

Role of Social Media and Digital Technology for Political Campaigning

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Abstract

Social media and the widespread use of digital technologies have led to a rise in social involvement and proactive participation in socio-political activities and political agendas. Nevertheless, our way of communicating is now undergoing development, and as a result, its impacts may be observed in the socio-economic-political aspects of the 'Information Society'. However, in a nation characterized by cultural intricacy and significant disparities in terms of accessibility, literacy, language, and geography, it is crucial to thoroughly examine multiple factors when discussing the utilization of social media in large-scale political campaigns. Social media exerted significant influence on voter behaviour during the 2014 general elections in India. Since 2014, several firms focused on social media emerged. As a result, several employment prospects were available for young individuals. By doing secondary data analyses of past research, journal articles, expert interviews, and books, a conceptual framework was developed. The current study primarily concentrates on the role of social media on political campaign, encompassing its significance, and potential prospects. Our research indicates that although politicians often claim to prioritize citizen involvement, they mostly utilize social media as a tool for disseminating information in a one-sided manner to persuade and for agenda setting. Additionally, they use social media to enhance their visibility and appear modern to the public. The study emphasizes the need for social media to be integrated into a comprehensive participatory democracy and communication strategy, rather than being viewed as a substitute for conventional campaigning efforts. This study will provide significant value to scholars and practitioners in the domains of journalism, mass communication, political science and marketing. It emphasizes the importance of political campaigning as a marketing approach with observable implications.

Keywords: Social media; Digital technology; Political campaigning; Political marketing

INTRODUCTION

The 20th century witnessed a greater convergence of new means of communication in the sphere of mass communication than any previous time in history. With the emergence of new forms of communication, such as the Internet, people around the world now have easy access to a vast network of interconnected systems. This has greatly enhanced the availability and variety of information and entertainment content for common people. Emerging communication media platforms are crucial in the establishment and maintenance of democratic systems, social

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structures, and economies worldwide. Social media platforms offer citizens the essential knowledge required to make well-informed socio-economic and political decisions. According to Singh, J. K. (2002), these new media platforms offer marginalized groups, women, and young people a voice and a platform to express their thoughts. These new modes of communication provide greater potential than traditional mainstream media. A significant portion of the benefits arising from new media stems from its inherent openness and accessibility. The new media provides an immense array of information. The internet has emerged as one among the most active modern phenomenon. The utilization of internet-based communication and information dissemination has significantly contributed to the progress of democratic society.

During election campaigns, social media have increasingly become a crucial component of political messaging. Since the advent of the Internet era, the mode of communication has progressed from social media platforms to forums and instant messaging. Social media is a contemporary and swiftly expanding phenomena within the realm of internet communication. Political parties and candidates utilized social media extensively to mobilize votes during India's 2014 parliamentary general election. The recent rapid expansion and widespread use of social media has garnered significant interest from experts studying political communication (Sharma, 2018). A notable focus is to examine the political influence of social media as a novel medium that facilitates individuals in acquiring political knowledge and engaging with others online. Through the interconnected nature of social media, which is rich in hyperlinks, users now have the capacity to receive, analyse, and disseminate news and information in a novel manner. In recent years, with the advent of the digital revolution, political organizations and politicians have increasingly utilized media outlets to disseminate their policy messages. This has led to the emergence of a new research field that examines social media's role as instruments for political communication also campaigning (Jackson and Lilleker, 2020). Although some politicians may have joined social media platforms later than others, it is undeniable that they all acknowledge its significance, considering the substantial assertions about the Internet's dominance in a changing public sphere (Dahlgren, 2005). The present study largely focuses on social media's role on politics, including its importance and prospective opportunities. The research seeks to analyse social media platform's role on political marketing with an objective of managing campaigns. The following are the objectives of the study:

- a) To understand the social media and democracy from the political campaigning perspective
- b) To learn the political campaign strategy using social media and digital technology
- c) To create a conceptual framework to understand the various components involved in political campaigning using social media and digital technology

