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Metamorphosis of Indian Electoral Campaigns: Modi's Social Media Experiment

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Abstract

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 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 have been centric to this winning campaign for brand NaMo. The amalgamation of social media and election campaigning has clearly 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 anatomized, with particular interest in the role and power of social media in giving a political party that winning edge over its opposition.

Keywords: Social Media, Digital Media, India, Elections, Narendra Modi, NaMo

1. Introduction

Participating as a prime ministerial candidate from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Narendra Damodar Modi (popularly known as NaMo), aged 63, emerged a winner of the

2014 Indian general election. An excerpt from the guardian talks about Modi's rise from being a mere 'lowly chai wallah' (translation: tea vendor) from the rural Gujarat city of India, to becoming a controversial Hindu nationalist, to ultimately standing as the prime minister of 1.25 billion people (Greenwood, 2014). Modi today serves the country as the 15th prime minister of independent India (TOI New Delhi, 2014). Distributed over nine phases and a little over a month, India's general election for the year 2014 is being called the longest spanning election in history for the country (General Election Results, 2014). Another article in the guardian by Bruke (2014a) calls Modi's electoral win a landslide victory. Bruke (2014a) talks about the voting numbers for the BJP coalition (over 300 seats), and states that no Indian election has been won by such a margin since the year 1984. Print media has been acknowledging this prime ministerial win as a commanding one, whereby BJP solely bagged more than 272 parliamentary seats that the party required to form a ruling government (Gupta, 2014; The Telegraph, 2014).

Malik and Malik (2014) quote the exact numbers in this much pronounced win by the BJP to be 282 seats, where the Indian National Congress (INC) secured only 44 seats accepting defeat by the former. Amongst listing the various factors that led to INC's downfall in this general election, Malik and Malik (2014) mention the aggressive campaigning procedures adopted by Modi as one of the many reasons backing his win. Social media and its fast penetration across electoral campaigning is well known since Obama's very successful presidential election. Modi's integration of social media in his prime ministerial campaign, and with the resultant being recorded as a historical win across the country, the role and effective use of social media to reach the masses at a political level has emerged as an intriguing aspect of study. As Chakrabarty (2008) argued, the gestation and functioning of the democratic form of Indian governance provokes intellectual avenues for scholars to generate massive amount of work on the topic. This paper is directed at anatomizing the use of social media by Narendra Modi's election campaigners, and the impact it had on the success of his election campaign.

For achieving the established purpose, this paper has been spread across the following aspects – the readers will be primarily introduced to the political structure being followed in India with some insight on the current leading national parties; this will be succeeded by information on the governance that has prevailed in the country since the start of 21st century; the change of power with the recent prime ministerial election from the Indian National Congress to the Bharatiya Janata Party will next be discussed; Modi's political era will then

be layered to get an overview of his political presence and ruling within the country. Further, the introduction and integration of social media in the Indian political scene will be probed into, with specific interests in the use of social media by Modi's election campaigners. Also, potential comparisons will be made on Modi's social media strategies with Obama's use of social media in his presidential elections.

2. Indian Political Structure

The Election Commission of India (ECI) serves as an autonomous body, which is particularly responsible for regulating all democratic electoral affairs in the Republic of India. Two exclusive bodies, Lok Sabha or the people's house (lower house of the Indian parliament) and Rajya Sabha or the state council (upper house of the Indian parliament), in specific majorities, hold the powers to legally unseat the chief election commissioner of ECI on justified grounds. The ECI is fully accountable for exercising responsible code of conduct across all electoral procedures, overlooking the polling finances, and monitoring the political party registrations for participation in all presidential, prime ministerial, and state legislative elections within the country, by law (ECI, 2014).

According to the Indian elections official webpage, the national political parties that are majorly recognized presently in India are the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Indian National Congress (INC), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Communist Party of India (CPI), Marxist Communist Party of India (CPM), and the National Congress Party (NCP). State parties such as the Aam Aadmi party (AAP), All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), Samajvadi Party (SP) and the All India Trinamool Congress (AITMC) have made their very strong presences felt in this democratic nation. Hundreds of active regional parties are also in existence within the country (Elections.in, 2014).

The political scene in the country has witnessed two parties, the INC and the BJP, playing powerful political leads since the 1800s (Gargan, 1993; India Syndicate, 2014). Of the ancestral origin, the formation of the Indian National Congress dates back to pre independence years, with it coming into being in late 1800s. Although the BJP had its genesis in two parties (Bharatiya Jana Sangh - BJS and Janata Party - JP) since the early 1950s through the late 1970s, it came into being in the late 1900s. The congress party led dominantly in the initial years of Indian politics; according to Malik and Malik (2014), formation of the INC dates back to 1885. It is claimed that, to retort secular ruling, BJS was formed by an ex INC politician after exiting the INC. Post independence, between 1947 and

1977, INC, in a row, recorded six majority wins in India's general elections (India Syndicate, 2014).

