



Routledge South Asian History and Culture Series

POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING IN DIGITAL INDIA

Edited by
Anil M. Varughese and Holli A. Semetko



Political Campaigning in Digital India

This book provides a conceptual toolkit to understand the changing technologies and dynamics of political campaigning in India. Examining political campaigning and party strategies across many Indian states, with special attention to regional politics, histories, cultures, and social and technological contexts, this book discusses the potential impacts of campaign strategies on electoral outcomes.

Political campaigning reached a tipping point with millions of social media users engaging online with family and friends, political issues, parties, and candidates in India's 2019 parliamentary election. Although India's political parties had been working with consultants and professional advertising agencies for decades, by 2019, millions of first-time voters and older voters were microtargeted with campaign messaging by parties and their affiliates, including frequent misinformation from unknown sources supporting one party or another.

Filling a key gap in political communication research on election campaigns in digital India, the chapters in this book capture how political campaigning is important for the electoral fortunes of political parties in India's diverse regions and states.

This book appeals to students, scholars, and practitioners in political communication, public administration, and political consulting, as well as anyone interested in data-driven political campaigning. It will also be an invaluable reading for those interested in South Asian studies. This book was originally published as a special issue of *South Asian History and Culture*.

Anil M. Varughese is Associate Professor at the School of Public Policy and Administration at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. His research interests are in comparative politics of South Asia and global social policy.

Holli A. Semetko is Asa Griggs Candler Professor of Media and International Affairs and Professor of Political Science at Emory University, Atlanta, USA, and was Fulbright Nehru Scholar at IIT Bombay, India.

Routledge South Asian History and Culture Series

Boria Majumdar – University of Central Lancashire, UK

Sharmistha Gooptu – South Asia Research Foundation, India

This series offers a forum that will provide an integrated perspective on the field at large. It brings together research on South Asia in the humanities and social sciences, and provides scholars with a platform covering, but not restricted to, their particular fields of interest and specialization. Such an approach is critical to any expanding field of study, for the development of more informed and broader perspectives, and of more overarching theoretical conceptions.

The series achieves a multidisciplinary forum for the study of South Asia under the aegis of established disciplines (e.g. history, politics, gender studies) combined with more recent fields (e.g. sport studies, sexuality studies). A focus is also to make available to a broader readership new research on film, media, photography, medicine, and the environment, which have to date remained more specialized fields within South Asian studies.

A significant concern for the series is to focus across the whole of the region known as South Asia, and not simply on India, as most 'South Asia' forums inevitably tend to do. We are most conscious of this gap in South Asian studies and work to bring into focus more scholarship on and from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and other parts of South Asia.

Children and Knowledge

Contemporary and Historical Perspectives from India

Edited by Zazie Bowen and Jessica Hinchy

Popular Cinema in Bengal

Genre, Stars, Public Cultures

Edited by Madhuja Mukherjee and Kaustav Bakshi

Communities and Courts

Religion and Law in Modern India

Edited by Manisha Sethi

Narrating Africa in South Asia

Edited by Mahmood Kooria

Political Campaigning in Digital India

Edited by Anil M. Varughese & Holli A. Semetko

For more information about this series, please visit:

www.routledge.com/Routledge-South-Asian-History-and-Culture-Series/book-series/RSAHC

Political Campaigning in Digital India

Edited by

Anil M. Varughese and Holli A. Semetko

First published 2024
by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Introduction, Chapters 1–4 and 6–8 © 2024 Taylor & Francis
Chapter 5 © 2022 Kiran Arabaghatta Basavaraj. Originally published as Open Access.

With the exception of Chapter 5, no part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers. For details on the rights for Chapter 5, please see the chapter's Open Access footnote.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN13: 978-1-032-78122-8 (hbk)
ISBN13: 978-1-032-78123-5 (pbk)
ISBN13: 978-1-003-48630-5 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003486305

Typeset in Minion Pro
by codeMantra

Publisher's Note

The publisher accepts responsibility for any inconsistencies that may have arisen during the conversion of this book from journal articles to book chapters, namely the inclusion of journal terminology.

Disclaimer

Every effort has been made to contact copyright holders for their permission to reprint material in this book. The publishers would be grateful to hear from any copyright holder who is not here acknowledged and will undertake to rectify any errors or omissions in future editions of this book.

