

## Use of New Media in Indian Political Campaigning System

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### Abstract

From e-mailing and e-commerce to e-governance, internet has brought us all at a single platform leaving the constraints of time and space far behind. The social engagement in socio-political activities and people's proactive participation in political agenda is also increased through social media and viral usage of networking. However, our communication process is still in its evolution and in turn its effects can be traced on the socio-economic-political life of the 'Information Society'. Nonetheless, in a country with cultural complexity and striking inequalities in terms of access and reach, literacy, linguistic and spatial differences, it would be essential to make a study of various aspects involved while discussing the use of social media in political campaigning at a large canvas.

**Keywords:** New media; Political communication; Social media; Campaigning; Internet; Technology

### Introduction of New media

It was more than a decade, when internet marked as a powerful medium of communication globally. However, due to technological reach and access, it was more vocal in the developed countries and developing countries like India. The world witnessed real command of internet during the presidential election campaigning of the year 2000 when in the US the internet provided a new interactivity tool of direct conversation between the candidate and voters. From then it is continuously growing leap and bound and have become an integral part of the communications in political campaign. As public access to the Internet has surged past 70 percent of the US population, the Internet has claimed front-and-centre status and campaign strategies' [1].

The trend has been followed by Indian political parties during General elections of 2004. The electronic messages were sent on internet and mobile phones created a buzz at that time. The hi-tech political campaigning is portraying grassroots political and social issues. However, it could not turn into being a success at that time. Ahead of the parliamentary elections in India, the political parties are again searching for the prospects in the new media tools for campaigning. On the same, it would be interesting to know the new communication patterns that have emerged and helped in the social mobilization and increasing participation in the political processes in the recent past particularly through the use of social media; Anna Hazare movement, for instance.

Therefore, the present study would involve the recent trends in relation to the use of social media in campaigning and mobilizing the popular sentiments by political parties. Since, the usage of social media is getting momentum in engaging the public in political debates/moves especially when the previous model of e-campaigning by political parties failed on 'ground', it would be pertinent to make certain observations:

- The social media has provided a virtual platform for political debates.
- It will also provide a new tool of pre-election polls. So far it has been observed that the advent of new media and increased usage of social media has stimulated the practice of voting among the educated class, which used to keep itself aloof from the election process earlier.

- After the extensive use of social media during Anna Hazare Campaign in India and witnessing the success of the same, government and opposition political parties have also started utilizing this tool to register their influence.

In the light of above observations the present study would strive to find out the interrelationship between the socio-political fabric of the country and the communication process initiated by the social media tools. Further the study would also attempt to know the strategic moves of the political parties specially to use social media in political campaign, implications and limitations of social media in the same, whether social media may be an effective tool for it or is it only successful while being a part of a convergent system. Therefore, the study would also look into the question of relevance of traditional media in contrast to the new media (traditional media vs. new media).

To make the study holistic, both, qualitative and quantitative approach has been incorporated. Focused group interview of 10 media personnel, politicians and social-political scientists has been done to find out the above mentioned objectives. The study includes a survey of 500 people (inclusive of men and women with age of 18 or more than 18 years, since they are eligible to cast their vote) to know the effectiveness of the social media as tool for political campaigning from audience perspective. The study also makes an endeavour to find out how social attitudes are being a force in changed designs of political campaigning through including open-ended/non-cued questions in the questionnaire. Along with it, some of the earlier studies on the similar subject had also been examined for the purpose.

Social media is comprehended as a communication platform where it users collect and disseminate information of their choice. It is believed that social media catalyses the process of public empowerment by opening up avenues for masses to freely articulate, share their experiences and to raise concerns creating the possibility of their

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**Received** May 13, 2016; **Accepted** May 26, 2016; **Published** May 28, 2016

**Citation:** Rahul K (2016) Use of New Media in Indian Political Campaigning System. J Pol Sci Pub Aff 4: 204. doi:[10.4172/2332-0761.1000204](https://doi.org/10.4172/2332-0761.1000204)

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further enrichment. Therefore, it is pertinent to know the use of social media in the political process.

