

## Political Campaign and Social Media: A Comparative Study of 2014 and 2019 General Elections in India

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### **Abstract**

*Elections are thought of as setting the tone and standard for forming governments and carrying out policies. Elections are significant for citizens as well as politicians. Every Indian citizen has an equal voice in forming the government by voting. A political leader's reputation can be ascertained by following their campaign trail. Political leaders who are successful in elections owe a great deal to their election campaigns. Political leaders used to interact with the public by various means such as public gatherings, election rallies, hoarding, in-person visits, etc. The 21st century's technology advancements have rendered this antiquated form of campaigning obsolete. The use of social media in political campaigns is one of the more recent current methods that have been implemented.*

*Social media is thought to be one of the most effective and quick forms of communication. In the twenty-first century, people use social media more than they do traditional media, such as television, radio, and newspapers. Roughly 90% of political leaders use social media, according to studies on how social media affects political parties. The majority of political figures favour running their campaigns on social media, which is the quickest and most straightforward method. Thus, this article aims to evaluate the distinction between traditional and social media campaigning methods in Indian elections based on secondary sources. The study also compares the Indian general elections of 2014 and 2019 in an effort to evaluate the influence of social media campaigning.*

**Keywords:** General Elections, Political Parties, Social Media, Political Campaign

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## **Introduction**

Mass media is the most widely used medium for information sharing, and social media is a subset of mass media. It is not surprising that there are certain distinctions between media and social media, even if social media is a component of media. Social media provides a platform for information sharing and transmission to a large audience, enabling anybody to generate and share content. It can converse in both directions. Social media is an open system, in contrast to the closed system of media.

India has a democratic system of governance in which elections are used to choose the head of state. No democratic system can truly function without a well-managed and efficient electoral process. The Indian constitution's framers were fully aware of this prerequisite. As a result, they established guidelines for an impartial, wholesome, well-run electoral system as well as the Election Commission of India, which serves as the election administration apparatus. India has always had a multi-party system since it is a pluralist liberal parliamentary democracy. The Indian political process has been consistently engaged by a number of active political parties.

The Indian election scene has seen significant changes with the advent of the internet and the rise in popularity of social media, particularly during the campaign. Since social media came into being, political parties have used it to inspire people by spreading their ideas like wildfire because all it takes is one click to make a concept widely known. Today, Google has the answers to all of our questions. Social media is now the primary source of information during elections thanks to the technological revolution known as the Internet, which has connected people worldwide (Stieglitz, 2012). Social media provides the good news that the message now matters more than the messenger.

## **Objectives and Methodology**

The current study will examine current patterns regarding political parties' usage of social media for public opinion mobilisation and campaigning. The study primarily focuses on two goals: first, examining how traditional and social media platforms differ in terms of how they are used for political campaigning in India. Secondly, to evaluate the influence of social media campaigning by comparing the Indian general elections in 2014 and 2019.

The character of the current study is both analytical and descriptive. The information required for the analysis was gathered from the Election Commission of India's archives, as well as various journal publications and newspaper and magazine clippings.

## **Social Media and Elections in India**

Elections are seen as setting the tone and standard for government formation and policy implementation in India. Elections are significant not just for politicians but also for the general public because, in India, all citizens have an equal say in forming the government through voting. A political leader's success in an election is largely dependent on their election campaign, as it shapes their public perception. Political leaders used to interact with the public by various means such as public gatherings, election rallies, hoarding, in-person visits, etc. However, given the advancements in technology in the 21st century, this conventional approach to campaigning is now obsolete. Nowadays, social media campaigns are the new, modern method of running for office.

One of the most effective and quick methods of communicating with others these days is through social media. In the twenty-first century, people use social media more than they do traditional media like television, radio, and newspapers. Politicians are not exempt from it either. Roughly 90% of political leaders use social media, according to studies on how social media affects political parties. These days, the majority of political figures like running their campaigns on social media, which is the quickest and most straightforward method. Protest activity-related traits and communication, like recordkeeping, inspirational information, content dissemination, and perceived content reliability, are strongly correlated with social media use. Voters and political players can interact in a variety of ways thanks to it (Kaur and Kaur, 2013).

