

# Usage of Social Media in the 2014 Indian General Elections - A Review of *Modi* Factor and IT Czar's Digital Trail

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**Abstract** *For the first time in India's general elections of 2014, social media was used extensively by certain political parties and candidates. It was no different in Karnataka. Social media provided an alternative forum for parties and candidates to reach out voters. Social media has turned into additional vote base for political parties and candidates points out this study. The two national parties and one regional party made efforts to make use of the Internet based tools, though their efforts, interest and investments in terms of money were not equal. However, the social media tools used by them were more or less the same. The two national parties – the Indian National Congress (INC) commonly referred as the Congress party, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) – were way ahead of other national parties when it comes to using social media. Between the two, the BJP was more aggressive than its nearest rival the Congress on social media plank.*

**Key Words:** *Lok Sabha elections, Social Media, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google, Google+, Blog, Websites*

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2012, U.S. Presidential election was hailed as the social media election providing powerful platform for e-participation and 'microtargeting' of the voters truly democratizing the elections. During elections, Barack Obama had more than 20.4 million followers on Twitter, 29.1 million on Facebook, 2.3 million on You Tube and over 1.4 million on Instagram. Instagram is a popular photo-sharing application which was used as a media tool by Obama to post pictures of election campaigns and family to catch the attention of over 100 million Instagram users. Today there are more than 1.11 Billion users of Facebook in the world and their number is growing.

Unlike USA, in India it is too early to expect social media to influence elections in general and voting behaviour in particular. The political consequences of social network sites in India however were evident in the 2014 elections causing a paradigm shift in the national election campaigns. Indian general election of 2014 dubbed as the largest election in the world had whopping 814.5 million voters with 23.1 million or 2% of first time voters in the age group of 18-19 years. Interestingly, the total voter turnout bordered on 66.38% where around 8251 candidates contested for the 543 seats in the elections held in 9 phases covering 29 States and 7 Union Territories. Surprisingly right wing political party BJP and its allies NDA came to power with a thumping majority winning 336 seats. The ruling party Indian National Congress that dominated national political scene for over six decades was routed in the 2014 elections winning a meagre 8.1% (44) seats in a house of 543 seats.

India with its impressive growth with the IT exports naturally depended on the power of social media in challenging the conventional political communication channels with the aim of political empowerment and inclusion of young voters. To escape the gatekeeping by the media, politicians and political parties took shelter under social media. The new media has broken media stereotype and has become a medium for public discourse and has emerged as new power centre knocking down the mainstream media which wielded power for more than a century.

Social network sites are defined as 'web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system'(Boyd and Ellison, 2007). The definition that "Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) tries to establish that social media is more a new label for the existing web based technology and is merely touted as a new generation Internet tool. Observations like, 'the web is more a social creation than a technical one. It was designed for a social effect to help people work together' (Lee Tim Berners, 2008) sums up the power of integration of social participation and technology.

It is well said that politics would progress to diversity and multifaceted communication channels and content (Robert Dahl, 1982). From this perspective, it is opined that use of Facebook could widen the scope of democracy and bring in pluralism (Anderson, Medaglia, 2009).

The present study is about the use of social media by the political candidates from Karnataka State contesting elections in 2014 to the parliament – the high seat of power in India. There are 28 *Lok Sabha* (Lower house of the Parliament) seats in the state of Karnataka and the major political

parties - the Congress and BJP contested all the seats in 2014. The regional parties – the *Janata Dal* (Secular) fielded its candidates for 26 seats, while the *Aam Admi* Party (AAP) fielded 13 candidates. The real challenge for a candidate contesting any election is to reach out to maximum number of voters. Contestants try to get maximum foot prints and visibility. The digital forum is fairly a new platform added to the effective modes of communication. The study aims to understand the use of digital discourse in world's biggest election campaigns in India.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study which political party used social media tools to the maximum extent in the *Lok Sabha* elections of 2014.
2. To examine the type of social media tools used by prime ministerial candidate and a politician, Narendra Modi and a technocrat, Nandan Nilekani.
3. To study whether social media served as an alternative platform for political parties and candidates to reach out the target groups.

## METHODOLOGY

Many researchers have evinced interest in the Facebook phenomenon and the role of social media in elections and e-participation to measure the potential of interactive media vis-a-vis conventional approaches to elections. The methodology poses a challenge in such studies as research tools and techniques are new bordering on experimentation.

