



THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL MARKETING IN THE 2014 AND 2019 ELECTIONS IN INDIA

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Introduction

Marketing as it said to be one of the competent and most important factors for the growth of any entity, be it a brand, a product, a person etc. The same applies to the political world that we deal with at present. The ever-increasing competition among the political parties has left them with no option but to promote them in a way in which they can justify themselves to be the best amongst all. There has been an increased application of marketing techniques by the political parties these days which popularly has evolved and has become to be known as Political marketing. Over the years the implicit ties between marketing and political process have become inevitable and more prominent. Major changes have taken place in the political marketplace in the past three to four decades in terms of the influx of social and mass media as information dissemination tools. There has been a rapid escalation of campaign costs with respect to political marketing. Both business marketers and political marketers have started using media outlets to inform, remind, and alter the attitudes and behaviours of potential clients and voters (respectively), and they both try to employ similar tools when structuring campaigns, such as market research and statistical analysis.

The stage of National politics in India has been recently dominated by two opposites, the traditional reform oriented Congress party and the new-age radical rightist Bhartiya Janata Party. They are active in almost all states in the Union, with sinusoidal popularity trends with time. Also, with the growing clout of regional parties, it has become important to inculcate them to the national political scenario. This is mainly because more of often than not, in recent times, Central Governments have been formed and disbanded based on the support of such regional parties. Marketing is one of the most important activities followed by all parties, more so during the time of elections. Varied strategies are employed to reach out to the voters and gain their support along with votes. We changing demographic dynamics, these strategies have been modified to suit the target audience. Political marketing as a subject and practice has gained license among strategists.

Historically, politicians strive to understand the perception of voters and accordingly prepare their communication strategy. This awareness of a voter is influenced by her learning, experiences, and political socialisation. Angus Campbell, in a co-authored book, *The American Voter*, argued how informal sources, such as family, friends and peers, influence the political behaviour of a voter. However, this trend is fast changing. In an empirical study, this author found that formal sources, viz. television, internet and newspaper, have taken over informal sources that earlier succeeded in changing voter perception. In response to the changing source of political information, the practices adopted by political parties to influence voters, too, are changing.

Political Marketing has evolved in the last few decades to become more person dependent, or politician driven than ever. This has led to the phenomenon of politicians being branded based on electoral expectations and aspirations. While there has been extensive research on how and why a politician is branded, there isn't much work on how a politician's brand journeys through a voter's mind from the lowest level of association to the highest. This restricts the brand-building effort only to the perceptions of voter's needs and expectations. In political marketing, political parties apply the concept and tools of

marketing in order to attract the attention of the electorates with the aim of gaining competitive success in elections.

Political marketing is practised without much theoretical backing. Voters are treated as consumers, their needs are identified and researched and marketing campaigns are designed on that basis. Also, political promises/manifestos/leaders are sold as a product in return for votes instead of money. In their book, Political Marketing, Robert P. Ormrod et al. said, “Political marketing is a perspective from which to understand phenomena in the political sphere, and an approach that seeks to facilitate political exchanges of value through interactions in the electoral, parliamentary and governmental markets to manage relationships with stakeholders.”

In the race to win the mindshare of voters, political marketing agencies focus on 360-degree communication for candidates. This can be broadly categorised in three verticals – first is ‘content development’, which includes manifesto development, punch-lines and slogans, speeches and interviews to be delivered by leaders and audio-visual bytes broadcasted through mainstream and social media. Second is the ‘medium’ through which the content is disseminated, and this includes television, radio, newspaper, social media, loudspeakers, accessories like caps, badges and outdoor advertising, including banners, posters, pamphlets and hoardings. Efforts are directed towards repetition of catchy content through all possible mediums of communication for it to stay as top-of-mind-recall of voters. The third, and very important, category is ‘event’, which enables on-ground symbolic activity to show strength through public meetings (rallies), resentment through protests, connectivity through road shows, inclusiveness through religious visits and dinner programmes. Ormrod et al. have given the example of Mahatma Gandhi burning British cloth as one of the important symbolic events in history with far-reaching impact in India.

