REVIEW OF RESEARCH

ADOPTION OF NEW MEDIA FOR ONLINE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Vibhor Mohan

School of Communication Studies at Panjab University, Chandigarh.

ABSTRACT:

The study finds that there are clear differences between people who indulge in online political engagement and those who do not on the basis of their demographics such as age, gender, income, occupation and education. Adults in the 26 to 40 age group, mostly men, most likely to be professionals with graduation or high degree and in the age group of Rs 25,001-50,000 income bracket were found to be most likely to make political use of New Media. But there were sizeable number of users in other categories too and growing internet penetration and affordability of smart phones is expected to bridge the digital divide.

KEYWORDS: *online political engagement , demographics , digital divide.*

1. METHODOLOGY

For the study, data was collected through a survey of potential voters with questionnaire posted through e-mail and personal administration to potential voters. The questionnaire comprised open-ended and closed-ended questions and also included scales for psychographic profiling and Likert scales framed for determining attitudes such as the use to which the potential voter puts online presence of politician and impact of the online campaign on him. A survey of 150 potential voters was conducted in Punjab and Chandigarh.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

New Media adoption has been previously looked at in two contrasting ways - while there is one set of researchers who believe that online social networks could turn out to be a way to strengthen democracy (Lynch & (2012), bringing in the thus far disconnected voters into the political discourse, there is another view that the online channels only reinforce the existing gap between haves and have-nots with a digital divide (Min, S. J. (2010).

The entire adoption process can be seen in light of the diffusion of innovation perspective, which lays down that "younger, wealthier and more educated consumers" are expected to take up innovative services (Anderson et al, 1995). As pointed out by researchers like Roy, S., & Ghose, S. (2006), there could be some delay in adoption and laggards would be the last to adopt on the bell-shaped adoption curve.

This was necessitated as some of the existing research does not establish any clear associations between political New Media use and demographics. For instance, despite the inherent tendency of young users to be digital savvy, Hargittai, E. (2010) found systematic variation "in the online know-how even among a highly wired group of young adults." Also, when it is a question of analysing an individual's engagement in terms of possible increase in social capital, it is not the media per se that plays a role (Gil de Zu´niga, 2009), but the ways in which one makes use of it.

Also, it was imperative to look at gender differences as a growing number of women are now joining the online network and a sizeable section of them is taking

_____

to New Media for getting political information. Into early 90s, both genders exhibited comparable overall rates of computer usage (Bikson and Panis, 1995). But the trend seems to be now tilting in favour of women as they to now more likely to use computers and the Internet at work, in part because of the nature of differences in work profiles between men and women (Bikson and Panis, 1995; Kominski and Newburger, 1999).

Education, income and status occupation too play a role in the adoption process and past studies bear testimony to the fact that the early adopters of innovations are more likely to score high on these demographic variables than those who prefer to be nonadopters (Adcock, Hirschman & Goldstucker 1977; Bell 1963; Boone 1970; Feldman & Armstrong 1975; Kegerreis & Engel 1969; Rogers & Stanfield 1968; LaBay & Kinnear 1981; Plummer 1971; Robertson 1971; Rogers & Shoemaker 1971).

3. FINDINGS
3.1. DEMOGRAPHICS AND USER STATUS

Five key demographics – age, gender, income, occupation and educational qualification have a bearing on potential voters' adoption or non-adoption of New Media for political purposes. This is consistent with a 1996 survey by Pew Research that claimed that the population online was mostly younger, more educated, male and wealthier. As has been pointed out by researchers like Herrnson, P. S., Stokes-Brown, A. K., & Hindman, M. (2007) say it is the voters' demographics that affect politicians' Internet adoption. In fact, the unequal participation trends being replicated online has been attributed to income and education differences, point out Mossberger and Stansbury, 2003.

H2 (1): Age is the most dominant demographic variable in determining the user status of potential voters.

The data supports the hypothesis as the association of age with user status was found to be most significant with chi square value of 17.949 at degree of freedom 3 with p-value of *0.003*that is less than .05. The statistical test used was Chi Square.

Table 3.1: Demographics and User Status

Demographics	Significance level		
	Chi-square	df	Significance
Age	17.949	3	.003
Sex	7.543	1	.006
Education	6.741	2	.034
Occupation	17.273	5	.004
Income	9.875	4	.043

Each of the demographic has been taken up separately as existing research on the topic has left unanswered questions about adoption of New Media for political content. For instance, in terms of adoption of Twitter for campaigning, two studies by Williams and Gulati (2010) and Lassen and Brown (2010) have tried to analyze explain why some people adopt Twitter while others do not. They claim that urban constituency and the candidate's own age are not motivators for adoption. Besides, incumbents politicians were significantly more likely to have adopted Facebook and YouTube, but they were the least likely to be early adopters of Twitter. Lack of money and limited paid staff result in no or late New Media adoption.

