Influenced of facebook campaign on the presidential election of Sri Lanka in 2015

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Abstract

Facebook is one of the most famous and well known social media and utilized for election campaigning in different parts of the world. Recently, during the Presidential Election in 2015, a remarkable campaign was launched on Facebook, and it was a focal point in the history of social media campaign in Sri Lanka. This manuscript aims to analyze the influence of facebook election campaign on the Presidential Election of Sri Lanka in 2015; investigates the mechanisms/strategies used; the impact of this campaign on facebook users; the findings of qualitative and quantitative content analysis of facebook pages demonstrates the perceptions and behaviours' of the two presidential candidates; and it is an exemplified sample containing 316 posts collected on the use of facebook during the period of election. Findings show that both candidates used an emotional and motivational appeal to create a social capital. Analysis shows that the comments given to the posts were influenced by the component of persuasion used on the posts. Users' views mainly highlighted that facebook can be used as an influence channel for political campaigns and as a means to gain social prestige from voters.

Keywords: Political marketing, facebook influence, Election campaign, Political strategies, Sri Lankan Politics, Social media.

Introduction

Internet blogs, facebook and Twitter are progressively develop and popular as social media. The role of traditional media in the election process and political communication is influence the changes due to the development of public relations through social media[1]. On the other hand its influence on the co-relation between the traditional media and social media. Grazyna, 2011 emphasised that the social media being an alternative to the traditional media.

Some principal scholars have argued that a significant Internet effort has become an essential part of an effective campaign. Candidates are using the Internet, and particularly Social network services, to escape traditional campaign methods to reach voters[2]. The 2008 USA presidential campaign was the first to play out in the world of YouTube, facebook, MySpace, and political blogging - the major Internet-based social media[3]. By 2010, 22% of Internet users used social media websites for political activity[2].

However, empirical studies of social media on the Internet are limited. Boulianne has done a meta-analysis and examined the effects of the Internet on political participation and civic engagement. The result pointed out to that the Internet was significant. That meta-analysis, which attempted to incorporate all studies published and unpublished, revealed very few studies that isolated and examined the effects of social networking using the Internet on political participation[2].

In this view, the use of social media for political campaign is appositive entity that helps enlarge the capacitates to augmentation of fast communication through web. The effects of substantial and systematic campaign on citizens' voting behaviour have been discussed in several studies[4]. Ever more, for the information processing of the citizens, providing voters with the necessary information for making a choice in line with their pre-existing preferences campaigns are viewed as playing a key role[5]. However, the voters' democracy while little attention has so far been paid to the campaign strategies of political actors has been focussing by political scientists through analysis of campaigns.

This article firstly introduces the use of social media and gives an overview of developments in the world and the Sri Lanka practice during the past decade in the context of transition of electoral campaign system. It highlights the influences of online campaign practices that underline "facilitation" over communication, messaging or public relations in election movements.

The article then bring in facebook communication posted by the facebook users in Sri Lanka and Sri Lankan who live in other countries across the world as a form of facebook–based political marketing for focusing on change of current political practice in the country. The specify methods and findings from a close reading of posts to these facebook pages before election. The article concludes with observations about the arguments, criticism inculcated through technological platform as new innovation of campaign in Sri Lanka.

Role of social media on election campaign in Sri Lanka: In the electoral process in Sri Lanka, the public is given a channel to express its views and issues concerning governance are settled and elections manifest democracy and its practice for a long time. In 1978 election reform has been introduced as a proportional system for electing the parliament members. After independence Westminster system has been introduced[6].

Election campaign in Sri Lanka was conducted specially through traditional methods since independence. Along with the traditional mode of election campaign, use of social media for election campaign purposes was introduced in 2010 mainly as a modernized method in the politics. The 2015 Presidential Elections in Sri Lanka have confined the public's imagination in diverse ways. In effect unknown candidates won apparently against all probabilities. Specially, the candidate became "newsworthy" primarily use facebook and YouTube for electoral purposes. In Sri Lankan context, main political parties used several strategies for the election campaigns. The effectiveness and success of the campaign strategies were dependent on the media which they used. Face book election campaign was an innovative method which was used for presidential election in 2015. It was a platform to criticize each party and their actions openly and freely.

