



How Social Media Shaped Political Communication in India: A Journey from Padayatra to Social Media

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Abstract

The journey of political communication in India has witnessed a profound transformation, moving from traditional methods like Padayatras, political rallies, and small meetings to the adoption of print media, broadcast media, and, most recently, advanced social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram. This article explores this evolution in two sections. The first section traces the historical trajectory of Indian political communication, engaging with fundamental theories and perspectives from padayatra to social media and on the role of social media in shaping public discourse. The second section focuses on the significant changes introduced by social media in Indian politics, including increased voter engagement, data-driven strategies, and challenges such as misinformation and echo chambers. By examining these developments, the article highlights how social media has reshaped the landscape of Indian political communication, presenting opportunities and challenges for Indian democracy.

Keywords: Election, Social Media, Indian Politics, Political communication, Misinformation

Introduction

India is the world's largest democracy with a well-organized electoral system. The Election Commission of India conducts elections for the President, Vice President, Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and state legislative assemblies. (Rao, B. S., & Kashyap, S. C. 2004). With registered voters actively participating in these elections, political parties adopt various methods to connect with the electorate, such as election rallies, speeches, and print and electronic media. (Hauser, W., & Singer, W. 1986). In recent years, social media has emerged as a vital tool in political campaigning due to its cost-effectiveness, speed, and vast reach, surpassing traditional media. As an online platform for sharing



ideas and content, social media offers a dynamic space for political discourse and engagement. (Chopra, S. 2014)

Globally, social media has become integral to election campaigning, playing a prominent role in shaping the electoral narratives of countries like the United States and India. Landmark events, such as the U.S. presidential campaigns of Barack Obama, Donald Trump, Joe Biden, and India's general elections in 2014, 2019, and 2024, highlight its growing significance. In these instances, social media created an online digital public sphere where political news was disseminated, discussed, and debated. Political parties and leaders utilized these platforms extensively, leveraging advanced data analytics and micro-targeting strategies to reach specific voter demographics based on age, gender, location, and ideology. (Bali, A., & Jagan, S. 2017)

Social media was heavily used first in the Arab Spring, specifically in Tunisia's Jasmine revolution—one million signature movement for women's rights in Iran, and the Anti-Corruption movement in 2012 in India. The new digital movement witnessed a high level of political mobilisation, traceable by social media. (Wolfsfeld, G., Segev, E., & Sheaffer, T. 2013)

In India, all political parties also use social media platforms for election campaigns. Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) was the first political party in India to understand social media's importance and used it heavily in the 2014 general election. BJP has invested heavily in social media and its Information Technology (I.T.) cell. Nowadays, all political parties hire social media consultancy companies for proper strategies, such as the Indian Political Action Committee (IPAC) and many others. According to the Digital 2024 India report, As of January 2024, India has 751.5 million internet users, constituting 52.4% of the population. Social media users numbered 462 million, representing 32.2% of the population, with 1.12 billion active mobile connections, covering 78% of the population in India. With the help of social media like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, political parties reach a large population due to their quickness, low price, vast areas, and acceptability. (Ranganathan, M. 2014)

However, there is more than just the positive side of social media and election campaigning. Social media also manipulates public opinion. Social media companies remain neutral in fake news, disinformation, misinformation, and trolling cyber-attacks. Some scholars also believe that social



networking sites are the tools of the government and the corporate. (Mahapatra, S., & Plagemann, J. 2019). They use social media platforms to manufacture consent in their favour. These platforms are now used by what Herbert Marcuse calls "one-dimension man", where people are now overloaded with massive amounts of information. Social media have a higher chance of influencing and manipulating public opinion and voters' decisions through emotive and nationalist appeals. (Marcuse, H. 2008)

Over time, states worldwide have created rules and regulations for the smooth functioning of social media to curb the spread of fake news, misinformation, political propaganda and disinformation. In India, the election commission has taken many steps to combat fake news and misinformation on social media, including issuing guidelines for political parties and candidates and setting up monitoring cells.

