Chapter 4
Electoral Mapping of Social Mediasphere in India

Abstract  The role of the media was critical during the election and it was further exaggerated since social media joined the election in the form of Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp. Social media is now inevitable and found in every sphere of lived activities. Election is a live activity in democratic world. Everyone wants to capture the live activities including election, to know how and to what extent election has been influenced by social media through political contents. Social media emerged as a political tool and found precarious over a period of time. This chapter discussed the correlation between social media and election and how both are inseparable as well in spatial representations and interpretations.

Keywords  Social media · Elections · Political mobilization · Political agenda

4.1 Introduction

Media plays an essential role in a democracy, informing the public about political issues and acting as a watchdog against misuse of power. Mainstream media does not provide such a platform that is more connected to the people, whereas social media have to facilitate an interactive way of communication. Social media is playing a substantial new role in Indian democracy; therefore, social media does not only refer to a democratic space, but the concern is more about how this space is being used for communication. It deflected the mainstream media and directly spoke to the voters. At the time of the election, the state engagement with social media seems to be more powerful and being strategized. Furthermore, out of all social networking sites, Facebook and Twitter are considered as an authentic space to share the knowledge; sometimes it enshrines turbulence that often happens in the virtual war. Social media is a tool that brings politics closer to people. This section begins with an overview of the rise of social media and how it controls through the political parties during the election meanwhile social media is also subjugating the manpower. This section is interested to map the political economy of social media to how social media politicized the issues, manipulated the real ideas and to inculcate their agendas into peoples’ minds. In fact, we never consider social media as an emancipator space rather it is more about to shape the propaganda.
4.2 Social Mediasphere and the Election in India

While no doubt, how social media emerged quickly and generated so much excitement among the people. In a survey 2017–2018, study revealed that around 50.66% used platforms in order to promote themselves while 49.34% never used the platform to promote rather they used platforms for mundane purposes unlike others (Graph 4.1). The stimulus about social media is gradually multiplied over a period of time. Brook (2012) defines social media as a comprehensive platform in which one can create and discuss the information. Furthermore, he points out the websites and social media sites, in which he identified that these websites have exclusive control over the content and it simply displays for consumption by its users. On that account, he delineates three characteristics of true social media sites: (i) the information being posted is not directed at anyone in particular, (ii) the information being posted can be edited and/or discussed by all who see it and (iii) the information posted includes an easy way to share it with people not included within the scope of the original post.

Here, the basic concern is how to understand the reach of social media and their accessibility and how this social media space provides the interactions in terms of a political goal. As Brook defines characteristic of the ‘true’ social media sites is basically based on the partial way of dissemination of information. Moreover, in the author’s view, social media have grown quickly because of the two dynamics: first, social media allows us to send to a core network of random people. Second, the dynamic that seems to full public excitement about social media is the very powerful concept of ‘virality’ (Brook 2012). Brook provides a general overview of the social

![Graph 4.1](image-url)
media websites and how one can be used as their own way. The contextualizing of social media is based on the immense network through which the accessibility of information is enhanced.

As Brook’s account the ‘networks’ substantiate his vision of social media. Manuel Castells (2009) ‘communication power’ exemplified the power of networks and how these networks inculcate the ideas in people’s mind. Manuel Castells (2009) defines ‘networks is a set of interconnecting nodes’. The functionality and meaning of particular networks depend on the connectivity of the specific programme and on its interconnection with other nodes in the network. In the digital age, networks play a beneficial role to connect the people with altogether. Networks incorporate the ideas and fabricate around the set of goals simultaneously it operates unity of purpose and flexibility of accomplishment depending on their operating environment. Moreover, Manuel Castells (2009) also elaborated network as a form of communicative structure, communicative networks are the patterns of contact that are created by the flow of messages among communicators through time and space.

Manuel Castells (2009) specifies three features of the network which are important for the new technological environment: flexibility, scalability and survivability. Flexibility is the ability to reconstruct according to changing the environment and possess their goals while changing their components, sometimes elude blocking points of communication channels to find new connections. Scalability is the ability to expand or shrink in size with little disruption. Survivability is the ability of networks, because they have no single centre and can operate in an extensive range of arrangements, to withstand attacks to their nodes and codes because the codes of the network are embedded in multiple nodes that can reproduce the directive and find new ways to perform.

Manuel Castells (2009) firmly points out that digital networks create global networks. The network society itself is a global society. However, this does not mean that everyone is included in these networks but the processes that take place in the global networks fiercely affect people. Thereby, the digital media depends on the networks; the global networks control and shape the human activities in every corner of the planet. After globalization the structure and mode of communication have been changed. It is more about the market-oriented and power of the network also being changed. Furthermore, Manuel Castells addressed four distinct powers in the global network society, which is as (i) networking power, (ii) network power, (iii) networked power, (iv) network making power.

Each form of power specifies different processes that Manuel Castells (2009) elaborate. We have to understand how this power operates in the digital space and power connected to networks, one that has a network, who has power itself. Networking power refers to the power of the actors and organizations included in the networks that constitute the core of the global network society over human collectives or individuals who are not included in these global networks. This form of power operates by exclusion/inclusion. However, network power theorizes globalization from the perspective of network analysis by Guzzini (2009). In this sense, globalization involves social coordination between multiple networked actors. Power of networks set for a specific goal to control the particular group and the domination of networks depends over
the interest. But the question is who has power in the dominant networks? How does networked power operate? The elites who have the power to control the networks? And the most crucial forms of power follow the logic of network-making power, there are two basic mechanisms to exercise control over others: (i) the ability to constitute network(s) and to program/reprogram the network(s) in terms of the goals assigned to the network and (ii) the ability to connect and ensure the cooperation of different networks by sharing common goals and combining resources, while fending off competition from other networks by setting up strategic cooperation (Castells 2009: 45).

