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SOCIAL MEDIA: REORIENTING INDIAN POLITICS

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Abstract: Social media is a buzz word today. This new media is touching every spheres of human life. Politics is no exception. Politics today has been highly restructured and reshaped by social media. The way conventional media dealt with politics has been largely changed with the entry of social media into politics. Though social media has redesigned politics in many aspects, but the researcher has identified six dimensions of politics which have been highly affected by social media, namely – political communication, political mobilization, political campaigning, political socialisation, political participation and political culture. Through different data and examples the researcher has tried to establish her points. How the Indian politics has gained new momentum through social media is the key objective of the paper. The deeper penetration of social media in Indian politics is leaving greater impact on it. With the latest technological innovations Indian politics has reinvented itself to suit the new media era. The paper thus seeks to highlight how the politics of India has reoriented itself with the deeper penetration of the social media into political periphery.

Key Words: Social media, Political communication, Political mobilization, Political campaigning, Political socialisation, Political participation, Political culture.

Objective: The main objective of the paper is to understand how social media is reorienting Indian politics. The key objectives of the paper are as follows:

1. To study the restructuring of Indian politics through social media.
2. To analyse the changes brought about by social media in the field of political communication, political mobilization, political campaigning, political socialisation, political participation and political culture.
3. While analysing point number 2, researcher also tried to bring forward certain points of differentiation between old and new media with regard to the above (point number2) aspects.

Literature Survey: While doing this research, several books and articles have been consulted for refined output. Literature surveys have been immensely useful. Articles like, “Evolution of Social Media and its Impact on Journalism” is a very interesting study. Moreover, article named, “Impact of Social Media on Politics” added important insights on the effect of social media on politics. The article named “Influence of Social Media and Technology in the Indian Elections” has also been very useful. “Role of Social Media in Political Management in India” is also an interesting article. Equally helpful has been the article named “Impact of Social Media on Indian Politics”. These are only a few to name. Several other books and articles have provided interesting inputs.

Research Methodology: The research has been mainly conducted with emphasis on secondary data. Most of the information and data have been collected from different online and offline sources such as social media platforms, data and reports published both online and offline and have been compiled according to the need of the research work..

Introduction: The trait that has made the human race developed from any other species is communication. Not that the other species are not communicating among themselves, but that is at the very basic level. But the human communication system is not only biologically superior to them, rather mankind throughout the world are always trying to invent newer modes of communication which are technologically sound and innovative. In search of such innovations, human beings once invented the technologically driven newest media called the social media. Like in the different countries of the world, the people of India saw the first emergence of internet through email, followed by the introduction of Orkut in 2005. The social networking site was

mainly created for the people to have newer ways to establish connections and share pictures, which marked the birth of social media presence in India. With the passage of time, social media has crossed the drawing rooms of the people to enter into their bedrooms, even at the odd hours. From necessity it has turned out into a new addiction.

Now what exactly we mean by social media? Social media are websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. Social media is a particular expression for websites and applications that highlights virtual communication, community-based interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. Few popular social media websites include, Facebook and Facebook Messenger, TikTok, WeChat, Instagram, QZone, Weibo, Twitter, Tumblr, Baidu Tieba and LinkedIn. Depending on interpretation, other popular platforms that are sometimes referred to as social media services include YouTube, QQ, Quora, Telegram, WhatsApp, Signal, LINE, Snapchat, Pinterest, Viber, Reddit, Discord etc. Wikis are examples of collaborative content creation. Social media platforms differ from traditional print media like newspapers, magazines and journals, Television and radio broadcasting in many ways like — quality, coverage, frequency, operation, technical execution and permanence. Moreover while social media outlets operate in a dialogic transmission system (many sources to multiple receivers), traditional media outlets operate under a monologic transmission model (one source to multiple receivers). Thus social media with all its uniqueness and potentials is a buzz word today. The most common among these, like Facebook has a “wall” where the people come up with different posts including their stories and experiences which are shared in real times and are liked and tagged by other facebook friends. WhatsApp again is the one stop destination for instant communication across the world. Twitter helps in propagating people’s ideas through tweets which are again answered by re-tweets. YouTube helps in the posting of different videos, films, reels, documentaries, songs etc. But there is a problem for those who are economically poor. But companies like Xiami, Moto, Lenovo, etc have worked hard and sincerely in providing cheap smart phones for Indian customers. Social media now being easily available to the people particularly through the smart phones, touch every aspects of human life like – education, entertainment, profession, culture, tourism etc. These aspects of our daily lives are reoriented by social media. But among these the subject that has been highly affected by social media is politics. In India, politics is reshaped and reoriented by social media.

