

Social Media as a Game Changer in the 2014 Indian Parliamentary Election: A Study of the Indian Diaspora Society in Canada and Oman

Dr. Sangeeta Tripathi, College of Applied Sciences, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman

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Abstract

India is the seventh largest democracy of the world. Legislature, Executive, Judiciary and Press are its four pillars. So, media and politics have been cheek by jowl from many decades. Since Britishers till now, media is playing its significant role. Its role becomes more powerful with the advent of social media, because people got a platform to express themselves. 2009 election was different from 2014 Parliamentary Election. Earlier election campaigns were limited to rallies, public meetings, door to door canvassing, newspapers, magazines, radio and televisions. 2014 Parliamentary Election has become a milestone in the history of Indian Election. For the first time Bharatiya Janta Party, Aam Adami Party and many other political parties utilized Facebook, twitter, Websites, E-mail, SMS, Mobile Phones, Internet Banners, and Online Advertising as major tools of communication to reach to maximum publics. This study aims to evaluate the efficaciousness of Social Media as a game changer in Indian Parliamentary Election 2014. The study will also try to explore mindset of Indian diaspora society in Canada and Oman. Why and how they got involved in this election and they influenced the result of elections. Because of Social Media, particular election campaign strategies followed by politician had given a new flank to the Indian politics. The study would show how Indian and Non-resident Indian (NRI) took this Parliamentary Election and change their decision in favor of good governance rather than choosing hackneyed issues like secularism and so on.

Keywords: *Social Media, Parliamentary Election, Election Campaign, Communication tools, Communication Strategies, Political Parties, Game Changer etc.*

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Introduction: India 16th parliamentary election was held in nine phases for all 543 constituencies of India. Polling was started from 7th April to 12 May 2014 and results were declared on 16th May 2014. As per the record of Election Commission of India, 814.5 million voters were about to use their voting rights. 66.38% voters actually casted their votes during all nine phases of polling which is a record in the history of Indian Election. 2014 Parliamentary Election considered as a milestone for many reasons. Common public of India got fed up with the policies, corruption and inflation of United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government. Public of India were looking for a change in the leadership of the nation. Mean time name of Narendra Modi from Bhartiya Janta Party appeared on social media as a strong leader. Indian society started dreaming Narendra Modi as a Prime Minister. There were so many campaigns started on social media to support Narendra Modi. This is the main point where social media role became significant. Like US Presidential election campaign, first time Indian political parties had utilized social media. Politicians realized the power of virtual world that's why they used it to attract the youth who were going to use their vote first time.

In 2009 Parliamentary election, some political parties set up a digital war room but they could not utilize it in effective way. In 2014, Bhartiya Janta party had become first political party who used unique combination of Satellite, DTH, internet; Facebook, Twitter and Google+ hang out to reach its maximum public across the nation. Social Networking Sites have emerged as a major player during election campaign. Different Political parties and their candidates started competing each other in breaking news, messages over Facebook and Twitter. Even electronic media started following Facebook status, and Twits of renowned politician. Analysis of UPA government works and debates started on social media. Facebook and Twitter were full of debate and discussion on the issues like slow economic growth of India, inflation, corruption, women security, unemployment, infrastructure development, and communalism. The supporters of different political parties started commenting on these political issues on FB and Twitter. It had also been noticed that their discussion and comments turned up into quarrel on FB wall. This trend showed that social media would colossal affect the result of Parliamentary election. Above trend differentiate 2014 Parliamentary election to erstwhile elections.

Methodology: This study is based on content analysis of newspapers, available on internet, survey and In-depth interview. Data are collected from Indian diaspora society of Canada and Oman with the help of questionnaire and schedule interviews. Qualitative research method is applied to get result.