For 2014 general election, the BJP has emerged as the largest political party of India by posting its commendable majority win, recorded as an epic prime ministerial election victory for the country in the last three decades (The Telegraph, 2014). Of what is being acknowledged as a historic win for the BJP is being addressed as a crushing defeat for the INC (Bruke, 2014a). The next section will take the readers through the change in governing hands in India, whilst highlighting the impact of their governances on the nation's progress in the 21st century, overall.

3. Governance in the 21st century

India entered the 2000s with its two times prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee. His first tenure as the PM was short lived where he served the office for only 13 days in the year 1996 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2013). His second time was a successful tenure from 1998 onwards until the year 2004. Belonging to the BJP, he is known as the first prime minister, external to the INC, for having served a full five year prime ministerial term within the country. Reports suggest that controversies related to the many nuclear tests that India carried out in Pokhran, Rajasthan, under his tenancy clouded the beginning of his term in 1998 (Chicago Tribune, 2003). The Vajpayee government was also criticized and blamed for its poor response and efforts in putting a stop to the 2002 Gujarat communal riots (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2013).

Vajpayee received commendable acclaims for his dealings with Pakistan on the Kashmir issue. A recent 2014 article quotes Modi's statement where he acknowledged Vajpayee's notable efforts in restoring trust amongst the people of Kashmir (Kasturi, 2014). However, recently in news is Modi's take on scrapping Vajpayee's Pakistan policy (Kasturi, 2014). Also, circulating is the statement from the Hurriyat leaders who are accusing the Modi government of being naive for asking Pakistan to make amends in their Kashmir policy; the leaders are condemning Modi's decision to part from Vajpayee's Kashmir legacy (Singh, 2014). Vajpayee's governing was, and still continues to be, widely appreciated for accentuating India's economic growth and for working in the interest of people welfare that helped bridge the gap between India's per capita income and the world average (Virmani, 2014). Vajpayee also received credit for pushing the country's IT side to reach new heights; Gupta (2004) records some of the IT related initiatives that triggered IT boom in the country.

Interestingly, given Modi's suspicious associations (which has been rejected by the Supreme Court of India¹) with the Hindu Muslim communal Gujarat riots in 2002, post his election as India's PM in 2014, articles making rounds in the media are talking about how the Muslim community misses the former BJP prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee's leadership within the country (Indiacom, 2014).

After Vajpayee resigned from the office in 2004, the INC came into power with Dr. Manmohan Singh winning the 2004 prime ministerial election in India. Dr. Singh continued to retain his position in the office as the Indian prime minister for 10 years, with him being elected for two consecutive terms. Dr. Singh served the country exceptionally well along his finance ministerial roles, for which he continues to receive commendable acclaims. One recent Times of India article quotes him as the *father of economic reform and superfast growth* (Aiyar, 2014). Another Rediff India article addresses him as the *father of Indian reform* (Rediff Business, 2005). He has also served the role of the leader of opposition in the upper house of the Indian parliament from 1998 until 2004 (Zee News, 2013).

Dr. Singh's prime ministerial tenure, however, saw considerable wrath from the public, as well as his own peers, where he was blamed for ineffectively carrying out his office duties by constantly succumbing to the wishes of Sonia Gandhi, president of the INC (dna, 2014, Zee News, 2014). Indian politician, Natwar Singh, recently publicly accused Dr. Singh of never having stood up against Sonia Gandhi (dna, 2014). A 2014 Zee news report calls Dr. Singh a mere puppet in the hands of Sonia Gandhi (Zee News, 2014). Sanjay Baru, former media advisor to the prime minister, in his book 'The Accidental Prime Minister: The Making and Unmaking of Manmohan Singh' has been found stating that it was not Dr. Singh, but indeed Mrs. Gandhi who was running the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government (Zee News, 2014). UPA is the coalition of political parties in India that came into being post the 2004 general election (Indian Election Affairs, 2014).

Another 2014 news article addresses Dr. Singh as the puppet prime minister of India (Komireddi, 2014). A 2012 article from the independent questions if Dr. Singh turned out to be a saviour for the country, or is simply an underachiever (Buncombe, 2012). A 2014 guardian article lays out the fact as to how Dr. Singh is universally seen as the regent prime minister of India, keeping the position secure for Rahul Gandhi, son of Sonia Gandhi, and how Mr. Gandhi's taking over the prime ministerial position is being acknowledged as his

¹ <http://www.dawn.com/news/709390/narendra-modi-acquitted-in-gujarat-riots-case>

birthright by some in the country (theguardian, 2014). The same article quotes the former PM advocating the country against Narendra Modi as the next PM of the country, and instead promoting Rahul Gandhi as the most suitable candidate for the post just months before the 2014 Indian general election (theguardian, 2014).