MEDIA, DEMOCRACY AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

A healthy media landscape is essential to a healthy democracy. The press has consistently existed and possesses a unique privilege that is not afforded to any other business, namely, a distinct protection outlined in the constitution. Journalists often perceive themselves as guardians of our governmental system, sometimes referred to as "watchdogs of democracy." This perspective aligns with the beliefs of the founders of the constitution in several respects. Naturally, when one wholeheartedly embraces this role, it is inevitable to occasionally provoke irritation among those in authority. The general populace, consisting of a large audience of viewers and readers, frequently find themselves in a position of indecision, occasionally aligning with the media and at other times supporting the elected representatives. The influence wielded by the press in politics is a topic that occupies the thoughts of many individuals (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). The press is both criticized and commended for various facets of political life in all democratic societies. On one side, it is said to commit a multitude of offenses: jeopardizing national security, oversimplifying crucial matters of public policy, excessively emphasizing the negatives and neglecting the government's accomplishments, and exhibiting a certain degree of political prejudice. Conversely, the very politicians and experts who condemn the media make efforts to manipulate and regulate it, in order to disseminate their own views to the general public. It is essential to establish platforms that encompass various types of media and reliable sources of information in order to foster the growth and success of democracy. The media plays a crucial role in facilitating democracy by providing individuals with accurate information on societal advancements, enabling them to make well-

informed decisions. Additionally, it ensures that the elected representatives are held responsible to the general population. In order for the media to function effectively within a democratic society, it is imperative that it remains independent from both government and private influence. It is necessary for it to possess absolute autonomy in order to pursue its public goals (Singh, 2002).

POLITICAL CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Political campaigns are crucial in facilitating democratic electoral processes. It offers a medium for political figures and candidates to engage with the electorate and the wider population. Every political campaign starts with a carefully designed strategy. In order to convey their message with maximum impact, political players devise a comprehensive strategy and delineate tactics and strategies for their campaign. Campaigns should adeptly cater to the viewpoints and anticipations of voters, while simultaneously taking into account the social, economic, and political requirements of all stakeholders spanning the whole political continuum. This should be done through clear and precise language, messages, and communication channels, with a focus on specific target audiences and the overall environment. (Asante, 2020). The link between political campaigns and the media remains strong, despite the evolution of campaigns throughout time. The media's coverage plays a key role in political campaigns as it expands the audience's reach. The intimate relation that exists among politics and media implies that when the media undergoes transformation, political communication methods would need to adapt accordingly. The field of political campaigns has seen a significant and profound change, rendering the concepts and techniques that were widely recognized by experts and scholars 15 years ago mostly useless in the present era (Trent and Friedenberg, 2000). Based on the statement above, it is evident that technology is one of the factors influencing the development of political campaigns. The media's enduring presence in political campaigns is intrinsically linked to the transformation of political parties' campaign strategies. Politicians in Africa have used WhatsApp, a widely used social media platform across the area, into their campaign strategy, taking advantage of the growing popularity of social media throughout the continent. This is in contrast to sixty years ago, when the primary means of communication had been direct conversations and newspapers. Unanticipated events, such as pandemics, can also impact political campaigns. In 2020, amidst the global outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic, both the United States and Ghana were experiencing an election year. Several political parties have to involve Zoom into the campaign's strategy to organize virtual rallies, instead of traditional in-person gatherings with media attention.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY

Social media refers to a collection of internet-based software applications that facilitate the creation and sharing of material provided by users. These platforms enable interactive communication and increased engagement. Social media refers to digital platforms that enable communication between individuals and information sources. These platforms are characterized by personalization, scalability, speed, and convenience (Katz et.al 2013). Twitter, an online newsfeed and social networking site, has become an important tool in political communication. It serves as a platform for microblogging, allowing users to post and see concise messages known as tweets, with a character restriction of 140 (Levy, 2016). Twitter was introduced in 2006 as a social networking platform. Currently, it has over 328 million monthly active users worldwide (Statista, 2017). Despite Facebook's greater popularity with over 1.9 billion monthly active users compared to Twitter (Statista.com, 2017), Twitter data is frequently utilized by organizations, governments, and researchers for analysing online conversations of social media users. This is due to the platform's openness, which provides convenient access to its data for research purposes. Social media platforms have gained significant popularity among the youth in India, becoming integral parts of their life in contemporary society. The technology enables the younger generation to converse, share messages, exchange knowledge, and relate with one another, irrespective of the geographical distance that partitions them.

