SOCIAL MEDIA, POLITICAL CAMPAIGN AND INDIAN DEMOCRACY: STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SELECT REGIONAL PARTIES OF SOUTH INDIA

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ABSTRACT
Media has always been a crucial pillar of society, not just reporting events but also shaping public opinion, making it powerful in a democracy. The emergence of social media has revolutionized this space, providing a platform that mirrors the societal pulse. In India, the world's largest democracy, elections are paramount, and political marketing is evolving rapidly, with parties leveraging social media to engage voters, spread manifestos, and raise funds. Digital media bridges the gap between parties and voters, allowing targeted and interactive communication. The 2014 Lok Sabha elections marked India's first major social media election, with platforms like Facebook and Twitter becoming pivotal in political campaigns, transforming traditional methods. This article highlights social media's growing influence in Indian politics, examining its use by national and regional parties to expand their reach and impact electoral outcomes taking South Indian states, specifically as examples.

Keywords: *Social media, Indian Democracy, Political campaign, South Indian State, Regional parties, Impact of social media, Digital technology etc.*

INTRODUCTION

Media has always been a significant pillar of society. Apart from reporting the happenings, it also builds public opinion. This puts the media in a powerful position in a democracy. The media space has changed a lot with the emergence of social media. It is a platform that reflects the pulse of society. For the world's largest democracy India, elections fit as the greatest religion. Political marketing is growing at a fast pace with every party bringing in more of newer tools and techniques to woo the electorate. Parties drew young voters by creating an online buzz, using social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Parties effectively used these platforms to interact with voters, make voters aware of the party's manifesto and raise funds for their party, besides keeping the campaigning cost within the limit. The media today has well and truly spread its wings. From being limited to the whims of a few individuals, it has come a long way to become a means of social participation (Roy, 2015)

Digital media is changing the way political parties interconnect with voters, bridging the gap like never before. Given today's era of growing social media usage and increasing internet penetration due to expanded usage of smartphones on the one hand and saturation of traditional mediums on the other, digital media offers the perfect plan of action for political parties to reach audiences worldwide. The use of digital and social media increases the reach of communication efforts and allows targeting the advocacy and tailoring it as per the audience's marketers/campaigners are trying to reach. The 2014 Lok Sabha elections were the first social media election for a 1.2 billion strong India with the advent of Social Media giants in India, namely Facebook and Twitter, whose users run into millions from the urban domain to the rural domain. Social media in 2014 India has come out as a frontrunner in terms of Marketing and PR communications, especially in the realm of politics, an area which has traditionally been predominantly dependent on modes of promotion such as television, print, radio, rallies etc. It saw social media as a new battleground. Narendra Modi emerged as India's Obama. This election saw politics leveraging. Social media is used to reach out to constituents like never before (Adhana & Saxena, 2018). "Politics, and indeed democracy, is moving from the old model of one-way political rhetoric sans any real participation to an increasingly voluble, energetic, fractious, interactive engagement on social media," said Rajeev Chandrasekhar, an independent member of the Indian parliament, who formerly founded and then sold telecom operator BPL Mobile. "On Social networks, politicians cannot hide from scrutiny and interactivity." (Rai, 2013) The 2008 presidential campaign of Barack Obama proved the benefits of using social media for political campaigns. Nearly every aspect of that campaign used social media to advance its message to supporters

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including advertising, advance work, organizing in all 50 states, and fundraising. Facebook, YouTube and especially Twitter were used to let Obama supporters know how he felt about important issues. These social network sites have become significant virtual communities in his campaign, being used frequently and giving legitimacy to their influence in the political arena. From the victory of Barrack Obama, usage of social media in India increase to large extent, and first-time social media was used in the movement called India against corruption in 2011. At the end of 2012, it was estimated that India had more than 150 million internet users, which is the same as the number of television sets in the country. Of this, 65 million are Facebook users and Twitter has an estimated 35 million accounts. This puts the country among the top three Internet markets in the world after the US and China (Biswas et al., 2014).

