

## **TWITTER AS A TOOL OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

India is a democratic country with a federal structure. Sovereignty is a vital feature of Indian democracy. Each citizen lives under two sets of laws: the laws of the centre and the laws of the concerned state. (Indian history and the contemporary world, 2020) Punjab, as a border state, holds a unique position in India. The main political narrative in the state, both on the ground and in the virtual world, has been heavily dominated by the intense rivalry between the Indian National Congress on the one hand and its traditional *bête noire*, the Shiromani Akali Dal, on the other, which had an earlier alliance in Punjab with the Bhartiya Janata Party. While the farm bill issue finally led to the BJP losing its oldest ally, the Shiromani Akali Dal. The Aam Admi Party, the third force in the state, was the one who started the social media trends in Punjab politics, which helped them in their election campaign and to attain a landslide victory in the state of Punjab after winning elections in New Delhi. The Lok Sabha 2019 election was very important, as Twitter as well as other social media sites witnessed drastic changes in the election trend. The tweets by the prominent leaders underline what the policymakers in Punjab think about different issues, agendas, and problems. We intend to analyse the content that is posted by the prominent leaders of Punjab on their Twitter handles. The main aim is to study the narrative formed by the party in power and how it was supported or challenged by the other parties. Spanning over 12 months, from July 2018 to June 2019, we focused on analysing the monthly changes and trends in the rhetoric created by the eminent leaders and parties in Punjab. The paramount task was to examine the effect of a tweet broadcast by a leader in the public domain.

**KEYWORDS:** Lok Sab2019 Elections, Social Media Trends, Twitter, Punjab Politics, Political Communication.

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **THE ROLE OF TWITTER**

Twitter has seen a significant increase in popularity among users compared with other social networking sites such as YouTube and Facebook and is likely to remain the same. Today, Twitter has taken over as an official source of news and announcements. Tweets by various prominent leaders are seen as official announcements and statements. The official pages or profiles of the leaders of Punjab have become an important tool for advertising and public relations too. The leaders of Punjab stay under constant public scrutiny for what they say on these social networking sites. For instance, Chief Minister Punjab, Bhagwant Singh Mann, then and now president of the Punjab Unit, used his Twitter handle to blame Aam Admi Party national convenor Arvind Kejriwal for his apology to Shiromani Akali Dal senior leader Bikram Majithia regarding the drug trade in Punjab. Bhagwant Mann's explosive tweet was the headline for the day for all the media houses. Mann tweeted on March 16, 2018: "I'm resigning as president of AAP Punjab... but my fight against drug mafia and all kinds of corruption in Punjab will continue as an "Aam Aadmi" of Punjab." (**Times of India, 2018**). This worldwide Twitter phenomenon, which has inundated politicians, entertainers, journalists, and commoners alike, compels us to take up academic research to explore how the political communication and politics of Punjab are getting reshaped in the age of social

media. While taking a dig into political issues and communication in Punjab, a frontier and one of the most prosperous states in the North West region of India in the age of social media, it becomes pertinent to search and explore the micro-blogging giant, "Twitter".

### **POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN PUNJAB (INC, SAD, BJP, AND AAP)**

Twitter started with the birth of the national outfit when two of the principal architects of the party, lawyer turned politician Prashant Bhushan and psephologist and political ideologue Yogendra Yadav, were both not only unceremoniously kicked out of the organisation but were publicly humiliated at the instance of the party supremo, Arvind Kejriwal, right before the formation of the AAP government in Delhi. Although the tremors were controlled and Punjab remained relatively immune to such unsavoury developments—at least for some time—it was only a matter of time before the principles and the political approach that had caused the Delhi "theatre of the absurd" in this political player in national politics would begin to affect the border state also. Punjab, in fact, had been the only place other than Delhi where the party had received unexpected and unprecedented mass support. Against all odds, the party had won four of the 13 Lok Sabha seats in the 2014 parliamentary elections, with a staggering vote share of 25% (The Economics Times, 2014). All of a sudden, Punjab had a new major claimant to political and executive power in the state, and both the Congress and the SAD-BJP combine were taken aback and rudely shaken by this sudden jolt. The political script in the state seemed to have gone awfully wrong for the traditional rivals, and the AAP threatened to pull the rug from under both for the formation of a government in the ensuing 2017 assembly elections. The Congress made a resounding comeback in Punjab in the 2017 Assembly polls. The Aam Admi Party became the second-largest party for the first time in the Punjab Assembly Elections. Though AAP claimed to get more than 90 seats out of 117, it squeezed in 20 seats. Talking about the Lok Sabha Elections of 2019, all the major parties were in the fray to attain power in the state. Punjab, a state in North India, has 13 seats in the Lok Sabha, and the Congress has given a marvellous performance during its governance in Punjab. The Congress Party won eight parliamentary seats in Punjab. The Aam Admi Party leader was the only candidate from AAP to stretch the lead in these polls, whereas Shiromani Akali Dal and the BJP combined got four seats. Ultimately, the Aam Admi Party got a landslide victory in the Assembly polls in 2022. Aam Admi Party national convenor Arvind Kejriwal and Punjab unit chief and comedian turned politician Bhagwant Mann struggled hard for this victory in Punjab. They scored a historic victory by winning 92 seats in Punjab after four decades. The drastic change in voting was witnessed for the first time. The mandate that AAP got was actually against the traditional political actors in Punjab.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE DURING ELECTIONS**

