Review of New Media Studies in Political Communication

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Abstract

New media, simply put, is new form of mass communication. Another term for it is digital media. Relatively, it is recent media based on new information technology, a 21st century's people's media. It is dynamic as the Internet-based tools and technology keep changing in unpredictable ways, and evolving too. New media has redefined, given a new dimension to the very concept of communication, whether internal, intrapersonal, one to one or one to many. New technologies, which are emerging on a daily basis, are enabling new media to evolve. Inarguably, social media is shaping opinion, helping to build profiles of people, companies and government. Moreover, it is helping to get people 'connected' and draw moral support sometimes. Political communi-cation, which is a sub-field of communication, has dramatically changed in the last decade. Many traditional media as well as new media have changed politics which is inclusive of governance and players involved in it.New media platforms and social media tools have made democracy more vibrant, at least in the cyber world. This does not imply that the quality of governance has improved and society at large is happier because the quality of life has improved. But with the media becoming more and more interactive, public communication has increased which in turn has an impact on policy makers. 'Social media afford new opportunities for engaging citizens in democratic processes. Use of social media is increasing rapidly, these forms of media offer increased access to voters and potential voters,' (McNamara et.al, 2012) says the study on the usage of social media in Australia. A study on political changes in China (Ashley Esarey, 2011) observes that digital technologies empower citizens by providing forums for the expression of political views and critics of the state. The present paper is a Meta review of studies undertaken on new media as agents of political communication.

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INTRODUCTION

New media is rapidly growing in importance, bringing swift changes in the modes of communication. The process of communication has become an ever evolving field with the advent of technology. The impact of new media is such that it has helped in redefining the world's economic order, changed many aspects of social life and helped in spreading information and knowledge in a democratic and cost-effective way.

Political communication, which is a sub-field of communication, has dramatically changed in the last decade. David L Swanson, an American activist and writer, and Dan Nimmo, political science professor, in their book, 'Political Communication: AResource Book', define political communication as the strategic use of communication to influence public knowledge, beliefs, and action on political matters. Politics and media are entwined. Here media includes both conventional and new media. The global village concept has become a reality. Online media is speaking and is being heard. Citizens themselves are breaking news and disseminating information on social media. So, a new order of communication, independent of the media houses, has developed. This shows the significance and power of new media.

New media platforms and social media tools have made democracy more vibrant, at least in the cyber world. This does not imply that the quality of governance has improved and society at large is happier because the quality of life has improved. But with the media becoming more and more interactive, public communication has increased which in turn has an impact on policy makers. Many traditional media as well as new media have changed politics which is inclusive of governance and players involved in it.

New media and social media are being increasingly used in political campaigns with youngsters constituting a majority of the voting population in India. Politicians are trying to get a footing in the cyber world to reach and engage with the voters. Slowly but steadily, traditional media is facing stiff competition from new media. Convergence of traditional and new media is taking place in both developed and developing countries. Political activism is slowly shifting from conventional media to social media.

Political leaders, government leaders and political parties are getting closer to the masses with new media and social media platforms turning into mass media. However, the usage of digital platforms by politicians is not uniform. Those who are active in politics are also found to be active online. Political engagement with technology interface is going to increase. The impact of usage of digital forums has set the trend for personalisation of politics. Comparison between politicians who use social media and those who do not have online presence is inevitable in this e-world. New media is an evolving media that registers growth almost on a daily basis. Also, it is interesting to note that over the last few years, convergence of traditional or conventional media and new media is taking place.

Politicians are increasingly engaging with people through new media besides traditional media. Face-to-face social networks are slowly turning into Facebook social network. In personal interactions one can see the reactions and body language of those involved in communication, while in technology mediated communication where there is no visual usage, observations cannot be made instantly. However, reactions will come in verbal, visual and image forms. One-on-one message and one-to-many message in digital world can have great influence. Academic researchers have established that political and civic engagements are happening in the cyber world. Of course, this is still-emerging relationship which calls for in-depth constant studies. Nature (journal:2012) through a study, referring to the US congressional elections of 2010, had published that that "A 61 million person experiment in social influence and political mobilisation," had contended that messages on users' Facebook feeds could significantly influence voting pattern. Virtual world may be gaining importance. However, one cannot undermine the influence and impact of one-to-one communication and personal touch between politicians and people. Network in the real world and the cyber world both have significance of their own. Social media movement has a rich history that has changed at a rapid rate since new media became widely used.

