



New Media Communication Strategies for Election Campaigns: Experiences of Indian Political Parties

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Abstract

Politics and Mass Communication have been an unbreakable duo for many centuries. Public meetings, Newspapers, Magazines, Radio, Television are the major communication tools. With the advent of new media technologies, the political campaign has gained a new dimension. During the last elections Indian political parties used Websites, E-mails, IVRS, SMSs, Internet-Banners, Online Advertising, Blogs, Mobile Phones, etc. This study has aimed to assess the effectiveness of new media political campaigns during the elections. Content analysis, Survey and In-depth Interview methods were used in the study. The study has revealed surprising facts. Every large political party has tried to use all the available new media tools. Television, Mobile phone and Internet have played a great role. The utilization of new media communication tools and strategies gave a new facet that was highly beneficial to the Indian politics. The political parties have reached a large number of voters through the new media. It made their election campaign easy, fast and successful.

Keywords: New Media, Political Communication, Elections, Campaign Strategies.

Introduction

Mass communication is one of the inevitable allies of political parties. Most of the parties and their leaders exploited the mass communication tools very effectively. Even, most of the political parties and leaders have won seats in the government with the help of effective media and communication strategies. Most of the political parties and politicians have been using the mass communication tools for a long period. In the beginning they used oral communication like public speech, radio and textual communication via newspapers, pamphlets, posters, etc. and then they used Television and other tools. They are changing their communication vehicles from time to time on the basis of the availability, convenience and reach.

Erstwhile traditional political campaigners are now looking towards newer technologies as means of expanding their vote bank. There is a rush to capitalise on the newer technological innovations available today and the leaders of the pack in this race are setting benchmarks. Political parties and leaders are moving towards the new media communication tools for spreading their policies, communicating with the people and election campaigning. These newer forms of technology are actively being embraced by the political parties to gain more mileage.

The new media technologies have given a new dimension to the political campaign. Many political parties have created their own websites, blogs and Facebook/twitter accounts. They are regularly watching and reading their new media content. The content is also updated regularly. Some of the political leaders respond to the queries of the public and cadres. They are enthusiastically using the tools for the election campaigns. This paradigm shift has significantly helped them in reaching the voters. Political parties and leaders are enjoying the communication development and travel in the cyber world.

A large part of new media is based on computer mediated communication which when looked into, shows that it can cause many changes in the way people communicate with one another and it can influence communication patterns and social networks. Therefore when it comes to studying about new media, the Technological Determinism theory needs to be focused upon as communication technology is a fundamental part of human society. According to this theory, as

new technologies are discovered, they form a cause-and-effect relationship with society. Technical developments in communication technology and media, to a great extent influences change in the society. They provide solutions and create new needs.

Campaign and advertising agencies might utilize one medium or many media as well as advertising methods. The campaign theme is the central message that will be communicated in the promotional activities and these are usually developed with the intention of being used for a substantial period. Campaign is an attempt to reach a particular target group, by designing a series of advertisements and placing them in various media. During the election the political parties put forward their candidates and arguments with which they hope to persuade people to vote for their candidates and parties.

The message of the campaign is the ideas that the party/candidate wants to share with the voters. The message often consists of several talking points about policy issues. The points summarize the main ideas of the campaign and are repeated frequently in order to create a lasting impression on the voters. Most campaigns prefer to keep the message broad in order to attract the most potential voters. A message that is too narrow can alienate voters or slow the candidate down with explaining details. In the election of 2008, John McCain originally used a message that focused on his patriotism and political experience: "Country First"; later the message was changed to shift attention to his role as "The Original Maverick" within the political establishment. Barack Obama ran on a consistent, simple message of "change" throughout his campaign. If the message is crafted carefully, it will assure the candidate a victory at the polls.

Now the political campaigns have set new standards for how successful campaigns are conducted day-to-day. The modern information and communication technologies are now a core element of modern political campaigns. The effective implementation of these sorts of tools is under debate. Politicians in many states have started websites and blogs with a variety of degrees of success. Social software has been used to benefit politicians. Communication of information is usually in paid form and usually persuasive in nature about products, services or ideas by identified sponsors through the various media. Online advertising like contextual advertisements

on search engine results pages, banners, Rich Media, Social networks, online classifieds, networks and e-mail marketing are the major techniques used now (Mafua, 2002).