In all these three categories, the leader remains at the centre of the political marketing. Ideologies are withering and elections are becoming more and more idol-centric. The persona of a leader is taking over the policies of his/her party. Elections around the world are following in the footsteps of US presidential-type campaigns where the face of a party is the most important tool. Thus, the primary task of a political marketing agency is to carefully craft the image of a leader, who acts as the brand ambassador of party, policy, government and the people at large. Clever strategies are designed to malign the competitors by exposing their weakness and in response the opposition also carries out similar campaigns. On the face of it, this might seem like a humble exercise, but it is interesting to note that a whopping \$5 billion (highest in the world) was spent by various political parties for political marketing in the 2014 general elections.

There are few private companies in India which provide support to political parties, not explicitly in the name of marketing though, such as the Indian Political Action Committee, led by Prashant Kishore, Association of Brilliant Minds, working for the Bharatiya Janata Party, Dentsu, APCO and many others. The dubious source of funding is one of the many reasons why politicians and companies in India avoid talking about this open secret. With the passage of time, this field will see the entry of more and more companies, given the quantum of money involved; and as the sector grows, the awareness of voters regarding the subject is also bound to grow.

Citizens would soon start to understand the efforts adopted by various political parties and their leaders to influence voting behaviours through different marketing tools. Like in the case of the consumer market, marketing agencies will assist political parties to understand voter needs and design campaigns



accordingly. Eventually, it may lead to developing a feedback loop which becomes a tool for participative democracy, where voters can communicate their priorities to politicians and policymakers. Political campaigning is one aspect of any election system and it includes the use of many forms of communication tools including political advertising. As compared to other campaigning tools a large share of campaign expenditure is allocated for the purpose of political advertising and that too across various political parties in India. But, in India where elections are contested more on the basis of caste, creed, religion and regional issues, the attempt to make the people informed and knowledgeable, and to have their favourable action tendencies through the intense use of advertising is certainly a matter which makes us inquisitive about the role of political advertising in Indian context.

Voting is one of the most commonly used terms in contemporary age of democratic politics. The ever increasing popularity of democratic theory and practices has even made this term a household name. In democratic systems, and their number is quite large and ever increasing, each adult citizen uses 'voting' as a means for expressing his approval or disapproval of governmental decisions, policies and programmes of various political parties and the qualities of the candidates who are engaged in the struggle to get the status of being the representatives of the people. Man is a rational creature in the philosophical sense of term; he is not so rational in the realms of his economic or political behaviour. An empirical study of the determinants of electoral behaviour displays the astounding fact that the behaviour of man is influenced by several irrational factors and pressure groups in invoking religious and communal factors, influence of money or charismatic personality of a leader and host of other irrational forces have their definite influence on the minds of the voters. The main purpose of the present study is to focus attention on voting behaviour in India and to highlight the factors that determine the voting behaviour in India.

Types of Elections in India

As India is a Federal Parliamentary Democratic Republic, elections are used as a tool to elect the representatives of citizens of India. In India, elections are held for electing the members of Lok Sabha (Lower House), Rajya Sabha (Upper House), State Legislative Assemblies & Local Governments.

Lok Sabha (Lower House/ House of People): These are the elections where the adult citizens of India choose the 543 members of Lok Sabha (Members of Parliament) through direct voting. The term of MP is of five years or until the body is dissolved by President. The party who wins 272 seats is entitled to form the Central Government and the leader of the party becomes Prime Minister of the country.

Rajya Sabha (Upper House): The members of Rajya Sabha are not directly elected by citizens of India rather they are elected by the already winning candidates of Lok Sabha. The President can also nominate the members at his discretion. The tenure of each member of Rajya Sabha is six years but one third of the members change every year. Lok Sabha is more powerful than Rajya Sabha because it is treated as second level review body during the conversion of Bill into Act.

State Legislative Assembly: Members of State Legislative Assembly are elected by direct voting from particular constituencies. The total strength of the assembly depends upon size and population of each state, so, its variable. The tenure of members of Legislative Assembly is five years or until the body is dissolved by governor. The leader of the party is nominated as Chief Minister.

Local Government: Local government includes Corporations, Municipalities, Smitis & Panchayats. The members of local bodies are directly elected by the voters of relevant geographical area.

Techniques used in Political Marketing

Political marketing involves the organized political campaigns comprising of different techniques:

Direct Marketing: It is the foremost and classic method used by the political parties. They deliver their message through mails, phones, fliers, speeches, concerts etc.

