

Technology and Election

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: India is in the general election year, which is biggest social festival in India. Recently, we came out of the five state assembly elections, which most of political pundits called as semi-final of the 2024 general election. Over the years, lot of things has changed and emerged in Indian politics; parties, leaders, ideologies, way to approach voters, funding to political parties, etc. **Methodology:** After the invention of computer, internet, social media, the dynamic Information Technologies has deeply impacted on businesses, arts, culture, society, education, etc. And politics, political parties, political leaders, political analysts and voters at large are not an exception. **Findings:** Recently, during the assembly elections of five states; MP, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Nagaland number of Deep- fake videos were viral on social media in favour of one political party or the others. On this issue, Deep- fake technology, number of social activists raised their voices and Honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi also was worriedly concern about the use of Deep- fake videos during the election campaign. **Implications:** Political parties are using technologies and Artificial Intelligent to assist them to outreach larger number of voters in less time with minimum efforts and funds while staying in their poll offices. Introduction of EVM and use of Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, What's App and technologies in election system is topic for discussion for students, researcher, policy makers, political parties and election commission as well. **Originality:** This paper try to understand the impact of certain technologies by election commission, voters, candidates, political parties, pollsters, exit -poll surveying agencies and media during the election campaign.

Keywords: *Political Campaign, Deep- fake, Artificial Intelligence (AI), social media, Model Code of Conduct, Indian politics*

INTRODUCTION:

After independence, India witnessed number of general elections, state elections, by elections and local body elections. The first general election was conducted in 1951-52 and last one conducted in 2019. The next general election is expected within next six month. Since first general election in 1951-52 till last election, 5 state assembly election in November-December 2023 a lot has changed in our election system. During all these year the whole election process from registration of voters, announcement of election, nomination submission, scrutiny, polling, counting and declaration is digitalized step by step from time to time.

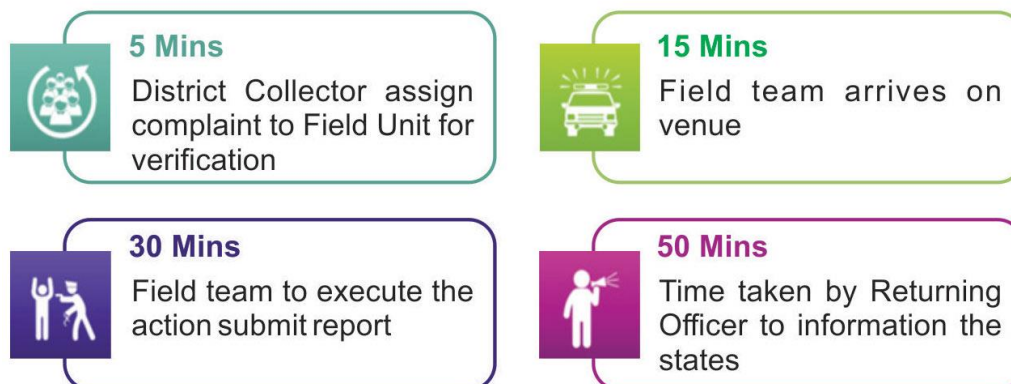
Digitalization of Election Process:

Election Commission of India (ECI) has developed as many as twenty mobile apps to facilitate all stake holders; voters, candidates, election conducting staffs, political parties, etc. This mobile apps also helps Election Commission of India to conduct fair and transparent election with ease within fastest possible time frame. There is mobile app and software available on official website of Election Commission of India which is available for new voter registration, change of address & constituency, deletion, correction can be done without personally visting voter registration centre and submitting hard copies. Election commission, start working and getting ready Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) six months to one year before the election. For this Election Commission of India uses EVM Management System app which keep record for the complete EVMs, its location, movement and time delivery to polling booths. During election, Election Commission of India uses web apps like cVIGIL App, which provides time- stamped evidentiary proof of the Model Code of Conduct / Expenditure Violation by empowering every citizen to click a photo or video using his or her Smartphone. The application is based on GIS technology. A unique feature of auto location

provides fairly reliable and correct information for action by flying squads to navigate to the right spot of incidence and take prompt action. This App prioritizes the speedy and effective actions by authorities and promises users status reports within 100 Minutes

ONE APP TO REPORT MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT (MCC) VIOLATION

Status in just 100 Mins



The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is a set of guidelines framed by Election Commission of India intended to regulate candidates, political organizations during the election period to ensure free and fair election in the country. Although MCC is not legally enforceable by Election Commission of India but Representation of the People Act 1951 and Indian Penal Code (IPC) powers Election Commission of India to observe and maintain MCC. Expert, pollster and several regional and small parties believe that increasing use of social media in the election process by the political parties and candidates requires for new set of rule to implement MCC properly throughout the country. While two of ex- chief Election Commissioners; Mr. S Y Qureshi and Mr. O P Rawat believe that there are rules in MCC which covers issues raised by the use of social media. They further said the problem is with enforcement, that it has to be enforced equally and forcefully.

