Social Marketing Intervention – An empirical study on awareness of Systematic Voter Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) among youth – the student segment

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Abstract

Background: The Election Commission of India (ECI) adopted Social Marketing principles and applied its techniques as voter outreach programs (SVEEP - Systematic Voter Education and Electoral Participation), to influence voter behavior.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to analyze the extent of awareness of SVEEP (Systematic Voter Education and Electoral Participation) among the student segment.

Methodology: This is a study using primary data collected through survey (using a structured questionnaire) from 100 respondents. A 5-point Likert scale is used to register the respondent’s scoring on awareness of SVEEP, a Social Marketing intervention.

Findings: The majority of the respondents are quite aware of SVEEP, though not equally among students of all academic disciplines. The SVEEP programs organized in the college premises are not known to greater number of students. The respondents hardly discuss on elections or electoral processes among peer groups exhibiting apathy apparently. The respondents’ perception on the knowledge of the student community and their own knowledge and understanding on the electoral process appears to be bleak.

Practical Implications: This study has generated a useful compilation of data that reveals several practical applications worthy of future study. To battle electoral apathy among youth segment is not a petite task. Therefore, a relevant mix of strategies appealing to the youth/student segment is essential. Also, the channel of dissemination of information should not be confined to the Elections Department alone, but must be diffused by various other sources including, academic curriculums, schools and other educational institutions, NGOs and other groups in the community as well.

Originality/Value: Although Social Marketing has grown in popularity and has witnessed wide usage in enhancing public health, research on social marketing in influencing voter behavior is very limited. This paper, therefore, is a pioneering attempt to study the awareness of SVEEP, a Social Marketing intervention and the knowledge, understanding and eventually the behavioral trend of youth towards electoral processes.

Keywords: Social marketing, SVEEP, voter behavior, youth, electoral apathy, electoral participation

Introduction

The term Social Marketing was first introduced as “the use of marketing principles and techniques to advance a social cause, idea or behavior” (Kotler and Zaltman). Social Marketing is a process that applies marketing principles and techniques to create, communicate and deliver value in order to influence target audience behaviors that benefit society as well as the target audience (Kotler, Lee and Rothschild, 2006 cited in Kotler & Lee, 2008). Social Marketing is the adaptation of commercial marketing technologies to programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences to improve their personal welfare and that of the society of which they are a part of (Andreasen’s 1995).

The paper analyses the efficacy of SVEEP (Systematic Voter Education and Electoral Participation) (2009-2014) strategies exclusively among youth, the student segment. SVEEP is
deployed by the Election Commission of India as Social Marketing interventions to influence voter behavior.

Conceptual Background

Youth is a creative force and a dynamic source of innovations. Throughout history they have participated, contributed, and even catalyzed important changes in political systems. The United Nations Development Program 2012 states that Young people between the ages of 15 and 25 constitute a fifth of the world’s population (Enhancing Youth Political Participation, UNDP 2012). Though the fact remains, the entire world is noticing a lack of confidence and trust in the traditional, long established system of democracy, particularly by the youngsters (Youth Participation in Politics and Elections).

The 2013 report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda regards young people as a vital asset for society: “Today’s adolescents and youth ... are shaping social and economic development, challenging social norms and values, and building the foundation of the world’s future”. Unfortunately, they remain often sidelined in formal decision-making processes. Voter turnout among youth ages 18-25 continues to be lower than other age groups and they are less likely to join political parties. The challenge of youth electoral apathy, political participation and engagement persists, and no democratic political system can claim to be legitimate if youth is excluded and disengaged from democratic processes. This electoral apathy and disengagement from traditional politics translates into the under-representation of youth as a segment of society within the institutions of democracy and national parliaments. This, in turn, leads to poor representation of the overall interests of youth and to their exclusion from democratic political processes and institutions (UNDP, 2013).

India has an unrivalled youth demographic wherein about 65% of its population is under the age of 35. ‘As estimated by demographers, the average age of an Indian will be reduced to twenty-nine years by 2025. Their participation in elections will help a plural society and secular polity. Furthermore, it is a reminder to the youth of their rights, responsibilities, representation, aspirations and transformation’ (Quraishi, 2014). To promote and enhance the understanding and participation of the people in the country’s democratic process, The Election Commission of India (ECI) adopted Social Marketing principles and applied its techniques as voter outreach programs, to educate the voters and increase people’s participation in the Electoral process through target specific interventions, eventually influencing voter behavior. One of the target segments is youth, a vital, productive and critical segment of the population. The voting awareness and behavior of this segment of the population would undoubtedly determine the strength and resilience of our adult franchise (Quraishi, 2014).

The great French thinker, Montesquieu, said in the eighteenth century: ‘The tyranny of a Prince in an oligarchy is not so dangerous to the public welfare as the apathy of a citizen in a democracy’. A bad government is the inevitable consequence of an indifferent electorate (Singhvi, Pai, Ramakrishnan,(1999), Nani Palkhivala Selected Writings). I have great hopes in our young men and women. To the youth of this country I would like to make an earnest appeal to enter public life and would commend for their consideration three maxims: 1. You must not desert the ship because you cannot control the winds. 2. It is better to try to do something and fail, rather than try to do nothing and succeed. 3. For the rebirth of morality in Indian politics, the period of gestation will prove lengthy and the delivery promises to be painful, but you cannot dedicate your life to a greater cause (Nani Palkhivala, 1997)

Initially, in 2010 the Election Commission of India adopted YUVA (Youth Unite for Voter Awareness) as an innovative approach and integrated it fully with its voter education drive. Subsequently, the ECI deployed the SVEEP activities targeting the youth segment as YVF (Young Voter’s Fest), wherein numerous competitions were conducted in Higher Educational institutions (Higher Secondary Schools, Colleges, etc), promoting positive awareness in favor of participatory democracy and elections. SVEEP is defined as “Systematic Voter’s Education and Electoral
Participation is a programme of multi interventions through different modes and media designed to educate citizens, electors and voters about the electoral process in order to increase their awareness and participation in the electoral processes. SVEEP is designed according to the socio-economic, cultural and demographic profile of the state as well as history of electoral participation in previous rounds of elections and learning thereof.” (ECI, SVEEP, India National Document (2009-2014)).