The use of political advertising in the United States is often associated with the commercial meaning of advertising as a promotional device whose use is dependent upon the market economy and the right and ability to purchase the means to promote products or services or, in the case of politics, candidates or idea. Mobile and social media have now become a critical element of the campaign process and doing it well clearly makes a difference in who wins an election (Wehrs, 2009).

A major part of an election campaign is done through electronic media such as SMS, Blogs, E-mails, SEO and SMO projects, Banner Advertisements, Phone Calls, Mailers, Brochures/Flyers and different Websites. With the outbreak of new technologies, election candidates are looking for new ways to reach out to their followers and prospective voters.

Mobile phones are portable, affordable and in wide-spread use. Elections and voter registration campaigns are one arena where mobile phones have made an impact. Mobile active has observed the use of mobile phones to register voters, educate citizens on specific candidates or referenda, track electoral activities such as turnout and fraud and raise money for candidates and parties (Stein, 2008). Mobile continues to prove that it is an effective advertising medium. The use of mobile phones in elections and voter registration campaigns is still in an experimental stage, and a lot has been learned about the characteristics of successful campaigns. However, little is known regarding the effectiveness of such campaigns and the factors contributing to their success (Dimitris et al, 2006). Politicians are using mobile phones to promote their parties. Many first-time voters are likely to be connected via Internet and mobile phones.

SMS used for political campaigns, especially for party list groups. The issue of having proper identification also has implications, especially when considering SMS as a means for people to participate through elections or referenda. The idea of one vote for one person may require people to register their names and their phone numbers. This is a touchy issue in the Philippines,

where people are wary about state control and privacy and may be an issue in other countries as well (Mendes et al, 2007).

This study is also an indicator of the times to come when new media takes on a more powerful role. A sense of technology's power as a crucial agent of change has a prominent place in the culture of modernity (Smith and Marx, 1994). According to the technological determinism theory, technical developments, media or technology as a whole, is the key mover in history and social change. New technology today can alter the very structure of daily life and is no longer just a bystander in everyday life. The introduction of technology therefore into the sphere of election campaigning has its own effects. Therefore in the future the new media may no longer take the role of a small player but might be a central player around which elections are fought.

This has been substantiated by a research conducted by IRIS Knowledge Foundation and the Internet and Mobile Association of India, which claims that results in over 150 constituencies could be decided by 'Facebook users, making them the newest vote-bank with the power to shape Indian politics.' In the example given by the study, the Thane parliamentary constituency has over 4,20,000 Facebook users. In the last Lok Sabha elections, the winning candidate had a victory margin of less than 50,000 votes. In such a scenario, a successful Facebook campaign could influence the outcome of the 2014 parliamentary election.

In this context, the rate at which this newer technology has been adapted and spread through in India can be understood more in the background of the "Diffusion of Innovations" theory. Over the years, India has slowly moved through the various stages of adoption of using the new media as a part of the election campaign. Eventhough the new media came into existence more than a decade, now early majority of individuals, groups and organizations have started using new media.

During the first decade of the 21st century, Indian elections faced vibrant new media campaigns in different levels. Compared to the previous elections, the last 2009 parliamentary and assembly elections have experienced extraordinary campaigns through the new media. During the recent

elections they used Interactive Voice Response Systems (IVRS), Short Message Services (SMSs), E-mails, Internet Banners, Websites, Online Advertising, Blogs, Mobile Phone Services, etc.

These new forms of campaigns have thrilled the common people and influenced them greatly. Political and media critics are also surprised. An ordinary person received a phone call from his fascinating leader and listened to the leader's appeal for voting. A semi-urban woman received alluring message from a political party in which she was interested. Some of the people received/listened to the leading political parties' election agenda, assurances, etc. through e-mail. Few of them initially felt that the phone calls are directly received from the party leaders. Later, they understood the advantages of the new media technologies.

