

Digital Media: Role and Efficacy in developing and managing Political Campaigns

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Abstract:-The marketing landscape is witnessing a paradigm shift with the revolutionary effect of technology. No marketing space is left unaffected with the impact of digital media. Political marketing or campaigns run by political parties is no exception to this thunderous phenomenon. The way in the last few years political parties have adopted this new trend and benefited from it is as interesting as any general election. The traditional methods have been outshined by these new technology tools and have forever changed the way electoral campaigns are managed. The NDA and Aam Aadmi Party were highly successful through the adoption of these tools. This paper tries to identify the role and the reasons which led to the growth and immense impact of these digital marketing tools.

Keywords – digital media, digital marketing tools, social networking.

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital media is changing the entire landscape of the country, the way society is conducting itself these days is the impact of the social media, and the virality of its content. The way the youth of the nation has taken to digital media with both hands open and the tremendous support they are garnering from the other demographic sections of the society has made the advertisers sit up and take notice. The digital platform has now become the blue eyed boy of the marketers and one of the best mediums to reach out to the educated sections of the society. The reach coverage and impact of the platform is inspiring even the political outfits to make their presence felt in a big way on the digital platform and leverage the advantages offered by the digital platform. According to a survey, face book users in 160 Lok Sabha constituencies was more than the victory margin there in the last elections, this means Facebook users could be potential swing vote banks.

Political parties have started interacting with voters thus bridging the gap like never before. The medium not only has a mass appeal but the time and cost factors also make it a hit amongst the users. The space created by the saturation of traditional mediums and the near boredom that they had started offering coupled by the growth and penetration of internet and the usage of smart phones have provided an excellent opportunity to the political parties to use this medium. Political parties have taken this opportunity seriously and have even utilized the services of professional experts to harness the challenges.

The use of digital media allows targeting the right audience with the right message and a tactful handling of the message with a bit of tinkering and subtlety helps to reach out to other segments and not only in the spread of the message but also its advocacy. Digital media strategies are now an integral part of the campaign and parties are spending an increasing

amount of time and resources in digital marketing. It is being observed and concluded by pundits that this platform can help a long way on turning the political tide towards one candidate or party. 2014 Lok Sabha elections were India's first real tryst with the powerful tool, called digital and social media. The advent and use of social media giants like Face book, Twitter, whatsapp, and others with long tentacles and penetration powers not only in urban but in semi urban and rural areas have led the way and brought about a paradigm shift in the way election campaigns are managed and controlled in the country. Though new to India, this trend was first started by the U.S. President Barrack Obama himself who emerged as the First Social Media President. His party adopted the now popular strategy of Crowd sourcing via different vehicles of social media for the presidential campaign in 2008.

After the success in The U.S the digital media revolution took India by storm but surely not by surprise with more than 200 million internet users and millions of smart phone users and the numbers ever increasing the impact was certain to be felt. The impact of digital media is not limited to interaction and access between the actual participants. Discussions and debates happening on the digital platform spill over into the mainstream and become topics and issues of national reckoning. In the 15th Lok Sabha elections one critical factor that led to the rise and success of social media was the strength of the confident aggressive tech friendly 150 million first time voters. Political parties especially BJP and AAP were aware of the power and impact of this new voter and they were the first to take advantage of this rising population.

A fact finding reveals that Social networking giant "Facebook said that 29 million people in India made 227 million interactions through posts, comments, shares, and likes about the elections from the day they were announced. Fanbase of leading political leaders increased with the onset of their digital campaign and during the elections. Also, according to Facebook, between the day the elections were announced, and the counting day, 29 million people made 227 million poll-related interactions (posts, comments, shares, and likes)." Social media helps the concerned top players to come all guns blazing at each other with full armory of tweeting, posting, re-tweeting, tagging, checking for followers, blogging and enticing the voters in every manner possible. The Maharashtra state elections as a

case in point highlight the several shades of messaging on the digital media platform from bitter sweet to sarcastic to funny sometimes harsh and below the belt from personal comments to professional conduct. The PR team of these political parties which consists of experts from engineering to management background creates numerous trending tags on various social sites and micro blogging sites, all fighting for the same mind space of the users. We saw many interesting hashtags come up on Twitter one of which was #JhootheDin trend by critics of PM Modi. A parody of BJP's 'Ache din Campaign' #JhootheDin has been trending on twitter during the Maharashtra elections. Others trending were #mahaverdict, #voteforbjp, #ivoteforcongress.

The Pandora box of content and messaging on the social media platform has an entire 360 degree spectrum not only they harp on the good work and achievements of theirs but also highlight the down slide and ill effects of their opponents. The concept of crowd sourcing wherein parties are now involving and including the users and masses in their decision making process have created a new buzz amongst the users. The feeling of being important and that the voices are being heard and incorporated have gone a long way in making the medium impactful and effective. The success of social media campaigns are dependent on how well they are intertwined with each other across the platforms. When the virality of the message is escalated with the help of other tools and this interconnectedness creates a buzz amongst the subscribers, the chances of success increase manifold.

