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Clicking for Change: The Role of Online Marketing in India's Political Future

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Abstract

This study looks at how online marketing has changed political narratives, voter behaviour and election results in India. India, which has more than 820 million internet users, has developed into a hub for online political campaigning. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged as a leader in utilising online platforms during the 2014 and 2019 general elections, which marked important turning points in the integration of digital strategy. This study explores the methods and instruments used, evaluates how they affect democratic processes, and talks about moral dilemmas and legal issues. The study makes the point that internet marketing is not just a supporting element but a major driver of the changing political scene in India by examining case studies and new trends.

Key Words: Clicking, Online Marketing, Political Future

1. Overview

Communication has been transformed by the internet, and political debate in India is no different. With a large and diversified electorate, internet tactics have supplemented and in some cases

replaced traditional campaigning techniques like rallies and print media. These days, political parties use digital advertising, data analytics, and social media to reach people, create narratives, and rally support. Two crucial instances of this change are the general elections in

2014 and 2019. A major factor in the BJP's electoral victory in 2014 was its creative use of internet channels. By 2019, more parties had realised the importance of digital campaigning, which resulted in higher spending and more advanced tactics.

Due to shifting voter behaviour and technological improvements, online marketing is predicted to play an increasingly bigger role in politics as India gets closer to the 2029 elections.

2. Digital Campaigns' Ascent in Indian Politics

2.1 The 2014 General Election: A Watershed in Digital History

Indian political campaigning saw a dramatic change in the 2014 general election. In order to communicate with voters directly, the BJP, led by Narendra Modi, took advantage of the increasing internet usage. Under the direction of Amit Malviya, the party's IT Cell planned a sophisticated digital campaign that involved targeted advertising, social media interaction, and message distribution via WhatsApp. By using this strategy, the BJP was able to interact with voters more personally and avoid using traditional media outlets. The party's considerable electoral wins demonstrated the effectiveness of this campaign, especially in urban areas with higher internet usage.

2.2 Digital Domination in the 2019 General Election

By the general election of 2019, digital campaigning had gained popularity. By making significant investments in data analytics and targeted advertising, the BJP improved its digital initiatives even further. With almost Rs 700 crore spent on digital media alone, the party's spending on propaganda and PR skyrocketed. Even when other parties, like the Indian National Congress (INC), increased their own digital initiatives, the BJP was able to maintain its supremacy in the digital sphere because to this expenditure. In order to reach voters in rural areas, the INC's digital campaign used platforms like as ShareChat and concentrated on regional language content. Notwithstanding these initiatives, the BJP had a competitive advantage thanks to its extensive and well-planned digital campaign.

3. Political Internet Marketing Tools and Techniques

3.1 Advertising on Social Media

Social media sites like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook are now essential to political campaigns. These platforms are used by parties to communicate with voters, spread their messages, and establish their brands. By reaching specified demographics, targeted advertising enables campaigns to craft

messages that appeal to particular voting segments. The significance of social media advertising in contemporary political campaigns is demonstrated by the BJP's extensive use of it, which included spending more over Rs 25 crore on sites like Facebook and Google. > KAushal: Public opinion is significantly shaped by influencers, such as social media personalities, activists, and celebrities. Influencers and political parties work together to spread their thoughts and reach more people. These collaborations can provide political narratives legitimacy and relatability. The BJP has established a substantial online and grassroots presence thanks in large part to its wide network of volunteers and supporters, both inside and outside the party.

Influencers like celebrities, activists, and social media stars have a big impact on public opinion. Political parties collaborate with influencers to reach a wider audience and disseminate their ideas. These partnerships can lend credibility and relatability to political narratives. Due in major part to its extensive network of followers and volunteers, both inside and outside the party, the BJP has developed a significant online and grassroots presence.

3.2 Campaigns using SMS and Email

Direct communication with voters can still be accomplished with email and

SMS. These platforms are used by campaigns to deliver calls to action, reminders, and customised communications. Despite being economical, these techniques need to be carefully managed to prevent spam and guarantee legal compliance. The BJP's use of call centres and WhatsApp to interact with voters is an excellent example of how to combine digital tactics with more conventional forms of communication.

3.3 SEO, or search engine optimisation

Political information is more visible when it ranks better in search engine results thanks to SEO tactics. Campaigns may guarantee that people looking for political information will see their messages by optimising material with pertinent keywords and metadata. The BJP's success in digital campaigning can be attributed to its emphasis on producing material that people want to share and making the most of its internet presence.

4. Effect on Democracy and Voter Behaviour

4.1 Emotional Appeal and Personalisation

Personalising political messaging enables campaigns to connect with voters on a deeper level. Emotional appeals, including stirring feelings of dread or

patriotism, can increase voter turnout and engagement. However, employing such strategies presents moral questions regarding manipulation and the possibility of widening social gaps.

4.2 Filter bubbles and echo chambers

Social media platforms' algorithmic design has the potential to produce echo chambers, where users are largely exposed to content that supports their own opinions. The deliberative character of democratic debate may be undermined by this phenomena, which has the potential to polarise public opinion and diminish the range of viewpoints.

4.3 False information and phoney reports

Election integrity is seriously threatened by the quick dissemination of false information on internet media. Voters' opinions can be influenced and the political process disrupted by false narratives and misleading facts. The need for strong measures to counteract digital disinformation was brought to light by the spread of fake news during the 2019 elections.

4.4 Urban-Rural Divide and Youth Involvement

Since younger voters are more likely to access political content online,

digital platforms have emerged as crucial means for interacting with them. However, the disparity in access to political information caused by the digital divide between urban and rural areas may bias election results in favour of places with greater internet connectivity.

4.5 Isuse of Data and Privacy

There are serious privacy problems with the gathering and processing of voter data. The possibility of using personal information for political purposes has been brought to light by cases of data misuse, such as the Cambridge Analytica incident. Retaining trust in digital political campaigns requires ensuring user permission and data privacy.

4.6 Youth Involvement and the Urban-Rural Divide

Digital channels have become essential tools for engaging with younger voters, as they are more likely to access political content online. However, election outcomes may be skewed in favour of locations with better internet connectivity due to the difference in access to political information between urban and rural areas brought about by the digital divide.

5. Challenges and Ethical Concerns

5.1 Abuse of Privacy and Data

The collection and processing of voter data raises significant privacy issues.

Cases of data exploitation, like the Cambridge Analytica affair, have highlighted the potential for utilising personal information for political goals. Ensuring user consent and data protection is necessary to maintain trust in digital political campaigns.

5.2 Absence of transparency and regulation

Digital campaigning has expanded more quickly than regulatory structures have. Concerns over the openness of political ads and the possibility of foreign influence in Indian elections have arisen as a result of this regulatory loophole. The integrity of the electoral process is compromised by political parties using digital platforms for targeted messaging without sufficient scrutiny due to lax restrictions. Despite the Election Commission's recommendations for digital campaigning, several parties continue to flout them, and enforcement of these norms is uneven.

5.3 AI-Driven Manipulation and Algorithmic Bias

The application of artificial intelligence (AI) in political campaigns raises the possibility of algorithmic bias, in which voting behaviour may be manipulated or preexisting biases reinforced. AI-powered technologies, for

example, have the ability to provide tailored information that plays on voters' emotions and may influence their choices without their realising it. A major obstacle to the fairness of digital marketing is the opacity of AI algorithms, which makes it difficult to identify and correct such biases.

6. Indian Politics' Prospects in the Digital Era

6.1 Political Content

Generated by AI As AI technology develops, political campaigns are using more and more AI-generated content to reach voters. Artificial intelligence (AI) systems may produce speeches, movies, and messages that are specifically catered to the preferences of each voter. Voter participation may be improved by this, but it also calls into question the veracity of political communication and the potential for deepfakes to propagate false information.

6.2 Metaverse Campaigns and Virtual Rallies

Political parties may now reach voters without holding in-person events thanks to the COVID-19 epidemic, which hastened the acceptance of virtual rallies. In the future, voters will have the chance to engage with candidates in virtual settings through immersive political

campaigns made possible by the metaverse. But these technologies also present issues with digital literacy, accessibility, and the possibility of echo chambers.

6.3 Blockchain Technology for Openness

By offering a safe and unchangeable record of campaign contributions and expenses, blockchain technology has the potential to improve political campaign transparency. Blockchain technology might be used to allay worries about the role of money in politics and boost public confidence in the democratic process.

6.4 Digital Adoption and Regional Parties

Regional parties are increasingly using digital tactics to engage people, even while national parties like the BJP have taken the lead in digital campaigning. For instance, to spread campaign messaging, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu has made use of regional language portals such as ShareChat. This pattern suggests that digital campaigning is becoming more accessible, with even tiny parties using technology to increase their impact and reach. > KAushal: 7. Final thoughts.

The electoral landscape in India has changed significantly as a result of the incorporation of internet marketing into politics. Digital platforms have enabled political parties to communicate with people in new ways, from individualised messaging to real-time engagement.

However, issues with privacy, disinformation, and governmental control are also brought about by this digital revolution. Strong ethical frameworks and regulatory processes must be put in place as India prepares for the general elections in 2029 to make sure that digital campaigning strengthens rather than weakens the democratic process. In order to shape Indian politics in the digital age, it would be imperative to strike a balance between innovation and integrity.

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