Contents

<i>Citation Information</i>	vi
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	viii
Introduction—Political campaigning in India: changing contexts of political communication <i>Anil M. Varughese and Holli A. Semetko</i>	1
1 Political campaigning and party strategies: the importance of rallies in the northern states <i>Anup Kumar</i>	19
2 Political campaigning in West Bengal: violence, professionalisation, and communalisation <i>Suman Nath and Subhasish Ray</i>	39
3 Faith revival and issue framing in Kerala's 2019 campaign <i>Anil M. Varughese</i>	55
4 Campaigning and party strategies in Assam <i>Pahi Saikia and Rajeev Bhattacharyya</i>	74
5 Digital campaigning in Karnataka <i>Kiran Arabaghatta Basavaraj</i>	95
6 Maximum campaigning in Andhra Pradesh: from padayatra to Facebook and YouTube <i>Anil M. Varughese, Pahi Saikia and Tanya Reddy Sattineni</i>	113
7 Political hazard: misinformation in the 2019 Indian general election campaign <i>Syeda Zainab Akbar, Anmol Panda and Joyojeet Pal</i>	133
8 Political communication and campaigning in India: opportunities for future research <i>Holli A. Semetko</i>	152
<i>Index</i>	167

Citation Information

The chapters in this book were originally published in the journal *South Asian History and Culture*, volume 13, issue 3 (2022). When citing this material, please use the original page numbering for each article, as follows:

Introduction

Political campaigning in India: changing contexts of political communication

Anil M. Varughese and Holli A. Semetko

South Asian History and Culture, volume 13, issue 3 (2022) pp. 267–284

Chapter 1

Political campaigning and party strategies: the importance of rallies in the northern states

Anup Kumar

South Asian History and Culture, volume 13, issue 3 (2022) pp. 285–304

Chapter 2

Political campaigning in West Bengal: violence, professionalisation, and communalisation

Suman Nath and Subhasish Ray

South Asian History and Culture, volume 13, issue 3 (2022) pp. 305–320

Chapter 3

Faith revival and issue framing in Kerala's 2019 campaign

Anil M. Varughese

South Asian History and Culture, volume 13, issue 3 (2022) pp. 321–339

Chapter 4

Campaigning and party strategies in Assam

Pahi Saikia and Rajeev Bhattacharyya

South Asian History and Culture, volume 13, issue 3 (2022) pp. 340–360

Chapter 5

Digital campaigning in Karnataka

Kiran Arabaghatta Basavaraj

South Asian History and Culture, volume 13, issue 3 (2022) pp. 361–378

Chapter 6

Maximum campaigning in Andhra Pradesh: from padayatra to Facebook and YouTube
Anil M. Varughese, Pahi Saikia and Tanya Reddy Sattineni
South Asian History and Culture, volume 13, issue 3 (2022) pp. 379–398

Chapter 7

Political hazard: misinformation in the 2019 Indian general election campaign
Syeda Zainab Akbar, Anmol Panda and Joyojeet Pal
South Asian History and Culture, volume 13, issue 3 (2022) pp. 399–417

Chapter 8

Political communication and campaigning in India: opportunities for future research
Holli A. Semetko
South Asian History and Culture, volume 13, issue 3 (2022) pp. 418–431

For any permission-related enquiries please visit:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/page/help/permissions>

Notes on Contributors

Syeda Zainab Akbar, Microsoft Research India, Bangalore, India.

Kiran Arabaghatta Basavaraj, Exeter Q-Step Centre, University of Exeter, UK.

Rajeev Bhattacharyya, Senior journalist and writer, Guwahati, India.

Anup Kumar, School of Communication, Cleveland State University, USA.

Suman Nath, Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam Government College, New Town, India.

Joyojeet Pal, Microsoft Research India, Bangalore, India.

Anmol Panda, Microsoft Research India, Bangalore, India.

Subhasish Ray, Jindal School of Government and Public Policy, O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonapat, India.

Pahi Saikia, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati, India.

Tanya Reddy Sattineni, Departments of Economics and Political Science, Emory University, Atlanta, USA.

Holli A. Semetko, College of Arts and Sciences, Emory University, Atlanta, USA.

Anil M. Varughese, School of Public Policy and Administration, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada.

INTRODUCTION

Political campaigning in India: changing contexts of political communication

Anil M. Varughese and Holli A. Semetko

ABSTRACT

This volume focuses on the dynamic, distinctive and diverse aspects of political campaigning in India's varied information ecosystems during the 2019 Lok Sabha election. This introductory essay reviews important research in the field of political communication and campaigning, and distinctive forms of campaigning in historically important Indian elections, before discussing innovations and technologies in political campaigning in India since the 1950s. Greater access to low-cost smartphones and the internet since 2016 has meant that in most of the states studied in this volume, social media played a larger role in 2019 than previously. This volume brings together empirical evidence in two thematic case studies—one on how parties use massive campaign rallies to impact prime-time news agendas and another on misinformation on social media – along with five case studies on the most distinctive forms of political campaigning in the varied subnational contexts of West Bengal, Assam, Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. The concluding essay compares highlights from these case studies, discusses campaign research methods, and identifies opportunities for future research on political campaigning in India.

