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Role of Twitter as a Digital News Engagement Resource for Political Awareness of Journalists in India

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Abstract:- News on social media has outgrown television & radio news with instant update & feedback options; turning 'passive audience' into 'active participants' in the news making & news sharing process. Emergence of Twitter as a citizen engagement platform has been beneficial for journalists who use it for reading news & analyzing the latest Twitter trends as well as to acquire news worthy material for profitable news reporting. The paper foregrounds this dynamic function as well as critiques the role of Twitter as a participatory news resource for journalists' engagement with respect to political news in the nation and across the world. Twitter has become the informative site with over 320 million Twitterati (PEW Report, 2015). The primary focus of this paper is to understand how Twitter has developed as the most used social networking site by the Journalists for accessing and sharing Political News and to explore the motivations of Journalists for using Twitter for the purpose of political news sharing and participation in news related discussions.

Keywords— Social media, SNS, political news, digital governance, participatory communication, social networking websites, instant communication, crowd-sourcing, hash tag, news jacking, social commerce, Twitterati, Viral, micro-blogging, Newsfeeds.

I. INTRODUCTION: EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: FROM TELEGRAM TO TWITTER

Social media has captured the pole position in the mediascape with 2.3 billion active users in the world (Smith, 2016). The total population on social networking sites has collectively risen by 1.76 million in the last one year alone (Smith, 2016). Friends, family, events, LIVE streaming, .gif pictures, videos, emoticons, latest news and all the brands are packaged and present right there in one social networking website. The emergence of social networking sites in the early twentieth century has made communication easier, cheaper and quicker and resulted in rapid growth in social media usage. It was not so easy 20 years ago for a person in India to communicate with friends in the USA within seconds. Letters took days to reach and a telephone call was very expensive. Not so long ago receiving incoming calls on mobile also cost upwards of 16 rupees per minute. Today, communication with people around the world is possible with the tap of a finger and social media has made massive contributions in making this a reality.

In pre-digitized India, when cellular phones and e-mails were absent from the domestic mediascape, telegram was used as the classic medium of grievance redressal. Citizens wrote to the government, pleading for speedy action, which facilitated inter-personal communication between the providers (government officials) and the seekers (citizens). However, those complaints were not published in the existing print news media. Modernization bought with itself

electronic media Radio and Television as popular, mass media for infotainment, largely based on one-way communication and gate keeping with slow or no scope of receivers' feedback. With the advent of the telephone and e-mails, the two-way communication process was amplified; but only up to the sender-receiver extent, affordability and access remained as the primary barriers. In the context of grievance redressal, wide communication gap between the ministers, policy makers and the complainants magnified the common lack of trust further in the government machinery and made the system porous for corruption to creep in. However, the advent of new media transformed the dynamics of inter-personal as well as mass communication in the post-modern scenario.

Participatory digital governance through online portals has facilitated easy bill payment, enquiries, making requests and seeking information, thus opening up feedback opportunities. Apart from the helpline registries and online government portals, the online platform has proven to be quicker, simpler and effective in grievance redressal. Social media led governance paradigm in India consists of an e-platform called responsive24x7 government which has been initiated by the present government, so that a citizen can communicate their issues, concerns and suggestions anytime and from anywhere. Apart from the government websites solely dedicated to e-grievance redressal, it is the social networking site (SNS) Twitter, which is being effectively utilized by the government ministries for addressing people's issues, establishing an instant communication link between the government and the people. The consumer is smartened by the new, participatory mechanism wherein the complaints can be digitally registered and redressed with ample attention paid by the concerned ministries. Therefore, the social networking sites not only offer an alternate mechanism for grievance redressal but also democratize the process.

II. TWITTER ADOPTION BY JOURNALISTS FOR POLITICAL NEWS

A. Amplification of Political News via Twitter

Twitter has 317 million monthly active users around the globe (Statista, 2016) and 59% of Twitter users follow news on this social networking website. According to the PEW Report (2015), the percentage of Twitter users accessing news on this website has increased from 52% in 2013 to 63% in 2015. The number of social media users who access 'Breaking News' on Twitter has almost doubled in the last three years. This supports the idea that Twitter is the most accessible and widely used social networking website for current news consumption, particularly in relation to political news.