Social media facilitates nationwide connectivity, transcending disparities and geographical limitations. The shortening of time and distance, the integration of media, and the consequences of globalization have transformed a nation into an increasingly interactive entity. The younger generation is becoming at ease with utilizing and accessing social

media platforms to communicate and establish relationships online. The middle-aged category and adults are proficient in utilizing this technology due to their familiarity with the modern era. The younger generations may lack recollection of the specific circumstances or timeframe in which they acquired the skills to use a computer or utilize the Internet; these resources have been consistently there throughout their memory. Adolescents, in particular, readily utilize emerging technology in a manner that progressively blurs the distinction among their online as well as offline behaviours (Ahmed, 2017). Continuous advancements over time have enhanced the capability of data as well as digital marketing strategies. The integration of data collecting, analysis, and targeting became even more embedded in the everyday routines of consumers due to the emergence of social media channels and mobile phones. Due to their distinctive function in users' lives, these platforms have the capability to gather vast quantities of data, encompassing not just users' self-disclosed information but also data obtained from their everyday actions. The proliferation of software programs and analytical methods has enhanced ability of digital media companies and their advertisers to derive valuable insights from the large volume of data they generate (Smith, 2014). Predictive analytics has offered a wider range of methods to assess, evaluate, and classify persons, using a more detailed collection of behavioural, demographics, and psychographic information.

ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON INDIAN POLITICS

The 16th general election in India took place over a period of April and May, divided into 9 parts. Undoubtedly, it was among the most highly anticipated elections in recent times. The reason for this was the evolving landscape of Indian politics. Social media had a pivotal role in determining which party will secure the majority of seats. The Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) presented an intriguing report in April 2013. The study was also supported by the Iris Knowledge Foundation and the IAMAI. It has been shown that Facebook users exert significant influence on the outcomes of the votes in 160 out of India's 543 seats. The primary factor for this phenomenon is the youthful population of India. According to the survey, 50% of the population falls within the age category below 25, and moreover, 65% falls within the age group below 35. Individuals in this age bracket are often engaged in either pursuing further education at a university or employed in diverse business organizations. Corporate entities such as information technology corporations, business process outsourcing firms, research institutions, and entrepreneurs, among others. Their hectic schedule has resulted in a significant separation among radio and television. This phenomenon is particularly evident when it comes to obtaining or exchanging information. The younger generation is technologically inclined and enjoys staying connected with the latest trends and subjects. This form of connectivity may be achieved by utilizing laptops, desktops, or the increasingly popular network-connected mobile devices. India serves as a prime illustration of a nation that extensively utilizes social media for political communication. Social media platforms provide a distinct capability of personalizing political material, which politicians utilize to disclose information about different political matters (Xaxis, 2015).

An excellent example may be observed in the shrewd employment of social media specialists by the current India's Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi, amid his election campaign. A substantial proportion of social media users have subscribed to and followed the respective accounts on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, therefore establishing a new record. Based on the provided statistics, Mr. Narendra Modi has amassed a total of thirty-four million Facebook likes, eighteen million following across his official account, and thirty-four million following on his private profile (Burson-Marsteller, 2022). He employed his live discussions, such as 'India272.com,' 'Chai PeCharcha,' 'namonumber.com,' and even his page on Facebook, 'I support Narendra Modi,' to broaden the voting demographic. The strategic initiative offered several benefits, such as the opportunity to directly interact with approximately 120 million first-time voters, strengthen support from members of the political party Bhartiya Janatha Paty (BJP), communicate the party's regulations and goals to the public, establish a compelling narrative of progress, and continually motivate individuals with a strong inclination for change (Digiperform, 2015). The growing prevalence of internet usage has facilitated more engagement in social media platforms, allowing individuals to stay informed about prevailing political developments and actively contribute to social causes. An exemplary instance is the nationwide anti-corruption campaign headed by Anna Hazare during his youth. Contrary to the prevailing notion that the younger generation