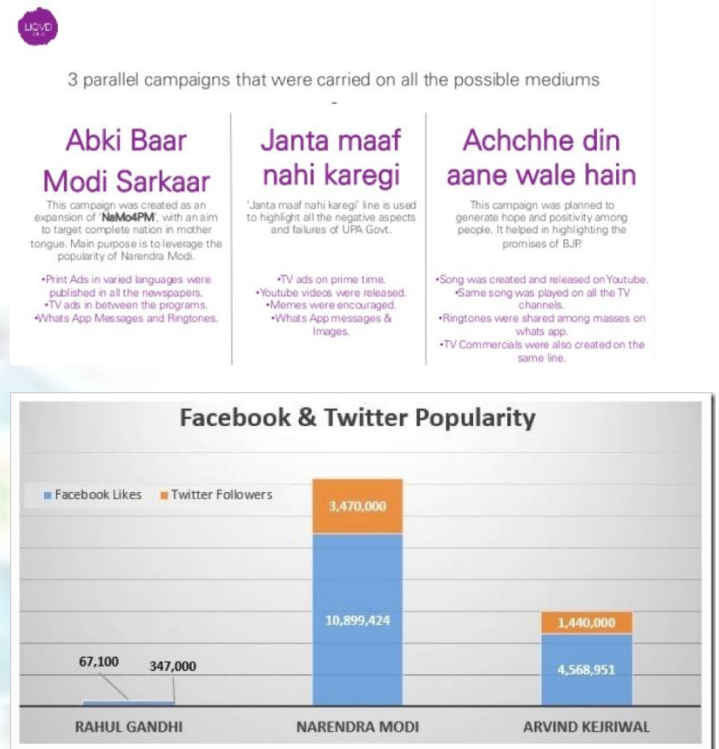
The most noteworthy reason for social media creating a strong ground for political campaigns is because it allows politicians to talk directly and efficiently with voters, this trend is here to stay and grow exponentially. Psephologists are of the firm and consensual decision that the 2014 Lok Sabha victory of Narendra Modi was given a major shot in the arm because of the social media. Researchers have concluded that with the help of digital media Mr. Modi could convey his message clearly and effectively. Congress M.P and strategist Shashi Tharoor says "Social media is indispensable, If you are thinking about a long-term future, which we are, you have to build a platform today." In a Business Today survey, conducted in 12 cities by market research firm MDRA in October, nearly 95 per cent respondents said they were following the digital campaigns of political

parties. The survey also showed that over 46 per cent of the 1,010 respondents, who will be eligible to vote for the first time, take opinions expressed online seriously.

2. HOW SOCIAL MEDIA PLAYED IMPERATIVE ROLE IN NARENDRA MODI'S HISTORIC POLITICAL WIN?

1. Narendra Modi and his team were quite active on social media since 2009.
2. Reach and coverage of social media
3. An innovative tool "Chai pe Charcha" to reach out to rural voters.
4. Website www.india272.com
5. Facebook page "I support Narendra Modi" (29 million likes and comments)
6. Third highest followers on Twitter.
7. Whats App account.
8. You tube channel (254611 subscribers)
9. Google Plus social media platform where Narendra Modi enjoys 2,749,196 followers and 352,183,305 views
10. Exposing the previous UPA government with the help of social media and creating an anti UPA environment.
11. User Engagement

Apart from reaching out to the voters one important role that Digital media played was creating a positive mood amongst the voters and supporters of Narendra Modi. The positive vibes generated through social media campaigns uplifted the mood of part workers and instilled faith and confidence amongst the voters and helped in swinging the momentum in favour of Modi and his party.



3. LEVERAGING THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

- ❖ Reach out to first time voters
- ❖ Reenergize the rank and file of the party
- ❖ Create awareness about party policies
- ❖ Generate confidence in the masses through positive social media campaigns
- ❖ Motivate and channelize people towards the BJP

1. The Expansion Effect

Once the key messages of the social media campaign have been identified, the next step is to amplify the same. One key advantage of social media as a tool is its virality, if the right buzz can be created around the message then the message can easily spread like wild flower.

2. Create Rapport

One key success points of several top leaders of today is the rapport and connect that they are able to establish with their voters. The digital format helps the leaders to communicate directly with their target group and try and develop camaraderie with them, try and

understand their point of view and assimilate the same in their campaigns, developing stronger networks and thereby making the voter feel important and converting that positive feeling into votes.

3. User friendly

One keep propeller in the surge that social media has witnessed in the last few user is the role that technology is playing. All social media tools have become extremely user friendly an the ease with which they can be navigated, reduction on hassles and their availability across platforms from computers, tablets to phones have not only made the access easier but also has lead to the ease in operation.