4. Prior the Change of Power: 10 years of INC (2004-2014)

As also mentioned earlier in this paper, the INC dominated the political scene in the country in the initial two decades, post the Indian independence in 1947 (Jenkins, 2007). This section will retain focus on the past decade, 2004-2014, when INC was in power and was actively governing the country. When the INC won the 2004 general election, the party president, Sonia Gandhi, refused to assume the post of prime minister, and instead nominated Dr. Manmohan Singh to the post (TOI Topics, 2014). The discussions that follow will be centric to the outcomes of their governance revealing both, the good and the bad, which affected the development of India, overall. Narasimhan (1997) then claimed that India's public life and services experienced an alarming rise in the extent of corruption, and the players contributing to such exponential increase in corruption are none other than the politicians and bureaucrats themselves, along with the powerful business people of the Indian society. Seventeen years hence, the situation has only worsened; the Indian political system has continued to be a carrier of corruption. The facts listed in the remaining parts of this section are in support of the above stated.

In evaluating the positives that were directed at the overall good of the country under the INC governance, Jindal (2014) highlights the following issues for all of which the INC deserves credit – the rise in the economic security, particularly in the rural areas of the country, that shot up from 0.8% to 3.4%; the enforcement of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act that ensured employment for about 48 million rural homes in India; the increase in food subsidy resulting in food security; introducing viable agriculture policies that promised credit to the farmers, which are also said to have caused the record production of grains during the period; efforts put in establishing peace and restraining militancy in communist affected states; and also the maintenance of social security in the country by ensuring priority to minorities by assisting them in building their small businesses (Jindal, 2014). The signing of the India-US nuclear deal is also viewed as a considerably important move during Dr. Singh's time in office (The Indian Express, 2014). Undeniably so, the nation also witnessed the 8.5% GDP rise during the initial years of Dr. Singh's office

tenure (The Indian Express, 2014). The INC governance did invest efforts in facilitating growth in the manufacturing and small industries (NDTV, 2014).

While the country was expected to reach new heights with the INC coming into power in 2004, the following ten year period witnessed disappointing deliverance from the party. The depreciation of Indian currency, the current account deficit, and the country's external debt concerns have all been widely looked upon as the failures on the part of INC governance (Jindal, 2014). In a recent comparison of INC's manifestos issued over their two term governance, the most recent manifesto released for the 2014 general election was accused of being more or less similar to INC's 2004 and 2009 manifestos (Zafar, 2014). While the BJP called INC's latest manifesto deceitful, the INC was mostly blamed for only rephrasing and rewording its previous term policies and presenting them as their plans for a more prosperous India; the INC has been criticized for having performed poorly, and allegedly the Indian citizens have been the victims of unsatisfactory governance, where much was promised, but only little was delivered (Zafar, 2014). A 2012 BBC news report states that the year 2011 saw INC being charged with a series of corruption scandals; they also quote the extent of damage these scandals have brought to Dr. Singh's status in the country, the man who was once acknowledged as India's most honest politician (BBC, 2012).

The same article lists the scandals that hit the INC fairly hard, for the citizens to finally voice against INC's governance style within the country. The list includes *the telecom license scandal* of 2012 or *the 2G spectrum scam* as it being more popularly known, which is also being called the biggest ever scandal in India; *the army bribery scandal* of 2012, where the army chief was attempted to be bribed to buy sub standard trucks; *the wikileaks scandal* of 2011, where bribing a US embassy official for votes was attempted; *forcing resignation of the head of India's anti corruption watchdog* in 2010, following the revelation of him already facing corruption charges; *the homes for war widows scam* of 2010, where senior officers and politicians were acquiring homes reserved for war widows; *the commonwealth games scandal* of 2010, where several game officials were jailed for financial irregularities during the commonwealth games; and *the mining scandal* of 2011, where illegal mining surfaced as a common scene in the Karnataka state of India since some years now (BBC, 2012).

5. Modi's Political Career

Print media acknowledges the period of the recent 16th prime ministerial election in India as the one of deteriorating economy and retarded business opportunities in the country, and this

general election as the world's largest ever democratic election (Alfred, 2014; Kapur, 2014). The official BJP webpage recognizes the year 1987 as Modi's debut year in the country's mainstream politics (bjp.org, 2014). He is known for having been actively involved with the Rashtria Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) as a campaigner during his younger days. He is more popularly recognized as the former chief minister of the Gujarat state of India, where he served at the post for 13 years in a row, from 2001 until mid 2014; he is known to have served the longest period as the chief minister in the history of Gujarat state (MapsofIndia, 2014).

Modi has been, and continues to be commended for his chief ministerial role that put Gujarat on the path of prosperity and progression resulting in considerable improvement in the state's economy (narendramodi.in, 2014; Timmons and Khullar, 2014). Modi's official webpage terms Modi's strategies and policies dedicated towards bringing about development in Gujarat as the *Gujarat Model of Development*. The page claims that this model has received recognition worldwide, which was directed at the optimum usage of technology encompassing agriculture, industry, and service sectors within the state to reduce corruption and accelerate the development of the state (narendramodi.in, 2014).

One side of print media has been positively acknowledging Modi's developmental efforts under his chief ministerial role by stating that the available statistics are proof to how the Modi governance was successful in lowering poverty, particularly amongst the Muslim community, reducing the problems of child malnutrition, and improving the quality of education, specifically at the primary level, within the state of Gujarat (Panagariya, 2014). There is however another side of the print media which reports that Modi's Gujarat developmental initiatives are not all that commendable, after all. A 2014 post in the economic times, and Timmons and Khullar (2014) open new facets of unwary fiscal management, unemployment, unequal income distribution across the rural and urban regions, issues of safe drinking water, infanticide and the male to female sex ratio, female illiteracy, and infant mortality, which altogether show that the Modi governance was not as successful as they claim they were.