OBJECTIVES

The basic objective is to conduct a comprehensive review of studies to draw inferences on the influence and impact of new media in political communication. Research focuses on the studies on new media usage by politicians around the world to comprehend the validity of studies on effectiveness and credibility of new media usage in politics.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is a Meta review initiative to give insight into the type of studies and new methodologies that are gradually evolving in the field of new media and political communication. Meta review enables researchers to perceive the quantity and quality of new research initiatives on emerging media like digital technology based media. Meta study is a systematic review of studies on a specific subject consisting of qualitative and quantitative studies. It is a mother analysis of multiple analyses meaning that it attempts to systematically study the several studies that have already been done by the researchers. It gives an elevated view of studies on a specific subject under one roof integrating similar studies with a view to understand the subject from different perspectives. It is a

challenge for any researcher to undertake a study on new media's impact, influence or process and theoretical framework as methodology and findings are still calling for validation.

A Meta study would bring whole range of studies on a common subject and enable researcher to summarize the several studies done on the same subject. A Meta study helps in combining data from multiple studies undertaken on the same subject. New media are new to the researchers and therefore methodologies are evolving. A new media study validates not only the subject under study but also contributes to method of study. This study is confined to the research on new media intervention in politics. It is in this perspective, the present study assumes importance.

NEW MEDIA STUDIES- A REVIEW

Usage of new media by politicians during elections has yielded sufficient study material for academicians, researchers and research institutions. A lot of research has been done to study the usage of new media in the US presidential elections. However, not much research has been done when it comes to the usage of new media by Indian politicians and this became obvious when the review of relevant literature was taken for the present study. The study done in the last little-more-than-a-decade has been reviewed here, according to which both developed and developing countries are eager to employ new media for political communication and engagement. However, the degree varies depending on the extent of Internet coverage, technology and affordability of a country to invest in infrastructure development to make use of wireless communication.

The usage of information and communication tools is different in developed countries. A study (Ron Davies, 2014) on the effectiveness of social media in election campaigning highlights how since the 1980s, democracy across the European Union (EU) was characterised by the increasing disengagement of citizens, particularly younger ones. The study says that the usage of social media form of communication among politicians and citizens may provide a way of increasing citizen involvement in political life, especially during election campaigns. The author says social media allows political actors, particularly smaller parties or less well-known candidates, to bypass mass media filters. They can influence journalists who follow social media for story ideas. He opines that whilst specific targeting of voters, which has proven effective elsewhere, may be problematic in much of the EU, messages can at least be targeted at the young, the largest group of social media users. "The network effects of social media, amplifying as they do the transmission of a political

message through social connections, make social media a valuable part of an election campaign," the author points out. He also says that while social media is increasingly used in campaigns across Europe, the ultimate effect of this usage remains unclear. Some attribute the increasing levels of political activity on the Internet to citizens who are already politically committed. It may be that social media has only a very limited effect on getting otherwise disengaged citizens to engage – even just to go out to vote, the study says. (Ibid)

The author sums up saying that the influence of social media use in elections may be different in countries with populations of different size and with different political and electoral systems. Nevertheless, even motivating a small percentage of the population can (at least in some electoral systems) make a considerable difference to the result of a party or an individual candidate. Certainly an upward trend in citizen participation in European elections due to any media, social or not, would be taken by many as a good sign. (Ibid)

New media technologies have their own impact on political communication and this has been delineated in the study (Saqib Riaz, 2014). The author elaborates on how the extensive usage of the Internet and mobile phone has its own impact on election campaign in developed and developing countries. It also suggests some new horizons of political communication through new media technology, especially in developing countries. Riaz observes that political behavior of people living in developed and developing countries is totally different. New media technologies can "flourish" only in societies where democracy is promoted and participatory. However, in undemocratic countries, media is "controlled'' and used for propaganda against the enemies and for publicity of those in power and their policies. "In such countries, digital media cannot play its role in spreading democratic values in society," the study says. The author points out that in many developing countries political freedom does not exist. That the Internet connection is limited in developing countries and hence in such situations digital media cannot play an effective role is the argument of the author. However, the author does not stop at this. He says new media technology has "greatly influenced" political communication in the whole world. However, its efforts are more evident in the developed parts of the world where this technology is easily available. Technology has influenced the process of political communication in developing countries and such countries are focusing more on spreading modern technologies like the Internet and mobile phones. The usage has also found to have impact on political attitudes and behaviour in the countries where it is used frequently. The developing countries can adopt similar methods to bring a positive change in the political attitude and

behaviours of their public. The wide-range availability of Internet in remote areas of developing countries like Pakistan is a major challenge in this regard, the researcher feels. (Ibid)

While discussing about the increase in the networked population from the early 1990s and for mass movement, the study on the impact of social media on politics (Surjit Kaur and Manpreet Kautm, 2013), discusses how social media was used in India for movement against corruption and to raise voice against the Delhi rape incident and the Telangana statehood movement among others. The advent of social media has enabled an "unprecedented" empowerment and engagement of the common man for expressing political opinions. One positive development the authors see is the youth talking about political issues mainly because of the emergence of social media. Earlier, political discussions were confined only to those who used to read newspaper and watch television news channels or participate in discussions. However, social media networking has made the youth of India "sit up and discuss political issues." But, the authors say that it is difficult to make youngsters participate in the voting process even with the usage of social media platforms. Getting youngsters together to vote in elections, even through the networking sites to help political parties is "still a pipeline dream''. However, the researchers (Ibid) conclude that it may take decades in India to replicate the US in the use of social media campaigning and influence the voters.

