

Convergence of the Conventional and the New Media : Electioneering in India 2009



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Abstract

The election campaigns for the Indian Parliament (Lok Sabha or People's House) in April 2009 demonstrated how the poll battles were fought deploying a mix of the traditional campaigning methods and information and communication technologies. The political parties and candidates used the mix to woo over 453 million voters who chose representatives of the 543 constituencies to govern India, the world's largest democratic nation.

Gandhinagar was among the hotly contested constituencies where the use of new technologies and the Internet was made more imperative. It also witnessed the time-tested traditional campaign methods being used to attract voters. Among the candidates was a towering 81-year political personality, Mr L K Advani, who was projected as Prime Minister-in-Waiting by his Bharatiya Janata Party. His local managers orchestrated the campaign using the mix of the conventional tools through a network of grass-root workers and youngsters of the cyberage. His Congress rival Suresh Patel, and internationally acclaimed danseuse Mallika Sarabhai, contesting as an independent, similarly exploited the mix. Politicians, workers and senior media persons were interviewed, websites were studied and print and electronic media were used to record the data.

This paper demonstrates how the parties deployed websites, e-mails, SMS, blogs, Twitter, FaceBook, YouTube, radio and TV; yet they did not ignore banners, posters, handbills, processions, rallies and street corner meetings to reach out to the voters. Campaigns in the constituency included involvement of civic groups, film stars, rural folk artistes and urban dancers.

1. Introduction

Gandhinagar, the capital of Gujarat state in western India, attracted media attention during the 2009 election to the Lower House of Indian Parliament for more than one reasons. It has for a long time been a stronghold of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), one of the two major political parties dominating the national scene. Its rival, the Indian National Congress (commonly known as the Congress), appeared to have challenged its monopoly in this constituency this time. The BJP's former president, former union home minister and former deputy prime minister Lal Krishna Advani was its candidate for the fifth time since 1991. The party had projected him as India's Prime Minister-in-Waiting. His Congress rival, Suresh Patel, was less known outside the constituency but had made BJP campaign managers jittery because of his aggressive campaigning. High profile internationally-known Indian classical danseuse Mallika Sarabhai had jumped into the poll arena to oppose the politics of BJP in general and of Gujarat Chief Minister Mr Narendra Modi, in particular (Vijapurkar, 2009).

Yet another reason for the media attention was the use of new media in the election campaign, much before the polling took place on April 30, 2009. The BJP had begun deploying web sites, e-mails, short message service (SMS) and recorded voice

messages during the previous general election in 2004, but this time it had decided to use these and also the latest additions to these tools in the form of the social media (Jawadkar, 2009). Thus, the party had www.bjp.org, a portal hosted and updated from national capital New Delhi and www.bjpguj.org, another portal maintained for BJP's Gujarat unit from Ahmedabad near Gandhinagar. The third portal, www.lkadvani.in, was exclusively devoted to promote Mr Advani as its prime ministerial candidate. These portals offered contents in English and Hindi.

Mr Patel did not host his website. His party had a portal, www.gpcc.com which covered the scene of all the 26 constituencies in Gujarat. In contrast, Dr Sarabhai had her website in English and Gujarati and was discussed in newspapers and magazines in English, Gujarati and Hindi language.

This researcher was part of a team that monitored web sites hosted by politicians and political parties in Gujarat and neighbouring Maharashtra to study the use of Internet for electioneering during the poll period. One aspect of the research project was to find if new media was deployed in Gandhinagar, as a representative of Indian constituencies, and also the one that had presence of Advani belonging to the Internet savvy BJP party.

This paper documents the traditional and new media tools used by the contestants in the latest electoral battle in India.

2. Literature Review

The relation between the Internet, political participation and democracy has been attracting a growing interest among political scientists as well as communication and media scholars. (Polat, 2005).

USA, UK, Australia, and South Korea, Finland, Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Hungary, have witnessed Internet and other new media tools being used for election campaigns in 2004 and 2005. An important study was carried out by scholars in these countries to publish (Kluver et al, 2007). One key finding of the study was that the parties and candidates examined in Finland, Netherlands, Slovenia, the Czechs Republic and the United States tended to use web sites to provide information to potential voters, journalists, and other political actors, but did not seek to engage or involve or mobilise citizens. At the same time, there are clear indications that use of the web did not simply reify existing political structures (Kluver, 2007).

