



## SOCIAL MEDIA IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING AROUND THE WORLD: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

**Dr. Raju Naik**

**Associate Professor , Department of Political Science,  
Government First Grade College, Peenya, Bangaluru.**

### ABSTRACT

*Social media has had a significant impact on political campaigns all over the world. According to the most recent data from the Pew Research Center, close to three-fourths of adults in the United States use social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, with young adults using them almost exclusively. In 2018, it was estimated that 2.62 billion people around the world used social media on a daily basis, and that number is expected to rise to 2.77 billion by 2019 (Statista, 2018). Social media have become an essential component of modern political campaigning, both domestically and internationally, thanks to their rapid expansion. The way political campaigns are run has changed thanks to platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit; how political information is accessed and shared by politicians and the general public; and the manner in which we learn about politics, form opinions and attitudes, and eventually participate in the political process or withdraw from it.*

**KEYWORDS:** Social media , social networking , politicians.

### INTRODUCTION:

Although social media have clearly impacted our understanding of political communication and its impact on the public, it is difficult to discern a single, definite effect. A 2009 meta-examination showed that Web use overall had positive, albeit moderately little, impacts on various parts of political commitment (Boulianne, 2009). Similarly, only half of 170 reported effects from 36 selected studies were statistically significant in a 2015 meta-analysis of digital media use and political participation (Boulianne, 2015). Another meta-analysis that looked at 116 relationships or effects reported in 22 different studies found that social media

had generally positive effects on three different dimensions of engagement: civic engagement, political participation, and social capital (Skoric, Zhu, Goh, & Pang, 2016).

These in-depth studies show that the effects of social media use and consumption are not always the same for different groups and contexts. Compared to studies using general population samples, for instance, studies using random youth samples are more likely to find a significant effect (Boulianne, 2015). Additionally, according to Boulianne (2015), studies that use panel data are twice as likely to discover positive and statistically significant relationships between social media use and political participation. Additionally, different types of Internet use have different effects on political engagement, according to studies. For instance, Gil de Zuniga, Bachmann, Hsu, and Brundidge's (2013) findings



suggest that only expressive uses of social media can predict both online and offline political participation, including voting, whereas consumptive uses cannot. In a similar vein, Dimitrova and Bystrom (2017) demonstrate that, in contrast to passive use, active social media use has a negative impact on caucus participation. However, different examinations have shown most grounded impacts when online assets are utilized for instructive purposes (Boulianne, 2009). Findings, for example, these recommend that virtual entertainment impacts might rely upon numerous variables, including what sort of channels are inspected (e.g., Twitter versus Instagram versus Snapchat), the particular crowd qualities and inclinations (precursors such as age, political interest, crusade contribution, and other mental elements) and client inspirations (e.g., relationship support versus political commitment versus self-favorable to movement), what sort of online entertainment use is caught (educational, expressive, or relational use), and the political mission setting in general.

### **SUMMARY OF SPECIAL ISSUE**

There are eight articles in this special issue that cover a wide range of topics and approaches related to research on political campaigning and social media. Using data from the United States, Asia, Australia, and Europe, they all innovatively address the complexities of social media content, use, and effects. The observational data used in Bosseta's study compares cross-platform content on Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat during the 2016 U.S. presidential primaries. Robust and Grabe zoom into the utilization of visuals in Clinton and Trump Subreddits during the 2016 U.S. Crusade and interface that to news values and orientation authority characteristics. Bruns compares the use of Twitter in Australian federal elections between 2013 and 2016, extending social media research beyond the United States. Fake news is another significant aspect of the political conversation that takes place on social media. Brummette and her colleagues demonstrate that Twitter has become highly politicized, with network clusters forming along party lines.

Four articles in this special issue go beyond the content and use of social media to address important theoretical questions about the effects of social media on various outcomes. These articles make it abundantly clear that the "effects" of social media vary widely. They can be both alarming and encouraging from a normative perspective. Cacciatore and colleagues focus on how learning is affected by social media. They show empirically that using Facebook for news consumption and sharing has a negative correlation with political knowledge, which could have a negative impact on deliberative democracy. Chan analyzes web-based entertainment use among electors in Hong Kong and notices contingent impacts of political vacillation and political conflict on the connections between hardliner strength and virtual entertainment use. Moving on to the context of Hungary, Marton investigates the connection between Facebook performance and electoral success during the Hungarian general election, locating empirical support for the two-step flow model as follows: Information shared on social media has an effect on friends and acquaintances of political candidates, not the candidates themselves. Lee et al., lastly examine how the personal disclosures made by politicians on social media affect voters' intentions to vote. This suggests that, in certain circumstances, making politicians' private information public may make them appear less competent. Thus, while social media may make politicians appear less competent, it may also have positive effects on turnout and persuasion.

### **KEY CHALLENGES AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

In the following sections, we offer some recommendations for future research on social media and political campaigning and outline some key challenges based on these multifaceted insights. In spite of the progress that has been made, there are, in our opinion, three issues that researchers in this field must address: how to determine the context of social media use and application, how to measure its content and use, and how to advance our field's theory building.

## SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND CONTENT

While seeing crowd concentrates on via virtual entertainment and legislative issues, the largest part of exploration utilizes study technique, for the most part cross-sectional overviews with self-announced proportions of web-based entertainment. There are many reasons why cross-sectional surveys are useful, one of which is the speed with which data are collected. Cross-sectional surveys, on the other hand, raise concerns about spuriousness and reverse causal order (Boulianne, 2015; Hopmann, Matthes, & Nir, 2015; Skoric et al., 2016). We can also assume the opposite effect if, for instance, social media use predicts participation after controlling for a variety of variables: Participating individuals are also more likely to use social media. An unmeasured third variable can cause spurious relationships in these models, despite the effect's direction, which could lead to incorrect conclusions.

Albeit the impediments of such plans are notable and more board studies have been distributed as of late (e.g., Dimitrova, Shehata, Strömbäck, and Nord, 2014; According to Theocharis & Quintelier (2016), research on political campaigning and social media continues to be dominated by cross-sectional studies. Even more importantly, the increased use of cross-sectoral data as a result of the recent interest in conditional process models has obscured the designs' limited utility (Hopmann et al., 2015). When applied to cross-sectional data, conditional process models are only correlative in nature and cannot test claims of causality.

In addition, cross-sectional studies are unable to provide us with information regarding the dynamic nature of social media usage and its effects over time. This, nonetheless, is an essential to understanding how web-based entertainment can apply their impact given the sensational changes in crowd structures over the course of the past many years. At the point when openness to customary news sources (i.e., papers, TV news) is in decline and openness to news via virtual entertainment is on the ascent, we should have the option to test whether virtual entertainment lead to a genuine expansion in standard ticipation and media impacts, controlling for a diminishing significance of conventional editorial news. If cohorts that previously relied on traditional news sources switch to social media, it should come as no surprise that social media have a significant impact on the audience from a longitudinal perspective. As a result, the effects we observe may resemble "old wine in a new bottle" to some extent. Influential new channels are likely to replace established ones as individual media repertoires shift in response to rapid technological advancements. We would essentially observe the same effect on a different channel if this were the case. Therefore, the question arises as to whether people who previously stayed away from traditional media can engage in politics through social media, or whether those who are politically engaged simply add social media to their arsenal at the expense of traditional channels. Naturally, there are numerous arguments against this zero-sum approach, such as the networked nature of social media and its expressive nature, both of which may explain the effects observed in research on political campaigning and social media. However, it would appear that longitudinal studies that span a significant amount of time or employ sequential designs with multiple cohorts will be able to convincingly resolve this issue (see Farrington, 1991).

The ways in which we conceptualize and measure exposure in social media research is the second difficult issue that needs to be addressed by future research. Self-reports asking respondents to estimate the amount of time or exposure to social media make up almost all of the research. This tactic has two shortcomings. First, making judgments about social media exposure is difficult due to the fragmentation and dispersion of exposure events across situations, devices, and platforms, which makes self-report accuracy extremely difficult (Araujo, Wonneberger, Neijens, & de Vreese, 2017; 2016 by de Vreese and Neijens; 2016 Scharrow). According to Segijn, Voorveld, Vandenberg, & Smit (2017), using social media while simultaneously performing other media- or non-media-related tasks arguably reduces attention and, as a result, the capacity to accurately report exposure to political information. In fact, recent studies that use tracking data as a "gold standard" show that respondents aren't very good at giving accurate estimates of how they use the internet (Scharrow, 2016). In addition to the finding that respondents are more likely to over-report on turnout and political participation measures (Karp & Brockington, 2005; According to Persson & Solevid (2014), when

measuring social media use and comparing it to participation responses, at least some correlation is necessary.

Second, self-reported exposure data do not provide any insight into the actual content respondents were exposed to. De Vreese and colleagues ( According to a 2017 study, "such designs say little about the actual impact of the media content and can thus be dubbed 'mere exposure studies,' i.e., they show a plausible correlation between media usage and an outcome variable," as the authors put it (p. 222). Nonetheless, understanding the political substance that online entertainment clients are presented to is pivotal for hypothesis working nearby. For instance, Eveland, Morey, and Hutchens (2011) argued that we need a deeper comprehension of how survey respondents actually interpret the term "political," particularly in the context of social media, where the distinctions between political and nonpolitical information are blurring. In the same way, asking respondents how much exposure they think they have is completely missing the significance of visuals. The development of picture based social net-works like Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, or Snapchat hosts had an impact on the manners by which gatherings and lawmakers are driving their missions (Page and Duffy, 2018). Understanding the persuasive power of social media requires visuals. Because we have complete control over the content that respondents are exposed to, including visuals, experimental designs may be one potential solution. However, given the abundance of options in the social media news environment, most, if not all, experimental studies on social media and political campaigning have used forced exposure (for example, Heiss & Matthes, 2016).

