

Influence of Political Marketing Campaigns through Social Media on Political Activism: Special Emphasis on Youth of Pakistan

Sayyed Muhammad Irfan Raza Naqvi & Muhammad Shoaib

Abstract

The objective of this study was to analyze the possible relationship of online political marketing campaigns and offline political mobility of the Facebook users. Online political marketing on Facebook was analyzed and checked the effect of this marketing effort on offline political activity of the users. The targeted population was youth of Pakistan between the ages of 18-35 (registered voters). Data on the study variables was collected through structured questionnaire from 607 youth who have Facebook account and were interested in seeking online political information. Participants recorded their responses through online questionnaire. Statistical analysis included reliability test and correlation. The results of the study reveal that the study variables have significant relationship with each other. The

findings of the study provide deep insight of the relationship, and magnitude of two data sub sets on the basis of active and passive use of Facebook, and their relationship with real world political activism. Surprisingly, passive users of Facebook were found more active in offline political activities as compared to the active users. Possible reasons, limitations, and recommendation are discussed in detail.

Keywords: Political activism, Political participation, Online & Offline activism, Youth, Pakistan

Introduction

This dominating, influential and dynamic class comprises of young adults, male and females, who are educated, aware and want to seek political information. This study will investigate their participative role in real time politics, which will resultantly contribute in facilitating the political marketing planners and executors of different political party. The importance of understanding the profile of this young online user becomes more significant in the next election, to devise a comprehensive political marketing campaign by the political parties. Because this huge number of user will not stop here and it will continue to increase in its number, they will not only have a great impact on election result, but they will also contribute in making opinion about a particular party. They will impact more rigorously in the next election by influencing 'Offline' political process contributors and stakeholders. Facebook is open for all, free of cost and welcome all level of participants. For this particular study, clear categories are necessary on the basis of usage, frequency and time spent on

Social Media website like Facebook. The categorization of Social Media was done by Kaplan & Haenlein, in 2010. This classification or bifurcation of social media is based on social presence, media richness and self-disclosure/self-expression (Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. 2010). On the basis of this, following categories can be divided;

- i. Active User: In this category, those users are included who are initiators, posting different videos, images, news and blogs on the Facebook. They act as ‘online opinion leaders’ and contributes a lot in making views of masses related to any issue, personality or news.
- ii. Passive User: They are on receiving end, contributing by sharing, commenting and show their intentions on existing available information uploaded by active users. They don’t initiate any string on the Facebook, but wait for someone else to initiate on a particular issue.

Political parties may use Facebook to communicate with public who are eager to listen. Active and passive users may contribute and they are contributing in dissemination of particular information to their local virtual groups and communities. They play as the frontline spokesperson for political parties and spread the word of mouth more affectively as compared to the official representative of any political party. Facebook become the true predictor of the public opinion and sentiments.

Research Rationale

All kind of efforts by the political parties are to engage online user in seeking information and influence, so that this online user may contribute in offline political activities and real time politics. Parties’ online marketing campaigns focus on bringing that online

user on the roads and motivate them to contribute. In this study this phenomenon will be explored that is it really happening or not. As we already has the firm believe from the above discussion that social media (like Facebook) is most remarkable thing of this era which not make impossible things possible but also provide a ground for future actions. No precedential evidence exists for the support or against this proposition. This area is still grey and this research will provide a substantial support for the future strategic marketing campaigns and decisions.

Problem Statement

Social Media marketing is the recent induction in the modern marketing techniques, and has significant contribution in devising Integrated marketing Communications. It is dynamic and wide spreading tool of the modern era. In the traditional marketing communication model, the content, timing, frequency and the medium of communication by the organization is in the collaboration of the external agents like advertising agency, marketing research firms, and public relation firms. However the impact of social media is huge and enormous on the conventional way of communication (Anjum, A. H. 2011). Now this situation converges to the more specific way of hitting the target audience, so the political parties are focusing. So the affectivity of social media need to be judged and evaluated through sophisticated research process, so that contributing factor towards the established proposition can be analyzed in more systematic way.

The coherence between the conventional media campaigns and new media campaigns is s of great importance, because the message / information transmission becomes different and delivery

routes are different. But the strategic objective of the organizations is the same for both. Now learning organizations have to explore the limitation and delimitations of the new media campaign requirements and pitfalls. Any constraint in the way of communication can only bridge by highlighting the possible dimension of the stated issue. This transition from the conventional way of doing marketing communication is changing rapidly. So the key to success is to change marketing strategy at each level (Strategic, tactical and operational).

