

Political Psychology in the Digital Era: A study on the Political behaviour in Kerala

Dr. Binoj Jose

Prajyoti Niketan college, Pudukad, Kerala
binojjose@prajyotinetan.edu.in

ABSTRACT:

The psycho analysis on the influence of social media reveals that the social media provides a sense of belonging, increases trust and bondage and reconnects people. This happens in the political sphere too. The social media friendship also has a pivotal role in politically educating the people. First, the perceived intimacy of social network contacts should increase the psychological impact of political appeals. The state of Kerala finds a premier place in use of social media. There is a high level penetration of the use of smartphones and internet in the state. Digital Kerala will definitely find a transcending change in the political participation, behaviour and culture. Along with the existing socio-economic and educational standards, the greater number of social media usage would certainly provide a better place for digital politics. The sum total of the changes in these political cultures would rather engender similar variation in the political behaviour of the state of Kerala

Received on 22Nov 2020; Revised and Accepted on 15 Dec 2020 and Published in January 2021

INTRODUCTION

Political culture of every region is undergoing tremendous shifts in this digital era. This is because the new social media has a massive impact on the political process, particularly, on political socialisation. Kerala is a small costal state located at the Southern tip of the Indian Union. The state is unique in its socio-political and educational spheres. The political culture and process in the state is different from other states of India. It democratically elected the first communist government in 1957. Infact, the civil society in Kerala is very active and it has a very high political participation denoting the presence of participant political culture. The demography and the topography of the state is also quite different. Even, amidst the rich diversity existing in the society, social democracy has succeeded in the state. The Kerala model parenting is also different that there is a considerable influence that the family make on the children, especially on the socialisation process. The process of political socialisation is also heavily influenced by the family. However, this traditional socialisation process have undergone broader shifts in the digital era, where the new social media has absorbed the role of a powerful socialising agent. The new social media has created a new culture of digital marketing, digital governance and digital civic engagements in the state. Indeed, the political psychology of the state of Kerala has been remapped by this digital culture of the people particularly of the youth.

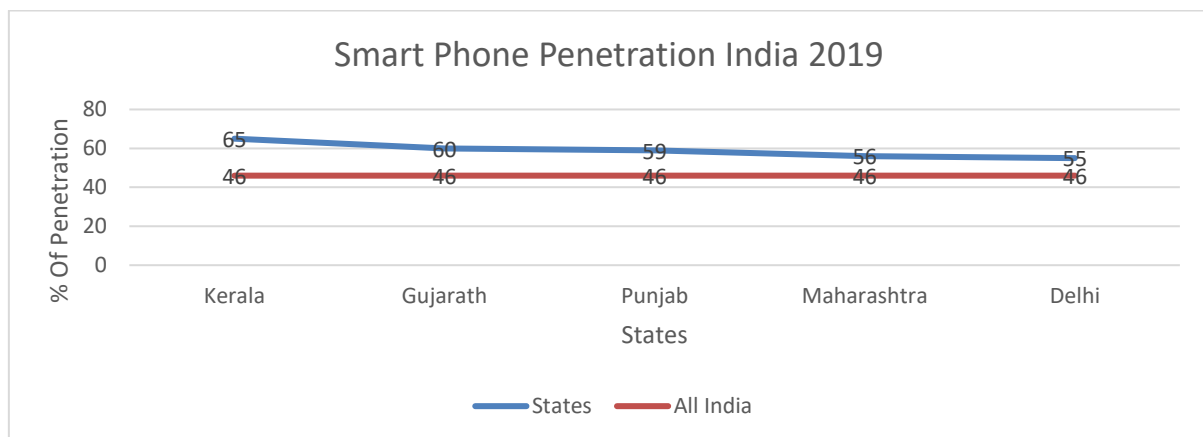
Now, social media influence the shaping of personal political attitudes in the political process of a nation.