Competition Research: Political marketing doesn't only involve the propaganda of its own USPs, rather it is focused on the publicity of negativity of opposition but the negativity must be concrete and evidenced one. It requires a lot of research on the same issue. It is actually based upon SWOT analysis emphasizing that the weakness of a competitor is one's own strength.

Internet Marketing: The use of internet marketing is on the rise. Political parties use internet marketing tools like e-mail marketing, pay per click advertising or social media, blogs to advertise their political agenda, party, candidate, campaign, party etc.

Market segmentation: Political marketers use the technique of market segmentation i.e. segmentation of the target voters to design their speeches keeping in mind their cultural background, demographic features etc.

Product Development: In political marketing, the product is the party or ideology or the candidate. As the voters are very much interested in knowing about the product, the parties tend to design the product in most effective and elaborated manner e.g. creating the image of their candidate by highlighting struggle in his life, his achievements, and his contribution in social, economic, cultural or political arena etc.

Market Surveys: Such surveys are also conducted by the political parties to critically analyze the acceptance of the candidate and accordingly to design the political strategies.

Branding: Political parties also use branding for their marketing. They pose their candidate as a brand or a symbol of prosperity. BJP used the image of Narendra Modi as a brand in 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha Elections by emphasizing Modi wave.

A Brief of 2014 Elections

The 2014 Indian general election was a historic event on multiple fronts a staggering 834 million citizens were eligible to vote, of which nearly 554 million voters actually cast their ballots on Election Day at more than 900,000 polling stations throughout the country. This amounted to a voter turnout rate of 66.4 percent, the highest in India's history and a full 8 percentage points higher than the turnout recorded in either the 2004 or 2009 national elections. When deciding whom to vote for, India's voters had an expansive number of options to choose from: 8,251 candidates representing 464 political parties faced off in 543 parliamentary constituencies across 29 states and seven union territories.¹ Although the numbers are difficult to pin down, experts believe the 2014 poll was the second most expensive election ever held, following only the 2012 U.S. presidential election.²

The election's outcome was also historic. Preelection polls had uniformly predicted that the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which held power from 1998 to 2004, would emerge as the single largest party in parliament. Yet few foresaw the size of the victory achieved by the BJP and, conversely, that of the defeat suffered by the ruling Indian National Congress (INC).³ Of the 543 seats in India's lower house of parliament (Lok Sabha) on offer, the BJP claimed victory in 282, while its coalition allies

notched wins in another 41 seats. Although it chose to form a government with its preelection alliance partners, the BJP was not compelled to do so; it had a clear majority in the Lok Sabha, the first time a single party has won such a majority since 1984 and the first time ever that a single party other than the Congress has achieved this feat.⁴

The Congress Party, on the other hand, saw its tally drop to a paltry 44 seats, a dramatic decline from the 206 seats it captured in 2009 (see figure 1) and its worst-ever performance in a general election. The party's seat total was so small that it fell short of the minimal threshold necessary to nominate one of its own to serve as leader of the opposition in the lower house—a designation that requires a command over at least 10 percent of the body's seats.



The BJP victory also appears to have redrawn the political map of India. After winning more than one-quarter (25.6 percent) of ballots cast and 182 seats in the 1998 general election, the BJP experienced a secular decline on both counts.

All things considered, the 2014 election presented a mixed picture. Economic factors played an unusually large role in shaping voting behavior. Traditional patterns of caste-based voting were much less evident, and regional parties, often thought to be gaining ground, suffered a setback. A slightly deeper look, however, reveals that these changes were not necessarily unique to the 2014 general election. There is evidence to suggest that many of these trends have been percolating beneath the surface for some time. What 2014 has done is to bring these trends to the fore of public consciousness. However, on other dimensions, 2014 signaled more continuity than change. Despite widely held pronouncements that a young, aspirational, and increasingly urban India is no longer amenable to the

idea that politics will be, to a significant measure, the province of a relatively small number of political families, dynastic politicians performed very well in the 2014 elections. The same can be said of politicians associated with criminal wrongdoing; as a percentage of India's parliament, more politicians with criminal cases pending against them (including those of a serious nature) were elected than ever before.

