ROLE OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION IN INDIAN POLITICAL CAMPAIGN

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ABSTRACT

The domain of political advertising and marketing campaigning has transformed significantly in India over the last decade. Political awakening campaigns transition from traditional tools like newspapers, posters, rallies, public gathering, door to door campaigning, television and radio towards the modern tech savvy tools have now predominantly moving and occupying a strong place on digital platform. This change has occurred largely due to the increase in mobile phone users in India, facilitated by affordable internet plans and access to social media such as facebook, instagram, twitter etc. Despite on spending huge promotional budget on newspapers advertisement and getting a slot of 3-5 seconds, the parties are not able to get attention of public on their advertisements while an average user screen time is 6 hours and 40 minutes per day across various devices.[1] This paper emphasizes on the journey of election promotional campaign from conventional modes to the digital platform. It will conclude with the discussion of various strategies and plans adopted by political parties to increase transparency and develop confidence among their target audiences.

***KEYWORDS**: Promotion, Digital Media, Election, Political Party, Electorate, Marketing.*

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Introduction

India is a largest democratic country in the world where the citizens are having rights to choose the right candidate from the nominated candidates, henceforth it become necessary for the nominated candidate to convince their target population. In today's era marketing is everywhere how political environment can stay untouched from its effect. Politics marketing is a compulsory ingredient for successful election campaign which is used to interact with their electorate.

The above-the-line strategy for political marketing engages the target demographic using various kinds of media, including radio, television, newspapers, and digital platforms. During elections, political parties' and their candidates' personalities are significantly affected by their promotional materials. One's approach to political marketing varies based on the population at large. Parties promote for the long-term sustainability of their organization in addition to winning elections. Political parties' works as a business houses and want yields on their investment made (1).

Lock and Harris (1996) that —political marketing is concerned with communicating with party members, media and prospective sources of funding as well as the electorate (2).

Practices of political marketing ought to include an interaction among voters and political parties in the political marketplace. It is an advocacy of ideas and thoughts which are associated with societal, political, or particular opponents. In the electoral market, it aims to position the party. It entails integrating marketing strategies, tactics and instruments used in politics, such as political advertising, celebrity

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[1]//backlinko.com/screen-time-statistics (retrieved on 15th August 2024)

sponsorships and professional participation internet campaigning, consultants and campaign managers, mobile segmentation, microtargeting, canvassing, etc. It is among the most significant methods that political parties employ to converse with the voting public. It's referred to be among the avenues via which political candidates advance their manifestos in addition to oneself (McNair, 2017).

Political parties have had to devise marketing techniques in order to obtain a competitive advantage over their rivals due to the intense competition. This paper will study political marketing in India. It will also examine the main tactics employed by prominent politicians, the difficulties facing Indian political marketing, and its prospects.

Overview of Indian Political System and Political Marketing

The president of India is the head of state and the prime minister of India is the head of government of this federal parliamentary democratic republic. Politics always focuses on various societal segments as well as various regional practices of other cultures. The majority portion of society is the foundation of politics.

"The ignorance of one voter in a democracy impairs the security of all". John F. Kenady (5)

As a result, marketing has evolved into the core essence of politics and permeates every facet of political initiatives, speeding up communication when done correctly. Political marketing is expanding quickly, and since political party voters are akin to corporate marketers' target audience, they must swiftly adhere to new strategies to win over their support. A plethora of avenues exist in the contemporary political marketing landscape for reaching out to prospective voters and influencing public opinion. These include cold calling, email campaigns, direct mail flyers, radio advertisements, social media volunteering, and participation on television conversations and news programs.

Political marketing benefit greatly from the critical knowledge of the function that ICT play in the field. This study area is also expected to be very relevant and fascinating. Newspapers, movies, radio, and television have all historically been used as innovative technology in their respective fields. The communications arena has seen enormous changes since the introduction of the World Wide Web and the following development of websites, e-mails, blogs, and social networking platforms. The intense competitiveness of today has made political communication more vital than it has ever been.

Role of Election Commission in India

Founded in 1950 under the Indian Constitution, the Election Commission of India is tasked with administering elections in the country at all three tiers: municipal, state, and federal.

