

CHANGING FACE OF ELECTION ADVERTISEMENTS IN INDIA

Dr. Raghavendra Mishra, Professor, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication,
Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, MP

ABSTRACT-

Candidates and political parties use different advertising tools to impress the voters and convey their messages effectively. Since the first elections were held, various advertising methods and tools have been used by different political parties. Political rallies, canvassing, roadshows, banners, holdings, posters, and handy materials have always been an important part of election-related campaigning. Political advertising and election canvassing take place in our country in various ways. Historically, three factors have been most determined in India's political campaigning- first, the Charisma factor, second, booth level workers and locally managed workforce for grassroots canvassing, and third is technology. These factors have influenced the tools and strategies for election advertising and campaigns and the results and performance of the political parties in elections. The present paper attempts to discuss these factors, their impact, tools, techniques, and methods of advertising used in Indian elections from a historical perspective.

Keywords- Advertising Tool, Political Campaign, Election, Digital Media

INTRODUCTION

The first massive elections where many people participated were held in 1936-37 under the colonial rules. The first-time Congress participated in the polls and faced many hurdles from the government to stop gaining political power. The elections were held under the Government of India act-1935. Congress initially opposed the act, but the later party decided to participate. Elections were held in 11 provinces, and Congress formed governments in eight provinces. In Sindh, Punjab and Bengal Muslim League came into power. (Choudhury, J. (2008), p.26)

It was the first election where a large population was allowed to cast their votes. Total more than 30 million people, including 4.25 million women, had acquired the right to vote (14% of the total population), and

15.5 million did use their right to elect government (Reeves, P. (1991). p.224). Numerous verified and new advertising tools were used in the election campaigns, ranging from public meetings to rallies, posters, wall writings, and campaign marches. Political star campaigners led the election campaigns of their parties, and thus it became the primary weapon of election communication and publicity in our country. Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru has emerged as the star campaigner of the Congress and the charisma of Pt. Nehru attracted thousands of people to vote for Congress. 'This election campaign began on August 1, 1936. Continued until the end of January 1937, it turned out to be an extremely successful exercise for Congress. A huge crowd turned up for their election campaigns and Jawaharlal Nehru, one of the chief campaigners, found that he thrived on election meetings' (Menon, 1982). The election saw charisma factor worked, and famous leaders pulled masses to the election meetings. The establishment of the value of star campaigner is one unique element of election publicity and advertising introduced in our country.

Since then, several factors and methods have been used and influenced the election time behavior of the voters. As a nation and as a vibrant society, we have achieved incredible progress. This progress and exposure to the new world and new thoughts have influenced the social attitude of the public. With their growing importance in society, all these factors and technology have been incorporated in election communication and shaped the ways, means, and methods of election campaigns. The present article attempts to present a critical analysis of the patterns and trends of political advertising in India with the help of a review of available data on numerous platforms.

WHAT IS ELECTION ADVERTISING?

During elections, politicians and political parties use purposeful communication that includes all forms of communication to attract votes for candidates and the party. This election time political communication includes different tools and techniques used to convey information to the public. Election time communication consists of both paid and non-paid communication. First falls in the category of advertising and second in publicity. But, if we look at the means and methods of communication used during elections and its cost, then the question arises on the distinction of advertising publicity. Most political parties are now hiring services of the advertising agency to deal with all kinds of promotion; therefore, their expenses on advertising agency can be included in political advertising. The spectrum of modern age political and election advertising is diversified, including electronic media advertising, print media advertising, online and social media advertising, mobile advertising, media interactions, media meets, event management, etc. We must include all these to calculate the expenditure on advertising and clearly explain the trends of increasing advertising interference in political communication.