Presidential Election in Sri Lanka held on 8th January 2015: Out of the 19 candidates, two main opponents contested this election. Maithripala Sirisena (MS) was elected as the new President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka by the majority of 51.28% as fifth President of Sri Lanka. The United National Party (UNP) front opposition coalition chose to field Maithripala Sirisena, the former Minister of Health in Mahinda Rajapaksha's government and the General Secretary of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) – the main constituent party of the United People's Federation Alliance (UPFA) – as its common candidate. President Mahinda Rajapaksa (MR) came up in second, by obtaining 47.58% of the votes and he was the United People's Freedom Alliance's (UPFA) candidate. According to the constitution in Sri Lanka, the normal term of office for a president is six years, although an in office serving a second term may call an election at any time after four years in office[7]. The election was decided by President Mahinda Rajapaksha (MR) in 2015 two years ahead of schedule. It was the first election in Sri Lanka which was widely discussed in social media[8]. The social media coverage and engagement of all events that outspread during the presidential election campaign was remarkable and certainly influenced the end result. Previous elections experienced extraordinary campaigns through the liberal usage of posters, banners, public meeting and traditional media[9].

Influences of Social Media in Contemporary Political Campaign: Currently, facebook has more than 500 million users commonly use communication technology worldwide, second only to Google in terms of worldwide Internet traffic, and has emerged as the most widely used form of social networking. Political Facebook groups emerged as an significant forum for political expression[10]. Political campaigns have paid increasing attention to social media in recent years[11]. Currently, online social networking sites are becoming a central component of the modern political campaign[2]. Evidence suggests that social media" understood as the solution to the wider problems of democracy such as deceitful politicians; civic apathy; lack of information and rapport between citizens and politicians; insurmountable gap between citizens' concerns and politics[12].

The recent widespread implementation of social network sites influences communication behaviour in a variety of contexts, including political participation[13]. Rather than looking purely at the election campaign process, contemporary research looked at understanding the impact of social media campaign on election. Systems of election campaigns are a major source of political movement around the world which has significantly advanced over the last decade. The beginning of social media has given political parties worldwide new tools for logistics and new ways of reaching potential supporters[14]. By designing a series of advertisements and placing them in various media, election campaign is an attempt to reach voters as their target groups. The campaign theme is the central image that will be communicated in the promotional activities. In any type of elections, campaigns aim to market their politics.

As electoral tools in globe, social media such as facebook, Twitter or YouTube have gained a positive reputation in recent years[15]. Conversely in the world, considerable research over the years has been conducted to verify the impact of media use on political movement[16]. Studies that compare results across countries show, the popular social media such as facebook, MySpace and YouTube were extensively accessible during the USA Presidential Election campaign in 2008. It was the initial presidential campaign which used social media widely. Consequently, research investigates on Political Cynicism in the Age of facebook, MySpace, and YouTube in 2008 Presidential Campaign and the impact of these social media on political cynicism this campaign offered the foremost opportunity. Evidence suggested that the social media and technology as an integral part of this campaign and its strategies were more important. A major success reason for Obama's victory was the strategies and mechanisms which were used for social media campaign[3]. For this campaign certain political blogs provide a forum for commenting on and reading about political information in a more mass communication-related context. Facebook and MySpace are used primarily for interpersonal and intergroup communication; YouTube is a delivery system for video as a mode of election campaign.

In 2012, US Presidential Election seems draw attention to the contemporary public diplomacy online and potentially reflects larger connections between the affordances of a technological platform were recognized. In 2013 Craig Hayden, et al,

conducted a research pages based on a close reading of the responses to these U.S. sites and the qualities of the communication provoked by these public diplomacy overtures, the nature of public argument via the facebook platform, and how the election served as a process to further contemporary U.S. public diplomacy to examines social media discourse about the 2012 election posted on their facebook. Facebook posts most commonly exhibited expressions of support for the United States, its character, and legitimacy in this study. Nature of "engagement" via social media that seems to underscore contemporary public diplomacy online and potentially, reflect larger connections between the affordances of a technological platform and the social function of claims-making associated with such platforms[17].

The study conducted in Calgary, Canada 2010 municipal election recognized the intense use of social media by the winning candidate has been seen as proof of the democratic power of these communication technologies to bring together politicians and citizens about the politics as customer relations, social media and political authenticity[12]. Results indicate that social media emerge as both the sites where "political authenticity" is performed, and the guarantors of its sincerity in Calgary municipal election. For the positions of "political authenticity" the citizen/user as a customer, awaiting a response and a solution from the politician through social media[12]. By the end of the campaign however, online presence consisting of a Twitter account, a facebook profile and a series of YouTube videos make interest among followers about politicians. In terms of the number of facebook friends and Twitter followers, suggesting a direct relationship between electoral success and social media use. In the history of the city in Calgary the elections were marked by the highest turnouts in the end.