Social media has impacted all facets of our lives, including politics, business, administration, marketing, and culture. It has a significant impact through marketing, news, interaction, and education. Social media is now a significant news source. In India, it has resulted in the rise of citizen led governance, or C-governance. India's election is a significant event for the world at large in addition to India. Given the shifting patterns, it is predicted that young people who use social media will now select candidates in the future. The number of Facebook followers is rising daily due to the rate of urban development. Politicians reportedly plan to use Facebook's new voter bank. Positive outcomes have undoubtedly been observed by candidates and parties who have the ability to make an impression on Facebook. This is why having a clear strategy that is tailored for social media is essential to increasing the efficacy of marketing.

## **Meaning and Types of Election Campaign**

The process through which candidates and political parties get ready for election day and inform the public of their positions on various subjects is known as the election campaign. In order to contact voters and spread their messages, candidates employ a range of strategies, including written materials, public events, new and conventional media, and other channels.

Certain nations provide contestants with space and public media for this reason. The start date of the formal campaign period for elections. Election Day and the official campaign period's dates are frequently set by law. A day or two before Election Day, the legal window for campaigns ends in many nations, creating a "black out period"<sup>i</sup> right before voting. Parties and candidates will set up physical locations from which to conduct their general operations and campaigning.

A democratic election necessitates open and informed voting, as well as an equal opportunity for candidates to garner support and inspire followers to assist them in assuming government. For those objectives to be met, election campaigns are essential. Genuinely competitive elections provide candidates with fair opportunity to present their positions to voters and vie for votes. Election campaigns give politicians and political parties a chance to reach out to the public and spread their message, enabling voters to cast well-informed ballots on election day. Any public resources given to candidates in an election must be distributed fairly in order to assist guarantee fair competition and an outcome that ultimately reflects the citizens' desire. In order for competitors and the general public to comprehend and have faith in the results, decision-making procedures for the distribution of those resources must be open and transparent (Narasimhamurthy, 2014).

- a) ***Conventional Campaign:*** Conventional campaigning methods rely on strategies such as newspaper ads, political party broadcasts, posters, and pamphlets. The main goal of traditional campaigning is to sway people through print media. Political candidates occasionally employ personal meetings and rally schedules as part of their campaigns. It should come as no surprise that these campaigns have a direct impact on the public. The political candidates use posters with catchy taglines to attempt and draw voters to them. Political parties conveyed their message to voters through the canvassing method, which is widely seen as more successful in influencing voters than other strategies like leafleting. During election campaigns, these strategies are frequently used by political parties in an effort to mobilise a sizable number of local volunteers or supporters.

This process gives parties the chance to discover potential supporters who can be further targeted, as well as to win over undecided voters. Through political party broadcasts, they defend their positions or disparage those of other parties. Since the majority of people in India still obtain most or all of their political information from television, they can be said to advertise to or use the medium to reach a target audience of millions. Advertising companies are typically hired by political parties to provide expert advice on how to maximize the impact of their posters or to ensure that they are noticed. Historically, rather than highlighting the good aspects of the party that created the poster, poster campaigns have been negative or have been used to condemn others. This kind of campaign's effectiveness usually depends on how the message is interpreted.

- b) **Modern campaigns:** Usually referred to as electronic campaigns, these involve the use of electronic media such as social media, voter targeting software, phone banks, blogging, YouTube, and mobile apps. Social media is currently a key source for election campaigning among these several modes of campaigning. The majority of political parties worldwide are realising that in order to compete, they need to use digital channels in addition to traditional ones like newspapers and television for advertising. The majority of political parties worldwide are realising that, in addition to promoting through conventional channels like newspapers and television, they now need to engage in digital campaigns to stay competitive. India has demonstrated a recent surge in the use of social media campaigns as a means of outwitting rivals. Social media is more popular during election campaigns since it has the power to affect people's thoughts and decisions (Rachamalla, 2021).