Study of user behaviour of social network requires different methods of study. Conventional research methods are not appropriate to study new media. In the age of OSN – Online Social Network users can customize their pages and control content facilitating sharing private life and professional life in public platform and participate in public discourse on varied issues. As a result the medium of social networks have become distinct and unique posing a challenge for researchers prompting one to devise appropriate methods to study the new media. The rapid expansion of Internet technology has created platform for its use in political activities like elections which require high degree of participation of the electorate. So, social media have enabled large scale participation of the people in heavy internet penetrated countries where social networking services are serving the political cause. A review of methodologies adopted by the researchers throws new insight into the complex nature of media under study.

In order to study one of the popular social networks, Facebook, few researchers developed methodology consisting of a multi-threaded crawling which can track and store individual Facebook user profile pages in a file system (C. Tang et al.). They used this method to recognize the gender based identity and behavior pattern among Facebook users. In the study by Tang and others, Facebook public profile pages for 1.67 million users in New York City were traced through crawling. Based on the users a comprehensive name list and a technique was developed for inferring gender of the users and the researchers achieved accuracy in their study with this technique thus illustrating the ingenuity of the researchers. Since methods are being improvised with every study, the field is wide open for large scale experimentation as the last word has not yet been said about the methodology to study new media.

In one of the studies on visual identity in Facebook that focussed on studying profile photographs of Facebook users to correlate with their self presentation, a combination of digital, sensory and visual research methods have been used (Paula Uimonen 2013). Most of the studies are using online survey method with email to access questionnaire as a tool for data collection. E-questionnaire is a popular, credible and tested empirical research tool that has helped researchers not only to test the potentialities of the tool but also to study the non linear pattern in access and consumption of new media content by the users. In a study on the use of social media in elections, the researchers (Anderson , Medaglia, 2009) have used the Facebook registered friends of the political candidates contesting as the universe for drawing a representative sample of the study. A questionnaire to collect data was used with the help of SurveyMonkey, the online survey software.

In a study on Facebook (Hilsen, Helvik 2010) researchers have selected purposive non-probability sample through snowball sampling (Thagaard 2003). A snowball sampling is found appropriate when there is no authentic list of population to draw the sample. It uses a technique wherein initially few subjects are deliberately chosen and they are in turn asked to recommend some of their friends or acquaintances that meet the desired needs of the study and elaborate the chain by recommending few more thereby gradually increasing the size of the sample. This is based on an analogy of how a snowball gathers more snow when rolled down the snow capped mountains and increases in size.

In a study on the role of information technology in motivating Facebook users, the researchers have used a sample of Facebook users using CheckFacebook.com to draw purposive sample (Tsai, Huang, Hsieh, 2011). This website though not hosted by Facebook tracks data generated from Facebook advertising tool. It helps researchers as well as marketing people to know the penetration of

Facebook in the world. This website could be resourceful for researchers to draw the sample pertaining to the study of Facebook.

The fact that it is possible to draw representative sample in Facebook has been established by researchers who have built a random sample out of student enrolment register in the university. Here selected students were sent a mail to participate in the online survey specifying the purpose of the study and those who provided email Ids and completed survey were rewarded with a lottery draw to win 10 gift vouchers of \$50 each. In some surveys respondents who happened to be students have earned extra credit in a course or an honorarium for participating in the survey (Yang, Chia-chen and Brown B. Bradford, 2012). Many studies have offered gifts to encourage more users to participate in the survey. Some surveys have been administered anonymously to reduce the degree of bias. This technique has paid rich dividends as students have responded and participated in the online surveys but it raises the question of ethics. Should researcher pay the respondents for participating in surveys? Online survey requires respondents who are users of online media. Some researchers used crowd-sourcing market like Amazon's Mechanical Turk to gain access to huge number of workers available. The website claims that Amazon Mechanical Turk is a 'marketplace for work that requires human intelligence'. Despite apprehension expressed about the quality of data that one may end up getting, this data source has been supported by some researchers who see more benefits like survey platform services that help researchers to get country based data and the speed of data collection. This data source has been appreciated for its consistency in all the published studies (Bohannon 2011; Goodman et al. 2012) and it has also been increasingly used in quantitative studies with focus on perception and behavioural studies (Mason and Suri 2012).

Many studies have adopted different methods to recruit respondents for the Facebook study as sampling is one of the challenges in online research. Most of the studies require purposive sample like active online social network users who are invariably recruited through advertisements or announcements in colleges and universities. The established technique is to post online announcements inviting volunteers on number of social groups. Interestingly, in a study on analysis of characterization of ego networks formed inside Facebook, the researchers have performed data acquisition campaign and the respondents were asked to use a Facebook Analyser (FBA), the Facebook application designed for this study with an embedded electronic survey (Arnaboldi et.al, 2011). In a study on the intervention of Facebook in community learning, researchers selected a sample of students already enrolled for a particular course and were encouraged to form a learning group in Facebook on a project work (Wong et.al 2011).