lacks political engagement or interest in social and political activism, the movement has demonstrated that young people were driven by social networking sites (Neyazi, 2013). Figure 1 portrays the dimensions of political campaigns in India using social media.

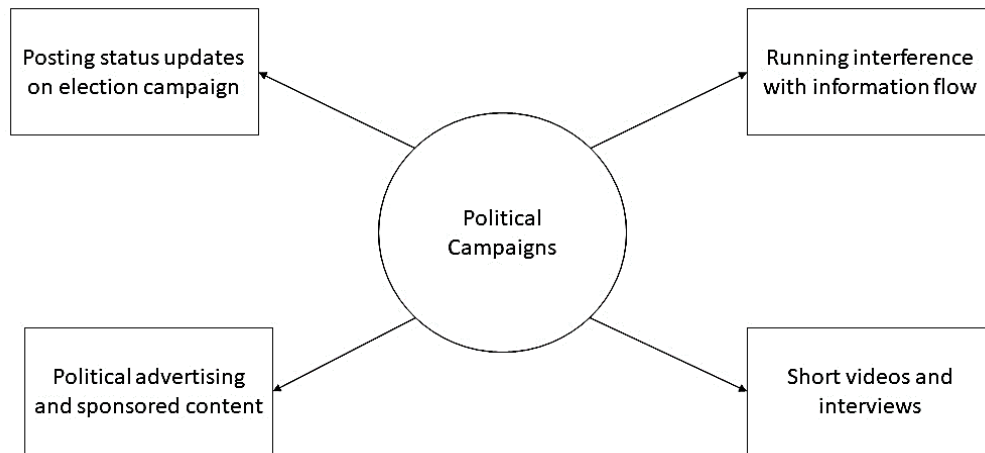


Figure 1: Political campaigning in India

Mishra (2015) contends that the outcome of the 2015 Delhi Assembly Election was significantly impacted by the utilization of the internet, given that over 90% of the electorate possessed internet connectivity. Social media has transformed the conventional one-way communication model, leading to the emergence of interactive discussions and dialogues. The study done by Safiullah et.al. (2016) emphasizes relationship between political marketing driven by social media and percentage of votes obtained in the context of India. Udupa (2019) argues that the use of extreme speech and abusive content using memes, labels, hashtags, video and syntax, remixes have become a prominent characteristic of political involvement on social media platforms, reflecting the changing dynamics of modern politics. Chopra (2019) emphasizes the perilous pattern of utilizing Facebook and WhatsApp during elections to propagate hate speech and disseminate false information, frequently provoking communal violence. Globally, social media networks have increased hazards that female politicians face, especially from trolling and cyberbullying (Patterson 2016).

POLITICAL MARKETING AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

In recent election cycles, political campaigns have utilized micro-targeting techniques to influence individuals' actions by leveraging personalized data sets and marketing applications. However, significant technological advancements and industry progress have resulted in a more advanced system compared to the one in place in 2012 (Rubinstein, 2014). Political campaigns have long had the ability to compile comprehensive and broad profiles of US voters by combining official voter databases with commercial data from information brokers (Rubinstein, 2014). Thanks to recent advancements in advertisements technology as well as information businesses, there is now an expanding network of specialized firms that provide enhanced facilities for mining data and voter targeting. Data marketing clouds are among the newly introduced entities. These clouds, created by prominent companies like Oracle, Adobe, Salesforce, IBM, and Nielsen offer political data and comprehensive consumer data for every prospective target. This includes information like as credit card activity, personal hobbies, consumption patterns, and media consumption patterns (Salesforce DMP, 2017). Some expansive cloud services also serve as a vital and contemporary component for accurate digital targeting—the data management platform (Chavez, 2017).