India's 2019 national election campaign was the biggest electoral exercise in the digital age, with some 900 million eligible voters.¹ It was the first national election in which roughly half of the voters had access to digital communication and about one-third had access to social media.² Over 500 million citizens were connected to the internet, and some 340 million were on Facebook, and 400 million on WhatsApp.³ With more than half of the population below 25 years of age, India's rapidly expanding young, urban middle class adopted digital technology at a faster pace since 2016 with low-cost smartphones and greater internet access. Voting behaviour in India has historically been attributed to socio-structural variables such as caste and religion, yet in ethnically diverse urban locations such as Delhi, class has become increasingly important.⁴ The growth and penetration of information and communication technologies along with the growing population of young voters, alongside long multi-phase elections, suggest that campaigns are an increasingly important venue for Indian voters to make up their minds. Political parties, new media and voters are redefining political communication in election campaigns and adapting to this changed context. How did political parties utilize new media alongside traditional avenues of political campaigning in 2019? What were the distinctive forms and characteristic features of campaigning in India's varied states? This volume addresses these questions with thematic and regional case studies from different political communication environments across the country.

India's ethnolinguistically bordered states all have vernacular media and distinct political parties, making the country home to many different media and party systems.⁵ Despite important variations in India's subnational contexts, most accounts of Lok Sabha elections focus on a national narrative, with little attention to the dynamic, distinctive and diverse aspects of political campaigning and vernacular information ecosystems in different states. This volume brings together empirical evidence from a variety of contexts, including research on the centrality of massive rallies in a party's campaign strategy, particularly in the northern states and Delhi, along with research on strategic misinformation posted on social media, as well as the most distinctive forms of political campaigning in a number of diverse states, including Assam in the northeast, West Bengal in the east, and Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh in the south.

In what follows, relevant research on political campaigning in the growing interdisciplinary field of political communication is first reviewed briefly. The next section focuses on distinctive forms of campaigning in historically important Indian elections, before discussing innovations and technologies in political campaigning in India since the 1950s. It concludes with a discussion of important aspects of political campaigning in 2019.

Research on political campaigning: the state of the art

Propaganda and persuasion are central to political campaigning and have existed in various forms for thousands of years. Ancient India's Arthashastra, a treatise on statecraft by Chanakya, otherwise known as Kautilya (350–275 BCE), and Cicero's later treatise on how to win an election in ancient Rome (64 BCE) are just two of the earliest examples. Political campaigning is a central topic of research within the larger interdisciplinary field of political communication. Although propaganda and persuasion have been practiced for thousands of years, it was only in the last two decades of the twentieth century that the interdisciplinary field of political communication was officially launched by organized groups of scholars in leading professional associations representing the fields of communication and political science. Since then, developments in technology – beginning with mobile phones, and then access to the internet, smartphones and apps with the rise of companies like Google and Facebook – have led to an explosion of data, which has given rise to an increasing array of opportunities for research, especially in the arena of political campaigning. The importance of this interdisciplinary field and contemporary research paradigms corresponds with the significance of the internet and social media in societies around the world.

Given that Facebook, Instagram (owned by Facebook), Google, Microsoft and Twitter are publicly listed for-profit companies whose staff often consult clients to help them achieve their online goals via targeted marketing on their platform, it comes as no surprise that such consulting extends to organizations, political parties, candidates, governments, and countries advertising on these platforms. Representatives at these firms are often 'quasi-digital consultants to campaigns, shaping digital strategy, content, and execution.'⁶ This practice sets social media companies apart from traditional media companies – television, radio and print media – which may also sell advertising to political parties, but have been more or less regulated by governments since their inception.

The large body of research in political communication can be described generally as primarily focused on the context of Western democracies and the growth of the field can be attributed to mentorship and training in university graduate programmes as well as cross-national grant programmes (for example, European Union-funded collaborative research training grants). National science foundations and private foundations in many democracies provide competitive grants for political communication research, particularly in the context of election campaigns. The sheer lack of resources in national social science budgets in lower-income countries in the Global South has meant less funding for researchers in those countries to conduct empirical research in the field of political communication. With some important exceptions, there is comparatively less research on political communication and political campaigning in countries of the Global South.⁷

Some have argued that the lack of published research on political communication from the Global South is due to a publication bias that favours higher-income countries, and having to spend more time discussing unfamiliar contexts.⁸

There is a strong tradition of cross-national comparative research in the field of political communication, especially from the early days of the internet to the present, in which election campaigns are the focus.⁹ Election posters on the streets are said to be the most common form of political advertising in many countries and India is no exception.¹⁰ A notable cross-national comparative study on the use of the Web in the first decade of this century included India and other countries in the Global South in cross-national comparisons.¹¹

A number of studies in political marketing are also comparative.¹² Advertising, for example, takes many forms, and regulatory practices vary cross-nationally and over time, especially with respect to television and radio ads, as well as broadcast news.¹³ Research on political marketing took a global comparative perspective in a 1998–2000 study in which 592 political consultants from 43 countries were asked to evaluate the importance of the national party organizations for successful campaign operations. A full 77% of Indian campaign professionals answered ‘very important’ compared with 80% in Australia and 96% in South Africa, and only 13% in the U.S., with regions ranging from 64% in East Central Europe to 45% in Latin America.¹⁴

