

Computational Politics

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Abstract - Computational politics means the application of digital targeted-marketing technologies to election campaigns in India. Computational politics is directly related to elections. Election means a formal group decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold public office. This paper examines the digital strategies and technologies of today's political operations, explaining how they were employed during the election campaign cycle of India, and exploring the implications of their continued use in the civic context. Election is a very important part of every country. Political campaigns are used during elections to pursue voters in India have employed digital technologies and are developing increasingly sophisticated tools and techniques during each election cycle, as "computational politics" have become standard operating procedure. In today's century, Online participation in political engagement has been widespread. The excessive usage of internet and social media has created a pathway for Indian politics to connect to the population in a very effortless manner. Political campaigning via social media has given the party a new way in connecting with voters. It also focuses on the evolution of political campaign and political marketing since 1991 to 2014. Political promotions attract public attention and is an elementary part of the political life. Though the application of social media is now commonly used, this research paper will also address some loopholes about strategies of political campaign and its implementation. Wide variety of techniques are used to influence public opinion of a political party, policy or candidate.

Key Words: Political Branding, Political campaign, Political promotion, Political communication, Attack advertisement, Leader centric, Traditional/conventional campaign, Hybrid information ecology, Image management, privacy, analytics.

1. INTRODUCTION

"Politics" refers to the way that countries are governed, and to the ways that governments make rules and laws. Politics is all the set of activities associated with the governance of a country or an area. It refers to achieving and exercising positions of governance—organized control over a human community, particularly a state. In India politics has taken a lot of twists and turns.

Since, India became a free nation in 1947 through what is known as 'the transfer of power'. Three major ideological influences seem to have been critical in Indian politics: colonialism, nationalism and democracy. The colonial, nationalist and democratic articulation of 'the political' remains therefore crucial in comprehending Indian politics even after decolonization.

In 1991 Lok Sabha elections, being the mid-term elections could not gain much campaigning momentum but in 1996 Lok Sabha elections INC suffered one of the worse defeats and BJP government was finally in power. The national polls in 1999 and 2004 were a watershed in India's political history for at least two reasons. Firstly, as no party involved in election had a stable vote bank Parties win or lose not because of the ideology they represent but because of their electoral strategy to muster support at the time of elections. Second, the 2004 election was also a new era for a voter's calculations. The three Ms of the 1990s – Mandal, Mandir and Market – hardly remained effective in garnering votes. Hindutva, for or against, had lost its appeal and the incumbent ruling party, BJP, had to draw on the 'India shining' campaign, which failed to sway the voters.

Political parties thus tell 'a story of gradual withdrawal from linkages of one's performance and capabilities'. The election commission at that time had strictly directed a expenditure budget for political campaigning which was around 4.15 lakh, which made the parties quit the idea of getting themselves involved in high tech campaigning tools and just stick to the traditional door to door canvassing which was termed as the first "Mohalla elections" in 1996. Letter writing was also used to influence the literate voters. As the world is crawling towards digitalization and the governance is also trying to adapt the same. The word digitalization is means converting information in any medium into a digital format or a electronic format. Nowadays, the representation of images, information, documents etc have been digitalized. Digitalization or the upcoming technologies have transformed the political behaviour in India. Internet which is the soul of digitalization is marked as a powerful medium of communication globally. The introduction to new media in the political system have transformed the way political parties work. Due to technological reach and access political parties are more attracted towards it.

In the light of above observations the present study would strive to find out the interrelationship between the socio-political fabric of the country and the communication process initiated by the social media tools and digitalization and the impact of the same on the potential voters.

1.1 The Link between Digitalization and Politics

In the light of above observations the present study would strive to find out the interrelationship between the political fabric of the country and the communication process initiated by the social media tools. As the heyday of political digital marketing continues, it is important to take stock and recognize the effects of rapid digitalization on how politicians respond to the public, to their friends and foes, and to the new policy concerns they face.

