

**USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL OF ELECTION CAMPAIGNING IN INDIA  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ASSAM**

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**Abstract**

Social media, a 21<sup>st</sup> century platform has emerged as an essential tool for the people to create, exchange and express their views, thoughts and opinions widely. The emergence of social media platforms have facilitated people's task to communicate across all borders. Use of social media tools for political campaigning has now emerged as a global trend. Almost all political parties and political leaders use social media platforms to reach out to the voters more easily and effectively. Political parties regularly share photos, videos and give regular updates about various events on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube etc which connect them directly with the masses. Like any other democratic country, in India also use of social media platforms for political communication has now become an integral part of election. India is in rank three with regard to use of social networks in the world. This paper is thus an attempt to study the use of social media as a tool of election campaigning in India with special reference to Assam.

**Keywords:** *social media, election campaigning, assam, voters*

**Introduction**

Social media is the most recent and rapidly growing platform which become an integral part of political communication during election campaigning. The structure or composition of social media is very different from traditional media as it allows people to communicate with each other more easily and effectively. The political parties with the help of social media are now able to get information regarding voters' needs, likes and dislikes. Now political campaigns are not just about banners, rallies, public meetings but the new political campaigns are filled with advertisements, facebook posts, blog posts, tweets, Instagram posts etc. There are predictions that social media will transform democracy by allowing citizens to connect with political leaders in a new and different way.

In earlier times, traditional media had been playing an important role in election. But with the emergence of new technologies, traditional media has been replaced by social media platforms and now it is growing as an effective forum for performing political activities. Social media platforms

such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp etc. are new ways for political parties to encourage engagement of citizens during elections. These platforms have reduced the gap between politicians and voters. The new inventions and new technologies have urged political parties to reach out to the voters more easily. The 2008 U.S. Presidential election was the first election to use social networking sites to impact voters. In India, the strategy of using social networking sites for political campaigning was inculcated from 2014 Lok Sabha Election which resulted the victory of Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister of India.

Although Assam is a state where internet facilities are not available in all parts, yet social media has made a great impact in the last assembly elections of the state. This new way of political campaigning has changed the political atmosphere of the state. In 2016 and 2021 Assam Assembly elections the use of social media by political parties was comparatively higher than earlier elections. Therefore, Assam is an interesting place where we can examine the role of newly emerging social media platforms to mobilise people during elections.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. To study the use of social media in election campaigning,
2. To examine the use of social media by different political parties for election campaigning with special reference to Assam.

### **Methodology**

This study is based on secondary sources and data has been collected purely from the published sources like journals, books, articles, research papers etc.

### **Literature review**

This review of literature examines the concept of social media and role of social media in election campaigning with special reference to Assam.

Maya Dollarhide in her article *Social media: Definition, Effects, and List of Top Apps* said that social media is a platform which facilitates the sharing of ideas and information through virtual networks. Again she asserts that social media covers a broad universe of apps and platforms such as facebook, twitter, instagram, youtube and these platforms allow users to share content, interact online and build communities. She has added that in 2022, the number of social media users worldwide grew by 137 million. It is also rightly added that social media is an ever-changing field and it is changing continuously. With the advancement of technologies, various new apps are joining in social media platforms along with facebook, twitter, instagram and youtube. This article clearly defines the meaning of social media.

Michael Dewing in his article *Social Media: An Introduction*, defines social media as wide range of internet based and mobile services that allows users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content or join online communities.

Ankit Lal in his book, *India Social- How Social Media is Leading The Charge and Changing The Country* has asserted about how political leaders fought with their tweets and how these fights sometimes landed them in trouble. In this book, he discusses how in the last ten years, platforms like facebook, twitter, youtube and whatsapp have changed the way Indians engage with politics, popular culture and social revolution. This book has clearly discussed about various issues

like Nirbhaya's Legacy, NaMo 2014, India against corruption movement etc. This article also describes how WhatsApp is becoming the major tool used to spread the agenda of major political parties

An article has been published by N Narasimhamurthy '*Use and Rise of Social media as Election Campaign medium in India*', where he clearly discusses about how social media plays a central role in attracting voters and especially the new generation of young adults. He asserts that unlike traditional media social media allows political parties to share their beliefs, goals as well as actively engage with their potential voters. On the basis of Uses and Gratification theory he analyzes the rise and use of social media in election campaign medium during the election time. This article also discusses about political reasons and the motivating factors for which people engage in social media platforms during election campaign period. This article provides data about 2014 Lok Sabha elections and asserts that this election was India's first election where large scale of technology and internet access platforms were used to connect and mobilize the citizens.