Some of the leaders are regularly blogging with the cadres and the voters. This type of innovative communication strategies influenced their party cadres, common people and the voters. Each and every political party spent huge money especially for this purpose. They have employed companies of various information technologies and agencies for the campaign.

Politics in India is essentially local and India's voters elect their representatives based on small local and regional issues, instead of the big national issues. As a result, election rallies and door-to-door canvassing, supplemented by local hoardings and print advertisements in the regional languages have traditionally been at the core of election campaigning in India.

In 2004, the incumbent BJP broke away from this old pattern with its aggressive nation-wide 'India Shining' campaign. About 5% of its campaign budget went to an e-campaign, for revamping its campaign website, pushing out text messages, pre-recorded voice clips and e-mails to its database of 20 million e-mail users and 20 million phone users and offering campaign-related mobile ringtones for download. They could be largely credited with being the innovators who brought new media into play as a powerful force in the election campaigns.

Even as politicians are trying to use new media tools effectively, agencies specializing in digital political campaigns have sprung up in response to the opportunity and are even offering money back guarantees. Today, with the power of new media having been established, India is now in the mid-way mark of the adoption process. With most political parties having accepted new media as an election tool and they are in the early majority stage. The coming elections will be an indicator if any major progress has been made. The use of Internet and mobile technologies for political campaigning has also posed new questions in front of the election commission, related to tracking expenditure on new media and implementing rules that ban campaigning 48 hours before the poll (Dimitris, 2006).

According to Rogers (2003), innovation is an idea, practice or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption. In this study, new media and its use as a tool for communicating messages and as a campaign tool is the innovation. With the innovation having been introduced into the society, there is now diffusion taking place. This is the process by the innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of the social system. The efforts to integrate and maximize on this innovation is planned and systematic. The questions to be considered while understanding the impact of new media as a tool are if it is better than the campaigning tools that were available before and if it fits the needs of the intended audience. The innovation should be easy to use and its impact should be visible and easily measurable. The adopter categories are innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards.

Therefore today, apart from liberal usage of posters, banners and going to different places to meet people, political parties are also using cost-effective mediums like mobile phones, online campaigns like websites, etc. With Indians becoming more and more dependent on mobile phones and Internet, political parties are eagerly choosing these two mediums for their upcoming election campaigns. Such election campaigns have taken over as the favourite campaign medium of political parties around the globe.

As India's 714 million voters prepared to elect their 543 representatives, they are witness to a range of digital initiatives from political parties, civil society organizations and media houses. Leading from the front was L.K. Advani, the prime ministerial candidate of the right wing Hindu nationalist BJP, who had embarked on Obama style new media campaign. He used one of the most aggressive online advertisement campaigns ever seen in India that reached 250 million mobile subscribers.

Mumbai-based Net core Solutions, which has won a nationwide contract from the BJP to use its SMS technologies for the party nationally, plans to buy wholesale capacity of around one billion SMS messages from telecom operators. The company has the technology to reach about 250 million cell phone users, who are not enrolled in the Do-Not-Call registry, and the new capacity will allow it to send each of these subscribers' four text messages on behalf of the BJP.

Idea Cellular's My Idea campaign is a continuation of its participatory democracy advertisement campaign where a lady politician, aided by her tech-savvy assistant Abhishek Bachchan, gathers the views of the citizens in her constituency using mobile phones –The campaign asks people to submit an idea that can change India and vote on the ideas submitted by others. Air2Web bought about 200 million bulk SMS inventory. It was working with four political parties and their advertisement agencies sent voice-SMS campaigns (Philip, 2009). According to Gauravmishra, (2009) mobile technology is playing a small but important role in the Indian parliament elections. Even as the media focus is on the web 2.0 elements in the digital election-related initiatives, SMS also made the most difference.