India has the third-largest internet user base following the United States and China. In reality, the reach of the internet, and consequently social media, is limited, as it was nearly 150 million users represent a fraction of the total population. Of these, however, two out of three users were said to access social networks daily. India is shaping up to be an important market for online advertising. (Rai, 2013)

As per a Google survey, social media could impact around 30% of seats in Lok Sabha Elections 2014. It was likely to influence 160 of India's 543 Parliamentary constituencies making Facebook and Twitter users the nation's newest voting bloc as per IAMAI (Internet and Mobile Association of India). IAMAI released a report showing that increasing spending on social media campaigns could swing 3%-4% of votes in 24 states where Internet usage is sizeable. Social media marketing can play a decisive role as a swing over 1% could change the outcome of elections, it claimed. 4 out of every 10 urban voters (or 37%) in India were online, just a little less than the number (42%) who are undecided about whom they will vote for in the 2014 general elections. An experiment in the US found that a reminder to vote combined with photos of your friend who had voted lifted turnout by around 3,00,000 votes, or 0.6% among those who saw it (Khurana, 2013).

This article sheds light on the increasing presence of social media in Indian politics and how various political parties are using it as a tool to reach more and more people from urban as well as rural interiors of India. The study briefly mentions the last two major elections in which the importance and power of social media are clearly visible and analyses the 6 regional parties of select South Indian states and how they are using social media as an apparatus for political gains. In the game of social media, these regional parties are not at all lagging behind any national parties and are at par with the national-level parties in spreading their outreach among the regional areas of their respective states.

2014 LOK SABHA ELECTIONS

"Facebook Users could swing the result in 160 Lok Sabha Constitutes"

- The Hindu

India's 2014 elections will be remembered for many reasons but especially this: Social media platforms, which have contended with government censorship since 2011, became vital political campaign tools and a place for free political expression and organizing. It is no coincidence that the national parties that were late adopters or did not have a social media strategy also acquired the image of non-transparency, out of sync with the aspirations of the youth, first-time voters and other key voting demographics in the country. Undoubtedly, this was India's first election with such large-scale usage of technology, and open-access internet platforms to connect build conversations, share, mobilize opinion, and citizen action. Prime Minister-elect Narendra Modi saw this firsthand and had the first-mover advantage in using these technology tools to reach out to India's huge youth demographic. These elections were about jobs, fighting chronic corruption and restoring leadership, amid a lost half-decade of drift and diminishing governance (Das, 2014).

India's 2014 prime ministerial elections witnessed an unprecedented outcome, where the Bharatiya Janta Party callously defeated the Indian National Congress by majority votes, and Narendra Modi stood elected as the 15th prime minister of India. This outstanding electoral victory is being extensively debated and analysed across print

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and broadcast media for its remarkable campaigning strategies that successfully established a two-way dialogue between the prime ministerial elect, Narendra Modi, and the voter population of India. The use of social media and adoption of campaigning tactics from the Obama US-presidential campaign has been centric to this winning campaign for the brand NaMo. The amalgamation of social media and election campaigning has redefined the face of political movements in India. The stratagem that team Modi followed to break the Congress era running in the country over the past decade will be concisely anatomised, with a particular interest in the role and power of social media in giving a political party that winning edge over its opposition (Kapoor et al., 2014).

2019 LOK SABHA ELECTION:

Social media polarisation, especially during elections, has reached its zenith. This is, in no small reason, thanks to the political parties who have pumped in huge sums of money for propaganda and voter outreach. In 2019, a total of Rs 57 crore was deployed on Facebook and Google platforms- with the BJP spending the lion's share- for political ads. Four of the top five spenders on Facebook were the BJP and its proxies. The 2019 Lok Sabha elections have been dubbed as India's first "WhatsApp elections, taking into consideration the impact, mobilization and spread of fake news on the 200 million–strong messaging platforms (Hari, 2019).