NEED OF ELECTION ADVERTISING

India is a vast country divided into 550 constituencies (<http://loksabha.nic.in/>) which elect their representatives through open election process. 8026 persons contested in 2019 Parliamentary elections with average 14.81 candidates each constituency (<https://eci.gov.in>). It means, on average, one candidate had to reach more than 15 lakh voters in a very short 40 to 60 days' time span if counted from the date of declaration of the polls. Indian voters bear peculiar character where apathy, ignorance, no-information, and isolation are common features. In such a situation where more than 40% of voters do not understand how to vote, political parties, and candidates in the constituency, it becomes complicated and challenging to reach each household and inform voters of symbols, candidates, and the voting procedure effectively. Political advertising increases the participation of voters in the electoral process (Pinkleton, 1998). Advertising creates balance, and by altering the partisan composition of the constituency, it affects election results (Spenkuch & Toniatti, 2018). Political advertisements and campaigning help candidates and political parties do this lengthy, challenging but vital task of wooing voters delicately. Election

advertising helps a candidate and political party inform voters about the symbol and the candidate, election promises, convince and mobilizing voters for votes in favor, and minimize the effects of voter's prejudices. All political parties use different advertising tools and methods to reach and influence the voters. Besides, the election commission of India also uses advertisements to educate the voters to cast their votes and avoid money traps.

DIFFERENT TOOLS OF POLITICAL ADVERTISING

The election has always been a multi-party competition in our country. To secure a win in the elections, many advertising tools are used by these parties and candidates. Even if we look at the other democracies or US elections, where most election advertisements were invented, introduced, utilized, and replaced by other new tools, advertising has played a vital role. It has been one of the dominant phenomena in the elections. West (2013) has analyzed the change in the use of election advertisements in the last 70-80 years in the USA. He points out that 'the method, though perhaps not the tone, of communicating with the electorate has changed dramatically since 1828. Handbills have virtually disappeared. Radio became the most popular vehicle in the 1920s and 1930s. After World War II, television emerged as the advertising medium of choice for political candidates. And in the twenty-first century, the media marketplace has fragmented into a bewildering variety of communication channels from cable television and talk radio to late-night entertainment shows, the World Wide Web, and social media.'

In India, too, different political advertising tools have been used in different elections with march of time. From 1952 to 1984, primarily conventional print media advertisements and some audio-visual ads were developed and used in election campaigns in early polls. After 1984 Television got fillip due to various factors, and political parties have started using electronic media extensively. In future elections, electronic media advertisements became more critical because of their visual appeal, power to depict messages to every part of the country, and the emergence of satellite channels.

From the beginning of our journey as a democratic nation, we have been relied mostly on the conventional and established means of political advertising. The outdoor advertising methods seconded by printed and written publicity materials

have been the primary advertising material in our elections from the first elections. First elections were held under the glory of freedom and commitment to reconstruction and national development. The first three elections were held under optimism and a sense of achievement and are known as the Nehru era. In these elections, public rallies were used as the main weapon supported by outdoor and printed publicity material. With the emergence of Indira Gandhi, the political environment and election equations were changed in our country. Mrs. Gandhi used charisma and famous slogans with the help of advertising gimmicks to win the voters. The use of advertising with the help of professionals came into elections, and later it became a regular element of election management. Nowadays, it is expected that soon advertising and PR professionals would replace political management for election management.

ELECTION ADVERTISING IN DIFFERENT ELECTIONS

From the first elections onwards, we have developed, copied, and used different election campaigns to woo the voters and persuade them for favorable voting. Public meetings, rallies, roadshows and march, traditional folk media, placard, banner, posters, wall writing, flags, stickers, TV, Radio, and Cinema slots are some of the popular tools that Indian political parties and candidates have been using since last many decades. Besides, in the recent decade, telephonic communication, new media communication, and social media communication emerged as the latest and practical platform of political advertising.

The first Indian elections were held in 1951-52 under dreams of nation-building. As a political party and Nehru as star campaigner and charisma factor, Congress-led Congress to the one-sided victory. Apart from using political meetings, rallies, door-to-door canvassing banners, posters, wall writing, hoardings, placards, and handbills were used as main advertising tools for political communication election time.

