A study of Electronic Media on the Voting Behaviour of Indian Voters

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Abstract:

In recent years, electronic media, including television, social media and online platforms, have gained immense popularity and influence in shaping public opinion and political discourse. With its large and diverse electorate, India provides an exciting context to explore the impact of electronic media on voting behaviour. The introduction of liberalisation in the early 1990s became a significant factor in increasing the influence of electronic media in Indian elections. People began to use blogs, surveys, and social networking sites to express their opinions, with the Internet as an additional source of information. This study was an attempt to learn about the role of electronic media in creating an environment for a particular party's support. For this electronic media content, tele-epic and exit polls have been studied. A qualitative research method has been used to understand media impact.

Key Words: Electoral Participation, exit poll, opinion poll, Party Performance, Voting Behaviour, Voter Turnout.

Introduction

Electronic media has played a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of Indian elections, with its influence evolving significantly over time. From the early days of radio and television to the digital era dominated by social media platforms, the impact of electronic media on Indian elections has witnessed profound transformations. A new era in India's history of electronic media was begun with liberalisation. Several changes have occurred in both the structures and operations of government-controlled media and privately owned media and ending the government's monopoly over electronic media, relative independence from government-controlled media, an increase in privatisation in the field of electronic media, competition among media houses and organisations, the commercialisation of the media, and the shifting of the focus of issues from ordinary to critical. The media had served as a platform for disseminating images and messages about political and social matters. Media has served as a platform for disseminating images and messages regarding political and social matters.

Furthermore, this is an essential reason that all political parties want to establish supremacy over the media. Most of the media are owned by political parties. According to a study titled 'media ownership monitor India' published in "data leads," almost media owners are involved in politics directly or indirectly, and some of them even represent political parties. However, innumerable more own media firms but have shied away from disclosing their political beliefs. Media owners with political ties collectively control a sizable portion of readers and viewers. Every political party wants its relations with the media to stay healthy, so it has spokespersons to convey party information and its agenda to the public. Mass media medium has a remarkable effect on its reader, listener or viewer.

Electronic media is an audio-visual medium that can create a particular viewer perception. We see how political parties and candidates have used social media platforms in previous elections, and it is easy to reach the public; clips of electronic

media content are often shared on those platforms. In which there are parts of some news, some speech or political debate. Along with the use and influence of media, it is also essential for people associated with the media profession to know about their code of conduct and duties. So that a journalist can freely talk about the shortcomings of power and the needs of the public, and at the time of elections, the public can become aware of the fundamental issues and understand their rights. Emphasising the need for a permanent press in India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said, "Freedom of the press in its broadest sense is not merely a slogan but a necessity of the democratic process. I prefer the concept of a full-fledged newspaper with all the dangers of misuse of Freedom rather than suppressed newspapers". Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "If I remain conscientious towards my faith, I cannot do anything in anger or malice. I will write; I prefer to avoid getting carried away with emotions while writing. Society is greater than the individual, the country is greater than the government, man is mortal, and institutions and principles are immortal". In this paper, the researcher has attempted to examine the impact of electronic media on political participation as a whole, with a particular focus on voting behaviour.

India is a nation characterised by its diverse linguistic, ethnic and religious composition, significantly influencing the pattern of political conduct. The political participation of citizens can be seen with the influence of television. People who watch television (mainly political news) regularly cannot avoid being influenced by one or the other political ideology. According to a report published in Amar Ujala, a Stanford University study of 1.55 crore Twitter accounts and 1.06 crore posts, they concluded that BJP won the 2014 elections because of its strong hold on social media. Voting numbers have increased in the most recent general election, 2019, where India recorded the largest voter turnout in history, with 67.1%. Talking about the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections, since the 2017 elections, the total number of voters in Uttar Pradesh has increased from 14,71,43,298 to 15,02,84005. Of these, 24,03,296 voters were above 80 years of age. Comparing male and female votes, the

state had 8,04,52,736 male voters, 6,98,22,416 female voters and 8853 people identifying as a third gender. According to an analysis of all data by the Election Commission of India, India's average voter turnout rate currently stands at 58.48%. It will exceed 60% in the 2024 general elections if current trends continue. In India, the internet and cable television have led to significant changes in the public and private domains, compared to progress in education, industrialisation, or any other socio-economic field. The advent of television in urban India in September 1959 contributed significantly to the growth and development of mass media. The political sphere of this particular context displayed a significant level of fragmentation. Several vigorous discussions and deliberations between politicians and bureaucrats characterise this fragmentation. Their primary concern revolved around the effectiveness of allocating resources for television investment, especially given the limited number of individuals who had the means to access the medium (Sinha, n.d.). Under government control, the national television network was initially set up as a relatively modest enterprise, providing viewers access to a single channel. The impact of state-regulated electronic media on civic and political participation was limited, as its objectives focused primarily on educational and entertainment programming (Sinha, n.d.). Less than a month after taking office as Prime Minister in 2014, Modi became the world's second most-liked leader on Facebook (Goyal, 2014). As of 2019, his page has over 43.5 million likes, and the official Prime Minister of India page has over 13.7 million likes (Berson et al., 2019). Similarly, Modi uses Twitter to promote his message by deftly employing social media strategies such as carefully thought-out and inclusive messaging, selfies, celebrity involvement and "community action" (Pal et al., 2016). maintain their dominance. He has a large number of followers. With 42 million followers on his account (@NarenderModi) and 26 million on his institutional account (@PMOIndia), with the fourth largest following internationally, Modi was the third most followed person in the world on Twitter in 2018. He was a leader. (Berson Cohn and Wolff 2018). With 30 million followers as of October 2019 (NDTV 2019),