How to understand the significance of new media networks? There are four core characteristics of these networks: first, the new media networks enormously rely on social relations that flourish in society. The individual can see new networks as an extension of an individual’s social self into the virtual realm that promises greater connectivity, accessibility and maintenance of interactional communities created. Second, new media networks give genesis to speak for debate and discussion and counter the systemic constraint that is intrinsic to the content by the individual. Third, plurality, which is the third characteristic of these networks, arises from the coexistence of multiple outlooks existing within a shared framework of the information and communication technologies. Fourth, the shift from ‘the mass’ to ‘the self’ has been revived by the expansion of new media networks.

Manuel Castells (2009) analysed the structure of power and network moreover, how this network configurations with the power which depends on the program goal. When the network of power control through social actors, therefore, it resist the power of the development of counter-power emerged. The resistance of power also takes place through and by networks. Because of counter power, the domination of power modifies their actions, according to their specific structural goals. Thus, the dualism of social media itself is a complex phenomenon that is more dominated and less liberal. We cannot find the centre of domination; there is no sequence but a flow of network that comes with both forms of domination as well as resistance.

4.3 Social Mediasphere: New Political Tool

It has been a decade when social media seemed like a powerful and opinionated medium of communication in the developed countries and developing countries. In a survey 2017–2018, around 74.67% agreed upon that social media is a potential political tool which can be used during election while 25.33% completely differed with that social media as a political tool or politician used social media for said purposes (Graph 4.2). The world had witnessed at the time of the US presidential election in the year 2000 when social media covered all the aspects related to social media that was the real time when the Internet provided a new connectivity and interactivity tool of the direct conversation between the candidate and voters. After the presidential election of the United States, the Indian political parties too followed
At that time, smartphones created a buzz and electronic messages were sent on the Internet. It would be interesting to know to what extent social media platforms have increased the participation and new pattern of communication that is more relevant nowadays. Social media is certainly playing a crucial role in opinion formation and mobilization of masses.

At the time of the election, social media creates some sort of fake news and generates misinformation that affects people at another level (Sinha 2019). Misinformation played an important role in the whole process of election. Regarding this issue of misinformation and fake news, Election Commission of India offered to take voluntary measures to check the occurrence of fake news and other objectionable content on their platform. The fake news is the biggest threat in the process of election. In India, the focus is WhatsApp and growing evidence of messaging platforms being used to spread misinformation so that digital literacy is still on the rise as is awareness around how to differentiate between what is true versus what is false. Social media continue to struggle with these issues of misconception and misinformation of fake news. The growth of virtual space increases day by day at a very high rate. The role of social media during Parliamentary election 2019 can be accessed in India; the political parties who have the greatest social media supporters have the privilege to become closer to the winning path.

However, according to a survey 2017–2018, around 23.14% found more religious contents followed by others, about 6.11% found caste-related contents are overwhelmingly over others, nearby 12.66% found class (in economic sense) contents are found more than else types of messages, around 23.58% encountered more contents on regionalism than else and, nearly 34.50% contradicts from above contents and
found some others (Graph 4.3). The above-mentioned issues are often found in political tone or in other words we can read such issues purely as political to propagate political agenda where issues like religion, regionalism, caste and class would have been criticized for myriad reasons.

To substantiate the power of social media, we can take an example of the Arab Spring, a comprehensive wave of demonstration and protests in the Middle East and North Africa between 2010 and 2012. By early January, urgent appeal for help and amateur mobile phone videos were spreading across North Africa. The impact of protest covered many countries such as Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Sudan. Since 2000, technology proliferation has been particularly rapid in the Arab world. Social media conceptualize the whole process of movements with their active supporters. It was a massive movement all over the country in which the social media played their extensive role towards the same. The movement has several features, and basically, it was related to a political change and democratization of the countries. More anything, social media allowed communities to realize shared injustice and transportable strategies for mobilizing against dictators. Mainly in each country, people used digital media to update the reports of the events and to build a political response to a local experience with injustice.

The effective use of social media during Arab Spring was the impact on organizational behaviour and there was a different prediction about the demonstration at a very high level. Social media forms public opinion, develops the common consensus and provides new structures for collective action. Social media space recognized as a public sphere where autonomous and anonymous public debate can take place simultaneously; it is considered a global world in which we can talk or share anything at the
corner of the planet. The fundamental phenomenon of social media is to give a space that people are able to communicate wisely and put their argument strongly but at the same time larger political parties and other powerful organizations that deal with social media to propagate the ideas, to influence the behaviour and to manipulate the decisions of people for that matter. It is really partial to be less democratic because social media should be seen as an equal power for the same but unfortunately this is not happening as such. The social media has a massive impact at the time of election through which people make up their mind to which they want to give a vote. Each and every story of social media has an impact and effectiveness however, whatever the outcome, the central role of social media cannot be wished away. The issues mediated through social media are more about those issues that are less concerned at mainstream media.

4.4 Political Communication and Social Mediasphere in India

Political communication is a branch to study modern communication studies. Most of the earliest studies of modern communication were created by analyses of propaganda/persuasive messages, mass media effects on voting, and public opinion of social and political issues. There are many authoritative scholars in the development of modern communication that worked in the domain of political communication study, for instance, political scientist Harold Lasswell, sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld and psychologists Carl Hovland. The origin of political communication can be traced at a very long back it is about centuries (e.g. Plato’s works in ancient Greece), as a cross-disciplinary area of study, it started in 1950 (Nimmo and Sanders 1981). At this period, the label political communication first appeared to describe an intervening procedure by which political institutions and citizens interact with each other and ‘political influences are mobilized and transmitted’ (Nimmo and Sanders 1981). Furthermore, the author talks about research traditions in multiple disciplines that contribute to the emergence of political communication. The first tradition is the rhetorical analysis of public political discourse. It contains the longest history of political communication study. There are some of the classic writers such as Aristotle, Blair, Campbell and Whately, who work on it. This perspective is qualitative in nature and the sources of a political message and the message have been historically and critically examined.