Shifting focus from traditional media to social media: A Journey of Indian Political Communication

Communication is the driving force of human civilisation, an ever-evolving journey that has shaped and defined societies throughout the ages. From the rudimentary beginnings of face-to-face exchanges to today's technologically advanced interconnected world, the evolution of human communication is a testament to our innate desire to connect, share, and understand. The earliest form of human communication was rooted in face-to-face interactions. In this stage of civilisation, our ancestors relied on gestures, expressions, and simple vocalisations to convey information within small, close-knit communities. This direct communication was essential for survival, enabling coordination in hunting, gathering, and communal living.

As human societies evolved, so did the need for a more sophisticated mode of communication. The development of language marked a revolutionary milestone. Spoken language allowed for the articulation of abstract concepts and the transmission of cultural knowledge. Later, written language emerged, providing a way to record and save information beyond just passing it down orally. Writing systems made it possible to create scrolls, manuscripts, and, eventually, books. In the 15th century, Johannes Gutenberg's printing press invention revolutionised how information was shared, making it much easier for more people to access printed materials like newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets. This, in turn, played a crucial role in spreading knowledge and ideas to a broader audience. Then,



there was a technological advancement in the 20th century, leading to the origin of mass media. It is one-way consumer participation and message-driven. It is also called broadcast media, involving news reporting on radio and television.

The technological advancement in the late 20th century brought a paradigm shift in communication. The advent of the internet and social media has changed the nature of political communication not only in India but also all over the world. It's the first time in human history that, with such a gigantic population, political leaders can reach the masses anytime, anywhere by just clicking some social media platforms. This era is the paradigm shift in the Journey of Indian political communication. (Varughese, A. M., & Semetko, H. A. 2022)

Padayatra

Before social media and digital communication, Indian politics relied on creative and immersive methods to connect with the masses. One such powerful tool was the "Padayatra" or mass campaign, where socio-political leaders embarked on journeys by foot to engage with the masses directly. Mass campaigns, like the "padayatras" (foot marches), were popularised by Mahatma Buddha in ancient times, Kabir, Ravidas, and other saints in medieval times, and Gandhi in modern India. It involved walking through villages and towns to connect with people on a personal level. These padayatras helped establish a grassroots connection between the people and voters.

Padayatras held a unique place in Indian politics. They were not just physical journeys but symbolic endeavours demonstrating a leader's commitment to the people and their issues. padayatras were immersive experiences, as leaders walked alongside citizens, interacting with them, listening to their concerns, and sharing their vision for the problems they are facing in daily life. The physical presence of leaders lent credibility to their advocacy, making their messages more impactful. Padayatras had the power to unite communities and inspire collective action. As leaders traversed villages and regions, people from various backgrounds joined to participate, reinforcing a sense of solidarity.

Padayatras were particularly impactful during election campaigns. They allowed leaders to cover extensive ground, reaching remote areas that might not have been accessible otherwise. The direct interaction with voters established a personal connection that resonated when it came time to cast ballots. Political leaders often participated in traditional festivals and gatherings, using these



occasions to connect with citizens and deliver speeches that resonated with local cultural sentiments.

During these foot journeys, leaders talked about their plans and ideas, showing unity's strength.

The inception of padayatras in modern Indian politics can be traced back to Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, who initiated the iconic Dandi March covering 272 km from Sabarmati to Dandi from 12 Mar 1930 to 6 Apr 1930. This 24-day march marked a pivotal moment in the non-violent civil disobedience movement in British India. (Nath, S.2013). In Post-Independence India, Vinoba Bhave pioneered padayatras, which commenced from Pochampalli near Hyderabad. His remarkable journey, spanning about 58,000 km, began in April 1951 and extended for 13 years, focusing on the Bhoodhan movement for land donation to vulnerable communities.

The rise of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in Indian politics can be traced back to the strategic implementation of padayatra; notably, in the 1990s, L.K. Advani's Rath Yatra and Murli Manohar Joshi's Ekta Yatra played pivotal roles in mobilising support by tapping into the cultural and religious sentiments of the Hindu masses. The Rath Yatra, led by Advani, became a powerful tool for connecting with people and fostering a sense of unity among the Hindus.