Digital communications are a growing part of local, national, and global political conversations. Learn how the use of digital forms of communications are having both positive and negative impacts on elections, policymaking, and global politics. Politics and policy have long been subjects of public discussion. Until the 20th century, face-to-face or printed materials were the only form of political communications. Information and discussions were therefore limited to a few hundred or a few thousand people at a time.

In 1920 radio began to reach out to millions of people, and by the 1940s it was used to spread political and propaganda messages globally. In the 1960s television displaced radio as political conventions, debates, and speeches were televised to hundreds of millions of people. As the reach of technology has expanded, with over two-thirds of the world's population now having a mobile phone, so has involvement of general citizens in the political process. The digital media revolution began in the early 21st century and rapidly invaded the political space. Government bodies both large and small use social media to engage with their stakeholders as well as with the general public. The word digitalization considers social media, internet, electronics, robots etc. social media has provided a virtual platform for political debates in the upcoming years. Internet marked as a powerful medium of communication globally. However, due to technological reach and access, it was more vocal in the developed countries and developing countries like India. From then it is continuously growing leap and bound and have become an integral part of the communications in political campaign. Since, the usage of social media is getting momentum in engaging the public in political debates/moves especially when the previous model of e-campaigning by political parties. Therefore, the present study would involve the recent trends in relation to the use of social media in campaigning and mobilizing the popular sentiments by political parties.

1.2 Marriage of Politics and Commerce

Since the mid-20th century, advertising has been an increasingly powerful and pervasive presence in Indian political campaigns, as a growing cadre of ad agencies, public relations firms, and consultants perfected the use of opinion polls, focus groups, and psychographics to reach and influence voters through radio, television, direct mail, and other media. With the rise of the internet, campaign operatives began to harness digital technologies and tools to mobilize voter turnout, engage young people, raise money, and support grassroots ground operations. Both major political parties in India developed large, sophisticated data and digital operations. The growth of Data driven political marketing has been a boom in the coming years and is being utilised by all the major political parties. The growing infrastructure offering intensive resources for targeting voters increased the interest of political parties having a tie up with them. For example, Developed by well-known companies such as Adobe, Oracle, Salesforce, Nielsen, and IBM, these clouds sell political data along with an exhaustive amount of detailed consumer information for each potential target, including, for example, credit card use, personal interests, consumption patterns, and TV viewing patterns. Also, Facebook and Google now play a central role in political operations, offering a full spectrum of commercial digital marketing tools and techniques, along with specialised ad "products" designed for political use. With the new upcoming technologies the communication process has become more direct, fast as well as complex.

The growth and increasing sophistication of the digital marketplace has enhanced the capacities of political campaigns to identify, reach, and interact with individual voters.

2. Indian Elections

There has been a data revolution in the study of Indian politics in recent years. Indian politics has always been a fascinating field, in comparative perspective and in its own right. Accounts of fieldwork in India have challenged and informed discussions about democracy in the developing world for decades. More recently, technological innovations and the increasing availability of online data sources have opened the door to new ways of studying Indian politics quantitatively and qualitatively. Technology in Indian elections have been utilized quite fast. In Indian there are four categories of elections namely:

1. Executive

- President and Vice-President (indirectly elected)

2. Union Legislature (Parliament of India)

- Lok Sabha (Lower house) (directly elected)
- Rajya Sabha (Upper house) (indirectly elected)

3. State Legislature

- State Assemblies (directly elected)
- Legislative Council (indirectly elected)

4. Elections to Local Bodies

- Municipal Corporation
- Gram Panchayat
- block panchayat

The word directly elected means that they are elected by the citizens of India on the basis of universal suffrage and not internally. General elections are the biggest elections in India. The trend of using electronic media and diverging from the traditional media started from general elections of 2004. It started with high tech electronic messages sent by internet on mobile phones which created a buzz. Though it could turn out to be a success at that time but political parties still kept on searching for new media tool for campaigning. The new emerging communication patterns have helped in social mobilization and increasing participation in the political campaigning process particularly through the use of social media. For instance the Anna Hazare movement.