### Social Media and a New Public Sphere

Technology changes the communication process with a change in itself. With the advent of new media technologies the communication process became more direct, fast and complex. This has also led to a process of shrinking words and expanding access at the same time. Certainly, this change has a bearing on the social fabric as well. Till the recent past, dissemination of information and news was the business of formal organizations with a great degree of credibility. It was a one way communication mode, however the pattern of information dissemination has now been changed to two way communication with almost no cost for accessing that information.

To respond is an obvious societal nature. However, earlier it was limited to interpersonal communication and time and space were the constraints in the process of communication. Internet is undoubtedly converting a larger society from passive to active. Today social media is not only confined to the metropolis but reaching to the small cities and towns among the educated youth. Laptop, mobile and internet driven discourses have already been initiated in the society. It has an impact in the democratic polity and the protest for Lokpal Bill initiated by Anna Hazare was symbolic of this emerging public sphere. The audience of social media is, thus, interactive and reflective in a multimedia society of present. Unlike the mainstream media it is providing a pluralistic platform to people and also setting agenda other than the agenda set by 'paid and sponsored formal media'. The socio-political fabric of India could be seen as changing vibrantly, particularly, during the recent phase of electoral process under the democratic setup and one could observe the change in the political behaviour of people on the similar lines as John Dewey [2] puts forth while discussing the optimistic view of public in *The Public and its Problems: The strongest point to be made in behalf of even such rudimentary political forms such as democracy has already attained popular voting, majority rule and so on, is that to some extent they involve a consultation and discussion, which uncover social needs and troubles...The essential need, in other words, is the improvement of the methods and constitution of debate, discussion and persuasion. That is the problem of the public.*

Sociologists and Political Scientists are looking the virtual ground with sanguinity for creation of a public sphere beyond the elite class. However, the experts of formal media find it not at all useful; they take the social media as a menace, rather. According to Media Analyst N K Singh, "because it is a mode of mass communication, the quality of discourse will be affected. Social media is hostile and it cannot be called a breeding ground for a true public sphere'. Here, the argument of issues becomes strong. Due to the heterogeneous character of the masses and netizens to set a common objective or a common set of agenda is still a problem to be looked at while considering the virtual public sphere as ready for discourses. To quote Jim Walch [3]:

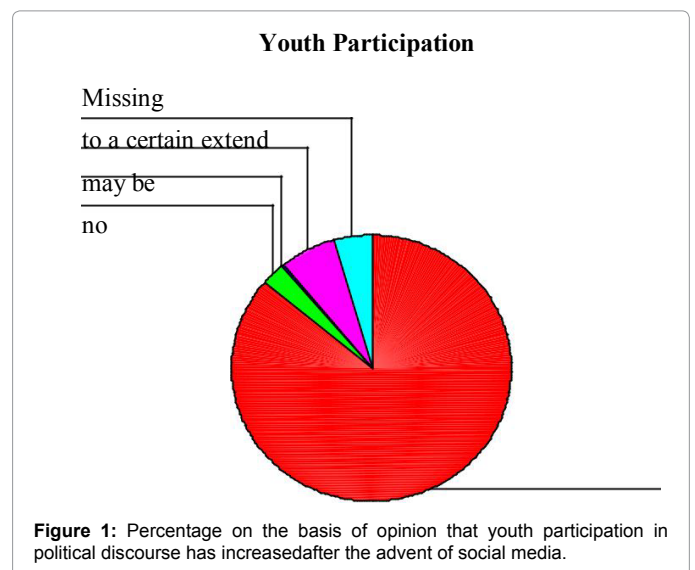
*'Electronic democracy', like communitarian computing, has also become an area of both political and academic interest. This other use of computer-mediated communication is what radical democrats see as something of an electronic town-meeting. Besides pursuing a public discourse of issues and opinions, the technology could make it possible to conduct online voting. While this approach may help to re-enfranchise the electorate, it still has problems in dealing with the selectorate - those who set the agenda and choose those who set the agenda and pose the questions. However, the possible uses for strengthening direct democracy are still young and experimental.*

We still cannot deny the fact that the new/social media has blurred the earlier patterns of communication process and it has brought the global and local at the same platform. it is a new form of media and the process of socialization is still on. According to Prof. Anand Kumar, "It is the virtue of social media to always remain in novelty and that is providing the nature of it's being evergreen. The discourse at a common platform has started." Indisputably, social media has increased public opinion with an increased knowledge base among the masses. Social media sites such as Twitter have encouraged people to express and politically involve themselves through the use of media tools be it laptop or mobile phone. The next sections of the paper closely examines whether the political behavioural change among people have its bearing on the upcoming elections in India or not.