4. Pulse positioning

Reciprocation in dialog is an important element of social media. Social media helps in understanding the pulse of the people, what the nation is wanting and expecting. Leaders like Narendra Modi, Arvind Kejriwal were extremely successful in handling their campaigns as they could read the pulse of the people whether it be issues related to corruption, law and order, development or even religious sentiments.

5. Data Analysis

Measuring the success of campaigns is another challenge that can easily be countered by the use of digital media. There are several analytical tools like Google analytics crowd sourcing that are available that help to analyze and study the effect and impact of all campaigns, such tools help in deciding which campaigns have to be continued and which ones have to be discontinued and replaced.

6. Effective and Timely Response

Rebuttal is another important feature of the digital media platform. In any election campaign there is a lot of mudslinging and opening up of several Pandora boxes by the opponents with the sole intention of maligning the other party and candidates. This can easily be countered with the use of social media and the aggrieved can easily put his or his party's point of view in the public domain. In the U.S there is a specific term called (ATR.. ability to respond) which helps the politicians to act at critical moments in the campaign where perception matters.

7. Digital media

It is the store house of all kinds of data and information Social media can help ascertain the pulse of the nation and whatever is trending and relevant. Political parties can analyze for example such data with the help of social media.

- ❖ Trending Issues
- ❖ Demographic data
- ❖ Mood of the subscribers
- ❖ Thought Processes and Preferences

8. Fundraising

Though still not very popular in India but on the rise online donations can be attracted with the help of social media. In today's time when most political parties are harping on zero tolerance towards corruption, transparency and accountability can help a long way in their brand building and developing a positive perception about them.

9. GOTV (Get Out The Vote) Strategy

In the last general election in Canada, over 23% of the 7.5 million people who didn't vote said they skipped the ballot box because they were "too busy".

Social media can step in here and as seen in India that the elite class and sections of the middle class do not go out and vote can be encouraged, persuaded and coaxed into voting not only by the political parties towards which they have affinity but also by the election commission to come out and cast their vote and participate in the biggest festival of democracy.

10. Apathy to opportunity

Voters can be categorized into three types, (a) In favour (b) against (c) Undecided. The digital media can help to persuade those voters who are undecided by sharing with them the policies, views, manifesto, ideology, and principles of the party. Though there is no certainty that undecided voters can be converted into voters but at least an effort can be made in that direction without really spending too much time and effort and hence if it works it could be great garner of votes otherwise not much ground would be lost

