

Influence of Facebook and the User's Perception of Emoticons during the Student Council Election: A Study of Student Community of Guwahati, Assam

Farha Yashmin Rohman*

Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, JAIN (Deemed-To-Be-University), Bengaluru, India

Abstract

Social media is the most indistinctly used term for virtual reality revolutionizing the real world within a single click. It has become a crucial part of this contemporary living and its sophisticated lifestyles through social networking platforms. Among all the social networking sites, Facebook has emerged as the most popular platforms which allow the users to connect with their friends, family and acquaintances globally by sharing their posts in the form of text, images and video. Facebook has greatly affected the way today's youth spend their leisure time. It has changed the way young people socialize and interact with each other. Specially, student leaders of the college union body use Facebook to connect with his/her fellow student's community during the election. This study explores the usage of Facebook by the student leaders in influencing the voting behavior of college students in the elections and also analyzes the use of Facebook emoticon reactions by the students on the crucial post shared by the student leaders. The study employs the quantitative method to analyze data from the student community of Guwahati, Assam. The different narratives on the exemplary of student leaders, voting behavior based on the post shared and emoticons representing choices constitute the main finding of the study.

Keywords: Facebook • Student leaders • Student council elections • Emoticons • Voting behavior

Introduction

The world is noticing the proliferation of social media platforms which is intervening the patterns of information dissemination and communication among the youth. For millions of youngsters, Facebook is a significant platform for exploring themselves consciously or unconsciously, trying to find their identities. Facebook is not only a tool for socializing between friends and communities, but it is also a favorable platform to promote political awareness among higher institutions. It also promotes the reputation of individuals and leaders contributing the development of society through political affairs. Needless to say, everyone in the universities accesses social media platforms. Web-based communication has removed all the digital barriers of time and space opening new gate away for humans to communicate and express their feelings with the use of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) equivalent to the speed of a human mind. Initially from a village in the remotest corner of the world to the metropolis, communication is initiated within the use of a single-click through the World Wide Web (www) [1].

We are living in a networking era, where Facebook is the easiest mode of communication among other SNSs, through which peers can

stay connected. Using Facebook, information gets disseminated quickly to the users in academia with maximum benefits in minimum cost. Post-modernism has impacted the lives of people globally. The students of northeast India are also affected by this contemporary ethos and follow it judiciously on social media by a single touch on their cell phones. Facebook has narrowed down the vast terrains of cultural and political communication between nations virtually. The whole idea of virtual reality sets in both the rural and urban dwellers of youth in the northeast India. For instance, the student community of Assam has been found using Facebook effectively in their day-to-day life for academic and other purposes. While as, the revolution of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) brought a drastic change in the education system, serving the conventional libraries as open access platform, encouraging communication through scientific knowledge and research [2].

Over the decades, Facebook has gained immense popularity among the youth as it not only offers scope of connection but also provides updates about various activities. Youth are a very important resource of any society; it is necessary for them to be productive and wise for the development of society in the shorter as well as longer terms. Studies conducted have found that there is a difference in the

*Address for Correspondence: Farha Yashmin Rohman, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, JAIN (Deemed-To-Be-University), Bengaluru, India; E-mail: farhayasminrohman@gmail.com

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pattern of using Facebook between genders. Facebook offers an opportunity to college going students to communicate with their friends, colleagues, relatives and unknown friends within a short duration of time. In this information age, youth are always in hurry and get less time to communicate with their friends and contacts. This is where the characteristics of social media in general and Facebook in particular, are becoming the most preferable platform to keep in touch with each other [3]. There are number of cultures, communities and religions across the globe that Facebook is considered as a desirable avenue to political outlook and allows the youth to be a part of the decision maker. The youngsters get a chance of showcasing their creativity and talents to the world virtually by sharing their creative ideas and innovative thoughts, in the form of pictures, poems, videos and statements. This helps them in getting feedback from friends, family and other walks of life, making them and their intuition popular globally [4].

Emphasizing the patterns of virtual communication, Facebook has reduced the compulsion of face-to-face communication among college students. The students are busy in scrolling their Facebook resting at their homes instead of having heart-to-heart conversations by writing or meeting their friends personally. It has reduced the importance of human communication among youngsters. The audacity of posting selfies, photographs, videos and other personal information among the youngsters have increased the level of self-centeredness. They are interested in mostly knowing what is happening in their friends or non-friend users' lives through the post shared. Constant sharing of personal information online makes the youngsters victims of cybercrimes with bullying, trolling, mental and sexual harassments. This has resulted psychological disturbances of the youngsters who uses Facebook [5].