### Is it going to affect the voting pattern?

Social media is definitely playing a crucial role in opinion formation as well as mobilization of masses. The best example is the way public movements against existing governments were coordinated and carried out in the Arab world. In India governments have been using the social media to propagate the welfare activities carried out by them and to reach the public at large to address their grievances. However, post Anna's movement for Jan Lokpal the usage of social media for creating political consciousness and organizing mass movements has grown by leaps and bounds. 'As John Dewey put it, there are two types of knowledge: that of the spectator and that of the actor or participant. Studying how CMC is being used for social and political change appeals mostly to the latter category' [3].

Senior TV Journalist Mr. Kanhaiya Sharma said, "In our fast paced lives social media is playing a very crucial role of connecting individuals and has created a public sphere where information is being shared and ideas are being exchanged at lightning speed. Hence social media will have an important role if not the decisive role in the upcoming elections". The result of the survey conducted under this study also reveals that the participation of youth in political discourses has increased after the advent of social media (Figure 1). According to the new data, there are 19 crore internet users in India; 16 crore internet enabled mobile phones are in operation. There will be 9 crore new voters under the age of 18-23 this time and more new voters under the age group of 18-30 years. They could be swayed through the use of social media undoubtedly. This was not possible through formal media



since it was filtering information to rationalize the audience. This will be the first phase for such voting and there are many chances for a positive effect on those lines.

If we see at the other elements of voting patterns in terms of total percentage of vote cast, one can safely say that the percentage of voting among the educated urban class has increased in the recent past and here political awareness through social networking sites has remained a contributory role. During the survey, 100% of the sample mentioned that they will cast their vote. Out of 500 people surveyed 64.5 percent (error of +2/-2) agreed that their political behaviour has changed after they came on social media and they are now politically more aware. 53 percent (error of +5/-5) people said a 'yes' to cast their vote on the basis of information put on social media while 13 percent people said that they might use the information for casting their vote in such a manner. However, one-third of the surveyed denied to count social media as a source for information for election purpose since they think it as unauthentic and manipulative medium. Similarly, the issues/agendas during elections have been shifted to local problems along with the development at national level. About 75 percent (error of +3/-3) of the people surveyed during the study also believe that the vote cast in the upcoming general elections will be based on the local/developmental issues and the respective achievements of the candidates.

However, it is still very early to say that social media can bring about a drastic change in the voting patterns of committed cadres and people with leaning towards a particular party. As Prof. Kumar inferred, "There will be a marginal role of social media in relation to the voting pattern as such. Political community has a set pattern of behaviour unlike larger community. Election process involves a political interface. It is decided by certain very important set of problems which has been determined only by political process" (Figure 1).

### What will Negative Advertising Do?

*Media had little direct impact on campaigns and voting and, when and if they did, that the impact was in the form of reinforcement* [4]. So far, this has been true to Indian democracy. Indian media and public at large hitherto, have been noticed to be 'negative' in terms of negative advertising and voting. The observations made by Ansolabehere and Iyengar [5] could be aptly put here that *'the point of negative advertising is not to convince a voter but rather cause a voter to be less likely to vote on election day'*. However, the political scenario in India (as elsewhere) is changing rapidly with the advanced media technologies which are still changing shapes swiftly. Yet, social media still has a long way to go before it becomes effective enough to play a significant role in influencing peoples decision to vote or vice versa. To an extent, the younger generation seems to be quite influenced by social media whereas the older generation is still trying to come to terms with it. According to Senior Print Journalist Mr. Pankaj Kumar Pandey, "as of now we cannot say with certainty whether social media can bring about any drastic change in this regard. Nevertheless, if social media is able to penetrate this rank and make people a bit more critical or even make them think twice about their choice it will serve its purpose."

