

Political Parties and Political Communication: A Study of Facebook Pages of Indian National Political Parties

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Central University of Haryana for the Partial
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DECLARATION

This is to certify that I, Adarsh Kumar have carried out the research embodied in the present dissertation, “Political Parties and Political Communication: A Study of Facebook Pages of Indian National Political Parties” for the full period prescribed under M.Phil. ordinance of the University. I declare to the best of my knowledge that no part of this thesis was earlier submitted for the award of research degree of any University.

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This is to certify that this dissertation is a record of original work done by Adarsh Kumar during the period of his study (2017-2018) and to the best of our knowledge and belief this has not been previously formed the basis for the award of any degree/diploma of this University or any other institution. We recommend that this dissertation work be placed for the examiners for evaluation.

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Abstract

Political Communication has undergone many changes with the evolution of internet and social media. This study was conducted with the objective to understand and examine the use of Facebook by Indian national political parties for the purpose of political communication. It was conducted to compare the Facebook strategy of Indian national political parties with their use of Facebook pages in practice and to find differences between them. Social media has provided opportunity of open interactions and dialogue between the people and the politicians. However, is this potential being utilized by the Indian national political parties in their Facebook pages? The answers to the questions were studied by comparing the data collected from the field study to know the strategy of political communication of Indian national political parties in their Facebook pages with the data regarding the actual engagement of the parties which was collected from their Facebook pages. The field study was done using the interviews with the senior leaders and social media strategists of the Indian national political parties. The data from the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties was collected by using the Graph API of the Facebook and applications, websites such as Facepager, fb_loader and the manual analysis of the pages. On comparing the data it was found that though there are similarities in the strategy and the real engagement of the Indian national political parties in their Facebook pages regarding the issues like how to share data that can influence the population, how to make content catchy and how to reach out a large population, the part of the strategy of Indian national political parties to use Facebook and social media to strengthen the democratic values of open and free discussions between the people and the parties was not manifested in actual practice.

Keywords: social media, political parties, political communication, democracy, Facebook

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List of Abbreviations

AITC	All India Trinamool Congress
BSP	Bahujan Samajwadi Party
BJP	Bhartiya Janta Party
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxists)
INC	Indian National Congress
NCP	Nationalist Congress Party

Chapter One

Introduction

Political communication is an important element of a political system. David Easton, one of the earliest system theorists, did a systematic study of a political system and role of political communication in sustaining a democratic political system. In his system theory, he explained about how inputs in the form of demands enter the system and output in the form of policies and programs are produced. He draws the importance of 'feedback process' in a political system which reflects the people' feedback of generated output in form of policies which in turn produces another kind of input in the form of 'support'.¹ Various parts of the system need effective communication process to work efficiently. The system model of David Easton explains how a democratic political system evolves and maintains itself. Further, the importance of political communication was taken into consideration by structural-functionalists and Communication theorists. Communication theorists not only studied about the role of political communication in maintaining a system but they took it as a basic element for the study of how a political system works. In a political system, political communication between the people and government happens via different kinds of media. Media plays an important role for the political communication between the government and the public and acts as a bridge between them. Traditionally, this role was performed by print media, radio and more recently by television. However, the development of internet and social networking has evolved another media of political communication known by the name of social media.

Digital networking and the growing social media penetration all over the world has led to the focus of various scholars towards investigating the impact of the use of social media in various aspects of life. Today, democracy is a widely accepted form of government. India, after

independence has also embraced the democratic form of government (representative democracy). In a democracy, media plays an important role to inform people about various social and political issues and the abuses of power. During elections it plays an important role of providing analysis and information about the political parties and their manifestos. Media is an important tool by which political parties try to win the public support and advertise about their candidates, agendas, policies and performances. However, this media has taken a shift from traditional to electronic to the social media. With this shift, there is a corresponding change in communication from 'one to many' character of print as well as broadcasting media to 'peer to peer' nature of digital and social media. Content being digitized becomes accessible from many platforms including devices like radio, television, Computer, and recently, the smart mobile phones. The new opportunities of interaction have grown with the digitalization of data in the form of text, image, sound and video.

This research work analyses the changes in strategic thinking around political involvement, communication and campaigning in a continuously evolving media environment, especially by the rise of channels of digital communication with social networks as growing platforms of political communication. The study investigates the importance of the social media as a platform of political communication, its perceived importance by the political parties and how they use it. The research work is focussed on the study of Facebook as a media for political communication among people and political parties. The research investigates the use of Facebook by Indian political parties.

Literature Review and Problem Analysis

This section will provide insight into the existing literature regarding the political communication, social media, their inter-relations and how political parties are utilizing social media. It will look into the meaning of the term Political Communication, how it has undergone

changes with the development of ‘new media’ / ‘social media’ (terms are used interchangeably in the thesis) and the existing literature regarding use of social media by political parties for political communication and campaigning.

Political communication. Political communication is a term that is difficult to define precisely. This is due to the reason that its component words (Political and Communication) itself have been defined in various ways by various scholars. For instance, Denton and Woodward (1990, p. 14) have defined political communication as discussions purely related to how public resources are allocated, official authorities who are provided with power to making legislative and executive decisions and the official sanctions in the form of rewards or punishment by state.² This definition includes communication in the form of verbal as well as written political rhetoric. However it doesn’t include the communication in form of symbolic acts which is of growing importance for understanding the political processes. A broader meaning of term is provided by Doris Graber (1981) as she talks about the ‘political language’ to include paralinguistic signs such as body language, gestures, tone and acts like protests and boycotts in addition to the rhetoric.³ Also, Denton and Woodward characterise political communication in terms of the purpose of the producer and sender of the message to influence the political environment. According to them, it is the content and purpose of the communication which makes it ‘political’ but not the source of message (1990, p. 11).

As, this research work is oriented towards studying of the political communication in the Facebook pages of political parties. It includes studying the messages in the form of texts, images or videos posted by the parties which are intended to influence the political environment by increasing the knowledge of the people about a politic event, policy or process, create public

opinion and generate support and also the interactions between the people and parties revolving around those messages.

Social media. Social media are computer driven technologies that can be used to create and share information, express any idea or interest through virtual networks. These are interactive Web 2.0 Internet based applications.⁴ These technologies are in different forms such as blogs, business based networks, forums, microblogs, products review blogs, social bookmarking, social gaming, social networks, images and video sharing networks and virtual worlds. Social media started developing in simple platforms like sixdegrees.com. Unlike ICQ and AOL which are instant messaging clients, it was the first online business created for real people which used their real names. However, users lost interest in it and it was short-lived. Contemporary age is the age of social network revolution which has led to the emergence of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and apps like WhatsApp, We chat and many more.

Social media are termed as the aggregate of applications based on internet which allow creating and sharing of content generated by users, making two-way communication possible.⁵ It can be defined as multidirectional and digital channels that allow communication among people, people and sources of information and which are personalized, easy and speedy (Katz, Barris, & Jain, 2013, p.12).⁶ Twitter has gained significance in communication as an online networking and news service. It is a platform which allows users to create and share post in the form of messages which can be of 280-characters size. These are known as tweets. However, Facebook is more popular which has overall more users across the world. Other, popular platform is that of YouTube which provides facilities of uploading and sharing information in the form of videos and also other users can like, comment and share their views about a video in its comments section. With the

widening reach of social media and people embracing it in the day-to-day life, the political parties have increased their presence in the social media across various parts of the world also.

For the purpose of this research work, not all the social networking sites are the subject of study. In this study only Facebook has been considered and thus can be interchangeably used in place of the term 'social media'.

Social media in India. Many nations have undergone the communication change due to the evolution of new media or social media (social media and new media terms are used interchangeably all over the text of thesis) with the growth of science and technology. Social media has spread in such way that in spite of being a virtual thing it has large connections with the real life of the people. People chat and share about their life in social media. They communicate to people to tell them what they are doing in day to day life. They also share news, information and receive them from others. This has made social media an important platform of social and political communication.

All over the world, there has been tremendous growth of social media. This change can be seen in India as well. "As of the third quarter of 2017, the most popular social network were YouTube and Facebook with a 30 percent penetration rate each. WhatsApp was ranked third with 28 percent reach. India ranks second among countries with the most Facebook users, accounting for 11 percent of global Facebook audiences in April 2017".^{i,7} Increasingly in India, "political parties are becoming tech savvy as this is the only way to reach out eloquent youths. Among major political parties in India, BJP has the biggest charisma in social media. BJP started using the social

ⁱ GlobalWebIndex.India, Social Network Penetration (2018). Penetration of leading social networks in India as of 3rd quarter 2017, Digital in 2018: Southern Asia, 87: We Are Social. In Statista- The Statistics Portal. Retrieved February 10, 2018 from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/284436/india-social-network-penetration/>

media even before 2009 general election, which it lost. But in recent years, it has dig deeper into social media. Several senior leaders like Sushma Swaraj, Rajnath Singh, Arun Jaitley, Narendra Modi and many are on social networking sites. Narendra Modi as the BJP's prime ministerial candidate for the 2014 general election has his own team for his social media management".^{ii,8}

Social media and political communication. Today, democracy is a widely accepted form of government in which it is believed that power should ultimately reside with the citizens while the elected leaders being representatives of this power (representative form of democracy). In this context, social media can be said to be an important tool of making political communication more democratic and open which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Political parties have also acknowledged the rise of social media as an important tool to interact with the people. With the changes in the media of political communication, political parties have also moved towards using social media along with the traditional media for their political campaigning. This change, along with various other nations, can be seen in India as well. Social media is not only a new media of communication technology but it has changed the activities in which people connect with each other and influence their social and political participation.

There are a growing number of studies regarding the political communication in social media across the world but are very limited in Indian scenario in particular. The studies regarding the communication which looked into the internet based communication along with the traditional communication such as by Shah. D. (2001), investigated the effect of communication in various platforms such as print, broadcast and internet. The study concluded that the exposure to any kind

ⁱⁱ Meti, V. Khandoba, P. K. Guru, M. C. (2015). Social Media for Political Mobilization in India: A Study. In *Mass Communication Journalism* 5(275). 1-4. doi:10.4172/21657912.1000275.

of media whether print or internet had modest level of positive impact on civic engagement of the young people.⁹ Kenski, K. & Stroud, N. (2006) studied the relationship between internet and political participation. The study made an analysis of data from National Annenberg Election Survey conducted during the American presidential elections 2000. It concluded that the exposure and usage of internet increases political knowledge and contributes to participation. It showed that there is positive relation between the online engagement and the political participation and it was also significant.¹⁰

Another study shows that there was positive impact of social networking sites like Facebook in the people's openness in sharing their opinion and beliefs about the political issues and processes. It also indicated that Facebook played significant role in the 2008 presidential elections. This study was done by Vitak, J. et al. (2008) which came in the form of an article named, "'Poking' People to Participate: Facebook and Political Participation in the 2008 Election".¹¹ The objective of the research was to find out the relation between the Facebook activities of the youth and their participation in the political activities or civic engagement. Random sampling method was used in the research. Survey sample taken was that of the undergraduate students (683 students) of Midwestern University in United States. The survey was done just one month before the presidential election 2008. Again, Ahmed, M. (2011), in his study conducted on 500 university students and titled as, "Student's Exposure to Political News on the Internet and Political Awareness: a comparison between Germany and Egypt" found or suggested that political awareness can be increased by the use of Internet for getting information and online news.¹² The conclusion was made based on the study with the objective to check the impact of students' exposure to the online world of internet on their civic and political awareness as well as activities.