Many autonomous software tools have been devised by the researchers for mining data devising different sampling methodologies like breadth-first-search and the uniform sampling illustrating that there is opportunity for every researcher to build research methodologies determined by the variables

of the study. Websites hold huge voluminous amount of information which is difficult to quantify. More and more research is depending on web based media tools to understand the nature and process of communication. Conventional methods like content analysis need to be improvised and modified to study and integrate with network analysis to experiment, evaluate and analyze the content of web media. In the present study, the social media content of political parties and candidates were studied through network analysis. The reports published in newspapers and websites on the topics were also read to verify the difference between conventional and new media coverage. The IT cell members monitoring political social media sites and candidates were interviewed for data collection.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

As far as Indian electorate is concerned about 23 million people are in the age group of 18-19 years enrolled to vote out of the total electorate of 815 million. This also means that at the national level 10 per cent of the total eligible voters are the first-time voters. As per the Election Commission's data, the proportion of 18-19 year old registered voters in the state of Karnataka is 1.8 per cent. Interestingly, India has witnessed addition of young voters (in age the group of 18 to 25 years) in the 2014 elections. As per the Press Information Bureau (PIB) and Election Commission of India, in Karnataka, which has a population of 63.9 million, 46 million are the electorate with 23.5 million male and 22.6 million female voters. Half the total electorate of 46 million are bellow 40 years. Interestingly 25.14 per cent are in the age group of 18 -29 years. The new young voters' population in terms of real numbers have gone up by 1 million as compared to 2013 Assembly elections in Karnataka.

It is this emergence of new voters or to be precise youth force which gave courage for the promoters of social media tools as well as political parties and candidates to focus on maximising the usage of digital space. Regarding new media technology, it is said that there are more than 39 different kinds of social media tools (Jay Baer) that one can explore individually in public discourse. However, the study finds out that prime political parties – the Congress and the BJP – mainly confined themselves to Facebook, Twitter, and Google Hangouts. Interestingly, the *AamAdmi* Party, the one year old party, was active on Facebook and Twitter.

The major parties like Congress, BJP and AAP generated a lot of reading material and raised debates, expressed views, reacted swiftly to developments, made snide remarks, backtracked on their utterances in public and issued clarifications on social media. Interestingly, the JD (S), which has been reduced into a regional party from the status of a national party, is living up to its image of a rural party when it comes to using the technical innovations in communication. The party's leaders

and candidates were not active on social media though some of them had opened accounts on Facebook and Twitter. Interestingly, the party's website offers more information and insight into its policies compared to the Congress and the BJP. But the JD(s) party found to use less of social media in the 2014 general elections compared to the 2013 Assembly elections in Karnataka. No doubt the elections were keenly fought this time unlike in the past. The candidates were found doing all possible acrobats to reach and read the pulse of voters.

The Election Commission too engaged with civic agencies, citizens groups and NGOs besides colleges in its voter's awareness campaign. The website of Election Commission (EC) both at the national and state level were voter friendly by giving lot of basic information on the elections. It also hosted ward-wise voter list to enable voters to check whether their names were in the list. Probably, the vigorous campaign to make voters exercise their franchise by the EC as well as by political parties also led to increased voting percentage across the country. As per the EC information, the total voter turnout after the 9th and final phase of elections was 66.38 per cent as compared to 58.19 per cent in previous 2009 *Lok Sabha* elections. This is the highest turnout since the elections held in Independent India since 1952. The Press Information Bureau in association with the EC of Karnataka also made arrangements to Tweet results besides announcing results in real time on its web portal.

All the prime political parties made their presence on the Internet through their IT cells. In addition, some of its contestants had personal accounts on Twitter, Facebook, Blog and website. Their efforts were independent of their party's efforts. Compared to the previous *Lok Sabha* elections and Assembly elections, the 2014 LS elections saw the maximisation of the usage of social media tools. However, it is not possible at this stage to scientifically analyse the impact of the same on the voting pattern or the poll outcome.

The parties invested money on social media unmindful of the outcome. Though no party has spelled out as to how much it invested on publicity and communication, it is estimated that the prime party like the BJP invested in the range of 2 to 5 per cent of the total funds earmarked for the elections. The political parties drew confidence to invest money on employing social media for campaigning due to various factors. The usage was despite the hard fact that the Net based tools usage is limited to the urban youths who are by and large hooked on to surfing the Net and using smart phones. It is definitely yet to catch up with the rural masses. And not less than 70 per cent of the Indian population lives in rural areas.

### **Facebook in Indian Elections**



The American companies – Facebook, Twitter and Google – seem to have made conscious decision to keep track of Indian elections as they were sure of getting more hits or eyeball movement as well as revenue in terms of advertisements. When it comes to popular social media tools, Facebook is estimated to have 100 million users in India, which is largest outside the US. Twitterites have doubled in India from January 2014.