In the recent past, Twitter has emerged as the participatory digital media channel that not only serves as a tool of networking and entertainment but also works as an informative tool for accessing news. Electronic news accessed via Twitter helps users keep themselves up to date with the current happenings. The three pillars of news media – *Truth*, *Fairness* and *Objectivity* are also applicable for the news shared on Twitter. It is observed that with the growth in usage patterns of Twitter and Facebook, there is an upward shift in the powerbase, empowering the common man to participate in the news-making and news sharing process, unlike conventional models of communication when news followed the *Two-Step Flow Theory* (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955) wherein news flowed in the linear fashion from the influential group of people to the larger masses. However, the rules of *Agenda Setting Theory* (Mc. Comb and Shaw, 1968) still hold relevance in the context of social media news. Every news channel or newspaper has a political and corporate alliance, which needs to be understood by the 'active users' (Gerbner, 1972) before reading the news. Therefore, news even on social media platforms is politically dominated and strategically filtered by the influential gatekeepers. These gatekeepers set the agendas by giving prime value to certain selected issues so that social media users view, tweet and follow those selected news items. Moreover, these news items are packaged in a way that suits the interests of the sponsors and corporate allies. Social media users in India are living in a smart age where information is available at the tap of their finger. However, maturity and smartness of the user also lies in knowing about the power structures of news channels and newspapers to understand the political nature of the presented news items.

B. Review of Literature

Murthy (2011) investigates whether Twitter has changed normal people into resident columnists; for whom news perusing takes after or whether their voices are only subsumed by customary media. The study enquired whether, "Twitter has truly delivered another space in which standard individuals definitively connect with normal individuals around the globe who have rich insider accounts relating to different types of financial life?" Murthy (2011) further contends that conventional individuals on Twitter are creating news and devouring news (particularly "breaking news") delivered by other standard individuals. Miniaturized scale blogging on sites like Twitter has been considered with regards to resident news coverage, where people perform a portion of the systematized correspondence elements of the

expert writer, regularly giving the principal records, pictures or video of a news occasion (Ingram, 2008). Boyd et al. (2010) recommend that Twitter messages permit people to be incidentally mindful of exchanges without being supporters. The effect of these online networking supports on news utilization can be unmistakably measured through online records of client activity and conduct. In 2009, Twitter and other online networking rose as effective apparatuses for dispersing data and assembling nationals, for example, dodging the blue pencils in Iran and conveying from the quake fiasco zone in Haiti. The lion's share of Internet clients (59%) now utilize some sort of online networking, including Twitter, blogging and organizing locales. ("State of the News Media," 2010)

C. Theoretical Framework

The subject matter of the paper is closely related to the Diffusion of Innovation Theory proposed by Everett Rogers (1962) which investigates how the new media innovation diffuses among the various strata of the society over a period. Rogers suggested that for any new technological innovation, there are five categories of adopters Innovators are the scientists or researchers who introduce a new product or service; Early Adopters are the first to adopt the new media technology (e.g. opinion leaders or those with affluent socio-economic status); Early Majority are those in close contact with opinion leaders and adopt it on recommendations; Late Majority are sceptics and adopt after majority has adopted an innovation; Laggards are the last to adopt a technological innovation. This category includes people with limited financial liquidity. They may be orthodox or unwilling to accept new things. Theories that extend the discourse of the paper and are contextual for this research study are mentioned below.

Philip Tichenor developed knowledge Gap Theory in 1970. It says that knowledge is a commodity, which is not equally distributed throughout the society. As the technological value of media increases, political news information becomes available online with limited educated users. Magic Bullet / Hypodermic Needle Theory is a theory of media effects developed during 1950s. It says that media is like a magic gun or a syringe (injection needle) and the audience are passive receivers without any autonomy of choice or control. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) developed by Fishbein and Ajzen in 1975. According to this theory, a person's behaviour (action) is guided and reasoned by his/her intentions. Our behavioural intentions are based on attitudes and subjective norms build over a period of time. Attitude of a person is composed of evaluation of the situation and the strength of beliefs related to the situation. Subjective norms are further categorized as normative beliefs and motivational beliefs.