Political campaigning research in India

There is a robust tradition in election studies in India collected by the Lokniti-CSDS project, at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) in Delhi, home to the Sage journal *Studies in Indian Politics*, launched in 2013, which was one of a number of journals publishing special issues on the 2014 and 2019 national elections.¹⁵ Drawing on CSDS surveys in *Studies in Indian Politics*, Pradeep Chhibber and Susan Ostermann discussed the BJP’s ‘fragile mandate’ and the role of Narendra Modi and ‘vote mobilizers’ in 2014, and in *Economic and Political Weekly’s* special issue on 2014, Pradeep Chhibber and Raul Verma discussed the ‘Modi wave’ as an ‘ideological consolidation of the right,’ which was further discussed in their article on the new social coalition supporting the BJP in 2019.¹⁶ The informative volumes, *Electoral Politics in India: The Resurgence of the Bharatiya Janata Party*, edited by Suhas Palshikar, Sanjay Kumar, and Sanjay Lodha, and *Party Competition in Indian States*, edited by Suhas Palshikar, K.C. Suri and Yogendra Yadav, also draw on Lokniti-CSDS survey data to explain variations at the subnational level in recent national elections.¹⁷ In *Contemporary South Asia’s* special issue on ‘Indian Elections 2014: Explaining the Landslide,’ author and editor Louise Tillin discusses regional party resilience and national party system change, and Oliver Heath uses constituency-level data to discuss mobilization, conversion and vote swing favouring the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2014.¹⁸ Christophe Jaffrelot and Gilles Verniers, editing *Contemporary South Asia’s* special issue on the 2019 election, focus on the BJP’s national campaign.¹⁹

Taken together, the available post-election analysis is largely focussed on caste-class-religion arithmetic and party-system variables in understanding and explaining voter perception and behaviour, with little attention to political campaigning in subnational contexts. The national level has been the primary focus in most of the published research on 2019. There has been little systematic attention given to the diverse subnational contexts of political campaigning, which give rise to questions about the potential for the influence of *information and campaigning* on public perceptions of parties, leaders and issues in 2019. This volume seeks to address the gap in the literature as there has been little in the way of systematic comparative research on the channels and forms of political communication employed by the political parties in different subnational contexts.

Other recent studies have sought to explain election results by referencing the campaign, but without using survey or content data from the campaign. In their book *Winning the Mandate: The Indian Experience*, Bidyut Chakrabarty and Sugato Hazra find the use of digital modes of political

communication such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Google Plus, in addition to the traditional media (television, print, radio), a key ingredient in the BJP's campaign inventory. They assert that in 2014, the use of social media by Narendra Modi 'blunted the mainstream media, which had been anti-Modi' and that 'for Congress the tool [social media] was irrelevant since the ruling politicians had unstinted support from mainstream media,' yet the authors cite little empirical evidence from content analysis of news media to support this conclusion.²⁰ In *Electoral Politics in India: The Resurgence of the Bharatiya Janata Party*, Palshikar, Kumar, and Lodha attempt to explain the BJP's 'spectacular' victory and note that in 2014, among many other factors, Mr. Modi's massive national campaign involving 437 public rallies and an additional 1,350 rallies through a three-dimensional holographic medium was one of the factors enabling the BJP's victory.²¹ Rally attendance in India may be high compared to other countries, and many rally goers attend rallies for different parties, a practice rarely found in the U.S. and Europe. Yet in all countries, television coverage of the rallies reaches far more potential voters. *The Algebra of Warfare-Welfare: A Long View of India's 2014 Election* takes an anthropological-sociological long-term approach to studying the outcome of the 2014 election in the context of a long-term cultural shift in politics.²²

In *Citizen Raj: Indian Elections 1952-2019*, economist Surjit S. Bhalla uses aggregate-level data to discuss votes and seats in elections since 1952 – his formula for assessing the 'Modi effect' in 2014 – and provides his forecast for the Lok Sabha 2019 election.²³ A different approach is found in *The Game of Votes: Visual Media, Politics, and Elections in the Digital Era*, which focuses on the importance of campaign slogans in past elections, contemporary political marketing, and how branding, data analytics, multimedia content and crisis communication techniques were used by the BJP as early as 2004 and in a 'masterful' way in 2014.²⁴ *When India Votes: The Dynamics of Successful Election Campaigning* discusses how concepts in marketing can be applied to recent election campaigns in India.²⁵