There are lot of innovative ways in which political communication can be done in social media (text, image, graphics and videos etc.) and which can be said to have impact on the political participation of the people using it. For instance, there are certain applications of games which can increase the political knowledge of the players and be source of knowledge for them. Skoric, M. and Kwan, G. (2011) studied about whether Facebook games can increase the political awareness of the youth in Singapore and enhance their engagement in political life.¹³ The study suggested that the exposure to the civic and political contents in the Facebook video games can provide opportunity for youth to enhance their civic and political skills and it will also reduce the cost of participation.

Political parties and political communication in social media. Parikh, K. H. (2011) claimed in his study that social media provides greater transparency between the voters and the politicians.¹⁴ The study was done based on the data collected with the help of interviews which was inclined to study about how relationship between young voters and politicians has changed due to social media. Further, claim has been made that the digital political communication can lead to increase in political engagement of citizens by bringing them closer to politics and vice versa by interactivity.¹⁵ There are potential opportunities for the political parties to connect and interact with people, mobilize them and to fundraise which is attracting political parties to the social media.¹⁶ Thus, parties are trying to strategically use social media during the election campaigns which can prove to be beneficial. Political communication can either be mediated via social media or take place face-to-face. However, it commonly involves strategic or purposeful function. Thus,

it can be defined as “communication undertaken by politicians and other political actors for the purpose of achieving specific objects” (McNair, 2012, p. 4).^{iii,17}

Accordingly, political parties are not only developing strategies regarding the communication through the channels like newspaper, TV, radio, but also to the new emerged and increasingly growing social media. This shift towards the social media platforms along with the old tools of campaigning has been called as “hypermedia campaigning”.¹⁸ Smith also talked about the political campaigning in the age of social media in his thesis. While studying the role of social media during the campaign United States presidential election in 2008, he claimed that social media has played an important role in the political campaign and hence can be beneficial in future political campaigns also.¹⁹ Barack Obama’s Presidential campaign in 2008 for the presidential election demonstrated how the social media platform can be utilized efficiently. The campaign was characterized by the extensive use of social media to motivate people and also to fundraise which was an inspiration to the whole world.²⁰ This proved to be the international flagship campaign for integrating communication technology with the election campaigning. In India, national elections of 2014 are claimed to have brought in social media to a recognizable extent into political communication and campaigning. Political parties are using social media increasingly because election commission regulates the mass media communication in India. In India, political parties first used to share their message in static webpages but now more and more parties are using social media sites and applications such as Facebook, twitter, WhatsApp and YouTube etc. to be in contact with the people.²¹ Use of social media by political parties has further increased in the state elections following national elections 2014. In India, a study to investigate

ⁱⁱⁱ McNair, J. B. (2012). *An introduction to political communication* (5th ed.). London, England:Routledge.

the engagement of citizens to the social media use initiatives by government done based on the case study method showed that social media has become a platform to share ideas both for the government as well as citizens.

From the above, it is clear that political parties are seeking to use another means to communicate with the people due to the declining reach of traditional media in the industrial democracy. Television, which was dominating earlier is being accompanied by taking the digitalised means of sharing information in online world as a means of campaigning by the strategists. India has recently noticed the mass media to be a major element of elections campaigning, now being accompanied by the digital information sharing.

However, the use of social media by political parties for political communication has been questioned by some scholars. Along with political advantages that are provided by the social media by giving possibilities of interactivity, there are studies that show that political actors are reluctant to use social media for the interaction with the citizens. These studies suggest that in theory, political parties regard it as an important tool by which the government and parties can directly engage in the dialogue with the citizens and enhance the democracy by enhancing the peoples' participation. However, studies show that political parties give less direct response to the people and avoid direct dialogue and discussion in practice. Some of the reasons given are lack of resources and expertise as well as need for control.²² A study conducted regarding the motivation of using social media among the Norwegian political candidates during election in 2009 and 2011 showed that politician report more idealistic motivations regarding democratic communication in the form of dialogue in the social media than they actually managed in reality.²³ Their actual social media use was more oriented towards marketing purposes. Similarly, in a study of Danish

politicians it was found that majority of parliament members were engaged in one way communication in social media and hence lacked responsiveness the importance to which they tend to magnify.²⁴ So, the problem is that though social media has the potential of democratic or more two-way communication of political parties, parties in power with the people but it is not being utilized.

The above described disparity is found in studies varying from Swiss political parties²⁵, political parties in France²⁶, Canada²⁷, Italy²⁸, U.K²⁹ and Norway³⁰. However, there is no comparative study of what the political parties claim as their aim and strategy for using social media and how it is different from their actual social media use regarding the Indian political system. In this study, objective is to investigate this disparity in the context of Indian political parties.

Statement of Problem

From the reviewed literature above, it is clear that while political parties are not found using social media for interaction with the people in social media, they claim that they use social media for interacting with people in order to have their 'opinion' or 'say' regarding policy or decision making. Some scholars concluded in their study that political parties use social media only for marketing purposes and the capacity of social media to be a two-way interaction of people and political parties is not being utilized. However, there are only a few studies regarding the use of social media by political parties in India for political communication. This area still needs the attention of the researchers as social media is increasingly being embraced by the political parties in India. Literature is missing regarding the comparative study of strategy to use Facebook as a part of social media for political communication as articulated by Indian political parties and how

they use it in practice. So, this research aspires to fill this knowledge gap. Studies across the world have found disparity between the articulated strategies of social media use by political parties and their actual social media use. The studies show that the possibility of free and open discussion between the political parties and people is not fully utilized by the political parties. However, is this true in case of the Indian political system (the biggest democracy in the world)? More explicitly, what are the differences between the claimed strategy of Facebook use for the political communication by the national political parties in India and their use of Facebook pages in practice? Are, Indian national political parties engaged in open and free discussions with the people in their Facebook pages? The study will proceed by comparing the claims of political parties regarding their strategy of using social media with their actual engagement in Facebook pages with the help of data collected through interviews by political parties to compare it with the data of interactions by political parties in their Facebook pages.

Research Questions

Based on the research problem, I draw following research questions:

- What is the importance of Facebook for Indian national political parties for the purpose of political communication?
- What is the strategy of Indian national political parties to use Facebook pages for political communication?
- How do Indian national political parties use their Facebook pages? Also, how the people are engaged in the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties?

- Do Indian national political parties use Facebook pages only for sharing information and advertising about their policies and work or they use it for participating in the open interactions or discussions with the people?
- What are differences between the strategy of using Facebook pages as claimed by the Indian national political parties and how they use their these pages in practice?

Objectives of Research

The Research has been conducted with the following objectives in mind:

- To study the strategy of social media use by Indian national political parties.
- To study the perception of the Indian national political parties about the importance and relevance of social media in political communication.
- To compare the articulated strategy of Indian national political parties with their actual use of social media.

Significance and Scope of the Study

With web-based social networking, political parties now have another approach to speak with people and their supporters, in a speedy and productive way. By posting some content on Facebook which takes only a time of few seconds, parties can achieve a large number of people, reacting and providing their convictions on an issue, making a major declaration, or a report on their lives. As an individual part of a political system, one needs to hear what the leaders who I voted in favour of are doing with my vote. In social media, one watches the news at whatever point he/she wishes to. As a general rule young generation in India don't watch the news day by day, yet most do check online networking. It perhaps is not good for the state that the subjects check online networking more than the news, however it's not something that will simply change in a flicker of

an eye. So it's awesome to see legislators adjusting to the way constituents live. Additionally, interactions in social media are taken into consideration by legislators to make some critical messages to the populace that partakes in web-based social networking. With online networking, government officials can reach out to a large population, including the more youthful generation with an ease. We have fused online networking into most parts we can possibly imagine, even school for various educational purposes. So, web-based social networking certainly is a path for legislator's to contact the more youthful individuals. Also, it makes government officials to appear normal to the common people as they share various events of their lives to devotees and supporters.

Social media is growing very rapidly in India and political parties have started to look and use it for the political communication. So, it becomes necessary to study the change in political communication in India with the rise of social media. Also, one of the most important capacity that social media provides the people is that it has made them able to react, comment, criticize or participate in the communication with the political parties. Keeping this capacity in view many positive opinion holders about the rise of social media claim that it has strengthened the democracy and ended the one-way authoritative nature of interaction in broadcasting media. Now a days, political parties in India not only are competing amongst one another in the real world but also in the virtual world of social media. However, there is no study regarding social media paradox in India and hence this research work will study the perception of political parties towards social media use and how they use it in practice. This research work tries to test the result of studies mentioned in the literature review in the Indian context by studying the social media use by Indian national political parties. Also, increasing penetration of social media in politics demands new studies to be done to build knowledge in this area which still lacks comprehensive understanding, especially in India.

National Political Parties are taken as the subject of study because they represent the whole India and some of them are present in all the parts of India, such as, INC (Indian National Congress), Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP). Other regional parties are not in the scope of study. The study is also limited to the Facebook use by political parties to connect with the people and for political communication.

Research Methodology

The research relies largely on qualitative methods. However, quantitative data is used to support the qualitative analysis. So, the research work implies a mixed method approach to find answers to the research questions. In order to know the Facebook strategy of Indian national political parties, the data will be collected from the interviews with the parties and it will be compared with their actual engagement in their Facebook pages.

Participants and subjects under study. Following are the participants and the subjects which were studied:

- Indian Political Parties recognized as National Political Parties after central elections of 2014, which are Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), Indian National Congress (INC), Bahujan Samajwadi Party (BSP), All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), Communist Party India (CPI), Communist Party India Marxist (CPI (M)), Nationalist Congress Party (NCP).
- Facebook Pages of the political parties and the leaders of those political parties under study.
- People engaged in various activities in the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties.

Sources. Both primary and secondary sources will be used according to the necessity of study. These include:

Primary sources. Interviews from the Indian national political parties and analysis of their Facebook pages.

Secondary sources. Data from the secondary sources such as books, journals, articles and web sources will be used to analyse growth of social media in politics and its use by political parties as a new media of political communication.

Tools and techniques. To measure the importance of social media against other means like broadcasting and on field campaigning as a means to political communication and campaigning and to know the strategies of the political parties in using social media, open ended questionnaire for conducting interviews of the strategists and political leaders is used. Also, in order to study the disparity between the perceived strategies of using social media by political parties and leaders, the perceptions obtained from interviews will be compared to their actual practice on their pages in Facebook. The responsiveness will be studied by monitoring of the responses and replies made by the page owners to the comments of the citizens on the posts of the page using the content analysis. For getting data such as posts, likes and comments on the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties, Graph API of Facebook along with some applications using graph API of Facebook such as Facepager and fb_loader are used.

Assumptions and Limitations

The study has been proceeded upon some assumptions and has some limitations as well. These are as under:

- Only national political parties are taken under the scope of study due to paucity of time and resources.

- It is assumed that the leaders from the political parties will seriously reply to the questions during interviews and present the parties' strategic view and not their personal opinion.
- It is assumed that the recognized pages of political parties by Facebook are authentic and used by party members of the particular page.
- Three months' (January 2018, April 2018 and May 2018) data was drawn from the recognized pages of political parties in Facebook due to limitation of time. These months are taken in order to include the interactive data of the month prior to the elections (Karnataka elections in May 2018) and just before and after the elections so that political communication in all the three possibilities can be studied. The national elections in 2014 are not taken into account in the study because there are a lot possibilities of data being modified and fresh data can't be expected. The other obvious reason is the paucity of time.
- Again, in order to do better study in a limited time, only Facebook is taken into account in this study in order to produce accurate and focused results. Other reason to study Facebook is that it has the largest penetration in India which is equal to that of YouTube while other social media platforms such as twitter, WhatsApp, WeChat etc. stand behind them.