Social media's influence in the Lok Sabha in 2019 has been stronger than it has ever been before and has also led to a loss of the dominance of traditional media in the public domain. The prominent leaders of the nation as well as of the other states used the platform Twitter as a source or tool to do election campaigning as a new trend. Big and small candidates tweeted to express their position, to attack their opponents, to retweet endorsements, to encourage people to vote, and a lot more. Subsequently, Twitter has become the most important source of communication for the entire Punjab as well as India. Within a short span of time, candidates of all the parties used Twitter to broadcast their party agendas, ideas, messages, constituency work, and so on. Twitter as a social media tool became important for print media and electronic media houses to chase the prominent leaders of Punjab to catch the headline for the day or for the next day. This research paper intends to analyse the tweets of

prominent leaders in Punjab in order to understand the communication strategies performed through this medium. (Journal of Marketing Communication, 26 (1), 88–144, 2020)

## **THE ROLE OF TWITTER AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE**

The study is significant in itself as it would shed ample light on present-day politics and political communication in a state that stands out in India for historic reasons as well as for its present strategic position in the North-West region. The tweets by the prominent leaders underline what the policymakers in Punjab think about different issues, agendas, and problems. The prominent tweets would also provide valuable insights to understand state politics from a wider perspective. This border state shares its boundaries with Pakistan in the west, Rajasthan in the south-west, Haryana in the south, Jammu and Kashmir in the north, and Himachal Pradesh in the east. Punjab has its own peculiar set of issues and problems, like any other state in India, yet it is distinct from others. One Punjab exists in India, and another Punjab exists across the world. Punjabis, being the largest Indian community residing outside India in European, African, and North American countries, are playing an important role in the socio-economic development of the world and have been able to mark their respectable position in power corridors in various countries. Political communication through social media has gained momentum over the years to the extent that elections, whether in Punjab or outside India, draw huge attention amongst political leaders and the people across the borders.

## **OBJECTIVES**

Twitter has distinct conventions as compared to other online social media texts, due to which it becomes important to understand the usage of Twitter by the prominent leaders in Punjab and their political communication. Special care is taken during the cleaning and pre-processing of raw tweets; the study itself becomes important to upgrade knowledge regarding the inclination of policymakers and other leaders towards the microblogging site Twitter. Indeed, it becomes interesting to analyse the content that is posted online by a leader. What kind of content gets viral and which tweets become sensational in the public domain as well as in the political market? New trends have been witnessed these days, like leaders and all other people giving reactions to one or the other tweet. Sometimes those tweets hit the headlines the very next day. The study also illustrates how proactive leaders in Punjab put out a fire tweet to provoke their opponents through this platform.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Developments in technologies like the Internet and social media sites have shifted the entire process of mass communication and socialisation. Social media has changed the way social interactions take place; both personal and professional interactions have been affected by the advent of social media, as a huge part of social interactions has shifted online. Politicians and policymakers have tried to make the most of this changing communication scenario through political communication; they take to social media's blogging site Twitter to maintain a personal touch with their followers and to promote their party work, agendas, and policies. The following studies and research have been done to ascertain the changing nature of communication in a world where Twitter is a constant.

James E. Karz, Michael Barris, and Anshul Jain (2013), in their book "The Social Media President: Barack Obama and the Politics of Digital Engagement explain the rise of social media in society". They have acknowledged that the proliferation of social media has altered the way that people interact with each other, levelling the channels of communication to allow an individual to be "friends" with a sitting president. In a world where a citizen could

message Barack Obama directly, this book addresses the new channels of communication in politics and what they offer. This book throws light on the way digital media technologies have evolved over the past two decades to play an important role in US presidential elections.