Authors Shyam Tekwani and Kavitha Shetty who studied 'Two India's for the role of the Internet in the 2004 elections' quoted the observations of IT Blitz (May 2004) as follows :

- The IT-savvy campaign of BJP-led NDA that included phone-ins by the prime minister, SMS and e-mails miserably failed to woo the electorate. A bulk of voters failed to feel good and preferred the age-old road show style of the Italian-born Congress President. The gruelling campaigns and personal street corner meetings during her road shows and the overwhelming respond to her visits

indicate that a two-way communication scores much more than carpet bombing (Kluver, 2007).

- In this election of 2004, politicians reached out to the public in a one-on-one basis through e-mail and mobile; perhaps in the next, the average citizen will reach out to the government, political parties and the interest groups to drive the election in a way more reflective of the concerns and agendas of the non-elite segment of India's population (Kluver, 2007).
- The politicians in India, as elsewhere, would not rely totally on the new media for campaigning. The traditional tools can not be replaced by the social media and other tools of the web, but their use would grow because more and more Net savvy young players would dominate the electioneering in the future (Walimbe, 2009).
- In the same manner, Sara Bentivegna argued that the ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) are certainly able to take on a relevant role in stopping the march towards post-democracy. ..However, for this to happen, it is necessary for citizens to perceive the need to change course (Bentivegna, 2006).
- Cherian George posed a question: Does the Internet democratise communication? He responded himself saying that .. ' the relationship between new media and political actor is far too dynamic and interdependent to be reduced to simple causal statements' (George, 2005).
- Although the politicians believe that Net at present could not be depended upon in electioneering, they do not suggest that they should do without it (Pawar, 2009). This is similar to the observation that while the promotion of sites should be broadly welcomed, their addition to political communication should not be overstated (Hibberd, 2003).
- It is unlikely that the Internet can replace traditional forms of communication, especially face-to-face interaction (Weare, 2002).

3. Objectives of the Study

1. The study, taken up as part of a larger study of use of Internet in electioneering, was to take an overview of political communication process during campaign period of Lok Sabha poll in 2009.
2. It was also to document the status of the convergence of the Conventional and the New Media during the end of the first decade of the 21st century when the Internet appeared to have penetrated beyond the metros and cities.
3. The study was to record if the issues taken up by the political actors and the media, had undergone any change between the recent past and the year 2009

4. Research Questions

- Q1. What are the methods used by an Indian politician for campaigning in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Indian parliament) election in India in this cyber era?
- Q2. Do such politicians exploit the utility of the Internet as a tool for poll campaigns?
- Q 3. The 81-year-old Leader of Opposition in last Lok Sabha, Mr L K Advani, contested the election from his traditional constituency of Gandhinagar. He was projected by his Bharatiya Janata Party as the Prime-Minister-in-waiting.

Did he use the social networking sites and other latest Internet tools for his campaigning? Did he depend only on the ICTs?

Q4. What were issues taken up by politicians and the media during the campaign period?

5. Research Methods

The exploratory study included

- Not-participant observation during the poll campaign in the constituency
- Unstructured interviews with campaigners, politicians, workers and senior media persons, and website designers/web masters
- Secondary data, mainly from newspapers and magazines
- Monitoring web sites of political parties and candidates of Gandhinagar

6. Findings and Discussion

The strategy to use Internet campaign for Mr Advani was evolved after studying Barack Obama much before he became USA president. The Washington Post had quoted Mr Sudheendra Kulkarni, the chief strategist for the Advani campaign as saying that the targeted audience was the 100 million first time voters. (Andhranews.net, 2008).

Advani had himself learnt his first lesson of electioneering way back in 1951 when he was in mid-twenties and was in charge of campaign in Rajasthan. He recounted in his blog how a candidate of a dominant community told him that he was most confident that he would be elected because of his caste. The manifesto and handbills would be of no use (Advani, 2009).