The Chief Election Commissioner and two more election commissioners currently oversee the Commission. These Commissioners are in office for a term of six years, or until they reach sixty-five, whichever comes first. The President of India designates these Commissioners. The Commissioners vote in favor of the decision. Only the President has the power to remove the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) in instances where a special majority of both houses of Parliament choose to do so due to inefficiency or misbehaviour. In the same way, the CEC has the authority to dismiss other commissioners or regional commissioners. In order to maintain democratic decorum, the Chief Election Commissioner is in charge of overseeing the free and fair conduct of elections in India. It assigns candidates and political parties election symbols. It authorizes the Tribunals to resolve any conflicts that may arise throughout the election process. Additionally, the Commission regulates a certain amount of money that political parties must spend on promotions as part of their political marketing. It closely monitors expenditure. It also periodically requests the political parties' audited financial statements.

In the sameline, Section 126(1Xb) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 draw attention of all media. This section prohibits the display of any election matter in any polling area for forty-eight hours, ending with the hour designated for the poll's conclusion for any election in the polling area, using, among other things, television, cinematographs, or similar apparatus in the following ways (3).

- Prohibition of public meeting before 48 hours ending with hours fixed for conclusion of the poll
    - No person is allowed to display any election material to the public by any mass media communication tools
    - Anyone who breaches sub-section (1) may be subject to a two-year maximum imprisonment in prison, a fine, or both.
    - "Election matter" refers to any matter that is calculated or intended to influence the end result of an election in this section.

- The Representation of People Act, 1951, restricts public meetings as well as the circulation and showing of election-related materials to the public during the silent period. It does not, however, apply in the event of multi-phased elections, which are held on many dates and the subject matter pertains to one or more later phases and does not address the polling place in any manner during the silent time.

- In order to maintain the integrity of the electoral process during the General Elections to the LokSabha 2019, the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) has also developed a "Voluntary Code of Ethics" for all participating social media platforms. This code is intended to ensure free, fair, and ethical usage of these websites and apps.

- Broadcasting channels, internet websites, and social media platforms can approach state, district, or local authorities for the necessary permission to conduct any broadcast-related events (apart from exit polls) during the time frame not covered by Section 126. These events must also adhere to the guidelines set forth by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting under the Cable Network (Regulation) Act regarding decency, the preservation of community harmony, and other relevant issues.

- On election day and one day prior to the polls, no political party, candidate, organization, or individual may publish a commercial in the print media unless the contents of such advertisements have been granted pre-certification from the State/District MCMC Committee, as applicable. The applicants have to submit their requests to MCMC no later than 02 (two) days before the scheduled publication date of these advertising.

- Newspapers cannot carry political advertising, particularly those that pose as news headlines in order to deceive readers. Advertisements that forecast a specific party's win should be expressly prohibited, and any speculation about the results of elections should be avoided. The Press Council's Norms of Journalist Conduct, Part (A), para. 2 (xii), which states that "An editor shall be responsible for all matters, including advertisements published in the newspaper," is another point of interest. If accountability is revealed, this must be made clear in advance."

In 2016, 57% of people watched television frequently for news, while 38% went online, according to a Pew Research Center survey. The regular viewership of television fell to 50% of the population between 2016 and 2017, while the audience for the net news increased to 43%.

Campaigners are spending an increasing amount of money on digital commercials due to the growing trend of digital platforms. According to the WSJ, political advertising expenditures on digital platforms reached roughly $1.9 billion in 2018. By 2020, this amount will be projected to increase to $2.8 billion(9). This graph depicts the exponential increase in digital advertising spending over time:

Driven by COVID-19, In US the political arena shifted from traditional tactics like door-to-door canvassing and live events to more organic social media, Zoom fundraising, and—most importantly—digital advertising. Despite exceeding the growth of federal election spending by 2.4 times between 2018 and 2020, the amount spent on political internet advertising increased by 4.6 times, making up less than 20% of all expenditures.

Evolution of Election Campaign in India

Election campaigning in India prior to the year 2000 was characterized by a unique approach that integrated conventional methods with recent advances in modern communication. During this time, political campaigns were based on public engagement, print media advertisements, and grassroots organizing, which reflected the socio-political environment of the day.