3.2.1 Age differences

It was found that that the age group of 26-40 years (89%) was most likely to make political use of New Media while the number of users was the least in the oldest lot of 51 years and above (Refer Table 3.2). Even as previous studies point out that young adult take the lead in adoption of New Media per se, it is not quite the case when it comes to online political engagement. This is validated by the fact that number of users in the young adults (>=25years) category is much lesser (Refer Table 3.2). 26-40

_____

_____

years is the category wherein a majority of New Media users tend to exhibit two attributes - tendency to go online and interest in politics, and this prompts them to use the online channels for political engagement. The oldest lot of users (51 years and above) have the highest number of non-users at 63.6% (Refer Table 3.2) but they too are slowly jumping on to the online bandwagon.

<p align="center">Table 3.2: Age and User Status</p>

Age	User Status		Total
	Non user	User	
<= 25	11	24	35
26 - 40	8	65	73
41 - 50	8	23	31
51+	7	4	11
Total	34	116	150

Results show that beyond the 40-year mark, there is considerable dip in the number of users, especially because the elderly were not conversant with use of technology. So while in contrast to young adults, most respondents in the other two categories - 41-50 years and 50 and above were interested in political affairs, they had to rely on other sources of political information. It also needs to be brought out that with growing number of elderly taking to New Media. 22.7% of the respondents in the 51 years and above category too were found to be users.

So despite being hailed as 'digital natives', many among the youngest lot turn out to be non-users when it is a question of seeking political content. A little less than half (31.4%) of the chunk of users (68.6%) users were found to be non-users. Salman, A., & Saad, S. (2015) rues that the fact that youth are more inclined to using the new media for entertainment/social networking and not engaging with politicians is actually a waste of resources. Analysing the reasons, Clarke, A. (2010) says youth are likely to vote or join politics and social media can be used to draw them back into political discourse. Some youth, he says, consider it intrusion when public figures join them on social networks. Lynch, K., & Hogan, J. (2012) say the use of social media assumes significance in terms of reaching out to Generation Z, which is becoming politically disinterested. Millennials, claim past studies, consider politics boring, complex and irrelevant (ICR, 2006; Print, Saha and Edwards, 2004; Moffet and Albowciz, 2003; Russell et al., 2002; White et al, 2000; Branngart and Branngart, 1998). Lupia and Philpot (2005) argue that use of online channels for political communication can help engage young adults.

For the young adults who do go online for political content, Dumitrica, D. (2016) says social media to them appeared "both the tool that produced engagement and the space where this engagement unfolded." Besides, these may not be adopters of New Media for political use in the true sense as Pew Internet and American Life Project said many young adults do not actively search for political information but just stumble upon such content while they are using the Internet for other reasons (Kohut, A., 2008).

3.2.2 Gender differences
Men (84.4%) were found to be more likely than women (64.8%) to make political use of New Media. However, the number of user women was higher than non-users (35.2%) as women supporters of political parties too relied on New Media to get political updates and share their opinions during the campaign period (Refer Table 3.3). Among the user respondents, men outnumbered women but as has been emphasised by Wasswa, H. W. (2013) in a similar study on the "Role of social media in the 2013 presidential election campaigns" says gender imbalance is of little significance if the nature of the nature of research and the questions asked are not gender sensitive.

_____

_____

Table 3.3: Gender and User Status

Gender	User Status		Total
	Non user	User	
Male	15	81	96
Female	19	35	54
Total	34	116	150

The fact that there are more women uses has been analysed in previous researchers like Schuster, J. (2013), who says where the more politically active older lot of women are more visible, there is a growing undercurrent of young women's online activism as "political online work offers many opportunities."For the nonusers, disinterest in politics is the key reason that is perceived to be not as politically active on micro blogging site Twitter (Baumann, A., Krasnova, H., Veltri, N. F., & Ye, Y. (2015). Further, the unwillingness of top micro bloggers to re-share female posts is another reason and the result is that men continue to "dominate political micro blogging."

Where a sizeable number of young adults (<=25years) among women were not interested in politics and preferred to be thus non-users, they were homemakers, besides supporters and volunteers of parties among the older age groups who were actively following the campaign online.

3.2.3 Income differences

91.7% of the total respondents who earn Rs 25,000 per month or less were users while a sizeable 36% of those with no regular income were non-users. As previously pointed out, inability to buy smart phones or personal computer was a reason for 14.7% of respondents to be non users (Refer Table 3.4). During the 2014 Lok Sabha campaign, smart phones were still out of reach of many voters and therefore not as much in use in the Chandigarh-Punjab region. A majority of those who were users despite having no source of income were students This deprived the users of mobile applications like WhatsApp, and also the news portal apps, affecting not just usage patterns but also adoption.