These findings suggest that the Indian voter has neither fully entered a new era, nor stayed firmly in line with past behavior. For instance, while the aspirations of Indian voters may have changed insofar as they are placing greater emphasis on macroeconomic outcomes when deciding whom to vote for, there seem to be few changes in the personal characteristics of individual candidates on offer.

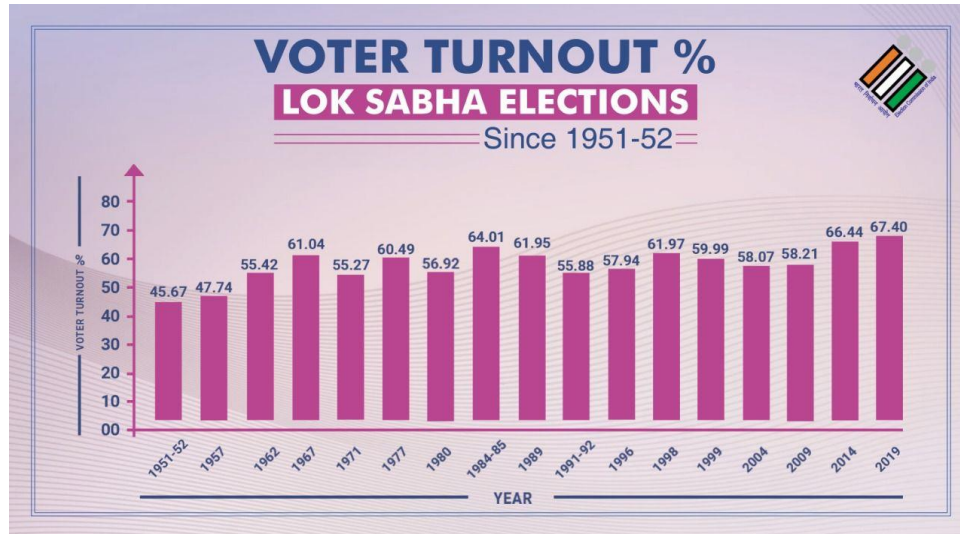
At the same time, social biases built around caste or ethnic identities remain deeply entrenched in politics, even as the way they are expressed might be changing. Cross-caste coalitions have been a hallmark of recent state and national elections, and appeals to identity politics are increasingly married with promises of economic development.

Finally, the regionalization of politics has stabilized in recent years, and may in fact have suffered a reversal. The share of the vote flowing to regional parties decreased in the 2014 general election, and many dominant regional parties saw their fortunes plummet even as a limited number of others held steady. The biggest change, however, was the composition of the vote accruing to the two national parties with truly pan-Indian appeal, the Congress and the BJP. In a sharp break with the prevailing trend in postindependence India, the BJP has now displaced the Congress as the "pole around which political competition is organized," to borrow a phrase coined by Yogendra Yadav.⁷ In many states where the BJP had a marginal presence in past elections, the party profited at the expense of the Congress, whose local support greatly diminished.

A Brief of 2019 Elections

The 900 million Indian voters will, through a direct, constituency-wise system, elect their federal representatives for the 543 seats in the Lok Sabha through a simple majority in each specific geographically defined constituency that is demarcated on the basis of population. The two remaining seats out of the total of 545 seats in the Lok Sabha are reserved for the Anglo-Indian community, which traces part of its ancestry to Europeans who intermarried with Indians in the colonial era. These two members are nominated by India's President. Each election constituency has a variable number of candidates, most fielded by either a national or a regional political party, although some independent candidates and strategic independents planted by rivals to cut into each other's votes are also invariably in the fray. A party or a coalition of parties requires a simple majority of at least 272 Members of Parliament (MPs) to form a government. This majority selects its leader, who becomes the Prime Minister.

