

The influence of social media as a mode of campaigning during the 2015 presidential elections in Sri Lanka

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Facebook® is probably among the most popular and well known social media sites for election campaigns in different parts of the world. In Sri Lanka, internet usage has grown fast during the last few years. Prior to 2015, the main political parties in Sri Lanka hosted their party websites and a few national politicians maintained news websites. The 2015 presidential election was a turning point in the history of socio-political movements and Facebook election campaign. The present study aims to present the findings of a qualitative and quantitative content analysis of the Facebook pages of the two presidential candidates. The sample contained 150 Facebook posts during the last two months of the 2015 Presidential election campaign in Sri Lanka. The objectives of the study were to identify the different elements of the statements of influence, campaign strategies by the users, and the additional roles that the Facebook pages play in the campaigns. The results indicate that Facebook have a significant effect on the political campaign during the presidential election of 2015. Findings show that both candidates used an emotional and motivational appeal to create social capital that the campaigns wished to control the message displayed on the pages by posting information and to present a personal image that revealed very little of their personal lives. Statistical analysis shows the numbers of comments and likes given to the posts were influenced by the element of persuasion used on the posts. Users view Facebook mainly as an channel to exert influence and as a means to gain social prestige.

Key wards: Political campaign, social media, Facebook, presidential elections, politicians, Sri Lankan politics