This trend of padayatra extended to South India, where leaders like Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, N. Chandrababu Naidu, and Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy engaged in extensive journeys on foot. Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, the former Chief Minister of United Andhra Pradesh, covered a remarkable distance of 1,470 km over 64 days in 2003, ultimately ascending to the position of Chief Minister the following year. Similarly, Chandrababu Naidu embarked on a 208-day padayatra in 2013, covering 2,340 km, culminating in his return to power in the 2014 elections. Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy continued this tradition with the Praja Sankalpa Yatra in 2019, covering a staggering 3,648 km and engaging with millions of people, ultimately leading to his victory in the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly election.

Even in social media dominance, padayatras remain remarkably relevant in Indian politics. For instance, Rahul Gandhi led the Bharat Jodo Yatra (2022), organised by the Indian National Congress (INC), covering a distance of 4,080 km from Kanyakumari to Jammu and Kashmir over 150 days. This movement aimed to galvanise party members and the public alike, showcasing the enduring impact of padayatras in connecting with the masses. Beyond mainstream political figures, individuals like Prasant Kishore, a former political strategist turned social activist, initiated the Jan Suraj Yatra in Bihar. From Mahatma Gandhi's Bhitiharwa Ashram in West Champaran in 2022,



Kishore's yatra focused on establishing direct connections with the people, engaging with local youth, and addressing issues such as employment and political involvement.

However, the success of padayatras has its challenges. India's vast and diverse nature poses logistical difficulties, requiring meticulous accommodations, food, and crowd management planning. Despite the many difficulties faced, the success of padayatras emphasises the dedication and adept planning of political leaders. Rather than impeding progress, these challenges serve as opportunities for leaders to engage with ordinary citizens, demonstrating their commitment to democracy within India's intricate social and political milieu.

Public Rallies

Before the age of the internet and smartphones, public rallies and speeches played a crucial role in Indian politics. These rallies were the heart of political activism, where leaders spoke directly to people, transcending geographical barriers and connecting with citizens from various walks of life. Political leaders organised rallies to address large crowds, share their vision, and gain support. Public rallies were more than just speeches; they were emotional appeals that deeply resonated with the masses. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Indira Gandhi used their oratory skills to stir emotions, creating a solid bond between leaders and followers. (Nath, S.2013)

These rallies were often held at symbolic locations, tying them to crucial events in India's struggle for independence. Historical landmarks and venues associated with the nation's past were chosen to reinforce leaders' commitment to India's ideals and aspirations. Public rallies had a unique ability to mobilise mass support, showcasing the strength and popularity of a particular political movement. Leaders tailored their speeches to address diverse audiences' specific concerns and aspirations, whether farmers, labourers, students, or professionals. Public rallies weren't just emotional appeals but also platforms for addressing national issues, advocating policy changes, and outlining a vision for the country's future. Public rallies and speeches were important for politicians to talk to people, but they also needed some help. It was challenging to organise big rallies; there were challenges in planning, making sure everything was safe, and controlling the crowds. Keeping things secure and making sure the crowds behaved was a big task. Plus, it was hard to reach faraway places, and not everyone could quickly join in. Despite the complexities, public rallies remained indispensable in the political landscape, enabling leaders to connect with the nation's pulse and share their ideas directly with the people. (Kumar, A. 2022)



Print Media

Print media, such as newspapers and magazines, are a significant part of political communication. They helped spread information, shape people's thoughts, and allowed politicians to share their ideas. Leaders and parties used them to publish articles, posters, ads, and opinion pieces to talk to the public. Print media was a big deal during elections. Parties made catchy ads, posters, and plans to get voters interested. They wrote about economic policies, foreign relations, and social changes in articles and editorials. When leaders disagreed, it often ended up in the newspapers, showing people what was happening in politics.