Years later, Advani's BJP became a pioneer among political parties in the use of the Internet not only as a medium of communication but also as a platform for mobilization of campaign volunteers (Advani, 2009).

The BJP, leading the ruling National Democratic Alliance government between 1999-2004, had launched an aggressive India Shining campaign to return to power. It spent substantial chunk for print and TV advertising, and allocated five per cent of the campaign budget for an election campaign. It was to push text messages, pre-recorded voice clips and emails to its database of 20 million email users and 20 million phone users who received campaign related mobile ring tones (Globalvoiceonline, 2009). This did not work as the Congress-led United Democratic Front came to power in 2004.

7. Electoral battles in India

Gandhinagar was treated as a key constituency in the general election 2009 in the media and political circles. That was mainly because Mr Advani was one among the 19 candidates in the fray. He is among the top leaders of the BJP, its former president and former deputy prime minister in the BJP-led government during the 1999-2004 period. The party had projected him as the Prime Minister-in-Waiting, some thing not done in India earlier.

The Indian National Congress, which had completed a five year term, had followed to project Dr Manmohan Singh as its prime ministerial candidate once again. For BJP, at stake was the prestige of State chief minister Narendra Modi who had emerged as the leader of national stature in the party hierarchy. Among other factors for treating Gandhinagar as the key constituency was its importance as the capital of Gujarat. Mr Advani's Congress rival was Mr Patel who was little known outside the state and had not attracted media attention outside Gujarat. Danseuse Sarabhai, one among nine independent candidates, received more media attention, because of novel methods of campaigning using film stars and performing artistes (Dasgupta, 2009).

Mr Advani won the election with a comfortable margin when the results were announced on May 16, 2009. Yet, as the study found out, he and his party faced the same experiences by any other low profile candidate, any political party in an Indian general election.

The present study was aimed at documenting the status of traditional campaign tools when the ICTs were also being deployed in India.

8. Considerations in Electioneering

Political parties do have their manifestos and programmes to approach the electorate. However, they have to consider several important and critical issues in run-up to the polls before the lists of candidates are finalised. For example, a party has to take into account religions and castes/sub castes of the prospective candidates, language and regional roots, 'local' (who is a permanent resident of the constituency) versus outsider candidates, electoral performance in the last election, performance as the constituency's representative during the preceding tenure, criminal record, internal squabbles in the party, ability to provide or raise funds for the personal and party's campaigns, incumbency or anti-incumbency factors, contemporary issues relating to behaviour of the prospective candidate or party leaders. Other issues that need to be considered before the list of candidates are finalised are migration of voters, change in the geographical jurisdiction of the constituency, apathy of urban middle class and educated voters (Takalkar, 2009).

9. Tools of Campaigning

Following are important traditional methods used by Indian political parties and politicians for election campaigns :

- Handbills
- Billboards
- Posters
- Banners
- Pamphlets
- Newspaper advertisements
- Inserts of printed campaign material in copies of newspapers
- Party flags and festoon, stickers, badges, ribbons, scarves, caps
- Street corner meetings
- Road show

- Processions, religious/cultural programmes, sports competitions sponsorship
- Rallies
- Public Address systems fitted to bi-cycles, two wheelers, three/four wheelers moving around the constituency
- audio cassettes and 'live' announcement by volunteers
- Booklets
- Entertainment programmes: local/outside artistess song and dances, mimicry, parody, satires
- Film stars participating in rallies
- Short films and slides screened in cinema theatres
- Door-to-door visits
- Audio-video cassettes
- Address over state-run electronic media during the time allotted for political parties (but not debates among the candidates, or the national leaders projected as Prime Ministers)
- Screening of campaign video films through a van at urban and rural locations
- Donations for local organisations for community cause, like construction of temples or gymkhana
- Cut-outs of life-size portraits of candidates
- Traditional fairs and weekly bazaars, weddings in rural areas
- Meetings of associations of communities based on caste, religion, trade, profession and job
- Trade unions and cooperative societies under the umbrella of the party or the politicians
- Bribing voters and community leaders
- Intimidating voters through middlemen/agents
- Magic tricks, masks resembling leaders/candidates (Patwardhan, 2009)