But, due to the social structure of the country, some of the socio-political thinkers and media experts have their concerns in terms of 'negative effects of negative campaign advertising'. As Mr. N. K. Singh puts it, "India has a peculiar condition where she has varied divergent identity groups divided into various social, cultural, class, economic divisions. These groups are mutually feuding. They still do not have a reasoning power to interpret the messages spread through negative campaigning and it itself could have a negative effect 'on ground' in

terms of disastrous incidents instead of having any impact on voting pattern".

Social media orients and influences the political community till a certain point. The information level has been increased through social media along with the enabling of feedback from all the directions. Yet, there is an undecided middle ground in terms of voting behaviour. The country is going through a process of social churning. Social media is certainly playing role of a neutralizer/nullifying medium. According to Prof. Anand Kumar, "It is democratizing the media in true sense and providing multiple channels to the voters. Even for political community, it will be a win-win situation to retest their ideology and to check their political behaviour. The counter processes offered by social media will make democracy much more meaningful".

### Electronic Warfare and Campaign Carnival

*'Media coverage of candidates and campaigns tends to reconfirm support among already committed voters and solidify support among those leaning toward particular candidates.'* [4] Now after almost one and a half decade when Baran made this observation, the societies in general, and Indian society in particular have reached a point of strong political/democratic sense. Moreover, the exposure to the mediated communication made possible by new media technologies and increasing participation at social media, people experience a changed 'politico-social' life in comparison to yesteryears. According to Political Analyst Dr. Madhushree Chatterjee "We are steadily evolving into a mature democracy and we should trust people's ability to differentiate between truth and falsehood and the more these things are there on the social media platform the more the chances of false information being rejected rather than accepted. People might get misled once or twice if the campaign is camouflaged but this cannot be the norm and those candidates who think they have been able to hoodwink the electorate once will eventually get exposed in the long run."

Though Walter Lippmann in *The Phantom Public* takes the public as negative for the governance, yet he implicitly agrees upon the temporal interventions made by the public into the democratic governance system. Somehow, one could observe social media as a platform strengthening this practice among people and thus contributing towards electoral process of a democratic political system. Here, to make the point more elaborative, Lippmann [6] is required to be quoted, *'an election is in essence sublimated warfare. By their occasional mobilizations as a majority, people support or oppose the individuals who actually govern. We must say that the popular will does not direct continuously but that intervenes occasionally.'*

The short lived content of varied nature is just like a crowd carnival. People continuously add different things to this kaleidoscope and this process is very speedy. Nevertheless, there will remain certain peaks on the basis of virtues and capacities even in the social media. There will be certain significant figures in social media too. "Oligopoly/monopoly survivors will be there in social media also", asserted Prof. Anand Kumar while responding over the issue. Thus, if one goes with this inference there will be what Lippmann calls *incumbents* and *challengers* even on social media who will be able to retain till last and thus, the democratic rule or even the electoral process would be saved from reaching to *either a failure or a tyranny*.

However, this could not be counted as a limitation of social media towards its contribution in electoral process/campaign. Since, the monitoring of the facts and penetration of information will be more in social media, the misuse of social media is not possible for a long time. The manipulation of information beyond a degree is not possible on



social media. Similarly, nobody can impose her/his opinion on others on social media, as it freely provides a stage for communication to all in a democratic manner.

### Political Economy of New Media

History of political campaigns and history of media go hand-in-hand when we discuss the issues of propaganda and political economy. Be it the history of any political regime, be it the history of any political war, media has always been a tool for propaganda. However, it remained successful in certain conditions of some times and proved a failure at another. The moments of Nazi propaganda and counter-propaganda against Nazi propaganda are but one of the instances during 1930s. Consequently, the authority and control over media was always a question of strife between the political parties/entities to enable propaganda among people. To establish the political hegemony and to win people's consensus, political entities have been tried their hands over the *media industry*. This is an undeniable fact that '*media helped set the issue agenda for the campaign and that agenda dictated the issues on which many people ultimately based their voting decisions.*' [4] The modern political system is more based on this premise and thus, different political parties try to have an access over different media economically as well. Since social media has immense potential in terms of reach and access of the masses, it is being observed not only as an 'agent of political change' but also as an 'object of hegemony'.