Modi is the elected official with the most followers worldwide. The main opposition party, the Congress, changed its media strategy in 2017 under Rahul Gandhi, with a renewed emphasis on social media, analytics and crowdsourcing to garner online attention and compete with the BJP. Despite the shortcomings of the party's social media strategy (Khosla, 2018), Congress made significant progress in its use of social media. Gandhi gradually gained support in the months of the 2019 general elections (Pal & Bojarth, 2018). Gandhi was able to brand himself as an essential national political candidate through frequent, hilarious and intelligent interactions with audiences on social media (Antill & Verma, 2019). Nevertheless, the BJP and Modi benefited tremendously, made possible by the party's highly developed Information and Technology (IT) division. Clips of political campaign stories, electronic media debates, news and material circulated in party pamphlets for the 2019 general elections were circulated on social media. Because social media has become a significant and accessible area to push political agenda; however, some early studies suggest that the influence of social media on voting patterns has been dramatically exaggerated (Daniels, 2019).

The Utilisation of electronic media as a Political Instrument:

Television frequently assumes the role of a persuasive medium that shapes a standardised national consciousness about language, imagery, and audio. Television influences its viewers through its ability to recreate and disseminate a particular worldview. These productions establish a connection between television and the political economy of constructing a nation. According to Ives (2007), the medium can facilitate socialisation among individuals, stimulate materialistic desires, and establish consumer relations as the norm. When considering the argument within the framework of Indian television, it becomes evident that state-controlled broadcast media played a role in partially narrowing the divide between an educated upper class and the larger population, which had previously relied on print media for information and entertainment. The colonial state in pre-colonial India implemented

measures to limit literacy access and educate a specific segment of the middle class for administrative functions (Rajagopal, 2004). The advent of cable-satellite television significantly reduced the disparity between the literate elite and the general population. It was particularly evident as it facilitated the convergence of market forces and the influence of television, a phenomenon that had fully materialised by 1992 (Rajagopal, 2004).

Political Participation in Hindu Epics on electronic media

If a distinct genre emerged in India, it would likely draw inspiration from the Hindu mythological tele-epics that originated in 1987 (Kumar, 2005). This phenomenon becomes apparent when examining the popularity of mythological soap operas, such as the Ramayana (1987-1988) and Mahabharat (1988-1990), which garnered a viewership of over 500 million on television. However, our focus lies in examining whether the narrative-discursive framework of the tele-epics presented new challenges for Indian society, specifically in the emergence of an assertive Hindu supremacy evident in the Ram Janmabhumi Movement of the 1990s. According to Rajagopal (2004), the introduction of religious programming on state-controlled television resulted in the developing of a unique programming genre known as mythological soap operas. These soap operas can be seen as a replacement for the government's unsuccessful attempt at producing developmental soap operas. The Indian television's portrayal of "serialised epics" facilitates the communal dissemination of an idealised Hindu historical narrative, thereby creating a platform for religious-nationalist mobilisation. The battle scenes depicted in the epic Ramayana served as a paradigm for Hindu militancy. At the same time, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) initiated the mobilisation of the political-religious Ram temple movement, drawing inspiration from the epic serial (Rajagopal, 2004). The serial, aired to a broad audience nationwide, facilitated various types of political mobilisation, such as engaging in riots or participating in community services like 'kar-seva' (selfless service) and influencing changes in voting patterns.

Regarding the narrative of political mobilisation, the Hindu nationalist movement persisted in utilising the construction of memories that emphasised the concept of "otherness" within a community as a strategy to resist oppression (Rajagopal, 2004). There was a consensus that the commodification of Hindutva, the prevailing religious ideology, commenced in the late 1980s, approximately three decades after India attained independence. The government, led by the Congress Party, made a significant decision to permit the broadcasting of Hindu epics on state-controlled television. The decision, which carried significant political implications, aimed to rejuvenate the party's declining popularity by strategically appealing to the "Hindu votes." However, this approach posed the potential risk of alienating Muslim voters and undermining the party's secular reputation. Due to organisational deficiencies, Congress could not effectively leverage electronic media popularity and revive its financial prospects. The BJP's success in leveraging the electronic media narrative of a burgeoning collective Hindu identity can be attributed to their explicit endorsement of Hindutva, representing the movement for Hindu self-assertion and nationhood. According to (Chatterjee, 1994), the political party in question achieved national status and experienced substantial electoral advancements by the time of the general elections in 1991.

