

Chapter 4

Indian National Political Parties' Facebook Use: Online Interactions in Practice

The previous chapter discussed about the strategy of using Facebook by the Indian national political parties as articulated by them. Here, it is important to recall the main research question posed in the first chapter of the dissertation which is regarding finding the disparity or similarity between the strategy of using Facebook as articulated by the parties and their actual engagement in the Facebook pages. This chapter is about the actual engagement of Indian national political parties in Facebook which is studied using the data extracted from their Facebook pages.

The chapter will analyse the Facebook pages in Indian national political parties in the following headings:

- (a) Basic information about the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties
- (b) Interactions in Facebook pages of Indian national political parties.

The first part will analyse the basic features and layout of the Facebook pages of the Indian national political parties and the second will look into how the political parties share information in their Facebook pages, how much do people react and comment on the posts, and is there any direct interactions between the political parties and people in terms of dialogue between them in the comments section of the posts.

Method

The data has been collected by using the Graph API of Facebook, fb-loader application on the website produced by Oslo University to collect information about the Facebook pages and Facepager application which uses access token from Facebook to extract the public data from the Facebook pages. Also, manual analysis of the Facebook pages is also done.

The openness of interactions in the Facebook pages of the Indian national political parties is analysed based upon the privacy and restrictions set by them (such as, can people post on the pages of the parties or not) of their Facebook pages, their interactions with the people in the form of comments and re-comments regarding any post.

Important Notes

Some findings are required to be mentioned as important notes to keep in mind while going through the following text of the chapter. They are:

(i) The most important thing to note here is that All the Indian national Political parties except Bahujan Saajwadi Party (BSP) were found to have official Facebook pages which are verified and have blue tick mark which is a sign denoting that the page is a verified one (and not a fake one created by someone less). So, where ever the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties is mentioned, it does not include Bahujan Samaj wadi party (BSP).

(ii) The other thing to note here is that the information about the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties is collected during the period of the study (March, April and June, 2018). It may undergo changes later on.

Facebook Pages of Indian National Political Parties: Basic Information

Before going into analyses part of the nature of interaction in the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties, it is important to draw out the basic information and features of these Facebook pages. The basic information will reveal some of the important things such as how much famous a party is in Facebook what is the basic layout of the Facebook pages of different Indian national political parties and what are the privacy settings applied by different parties in their pages.

It is not surprising that the layout of all Indian national political parties will be more or less same because Facebook provides a layout of the page based on what is the page about. A Facebook page can be of six types (2018). It can be a page for Local business or place, Entertainment page, page for company, organisation or institution, page for brand or product, page for Artist Band or Public figure, page for cause or community. Thus, in case of page for organisation (such as political organisations or political parties), the layout of the Facebook page will be similar to a large extent for any political party. However, there can be some differences between these pages based upon a particular settings chosen by a political party which are important to consider. The layout of the Facebook pages contains following elements:

- (a) Display Picture (b) Cover (c) 'About' and other sections (d) Popularity

Display picture. Display picture, is the picture which a page owner wants to show others to recognise him/her or any organisation, product or brand. All Indian national political parties. All Indian national political parties having Facebook page have kept their 'party symbol' as the display picture of their page (1, June, 2018). This is important, as people will start to recognise



Figure 1. Profile pictures of Indian national political parties in their Facebook page.

the party with its party symbol as it is the party symbol which is used in elections for voting. Also, party symbols have some meaning associated with the party.

Figure 1 shows the profile picture/display picture of the Indian national political parties on their Facebook pages. It can be seen that all the Indian national political parties (except BSP who was not found to have any verified Facebook page) have kept their party symbol as the display picture (profile picture). Below the picture, there is the name of party which is followed by a tick mark in blue color. This tick mark is a sign that it is an authentic page of the organisation (in this case political parties) as verified by Facebook. No such page of Bahujan Samajwadi Party was found during the research.

One more thing to note here is the code or link below the name of all the parties. This link (e.g. @BJP4India) is a link by which the page can be easily found in Facebook or in Facebook Messenger by using the search option of Facebook.

Cover. Cover can both be a picture or video (recent update by Facebook). The cover picture or video is public and anyone can watch it. It is at the top of page and needs to be impressive in order to gain the attention of the viewers and hence to make the page impressive to the viewers. The parties were found to keep the pictures of important leaders of the party with a short and impressive message or videos about the achievements of the party as their cover (From March 2018 to June 2018).

Different sections in the Facebook pages. The difference can be found regarding the number and type of sections in the pages of different Indian national political parties. The party-wise description of the sections of Facebook pages of different Indian national political parties is given in below sub-headings.

Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP). The party has an ‘About’ section in the page which has the business info, contact details and basic message about the organization that created the page. The Indian national political parties have mainly provided the information about the foundation of the party, contact details (such as email, other social media accounts and phone numbers) and a short description about the party in the about section. The party has provided only a few details in the ‘about section’ of their Facebook page regarding the foundation of the party, details of contacting in Facebook (and messenger application of Facebook) and brief note about its leading role in National Democratic alliance.