The question of political economy of new media is important to discuss especially in relation with the election campaign since the control of a political party or the ruling governments for that matter may change the whole politics of elections through *pseudo-events* if having control over mass media. '*Candidates recognize that the public tends to trust news more than commercials. The goal of pseudo-events, therefore, is to earn candidates and their campaigns media coverage while allowing the campaigns to control the content of that coverage*' [4].

Recently, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India declared Social Media as a part of it. Almost every political party, including the party of the incumbent government has its social media wing to take care of the political campaign and have budget allocation for the same. Similarly, Indian government has put its 'Bharat Nirman' campaign on the social network. These new additions in the election campaigns have their implications in terms of political economy of both, the media and the elections. Since the social media is 'new' and on increase to add more number of audiences to it, it is an unsaturated (unlike the old media) and untapped media to connecting with the masses and has wide prospects for experimenting in relations to the content and programming. Because of this characteristic of new media, the political parties along with the commercial media managers are striving hard to put this medium under market mediated process.

In view of the fact that the formal mass media is governed through money power, social media has been seen as an alternative to it. Again, this virtue of social media is being the very reason for political parties to have a control over it. According to Prof, Anand Kumar, "Social media has provided a stage for social engagement, mobilization of opinion and it is bridging the gap between knowledge rich and knowledge poor. So far, social media has not much of the trust level. However, with developing corrective measures, it will play a role in mind building eventually. There is an increasing interdependence upon social media than mainstream media because of its pluralistic approach and non-economical tilt in relations to the content."

However, the political class itself asserts that no attempt would be a success in having a political-economic control over social media

by anyone. According to the politician Mr. Manish Sisodia, "Certain political groups and governments are making efforts to control social media but it is not possible since any control over the social media may result in the curb over their fundamental rights and it will turn people against such groups. There are instances, where such steps taken by the government have been highly criticized by people and government has been compelled for roll back."

### Controlled Content vs. Free Content

*'The difference between media environments in 1935 [Radio], 1970 [Television] and 2005 [Internet] are impossible to miss'* [7] It becomes more essential in terms of the relationship between the electoral politics and political economy of media and particularly its content. In earlier mediums like radio and television, there was clear classification between state owned, private/public media organizations and the character of their respective content. There were the content makers and the audience and process of sending and receiving of the message. However, since those segregating classes have been melting in the pot of internet and the consumer of the content started to shift her/his role interchangeably to the producer of the content, a set of problems in relation to the religious-cultural-ethnic sensitivity of the society also came along with the benefits of the new media. Most importantly, new media tools can be easily manipulated by the political parties who were involved in 'vote-bank politics' up till now. The recent communal riot of Muzaffarnagar is a critical example of this, where social media was used by some members of national political parties to provoke the riot further. This has been seen as a factor to control the new media content by the governments in the very capacity of a governing body of any country beyond thinking themselves only as a political party.

Certainly, it is a double edged sword, because not only the public but also the political parties who have started using social media as a platform for political campaign and to sway people through it will cry over any step taken by the government. One cannot stop the content or the content cannot be controlled since it is coming from all over. And, if it is stopped then the question of the right to free expression, free speech and right to information and knowledge will head up. This situation results in the reinforcement of the earlier patterns of election campaign in India where the political agendas were imposed on the public to divert them from the issues of social development and economic growth. The penetration of political parties and their political campaign, therefore, has to be observed cautiously by the active communities of the virtual world.

"The issue of regulated social media is a matter of debate across the globe like science it can be a good servant but a bad master. Social media provides a platform to all shades of public opinion as well as parties in power. We need to have faith in institutions of democracy and the form of governance it stands for. While governments having control over the social media may be a cause of concern at the time of election however, unregulated social media can wreak havoc as well. With adequate safe guards social media can contribute immensely in strengthening democracy." Responded Kanhaiya Sharma.