Even during British rule, Newspapers were significant for both the British and those fighting for freedom. Newspapers told the colonial story; Indian leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and Bal Gangadhar Tilak used newspapers to talk about the problems of colonialism. Print media became a battleground for ideas during the freedom struggle. Leaders used newspapers like "The Hindu," "Amrita Bazar Patrika," and "Young India" to gather people against British rule. Mahatma Gandhi wrote a lot in newspapers like "Navjivan" and "Harijan," showing people a way to resist peacefully. Print media didn't just talk about political freedom; it also spoke about social issues. Leaders like Baba Saheb B.R. Ambedkar used newspapers like "Mooknayak" to fight against caste-based oppression and discuss marginalised communities' rights. These newspapers helped people who were not part of the central politics and played a significant role in social change.

Print media faced its own set of challenges in political communication. One major hurdle was adapting to the changing times with the rise of digital media. The shift to online platforms and social media challenged traditional newspapers and magazines to maintain readership and relevance. Economic challenges, including declining advertising revenues and circulation, also created financial strains for many print publications. Print media remains relevant despite the rise of digital platforms because it offers a tangible source of information that some audiences still prefer. The physicality of newspapers and magazines provides a different reading experience and a sense of trustworthiness for specific demographics. (Ravindran, G. 2017)



Television has been a game-changer in Indian politics since the late 1950s, transforming how politicians connect with the public. Before TV, radio was the prominent way leaders spoke to people, but TV added visuals that everyone could see. Leaders quickly realised its potential, as TV brought them into people's homes, allowing them to address the nation directly. This visual aspect played a significant role in shaping public perception and trust. TV became a powerful tool during elections, with political parties creating compelling ads and shows to reach a vast audience. It also turned debates into a public platform for discussing crucial socio-political topics.

However, the TV landscape faces challenges in the digital age. The rise of digital platforms, online streaming, and social media has disrupted traditional broadcasting. People now have more choices, and on-demand content has led to declining viewership and advertising revenue for conventional TV. Government regulations add another layer of challenge, covering content, advertising, and spectrum allocation, impacting creative freedom and operational costs. Streaming platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video have become formidable competitors, offering premium content that attracts viewers away from traditional channels.

Radio has also played a vital role in political communication, offering an accessible medium for leaders to engage with the public. While TV brought a visual dimension, radio remained essential, especially in remote areas. Political speeches and interviews on the radio allowed leaders to convey their views directly, fostering a sense of intimacy and immediacy. Despite the rise of TV and digital media, radio remains resilient, adapting to different formats and serving as a reliable source of information, particularly during crises.

However, radio faces challenges similar to TV. The advent of digital platforms and streaming services has changed how people consume media, posing competition for attention. While radio maintains a dedicated listenership, regulatory challenges and financial constraints impact broadcasters. Compliance with broadcasting regulations and shift in advertising revenue toward digital platforms add to the hurdles. In conclusion, Television and Radio have been crucial in political communication, each offering unique strengths.



Social media has become an indispensable part of modern society. In today's world, billions of people use social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, and LinkedIn to connect, share information, and express their thoughts and ideas online. To understand the deeper meaning of social media, it is necessary to understand the meaning of both the words social and media; something connected to society/individual and group is called social, while media means the medium/ tool of communication of that individual and group. So, social media represents a group of people interacting with each other through a particular medium of tools. Thus, social media is an online platform where people can easily share information and ideas. Boyd and Ellison define social networks as "web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile. Within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users they share connections with, and view and traverse their list of connections made by others." (Boyd, D.M. and Ellison, 2008)

In more technical words, Social media are web 2.0 internet-based applications that are user-generated content where social media organisations create specific profiles, and their profiles are connected with other individuals and groups. Any social media user can download social media services through web-based applications to their mobile devices like smartphones and tablets. Then, they can be used by individuals, communities, and organisations to share any content for corporate discussion and participation. Social media is frequently interchangeably used with Web 2.0. Kaplan and Haenlein also state that "social media are internet-based applications built on technological and ideological foundations of web 2.0 that allow user-generated content." According to the Britannica dictionary, "It is relating to or involving activities in which people spend time talking to each other or doing enjoyable things with each other." The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "social media as forms of electronic communication (as websites for social networking and blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as video). (Kaplan, A.M. 2016)



Evolution of Social Media

As we know, over time, political campaigns have undergone various changes. Pippa Norris, in an article "Political Communications and Democratic Politics" in the book by Bartle J., Griffiths D. (eds) *Political Communications Transformed*", divided the political campaign into three distinct phases, which are as follows-

Pre-modern Campaign (Mid-19thC to 1950s)

Modern Campaign (Early 1960s-late 1980s)

Post-Modern Campaign (the 1990s to the Present).