Social Media: An Overview

Year 2002, first social networking site "Friendstar" started in US and within three months, 3 million users got registered. In 2003, MySpace social networking site launched and Facebook got started after it in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg. FB became famous among youngster due to its features. Podcasting started in the same year and Flickr image website was founded as a social news website. Now people can share their stories across the world. YouTube also began storing and retrieving different types of videos in 2005. FB defeated MySpace during 2008 in terms of monthly visitors. FB became the most used social network worldwide in 2009. More than 3 billion users are across the world.

Internet Users by Region As of July 1, 2013:

243,198,922 internet users are in India alone and it is growing by 14 to 15% per year. In 2013 Facebook users became 1.11 billion. Near about 108,000,000 people use FB in India only. The numbers of FB users in big metro cities are as followed-

Delhi- 11,000,000
Mumbai- 7,400,000
Bangalore- 4,800,000
Chennai- 4,400,000
Kolkata- 4,400,000

Social Media- A Game Changer

Actually, above internet users numbers are a huge number which attracted Indian politicians to step into social media world. They realized that large number of population can be directly addressable online. A study by Pew Research says that 45% Indian internet user connect to social media to discuss political issues. And this is the reason, Politicians cannot afford them to ignore. Many political parties had extended their presence on the Internet during general election 2014. But among all Indian politicians, BJP's prime ministerial candidate, Narendra Modi was the first person who set up a website and utilized all types of social media. Modi main opponent Rahul Gandhi, the undeclared PM candidate of congress party did not use a website and other social media. Anna Hazare movement activist and India against corruption campaigner turned- politician Arvind Kejriwal had utilized all types of social media to reach general public. He urged for fund for the election campaign.

The followers and likes on the social media may not turn into votes but it cannot be ignored also at the same time. It definitely throws in a few interesting figures. Narendra Modi from BJP and Arvind Kejriwal from AAP were more active on their online campaign. Some left parties like Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) used social media. DMK chief M Karunanidhi and his son M K Stalin had also joined Twitter and Facebook to woo young educated voters who were going to cast their vote first time.

List of Politician who used Social Media during General election 2014

Narendra Modi- First connected to twitter from January 2009
As of March 18, 2014- his followers on Twitter 35.5Lakhs
Twitting 10 to 12 times in a day during his election campaign

Arvind Kejriwal- First connected to twitter from November 2011 almost three year after Modi. And before launching of AAP
As of March 18, 2014- his followers on Twitter 1.51Lakhs
Twitting 15 to 20 times in a day during his election campaign

Shashi Tharoor- Congress MP, his followers on Twitter 21 lakhs
He posted a lot of pictures of him interacting with the voters in his constituency.

Gul Panag- AAP candidate from Chandigarh, 8 Lakhs followers

Nandan Nilekani- Congress candidate from South, 80,000 followers

Anant Kumar- BJP candidate from South 22,000 followers

Kapil Sibal- Congress candidate from Chandani Chawk
77,000 followers
Ashutosh- AAP candidate from Chandani Chawk, 1.45 lakhs followers
Shazia Ilami- AAP candidate from Ghaziabad, 93,000 followers
Shusma Swaraj- BJP candidate from Vidisha (MP)
Rajnath Singh- BJP candidate from Lucknow, 2 lakhs followers
Jay Panda- BJP candidate, 50,000 followers
Milind Deora- Congress candidate, 1.24 lakhs followers
Mandya Ramya- Congress candidate, 2.22 lakhs followers

The Congress President Sonia Gandhi and Vice President Rahul Gandhi were not on any social media. They were using traditional way of canvassing in general election. Congress had realized that their opponent party was ahead of them. Blogworks had also mentioned in their report that BJP prime ministerial candidate Narendra Damodar Bhai Modi continued to be most mentioned on Social Media. Congress supporters opened fake accounts and started using different hashtags against Modi on Facebook and Twitter like #FakuExpress and www.fekuexpress.com etc.