D. Research Methodology

The fundamental objective of this research is to analyse the recent growth of Twitter as news oriented platform for following political news. Editors and sr. journalists have been the primary respondents for the study across the country. The study followed the methodological approach of triangulation for data gathering purposes. The methodology of the study included two primary tools of research Questionnaire and Personal Interview and the secondary tools of research included Textbooks and Online Journals. Quantitative information was sought from primary research to understand various factors that motivate respondents to use Twitter for political news. Several select editor and journalists meeting were held with focused discussions. Ten Focus Group Discussions with news correspondents and editors working on political news beats on social networking sites were the participants in the discussion. The topic of the discussion was given to them by the researcher well in advance. The variables related to the Social networking sites identified through researcher's review of literature were given to the respondents. Then, the respondents selected those variables, which they assumed to be relevant for accessing political news on social networking sites. The discussion was moderated by the researcher and continued for over two hours. The survey instrument consisted of a self-administered questionnaire divided into two parts: It was aimed at capturing the demographic profile of respondents and the news following pattern of journalists for accessing political news. It was designed to capture information on the factors affecting political news adoption on SNS. These factors were relative advantage, complexity, compatibility and observability and trial ability.

E. Results of the Study

It is understood from the data given below that 38.94% journalists use miscellaneous online news sources to read political news whereas 18.48% journalists still rely on broadcast media for watching or listening to political news using television and radio respectively. About 23.76% journalists prefer newspapers and 10.23% journalists prefer newspapers and magazines respectively to accessing political news. Only about 10.23% journalists access political news using social networking sites. This means that digital news utilization by Journalists is still in its nascent stage in India.