Political culture is the sum total of the behaviours of the people towards the political system. It is affected by the past history and tradition of the country. People's beliefs, symbols and values structure both their attitude to the political process and, crucially, their view of the regime in which they live. Social media influence the political behaviour of the people and the general political psychology of the society. The social media friendship also has a pivotal role in politically educating the people. First, the perceived intimacy of social network contacts should increase the psychological impact of political appeals (Davis & Rusbult, 2001; Yu, 2016). Social media help in disseminating political ideologies, nationalism, patriotism etc. For example, the Social media that depict negatives aspects of politics produces political cynicism in the society where people are indifferent to politics or political process. On the contrary, social media that shows positive aspects of politics causes political efficacy where there is a good level political participation (Varghese; 2013). The attitude of the people towards politics gets changed as they get in touch with political information. In a study on the impact of social media in the political culture in Kosovo, Camaj Lindita, suggests that the more people use mass media for political information, the more they tend to participate in different forms of political actions (Camaj, Lindita; 2011). It is the digital space in which individuals can directly and actively submit and access information, develop their political knowledge, and get involved in political debates, overcoming time lags, geographical distances and often hierarchical dynamics existing in some communities (Calderaro; 2018)

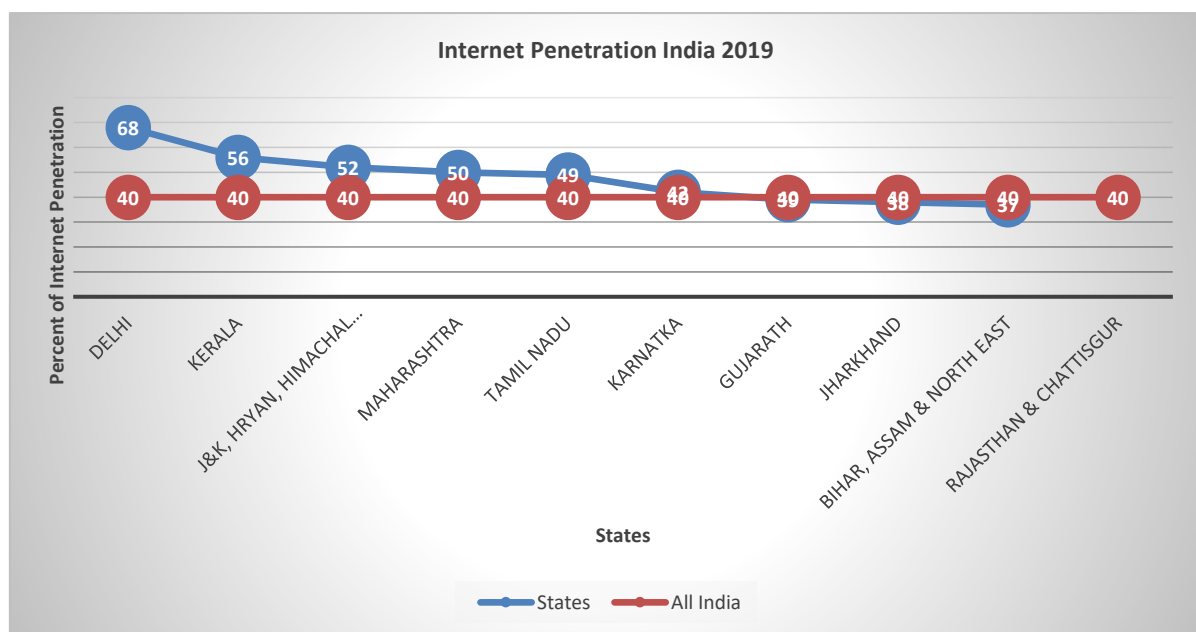
Kerala in the Digital Space

In this digital era the use of the social media has quadrupled all over the world and no region or no society is an exception to this trend. The significance of this trend is that it has brought the youth and women, traditionally passive sections, to be very active in the Socio-economic and political spheres. The state of

Kerala finds a premier place in use of social media. There is a high level penetration of the use of smartphones and internet in the state. The influence of the new media is very high as around 40 % of the population of the state belonging to the age group of 15-50 are actively involved in the social media. The factor of digital divided shall not be discarded here. However, being a state with highest literacy rate and higher living standards, Kerala has a very minimum digital divide.