An empirical study about the use of social media by the political candidates in India's main elections to Parliament in 2014– the high seat of power in India (Asha and Usha rani, 2014) makes interesting revelations in Indian context. The study shows that 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), the right wing party – 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 State, known as IT capital of India, 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 used 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, says the study.

The 2011 elections in Switzerland also saw the usage of digital forums for campaigning. A research study (Ulrike Klinger, 2013), while giving an insight into the usage of social media and Swiss elections, says that all major political parties have their own websites and are active on social media. While analyzing structurally the usage of Facebook sites and Twitter feeds, the researcher says, "While political parties claim to appreciate the dialogue and mobilization potentials of social media, they mainly use social media as an additional channel to spread information and electoral propaganda. The overall resonance is still at a very low level." (Ibid)

The usage of online media for political communication in advanced countries may not be a tough challenge but the situation will be different in underdeveloped countries. The research on the impact of social media on political mobilization in East and West Africa (Yusuf Kalyango Jr and BenjaminAdu-Kumi, 2012) examines whether the online and wireless digital media have aided political mobilization in Africa more than the traditional media in the past five years. The digital media, such as cellular phone, have penetrated areas in many African countries that are inaccessible to traditional media. The study covers four countries of interest - Ghana, Ivory Coast, Uganda, and Kenya. Online and wireless digital media are conceptualized here to include the Internet information from social online networks. Mentioning various social media sites like Friendster, MySpace and Facebook, the study says that the data shows that the sites have helped African netizens to perform the crucial function of keeping in touch with people from around the world. (Ibid)

Explaining how the new technology has helped the common man to get better-connected with even politicians and people of all classes in the digital space, the researchers say people use it to connect with distant others including leaders and policy makers who are otherwise not easily reachable by any other means. The respondents had overwhelmingly said that social media platforms provide an enabling environment for low cadres to network with middle class and very wealthy

netizens through mutual social networks to collectively discuss familiar communal obstacles, shared opportunities, mutual social events, and shared ideological politics, the study contends. (Ibid) The authors capture the optimistic view of Africans that new media would help in getting involved in the political process for a better order. The study reveals that for African netizens in the four countries, political mobilization for social change is part of that enjoyment.

One of the key observations of the study is that though Africa is still at the bottom of Internet usage in the world, all hope is not lost because there is growing optimism among netizens in Uganda that what social media did for the Egyptians and the Tunisians in North Africa will be replicated in East Africa too. Voting citizens in many countries are now demanding better treatment and better economic opportunities from their government. Further the authors, in their concluding observation, say, "There is a paradigm shift in narratives and a very good indication that Africa is slowly heading in the right direction as far as the freedom of expression via the Internet is concerned." (Ibid)

While the researchers Yusuf Kalyango Jr and Benjamin Adu-Kumi have explained the trends in the usage of new media in a developing country like Africa, there are many research-based studies that explain how the US is far ahead of other countries in the world in terms of using the social media for political changes and elections campaigns in particular. There has been sufficient interest shown by academicians and researchers to assess the impact of new media on the US presidential elections. In one such study (Aronson Elise D, 2012), the research addresses the impact new media tools have on different segments of the electoral process in the US. The impact is assessed from the point of providing information, influencing news, setting agendas, moulding public opinion, opportunities to raise funds, increasing political participation and influencing youth voters and finally, changing poll results.