The BJP's 2014 and 2019 general election victories, coupled with the party's meticulous expansion at the state-level and approaching majority in the Rajya Sabha (indirectly-elected upper house of Parliament), firmly establish it as the central pole around which politics in India now revolves. If the party's victory in 2014 raised doubts about the resilience of India's coalition-based "third party system," the 2019 election decisively shattered the idea that 2014 was a "black swan" election — a lone aberration rather than the dawn of a new era.²



There is little doubt that the frenetic and ostentatious campaigning that accompanies every Indian General Election lends an air of festivity to it, and the 2019 elections have been no different. That, however, in no way detracts from the seriousness with which the exercise is undertaken by candidates and voters alike. Hence, the term “show” tends to trivialize the gravity of the elections by focusing on the festivities while diluting or clipping away the real issues involved. The discerning nature of the Indian voter is also overlooked by such a description. In the midst of all the colour, fun and frolic that have become traditions at every General Election, the voters have been known to spring major surprises that make pundits and forecasters look rather sheepish. The modern voter bases decisions on a dispassionate scrutiny of the government’s performance over the preceding five years, on whether it has fulfilled its pre-election promises, the extent to which its policies and decisions have benefited them and their communities, but above all on their perception of the promises made for the next five years. The opposition too is gauged by its historical performance, its track-record in honoring past election pledges, and whether its current manifesto contains offers that are alluring yet implementable. The charisma and standing of the individuals projected by each party as their Prime Ministerial candidate also plays an inextinguishable role in the voters’ choice.

Democracy has a long and sustained history in India. A limited form of democracy was exercised in the country even before it attained freedom from British colonial rule in 1947. Post-independence, in an unprecedented democratic experiment India adopted universal adult suffrage under which every adult Indian was given the right to vote. There had been widespread skepticism over the fate of democracy in a newly independent country as large and diverse as India. The doubters, however, underestimated the appeal democracy had for the Indian public. The first post-independence General Election was held in 1951-52, and the one this year will lead to the formation of the 17th Lok Sabha.

The scale and scope of the General Election in India is mind boggling. The Economist magazine once compared it to a “lumbering elephant embarking on an epic trek”. The number of eligible voters at this year’s election is 900 million. This constitutes over 10% of the world’s total population. To put it in perspective, it is more than the combined population of the continents of Europe and Australia. It is also four times the number of eligible voters in the next largest democracy in the world, the United States (US). Quite simply, the 2019 General Election in India is the largest democratic exercise that the world has ever seen.

Some commentators have termed the 2019 elections as the most significant amongst the 17 that India has had since independence. As Dr. Gareth Price, Senior Research Fellow at the Asia-Pacific Programme of Chatham House puts it, they hold “particular importance because they are likely to determine the type of country India will be over the next decade or two. The opposition parties argue that they celebrate India’s diversity—of religions, languages and ethnicities. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), however, argues that this emphasis on division—a colonial legacy—has weakened India”.

The logistics involved in organizing an exercise of as massive a scale as the Indian General Elections is truly daunting. The responsibility of carrying out this onerous task is vested in the Election Commission of India (ECI), an autonomous constitutional body that has more than 300 full-time officials at its headquarters in New Delhi. The ECI on 10 March announced the much anticipated schedule for the 2019 elections, setting in motion the whole electoral process. It decided that because of the huge number of election officials and security personnel involved, voting would take place in various parts of the country in seven phases over 39 days – on 11 April, 18 April, 23 April, 29 April, 6 May, 12 May and 19 May, and after a short break counting of the votes would be done on 23 May. In total, about 930,000 polling stations will be set up where voters will cast their votes using Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). The ECI is required to ensure that no voter needs to travel more than two km to reach a polling station. This is an enormous challenge in itself, especially when seen in the backdrop of an ECI survey finding last year that over 80,000 polling stations lacked mobile connectivity and nearly 20,000 were in forest or semi-forest areas. Polling stations are often in remote areas, and one such station is being set up in the Gir forest in India’s Gujarat state for just one voter, a monk. It is not surprising, therefore, that more than 11 million government officials have been deputed to conduct the elections, and they will travel by road, train, helicopter, boat, foot, and sometimes even on elephant back, to where their election duties take them. The cost of organizing the elections is also substantial. As per the ECI’s estimates, the previous General Election in 2014 cost 38.7 billion Rupees (\$552 million) to organize.