The use of the Internet and social media has shot up in India. CSDS data shows that nearly four times more people use Facebook today than they did in the previous general election. Moreover, the number of voters consuming news over traditional mediums is falling, thus increasing the importance of social media further. CSDS data found that high social media use correlates with people being more politicised. For a person with high social media exposure, his chances of attending an election rally were more than twice as high as compared with a person with no exposure (Daniyal, 2019)

As of January 2018, Statista reported that India had around 462 million active internet users at any given time. Of these, 250 million were present via social media only. The site also stated that over the last half-decade, the number of internet users has only grown in the country, both urban and rural, and predicted that the user base will cross the 600 million mark by the end of 2019. Right before the 2019 Lok Sabha elections ensued, the social media picture in India looked somewhat like this, according to The Companion: For Facebook, the number was 24.1 crores or one in every four voters. Now, if a platform of around 4.3 crore user base saw this much engagement, the extent of discussions on WhatsApp and Facebook is truly unfathomable. In the words of R. Chandrasekhar, the former Telecom Secretary and former President of NASSCOM, "It is indeed difficult to place an exact percentage about the influence of social media on the Lok Sabha Elections, but there is hardly any doubt that the figure will be significant" (Finessse-svg, 2019).

Social media has rapidly grown in importance as a forum for political activism in its different forms. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter provide new ways to stimulate citizen engagement in political life, where elections and electoral campaigns have a central role (Insight editor, 2016) India's large population and increasing tele density, especially in urban pockets, has spurred an impressive jump in the number of people online. Moreover, a recent report released by the Internet and Mobile Association of India and IRIS Knowledge Foundation has revealed that of India's 543 constituencies, 160 can be termed as 'high impact' – that is, they will most likely be influenced by social media in the general elections. As the report explains, high-impact constituencies are those where the numbers of Facebook users are more than the margin of victory of the winner in the last Lok Sabha election, or where Facebook users account for over 10% of the voting population.

This Lok Sabha election was reportedly said to be fought more on digital platforms than actual election battlegrounds. Larger audiences received every poll-related information quicker than any traditional media and social media made a huge impact in shaping the minds of the voters towards political parties. Political parties through social media try to woo especially swing voters. Thus, we can say in Indian political scenario, social media has become an inevitable element.

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USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY REGIONAL PARTIES OF SOUTH

This part of the article will mention the select regional parties of states of South India and their use of social media and how gradually these regional parties are following the footsteps of national-level parties in the arena of social media. The essay also tries to put forward the fact that how social media is becoming crucial day by day for attracting not only the urban population's attention but also rural people's and especially youngster's votes and it is indeed a reality that in the present scenario, without campaigning in social media, no party could survive in the election battlefield.

ANDHRA PRADESH

As per The Hindu, if social media were the poll battleground, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), the Jana Sena and the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) would have proclaimed their victory by now with great fanfare (Kurmanath, 2019)

"The use of digital media as a platform for poll campaigns has gone up significantly. Last time, it was the Bharatiya Janata Party that used it the most for reaching out to people. This time, almost all parties in all regions have taken to social media and websites to spread across their message," said Suresh Reddy, Chairman and Managing Director of Ybrant Digital, a global digital marketing solutions company. The TDP has reportedly roped in top Telugu commercial film director Boyapati to create the content for its digital and TV channel promotion, and it is therefore ahead of the competition. It has already released a number of ads, highlighting the ruling party's achievements and welfare schemes initiated by the Chandrababu Naidu government. The YSRCP has taken the help of a firm owned by Prashant Kishore. YSRCP's followers have also virtually flooded the video-sharing platform TikTok. Using clips from party president Jaganmohan Reddy's speeches, TikTok users have been posting and sharing videos extensively. TDP and Jana Sena followers too have started sharing videos (Kurmanath, 2019).

Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP)

Setting a new trend in social media networking, the YSR Congress Party has made an impact in online networking with netizens patronizing the online community portal and several likes mounting with every passing day and stands tall among the regional parties in this field. During the 2013- 2014 period, within a short span of 10 months, the Party's official Facebook page has crossed the 3-lakh mark and counting which shows the popularity of YSRCP in the online community is on the rise. YSRCP leads the table of regional political parties in getting likes on Facebook.

The online social networking team of YSRCP has met Party Honorary President YS Vijay Amma who congratulated the team for taking the Party ideals closer to the people using Facebook and other forms of online networking sites. "The tremendous response to the online portal reflects the Party's priorities and promises and this medium should be used to extensively propagate the ideals of YSR at the same time contrast should be drawn to show how the welfare schemes were watered down by the Congress government after the death of YSR," YS Vijay Amma told the team that has called on her on YSRCP third foundation day.