**Research Methodology**

The main objective of this study is to analyze the awareness of SVEEP (Systematic Voter Education and Electoral Participation) among youth, the student segment. Besides, this study ascertains their perception of knowledge and understanding of electoral awareness among students and self. The primary data is collected through a direct survey with the help of a questionnaire and the data was obtained from respondents who are college students from different academic disciplines. A 5-point Likert scale is used to register the respondent’s scoring on awareness of SVEEP and their knowledge and understanding on the electoral process. The sample is the convenience sampling of about a sample size of 100.

![Figure-1: Profile of respondents](image1)

![Figure-2: Voting experience of respondents](image2)

The questionnaire designed for this study concentrates on the awareness of the respondents regarding the SVEEP programs, their participation in the electoral process and their perception of knowledge on it among students and self. The questionnaire also details the demographics of the individuals.

**Findings and Analysis**

The study is conducted to investigate the awareness of SVEEP interventions among the student segment.
At the outset, the extent of awareness of SVEEP activities among students is studied, wherein 54% of the respondents are aware of the ongoing SVEEP activities, of which 35% are totally aware of it. 29% of the respondents are completely unaware. 19% of respondents from Engineering and 16% belonging to Humanities mainstream contribute to the 35% who are very much aware of the SVEEP activities in complete contrast to respondents belonging to the mainstream of Medicine, wherein 20% are completely unaware.

The median and mode for the above is calculated to study the average and the most frequented response. From the analysis, it is found that the Median is 3 and Mode 5; which infers that an average number of respondents are ‘somewhat aware’ of SVEEP and the maximum of 35% was ‘very much aware’

Secondly, the awareness of SVEEP activities conducted in the college premises of the respondents was studied and the following data is obtained. The chart below exemplifies the level of awareness of the respondents on the SVEEP activities conducted in their college premises, as per academic discipline.
Thirdly, the degree of reach of the SVEEP campaigns conducted in the college premises was studied. From the respondents reply, it is observed that the reach was not extensive and was confined to a marginal group which is less than 50% of the students.

**Figure - 6: Extent of reach of SVEEP activities**
Further, the interest and inquisitiveness of the student community on elections and electoral process was analyzed. From the above graph it is inferred that the 14% and 7% of the respondents have frequent discussions offline and online respectively. And 57% and 39% of the respondents never have discussions on the topic.

Finally, the respondents were studied for their opinion of the student community’s knowledge on the electoral process followed by their satisfaction level on their understanding and knowledge on the electoral process, as a person (self).

The graph above illustrates that 24% of the respondents strongly disagree that the student community is well informed on the electoral process, 42% of respondents neither agree nor disagree and 13% somewhat agree. The median and mode for the above is calculated to study the average and the most frequented response. From the analysis, it is found that the Median and Mode is 3; which infers that an average number of respondents, ‘Neither Agree nor Disagree’ that the Student community is well informed on the electoral process and the same response remains the most frequented among the respondents.

The diagram below shows that 19% are very satisfied on their knowledge in the electoral process, 12% are strongly dissatisfied and 48% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. The median and
mode for the data below is calculated to study the average and the most frequented response. From the analysis, it is found that the Median and Mode is 3; which infers that an average number of respondents are ‘Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied’ with their personal knowledge and understanding on the electoral process and the same response remains the most frequented as well.

![Knowledge on Electoral Process - Personal Satisfaction](image)

**Figure - 9: Knowledge on Electoral Process – Personal Satisfaction**

**Implication and Conclusion**

This study has brought to light the extent of reach of Systematic Voter’s Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) interventions by Election Commission of India among the student segment. Though the ECI has taken remarkable efforts deploying SVEEP to battle electoral apathy, this study has revealed on-field deficiencies, which when scrutinized and rectified can yield far better results.

Based on the study made on the individual users, their perception on the knowledge of the student community and their own knowledge and understanding on the electoral process appears unconfident and skeptical. Majority responses evidently exhibit doubts on their understanding of the electoral process and still seem uninterested and apathetic in discussions on the topic with peer groups.

Article 8 of Tunisia Constitution reads “Youth are an active force in building the nation. The state seeks to provide the necessary conditions for developing the capacities of youth and realizing their potential, supports them to assume responsibility and strives to extend and generalize their participation in social, economic, cultural and political development”. The United Nation’s Youth Strategy 2014-2017, titled ‘Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future’, reflects UNDP’s heightened level of engagement with and for youth in order to enhance their role as development actors and beneficiaries. The strategy seeks to address the aspirations of youth, and aims to create an enabling environment for inclusive and meaningful engagement and participation of young men and women in development discussions, formal planning, programming and decision-making processes.

Therefore, the deployment of SVEEP ought not to cease superficially; the actual intent of the program is accomplished only when the grassroots of the student segment get involved and participate. Strategies should be developed such that it uniquely appeals to the target segment and distinctly captivate the interest of the students/youth. Though the intention of SVEEP program is to increase awareness and participation of target segments in the electoral processes, its ultimate objective should serve a higher purpose of inculcating civic values and thereby influencing voter behavior.

The limitation of the study is that the respondents were confined to students (homogenous sampling). The study could be better if the sample was diverse which includes the non student segments of Youth as well. The scope of the study can be extended towards various other target segments too.
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