Later in the timeline of 2014 general elections, it was observed that there was more use of digital information channels by all parties, the main parties being Bhartiya Janta Party, Aam Aadmi Party and Indian National Congress. It was seen that new media did not displace the older media but instead facilitated in the emergence of a hybrid system. It was also observed that 70% of all the internet users in India accessed the web via smartphones and there was an increase in voters using regular cell phones. The use of social media influenced and shaped the campaign information which was widely witnessed and reported especially in urban constituencies. It was found out that Narendra Modi exploited the emerging hybridity and successfully used it to benefit him as well as his party to encourage and gather new supporters. They used it so well that there was a “Modi hype or a Modi wave” in the media and among the users. BJP identified 160 digital constituencies which were in urban areas in which the party could communicate online via a social networking service to sufficient number of volunteers and potential supporters. This also included SMS and tweets via SMS who couldn't use or afford internet access. While AAP, INC and BJP each utilized digital tools, the general finding was that BJP's digital campaign was the most robust, engaging and strategic of the three parties.

2.1 Timeline of Political Campaigning Systems in India.

Political campaign is a vital part for every party as seen above. It has been carried out since the freedom struggle. Campaign strategies of Indian political parties have rarely moved away from traditional methods of broadcast campaigning of printing campaign posters, playing tv and radio ads and door-to-door campaigning. These methods have given them results in the past and so few campaign managers saw reason to change a winning strategy. There is always an apprehension about adopting something new and moving towards digital medium. Moving towards a digital medium also poses the threat of leaving out the rural voter bank who have limited access to smartphones and internet. The biggest issue faced was that there was no completely accurate voter files available to leverage targeting.

Past election campaigns made an ideology to define their party goals and it would be their loudest message. But issues and concerns are not the same for every voter and a blanket approach to campaigning does not give the desired results.

For national campaigns, the biggest reason for not adopting digital channels into their campaign is because majority of India's voting bank is rural. To win an election, a campaign needs to only target this large voting bank. Old ideas have worked well and will continue to be an easy bet. When it comes smaller campaigns like state elections, urban cities count

for a significant size in the voting bank. The Obama campaign in 2008 became a proof of concept for Indian political campaigns. Their campaign had a 100-strong analytics team that helped him rally voters and win the election. The Obama campaign brought the advantages of big data to the attention of Indian campaigners. 2014 saw a new face of election campaigning in India when Modi hired the political strategist, Prashant Kishor to manage his election campaign. The 2014 Modi campaign heavily used social media data to target voters and market their candidates. The 18 month long campaign was backed up by meticulous research done over the span of 3 to 4 years. This shows the shift and difference of the political campaign from conventional or traditional to modern techniques.

Many criticize that media disrupts politics but the researcher feel that social media has provided a virtual platform for political debates and has stimulated voting practicing among the educated class. Recently, the BJP Rally for the state assembly election held in Kharghar by Narendra Modi also made the researcher realise that most of the people coming to attend are unaware of the agenda of the meet. They people who are potential voters are sitting comfortably in front of their television watching new channel to properly comprehend and analyse the speech given by Narendra Modi in the Sabha. This indeed shows the convenience that internet, social media and other technological advancements have provided the political campaigners with. Politics is just marketing where the candidate is a product and the attributes of the candidates are being advertised and showcased. The marketing strategy in the same involves positioning of the image of the candidate which is done by conventional or modern techniques.

2.2 Research Question and Hypothesis

In India seeing the boom of the emerging technological advancements and the potentially growing importance of social media and internet marketing or campaigning the researcher is interested in knowing how social media and the excessive use of upcoming technology in political campaign leads to an increased engagement of potential voters.

Research question: Social Media is widespread and used by all political parties but Does social media and digitalization in political campaign influence voters or potential voters?

Although the face to face techniques are used and they remain to be influential, the cell phones, including smart phones have also become an important part of the tools available to political parties and citizens to influence and get influenced by the information provided. Telephone contact in forms of pop ups, SMS texts does influence potential engagement.