Social Media and Politics: The 2008 Presidential election of Obama in America made a history – not only in the sense that he was the first African American President of USA, but also because of the fact that he used social media as a major campaign strategy. Social media became a popular term in Indian politics since the Indian Parliamentary election in 2014. During this election Narendra Modi emerged as India’s Obama. Since then almost all the political parties are using social media to communicate with the people. The political campaigning today is flooded with advertisements, blog posts, and innumerable tweets and re tweets. Social media has restructured Indian politics in several ways. Six aspects have been identified for discussion:

I. Political Communication: Communication is the very basic of any democratic political society. In a democracy, the political leaders need to keep direct and indirect contact with the voters. Previously, the face to face political communications were mainly done. But with the coming up of social media and its deeper penetration in the Indian politics, political leaders irrespective of the political parties are using these new media for constant communication. A networking pool is created through the social media through which the people draw in political inputs and deliver refined political outputs. These information sharing through social media helps to sustain the political system. Anytime, anywhere connectivity has now become the salient feature of political communication. Not that conventional media did not engage in political communication, but those were mainly one way. The inclusion of social media in politics has made the communication dialogic. The use of social media platforms by different political leaders proves how social media has become a popular means of political communication.

Table 1: popularity index of some Indian political leaders in social media apps

Leader and Their Party Name	Facebook		Twitter	Instagram
	Total Likes	Total Follows	Followers	Followers
Narendra Modi (BJP)	46M	46M	73.2M	63.6M
Rahul Gandhi (INC)	3.9M	4.5M	19.5M	1.7M
Sitaram Yechury (CPIM)	261K	270K	1M	16.8K
Arvind Kejriwal (AAP)	8.2M	8.8M	23.5M	1.2M
Mamata Banerjee (AITC)	3.8M	4.7M	6.3M	183K

Source: Meta © 2021(Compiled by the author).

II. Political Mobilization: Electoral politics is all about political mobilization. Political leaders cannot reap any benefit from the political system until and unless they can mobilize the citizens to be their voters. Since democracy is a number game, therefore more the supporters, the more are the strong political support base of political leaders and the parties. Traditional media also help in the political mobilization through the panel discussions in the television, through newspapers which act as party mouthpiece, different journals and road shows and lectures. But these are time bound and have little scope of repetition. But in social media through different posts, blogs, videos, etc these are shown 24x7. Moreover, the visual attractiveness makes those posts highly penetrative to the human brains as seen in the magic bullet theory. Not only these are highly effective, these are also durable in the sense that they mobilize the human senses. Moreover, the comments and lives, posts and videos shared by one's 'social media friends' help in further political mobilization. Thus political mobilizations are carried out in two ways – one directly by the party leaders and the other by the loyal voters through social media.

