

An investigative study to identify the impact of micro-targeting on voting decisions in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

The focus of the research is to see if political parties' micro-targeting messaging have a substantial impact on voter decisions. This is a pilot study conducted with the use of a misleading research design. The respondents in this study were law students, lawyers, and judges. A structured questionnaire was used to assess 38 samples using the convenience sampling technique. From the analysis performed it was found that the majority of the respondents considered were male lawyers belonging to the age category between 25-and 35 years. It was found that there is no significant difference as per the opinions of the respondents in the impact of Micro-Targeting Messages on voters'. It was understood that the major portion of the respondents agree that they have noticed that the Public is receiving customized messages from political parties as per their search history in search engines. Further, they convey that, the micro-targeting messages despite they are fake, it is influencing the public voting decision. Further, it was identified that voter behaviour varies despite micro-targeting. It was understood that the public considers messages circulated on Social media to make a voting decision as per the opinion of the respondents. Further, as per the opinion of the respondents, the public considers news from famous channels, publishers and reporters as an important source of information to making a voting decision. It was also, found that there is a significant impact of micro-targeting messages by political parties on voters' decisions.

Keywords: Micro-targeting, Voters' Behaviour, Election Campaign.

INTRODUCTION

At both the corporate and individual levels, the advent and expansion of digital and electronic activities has resulted in an explosion in the amount of personal and private data available. Many companies have reported incidents involving the use of massive amounts of data "to make customer-cultivating strategy work." This data has recently been found being exploited for politically motivated election campaigns, with the 2012 U.S. presidential election bringing it to the forefront (Kertysova, K., 2018). The successful execution of the 2012 presidential election in the United States opened the door to a new type of data-driven electoral campaigning, for which the operational and ethical bounds

have yet to be fully defined (Bennett, C. J., 2015).

Many countries have seen circumstances of illegal infringement of personal rights as a result of the ethical and operational ambiguities around this. Political organisations in countries such as Germany "are highly interested in the deployment of individual-based campaigning strategies without considering the ramifications for personal privacy, civil liberties, and democratic ideals," according to the report (Chandra, K., 2007). In addition, India boasts the world's most diversified electoral population in terms of language, caste, creed, and colour. Given the multiplicity of facts, accurate sampling of the needed data is always a difficulty, as even a little blunder in data

selection can result in the data-driven political campaigns' entire aim being defeated. According to sources, such data-driven campaigns became popular in India starting with the 2014 general legislative elections (Gopalkrishnan, S., 2017).

Review of Literature

The collecting of data is the first step in a data-driven election campaign. Campaigns, at the very least, require precise contact information about residents, volunteers, and donors. Campaigns want to know who is participating in certain aspects of the campaign, such as providing money, volunteering, attending rallies, signing petitions, and expressing support for candidates (Chauchard, S., 2016). All of this historical data necessitates tracking citizens over time, which is problematic because people's addresses and contact details change regularly. The most difficult component of the tech-savvy campaigns, according to David W. Nickerson and Todd Rogers, was "campaigns battled to manage and integrate the numerous sources of their data" (Singh, S. S., 2019).

Digital data obtained from the internet, primarily from social media platforms, and data collected from fieldwork such as focus groups and voter list identification are among the numerous sources. As a result, the digital data acquired by campaigns in the past rarely matched the data collected in the field. The "Narwhal" computer programme, created as part of President Obama's re-election campaign in 2012, was groundbreaking in this regard because it combined all three sources of data, namely digital, field, and financial, into a single database (Geetha, K. P., 2019).

The publicly available database, which is kept by the Secretaries of State in the United States and the Election Commission of India in India, would serve as the cornerstone of all campaigns' voter databases. In India, the official voter's list comprises a unique electoral identity that includes not only the voter's name and age, but also the gender, home address with house number, father's name, and the name of the booth where the voter votes (Yawney, L., 2018).

Objectives of the Study

The study is an attempt to discover whether there is a significant impact of micro-targeting messages by political parties on voters' decisions.