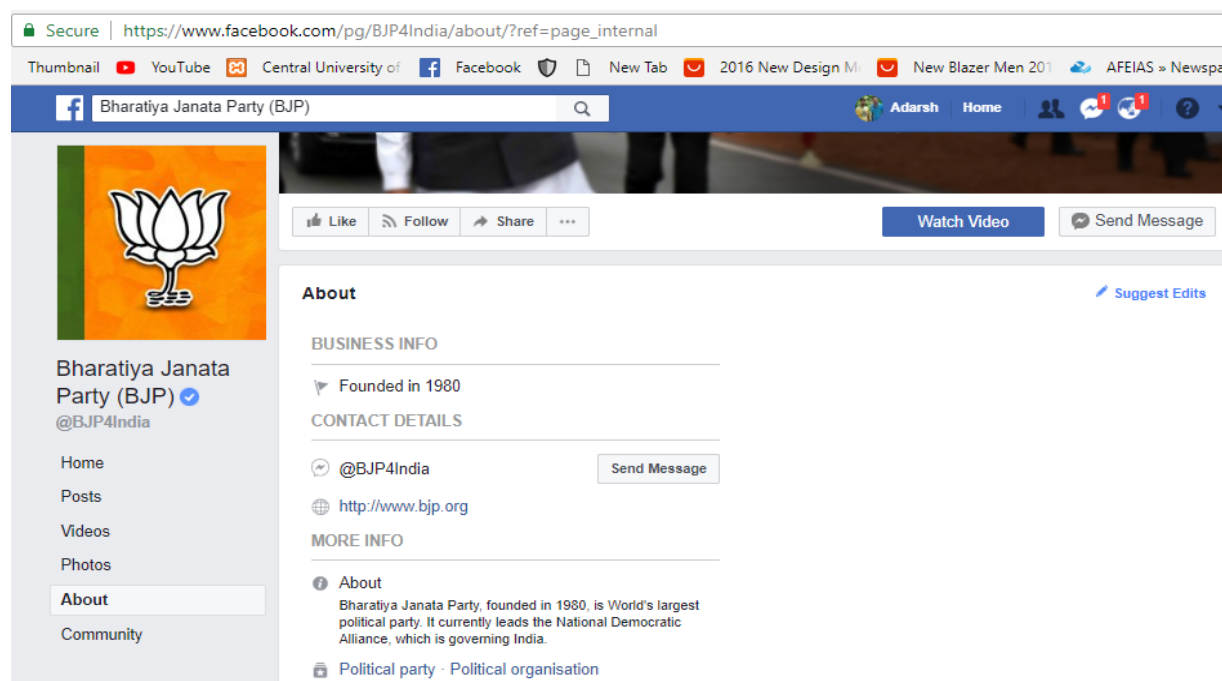


Figure 2. A Screenshot of ‘About’ section in the Facebook page of Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) also showing names of other sections in the page.

Figure 2 shows that the page also has a ‘send message’ option that can be used by a user to send message to the party. This feature is shared only by the Facebook page of CPI(M) apart from the BJP. Other than this, there is a ‘Home’ section, by clicking which the viewer can see the newsfeeds in the page. ‘Posts’ section directs directly to all kinds of posts on the page and ‘Images’

and Videos' section directs straight to the images uploaded and live streaming videos in the page respectively. Also, there is a 'community' section which gives information about the number of the followers and likes of the page also about who likes the page. However, privacy setting is such that one can only see the friends who or his/her friend in Facebook and who like the page (For example, my 88 Facebook Friends liked the page of BJP till 1 June, 2018). There is also an 'Events' section on the page. This section is directs to the events organized by the party in their Facebook page.

Indian National Congress (INC). Relatively greater details about the mission of the party are present in the about section of the Facebook page of Indian National Congress. Also, Link to the official mail, contact information about the official website of the party and a little note about the party can found in the section. See Figure 3 below.

The screenshot displays the 'About' section of the Indian National Congress (INC) Facebook page. At the top left is the party's logo, a hand with fingers spread, set against a background of the Indian national flag's saffron, white, and green horizontal stripes. Below the logo is the text 'Indian National Congress' with a verified badge and the handle '@IndianNationalCongress'. A navigation menu on the left includes 'Home', 'About' (selected), 'Notes', 'Photos', 'Apply for Membership', 'Twitter', 'YouTube', 'Videos', 'Events', 'Posts', and 'Community'. The main content area is titled 'About' and includes a 'Suggest Edits' link. It is divided into three sections: 'BUSINESS INFO', 'CONTACT DETAILS', and 'MORE INFO'. The 'BUSINESS INFO' section lists the founding date as 28 December 1885 and the mission statement. The 'CONTACT DETAILS' section provides an email address (connect@inc.in) and a website link (http://www.inc.in). The 'MORE INFO' section includes an 'About' paragraph and a 'Political party' icon. On the right side, a 'Milestones' section lists key events from 2003 to 2013, such as the Right To Food Legally Guaranteed, UPA Pushes Reforms Agenda, Lok Sabha Passes Lokpal Bill, UID Aadhaar Launched, 125 Years Of INC, UPA Wins Again, In 2009, Shri Rahul Gandhi Appointed General Secretary, AICC, UPA Wins Nuke Deal Trust Vote, Farm Loan Waiver, Forest Rights Act Enacted, NREGA Enacted, RTI Act Passed, National Rural Health Mission Launched, Dr Manmohan Singh Heads The UPA Government, Smt Sonia Gandhi Renounces PM Post, Congress Wins Mandate to Form Government, and Shimla Sankalp Adopted.

Figure 3. A Screenshot of 'About' section in the Facebook page of Indian National Congress (INC) also showing names of other sections in the page.

Apart from this, the party has provided a list of the milestones that party has achieved starting from the origin of the party up to the present time. From Figure 3, it is clear that while other sub-sections in the 'about section' of the Facebook page of Indian national Congress looks more or less similar to the Facebook page of BJP, they have also provided another sub-section regarding milestones achieved by the party.

Again, there is a 'home' section in the Facebook page of INC party. By going into the section, the user can view all the newsfeed, number of followers and number of people who like the page. The other sections such as "posts", "videos", "photos", "events", "community" are also there. One thing which is different from the Facebook page of BJP is that the Facebook page has linkup with the other social media websites like "twitter" and "YouTube" also. By using these sections, the user can directly see the videos that the party uploads in YouTube and also posts in twitter without actually using these websites (i.e. YouTube and Twitter). So, by using Facebook, people can easily get new information and posts which is a great source of broadcasting about the political parties.

Communist Party of India (CPI). About Section of the Communist Party of India has the information regarding the foundation of the party (26 December 1925) and a detailed description of the mission of the party. In the contact details, they have provided a phone number, mailing contact details and the address of their official website. In 'more info' sub section it is described that the page is the official page of the Communist party of India and also that it is a political party. There is not a comprehensive list of milestones as provided by INC. In sub-section 'milestones', only one entry about the 21st Congress (2012) is there. Below is the image clearly showing the 'About' section of the CPI.

