Abstract

There is an exponential rise in the volume of media content generated and simultaneously consumed by the general public through a wide range of channels from legendary media such as television, radio and print-based newspaper, magazines to developing online platforms such as social networks, podcast and mobile applications on the internet, in the 21st century. This aim of this research was to examine the newspaper generated by Indian print media for months before leading up to the State Legislative Election and 2019 General Election held in three states, Chhattisgarh, Punjab and Karnataka which served as the three case studies. Politics is deeply associated with the electorate's perception and the media plays a pivotal role in shaping it. Combating prejudice against a political leader or a party is a challenging task in current multicultural societies such as that of India. Mass media can decisively shape prejudice and electoral 'mood' because it often represents the main source of information for general masses. There is very little research that captures the causal effect of different media features on attitudes toward different important political events, such as granular state legislative elections and its effect on the General Parliamentary elections. This research work distinguishes it from other work conducted in a similar domain by using political sentiment expressed in news articles during several State Elections held in India and uses it as a proxy for observing the impact it had on the Indian General Election using the sentiment and political features extracted using sentiment Analysis.

The newspaper data was collected using an authoritative third-party data aggregator, LexisNexis. The sentiment analysis was performed using a dictionary-based lexicon approach in conjecture with a "bag-of-word" and vector space model. The Rocksteady affect analysis system was used to calculate negative sentiment affect time series data for all three case studies. Descriptive statistical analysis along with correlation heatmap and newspaper polarity were conducted using the political factor sentiment time-series generated by the program. The statistical significance of the features extracted from the news articles allowed this study to compare the results of two elections. The key finding from this study indicated the rise in overall negative sentiment communicated in the newspaper in the two elections. It observed that the winners of state elections saw a reduction in the negative sentiment expressed against them in subsequent general elections. A rise in coverage for the winning party in the state election was also noted across all case studies. This lower negative sentiment and higher media coverage do not necessarily translate to victory. Political features such as political leaders and parties in the news articles also had a considerable effect on the results. Although state election influenced the sentiment expressed in the English newspaper which subsequently shaped the electoral perception, with the given data and results observed for the scope of this study it is not reasonable to extrapolate the results of state election and predict the results of the national-level General Election in India.