In the literature, some solutions to these two issues have been suggested (Araujo et al., 2017; 2016 by de Vreese and Neijens; Moy & Murphy, 2016), including the use of anchors, eye-tracking data, smartphone and app-based measurements, specific question types for media exposure, and, most importantly, combining survey data with tracking data or content analytic data. When planning future research on social media and political campaigning, a particular blind spot remains the combination of survey and content analysis data. Naturally, sampling social media content using conventional sampling methods is difficult due to its diversity and complexity. However, in the age of "big data," social media research opens up new opportunities for social scientists. When looking into the role that social media plays, mixed-method research designs are highly recommended. For instance, researchers ought to try to combine real-world indicators of political and civic engagement with survey data about social media use and computational analyses of social media content. Through their Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), companies like Facebook and Twitter collect troves of granular-level data like user engagement. Social media provides scholars with a wealth of data, which is both its benefit and its drawback. New analytical tools like topic modeling and social networking analysis are needed to analyze these large data sets. These tools, when combined with more accurate measures of social media exposure, can open up entirely new research avenues.

## THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The articles in this issue demonstrate that the specific context is required to comprehend the uses and effects of social media. Nations and locales contrast in their party framework; their media framework; the attributes of their citizens; the political campaigns' content, scope, and polarized nature; the extent of political preferences-based selective exposure; and even the organizational structure of social media environments (Van Aelst et al., 2017). Notwithstanding, most of exploration via virtual entertainment and political battling depends on information from the US which obviously can't be summed up to different nations and settings

Even more significant, the majority of research is based on studies of a single nation, and truly comparative research is rare, if not almost nonexistent (see Mosca & Quaranta, 2016; 2014) (Xenos, Vromen, and Loader). This is disturbing in light of the fact that solitary nation stud-ies are limited by the quirks of the particular setting (see Hopmann et al., 2015), and as a consequence, we lack knowledge regarding the cultural and contextual factors that influence social media's content and impact on politics. As a result, we must compare the content, use, and effects of social media. The same conclusion was reached



by a recent meta-analysis, stating that cross-national research is required in the future (Boulianne, 2015). According to Boulianne (2017)'s findings, countries with a free and independent press, like the United States, have smaller effects on participation from informational uses of social media. Even though a lot of important and insightful studies have been done in the United States, future researchers must move beyond U.S.-centric questions and study the phenomenon in a comparative way, taking into account national context and local political environment to give a truly international perspective, using multilevel models ideally. According to Boulianne (2015, 2017in), national context and dominant political system (e.g., established democracies versus other) do, in fact, make a difference. Therefore, determining the role of social media in political campaigns necessitates moving beyond studies focusing on a single nation.

However, the national context is not the only factor that matters. According to Knoll, Matthes, & Heiss (2018), political social media messages and images embedded in a typical newsfeed must also be taken into consideration. According to Theocharis & Quintelier (2016), studies frequently overlook the fact that social media are primarily utilized for relationships, entertainment, and political information, particularly among young people. Neglecting non-political uses runs the risk of underestimating the positive effects of social media as well as the negative effects of social media. On top of that, political and non-political uses cannot be completely separated on social media due to the simultaneous presence of political and entertainment-oriented content. In a typical newsfeed, both are completely mixed. In this manner, while examining the impacts of political substance, its nonpolitical setting should be considered also. The surrounding content of a message can have significant effects on how the message is perceived and interpreted, according to a long body of research on context effects (Baumgartner & Wirth, 2012, for example). Affective priming provides a theoretical explanation (Kühne, Schemer, Matthes, & Wirth, 2011). Positive emotions or metaemotions will be cultivated through entertainment. According to Kühne et al., this may, in turn, reduce the likelihood of citizens processing information with negative thoughts, thereby lowering the perceived severity of political issues. (2011). Subsequently, while taking a gander at political virtual entertainment content, openness, and impacts, we contend that the diversion situated setting ought to be considered too.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we believe that research on social media and political campaigning must address numerous obstacles by building on the articles in this special issue.

We hope that scholars from all over the world will use this special issue as a starting point for developing theories and as an inspiration for designing studies that are challenging from a theoretical and methodological standpoint. The content, uses, and effects of social media are inextricably linked to the future of political campaigning. As a result, our discipline will be evaluated based on how we address these challenges in our work in the future.

## REFERENCES

1. Araujo, T., Wonneberger, A., Neijens, P., & de Vreese, C. (2017). How much time do you spend online? Understanding and improving the accuracy of self-reported measures of Internet use. *Communication Methods and Measures*, 11, 173-190. doi:10.1080/19312458.2017.1317337
2. Baumgartner, S. E., & Wirth, W. (2012). Affective priming during the processing of news articles. *Media Psychology*, 15, 1-18. doi:10.1080/15213269.2011.648535
3. Boulianne, S. (2009). Does Internet use affect engagement? A meta-analysis of research. *Political Communication*, 26, 193-211. doi:10.1080/10584600902854363
4. Boulianne, S. (2015). Social media use and participation: A meta-analysis of current research. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18, 524-538. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2015.1008542
5. Boulianne, S. (2017). Revolution in the making? Social media effects across the globe. *Information, Communication & Society*, 1-16. Advance online publication. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2017.1353641