1Harold Laswell was one of earliest communication model profounder. His popular communication model was based on, ‘who said it, what was said, in what channel it was said, to whom it was said, and with what effect it was said’.

2He was first who laid foundation of modern research institute; he was twentieth century empirical sociologist who initiated empiricism in study of communication.

3Carl Hovland was associated with US army and assisted them to understand the war psychology and later he developed social judgement theory based on communication and attitude change.
The second tradition was political propaganda study throughout the period of post-world war to post-world war second. There are such scholars like Harold Laswell and Leonard William Dood\footnote{Leonard William Dood (1909–2000) was an emeritus professor of psychology and worked extensively on propaganda. He believed that communication and behavioural science—motivation, attitudes, personality and values are used as tools to understand the propaganda.} that deal on how different governments used propaganda/persuasive messages to influence public opinion. Laswell’s (1927) firmly described quantitative analysis\footnote{Content analysis of messages provided by the government demonstrated the power of mass political communication in created public opinion. His question, ‘who says what in which channel to whom with what effects?’ it shows the communication process and identifies a framework for later communication studies. The third tradition is related to voting studies in the United States. In this tradition, scholars combined a diversification of quantitative and qualitative research methods. It includes survey research with both in-depth interviewing and observation, content analysis with biographies and panel studies with focused interviews.} (Rogers and Freiberg 1994). Lazarsfeld (legacy edition, 2020) and his colleagues had done classic work in the sphere of voting study. The fourth tradition is based on mass media effects. This tradition basically started by Lazarsfeld. He questioned the burly model of mass communication and emerged different concepts such as opinion leadership and the two-step flow of communication (Rogers and Freiberg 1994). Lippmann’s (1922) ‘Public Opinion’ was the first illustration of the agenda-setting function of mass media. In that account, the political effects of mass media, as stated by this tradition, are the outcome of the media agenda-setting process in which media ‘may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling [people] what to think about’ (Cohen 1963: 13). These traditions illustrate the emerging concept of political communication. Political communication is merely done through the media; the media actors sensationalize the issues and manipulate the entire concepts. Sometimes, it is being difficult to trust them and people lose their faith towards the media. Politicizing the issue is something that challenges transparency and accountability. Before the Lok Sabha election, twitter and other digital platforms started the participation and circulation of different ideas of the campaign. Twitter has different hashtags which are available in twelve Indian languages. There are several functions in which political communication exists: (i) the politicians develop their control and create their point of view at any cost even still when journalists stop them (ii) social media given privilege for the politicians to post a tentative political agenda. Meanwhile, nowadays, it has become a common practice for journalists to get some statements from Facebook pages of politicians. (iii) Through social media, political parties or politicians can mobilize the public and provide such a platform to them so that they can participate in the discourse on some issues which are supported by the public. (iv) Consuming the social media as an effective tool, politicians and the political parties have the same propaganda to gain access for their own sake of benefits, apparently with more rationality with their supporters, beyond the institutional and bureaucratic rigors. Among the vital political parties in India, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) has the biggest presence in comparison with other political parties on social media. Both national and regional political parties had used vernacular media.
to expand their political horizon. The vernacular public sphere plays a crucial role in political communication and mobilization (Saeed 2013; Neyazi 2018).

Political communication and mobilization works informally and rhetorically when words are jumbled in such fashion that it sends multiple meanings. Tweets are often considered an idea of an individual who works in mundane capacities either to respond to the public or private for different reasons. Tweets and retweets are two different entities and two separate ideas that work in two different ways. Tweets invite formal or informal acknowledgement by followers. Similarly, PM Modi made the tweet ‘Phir Ek Baar...Cameron Sarkar’ (once again...Cameron Government) on 8 May 2015 after David Cameron won the Parliamentary election. The tweet was read in a different light or politically contested interpretations when PM Modi hinted that the time will repeat in India as well and asked the followers to be ready or to do so in order to secure such a repetition for his own government. The tweet was of course rhetoric in nature ‘once again’ which invites many spatial representations (Moinuddin 2019).

The BJP began using social media even before the 2009 general election, which they lost. Nowadays, the party has great control on social media; many senior leaders such as Narendra Modi, Rajnath Singh, Subramanian Swamy and many others are on Twitter. The most important aspect of social media is to create the phenomenon of fake news and misinformation during the time of elections and to see tussle between the politicians and parties is another to look at the digital space. The digital media flourished in a different way until the ‘spatial turn’ of communication being very productive. Social media develop fake identities and the agenda setting plays a significant role to establish these fake identities. For the 2019 Parliament election, the proper use of social media has started in 2018 and parties have been using platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp to woo voters including youths particularly those who would have cast their vote for the first time. Thereby, through social networking sites politicians shared their opinion, tweet to hashtags and they can make themselves visible through social media. Thus, today’s culture has contained different phenomena, new technological advancement is the primary component to develop the new channel, which information and ideas can quickly flow, but this space being exploited by politicians for determining competitive advantages. The political parties dominated the young and challenged voice and also manipulated the real ideologies. The participation for the real voice is less relevant, there are differences related to the religious ideologies. The question arises, do social media give equal space thereby everyone gets equal benefits to take the advantage of that medium? Equal participation is another concern of the recent paradigm of social media. Therefore, all political parties have moved to digital platforms and are trying hard to connect supporters, sympathizers, ideologues and funders. Social media of course changed the mode of political communication and mobilization if compared to the past.
4.5 Political Participation and Digital Public Sphere

