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# Political Parties through Social Media: Context of Facebook

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*Abstract: Today nearly all major political parties of India are in one or the other way using new media for reaching the masses and trying to connect with them for publicity, and complaining purpose. Top leaders like Rahul Gandhi, Narendra Modi, Sushma Sawraj, Shashi Tharur are regularly updating their social pages either it may be Facebook or twitter and keeping the people inform about their activities. The social media has become the modern tool of political discourse. Using social media especially Facebook for political discourse is becoming common practice, especially around election time. Politicians in this sense are the group of people who are being paid for their activities, and who are being elected or appointed as the central players in the polity. If we talk about discourse, Discourse is spoken or written communication between people, especially serious discussion of a particular subject e.g. a tradition of political discourse. The paper deals with the study of use of social media for public discourse by the political parties of India, mainly two of the biggest parties Congress and BJP. BJP is a major political party in India; the party is associated with ideology of Nation First and advocates conservative social policies, self-reliance, free markets, and foreign policy driven by a nationalist agenda. The Indian National Congress is the world's largest democratic political organization.*

**Key Words:** Political Parties, Social Media, Public, Discourse, Facebook.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Facebook is the new ground of political discourse where major political parties post their lectures manifesto, vision, ideas to inform the masses. Whereas the masses give the feedback to these parties by likes and comments. The Dictionary of Media and Communication defines discourse as the use of language in communication or serious discussion about a subject or particular style of talking and writing. This term is first used by Michel Foucault to describe how language is used by people and institutions to shape social reality. In this sense, discourse is seen as a form of power because it articulates and ensconces through language the ideas that are accepted as truth. The term is now extended to include non-verbal and other kinds of languages (visual discourse, narrative discourse and other discourses) (Danesi, 2009, p. 98).

New media has provided umpteen opportunities to express and share personal experiences across the world instantly and efficiently. Social media are becoming increasingly popular among politicians and their organizations as a means to disseminate political messages. Many political parties and their supporters have created accounts on popular sites such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and Flickr, Blog etc. etc. Some of them also have linkages on YouTube exhibiting various clips, advertisements, and other video recordings related to the party and candidate.

Party officials are also sharing views and information with the public. Links to these accounts are mentioned on the official websites of each party, along with features that allow users to “bookmark” and share elements of the party’s websites with their online networks. Each party website also has unique social media features. Social media are also being used as campaign tools. For example, in 2009, during the US presidency campaign Mr. Obama drew on a database of approximately 13 million email addresses, an active community blog, and a digital network of volunteers to raise money, encourage voter turnout and support a grassroots approach to election campaign.

Facebook, which has become incredibly popular in India and has over 82 million active users in the country. This makes India the second biggest country after the US and Canada in terms of number of Facebook users. The social media site not only hosts private pages and group pages maintained by companies, but also pages through which political parties and activists broadcast messages and information.

The usage of social media in politics in India is continually growing, with an increasing number of politicians in the country taking advantage of the medium to communicate instantly with thousands of people. Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are three basic social media platforms that most politicians use to amplify their presence and clout. Every politician now wants to reach out to individuals directly through Twitter or Facebook. Even



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political parties have accounts, which they use to post information on political campaigns, press releases and other news updates.

## II. INDIAN POLITICIANS ACTIVE IN SOCIAL MEDIA

**Narendra Modi:** With approximately 1.3 million followers on his Facebook page, Modi is one of the most famous politicians on social media. He joined Facebook and Twitter in 2009 and became the first politician to use Google Plus. He mainly targets youth through his social networking. People are highly responsive his updates by liking, commenting and sharing his updates. Modi has a dedicated website on which developments in Gujarat done by Modi government are given in large detail.

**Rahul Gandhi:** Rahul has approximately 2.5 lakh fans on his page. Not only Facebook, he is a very active blog writer too. He has also been very interactive on his Facebook page. He writes blogs which get published for people to know his views on issues. Rahul Gandhi also focused on youth through his Facebook profile. Rahul profile also like by people special young generation and they give highly responsive his updates by liking, commenting and sharing his updates.

**Shashi Tharoor:** At times, Shashi Tharoor is also referred to as the "Twitter minister". Tharoor might not have an official page on Facebook but to cover that up, he has almost 15 lakh followers on Twitter. That count also makes him the most persuasive politician on Twitter.

**Sushma Swaraj:** She might not have an official Facebook page but her following is such that her community page on Facebook has approximately 95,000 likes.

**Manmohan Singh:** He has an official page on Facebook with more than 3.5 lakh fans. His Facebook page is updated with latest activities in the government, PM's conferences, speeches, press releases, information and functions. His Facebook page is updated with latest activities in the government, PM's conferences and functions. He tweets on various social issues and latest happenings around the country.

**L. K. Advani:** He has a large number of fans and followers on Facebook and Twitter. He has an official website called <http://www.lkadvani.in> on which one can find every detail about his background, his latest activities, speeches etc.

**Chandrababu Naidu:** He has an official Facebook page with almost 35,000 fans on it.

**Omar Abdullah:** He connects to people through his frequent tweets. He has over 1 lakh followers on Twitter and he interacts with people frequently.