Politicians and their parties have been spending huge amounts of money while promoting themselves on social media but never was the expenditure known. The social media giant Facebook's initiative of making public the details of advertisements (ads) related to politics and issues of national importance posted on Facebook and Instagram has now made it possible for any internet user to access the spending details across the country. Through the "Ad Library", a searchable database, Facebook offers all the details, including highest spending advertisers, their target users, money spent, reach achieved and others. According to the Library's latest report of spending between February 1 and March 2, 2019, in India, YSR Congress Party chief Y.S Jagan Mohan Reddy and Andhra Pradesh ex-Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu figured out in the top 50 spenders list in terms of money at 27th and 44th place (Boda, 2019).

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Mr. Jagan spent Rs. 1,79,682 for 25 ads in February 2019 promoting their official pages. In addition, Indian political Action Committee (I-PAC) that works for YSRCP has been heavily promoting the party taking forward the party's digital content and publicity campaigns. It cost Rs. 53,392 in a month.

Telugu Desam Party

Telugu Desam Party president and former Andhra Pradesh chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu was always referred to as a tech-savvy leader, getting the latest updates on technology etc. But despite the advancement of technology in the communication field, the TDP chief was always banking on the mainstream media like newspapers and television channels which gave him huge publicity. He was a darling of the national media in his heydays. However, despite being so techno-savvy, Naidu somehow failed to understand the importance of social media which has become technologically advanced and a powerful medium to spread the news faster than the conventional media. He did not pay much attention to social media which is the fastest medium of communication in the era of smartphones and other electronic gadgets. Though the TDP had a social media wing, it was not as efficient as the similar wings of other parties like the Bhartiya Janata Party and the YSR Congress party.

As a result, the TDP suffered a lot because the opposition could reach out to the people through social media networking faster than the TDP. Moreover, it also helped the rival parties to run a negative campaign against him. Thus, social media also played a key role in the defeat of the TDP in the elections. The electoral defeat was an eye-opener for Naidu who realized the importance of social media. Now. his party has started making maximum use of social media platforms to attack the YSRC government. The TDP's social media wing has been activated to get instant information from the government and propagate the same. It is learnt the TDP has been spending huge money on social media, especially for designing innovative concepts and taking them to the people (Great Andhra Bureau, 2019)

As per a 2018 report, social media is fast emerging as a battlefield between the BJP and the Telugu Desam Party on the issue of the implementation of the assurances given at the time of the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh. While the center and the State were slugging it out on the floor of Parliament, the social media warriors have taken the battle to the virtual world. With both the TDP and the BJP owning efficient social media machinery, they are fighting the information war. The TDP has marshalled its men and resources through TDP Twitter Trends and Telugu Desam Official on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, while the BJP too us not lagging (The Hans India, 2018).

TELANGANA

'The election would be fought and won on social media'—a popular catchphrase that has been making the rounds on the internet in the run-up to Parliamentary polls – raised the need to examine the various mechanisms political parties have devised to reach out to their tech-savvy constituents. When the election was knocking on the door of every Telugu household in Telangana, social media was buzzing with videos, images and texts by parties. With hashtags such as #AbHogaNyay, #Telangana-withKCR and #IsBaarPhirModi trending, candidates and official party pages left no stone unturned to reach out to voters with their schemes (Jose, 2019).

Telangana Rashtra Samithi

The ruling TRS has decided to train at least one-party worker from each polling booth area as social media activist of the pink party. The party had created around 30,000 to 35,000 social media soldiers, who would be entrusted with the task of promoting the programmes and activities of the party and the government. They were trained to counter the anti-party and anti-government campaigns on social media platforms. The party also launched the first of these training programs in Adilabad on Wednesday, providing training to around 250 social media activists . According to 2019 party sources, the TRS had 10 lakh followers on Facebook while 3,24,000 follow the party's official Twitter handle @trspartyonline. The party's working president KT Rama Rao has 1.79 million followers on Twitter. Former MP Kalvakuntla Kavitha has 8,21,000 followers, while former MP B Vinod Kumar has 38,100 followers on Twitter. In the recent past, the TRS has been facing negative campaigns on Twitter and Facebook (The New Indian Express, 2019).