The concept of public sphere comes from the German philosopher and sociologist Jurgen Habermas (1974) as ‘The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere’. Habermas (1974) raises the question that is a crucial one for democratic theory. He asks, for a rational-critical debate about political issues controlled by private persons willing to let arguments and not statuses dictate decisions? Habermas’s social theory is often interpreted as moving over the years from a Hegelian-Marxist inclination to a sort of Kantian orientation. Kant preoccupies the main place in structural transformation as the theorist who proposes the fullest enunciation of the ideal of the bourgeois public sphere. Habermas’s task in structural transformation is to define a critique of this category of bourgeois society, to develop some specific explanation: (i) its internal tensions and the factors that led to its transformations and partial degeneration and (ii) the element of truth and emancipator potential that it contained despite its ideological misrepresentation and contradictions. The transformation of Habermas public sphere now turns into the largest on its continual expansion to include more and more participants (as well as on the development of large-scale social organizations as mediators of individual participation). In most traditional complex societies, ‘public’ issues are discussed and decided on only by the elite. Therefore, the rise of consumerist mass democracy is another that challenges the public sphere. Mass media focused on consumerist advertising interests and public relations. Public opinion was reduced to a marketable commodity managed by public relation experts rather than formed through rational discussion under such conditions the political process itself was stage-managed to the benefit of commercial interests pressure groups. Basically, Habermas’s public sphere approach focused the elite people who control the public sphere for the sake of their own benefits. However, the advancement of technology changed the shape or structure of the public sphere. The structure of the earliest public sphere based on the print media, local discussions platform but the emergence of digital platforms changed the paradigm of the public sphere and the ‘New’ in sense of digital public sphere has been established. What I looked these social media as dual communication platforms somehow allows users to share openly their discussions in various formations. Or, in other words, we can say we are living in the age of platform democracy wherein social media is influencing democratic elements.

The advancement of technology changes the communication process and the new media communication process becomes more direct, fast and complex. The public sphere is important for gathering the public opinion and necessary to assess the functionality of participatory democratic government. But the question has been ‘does a political discussion on social media qualify social media as a feasible public sphere’? The answer is in two ways. First, the qualifiers of the public sphere have changed with regard to how social media could be a digital public sphere. Peter Dahlgren (2005), Maria Bakardjieva (2009) and Nick Couldry (2005) stated that new definitions of civic engagement and the public sphere should be used to assess political
discussion on social media. Moreover, social media creates a constructional platform for the public sphere, political discussion on social media is subject to forms of power that hinder what Habermas defined as public opinion. Habermas’s model of the public sphere is important to understand the composition of political discussion on social media. Sarah Brenne (2016) in ‘political discussion on social media and the public sphere’ defines three dimensions which conceptualize the public sphere in order to discuss online discussion. The first dimensions are structural features that focused on classic democratic rights such as the freedom of speech and equal access to the public sphere. The second dimension is the representational dimension that focused on an output of symbols–phrases, sign or images and their communication. The third dimension is the interactional dimension. Moreover, Habermas emphasizes two criteria that allowed for the rise of the public sphere in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in continental Europe. The first condition was the rise of the reading public. The bourgeoisie would meet in coffee houses to critically discuss literature. The second condition was the emergence of private spheres, majorly freedom of religion and land ownership.

The structure of the public sphere allows people to participate in the realm of political discussion. For instance, during Tunisian uprising and the ensuing Arab Spring around 90% of the population had access to social networking sites, or through their cell phones. Furthermore, women had the opportunity to engage in political discourse in countries where they had earlier been discouraged from engaging in public debate. With the parallel of political participation, social media confine public opinion at the same time. India is democratic country and everyone has the right to express his or her views. Social media fails as a public sphere in Habermas’s terms. Habermas examines the downfall of the public sphere as being connected to the mediatization of politics and the commercialization of the media. Social media considered as the commercial platform, there is no public debate or shared public opinion despite the fact that social media is only used for promoting the product or at the time of the election for promoting the election campaign. Furthermore, Habermas argued that the public sphere became a utility for managing consensus and less a space for public information and for debate. How can we consider social media as the tool for managing consensus? In this context Michel Foucault (1982) defines through continuous surveillance and examination, social media becomes the tool for managing consensus. Furthermore, Foucault’s panopticon thesis argues that surveillance is a mechanism of power. Surveillance operates on social networking sites through desired visibility and a threat of invisibility. Therefore, social in terms of political participation play a dual role and control the digital public sphere by their powerful networks. The mediated public sphere seems to become the rival of public opinion; the constructed public opinion emerged which don’t have any logic and reason. Meanwhile, the elite people who own social media in order to suppress the true opinion of the people and make them realize that they are on the wrong side. Social media is not a free space that deals with real issues rather than a powerful network that controls it. For example, ‘the hashtag politics’ (Moinuddin 2019) emerged as result of digital public sphere.
The idea behind hashtags is to represent a similar story at particular links wherein anybody can search for the specific story easily, if they wish to read it. Unlike other symbols, it was an augmented journey of hashtag in the digital strata when the symbols (#) (Hashtag) became popular since Chris Messina used it for the first time in 2007. The symbols of hashtag (#) became unlike other symbols used for different purposes in both natural and social sciences as well. Social media has shaped the hashtag as a ubiquitous part of digital culture, which started from Twitter and expanded to other social networking sites. It was designed for categorizing posts and the hashtag can now be a tool for a supplementary words and comments (e.g. #MakeInIndia). The word tag means—‘a word or phrase used for description or identification’. The symbols became popular on Twitter and other microblogging sites to represent the similar nature of the story. Stephen Jeffares (2014) argues what policymakers do creates branded policy through Twitter and how Twitter makes the information mediatized in a short while in the shape of hashtag politics (Moinuddin 2019).