### **Social Media's Effect on Political Campaigns**

One of the world's most active social media users is estimated to be Indian. In India, the socio-economic effects of the internet are becoming more apparent in practically every area of life, including development, education, socialisation, healthcare, communication, and entertainment. The Indian political system is now accessible to anyone thanks to the internet. Nearly every significant political party in India has a website, a Facebook page, a Twitter account, and a blog.

The internet can be used in politics for a variety of purposes, such as recruiting, fund-raising, messaging, geographic targeting, mobilisation, and large-scale organising. People in India can now engage in interactive political social media campaigns and grow more involved in politics thanks to the internet. Additionally, voters are using it to get to know and select candidates better (Kaur and Kaur, 2013).

The internet is a potent global communication tool. Political parties in India have essentially been following this path since the 2014 general elections. There was a buzz about the election message that was transmitted via mobile and internet. The high-tech political campaign illustrated social and political challenges at the local level. Prior to India's legislative election, political parties looked for opportunities in new media platforms for their campaigns. Using social media as a campaign tool not only enables political leaders to win over voters, but it also empowers citizens to make the best decisions for themselves. Election campaign patterns can be altered by social media since it offers a unified platform for diverse information and covers nearly all topics through user-generated and interactive discourses (Ahmed, Jaidka & Cho, 2016).

The vast majority of Indians observe effective social media use everywhere. The use of social media platforms has affected Indian politics in the last several years. Almost all political figures maintain close relationships with their following on these social media platforms. By tweeting or sharing information on Facebook, they convey their opinions to them. The best part is that they also learn about their advantages and disadvantages, which enables them to make informed decisions on implementation and adjustments. Social media is essential in amplifying the influence of politics on those connected via networking sites. A substantial number of comments are left on any Facebook post or tweet by individuals from various segments of Indian society.

### **The 2014 General Elections and Social Media**

Social media has altered the ways in which citizens and politicians connect with one another in recent years. The social and financial barriers that once existed in society have all but disappeared thanks to social media. The divide between citizens and politicians has shrunk as a result of the increased usage of social media by politicians. Social media has become a very effective instrument for political campaigns, and practically all political parties use it. Social media has developed into

a potent instrument for political campaigning, and practically all political parties now use these platforms to interact with voters. After the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won a landslide victory in the 2014 general elections, social media platforms have become an integral part of routine political communication. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP made great use of social media during his first term in office and in the run-up to the 2014 elections, and this change builds on that (Rao, 2019).

Other Indian political players started to pay attention to how social media was changing the game after Modi's extraordinary performance in the 2014 general elections. The political communication landscape in India has never been more diverse, inclusive, fragmented,

dynamic, chaotic, creative, and equally divisive at the same time, with more political parties joining the social media bandwagon. The majority of politicians, including Modi, Rahul Gandhi, and the Aam Admi Party (AAP), were engaged on social media, using platforms including Facebook, Twitter, and Google Hangouts. Politicians can directly connect with voters using social media, which offers an open, transparent, and participatory platform for increased contact between them and the electorate.

After the US presidential campaign, the 2014 Indian election campaign was the second most costly in world history. The US presidential election of 1992 marked the beginning of a new age in media campaigns, with the Indian Lok Sabha election of 2014 leading the way in terms of both technology and expenditure. A significant shift occurred in the way political parties conducted their campaigns. Rather than using the traditional print and broadcast media channels, the parties attempted to use innovative tactics like social media, digital rallies, crowd-fund-raising, and compelling storytelling.