Role of electronic media in the Indian Election

The exit poll polls predicted a neck-to-neck fight in Goa, with both the BJP and the Congress projected to win 16 of the 40 seats in the state. The polls suggested that Arvind Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) would win Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh would remain firmly with the BJP. According to six other exit polls, the Yogi Adityanath-led BJP in Uttar Pradesh was predicted to win another term with a thumping majority. The exit poll totals showed the BJP and its allies getting 241 of the state's 403 seats, and Akhilesh Yadav's Samajwadi Party was projected to finish second with 142 seats.

An average of 10 polls predicted a significant victory for AAP in Punjab. The exit polls gave AAP 63 seats in Punjab with 117 seats, with a majority of 59. The ruling Congress was said to be a distant second with 28 seats in the assembly, indicating the party may have to pay the price of intense infighting.

In Uttarakhand, 11 exit poll surveys predicted a close fight between the BJP and Congress. According to exit polls, BJP can win 35 seats, and Congress can win 32 seats, and according to the surveys, AAP may get a seat. Exit poll surveys forecast a neck-to-neck fight in Goa, with the BJP and the Congress projected to win 16 of the state's 40 seats - well below the majority mark of 21. Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool was given three seats. Based on data from ten exit polls, she can be a kingmaker in the battle for the majority. According to the six exit polls, the BJP will emerge as the single largest party in Manipur. It was told that BJP would get 30 seats and Congress would get 13 seats in the 60-seat assembly.

Effect of electronic media exit polls on Uttar Pradesh Election 2022

Most exit polls of March 7, 2022, projected that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) would secure the highest number of seats in the state, ranging from 222 to 326 out of the total 403 seats in the assembly. According to the surveys, the Samajwadi Party, led by Akhilesh Yadav, experienced an increase in its seat count to 47 in 2017. However, the projections indicate that the party was expected to secure between 71 and 165 seats in the current election, a significantly lower range than its previous power attainment. The threshold for a majority in the Uttar Pradesh assembly, consisting of 403 seats, was 202. The India Today-Axis refers to the collaboration between India Today, a prominent media organisation in India, and Axis Research Mind, a research firm specialising in public opinion analysis and the market. According to the India exit poll results, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is projected to secure 288-326 seats, while the Samajwadi Party (SP) was expected to win 71-101 seats. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) was anticipated to secure 3-9 seats, the Indian National Congress was projected to win 1-3 seats, and other parties were

expected to secure 2-3 seats. According to the Matriz exit poll, the projected seat distribution for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly was as follows: the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was expected to secure 262-277 seats, the Samajwadi Party (SP) and its allies were projected to win 119-134 seats, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) was anticipated to secure 7-15 seats, and the Indian National Congress (INC) was expected to win 3-8 seats. Based on the P-Mark exit poll data, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was projected to secure 240 seats.

In comparison, the Samajwadi Party (SP) and its allied parties were expected to obtain 140 seats. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) was projected to secure 17 seats, with the Indian National Congress anticipated to secure four seats. According to the survey conducted by India News-Jan Ki Baat, it was projected that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) would secure a range of 222 to 260 seats. On the other hand, the Samajwadi Party (SP) and its allied parties were estimated to obtain 135-165 seats, while the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) was projected to secure 4-9 seats. The Congress party, however, was expected to secure a modest range of 1-3 seats. According to the Times Now-Vito exit poll, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was projected to secure 225 seats.

In comparison, the Samajwadi Party (SP) and its alliance partners were expected to win 151 seats. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) was predicted to secure 14 seats, followed by the Congress with nine seats and four seats for other parties. It marked a significant milestone in the history of Uttar Pradesh (UP), as it witnessed the return to power of a political party following the completion of a full five-year term by its Chief Minister. Uttar Pradesh (UP) was represented by many Members of Parliament (MPs) in the Lok Sabha, with 80 representatives. This count surpasses that of any other state in the country.

Conclusion

The study on the influence of electronic media on the voting behaviours of Indian voters underscores the significant impact of television, social media, and

online platforms on political decision-making. Electronic media has revolutionised the accessibility of political information, shaped the political agenda, influenced issue framing, facilitated political advertising, and transformed youth engagement in politics. The shift from traditional mediums like radio and television to digital platforms has democratised political communication and enabled broader citizen engagement. As technology continues to evolve, the influence of electronic media is likely to play an even more significant role in shaping the future of Indian elections. This study examined the role of tele-episodes and exit polls; studies show that cable network channels strongly influence political participation and elections in India.

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