Social networking sites such as Twitter and facebook are fostering new styles of conversation between candidates and voters and that these new connections can play a central role in showing up voter support demonstrates in National Elections in Brazil 2010[11]. In every level of government, winning candidates identiied as challengers and they had more aggressive digital media campaigns than losing candidates. Moreover, for newcomers social media strategies provided with electoral advantages particularly using mobile technologies. applications proved for successful senate campaigns social networking is particularly important[11].

In the past years more and more Romanians started to use social media, and facebook was first used in Romania by political candidates for presidential campaign in 2009[18]. From this study identified the issues on whether the Romanian left wing or right wing adapted its communication faster to the online environment during 2009 presidential campaign. Political candidates used social media to mobilize voters to the poll or to inform them regarding the activities in their offline campaign in this election. The campaign blogs constituted a medium for expressing electoral campaign themes, especially for the left wing.

In 2013, German Bundestag parliament election campaigns were constructed on several strategies through facebook and Twitter to succeed the election[19]. Twitter use as a political engagement tool between Pakistani political parties and the public during 2013 election in Pakistan[20]. The findings revealed that a unique combination of Twitter communication and face-to face campaigning aimed at increasing voter turnout, especially among the youth population. Twitter account also had an excess of campaign updates during this election and it included real time updates about politician's campaign activities together with photos and videos from campaign sites. The personality politics paradigm, personalities of candidates who capture the voters' attention, political actors imposes on political relationships, political intention of bringing Pakistan closer to a true democracy, online campaign updates, interacting and mobilizing to vote[20]. In Pakistan politics to the forefront was a combination of strategic online and offline campaigning tapping on the wave of change against corruption in the country.

Similarly, in 2013 the Czech Parliamentary elections, social media played significant role to change voters and user's behaviours. Online participations during the period of the election campaign, has increase citizens' interest in politics and their levels of engagement[21].

The social media has proven to have the power to change the scenario of battle and changing the way of political campaigns in 10th Sarawak state election in Malaysia. Voters especially the youth and residents in urban areas are increasingly tuning out traditional and mainstream media campaign and are much more interested in what is going on within their own social media circles. The influence of social media has widely spread in the context of Sarawak politics, especially among the youth voters in urban areas. The locality design in Sarawak has the influence of ethnic structure and behaviour where the influence of social media in politics is demonstrated and envisaged by ethnicity of the urban residence where most social media are accessible[22].

In Sweden empirical study on political participation and social media explore attitudes, motives and alleged behaviour of social network site users in relation to political participation. The relationship between different groups of politically interested people – party members, interest organization members, and the non-organized public – is changing, creating new and potentially far-reaching developments in the way that democracies work[23].

There are only a few studies so far dedicated to the influence of social network site use on political participation, and those published have come to unreliable end. However, it has been examined how political campaign embeds them within this broader mediation of campaign culture online. Most of the research in the social science literature has focused on election campaign in traditional media such as television, print banners, and posters and other below-the-line marketing, paying little attention to social media.

Considering previous research on social media and political engagement has no long history. In regards to this specific research focusing on Sri Lankan face book election campaign, no studies have been published. Evidence demonstrated that in 2010, presidential election campaign in Sri Lanka, little attention was focussed on social media. However, it was not much popular among voters/facebook users, even though social media, especially facebook, remarkable online campaigns were done on presidential election in 2015.

In this paper, attempt is made to analyse the manner in which the facebook election campaign influence on the Presidential election of Sri Lanka in 2015? This election campaign was unique in Sri Lankan history because the main political parties and supporters relied on very personal promotional way to campaign through essentially facebook and other social media. On the other hand, use of facebook is a current trend in the countries like Sri Lanka and it leads to increase accessibilities to gain knowledge and awareness, both positively and negatively. The impact of using social media is dependent on individuals.

In the political phenomena, social awareness through facebook or other social media tend to influence on attitudes and perception. The modern technological innovation's impact in many ways on Sri Lanka as a developing country. Focus of research is also limited due to unavailability and less accessibility of such resources among the population in the country in spite of the government's attempt to improve the computer literacy and accessibility to cyber usage from few years back. Conversely, social media can influence on politics to overcome the boundaries to reach optimum levels. Therefore, this research hope to bring the knowledge on impact factors which lead to expand campaign capacities in political arena.