Prior to the 2000s, one of the defining characteristics of Indian electoral campaigns was the focus on community mobilization. Local leaders, employees, and volunteers played an essential part in helping political parties campaign door-to-door, interact with voters in their communities, and secure support for their candidates. This strategy was particularly essential in remote regions where local networks and interpersonal relationships were major determinants of election results.

The 31st Constitutional Amendment Act of 1973 led in a 545 seat increase in the Lok Sabha. India has a population of over 54 crores in 1971. Over 102 crores resided in India in 2011. The number of seats in the Lok Sabha has not risen despite the population growth.

Due to this demographic explosion, an MP now represents, on average, over 15 lakh voters—a record 4.5 times higher figure than at the time of the initial general election in 1951. As a result, it is difficult for candidates to communicate with their supporters.

According to a recent research by investment firm Omidyar Network, Indians primarily utilize their mobile phones for recreation and social communication. Whatsapp, Facebook, and other entertainment apps account for about 70% of the time spent via the internet by the typical Indian smartphone user. Only 38% of this 70% of time is spent on Facebook and its related applications, which includes Instagram, Whatsapp, and other social media leaders. This is considerably greater than the 50% of mobile phone time than US users spend using these apps. Political parties have appropriately acknowledged and taken into account the potential of internet-based mobile devices, and they have been communicating out to voters directly through SMS and telephonic communication.

Therefore, it makes sense that political parties have modified their tactics as well in order to communicate with voters more successfully. Furthermore, although while print and television media are still important because a large percentage of Indians still get their news from these sources, their expensive prices frequently prevent those with little resources from using them, which disadvantages those with limited resources

Online voter registration and transparency campaigns were introduced for the first time in the 2009 Indian elections. Political parties are becoming more tech savvy. The Bharatiya Janata Party, or BJP, employed this tactic to good effect during the Lok Sabha elections. This tactic is mostly used for convincing people by presenting them with appealing policies that a party hopes to enact after taking power. BJP members skillfully employed this tactic to persuade voters that they should cast ballots.(Banerjee & Ray, 2016)

The BJP, one of the major political parties in India, used social media even before the 2009 general election, though it lost.In the 2014 elections, Prashant Kishore's Citizens for Accountable Governance (CAG) brought an innovative way of campaign management to India. With the help of Kishore's strategic advice, NarendraModi's successful campaign for prime minister was coordinated, bringing the next generation for effective campaign administration to Indian politics.

Political consulting firms are becoming more common in Indian elections.

Nowadays, political parties in India use experts to help them with the political marketing process.(Henneberg, 2003).

For instance, the 2014 LokSabha elections were won by Modi thanks to the creative tactics of the CAG, like as the "chai pecharcha" (conversation over tea) program, which was started after Congressman Mani Shankar Aiyar attacked Narendra Modi for being a "chaiwala," or tea vendor. This strategy was particularly successful with younger voters and urban voters, particularly Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), and it greatly contributed to the BJP's stunning victory.

Political consulting firms play a more significant role than just conducting campaigns. In order to maximize election success and streamline electoral strategies, these entities provide a wide range of services, such as building alliances, voter profiling, data analytics, and message drafting. Political parties may effectively handle the intricacies of modern day politics and obtain an advantage in ever-more competitive electoral environments through the use of their resources and skills. The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) estimated that political consultancy firms likely generated revenue exceeding Rs 700 to 800 crores from the 2014 general election(7).

Election campaigning has undergone a radical transformation with the rise of digital platforms and social media. India is the third-largest Internet user base in worldwide, with over 243 million users, almost all of whom are adolescents. More than 100 million of these individuals are active users of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and numerous other social networking sites. Thus, the general elections in 2014 and 2019 are referred to as the "WhatsApp Election" of India because social media was utilized in a novel way to sway voter opinions and rally support from all political parties. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp were utilized by political parties to communicate with voters directly, debunk misconceptions about the opposition, and offer campaign updates.

In election campaigning, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) are also becoming game-changers thanks to their incomparable powers for data analysis, predictive modeling, and optimization. Election campaigns have gone through an evolution because to AI-powered innovations and algorithms that allow for real-time tracking, sentiment analysis, and personalized communication.

Political parties, for example, have used AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants to connect with people, respond to their requests, and get opinion on important subjects. Real-time translation of PM Narendra Modi's speeches from Hindi to Tamil was made possible with the assistance of the AI tool Bhashini.