Methodology

This is a pilot study made using a deceptive research design. Herein law students, lawyers and judges were considered the respondents. Herein 38 samples were considered using the convenience sampling technique through a structured questionnaire.

Analysis and Interpretation

Herein percentage analysis was carried out on the demographic profile of the respondents considered for the study.

Table No. 1: *Percentage Analysis - Demographic Profile*

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	28	73.7
	Female	10	26.3
	Total	38	100.0
Age	Less than 25 Years	10	26.3
	25 - 35 Years	16	42.1
	36 - 45 Years	10	26.3
	Above 45 Years	2	5.3
	Total	38	100.0
Designation	Law Student	10	26.3
	Lawyer	26	68.4
	Judge	2	5.3
	Total	38	100.0

Source: (Primary data)

Here for the study, the majority of the respondents considered were male lawyers belonging to the age category between 25-and 35 years.

Below performed a non-parametric analysis to identify whether there is a significant difference as per the opinions of the respondents in the impact of Micro-Targeting Messages on voters.

Table No. 2: *Non-Parametric Test – Micro Targeting*

Hypothesis Test Summary				
	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of I have noticed that the Public is receiving customized messages from voters as per their search history in search engines. is the same across categories of Gender.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	1.000 ¹	Retain the null hypothesis.
2	The distribution of The micro-targeting messages despite they are fake, it is influencing the public voting decision. is the same across categories of Gender.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.683 ¹	Retain the null hypothesis.
3	The distribution of The micro-targeting messages are generally circulated in high volume, especially during the election campaign. is the same across categories of Gender.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.503 ¹	Retain the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

¹Exact significance is displayed for this test.

Hypothesis Test Summary				
	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of I have noticed that the Public is receiving customized messages from voters as per their search history in search engines. is the same across categories of Age.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.150	Retain the null hypothesis.
2	The distribution of The micro-targeting messages despite they are fake, it is influencing the public voting decision. is the same across categories of Age.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.082	Retain the null hypothesis.
3	The distribution of The micro-targeting messages are generally circulated in high volume, especially during the election campaign. is the same across categories of Age.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.272	Retain the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of I have noticed that the Public is receiving customized messages from voters as per their search history in search engines. is the same across categories of Designation.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.075	Retain the null hypothesis.
2	The distribution of The micro-targeting messages despite they are fake, it is influencing the public voting decision. is the same across categories of Designation.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.424	Retain the null hypothesis.
3	The distribution of The micro-targeting messages are generally circulated in high volume, especially during the election campaign. is the same across categories of Designation.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.053	Retain the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Source: (Primary data)

The estimated significance value is greater than 0.05 for all the cases. Hereby the null hypothesis can be accepted. This indicates, that there is no significant difference as per the opinions of the respondents in the impact of Micro-Targeting Messages on voters.

Below is performed mean score analysis to identify the important opinion illustrated by the respondents considered for the study regarding micro-targeting.

Table No. 3: *Descriptive Statistics – Micro Targeting*

Descriptive Statistics		
	N	Mean
I have noticed that the Public is receiving customized messages from political parties as per their search history in search engines.	38	4.5263
The micro-targeting messages despite they are fake, it is influencing the public voting decision.	38	4.4737
The micro-targeting messages are generally circulated in high volume, especially during the election campaign.	38	4.3947

Source: (Primary data)

From the mean score, it was understood that the major portion of the respondents agree that they have noticed that the Public is receiving customized messages from political parties as per their search history in search engines. Further, they convey that, the micro-targeting messages despite they are fake, it is influencing the public voting decision.

Below performed a non-parametric analysis to identify whether there is a significant difference as per the opinions of the respondents in the impact of Micro-Targeting Messages on voters' behaviour.