Methodology

As mode of election campaign has moved online to encompass modes of digital engagement through social media, new forms of evaluation are necessary. Beyond the counterproductive debate about whether social media sites are fairness or unethical for democracy, this study is aiming to form a picture of how these forms of communication affect political participation, campaigning and voter behaviour.

This article analyzed, how did facebook election campaign influence the Sri Lankan Presidential Election in 2015. It mainly focuses on identifying the election campaign mechanisms/strategies used in facebook, demonstrate the impact of facebook election campaign on facebook users' perception and behaviours.

In order to analyze the Sri Lankan presidential election campaign, data were collected from individuals who have facebook accounts and actively engage in posting and sharing different types of election campaign pictures, statements, cartoons, news links and videos during the presidential election

in 2015. The facebook election campaign has been chosen for this study due to three main reasons: i. Facebook is popular among Sri Lankan youth and adults rather than the other social media ii. Use of facebook for election campaign is a new innovation in the country iii. Facebook campaign became more popular and it has done a significant influence on the presidential election in 2015. Firstly, the sample selected is based on the facebook pages maintained by individual users who supported the main political parties in Sri Lanka during the period from 5th December 2014 to 7th January 2015. Subsequently, the comments of facebook users were evaluated for each post, and investigated the strategies/mechanisms used for the election campaign. Secondly, interviews were conducted with 30 informants who have shown interest in politics using facebook.

This particular timeframe was selected since it was the period of political campaign conducted by facebook users in Sri Lanka and the presidential election was held on 8th January 2015. It was decided to analyze the posts in accordance with the progressive sequence to minimize the bias. The pictures, statements, cartoons, videos, news links were analyzed on daily basis during the period of data collection.

For this analysis, almost 316 posts were collected including pictures, statements, cartoons, videos, news links to maintain the statistical standards and fairness of the data which was published on facebook during the above timeframe.

Evaluation was done on the public posts and division of the posts was based on their keywords. Both the original and shared posts were assessed. An assessment criterion was developed based on the types of posts in election campaign on facebook such as pictures, statement, cartoons, news links and videos. A content analysis was employed for the analysis[19].

The coding of the posts covered four main areas which were done. Firstly, general descriptive elements such as methods, strategies to create posts were coded. Secondly, the main and secondary topic of each post was coded.

Thirdly, the researcher determined the evaluative content for main presidential candidates (Mahinda Rajapakse and Maithreepala Sirisena) in the posts by examining the contents of the posts. Finally, positive or negative aspects of comments of the facebook users and interviewers were analyzed.

Influence of facebook campaign on presidential election in 2015- Sri Lanka: Analysis of the sample posts: There were 316 posts collected in respect of both main candidates from individuals who have facebook accounts and directly involved in the election campaign by sharing and posting different types of posts during the period of election campaign from 5th of December to 7th of January 2015. The collected posts and its' distributions are as follows:

Table-1: Outline of the posts (sample).

Types of Posts	No of Posts	Percentage
Picture	126	40%
Videos	66	21%
Statements	54	17%
Cartoons	41	13%
News Links	29	9%
Total	316	100%

Political campaign strategies utilized by political parties, in terms of winning a vote in a given election campaign, whilst political marketing is concerned with the long term relationship building and satisfaction of the electorate[24]. As marketing strategies, political parties in Sri Lanka employed different methods through facebook campaign. Pictures, Videos, Statements, Cartoons, and News links were identified as election campaign methods. The 40% of the posts were pictures. Those pictures included real photos of the two main candidates and their family members, party members, supporters and government officers (such as police, election commissioners, secretaries of ministries) and popular stars. The pictures contained the themes of bribery and corruptions, family politics and threats. Beliefs and personality and leadership issues focused on racism and the highlights of religious sensitivity issues aiming to create negative or positive impression amongst the voters. There were incidents of changing natural pictures and creating new offensive pictures with a view to insulting and criticizing the political leaders. E.g: Super imposing faces on another human figures and/or animal bodies. Further there had been instances of posting pictures to depict a particular incident which had actually happened somewhere else with the objective of changing the attitudes and perception of the audience. During this election campaign, ruling party Mahinda Rajapaksha used a person as a duplicate opposition candidate against the common candidate Maithreepala Sirisena. Those pictures were shared by Rajapaksha supporters through facebook accounts rapidly. However, when analyzed it was found that those picture posts were highly criticized and condemned by the facebook users in their comments.