It is evident that a large portion of the current study of the new communication environment is infused with language of transformation. With every election that has passed, new forms of campaign media have proliferated and become increasingly visible. Candidates use multifaceted media strategies and plans that combine conventional media management techniques with a rotating menu of new media innovations. Professional journalists are no longer the only ones covering campaigns; bloggers and regular people also document events and offer publicly accessible analysis. In light of this, social media was portrayed as the perfect tool and information source for determining public opinion on policies and political stances as well as for fostering support for public office candidates among the general public in the 2014 general elections.

It has been noted that politicians in contemporary democracies around the world have quickly embraced social media as a means of interacting with their voters, having direct conversations with the public, and facilitating lively political debates. Online interactions give rise to discussions, debates, reactions, and feedback. Sharing messages on personal networks increased their reach and opened them new viewers (Rao, 2020).

The Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) survey states that by December 2014, there were 91 million social media users in India as opposed to 86 million in October 2014. Undoubtedly, this represents a small portion of the almost 700 million voters in India. Not all social media users cast ballots, either. However, these individuals are actively influencing opinions and participating in political discourse.

In addition, in 2014 there were over 149 million first-time voters. Facebook, During the 2014 Indian general elections, political parties and candidates fought it out to be the first to break news and distribute their message via the three American social media behemoths, Facebook, Twitter, and Google. While he and his team have been engaged on social media since 2009, there has been a noticeable increase in the use of digital media since the BJP announced him as its candidate for prime minister. In addition, Modi and his gang started initiatives like

Chai Pe Charcha through live interaction in order to win over farmers and lower-class people.

Also, namonumber.com was introduced to expand the voter base of the website India272.com. The "I support Narendra Modi" Facebook page has gained a lot of popularity. In order to ensure that a greater number of people are aware of Modi's speeches and rallies, the campaign was also boosted by the launch of the WhatsApp number 07820078200. The main purpose of WhatsApp was to facilitate easy, direct communication between leaders and followers in both directions. Moreover, Modi utilised to respond to the people's comments on digital media since it allows for two-way connection and keeps the public interested. In addition to providing thorough daily summaries of the day's events, the Facebook posts discussed the daily protests and the policies he intended to enact if elected.

### **The 2019 General Elections and Social Media**

In India, the general elections of 2019 was the first national battle held in a genuinely digitally consuming culture, with roughly half of the electorate having access to digital channels and a

further third to social media. According to CSDS lokniti 2019, by May 2019, over one-third of Indians had access to Facebook, Whatsapp, and YouTube, up from 9% in 2014. The Jio phone network's September 2016 launch set off this inexpensive data revolution, which also had a profound impact on Indian politics.

The 2019 general election was India's first "post-Jio- election," according to Indian journalist Saba Naqvi (Naqvi, 2019).

Regarding the use of social media by political parties and candidates in the general elections of 2019, the Election Commission established explicit guidelines. The things that follow are

The salient features of these guidelines are as follows:

- At the time of nomination submission, candidates must provide information about their social media accounts.
- All political advertisements on social media, which by definition are electronic media, must receive pre-certification from Media Certification and Monitoring Committees (MCMC)
- Political parties and candidates must include all campaign-related expenses, including those for social media advertisements, in their election expenditure accounts. This will include, among other things, paying internet companies and websites to run advertisements, as well as campaign-related operational costs for developing creative content and paying the team of employees who are hired to manage their social media accounts with salaries and wages.
- All of the Model Code of Conduct rules will also apply to the material that political parties and candidates post on social media.
- Online rumours and fake news also saw a surge during the 2019 election. The government, in particular the Election Commission, and IT corporations made efforts to regulate. Compared to 2014, the 2019 election campaign used a much higher amount of digital media. The first mover advantage was lost by the incumbent BJP, and all parties increased their use of digital media for campaigning. The majority of political parties have a social media presence before to the 2019 election. A further development in the 2019 election was the formation of separate social media teams by individual politicians (Naumann, Sen, & Swarupa Murali, 2019).