(Source: Source: Internet & Mobile Association of India: 2019)



| Internet Penetration Across India 2019 Top Ten Positions | | |
|---|--------|------------|
| Sl. No | States | Percentage |
| 1 | Delhi | 68 |
| 2 | Kerala | 56 |

| | | |
|--|---|----|
| 3 | Haryana, Himachal Pradesh & Jammu and Kashmir | 52 |
| 4 | Maharashtra | 50 |
| 5 | Tamil Nadu | 49 |
| 6 | Karnataka | 42 |
| 7 | All India | 40 |
| 8 | Gujarat | 39 |
| 9 | Jharkhand | 38 |
| 10 | Bihar, Assam & North East | 37 |
| 11 | Rajasthan & Chhattisgarh | 35 |
| Source: Internet & Mobile Association of India; 2019 | | |

The immense impact of the new social media on the political process, especially, on political socialisation need to be discussed here. The question of political alienation revolves around three major situations such as digital divide, political apathy and spread of fake news. Traditionally, the family and the local social groups had a very powerful influence on the political socialisation process. The process of political decision making, even, electoral politics was highly influenced by the parents and the siblings of the family. However, various studies have rightly pointed out that there is a substantial change in the influence of family on the youth in the digital era. Indeed, this is also reflected in the political process also. The political character of the society is redrawn by the new social media. These virtual platforms have provided a very successful space to the people for political engagements- addressing political issues and even participating in movements that have ramifying political effects. This has brought about a new shift in the political culture of the society, ensuring very effective political participation, even of the 'traditionally politically passive' groups. The most visible political participation is the electoral participation, which involves election campaign, political discourse and voting. The high level penetration of the new social media has brought tremendous shifts in the electoral politics. This could be very clearly understood by analysing the post three elections held within two years- Lok Sabha election April 2019, Panchayat election December 2020, and Legislative Assembly election April 2021- in the state. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and WhatsApp were widely used for election propaganda by the political parties and candidates and their supporters throughout these elections. Facebook is arguably the most popular social networking site at least among the Indian teenagers because of its user friendly interface, opportunity for relaxation and the chance of maintaining relationships. There are students who log into facebook as their first activity of a day (Varghese & Nivedhitha, 2012). Since it is very clear that this behaviour of the youth was the major target of the political parties during the time of the election