In 2009, Congress politician Shashi Tharoor showed that politicians can connect well to the computer literate masses by Tweeting. He had about 6,000 followers in 2009 and it has bulged to 2.16 millions. And, now almost all prime politicians and political parties are into micro blogging. Among Indian politicians, it is Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, the prime ministerial candidate of the BJP-led NDA in 2014, who has the highest followers on Twitter – 3.89 million and stupendous 14 million fans on Facebook. The US President Barack Obama, at the global level, is the topper in the usage of Facebook and Twitter. Katie Harbath, Manager for Policy at Facebook, had said that Facebook began working on the Indian elections during the end of 2013 and stepped up its efforts in March in 2014 when the elections were notified. Harbath had said that the entire India was discussing the LS elections and Facebook was really the key place of the conversation that was happening. According to Adam Sharp, Head of government and nonprofits at Twitter, Facebook is a powerful way to return to retail politics. The elections helped Twitter in India expand its presence. According to Sharp, the 2014 LS elections were turning into India's first Twitter elections. It is not just the candidates, even the media and citizens were using the Twitter platform extensively to discover elections content, converse with others in real time and express their views. It is estimated that Facebook has 100 million users in India, next only to the United States. In 2013, India had the third highest Net users in the world. It stands next to the US and China in terms of users.

As per a report of the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and Indian Market Research Bureau (IMRB), in December 2012, 74 per cent of the Indian population who are using Internet are urban people. It is natural for political parties and contestants to try to reach out this upwardly mobile population including the young and first time voters on the Net, whatever may be the tool. The IRIS Knowledge Foundation, a public service initiative of IRIS Business Services Limited, during the research conducted in March 2013, had estimated that the usage of social media would spread by the 2014 LS elections. Facebook would be the emerging giant in the social media space, as the clout that the users enjoy is immense. It would leave the citizens empowered, it had said. About 10 per cent of the voting population have Facebook account and 97 per cent of them are active members. And, on a daily basis almost they make their presence felt. For the first time the Election Commission gave voting power to Non Resident Indians (NRIs). About 25 million NRIs, if they willed, could have voted. Even if they had not made it to India only to participate in the



democratic process, majority of them would have watched the campaign and the related activities back home.

The Congress and the BJP conducted Google Hangouts for its prime leaders to engage in conversation with their party workers and select groups of citizens. It provided the leaders to express their mind as well as take questions. Internet and Mobile Association of India had estimated that well executed social media campaign can swing 3 to 4 per cent of voters. As per the 2011 Census report, India has more mobile phones than toilets. It also means that nearly 1.2 billion population is using cell phones. With the ever evolving smartphone technology and wide use of the same across India, social media tools have become easily available to the users at affordable rates. Hence, political parties and candidates tried their best to exploit the tools for vote gains.

### **Narendra Modi and Social Media**

In Karnataka, the two most discussed and visible politicians on the Net were Narendra Modi, the PM candidate of the BJP, and Nandan Nilekani, the co-founder of Infosys, who had contested from Bangalore South as the Congress candidate. Modi had not contested from Karnataka. But he was the de facto BJP candidate pan India. Hence, the Netizen-cum-voters followed the campaign of Modi keenly. His digital presence was very high as compared to any other candidate in the poll fray. Modi has exclusive IT cells in his home state. The BJP's IT cell - National Digital Operations Centre (N-DoC) in New Delhi is branded as IT war room. The party had identified 155 LS seats where it had extensive social media campaign besides the conventional campaign. This is based on the assumption that the BJP's prospects are better here. The details of voting pattern in each of the assembly constituencies in these select LS seats were monitored by the Delhi IT cell. According to Chennamallikarjuna, IT Cell Head of the BJP in Karnataka, Modi turned into usage of social media post 2002 or *Godhra* incident. As the mainstream media began almost a hate campaign against him, Modi began depending more on the new tools to reach out people so that he can express his mind. He has been able to strike a chord with citizens through the extensive usage of the Net, said Channamallikarjuna. An engineer by profession, Channa-mallikarjuna said he worked in a team which created a Twitter account for Modi a couple of years ago. A bunch of professionals worked both at the IT cells of Ahmedabad in Gujarat and Delhi. It is said that more than one IT room functioned in Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar.