### Political Campaign and the Divides

Political campaigns are based on agendas and there remains not a single agenda but a set of different agendas carefully designed to attract different classes of people. Most often this is done with the objective of dividing people and diverting them from being unite over an issue. '*Lasswell's analysis is even more prescient when it comes to the need for developing different propaganda appeals to different segments of the populace. We call this "segmenting," or "slicing and dicing," and wrongly*

assume it is a new technique.’[8] Conversely, social media is capable of changing this pattern of election campaigns as it provides a single common platform for a pluralistic content along with ‘linked’ pros and cons with almost every issue covered through interactivity and generated discourses [9]. Therefore, it is difficult to create a diversion through manipulative agendas on social media in a longer run. As a consequent, it will be a testing ground of political parties themselves and will be profiting to the honest political campaigns.

However, with enormous class-gender divide within the socio-political structure of the country, it will be insufficient to run a campaign only through social media [10]. Without going deep into the cultural and socio-political divides, even if we touch only upon the issue of physical reach of and access to social media, it paves a grave challenge in terms of divides (digital) to make the virtual political campaign fully feasible.

### The Urban-Rural Divide

According to a report of the Internet and Mobile Association of India, only about 11% of India’s total population uses internet which could be taken as insignificant in terms of vote count. Out of 137 million only 38 million were based in rural areas as of June 2012, the report revealed [11]. We are in early stages and still majority of people in the country and particularly in rural areas do not have access to basic amenities hence election campaign through social media has very limited scope as of now. However, this scenario is definitely going to change with time with increased e-readiness and reach of e-media political campaign over social media can become an effective tool in future elections. Though a direct social media political campaign has not been observed in the rural segment of India due to above mentioned factors, yet there is an interesting pattern developing with the emerging class of people to whom Wilbur Schramm and Charles E. Osgood call *Opinion Leaders* (Two Step Flow Theory) even in the rural India particularly in relation to the social media [12]. These leaders either have an access to the social media in the villages or they migrate to the urban areas frequently where they experience social media consumption. Thus, they are the agents who are indirectly bringing the political campaigns on social media to the rural arena.

### The Urban-Urban Divide

The Nielsen study reveals that big metros have the highest penetration of smartphones; however, the number is increased in Tier I and II cities at 13% during the year 2013. To be more elaborative, ‘any sophisticated understanding of media and politics requires a careful analysis of the ways in which citizens come to use new technologies in conjunction with the patterns of political communication they have already established.’[8] Since the traditional media has already an establishment and there are factors such as technological barriers, availability, accessibility, affordability, time resources along with issues of socialization within the urban areas, a digital divide prevails that limits the role of social media in political campaigns. The survey conducted for the present study, though reveals a majority of netizens using social media, however, 6% (error of +2/-2) out of 500 people surveyed do not use social media. This divide becomes more prominent with the classification of urban areas into metropolis, big cities and small towns [13].

### Divide within the Users of Social Media

Like the traditional media, social media has its own classification of audience but with a difference. In print and electronic media (TV and Radio) we see a pattern of content consumptions related to various

segments/specialized or thematic content and different genres [14]. On the other hand, social media contains an array of subjects/issues of pluralistic nature at a similar platform. It would not be wrong to pronounce it as platter of multi-content. This characteristic of social media blurring the picture of its users and consequently we see all social media users as politically aware and consumers of political campaigns put on social media at large [15]. However, a minute examination of the usage pattern shows dividing lines among social media users too (Table 1). The results of the survey, thus, depict that only 4.8% of the social media users are heavy users of political content while cumulatively 23% of the total sample use political content together with career related information, information related to their friends and society [16] (Table 1).

### Divide within the Youth Using Social Media

According to a recent study compiled by Nielsen Informat Mobile Insights, there are 51 million smartphone users in urban India. The biggest spurt is in the youngest age group between 16-18 years i.e. 22% of the total [17]. The survey of the sample under the age group 18-35 years (first age group) also reveals a divide in terms of heavy social media consumption, the content choice and the devices used to get connected online. Out of 370 people under the first age group, a little more than one-third i.e. 37% of the sample use mobile phones for social media while 41% still use personal computers that restricts their social media consumptions time. Similarly, while 59.6% participate in social media activities through Facebook, only 2.8% of them are active on twitter which is considered more oriented towards political content [18,19]. The percentage goes further on decrease (0.8) when it comes to the consumption of political blogs. However, a majority of the people surveyed have a positive opinion on the issue of role of social media in increased political awareness among youth.