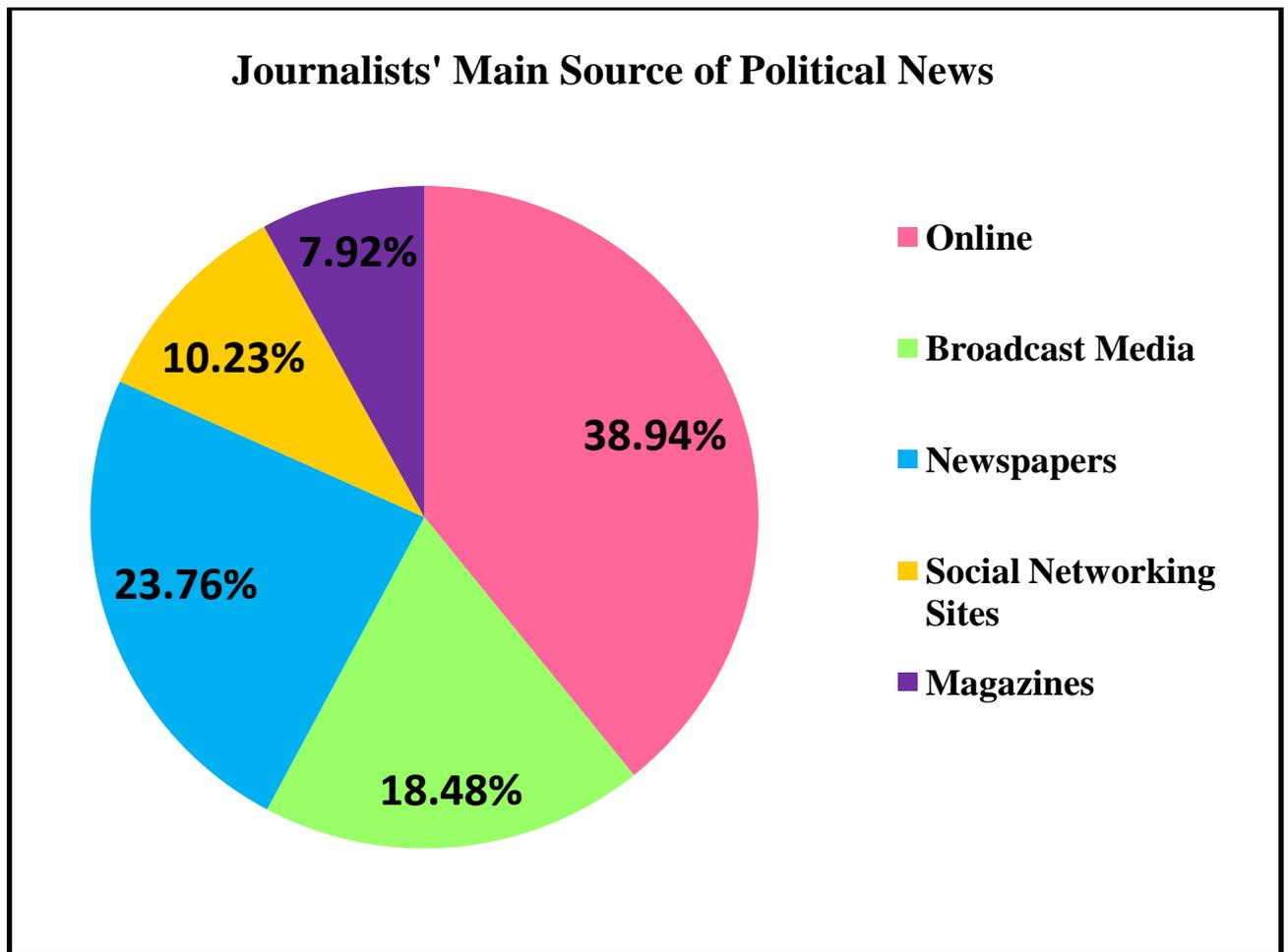


Figure 1: Representation of Journalists' various media sources of Political News

It is clear from figure 2 (below) that Twitter has emerged as the most accessed site by 45.87% journalists for reading political news. Out of all the other social networking sites, it has gained the maximum value for news correspondents who tweet and re-tweet about the news items. Facebook has evolved as the second most useful site for accessing political news with 24.75% journalists using it for political news reading. LinkedIn is the third most used site with a preference of 8.58%. Google+ and YouTube are two social networking sites with equal percentage shares of 4.62% journalists using them to access political news. Apart from these, there are around 7.59% journalists using miscellaneous social networking sites for reading political news.

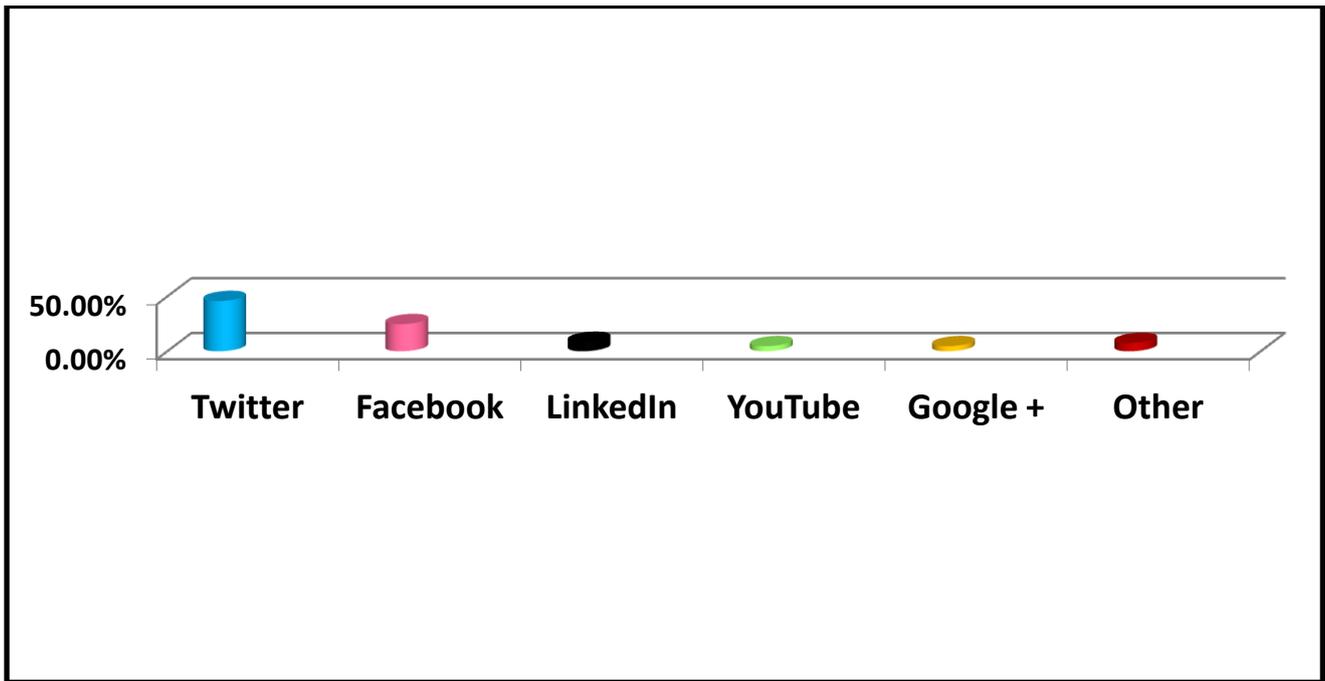


Figure 2: Favourite social networking sites of journalists for accessing political news