Disposition

To make the reader to have some indication about the structure content of the dissertation work, the name and short description about the content of the following chapters is given below.

- **Theoretical Framework-** The chapter explains the concepts of Political Communication and how it has changed with the coming of social media in the world in general and particularly in India. It draws the theoretical framework of study. The study is based on the analysis of secondary sources like books, articles and journal papers and primary sources like government reports and statistics.

- **Indian National Political Parties’ Facebook Strategy: Findings of the Conducted Interviews-**This chapter includes the data gathered from the political parties regarding their strategy and purpose of using social media in general and Facebook in particular. It includes narration and analysis of the data collected through the help of interviews.
- **Indian National Political Parties’ Facebook Use: Online Interactions in Practice-** This chapter is based upon the study of the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties. It includes the study of interactions of the political parties in terms of the response given by the political parties to the people on their pages.
- **Conclusions-** The chapter draws comparison between the data collected from the interviews and Facebook pages to analyse the findings and conclude the study.

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Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework

This chapter is devoted to frame a theoretical framework of the study, clarifying and explaining the concepts and terms such as political communication, democracy and social media and on providing interrelations between them. The theoretical framework will be further useful in the following sections for the purpose of analysis.

Political Communication

Political Communication is a process of interaction which is concerned towards the spreading and sharing of information among politicians and public. News media plays an important role in this. The process operates in all the directions, i.e., from the institutions of governance towards citizens, horizontal transmission of information between different political actors, and also in the form of upward transmission or interaction from the public opinion towards government or authorities.¹

The literature in the field of political communication can be further divided into three major categories based on the focus of the studies. These studies are divided based on their focus given to the different elements in the process of political communication, i.e., production process, contents and effects. Studies regarding production process focus on the generation of the messages by different political actors such as political parties and interest groups and how these messages are transmitted by means of direct channels such as direct political advertisements as well as indirect channels such as newspapers, radio and television. Another research tradition has focused on the contents of the generated information or messages produced by the process of production such as what amount of and in what tone a report is presented in the news on television, the coverage of various political events such as election campaigns, presentation of the reports of

policies and discussion on those policies and how the social minorities are presented in the news media. Moving beyond this, the main challenge is to relate the content of the generated information or messages to the cause of its production or to its effect. Lastly, studying effects has been perhaps the biggest interests of the researchers, especially in United States. In these research works, the focus is to study the impacts of exposure to varieties of political communication messages (Norris, 2004).

This research work is going to focus on the political communication in the Facebook pages of the national political parties in India. However, the main focus is on the strategy of generation of messages by political parties, the amount of the content produced by the political parties in their Facebook pages and how they react or counter-respond to the responses in form of posts by individuals and critical or supportive comments of the people regarding messages generated on those pages itself. In other words, the research work is inclined to study about the openness, free and interactive nature of political communication in the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties. This kind of political communication is characterised with the democratic political systems. Thus, this paper will investigate if the political communication on the Facebook pages of national political parties in India (the biggest representative form of government in world) is democratic or not.

In order to proceed in the study it is important to look into the theories explaining the political communication in a democracy.

Public Sphere and its Evolution

Jurgen Habermas' theory of public sphere is of such an importance that no good quality analysis regarding the role of media for development in a democracy can be done without mentioning it. Habermas' theory is one of the main theories used to describe the development of

political communication in democracy with the evolution of social media and its role in developing democratic communication. Jurgen Habermas talked about the origin, potentials and degeneration of the public sphere of bourgeois of eighteenth century.² This public sphere was engaged in rational debate on the important political matters which contributed in enlightened ideas such as equality, justice and human rights (Habermas, 1991, p. 69). Habermas talked about this public sphere and the conditions such as infrastructure and the norms and practices that supported the flourishing of critical and rational discourse. The public sphere that formed in the seventeenth century urban culture with its coffee houses, print media and intellectual salons. The central point in the communication in the public sphere was the rational and critical argumentation and discussion. The strength of made arguments was important and not the identity of speaker (Habermas, 1991, p. 54). At that time citizens criticised and discussed rationally about the actions of government and hence checked arbitrary power of government (Habermas, 1991, p.120). Habermas also refers to 18th century when for the first time press emerged as a genuine instrument of public engaged in critical political debate. While many changes occurred since that time the press provided opportunity for people's opinion (Habermas, 1991, p.60). Public opinion reflected in the form of common sense. It was scattered among people as prejudices, but still it reflected the authentic needs and true susceptibility of common life (Habermas, 1991, p.120). Public opinion was formed out of public discussion when public by means of education and information had been in a situation to reach a considered opinion. Though, public opinion reigned but it stopped to govern with the emergence of parliamentary democracy to some extent as a result of public sphere. In the parliamentary system, parliamentary discussion helped in the formation of public opinion which informs the government about its desires and government in turn informs about its policies to the public opinion (Habermas, 1991, p. 239). However, Habermas explained about how public sphere

decayed as an institution with the rise of industrialization and the mass popular media. According to him, the mass media have from one perspective accomplished an incomparably more prominent range and adequacy - the public sphere itself has extended correspondingly. On the other hand individuals have been moved ever farther of this sphere. "The more people's effectiveness in terms of publicity increased, the more they became accessible to the pressure of certain private interests, whether individual or collective. Whereas formerly the press was able to limit itself to the transmission and amplification of the rational/critical debate of private people assembled into a public sphere, it now conversely gets shaped by the mass media to begin with"ⁱ (Habermas 1991, p. 188). For Habermas, all the problem have started with the press becoming commercial and profit oriented. This made people simple consumers of the information (Habermas, 1991, p. 184-190). The advertising business started and it put whole new basis for the financial calculation. In the condition when the number of buyers multiplied and price per copy lowered greatly, the publishers could rely on making the large space of paper reserved to sell for advertisements. Increasing efficiency by developing technical and organizational structure demanded the change of policy of the editors to suit the increasing pressure for capital and necessity of business efficiency. This had resulted in the change in the relationship of publisher with editor. Editorial activity which used to be a literary one changed to a journalistic one. Selecting material gained importance over publishing a lead article. The screening and evaluation became more important than rational political debate advocated by effective literary presentation. (Habermas, 1991, p. 184-190).

According to Habermas, the public sphere has decayed due to the commercialization of mass media. The capitalist economy and commercial interests into the mainstream media have led

ⁱ Habermas, J. (1991). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An Inquiry into a category of bourgeois society* (J. Habermas & F. Lawrence, Trans.). Cambridge: MIT Press. (Original work published 1962)

to the colonization of public sphere and the rational and critical discourse which is so important for the public sphere. This rationality has been compromised with television playing a frequent role as vanguard. However, Habermas' public sphere has been criticized by different scholars. Marxists point out the limitation of public sphere in terms of exclusion of working class and feminists criticize it in terms of gender. The criticism is sound to some extent as the public sphere provides the opportunity of taking part in governing process while excluding others. It doesn't matter if individuals are uneducated or women, excluding the large part of population from public sphere is not good and is sad.³

Political Communication in Democracy and the Role of Public Sphere

Many scholars have tried to explain democracy during the twentieth century. Some of them gave it a broader meaning than the others. Democracy as a concept is continuously evolving, resulting in the previous researches to become outdated and creating a space for new studies and explanation. Diamond argues that there exists a strong relation between democracy and liberty which means that the countries conducting free and fair elections are significantly more liberal than the countries that do not conduct free election.⁴ If one assumes this to be a main attribute of the modern democracies, he can stem out some key features which are typical for the minimalist definition of democracy which is also known as electoral democracy. It suggests a system in which decisions are arrived at by the individuals who acquire power of deciding by undergoing a competitive struggle for the purpose of getting people's vote (Diamond, 2003, p. 30). Earlier, Robert Dahl also talked about the competitive elections to be the core of democracy. According to Robert Dahl, democracy suggested that the elections are held such that the opposition also enjoys the same chance of winning and getting office.⁵ He also advocated the 'civil liberty' in terms of freedom of speaking or publishing differing views, freedom to join an organization or to form a

new one and freedom to go for alternative sources of information (Dahl, 1971, p. 2-3). However, Dahl doesn't give much attention to non-electoral elements of democracy. He regarded competition and participation as the actual measures of the democracy and encompasses non-electoral dimensions only to provide meaning to participation and competition. However, in the modern days, the meaning of democracy is often associated with the liberal democracy which includes few other elements besides what are the elements of electoral democracy. Among these other elements, special attention is given to pluralism (political and civic) and to the freedom of individual and groups. These are regarded as the important element of democracy because they allow the competition of political values and conflictual interests to be present not only at the period of elections but also beyond it (Diamond, 2003, p. 35).

This addition of new elements to the meaning of democracy is often associated with the social and political change that happened gradually making them an important part of democracy. The main features of the modern democracy were defined by Lipset as below:

1. According to Lipset, modern liberal democracy is characterized by policymaking institutions' dependence in government.
2. Political leaders have right to compete for support and votes of people.
3. In modern liberal democracy there is a freedom to join an organisation or to make new one.
4. Freedom of speech and expression is another feature of modern liberal democracy (Lipset, 1959, p. 69-105).⁶

The only thing which at that time was not included by Lipset in the list was the concept given by Diamond regarding continuous process of representation and articulation, at the period other than that of elections.

The scholars have also identified types of democracies depending upon the way of participation of the public in the process of governance. The meaning democracy for the purpose of this dissertation work is also important to be made clear. Democracy in the ancient Greece meant that every citizen has the equal opportunity to participate in law making (Urbinati, 2008, p. 2).⁷ This is the type of democracy which is ideal in its form and in which every citizen plays his role in decision making. It is characterized by regular debates in which citizens participate and arrive at decisions by voting according to their opinions and is usually called as direct democracy (Woolf, 2006, p. 4-5).⁸ However, direct democracy is hard to achieve now a days when states' population is huge. This is why, modern democracy has adopted a model of democracy known as representative democracy. It allows citizens to choose or elect their representatives who on their behalf take part directly in the process of decision making. This reduces everyday burden of citizens related to the governance (Woolf, 2006, p. 4-5). Definitions provided by Diamond and Lipset make it clear that long and careful consideration or discussion was one of the core element of any kind of democracy. It meant the decisions making through the process of discussions over issues considered based on their merits by the citizens (or representatives) (Fishkin, 2009, p. 11).⁹ In other words it meant the participation of the citizens. So, what unites all kinds of democracies is the ability to participate in the decision making process by expressing own opinion.

Habermas discussed about how public sphere can make representative (parliamentary) government more participatory as it involves rational and critical discussion forming public opinion which checks the arbitrary power of government. However, in the representative (parliamentary) form of government, this public sphere is occupied by political parties in logical terms. So in practical terms, the participation of citizen in the decision making process implies his voting capacity during parliamentary elections followed mainly by passive observation of how

various important issues are being handled and discussed in the parliament. This is due to the result of mass media getting commercialised which in turn largely limited the opportunity of expressing ideas and opinion for citizens and hence people participated in the decision making process by electing government at the period of elections only. According to Donatella Della Porta, the ability to elect government during elections expresses the democratic principal most directly. But this ability to elect government periodically is almost all the time accompanied by the desire to have a more permanent control over the elected government (Della Porta, 2011, p. 802).¹⁰ However, if we go back to the point made by Habermas, one can conclude that people discuss what media suggests them to discuss as the commercialization resulted in the decay of purity of public sphere and less possibilities for people to express their views regarding important issues in a traditional media.