### Audience’ Shift from Mainstream Media towards Social Media

‘The nightly network news broadcasts now compete with numerous alternatives and have the shrinking and aging audiences to prove it.’ [8] This situation in the developed world has its bearing on the political campaign as well and the studies based on the political milieu of developed nations indicate the shifting trend towards new media.

Valid	Type of Content	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Friends	165	33.0	33.4	33.4
	Social information	86	17.2	17.4	50.8
	Career related information	36	7.2	7.3	58.1
	Political content	24	4.8	4.9	63.0
	Friend and career	35	7.0	7.1	70.0
	All	63	12.6	12.8	82.8
	3+4	12	2.4	2.4	85.2
	1+2	31	6.2	6.3	91.5
	2+3	22	4.4	4.5	96.0
	1+4	12	2.4	2.4	98.4
	2+4	4	.8	.8	99.2
	Not applicable	4	.8	.8	100.0
	Total	494	98.8	100.0	
Missing	24.00	6	1.2		
Total		500	100.0		

**Table 1:** Percentage of people on the basis of different types of content they see on social media.

Contrary to this, in India, where social media is a new phenomenon, the things seem different empirically. Here, though the people have started to discuss and debate over the political issues on virtual platforms, they are still attached to the television sets to see their candidates, onscreen (Table 2 and Figure 2).

The results of this survey were contradictory to the earlier studies in terms of the positive relationship between media and political campaigns [20]. However, the answer of this lies in the further examination of the basis of how people rate their vote. The results show that majority of people rate a candidate to cast their vote on the basis of achievements in terms of work done for the constituency. There were 72.8% of people who went for this option. On the other hand, only 12.8% of the sample put the media presence of a candidate at a priority to rate the candidate for their vote. Thus, the results clearly indicate that though people like to see the candidates on the TV screen but when it comes to the question of their vote cast they like to reshuffle their priority [21]. Here, social media certainly has a potential to make a shift among the audiences since it provides all the desirable content at the same space and time.

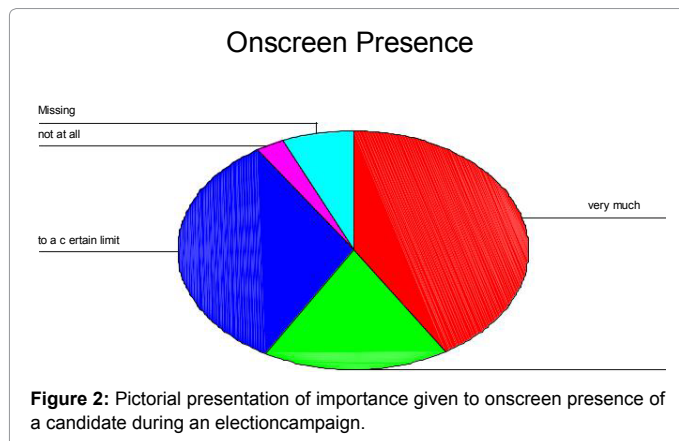
### Will it Turn the Dominant Frame into Governance Frame?

While examining the patterns and process in relation to media and political/election campaigns, it is pertinent to discuss the dominant and governance frames. To use the concept note given by Press and Williams [8]:

*The dominant frames, or perspectives, used by journalists in covering elections emphasize which candidate is ahead, who is behind, and what strategies the campaign are using to attract voters - what is often called the "horse race" aspect of elections. In contrast, what voters need is information and insight into what candidates will do if elected, what Patterson calls a "governance frame."*

Onscreen presence					
Valid		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Very much	205	41.0	44.0	44.0
	Not much	87	17.4	18.7	62.7
	To a certain limit	162	32.4	34.8	97.4
	Not at all	12	2.4	2.6	100.0
	Total	466	93.2	100.0	
Missing	92.00	34	6.8		
Total		500	100.0		

**Table 2:** Percentage of people who feel that onscreen presence of a candidate matters.



**Figure 2:** Pictorial presentation of importance given to onscreen presence of a candidate during an election campaign.