Materials and Methods

History of student's politics in Assam

The origin of student politics in Assam is traced back to the 19th century with the historical practice of colonial rule in Assam. The initial step towards student activism was found in the memorandum submitted by Assamese students under the leadership of Anandaram Dhekiel Phukan to A.J. Moffat Mills during his visit to Assam in 1853. In fact, the development of growth of student politics in Assam is associated with many historical events. The Assamese students residing outside Assam has also remarkably contributed to the development of student politics, in the form of student activists. One of the most effective movements that took student politics in Assam to a new height was the Assam agitation also known as the Assam movements. The primary cause of this movement was the illegal immigrants' movement which has shown its seeds in the ideas of, power, political movement, study and struggle of student politics. The power of student movement reflects the ideology behind the need of independent political communication among the students. This movement led to a social change to connect the student with the organized working-class public in the region [6].

Student politics in Assam has been developing with the awareness of student activism in the overall development of democratic practices in a society. The student activism of Assam has been active for decades and left no stones unturned in raising their voices

against any oppression and exploitation by the governance. The students have formed different unions or bodies in the state and taking up issues, confronted by them. Some of the student communities are working independently and others are under the different political parties. In the current scenario, the college and university students of the region take active responsibility and participation in student politics with the hope to bring fruitful changes in society. They work tremendously in the welfare of the students and society by taking up their grievances in front of the administration. The flame of working for the welfare and development of their state makes them stand out as leaders who are capable of taking part in regional and national politics [7].

Facebook and political communication

Political communication is a way of interacting with citizens, media and institutions on political issues. It starts from all directions comprising governing authorities to citizens for the welfare of the society. Facebook is not only a tool for socializing between friends and communities, but it is also a favorable platform to promote political awareness among higher institutions. It also promotes the reputation of individuals and leaders contributing the development of society through political affairs. The feedback received on their messages and opinions shared through virtual debates, Facebook live, photographs, comments from other users, etc. helps in building their identity and influences the voter. Political communication on Facebook focuses on the idea of reputation management whether in reality the identity of the leaders or politicians are same as the one they represent virtually or they filter what they delivers. Student leaders employs Facebook as an effective platform to persuade their political agendas and garner votes by posting their strategies in various formats, in the form of photos with friends and groups, sharing their ideologies, opinions and beliefs [8].

The discourse of messages created for political interaction on Facebook is informal in nature completely differing from the official pattern that is shared through newspapers and television. Political messages conveyed with formal language at times do not receive the exact feedback from the users and the meaning remains untouched among the public. As most of the users spend their time on Facebook for leisure purposes, the users expect some creativity and entertainment in sharing of information [9]. A simple poster with a caption denoting a political message can bring a huge difference in the feedback and number of followers. The use of entertainment for the purpose of political communication is referred to as infotainment that provides the users soft content with positivity highlighting the valuable information framed in it. The entire process of political communication has been transformed with the engagement of Facebook as medium for dissemination of opinions to a large number of audiences in a fraction of seconds. The instant sharing of thoughts and ideologies facilitates large number of potential voters to support the politicians not only on their personal Facebook accounts but also on their fan pages. Thus, the entire political party is benefitted by the strategies adopted by the candidates and the chances of their winning increases. Impact of the political communication can be calculated by the publicity received by their daily online engagement with the number of reactions received through like, comments and share by the users [10].

Facebook emoticons

Facebook emoticons are available for users on the facebook website in the form of animated emojis for reacting to different posts and pictures. These emoticons are popular among the users and become easy to use since some new emojis they were introduced in the year 2016 [11].

These are graphical representations of emotions used for the purpose of visual communication perceiving social intimacy. It makes communication vibrant and visually passable. According to the statistics provided by Facebook, everyday more than 0.9 billion of emojis are used for reacting and communicating by the users [12]. In comparison to emojis, usage of emoticons is faster and easier conveyed within a single click for conveying facial expression through text. The impact and frequency of using emoticons varies among individuals and cultures depending upon the hierarchy of the relationship [13]. Emojis and emoticons are not the same thing. An emoticon is a set of punctuation marks, letters and numbers arranged to resemble a human face. Each emoticon is more or less universally understood and denotes a certain emotion or sometimes an object. An emoticon is a typographic display of a facial representation, used to convey emotion in a text only medium. Unlike emoticons, emoji are actual pictures, of everything from a set of painted nails to a slightly whimsical ghost. And where emoticons were invented to portray emotion in environments where nothing, but basic text is available, emoji are actually extensions to the character set used by most operating systems today [14].