Narendra Modi supporters created Joke of Pappu for Rahul Gandhi. Facebook and Twitter walls were full of Pappu and Feku jokes. U tern and Kajri Bai name were used for Arvind Kejriwal. To create awareness about Modi Visit in different cities #NAMOInHyd, NAMOInVaranasi etc. were used. NAMO, RaGa Gandhi and AK were Abbreviation used for Modi, Rahul, and Arvind Kejariwal. AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal was trying to encash scandals during UPA 2. He was taking up this issue through media to the public that all politicians were corrupt. Increasing food prices and women security were also some issues which was discussed by the youth of India online.

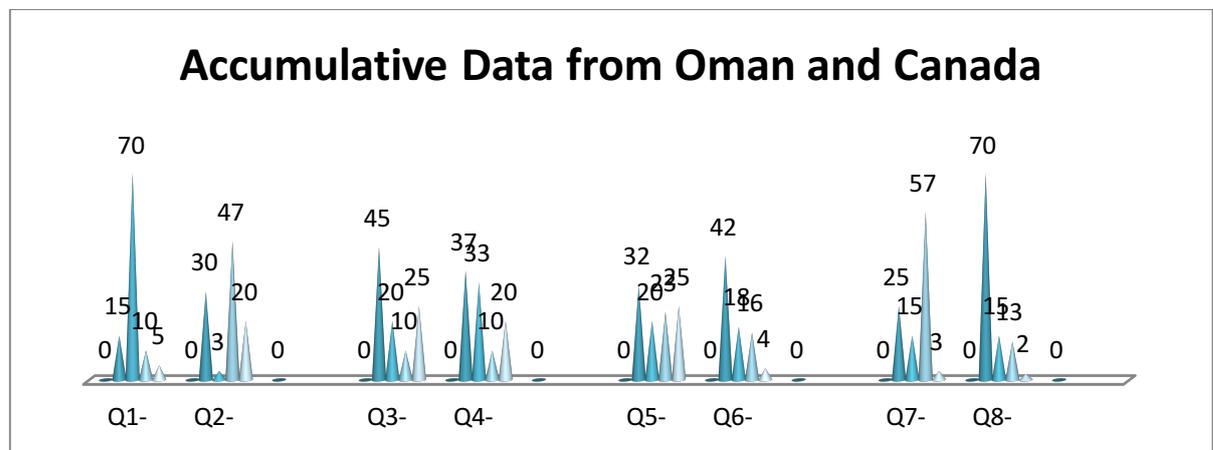
After seeing this trend, a lot of blather and speculation were started over the impact of social media networks on elections' outcome. The big reason behind such kind of speculation were those movements which were fuelled by social media like Anna Hazare's Movement for Jan Lok Pal Bill, India against corruption, justice for Damini etc. One google based survey showed that social media would impact 30% seats in Lok Sabha Poll. It might be 160 of 543.

IAMAI also released a report which said that social media campaigns could swing 3% to 4% votes in 24 states. **The Hindu** newspaper also published "Facebook users swing the result in 160 Lok Sabha Constituencies."

Word of mouth carried out offline. Those who were passively engaged with comment and conversation carried out the opinion offline to family, friends, relatives and their colleagues. Thus social media had become a huge source of influence even in the physical world. Easy accessibility for new users and female voters, powerful platform to educate, inform, transparent, fast and quick and enabling everyone to share are some qualities of social media which could connect a huge mass to the internet worldwide. Mobile phones became also a great tool to reach to people. AAP political party had signed up thousands of members by urging people to give them missed call for free. BJP social media and IT head Arvind Gupta said that mobile had become an integral and most unique electioneering tool which allowed potential voters to listen Modi rally speeches on their cell phones.