Traditional election process:

Prior to use of electronic technologies, ICT and social media the election campaign was full of banners, political parties flags, dhool beats, wall paintings of candidates appeal at every village house to city building. Slowly, in cities and tier 2 towns some posters and banners were replacing wall painting appeals. Door to door campaigning, corner public meetings, personal and relatively discussion with voters at all levels were observed among candidates, political workers and candidates' well-wishers. With the increasing use of digital media and social media; Facebook, What's App, Instagram, YouTube, X, etc., traditional campaign methods like door to door contact, corner meeting, rallies, children shouting slogans in favour of candidates, women gathering, banners, flags, batches, drum beating have become less popular way among political parties and candidates in Indian elections. The demand for printing papers, banner designing and display, batches and flag businesses, rally organizing accessories has fallen drastically and remained only about 20% of the total turnover.

The demand for election accessories has fallen by almost 80%, with candidates now relying on social media to interact with voters. This trend started in 2003 and has gradually reduced the demand for physical campaign items Vendors claim that candidates now spend significantly less money on these items, as social media allows them to reach more people with less expenditure. Memes, voice messages, and videos have become the preferred tools for online promotion.

Memes and voice messages have taken over the nukkad rallies "It is visible that candidates are preferring social media. They have hired professionals for crafting memes, voice messages and videos", said a voter.

Technology laden elections:

According to data released from TRAI, total number of internet subscribers in India has reached to 881.25 million till March 2023 which is nearing to 48% of the total population. The majority of the internet users are in the eligible voter age group i.e. above 18 years. Out of 881.25 million internet subscribers 467 million subscribers are active social media user which is 32.8 percent of the total population. Keeping these data in mind, most of political parties and candidates now rely on what's App group, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube to interact and reach to voters. It is easy and fastest mode to reach target groups. Member of a social media team said that promotion on social media is easy as one can make anything viral within a short span of time.

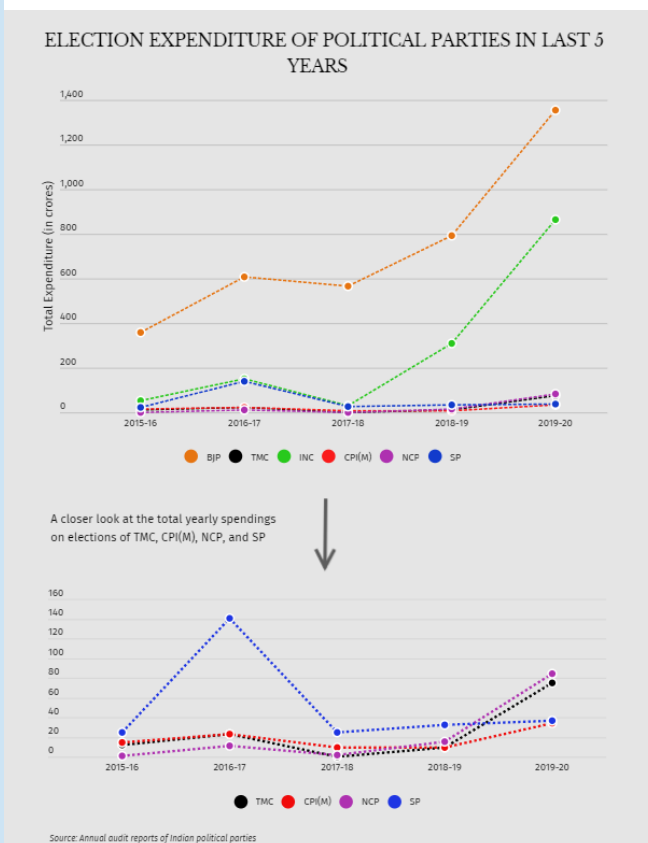
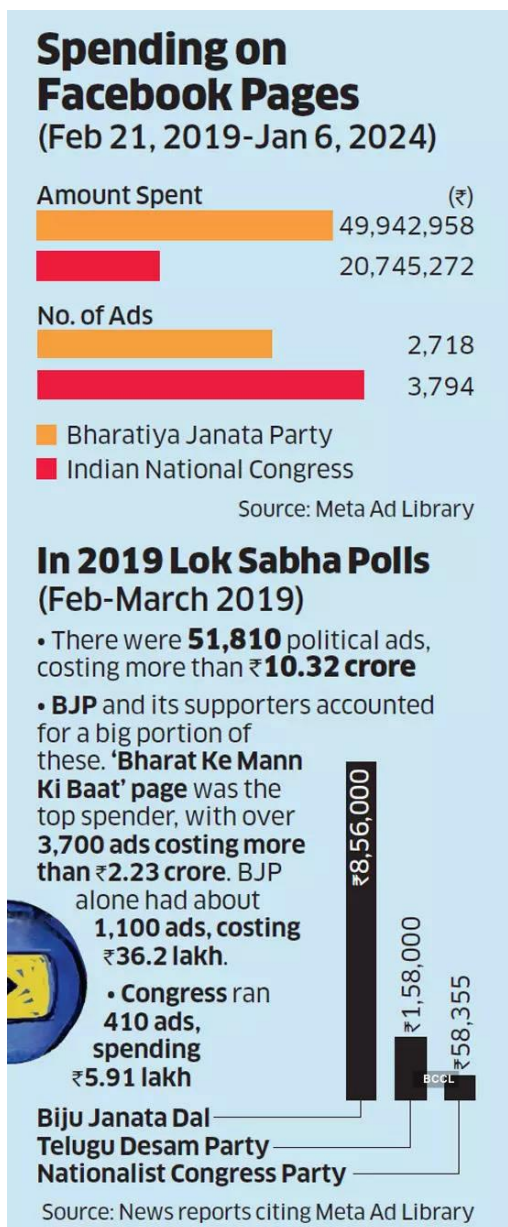
The introduction of technology in the electoral process was introduced during 1980s. The first Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were used in 1982 on an experimental basis for North Paravur Bye-Election, a Kerala state assembly election in India. The experiment was successful and encouraging for Election Commission of India as well as common voters. This started on hand, the process of testing and acceptability of the technological aspects of these machines and how they could make the voting and the counting process efficient and accurate. At the same time ECI launched Booth App which help voters to local their pooling booth. This App is easy to use and save lot of time for voters resulting in number of turn out voters increased. Another mobile app which is used to calculate the turn out percent of the total voters in particular election, constituency and booth. This voter turnout app is exclusively used by citizens and also has been the primary method used by media houses. Prior using EVMs the election process takes months to complete and election results declaration were most difficult and tedious work for Election Commission. Ballot paper counting, verification and official result declarations took weeks. The votes cast are counted manually and is a tiresome and error prone task which is time consuming. During 2019 General election there were approximately 91 crore registered voters in our country and this number is expected to increase to 95 crore in the 2024 coming elections. Counting such a large number of ballot papers cast votes manually is quite difficult and unsafe task. It take many days to count and arrive at the correct results. During counting process, it is also responsibility of EC to keep safe and secure all ballot papers from booth capturers and goons. This extra work is a huge burden on the election budgets.