There is a gap exist between the conventional mode of launching IMC (Integrated Marketing Communication) campaign and the new media (Social Media) marketing campaign. It is important to fill this gap by investigating that how much social media political campaign has the impact on real time / offline political activism. If there is a relationship exists, then further research will explore the dimensions and factor that affect new media political marketing campaign. The purpose of the study is to highlight the political participation of online user in main stream politics, also find out the possibility of relationship of online activism with the offline political activities of the same user.

Literature Review

Public is a dissimilar group of people that have an actual or a potential interest and/or impact on organization. (Kotler, P., & Murray, M. 1975). Another school stated this concept in different dimension and stated that Public generally refers to a situational group of individuals who appear and establish in response to a problem. (Wu, M. Y., Taylor, M., & Chen, M. J. 2001). In context with the active group and public opinion, social scientists

recognize this activism in more delicate way. The situational theory of publics: non-publics, aware publics, latent publics, and active publics (Grunig, J. E. 1983). According to Grunig, the respond towards a particular situation can be characterized by the classification of Public into smaller segments or classes. In this study, my focus is on 'active public', which is considered as the most dominating segment of general public. The impact of this segment can be clearly observable in online activism.

The image inside the minds of people, the pictures of their own, of others, of their wishes, drives, and affiliation, are their public sentiments. Those beliefs which are acted upon by clusters of people, or by individuals acting under the name of groups, are 'Public Opinion'. (Lippmann, W. 1946). According to some scientist, Social media is a collection of Internet-based applications that build on the moral and hi-tech foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the formation and exchange of User Generated Content (Kaplan, et al., 2010). Some scientist like Aula, professor at University of Helsinki said that Social media is characterized by interactivity – partakers freely send, receive, and share content, which is contributed by other (Aula, P. 2010). It not only gives leverage to seek information but also create opportunities to participate. As increasing numbers of young people interested in becoming expert in use of media tools to express themselves, explore their individualities, and connect with others—to be active makers as well as users of social culture—experts have a chance to inspire young media creators to practice active citizenship (Boyd, D. 2007). The keen acceptance of Web publication, digital video making and online video circulation, social networking facilities, immediate messaging, multiplayer enacting games, online societies, virtual spheres, and other Internet-based media by

masses of young people around the world establishes the strength of their aspiration—uninterrupted by adults—to learn digital creation and communication abilities (Rheingold, H. 2008). Researchers like Ryan, Y. (2011), Al-Atraqchi, F. (2011) and Diamond, L. (2010) have detailed work on Egyptian and Tunisian movements and cover the role of social media in these revolts. Blogs, Facebook and Twitter have a significant role in mobilizing youth of such a massive move. Also the political mobility was observable on roads.

Public participation is actually the involvement of public in the process of decision-making (Stewart, J., & Clarke, M. 1987). Kathryn Montgomery has worked on network neutrality in reference with the youth digital democracy. She highlighted whether the democratic media does play a vital role in democratizing the youth to express their feelings, consent and expression about any particular issue, while considering the policy, practices and marketplace (Montgomery, 2008). The Internet played a significant role in all these efforts, not only facilitating each initiative with an objective of reaching its target audience but also enabling cooperation among the virtual groups, supporting virtual alliances through linkages and cross-promotion settings, and creating a “youth engagement Web sphere” on the Internet that was enormous in magnitude and more urbane than any before (Bennett, L., & Xenos, M. 2005)

The exclusive style of individual expression that differentiates one’s opinion from those of others can be called upon to help link young people’s active participation in ‘identity-formation’ with their prospective commitment with society as citizens. Moving from a private to a public, opinion can help young people to turn

their ‘self-expression’ into a form of public participation (Agre, P. 1998). Public voice is learnable, a matter of deliberately involving in an active public rather than dissemination to a passive audience. This urge and motivation compels youth to be more expressive and passionate (Rheingold, H. 2008). The public opinion of individuals, combined and in discourse with the consent of other individuals, is the basic part of “public opinion.” When public opinion has the influence and liberty to effect policy and grows from the open, lucid, critical deliberation among peers postulated by Jürgen Habermas and others, it can be a vital tool of democratic self-governance (Kellner, D. 2000). James Fishkin at Stanford, Peter Levine at the University of Maryland and John Gastil at the University of Washington have been exploring whether better premeditated practice can help in making better publics (Fishkin, J.S. 2006)

Hypothesis

On the basis of preliminary data gathering and analysis, following hypothesis can be established, in order to find out the relationship between online political activism with offline main stream politics in response to the political marketing campaign on social media.