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As per April 2020 report of The Week, TRS to form a 'digital media army', for municipal polls. TRS decided to form a 'social media army' to reach urban voters through social media platforms. KT Rama Rao, the TRS working president and son of Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao, held a review meeting with senior leaders of the party and legislators from Hyderabad and Ranga Reddy districts to chalk out the strategy for Municipal elections. KTR instructed the leaders to form party committees before September 6. Along with these committees, a booth-level social media coordinator for every Assembly constituency should be appointed and the party should impart training to this social media coordinator, a TRS press release said on Tuesday. "These coordinators who will work like 'digital media army' will disseminate information with regards to the government welfare measures and developmental schemes to the people through social media platforms", it added. Rama Rao also said every leader in the party should recognize the fact that social media's influence is growing election after election. The release said Chandrasekhar Rao is expected to announce the party in-charges for the municipal elections in a couple of days and the MLAs and the in-charges of constituencies were advised to work in tandem, to ensure TRS' victory in the polls (The Week, 2020).

TAMILNADU

In Tamil Nadu, the impact of social media is very high among the young generation. Due to the use of social media and networking the youngsters made tremendous contributions during the Chennai flood. During the Jallikattu issue, social media and networking brought millions of people into the street to fight for the cause. At least one person per family participated in the state-wide agitation and finally got success (Madhavan et al., 2024).

As per a 2016 news report, during the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, political parties in the state are starting to campaign aggressively. Realizing that social media plays a vital role in harnessing votes and influencing people, most parties were on Facebook and Twitter. The total number of Facebook users in Tamil Nadu as per the report in the Daily is 1.1 crore whereas Twitter has about 8.8 lakh users. Many apps have been launched by regional political parties, but it looks like Facebook and Twitter have won the social media war. None of the mobile apps have crossed the 50,000 mark adds the report in the daily. DMK MLA J Anbazhagan has been quoted as saying that at least 10% of voters in a constituency are swayed by social media (DNA India, 2016).

Even though there are about 11 million Facebook users and about 8.7 lakh Twitter users, in Tamil Nadu, no political party used social media as a channel to do their campaigning till the 2016 elections. The digital scenario looked deserted. Inspired by the success of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's digital campaign, for the first time in Tamil Nadu, many parties have started to launch their campaign on social media along with conventional channels for their 2016 election campaign. All parties are striving to tap the first-time voters using social media channels. Sources say that these first-time voters could be game changers. Tamil Nadu's biggest political parties – the AIADMK and the DMK started full-fledged campaigns on social media for the 2016 elections. All parties actively posted advertisements in both English and Vernacular languages (Webdefy.com, 2016).

All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK)

As per a 2016 report, AIADMK's official Twitter channel made about 2895 tweets with 12400 followers. The tweets were made both in English and Tamil. The AIADMK party was consistent on YouTube with about 100+ videos uploaded and 633 subscribers overall. AIADMK has a website which is not responsive but connects all their social media channels through the icons at the bottom of the page. The then-party leader Jayalalitha was not available on any Facebook/Twitter account. However, there were many parody accounts of the party leader (They were either maintained by fans or by random people). There was also a Wikipedia page on Facebook of the party leader with about 1,12,752 likes (Jain, 2016).

AIADMK has an official handle on social media. The Hindu quotes the AIADMK IT wing head 'Aspire' Swaminathan as saying that social media has tremendous potential as a propaganda tool as one can customize content. AIADMK reportedly has the mobile numbers of 5 crore people in Tamil Nadu, and they have a crore of WhatsApp users.

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During the 2016 state elections, AIADMK had over 2 lakh likes on its Facebook page. The Party appointed more than 720 officers to its IT wing to lead the party's campaign on social media. They have structured their IT wing such that every district will have a 14-member IT wing to do the micro-level campaigning using social media. Sources say that AIADMK also campaigned through WhatsApp. The conversation is being sent through exclusive software obtained for AIADMK's campaign and propaganda. Every day the audio clip reaches around 10 to 12 lakh people.