**S. M. Krishna:** The former external affairs minister has almost 32,000 followers on Twitter.

**Rajeev Chandrasekhar:** He not only owns a website but also has a Facebook page and a good number of followers on Twitter. He has approximately 1 lakh followers on Twitter.<sup>1</sup>

## III. RESEARCH DESIGN

**Research Questions:** Are Facebook being used as public discourse tools by political party in India.

**Objective of the Research Study:** The broader objective of the study was to assess the role of social media in public discourse specially Facebook- the specific objectives of the study were as follow;

- Facebook profile study of both top political parties Congress and BJP.
- To know the Role of Facebook as a tool for public discourse?
- To study the postings of both political parties on Facebook to initiate public discourse?
- Content study of Facebook on public discourse.
- Is Facebook efficient in initiating public discourse?



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- To study the public interaction and involvement on the content of political parties?

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is the systematic, theoretical analysis of the methods applied to a field of study. In this study the content analysis methodology & qualitative analysis of Facebook pages has been used. BJP&Congress parties have been chosen because both parties are national and major in India. In this study we watch of both parties their using Facebook material e.g. comments, tools of public discourse, content etc. The research was carried out for 39 days from 1<sup>st</sup> of Nov. 2013 to 9<sup>th</sup>Dec. 2013, on through study of the Facebook pages of two major political parties of India viz. Indian national congress and BhartiyaJanata party. The study involved collection of information (content) posted by the parties on their Facebook pages & the feedback they received from the public in terms of likes, comment sharing etc. the distribution of study was on content from the party's side and feedback from public to complete the process of public discourses.

**Sample:** In India many more political party connect with Facebook. But, there are researcher has chosen only two major national political parties. (i) Indian National Congress, (ii) BhartiyeJanta Party. The sample has been chosen from congress and BJP Facebook pages only one week.

**Utility of the Research Study:**Is the new media accepted as medium of public discourse. Discourse and it an accepted by masses to know, interact with the political parties. Will this method be useful in complaining and reaching the masses and making them aware of the political developments of specific party in whole?

**Data Analysis:** the research was carried out for 39 days from 1<sup>st</sup> of Nov. 2013 to 9<sup>th</sup>Dec. 2013, on thorough study of the Facebook pages of two major political parties of India viz. Indian national congress and BhartiyaJanata Party. The study involved collection of information (content) posted by the parties on their Facebook pages & the feedback they received from the public in terms of likes, comment, sharing etc. the distribution of study was on content from the party's side and feedback from public to complete the process of public discourses.

The Facebook pages of parties had contents varying from photos, videos, messages for public updates of party's development and follow up of public responses. The research study revealed that the Facebook page of BJP was liked by 1,883, 943 people and more than 10, 104, 0 talked about the same, whereas the page of congress was liked by 3, 66, 957 people and 27,577 people then same.

The images posted by BJP mounted to 51 & videos to 08. The likes for these were from the range of 68 minimum to 2496 of maximum, whereas the received comments ranging from 24 to 538 whereas major posts were shared by the users. On the other side the congress posted 81 photos and 9 videos for which the likes ranged from 45 to 2870 and the public had commented on the same from 11 to 470 times.

The content analysis of both party pages had interesting outputs. Both parties had discourses on their agenda for forthcoming manifestos and messages for masses along with photos and videos of lectures by the prominent personalities form each party.

BJP posted the messages of prominent leaders like SushmaSwaraj, Arun Jetly, party president Rajnath Singh and video of veteran leader L.K. Advani. But the most prominent personality to be showcased was the prime ministerial candidate NarendraModi. The main focus of discourse was the youth. The page also displayed the day today development of party& party coming programmed e.g. Run for Unity, Join mission 272+, Lalkar Rally, Vijay Shankhnaad rally etc. The page also paid tribute to its legends e.g. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on his 58th ParinirvanDiwas, Nelson Mandela etc. all this material as discussed above received likes, and was shared by many. The masses also commented the posts.

Whereas as the congress had posted messages of Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, KapilSibbal and other prominent leaders but the most promoted were the rallies and messages of Rahul Gandhi, the Facebook page of congress focused on public welfare and schemes launched by the ruling govt. viz.mid-day meals, NAREGA, Scientific initiatives. The page also updated according to occasion & paid tribute to such as Ambedkar Birthday, Maulana



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Abdul Kalam Azad, and Swami Vivekananda, Congress President Smt. Sonia Gandhi's condolence message on the death of Nelson Mandela, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore and other Indian prominent persons.

The documentaries of famous congress leaders like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and others were also showcased. All content were liked and shared by many and as well as commented. Based on the content the party pages received responses and this lead to public discourse.