Criticism of Modi was on its full swing on social media. But he tried to perform his best. Sometimes it seemed that Facebook and Twitters ‘walls were looking like war place. He used video conferencing which connected his with 10000 tea stalls in 300 cities at the same time. He could reach to lakhs of his supporters and curious onlookers. The event named “Chai Pe Charcha” was organized by NGO citizens who were accountable for governance. It appealed the youth of India who were very keen towards use of technology. The programme was relayed live from Iskon Gandhi Tea Stall in western Ahmedabad. National and International all types of media covered that event. **The Washington Post** wrote, “Modi the son of a train Station tea vendor is vying for power with Rahul Gandhi 43 year-old scion of the powerful political dynasty that has nominated the congress party”.

Data Analysis

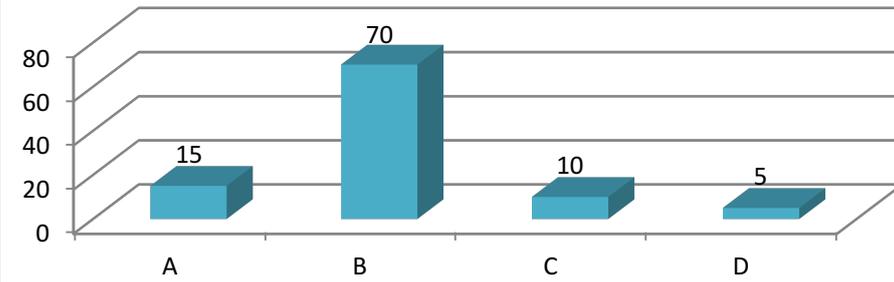


Graph No. A

Above graph presents an accumulative data from Oman and Canada. Random sampling method is applied to collect primary data from Salalah, Sohar and Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, and Montrell, Canada. The sample size was one hundred. I could have only 10 data from Montrell, Canada through one of my friend Ms. Madhu Sawney. Rest ninety data are from Oman. Both countries NRIs are from different states of India like Gujrat, Punjab, Delhi, Karnataka, Chennai, Hyderabad, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. They were interviewed through scheduled questionnaire. To ensure qualitative research, samples are gathered from public and private sectors, hospitals, academic institutions etc. Questionnaire has total eight questions to reach to objective of research. Variables are election fever and pattern of social media use.

In answer to first question, 70% of the respondents said that parliamentary election was hugely affected by Social Media. Graph 2 shows that 15% believed it as erstwhile election, while 10% NRI believed that it was not much affected. Only 5% thought that it is not affected.

Q 1- How do you see parliamentary election 2014?



Graph No. 1

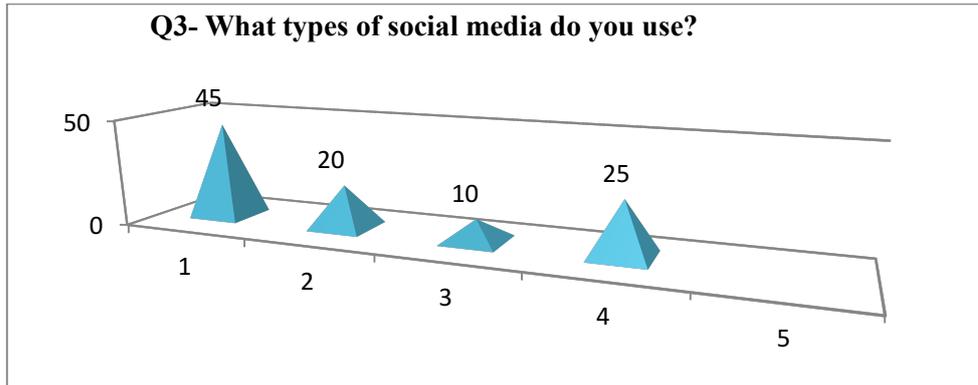
During parliamentary election, 47% member of Indian Diaspora from Montrell, Canada and Salalah Oman got involved through TV. They said that TV is still more easy and comfortable medium to access news and entertainment. 30% NRI used Facebook to connect to their country's politics. 3% NRI said that they used internet newspaper portal to know election news and activities.

Q 2- How did you get involved in your country election while you are living abroad?