The pre-modern campaign was primarily interpersonal and local. The connection between the political parties and citizens was through printing, press printing, templates, and election manifestos as the median of political campaigns. In the modern phase of campaigning, the press has been replaced by the television or broadcast media. Political parties popularise their campaign in the media and the advertisements. New media or digital media has become essential in the post-modern campaign. The Internet has changed political campaigns and has bridged the gap between political parties, leaders, and citizens. It provided a tool for top-down or bottom-up communication between citizens and parties/leaders. (Norris, P. 2001)

The Internet and social media have transformed how we communicate, access information, and consume media. The Internet as we know it today was born in the late 1960s when the U.S. Department of Defense created the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET). The ARPANET was designed to be a decentralised and reliable communication system that allows researchers and military personnel to communicate during a nuclear attack. The ARPANET was the first true computer network, and its creation marked the birth of the Internet. Over the following decade, the ARPANET continued to evolve and expand, connecting more and more researchers and universities. In the 1970s, the ARPANET was used to develop the first email system, which allowed users to send messages between computers for the first time. In the 1980s, the Internet continued to evolve, and new technologies were developed to change how we communicate and access information online. One of the most significant technologies was the World Wide Web (WWW), which Tim Berners-Lee created in 1989. The World Wide Web allowed for the creation of hyperlinked documents that could be accessed by anyone with an internet connection, making it easier for users



to find and access information online. The major paradigm shift in the development of social media was the Internet when Tim Berners-Lee connected hypertext software to the Internet in 1991.

The development of social media can be traced back to the early days of the Internet. The first recognisable social media site, Six Degrees.com, was developed in 1997 by Andrew Weinreich. Six Degrees allowed users to upload a profile and connect with friends, creating the first social network. Over the next few years, social media continued to evolve, and new sites emerged that allowed users to share photos and connect with others. Sites like LiveJournal (1999), Friendster (2002), and MySpace (2003) gained popularity, offering new and improved ways to connect with others online. The rise of the smartphone and mobile devices in the late 2000s saw the launch of new social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, and many others.

The area and scope of social media are wide. Different social media platforms have various specialisations. For example, LinkedIn is used for business networking, Wikipedia is used for collaborative projects, Twitter is used for microblogs, and Instagram is used for photo sharing. Facebook is a social networking site, YouTube, that allows video watching and sharing. (Chopra, S. 2014). There has been rapid development in social media technology in recent years. According to a statistical report, Social media usage is among the most popular online activities. In 2021, over 4.26 billion people were using social media worldwide, projected to increase to almost six billion in 2027. Social media is an integral part of daily internet usage. On average, internet users spend 144 minutes daily on social media and messaging apps, an increase of more than half an hour since 2015. The following are the most popular social networking services: Facebook, 3 billion; YouTube, 2.5 billion; WhatsApp, 2 billion users; Instagram, 2 billion users; and TikTok, 1 billion users. (Statista, 2025)

How Social Media Changed Indian Politics: What Changes Have Brought Social Media in Indian Politics

Before social media, the distribution of news and information was primarily controlled by traditional media outlets such as newspapers, magazines, television, and radio. Today, anyone with an internet connection can share their thoughts, opinions, and experiences. This has given rise to new forms of citizen journalism and activism and has provided a platform for marginalised voices to be heard/spoken. Another significant impact of social media has been how it has changed and how we can build and maintain relationships. People can now easily connect with friends, family, and strangers worldwide. This has made it easier to maintain long-distance relationships and led to virtual