Digital public sphere mobilizes political participation in mundane ways when users taking part as ‘clicktivism’ or ‘slacktivism’ in order to show his/her solidarity on some issues what he/she is very much profound for political or else rational. For example, Bihar Assembly election 2020 is progressing where digital platform or online media would play a decisive role when digital election rallies, digital election poster, target voters (through AI profiling by Facebook or other involved agencies), digital election meetings are conducted through digital equipment in order to reach out to voters. Such process and procedures started couple of months back when BJP organized a digital rally to reach out their sympathizers. This election will create a new landscape for future elections not only in terms of campaign, rallies, meetings rather to propagate false information, misinformation, inauthentic information and handling to all such will be a herculean task for Election Commission of India in the country.

4.6 Social Mediasphere: Formation of Public Opinion

Walter Lippmann (1922) talks about the functioning of democratic government, especially of the irrational and often self-serving social perceptions that influence individual behaviour and prevent optimal societal cohesion where public opinion is manipulated according to the requirement of benefits of the elite class. Lippmann proposes that the political elites are members of the class of people, professional specialized class collect and analyse data, and turn the conclusion as per the requirement. Elite classes are manufacturing the consent and to redefine the whole truth through power. Media manufacture the consent where they used materials or evidence in dark light in order to prove what is right despite being conventional understanding or in other words, to think as per se media on such issue what media said is right (Herman and Chomsky 1988). The main problem of ‘public opinion’ is to demonstrate the problem facing democracy in its original form ‘because the pictures inside
people’s heads do not automatically communicate with the world outside and to propose a retrieve based on classify intelligence and “representation of the unseen facts of public affairs” (Lippmann 1922: 19). Walter Lippmann defines how public opinion consists of pictures inside men’s heads and why the pictures are so often misled in their dealings with the world. He explains how stereotypes affect public opinions and how these individual opinions are crystallized into what is called public opinion (Lippmann 1922).

The nature of public opinion transforms the social relation and controls the decision-making power. The public sphere moreover has to take into account the growing intermission of the state, which tends both to the condition, it subtract from the total control of civil society. The growing audience of speakers is joined not only by the audience of readers/viewers but also more generally by the consumer public. The mediatization of public opinion is unlike a mechanism that played a critical role in the formation of public opinion in the society. The public opinion is not in the hands of the public, rather is in the hand of the media through which people get influence and control by politicians or elite class. The influence highly depends on social media as per their structure it shaped the opinion. For example, the hashtag that controls the issue and shapes the news contents of that spatiality or time being, whatever: the news is in control of the elite through the media.

4.7 Hidden Agenda: Election Campaign in India

Social media can be considered as an aggressive platform in which diverse groups fight each other and their opinion might be called influential thoughts. In the current scenario, everyone wants to become part of social media, since everything is concerned in the digital era. For example, one of the latest survey reports of a social marketing agency, ‘We are social’ expressed that India has 242 millions of people using social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and other mobile apps like Hike, WhatsApp, etc. This has become an instrumental and best possible way for marketers to reach every individual in the easiest manner. But the question arises ‘How is the power used by the politicians for the campaigns through social media’? The first thing which is important for them to get connected with people through social media thereby, the use of social media during the political campaign has become a crucial part for every political party and candidate. Social media has a significant impact on the elections relating to the number of people involved and the speed of communication. For instance, in 2008, Barack Obama, the US president used the social media successfully for his campaign since he understood the social media and leveraged it and it was the initial campaign where social media was pervasive.

Politicians try to create interesting posts and make the followers engaged which is similar to the strategy followed by a brand or media company. While the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) led by Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, was the first party to use social media to campaign for its own programme and ideology in the 2014 elections, in the years since most other parties, including the Indian National Congress
(INC), the Samajwadi Party and many others have established IT cells to interact and promote campaign for their programme and vision for the 2019 elections. In a survey 2017–2018, around 19.65% found that political parties used manifesto to reach the voters, what they promised to do, if voted to power, nearby 24.02% used slogans to attract viewers attention which found a effective medium to catch viewers gaze, nearly 42.36% used the photos of their respective leadership on social media, and around 13.97% found flags are used by political parties across social media (Graph 4.4). In general, politicians used photographs of their leaders to promote political ideology. A study of the patterns of political enunciation across social media leaves the distinct impression of a rupture and fragmented public sphere. Each of the large electoral alliances led by the BJP and the INC, severally, seems to be addressing completely different public spheres through social media. Social media campaigns are consequently likely to have an important impact on the 2019 elections whereas most commentators are less than assured about their impact and fear social polarization leading to significant crooked in the electoral outcome. The supporter of the two sides along with trolling each other is fighting out brutal battles on social media. Social media is considered as an effective tool for election campaigning in India and all over the world. According to a survey 2017–2018, around 70.74% convinced at large that social media is inevitable during election time while 29.26% did not convinced that social media can influence the election anymore (Graph 4.5). Around two-thirds agreed upon that social media could influence the election or set the agenda for desired electoral results.