Another article has been published by Pratysh Paras Sharma and Tanaya Hazarika, '*Social Media and Election Campaigns: An analysis of the usage of Twitter during the 2021 Assam Assembly Elections*' where they discuss about the use of digital technologies like mobile phones and social media platforms including Twitter for broadcasting messages and for creating political communities. They discuss about use of Twitter in 2021 Assam Assembly election by two main political parties- Bharatiya Janata Party and Indian National Congress and explore which party was able to use Twitter significantly and how far this strategy of online communication was effective.

### **Discussion**

Social media in India is becoming popular day by day and the people have accepted it as an important tool to interact with political leaders. The Parliamentary election of India in 2014 is considered as a social media election because most of the election campaign took place online and it played a huge role in the victory of Narendra Modi. Early in 2014 itself, Modi realised the potential of social media and decided to make it a campaigning tool to mobilize voters.

Though Assam is a backward state in terms of its technological advancement, yet in each and every election there have been some conspicuous new trends and use of social media platforms during election is one of them. In 2016 Assam Assembly Election political parties and the voters widely used social media platforms for election campaigning. In 2021, Assam Assembly Election also same scenario was evident as political leaders were very active in social media. In *The Indian Express* it is stated that, social media played a major role in tremendous performance of United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) in the Assam Assembly Election 2021.

There was also seen some fights during election time in Assam on social media platforms. In 2021 Assam Assembly election the two major political parties Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Indian National Congress extensively used many unique hashtags on Twitter to reach out to the voters. BJP used certain hashtags in their tweets such as #BJPdelivers, #BJP4SecureAssam etc. In Congress's social media handles an animated character Kokoi with hashtag #KokaaiKiKoi was used. The party

also come up with other various hashtag #BaadDiaHe which was used to highlight BJP's 'false promises' for Assam.

After successful campaign in 2019 general election, in 2021 Assam Assembly Election BJP widely used social media platforms for online advertising. BJP mainly highlighted their achievements in the state in online campaigning and introduced many welfare schemes for tea garden workers. The party was posting pictures and videos of their grassroots-level campaigning rallies, meetings with massive crowd gatherings to showcase the party's huge support base in the state.

Congress party was heavily criticised when they used tea garden pictures of Srilanka and Taiwan as Assam's tea gardens on their social media pages. Despite an innovative online campaign strategies of Congress party, these few lapses made opposition to take full advantage of it.

Thus, Social media is a platform where political leaders interact with their voters easily. In the age of globalization it is very necessary to understand and explore the role of social media in election campaigning. Along with the benefits of using social media by political parties, there are some negative impacts also. During elections, lot of misinformation and propaganda spread on social media which create difficulty for users to know what information they should trust. Sometimes these platforms become a tool for spreading fake news about candidates which not only impact their reputation but also their online campaign. Therefore, election commission should give more attention to these social media sites which are used by politicians during elections.

### **Conclusion**

The new technologies and new media have changed the political scenario of the world. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram etc are the platforms where all leaders and voters directly interact with each other regarding various issues and problems. These platforms emerge as a biggest promotion tool during elections for the political parties to influence, connect and express their vision properly. These new technologies have changed the political atmosphere thereby encouraging people to become active citizens. Assam is a northeastern state, where network facilities are still not available in many parts, yet people of the state are quite active on social media platforms to raise and discuss their issues. In the last Assam Assembly election the engagement of political leaders in social media platforms was quite high. The covid-19 pandemic had put a ban on political gatherings for which political parties held their organizational works through social media platforms during this election. Thus, there is no denying that political parties use social media platforms as a tool of election campaigning to mobilize voters as well as to reach out to the voters in every corner of the society.

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