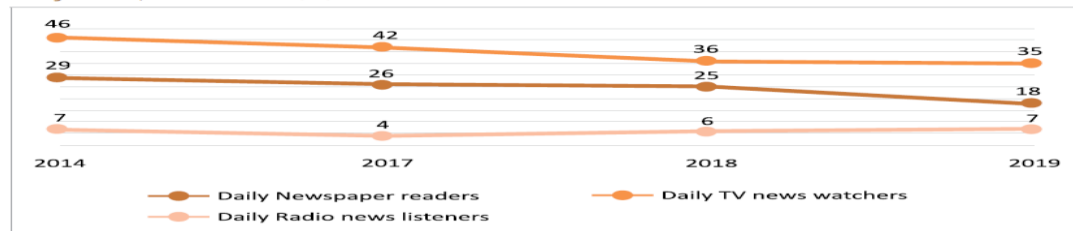
communities where people can connect and support one another based on shared interests and experiences. The smartphone has become one of the most popular devices accessed by the Internet in India. (Kumar, S.2024)

In his famous book, "The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power," Andrew Chadwick argues that traditional media and digital technologies have converged to create a hybrid media system that profoundly influences how information is disseminated and political actors operate. Chadwick introduces the concept of a "hybrid media system" where traditional and digital media coexist and interact. He says traditional media like television, radio, and newspapers, alongside social media platforms, blogs, and websites. They together shape the political communication landscape. He examines how political actors, both traditional and emerging, engage with the hybrid media system to shape the media agenda and influence public opinion. Chadwick explores how gatekeeping and agenda-setting functions have evolved in the hybrid media system. Traditional gatekeepers like news editors are now joined by algorithmic gatekeepers on digital platforms, impacting what information the public consumes. Chadwick also looks at the political consequences of the hybrid media system. He discusses how it can lead to polarisation, filter bubbles, and the spread of misinformation but also highlights its potential for promoting political engagement and accountability. (Chadwick, A. 2017)

Sanjay Kumar and Praveen Rai's book *Measuring Voting Behaviour in India* (2014) provides a detailed analysis of India's electoral system and the factors influencing voting behaviour, including the role of money, muscle power, caste, religion, and technology in elections. The book highlights the voting patterns of different social groups and the challenges facing Indian democracy. Data from the Lokniti-CSDS survey also shows a steady decline in traditional media consumption, with newspaper readership falling from 29% in 2014 to 18% in 2019 and daily TV news viewership dropping from 46% to 35% in the same period. This shift is accompanied by the rapid growth of social media, which has become a dominant information source. Between 2014 and 2019, Facebook users in India grew from 9% to 32%, while WhatsApp usage rose from 22% to 34%. YouTube emerged as a popular platform, used by 31% of respondents, and Instagram gained traction with 15% users. Twitter also saw remarkable growth, increasing from 2% in 2014 to 12% in 2019. By the 2024 general election, social media had surpassed traditional media in political outreach, with the Congress party contacting 51% of voters through social media campaigns, compared to the BJP's 44%,



Figure 1.1: Percentage of voters consuming news via TV, newspaper and radio on a daily basis, 2014–2019 (%)



Source: CSDS, New Delhi

Social media has brought several significant changes to Indian politics over the years. (Chopra, S. 2014) These changes have transformed how politicians’ campaign, communicate with the public and engage in political discourse.

First, speed up the process of political communication: Social media platforms have revolutionised political communication in India, providing parties like the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) with unprecedented avenues for engaging with the public in real-time. These parties swiftly disseminate information, convey their agendas, and mobilise supporters through platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. By maintaining official party accounts and candidate profiles, they utilise social media to share campaign messages, policy positions, and party ideology, fostering direct dialogue with supporters and influencing public opinion. This direct interaction allows for the prompt addressing of concerns and the immediate gauging of public sentiment, which contributes to building voter trust and connection with political leaders.

Compared to traditional media channels, social media offers unmatched speed and efficiency in spreading information, allowing parties to bypass the time-consuming production processes of newspapers and television. This rapid dissemination is particularly advantageous during election campaigns, enabling parties to launch initiatives, rally supporters, and respond swiftly to unfolding events. Moreover, the agility of social media communication ensures that parties stay ahead of the news cycle, ensuring their messages reach voters in real time. The dynamic nature of these platforms also facilitates political discourse, allowing for the exchange of ideas and opinions, which parties can



monitor and adapt to shape public opinion effectively. Furthermore, the virality and shareability of content on social media amplify the impact of political communication efforts, fundamentally altering the dynamics of electoral campaigns and public discourse in India.