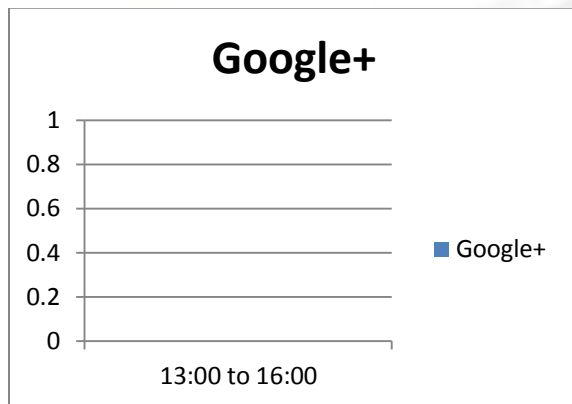
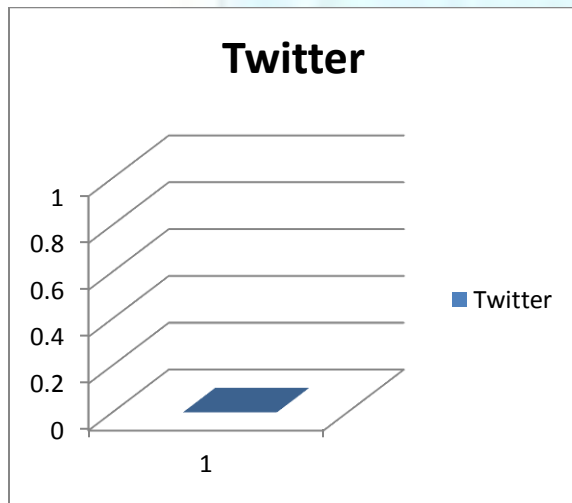
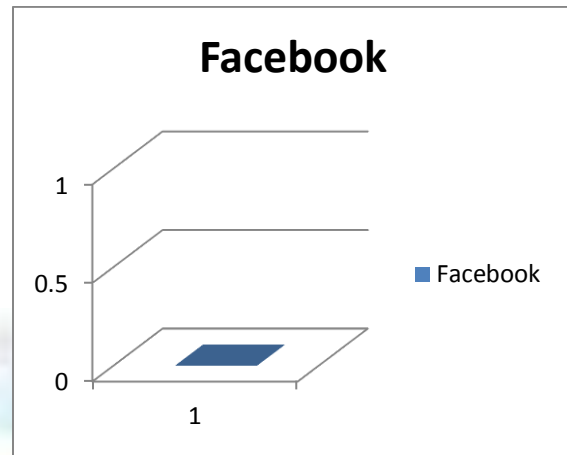
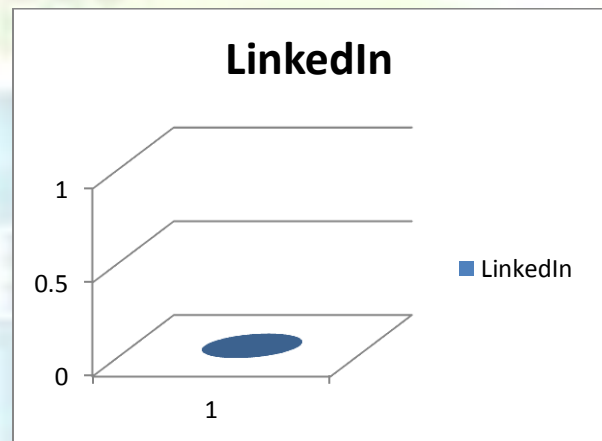
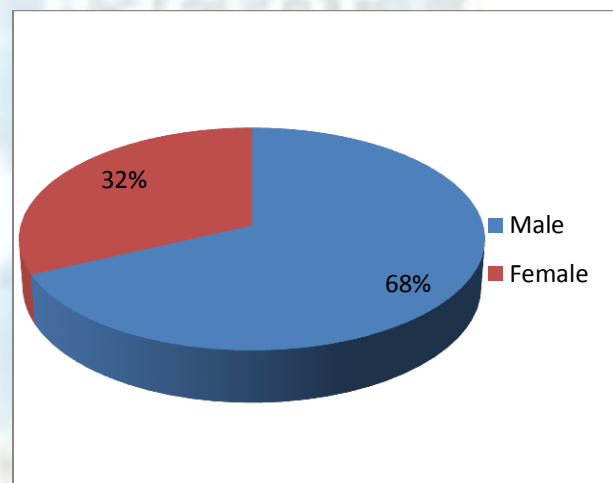
11. Highlighting Individual Differences

Social media not only helps the political parties highlight their USP to the voters but it also helps to bring forward the individual differences that any

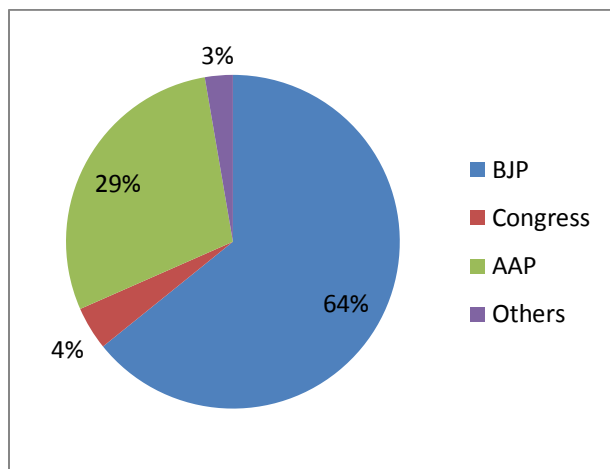
candidate may have over their rivals. Each candidate has their own personality and working style, It helps the candidate to gain a perceptual edge in the voters mindset and thereby increase their chances of scoring a victory.

4. SOCIAL MEDIA KEY INDICATORS

The figures below depict the time period where traffic on different social sites are the maximum.



The above pie chart shows the percentage of male and female respondents.



The above pie chart depicts the most visible political party on social media.

(Source Woodrow Wilson Centre for south and south east Asia)

5. CONCLUSION

Technology has completely changed the way we run our lives, businesses today and politics and political campaigns have also been impacted by the huge influx of various social and digital media tools. The way common masses interact today and the ease with which they can voice their opinion and address issues has totally changed the political campaign landscape. Today politicians have to be very particular about issues and how they are handled as opinions, comments and free expression is the order of the day. Any unwarranted comment can lead to a backlash that can have a severe impact on the aspirations of political candidates and the performance of political parties. Outfits organisations that have been successful in managing and handling this platform and creating a direct connect and communication with the vote banks have over the last few elections performed relatively well and achieved success whereas others have lagged behind. This paper attempted to decipher this social media code and the kind of role it's playing in the political landscape, its efficacy and what are its relative advantages in the current scenario. An attempt was made to understand the last few electoral victories and the impact of social media and media managers in that regard. It was attempted to bring forth the power of the digital world and how ignoring it could lead to peril and perish and how its effective use can lead to strategic advantages

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