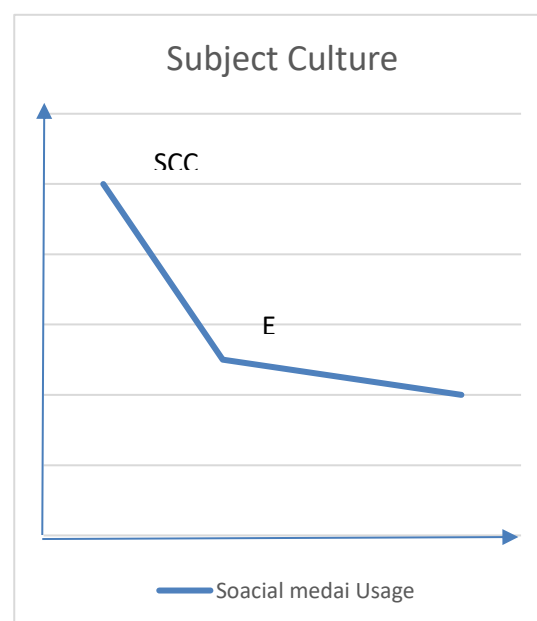
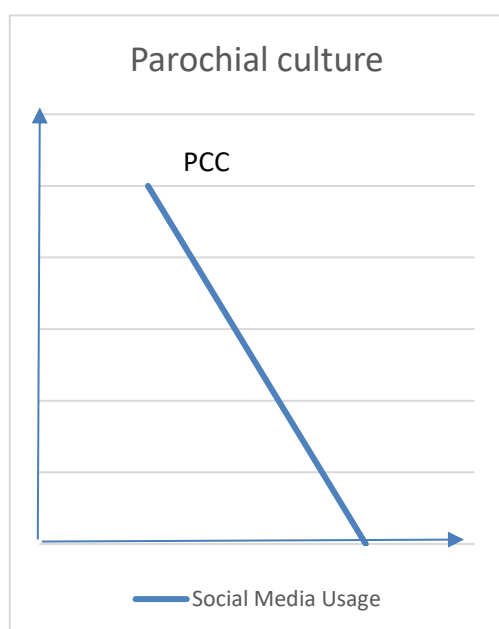
campaign. Major Political parties tried to create maximum followers in Social media, BJP with 7.16 Lakh followers, possessed more followers in Face Book, followed by CPM (6.72 Lakh) and Congress (2.98 Lakh). However, Congress occupied the first place in Instagram followers (48.5 K) followed by CPM (263K and BJP (20 K). These Political parties had set up cyber teams to lead the virtual the election campaign. The digital campaign of Indian National Congress was led by Mr Anil Antony, son of AK Antony former defence Minister (SR Praveen: 2021). LDF and UDF have created over 1000 What App Groups each for election propaganda. Each party has set up digital war rooms. The thrust of the social media activities of each alliance was different though their primary aim was to capture political power. UDF focussed on disclosing corruptions of the Government, LDF focussed on busting fake news and NDA focussed on development (G Rajesh: 20201). Infact, this political behaviour of the people of Kerala provides for a strong support to digital democracy. The e- services of the government is very effectively utilised by the people in Kerala. This happens because of the socio-economic and educational development within the state

Digital Kerala and the Political Culture

Digital Kerala will definitely find a transcending change in the political participation, behaviour and culture. Along with the existing socio-economic and educational standards, the greater number of social media usage would invariably provide a better place for digital politics. The political psychology of the state denotes a very active student political participation of the youth that even amidst the strong protest against student politics, campus politics is live in the state. This attitude of the youth coupled with the active involvement in the social media networks will form a new face to the political behaviour. The existing political culture- a blend of parochial, subject and participant cultures- will find similar changes. The existing parochial culture in Kerala will quickly vanish due to the use of the social media. Psychological studies reveal that the frequent exposure to the political news through the social media will force to see, read or hear

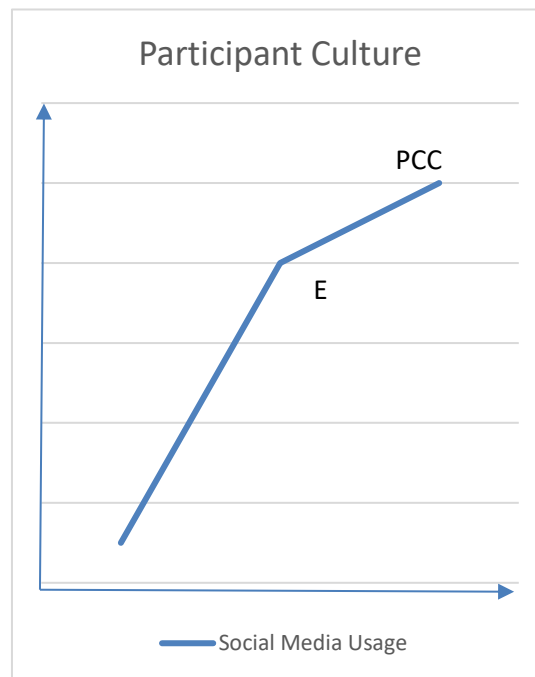
the news and respond. Therefore, political alienation, political apathy and political cynicism will slowly disappear. However, the indifference to technology may be discussed here. The mere provision of IT resources does not automatically assure digital equality but require strong motivation to reap the benefits of IT. Psychological factors can also act as a hindering element among people from embracing IT into their lives. A considerable proportion of population remains at the negative side of the digital divide due to attitudinal differences. Van Dijk (2012) remarked that there are not only 'have-nots', but also 'want-nots' considering digital technology. Anxiety towards IT and technophobia may lead to reluctance in embracing new technological advancement among old age and uneducated people and also among a large part of women population (Van Dijk, 2012; Aswathi & Haneefa, 2015).