Figure 4 also shows that like other parties, CPI is also having the sections like “home”, “about”, “posts”, “videos”, “notes” and “community” in their page. The home ‘section’ also shows the number of followers, number of people who like the page and the newsfeed going on in the page. Users can get all the posts in the form of text, images or videos by clicking on the ‘posts’ section. Also, there are the facility for the common people to directly

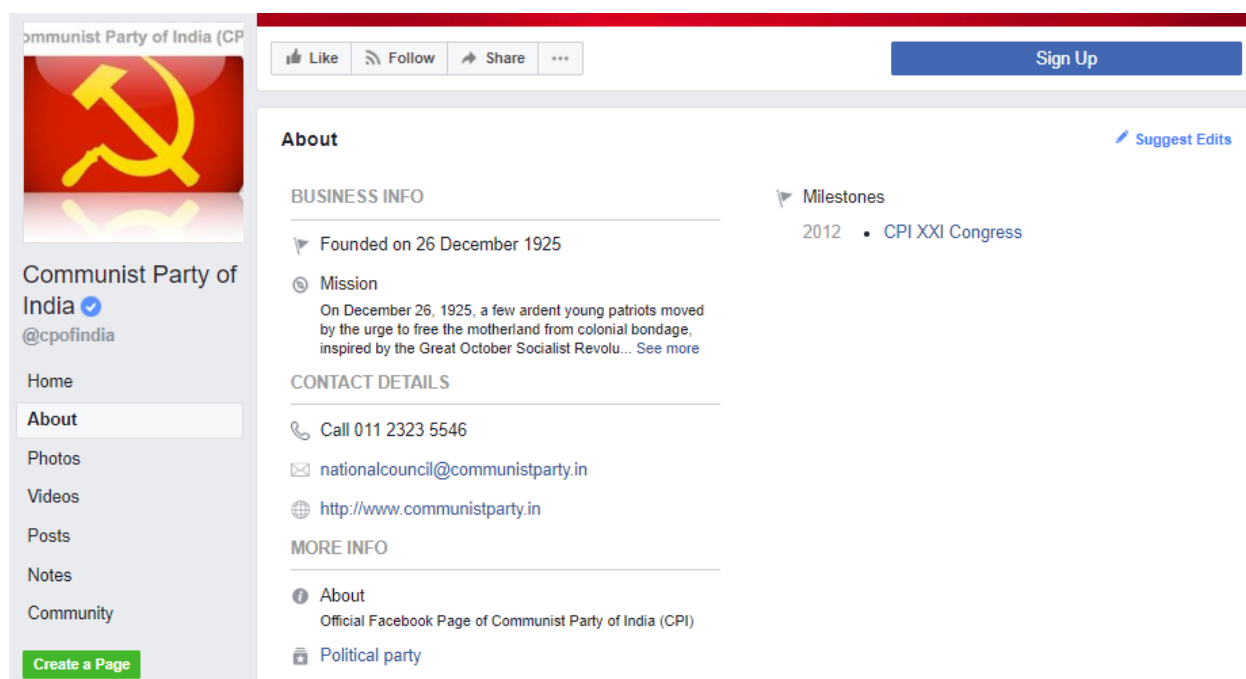


Figure 4. A Screenshot of 'About section in the Facebook page of Communist Party of India (CPI) also showing names of other sections in the page.

ask their queries or post any information in the ‘Home’ section of the official page of communist party of India. This feature of the Facebook page can’t be seen in the case of BJP, INC and CPI(M).

Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI(M). The Facebook page of the party doesn’t has much details in the ‘About’ section of the Facebook page of CPI(M). Figure 5 shows that a

person can see a brief description about the business info, contact details, milestones and a short note on the more info about the page.

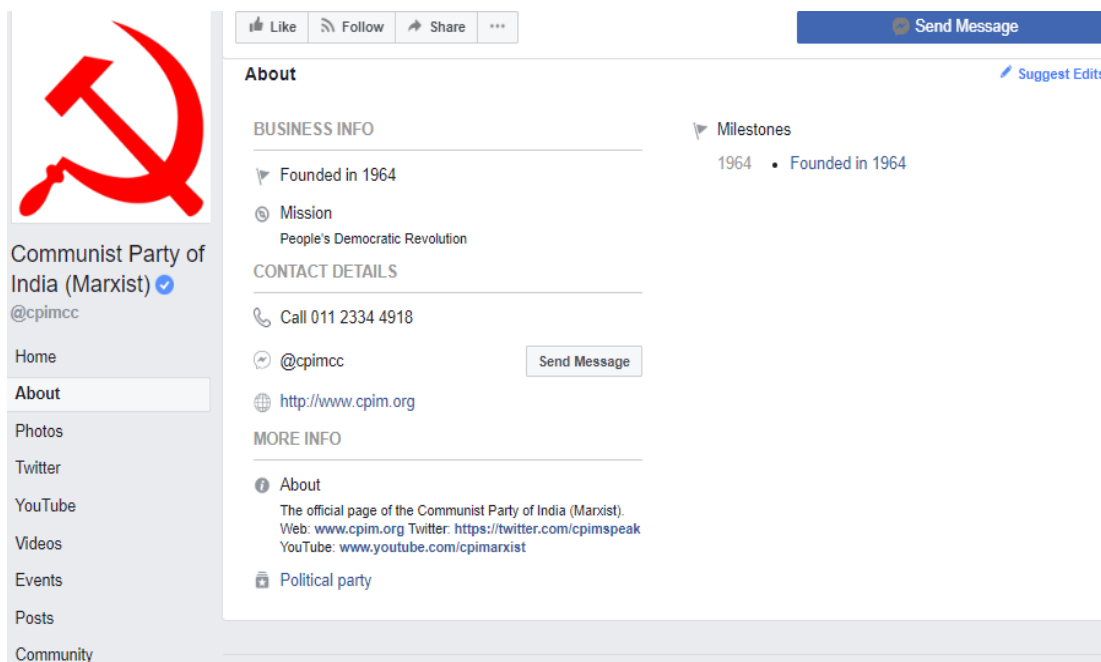


Figure 5. A Screenshot of ‘About’ section in the Facebook page of Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] also showing names of other sections in the page.