Despite his overwhelming victory in the recent general election, Modi continues to be under the critical lens of many in the country for his probable suspicious involvement in the tragic Gujarat communal riots at the time when he was serving as the acting chief minister of the state (Kapur, 2014). Although legally exonerated of any involvement, the common man of

the country continues to carry his doubts, and fears that this current chosen prime minister may carry traces of prejudice and animosity against a particular race that might stir communal dissonance, this time at a national level (Bruke, 2014b). Bruke (2011) adds that the Modi governance was repeatedly blamed at the time of not being able to put effective measures in place for preventing such hate crimes against the Hindus in Gujarat.

Substantial literature points at the 2002 communal Gujarat riots as a case of state bound terrorism (Odgen, 2012; Pandey, 2006). The roots of this communal riot are laid in the burning of a train in the town of Godhra that killed about 60 Hindu pilgrims (Burke, 2011). Pandey (2006) quotes Modi in his book, where Modi issued a press note post the burning train incident and called the entire episode, the Godhra genocide. Modi is said to have associated the incident to Pakistan's proxy war and terrorism against Gujarat (Pandey, 2006). Modi, despite retaliations, asked for Godhra victims' corpses to be taken to Ahmedabad, the capital city of Gujarat; this decision by the Modi government was severely accused of having triggered the damaging Hindu Muslim violence in Gujarat (TOI, 2004). There are direct allegations against Modi that clearly state that he allowed and encouraged communal violence post the Godhra train burning incident, which led to the killing of about 1000 to 2000 people, most of whom were Muslims (Alfred, 2014; Bruke, 2014b). Despite him acquitted by the highest judicial court of India (i.e. The Supreme Court of India) regarding his involvement in the Gujarat riots, many of his opponents particularly from the INC continues to attack and blame him for his involvement in the Gujarat riots.

Post the 2002 communal riots, Modi faced a de facto travel ban from many countries across the world (Bruke, 2012). Modi's US visa was revoked in 2005 as he was reportedly involved in 'violating religious freedom', which was followed by a ban on Modi by the European union and other nations; post his 2012 Gujarat victory, the British government, the European union, and the other countries dropped the Modi boycott (Gosai, 2014). It was initially reported that the US ban on Modi would be automatically lifted if he emerged the next prime minister of India (Indian Express Washington, 2014). Post the electoral win, the United States lifted the ban on Modi, and president Obama himself invited Modi to visit Washington to work on strengthening the India-US bilateral relationship (Iqbal, 2014; NDTV Delhi, 2014).

From being a tea seller in a remote town of Gujarat, to doing menial jobs for the RSS, to emerging as the chief minister of Gujarat, to finally making a historic electoral win and becoming the prime minister of India, Modi's steps behind his laudable journey to the prime

ministerial position have been much debated. The support that Modi had from the RSS is said to have highly helped his electoral campaigning; his extremely competent and adept electoral campaign in itself received much credit (Bruke, 2014b). Modi's associations with high profile business people and other BJP officials is said to have brought in huge amount of funding during the elections (Bruke, 2014b). Another winning factor for Modi is said to be his weak opposition party, from whose governance the country has remained exhausted for a while; adding to it was also his weak opposition candidate, Rahul Gandhi, who had been nothing but naive in most of his public appearances and debates, so much so that the youth of India began mocking and ridiculing him as the clown face of INC, with many twitter feeds and videos of him going viral all over the internet (Nelson, 2014). Modi himself publicly addressed Rahul Gandhi as the one of a clownish character, to which some of the INC members directly retaliated (Seth, 2014).

6. Social Media and Electoral Campaigning

The 2014 Indian prime ministerial elections almost witnessed the cessation of traditional campaigning methods with the well defined rise of social media campaigning. Modi's use of social media has since been time and again referred to as the classic exemplification of the impact that social media can have in influencing the voters; the impression of social media use was felt so much so that this general election is supposedly being called the country's first social media election (Ali, 2014). One of the biggest reasons favouring Modi's 2014 electoral win is said to be his use of social media to directly connect with the masses of the country. The core of Modi's social media campaigning was to remain constantly engaged with the netizens of the country, and to do so his strategists planned to build a cyber army that would continually campaign for Modi on the social networking platforms, aimed at reemphasizing and spreading his messages and ideas to the masses; scores of people came forward and ultimately 2.2 million net users were accounted as the volunteers of Modi's online campaigning strategy (Mishra, 2014).