Now, with the help of software applications EC ensure fast and authentic results of the election. Specially developed software applications securely connects the counting centres across India. The counting data is calculated through this application and entered. After verification by the Counting staff, the results are officially submitted online. The moment the results are punched in, it becomes available to the citizens on public domain through various websites. The Election Commission of India host the results on its official website Results. The official websites of ECI is very popular and trusted among citizens. The result of Lok Sabha 2019 election was surfed, visited and viewed by as many as 812.3 million viewers. Moreover, political parties and candidates has to submit election expenditure details incurred by them during the election through a software developed by Election Commission. This app is aimed to monitor and control malpractices and use of money to influence voters and conduct free and fair election in the country. Increasing number of internet and social media user/ voters force political parties and candidates to spend more and more on digital publicity on electronic media and social media.

As compare to 2014 general election, the use of digital media for campaign was greater during 2019 general election. In 2014 general election ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had first mover advantage while in 2019 general digital campaigning intensity has increased across all political parties. All political parties and most of heavy weight candidates has set up their own social media cell to look after digital campaign. However, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is still far ahead of their political rivals. In 2019, BJP had three What's App groups for every polling booth which is over 90,000. It is estimated that more 12 lakh social media volunteers / workers were engaged by BJP alone to complete day to day assigned task by their respective cell heads. The NaMo app, which tracked every electoral activity of Honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was extremely popular too. The Twitter (now X) handles twits are also very popular among the voters. Some of most popular twit followers in India are, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi, Member of Parliament Rahul Gandhi, Dr. Shashi Taroor, Home Minister Amit Shah, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal where followers are in tens of million.

A 'Fact Checker' team analysed the audit report of political parties submitted to Election Commission stated that more than Rs. 6500 crore was spent on election by seven major national political parties and 11 regional parties between 2015 and 2020. Out of 6500 crores Rs 3400 + crores were spend on publicity alone.

The 2019 election also saw individual politicians forming their own social media teams. However, the BJP was still ahead of the curve with reportedly three WhatsApp groups for each of India's over 90,000 polling booths and 1.2 million social media volunteers. The NaMo app, which tracked every electoral activity of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was extremely popular too.