Table 3.4: Income and User Status

Income	User Status		Total
	Non user	User	
No income	18	32	50
<= 25000	2	22	24
25001 - 50000	10	34	44
50001 - 100000	2	11	13
100001+	2	17	19
Total	34	116	150

A high 91.7% of those having income between 25,000 and 50,000 are users and this tends to go with the finding in the next section that a majority of small enterprise owners and professionals were users. But there were also 36% non-users in the category with no income and it can be seen as reinforcement the offline hurdles to political participation, even though the Internet alters the resources necessary for political activity, individuals who participate online are similar to those participating offline (Best, 2005). This highlights the notion of digital divide among participants of online political discourse.

Conversely, better income ensured active participation in the online political discourse. There were reports of staunch supporters of the party/candidate buying smart phones as the campaign picked up to have access to WhatsApp and Facebook mobile apps.

_____

_____

3.2.4 Occupational differences

Of the total respondents, all of the small enterprise owners (100 %) happen to be New Media users while professionals (90.09 %) come next, followed by 76.9 % users pursuing other vocations among the total users in each of the categories (Refer Table 3.5).

Table 3.5: Occupation and User Status

Occupation	User Status		Total
	Non user	User	
Student	12	30	42
Homemaker	7	5	12
Professional	3	30	33
Small Enterprise	0	14	14
Govt. Service	6	17	23
Others	6	20	26
Total	34	116	150

Apart from their political affiliations, various communities involved in the same vocation keep tabs on the political going-ons to watch their professional and business interests and this makes some of them more active participants in online political activity as a group. There was also a tendency to share political content on WhatsApp groups with members from the same profession.

If professionals take the second slot in the current study, it is in keeping with past researches that those involved in managerial, professional, and technical jobs use computers or the Internet frequently in their workplace. As is reflected in the next section dealing with the usage patterns, a sizeable number of respondents did access and share content across the week and in some cases only on weekdays, it can be concluded that internet availability at workplace could be a deciding factor in the user status of a potential voter.

Better socioeconomic status leads to a higher level of political participation (Cohen, Vigoda & Samorly, 2001; McLeod et al.,1996; Nowak, P. J., Rickson, R. E., Ramsey, C. E., & Goudy, W. J., 1982). But for the small enterprise owners, it could be a matter of availability of relatively more time to spare for political activities that made them more active in online discourse as well. The liberty of working at will gives them the advantage of checking on political updates and notifications at regular intervals, unlike other vocations that ned undivided attention at workplace.

3.2.5 Educational differences

User respondents having post-graduation (81.8 %) and graduation (80.6 %) were found to be almost equally poised at using New Media. At the same time, only 56.5 % of uses among those who had lesser education with Class XII or below were found to be New Media users (Refer Table 3.6). A high 43.5% of those with no regular source of income were found to be non-uses in the category. Use of New Media channels not just requires technical knowhow of devices like laptops and smart phones, features of channels like Facebook have to be understood to effectively access and share information. Micro blogging site Twitter requires deftness at use of language to be able to make its effective use. 11.8% of the non-users (Refer Table 3.6) said they were not conversant with use of social media and this could be due to their educational background. Researchers like Bartel and Sicherman (1998) have also found that more educated individuals may require less training in response to technological change. But there were potential voters in 2014 crossing the barrier by opting for affordable ordinary phone with WhatsApp compatibility and switching to vernacular language on social networking sites to get political content.

_____

4. CONCLUSION

Results show that it terms of political use of New Media, there is still scope to draw in the younger lot of voters (>=25 years) and the low income groups into the online political participation. Since students fall in both categories, they can be brought on board with incentives like free internet facilities on campus. The present scenario, however, does point to some of the offline biases being replicated online too - with the less educated, economically weak and women trailing behind.

