.04 (.03)	.11** (.02)
Party websites	.01 (.03)	-.02 (.04)	-.04 (.03)	-.02 (.03)
Political blogs	.00	.02 (.04)	-.00 (.04)	.03 (.04)

	(.04)			
Commenting/participating in discussion	.00 (.03)	.01 (.04)	.03 (.04)	-.02 (.04)
Facebook	.05 (.07)	-.01 (.09)	.03 (.08)	.05 (.09)
Twitter	.05 (.06)	.15* (.07)	.11 (.06)	.06 (.06)
YouTube	-.20 (.10)	-.19 (.13)	-.17 (.12)	-.10 (.12)
<i>R</i> ²	-.03 (.06)	-.09 (.07)	-.14* (.07)	-.11 (.05)
<i>N</i>	0.10	0.15	0.21	0.21
Age of the respondent	787	787	787	787

Significance ar * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Perceptions of ability to lead are made as the final hypothesis to study and test up on. To start with Modi, the factors that were identified as significant predictors are age of the respondent ($\beta = .00$, $SD = .00$, $p < .05$), education of the respondent ($\beta = .08$, $SD = .03$, $p = .06$), ideology of the respondent ($\beta = -.13$, $SD = .06$, $p = .06$), viewing television news for transparency ($\beta = .13$, $SD = .03$, $p < .05$), and listening to radio ($\beta = -.06$, $SD = .03$, $p < .05$). None of the online information sources were significant.

For Chandra Babu Naidu, presence in Face book by means of activity such as following the candidate has a positive impact ($\beta = .08$, $SD = .04$, $p < .05$), as similar to reading various political blogs ($\beta = -.12$, $SD = .05$, $p < .01$). Accessing to the news online from various websites ($\beta = -.07$, $SD = .04$, $p < .05$), however, is negatively related to Chandra Babu Naidu's ability to lead. Among the traditional media platforms, television news ($\beta = .07$, $SD = .03$, $p < .05$), radio news ($\beta = .07$, $SD = .03$, $p < .05$), and outdoor advertising ($\beta = .08$, $SD = .03$, $p < .05$) stands as positive predictors. In connection with Chandra babu naidu, the Ideology ($\beta = -.17$, $SD = .03$, $p < .000$) is also highly significant in nature.

Where in Jagan's ability to lead is significantly affected by voters' ideology ($\beta = -.19$, $SD = .03$, $p < .000$). News obtained from television ($\beta = .09$, $SD = .03$, $p < .000$) has a positive impact on one's ideology. Those who access news through websites in an online mode more often were likely to perceive Jagan's inability to lead, but the impact is not so significant ($\beta = -.05$, $SD = .04$, $p = .09$). Pawan's ability to lead is affected by the education level of the respondent more significantly ($\beta = -.07$, $SD = .03$, $p < .05$), where in income of the respondent ($\beta = .04$, $SD = .02$, $p < .05$), Radio news as a source of information ($\beta = .05$, $SD = .03$, $p < .05$) has its positive impact, similar to outdoor advertising ($\beta = .08$, $SD = .04$, $p < .05$).

Table 3. Impact of Candidates ability to lead Ratings (Ordinary Least Squares).

	Narendra	Chandra	Jagan(YSR	Pawan
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	Modi (BJP)	Babu Naidu (TDP)	CP	(JSP)
Constant	2.14*** (.28)	2.85*** (.30)	3.01*** (.30)	2.78*** (.29)
Age of the respondent	0.00* (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Gender of the respondent	.09 (.06)	.03 (.06)	-.05 (.06)	.08 (.06)
Education of the respondent	.08* (.03)	-.02 (.03)	-.01 (.03)	-.07* (.03)
Income of the respondent	.02 (.02)	-.00 (.03)	.03 (.03)	-.04* (.02)
Orientation (Ideology)	-.13*** (.06)	-.17*** (.03)	-.19*** (.03)	-.17*** (.03)
Interpersonal discussion	-.03 (.03)	.02 (.03)	.02 (.03)	.03 (.03)
Follow the campaign	.03 (.04)	-.09 (.05)	.03 (.05)	.06 (.05)
Television	.13** (.03)	.07* (.03)	.09*** (.03)	.04 (.03)
Newspapers	.03 (.03)	-.01 (.04)	.03 (.03)	-.05 (.03)
Radio	.00 (.03)	-.02 (.03)	.00 (.03)	.01 (.03)
Outdoor advertisements	-.06* (.03)	.07* (.03)	.03 (.03)	.05* (.03)
Online news website	.04 (.03)	.08* (.03)	.03 (.03)	.08* (.04)
Party websites	.01 (.03)	-.07* (.04)	-.05 (.04)	-.05 (.04)
Political blogs	-.05 (.04)	-.01 (.05)	-.02 (.05)	.09 (.05)
Commenting/participating in discussion	-.08 (.04)	-.12** (.05)	.07 (.04)	-.01 (.04)
Facebook	.00 (.09)	-.09 (.10)	.07 (.10)	-.16 (.09)
Twitter	.10 (.07)	.08* (.04)	.07 (.07)	.12 (.07)
YouTube	.01 (.12)	.05 (.14)	-.09 (.13)	.23 (.13)
R^2	-.08 (.07)	-.13 (.08)	-.06 (.08)	-.16* (.07)
N	0.09	0.13	0.16	0.19
<i>Age of the respondent</i>	787	787	787	787

Significant at $*p < .05$. $**p < .01$. $***p < .001$.

The other hypothesis predicts that various social media for political use would influence voter's political affiliation. The results reveals that there exists an association with political affiliation ($\beta = -0.301$, $p > 0.001$). The negative beta values suggests that political use of social media was higher among the voters with political affiliation in comparison to voters with no political affiliation at all.

Political affiliation can be influenced by various other factors such as one's political knowledge and level of political engagement. As affiliation with any political party may result in enhancing political knowledge and greater level of political engagement which triggers greater sense of political participation among the voters..

Table 4. Multiple regression analysis

Variables	Non standardized coefficients		Standardized coeffi	
	ta	Std. error	Beta	T
(Constant)	16.876	2.593		6.508
Time spent in social media platform	-0.583	0.222	-0.049**	-2.627
Social media base	-0.311	0.377	-0.016	-0.823
Usage of Social media	1.116	0.043	0.488***	26.035
Political affiliation with a specific party	-8.418	0.594	-0.244***	-14.176

5. Conclusion

From the findings, it was observed that voters prodigiously use social media, especially social media platforms like WhatsApp, Face book, twitter and various Youtube channels. Hence it also emphasizes that the voters widely use these social networking platforms which exerts considerable impact on their evaluation and affiliation. Similarly, using social media for political purpose social media base, and an amount of time spent in social media platforms were considered to be one of the most significant factors which have its impact on the way voter's evaluate the politicians and political party as well as voter's political affiliation. Consequently, social media not only limited to enhance political participation among the voters by using different online interactive forums but also used as a tool of political change among voters. In this study, It was highlighted that vibrant role of information technology in determining voter behavior and the political effectiveness of social media platforms that was employed in various political campaigns.

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