The Modi's office did not give out much information on its IT offices. But what is written in the media is that they nearly worked 18 to 20 hours a day. The dedicated technical team, mainly

youngsters, kept track of issues related to Modi, his campaign and developments related to the elections. This helped in keeping touch with the Netizens and media besides keeping Modi updated on the developments. The feedback was helping Modi to quickly react to the development and his detractors. Modi's website [www.narendramodi.in](http://www.narendramodi.in) consisted of his promotional material and the decisions taken by the Gujarat government. The presence of publicity material during the election campaign went up dramatically. It is said, according to a Daily News Analysis newspaper's report, the site on an average received 27,000 responses for the postings on the web on any given day and during the campaign period it touched 2.5 lakh responses a day.

The website had Modi's campaign letters, audio and video prints of campaigns, updates on his public rallies and daily engagements, news photographs and YouTube videos. There was provision for real time watching of his election rallies. Modi is hyper active on Twitter and Facebook. He was regularly posting his thoughts on his blog. Even on the last day of the polling on May 12, 2014 he had put a long thought cum thanking note. The content on this Twitter, Facebook, website and blog are same though the length varied.

Interestingly, for the first time a prime politician has acknowledged the power of social media. In his blog, Modi wrote on May 12, 2014 '....We have to profusely thank social media – it has caused the downfall of manufactured lies and half-truths at a very nascent stage.

Earlier during elections we had people whose lies would reach every section of society. In a time when means of communication were less, they could get away with their same old speeches and half-baked assurances. Social media has changed that! In this age of information and social media the lies that come out of their microphones cannot even get past the podium of their speech venues, forget reaching others. More power to social media in the days ahead.' Modi did Google Hangout to connect to party workers and youth. He used Flickr, Tumblr, Stumbleupon, Google Plus among others. He has been able to post a lot of publicity material using the social media tools.

The election season also witnessed the mushrooming of *NaMo* brigades from cities to villages in the country. *NaMo* stands for Narendra Modi. Youngsters formed groups or *NaMo* brigade to improve the chances of Modi to become the Prime Minister. The groups also extensively used the Net to unleash publicity. The *NaMo* websites were created besides getting connected to the people using other tools such as Facebook and Twitter. The brigade members are said to be volunteers. The groups were disintegrated in Karnataka soon after the polling.

A bunch of Gujarat based businessmen also launched 'Modi Android' for smartphones. In addition, he went for a 3D holographic speech delivery programmes. He could reach out to the masses through videos in different constituencies simultaneously. It got him a place in Guinness World Records for delivering a speech at 53 locations simultaneously. Modi app India 272+ was launched on Google Play store on January 1, 2014. There were caller tunes to promote him and SMSs regarding all his 477 rallies that were sent to the target groups. The office of Modi came out with *NaMo* Number which allowed electorate to register with the party and get the date, booth number and other details of voting. A voice based mass messaging system was another novelty. It helped volunteers talk to each other. In this closed group application, sending and receiving important messages on the campaign was allowed.

It is said that the people who were involved in boosting Modi on social media, spent considerable time on creating a database of information related to polling and potential voters. In addition, a separate cadre worked for his prospects besides not less than a million volunteers. He and the BJP both succeeded in crowd sourcing, both conventionally and digitally/social media mode. The BJP also has *YuvaiTV* Internet channel through which Modi's speeches were live telecast. His appeals to voters seeking their blessings were also telecast. In addition, cyber *Hindu* groups were active in promoting Modi.

Modi turned into a big canopy under which almost all candidates took shelter or did piggy riding on his back. The BJP's Prime Minister nominee also used social media to issue rebuttals to media houses when his comments got coloured, twisted or backfired. He asked the people, especially media houses to watch the content of his speech on videos, before drawing conclusions. One such incident was his interview to *Doordarshan* recorded by *Doordarshan* – the public broadcaster on April 26, 2014 in Gandhinagar. There were rumours that in the uncensored version of the interview, Modi had said Priyanka Vadra Gandhi, daughter of Congress party president Sonia Gandhi, was like his daughter. Priyanka had sharply reacted to his reported comment, while the BJP maintained that *Doordarshan* telecast censored version of his interview due to the Central government pressure. Modi argued that he has been wrongly quoted. When the row did not subside, his office hosted the entire uncensored interview on his YouTube and eventually the statements and counter-statements on the issues ended.