McCombs and Shaw (1972) illustrate the agenda-setting theory on the American presidential election. In the 1968 ‘Chapel Hill study’, McCombs and Shaw indicate
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Graph 4.5 Relevance of social media during election time (Prepared after survey, 2017–2018)

A strong correlation coefficient between 100 residents of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, belief was the most crucial election issue and what the local and national news media reported was the most important issue. By comparing the salience of issues in news content with the public’s viewpoint of the most important election issues, McCombs and Shaw (1972) were able to elaborate the degree to which the media shape public opinion. On that account, agenda setting can be detected in the first chapter of Walter Lippmann’s (1922) ‘public opinion’. Lippmann argues that mass media are the one who mediated between events in the world and the images in the minds of the public. In the agenda-setting theory, McCombs and Shaw (1972) define three types of agenda-setting: (i) public agenda setting, in which the public’s agenda is the dependent variable (The traditional hypothesis), (ii) Media agenda-setting, in which the media’s agenda is treated as the dependent variable (Agenda Building), (iii) policy agenda setting, in which elite policymaker’s agendas are treated as dependent variable (political agenda-setting).

On the other side ‘Framing’ is another way to influence the people about a particular issue. The notion of framing has obtained impulse in the communication source presenting and defining an issue. Entman (1993) noted that frames have several locations, including the communicator, the text, the receiver and the culture. These components are integral to a process of framing that consists of distinct stages: frame-building, frame-setting and individual and societal level consequences of framing (D’Angelo 2002; Scheufele 2000; de Vreese 2005).

Framing is an important aspect to frame the particular issue, on that account; the consequences of framing can be conceived on the individual and the societal level. The election campaign frame according to the agenda setting, in the political
campaign there is a hidden agenda that influences through the power of words and design. Consequently, Gitlin (1980: 7) marked frames as ‘persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation of selection, emphasis and exclusive by which symbol handlers routinely organize discourse’. In short, a frame is an emphasis on the salience of different features of a topic. While agenda-setting theory allocates with the salience of issues, framing is anxious with the presentation of issues. To substantiate the argument, we take an example of ‘TikTok’ considered as an online platform; it made Modi to become popular among young voters. Sharing App TikTok played a major role in creating a ‘Modi Wave’ among them. In a survey 2017–2018, around 27.95% agreed that politicians used social platforms for personal popularity or personal benefits while nearby 72.05% found that politicians used the platform to express his/her political ideologues, whatsoever (Graph 4.6).

The strategy made by Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) to hire young ‘karyakartas’ (field workers) to expand Modi’s digital presence across the platform including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok. According to a survey 2017–2018, around 62.45% agreed that national parties are using more social media platforms than regional political parties while 37.55% believed that regional political parties are using more social media than national parties (Graph 4.7).

The App affects young voters to choose to the platform to record themselves, shouting the famous ‘Mitro’ (Friends) and ‘Is Baar fir Modi Sarkar’ (let’s again Modi govt.) videos, hash-tagged them with social media drift and shared those. This is considered as the hidden agenda of the political parties that mainly arises at the time of the election. Not just a person but families recorded themselves emulate Modi’s ‘Aap Aashvast rahiye, aapka ye chowkidar, poori Tarah chowkanna hai’ (You do not need to worried I am very tentative and punctual as gatekeeper) dialogue.
along with videos on the ‘Mein Bhi chowkidar hu’ (I am too gatekeeper) songs. The political content is basically somewhere most influential that creates tussles between the two parties and their supporters. Furthermore, several TikTok videos were shared in other regional languages including Bhojpuri, Rajasthani, Gujarati and Bengali. Every political party plays their card to use social media for their own propaganda and supposed to misguide the people out there. In spite of this, on the other side political advertisement plays a crucial role to propagate the people’s mind. The campaign of the BJP during Parliament election 2014 ‘Ab ki Baar Modi Sarkar’ (once again Modi govt.) used a wise combination of animated films and films with actors can be seen in both affecting and inspirational manner. Indian National Congress (INC) also came with an interesting advertisement during 2014 general election through its slogan ‘Har Haath Shakti campaign’ (each hand is powerful). The political advertisement has frequently fastened with an acute and intense need to influence mindsets. Moreover, political advertising is majorly about to enhance a ‘human-brand’ or enhance a politician, as a brand. According to a survey 2017–2018, nearly 22.71% endorsed that contents across the platforms are quite informative in nature, nearby 14.85% said contents are often portrayed in cultural affiliations, about 45.85% said most of the contents are political in nature, and approximately 16.59% agreed that the contents are socio-economic in nature (Graph 4.8). During the survey, it was common and around half of respondents agreed that contents found on social media are political in nature followed by informational, socio-economic and cultural contents.

Meanwhile, all these years, political advertising was done in a very different way, the corporate one, the recently Prime Minister Narendra Modi changed this attitude once and for all. He made himself experience with the different types of media platforms and involved with all of them in their appropriate languages creatively. The main agenda of campaigns was made to divert and divide people from the major
issues and to create such kind of images among its viewers that affected people at a larger level.

Social media is the wider platform in recent times that circulates the information at the global level and unites the people in a common space. This virtuality of social media somehow spread the fake connection. The campaigns of Indian political parties through social media propagate the ideas and control the minds of the people. The rationale behind the campaign was to divert them from the serious issues and involve them in an absurd religious perspective. In present scenario, the government agenda was to revolve them around Hindu-Muslim politics, the situation has been worst at some extent. People did not understand how much the government had suppressed the people in the name of the development. The situation reached that level, people even did not believe the voting system was right because the corruption that happened in nowadays is simple and ridiculous. That proves the government can only propagate, manipulate and suppress to showcase the card of development. During the global pandemic of COVID-19 when the whole country was struggling with COVID-19, BJP was busy in Bihar Assembly election preparation, which was scheduled in the latter half of 2020. BJP managed to organize the first digital rally to reach voters in Bihar. The COVID-19 pandemic opens a digital door to politicians to address the masses or we can say it is a shift in the election campaign when both voters and leaders are sharing political promises through the Internet and platforms.