With the emerging social media culture, the use of Facebook emojis also known as emoticons have been profoundly impacting the new communication technology. It has been found that the use of Facebook emoticons by students is a popular texting discourse and is highly important in the discussion of students' council election. It has been found that usage of emoticons is relatively more among the young generation than the older generation. A study conducted reveals that youngsters use emoticons for specific communication purposes implementing certain non-verbal cues [15]. Emoticons enhance the power of sentiments expressed in the real meaning of communication.

Objectives

For this study the primary and secondary objectives are as follows:

- To investigate the usage of Facebook in student council elections.
- To analyze the use of popular emoticons among the students.

Research questions

The key research questions are as follows:

- Does Facebook influence the results of student council elections?
- Are emoticon buttons used by students to react to the content shared during student council elections?

The current study is to describe the usage of Facebook and emoticons' impact on the voting behaviour of the students during student council elections in Guwahati. The study is descriptive in nature where quantitative methodology has been employed by using survey as its method. A questionnaire tool has been implied with a closed-ended questionnaire by using Likert-scale to

measure the data. The data were collected by circulating 150 questionnaires among the under-graduate students of Guwahati. Therefore, purposive sampling method under non-probability sampling was adopted for collecting the primary data. The theory of semiotics and self-presentation has been applied to the usage of Facebook and the role of emoticons in students' council elections.

Results

Major findings

While looking into the discourses of the usage on Facebook and emoticons in student council elections it has been found that the majority of the students accepted the fact that there is an impact of Facebook and use of its emoticons on the student council elections. Facebook remains the biggest social network worldwide with 2.91 billion monthly active users in 2021, yet there was a decline in its userbase due to tough competition from other applications. In this digital age young people present themselves contradictorily with their real set of beliefs and values giving rise to incongruity. With the ubiquitous usage of Facebook among the students, broad changes can be identified in the student council elections as well as the usage of emoticons with a sudden shift in the digitally mediated communication. It has become the main platform for young adults to sustain their social presence as well as expand their social networks on youth decision-making. The students and their representatives make the usage of social media to portray their thoughts and decision-making irrespective of their studies and professions but on the contrary also developing social ties with the world that revolves around them. They also use their Facebook accounts for image building exercises among the students in the form of gestures, body language and behavior to create an environment of openness and transparency in leadership.

Daily usage of face book

From the Figure 1, the majority of the students confirmed that they use Facebook on a daily basis with 91.7% of the respondents and 8.3% of the students denied the usage of Facebook on a daily basis. Social media has become an indispensable part of human lives. Among all the social media networks, Facebook has become the most popularly used social media with the highest number of users at a point in year 2018 and 2019. It started with the prime goal of connecting people all over the world.



Figure 1. Daily usage of Facebook.

Time spend on Facebook daily

The data represented in the Figure 2, reflects the time spent by students daily on Facebook. It was found that 53.6% of the respondents spent 1-2 hours daily followed by 19% of the respondents spent 0-1 hour, 15.3% of the respondents spending 2-3 hours and 12.1% of the respondents spending more than 3 hours daily on Facebook.

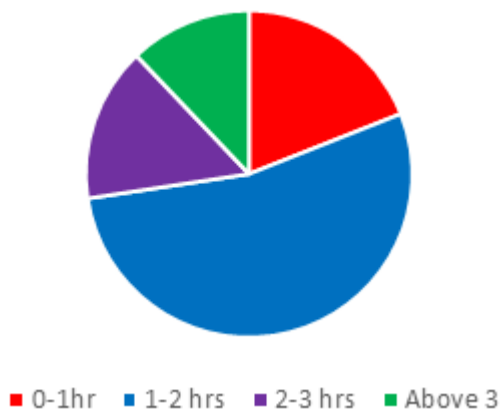


Figure 2. Time spend on Facebook daily.

Facebook play an active role in student politics

In the Figure 3, 81.2% of the respondents accepted that Facebook plays an active role in student politics. While 18.2% of the respondents denied the active role of Facebook in student politics. Use of Facebook can be extremely linked with college students belonging to the millennial generation as they grow up in a digitally connected world where sharing lives over social media is a day-to-day activity for them. With the increase in the intensity of using Facebook among the students in colleges, their tendency to participate in political communication also increases. Through Facebook a student's tries to express their direct and indirect opinions by posting, sharing and following despite asserting their political preferences. In student politics, Facebook plays a fundamental role in political participation among the students with switching of political views and posting comments on controversial issues.