H1: If youth is more politically active on social media then they are more likely to take interest in seeking and sharing political information on this medium than those less politically active on social media.

H2: If youth is more politically active on social media then they are more likely to participate in offline political activities than those less politically active on social media.

Theoretical Framework

Following figure shows the relationship of independent variable of online activism through online political marketing campaign and dependent variable of offline political activism which could possibly be depicted by political affiliation and offline political participation.

Figure 1



3. Research Design

Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

The population of this study composed of young voters who are actively participating in the online political activities on social media and involve in civic engagement in different vicinities of Pakistan. According to the official statistics of Election Commission of Pakistan, the total number of electoral roll in December 2011 was 80,724,009, which includes all verified and unverified voters. As per rough estimate, youth comprises of 56.4% of total population. When having such a huge population, non-probability sampling is used by adopting convenience sampling technique. In this technique the survey form was shared with the masses to collect data from maximum number of

respondent within specified span of time. The sample size was 609, from more than 700 respondents. After omitting invalid questionnaire, 609 were left for analysis.

Measurement and Instrumentation

Demographic section of the questionnaire has close ended questions, providing range of figures in few questions and multiple choices in other questions. One multiple choice questions provide the right to the respondent to select more than one option, to explore the number of mediums used by the subject for information seeking. Other two sections of the questionnaire have 6 level bipolar scales for the analysis of active use of social media and political activism by the same respondent. The 6 point scale ranges from 'very often' to 'very rarely'. Respondents can give feedback on the basis of their level of engagement in the political activities. Questions were based on the reserve words for Facebook and direct questions for the offline political participation including public processions, rallies, donations, etc.

Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected through online survey form, and the link of that form was shared on social media and also through personal links to collect responses. For convenience, public and private universities were selected to have access of targeted population.

4. Result and Discussion

Validity & Reliability Testing

Validity refers to the degree to which a test measures what it supposed to measure (Babbie, 1979; Punch, 1998; Maxwell &

Loomis, 2003). Valid research is reasonable, reliable, and therefore, defensible. (Johnson & Christensen, 2000, p.207). Construct validity is used because this study focuses on hypothetical construct in which online activism is considered linked with the offline political activism. This assumption can be validated by asking questions with the reserved word for that construct. These reserved words serve as the fundamental predictor to analyze the major domain of the construct i.e. political activism. Nunnally (1978, p. 245) recommends that tools used in basic research must have reliability of about .70 or better. Instruments used in applied settings; reliability should be at least .80 or better (Nunnally, J. C., & Bernstein, I. 1978). Reliability is analyzed by using Cronbach's alpha; the coefficient of this test shows the consistency in data. The value of alpha for online political activism was 0.897 and for offline political participation 0.931.

Hypotheses Testing

Following results shows that there is a strong relationship exists between both variables in each group (data subsets). The value of coefficient is also significant in both cases and shows a strong association between the observed variables

H1: If youth is more politically active on social media then they are more likely to take interest in seeking and sharing political information on this medium than those less politically active on social media.

H2: If youth is more politically active on social media then they are more likely to participate in offline political activities than those less politically active on social media.

Table 1***Correlations***

FB_Group			FB	PP
.00	FB	Pearson	1	.743**
		Correlation		
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		Sum of Squares	171.327	149.057
		and Cross-products		
		Covariance	.362	.315
	N	474	474	
1.00	FB	Pearson	1	.529**
		Correlation		
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		Sum of Squares	56.399	45.445
		and Cross-products		
		Covariance	.421	.339
	N	135	135	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There is a significant relationship exist between these two variables, which means that online political activism or the influence of online political marketing is as significant as the offline political marketing campaign, because sample response is significant in both cases. The results of 2 tails level of significance, shows that the value is less than 0.01 ($0.000 < 0.01$) which means that there is a significant relationship exists between the observed variables. In case of passive user of group, the relationship

between online and offline political mobilization / participation is statistically strong. In case of passive user group, the relation between online and offline political activism is also statistically significant ($0.000 < 0.01$).