### **A Factfile of Social Media Usage by the Narendra Modi Election Campaign**

- By dialling 4501-4501 number, 3 million people heard Modi's speech in April 2014
- WhatsApp message to 78200-78200

- An average of 100,000 missed calls on a daily basis
- Distance travelled 300,000 kms; events attended 5,827 public programmes covering 25 states
- YouTube video downloads 13 million
- Facebook Likes – 13 million
- Twitter followers – 3.9 million
- Called tunes downloaded - 100,000
- SMS, WhatsApp texts sent and voice calls made to 130 million people
- Total electorate in 2014 elections – 814 million
- Total direct interactions – 234 million
- 38 mega rallies attended by 11 million people
- 196 *Bharat Vijay* rallies attended by 15 million people
- *Chai pe Charcha* in 4,000 locations reaching 5 million people
- 3D hologram rallies in 1350 locations reaching 14 million people

As per the infographic published by India Today on May 19, 2014, Modi unleashed a poll blitzkrieg never seen before in the history of Independent India. The massive campaign of Modi overshadowed the campaign of his candidates in Karnataka. Among the 28 candidates, it was Ananth Kumar, BJP general secretary and Bangalore South candidate who was more active on the Net. Ananth Kumar's website

– [ananth.org](http://www.ananth.org) – made him connect to his Net savvy people. His Facebook page was <http://www.facebook.com/Ananthkumar.official> was no match to his rival, the maker of IT corridor in Karnataka, Nandan Nilekani's digital campaign.

The website has bigger image of Modi than Ananth Kumar. Kumar has a Twitter, Facebook, google+ and YouTube accounts. The content of his website is bilingual – English and Kannada. It was giving updates on Modi, as a one line scroll. There were a whole lot of pictures of Ananth Kumar campaigning across Bangalore South. His family- run NGO *Adhamyachetana's* work occupies a special position on the website. There is nothing spectacular and even special about the

website except giving basic information on the candidate, constituency and activities. Ananth Kumar, a key person in BJP has website since 1997.

### **Nandan Nilekani and Social Media**

It was Nandan Nilekani who made significant presence on the web space during the campaign. He is a known strategist. He built Infosys as well as created a huge database as the Chairman of the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIADI). His website is <http://www.nandannilekani.in> and the Facebook account is - <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Nandan-Nilekani>

While appreciating and adopting the US presidential form of campaigning by Barack Obama in 2012, Nilekani, however, followed social media as well as traditional mode of campaign. Months before he was declared as the official candidate of the Congress to take on the five-time MP Ananth Kumar of the BJP, Nilekani had launched 'Operation Agile'. In IT sector, Agile is a popular practice to handle unpredictability in the business field. So Nilekani, with an aim of getting connected to the masses as an alternative to the traditional mode of conducting rallies, taking out *padayatras* and group discussions, decided to get in touch with people through social media.

The Congress candidate went after development agenda while trying to lure voter on the Net. In his website, under the banner "Ideas for Bangalore", he engaged citizens in discussions on ideas and suggestions as how to improve Bangalore City.

The cover pages on his Facebook focussed on ideas and plans to effect changes to make Bangalore a better city. It had hashtags #ideasforbangalore and @CityChallenge. He had eloquently explained on YouTube how *Aadhar* scheme was launched and worked for the good of the country. He also took initiative like 'Photo of the Week' where he, his wife or followers took pictures of public importance and campaign and posted on the Facebook and Tweet. He also shared his thoughts on various issues but mainly related to Bangalore. He introduced 'Ask *Nandan*' campaign on the web to elicit suggestions for improving the city. Basically he projected himself a saviour of Bangalore. This was a strategy to strike a chord with young Bangaloreans, who discuss a lot on improving the City, on the Net. His office developed a software programme which was split into different modules which can fit into different situations, areas and groups. For example, if a particular polling booth was witnessing a very less percentage of voter turnouts, then the module helped the Nilekani team to adopt aggressive approach to reach out to voters to make them cast their votes.

Bangalore South has about 1.8 million voters and half of them are digitally educated. That also means they are fairly younger. The constituency has many industries including the Electronic City.

Nearly 10,000 employees are into software profession. Keeping this in view, Nilekani tried to lure them through Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. He, at one time, had about 80,000 followers on Twitter. He extensively Tweeted his mind and posted photographs on Twitter.

Like Obama and Modi, Nilekani too depended on volunteers to campaign for him. Despite being a novice in politics, he did not entirely depend on the party cadre to help him to get visibility and reach out the masses physically. He sent not less than 6,00,000 personalised letters to houses seeking their support to win the seat. His tech team also developed a smartphone app called Hawkeye which kept tracking information on the local issues, corporators, local issues bothering the citizens besides the health of the local civic body, BBMP. This helped the candidate to talk relevantly on the city matters. The volunteers, who tried to complement the efforts of Nilekani, also used social media to maintain the heat of the campaign. The volunteers, basically IT professionals, ranged from 20,000 to 1,00,000. A good number of youngsters took leave of absence from their office to voluntarily campaign for Nilekani, it is said. But there is no official confirmation to this effect. Majority of them worked behind the scene and did not like to get any media coverage.