In the same way, machine learning algorithms have been employed to evaluate social media trends, recognize influencers, and personalize ad messaging for greatest impact. Election campaigns are now more effective and efficient than ever because of the use of AI and ML, which has also completely changed political communication in the digital era.
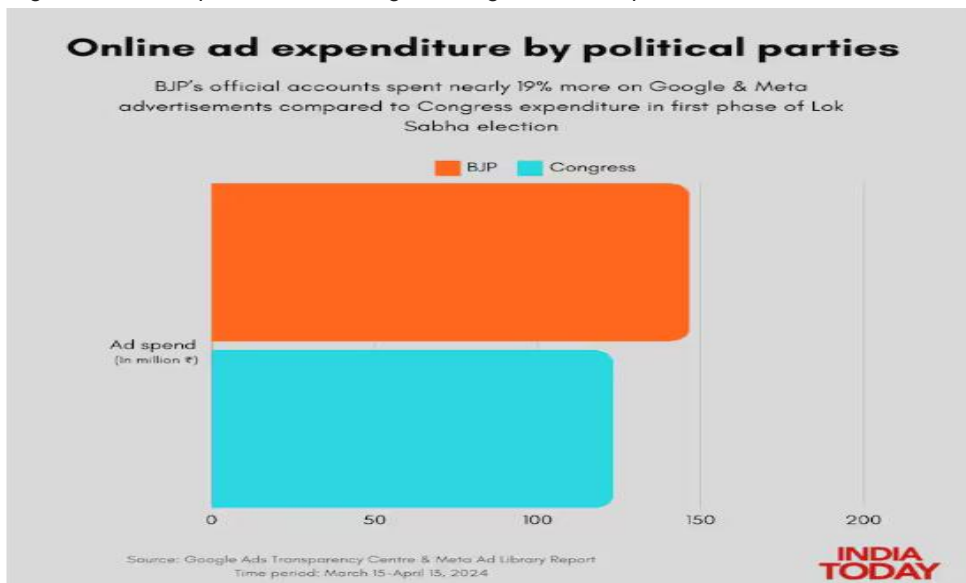
India has gradually embraced the use of modern strategies for political marketing. PM Narendra Modi and his team recognized the potential of new media and the opportunities offered. The BJP is honored with starting the first political advertising campaign in India, called "India Shining," on television. The success of the so-called NaMo campaign was attributed to the party's effective use of technology, particularly social media in 2019 elections.

FORTUNE

Largest Democratic Exercise 2024

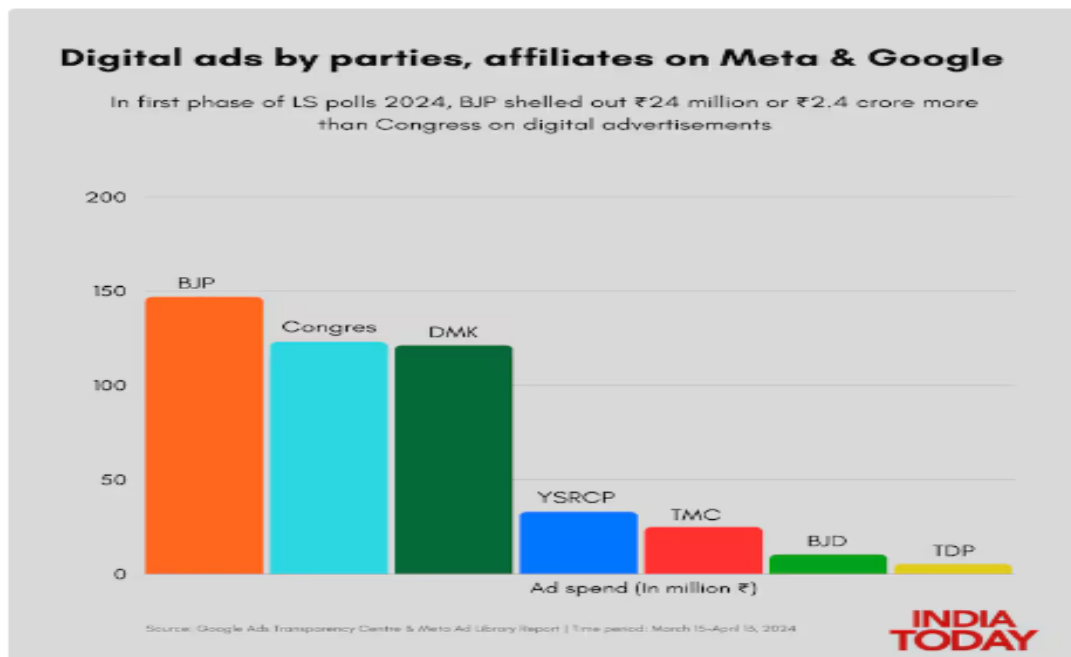| Key Stats	2019 Polls	2024 Polls
Candidates	8,054	5,903 (till phase 4)
Expense	₹60,000 cr	₹1.35 lakh cr
Eligible Voters	89.6 cr	96.88 cr
Parties	673	2,500 (total)
Male Voters	46.5 cr	49.7 cr
Female Voters	43.1 cr	47.1 cr