The Verdict: Decoding India's Elections provides a wealth of anecdotal and data-driven insights into India's elections since 1952, at both national and state levels.²⁶ The authors discuss the value of concepts such as the Index of Opposition Unity (IOU), the incumbency and anti-incumbency vote, and the idea of a landslide. They point out that at the state level the issue and party combinations in Lok Sabha elections are often completely different from one state to another, so that the idea of a landslide at the national level instead should be seen as a combination of different local circumstances and often different parties contesting simultaneous state elections to the Lok Sabha. They also discuss how electoral alliances in India's 'jugaad' first-past-the-post electoral system have given rise to regional party support, and they offer an assessment of public opinion and exit polls in forecasting state and national elections. Drawing on Assembly election polls versus Lok Sabha polls from 1980 to 2019, for example, the authors demonstrate that opinion polls for Lok Sabha elections are as reliable as Lok Sabha exit polls and generally can be trusted given that they have a 97% strike rate at correctly forecasting the winner, excluding the year 2004 when all polls were off the mark. However, the authors point out that polls for State Assembly elections are systematically far less accurate and tend to underestimate the winner by a large percentage – with only 66% of opinion polls and 82% of exit polls correctly forecasting the winner – to the extent that they do not meet the threshold of acceptability.²⁷

Each of these books focuses primarily on the national level; both historically and in terms of political parties, the focus is on national parties – the INC and the BJP – with relatively little attention to state-level or regional political parties and campaigning. Taken together, these recent books provide different and important insights into electoral politics, but they are largely focussed on the national scene and socio-demographic variables. This volume's systematic and comparative focus on political campaigning in subnational contexts is intended to address this gap in the literature.

The BJP victory in 2014, which gave the BJP an absolute majority of seats, was an outcome that many observers noted had not been seen since the historic 1984 election. Interestingly, the 1984 election was also the election in which for 'the first time in the history of the country,' a professional

advertising agency was hired to design a campaign.²⁸ That campaign (the Indian National Congress Party's [INC's or Congress Party's] winning campaign in 1984) is discussed briefly below, followed by a discussion of the 2014 campaign, India's first real 'mediatized' election.²⁹

The 1984 Lok Sabha election campaign

In planning the 1984 campaign many months in advance, then INC president and prime minister Rajiv Gandhi was driven by his belief that modern consumer marketing techniques should be used in politics. A professional advertising agency, Rediffusion, was hired to design the INC campaign – an agency that was consulted by Ted Bates, and responsible for Ronald Reagan's advertising in the 1980 and 1984 campaigns.³⁰ The INC in 1984 was well ahead of the UK's Labour Party, whose leaders in the 1983 British general election were dismissive of professional political marketing, believing that politics should not be sold like soap powder.³¹ A brief history on how the INC's 1984 campaign came to be advised by an Indian agency and an international agency is provided below.

Indira Gandhi was prime minister of India when two of the most widely acclaimed political marketing campaigns helped to usher Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party into office in the UK in 1979, and Ronald Reagan and the Republican Party into the White House in the USA in 1980. PM Indira Gandhi had warmly received Thatcher on her first visit to India as an MP and the head of the Conservative Party in 1976, and one political observer later described Indira Gandhi as Margaret Thatcher's 'real soul mate.'³² Gandhi made a return visit to the UK in 1978, as leader of the Congress party in opposition, having lost her seat in the post-Emergency 1977 election, where she met with Thatcher in London. Earlier that same year, Thatcher and the Conservative Party had hired the professional advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi to plan Thatcher's successful 1979 election campaign. Thatcher personally selected the 1979 campaign's popular slogan 'Labour isn't working,' accompanied by visuals of trash piled high in central London, power outages, and the phrase 'the dead were left unburied,' a situation that was blamed on the Labour government and strikes by public sector employees. Thatcher went on to run the UK as prime minister for 18 years. This brief history is important because before 1979, in the UK, no political party had hired an advertising agency and marketing was designed by those working in the parties even if they had no experience in marketing.³³

Indira's favourite political strategist was her younger son Sanjay, who ran the 1980 campaign that brought her back into office in January, but in June that same year he died in a tragic air accident. His older brother Rajiv then left his job as an Air India pilot to run for Parliament and worked with his mother, the prime minister. Indira Gandhi had cordial meetings with both UK and U.S. leaders at the Cancun meetings in 1981, and she, as prime minister of India, and her son Rajiv officially visited the Reagans in Washington, D.C. in late summer 1982.³⁴ After PM Indira Gandhi's tragic assassination on 31 October 1984, Rajiv became party leader and prime minister, and decided the national election campaign scheduled for December that year would proceed as scheduled.

The theme of the INC's 1984 Lok Sabha campaign – 'Give Unity a Hand' – was designed by Rediffusion, and Rajiv Gandhi was quoted in interviews as saying that 'the integrity and unity of India is the biggest issue before our party today,' painting the Opposition as 'wilful conspirators and destroyers of its integrity.'³⁵ The theme had been chosen when PM Indira Gandhi was alive, and with her suddenly gone, plans for the campaign pivoted 'overnight' to focus on her last words.³⁶ The cover of *Time* magazine later pictured her with a quote from her speech in Orissa on 30 October 1984: 'If I die today, every drop of my blood will invigorate the nation.'³⁷ Table 1 describes the political marketing for the Congress Party's 1984 Lok Sabha campaign, drawing on the fascinating book *The Lotus Years*, which notes that at almost all of his rallies, Rajiv Gandhi would recall the memory of his mother to address the big issue of national unity, as in the following quote from one rally:

Table 1. Political marketing in the 1984 Congress Party Lok Sabha election campaign led by PM Rajiv Gandhi.