Second, Cost-Effective Campaigning and Crowdfunding: Social media platforms have revolutionised political fundraising in India, offering a cost-effective avenue for parties like the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) to reach a broader audience than traditional methods. AAP, in particular, has leveraged platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to launch compelling crowdfunding campaigns, tapping into the collective financial resources of their supporters and the wider public. By utilising these platforms, Political Parties can mobilise a diverse array of supporters, both locally and globally, to contribute financially to their cause. These crowdfunding efforts are shared widely across social media, allow political parties to gather financial support for specific goals or initiatives, empowering them to compete with larger, more established political entities.

One distinct advantage of crowdfunding via social media is its ability to streamline the donation process. Platforms often provide features such as donation buttons or links integrated into party profiles or posts, enabling supporters to contribute easily. This direct donation mechanism ensures that parties receive immediate financial backing from their social media followers, bolstering their resources for election campaigns and other political activities. Furthermore, social media enables politicians and smaller parties to amplify their voices and attract funding by highlighting issues that resonate with the public. Leveraging the viral nature of social media content, politicians can draw attention to pressing concerns and mobilise support around specific causes, attracting funding from individuals who align with their vision and values. In essence, crowdfunding via social media has transformed political funding in India, fostering a more inclusive and participatory democratic process by providing smaller parties like AAP with the means to compete and significantly impact Indian politics.

Third, breaking all types of barriers and giving new spaces to historically marginalised sections: Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube have become indispensable tools for politicians and political parties in India to engage with a vast and diverse audience directly. Unlike traditional media, which often caters to specific regions or demographics, social media transcends geographical, social, and cultural barriers, connecting individuals from diverse backgrounds in real time. This global accessibility enables information to reach audiences



unprecedentedly, breaking down national borders effortlessly and allowing for instantaneous dissemination of political messages and content.

The borderless nature of social media fosters inclusivity and diversity by amplifying voices from historically marginalised communities and underrepresented regions. Regardless of their location or social status, individuals can actively participate in political discourse, contributing to the democratic process and shaping election campaigns on a global stage. Moreover, social media's personalised content delivery and sophisticated targeting tools enable campaigns to tailor messages to diverse communities' unique preferences, interests, and cultural practices, enhancing engagement and participation in the electoral process. In India, social media platforms have emerged as powerful tools for historically marginalised groups, including Tribal communities, Dalits, and other backward classes, providing them with a platform to share their stories and perspectives without relying on traditional media gatekeepers. This newfound accessibility empowers marginalised individuals to engage in public discourse, raise awareness about important issues, and build community solidarity. Furthermore, social media's inclusivity has allowed individuals from diverse backgrounds, including those in rural areas or with limited resources, to participate in public dialogue, enriching the broader narrative with various voices and perspectives. Extending content from historically marginalised sections contributes to a more inclusive public discourse, ensuring that diverse perspectives are heard and acknowledged.

Fourth, Data Analysis Strategy for election: Social media platforms have transformed election campaigning for Indian political parties like the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) by providing access to extensive data analytics and insights on user behaviour and public opinion. Through data-driven approaches facilitated by political consultancy firms, parties can gather demographic data encompassing factors such as age, caste, gender, location, religion, and interests, allowing them to understand and respond to the diverse preferences and concerns of the electorate more effectively. This data-driven approach enables parties like the BJP to tailor their communication strategies, crafting messages that resonate with specific voter segments and maximising the impact of their outreach efforts.