According to Willis (2014), Modi's continued use of social media platforms post the general election has made him even more liked amongst the people in and outside India. One of the first recorded instances of this is the Modi government sending out thank you notes to its most active 15000 cyber volunteers for their campaigning efforts online, and inviting them to register with the Modi government online to participate and contribute in the government's future projects (Mishra, 2014). Post the historical win, Modi was seen being widely addressed

as ‘the social media prime minister’, the ‘social media politician’, ‘India’s social media phenomenon’, and by many other related social media titles all over the web and print media (Chilkoti, 2014; Rapoza, 2014, Willis, 2014). A recent New York Times report quotes numbers from Modi’s Facebook and Twitter accounts to state that while Barack Obama ranks as the most popular politician, worldwide, it is only Modi who trails Obama to take the second position on Facebook as the most followed political figure in the world of social media (Willis, 2014).

Ali (2014) adds more insight on this to state that Modi acquires the sixth position on Twitter in the list of most followed world leaders on this other social media platform. More numbers from Twitter, as quoted by Chilkoti (2014) show that the period between the beginning of 2014 and the end of the 2014 general election, there were 58 million tweets on India’s 2014 election, and on the day of the verdict, over two million tweets were posted. Chilkoti (2014) adds that Modi’s victory tweet was the most retweeted post with over 70,000 retweets. Modi was seen making appropriate use of the most available social media tools. Facebook, Twitter, Google Hangouts, Blogs, WhatsApp, YouTube, Flickr, Pinterest were all included in his electoral campaigns and strategies to directly communicate information to the public, whilst also listening to what they had to say and share in return (Ali, 2014; Chilkoti, 2014; Dalal, 2014; DNA Mumbai, 2014). With BJP deciding to crowd-source its manifesto, an overwhelming number of citizens blogged and tweeted their opinions in response, which the party officials claim were later incorporated to improvise the manifesto (Ali, 2014).

Modi’s heavily talked about successful social media presence, including his active interaction with the global leaders on this platform, is said to have been managed by a 44 year old electronics engineer with a PhD from Gwalior’s Indian Institute of Technology and Management, Hiren Joshi; Joshi reportedly filters the important messages and updates Modi on the social media activities by the end of the day on a daily basis (DNA Mumbai, 2014). The head of BJP’s IT department was found giving a statement that the social media campaigning influenced almost 30% - 40% of the overall seats in this general election; the active internet using population in Indian is estimated to be at 74 million.

7. Modi’s Social Networking Crusade

Modi’s electoral campaigning team came up with one too many ways to keep the Indian citizens intriguingly engaged in Modi’s plans for a more prosperous India for when and if he came into power. Modi’s prime ministerial campaigning strategies have been directly

associated with Obama's presidential campaigning (Das, 2014). While Obama popularly holds the title of *first social media president of the United States*, Modi has come to gain a similar title on the prime ministerial level, where he is being known as the *first social media prime minister of India*. This section will bring together some of the many tactics that Modi's enthusiastic campaigners put together to attract the multitudinous supporters and their votes that made Modi the 15th prime minister of India. According to the reports, Ogilvy and Mather were specifically instructed by the BJP to create a campaign similar to that of Obama's US presidential campaign (Seervai, 2014).

The use of social media in elections has been accredited for bringing down the walls that once stood tall between the politicians and the common people of the nation, making free flow of information possible, with the priorities and objectives of the ruling party being clearly communicated to the country's population (Ali, 2014). Critics and journalists seem convinced that team Modi's relentless media campaigning that came hugely funded conspicuously led to such unprecedented win in the Indian politics (The guardian, 2014). Modi's electoral campaigning team sought the involvement of advertising giants such as McCann Worldgroup, Ogilvy and Mather, and others; having the legendary advertising minds onboard is claimed to have considerably contributed to Modi's success (Pandey, 2014; Greatlakes, 2014).

Team Modi is said to have been battling a threefold challenge, whereby their strategies were directed at shifting Modi's regional branding as the three-time chief minister of Gujarat to a national level prime ministerial candidate, establishing a genuine connection between the 63 year old elect and the youth of the nation, and to get Modi to break out of his comfort zone to communicate in English with the more politically aware urban population of the country (Pandey, 2014). Modi popularly goes by the acronym, NaMo, amongst his supporters and worldwide (India272, 2014). Quite interestingly, the acronym, NaMo, is also a Sanskrit word, literally meaning bowing down to the lord, but this word finds general usage in contexts of greeting with respect.

A dedicated website www.narendramodi.in was launched which strategically offered insightful facts and engaging graphics that positively contributed to the NaMo campaign; one of the website feature that made available Modi's rallies across different languages was highly appreciated (Dalal, 2014). A staggering turnout for the Modi campaign was from the outstanding support of hundred thousand volunteers who joined the Citizens for Accountable

Governance (CAG) group; reports suggest that these volunteers were the well established alumni of reputed Indian and international technological institutes and universities, some took sabbaticals, and some even went to the extent of quitting from reputed organizations to form a young IT savvy army under the CAG group for driving the Modi campaign at higher levels of organization and communication (Mallet, 2014). Two million volunteers from varied fields as IT, marketing, media, finances were involved in ensuring that Modi was constantly the talk of the online world; NaMo4PM, Pledge4Modi, Modi4PM were some of the many trends under which the Modi campaign was being raced (Latief, 2014).