The theme 'Give Unity a Hand' was advertised in posters, banners, and full-page newspaper ads, in an 'aggressive campaign' approved by Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, who was quoted in an interview as saying that, 'The integrity and unity of India is the biggest issue before our party today,' and painted the Opposition as 'wilful conspirators and destroyers of its integrity.' Rajiv Gandhi's strategy team divided the campaign into two phases.

Phase I
 'Indira Gandhi's martyrdom for the cause of India's unity and integrity'
 The slogan '*Indiraji ki antim ichcha, boond boond se desh ki Raksha*' ('Indira's last wish: every drop of her blood will go in defence of the country') was printed on 2.5 million posters, 100,000 cloth banners and audio cassettes.

Phase II
 'Rajiv as Mr Clean... personal integrity, a clear-cut vision for the country's growth, effective and efficient leadership were all projected as his core characteristics.'
 15 million posters with his picture and quotes from his speeches were distributed, along with 'a 30-minute video cassette featuring an interview of Indira Gandhi speaking about Rajiv, along with shots of the new PM working in his office.'
 '20 million bhindis' with 'the image of a smiling Indira' were distributed to women living in urban slums and in rural villages, and '20,000 stencils of her smiling at Rajiv,' as well as 'specially recorded songs and recordings of her speeches.'
 From Dec. 1, for the first two weeks of the campaign, 20,000 km, 17 states, 120 public meetings, on average 10 a day. And 'speed and scale were the hallmarks of his nationwide campaign, as was his new political persona.'

Some days ago Indira Gandhi was assassinated. She was killed by people who hoped to break India into fragments and make us fight among ourselves . . . That event opened our eyes to the divisive forces at work in the country. But the India of Gandhi, Nehru and Indiraji cannot be broken by the bullets of two assassins. The need of the hour is for all people to rise and protect India's integrity and unity.³⁸

Source: Summarized and quoted from Bhatnagar, *The Lotus Years*, pp. 174–175.

The Congress Party's strategy consisted of a pre-campaign distribution of hours-long videos of Indira Gandhi's funeral, followed by the first phase of the campaign, which encouraged voters to remember her contribution to national unity and portrayed the opposition parties as endangering national unity. The second phase encouraged voters to place their trust in her son Rajiv as prime minister. The strategy clearly called for the 'sympathy vote' that political observers said the party received, for 'the party left no stone unturned in playing the emotional card,' with voters completely hooked to the grief of losing Indira Amma to the assassins' violence.³⁹ There was very little, if any, reference to the legislative achievements of the Congress government or Indira's flagship programmes.⁴⁰ The election outcome was a 48% vote share for the INC across the country and an absolute majority of 414 seats for the Congress party. Many attributed the size of the majority to a sympathy vote due to PM Indira Gandhi's assassination.⁴¹ The opposition was decimated, as the second largest party was a regional party, the Telugu Desam Party, from Andhra Pradesh, with only 30 seats.

The 2014 Lok Sabha election

Fast forward to 2014 when the BJP won an absolute majority of seats for the first time since 1984. 2014 was India's first 'social media election' due to a dramatic increase in online activity and the hitherto unprecedented use of social media by political parties to court voters.⁴² The 2014 campaign became data-driven to an extent unseen in India before, as political parties realized the potential of big data in microtargeting voters, designing campaign strategies, calibrating advertisements, recruiting volunteers, raising funds, and modelling voter sentiment and engagement. Young techies replaced political pundits who traditionally built campaign strategies on the basis of years of on-the-ground engagement with voters, familiarity with the context, intuition based on calculations of caste and religious vote banks, and coalition arithmetic. The BJP, in particular, created its own customized data analysis tools and in-house digital strategy team that had been working together for some years, building voter databases and identifying strategic constituencies for channelling resources into seats seen as having high potential to become electoral gains. As a result, it was in a better position to connect directly with voters.