As traditional media started to run on the principles of screening the material to be published based on the profits, people started to get only the information that media wants to provide them. So, what media suggests, will be discussed by the people. Castells's concludes it by arguing that the issues which are not in the media are not in the minds of people. (Castells, 2007, p. 241).¹¹ Further, few political actors who exert influence over the traditional media are fed by it (Castells, 2007, p. 241). The vast majority of the people feel that they have 'very less' or 'no control' over the decision making process both in the country as a whole or its local areas. This doesn't by any means imply that they don't want to influence the decision making.

This creates a necessity of a new information media for the common people. It leads us from representative democracy to participatory democracy. If we look into the Habermas' public sphere which involved a space for the people to discuss rationally, produce public opinion by contending arguments and exert influence over decision making and if we also keep in mind the

decay of space of free discussion of ideas in traditional media, a stress to create such sphere of open and rational discussion providing with ability of equal and free participation provisions to people will be felt, which is a basic element of a participatory democracy (Della Porta, 2011, p. 803). Within the concept of participatory democracy is the freedom of expression. According to Barber (1984, p. 173), free talk lies at the heart of strong democracy.¹² This democratic talk involves ‘listening’ as well as ‘saying’. Among the various emphases the deliberative democracy theory stresses upon, is the importance communication. This is because deliberative democracy involves convincing people by the force of better arguments (Habermas, 1998).¹³ Therefore, participatory democracy is the one in which citizens have access to the policy decisions and can influence making those decisions (Zittel, 2007, p. 17).¹⁴

However, participation doesn’t mean the empirical model of direct democracy which is nearly impossible to achieve in the modern huge societies. This dissertation work focusses on the other institutional means which can help to achieve the notion of participatory democracy rather than direct democracy. For this, the formation of public opinion which is free and independent is required. This public opinion should be free and independent of decayed mass media. This public opinion functions as the permanent opposition to the dominating and monopolistic media (Zittel, 2007, p. 17). So, citizens have the ability to form their independent opinions and exercise control over government and participate in political processes by critical discussions and arguments in an independent and free media which is not monopolised. Social media can be this kind of independent channel. Habermas talked about the importance of public sphere for the democracies ranging from that of the Greek democracy to bourgeois democracy and the democracy in the welfare state in modern capitalism. But, with the decay of public sphere democracy evolved

accordingly and both underwent transformation into different types. Studying the change that the social media has brought about in the public sphere has thus become important.

Social Media, Public Sphere and Democracy

Before going into establishing relationship between these terms, it is important to look into the social media or new media as a notion (these terms are used in the paper interchangeably). We can break down the social media into two words, as done by Safko who points out that ‘social’ implies the instincts of human to connect and interact with other humans and the second part, i.e. ‘media’ means the channel or platform used to make such connections (Safko, 2010, p. 4).¹⁵ However, for the purpose this paper Facebook has been taken as social media (see scope and limitations’ subsection). Traditionally, mass media which was monopolistic and one-directional media doesn’t allowed all the people to participate and connect with each other. However, the only way in which people connect with each other is day-to-day life interactions with the people within one’s limited reach. In this sense, social-networks have provided another time saving and convenient way to a person to connect with large number of people. Thus, Facebook is taken as the social media for the purpose of this study.

Social media involves social mobilisation. This produces a need to have an insight into the concept of ‘social movement’. Different scholars have interpreted this concept in different ways (some have given a broad meaning while others have interpreted it narrowly). One of the important definitions of the concept of social movement can be said to be made by Herbert Blumer. He defines it as a collective enterprise which seeks to change the existing order with a new order of life (as cited in Crossley, 2002, p. 3).¹⁶ It can be argued that the new order does not necessarily means an order which never existed. It simply means that the order other than the existing one. Social movement may also be directed towards changing the existing order with another one which

existed at some point. Thus, the important point of ‘change from the existing order’ can be taken from this definition. According to another important definition, social movement refers to a temporary public space, as a collectively created moment that provides new ideals and identities to the societies (as cited in Crossley, 2002, p. 4). The important features according to this definition are ‘new ideas’ and ‘temporary nature of movement’. Another definition talks about social movement being a movement in which common people are in league with more influential people (as cited in Crossley, 2002, p. 4).

From the above definitions, it can be drawn out that social movement is a movement consisting of common as well as more influential people who try to change the existing order of life or provide new ideals to the society. Social movement mobilises people with new ideas and new order of life. However, scholars like Zibechi talk about the difference in the mobilization of elites and masses. He argues that elites undergo vertical mobilisation with a close link with institutions in which conscious social action takes place in a controlled manner. Masses, on the other hand undergo horizontal mobilisation which is spontaneous and is linked with traditional kinship and association of class based on territoriality (Zibechi, 2010, p. 11).¹⁷ According to Castells, the powerful in the society always spy on the citizens, but it is the first time that masses have got the power, at least to some extent, to watch the powerful. Today, everyone has a potentiality to be a citizen journalist who can upload and share about what is going on anywhere or someone is doing something wrong. The only requirement to be a potential journalist is to be equipped by some device such as mobile phones and internet (Castells, 2009, p. 413).¹⁸

Social media has multiplied the spaces for exchange and sharing of ideas. It has created not a single but multiple ‘public spheres’ of critical ideas. Social media is also free from the necessity of professional journalist skills. It is convenient in terms of technology, expertise and is

also financially efficient (Loader & Mercea, 2011, p. 759).¹⁹ The citizens need not be passive consumers of various information such as false political party propaganda and government promises anymore. They can challenge the existing discourse with their own opinions. With the development of social media and conscious political communication, Diamond argues, people expect more political participation and accountability as compared to the eighteenth, nineteenth and even twentieth century (Diamond, 2003, p. 30). However, considering social media to be public and rational can be easily challenged. If we go back to the Habermas, he stressed the rationality in the public sphere. In this regard, social media can be easily. It is relatively simple people are not always engaged in rational communication. Democratic potential of social media may be easily questioned. However, according Loader and Mercea, moving beyond the traditional participation in mainstream politics, such as casting votes, becoming party member and the like, leads us to a more open and wide concept of democratic citizenship. Accordingly, different set of questions and focus emerges (Loader and Mercea, 2011, p. 761). This approach doesn't focus only on one dimensional dutiful citizenship but recognizes the multiplicity of ideas and more open and personalized meaning of citizenship also.

Social media has provided the development of multi-dimensional and translational communication. Diverse public opinions come in contact with one another. It can be said that there are a lot of public spheres who undergo discussions and interactions inside a particular public sphere, as well as outside it with other public spheres. Social media not only provides expressing one's opinion in the form of text but also images, videos, visuals and graphics. YouTube stories, Facebook images and other such things shared by people regarding different events which influence the politics of the nation can be said to be political and rational interactions. This platform is evolving continuously and rapidly. It can be argued based on the fact that most of the

social media network sites which have a very vast user base, such as Facebook and YouTube have developed after the year 2004 only. This shows the innovative and changing nature of this platform which also makes it harder to draw conclusions with confidence. Even this research work may be not be as useful as now after few years because of the highly evolving nature of social media. But the fact is that social media is increasingly being embraced by the people and has become highly influential in their life as argued by many scholars.

From the above, it is clear that a lot of studies have shown that social media has the potential for expanding the democratic participation of the citizens by enabling them to have free interactions. Hence, debates and discussions which according to the Habermas used to happen in the public sphere have a possibility to get revived with the evolution of social media as a new platform of sharing of information and interaction. However, in influencing the policies and decision making, political parties play an important role in a parliamentary form of government. This is because either a political party comes itself in power after elections or exerts pressure over the one in power by criticising its policies. Can people influence the decision making and have control over it by just discussing it among each other is a question posed against the relevance of Habermas' public sphere by some critiques. In a representative parliamentary form of government, political parties are the entities who actually exert pressure over the government and decision making. That means, people should be able to control and exercise pressure over the political parties by interacting with them which in turn control the arbitrary use of power by government. However, interactions with political parties traditionally was possible only during the elections. In the time of elections parties come with their aims and agendas to interact with people and get votes from them in order to win the elections. Social media has made a more continuous and permanent political communication involving people and the political parties to be possible. The reason is

that general people and political parties are present and using social media actively in the modern times. In India all the national political parties (in 2018) have their own Facebook page and followers of the pages. There is a possibility that these pages can be looked at as public sphere as discussed by Habermas but in a new form in the virtual world of social media. However, can this public sphere be regarded as rational and effective? Do people really interact with political parties freely on their pages? Do political parties respond to people on their pages? Some studies discussed in the literature review section say that no. This paper will study this problem in the context of India which is the largest democracy in the world and hence is perhaps the most important subject to be studied in order to do study about democracy or democratic political communication.

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Chapter 3

Indian National Political Parties' Facebook Strategy: Findings of the Conducted Interviews

In the above section, the possibility of social media to be a new public sphere was discussed. This research, as already mentioned, is limited to the political interactions in the Facebook pages of Indian National political parties as public sphere. It was also mentioned above that how scholars argue for social media to be a platform of more democratic interactions among people and politicians. During the literature review, it was found that political parties claim to use social media with a strategy to contact people and have direct discussions about public policies and political issues. This chapter will discuss the interviews conducted with the Indian national political parties in relation to the research questions and objective of this research work. The findings will be discussed based on the following themes:

- (a) Opinions of Indian national political parties regarding changes in political communication due to social media.
- (b) Importance given to social media as an effective means of communication in relation to the traditional media.
- (c) Indian national political parties' Facebook strategy in connecting with people.

Method

The interviews were conducted based on the open ended questionnaire which was used to get views of political parties regarding their strategy for using social media in general and Facebook in particular. Interviews were conducted by the heads of social media departments of the Indian national political parties. Also, one spokesperson from each party was also interviewed which was selected based on the convenience.

Social Media and Change in Political Communication: Views of Indian national political parties

All the parties shared more or less same views regarding the major change in political communication due to social media. It was found that political parties are in line with scholars who believe that social media has empowered the people to (i) share their views (ii) produce information (iii) engage in political debates (iii) criticize government. Along with this they agreed upon the views that social media has (iv) increased youth political participation.

According to the Ranjan Srivasta, who is leading core social media team of Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) at the national level, social media has given opportunity to everyone for sharing their views. It has created equality in terms of control over posting, producing or sharing of information which traditionally was enjoyed by only some elites. While in an interview with him he said, “It has made you, me and all others to have same control over generating and sharing information. Sab log koi news share kar sakte hain aur wo kai bar viral bhi ho jati hai. So, this is the power of social media. Pehle tou aisa nhi hota tha na, sirf elite log jo media mai hote the, only they used to share the news and frame the debates”, said Ranjan Srivastava (BJP). Thus focus is on the production and sharing of information. While stressing on the capabilities that social media has provided to the common people, Hafiza Amin, national co-ordinator of the social media cell of Indian National Congress said, “Political communication has become more democratic due to the ability it has provided to common people to share their views. It is not the heads of the broadcasting media which used to decide what goes into the people but anyone can now talk about the political events, issues and policies. Social media has increased the importance of views of common people regarding socio, economic as well as political issues.” It shows that social media has been taken as an agent strengthening democracy in the country.