This will play a crucial role in making the institutions of democracy stronger with greater amount of debates and discussions on the kind of governance needed to meet the challenges of present and the future. Accordingly, Governance rather than the individual or the party should be the dominant frame in elections. Unfortunately this is not the norm as result of which the polity is highly fragmented [22]. The politicians through the campaign always try to put the image first and performance at a backstage. Social media is nowhere taking them to a rational ground, in the name of two way communication and interactivity politicians are again flashing up their images and trying to play emotive. There will always be two set of values. Both, the dominant and governance frame will overlap each-other time to time. Social media is no exception to it. "Unfortunately we are more interested in candidates personal attributes rather than his efficiency as a representative of the people which is why the fixation is with individuals. However, social media will help keep a watch on candidates before and after elections to ensure that there is no mismatch between promises made and fulfilled. [23]" Responded Mr. Kanhaiya Sharma. While Mr. Manish Sisodia posed a hope for future when he said, "It should be there and gradually with a developed public sphere, it is tend to happen."

### Will it Turn Audience of Virtual into Voters of Real?

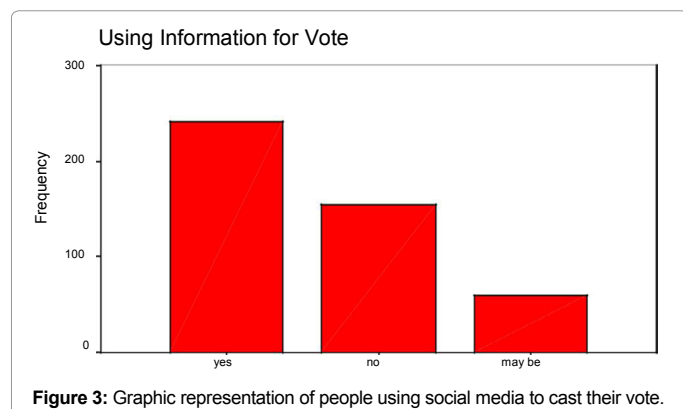
*'Lazars Feld assumed that most voters would make up their minds during the course of the campaign and be influenced by news media and political propaganda (i.e., what we now call "political advertisements").'* [8] the results of the interviews under the present study reveals the story other way round since most of the respondents are of the view that more of the people's participation on new media is based on reactions rather than true political discourse [24]. This will have a very limited influence and over a very short span of time. Without a cohesive and workable political agenda mere propaganda does not have a shelf life of its own. Hence public participation on the basis of propaganda alone will not work without actual people to people contact [25]. 'Elections are decided through power dynamics. Information has very limited role to play,' said Prof. Anand Kumar. The results, here, go in accordance with the earlier studies conducted by Press, Williams, Johnson and Moore, who Press and Williams [8] have cited as under:

*In our own research studying media use during the 2004 presidential election, we found that although many citizens did use the internet for a wide variety of information, when it came to following politics they still relied heavily on traditional journalistic sources, even when they found those sources online [26].*

Nevertheless, a section of the interviewees were optimistic towards the success of social media in political campaigns as they find social media as 'capable of paving emerging social realities of different times and spaces'. It is first time when people are interacting with their representatives. There are thousands of people who are connected to them through Facebook and Twitter. Undoubtedly, it will be a game changer. The results of the survey undertook for the present study also supports this assumption with higher percentage (48.2%) was willing to use the information provided on social media for casting their votes (Figure 3) [27].

### Conclusion

After examining all the elements i.e. media, content and audience within the communication process in relation to the political content, one can safely assert that if not a change, the new media has certainly brought an extension with its characteristics to the existing patterns of the political campaign. The public sphere of the masses has marked a beginning in India with an increasing political awareness, particularly



among the youth populace. Though there are digital divides in the society, those will be removed by increased e-readiness over time. The experienced tussle over ethical issues of content and attempts to control the new media could be observed as transitory to the situation and will be eradicated when social media usage will reach to a matured level. The upcoming general elections and political campaign on new media will prove a breeding ground for a much more meaningful politics of future with more political participation of 'netizens' in democratic process in general and electoral process in particular.

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**Citation:** Rahul K (2016) Use of New Media in Indian Political Campaigning System. J Pol Sci Pub Aff 4: 204. doi:10.4172/2332-0761.1000204

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