10. New tools in 2009

In addition to above, the campaigns used the following tools during the state and national elections from year 2000 :

- Web sites of the political parties
- E-mailed appeals and messages
- SMS text
- Voice mail
- Television advertisements through state-controlled and private channels
- Private FM radio stations

As the websites of Mr. Advani, Gujarat BJP, Gujarat Congress and Ms Sarabhai were monitored during April and May 2009, the following tools were noticed :

Advani: (lkadvani.in), bjpguj.org and bjp.org : Blogs, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, RSS, Photo Album, Video Clips, Appeal to join as volunteers

Gujarat Congress (gpcc.org) : Blogs, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, RSS, Photo Album, Video Clips, Appeal to join as volunteers

Mallika Sarabhai (mallikasarabhai.in) : Blogs, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, RSS, Photo Album, Video Clips, Flickr, Appeal to join as volunteers, and appeal to donate fund

Thus, although the three above used ICT and more specially the social media, the parties did not depend solely on these. They continued to use traditional media enumerated above.

Mr Advani won the election with comfortable margin of 121747. It is, however, difficult to ascertain what influenced the electorate, the traditional tools or the ICT or both.

Dr Mallika's website attracted a considerable attention in the print media. Her website said she met and interacted personally with 250,000 individuals and reached 12,00,000 voters through the new media. She had raised Rs 27 lakhs through online and offline contributions. She polled 9268 votes.

11. Campaign Issues

Mr Advani's rivals raised issues that included :

- His non-availability to the voters of Gandhinagar because he normally stays in Delhi and visits the constituency only once in a while. Members of Lok Sabha from other constituencies in the country are available to the voters during the five year term. But he is not available to the voters to solve local issues. He does not speak the local language, Gujarati.
- His party's state government and his trusted lieutenant chief minister Narendra Modi were soft on a spiritual leader Asaram Bapu in a criminal case because he (Advani) was close to him. The party's leadership had sidelined former chief minister Keshubhai Patel who belonged to the Patel community.
- The party raised the Ramjanma bhumi issue (the birthplace of Lord Ram) and the Hindutva (roughly meaning advocacy of promotion of Hinduism) only during election time. It angered residents of Gandhinagar where 300 illegally constructed Hindu temples were demolished because they used to obstruct movement of traffic.
- The party claimed to be practising high moral and ethical values in politics but it also indulged in horse-trading to gain power in other states of India. It violated code of conduct in force during the election period.
- The BJP distributed mangalsutra, an ornament worn around neck by a married Hindu woman, during the campaign period. It raised a controversy. The ornament, designed in the shape of a pendant, carried image of lotus, the BJP's election symbol. Opponents raised objections saying the mangalsutra was sacred to a Hindu woman as it is tied around her neck only by her bridegroom as part of wedding ritual.
- Another method of the BJP's campaigning was draping cows with the party banners, an ingenious and inexpensive way to increase party's visibility through the animals that roam around the streets (Source: compiled from local newspapers of Ahmedabad).

12. The Caste Factor

- Advani's campaign managers had to contend with the Patel factor that had not cropped during his earlier elections from this constituency. His formidable Congress rival Suresh Patel belonged to the community which has 15 per cent share in the total electorate of 1555709 in Gandhinagar.

The Patel community spread over the entire state always had a major role in deciding the chief ministers of Gujarat before year 2000 when the party was ruled mostly by the Congress. Current Chief Minister Modi was also similarly supported by the Patels in the last assembly election in 2007. He emerged stronger as a chief minister after this election, but in the process he invited wrath of the Patels who did not approve treatment meted out to veteran Keshubhai Patel in particular and the community in general. To them, this was the right time to settle score with Modi and the BJP (Shah and Kaushik, 2009).

As the electioneering was mid-way through in Gandhi nagar, English and Gujarati newspapers began carrying stories on how Non-resident Indians (NRIs) in USA had come down from USA to help Suresh Patel.

When a member of this research team met the Advani's campaign managers and party officials on April 23, 2009, they put up a brave face. They had full confidence that Modi would deal with a masterstroke to counter the campaign of the Patels. Modi, and the candidate Advani, had visited the constituency till then only once when he filed the nomination papers on April 08. Eventually, however, had taken out processions, road shows and had addressed rallies in Gandhinagar and Ahmedabad constituencies during the two days before campaigning period was to be over.