Aronson Elise says that this trend was demonstrated throughout the 2008 presidential campaign of Barack Obama. He used new media in ways not used before and to an extent not previously done to win the highest office by effectively integrating new media usage into his campaign strategy. "As far as election results go, while new media may not be the one resource that will mean if a candidate wins or loses, it is very likely that it could make a difference at the margins. This is especially the case in an extremely close election," his study finds. (Ibid)

The author says new media, in its speed and democratic nature, is a completely unique tool that has infinite capabilities in influencing the electoral process. The impact new media can have on

campaigns has many implications for future elections. Some of the impact of new media may be indirect in that it amplifies the existing forces in politics. New media usage will continue to be employed in presidential election campaigns and other campaigns too. It will be easier to assess and measure its impact. The electoral process in the United States, going by the case studies and systematic analyses, and data in the study, indicates that new media has already begun to heavily influence the electoral process. From the study it is clear that the author is confident that new media is an inseparable part of election campaigns in the US. (Ibid)

When new media is discussed, two things come into focus – one is the online news consumption, and another is the increasing social media networking sites. It is not that the usage of online news consumption is growing; even the usage of various Internet based social media networking sites has gone up dramatically. This only shows that new media is here to stay. Politicians choose the media they want to reach out to people, and credibility definitely becomes an issue. One needs to develop skills to assess the credibility of the media in general, and the online media in particular.

To understand the credibility point of view of online media, the study conducted on exploring online news credibility (Chung *et al*., 2012), helps. While investigating a range of traditional and technological factors that contribute to the credibility perceptions for three categories of online news, the authors say that mere online presence does not add much credibility if online sites do not employ hyperlinks to extend access to related topics. The researchers endorse that credibility is a "very complex issue'', and that multimediality and interactivity do not influence credibility perceptions. Usually, media houses which are online try to build data bank so that it can be linked to the stories they put up on their sites. It is generally believed that hyperlinks can enhance the credibility of news offered. But Chung *et al*., have countered this through the study. (Ibid) This point becomes relevant when people try to consume maximum news during elections.

Coming to political news and media, there is a general notion that media gives too much coverage to politics. This may not be demand driven. This argument gets support from a study of Pew Research Centre conducted in 2012. The study had concluded that all content receivers are not equally interested in politics, and also, usually all prominent political parties in the US were by and large making similar efforts to use social media platforms.

Like the Pew research, there is one more in-depth study on social media usage and democratic participation. A report by University of Technology, Sydney, accessed by Australian Electoral

Commission (AEC) elaborately explains different dimensions and partners in e -democratic initiatives and learning at different levels. The study report (McNamara et al., 2012) aims at examining approaches to social media by government agencies and the election management bodies (EMBs) in order to inform the Australian Election Commission in social media. The three authors, in their 95 pages report, say that a number of EMBs and other government departments and agencies, as well as political parties and politicians in Australia and internationally, have demonstrated that 'social media afford new opportunities for engaging citizens in democratic processes.' While citing the reasons for the same, they say the readership, listenership and viewership of traditional media are declining among most demographic groups, particularly among the youth. 'Use of social media is increasing rapidly, these forms of media offer increased access to voters and potential voters,' the study says. (Ibid)

The researchers, while explaining the contingent factors affecting and limiting e-democracy initiatives, point to the hard reality – social media, by and large, is personal and entertainment-oriented. In the political environment, they say, 'Social media are most effective in engaging citizens in new, non-traditional forms of political participation such as single 'issue politics' and direct action (Occupy and Kony 2012). Research indicates that social media is less effective in engaging citizens in traditional forms of political participation.' (Report 2012)

Politicians and political parties do every sort of exercise to reach out to their voters during campaign. But the question is how consumers react to the content.Are politicians and political parties are just giving what information they would like to give and thus turn the content into monologue? Is it out of curiosity that people read the content, or are they receptive? These questions, to some extent, are answered in one study. Pew Research Centre of the US conducted a survey from January 20 to February 19, 2012 among 2,253 adults to find out how social networking sites influence voters' views and political activities. The research (Lee Rainie and Aaron Smith, 2012) focuses on the social networking sites (SNS) of Democrats, Republicans and Independents, and getting feedback from the visitors to the sites. The study has come out with a good number of findings. One finding is that the vast majority of social networking site users (84%) say they have posted little or nothing related to politics in their recent updates, comments and links. Only six per cent of these users said that most or all of what they posted recently on the sites is related to politics, issues, or the 2012 campaign, and the rest ten per cent had said some of what they have recently posted has been about politics. The politically engaged citizens had observed that ' the sites were useful to them in their political

activities and they had become more involved in an issue after reading what others had said on the sites.' (Ibid)

The survey conducted for the study points out that, '80% of American adults use the Internet and 66% of those online adults participate in social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, or Google+. That amounts to more than half of the entire US population who are the site users.' It further found that those who describe their political beliefs as moderate or liberal are more likely than conservatives to use social networking sites: 74% of the Internet users who describe themselves as liberal use SNS and 70% of the Internet users who are moderate are SNS users – that compares with 60% of the conservative Internet users who are SNS users. There were no statistically significant differences among Democrats, Republicans, and Independents in their overall use of SNS. All were equally likely to be social networking site users, says the study. (Ibid)

People in every sphere of life have begun using new media and social media. It goes without saying that men in public life are no exception to this. The often quoted example as how new media was used to the hilt during elections is that of US President Barack Obama during his poll campaign in 2008. Obama mobilized the youth over the Internet for his victory in 2008. A study on twin social media outlets Facebook and Twitter (Annie Hellweg, 2011) observed that these sites have impact on the constituents. Social media's role continues to evolve within the political realm, and there are definitive relationships to be explored between a politician's use of their sites and the opinion of public. Facebook and Twitter have enabled people to 'access public figures at an unprecedented level; campaigns can no longer rely on traditional media to reach constituents without the risk of overlooking a new population of voters,' the researcher explains. (Ibid)

Hellweg sums up by saying whatever may be the tools used by politicians to engage people in political process, still people want politicians to be what they should be. In the midst of Facebook and Twitter's revolutionary impact over political campaigns and elected officials, it should be noted that, like everything, there is a limit. Ultimately, constituents still want their politicians to be politicians; while snippets into their personal lives are beneficial, this cannot take precedent over career-driven content. When it does, politicians lose credibility and trust with their voters. The author is right in pointing out that frivolous news alone cannot make people get attracted to social media sites. (Ibid) If politicians have to win the confidence of people, they would have to discharge their public duties. Whatever may be the media they use to reach out to people, their work also matters.

Usage of new media and communication strategies are best experimented in a developed and tech-savvy US, which is not surprising. What is interesting is even communist countries are now slowly being forced to open up to new communication platforms. Take, for example, a communist country like China, where there is no free media, which is also moving towards new media. A study on political changes in China (Ashley Esarey, 2011) observes that digital technologies empower citizens by providing forums for the expression of political views and critics of the state. Chinese online space has become a forum for advocating political reform, a phenomena rarely seen in the official media since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. "While not large …China is moving towards liberal communications, at least on the Internet. Even political institutions would find it difficult to resist new media, even in a communist country like China," Esarey says. (Ibid)

It is always interesting to make a comparative study of new media and traditional media, and the impact of new media on traditional or conventional media like newspaper, television and radio. Such a comparison is pertinent as people are now bombarded with news and information from many sources. Another pertinent question here is whether political communication happen more on digital space than through traditional media in the days to come. In a study on new and traditional media in Malaysia, it is observed by the researchers (Salman et al., 2011) that the advent of new media has posed a challenge to conventional media. While illustrating to it, they have pointed out that the impact has been felt on the circulation of print newspapers, especially in the US. However, in Malaysia, the effect of new media on conventional media is still manageable, they say.According to the researchers the credibility the new media gained prior to and after the General Election in 2008 is not something which is guaranteed to continue without any efforts as Malaysians generally favour TV as compared to the Internet when it comes to credibility. However, there are still complementaries between the new and conventional media. They will continue to coexist and reinforce each other particularly in Malaysia and other developing countries is the view of the researchers. (Ibid)

In another study on communist country China and youth participation in politics (Cara Wallis, 2011), it is admitted that the manner of communication is changing. The old order is changing and all may not have the same views on changing priorities. For some it may look good, and for others, it may not. But the truth remains that change is permanent in case of new technologies. It is a challenge for any government to stifle the voices of citizens in cyber space. In a tech-driven country like China,

it is impossible for citizens to resist the usage of technology, and even authorities cannot be selective, is the argument put forth by the author. (Ibid)

As earlier said, the usage of new media for political engagements is yet to go a long way in many countries. This is highlighted in a study on the usage of social media in the Romanian presidential campaign in 2009 (Paul Adrian Aparaschivei, 2011). The author contends that the use of new media and the social media as a tool of political and electoral communication represents a field "not yet fully explored" by Romanian researchers. A series of strategic and communication errors were made on the Internet by the Romanian candidates running for the presidential post. The finding was that no candidate had a positive presence on all the online platforms under the analysis for the study. The candidates were not guided properly by their campaign manager to maintain the Internet activity by a coherent strategy to win an election. (Ibid)

The general assumption is that technology is helping politicians to have a better reach and make their election campaigns easier. However a study on the elections in the Netherlands in 2010 and 2011 (Robin Effing, Jos van Hillegersberg and Theo Huibers, 2011), differs by throwing light on the usage of social media, public participation and the elections in that country. "Web 2.0 is not a completely new kind of web, but a new strategy reached with higher user participation," they say. They also observe that with the current increase in the use of social media, user participation level can increase dramatically and this does not mean that e-empowerment was not possible during the beginning of the www. Social media is a new stage of development where users are actively participating more than ever, they conclude. (Ibid)

New media with ever changing technology offers plenty of opportunities for politicians to change their communication strategy. The best example is the US presidential elections. But there are other smaller countries which have employed new media for poll campaigns, but not maximised their efforts. The situation is not much different in India.