The Facebook page of Communist party of India (Marxist) consists of the sections like ‘Home’ from which a user can see all the newsfeed of the page. The other sections are there like ‘Posts’ from which user can see all the posted information in the form of photos, videos etc. Then, in ‘Community’ section the number of followers and number of people who like the page are there. In ‘Event’ section the upcoming events arranged by the party are mentioned and the Facebook page is also connected to the other social media sites like YouTube channel and twitter page of the party .By clicking these section a person can check out the post made by party in YouTube and twitter without actually using these websites.

All India Trinamool Congress (AITC). The Facebook page of all India Trinamool Congress has different sections in its page like the ‘Home’ section which is having all newsfeed.

The section “Posts” contain all the information shared by the party and user can get to know it by browsing these posts in various forms such as photos and videos. In ‘Events’ section user can get to know about the upcoming events of the party. Then, the information about the number of followers and the number of people who like the page are in ‘Community’ section. The page contains separate sections for ‘Photos’ and ‘Videos’ along with ‘Posts’ section. One thing which is different from the pages of other Indian national political parties is that the page has a ‘Notes’ section which contains the details notes regarding various issues posted by the party.

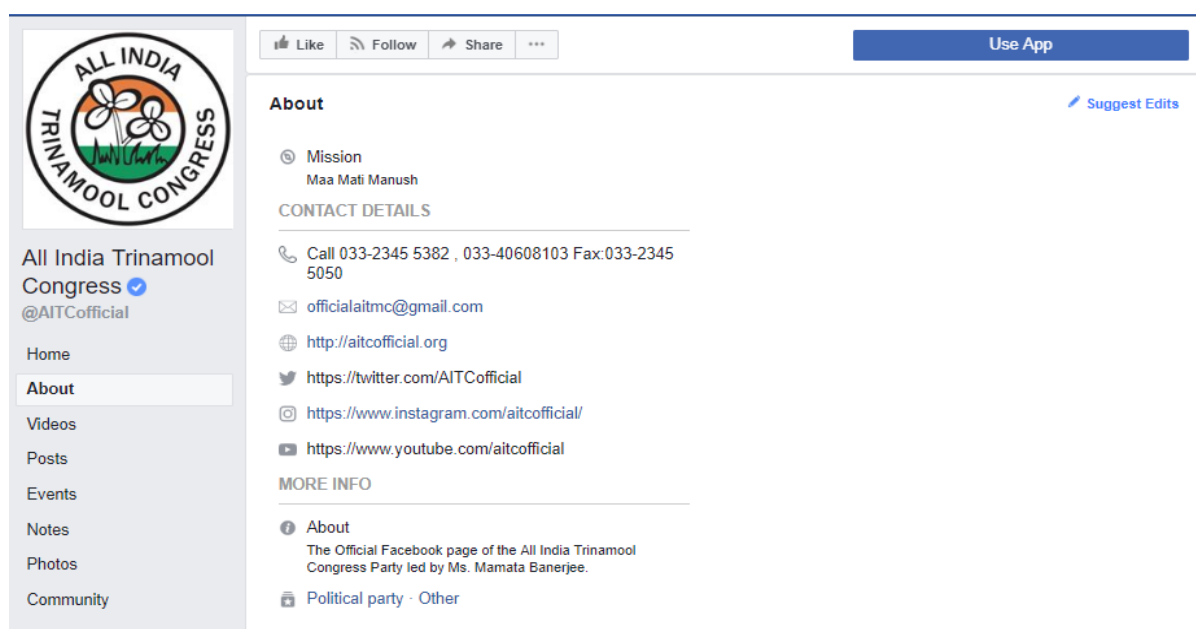


Figure 6. A Screenshot of ‘About’ section in the Facebook page of All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) also showing names of other sections in the page.

It can be seen in the Figure 6 that the Facebook page of the AITC, like the other Indian national parties, has brief details about the party but in ‘contact details’ sub-section, the contact details for different platforms such as, their website, in twitter, Instagram, Gmail and YouTube can be found. Also, the numbers regarding how to contact them on phone and fax.

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). The Facebook page of NCP has the sections like home, posts, community, photos, posts, twitter and YouTube. The home section contains all the

newsfeed. The ‘community’ section contains the people who like their page and the number of followers of the page. The ‘posts’ section has the information in the form of photos and videos by which users can come to know about the recent information shared by the party. The users can see the videos and posts made by the party in twitter pages and videos in YouTube channel on Facebook only by using the ‘YouTube’ and ‘Twitter’ sections.