The man once known as a chai wallah (tea vendor) was now getting his way with the same tea in his favour, and this time around for his electoral campaigning. Modi's *chai pe charcha* (translation: discussion over a cuppa) campaign was a success story in this direction. Team Modi targeted 1000 tea stalls across 300 Indian cities under this campaign, where Modi visited a tea stall to discuss the different issues staring at the faces of troubled Indian citizens over a cup of tea, which was broadcasted live across the 1000 targeted tea stalls via satellites and social media, encouraging spontaneous and direct interaction between the prime ministerial elect and the common people of the country (TOI Ahmedabad, 2014). This tea promenade took a new turn when numerous tea stalls across Ahmedabad, some renamed, and other new ones entered the market as the *Modi tea stall* and the *NaMo tea stall* (Desai, 2014). Others made alternate references to Modi's name; Desai (2014) exemplifies a particular case to put forth that these tea stalls that were barely making any income by the end of the month, post naming their tea stalls after Modi, were now making profits on a daily basis. It was a win-win tactic for both, the Modi government, and the tea sellers.

An extremely successful turning point in the NaMo campaign was the dissemination of the catchphrases that in one-liners were virally spreading Modi's messages through to the masses. The most successful phrase came from Singh, the cofounder of Spice Jet; this victory phrase that resonated exceptionally with the Indian citizens was *Abki Baar, Modi Sarkaar* (Translation: The Modi government, this time around it is) (Khurana, 2014). The catchphrase soon picked pace and was seen all over the social networking sites, billboards, print and digital media, leaflets, and wall writings (IBNLive, 2014; Khurana, 2014). Several thousand memes found their way into the web, where people started bringing humour in by making up content that would rhyme and end with *Modi Sarkaar* (firstpost, 2014). Scores of significantly relevant and numerous jest infused slogans circulated the online world perpetually throughout the electoral period.

Another tagline that made to most of the headlines during the electoral campaigning days was *Achche Din Aane Waale Hain* (Translation: Good days are in the coming) that also made rounds as an entire song uploaded on YouTube; phrased by Modi himself, the tagline was reportedly inspired by former prime minister, Manmohan Singh's speech at an event early this year (Pandey, 2014; Zee News, 2014). The television and radio campaigns revolving around the slogan *Janta Maaf Nahi Karegi* (Translation: The public shan't forgive) created quite a stir amongst the public with them adding improvisations to the original slogan to post their politically conscious messages in the online world (Pandey, 2014). In anticipation of Modi's win and as a manner of showcasing support for him, volunteers began posting messages and hashtagging opinions using captions as MODIfied India and 'Modi'fying India. An entire twitter account called Modi-Fying India appeared that was being moderated by an active volunteer(s) tweeting updates on the Modi whereabouts and the NaMo campaign (ModiFyingIndia, 2014).

Moving on, the online world that has hitherto been obsessed with the idea of posting selfies on social networking sites received a very clever tweet from their current hot favourite elect, Narendra Modi, to post a selfie of the ink stain to show their responsibility towards the country by voting in the 2014 general election; all these selfies trended under #SelfieWithModi; hundred thousands of Modi's followers and supporters came back to post their stained fingernails in response to a single tweet from Modi within a matter of only 72 hours (Rapoza, 2014). Another public winning event was the live online video chat via Google+ Hangout between Modi himself and people from all over the world (The Times of India, 2014). According to Modi's official website, this hangout session had viewers from 116 countries totalling to 4 million viewers, with it being recorded as India's biggest Google+ Hangout till date (narendramodi.in, 2014).

Aside the NaMo tea stalls, NaMo merchandise was introduced in to the market with the launch of NaMo store, and so were NaMo smartphones (John, 2013). NaMo branded saree and sweet stores also soon followed (India 272 Team, 2014). There was also a India 272+ initiative hinting at the number of parliamentary seats required for BJP to win by majority which was later transformed into an Android application asking people in favour of the Modi government to enrol using the phone app; the supporters were urged to leave their feedback and ideas for Modi's upcoming speeches that could be directly posted on social networking sites as Facebook and Twitter (Firstpost Ahmedabad, 2014).

In conjunction, followed the *Mere Sapnon Ka Bharat* initiative (Translation: The India of my dreams); it is being called 2014's most successful crowd-sourcing initiative where netizens shot videos on their version of dream India, that were posted on the video wall of India 272+ official website (India 272 Team, 2014). Another tactic being referred to as a game changer was that the introduction of a national toll-free number that the Modi supporters could make use of either by leaving a missed call, or an SMS, or even a Whatsapp message to become a part of the NaMo campaign (India 272 Team, 2014). The team managing the entire India 272+ campaign reportedly had no political background, but was well versed with technology and social media. They received direct orders from Modi, who insisted on crowd-sourcing to keep the people constantly engaged in a Modi conversation; they were ordered to trap the pulse of the people and were pushed to extremes to achieve the 272+ target (Krishnan, 2014). To wrap it up, just after the election results were declared, the team Modi campaigners introduced a victory wall on Modi's official webpage encouraging supporters and well wishers to leave messages on BJP's triumphant win (Mishra, 2014).

