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 am-ong 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

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[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

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[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

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[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 parties[25], political parties in France[26], Canada[27], Italy[28], U.K[29] and Norway[30]. 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 parities' 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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