In 1957, the second general elections took place, and Congress and Pt. Nehru dominated the political scene again. Congress regained power with the help of the magic of Nehru. The story of congress domination in general elections was continued till the 1977 elections, where Indira Gandhi was defeated and Janta Party came into power. Again in 1980, the non-congress parties lost their unity and public

support, and Indira Gandhi regained the power. 1984 elections were clean swept by the Congress party on the waves of sympathy. In 1989 Janta Dal won the mandate by raising the issue of corruption. In 1991 again, Congress came back in power but with the help of others. PV Narasimha Rao became the second congressman out of the Gandhi family who took charge of the Prime Minister. The 1996 elections saw the emergence of BJP as the single largest party, but first HD Devegowda and then IK Gujral became PM of the country. 1998, 1999, 2004, 2009, and 2014 Loksabha elections in our country witnessed various collisions, political rivalry, active election commission, and the era of NDA and UPA.

MAJOR TRENDS IN POLITICAL ADVERTISING IN INDIA

India has always been a unique election advertising environment. Since the very beginning, different publicity materials have been used for advertising. The invention of new methods, technology, and the strategic environment of the election campaign also changes in our country. 'Another reason for India's unique election campaign environment has been the strict limits on political advertising in the Indian broadcast media. Until 2004, political parties could not run full-fledged ad campaigns on Indian Television or Radio stations. Instead, the parties were restricted to free but pre-set advertising segments on the Television and Radio stations of Doordarshan and All India Radio. While political advertisements in newspapers and magazines were permissible, the widespread illiteracy among Indian voters limited the severe impact of print advertising campaigns.

As a consequence, the art of political advertising is a relatively young and unexplored field in India and has only recently shifted from traditional street and billboard advertising (Tekwani, 2005) to the more sophisticated televised campaigns; many of us are familiar with' (Willnat & Aw, 131). With the arrival of digital technologies and reduction in communication channels, our political advertising scene has been enormously changed, and new dimensions have emerged. Following trends are observed through periodical analysis-

ERA OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION BY POLITICAL WORKERS

Elections held during the regime of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru (1952, 57, 62) were used to managed by political parties. All election communication was

regulated by political workers and supporters, who have rendered their services preferably because of ideological commitment and as the party's responsibility. The following two elections held in 1967 and 1971 were also more or less managed by the political party system only. Political workers directly handled these election campaigns, so the advertising tools used were very elementary and supplementary. 'In a diverse country such as India, which historically has had relatively low literacy levels and a limited reach of the mass media, all election campaigns that took place between the 1950s and 1980s were interpersonal in nature. These campaigns were dominated by a large number of grassroots party workers deployed to mobilize voters through house-to-house campaigns during election times. In addition, public meetings, pamphlets, and wall writings characterized the early election campaigns' (Willnat, L., & Annette, A., p. 133).

PLACARDS, BANNERS AND HOARDINGS/ BILLBOARDS

Placards, banners, and hoardings have been used in elections from the colonial period. From fabric to flex banners have been used as the main tool of outdoor publicity during elections. Placards are popular and handy material preferred by individual supporters, bikers for publicity. During mass rallies, march placards are used and are effective in select situations. Hoardings and billboards are essential visual advertisement tools for elections. First-time big cut-outs were prominently seen in Tamilnadu elections with the entry of G. Ramachandran in the politics (Murali, G., 2007). Gradually, the increase in the personality-based party system and charisma factor 'larger-than-life' hoardings/billboards became important. Though in the post- TN Seshan era, due to restrictions of the election commission, candidates have started moving to other options, but it is still one of the most used publicity tools in India.