Artificial Intelligence and Deep-fake:

It is believed that BJP started using Deep-fake in Indian election campaign during Delhi assembly election, where BJP's poster boy, actor and singer turn politician, Manoj Tiwari's appeal to voters in favour of his party and party candidates in English language. This speech was converted in Haryanvi language using Deep-fake technology. This is first time deep-fake technology is used in election campaign.

The Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) at the National University of Singapore and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) organised a joint roundtable titled 'Digital Media, Politics and Elections in India' where 2019 general election was discussed with scholars, policymakers, researchers and media experts. This discussion summarized that 2019 Indian general election saw a spike in online rumours and fake news. Although, various steps were taken to check these rumours, fake news, misinformation by the Election Commission, whistle blowers, NGOs and tech companies but could not regulate them in election time. The report further mentioned that as compare to previous elections in India at the time of this, 2019 general,

election digital divide is bridged to certain level and hence number of internet, computer and social media user has increased from 5:1 to 3:1 ratio.

During the lately concluded assembly election in Telangana, thousands of voters received a video on their smart phones which depicts a state government minister appealing voters to vote against his own state government. Similarly, in Madhya Pradesh, video clips show the Amitabh Bachchan starrer quiz show “Kaun Banega Crore pati” asking questions around Madhya Pradesh politics to whip up anti-incumbency sentiments among viewers.

There are number of altered audio clips of actors, political leaders and other personalities available in public domain. The creation of such fake and altered audio clone is very easy and tools for it is freely available on internet. To affect the political sentiment, political rivals use altered audio clips to deliver misinformation. This kind of misinformation can easily influence voters’ mind and opinion. Furthermore, the audio clips can damage the reputation of rival candidates and manipulate the democratic process.

Lately, World Economic Forum (WEF), warned in its Global Risks Report 2024, that “Misinformation and disinformation may radically disrupt electoral processes in several economies over the next two years,” WEF in its report cautioned that misinform may also have deep impact on election process and results of Indian General Election 2024.

After the excessive use of internet and social media for election campaigning, the most challenging task for Election Commission is to regulate political parties and candidates to follow the Model Code of Conduct (MCC). As the MCC does not have any legal backing and electoral rules has no teeth to encounter challenges and threat arising from deep fake and Artificial Intelligence during the election campaign. Election Commission can only take executive action but not legal action. Social media plate forms and can asked to remove objectionable content from its site and no legal action against the culprit. But this misinformation or wrong information surely impact the decision of voter in favour of wrong candidates.

In the modern era election campaign is not just by the candidates only. The political parties campaign on broader level at national/ state level through their own Information Technology (IT) Cell, Social Media Cell, candidates set up their own IT and Social Media cells, dedicate workers, well-wishers, bloggers, you tuber, Instagram and X user in the constituencies as well as outside the constituency even out of the country also campaign for their favourite candidates and parties. Being election campaign is decentralized adherence to the ‘silence period’ - 48 hours before the end of polling during which no public meetings and announcement should be made is almost impossible. Although the last 24 hours and the last night before pooling which commonly known in the political circle as ‘Katl ki Raat’ is very crucial for rational as well irrational voters to decide which candidate to vote for. But the use of Social Media, deep fake technologies the voters can be polarized in favour of any candidates. This is could be very harmful for healthy democracy and the democratic country.

CONCLUSION:

The use of Artificial Intelligence, deep- fake audio and video clips will challenge and damage ethics and human values.

The credibility of data available on public domain will be not authentic. And as Artificial intelligence process available data and produce the final result, this fake data, misinformation, incomplete data will surely affect the system. The result and information on the internet would be biased due to mis-information and fake data.

The pace and intensity of Artificial Intelligence, deep- fake audio and video clips on social media will sure shake the confidence of general social media users and will be no longer trusted source of information.

Artificial systems can be vulnerable and using this tool anti-social forces can manipulate algorithms and produce immoral information.

Relying on such incorrect data will lead us to wrong decisions.

In such a scenario using internet, social media, cloud computing, ICT tools for information would difficult or else has to pay higher cost for safe, authentic data.

The incorrect data, fake information, deep fake audio, video and Artificial Intelligence processed data will mislead to policy makers, researcher, government, NGOs and Election Commission. If government, NGOs and Policy makers used such data and draft policy or take any other decision will be wrong and must be having long lasting negative impact on community, society and the whole country in general.

According to Mr. O P Rawat, former CEC, there should be legislation to deal with challenges from Artificial Intelligence (AI) since the Modal Code of Conduct does not have legal backing.

Government should draft and implement strict rule and empower certain Indian Penal Code and IT Acts which can be used to regulate and implement MCC.

Social media plate from should be forced to strictly follow and implement rules issued by Election Commission. Social media should take strict action against unruly users.

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