#### V. APPEAL TO THE MASSES BY THE POLITICAL PARTIES. (BJP)

- Delhi: We request every voter to go out in large number & vote for Development & Good Governance. Let's celebrate the festival of Democracy.
- Dear Supporters, We request you to call/SMS/email your friends/families/colleagues who are going to vote in upcoming assembly elections & ask them to vote for BJP.
- Greetings to the people of India and the NRI's world over on the sacred occasion of Guru Nanak Devji'sPrakashUtsav.
- ShriRajnath Singh, Smt. VasundharaRaje and other BJP leaders releasing BJP Manifesto for Rajasthan Assembly Election 2013 at Jaipur (Rajasthan) on November 20, 2013.
- Five years after Mumbai attack, there is a need to build a national determination against terrorism. Post 9/11, the Americans have substantially immunized their nation against terror. Why can't we do that?
- It was not Commonwealth Games, it was Congress Wealth Games: Smt. SushmaSwaraj.
- Run for Unity on 15th December 2013.
- BJP has won 68% seats in four states: ShriRajnath Singh.



Fig 1. Run for Unity on 15th December 2013.



Fig 2. ShriRajnath Singh paid tribute to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on his 58th ParinirvanDiwas.



Fig 3. Request you to Call/SMS/Email your friends/families/colleagues that are going to vote in Delhi assembly election & ask them to vote for BJP. (All Content: <https://www.facebook.com/BJP4India>)



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**VI. APPEAL TO THE MASSES BY THE POLITICAL PARTIES. (INC)**

- Creating Rural Infrastructure for Greater Growth the Congress understands that since a majority of Indians live in villages, true progress can be achieved only by transforming rural India. To change the landscape of rural India, the Congress had created the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF), to provide loans to State Governments and State-owned corporations to enable them to complete ongoing rural infrastructure projects.
- The UPA government has allocated Rs. 20,000 crore under the RIDF for 2012-13, taking the cumulative allocation to Rs 1, 54,000crore. As compared to the UPA's allocation of Rs. 20,000 crore just for one year, the total allocation under the NDA government was just Rs. 23,500 crore over a period of five years.
- P.M. Congratulates ISRO On Successful Launch of Mars Mission.
- Mangalyaan a Landmark for Space Research in India.
- Congress Committed to Skill Development to Empower Youth.
- Congress Promises 2 Lakh Jobs To Youth In Madhya Pradesh.
- India Pays Homage to the Heroes of 26/11 Mumbai Attack.
- Inspiring the Next Generation of Indian Entrepreneurship.
- Our Mission: the Empowerment of Each and Every Indian Very Soon, one wi-fi hotspot in each of the 2.5 lakh gram panchayats spread across the country.
- "Our Government is alive to the need for expansion of telecom services in the rural areas. One of the key objectives of the National Telecom Policy 2012 is to increase rural tele-density to 70% by the year 2017 and 100% by the year 2020." --- Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, at the inaugural address of 'India Telecom 2013' in New Delhi.
- Congress led the movement for women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions Today, the Congress fights for 33% reservation in Parliament and State Assemblies.
- You can join this conversation in a number of ways:
  1. Visit our website <http://www.incmanifesto.in/>
  2. Post your suggestions on our facebook page INC Manifesto
  3. Twitter: [https://twitter.com/INC\\_Manifesto](https://twitter.com/INC_Manifesto)
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Fig 4. The Indian National Congress has decided that its manifesto for the 2014 will not be a booklet drafted by 20 people in a closed room, rather it will be a document prepared by the people of India.

The idea is to set the national agenda through a nation-wide conversation in which each Indian can be a participant.



Fig 5. The most important factor that causes prices of all commodities to increase is the rise in international oil prices.



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**Fig 6. The Congress believes that politics must be based on empowering the people through rights, providing them opportunities to improve their lives and ensuring that everyone has a voice." Congress Vice-President Rahul Gandhi (All content: <https://www.facebook.com/IndianNationalCongress>)**

## VII. CONCLUSION

The research that was based on 39 days of study of Facebook pages of two major political party's viz. Congress and BJP. Based on this study it is concluded that Politicians are now ubiquitous on the internet especially in the social media. Social media is one such institution in a modern society which enjoys enormous power. The social media are the most important source of information for politicians e.g. Personal experience, comments, discussion, pictures message, profile etc. the research concludes that in matter of likes BJP has earned more laurels than congress and also it has surpassed its opponent in comments and talk about.

Messages of Modi got more likes than Rahul Gandhi, whereas Rahul Gandhi was commented more than Modi. The BJP displayed more of its manifesto, agenda and lectures. Whereas Congress party highlighted its development work during its ten years ruling reign. Regards to the information displayed on the respective pages Congress had more information sharing with its cadre and masses. Whereas the BJP pages revolved around speeches of Modi. Prominent leaders of BJP like Sushama Swaraj, Arun Jetali, Rajnath Singh, Lal Krishan Advani shared the space on pages.

Whereas leaders of congress Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, Kapil Sibal, Sheela Dixit had their opinions. The study also concludes that the Facebook initiated good public discourse but some unethical abusing comments, were posted by the supporters of respective parties against each other. This caused embarrassment for the neutral users. So we recommend that this media can work wonders if used in proper way and ethical ways and create awareness among masses to have a public discourse favourable for everybody and make a great impact in the development of Indian politics.

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