The BJP appeared to have a comparative advantage on social media in the 2014 election as it was perceived to be more visible on Twitter and Facebook; Facebook had far more users. The BJP had claimed months before the campaign began that 160 districts were 'ripe' for digital influence and went on to win those seats and many more.⁴³ Traditional media routinely reported on social media, and social media posted news from traditional media indicating the emergence of a 'hybrid media system' in 2014.⁴⁴

The BJP also had an extensive team of volunteers responsible for the party's Mission '272+' campaign theme, which refers to the goal of winning 272+ seats that would give the party an absolute majority. The BJP's 272+ goal was not really taken seriously by the media or the other parties in 2014. The new Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) had surprised all by finishing second in the December 2013 Assembly election. AAP leader Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal ran a minority government in Delhi and the news media began to entertain thoughts about what that could mean for the April–May 2014 Lok Sabha election. *The Times of India* commissioned IPSOS to conduct a survey of public opinion about support for the AAP and reported in early January 2014 on public opinion in India's eight most populous cities – Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Pune and Ahmedabad. The TOI-IPSOS poll found 44% said they would vote AAP if an AAP candidate ran in their district, which suggested potential for a hung Parliament. However, when asked 'Who do you think would make the best PM?' responses were 58% Narendra Modi, 25% Arvind Kejriwal, and 14% Rahul Gandhi.⁴⁵ Mission 272+ leaders believed that if the BJP won, it was because of the party's massive volunteer programme, involving tens of thousands, in which a network of volunteers across the country competed daily to sign up voters with their cell phone numbers to receive SMS messages on the latest BJP news and live calls from Mr. Modi's rally speeches; the volunteer with the most voters signed up would win an opportunity to pitch an idea directly to Mr. Modi.⁴⁶ Volunteers included those working at large businesses supporting the BJP who were given time off during the campaign to help canvas for the party.

While the general consensus was that the BJP ran the most robust campaign of volunteers and was the party most visible on social media, it was not as if the INC was lacking campaigning expertise and innovation. For example, just days before the results were announced, in an interview with the high-tech INC team managing the Bengaluru South campaign of Nandan Nilekani – one of the co-founders of Infosys who led the Aadhar project for PM Manmohan Singh's government – Fourth Lion cofounder and angel investor Shankar Maruwada admitted that they expected to lose to a 'Modi wave,' so they created an app to help their supporters get to the correct poll precinct.⁴⁷

Just before the campaign began in February 2014, Facebook purchased WhatsApp, which was sending an estimated 8.5 billion messages a day. WhatsApp was not recognized by the Indian news media or by researchers to be a vitally important campaign organization tool in 2014, despite the fact that it was the most popular messaging app in the country. The BJP used WhatsApp to organize internal planning and political marketing for its large volunteer network across the country, hierarchically linked from centre to state to district and local digital cell leaders and influencers.⁴⁸ Facebook launched online town halls with party elites such as the BJP's Arun Jaitley to showcase the platform's presence in the country, as did Google+ and Twitter. Much hype surrounded social media in 2014, with traditional news media posting Twitter 'sentiment scores' for the parties and their leaders almost daily, scores that reflected Twitter's small slice of social media users in the voting age population. Television news highly personalized the campaign with a focus on the 'personalities' of party leaders as expected.⁴⁹ The excitement surrounding social media was likely felt more by the media than the public, with the exception of those following Narendra Modi, whose constant use of Twitter prompted engagement, especially as he flew across the country to speak at up to five rallies per day and crowdsourced topics for his next rally speech while in flight.⁵⁰ Mr. Modi also delivered a speech in April via hologram in 100 towns across the country simultaneously. Research on the 2014 campaign found that party contact, as well as sharing information with others (face to face and/or electronically) and campaign interest were significant predictors of political engagement in each party's campaign (INC, BJP, AAP).⁵¹

Table 2. Technology and history of political campaigning in India.

Forms of political campaigning	Origin
Yatra	late 19th/early twentieth century
Street plays	1950s
Face-to-face forms of political campaigning	1950s
Rallies	1951
Traditional paid political advertising (message control) and free media (no message control): newspapers, billboards, posters, radio	1950s/60s
Public service TV, satellite TV, cable TV	1970s/1980s/1990s
First 'professionalized' campaign, with first ad agency hired by Rajiv Gandhi	1984
Websites, blogs, online paid political advertising, 'missed call' ads, short-messaging service (SMS) texting on regular cell phones	2000s/2010s
Another agency-driven election campaign ('India shining' campaign for BJP), robocalls, recorded voice message on cell phones	2004–
Social media platforms (used to varying degrees by parties, affiliates, candidates, media)	2009–2014
Growth of vernacular television news channels and digital news portals, blogs	2009–2014
Direct marketing (missed call poster ads build party cell phone lists)	2009–2014
Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Google Plus (paid ads and other forms of engagement)	2009–2014
Big data, microtargeting used in strategy development	2011–
Roadshows and high-tech holograms	2014–
Social media war-rooms, digital strategy teams, political marketing firms	2014–
Rapid growth in internet access, low-cost smartphones and data plans, political mobile apps	2016–

After nine phases of voting, the election results announced on 16 May 2014 gave Mission 272 + reason to celebrate as the BJP won 282 seats, up 166 seats, with 31.34% of the vote share. The INC lost 162 seats, down from 206 seats, resulting in 44 seats and a vote share of 19.52%.⁵² All regional parties received less than 5% of the vote and varying numbers of seats. The 1984 and 2014 campaigns had in common not only the fact that the majority of seats in each election were won by a single political party, but that the winning campaigns in each election could be described as 'professionalised' given the use of skilled campaign expertise as well as the latest technology to spread the party's message. Rajiv Gandhi, like Narendra Modi, believed in making use of the latest technology, which in 1984 was the video recorder and in 2014 was social media.