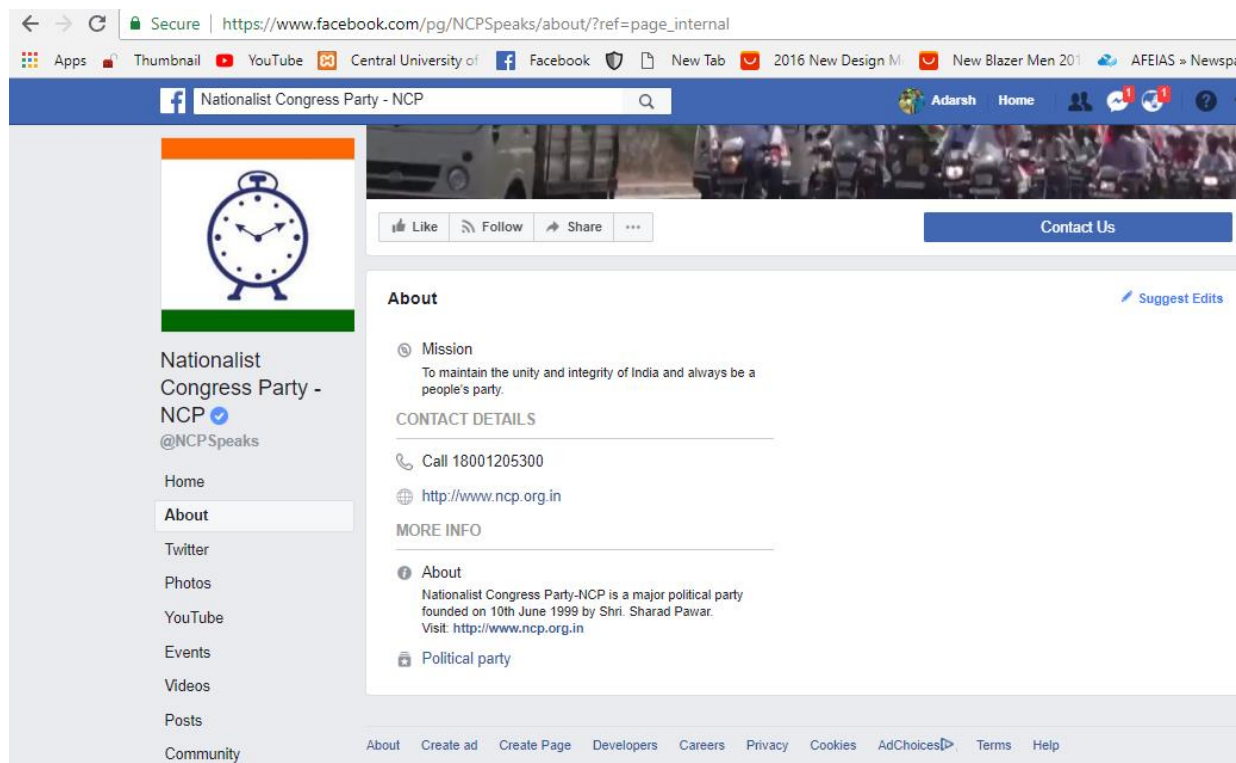


Figure 7. A Screenshot of ‘About’ section in the Facebook page of Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) also showing names of other sections in the page.

More or less similar to the ‘About’ section of the Facebook page other parties, the page contains brief description about mission, contact details, short note about the party in the ‘About Section’ of their Facebook page. It can be seen in the picture below. Below, we can see different sections present in Facebook page of NCP in Figure 7 above.

Popularity of Indian national political parties in Facebook. The popularity of Indian national political party can be derived from how many people follow or like their face book page.

It is important to consider the number of followers of political parties in their Facebook page because it reflects their strategical success to reach out a large population in Facebook. Are Indian national political parties really engaged in Facebook for connecting with the people? How much focus are they paying on connecting with people using Facebook? Also, how much successful are they in connecting with the people can be derived out of how much people have liked and followed their Facebook page. Also, the activeness of the people and party in the page is the most important which will be discussed in the next section. This section will look into how much popular a particular Indian national political party is in Facebook.

It was found that all the Indian National Political parties have the verified pages in Facebook except Bahujan Samajwadi Party which may be using a Facebook page but it is not yet verified. Many Facebook pages bearing name of BSP were found during the study but they were very less active and not any one of them had verified sign with them. All other parties are found to be actively using Facebook pages for connecting with the people.

Table 1 shows that BJP is the most popular Indian national political party in Facebook as it has the largest number of followers in their page and also the largest number of people like their page. This shows that BJP has a widest reach over the people in Facebook as compared to the other national political parties. It was found that communist party of India is least popular in Facebook in terms of their followers and number of people who like their page. There is a huge difference of popularity if compared to BJP is very large. The later has almost 461 times more followers than that of the former.

Table 1. *Popularity of Facebook pages of Indian national political parties*

S.NO.	Name of Indian National Parties	Number of followers (till 24 th June 2018)	Number of likes (till 24 th July 2018)	Increase in Number of Followers (from 11/06/2018 to 24/06/2018)	Increase in Number of Likes (from 11/06/2018 to 24/06/2018)
1	Bhartiya Janata Party(BJP)	14,430,878	14,526,854	7927	1954
2	Indian National Congress (INC)	4,816,829	4,844,639	8931	354
3	Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)	512,464	515,769	678	27
4	All India Trinamool congress (AITC)	487,630	484,936	1700	100
5	Communist party of India (Marxist), CPI(M)	355,550	353,577	4191	38
6	Communist party of India (CPI)	30,269	30,262	196	11
7	Bahujan Samajwadi Party (BSP)	Verified page not found	Verified page not found	Verified page not found	Verified page not found

Note. Data was collected from the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties.

Facebook page of INC is the second largest followed and liked Facebook page by the people among all the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties. It has more than 48 lakh people who like their page and also almost the same number of people follow their page. However, if compared to the BJP, there is a considerable difference. It is clear from the data that they have almost three times more followers than that of the Indian National Congress.

The difference in the popularity of the other Indian national political parties as compared to the BJP and INC is also huge. The third most popular party in the Facebook is NCP who has only about 1/28th the number of the followers of BJP. Next in the order comes AITC followed by CPI(M). At the last in terms of the popularity in Facebook comes Communist Party of India (CPI) which is far behind the other parties. The second least popular party in Facebook also has almost eleven times more follower than the Communist Party of India.

It is important to note here that the number of followers and the people who like the page of Indian national political parties is not static. So, one thing to consider here is regarding how fast the parties are growing in the Facebook. The above comparison was based upon the data collected on 24th of June, 2018. However, if we compare it to the data collected on 11th of June, 2018 we can see the difference and analyse about how fast a party is growing in the Facebook. From the data, one can easily see that BJP along with being the most popular Indian national political party in Facebook is also the fastest growing in the same. It is followed by INC. From the data it can be said that the third largest growing Indian national political party in Facebook is AITC. All the other parties don't have considerable difference in terms of their increase in the number of followers. However, data shows that Communist party of India, which is the least followed Indian national political party in Facebook shows least increase in the number of followers in the period considered here as well.