The main players at this year’s elections are the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led by the charismatic current Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, who had propelled his party to a landslide victory in the last elections in 2014 when the party won 282 seats. The BJP heads the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition that includes regional parties such as the Shiv Sena, the Janata Dal - United party (JD-U) and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD). Attempting to unseat the BJP is India’s grand old party, the Rahul Gandhi-led Congress that is the preeminent party in the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition. After two consecutive terms in power between 2004 and 2014, the Congress party suffered a chastening defeat in 2014 when it labored to secure a paltry 44 seats, down from 206 in 2009, on account of what the Indian voter perceived was a policy paralysis, and amidst a slew of alleged financial scams. The primary battle at the national level between these two powerhouses is spiced up by the several regional parties that are not formally aligned to either the NDA or the UPA, and whose seats assume great significance in the event of the national parties/coalitions falling short of a clear majority. Prominent among such regional parties at these elections are the socialist Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) led by Dalit icon Mayawati in the bellwether northern state of Uttar Pradesh, which elects more MPs to parliament than any other state – a whopping 80; the Trinamool Congress led by firebrand leader Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal; the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in Odisha; and the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) in Andhra Pradesh. Each of these parties is expected to win a sizeable number of seats in their respective states, and harbor hopes of becoming kingmakers, or even kings, in New Delhi in the event of voters delivering a divided verdict. Under the multi-party system that has been adopted by India, the candidate who secures the maximum number of votes in each constituency is elected to parliament. This effectively means that a candidate

could secure as little as 30% of the votes and yet be elected to parliament on the basis of the simple majority that is required.

The popularity ratings of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who emerged triumphant after a massive Modi wave at the 2014 General Elections consequent to a lackadaisical and indecisive last couple years of UPA rule, have remained high over the last five years. His party, the BJP has opted for a presidential style election campaign that revolves around the personage of Modi. The primary message being sent out by the BJP is that India is only secure and can only progress with the strong and decisive Modi at the helm. There have been shortcomings of the Modi government in the economic sphere, with slowdown in growth, agrarian distress, and unemployment numbers. Following the bold retaliatory cross-border airstrikes targeting Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorist camps deep within Pakistan in the wake of the Pulwama terrorist attack in February, the BJP has emphasized security and defence issues. The point that no Indian government had ever before responded to cross-border terrorism sponsored by Pakistan with such spunk, alacrity and competence has been underlined by Modi and his party. Modi and his party are equally vociferous in denouncing the opposition, especially the Congress, as opportunistic, dynastic, and weak and ineffectual on national security.

The opposition, meanwhile, has targeted the BJP, and Modi in particular, who it alleges is running a one-man show in which his Cabinet colleagues have little say in decision making, on issues such as the demonetization of 2016, the implementation of the Goods and Service Tax (GST) in 2017, allegations of favoritism in the purchase of Rafale fighter jets from France, attacks on institutions of the State, and dividing the country on religious lines by pushing through an anti-minority agenda. However, efforts at forging opposition unity leading into the elections have been in vain, barring some limited regional tie-ups such as that between the SP and BSP in Uttar Pradesh, and this has inhibited what at one stage appeared to be a winning strategy to capitalize fully on whatever discontent there was among the masses over the declining economy under the BJP. The opposition has also not succeeded in turning the electoral battle into one predominantly on the economy and welfare, as its focus has not been unwavering. It has, instead, leveled a plethora of charges over the last few months against Modi and the BJP, moving from one to another in the expectation that some will find resonance. They also appear to be hoping that anti-incumbency, historically a potent factor in the India electoral scenario, will do the rest of the work for them. Observers, however, feel that the opposition has fallen short in pro-actively and concertedly exploiting anti-incumbency.

Two elements that experts believe will have defining impacts on the 2019 General Elections are election spending and the use (and misuse) of social media. The skyrocketing cost of contesting elections in India is translating into a lack of transparency and conflicts of interest as political parties, faced with significantly reduced returns from traditional funding streams such as party memberships, are becoming increasingly reliant on donations from anonymous businessmen. Milan Vaishnav, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, believes that “elections are getting more expensive for many structural reasons. There is a growing population, increasing political competition, voter expectations of handouts in the form of cash and other inducements, and technological change, which means greater outlays for media and digital outreach”. Vaishnav, who co-authored a book titled *Cost of Democracy* with Devesh Kapur that deals with political funding, has estimated that India’s 2019 elections could cost up to \$10 billion. The Delhi-based think tank, Centre for Media Studies, put the estimated campaign expenditure a notch lower at \$8.5 billion. Nevertheless, both these figures are much higher than the 2016 US General Election that involved spending of about \$6.5 billion. To put things in perspective, the US is a \$19 trillion-plus economy, as against India’s \$2.7 trillion economy.