8. Discussions and Lessons Learnt

Some literary authors such as Gogia and Deept (2014) have accused the party based Indian political system to be deeply religion oriented; they insist in their paper on the need for the Indian political system to revisit their functioning and adopt a more ideological based system approach, in comparison to the region and religion based approach that is currently prevalent within the country (Gogia and Deept, 2014). Narasimhan (1997), in cleverly commenting on the spread of corruption in country, states that although independent today, the country is still a victim of a form of governance similar to the times of British rule; they accuse the elected politicians of adopting same measures as the British administrators, for deriving capital out of the system, the ultimate sufferers of which become the Indian citizens.

India's 2014 general election was the first instance in the country's history which extensively utilized technology to encourage individual voter involvement by placing specific focus on the country's ongoing problems along the areas of limited job opportunities, education, and mostly corruption (Das, 2014). Modi is known to have addressed the issues of poor economy, high inflation rates, and problems of unemployment even before the announcement of the 2014 general election; this expression of concern on the above mentioned pressing issues by him is said to have contributed to the instantaneous trust bridge built between him and the citizens of the country (Pandey, 2014). Post the 2014 Indian general election, different

analyses have been reported on what led to Modi's landslide victory. India had been dealing with targeted problems since quite some time. Modi promptly stepped in just at the time when the frustrated public was desperately in need of someone promising enough to effectively tackle the problems of corruption and economy; with the timing being right, the transparent and focused communication on good governance by this new propitious leader resonated perfectly with the people of country (Sridhar, 2014).

According to the recorded numbers, Modi journeyed 300,000km to personally address 196 rallies within a matter of six weeks (Mallet, 2014). The focal point of Modi's social media campaign was encouraging citizen feedback, which according to the analysts was exactly what the Indian citizens had been longing since over two decades now, a direct dialogue with the country's leaders themselves (Rapoza, 2014). While Modi's electoral campaigning will be exemplified as a winning campaign in the Indian context for a long time to come, the blueprint of this campaign will always be compared with Obama's presidential campaign, to the extent that some articles have already been referring to this prime ministerial campaign as the *Obamafication of Indian political campaigns* (LSE, 2014). The social media tactics employed by team Modi have been found to be very similar to those employed during the Obama presidential campaign; keeping the public engrossed in conversation with Modi, online and over mobile phones, is said to be one of the successful Obama borrowed tactics (Rapoza, 2014).

Reports online suggest that following Obama's brand MyBO, team Modi went ahead to introduce the NaMo store where people could buy Modi inspired merchandise, contribute their ideas and designs, and get involved to contribute in different ways to the Modi campaign (LSE, 2014). According to the reports, the Obama campaign kick started with an anti Mitt Romney campaign; the beginnings of the Modi campaign have also been found to have rolled along the similar lines with an anti UPA government campaign called *Dastak* (Translation: A Knock) (Shah, 2013). In addition, similarities are also picked between Obama's dashboard campaign and Modi's India 272+ initiative; Modi's campaign is said to have borrowed the idea of attracting supporters and volunteers through points based incentives for their efforts in propelling the campaign in the right direction; while the big prize for Obama's dashboard was a one on one interaction with the man himself, Modi's 272+ initiative went with the same grand prize and promised the winner an exclusive meeting with Modi (Bhattacharyya, 2014; John, 2013).

There was also the Google+ hangout session that Modi used to connect with the people that was directly inspired from Obama's *ask me anything* Google+ hangout in 2012 (John, 2013; The Times of India, 2014). Team Modi's idea of forming a cyber army of tech savvy individuals under the CAG group is also reportedly a replication of one of Obama's 2007 campaigning strategies when he employed hundreds of engineers, well versed with the use of internet and digital gadgets, to engage in campaigning for him across social media (John, 2013). Team Obama clearly classified Twitter accounts based on states to target situational messages relevant to the different regions under the lens; team Modi adopted an exactly similar tactic, where Twitter accounts in different Indian languages were created to gather specific region based information on different issues to construct targeted speeches that rightly resonated with the views of people from those different regions (John, 2013; LSE, 2014).

As a recent article in the Washington post suggests, the success of the Gujarat model of economic development under the former chief ministerial reigns of Modi, positively contributed in allowing the voters to validate Modi's potential in propelling India's economic growth, overall (Kashwan, 2014). Appreciation for his economic developmental plans and support from the country's business and corporate leaders is said to have given Modi the image of progressive politician capable of steering economic reforms for bettering the country's financial conditions (Pandey, 2014). Sridhar (2014) appropriately points out that contrastingly to the Indian election pattern where a party contended against the opposing party in an election, team Modi took the battle for votes to match the US presidential election pattern, where the voters vote for the contestant and not for the party. Much as Obama's electoral strategy, voters in this general election were voting for Modi, and not for the Bharatiya Janata Party. Team modi campaigned for Modi as the next Indian leader, and not for BJP as the next ruling party of the country which made copious amount of difference in drawing the winning number of votes for the party (Seervai, 2014; Sridhar, 2014).