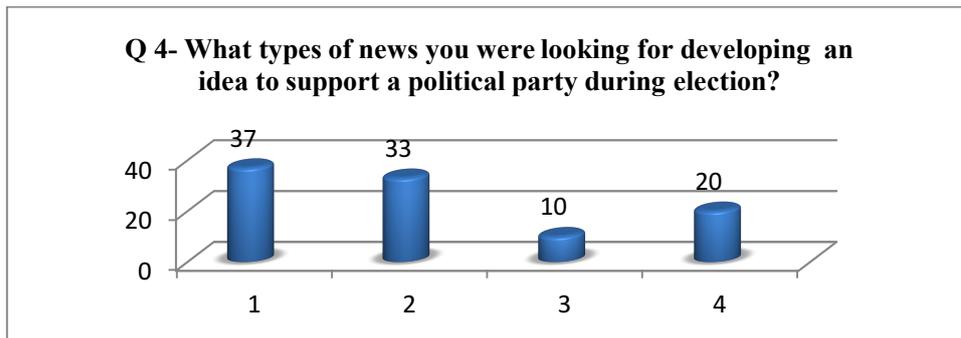
Graph No. 2

To the question of social media use, 45% NRI said that they are connected with Facebook, while 20% are with Twitter. 10% respondents said that they use YouTube to seek special types of interview of renowned politician. Congress Vice President Rahul Gandhi's interview on Times Now Channel with Arnav Goswami and BJP Prime Ministerial candidate Mr. Narendra Modi interview on India TV with Rajat Sharma got super hit on YouTube. 20% respondents said that they utilized all types of social media.



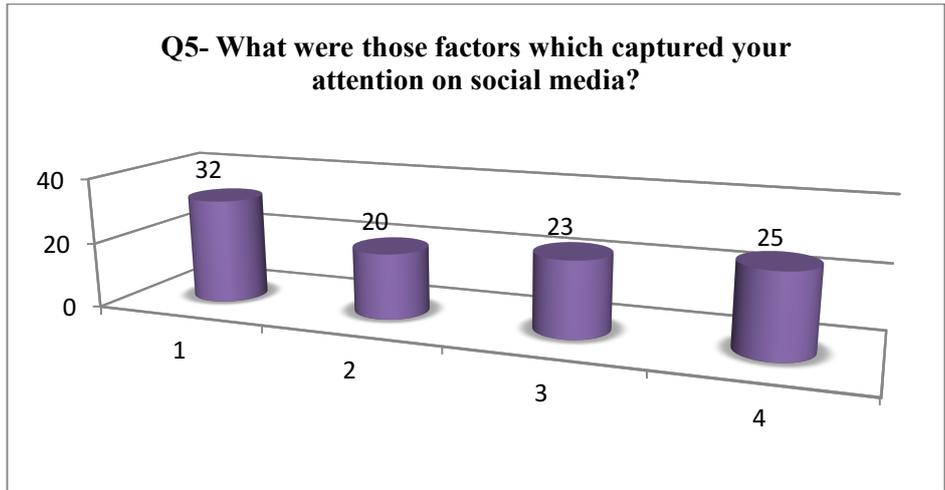
Graph No. 3

In response to the fourth question, 37% respondents said that they were looking for the strong leadership which could give a bang to their nation's slow economy to take it up to new height. 33% NRI said that they were looking for such news along with strong leadership, by which they could develop a view point about political parties. They said that inflation control and corruption were some issues which need to take care of. 10% NRI said that security and development issues were also important points to develop an idea to support a particular political party during election campaign. Graph No. 4 shows that 20% NRI answered that they were looking for all types of news about election.