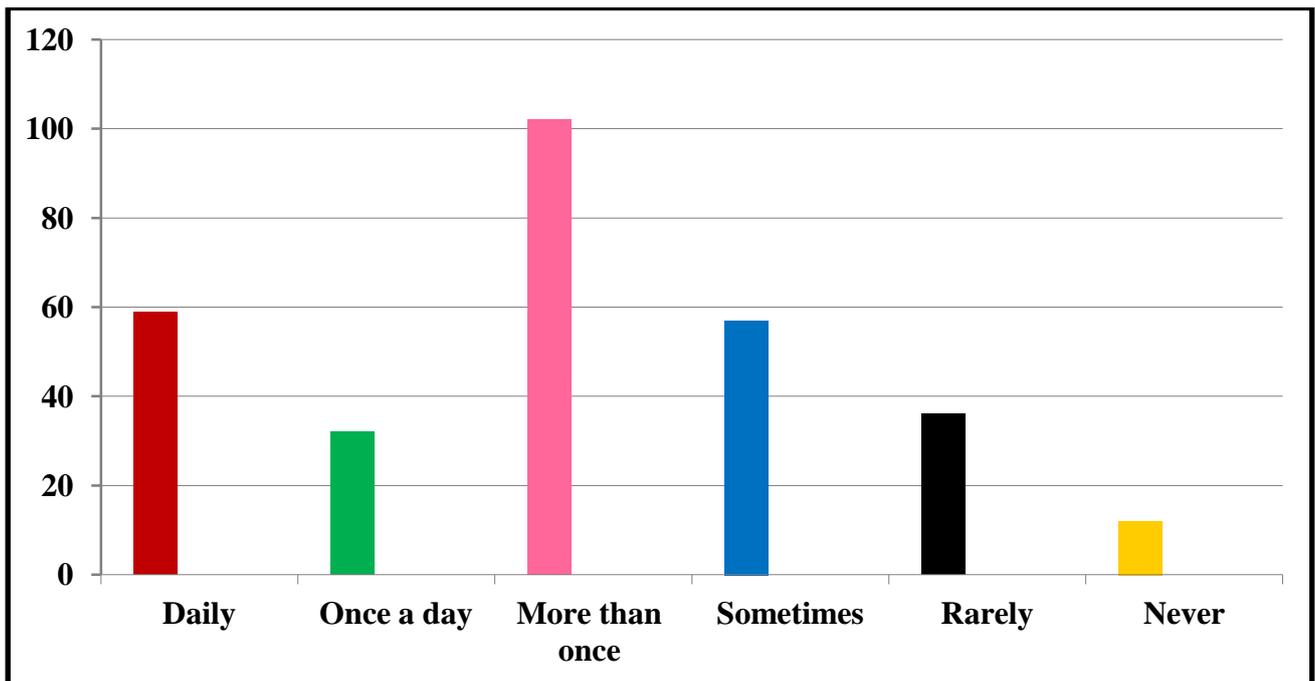


Figure 3: Journalists' frequency of reading political news in a day

It is observed from the graph (above) that 19.47% respondents use social networking site(s) on a daily basis to read political news. It also shows that there is an increase in the pattern of news reading via digital media outlets has increased. The study has revealed that 10.56% respondents use social networking site once in a day for accessing political news whereas 33.66% respondents utilize SNS more than once a day for reading political news. The graph above also shows that 11.88% respondents rarely use SNS for reading political news which implies that they have retained their strong trust on print media (newspapers) and electronic media (primarily television) for accessing authentic political news. Only 3.96% respondents have never accessed social networking sites for reading and sharing political news.