Data Management Platforms (DMPs) offer campaigners a means to efficiently manage and oversee every one of their audience's and campaign information in a single, centralized location. They do this by collecting and analysing

personal data from both digital and physical sources. First-party data from a customer's supermarket loyalty card or website, smartphone, or tracking device usage is included. Second-party data—information gathered by another firm and sold to others—is also used. Finally, they use third-party data from several suppliers, including financial, socioeconomic, and data-broker elements like race, ethnicity, and family size (O'Hara, 2016). This data may create specific "target market segments" and identify and "activate" people "through independent advertising platforms or exchange". According to Bennett (2016) and Regan (2016), DMPs are fast becoming an indispensable instrument for political campaigns. Political operations rely on Facebook and Google's wide variety of commercial internet marketing tools and methods and political-specific advertising "products" (Bond, 2017). The growth and complexity of the web-based markets have helped candidate campaigns identify, target, and connect with voters. Six key strategies define current digital political marketing. We also provide concise examples of how these approaches were utilized during election periods (Kaye, 2016).

Programmatic advertising: Programmatic advertising uses computer programs and algorithms to discover and target customers wherever they go (Allen, 2016). The procedure can potentially entail millisecond "auctions" that "present an advertisement to a particular customer, in a particular context" Programmatic advertising now uses new data sources to target people on any device they use (Regan, 2016).

Cross-device targeting: Engaging clients throughout their "multichannel" journey requires a thorough "identity-graph" of their permanent "identity". "Cross-device recognition" tells marketers if a social media user is using a PC and watching phone video. Political and other campaigns target across devices. Campaigns use voter files during onboarding to contact their target audience on smart phones at more responsive times (Kaye, 2016). The provision of such discrete information enables the development of "dynamic creative" advertisements, which are designed to be more precise and can be modified continuously to deliver "extremely targeted messaging" to specific individuals (Schuster, 2015).

Geolocation targeting: Through Wi-Fi, GPS, Bluetooth, mobile devices generate signals which gives marketers access to track users. Everything of these activities can be done faster and more efficiently. Many new location-targeting technology can now track consumers while they drive, shop, or enter a mall. Geolocation-based data-marketing solutions now include cellular data companies, machine learning, monitoring businesses, and new mobile targeting standards. (Tufekci, 2014). The following are the social media and digital technology methods that can be adopted for

Online video advertising: Mobile and other digital video is a popular approach for companies and marketing initiatives to offer emotive content. There are several short- and long-form web video ad styles that perform well in politics and other marketing. You Tube "Creators" used these campaign micro-moments to sway voters' political views (Schwartz & Solove, 2011).

Targeted TV advertising: Digital technology and "accessible" sets-top boxes have made broadband and broadcast television formidable micro-targeting engines that can send voter-specific advertising messages like web marketing. Television advertising is crucial to political campaigns. To produce more precise advertisements, political campaigns are at the forefront of implementing information brokers' "second-to-second viewer data" and "demographics and a cross-platform data obtained by a variety of resources" through set-top boxes (Ravi, 2011).

Neuromarketing, Psychographic, Emotion targeting: Advertisers have used psychological profiling, mood evaluation, and emotional assessment for years, especially in campaigns for politics (Packard, 2007). Recent improvements in neurological science, cognitive technology, predictive analytics, behavioural surveillance, and other fields have helped the industry of digital advertising improve these technologies (Crupi, 2015). Digital advertising uses granular-based communications to more effectively "engage" with people and develop brand connections. Facebook (2015), Nielsen's research, and most major businesses employ "neuromarketing" services to assess advertising messages' emotional impact. Google has identified "Emotion Analytics" to be a developing discipline that leverages new data sources and tracking methods to help marketers assess campaign and asset emotional impact. According to Katz et al. (2017),