12. The Asaram Ashram Episode

Campaigns in India bring forth unexpected issues not related to the party policies and manifestoes. Advani and his party who too rake up such issues were paid in the same coins. They had to face embarrassment when they were confronted with handbills distributed by the Patel clans (Shah and Kaushik, 2009). The handbills carried a photograph showing Advani touching the feet of spiritual leader Asaram Bapu reverentially. The spiritual leader's Ashram school was in the eye of a storm due to death of two boys in mysterious circumstances in July 2008. The deaths were followed by violence in parts of this constituency. The mutilated bodies of the two boys were found from the Sabarmati riverbed on July 5, two days after they mysteriously disappeared from the ashram. The issue became part of the anti-Advani campaign amidst insinuations in several blogs and websites critical to Modi and Advani, that the spiritual leader, belonging to the BJP candidate's Sindhi religion, had his backing. For example: <http://www.hardnewsmedia.com/2008/08/2302>.

13. Shoe : A New Missile

In recent times, US President George W Bush was targeted by an Iraqi journalist with both of his shoes in Baghdad on December 14, 2008. Bush who was addressing a press conference, ducked and was not hit (*The Los Angeles Times*, 2008).

A Sikh journalist hurled his shoe towards Indian Union Home Minister P C Chidambaram while he was addressing a press conference in Delhi on April 07, 2009. On April 18, a Congress worker threw a food packet towards party Rajya Sabha member Shantaram Naik at Curchorem in Goa. The packet did not hit him. A disgruntled BJP worker unsuccessfully targeted

Advani while he was addressing a rally at Katni, Madhya Pradesh, on April 16, 2009 (sourced from stories published in several newspapers). These incidents prompted the police and party organisation to take measures to avoid such missiles hitting the speakers. The BJP organisers increased the distance between the dais and audience. In Naroda locality of Ahmedabad, the organisers put up volleyball net in front of Mr Modi on April 19 to provide him protection (*The Economic Times*, 2009).

On April 26, Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh and Advani addressed rallies in Ahmedabad, where similar attempts were made to hurl shoes. An engineering student had managed to occupy a seat in the press section of the venue where Dr Singh was addressing the rally.

The student hurled a shoe at the dais and was immediately whisked away by security men. Hours later, a mentally unstable person was nabbed before he could throw footwear at Advani who addressed a party rally late in the evening elsewhere (*The Economic Times*, 2009).

14. Associated Organisations

The BJP banks on organisations like Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bajarang Dal, and scores others working in fields such as education, banking, cooperative societies, tribal and womens' welfare. The BJP and all these organisations have their roots in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh that has its own network of trained cadre all over the country. These do not work in the open, but remain active during the campaigns all the same. A senior journalist in Ahmedabad had indicated that the RSS, VHP and other organisations had not been active so far this time. Yet, he felt, these would spring into action during the last days of the campaigning and would fan out throughout Gandhinagar (Yadav, 2009).

Leaders of the sister organisations were unhappy with the BJP leadership, particularly with Advani, for not being consistent and aggressive on their main demand to construct Ram temple at Ayodhya in place of the Babri mosque which was sought to be demolished in 1992. The VHP president Ashok Singhal had publicly admonished Modi for demolishing several Hindu temples in Gandhinagar. The argument that these structures were unauthorised and had obstructed traffic had not cut any ice with the VHP. However, Singhal had visited Ahmedabad on April 24 asking his activists to work for Advani's victory (Yagnik, 2009).

15. National Issues Not on the Agenda

The political parties did not take up any major national and international issue or ideological issues, during the campaigning. Judging from coverage in print and electronic media, it appeared that the politicians, as also the journalists, were obsessed with the break-up of alliances and fronts that existed before the announcement of the election schedule. Their focus appeared to be on the coverage of the formation of new alliances, shifting loyalties and on who would be the new prime minister.