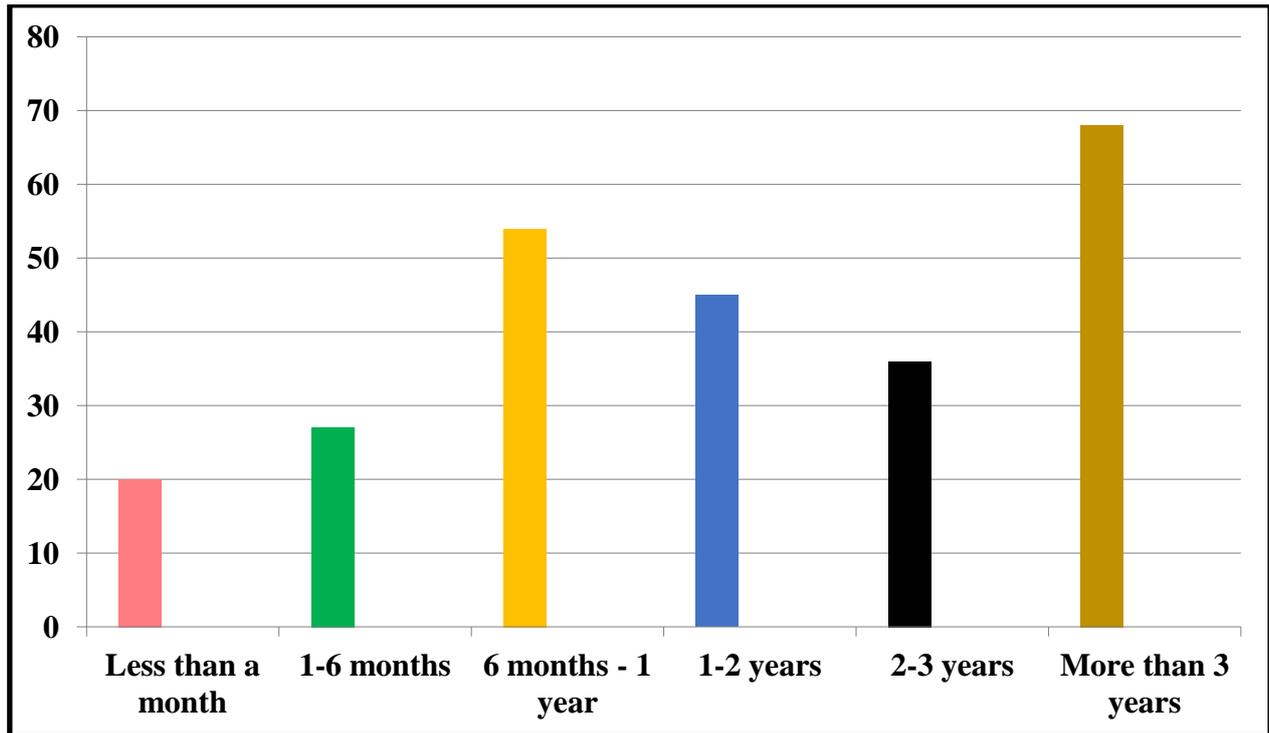


Figure 4: Time Range of Journalists engagement with Twitter for accessing Political News

It is understood from the graph (above) that 22.44% of total respondents have been using Twitter for more than 3 years and have been reading political news on it and 11.88% respondents have been using Twitter for 2-3 years and read political news on it. This shows that Twitter has grown as a consistently preferred social networking site for Indian journalists in context of political news reading. The graph reveals that 14.85% respondents have been acquainted with Twitter for 1-2 years and 17.82% respondents have been using Twitter for the last 6 months to 1 year. It shows the growing readership of political news items shared on Twitter. 8.91% respondents were comparatively new users of Twitter, who have been using it from 1-6 months along with a set of 6.60% respondents who have used Twitter for less than a month. Only 3.96% respondents have never used Twitter for political news reading and sharing.

CONCLUSIONS

Twitter has evidently risen as the most accessed social networking website by the journalists for reading and sharing the latest political news in the nation and the world. It is currently playing an intriguing role in the news making process by empowering journalists with quick facts and figures and involving them and the mass users in the loop of several debates of political concern. News sharing on Twitter involves participatory involvement of people in the political debates of wider public concern. The traditional mass media (mainly newspapers and television) offered only one-way communication in terms of political news leaving less or no scope for receivers' feedback. The designing of social networking sites especially Twitter has come to alter this approach by offering two-way communication in terms of audience feedback to the posted political news items. It has broken the hegemonic chain of news making that involved gatekeepers who served filtered political news, framed with their political motivations and inclinations intact. Twitter has allowed masses to create a buzz and has given a platform of discussion to the people from which news ideas are picked up by the journalists who are always in search of profitable newsworthy items of news.

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