The AIADMK's latest campaign slogan translates to, "Don't commit the mistake, don't vote for the DMK". The party released 17 videos of attacks by DMK functionaries in various places – biryani shops, mobile outlets and against women at the beauty parlor and coconut sellers on the roadside. The videos also blame the DMK for giving up the State's rights and agreeing to Neet, oil exploration and Jallikattu. The official Twitter handles of the Chief Minister and Deputy chief minister and scores of party functionaries help the party pick up momentum for the social media campaign (Mariappan & Shanmughasundaram, 2019).

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)
In the year 2017, the DMK launched an information blitzkrieg on Twitter, to explain about its flagship schemes, introduced during the period of Periyar, CN Annadurai and M Karunanidhi. The tweets do not stop with the just explaining the schemes; to also defends the party and its leaders like A Raja against charges of corruption. The tweets also hail party's working president M K Stalin for bringing metro rail to Chennai. Interestingly, those who handle the twitter handles were not primary members of the DMK. They were "friends" as the party called them, including some expats and sympathizers of other parties (Sivakumar, 2017).

Most of the tweet handles are managed by people in Kolkata, Japan, the US and Some in Tirunelveli. "One of the people managing the handle is a PhD from Harvard. Similarly, another person is a Tamil expat settled in Japan. These people don't have any connection with the DMK except that they are friends of IT wing chief PTR Palanivel Thiagarajan," said a DMK IT wing member. DMK IT wing inducted several IT professionals and none of them were or are DMK members. "Intellectual talent was infused into the IT wing and since then professionals are managing social media for the party." Said the IT wing member.

The official website of DMK is in Tamil as well as in English, which is a brilliant move. DMK's website is responsive – this is one of their biggest competitive advantages in the digital space.

DMK IT wing has cornered a lion's share of advertisement space of online giant Google's AdSense and social media platforms for online campaigning till the end of polling on April 18. Sources in the DMK IT wing said they have "outsmarted" their opponents by limiting their presence on the online campaign platforms by blocking the bulk of the prime space on YouTube, Share Chat, private publishers, Facebook and Twitter. DMK gradually brought up ad space inventory and currently owns more than 70% of what was on offer. This leaves rivals fighting for ad space. According to sources, crores of rupees are spent to buy ad slots on social media (Mariappan & Shanmugasundaram, 2019).

Most of the slots from masthead, top and side banners available on the prime social media platforms have been blocked until voting in the state by the DMK, BJP state IT wing president R Nirmal Kumar told TOI. "This has reduced our presence on Social media, and they (DMK) would have invested several crores of rupees in this exercise," added Nirmal. A DMK functionary said it was part of their IT wing strategy, led by PTR Thiagarajan after the party president gave his approval for an aggressive campaign in the digital world. "We planned well in advance and gradually increased the purchase of the advertisement inventory from 0.5% to 10% to 20% and went on to block more than 70% of the ad space, leaving little scope for the opposition camps. We have invested several crores of rupees for the online campaign," he said. Unlike elections from earlier days, social media has taken over as the media used for propaganda and it is predominantly used by the political parties to reach a large section of the voters aged between 18 and 40 years. Commenting on the clash for ads on digital space, T R Gopalakrishnan, an assistant professor of journalism and communication at the University of Madras, said,

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"Online campaign is inevitable, and it is seen as an important strategy to reach out. The political parties must ensure their presence, but it will not guarantee victory."

KARNATAKA

In the run-up to the 2018 Karnataka assembly polls, the three major political parties – Congress, BJP and Janata Dal (Secular) JD(S)- deployed considerable resources to strengthen their respective online platforms, especially after the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, where a significant portion of the BJP's success was attributed to its online campaigns (Poovanna, 2018).

"All parties now indulge in a good deal of segmentation, particularly along the vector of economic segmentation," said Naman Puglia, director at Fourth Lion Technologies, a firm that helps politicians and political parties use data, analytics and technology in election campaigns. He was referring to how political parties have different campaigns for different classes of people. A growing number of internet and smartphone users between the ages of 18-35 help the process. Divya Spandana, the head of the Congress' social media and digital communication wing, in an earlier e-mail interaction with Mint, said that online campaigns help increase footfalls at offline events as well. Social media teams for all three parties stand at about 10-20 core members and a dedicated "war room", who coordinates with hundreds of groups that comprise thousands of "influencers" (Khanna, 2019, July 24).