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6It was first election rally that was held on digital platform when BJP managed more than 72,000 LED screen to address the voters in the state. For details, https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/amit-shah-virtual-rally-live-amit-shah-speech-today-updates-bihar-assembly-election-2020-latest-news-rjd-congress-jdu-nitish-kumar-tejashwi-yadav/1983808/. Accessed 24 June 2020.
4.8 Digital Change in Election in India

Earlier, media during the Indira Gandhi rule appeared as the main villain and was promptly shot. The control of the government over the television and radio being there, India Gandhi transformed herself into the most powerful public personality and charismatic leader by the time of 1971 elections. Media then popularly called the press was the vehicle that carried all information to people and the government, which felt threatened by mounting criticism. Meanwhile, in the last four years, there has been a shift in social content and strategy of the BJP and the major opposition party, centre-left Indian National Congress (INC). Thereby, during 2014 the BJP was banked on development agenda but meanwhile by approaching 2019 BJP shifted to polarization and that became contentious for both the BJP and the INC.

In earlier times, the media were under full government authority; there were mainly government channels, and private or independent channels were not there. The government used three principal methods to control the media during an emergency. Those were not the days of social media Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc. In a survey 2017–2018, around 21.83% often used to like political news, nearby 16.59% shared the political news, about 3.93% preferred to tag the political news, nearly 12.66% used to sanctify such news, about 25.76% preferred to comment on the news, if they agreed upon the contents, and approximately 19.21% just scrolled off the news without any responses (Graph 4.9). Almost two-thirds scroll the political news and react accordingly. The response of each one is quite different upon the same political news. Media depended on their own communicator or the news agencies for information. Moreover, social media is supposed to disseminate the

![Graph 4.9](image)  How you responds which you liked on social media (Prepared after survey, 2017–2018)
election campaign and circulate the information around the world. Indian politics has assumed a wider change over the period of time. In the 2014 general elections, it was presumed that social media became the battleground of various political campaigns and the enormous flow of different political opinions. The Indian public sphere is expanding not just by conventional media—TV, print, online and radio rather seeking information, pushing disinformation and immediate indulgence. The expansion of Internet networks enhances the business of social media in small towns as well. The extensive emergence of multiple media platforms including social media addresses the role of the media in politics and government and the relationship between the two. In the earlier history of Narendra Modi as chief minister, especially with some elements of the English media following the 2002 riots, he developed a new strategy for media-government relationship. In a survey 2017–2018, nearly 69.43% agreed that elections are mediated wherein the role of media including social media is visible while 30.57% do not find any reason to believe that elections are mediated (Graph 4.10). The Prime Minister Narendra Modi used a media-centric strategy where his government wanted to shoot all issues through media or judiciary to reach their goals whatever. For example, the Supreme Court of India declared the final judgement in the Ayodhya dispute on 9 November 2019. The Supreme Court of India ordered the disputed land (2.77 acres) to be handed over to a trust (to be created by Government of India to build the Ram Janmabhoomi (revered as the birthplace of Hindu deity, Ram)) temple. The court also ordered the government to give an alternate 5 acres of land in another place to the Sunni Waqf Board for the purpose

Do you realize that now elections are mediated in India

Yes
No

30.57%

69.43%

Graph 4.10 Elections are mediated in India (Prepared after survey, 2017–2018)
of building a mosque. The case was an acute example of sabotaged judiciary when final pronouncement of the judgement does not comply with its own evidence.

In the five years of the Modi-I regime, the party and government utilized a simple formula: delegitimize existing media and operate your own channels of communication with the voter and citizen. Over the five years, more than any time in the past, media houses in India find the integrity of self-censorship. NDTV was exposed as the channel that had practiced internal censorship during the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) regime as well. There are so many allegations made on NDTV from politicians particularly right wings. Nowadays, Modi has great control over the media and information dissemination and they are doing as per their requirements. Since May 2014, when this government again came to power, the 404 error page on media websites is showing up rather more commonly than before. The de-legitimization of mainstream media has been attained by communicating directly with citizens and voters, by inclination on private sector media outlets in ways that conduct to increasing self-censorship and by giving interviews to only those journalists with whom the prime minister is congenial. However, BJP creates its own media, election time accelerates Modi’s image and a message has led to different experiments in 2014 and 2019. The 2019 Parliament campaign was powered by an unflagging media machine explained in this Time Magazine report on how WhatsApp has disseminated fake news ahead of the election. There was also a more unflinching experiment with NaMo TV launched on 31st March 2019, just a few days before the polling was scheduled. On YouTube channel, Modi’s rallies and speeches were telecast on 24 × 7. NaMo TV encourages Modi through every phase of polling. The instrumentality of media occurred means control of the media from the outside actor, political instrumentalization and commercial instrumentalization happened at the same time. After 1991 when globalization policies transformed the structure of media that caused a change in the nature of politics and thereafter a new style of political campaigning replaced the old model of political campaign that benefited both the politicians and social media to grow each other. All political organization adhere digital public sphere in order to promote them.

4.9 Political Mapping of Social Mediasphere in India

As the field of study, the political economy of communication has three main concerns: (i) examining the ownership of media organizations to determine how

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7The Supreme Court decision was binding to both the sides Hindu and Muslim to accept the decision, though the various remarks made by honourable court were fictitious and conflict to itself and let decision pronounced on Faith not on evidences. For details, https://www.sci.gov.in/pdf/JUD_2.pdf. Accessed 20 June 2020.

8It can read as Narendra Modi (NaMo).

9Ideas that played as pivot in order to execute some actions.