Hypothesis 1: sharing information electronically via social media, SMS text, Email or WhatsApp, will significantly engage the voters or potential voters and attract the young first time voters.

Hypothesis 2: information supplied because of technological advancement and digitalization does have an impact on the actions of the potential voters.

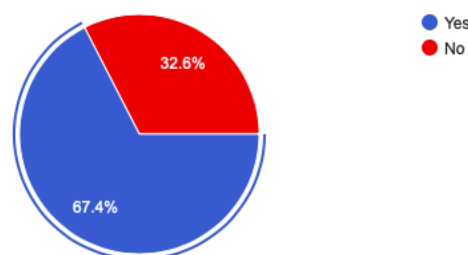
2.3 Finding and Analysis

The method used in this research paper was a survey. To prove the above hypothesis. The researcher would like to present statistical data.

Interpretation 1: 67.4 % of the respondents out of 100% do vote. Which means the right amount of audience was targeted for the survey purposes. The most of respondents who voted for the option “NO” are under age or Indian citizen living abroad. In the furtherance it is also observed that the respondent who voted “NO” as their answer are also interested in politics and follow political parties and candidates on social media as they can be potential voters or due to personal interest.

Do you vote?

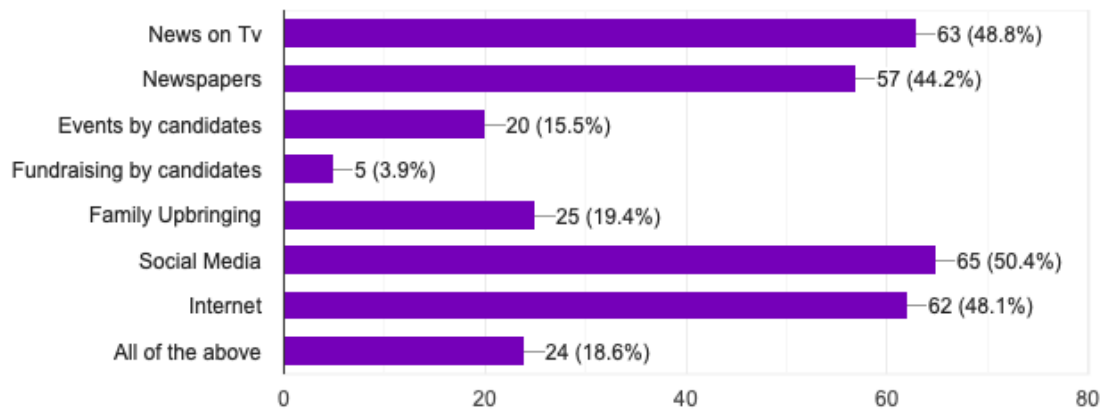
129 responses



Interpretation 2:

On what media platform do you locate the most amount of candidate data?

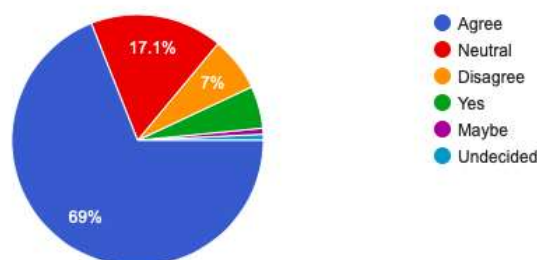
129 responses



According to the given results, it is rightly proved that respondents do use social media platforms and are actively participating in the same. It is also substantiated that respondents do locate most of the information on social media, internet and news on TV. As these three sources contain the highest amount of percentage. The reason behind bifurcating internet and social media is that internet includes all types of sources and websites, whereas social media is Apps like WhatsApp, Instagram, twitter, snapchat etc. Social Media comes under the ambit of internet but it's not the other way around. This shows that if political parties tend to shift their focus on such mediums they will be able to grab maximum attention of the target audience.

Have you noticed Social Media promoting and advertising political parties?