Interactions in the Facebook Pages of Indian National Political Parties

The previous section was about the basic layout and information regarding the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties. An Insight into the basic information was important as it will be helpful to understand and analyse the further findings in the study. This section is going

to dig into the nature of interaction in the Facebook pages of the Indian national political parties.

This will be done in the following sub-sections:

- (a) **Activeness in the Facebook Page:** Interactions in the Facebook page depends upon how actively or the page owners and public engaged in using it for sharing information and other related activities.
- (b) **Openness of the Facebook Pages:** If we talk about the democratic use of the Facebook pages for connecting with people, the openness in terms of various access options provided to the people by the Indian national political parties in their Facebook pages are important to look into.
- (c) **Responses to the Public Comments by Indian National Political Parties:** Finally, the main objective of the research is to find out how much response do political parties give to the common people in their Facebook pages. Do they reply to the comments of the people in various posts? Are they engaged in the open dialogue with the people in their pages? It will be discussed using the data extracted during the research.

Activeness in the Facebook pages. Previously, the popularity of Indian national political parties in the Facebook was analysed. However, if one wants to find out that how much importance a party gives to Facebook for connecting with the people, it is important to know that how active they are in their page. Knowing how frequently and in what manner do they share information in their Facebook page becomes important. Our focus is more on frequency of the messages and information shared by the Indian national political parties and not on the content of messages and information that they share.

Also, the activeness of page involves the engagement of the people in the page. More the number of people are involved in various activities in the page, more active will be the page. The

table 2. shows the engagement of the Indian national political parties in their Facebook page and also the involvement of people in the activities in terms of ‘likes’, ‘shares’ and ‘comments’. It shows the data collected by analysing the Facebook pages of the Indian national political parties (in the months of March, April and May of the year 2018). It was found that Indian national political parties are active on their Facebook pages on a daily basis. They regularly post information on their Facebook page in various forms. While comparing the activeness of Indian national political parties in their Facebook pages, it was found that BJP and INC are most active parties. Both are almost equally active on their respective Facebook pages. Both the parties, on average post in their Facebook page ‘seven’ number of times a day. However, if we talk about the total posts (From March-May, 2018), thirteen more posts were found on the Facebook page of BJP as compared to Indian National Congress INC. All India Trinamool Congress AITC was found to be very active in posting on their Facebook page as well. On average, the party posts ‘six’ times a day. Next in the race are CPI(M) and NCP, posting ‘five’ times a day on average. CPI was found to be least actively engaged in their Facebook page. Though, the party posts regularly on the page but the number of average posts per day is just ‘one’. Also, in a few days the Facebook page of CPI was found to have no posts by the party.

Table 2 shows that all the parties are not just present in the Facebook but them also are regularly posting and sharing information using their page. It shows that the Indian national political parties consider ‘Facebook’ an important platform for connecting to the people. It is clear that the parties are actively using their Facebook pages. However, interaction is not possible if people are not watching these posts and reacting accordingly. So, the activeness of the people on the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties needs also to be analysed. Here, the

activeness of the people has been studied based upon their likes and comments on the posts made by the parties. Also, how much do they share the posts of the parties is also important.

Table 2. *Activities in the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties in the period of three months (March, April and May, 2018)*

Facebook Page of Indian National Political Parties	Number of posts by party	Number of likes by people per post (Mean)	Number of comments by people per post (Mean)	Number of shares by people per post (Mean)	Number of likes by people per day (Mean)	Number of comments by people per day (Mean)	Number of shares by people per day (Mean)
Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)	672	158544	1967	47895	1158062	14371	349842
Indian National Congress (INC)	816	9463	296	2023	83933	2621	17945
Nationalist Congress party (NCP)	434	5072	42	43	23927	197	196
All India Trinamool Congress (AITC)	565	645	167	459	2581	1037	2819
Communist party of India (Marxist), CPI(M)	497	448	14	184	2422	74	996
Communist party of India (CPI)	101	91	3	33	99	4	36

Note. Data was collected from the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties for the month of March, April and May, 2018.

Table 2 shows that people are most actively engaged in the Facebook page of the BJP in terms of liking the posts made by party, commenting on it and also sharing the post. The Facebook

page of INC shows the second highest active engagement of the public. However, the activeness of people in the Facebook page of the former is far ahead than the later. On an average, more than 'one lakh people' like a post on the Facebook page of BJP which is almost 'thirteen times' in the case of INC. In this concern, INC in turn is far ahead of other Indian national political parties. AITC and NCP are in close competition with each other. Among these two parties, the former is ahead of the later in terms of the number of average comments and shares they get from the people on a post but it is vice-versa in the case of average likes on a post by people. Also, CPI(M) stands just behind the AITC. In the last, CPI gets 'ninety one' average likes and just 'three' average comments from the people on a post which shows the party still need to grow in the Facebook.

Having said above, one important thing to consider while studying the activeness of the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties is to look at the change in activities on the page before the elections, just before the elections, and after the elections. The national elections are still to come in the next year. So, in the study, Karnataka state elections were taken as the reference which were held in the month of May. This is why the Months March, April and May are taken into account for the study to know the difference of Indian national political parties' engagement during these months.

It was found that in the month of 'April, 2018', Bharitya Janta Party (BJP) and Indian National Congress (INC), were more active as compared to the normal times. However, the other Indian national political parties' were found to be almost equally active during the elections as well. The difference in activeness is not very significant in case of the former parties as well but it can't be ignored.