Pakistan and USA presidential election campaign highlighted that videos, photos and pictures highly used and its influence as political campaign strategically[17,22]. Considering the methods of election campaign in Sri Lanka used in facebook posts, the videos related to the politics were more popular among facebook users for the reason that, majority of facebook users shared videos more than the other posts. These videos have been created aiming at the election campaign by using music, songs, and public speeches made by politicians in different places and highlighting the speeches, language (words) where they had expressed in their own campaigns. The percentage of videos posts was 21%. In fact, both pictures and news links also contained videos.

The statements carried 17% of the campaign posts. These statements highly emphasized the different elements, highlighted the particular personalities, criticisms, data and evidence, and bullying. Concerning progressive sequence of the statements from 5th of December 2014 to 8th of January 2015, the language used by politicians in different parties highlighted to address the individual needed to be selected from the statements made on facebook subculture of language related to Sri Lankan politics were created at the end of this campaign. According to these statements, facebook users who supported the main two candidates were divided in to two groups in the middle of this campaign and they introduced themselves as "Bayyo" and "Toyyo". According to this term, the Rajapaksha supporters were called as "Bayyo" (Villagers/countryside people/) while Sirisena supporters were addressed as "Toyyo" (The people who live in city area) but the meaning was actually not real. These two divisions were formed according to the speeches made by politicians of the main two political parties. With reference to the post election campaign on facebook, these two groups were still campaigning continuously even after the election. The words/statements stressed, highlighted and emphasized the content by using font size and colours attractively.

Cartoon is another component used in this campaign which was shared through daily news papers. These cartoons were interpreted different themes and humour and the main element identified through cartoon campaign led to an increase in curiosity. In addition, cartoons were used to insult the political characteristics. Total percentage of cartoons was thirteen. It's targeted to create an impression on political issues. Cartoons consisted few words, images but expressed the weaknesses of both candidates.

Of the total 9% were web news links such as BBC Sinhala-Sandeshaya, Lanka e news, Lanka C news, Lanka truth, the independent, Thaprobane, Colombo Telegraph which were maintained by political parties, individual politicians and/or their supporters. According to news links mostly criticized the Rajapaksha Government. In this period, ruling party mainly used traditional media such as electronic and printed Media for their campaign. Therefore, they were not concernrd much about the web news. In his public speeches, President Mahinda Rajapaksha criticized the web news and social media. Facebook political campaign focused on the diversity of users and through these mechanisms targeted a change in the political mindsets by using variety of strategies to market their own party politicians. A distinct bias in the marketing strategies usage was visible in the campaign. Through facebook posts it has been criticized and compared oppositional politics party, with regard to the

possibilities of their usage; this has been undertaken on a descriptive level.

Mechanisms/strategies: Concerning the political needs as a subjective expectation and/ or as performed identity in a broader sense and it's not regarded merely as field of organized politics.

Opposition parties had criticized Mahinda Rajapaksha's government which was elected as a ruling party since 2005 and the Rajapakshas' family on the issue of bribery and corruption. The facebook users who supported Maithreepala Sirisena campaigned strategically to make the people aware of the bribery and corruption, election violence and malpractices done by the ruling party. Through this posts facebook users argued and criticiced all the political malpractices.

Referring to graph.01, the highest percentage of post was about bribery and corruptions against the Rajapaksha Government. This was identified while evaluating the comments on these posts, and showed that it was a negative impact on the image. Hanson G mentioned that scholars have recognised political socialization as a complex phenomenon which involving several information gathering strategies and communication channel in numerous attitudinal and behavioural outcome[3].

As political socialization agents, the influence of one's family and friends are important and one's political attitudes and behaviour contribute as civic participation[25]. Executive power and family politics were criticized through posts. During his government Rajapaksha family members were directly involved in politics and administrative positions. The Rajapaksha supporters admired President Rajapaksha through facebook election campaign on the ground that his family integration led to develop the country and also to stop the 30-year long war in a positive manner. On the other hand, oppositions pointed out Rajapaksha' hegemony influence on democracy, freedom of expression and economy etc, in the country.