“psychological and emotional targeting” in advertisement allows huge groups to be influenced by “modifying persuading messages to the psychological requirements” of specific audiences.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study is grounded on the theoretical framework of participatory democracy theory. Participatory democracy is a kind of decision-making where citizens collectively choose policy recommendations, but politicians are responsible for implementing such policies (Aragones & Sanchez-Pages, 2014). This review examines the correlation between participatory democracy and social media within contemporary democratic contexts. Within several civilizations, a key challenge in participatory democracy theory is in the electorate's restricted awareness of the challenges they confront and the decisions they must make. Additionally, there is the issue of a dearth of enthusiasm and motivation to actively pursue novel knowledge. This offers contemporary politicians the opportunity to disseminate information to the public for minimal or no expense, in contrast to the substantial cost associated with utilizing traditional media. In any democratic system, it is the responsibility of the candidates to proactively engage with the public, rather than for the public to initiate contact with them. Participatory democracy involves the engagement of all political players. The conventional media often hinders the complete achievement of participatory democracy as not all relevant parties actively engage in the political discussion. The discourse is exclusively monologic, consisting of political groups and the candidates communicating with the people with their intents, aims, and reasons for deserving votes. Conversely, social media strengthens the participatory democracy idea by providing an opportunity for all political stakeholders to actively engage to campaigning or discussions. Individuals can interact with politicians via social media platforms by expressing their approval, leaving comments, and disseminating their messages. Candidates can generate public attention by producing content that strongly connects with the electorate (Arya, 2013).

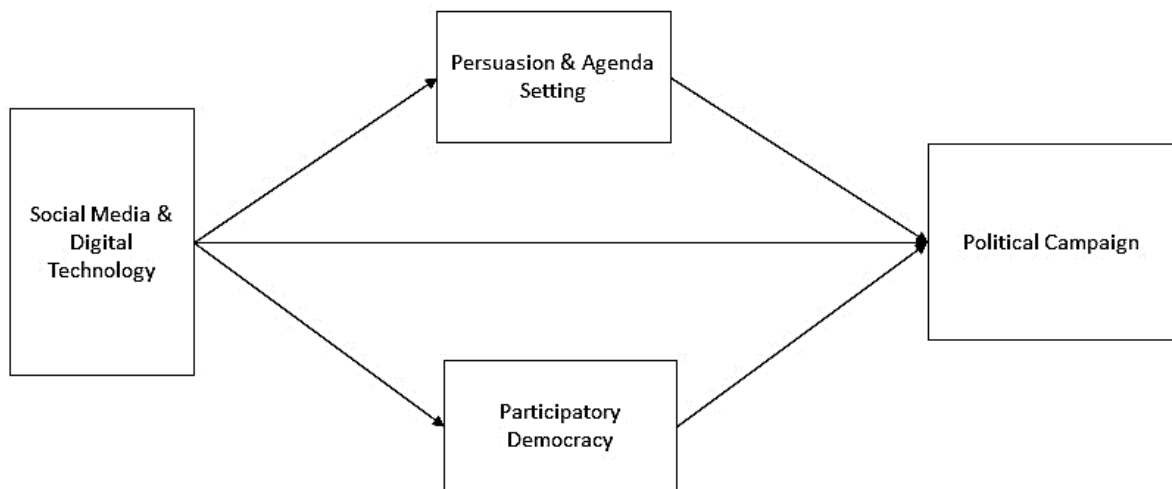


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

Persuasion: It is commonly understood as the act of influencing people by altering their views, values, or attitudes via human communication (Simons, 1976). Persuasion approach is an advertising philosophy that seeks to quietly alter values, attitudes, and views. The cognitive dissonance theory, a form of persuasion theory, aims to generate sufficient conflict in individuals to prompt them to modify their views, principles, convictions, or behaviours. The social judgment hypothesis, developed by Muzafer Sherif and Carl Hovland, posits that individuals are more easily persuaded by those who share their viewpoints. In the realm of politics, however, each candidate harbours the objective of becoming victorious. The path to success requires not only the backing of devoted supporters but also the endorsement of indecisive voters (Darshan & Kalyani Suresh, 2017).