Table 3. *Activities in the Facebook page of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the period of three months (March, April and May, 2018)*

Name of the Month	Number of posts by party	Number of likes by people per post (Mean)	Number of comments by people per post (Mean)	Number of shares by people per post (Mean)	Number of likes by people per day (Mean)	Number of comments by people per day (Mean)	Number of shares by people per day (Mean)
March	203	157857	1961	47692	1033710	12842	312303
April	251	158840	1969	47982	1328967	16475	401451
May	218	158842	1971	47984	1117021	13861	337437

Note. Data of collected from the Facebook page of Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) for the months of March, April and May, 2018

From the data in Table 3, it is clear that the party posted most in the month of April which is followed by the posts in the month of May. The month of March is having least number of posts by the party. So, it can be said that the party is more active in Facebook during the time of elections.

Similar is the case with the Indian National Congress party. Table 4 shows that the party was most active in April, followed by May and was least active in the month of March. The party posted highest number of times in the month of April. However, people appear to be most active in the month of May, this is because of the reason that followers of the page increased with the time and accordingly more people liked, commented and shared the posts on the page.

Table 4. *Activities in the Facebook page of Indian National Congress (INC) in the period of three months (March, April and May, 2018)*

Name of the Month	Number of posts by party	Number of likes by people per post (Mean)	Number of comments by people per post (Mean)	Number of shares by people per post (Mean)	Number of likes by people per day (Mean)	Number of comments by people per day (Mean)	Number of shares by people per day (Mean)
March	246	9406	294	2032	74648	2335	16127
April	293	9486	295	2018	92653	2884	19713
May	277	9488	297	2020	84781	2653	18051

Note. Data was taken from the Facebook page of Indian National Congress (INC) for the months of March April and May, 2018.

The Fact that the other Indian national political parties were more or less equally active during each month shows that their Facebook strategy and presence is not as good as the BJP and INC.

Openness of the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties. The interaction in the Facebook pages of Indian national Political parties can be said to be more open and democratic if people can openly share their views and interact with the party and one another on the page. So, it becomes important to study how much open is the Facebook page of Indian national political parties to the public. In other words, this section will look upon if people can participate in sharing information and reacting on the information shared by the Indian national political parties instead of being mere spectators of activities of the later on their Facebook page. This can be done by finding out different capabilities available for the people to participate in the interaction in different way in the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties. The more capabilities available to

the people, the more open is the Facebook page. So, we will look at whether common people can post and share information, send message to interact with the parties, comment on the information shared by the Indian national political parties on their Facebook pages etc. or not. The analysis of the capabilities provided to the people by the Facebook pages of the different Indian national political parties will be done in the following sub-headings such as - (a) Like, Follow and Share (b) Who can comment? (b) Who can post? (c) Miscellaneous

Like, follow and share. This is a common feature made available for the people to be used on their discretion. People can like the page, follow the page or share the page to other people if they want to. In the picture below, you can see that just below the cover page, there are options to like, comment or follow the page. However, this feature can't be said to provide any control to the people over sharing the information on the page. These features are just available for the people to be in contact with the Facebook page of Indian national political parties on their own choice and they can also influence their friends and relatives to like or follow the page by sharing it to them. Important to note here are the three dots after the 'share' option that can be



Figure 8. Image showing the options of control available to users on the Facebook of INC party.

seen in the Figure 8. These dots when clicked upon by a user, provide few more options to be used by the people regarding the page. These are related to saving, suggesting edits in the page, inviting friends, block the page and reporting it. People can choose to block the page if they want to. However, it means the person who has blocked the page will not be able to see profile of the page or any further activities of the page but the page will be visible to all other individuals.

So, it can be concluded that though these options provide people a little control over whether they want to be in contact with the Facebook page or not but it does not in any way enhance an open interaction between the public and the Indian national political parties. It is rather a step prior to entering into the open interaction with the parties with the people's own discretion.

Who can comment? In a representative democratic political system, the need for a feedback from people for what government is doing is of immense importance. The Facebook page is used by the political parties to share the information regarding their agendas and policies or their views on different policies of the government. Hence, comments from the people reflect their feedback regarding those policies and political ideas. However, is the Facebook page of Indian national political parties open to the people in such a way that it allows them to comment on various information and messages posted by the party? This question is very important as it can be the base of the public debate on the Facebook page of the Indian national political parties (Facebook page serving as new public sphere).

It was found out and is also clear from the above section that all the Indian national political parties are open for the public comments on the various information posted by the parties on their page. However, an interesting thing here is the default option of 'Most relevant' associated with the comment section on a post. What the 'Most relevant' option does is that it keeps the most relevant comments having more views, more reactions and replies at the top in the comment list of a post

in the page and filters out the other comments. The settings of the Facebook pages of all Indian national political parties is such that it shows relevant comments at the top. However, a person can also see all the comments but only after choosing ‘Show all the comments’ option associated with that post. Figure 9 shows the options regarding filtering out the comments on a post taken from the Facebook page of BJP.



Figure 9. Image showing Filtration of comments of people on the posts in Facebook page of BJP.

There is a limitation of the study in finding out whether the Indian national political parties delete the comments from the people for their own interest as investigating that is against the privacy policy of the ‘Facebook’. However, surely there is a setting option on comments section of a post which can be used by a party to party favouring comments on the top of the comment list. It is also a fact that there are a lot spams and fake comments which are necessary to be filtered out. The problem here is that this filtering option can be used to enhance the image of the political party in the eyes of the common people.

Who can post? One of the most important claimed out merit of the social media is that it has ended the monopoly of the elite to share information. However, is this true on the Facebook pages of the Indian national political parties? In most of the cases, yes it is. Out of six Indian national political parties who were found to have verified page on Facebook, three were found to have kept the option of posting in their Facebook page open for the people. Surprisingly, the Facebook page of the frequently winning Indian national parties like Indian National Congress and Bhartiya Janta Party were not found to have the page open for people to post some information. Similarly, the Facebook page of Communist Party of Indian (Marxist) was not found to have the facility for the common people to post on the page. The Facebook page of Communist Party of India, Nationalist Congress Party and All India Trinamool Congress was found to be open for the public posts. However, not a single post from any one other person than the party themselves was found in the study for the months taken under investigation. This means that either people don't pay any interest in posting in the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties or their posts are removed (deleted) by the party from the page. Also, there is an 'Events' section on the Facebook pages of all the Indian national political parties in which anyone can post and is open for discussion which will be discussed later in the chapter.