Besides Mr Advani and Dr Singh, there were others like Ms Mayavati (Bahujan Samaj Party) and Mr Sharad Pawar (Nationalist Congress Party) whose ambitions to be the next Prime Minister were discussed in the media. A considerable broadcast time was devoted by panellists on TV, and space in newspapers by columnists, to point out how it would not be possible for any of the two national coalitions, to lead the country in absence of the adequate number for a majority. Some loose descriptions like 'the third front' and 'fourth front' emerged but it was not clear, during the campaign period, which front included which parties.

The debates initially centred on an 'issue' raised by Advani who called Dr Singh 'weak prime minister' as he acted only on the instructions of his party president, Mrs Sonia Gandhi. The prime minister countered by pointing out weaknesses of Advani who was union home minister in an earlier BJP-led government (source : print and electronic media monitored during the period).

There were little efforts to explain to the electorate important points of their respective manifestoes. Instead the leaders spent most of their speech time in trivial matters, and tried to tell the audiences how the rival had not delivered or had erred when in power. The BJP accused the Congress and other rivals of appeasing the Muslims for votes. The Congress leaders claimed how it followed policies of 'secularism' without considerations of religions and castes.

It appeared in the last week of April that the campaigners had finally some issues to pick up.

The first one related to the Central Bureau of Investigation withdrawing the red corner notice against Italian businessman Ottavio Quattrocchi, the only surviving accused in the kickback case, that had dragged for 22 years. The BJP saw the CBI's decision as a farewell gift by the ruling Congress to the Italian businessman who was considered to be close to the Sonia Gandhi family. The CBI's decision to withdraw the Red Corner Notice in the Rs 64 crore Bofors payoff was challenged through a public interest litigation (*The Times of India*, 2009).

Similarly, the BJP was caught in a tight spot when the Supreme Court ordered probe into the role of Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi and his cabinet colleagues in the post-Godhra riots of year 2002 (NDTV, 2009).

In the wake of these developments in Delhi, a massive anonymous SMS campaign was launched two days before the polling. The message read 'Gujarat Ke bete ke liye jail aur Italy ke bete ke liye bail' (Jail for Son of Gujarat and bail for son of Italy).

How these issues, picked up by the rival parties for electioneering, were to influence the voters was not clear because campaigning in large part of the country was already over. In Gujarat, in particular, where Advani was contesting, had the polling for its 26 constituencies scheduled to be held on April 30. Yet, nervousness in the BJP was palpable as its strategists published an advertisement in local newspapers insinuating that the Congress had influenced the Supreme Court to order the probe. The front-paged advertisement appealed to voters to turn out in large number on April 30 to

give a protective cover to Modi and to foil the attempt of the Congress to send him to jail. A complaint was lodged with the Election Commission against the advertisement for violation of the code of conduct. Modi's reported remark at a rally in Anand where he allegedly cast aspersions on the Supreme Court was matter for another complaint lodged with the Commission (Khan, 2009). A day later, a contempt of court petition was filed in the Supreme Court against Modi for his alleged remarks in his speech and also for these advertisements (*The Hindu*, 2009).

While the polling was in full swing on April 30, a mysterious pamphlet in Gujarati was doing the rounds close to some booths of the Gandhinagar constituency. Translated in English, it read: "If you want to see Modiji as the prime minister, defeat Advaniji." This was in the wake of statements made by some BJP leaders in Delhi that Modi should be the Prime Minister after the next election in 2014 (*Ahmedabad Mirror*, 2009).

Yet another setback for the BJP and Modi was the Supreme Court order on May One, 2009 to set up six fast-track courts for trial of eight cases connected with post-Godhra riots (*The Daily News and Analysis*, May 02, 2009).

Earlier, Advani raised an issue of black money he alleged was stashed in Swiss banks and charged that the Congress-led government did nothing to bring it back to India. The Congress countered this allegation asking why the BJP-led government did not act when it ruled the country for six years.

15. Media Initiative

An important feature of the election coverage in the print and electronic media of Gujarat was that the initiatives undertaken by their owners/editors to create awareness among the people to exercise their franchise. *The Times of India* continued its Lead India campaign to motivate readers to involve themselves in tackling the problems facing the country. The paper carried Lead India's advertisements that spoke about, among other things, the need to vote fearlessly.