It is easy to guess about the positive orientations of two big national political parties, i.e., Indian National Congress (INC) and Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) about the role of social media in strengthening democracy by making people exercise more power over the communication and decision making. This is due the fact that these parties are having many followers in Facebook. This can be justified by the fact that present Prime Minister Narendra Modi (BJP) is the most followed political leader in social media (as of 10 April 2018). Also, during the visit of the headquarters of the Indian national political parties, it was found that these two parties were having separate and well-resourced social media cells as compared to the other Indian national political parties.

Other national political parties in India also responded enthusiastically about the change in political communication due to the social media. They not only recognized the capability of sharing ideas in social media but also the ability of engaging in public debate that social media has provided to the common people. In the interview with Derek O'Brien, a senior leader of AITC, he said, "Due to the emergence of social media, political communication in the life of common people, which used to be limited among the family members, friends and neighbours has extended to the larger population. Now, you can share and discuss what you think with a large population which was very limited earlier. In other words, every one using social media can become a broadcaster or content producer and reach out to large population which was earlier enjoyed only by traditional broadcasting media with television becoming the most important after print media". In this context it can be said that public sphere in social media has broadened as a result of new possibilities to connect with many people at a time, which earlier was limited to the debates with friends and families inside the rooms, halls, coffee shops now has broadened to such an extent that

people from many rooms, halls and coffee shops can together be engaged in political debate in the virtual room of social media.

It is very important to take the view of socialist parties regarding the change in political communication, if any, due to the social media. It was found both the Indian national political parties who owe their origins to the socialist ideology also take the change in political communication as a positive thing. In an interview with Pran Jal, national head of the social media cell of the Communist party of India (Marxist) abbreviated as CPI (M), he said, “Social media has empowered common people to raise their voices while in the traditional time the media was dominated by some elites who presented the information according to their own way which often used to be modified. Hume pata hai jab koi sources of production of information limited hands mai chale jate hain tou wo corrupt aur exploitative ho jate hain”. Parties agree that traditionally the nature of media was monopolistic which has changed now with the dawn and rise of social media. “Social media has given opportunity to the common people to share their view and information and criticise government. So, it has put an end to the monopoly of some people in the broadcasting media who earlier had exclusive control over sharing of information”, said Duraisamy Raja, National Secretary of the Communist Party of India (CPI) since 1994.

Another substantial change that Indian political parties talked about is that it has multiplied the number of sources from which youth can get information about an event or issue. For instance, Devashish Jararia, leading the youth wing of Bahujan Samajwadi Party (BSP) and the head of newly established voluntary social media wing of BSP, said that, “The most important thing that the social media has brought into is that it has allowed youth to go through the multifaceted information from various sources, think and decide what is true and support it”.

It is clear that Indian national political parties accept that social media has increased the weight of ideas of common people extensively. They also agree that it has increased political participation of the people by engaging in public debates. Thus, it can be said that social media has made political communication more democratic. However, the fundamental characteristic of 'public sphere' as described by Habermas is that people in this sphere are engaged in the rational public debate. It can be said that 'rationality' of the discussion and debates is the soul of the public sphere according to him as discussed in above section also. The quest is that, can public interaction or debate in social media said to be rational? Indian national political parties do warn about the irrationality and also the possibility of unauthentic information to get viral. Some of these information is made viral by specific persons with a particular agenda such as to defame someone. While talking to Sima Malik a member of Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), she said that the most important change in political communication due to social is that, "earlier only some elites use to influence the people. Elites are still having the edge over common people but now, common people have more power to share their views and influence others. So, it is a competitive world now. Though, it can't be said that the capacity provided by social media to the people is always productive. We can see a lot of cases where people misuse by spreading fake information about someone and defame them. However, this doesn't means that social media is bad altogether. We have to think about the more productive, genuine and efficient way to use it." Thus, Indian national political parties though aware of possibilities of irrational use or in other words, misuse of social media by some people, focus more upon the democratic opportunity of free and independent communication it has provided.

Social Media or Traditional Media? Comparing importance given by Indian National Political Parties

It is already discussed that how social media is penetrating into politics in India as well as across the world. It was also discussed that how political parties around the world are using social media for political communication and particularly in campaigning. In India, in the recent few years, increasing involvement of political parties for communication in social media is found. So, one of the objective of the research was to find out how much important is social media for Indian national political parties in the modern times. Are political parties moving towards social media from the traditional media as a platform for communication? How much importance do political parties give to social media strategy for communicating with people during the time of elections and at time when there are no elections? Findings from the data collected through interviews with the political parties show similarities in answers of all the Indian national political parties. Political parties talked majorly about two things - (a) whether it is social media or traditional media, they are equally important (b) effectiveness of social media or traditional media depends upon which category of population one wants to connect with.

It was found that no party wants to compromise any media for connecting with the people whether it be traditional or new media. Ranjan Srivastava (heading core social media team of BJP at national level) said that, "Traditional as well as social media both are important for connecting with the people in the modern times. It is obvious that social media is growing at such a scale that it can't be ignored at all. However, social media can't go all alone and conventional means of connection and also on-ground events are not replaceable. In order to effectively connect with the people and if we talk in terms of political parties to be effectively communicating what they are doing, they need to be strong on-ground as well as in social media". Again, Hasiba Amin (National

Convenor in social media department of INC) talked about the importance of particular media in connecting with particular set of population. She said, "Both are equally important. The reason is that social media is more effective in connecting with particular set of population, such as youth population which is more engaged in social media. On the other hand traditional means of communication are more effective to connect and communicate with, for example, old generation. So, in order to have comprehensive reach to whole of the population of the country, importance of traditional as well as social media can't be compromised". In similar tone Derek O'Brien said that, "As a political party who wants to be successful, you have to be present everywhere. This is because in order to reach out particular category of population social media can be more effective than the other while in case of other category of population, traditional means may prove to be more effective. For example, for reaching out to the youth, social media is becoming more and more convenient and effective and while in order to connect with the older generation it is the traditional media which is more successful as most of them still don't use social media".

Social media cells and departments have already become part of the organization of the political parties (particularly BJP and INC) while others (particularly BSP) admitted they were lacking in social media field. Ambeth Rajan (BSP member) in this context said that, "In fact, all types of mediums whether it is traditional or social media are playing important role in communication in the modern time. However, our party is inclined towards removing inequality from the Indian society and emancipation of the weaker sections of the societies which are in minority. In order to connect with these weaker sections of the society, traditional methods such as face-to-face communication by organizing talks and meeting people are more effective and so we have largely relied upon them.

Indeed, social media is becoming more and more important with time and we, particularly our youth volunteers have started to make us strong in social media as well". In this connection Devoshish Jararia (head of the youth wing of BSP and voluntary social media wing of BSP) said that, "Conventional means, especially on-ground connections can't be replaced. However, youth's engagement in social media and the capacity of social media which allows youth of India to share and receive confronting information so that they don't have to rely on the biased truth and sort for themselves what is true, social media has become very important. All the parties have developed there social media cells and department but BSP has mainly relied on traditional methods of connecting with the people. However, now we are making the voluntary team of the young people who support the cause and agenda of BSP to challenge the bigger parties through the means of social media also. The young volunteers of BSP are making two teams, one will go on ground to meet and interact with the people and other will focus on the social media for that concern. So, we are trying to be more effective in both". Similarly, communist parties, CPI and CPI(M), talked about increasing social media presence. While talking to Pran Jal [convenor of social media cell of CPI(M)], he said, "Though we have not been voted by the people in many parts of India, the people often come to us for raising their voice against the exploitative and defective policies of various political parties in power. So, we are increasingly trying to improve our presence on social media to listen to the voices of the common people. However we have not stopped to speak publically, conventionally and the importance of traditional media in connecting with the people has not reduced".

It can be concluded that Indian national political parties are taking social media very seriously as a means to connect with people in the modern times. BJP and INC are the two big parties who are ahead of the other national parties in terms of the organised social media cell and

strategy. However, other parties have also recognised the need of social media and are focussing to improve their presence in social media too. However, all the parties admitted that the rise of social media has not replaced the traditional means of connecting with the people and both are equally important.

Indian National Political Parties' Facebook Strategy

There are many aspects which come under the umbrella of the term 'Facebook strategy'. However, objective of this research is to investigate the democratic use of Facebook by Indian National Political Parties. 'Democratic use of Facebook' in itself is ambiguous phrase. However, this research is inclined towards studying whether Indian national political parties engage themselves in direct dialogues, discussions or interactions with the people in their Facebook pages or not. They gave five major reasons for using Facebook – (i) Sharing information creatively (ii) connecting with youth (iii) bypassing gate-keepers in traditional media (iv) direct interactions with people and (v) Taking feedback from people

Sharing information creatively. Traditionally, it needed a lot of efforts to share information with the people. However, social media has made it easy by reducing the time and cost of information. "Technology has made sharing information as simple as hitting the keys of keyboard and posting it with a click in blink of an eye. Thus, what you need is to have a device connected to the internet, have accounts of twitter or Facebook or any other social networking website and you are ready to connect with the masses. In order to connect with the elite group of people who are relatively literate and from good economic background, twitter is most effective and to connect with large number of common people, Facebook is the most important", said Derek O'Brien (AITC). This shows that indeed parties are using Facebook for sharing information with the people. The question is that how they do it. Ranjan Srivastava (BJP) said that they share

information about the policies and programmes of government in form of textual posts, images and creative videos. “We have a social media team in which we have divided tasks among the workers who are specialised in different areas. Some of them write effective messages, some of them design images others are animators. After selecting the information we want to share, the message is created and shared in the most presentable form so that it can reach to as many people as possible”. He also said that, “it is easy to post text messages in the pages but they are not as influential as images and videos. Creative videos are most important to convey the message to audience influentially. But making creative videos needs more time and effort. So, if we talk about Facebook, we do share videos but in order to fill the time gaps we share images with certain short message having deep meaning written on those images. It allows people to get the message in interesting form and also it is less time consuming for them to look at it”.

India is a diverse country having various languages and cultures in its various parts. Thus, a uniform message is hard to have its desired impact on the whole population of the world. It becomes an important question or challenge in front of the political parties to cope up with this diversity. It is generally accepted that people in the urban areas are more technology oriented and hence engaged in social media also as compared to the rural areas in India. So, one can't expect a uniform Facebook strategy to connect with the people of rural as well as urban areas. Indian national political parties do admit that the way of connecting people using Facebook can't be same for all the regions. However, interesting to note here was that to confronting views regarding to the importance given to Facebook to connect with the people of rural areas were found during the interviews with the Indian national political parties. One view is that whether it is a rural or urban area the importance of social media in general and Facebook in particular can't be ignored while connecting to people. The other view while considering social media more important for urban

areas than the rural areas admitted that in order to be successful political party it should have strong presence in all the media. Hasiba Amin (INC) while recognizing the need of different strategy for different regions said, “The strategic importance of connecting with people in urban and rural areas is not different. Yes, we generally use English or Hindi language for connecting with the people in urban areas while in rural area focussing on the local language is very important. Regional factors do matter but they don’t reduce the importance of social media or Facebook for a particular region in any way”. Similarly, Ranjan Srivastava (BJP) said, “As long as there are any Facebook users in an area it becomes important in that area. Also, we should not ignore that internet and social media penetration is increasing very fast in each and every part of India. This means ignoring social media in any part of the country is not in any way good for a political party”. However, According to Devashish Jararia (BSP), “This is true that BSP has relied mainly on the traditional methods of connecting with people because of the reason that conditions of minorities in India is not good they were mostly illiterate and can’t use social media. If we talk about Facebook, there is no official page of BSP there. But, there are many pages created by young volunteers supporting BSP”. He further said that, it can be seen that many young individuals of minorities are now educated and they move to urban areas in order to study and get a job. After completing their study they come back to their native place and make their children to study as well. In order to emancipate the whole population of minorities it is very important to connect and make these educated youth to understand the cause and agenda of BSP and who in turn will make it possible to educate the illiterate and poor people. Social media can prove fruitful in that. He adds that, no doubt traditional methods were very important for them but they are trying to make BSP strong in online world also.