5. REFERENCES

1. Adcock, William 0. Jr., Elizabeth C. Hirschman, and Jac L. Goldstucker (1977), "Bank Credit Card Users: An Updated Profile," in *Advances in Consumer Research.* Vol. 4. ed. William D. Perreault, Jr., Atlanta, GA: Association for Consumer Research. 236-41.
2. Anderson, R. H., Bikson, T. K., Law, S.A., & Mitchell, B. M. (Eds.) (1995). Universal access to e-mail: Feasibility and societal implications. *Santa Monica*, CA: Rand Corporation.
3. Bartel, A. P., & Sicherman, N. (1998). Technological change and the skill acquisition of young workers. *Journal of Labor Economics*, *16*(4), 718-755.
4. Baumann, A., Krasnova, H., Veltri, N. F., & Ye, Y. (2015). Men, Women, Microblogging: Where Do We Stand?.In *Wirtschaftsinformatik* (pp. 857-871).
5. Bell, W. E. (1963), "Consumer Innovators: A Unique Market for Newness," in Proceedings of the American Marketing Association, ed. S. Greyser, Chicago: *American Marketing Association*, 85-95.
6. Best, S. J., & Krueger, B. S. (2005). Analyzing the representativeness of Internet political participation. *Political Behavior*, *27*(2), 183-216.
7. Bikson, T. K., &Panis, C. W. (1995). Computers and connectivity: current trends. In Anderson et al,(Eds.), Universal Access to Email: Feasibility and Societal Implications. *RAND.*
8. Boone, L. E. (1970). The search for the consumer innovator. *The Journal of Business*, 43(2), 135-140
9. Cohen, A., Vigoda, E., &Samorly, A. (2001). Analysis of the Mediating Effect of Personal-Psychological Variables on the Relationship Between Socioeconomic Status and Political Participation: A Structural Equations Framework. *Political Psychology,* 22(4), 727-757.
10. Clarke, A. (2010). Social Media:. Political Uses and Implications for Representative Democracy. Retrieved 11/28/2011, from *http://www.parl.gc. ca/Content/LOP/ResearchPublications/2010-10-e. htm.*
11. Dumitrica, D. (2016). Imagining engagement Youth, social media, and electoral processes. Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies, 22(1), 35-53.
12. Gil de Zúñiga, H., Jung, N., & Valenzuela, S. (2012). Social media use for news and individuals' social capital, civic engagement and political participation. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 17(3), 319-336.
13. Hargittai, E. (2010). Digital na (t) ives? Variation in internet skills and uses among members of the "net generation". *Sociological inquiry*, *80*(1), 92-113.
14. Herrnson, P. S., Stokes-Brown, A. K., &Hindman, M. (2007). Campaign Politics and the Digital Divide Constituency Characteristics, Strategic Considerations, and Candidate Internet Use in State Legislative Elections.Political Research Quarterly, 60(1), 31-42.
15. Kohut, A. (2008, January 11). Social networking and online videos take off: Internet's broader role in campaign 2008. *The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press.*
16. Kominski, R., &Newburger, E. (1999, August). Access denied: Changes in computer ownership and use: 1984-1997. In *Annual Meeting of American Sociological Association*.
17. Lassen, D. S., & Brown, A. R. (2010). Twitter: The electoral connection?.Social Science Computer Review, 0894439310382749.
18. Lupia, A., & Philpot, T. S. (2005). Views from inside the net: How websites affect young adults' political interest. Journal of Politics, 67(4), 1122-1142.

_____
Journal for all Subjects : www.lbp.world

6

_____

19. Lynch, K., & Hogan, J. (2012). How Irish political parties are using social networking sites to reach generation Z: An insight into a new online social network in a small democracy.

20. Min, S. J. (2010). From the digital divide to the democratic divide: Internet skills, political interest, and the second-level digital divide in political internet use. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics, 7(1), 22-35.*

21. Moffet, C. J., and Albowicz, K. (2003) New Millennium Best Practices Survey, Washington, D.C., National Association of Secretaries of State.

22. Mossberger, K., C. Tolbert and M. Stansbury. 2003. Virtual Inequality: Beyond the Digital Divide. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

23. Nowak, P. J., Rickson, R. E., Ramsey, C. E., & Goudy, W. J. (1982). Community conflict and models of political participation. Rural Sociology,47(2), 333.

24. Roy, S., &Ghose, S. (2006). Internet adoption as a two-stage transition-Converting internet non-users to internet users and to online buyers.International Journal of Market Research, 48(3), 321-349.

25. Williams C. B. and Gulati J. (2007). Social networks in political campaigns: Facebook and the 2006 midterm elections. Paper for presentation at the American Political Science Association conference, Chicago, 30 August – 2 September.

26. Salman, A., &Saad, S. (2015). Online Political Participation: A Study of Youth Usage of New Media. Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 6(4), 88.

27. Institute For Conflict Research. (2006) Youth Participation in the Democratic Process, UK Electoral Commission, www.electoralcommission.org.uk, accessed 22/03/06.

28. Russell, A., Fieldhouse, E., Purdham, K., and Kaira, V. (2002) Voter Engagement and Young People, UK Electoral Commission, www.electoralcommission.org.uk, accessed 22/03/06.

29. Wasswa, H. W. (2013). The role of social media in the 2013 presidential election campaigns in Kenya (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi).

Vibhor Mohan
School of Communication Studies at Panjab University, Chandigarh.

_____