In the figure the Parochial Culture curve is Downward sloping from the left to right, showing a fall in the parochial culture and the speed of this fall is greater than one $PCC > 1$. In figure the subject culture is represented. Along with getting more information on political events, people get better space to response through the social media. The subject culture therefore, will fall initially at a greater pace. However, this initial pace will not be found in the later period due to reluctance of the people to respond to and participate in political activities. In the figure the subject Culture Carve (SCC) is downward sloping from left to right. At point E slope of the curve is reduced indicating slow response and political participation.



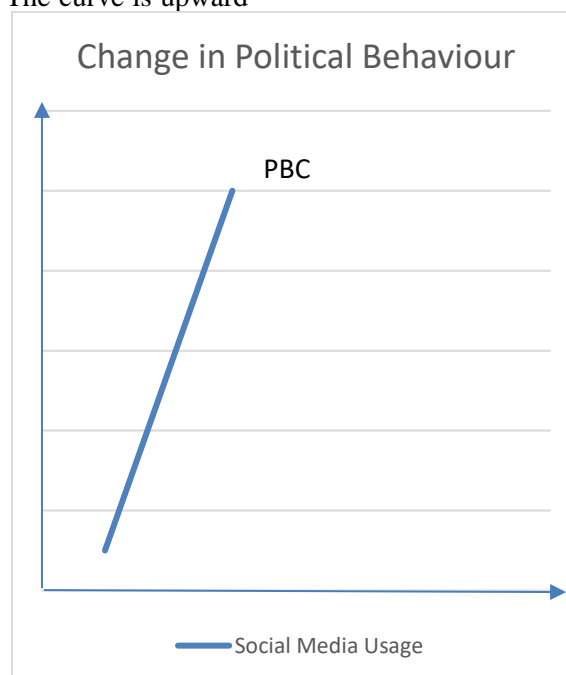
The change in the participant culture is represented in the figure below. Since social media provides a better space for getting political information and respond to such information, political participation will rise at a greater pace initially. However, the presence of political apathy and cynicism slow down the political participation. In the figure The curve PCC represents the change in the participant culture. Initially the curve

is moving upward with a quick speed and in the later period from Point E it slows down. Another fact about the political participation is the presence of non-cognitive participation. This happens because social media enhances the facilities to participate in the political process. The political information is not properly understood but they respond to the information.



The sum total of the changes in these political cultures would rather engender similar variation in the political behaviour of the state of Kerala. The figure below represents the change in the political behaviour that would be caused by social media. The curve is upward

sloping from left to right, showing a quick change in the political behaviour, where the change is greater than one i.e. change in PBC > 1



Conclusion

The influence of the new social media on social cognition needs to be discussed here. The advantage of the social media is new broadcasting as well as re-sharing the older ones which can very powerfully influence the cognitive behaviour of the people. This indeed is reflected in the political sphere too. The major shifts in the political behaviour in the digital era are:- a.

reducing the role of family as an agent of political socialisation; b. strengthens social democracy; c. enhances the political participation of women and youth, the traditionally passive groups. The psycho analysis on the influence of social media reveals that the social media provides a sense of belonging, increases trust and bondage and reconnects people. This happens in the political sphere too. Psychological studies disclose that media makes very powerful impact on the

future of the society and human perceptions. Social media satisfies five psychosocial needs such as showing affection, venting negative feelings, gaining recognition, getting entertainment, and fulfilling cognitive needs (Waller & Süß; 2012). This, infact, includes the political perceptions of the people. There are visible examples of how social media emotionally mobilise people. The Arab Spring is the best example. In India the social media protest on the Delhi rape case and its influence on judiciary is another illustration. The state of Kerala has also witnessed a good number of protests through social media which have directly or indirectly connected to political process. Political parties and candidates attempt to emotionally and mentally mobilise the people through social media. Therefore, the state of Kerala is really in the forefront of the digital politics and the political behaviour of the state is getting transformed with the high influence of the new social media.