Another interesting thing that came up while interviewing Indian National Political Parties was about compromising authenticity or faking information while focussing more on the presentable and catchy message to influence the people. It is obvious that no party will admit doing this. However, one of them specifically talked about this. While talking to Pran Jal (CPIM), he said, “You have to make information interesting and presentable without losing its authenticity. You can’t compromise in the authenticity of message just to make it go viral. There should be no fake elements in the images and videos that you share with people and the message should be informative so that it improves the knowledge of the people and invokes their thoughts by getting that information.” He further adds that, “Sadly, political parties share messages in the Facebook and other social networking sites just to gain the attention of the people and they don’t bother about lying with people or faking everything. But I want to tell you that we only share the real information and never compromise authenticity of the messages shared”.

Thus, it can be concluded that Facebook is used to share information in such a way that more and more people browse it and the message reaches to the large population. In order to do so, Indian national political parties first of all decide upon what is to be shared and then about what is the best way to share the information. Images are considered as the most influential form of sharing information on Facebook pages because these are interesting as compared to simple text messages and also require less time to be browsed by the people. Indian national political parties do admit that creative videos are most influential in conveying the message to the audience. However, it requires more time and effort to create videos. Also, Facebook users do have internet speed issues as well as time issue to watch the videos. That’s why images are given the most importance. However, it doesn’t mean that textual posts and videos are not important but images are relatively preferred more. The other thing that was found that Indian national political parties

do recognise that India is a diverse country as such it requires certain variations while connecting to the people of different regions. It was specially mentioned that in the rural region in which less people are literate, using local languages to share the information is very important. At last, each party emphasised that they don't spread fake news and information just to get the attention of people.

Connecting with the youth. India is a youth nation. So, connecting with the young population is very important for any political party. Accordingly, it was found that one of the important strategical part of using Facebook for Indian national political parties is to connect with youth. They consider it very effective in connecting and communicating with youth population. Shree D Raja (CPI) said that, "For the youth population, social media is definitely having a wide edge over traditional media. However, traditional media is still important while connecting to old generation who are not active in social media and all the people who still are not using it by their own wish or due to some reason. Youth population needs to be more informed about the defective policies of the party in power. We get a lot of support and positive response from the youth when we post some information in the form of text, image or video". According to Hafiza Amin (INC), "Today's youth is using technology and internet very extensively. Young population is increasingly relying upon internet for many things .starting from enjoying videos on YouTube, getting information, learning things, getting all kinds of knowledge including what's going on in politics, buying things, even getting jobs and many more. If you go outside from here in Delhi Metro, you will see young people all around you who are busy in their mobiles for various things like watching videos in YouTube, chatting in WhatsApp and using Facebook and Instagram. So, yes, one of the important aspect of using Facebook is to be in touch of the young population".

Indian political parties recognised that Facebook and other social networking platforms are more effective for connecting with Indian youth. However, they also emphasised about its increasing importance in the near future when it will be effective for connecting with whole of the nation. In this context Derek O'Brien (AITC) said, "Though, at this time young people are more active in social media, trends show that soon it will encompass whole of the population of India. For instance, take the example of political parties, leaders of old generation who had never seen Facebook or Twitter in their life. Are running their pages and accounts with many followers as well".

It can be concluded that one of the most important strategical element of the Indian national political parties for using Facebook is to connect with the youth. The reason provided was that youth are actively engaged in the social media and relied on it for many things like connecting with friends and relatives, getting information and news, playing games, for seeking general knowledge and for other entertainment purposes. Thus, in order to connect the youth population of India, the Facebook can be a very important media.

Bypassing gate-keepers. Another important strategic reason for using Facebook along with other platforms of social media that Indian national political parties described was about bypassing gate-keepers in broadcasting media (print media and television etc.). Gate-keepers here means the person at the head of broadcasting media who do the screening of the content going for publishing or for broadcast. Here, it is important to go back to the Habermas' public sphere and his view about how media evolved. According to him commercialisation of media led to the screening of the information that would go for the publishing and hence editors had to look into what will sell more in the market and it shaped the content of the articles Pure public sphere was the one in which debates were rational and the media published content and information without

self-interest. In this context, social media has provided an opportunity in which screening of the content to be broadcasted can be avoided. In the interviews with the Indian national political parties, it was found that they also regard social media an important revolution in the media as now unnecessary screening of content to be shared can be avoided.

While talking to Pran Jal (CPI(M)), he said, “It is really important to understand that broadcasting media works largely for the pleasure of elite groups such as heads of media and the government. What we receive is a partial truth or we can say a modified truth which is modified in the interest of broadcaster or the one benefitting the broadcaster. Social media can prove to be very beneficial in this context to provide the multifaceted reality to the people. It becomes more effective because social media is dominated by youth. Young people are creative and they can understand what is the reality is, provided they are not limited to one-sided truth that the broadcasting media or I will like to call it ‘elite media’ shows them”. However, other parties focussed more on the monopoly of elite over media for sharing of information. Common people can’t have their say due to no control over broadcasting media. Hafiza Amin (INC) said, “Social media has empowered the common people to share their truth and information with the large population. Every person has got some information which he or she gets in day to day events in life. Obviously, not everything can be shared by the broadcasting media. Also, there are biasness while showing news such as television. We notice that one news is repeated a lot of times by a particular television channel while there are many other things to be shared by people and discussed upon”.

Thus, Indian national political parties regard it very important to share information with people without the risk of information getting filtered out. Social is media is a useful platform where political parties and leaders can present themselves and their achievements creatively and

in many ways. Social media in general and Facebook in particular is thus considered strategical important by Indian national political parties for this reason as well.

Interactions with people and consideration of Feedback. Another important element of the strategy of the Indian political Parties which they focussed upon was to use Facebook for ‘interactions with people’. It is important to note difference between the term ‘connecting with people’ and ‘interacting with people’. Connection not necessarily needs to be a two-way process. Connection just means to be in touch with people. Sharing of information by political parties and people receiving it without the involvement of reaction and counter-reaction also comes under the connection. However, in order to interact, a two-way communication between the political parties and people is needed. Thus, people react regarding an information shared by a particular party which in turn counter-reacts and it makes the interaction between the two possible. Here, it may be reminded that the main research question of the work was to find out about whether there is openness and free two-way communication between the people and Indian national political parties in their Facebook pages or not. This section is regarding the findings related to the question that were taken from the Indian national political parties via interviews which will be compared with the data collected from their Facebook pages in the following chapter. All the parties said that their strategy for using Facebook was to interact with the people and they allow people to say what they want to say. Ranjan Srivastava (BJP) said, “We allow people to say what they want to say about any information that we share on our pages. We want to make communication in our pages as interactive as possible so that new ideas can be generated and people can also have a say regarding the policies and programs which will be formulated or have already been formulated. Of course our purpose is to make communication as democratic as possible”. Similarly, Hasiba Amin (INC) said that, “One of the most important limitations of the traditional media is that it is

a one-way connection. Social media has provided the possibilities to remove this limitation as it is now possible to have direct interactions with the people which can strengthen the democracy by making the communication between government, political parties and people more open. We are very receptive towards our audience and our aim is to use this possibility of interaction with people as fully as possible”.

Also, the parties emphasised their use of social media for taking feedback from the people regarding their policies or agendas or regarding any information that they share on their Facebook pages. While talking to Seema Malik (NCP) she said, “Any kind of Media is a means to connect to the people. However, earlier it was a one way process which has changed now. Of course, social media has allowed people to share their views and made dynamic interaction possible. It is necessary to utilize the potential that social media has provided for free and open expression of thoughts or even take criticism from people to make more progress. Unlike, some other parties, we accept our criticism on our Facebook pages. We don’t want to dominate the content and threaten the people to criticize us on anything done by us which is undesirable according to them. Surely, our party considers the views and feedbacks of the people and the free interaction is the basic element of democracy which we should never compromise”. When asked regarding the interactivity in Facebook pages,

The parties also talked about certain challenges in interacting with people on Facebook. It was found that they sometimes consider it necessary not to react to spams or irrelevant comments (such as abuses). However, neglecting the importance of interactions and discussions all together will destroy the opportunity provided by social media to make political communication more democratic in nature. Parties also mentioned about the fake messages and trolls as the serious challenge for democratic interactions in social media. Seema Malik (NCP) also said that, “There

are a lot of challenges and the most important among them to think about is the problems related to fake trolling, pages and profiles made on fake identity. Our party has faced the serious attempts of defamation by making the fake accounts and pages by the name of our party leaders and party on the whole. This is a very serious problem which we have faced and it really hampers the democratic character of social media drastically". Thus, It is true that social media has provided weight to the ideas and thoughts of common people but it is challengeable to consider political communication in social media to be 'rational' as it was in Habermas' 'public sphere'.

The most important thing to note here is that Bahujan Samaj Wadi party (BSP) has no official page on Facebook which is verified by Facebook to official. (The verified pages have a blue tick mark followed by the name of the page). However, Devashish Jararia admitted that the pages on Facebook having the name of Bahujan Samajwadi Party were running based on the volunteer support from the young people. The only thing they talked about was that they are trying to make the party strong in the online world also. That means they are trying to increase the presence and influence of the party in the online world of social media. As such, they might be thinking about creating official page in Facebook as well. It is also possible, that they might have already created the page but it needs some time to get verified by Facebook developers. However, the exact position is unclear. The only thing that is clear is that the youth wing of Bahujan Samajwadi Party are helping the party grow in the online world and they are making a large team of young supporters who will support the cause and agenda of Bahujan Samajwadi party using internet as well as through on-ground connections.

Thus, except Bahujan Samajwadi party (the position of which is unclear in Facebook), all Indian national political parties accepted that one of the important strategy of using Facebook was

to interact with the people, get their feedback which according to them will result in the improvement of the party agendas and ultimately in the development of the nation.

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 (c) 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.