In an election in which the amount of cash a party has in hand has the potential to dictate its prospects at the hustings, the BJP would reckon that it is in a very favorable position. Analysis of data by election watchdog the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) revealed that in the financial year 2017-18, corporates and individuals contributed 12 times more to the BJP than to six other parties combined, including the Congress. The BJP received 93% of all donations above 20,000 rupees (\$290) that year. In total, the BJP received 4.37 billion rupees (\$63.3 million) while the Congress got a comparatively paltry 267 million rupees. This incomparable disproportion caused Niranjana Sahoo of the New Delhi-based think tank the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) to say, “There is a huge funding disparity now. Congress simply doesn’t have the money to fight elections”.

Social media had emerged as a game changer in the 2014 General Elections and had yielded rich dividends for the BJP. That was also the first time in an Indian election that a party had creatively and effectively utilized technology, including analytical engines, as a potent tool. The Congress lagged far behind in this field, and that found reflection in the final results. At the time in 2014 when Twitter published an article on the influence of Narendra Modi on their platform, Rahul Gandhi had not even joined the micro-blogging platform. He did so only in 2015. Despite Modi even today remaining one of the most followed politicians globally on social media, and a fair distance ahead of Rahul Gandhi, the Congress party has since the 2014 electoral debacle pursued its social media outreach seriously. While the BJP still retains the edge that it derived by starting way earlier, and expanded using its brimming coffers, the Congress, as also other major parties, is now also making its presence felt on the digital platform. It would be suicidal not to. There are close to half a billion smartphone users in India, of whom about a quarter of a billion are on WhatsApp and an even larger number on Facebook.

Critical Analysis of Strategies Used by Political Parties in India

Political parties use social media because traditional communication medium are highly governed by election commission of India. Initially, it was the use of static webpage to promote campaign goals, promises and information. Since then the popularity of social media or the social networking sites (SNS) is increasing day by day not only globally but locally also. For example, the 2008 U.S. presidential election was the first election to utilize fully the power and reach of the SNS’s to impact voters. In the same way, during anti-corruption movement 2012 in India, social activist, Anna Hazare used social media to connect people in New Delhi.

Social media is playing entirely new role in Indian democracy. Now a days, political parties and politicians have found a new ways of reaching out to a younger and aspiration population. It was for the first time in 2009 Indian elections when online voter registration and transparency campaigns started. Political parties are becoming tech savvy. BJP, one of the major political parties in India used social media even before 2009 general election, though it lost. India has gradually adopted the use of modern strategies for political marketing. PM Narendra Modi with his team best understood the potential of new media and the opportunities offered. The credit of initiating Political advertising in India goes to BJP who started the first ever political ad campaign ‘India Shining’ on T.V. It was the effective use of technology especially social media i.e. (Google+, Hangouts, Facebook, Twitter, Blog, Youtube, Whats App, LinkedIn) that led so called NaMo campaign to success in 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The success of the campaign paved the path for every political campaign in the near future because it showed not only how to spread the messages efficiently and effectively but to exercise the multiplier effect of the same through social media platforms.

Similarly, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) utilized the technologically advanced social platforms not only to approach the people but also to accept donations through these channels. As per Internet Giant's Indian Transparency Report, political parties and their affiliates have spent Rs 3.76 crore on advertisements since February 19, 2019. BJP has taken a big lead in advertising on Google and its affiliated platforms such as YouTube with an ad spend of Rs 1.21 crore, while its main rival Congress has spent only Rs 54,100, the search engine said.