The book also mentions how former US President Barack Obama swept to power on a platform of hope and change that included social media to effect that change. Many pundits underscored the internet's role in bringing him to power. Hence, Al Gore, the former US vice president, Nobel laureate, and 2000 Democratic Party presidential standard bearer, declaimed that Obama's election win "could not have happened without the Internet." He described the internet as an electrifying redemption of America's revolutionary declaration. Another commentator declared Barack Obama "the president that the Internet elected."

Jason Gainous and Kevin M. Wagner (2013), in their book "Tweeting to Power: The Social Media Revolution in American Politics," also tried to explain the growing ability of social networking sites to generate votes in US political campaigns. Tweeting to Power is the study that not only considers the impact of the Internet on political participation but also provides an example of how politicians use social media. The majority of Tweeting to Power therefore negotiates the link between political leaders and voters. Indeed, the authors describe social media as a positive force and see the infinite, uncountable conversations that now take place online as a democratising power.

The Art of social media (2014) is a book by Guy Kawasaki and Peg Fitzpatrick, according to which social media alone will determine one's success or failure regardless of whether one is promoting oneself, an idea, a product, or a business. It offers over a hundred tips and tactics to produce a compelling presence on social media.

The Pulse of News in social media: Forecasting Popularity (2012) by Roja Bandari, Sitaram Asur, and Bernardo A. Huberman, published in 2012, talks about news in the online world, where news articles heavily rely on the news value of timeliness. There is also intense competition among news items to spread as widely as possible. It is very exciting and challenging to predict how popular a news item is going to be on social media. It is most desirable to predict the popularity of items before they are released, which makes it possible to make appropriate changes to increase their popularity. This paper evaluates the efficacy of certain features of an article as predictors of online popularity. According to this paper, despite randomness in human behaviour, it is possible to predict popularity on Twitter with 84% accuracy. The study also illustrates the difference between sources that are extremely popular on social media and traditionally prominent sources.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **DATA COLLECTION**

The focus of the study revolves around Twitter, collecting thousands of tweets while monitoring political leaders' regular activity on the site. The researcher analysed tweets from all the political handles to see how narratives were being shaped and altered over time. In this study, the researcher focused on testimonials formed by the party already in power and how the party got support or was challenged by other parties. The collected 1482 tweets are prominently significant to the four main political parties in Punjab. The relevant tweets are identified, and category-wise division of tweets is done keeping in mind the major issues in Punjab. A look at the Twitter activity of the main leaders of the principal political parties in Punjab During this period, the researcher witnessed the dominance of several key issues affecting the people of Punjab. Tweets on political issues, tweets on social issues, tweets on religio-political issues, tweets on economic issues, tweets on agriculture, tweets on

mishaps—all these tweets have been categorically analysed and interpreted to understand the concept of a significant increase in the popularity of Twitter. Why and how tweets by various prominent leaders are seen as an official source of news and announcements The leaders whose tweet content has been collected, analysed, interpreted, and re-interpreted are mentioned as follows:

Aam Admi Party: Bhagwant Mann, Aman Arora, Harpal Cheema, Meet Hayer, and Prof. Baljinder Kaur

Congress: Captain Amarinder Singh, Brahmohindra, Sunil Jakhar, Manpreet Singh Badal, and Navjot Singh Sidhu

Shiromani Akali Dal: Sukhbir Singh Badal, Harsimrat Kaur Badal, Dr. Daljit Cheema, and Parminder Singh

Bhartiya Janata Party: Vijay Sampla, Shwait Malik, Kamal Sharma, Anil Joshi, and Tarun Chugh

## CONCLUSION

Social media sites have gained tremendous importance in today's world. The whole concept of communication and mass communication has evolved with the advent of social media platforms. Social media site Twitter has largely replaced traditional mediums as a source of news and information. Twitter has emerged as a unique communication tool where a large number of people can be reached instantly. Twitter has become the most powerful source of news updates. This has given rise to a unique kind of communication. With the advent of new technologies, political communication has been constantly changing its dimensions and dispersion. The democratic setup thrives on public opinion and vote banks. The researcher has illustrated the content posted by the political actors: frequency of tweets, main subjects and their relevance to the social and political climate of the state, content, language, relative exposure, The brains behind the Twitter activity of different leaders, the usage of Twitter as a recent serious political phenomenon, be it international, national, or regional, and the rise and growth of Twitter In a way, Twitter has replaced traditional or even contemporary media in many areas for prompt news.

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