Table No. 4: *Non-Parametric Test – Voting Behaviour***Hypothesis Test Summary**

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of The public considers messages circulated on Social media to make a voting decision. is the same across categories of Gender.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.568 ¹	Retain the null hypothesis.
2	The distribution of The public considers news from famous channels, publishers and reporters as an important source of information to make a voting decision. is the same across categories of Gender.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.782 ¹	Retain the null hypothesis.
3	The distribution of Messages related to language, caste, racism, and religion generally influences my voting decision. is the same across categories of Gender.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.286 ¹	Retain the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

¹Exact significance is displayed for this test.

Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of The public considers messages circulated on Social media to make a voting decision. is the same across categories of Age.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.689	Retain the null hypothesis.
2	The distribution of The public considers news from famous channels, publishers and reporters as an important source of information to make a voting decision. is the same across categories of Age.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.173	Retain the null hypothesis.
3	The distribution of Messages related to language, caste, racism, and religion generally influences my voting decision. is the same across categories of Age.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.046	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of The public considers messages circulated on Social media to make a voting decision. is the same across categories of Designation.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.780	Retain the null hypothesis.
2	The distribution of The public considers news from famous channels, publishers and reporters as an important source of information to make a voting decision. is the same across categories of Designation.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.034	Reject the null hypothesis.
3	The distribution of Messages related to language, caste, racism, and religion generally influences my voting decision. is the same across categories of Designation.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.019	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Source: (Primary data)

The estimated significance value is less than 0.05 for some cases. Hereby the null hypothesis can be accepted. This indicates, that there is a significant difference as per the opinions of the respondents in the impact of Micro-Targeting Messages on voters' behaviour.

Below is performed mean score analysis to identify the important opinion illustrated by the respondents considered for the study regarding the impact of Micro-Targeting Messages on voters' behaviour.

Table No. 5: *Descriptive Statistics – Voting Behaviour*

Descriptive Statistics		
	N	Mean
The public considers messages circulated on Social media to make a voting decision.	38	4.3158

The public considers news from famous channels, publishers and reporters as an important source of information to make a voting decision.	38	4.2895
Messages related to language, caste, racism, and religion generally influence my voting decision.	38	4.2105

Source: (Primary data)

From the mean score, it was understood that the public considers messages circulated on Social media to make a voting decision. Further, the public considers news from famous channels, publishers and reporters as an important source of information to making a voting decision.

Below is performed analysis to identify whether there is a significant impact of micro-targeting messages by political parties on voters' decisions.

Table No. 6: *Regression Analysis – Impact of Micro-targeting on Voting Behaviour*

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.725 ^a	.526	.513	.31083		
a. Predictors: (Constant), Micro-Targeting						
ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3.860	1	3.860	39.952	.000 ^b
	Residual	3.478	36	.097		
	Total	7.338	37			
a. Dependent Variable: Voting Decision						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Micro-Targeting						
Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.431	.465		3.078	.004
	Micro-Targeting	.654	.103	.725	6.321	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Voting Decision						

Source: (Primary data)

The calculated R-value (0.725) indicates that there is a 72.5% relationship between Micro-Targeting messages and Voters' behaviour. Further from the R-Square Value (0.526), it was found that using Micro target as the independent variable it is possible to forecast voters' behaviour with 52.6% accuracy. Furthermore, the coefficient significant value is less than 0.05, meaning there is a significant impact of micro-targeting messages by political parties on voters' decisions.

Findings and Conclusion

From the analysis performed it was found that the majority of the respondents considered were male lawyers belonging to the age category between 25-and 35 years. It was found that there is no significant difference as per the opinions of the respondents in the impact of Micro-Targeting Messages on voters'. It was understood that the major portion of the respondents agree that they have noticed that the Public is receiving customized messages from political parties as per their search history in search engines. Further, they convey that, the micro-targeting messages despite they are fake, it is influencing the public voting decision. Further, it was identified that voter behaviour varies despite micro-targeting. It was understood that the public considers messages

circulated on Social media to make a voting decision as per the opinion of the respondents. Further, as per the opinion of the respondents, the public considers news from famous channels, publishers and reporters as an important source of information to making a voting decision. It was also, found that there is a significant impact of micro-targeting messages by political parties on voters' decisions.

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