As a first timer, Nilekani made his presence felt more than any other candidate in Karnataka and also gave his rivals run for money in the fray. Thanks to extensive usage of social media and also traditional mode of campaign. Being the richest candidate in the country and IT firm founder, he received extra media attention too. Weeks before Karnataka went into polls in April, Nilekani had 718 Tweets with 101,000 followers, while Ananth Kumar had 583 Tweets and 24,200 voters. Both of them made themselves available to voters and select citizens through Google Hangouts. Nandan's plus point was he issued pop up ads in online media. The high decibel campaign of Nilekani was well supported by social media as well as the conventional style.

Even for breaking news, Nilekani used Facebook and Twitter. When the campaign was on, he tendered resignation as the Chairman of UIADI. When his office was contacted by media houses to get a confirmation and quote from him, his media managers said, Nilekani would be Tweeting his take on this particular issue. And, of course, he tweeted regarding his resignation.

The Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) representing a national party had constituted a 90-member team to run its online campaign. Party national Vice President Rahul Gandhi had interacted on Google Hangout twice with party workers in the state. It was part of the nation-wide exercise. But it was a lacklustre campaign. The party hardly made its presence felt in digital world.

## ***AamAdmi* Party (AAP) and Social Media**

*AamAdmi* Party (AAP) made its maiden debut in the LS elections. It made its presence felt on social media to a considerable extent in Karnataka though not to the extent it did when it carried out anti-corruption campaign. Going by the spectacular performance in the Delhi Assembly elections, the AAP was expected to make right noise. But as far as the campaign on social media, the AAP candidates in Karnataka did not make much presence.

AAP had fielded 13 candidates. Of them, one who made use of Facebook to promote himself and the party was Ravi Krishna Reddy. Interestingly, he was contesting from Bangalore Rural. Probably he is the only one candidate in rural Karnataka who used Facebook to the maximum for campaigning. This could be a conscious decision too. He is basically an IT professional. His constituency has three assembly constituencies which come under the Bangalore city limits. Hence it helped the candidate to maximise his presence in the fray through online. He has a website [www.ravikrishnareddy.com](http://www.ravikrishnareddy.com). On his Facebook, he was running phone-in campaign for his party prime candidate Aravind Kejriwal in Varanasi. The post said '*Phone ghumao, desh bachao*' – call toll free number 1800-3010-1223. But for him, the rest of the AAP candidates were not very active in terms of using social media.

Karnataka's AAP website is bilingual. It has basically the Kannada version of English content that is hosted on the AAP website which is managed from Delhi. Tweets of AAP founder Aravind Kejriwal is retweeted from the party's Karnataka unit. Sometimes the Kannada version of the same is also available. The website of AAP in Karnataka had good basic information on the 13 candidates. It is also a member of Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. The party's website of Delhi has online TV channel where Kejriwal's speeches are uploaded. At times, it had real time coverage of the rallies too. Kejriwal is the world's fifth most popular leader with 4.9 million Facebook fans. The party has also developed a mobile App.