The next augmentable point was the involvement of both astrologists and their believers. Facebook posts stated that, the election was decided by President Mahinda Rajapaksha two years ahead of schedule according to the astrological predictions. The comments were humorous and criticized those posts and mentioned that particular candidates believed in myths were not suitable for future leadership. In addition, the politicians who believe strongly on astrological support and rituals were highlighted. Respondents' pointed out that the politicians who followed the astrological believes unnecessarily would lead to their failures.

As a strategy, Rajapaksha invited Bollywood actors Salman Khan and Jacqueline Fernandez with the intention of getting more attention from the public audience. As a result of their attempt to obtain support of 'Bollywood' made a point for heated discussion about the Rajapaksa and his modes of election campaign. It was widely shared through facebook and criticism arose. When thoroughly investigated the comments and respondent's opinion regarding the use of Bollywood stars, it was highly critical.
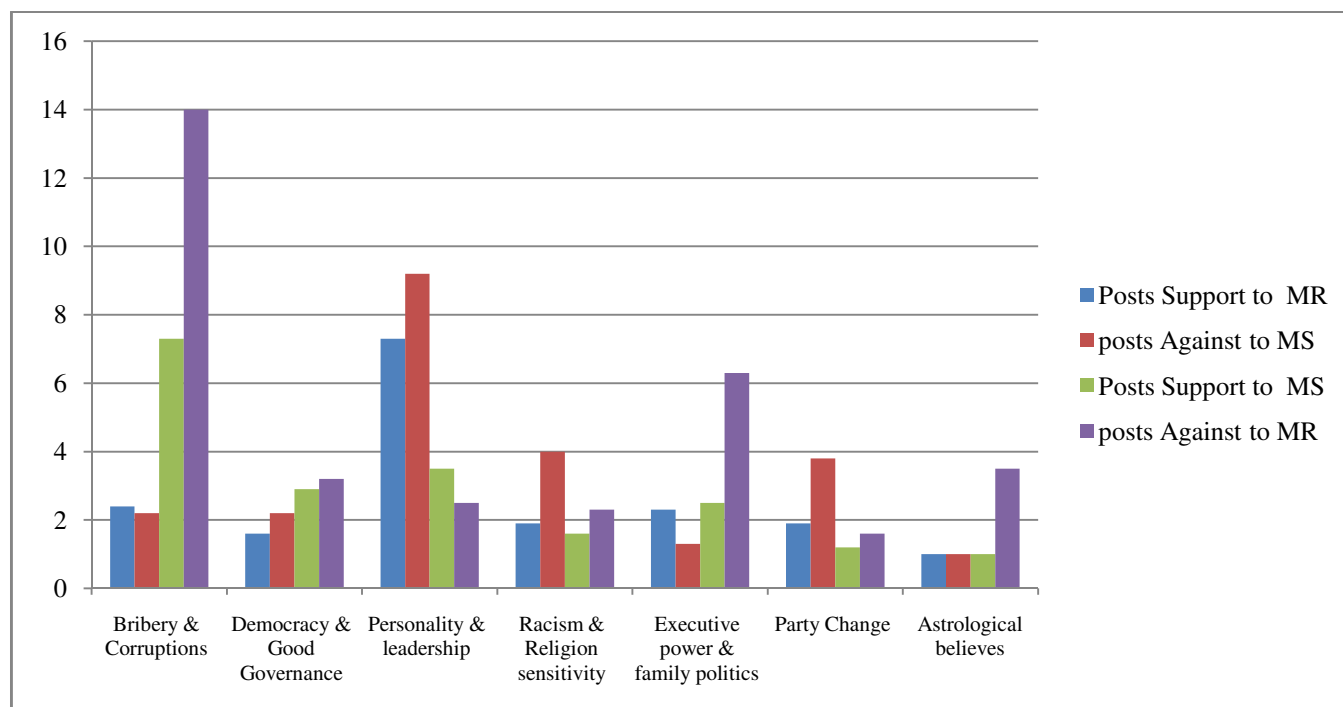
*Note: MR = Mahinda Rajapaksha / MS = Maithreepala Sirisena
Figure-1: Percentages of campaign mechanisms/strategies on posts.