Political parties are very much interested in using these technologies for reaching the masses, especially during the elections. The political parties exploited these technologies and facilities for the election campaigns. This trend is growing year by year. There is a need to analyse the utilization, reach and effectiveness of these media for the election campaign. To analyse the new media election campaigns and assess the impact, in India this study was conducted between April and May 2009 in the state of Tamil Nadu in India. The objectives of this research are: To identify the new communication strategies used in election campaign; to analyze the new media

content and usage for political campaigns; to analyse the reach of new media communication in the election campaign among the voters.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to analyse the usage and reach of new media technologies like websites, blogs, mobile phones, SMS and Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS) in the parliamentary elections 2009 in month of April 10th to May 25th to determine the extent of technological determinism that was taking place. This study followed content analysis, survey and in-depth interview methods. The quantitative content analysis of the respective campaignables the researcher to include large amounts of textual information and systematically identify its properties, by detecting the more important structures of its communication content. Semiotics also helps understand the message of these campaigns and allow for comparisons. This was done to understand how various parties had adopted the innovation of new media to capture vote banks in the election and to understand as to in which stage of adoption of innovation, the Indian political community is in. Within political parties, there are parties who are at various stages in the adoption stage and the methodology used in this study was designed to see how each party used new media. This study also involves survey method. This is a quantitative research method that involves data collection through e-mail and Internet surveys. The survey was conducted with 150 voters those have the access to new media tools like mobile phones, internet. The sample included 100 male and 50 female with the age group of 18 to 70. Random Sampling technique followed in this study. In-Depth Interview method is also used for obtaining data from the experts from political parties and media.

Results and Discussion

The collected data from the content analysis, survey and in-depth interview were analyzed and presented here. Data analysis is the act of transforming the data with the aim of extracting useful information and facilitating findings and conclusions within the scope of the objectives.

Content Analysis

A complete in-depth content analysis of political party's websites, Internet Banners, SMS and Voice campaign of the parties was carried out both quantitatively and qualitatively. The following variables like Type of advertisement, Colour, Photos, Catchy statements, Allegations/Promises, Sites that published the advertisements, Dynamic links, Archives, Photos, Voice Messages, Videos, Documents, Updates, Multimedia Contents, Languages used, Nature of message, Text, SMS were analysed for the study.

The advertisements given by DMK on the Internet are mostly static. These advertisements are in yellow, white and red in colours. These banners had the photos of DMK's party symbol, KalaingarKarunanithi and Sonia Gandhi. The word that was mainly used across all the banners was Support Rising Sun. These advertisements are mainly published in party websites. AIADMK on the other hand had both static and dynamic advertisements and their advertisements reflected the party colours white and green. The constant words are used in all the banner advertisements were vote for the continuation of good government. These advertisements were also published in blogs apart from the party websites.

Table 1 Advertisement given by the various political parties in the Internet

Party name	Type of advertisements	Colours used	Photos	Catchy word	Allegation/ promises	Advertisements in the websites
DMK	Static	Yellow White Red	Karunanithi Rising Sun Sonia Gandhi	Support rising Sun	Allegations - Who has protected the government staff? Promises - Will improve the standard of Tamil Nadu	DMK website
AIADMK	Both	White Green	Jayalalitha Party symbol	Support for continuation of the good government	Nil	ADMK Website and Blogs
DMDK	Static	Yellow Green Red Black	Vijayakanth	Vote for your future and future for your children	To Increase the procurement price and for the welfare of farmers and their families	DMDK website and social sites

BJP	Both	Red Saffron Green	Advani – National party L.Ganesan- South Chennai	Strong, Prosperous and secure India. Your Vote our Commitment. Determined leader, Decisive government.	Allegation – Fight against terrorism and Inflation of Rice	BJP websites Web TV, Google AdSense
Congress	Static	White	Sonia Manmohan Rahul	Stability and Integrity	Nil	Advertisements by Google

DMDK also followed similar trends but the colours used are yellow, green, red and black with photographs of its respective leader. The common message in these advertisements was “Vote for your future and future for your children”. These advertisements were also published in social networking sites apart from the party websites. BJP published its advertisement across all the platforms in Internet including other Websites, Web TV, Google AdSense etc. All the BJP advertisements had the photograph of Advani. The advertisements had the photographs of Advani and these were designed with colours like “Red, Saffron and Green”. The Message present in each advertisement was “Strong Prosperous and Secure India”, “Your vote our commitment”, “Determined leader, Decisive Government”. Congress advertisements are given on the Internet are static and mostly in white colours. The leader they used in the banners is “Sonia Gandhi, Manmohan Singh, Rahul Gandhi”. The commonly word that was used across all the banners was “Stability and Integrity”. These advertisements are mainly published in party websites and advertisements by Google.