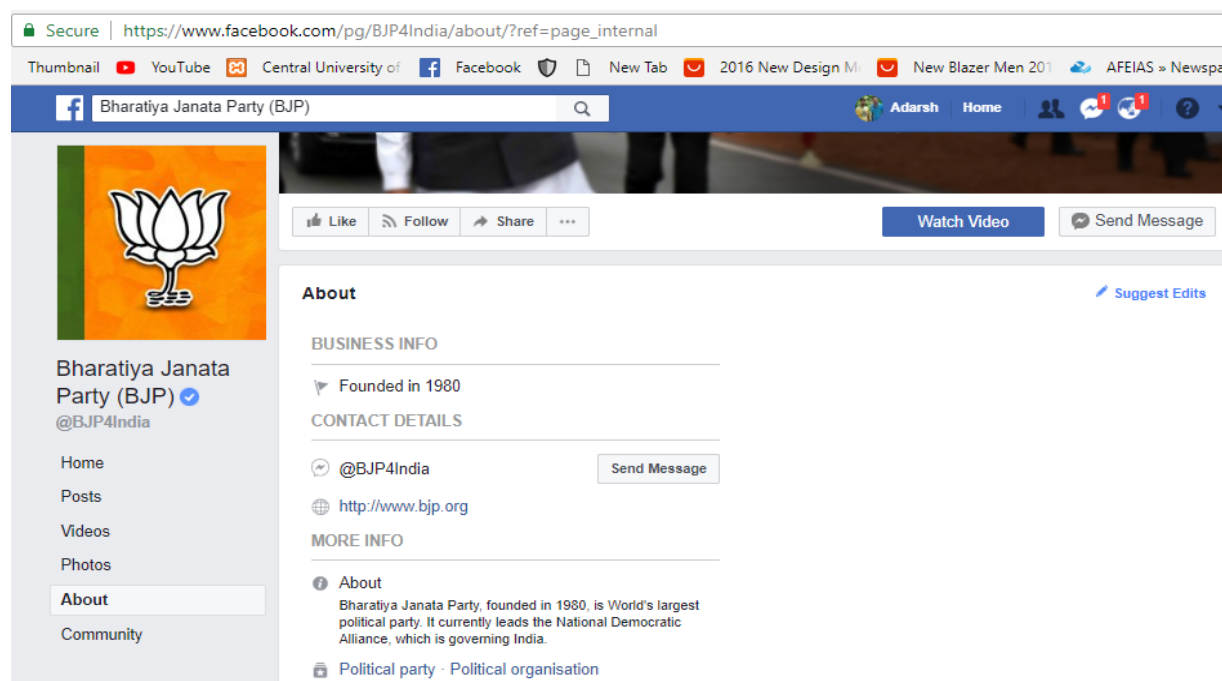


Figure 2. A Screenshot of ‘About’ section in the Facebook page of Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) also showing names of other sections in the page.

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' (highlighted), '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 party's mission. 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' category. To the right, 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

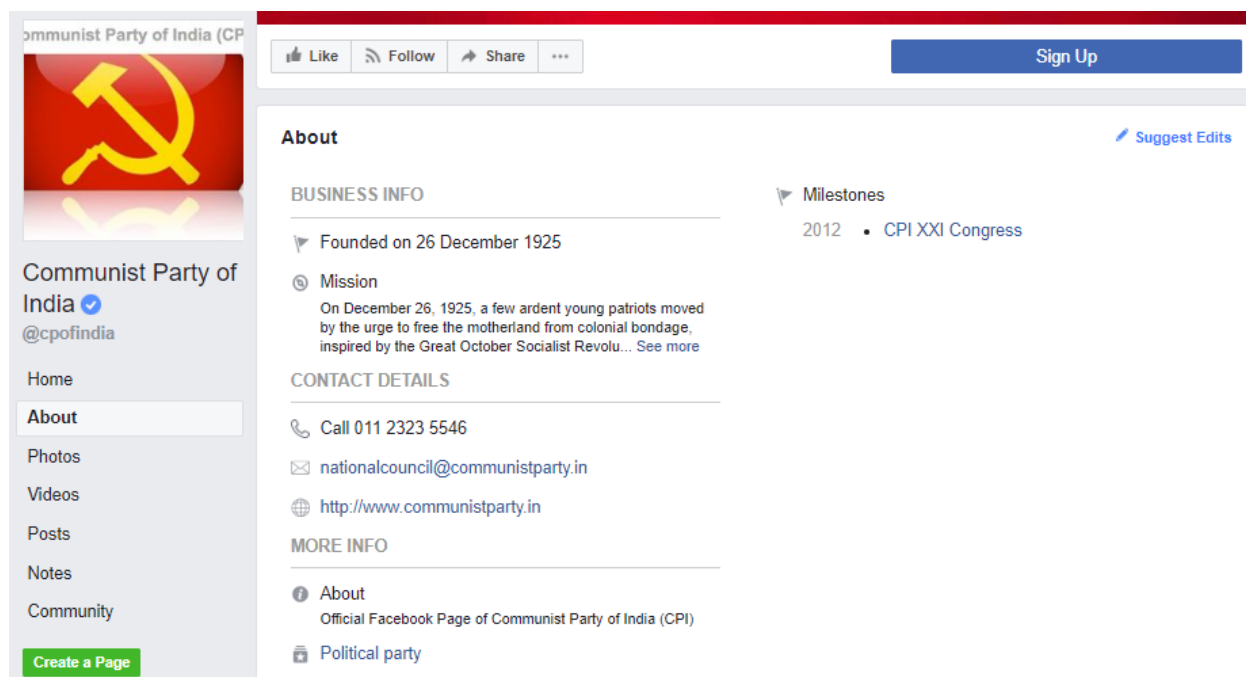


Figure 4. A Screenshot of 'About section in the Facebook page of Communist Party of India (CPI) also showing names of other sections in the page.

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.

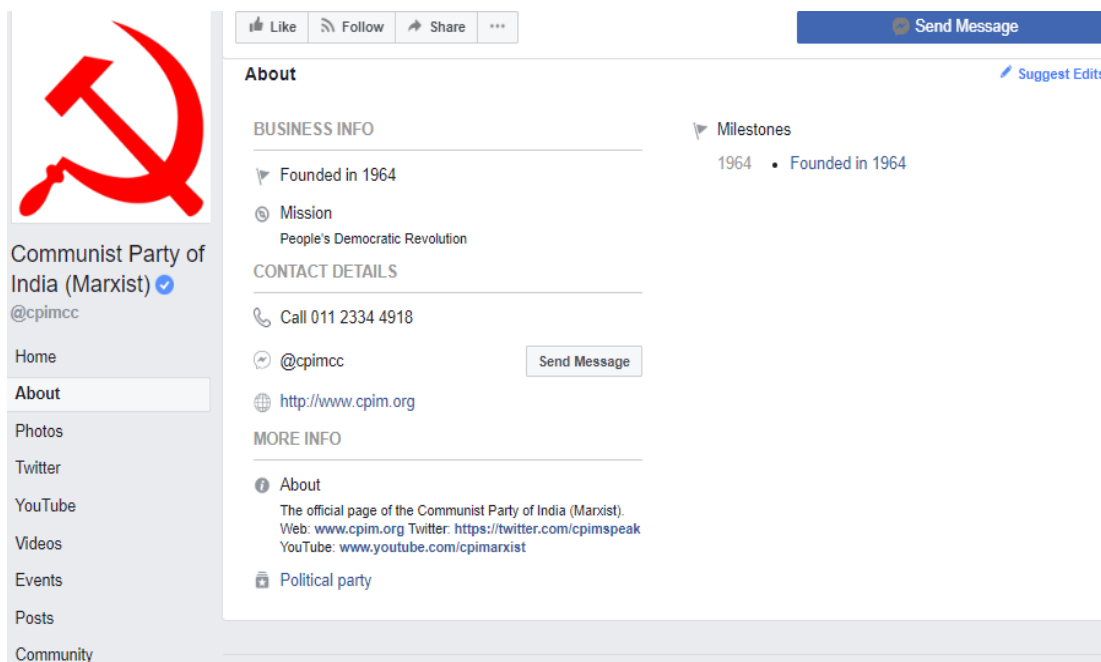


Figure 5. A Screenshot of ‘About’ section in the Facebook page of Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] also showing names of other sections in the page.

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.

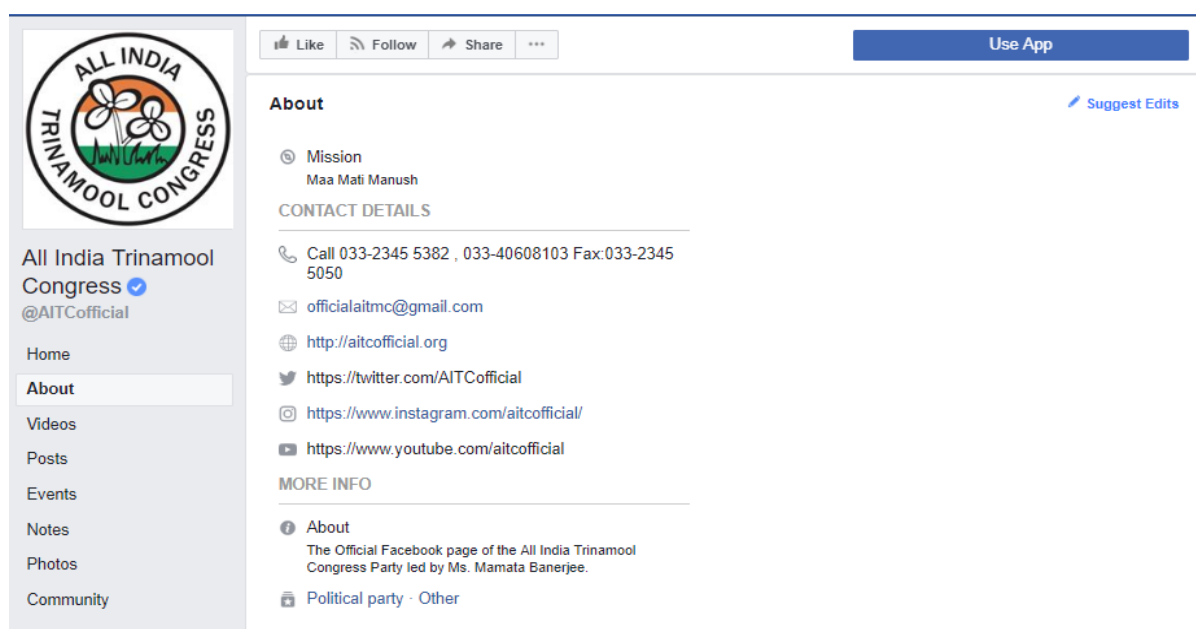


Figure 6. A Screenshot of ‘About’ section in the Facebook page of All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) also showing names of other sections in the page.

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.

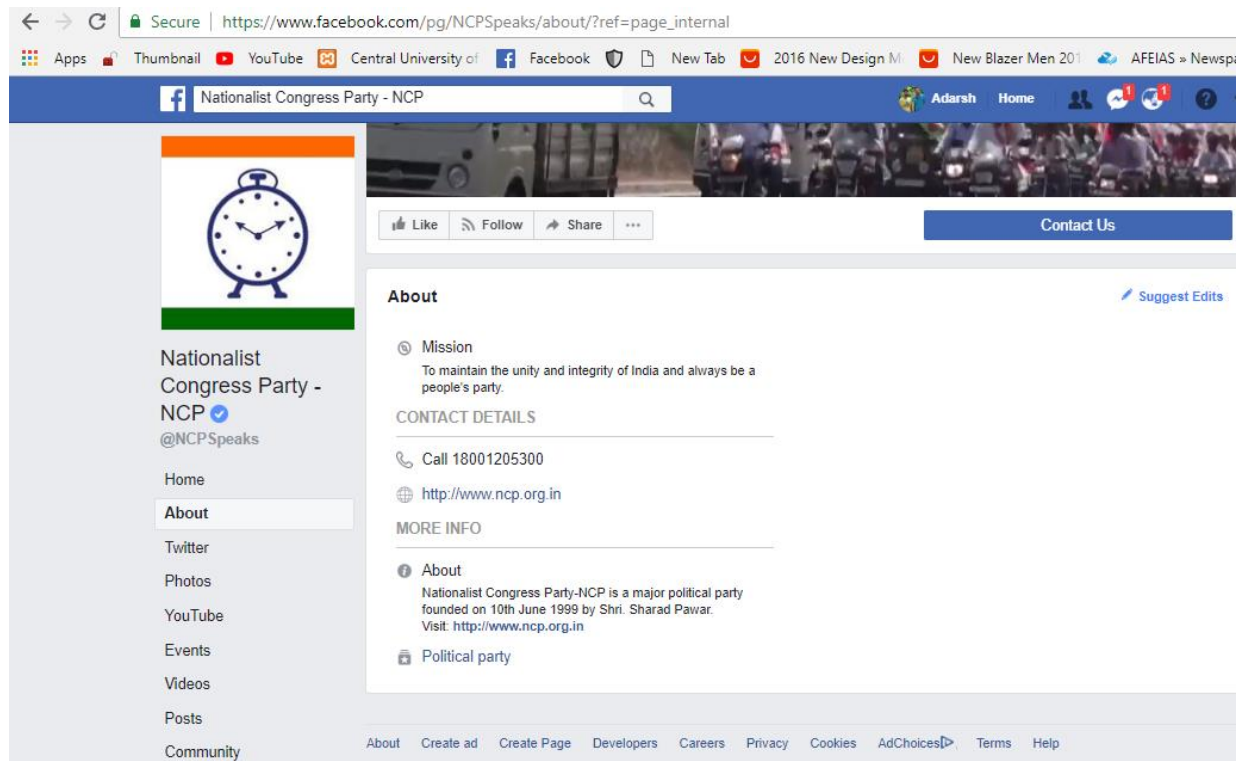


Figure 7. A Screenshot of ‘About’ section in the Facebook page of Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) also showing names of other sections in the page.