Sentiment analysis tools further empower parties like the BJP to gauge public opinion and evaluate the reception of their communication on social media platforms. By deciphering the prevailing mood and sentiment of Indian voters, parties can adapt their messaging in real-time to



better resonate with the electorate. Additionally, the micro-targeting capabilities of social media platforms enable precise targeting of specific voter segments based on demographics, interests, and geographic location. This personalised approach allows parties to optimise resource allocation for election campaigns, focusing efforts on critical demographics and regions where support is crucial. Through the fusion of data analytics and social media platforms, political parties can refine their messaging, shape public opinion, and strategically allocate resources to maximise their electoral impact, solidifying their influence over public discourse in India. (Kanungo, N. T. (2015))

Fifth, Shaping Image Management, Narratives and agendas: Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for image management, agenda-setting, and narrative shaping in the political arena, as exemplified by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's strategic utilisation of platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Throughout his tenure, Modi has meticulously curated his public image, projecting himself as a decisive leader with a vision for economic prosperity and accessibility to the public. His adept use of social media, through a blend of posts, videos, and live interactions, has resonated particularly with India's youthful demographic, bolstering his image as a dynamic and effective leader. Moreover, Modi and his Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) have successfully normalised the pro-Hindutva agenda through social media, emphasising themes of national pride, cultural identity, and religious symbolism to galvanise support among Hindu voters and shape the national discourse on matters related to religion and nationalism.

In addition to image management, social media has served as a potent tool for countering opposition narratives and undermining political adversaries, such as Rahul Gandhi of the Indian National Congress. Modi sympathisers and BJP supporters have utilised targeted campaigns and memes to propagate derogatory images of Gandhi, portraying him as an ineffective leader, eroding his credibility and reinforcing Modi's image as a decisive leader.

Sixth, most importantly, Capturing the Psychology of mass and recruitment of political volunteers: Social media has become a crucial tool for politicians and parties in India, like the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and Indian National Congress (INC), to cultivate echo chambers and recruit volunteers who align with their ideologies. This strategy involves curating content that reinforces the party's narrative, solidifying the beliefs of individuals who resonate with its message. By fostering camaraderie among like-minded supporters, these echo chambers motivate individuals to reject alternative ideologies, hindering constructive dialogue and cooperation across



ideological lines. The BJP, AAP and INC parties, for instance, have adeptly utilised social media to disseminate its ideology and mobilise support from diverse demographic groups, using terms like "Andhbhakt" (blind follower) and "WhatsApp University" to empower and mobilise supporters online. Through targeted messaging, the parties successfully recruit volunteers enthusiastic about championing its agenda and worldview, tapping into shared values and aspirations to foster a sense of belonging and purpose among its supporters.

However, while social media recruitment strategies may bolster party loyalty and activism, they pose risks. Parties risk deepening societal divisions and stifling critical thinking and open-mindedness by exclusively targeting individuals who align with a particular ideology. The creation of echo chambers on social media platforms may provoke backlash from individuals who feel excluded or alienated by the party's messaging, underscoring the complex dynamics of digital political engagement. (Kumar, S. 2024)

Conclusion

Social media have become essential to modern-day election campaigning. Technological development in recent years has led to the shift of election campaigning from traditional to modern digital media. The medium of interaction between the political parties, leaders and voters has changed. Now, billions of people are using social media platforms and expressing their opinions on social media via accounts like WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Political parties and leaders get to know voters' views through social media and then announce their election manifesto and strategies. Political parties now reach the voters directly, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers to spread the message widely and quickly. Social media has given greater control over their campaign narratives and allows direct contact with voters.

Social media has given millions of people the voice to express their opinions. It offers digital platforms to share views and engage with others in real-time. Social media has given space to the marginalised communities excluded from the traditional media. Social media has become a powerful tool for shaping public opinion, particularly during elections. Political parties target specific groups of voters and share their message. Now, political parties mobilise voters, especially those active on social media and more technologically savvy voters. Political parties have also participated in the digital dialogue, volunteering to make campaign donations through social media.



Despite its numerous benefits, social media election campaigning does not always reflect on-ground realities. While social media platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for communication, engagement, and mobilization, they can also distort public opinion. These platforms are often used to propagate, promote, and even manipulate narratives, raising scepticism about their authenticity and reliability. Additionally, social media introduces new challenges and risks, such as the spread of fake news, disinformation, polarization, and the creation of echo chambers. These complexities underscore the dual-edged nature of social media in modern political campaigns, necessitating ongoing scrutiny and critical examination of its role in shaping democratic processes.

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