SOURCE: ECI DATA & CMS ANALYSIS

fortuneindia.com

During the first phase of the LokSabha elections in 2024, political parties spent a minimum of Rs 36.5 crore advertising their policies, accomplishments, manifesto, and poll objectives. After a slow start, the Congress party has now overtaken the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in terms of online ad spending, according to a review of political advertising on Google and Meta platforms.

Online ad expenditure by political parties

BJP's official accounts spent nearly 19% more on Google & Meta advertisements compared to Congress expenditure in first phase of Lok Sabha election

■ BJP ■ Congress

Ad spend (In million ₹)

0   50   100   150   200

Source: Google Ads Transparency Centre & Meta Ad Library Report
Time period: March 15-April 15, 2024

INDIA TODAY

An analysis of data from Google Ads Transparency Centre and the Meta Ad Library Report shows that between March 15 and April 13, the BJP spent Rs 14.7 crore, or Rs 147 million, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) spent Rs 12.1 crore, and the Congress spent Rs 12.3 crore. The BJP, on the contrary hand, persists to keep up the upper hand.

Digital ads by parties, affiliates on Meta & Google

In first phase of LS polls 2024, BJP shelled out ₹24 million or ₹2.4 crore more than Congress on digital advertisements

Source: Google Ads Transparency Centre & Meta Ad Library Report | Time period: March 15–April 13, 2024

For effective ad targeting, almost all political parties either fully or largely rely on outside companies. For the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, political organizations spent Rs 36.5 crore on online campaigns. Political ads are not allowed by X (previously Twitter) in India.

BJP's internet advertisements focus on a number of important issues, including its efforts for infrastructure, the main welfare packages of the Modi government, youth development, enhancing skills, the Ram Temple, and the lifting of Article 370.

The main opposition party, Congress, applied its campaigns to draw attention to the Modi government's shortcomings on a number of fronts, including development, paper leaks, job security, joblessness and and farmer concerns.

Of the whole advertising budget, Google was allocated the largest portion. Google Adsense and YouTube marketing accounted for more than 81% of the BJP's digital ad spending. In actuality, 78% of voters supported Congress. In terms of total internet ad spending, the YSR Congress, led by Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, came in third place, behind the Trinamool Congress (TMC)BijuJanata Dal (BJD), and Telugu Desam Party (TDP)(4).

Connecting with younger voters—who are more likely to interact with content provided by their preferred celebrities—through these online conversations is an effective way to reach young voters. Political parties can increase the reach and attractiveness of their message to a wider audience and improve their prospects of winning elections by forming alliances with well-known individuals and taking advantages of their social media following.

Conclusion

The expeditious diffusion of information via social media and digital platforms has made it easy for deceptive narratives and misleading material to sway public opinion and compromise the veracity of the voting process.

The constant harmony among tradition and innovation is seen in the evolution of Indian election campaigns, as political parties respond to evolving communication tactics and technology environment. Even though campaign strategies have changed significantly over the years, drawing support and

winning elections continues to be the major goals of the game. Voters must be able to distinguish between the buzz of political jargon and the reality of policy ideas in the course of the changing tactics and strategies deployed by political actors.

Adopting inclusive methods that put reach, variation, and respect for cultures first is crucial for political parties and campaigns. To incorporate every community in the political process, this entails offering multilingual stuff, approachable forms, and specialized campaigns for outreach.

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