Last year, people used various social media platforms to give suggestions and to slam politicians for prolonged political drama. Almost every social media platform, including WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram. Facebook and Pinterest became weapons for citizens to express their opinion. Twitter user, Santosh Vishwamithra tweeted, "This person @hdkumaraswamy will not leave the chair till this happens. Worst CM ever. 18 days we are seeing this person in resort only,"[1]

Janata Dal (Secular)

"In 2013, social media helped us get about 2.5 lakh out of the total 6.2 million votes. On average, we can say that about 3% of votes come because of social media," C. Naveen, who works as the vice-president of a multinational corporation and is also a key member of the JD(S) social media team. The pro-rural party launched a 3D political game around its leader H.D Kumaraswamy last month. Yeddyurappa, Siddaramaiah and Kumaraswamy all have dedicated social media teams, and they take an active part in their online strategies (Khanna, 2019)

In 2018, the social media team of the Janata Dal-Secular took the party's alliance with the Congress in the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections to a whole new level. The new social media war room and media Centre of HD Deve Gowda's party had been set up right next to the Congress's war room off Cunningham Road. The independent two-story house that was inaugurated a month ago is the new strategy Centre for JD(S) that is making its presence felt on social media. A team of 50 youngsters – employees and volunteers – work round the clock to create content for all social networking sites of the party. The JD(S) had a media Centre and social media war room in Sheshadri Puram prior to the assembly polls. "We have shifted the social media cell to a larger office in the heart of the city. We create content, promote campaigns, edit videos and upload all activities of Chief Minister H D Kumaraswamy largely on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook", said a party source (Ravi, 2018).

Kumaraswamy made his presence felt on five social media platforms – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google Plus and SoundCloud by formally launching them at Vidhan Soudha. Speaking to media persons, Kumaraswamy said that he aims to keep in touch effectively and directly with people and media through social media, which is gaining popularity in both urban and rural areas of the state. Kumaraswamy said his speeches across the state would be stored on SoundCloud. On YouTube, his programmes and media interactions would be uploaded. He also said that he would tweet and post on Facebook his reactions to developments and issues and added that he

would keep himself active on social platforms as long as he is in public life. "A team of 30 to 35 people will manage online networks," he said. "There are many groups on Facebook supporting me," he added.[2]

CONCLUSION

Social media, a relatively newer entrant in the field of mass media, has proved to be more democratic than newspapers and television. Social media has provided the opportunity for citizens who are conversant with the medium to express their views about several issues. The power of the medium can be easily judged from the developments in India in recent times. Social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter etc. were used to garner support for the rise of various political parties. The barrier to communication is minimal in this medium which helps in the formation of a participative environment. There is also greater empowerment of the users through a higher level of interactivity and flexibility in the choice of media outlets. The potential of the medium lies in its ability to be more personalized by offering user-created content (Roy, 2015).

The use of social media is rapidly increasing, and this enables people freely share their ideas on the internet, establish rapid and mutual communication and be easily organized. Especially, people can easily express their ideas and democratic demands due to the difficulty of censoring on the social networking sites. In this sense, social media found an effective field of use in political areas (Balci & Gölcü, 2013).

This article tried to put forward the role social media played in regional politics in the southern part of India and how more and more regional parties are following the footsteps of national level parties in the matter of incorporating social media campaigning in their political campaigning strategies. Not only this, but regional parties are also hiring top PR companies and political strategists for an effective campaign 2-3 years in advance in hope of winning the election. Not only in southern states politics but regional parties of West Bengal namely Trinamool Congress also hired Prashant Kishore's IPAC for extensive political campaigning in the upcoming state elections.

'Thus, to conclude we can say that social media is day by day becoming a crucial and inevitable apparatus for any political party of India where it is national party or regional party, without social media no one can imagine political campaigning to reach its zenith. Social media's reach is far deeper than any traditional media.

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