10Business does matter, nothing to worry about ethics or moral values.
much and what kind of autonomy (freedom) it affords, (ii) examining how advertising and commercial values influence, determine or shape media content and (iii) critiques the state policies and the way media are owned, controlled and managed the capacity of the media to serve the democratic imperatives and relevant and reliable information. Metaxas and Mustafarji (2012) in ‘social media and the election’ examined the spamming\footnote{Spamming is used for messaging systems to send unprompted message especially advertising as well as sending messages repeatedly on the same site.} and through illustrations tried to understand how social media predicted the election. The spamming creates the chain through which messages circulate, and data from social media are fundamentally different from data from the natural circumstance. People will change their behaviour the next time around spammers and activists would have taken advantage, for instance—‘Twitter Bomb’.\footnote{Twitter Bomb refers posting various tweets with the same hashtags and other similar content, involve @messages from multiple accounts with the objective of advertising a certain meme, basically by people’s tweet feeds with the same message and making it a ‘trending topic’ on twitter.}

The spammer has also created some sort of connection; therefore, the people connect and political business gets higher. In the earliest time, in Germany, Nazi party used the hegemonic power to implement various policies and to gain people’s consent including from jurisdiction to the political economy of media, it is not a new aspect, the influence remains the same but the structure is changed. The political economy may change through the different phenomenon that has been used through the ruling government and the various political parties. The advent of social media raises the impact of political economy that changed the entire concept of power.

On that account, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India has made several laws pertaining to govern the social media and to reduce the gap between government and people. Various private companies are working with the government to expand the business of social media, thus, Reliance-Jio launched 4G-telecom service for free for the first four months in September 2016. A report on Economic Times in 2018 revealed how Reliance-Jio had made 100 million subscribers in the first six months since it’s launched. The 4G have created a lot of enthusiasm in the market and politics. In fact, the technology has paved the path to fill the propaganda and collateral business tie up between the government and Reliance Telecom took further to take care of mutual interests.

The political campaign is another important side in which we have to discuss the political economy because the political economy is also affected by campaigning in a very different way. Since Modi assumed PM office he himself has taken the lead to use social media platforms as much as and subsequently emerged as a ‘Brand’ as nothing exceptional rather an extension of such a project when politicians are likely to treat as a celebrity so that people get influence over them. In the past, the argument on political marketing was often considered as sacred for political campaigning (Baines and Egan 2001; O’leary and Iredale 1976). The concept of introducing the marketing technique in the political campaigning remains a subject to others and to differentiate with profitability where politics has greater intent than the commercial or the other who notify marketing along ‘style’ relatively than ‘substance’. The ordinary anguish
of the political field into the access of marketing recommends that critics give higher credibility to ‘power of marketing’ than the marketer’s grants for themselves.

The pessimistic spectators are often considered as vital for marketing exposure that political consumers suffered a little less than a general consumer. Either from political or financial perspectives the higher authority has a wider knowledge than the voters (consumers). It is stated that in either of the conditions, consumers are expecting higher assurance in making an exact decision, and done by the marketing through providing adequate information (Baines and Egan 2001). Further illustrate that marketing is performing a crucial role in modern politics but the outcomes are inadequate. From the marketer’s perspective, the outcomes are anguishing as the aloft purchases (higher voting) are identical to the measure of success. (Baines and Egan 2001) state that unstableness of marketing in the context of political campaigning operated the Internet in political activity and networked digital connectivity. Langlois and Elmer (2013) stated that social media sites such as Twitter have become an important site for fast response in order to political events. In addition, voters and consumers both prone to ignore the media message, whether commercial or political, if they don’t feel it suitable (Vakratsas and Ambler 1999). Moreover, it is clear that there are similarities between marketing and political campaigning practice, and in the micro-level, there are certain unsuitable factors concerning particular audiences related to political and commercial.

It is clear that politics and marketing depend on each other; the political parties spent a big amount on the campaigning. The global networks take part in the sphere of marketing. The advertisement plays an important role to develop the excitement among the people. The political hegemony establishes through the political parties and it propagates according to their agenda. The political parties joined the social media to increase their voters and to enhance their strategies so that they gain public support. The advertisement creates marketing and it is the source to manipulate the people’s mind through the soft power or hegemonic power. The social media as a form of the virtual market is widening day by day at a very larger level in India.

4.10 Conclusion

Social media establishes as the wider platform in making a public opinion and disseminating the information at a very fast level. Social media reached the corner of the world; everyone gets access easily and shares their views all together or separately at the same time. Substantially, social media rises as a free platform; it becomes less free and less democratic at the same time. The whole concern now shifted from mainstream media to social media. The free public sphere converted into the dominated public sphere. The social media created some sort of network that binds the nodes with each other; this network is horizontal in nature. The media have always been an important aspect in the context of politics while the government often wants to control the media.
It is clear that social media as a platform for candid political discussion, thereby; social media is still a popular platform for organizing political movements and during COVID-19 pandemic digital election rally were reported from Bihar. Social media arises from political myths and discourse as what we experience is fiction in arts and theatre. The useless fight occurred or debates occurred on social media as some sort of propaganda to capture the collective attention. On the other side, in the past five years, the media landscape has also been changed. There are so many websites, bloggers and different media platforms developed. Many of these have benefitted from a new trend of corporate philanthropy that is funding independent media. The media and politics both are interdependent to each other, but now the entire mainstream media shifted to social media. The more often they use social media, the more often they use social media for political activities. The spatiality of social media furthered in new shapes and sizes and pushed the politicians and political parties to colonize the spatiality of social media, if they want to influence the election. The political ideology often talked about regionalism versus nationalism.

The upcoming chapter is about how signs and symbols shaped and reshaped the social media and how it works in the communication. The various dimensions of semiotics were discussed in the section.

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