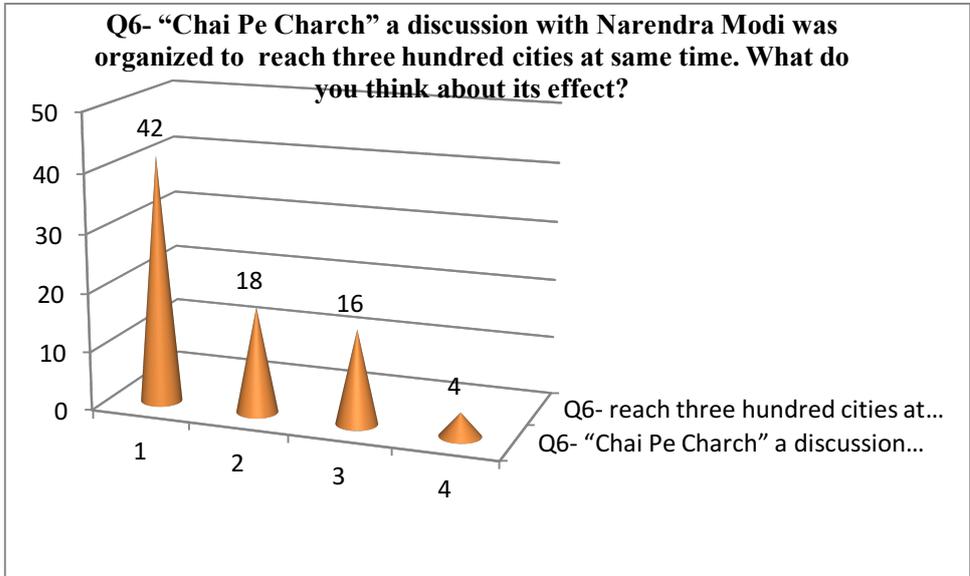
Graph No. 4

Following fifth graph is showing those issues which captured the attention of NRI on social media. 32% respondents said that they were more interested to know about Mr. Narendra Modi and his criticism related news. 20% respondents said that this election was different because hackneyed issues were ignored. They appreciated that 2014 election campaign was mostly based on India against corruption, nation building, employment and infrastructure development. 23% respondents said that communalism and secularism had also dragged their attention on social media. They said last phase of campaign was tried to polarize by the political parties. 25% NRIs said whatever issues were coming through news portal or social media were capturing their attention.



Graph No. 5

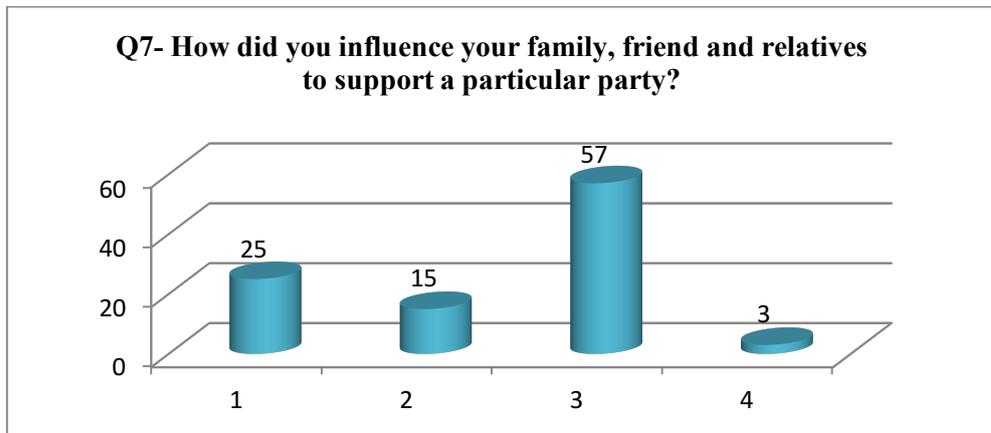
A satellite transmission programme “Chai Pe Charcha” a discussion on tea was organized to reach 300 cities and 1000 tea stalls at the same time. It was happening first time in India during election campaign. 42% NRIs admired this technological experiment and admit its great impact to increase **Modi Wave**. They themselves want to see India as a young and technically equipped nation. They believed if their Prime Minister would use this type of technology to connect with their people, country will touch to new height definitely. They also said that they want such leader who can connect with all age group of the country people, mostly to the youth. 18% respondents said that it was less effective. 16% NRIs said that it increased only **Modi Wave**. 4% respondents said that they did not watch that show.