Technology and the history of political campaigning

An overview of technology in the history of political campaigning in India – beginning with one of the oldest and perhaps still most widely respected forms of campaigning, the padayatra (walkathon) – is given in Table 2. The yatra is a Sanskrit and Pali term from ancient India which means journey, travel, pilgrimage. Politically, the yatra began to be used in India's independence movement in the nineteenth century. Mahatma Gandhi's Salt March to Dandi in 1930 was a yatra that made world news. Politicians in India often walk across the state or region to gather support. In the case study of Andhra Pradesh in this volume, the winner in 2019 and current Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy was said to have followed in his father's footsteps with a padayatra that propelled him into a landslide victory. Technology is used to capture images of the candidate on the yatra that are often seen in political advertising and news.

The decade of the 1950s saw the first Lok Sabha elections and Assembly elections in India, with emphasis on various forms of face-to-face campaigning. Canvassing door to door, booths on the streets, and meetings with groups organized by caste and religion were the norm. In some states, party-supported gangs or syndicates fostered gang violence and induced fear. The street play was a unique form of campaigning used by the Left parties and their cultural affiliates in areas with low levels of literacy. The 1950s also saw the beginning of massive

campaign rallies (more common in North India, Western India, and Tamil Nadu) where party leaders addressed attendees, and attendees were offered meals. Voters often attended rallies for different parties.

By the 1950s and 1960s in India, the main media were newspapers, billboards, posters and radio. With the exception of radio, there was traditional paid advertising in elections, over which the parties had control of the message. There was also free media, for example, in photographs and news articles in the press, but parties had little to no control over the message. Public service television news started in 1959, with Doordarshan, and began to reach all parts of the country by the 1980s.

In the 1980s satellite technology introduced more accessibility for television viewers. Cable was introduced in 1991 when the first Gulf War was broadcast live on CNN to business travellers in the Taj Mumbai and local residents demanded cable in their homes. The 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century experienced massive growth in technology built on the internet, from websites and blogs to sales and online payments and the rise of platforms. Websites and blogs preceded the rise of social media. Parties used 'missed call' ads to obtain voter cellphone numbers for direct marketing, such as communicating upcoming events and live rally speeches. Apple launched the first iPhone in 2007, and the first Android phone was launched in 2008. WhatsApp was launched in 2009 as an app for one-to-one messaging, group messaging was launched in 2011 and WhatsApp hit a total of one billion messages a day that same year.⁵³

The 2014 Lok Sabha campaign was notable for the high visibility of social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. Social media platforms created even more options for party communications, but the number of users was comparatively small as internet access was concentrated largely in urban areas and low-cost smartphones were not yet available. Indian households with television had hundreds of news and entertainment options provided by cable and satellite. And there was a growing vernacular newspaper and television market going into 2014, as well as growing numbers of digital-born online-only news outlets in vernacular languages.

In the years between the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the national political parties that had not fully utilized social media in 2014 came to recognize its usefulness for constantly communicating with supporters and identifying would-be supporters, resulting in what some might call a state of permanent campaigning. The concept of continuous campaigning is hardly foreign to companies in retail and fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sectors in India, which aim to remain in constant contact with consumers. As more and more citizen consumers purchased low-cost smartphones from 2016 onwards, regional political parties also became more active on social media platforms. Although several states appeared to have reached a saturation point in terms of the number of mobile phones by 2019, not all were smartphones with online access. Yet the amount of growth in internet access via smartphone use had changed the media landscape remarkably by 2019, with more companies and political parties competing for attention from India's citizen-consumers on their hand-held devices.

By 2019, all parties were competing online in political marketing and different strategies were evident online. The INC, for example, focused more on Twitter than in 2014, and Mr. Rahul Gandhi held many more rallies than in 2014. Many parties posted thousands of ads on Facebook and Google, along with the typical posters, billboards and party booths on the streets. Yet when it came to the ground campaign the BJP outshined all other parties.

A terrorist attack that occurred weeks before the 2019 election changed the course of public opinion at the start of the formal campaign period. A suicide bomber driving a jeep laden with explosives rammed into a bus carrying 40 young Indian security personnel in Kashmir (Pulwama) on 14 February 2019 and Jaish-e-Muhammad, a Pakistan-based extremist group, claimed responsibility.⁵⁴ India's retaliatory air strike on Balakot on 26 February 2019, inside Pakistan's borders, bolstered Modi's image as a decisive leader who would protect the country's honour and interests.⁵⁵ Modi's personal approval rating, which was at 37% in early February 2019, rose to 63%