## **Comparing Social Media Use in the General Elections in 2014 and 2019**

Although politicians primarily used Facebook and Twitter in 2014, particularly the BJP, WhatsApp emerged as the preferred social media platform for the general elections of 2019. More people than any other countries use WhatsApp with over 200 million users and Facebook with 300 million users. In fact, a lot of people labelled the 2019 election the "WhatsApp Election." Furthermore, millions of Indians access other media sites like the widely used TikTok and the regional language platform Share Chat. One in five Indians had access to digital media in 2014; by now, one in three have done so. Affordable data plans and smart phone prices have also resulted in a significant improvement in access quality. The following three approaches can be used to further explain the contrast in terms of social media use:

***Considering the electorate:*** According to Election Commission figures, there were around 900 million voters in the 17th general election, of whom 360 million belonged to the younger age, compared to 286 million in the previous election. Fifteen million of the 360 million voters were younger than eighteen or nineteen years old. When compared to the general elections in 2014, the percentage of young people using social media climbed to 65.29% in 2019.

***Based on political parties:*** According to Election Commission data, 436 more political parties registered for the 17th general election than for the 2014 general election. During the 2019 general elections, political parties such as the BJP, INC, and APP saw a rise in their social media followers.

***Based on political figures,*** the current prime minister of India, Narendra Modi, has more Twitter and Facebook followers worldwide in the 2019 general elections compared to the 2014 general elections. Similar to how Arvind Kejriwal and Rahul Gandhi gained popularity on Facebook and Twitter during the 2019 general elections, Modi's online persona and presence helped him to prevail in those elections as well.

## **Digital Politics' Future**

Social media's introduction has altered political communication in India as well as the way politics is planned and carried out. Social media has, on the one hand, contributed to the democratisation of politics and given it new life. Conversely, the involvement of political players in unethical uses of social media creates a number of ethical conundrums, which are exacerbated by the widespread usage of social media among a populace that lacks digital literacy. Nevertheless, the reality that

the 2019 elections were a significant turning point in India's evolution into a digital society powered by inexpensive data cannot be overlooked. Digital platforms' self-regulatory measures around content violations and transparency.

While there is still much to be done, the measures made by digital platforms to self-regulate content infractions and increase transparency in political finance are encouraging. However, a significant start has been made. Similar to the BJP and Congress, a few regional political parties, such as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the Yuva Jana Sramika Rythu Congress (YSRC), have embraced digital technologies; nevertheless, the majority of them have not maintained an active presence on these platforms. It's evident that the process of political mobilisation has undergone a significant change as a result of cheap data, even though different parties have adjusted differently. We're only now starting to sort through this change's consequences. It is impossible to comprehend contemporary politics without comprehending the parameters of this transition.

It has created a lot of opportunities for our politics, but it has also raised intriguing new research questions (Mehta, 2019).

## **Conclusion**

People are social creatures who cannot exist in isolation, which is why communication networks are vital to human survival. Since media are the simplest, least expensive, and fastest form of communication, they can be seen as an essential component of human existence. In India, social media was introduced in the 1990s, which made communication simpler. There was also an alteration made to the election protocols. Social media not only aids political parties in their campaigns, but it also assists voters in making informed decisions. In addition, it can aid in the organisation of public opinion.

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opinion.

Social media therefore has a significant impact on politics. Social media was a weapon that many politicians and political parties used to win elections and advance in their careers. Socialmedia is an excellent instrument that gives individuals more voice and influence. They were able to better tailor political party programmes to meet public expectations because to social media's participatory features. Political advertising on social media encourages people to voteby following the correct candidates. It links a sizable number of people and is incredibly cost-effective for campaigns.

In conclusion, social media has a bigger influence on politics and has the potential to influence young people's long-term political behaviour. By 2024, when there are general elections, it is anticipated that the number of new users may rise and have access to the internet. It's possible that social media's significance will only grow. But in order to counteract the detrimental effects of fake news or poor public discourse and to increase the likelihood that voters will beinformed, a modern multi-stakeholder conversation involving political parties, civil society, tech companies, and the Election Commission's involvement is imperative.

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