III. Political Campaigning: Political campaigning which is largely based on political communication and is done for the sake of political mobilization has become easier through social media. The political parties upload different videos, blogs, and posts covering their developmental activities, long term plans and programmes which motivate the voters to vote in their favour. At the same time, political party leaders often share the illegal and un-parliamentarian activities of their opposition party members which disturb their credibility and hamper their vote banks. Though often the news shared in the social media loses credibility due to the relentless circulation of fake news, still this new medium acts as one of the easiest mode of political campaigning. The political parties often come up with different hashtag campaigns which help in political mobilization. Digital rallies were also introduced in the Indian politics during the Covid-19 pandemic. Talking to Times of India, Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) in-charge of National Information and Technology department Amit Malviya said, "BJP conducted various virtual rallies which were addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi where lakhs of people were mobilised in several locations keeping the Covid guidelines in the mind. The same virtual rallies were viewed by millions of people on their social media accounts and on hand – held devices". Moreover, social media offers equal scope of political mobilization for all political parties, at least technologically, if not economically.

IV. Political Socialisation: Previously political socialisations were mainly performed by conventional media, family and peers. But now social media play a huge role in political socialisation. Often these socialisations are in the form of covert socialisation. The different political posts, videos and political lectures shared by the political parties keep flashing in the walls of social media or are circulated as messages through WhatsApp. Moreover, the political ideas and comments shared by someone's near and dear ones also inject political values and reshape the political behaviour of an individual. Thus, political socialisation has found a new

dimension through social media. The political activities of larger sections of people are captured by the social media and are presented before the individuals, particularly the youth, who in turn build up their political attitudes.

V. Political Participation: It often becomes embarrassing for some people to directly participate in party activities, walking in road shows and rallies, or give lectures from the political stages. But for them things become easier virtually. In the social media they can participate, often not fully disclosing their identities. Therefore, there remains no risk of getting politically marked. Moreover, those who remain marginalised in the conventional media particularly the youths and women also get the scope of political participation through social media. The hardcore journalistic practices often prohibit these excluded groups from participating in the political process. But social media gives them a platform where they can come up with their own ideas and opinions and get them circulated which in turn gives birth to counter ideas and opinions.

VI. Political Culture: We see a sea change in the political culture of India with the entry of social media into politics. The pre-electoral campaign strategies have changed drastically as social media has taken the key position in politics. The wall writings and the graffiti which were once so famous have been now mostly substituted by Facebook wall writings. The politicians now feel comfortable to upload their political videos in social media and get them circulated to the larger audiences. Moreover, India is observing a new political culture with the different trolls, memes, tweets and re-tweets which often cross the civilised limits. Languages and emojis used in social media to counter the political opponents often are un-parliamentarian. The constitutional positions often engage in tweet wars which disturbs the sanctity of their constitutional posts. The following example exemplifies the case.

image 1: a glimpse of the tweet-war between Jagdeep Dhankhar and Mamata Banerjee



Conclusion: With such a huge penetration of social media in India's politics no political leaders or the political parties had kept a single stone unturned to utilise the potential of the new media to the fullest. Prime Minister Narendra Modi can be a very relevant example. Since the 2012 Assembly election of Gujarat Modi emphasized on his virtual activities in different new media platforms. His Facebook campaign named 'Ek Hi Vikalp Modi' was introduced when he campaigned for his prime ministerial candidacy. The IT cell of the BJP, in collaboration with the US-trained software professionals, was established in New Delhi, in July 2013 as the National Digital Operations Centre. In 2015, India saw a unique political campaign. Tweets and hashtag usage reflects support for specific initiatives like, #Sachch Bharat, #Make In India, #Start Up India, #Selfie With Daughter etc. Modi's Twitter handle @narendramodi and PMO Twitter handle @PMO India worked hand in hand to inform his followers about governmental activities. In 2015, Modi launched the 'Narendra Modi Mobile App' (NaMo) to obtain feedback of the citizens on different developmental plans and programmes. The usage of social media by the most important office of India proves the very fact that how much space it occupies in politics. Not only it has brought quantitative changes in politics, but it has also brought in some qualitative changes particularly in the sphere of political communication, political mobilization, political campaigning, political socialisation, political participation and political culture as have been discussed earlier.

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Source: https://twitter.com/ANI?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor