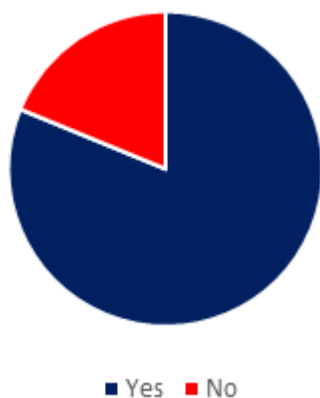


Figure 3. Facebook play an active role in student politics.

Facebook helps in creating opinions about the candidates contesting in the student council elections

The Figure 4 represents the responses from students opting undergraduate programmes in Guwahati, where 86.9% of the students accepting and 13.1% students denying the statement that Facebook help in creating opinions about the candidates contesting in the student council elections. A leader should be goal-oriented, honest, hard-working, responsible, encouraging, a good communicator, willing to listen to others, a good listener, a good decision-maker and have a positive attitude. Leadership means self-discovery, getting a better yield out of your attributes. Facebook is pervading the college student experience, particularly for those who occupy leadership roles on campus, by recording online behavior. Students' leadership, the presentation of their identity and decision-making are impacted by the usage of Facebook during elections. Student organizations, social communities and social change should be the focus of early initiatives, concentrating on identity expression, positive possibilities-based attitudes and social media's potential influence on student groups.



Figure 4. Facebook helps in creating opinions about the candidates contesting in the student council elections.

Candidates for student council remain more active on Facebook during the elections

The majority of the students, 77.4%, accepted the statement that the candidates for student council remain more active on Facebook during the elections. However, 22.6% students denied the statement. Facebook provides the student council candidates the means of asserting themselves and obtaining meaningful feedback from others in new and fresh surroundings. Student council candidates use the opportunity to communicate their image to other people, as well as the responses of others must influence a student's self-sense. Self-reflection is part of self-presentation process also influences how college student leaders view themselves. The structure of one's Facebook audience changes as they progress through the election process adding new followers by its conclusion. It was found that the candidates are found posting campaign manifestations, creating campaign related Fb events, posting video clips of debates and posting their talents on extracurricular activities (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Candidates for student council remain more active on Facebook during the elections.

Students support their favorite student council candidate by reacting to their Facebook posts

The Figure 6 represents the responses from the students for the statement that they support their favorite student’s council candidate by reacting to their Facebook posts. Out of which 85.8% of the respondents accepted the statement and 14.2% of the respondents denied it. It has been found that the use of Facebook emoticons by students is a popular texting discourse and is highly important in the discussion of students’ council election.



Figure 6. Students support their favorite student council candidate by reacting to their Facebook posts.

Does usage of emoticons by Student's leader for reacting influences the voters?

From the Figure 7, it can be observed that 84.5% of the respondents accepted the statement that usage of emoticons by student’s leader for reacting influences the voters. It can be said that the Facebook emoticons reflects the psychological mechanism of the students in communication. Emoticons help the students in expressing their mood and building their own identity. Emojis promote interaction among the students and student leaders by strengthening social on Facebook. Emoticons on Facebook are simple, convenient and conducive non-verbal cues used to express emotions by the users. With the emerging social media culture, the use of Facebook emojis also known as emoticons have been profoundly impacting the new communication technology. It has been found that the use of Facebook emoticons by students is a popular texting discourse and is highly important in the discussion of students’ council election.



Figure 7. Does usage of emoticons by student’s leader for reacting influences the voters?

Discussion

The question that this study set out to address was how usage of Facebook influences students’ council elections and what is the impact of using Facebook emoticons in students’ council elections? Many researchers have used this theory to analyze digital technology where social media plays a vital role. It originated in 1959 through the book “Presentation of self in everyday life” written by Erving Goffman, a famous sociologist. In its content, Goffman has used theatre’s imagery to portray different shades and the importance of social interaction done face-to-face. In his book, he presented a social interaction theory referred to as the “dramaturgical model” of social life. Since social media has made networking among people, friends and colleagues a complex one though used to create impressions among them for a long time, the use of Facebook has been increased with ten million new users in the last decade every quarter globally. Usage of Facebook has been increasing since the past ten years, where millions of new people from all over the world have joined Facebook in a year. While using Facebook, we can identify the activities of creating a profile, posting different contents, “liking” others’ posts and sharing our personal information through events, videos, and pictures is self-presentation. Over Facebook, self-impressions are formed by people on the number of friends one has and the number of photos and posts in which others are tagging us. Self-presentation aims to speak and act with others that were afore said to be helpful even for individuals to receive support reciprocally via Facebook. Therefore, people are likely to be additionally desirous of portraying themselves inbound ways to prime their best impressions of others and find social support reciprocally online. Posts like images uploaded and texts sent out in private or in public on Facebook may facilitate individuals to convey their desired image to receive support from different users.

Facebook provides us with one of the means of asserting ourselves and obtaining meaningful feedback from others in new and fresh surroundings. Student leaders use the opportunity to communicate their image to other people, as well as the responses of others must influence a student’s self-sense. Self-reflection is part of self-presentation process also influences how college student leaders view themselves. Earlier studies directed that exiting school and beginning a new life in the university might challenge students and their self-worth. “Friend sickness”, a concern with old school friends and a fear of losing them, is associated with low self-esteem.

The ability of younger groups of students to keep up with old school contacts via Facebook and similar networking tools has reduced the prevalence of friendliness and its influence on self-presentation. Student leaders' input from Facebook friends facilitates the practical use of social networking platforms. Because of the audience's propensity to write constructively, Facebook users will almost certainly get calming remarks or "likes" from people while examining or changing their Facebook statuses, resulting in a self-presentation-enhancing skill. Authentic, positive, deeper and broader, Facebook self-presentations were additionally doubtless to escort higher coinciding vanity via perceived appurtenant feedback.

The use of the new media, especially Facebook, improves the information of the student leaders' concerning political encouragement, political engagement and participation. It has been found in numerous studies that online candidature on Facebook directly engages and connects students before and afterwards perceptive political attitudes and engagement. Facebook postings on young people's political effectivity revealed that individuals with high collective and external effectivity characteristics and common pessimistic attributes had significant positive impacts. Facebook use in political activities among students will allow more political and civic involvement among the young, particularly those who recognize that they have limited capacity to participate in and perceive political viewpoints. Facebook assists in comprehending the many perceptions of political engagement, such as debates about contentious issues. Political participation on Facebook is powerful throughout edifice body choice. Student leaders use Facebook to attract their followers and keep them up to date concerning their political activities and schedule. The use of Facebook amid the college student union election campaign promotes the candidate with a rise in their political participation. Recently conducted studies explore the usage of Facebook and political involvement in the construction of students' union body election changes social media usage among candidates and political organizations. It additionally has negative predictions for political pessimism. Online political communication is common among voters because they understand their political candidates through numerous suggestions of their activities, both online and offline.

The practice of Facebook to be used for online campaigns and promotions highlights a student leader's temperament as a technique that urges followers to act instead of becoming authorized. Political communication over Facebook argues discursive processes and counter protocol implementations that ought to be a vital political issue that governs the candidates' activities. There have been studies that support Facebook's rising relevance as a political information environment, resulting in larger social impacts on political conduct and changes in political information consumption habits. Their peers' political actions significantly shape young people's political behaviour and influence manifested in perspective levels through old political perception shaping. Facebook encourages political activity by lessening the obstacles to expressing one's views.

Conclusion

To conclude, the researcher observed that Facebook has a profound impact on the student council elections and the usage of emoticons by the student council candidates influences the voters, at times it turns the results of the electoral process. It was necessary to highlight the impact of social media, especially Facebook, on the

students. Hence it was found that Facebook has a robust influence on student politics. Facebook facilitates political communication to be participative, flexible, open, immediate and uninterrupted where students can provide feedback through comments and have the control. Student council members are the quality role models for the students and their activeness in reverting back to the students on Facebook during the elections brings a change in the voting behaviour of the students.

The use of Facebook emoticons by the candidates for student council elections as well as the students helps in political communication through interpretation of their emotional sentiments. They use emoticons to communicate with the students and represent their gestures by reacting to the updates posted by them. This helps the students' council candidates to stay connected with the students. On receiving the reactions from the candidate supported by the students, sentiment of commonness and understanding starts emerging within them. With the increase in the number of like and love reactions on the posts shared by the candidates during the period of electoral process, the possibilities of their winning also increases. This makes them popular among the students and their competitors and enables them to gather more supporters for the post they contest. Sentimental analysis of the Facebook emoticons reflected the choice of the students whom they wanted to be a part of the student council. The use of Facebook emoticons brings a change in the process of non-verbal political communication among the students and their leaders. It also sets a new trend of computer mediated communication in student politics turning it to be more expressive, easy to understand, creative and measurable.

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