After making certain comparisons on the usage of new media in a developed country like the US, a communist country like China, and a developing country like Africa, it is interesting to understand how smaller countries are responding to new communication modes. There are studies to suggest that the usage of social media is growing even in smaller countries. In a study (Sali Emruli, Tahir Zejneli and Florin Agai, 2011) on the usage of Facebook and political communication in Macedonia, a small

state in transition, it is observed that the Internet is not fully involved in political communication in Macedonia. Government institutions and political parties understand the information given out in the digital platforms as a bulletin board, so the network is mainly used to write pages that are basically monologues rather than dialogues, they say, and conclude that all political parties give the same result as compared to the number of mandates won in party elections, and political parties have not yet exploited the potential of Facebook. (Ibid) Probably, this is the scenario in India, too. Neither government nor political leaders are exploiting the digital platforms for public utility. Networking sites are still serving as advertisement platforms.

Again, coming back to the US presidential elections, there is one more study on the topic which is worth taking note of as it discusses the quality of content. In the study (Daniel Kreiss and Philip N Howard, 2010) on the new challenges faced by political parties and lessons learnt from the first US presidential race in the cyber era, the authors recall that one month before the 2008 presidential election, Barack Obama sent an e-mail to his earliest supporters, purportedly from Campaign Manager David Plouffe, who reminded them that they were, 'one of the first million people to own a piece of this campaign' and 'helped build this movement when the odds were long and the Election Day was far in the future.' (Ibid)

According to the authors, many pundits and academicians argue that millions of citizens were the driving force behind the Obama campaign. The account of Obama campaign, however, mentions little about political data. The study also says that, "Despite two decades of research into the new media practices of campaigns, the working of the data and analysis 'backend' (Hindman, 2007) of electoral politics and the industry that supports it are still largely hidden from view, particularly given the press focus on social media." (Ibid)

The study says that the uptake of digital media in campaigning is primarily about voter identification, persuasion, and mobilization in the service of very narrow electoral ends. The researchers further observe that there is little to suggest that data transparency and regulation will come about on its own. The interests of political leadership and large data mining firms are closely aligned against the state regulation that would secure transparency in data practices. Interfaces, databases and consultancies form the largely invisible backend to web 2.0 politics. The lack of transparency and security in political data raises significant concerns for citizens. There could be a democratic deficit where only the wealthiest candidates can seriously compete and where vast swathes of the citizenry remain unengaged in the political process. Data practices and storehouses of

information should be made transparent and accessible. Much more scholarly work is needed into the democratic effects of the data-driven polity, the authors conclude. (Ibid)

Indeed Kreiss and Howard have given food for thought by discussing content from the point of transparency and also how people who have no access to the Internet may remain unaware of the issues being discussed. Such a trend is akin to what is being seen in India. While a good number of politicians and parties and governments are taking an e-route to communicate, a large majority have not been accessed due to various reasons including the lack of Internet access and affordability to use technology.

The United States Institute of Peace has brought out a report titled Blogs and Bullets: New Media in Contentious Politics.' The research-based study (Aday, Farrell, Lynch and Sides, 2010) aims at critically assessing both the 'cyberutopian' and 'cyberskeptic' perspectives on the impact of new media on political movements at five levels. Referring to the democratizing power of new media, the authors observe that though new media can plausibly shape contentious politics, they are only one among a number of important political factors.

One more observation cautiously made by the researchers is that opening up the Internet may not be a panacea. While a free media may improve the prospects for collective action, the effects on intergroup relations may be more troubling. New media maybe more likely to promote polarization and to provide targeted communication channels for already polarized groups than do traditional forms of broadcasting and mass media. (Ibid)

The Sean Aday team leaves many cautions when it comes to analyzing the effect of new media in political process. They observe new media, such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook and Twitter, and YouTube, have played a major role in episodes of contentious political action. Despite the prominence of social media tool based revolutions, policymakers and scholars know "very little" about whether and how new media affect contentious politics. Scholars and policymakers should adopt a more nuanced view of new media's role in democratization and social change, one that recognizes that new media can have both positive and negative effects, they categorically say. (Ibid)

There could be several studies to analyze the 2008 US Presidential elections. Still, one study is unique as it used Radian6, a real time online social media tracking tool, to examine major topics of

conversation during the general election campaign. The study on social media and the US elections 2008 (Emily Metzgar and Albert Maruggi, 2009) has attempted to evaluate conventional wisdom with empirical findings taken from the 2008 presidential campaign season, using data collected with Radian6. Metzgar and Maruggi say the elections gave an opportunity to evaluate the usefulness of social media technology. Social media platforms played a "facilitating role" in the unfolding of the 2008 election, there is "little evidence" that any of these social media venues actually drove "discussion, participation, or outcomes." They further say, "The bottom line is that social media tools are only tools. They are no replacement for message, motivation, or strategy." The authors point out that one crucial though obvious point - one-way mode of communication in mass media is fading with the advent of interactive media technologies. (Ibid)

Among the several observations made by the researchers, one is that social media was useful not just for its facility in distributing a campaign message, but also for its utility in offering a mechanism for the ongoing engagement on the part of those moved by the message. The second observation in the study is that though conventional wisdom suggests that "the medium was the message" in this election, the evidence considered here does not bear that out. In one more observation, it said that though the scale of coverage varied considerably between traditional media and social media, generally speaking the priority given to the coverage of an issue in traditional media was reflected in social media and vice versa. Some of the biggest issues, traditional media and social media coverage merged. Finally, they point out that social media has profoundly changed political communication in the United States. As tumultuous as the 2008 election season was, there will surely be stories to top this season the next time around. (Ibid)

One of the early study papers which have thrown light on how the US presidential campaign of 2008 went on and how the media covered new media usage was published in 2009. The research study (Michael Schudson, 2009) says that reading of *New York Time's* coverage of the 2008 presidential campaign demonstrates that America's most influential newspaper paid a great deal of attention to the role of new media and some old media in the campaign. While analysing the coverage of elections over the months, the author concludes it may be that the technological changes all around us and the cultural changes, too – The Daily Show and The Colbert Report are products not of a new technology, but of a newly exploitable cultural opening for irreverence – will become familiar, will settle into predictable patterns. Perhaps traditional centres of economic and political power that seemed shaken in 2008 will regain control, but that does not seem likely in the near

future. The new media singly and collectively are sponsors of a new intensity, ubiquity, and anarchism in our mediated public world. (Ibid)

Since this study was done, a lot of changes have taken place in terms of new media technology innovation and the consumption pattern of content. Constituents, who earlier had no belief, or who were not very sure of the impact of social media, have also accepted the tech-based media for daily use. Even the writing style of the content, be it in new or old media, has changed over the years, mainly because users of interactive media have turned into writers, and they express their mind. (Ibid)

Trends in election campaigns, online and offline, are continuously changing. There are also apprehensions whether there is a digital divide when it comes to political discourses as increasingly discussions and debates have now been reduced to digital platforms. This is obvious from the trends in American elections. This is well explained in the study (A. Baum and Tim Groeling, 2008) on how new media is polarizingAmerican political discourse. The authors say that blog users are more likely to discuss politics with others, than non-bloggers, and, in doing so, disseminate their views to the broader public. "News coverage in the blogosphere and the attitude of blog consumers may increasingly influence, and as a consequence, ultimately reflect political opinion and the broader citizenry," they conclude. (Ibid)

And, this trend of creating opinion blogs is happening in India. Yet blogging is not very extensive, especially by political, government and opinion leaders. Compared to political parties and their players, civic agencies and business houses which are into product manufacturing and selling are making more use of blogs.

When many studies post 2008 US presidential elections have focused on new media and politics, an early study in Spain discusses new media in a different background. New media and political participation in Europe, the terrorists attack in Madrid and the demonstrations that followed in Spain on March 13, 2004 has been captured in the study (Oscar Garcia Luengo, 2006). He says the demonstrations in Madrid present an interesting challenge for political communication research and comparisons between political activism and the consumption of new and old media in European countries.

Pointing out that people employed communication technologies in order to create the dynamics of peaceful civil disobedience, Luengo says that there were clear differences in the levels of activism between the countries. Respondents from well established democracies show high levels of political activism, while respondents from the younger democracies show lower levels of the same dimension. However, respondents from extremely young democracies show the lowest levels of non-conventional political participation. (Ibid)

Finally, the researcher concludes that these new communicational processes are not under the control of the state, the political parties or the democratic institutions. They are mechanisms that belong exclusively to the citizens who are able to demand responsibility from politicians. These developments show that new technologies are not necessarily elements of suspicion or distrust, as suggested by some pessimistic scholars. On the contrary, sometimes they can provide tools to facilitate a real intensification and extension of democratic principles and civic commitment. (Ibid)