Personality and leadership was the most influential factor in supporting the posts in facebook for Mahinda Rajapaksha. The percentage was 6.5% and it was comparatively low in keeping with corruption allegations against him which affected negatively as an influential factor. Comments emphasized that Mahinda Rajapakshas' personality/leadership is strong and also highlighted his morale and appearance. Oppositional candidate Maithreepala Sirisena and his supporters' personality and leadership were highly criticized through facebook and there were many posts against him in this campaign. Leadership styles, physical appearances, voice and speeches of Sirisena and his supporters were negatively highlighted. Similarly, racism/ethnic sensitivity and party changes were also negatively criticized. Furthermore, those posts were against his policies. When the comments were thoroughly investigated it was identified that the posts against Mahinda Rajapakshas were a positive influence on Maithreepala Sirisenas' victory indirectly and his campaign emphasized to create Good Governance, society and to curtail the executive powers of the President. As a result of this the new generation gathered around him through facebook.

All these methods were strategically focused on politicians, parties with the intention of insulting, threatening and warning and also making humours comments in order to motivate one's own party politicians and de-motivate the opposition parties and their members. These campaigns led to growing a personal sense of political efficacy and enhance social status.
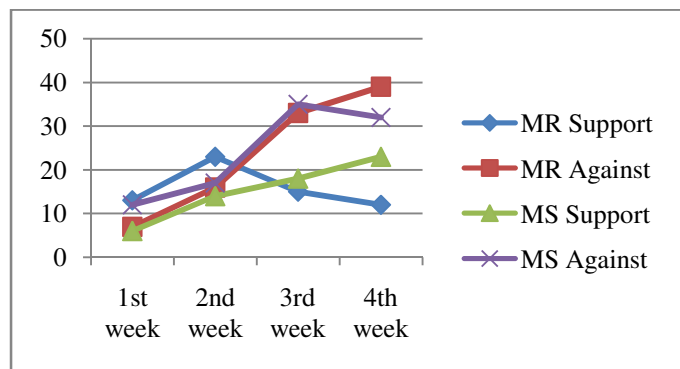

Figure-2: Both parties experienced and employed supportive and against posts in the campaign.

Both parties experienced and employed supportive and against posts in the campaign. Supportive posts were created by themselves by aiming to promote their own political views, activities, future directions and market their personalities in positive manner. Eg: Some posts were created to give positive impression of activities which they did and show personality through physical appearance, working with youth, showing skills by engaging in sports activities, and behaving as a young person etc. The against posts were created by opposition party exposing the negative things done and what they plan to do, criticized unethical activities and behaviours. Openly, these kinds of posts used to inculcate the negative attitudes about

political candidates who are in oppositional party but some posts were a positive influence as well.

Considering the progressive sequence order of the election campaign, during the 1st week of data collection, Supportive posts for Mahinda Rajapaksha were 13% and it was rapidly increased during the 2nd week to 23% then gradually decreased by the 3rd and 4th week of the campaign to 15% and 12% respectively. The Supportive posts for Maithreepala Sirisena were comparatively low in 1st week at 5%. However, it slightly went up week by week. There were 28% of supportive posts in the 4th week a difference of 14 percent.

The unsupportive/negative posts for both candidates were 6% for Mahinda Rajapaksha and 13% for Maithreepala Sirisena during the 1st week of data collection. Those posts were increased similarly by 3rd week as 33% and 35% respectively. There was a significant increase in Mahinda Rajapakshas' against posts which were identified in 4th week at 40% and the negative/unsupportive posts against to the Maithreepala Sirisena were slightly decreased to 33% by the 4th week. This week was the peak period of the election campaign.

According to the graph, it can be identified that the election campaign was mainly used to sling mud at each other by both supporters instead of positive promotion. Mostly, mud-slinging was used in an unethical manner.

The results show, for example, that highly sensitive posts had more impolite comments among the users, as well as support with evidence and facts. In the interview, the respondents were asked on the campaign mechanism that can influence voters for the presidential election. The questions for the interview covered both conventional as well as contemporary method of election campaigns. The results from the interview found that respondents stated "election campaign through facebook had been remarkable and influenced voters due to the fact that facebook offered unlimited access to information and made posts". Respondents' affirmed that facebook campaign provides avenues for the voters to create bonding and understanding on current politics in Sri Lanka.

Results and discussion

The facebook election campaign recognized as a facilitative mode to access political information in several ways. Through facebook individuals and group activists and ordinary citizens work in opposition to the government which has denied democracy and suppressing their views and voices[3].

The preparation of this analysis is to explore attitudes, motives, perception and assumed behaviour of facebook users in relation to political participation. Facebook is a media for freedom of speech and consent to people from different ethnicities, religions and backgrounds to directly share information without any restrictions and has involved the young generation especially during the election process[26].