Table 2 Voice campaign through mobile phone done by political parties during 2009 elections

S.No.	Party name	Leader	Promises/ allegation	Language used
1.	AIADMK	Jayalalitha	Promises	Tamil
2.	DMK	Karunanidhi	Allegations	Tamil
3.	BJP	Advani	Promise-Fight Against terrorism	English, Hindi and all regional languages

Out of the all parties AIADMK, DMK and BJP campaigned with voice messages through mobile. Both AIADMK and DMK had its voice message in Tamil with Jayalalitha and Karunanithi speaking respectively. For BJP, Advani spoke with the message of “Fight against terrorism”. BJP voice message was available in English as well as all Indian languages. DMK, DMDK, BJP also used SMS as a tool for campaigning apart from the other mediums. DMK SMS contained messages like “Vote for Congress – DMK alliance” DMK also sent picture messages with the party’s symbol along with remainder about their 2 Rupees rice and colour TV schemes.

Table 3 Campaigns done by political parties through SMS

S.No.	Party name	Text message	Picture message
1.	DMK	“Vote for Congress – DMK alliance”	Party Symbol
2.	DMDK	“A Vote for the DMDK is the vote for your future and the future for your children”	-
3.	BJP	“To Fight against Price Rise and Terrorism Vote and Support and Elect BJP candidate”	-

On the other hand DMDK and BJP stuck to only text messages which had content like “A Vote for the DMDK is the vote for your future and the future for your children” “To Fight against Price Rise and Terrorism Vote, Support and Elect BJP candidate” respectively. DMK, ADMK, BJP parties also used IVRS for the campaigning.

Table 4 Campaigns done by political parties through IVRS

S.No	Party name	Voice
1.	DMK	“Vote for Congress – DMK alliance” for a good government
2	ADMK	Vote for a Corruption free government
3.	BJP	“To Fight against Price Rise and Terrorism Vote and Support and Elect BJP candidate”

DMK IVRS was asked “Vote for Congress – DMK alliance” for a good government. ADMK mentioned that Vote for a Corruption free government and BJP emphasized that “to fight against price rise and terrorism, vote and support and elect BJP candidate.” DMK has concentrated more on maintaining documents pertaining to DMK rule in Tamil Nadu. The party website makes it more interactive by the people by having lot of dynamic links. These documents are maintained properly and most of the files present in the website are in PDF format. The drawback of this website is that the website is not upgraded in regular intervals which makes the information available repetitive. When it comes to AIADMK website, importance was given to photos and videos in contrast to DMK which give more importance to documents. When it comes to DMDK, the website is attractively designed with photos and videos.

Table 5 Description of the official websites of the political parties

S.No.	Party name	Dynamic links	Archives			Updates	Multimedia content
			Photos	Videos	Document		
1.	DMK	10	0	0	12	Rarely updating	All contents are in PDF format. No multimedia format
2.	AIADMK	7	476	39	5	Daily updating	Slide show is available for photo viewing
3.	DMDK	18	19	3	0	Every one hour updating	Videos using latest flash player and slide show is also available for photos
4.	BJP	14	4	0	2	Rarely updating	Manifesto in PDF
5.	Congress	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

It has to its advantage that it is constantly updating their website but when it comes to document they isn't much information available.

Survey

Statistical surveys are used to collect quantitative information about items in a population. Surveys of human populations and institutions are common in political polling and government, health, social science and marketing research. A survey may focus on opinions or factual

information depending on its purpose and many surveys involve administering questions to individuals.

Almost 54% of the samples taken are not aware of websites of political parties while the rest 46% know that political parties have official websites which gives details and information about that particular party. Among the samples almost 64% of them recall the name of the particular political party when they see a political party. 16% of them recall the slogans of these parties while 20% of them were able to recall the message of the party.

When asked about the quality and content of the advertisements 44% of the sample thought DMK had a good advertisement, followed closely by AIADMK with 36%. 8% of the sample also thought DMK had good advertisements. While only 2% each of the samples thought BJP and Congress advertisements were good. A minimum of respondents (8%) didn't have any particular opinion about these advertisements. About 1/4th of the sample thought DMK had bad advertisements followed closely by AIADMK with 22%. BJP had 18% of samples thinking their advertisements were bad followed closely by Congress and DMK with 14% each. A small percent of (8%) sample didn't have any opinion on bad advertisements.

According to 42% of samples DMK gave the maximum number of advertisements during the 2009 elections followed closely by AIADMK with 38%. A minimum of (8%) samples thought Congress gave more advertisements than BJP and DMK. Just 6% each of the samples thought DMK and BJP gave the least advertisements. The maximum reach of a political party via Internet was for DMK according to 35% of the sample followed closely by AIADMK 25%. According to the sample BJP and Congress had the same reach of around 20%. None of the samples thought DMK had any reach via Internet.

When it came to reach via mobile 50% of the samples thought AIADMK did better followed closely by DMK with 35%. A small portion (10%) of the samples thought DMK did much better in mobile arena when compared to BJP and congress. 5% thought BJP had a good reach via mobile. None of the samples thought Congress had any reach via mobile.

Advertisements by DMK had the maximum recall amongst the samples with almost 42% of them recalling the party's advertisement immediately followed closely by AIADMK which had a recall percentage of 40%. The advertisements by Congress had only 10% of recall among them while BJP and DMKD registering the lowest recall with only 4% each.

In-Depth Interview

In-depth interview has provided much useful information for the study. T.K.S. Elangovan, DMK's Organization Secretary stated that TV is the most important strategy in the present day scenario because it reaches all kinds of audiences. But in the election they had adopted two new strategies like mobile and Internet campaign. One advantage in mobile campaigning is that the mobile users will carry the mobiles in their hands, so the advertisement which has sent by the political parties, will reach them personally and instantly. In the other hand the usage of Internet is not up to the mark. Social networking site does not suit for advertising. Compared to Internet, mobile campaigning is cost effective. He also stated that, Voice campaign is more effective than SMS. Mostly we will use the websites as a communication tool. People like to post comments and send feedback through e-mail after the election victory.

Mr. S. Mohanrajulu, BJP State General Secretary stated that BJP is the only party which adopted lot of innovative strategies like Bulk SMS and e-mail, Voice SMS, Banner advertisements in other websites. He also says that BJP is the only party which is managing Web TV (Thamarai TV) and they are the only party which is utilizing modern technologies not only during elections. They have used mobiles as a main medium followed by Internet and Television. Educated youth and Upper middle class people are the target audience for the Internet campaign and general public who are eligible to vote are targeted through voice and SMS campaigns. He said shifting traditional medium to modern medium would increase the vote bank, because mobile campaigning reaches general public and Internet will reach youth audience.

E-mails, SMSs, voice drops, parties tap all possible ways to reach the voter. Electronic missives are issuing forth from the BJP and DMK to woo voters. The e-mail and SMS campaigns in Tamil Nadu are reaching out to inboxes of e-mail and mobile phones, campaign managers of both

parties say. The BJP campaign has a data bank of around 10 lakh e-mail addresses in each constituency it is contesting, which is approximately one crore e-mail addresses, says K.T. Raghavan, in charge of the media campaign in Tamil Nadu. “It is impossible in parliamentary elections for the candidate to meet every voter,” says Mr. Raghavan. Through this type of campaign we can reach so many more voters, where the literacy is high and many have access to the Internet, he adds.

While the BJP has tie-ups with organizations to obtain e-mail addresses, the DMK is tapping into its volunteer base to get e-mail IDs. “Though we have not reached the level of the United States where a lot of campaigning is done online, we are getting there,” says Hasan Mohamed Jinnah, deputy secretary of the DMK’s youth wing. Around one crore e-mails would be sent, he said. The DMK sites include www.dmk.in and www.mkstalin.net. The latter has been updated recently to include pages on the election campaign. Speeches given by DMK leaders on the campaign trail would also be uploaded to the site, said Mr Jinnah.

The BJP also plans to promote the website of L. Ganesan, its candidate for South Chennai, just as it promoted L.K. Advani’s site. The party has a tie-up with Google to beam advertisements of the site www.laganesan.in from the 300 to 400 sites popular among folks in Chennai, says Mr Raghavan. The DMK was focusing on the party’s achievements, rather than any particular candidate, says Mr Jinnah. DMDK is not planning e-mail campaigns, the party has a poll on its website www.dmdkparty.com, which lets them count the number of people who say they would vote for DMDK. The script does not allow for duplicate entries, a DMDK leader said. The All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam has not planned an e-mail campaign, a party leader said. For Independents too, the Internet is an affordable medium of campaign. Through the website lkadvani.in, 1250 volunteers had signed up, which was an indicator of the effectiveness, says Mr. Raghavan.

Findings and conclusion

The study revealed surprising facts. Every major political party has tried to use all the available new media tools. According to the Diffusion of Innovation theory the new media communication and technologies usage trend is increasing here from innovators to an early majority.

Parties have used various tools to propagate their messages, policies, manifesto, plans, etc. The findings show that almost all parties today are using new media. India is today in the stage of Early Majority adopters. Despite many parties accepting that new media has a role to play, only some parties are fully capitalising on the benefits of the new media. This can be seen in the quality of the message communicated or the effectiveness of the reach of the campaigns of various political parties. Overall there is a need to achieve a good fit between the attributes of the innovation (new media), the adopting individual or organization (the political parties), and the environment or context (election time) where the process takes place.

The survey revealed that about 48% of respondents mostly youngsters were aware on the websites of the political parties and 52% of the respondents are not much aware of political websites. Unlike the traditional method of campaigning, Internet advertisements, official websites of the parties, SMS, IVRS have reached large number of audience. The mobile phone campaign was more effective among them. The parties could continue their election campaigns even after 10 pm through these new media tools. The campaign messages are stored in the inboxes and read by the audiences repeatedly. It helped the audience to understand parties' policies, plans, etc., and to compare/ analyse them. It helps the people to recall the messages and slogans of different parties easily. This supports the technological determinism theory's view that the characteristics inherent in a new technology govern the direction of its development. The various features available with mobile technology offer benefits that erstwhile traditional campaign media did not provide.

Mobile phone played a cost effective and highly reachable role than the other media during the campaigns. This supports the 'uses and gratification theory' whereby by understanding how mobile phones are used by people and its inherent benefits, political parties are able to tap this

new medium. Respondents recall the party name more than the message and slogan while think about an advertisement campaign. DMK advertisement has high recall power, next comes AIADMK, then Congress, BJP and DMDK are least. Among the political parties only two parties used these new media to the maximum for the campaigns. It also has the high recalling capacity.

The utilization of the new media communication tools and strategies gave a new facet and gain to the Indian political parties. Methods used in Internet campaigns include but are not limited to search engines, banners, blurbs, video clips, interactive games, and e-mails. Now, mobile gadgets are very attractive to advertisers. The three features in new media highlighted by Rogers while discussing the information society theory can be seen to have relevance here. The interactivity, their individualized demassified nature and their nature of no longer being time bound is contributing to their increasing popularity.

On the whole the study reveals that, though new media technologies, especially Internet and mobile are good means of election campaigns, mobile phone campaigns will have a good reach among all class of people. Political parties feel the use of mobile phones is cheap and effective way to reach the people. Usage of Internet is common with youth and upper middle class. Internet campaign may be successful if it becomes popular among the rural masses in future. As new media develops, it can be seen that it adopts functions like mobilization that is essential for older media forms.

Overall there is now support to the technological determinism theory that new technologies are instrumental in setting the conditions for social change and progress. Technology, acting as a determinant is playing a crucial role in transforming society at social and individual levels. Revolutions in communication thus lead to social, political and economic revolutions.

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