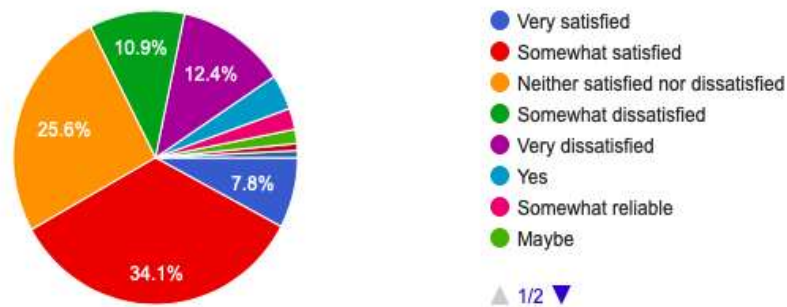
129 responses



Interpretation 3:

How do you rate social media as the authentic source to get information on a political candidate?

129 responses

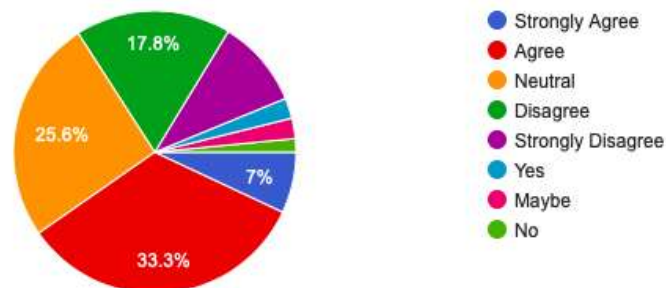


The above data manifests that most of the respondents are satisfied with the information they receive on social media. This indirectly proves our hypothesis that they are influenced by the information provided by various digital techniques. Also, authenticity can only be proved if candidates actually read, follow and take interest in the subject, the same has been proved above.

Interpretation 4:

Do you think it's right to advertise about political campaigns on social media?

129 responses



As per the results showcased most of the respondents have voted for “that they feel its right to advertise” this means that potential voters want to know more about the political parties and candidates in order to select their voting preferences. As social media is used very frequently and easily, all of the respondents look for their convenience. The survey proves that respondents do e a lot of posts and advertisements on political parties and its candidates on social media and internet as a whole. The respondents also agree that they do engage in posts related to political parties which they favor.

Thus, the researcher found two variables that are consistently important in predicting political engagement of potential voters with the campaigns of any party and that is party contact with the audience and sharing of information. This makes both the hypotheses fall true.

The researcher’s study is limited by the fact the survey is based on less number of respondents and is confined only to the impact of social media on voters for Indian elections. An important implication of the findings of this study is that as the penetration of digital media grows further in growing economies such as India’s, especially in rural areas, we will see more

use of social media and mobile phones in electoral campaigns by all the political parties, which will likely increase the influence of mediated inter- personal channels and their feedback in the flow of information coming through traditional news sources in a hybrid media environment.

3. Conclusion

After examining all the elements i.e. media, content and audience within the communication process in relation to the political content, one can safely assert that if not a change, the new media has certainly brought an extension with its characteristics to the existing patterns of the political campaign. The public sphere of the masses has marked a beginning in India with an increasing political awareness, particularly among the youth populace. Though there are digital divides in the society, those will be removed by increased e-readiness over time. The upcoming general elections and political campaign on new media will prove a breeding ground for a much more meaningful politics of future with more political participation of 'netizens' in democratic process in general and electoral process in particular.

4. Limitation of this research paper

The research paper was not able to address some of the gaps that were found. The limitations that were found and that can be worked upon in the series of next research paper are as follows:

- Lack of internet connectivity in rural areas and how political parties will target rural audience.
- The paper is focused on general elections but there are many more types of elections in India as addressed in the paper. The campaigning strategies used by political parties in other elections and does that include the modern technique.
- The paper focuses just on the tier one cities due to low funding.
- The paper showcases strategies and timeline of one political party. A critical comparison can be done on the styles of different parties and their political campaigning

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Not only Academics but she has also excelled in Sports by being a district level badminton player and a National Level Basket Ball Player from both Pune and Mumbai Districts.