In the framework of election campaign on facebook, the comments were influenced on changing the perception, attitudes and behaviour of the people to think differently. According to the argument[14,] attitudes toward online communication influence from Facebook use. Many research proved that online media campaign directly used to influence the young generation. This campaign was also most influential one in changing the perception among the young generation.

In Sri Lanka the majority of facebook users come from the younger generation and adults, especially from urban and semi-urban area due to less internet coverage and facilities for the people living in the rural areas denying the majority of youth and other voters access to facebook. Therefore, this vast campaign was influenced by mainstream urban, semi urban youth and other Sri Lankan non voters domiciled all over the world but directly involved in facebook political campaign seeking a positive political change in the country.

It was clearly identified that the contents of the posts published had total truth, partial truth and absolutely false information. The comments showed agreement, criticism and rejection. Interview responses showed that the young generation who actively engaged in facebook changed their political viewpoints and influenced them to create a common youth voice. At the same time, some groups tried to increase racism and religious issues against the opposition party highlighting the risks of instability of the country if Maithreepala Sirisena was elected President. However, the posts and comments show that the majority of Sri Lankans rejected racism and religious issues. In this study it was found that the posts created emphasized the personality traits of political leaders and other members. Theories in Political Psychology provoke that combination of these traits have connotations for leadership style and capacity. On the other hand, the creators of the particular posts mainly focused on physical appearance as a personality to promote their own leaders. Sheldon's' explained personality through body type theory. Evaluating the facebook comments for such posts, it could be recognized that the attitudes on human personality is different among the users. The leadership personality was standard in accordance with the cognitive ability of the particular leaders. Facebook users critically argued and made dialogs regarding leadership personalities. Cognitive theories, emphasized cognitive processes, such as thinking, judging and reasoning, decision making, influence on one's personality though not only through physical appearance. The commentators and respondents suggested that political leaders should not only have physical appearance but also cognitive capacities which are most important. From this view, it could be identified commentators are critical and intellectual.

Fest Inger, 1954, Cognitive dissonance theory asserts that behaviour can in turn affect attitudes. The theory suggests attitudes may be transformed by the simple act of voting. This study employs cognitive dissonance theory to explain attitudinal change. The respondents explained that the various posts which were uploaded during this campaign were contradictory and it affected the non voters' behaviour; vote decisions, election outcomes that conflicts with one's preferences may cause one to losing the importance of the election.

The presidential election outcome proves that, Maithreepala Sirisena was elected as the President with majority votes and Mahinda Rajapaksha was the first President to lose power in a presidential election in the political history of Sri Lanka. Mahinda Rajapakshas' campaign strategies mainly focused on traditional methods which are no longer valid in the present circumstances in comparison to methods used by Maithreepala Sirisena. The then ruling government's efforts of campaign mainly focused on traditional media state owned as well as other private media using their power and authority to maintain their campaign and used such media to promote their policies. Media bias was also recognized during the election. Instead of focusing on social media, the ruling party abused traditional media in an unethical manner. Therefore, their election campaigns were not successful to the level that they expected. The opposition party paid more focus on social media than ruling party creatively and purposefully. Consequently, facebook positively influenced the opposition party to win the presidential election in 2015.

Conclusion

In an effort to extend and foster such research and conclusion with a discussion, the most important challenges are in achieving data and dissemination. Several limitations have been identified in this study. In some cases, comparison is difficult due to lack of new and different perspectives on the research topic and due to less novel research questions in the context of Sri Lanka.

In addition, a lack of documented methods, data from social media platforms are mostly unavailable for secondary analyses. Traditional publication formats often do not allow describing processes of data collection and manipulation in sufficient detail.

The study analyzed only facebook posts which were shared by individuals during the period of election and also collected data by using chain sampling method. Due to the limitations to access facebook accounts and time duration, it was not possible to consider all the posts that appeared on facebook. Additionally, for technical reasons only messages posted during a one-month period were analyzed, suggesting that conclusions are based on limited information. There are broader opportunities for future research regarding the use of social media as a channel to facilitate participation in politics, fostering democratic deliberation and new spheres for political expression. Future research should investigate how social media influence on human behaviours, Professionalization of politics, Subculture on facebook, Future studies might explore political cognition among facebook users and their social behaviours and

the influence of social media on sovereignty of the country. In addition, it is important to further explore the political participation and the effect of social media on the political process and social discourse more broadly.

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