If we examine the state wise ad spending, Andhra Pradesh was the biggest ad spender with (Rs 1.73 crore), followed by Bihar (Rs 10.5 lakh), Maharashtra (Rs 17.19 lakh), Uttar Pradesh (18.47 lakh). While modern strategies are the most appropriate in the current dispensation, the traditional strategies cannot be ignored. It is only through the efficient integration of traditional media with new technology is useful in reaching to masses successfully. For instance, the door to door campaigns are very important because they offer an opportunity for the electorate to engage in a live conversation with the candidates. Besides, it is advantageous to the aspirants because they are able to convince the voters at a personal level. The modern strategies involve the use of media through televisions, radios, digital media, and social media. The emergence of social media has made people to virtually come together and interact with each other at the comfort of their homes and workplaces. Political players in India have seized this opportunity and as per now, social media is the most effective communication tool in political marketing. This is because the information is passed quickly from one social media user to another in a very short span of time through online sharing.

Political aspirants create an account with Facebook or Twitter and thereafter attract followers that will be viewing whatever they post in their status updates. At some points, the strategy used by the politicians is to create propaganda directed at their rivals in a controversial manner. The created controversy goes viral and the politicians sell their image far and wide. Although social media is widespread, it is mainly popular among youth.

Statistics on the use of social media indicates that since the year 2017 the percentage of the Indian population on social media has been on the rise since then. In 2019, social media users in India stand at 260 Million users which represents 26% of the total population. It is projected that social media usage will accelerate further. The graph below shows the growth of social media usage from 2017 and the growth projections up to 2023(—Topic: Internet usage in India,|| 2018). Televisions and radios are also used in India. However, political parties shy away from the services of these media because they usually charge exorbitantly. Besides, there is a high possibility that the information may not reach those in rural settings.

To cover the rural areas, political parties have opted for strategies like the use of posters, mobile vans with public address system and holding meetings. Another modern strategy in political marketing is through mobiles. The current generation has widely adopted the use of smart phones. These phones have made it easy for individuals to access information wherever they are at their convenience. In a recent report released by Investment firm Omidyar Network claims that Indians use mobile phones most for social communication and entertainment. The average mobile Indian internet user spends almost 70% of the time on Apps like facebook, whatsapp & other entertainment apps. Out of this 70% time, 38% time is spent only on social media giant Facebook and its other family apps like whatsapp, instagram etc. This is much more than the U.S. users who visit these apps for only 50% of the time they spend on the mobile phone. This potential of internet based mobiles is rightly identified and exploited by political parties and they have been using tele calling and SMS functions to reach directly to the voters. This was a strategy that was successfully used by BJP – Bharatiya Janata Party in Lok Sabha polls.

This strategy is mainly used to persuade individuals through sharing of attractive policies that a party intends to implement once in power. BJP members tactfully used this strategy to convince their followers that they were the right people to vote (Banerjee & Ray, 2016). Nonetheless, this strategy can be unethical especially where a company contacts an individual without prior consent. Data Extracted from Statista.Com (Internet Usage in India) Moreover, Social media activities can be either used to predict the outcome of elections. However, many companies have attempted to use the data which is available from the social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus and other platforms to predict election outcomes. Political campaigning has become a major focus in the growing field of social media studies.

Conclusion

The importance of political marketing in the political arena cannot be under-estimated. It has helped to build or destroy political figures based on the strategies chosen. From the above discussions, it can be concluded that political marketing is a field that should be viewed with a lot of seriousness if a politician is looking to emerge victoriously. It is a prerequisite for a politician's success but it should be used strategically.

The continuity in the operation of India's political system as a developing democratic political system is gradually training the Indian voters. Elections occupy a prominent place in the democratic government. It is a means through which people express and enforce their political opinion and regulate political organization of the society. Mere presence of an electoral system does not make a political system democratic. The will of people is expressed through voting in elections and therefore, all undemocratic and unfair means like manipulating and rigging need to be avoided in the elections.

The future of this form of marketing lies primarily on the internet and social media. This is evidenced by the fact that current digital generation is going to replace the older generation. This indicates that in the near future, almost everything is going to be digitalized and as such, political marketing is going to take a new twist. However, this change shall come with its challenges. One of the major challenges is that anyone has the ability to access the internet and post anything whether true or false. This is an indication that in the future, political marketing shall face the challenge of credibility and transparency.

Themes that appeared to find resonance during the first four phases included farm distress, the caste factor, anti-terror operations against Pakistan, religion and anti-incumbency. Most opinion polling agencies that released surveys said that Prime Minister Modi had got a boost from the recent tension with Pakistan and consequently the BJP would succeed in either getting a slim majority or coming very close to a majority.

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