## **Some Facts about Social Media and 3 Prime Political Parties:**

### **Facebook**

- Fans of BJP – 3.4 million
- Fans of Congress – 2.5 million



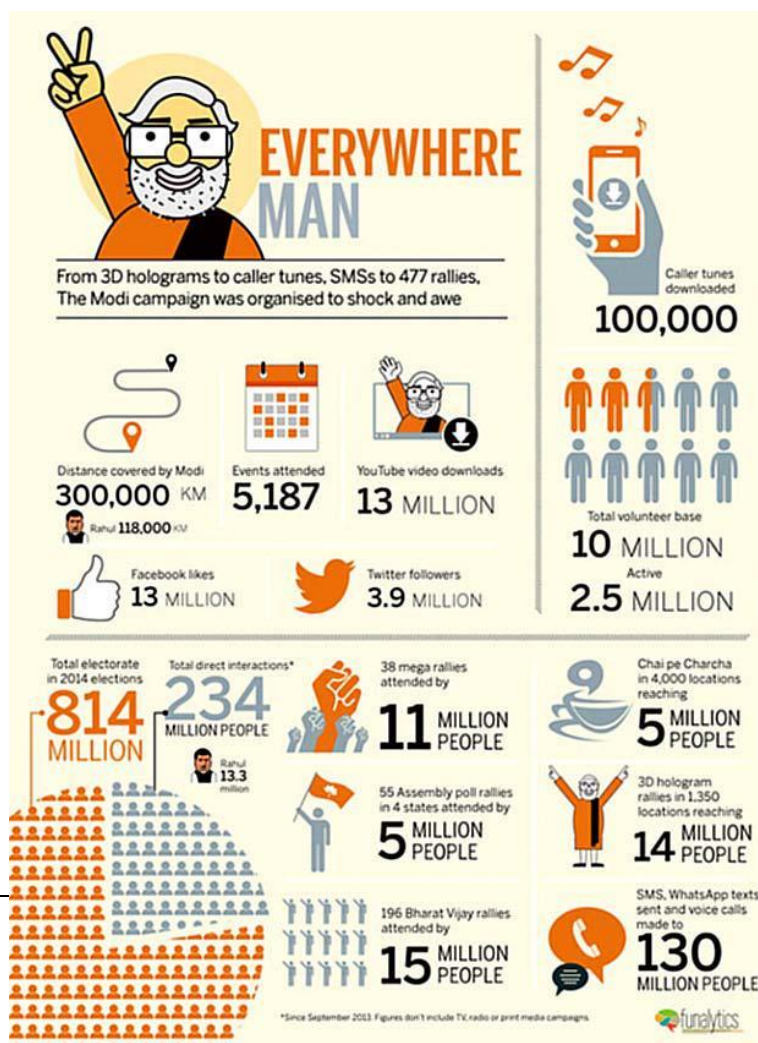
- Fans of AAP – 1.8 million

**Twitter**

- AAP – 5.17 billion followers
- BJP - 417,000
- Congress – 163,000

**Karnataka and Facebook**

- BJP has 90,816 likes
- AAP – 24,713 likes
- Congress – 20,713 likes
- JD (S) – 196 likes



*'Everywhere man' Factfile of Modi's Campaign 2014 Courtesy: indiatoday.intoday.in*

There are certain significant differences among social media content of the BJP, Congress and AAP. The BJP and Modi had well equipped and qualified IT professionals to run their shows on social media. The content was well thought of, sophisticated, structured well, thinks before inking, no flaws in the usage of language, sharp and witty replies to detractors on Twitter. The downloading of information and opinion was well orchestrated. The packaging and marketing was well carried out. The content was almost picture perfect. But that was not the same with social media content produced by Modi's fans or supporters.

The Congress, the oldest party of the country, remained a bit aloof when it comes to using the alternative platform created by technology. The party, unlike the BJP and AAP, did not depend on social media for reaching out the masses. The reasons could be many including continued trust in traditional campaign methodology and thus maximising voters of its trusted vote bank. The Congress, despite having IT Cells in Delhi as well in states, had outsourced publicity task to an online marketing firm and a public relations office. Rahul Gandhi, the undeclared prime ministerial candidate of the Congress and the Vice President of AICC, does not have a website of his own. He has shunned Twitter and Facebook. He is the youth face of the Congress as he is just 41 years.

In case of AAP, the campaign whether online or offline, is managed by volunteers. Kejriwal has often come out with spontaneous reactions to developments and his detractors. There is no set pattern when it comes to the content because Kejriwal as well as volunteers, who are mostly youth, quick in their reaction which is not well thought of. But the reactions do not look like manufactured to outsmart the rivals by mere rhetoric. They react like real common man. The fans of AAP call themselves as AAPsi and voluntarily work for the party. AAP has a separate website managed by NRIs and it also has an IT cell of 8 members in Delhi.

Social media also spread lot of humour, satire and spoof videos. There were unlimited jokes circulated and WhatsApp also served as a mass messenger. On April 1, Fools Day, three hashtags were trending on Twitter making mockery of Modi, Rahul and Kejriwal. Compared to the mainstream media, social media tools were put to best use when it comes to mocking at politicians who were claiming that they can give best administration to the country.

## FINDINGS

The two national parties and one regional party made efforts to make use of the Internet based tools, though their efforts, interest and investments in terms of money were not equal. However, the social media tools used by them were more or less same. The two national parties – the Indian National Congress (INC) commonly referred as the Congress party, and the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) – were way ahead of other national parties when it comes to using social media. Between the two, the BJP was more aggressive than its nearest rival the Congress on social media plank. Like in many parts of urban India, urban Karnataka too witnessed for the first time usage of Twitter for campaigning in LS elections. Parties seem to have been well influenced by the presidential form of campaigning in the US where in addition to usage of social media tools volunteers were engaged in large numbers. More than political parties, key contestants in urban constituencies use social media to maximise their reach to voters. The content of social media is by and large in English. Twitter seems to be emerging as the easy and quick mode of communication with the usage of smartphone increasing. Social media left the Netizens energised to engage in electoral process. Journalists of print and television, which are considered as traditional media, had to follow up on social media for keeping track of developments as tech-savvy candidates chose to break news and react on Facebook and Twitter. Social media is growing stronger than opinion polls in urban areas. Social media has arrived to stay and politicians can't ignore it anymore as its usage will only grow. Political parties and candidates are mainly depending on traditional or traditional mode of campaigning while not averse to social media in urban areas.

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