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.

Chapter Five

Conclusions and Recommendations

The objective of the study was to understand and analyse the strategy of Indian national political parties to use Facebook for political communication. The study intended to find out if the social media's potential of open and democratic interaction between the people and political parties in the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties is being utilized to its full potential or not. The study also intended to find out the importance of Facebook as a part of social media for political parties in comparison to the traditional means of political communication. In order to get a better understanding of the Indian national political parties' strategy of using Facebook for political communication, the data collected in field study using interview method was compared to the derived data about the actual engagement of Indian national political parties in their Facebook pages. The chapter will conclude and summarize the major results that can be drawn out by comparing the findings from the data collected by both the methods.

Research Questions and Main Findings of the Study

In the literature review section it was discussed that how the political parties all over the world are turning to social media for campaigning and communication with people. It is claimed by various scholars that the social media has made it possible for democracy to be stronger. The study was conducted to fill out the knowledge gap regarding the study of use of Facebook by Indian national political parties in political communication with the people. The research questions and the major findings that came out during the study are summarised below.

Importance of Facebook as a part of social media for Indian national political parties.

During literature review, we found the claims regarding political parties in India turning towards the online election campaigning. Also, the importance of traditional media such as television which

is slowly being replaced by the internet and social media among youth (Bakht, 2009). However, what is the importance do Indian national political parties give to political communication in social media in the present time? Are they really shifting from traditional media campaigning to social media campaigning? From the findings during the interviews, though it is clear that all the Indian national political parties recognise the increased importance of social media in political communication, the importance of traditional means has not reduced. This can be due the diversity in the population in India. Most of the Indian national parties said that they are trying to increase their online presence so that no platform of reaching out to public is left out. The parties also agreed upon the fact that social media can't be ignored in the modern world of internet. The findings from the conducted interviews show that though the importance of social media and Facebook has increased with the growth of internet and social media penetration among the people in India, the importance of traditional means communication has not reduced for the Indian national political parties. The Indian national political parties considered the online as well as on ground political communication important due to the benefits of the both in connecting with the diverse population. According to them, no media can be neglected and both of these need to be taken seriously. It was found that the importance given to the social media and Facebook depends upon the population the party wants to be in contact with the most. For example, BSP though claimed that they are now focussing on connecting with the youth using social media, have always used traditional media for the political communication and campaigning due the reason that they want to connect with the minority people who are mostly poor and many are illiterate who can't use social media.

The fact that the Indian national political parties are increasing their online presence was also clear from the analysis of the Facebook pages of the Indian national political parties. It was

found that all the Indian national political parties have created their Facebook page which has a verified tag following its name except Bahujan Samajwadi party. The later party was not found to have any page which had a tag showing that the page is verified by the Facebook team to be official and not fake. The data also showed that the parties were actively posting on their Facebook page. Implicitly, this means that social media and Facebook has become an important platform for spreading any information or message to the people. So, in the modern times Indian national political parties though have not reduced their importance for the traditional means of political communication, but have increased their focus on social media to a significant extent. It can be said that social media, of which Facebook is a crucial part, is playing an important role in political communication and is being actively used by Indian national political parties.

Facebook strategy of Indian national political parties. The study also intended to find answer of the research questions regarding understanding and analysing the strategy of using Facebook for political communication by the national political parties in India and the manner in which people as well as Indian national political parties are engaged in the Facebook pages of the later. Finding from the interviews show the various strategical reasons for using Facebook by Indian national political parties. The major strategy of Indian national political parties to use Facebook was to share information creatively and reach out a large number of population, connect with youth, bypass gate-keepers in the mass media, direct interactions and dialogue with the people and to take feedback from the people. The parties were of the view that the information shared on Facebook in the form of image and videos can have a powerful impact on the people. Facebook is also very important to connect with the youth as the young population is increasingly using social media and Facebook to connect with one-another and also for many other purposes. According to them, Facebook along with other social media sites are important as they help in bypassing the

gate-keepers present in the mass media. In Facebook the political party can share the information that they want to share and in the way they want it to share. Another important strategical reason to use Facebook was to interact with the people, discuss with them and have their feedbacks on very issues.

Use of Facebook pages by Indian national political parties and people's engagement in these pages. All the Indian national political parties who have the verified Facebook page are well aware of the fact that what content grabs the attention of the people. The Indian national political parties produce content on their page in the form of image, videos, animations and text they have also linked their page to the other social media platforms to make larger impact. It was found that the Facebook pages of the two big parties i.e., Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) and Indian National Congress (INC) are very active. The two actively post in their Facebook pages and people are also actively engaged in the pages. They like share and comment on the posts by the two parties on the page. Other Indian national political parties are also active in their Facebook pages but as far as their popularity and the engagement of people on their pages is concerned, it is relatively very less as compared to the former two parties. All the parties share information and message in the form of image, video and text. The parties have different sections on their Facebook page which makes people to use the page easily. This shows that in social media also, the major political parties grab more attention of the people than the minor political parties. Also, major political parties were found to be more active during the time of elections. This clearly shows that Indian national political parties are not just using Facebook just for communicating politically with the people but also to influence them by online campaigning.

Claimed strategy of using Facebook pages versus use of the pages in practice. The study intended to find out how the articulated strategy of using Facebook for political

communication by Indian national political parties is different from the actual practice. It was found that though there is similarity in the articulated strategy and actual practice of using Facebook for political communication in the matters such as what content to produce and what is the target population, there are differences in how Indian national political parties claim open discussion and interaction as a part of their strategy to use Facebook and what they do in practice. Do people have any control over the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties? The Facebook pages mostly have the posts from the parties only. This shows that either people or not interested to post on the Facebook pages or their posts are deleted by the party. Only three among the six Indian national political parties have left posting on the page open for all the users. BJP and BSP the two big parties, have not left posting open for everyone. It is only in the event section that all the users can post. The events are organised after long gaps. However, commenting on the shared information on the Facebook pages is left open for everyone with a twist of filtering out the few comments. It can be explained by the fact that there are large number of comments on the Facebook pages. Also, parties' strategy to restrict people to post on page was defended by the parties by saying that there will be lot of spams and it will destroy the intellectual and rational nature of the content on page. However, it questions the claimed freedom of social media for the open interaction between the elite and common people. The potential of social media to make the voice of common people to have more weight is obviously not being fully utilized by the Indian national political parties on their Facebook page. This can be said in the case of the Facebook pages of those Indian national political parties who allow posts of every user on the page also. This is because negligible number of posts of common people were found on the pages. So, the major purpose of Indian national political parties to use social media is only to broadcast the information for their personal interest and benefits. Also, what is broadcasted by the Indian national political

parties on their Facebook page doesn't always coincides with the real facts. This challenges the rationality of the interactions between the people on the Facebook page of Indian national political parties. Habermas on the other hand emphasised the importance of rationality of the debates in the public sphere. Also, there are comments by the large number of population on post which are not factual. However, such debate can be said to influence the minds of the people to know more about the issue and get well informed which ultimately can facilitate the rational public opinion formation.

It was discussed in the first chapter that the studies show that the social media increases transparency between the voter and the government and political parties (Komal H. Parkh, 2011). Habermas discussed about how commercialisation resulted shaping of public opinion by the mass media instead of earlier process of public opinion formation by undergoing rational public debates reflected in the mass media (Habermas 1991, p. 188). Social media has revived this possibility of public opinion formation not being shaped by mass media but rather be formed by undergoing rational public debates. In a representative form of government, political parties articulate and aggregate the public opinion which are produced before the system as an input (Easton, 1965). So, the role of political parties is very important for making the public opinion to impact the political system by shaping the policies and decision making in the representative form of democratic government. However, political parties can only reflect the real public opinion if they discuss various issues with the people. Social media has made this interaction or debate among people and with political parties possible. Indian national political parties clearly talked about their strategic goal of using Facebook to discuss political issues, policies and agendas with the people and have their feedback on these issue. However, in practice the parties were not found to interact with the people. The Indian national political parties talk idealistically about their strategy to use social

media for discussions with the people and to take their feedback but in practice there was hardly any direct discussion between the people and the parties. Limited resources to reply and respond to the large population on the pages can't be taken as a reason for the lack of interactivity between the people and parties. The findings show that the rate of response or replies to the public comments and posts is almost zero. The parties' intention not to respond to the comments of people can be the only be the reason of such a low amount of response. Clearly, there is disparity between the strategy of Indian national political parties to use Facebook for political communication and what they do in practice. Indian national political parties use Facebook more like a broadcasting media with themselves being in control of what, when and how to share than like a platform where there can be open or democratic interactions between people and the parties. Though some of aspects of the strategy of using Facebook to connect with the people such as sharing information creatively and bypassing broadcasting media was found to match with actual engagement of the Indian national political parties in there Facebook pages, the idealistic claims regarding the strategy to use social media for open interactions with people turned out to be totally different from what they do in practice.

Recommendations

The study analysed the strategy of Indian national political parties for engaging in the political communication using Facebook pages. The findings show the disparity between the Facebook strategies as articulated by Indian national political parties and their actual use of Facebook. However, this may not be true in other social media platforms like twitter and YouTube etc. It is generally accepted that politicians and political parties are more active in twitter than in Facebook. So, the research can be further proceeded to include other social media platforms in the study, particularly twitter. This is due to the reason that all the posts and comments on twitter are

publically accessible and hence analysing them is easier. The other reason is that many politicians are involved in regular tweets and retweets in twitter in modern times.

Also, in the study, mainly the data in the quantitative form was analysed in the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties. This was done due to the paucity of time. The research can be further proceeded to do content analysis and even the sentiment analysis of the data on the Facebook pages of Indian national political parties.

The study was confined to the Indian national political parties only. In order to know the importance of social media among the political parties in different regions of India, the research can further be proceeded to study the social media use by the regional parties. Also, a comparative analysis of the social media use by political parties in urban and rural areas will provide the holistic knowledge about the use of social media by the various political parties of diverse regions in India and not just the national political parties.

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