Reference

Abdul Fahad (2017): "Psychological Impact of Social Media On Youth In India" *International Journal of Law, Education, Social and Sports Studies (IJLESS)* Volume: 4, Issue 3, 2017 (July-Sept.);Page 41-48 ISSN:2455-0418 (Print), 2394-9724 (online)

Andrea Calderaro, (2018): Social Media and Politics, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication>
Knutson, J. N. (Ed.). (1973). *Handbook of political psychology*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

(Camaj, Lindita (2011). Media Use and Political Trust in an Emerging Democracy: Setting the Institutional Trust Agenda in Kosovo, *International Journal of Communication* 8 (2014), 187–209

Davis, J. L., & Rusbult, C. E. (2001). Attitude alignment in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 81, 65–84.

Internet & Mobile Association of India (2019): 'India Internet 2019'

Judith Moeller and Claes de Vreese (2013): The differential role of the media as an agent of political socialization in Europ Amsterdam School of Communication Research, The Netherlands *European Journal of Communication* 28(3) 309 –325 [sagepub.co.uk/journals](https://www.sagepub.co.uk/journals)

Lavine, H. (2010). *Political psychology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy (2013) (ed.): *Introduction: Theoretical Foundations of Political Psychology* the Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology

Ministry of Youth affairs and Sports (2019): Social Media for Youth And Civic Engagement In India

Peter Beattie (2019) Social Evolution, Political Psychology, and the Media in Democracy <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330062013>

Praveen SR: (2021): <https://www.onmanorama.com/news/kerala/2021/04/05/kerala-election-news-battleground-social-media.html>
Quinn Kelly (2018): Cognitive Effects of Social Media Use: A Case of Older Adults Social Media + Society July-September, [sagepub.co.uk/journals](https://www.sagepub.co.uk/journals)

(Rajesh G: (2021): <https://www.onmanorama.com/news/kerala/2021/04/05/kerala-election-news-battleground-social-media.html>
Ruiz Pardo, Ana C.,(2017): "Social Media and Cognition" (2017). *Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository* . 4714. <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/4714>

Staerkle, Christian (2015): *Political Psychology* University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland Elsevier Ltd.

Varghese, Titto, Dr D Nivedhitha, Dr. Pradeep Krishnatray, (2013): Teenagers' Usage of Social Networking Media in a South Indian State, *International Journal of Scientific & Engineering Research*, Volume 4, Issue 12, 622 ISSN 2229-5518 IJSE © 2013 <http://www.ijser.org>

Van Dijk, J. A .G. M. (2012). The evolution of the digital divide: The digital divide turns to inequality of skills and usage. In J. Bus et al. (Eds.), *Digital Enlightenment Yearbook*, 2012, 57-75. doi: 10.3233/978-1-61499-057-4-57.

Victor Agnes Monica (2017): The Psychological Impact of Media on Adolescents *IOSR Journal of Nursing and Health Science (IOSR-JNHS e-ISSN: 2320-1959.p- ISSN: 2320-1940 Volume 6, Issue 1 Ver. VII PP 70-75* www.iosrjournals.org

Waller, G., & Süß, D. (2012). *Handygebrauch der Schweizer Jugend: Zwischen engagierter Nutzung und Verhaltenssucht* [The use of mobile phones by Swiss youth: The boundaries between engaged usage and behavioral addiction]. Zurich, Switzerland: Zürcher Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften

Yu, R. P. (2016). The relationship between passive and active non-political social media use and political expression on Facebook and Twitter. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 58, 413–420.