Graph No. 6

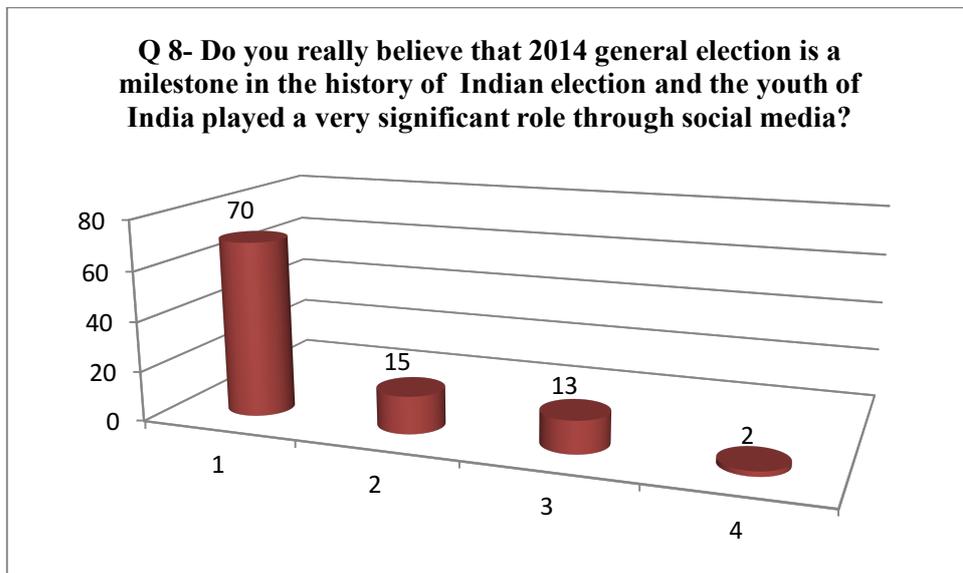
Answer to seventh question, 25% NRI said that they influenced their family and friends through Facebook status and comments. 15% respondents said that they used tele phone to convey their ideas about election. 57% NRI said that they utilized WhatsApp and

Viber to send their messages to their family, friends and relatives. Only 3% respondents did not influence any one.



Graph No. 7

Following graph no 8 is showing that 70% NRIs believed that 2014 parliamentary election is a mile stone in the history of Indian Election. Youth of India played a very significant role through social media. That's why it is first time when record voters tuned out for casting their votes. 15% respondents said that it was just like other election while 13% said that it was milestone in terms of voter turn-out only. We can say that social media effect was 50-50. Only 2% respondents said that they do not know anything about election.



Graph No. 8

Findings

After calculating all data and responds, the efficaciousness of social media becomes clear. During the research, a huge number of respondents agreed that social media has change the mindset of not only resident Indian but Non Resident Indian in abroad. The result shows how this backchannel Social Media becomes frontline media and played a significant role as a game changer in Indian Parliamentary election 2014. Not only resident Indian but Non-Resident Indian also got involved in election campaign. They

looked more inclined towards the issues like strong leadership, corruption, women safety, infrastructure development and good governance. Non-Resident Indian told that they could abolish the distance of thousands of miles between their native country and resident country due to this new media. A huge number of respondents agreed that Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Viber and YouTube had given them power to express and judge election scenario. In this way they could be able to influence their own people thinking and participate in their own country election. While taking interview, I found that many Non-Resident Indians planned their visit to India at the time of polling, so that they can cast their vote in nation building.

Recommendations

During research, Indian Diaspora recommended that Indian government should arrange such kind of facility, so that we can also cast our vote, as we are contributing in nation building through our remittance to Indian Economy.

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