There are arguments that it is not easy to assess the effect of new media on politics and voters. Similarly its influence on civic organizations is also difficult to fathom. In the study (Ken'ichi Ikeda & Sean E Richey, 2005) analyzing the impact of social media on Japanese political participation, it is concluded that social networking does increase political participation. "Vertical associations and networks influence to positively encourage civic-mindedness," it finds. However, the study says that openness in formal social networks has a significant positive impact but the data collected for research shows that none favour open informal networks. The possible explanation is that politicians visit civic organizations only occasionally. The political participation itself has not increased at the aggregate level in the recent years, but the number of civic organizations has increased. (Ibid)

Way back in 2005, the study (Philip N Howard, 2005) on democracy,
citizenship and the impact of digital media in the political campaign strategy, the researcher had observed that Americans were increasingly using digital tools to research politics and engage their friends, family, and political leaders in discussions. Ethnographic observation suggests that political campaign strategies are increasingly geared toward fragmenting the public sphere, either by sending particular messages to particular people or by designing tools for citizens to encode their personal interests and sequester their consumption of news. Though the excitement of the digital age was based in technological potential, one can be less confident that everyone in polity has access to the same quality of regularly published, generally accessible political information, Howard reasons. (Ibid)

Political parties do their best to exploit the usage of information and communications technology (ICTs) for not just electioneering but also to promote intra-party democracy. A study (Andrea Rommele, 2003) says that findings from the US and the UK party system indicate that mainstream vote-maximizing parties are proving to be keen to exploit the new ICTs for top down information provision, with participatory elements occupying less prominence. The research says that ICTs help in promoting specific advocacy groups. However, they are generally not leading to any far-reaching redress of existing power relations. It raises doubts over sustainability about advocacy campaigns on the Internet. (Ibid)

In another study (Philip N Howard, 2003) on the American political culture in new media age, the researcher opined that an immense source of power lies in the ability to produce political culture. An effective political campaign is about defining and acknowledging the stake-holders, framing arguments, and creating icons, and all three of these kinds of political objects are much easier to manage using the new communication tools developed over the last one decade.

The author argues that "information is still power, but having raw data does not lead anywhere". Instead, it is the careful production of political culture through the manipulation of data that makes political power. The data is used to produce opportunities for exercises in this citizenship and to produce data shadows for occasions when citizens are not engaged but need reputation on a specific issue, the author points out. (Ibid)

CONCLUSION

The digital world, which has a history of about two decades, includes various communicating forms, including compact discs (CDs), digital versatile discs (DVDs), on the Internet. Content is received through different gadgets like desktop computers, laptops, iPads, tablets and smartphones. It is rightly billed as the "network of networks". In new media, the sky is the limit for ideas and content generation. It is non-sequential interpretation with more than one source connecting or intersecting on a single platform.

The Pew Research Centre, an American think-tank based in Washington, says in its April, 2014 post that the growing digital new world largely made up of hundreds of smaller sites, often local in scope, is working to fill gaps left by the legacy of reporting. Emarsys, a digital marketing company of Austria, while listing seven social media trends dominating 2015, quoting a study, states that one-quarter of the world's population uses social media. They are posting, pinning, Tweeting, vining and

Instagramming. Every 60 seconds 4.7 million posts are produced to Tumblr; 277,000 snaps are shared on SnapChat, and more than five million videos are viewed on YouTube.

The meta review suggests that one of the studies endorses the power and presence of new media in the context of Indian elections of 2014 where the country witnessed extensive usage of social media by a politician, the Prime Ministerial candidate Narendra Modi who created history in the use of new media and was placed several notches above other contestants from major political parties. It was Narendra Modi who adopted all methods to reach the masses across the nation. He was the prime ministerial candidate of the right wing political party - BJP, and he had twin goals – to bring the party to power at the Centre and also become the prime minister. To attain both, he did not shy away from using all types of media in a calculated but extensive way proving in the process the enormous power of new media, says the study. The studies have revealed that new media intervention in elections around the world has proved the usage of new media for engaging citizens in political participation. The research points out that new media are a way of increasing citizen involvement in political life particularly young citizens who have demonstrated total disengagement in public affairs. It is amply evident from the body of research studies that social media networking has promoted inclusiveness of youth in political process even in Africa where political mobilization for social change has been initiated say the studies.

Nevertheless, social media which is increasingly used in campaigns across Europe, the ultimate effect of this usage remains unclear. New media cannot be the single factor in influencing winning or losing in elections. However, these digital media can amplify the existing forces in politics and influence the electoral process indicating the other variables that determine the fortunes of politicians. Studies point out that new media flourish in democracies promoting participatory political process than in totalitarian countries. Some studies have raised the crucial issue of new media promoting polarization by providing targeted communication channels for already polarized groups unlike traditional media. One of the notions affecting New media is its credibility as studies vouches for the fact that they are not institutionalized enough to influence credibility perceptions.

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