With the BJP government enjoying the fruition of its dedicated social media efforts and proposing further use of this online platform to run a transparent and more interactive government, the critics have expressed concerning opinions. They have pointed that such extensive incorporation of social media in the governance style could backfire at the BJP, with the tool turning out to be double edged, routing back open criticisms that are anti Modi government (Chilkoti, 2014). However, until date, social media has only been proving to be a boon for the Modi government. The submerging of serious political issues in the world of

social media, with those issues becoming the trending topics of discussion on the online tools amongst the Indian youth was phenomenal. The extent of voter involvement, especially from the younger population was remarkably exceptional, and at the same time, something that the Indian politics had never witnessed until date. The BJP instantly attracted the young voters, which greatly contributed to its success in the 2014 general election; 75% of the country's internet users have been estimated to be below the age of 35 (Ali, 2014).

Modi's stained fingernail selfie campaign and the rest of them that were triggered online started with a few people participating at first, but what followed was a chain reaction, or more so, a domino effect, where friends of those who posted Modi related selfies and slogans wanted to do the same as their friends, which was to participate and to show that they were responsible citizens too, aware of the fronts and rears of the political world. Individuals began voicing opinions loud and clear, and hash tags, especially the team Modi triggered ones became the talk of the online world. The power of social networking sites, for instance, in terms of the number of followers on Twitter, and the number of likes on Facebook and other social tools took a new high in the world of Indian politics. While Modi and his campaigners were doing an excellent job with the branding and advertising, every tactic and strategy of theirs was magnified in impact by Modi's followers and supporters on these social networking sites (Pandey, 2014).

One of Modi's raving slogans *achche din aane waale hain* recently experienced retort and was boomeranged on the country's ruling party. Immediately post the electoral win, the country is being hit by sudden rise in the prices of railway tickets, the most preferred means of transport within the nation, and other commodities have also undergone the price surge; reportedly, a public interest litigation has been filed against the Modi government by the anti corruption citizen welfare committee for breach of trust, where they accuse Modi of false promises and question him on *achche din kab aayenge?* (Translation: How long until the good days arrive?) (Caravandaily, 2014).

9. Conclusions

Sources online are calling the 2014 prime ministerial election *India's first open sourced election* with team Modi being applauded for getting innovative with campaigning for brand NaMo (India 272 Team, 2014). In discussing the factors leading up to Modi's recent political success, an article from the guardian (2014) attributes his monumental win to the metamorphosis of Indian politics; team Modi's streamlined incursion of the NaMo campaign

all over broadcast and print media, particularly, that over social media, coupled with the corporate sector of the country bankrolling the same campaign, drew in the extraordinary support from most of India. According to some available estimates, the NaMo campaign has costed the BJP over ₹500m; no fully confirmed estimated on the spending have been made available yet (Ghosh, 2014). While mostly being appreciated for such intense use of social media to gain votes from the younger generation of the country, Modi is also being accused of deceiving the Indian voters; team Modi's vehement campaigning/advertising strategies are being indicted for luring voters to cast their votes for Modi (Ghosh, 2014).

Modi reportedly educated the newly elected BJP members from different constituencies on the increased use of social media to effectually communicate the message of the governing party during a workshop, post the general election (Express News service, 2014; TOI Haryana, 2014). The BJP officials have also been reported of publicly proposing that the use of social media will be continued in their governance to communicate and gather feedback on different policies and strategies that the ruling government will be exercising in the near future (Chilkoti, 2014).

Team Modi admits of heavily borrowing and being influenced from Obama's presidential campaign, especially with their use of analytics (Baweja, 2014). The Obama-Modi comparative trend does not seem to be fading away any sooner. With Modi's prime ministerial campaign being so closely drawn from Obama's presidential campaign, and it turning out to become a historic success has a lot to do with this direct comparison game. The campaign strategies apart, the comparisons have grown as far as their personalities and governance styles. A recent news article picks on how both men grew into power despite coming from modest backgrounds, with both being well known for their rhetoric and their focus on infrastructure and development (IANS, 2014). Both leaders were seen fighting humbly in favour of the middle class common man (John, 2013).

Modi's aggressive use of social media and other techniques borrowed from Obama's presidential campaign have undoubtedly redefined the electoral campaigning in India. His customized speeches drafted on the basis of the views gathered from the general public and innovative use of social media proved to be a winning weapon for this prime ministerial elect. The political parties in India are expected to be looking away from the traditional methods to go for more MODified US-inspired campaigning strategies, involving micro targeting and volunteer mobilization, in the future (The Washington Post, 2014). Malik and Malik (2014)

in discussing INC's future in the country predict that post their 2014 political debacle, it may be another 10-15 years before they next emerge to take over governing reigns within the country; the authors also quote that one lesson hitting all the political parties in India very assertively at this point is of either to *perform or perish*. Drawing from the similar idea, the disproportionate 2014 electoral results, and the commendatory comprehension of Indian citizens to turn into more rational voters for the overall good, the future electoral candidates in this country will be left with no choice, but to stand by their claims and deliver accordingly, or simply be prepared to take the great fall as did the INC in this recent prime ministerial election.

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