Social Media and Agenda Setting: The media has a crucial influence in determining the topics that are given priority and attention. Agenda setting is a theory in mass communication that explains the interaction between mass media and its impact on the targeted population. The idea posits that mass media serves as the major means through which the public interacts with the external environment. During the era of conventional media, the responsibility of agenda-setting rested exclusively with the media. Nevertheless, in the era of digitalization, every political participant possesses the capacity to choose the course of action as well. According to the agenda setting theory, portraying them negatively (declaration bias), the media can influence an election by favouring their candidate (acceptance bias), and omitting significant incidents that involve their rival. When social media is used, this concept changes. Political parties may leverage their ability to create material and actively engage with the public to set the topic to a certain extent and enhance their exposure.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The conceptual evaluation reveals a paucity of literature with a restricted emphasis on the wider concerns. Social media in India is revolutionizing political communication by supplanting the old print and mass media's prevailing influence and establishing new benchmarks. The prevalence of social media utilization in political campaigns has experienced a substantial surge since its widespread adoption. While political communication beyond elections has grown commonplace in other nations, Indian political players have lately started engaging in this practice as well (Kamat, 2015). The subject of social media's impact on voting patterns and political involvement has been extensively studied. However, the factors that influence and the distinctiveness of this form of interpersonal interaction have not been investigated. Commercial digital marketing is playing an increasingly important role in modern political campaigns, causing significant changes in the dynamics between parties, candidates, voters, technology and social media (Schwartz & Solove, 2011). We recognize that digital technologies have had significant beneficial impacts on the liveliness of the political domain. These include the substantial expansion of news and information sources, the notable increase in opportunities for citizen engagement, and the empowerment of individuals from different socioeconomic groups to form alliances and shape policies. The techniques used in digital marketing also have greatly aided political campaigns in increasing voter engagement, improving their ability to raise funds from small donors, and effectively generating voter participation (Owen, 2017). Nevertheless, several strategies discussed in this work give rise to significant problems, including but not limited to privacy infringement, manipulation, unfair treatment, and absence of transparency. The use of modern digital marketing techniques has brought forth significant concerns over the protection of customer privacy in recent years (Solove & Hartzog, 2014). In the realm of politics, where the current technology of data analytics and targeting collects and analyses thousands of very sensitive data points, including political information about individuals, the hazards are significantly amplified.

Political communication in the realm of social media involves expressing one's political beliefs and scrutinizing adversaries via careful observation and analysis. The ruling administration utilizes social media platforms to disseminate its development goal to the general public, whilst opposition parties endeavour to identify and exploit any weaknesses or vulnerabilities. Social media platforms facilitate the establishment of virtual world democracy. The traditional media outlets and social media are displaying a growing tendency to align and be mutually exclusive. The investigation found that experts have neglected gender issues in social media and political communication in India and lack empirical data on this topic. Future social media research in India should focus on gendered political communication. The digital media and campaigning will persist in its endeavours to conduct research and development, placing great emphasis on utilizing the potential of upcoming technologies, like artificial intelligence, and cognitive technology, for the purpose of advertising. Advertising companies are currently implementing some technological advancements in the realm of politics (Facebook, 2016). In order to understand how digital behaviours affect politics and the system, academics and organizations from civil society must closely follow these developments. Successful public policies and best practices are needed to ensure that digital technology helps democratic institutions without sacrificing their basic functions.

Limitations and subsequent research

This study investigates political campaigning using conceptual literature. It is crucial to do research that is both introspective and based on empirical evidence in order to examine how political players navigate the process of driving change and bridging communication gaps between various categories such as non-political and political, public and private, and mass and specialized audiences. Future study may explore how moderating or mediating factors including communication skill, political actors' social media goals, and user expectations that affect political campaigns on social media.

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