Gujarat's leading newspapers like *Divya Bhaskar*, *Gujarat Samachar* and *Sandesh* similarly carried messages to appeal to their readers to come out to vote for any party/candidate. *Divya Bhaskar* did not limit itself to publishing the appeals in its columns. It organised awareness campaigns in educational institutes, housing colonies and clubs urging the listeners to vote.

16. Initiatives of Civil Societies, NGOs and Corporates

Civil Societies, Non-government organisations (NGOs) and some corporate houses played a significant role in creating awareness about the need to vote and to select the right candidates for good governance. Some NGOs like Association of Democratic Rights (ADR) set up on August one, 1999, had been active for quite some time. In year 2009, several new initiatives were visible in the print and electronic media, and more importantly through Internet, when the election to 15th Lok Sabha was round the corner.

Some of these, organised alphabetically, were:

Action for Good Governance in India (AGNI), Akhil Bharatiya Jan Chetna Manch, Amritsar Citizen's Forum, Association for Democratic Reforms, bangalorevoteid.org, Centre for Media Studies, Conscious Citizens Forum, Democracy and Public Interest Foundation, *empoweringindia.org*, *engagevoter.com*, *futurecm.com*, Google India Elections Centre, *indiavoting.com*, Insite Digital, Jaago re., Janagraha Centre for Citizenship, Janpath karmayog.org, *letsvote.com*, Lodestar Media, Mass for Awareness organisation, McCann Erickson, *mumbaivotes.com*, National Council of Churches in India, National Election Watch (NEW), Public Interest Foundation, Shut Up and Vote Rock concerts, Tata Tea, *thepetitionsite.com*, Vote Bangalore, VoteYatra, and, Wada Na Todo Abhiyan.

Similarly, some religious organisations undertook the task of creating awareness among the voters. These included Art of Living, Bharat Swabhiman Yatra, Bishops' Commission of Justice and Peace, and Catholic Bishops' Conference of India.

The Google India Elections Centre was set up as an initiative of the Google search engine and *The Hindustan Times*, in partnership with Association for Democratic Reform (ADR), Indicus Netlabs Pvt Ltd., Janaagraha Center for Citizenship and Democracy, Liberty Institute, and PRS Legislative Research.

Yet another nationwide campaign was launched under the banner of National Election Watch (NEW) comprising more than 1,200 NGOs and other citizen-led organisations working on electoral reforms, improving democracy and governance in India using the power of Internet, at www.nationalelectionwatch.org.

Public Interest Foundation had set its mission to cleanse the political arena, with its *No Criminals in Politics* campaign and had over 5,000 supporters on Facebook. The Press Institute of India and Liberty Institute came together to launch www.empoweringindia.org empower the under privileged. (Sourced from several English newspapers and websites during April 2009)

The Pew Internet and American Life Project study had indicated that more than half of U.S. adults used the Internet to participate in the 2008 election that made Obama President. Some 55 percent searched for political news online, researched candidate positions, debated issues or otherwise participated in the election over the Internet. What would be the scenario in India? This was the point debated in the Indian media during the run-up to 2009 election.

Some web watchers had expressed the doubts about utility of Internet as a political communication tools in India on the lines of the experience of USA in 2004. Rajesh Jain, the Founder and Managing Director of Netcore Solutions Pvt Ltd (messaging and security solutions, and mobile data services), had, for example, argued that mobile phones- rather than Internet- would be the tool to reach half the voting population of India. He had quoted the data of Telecom Regulatory Authority of India that the number of mobile phone users increased from 36 million in 2004 to 375.74 million by end February 2009 (Jain, 2009).

Political campaign managers, mainly that of the BJP, had used SMSes, voice calls or automated pre-recorded phone calls, and GPRS (general packet radio service) which is a mobile Internet service (Jawadekar, 2009). The thrust of the parties was on SMSes since it is non-intrusive and can help them reach voters directly in a targeted way (Jain, 2009).

During the campaign period, there was an increasing use of email as political communication tool. Chain mails had started giving viewpoints different from what that appeared in the traditional mass media (Jain, 2009).