Miscellaneous. Apart from the above mentioned factors, there were some miscellaneous options in the Facebook pages of different Indian national political parties. For instance, Bhartiya Janta Party and Communist Party of India (Marxist) an option of 'send message' to be used by people to send messages or queries of any kind to the party. However, upon sending message using the option, there was no reply made by the parties during the study. All India Trinamool Congress party has provided a unique option of 'Use App' on their Facebook page to be used by the people to install the android app of the party and connect with the party on mobile phone. Indian National

Congress, Communist Party of India, and Nationalist Congress party have provided an option for signing up and connecting with party for applying for the membership voluntarily.

Responses of Indian national political parties to the comments from people. From the above, we came to know that three of the Indian national political parties have put their page open for the public posts. However, no public posts was found on the Facebook page of any Indian national political party in the studied period. So, the response of the parties on the public posts is not possible to be studied. However, there are a lot of public comments on the information and messages posted by the Indian national political parties in their Facebook pages, particularly on the Facebook page of Bhartiya Janta Party and Indian National Congress. So, it becomes important to see that whether Indian national political parties respond to the comments and feedbacks of people or not. In the chapter 2, rational debate in the public sphere was discussed about. This debate here doesn't refer to some ideological discussion but it is a rational discussion which influences the decision formation and policies of the government. Political parties act as an important link between general public and government. However, do they respond to the public? Do they get involved in discussions with them? Earlier it was nearly impossible. However, with the coming of social media it has become possible. Facebook pages of Indian national political parties can be an important sphere of discussion between the parties and common people provided the political parties are not just using it for advertising purposes. The main research problem that this research work seeks to find out is whether the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties is used by the parties to interact and discuss with people or not.

The posts on the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties were analysed for the months of March, April and May. It was studied that whether the parties reply to the comments of people or not. Table 5 shows that the Indian national political parties' comments on the posts in the

three months of March, April and May, 2018 were almost zero percent of the totals comments on the posts. Table 5 clearly shows that Indian national political parties don't reply to the comments of people. Some accidental incidents of comments were found to be made by the page owners in the case of BJP, INC and AITC. However, the number is so less that it will not be wrong to say that Indian national political parties never reply to the comments of people.

Table 5. *Comments by people and replies from the Indian national political parties' Facebook page owners in the months of March, April and May, 2018*

Name of the Party	Comments by people	Comments by the page owners in percentage of the total comments
Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP)	1322086	0.0002%
Indian National Congress (INC)	241181	0.0012%
Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)	18228	0%
Communist Party of Indian (CPI)	303	0%
Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPIM)	6958	0%
All Indian Trinamool Congress (AITC)	94354	0.0010%
Bahujan Samajwadi Party (BSP)	No verified page found	No verified page found

Note. Data was collected from the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties.

However, there are some events related to discussions among party leaders and the people which can be found in the events section of the Indian national political parties. So, it becomes

important to study the events section of the Facebook pages to find out whether any discussion happens between the India national political parties and people in the events of the section or not. It was found that the parties very rarely create an event on the Facebook page. From the creation date of the Facebook page of the party, to June 2018, the number of total events organised by the Indian national parties on their page are almost negligible. BJP stands at the top which is followed by INC. However, no party was found to be organising active and frequent events on the Facebook page. BJP, which is the party having greatest number of events in the ‘events’ section of their Facebook page, was found to have only 33 total events in almost eight years.

Table 6. *Events section of the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties*

Indian National Political Parties	Facebook Page Created On	Number of Events in Events Section (till 5 th June, 2018)	Number of Question- Answer or Discussion- Events
Bharitya Janta Party (BJP)	May 30, 2010	33	10
Indian National Congress (INC)	February 20, 2013	18	1
Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)	October 16, 2013	4	0
Communist Party of Indian (CPI)	May 18, 2010	Event Section not found	Event Section not found
Communist Party of India (Marxist), CPI(M)	March 9, 2014	2	0
All Indian Trinamool Congress (AITC)	July 5, 2011	1	0

Note. Data was collected from the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties

From Table 6, we can see that the party which has organised the most number of discussions events is BJP and it has done so only ten times till the date of creation of page. Indian

National Congress has organised only a single discussion event since the Facebook page was created. BJP, which is at the top in the list, has rarely arranged such events of discussion with the people.

Table 7. Interactions in the 'Events' section of the Facebook page of Bharitya Janta Party (BJP)

Date of the event of discussion	Number of total posts in discussion	Number of posts in which Party replied	Replied posts by the party in percentage of the total posts	Total Number of comments on the Posts where party replied	Number of replies by the party on the posts	Comments by the party in percentage of the total comments on posts where party replied
December 22, 2010	123	4	3.25%	93	30	32.225%
January 27, 2011	50	1	2%	271	28	10.332%
April 9, 2011	183	1	0.5%	495	27	5.454%
June 1, 2011	130	1	0.7%	666	23	3.453%
October 15, 2012	57	1	1.75%	239	19	7.949%
July 22, 2014	178	1	0.56%	179	0	0%
March 16, 2015	105	3	2.85%	221	13	5.88%
April 13, 2015	82	2	2.43%	360	26	7.22%
September 21, 2015	124	4	3.22%	927	28	3.02%
October 19, 2015	87	3	3.44%	551	23	4.17%

Note. Data collected from the Facebook page of Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP)

Data in the Table 7 shows that the party has been very rarely engaged in the discussion events on their Facebook page. Number of public posts on which the party replied are very limited, never exceeding even the five percent or the total. Majorly, party was found to be engaged in a particular post among the many posts in the discussion event. On that particular post also, the

party's reply in percentage to the total comments exceeded the eleven percent mark only in the first event. In all other events it was below eleven percent. This shows that though there are some attempts made by the party for the discussion but they can't be said to be using Facebook for seriously interacting with the people in any way.