So the active and passive user's data sets show significant relationship between the offline and online political participation. The result can be derived that there is a strong impact of online political marketing campaign on Facebook users and they shows the same behavior in real politics. No matter they are 'Active' or 'Passive' in the use of Facebook or their active or passive involvement in offline political activities, their relationship does exist and the influence of online political marketing campaign has the significant impact on the user, which is visible in real time politics.

In comparison of these data subsets (0.00 and 1.00, i.e. Passive and Active users respectively), the passive users has strong relationship as compared to the Active group. From these results it can be generalized that online political marketing campaign have strong relationship in passive group (value of coefficient is 0.743) as compared to the Active group, which has 0.529 coefficient value. These statistics depicts that political activism in offline politics is influenced by the online political marketing campaign, but it is not the only key motivator for the political mobilization in real politics.

5. Conclusions

The quantitative analysis of the research presented in the preceding chapters show that there is a significant relationship between

online political marketing and offline political participation. This relationship is of two ways that mean it is observed that Facebook users are taking part in offline political activities and also political actors contributing in online marketing of a particular political party. This two way participation serves the basic purpose of any marketing campaign i.e. information sharing. In the participatory media channels like social media website does plays a dominating role in making public opinion about a particular issue. This collective sentiment results in sustainable and long term association with the manifesto of any political party. This could be considered as the sequence of sequential connected activities which are interdependent and resultantly have huge impact. It starts from individual consent to the collective belief about a particular issue. The number is user increases day by day, so the impact of social media website becomes enormous in coming days. This impact has two folds; one is the influx of user and political mobilizers, and on the other hand the increasing number of online users and motivators. By the increase in popularity of social media websites, like Facebook, political information seeker will defiantly get influenced by the online political marketing campaign, specifically on Facebook.

Figure 2



This figure shows the stepwise formation of political affiliation at individual and collective level. All users of Facebook whether they are active or passive, have a significant relationship with the real world political scenario. At the very first step, these users get influenced by the use of social media website like Facebook. It provides them leverage to interact with other fellows similar to their own political views. Then in the next step they got influenced by the online political efforts in the forms of campaign, viral news, dedicated pages, image files, video, external links, embedded material, linked webpages, and cause based events on Facebook. These marketing efforts are considered as the part of overall marketing campaign of a particular political party. This influence on the minds of users compels them share that information with their peers and as well as among the public (technically public and private spheres of the individual). This sharing is not confined to the social media websites, but can also visible in real world

politics. There is a strong relationship exists between online political activism with the offline political activities, so online user (active and passive) are interested in repetitive seeking of political information through social media. These two groups are politically motivated as they are seeking political information and also taking part in real world politics. The political affiliation is the consequent outcome of this sequential pathway. An individual can established association and affiliation with any political party or any political view after influenced by Facebook. Social media act as a stimulus and trigger the sentiments of user. An affective political marketing campaign can change or transform the political views of an individual. If the span of that campaign becomes wide (as in the case of social media) more and more people become engaged in it and that individual inclination and affiliation will transform into collective consent.

6. Recommendations

Impact of Online Political Marketing Campaigns

There is a significant role of social media in the expression of political affiliation and its relation with the real world politics, the mere importance is to make social media more reliable, viable, accessible and practical source of political mobility and political participation tool for voters. The prospects are of high importance but the time and other resource are creating hurdle in the way of seeking political information on social networking websites. These constraints and other hurdles should be address. One of the most significant hurdles is the span of time which a user spent on social networking site for seeking political information, which plays a decisive role for the user and determines the time and effort he/she

is allocating for the real time political activity. Moreover the participatory role of user is negatively affecting the real world political activism, as it is explored that passive users are more active in real world politics as compared to the online active users. This proposition helps in creating those activities which required relatively lesser time to engage a person online, and provide only relevant information in short time. For this purpose those campaigns would be successful which are based on graphics, written news, tweets, and clip of short time. Also that information would be more beneficial which is related with the real world political activity, like information regarding government policy, rally, political summon, and procession. Also, information about participating in some volunteer activity, social work, and representing political party in some vicinity around would be of great significance. 'Civic engagement' is most appropriate word to describe this recommendation. More the online user is engage in civic activities, more would be the participation in politics.

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