Social media (Facebook, Orkut) can amplify reach, but these are still early days, and their impact will be limited. Similarly, email and SMS forwarding, along with the social networking sites, can help spread messages fast, but their impact will be mostly restricted to urban constituencies. He argued that SMSes also have a major problem because of local language. Most people in villages and towns, and the elderly, do not use or even read SMSes. (Jain 2009).

P.N. Vasanti, the director of New Delhi-based multidisciplinary research organization, Centre for Media Studies, had expressed similar views. The hi-tech campaigns are now important but not sufficient in winning elections primarily because the information revolution in India still has a small voter base (Livemint.com, 2008).

The big impact will hopefully be in an increase in voting percentages in urban areas, given all the awareness campaigns that have been taking place.

So, equating India 2009 to US 2008 in terms of the impact of digital media on elections is incorrect — India is probably more similar to US 2000 or US 2004. These are early days, and therefore the goal should be to try out lots of experiments. Then see what works, and build on that for the state elections and the next general elections of the future.

Overall, this is a good start, and with the two-way tools that we now have at our disposal (email, SMS, blogs and websites), we have started on an irreversible citizen involvement and engagement in governance (Jain, 2009).

Thus, it is too early for the ICTs to impact political communication for electioneering during elections. The political parties and leaders will have to depend on their own networks of members and activists in urban and rural areas. They will have to take recourse to the convergence of traditional and new media tools during the next few elections.

17. Implications

The study is expected to be useful for political science teachers and students in understanding the ground realities during the first decade of the new millennium. The political actors would be better informed about the status of the convergence of the conventional and the new media. In the process, their campaign strategist will be in a position to plan to exploit the best of the conventional and the new media.

18. Limitations of the Study

The present study was limited to the Gandhinagar constituency in Gujarat. Similar studies in constituencies in different regions of the country during the next elections will be useful to find out the use and impact of new media on the election campaigning. As the computer and Internet penetrate into the countryside, the presence of the ICTs would be more visible as years pass by. Younger politicians and their campaign managers are expected to embrace these technologies and reducing the urban-rural divide. However, such trends will have to be monitored during the coming elections at local, state and national levels.

19. Conclusion

The study outlined the methods used by Indian politicians during the campaigns for Lok Sabha elections. Notwithstanding the availability of the new media tools, the political actors in India continued to depend heavily only on the conventional campaigning tools. The web sites, new media tools like SMS and audio messages and social media like Facebook, YouTube, Twitters, and blogs are used but only to the extent of attempting to reach out to the people across the globe. These tools are not yet considered to be vote-gainers. Experience gained during the 2009 Lok Sabha elections will be perhaps useful to fine-tune these techniques and skills during the polls in the future.

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Annexure 1

Result of the Lok Sabha Election from Gandhinagar held in April 2009

SN	Candidate Name	Party Name	Votes polled
1	Lal Krishna Advani	Bharatiya Janata Party	434044
2	Patel Sureshkumar Chaturdas	Indian National Congress	312297
3	Rakesh Pandey	Bahujan Samaj Party	5907
4	Ashok Kumar Ishvarbhai Patel	Bharatiya National Janata Dal	967
5	Khalifa Samsuddin Nasiruddin	Loktantrik Samajwadi Party	627
6	Trivedi Sunilbhai Manubhai	Mahagujarat Janata Party	1061
7	Firoz Dehlvi	All India Minorities Front	496
8	Menon Fatamaben Farukbhai	Indian Justice Party	504
9	Kalpesh Kumar Rajanikant Modi	Independent	677
10	Thakur Rakeshbhai Rajdevsingh	Independent	550
11	Patel Siddhesh Dineshbhai	Independent	789
12	Parikh Heta Kumarpal	Independent	663
13	Brahmbhatt Sanjaybhai A	Independent	882
14	Makwana Anilkumar Somabhai	Independent	1201
15	Dr.Mallika Sarabhai	Independent	9268
16	Mahantshri Dharamdasbapu	Independent	6612
17	Rahul Chimanbhai Mehta	Independent	7305
18	Vaghela Sukhdevsingh P	Independent	4348
19	Shah Mukesh	Independent	2539
		Total votes polled	155709