BEGINNING OF RECRUITMENT OF ADVERTISING PROFESSIONALS

first time in 1980s general elections any ad agency was hired in Indian elections 'when the congress party signed up an ad agency Graphic Ads' (Raju, M.S., & Xardel, D.p.378). Thus the year 1980 can be marked as the year of entry of professional advertising agencies and professionals in political and election communication in India. After high voltage but down-standard political rivalry started in 1975, political parties have started taking the help of

professionals openly. Indira Gandhi has pioneered it, 'but it was Rajiv Gandhi, Indira Gandhi's eldest son, who unheard in advertising as a tool to market his leadership in 1989 election campaigns. He hired the agency Rediffusion DY&R to design ads for his campaign, which is believed to be worth Rs 20 crore. The concept was focused on the concept of 'Mr. Clean' a word coined for Rajiv Gandhi. Some of the popular slogans used during the 1989 elections were 'The Government that Works Faster,' 'My Heart Beats for India,' and 'Give India a Hand, Vote Congress I.' This turned a new leaf in the history of political advertising in India' (Ibid). The 1989 elections saw the use of planned advertising and marketing strategies and the use of negative advertising campaigns at a large scale as a tool. 'In the run-up to the 1989 general elections, for example, Gandhi's ruling INC party introduced negative advertising as a new campaign tool in India' (Willnat & Aw, p.198).

POSTERS AND PAMPHLETS

Posters and pamphlets have always been an essential tool of election communication in our country. In every election, political parties use posters and pamphlets highlighting main issues, faces, and slogans. For the first three elections in our country, Pt Nehru was the face, and his slogans for national development were used as the line of publicity in posters. Posters used as prominent publicity tool in early years of democracy as 'in the 1960s, Congress campaign posters often directly equated a vote for Congress with a direct vote for democracy and for India' (<http://blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com>).

Posters and Pamphlets have played the role of the originator for the election campaign in 1980 general elections, where the first time the congress party was contesting as the opposition. Congress started its campaign by dropping 12 pamphlets in public highlighting the failure of the first non-congress Janta Party government. These pieces were written by expert writers, including Khushwant Singh. Congress candidates used the failure of the first non-congress government as the main narrative in their election deliberations. 'One crore and fifty lakh well-designed posters carrying a positive message were printed and sent out to all the constituencies. "Elect A Government That Works," "Indira Lao Desh Bachao" (Recall Indira, Save India), declared the posters—printed in bright colors hitherto unused in election posters. Designed by Romi Chopra, 38, who works for an advertising agency in Delhi, the posters

stood out from amongst the many mediocre and indifferently designed and printed and drew attention. If, for example, the Congress (I) bagged six of the seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi, the poster blitz had played its role' (<http://indiatoday.in>). These posters were prominently displayed in rural and urban areas and generated magical effects.

LEAP IN POLITICAL ADVERTISING: VIDEO TO COMPUTERS

By 1991 satellite TV arrived in our country, and it had changed the expectations of the audience and norms, facilities, and opportunities of designing and conveying messages. Apart from the coming of TV, Citizens of the country were gifted with Internet availability in 1995. The 1996 general elections first time witnessed election campaigns of national parties managed by advertising professionals at large scale. This election also saw the use of video, computer graphics, and musical campaigns/songs in the election campaigns. In 1996, the ruling Congress party released its video campaign with sleek advertisements featuring the then Prime Minister PV Narsimha Rao. The campaign projected PV Narsimha Rao as a multi-faceted man-a thinker, reformist, and a 'doer

'On the other hand, the BJP led its campaign with patriotic theme songs. The congress party hired the agency Madhyam to design its posters. The Congress had over 25 lakh posters featuring veteran congress leaders like Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Sonlakhandhi, and Sitaram Kesri along with the party symbol. The campaign was centered on the Gandhi family and Sonia Gandhi in particular, who was the widow of the late Rajiv Gandhi. The campaign was centered with slogans such as, 'Poore Bharat se Nata hai, Sarkar Chalana Aata hai.' The agency also released four 30-second ad-films on themes based on history, sacrifice, development, and experience' (Raju, M.S., & Xardel, D.p.378).

In the 1998 elections, both BJP and Congress were equipped with a team of media professionals for preparing campaign strategies. BJP designed its campaign from a voter's perspective showing how people from different identities come to BJP for various reasons and hopes. A 70-second film was prepared, 'NETA BAS EK ATAL HO', which was screened in 1000 cinema halls all over the country and on local cable networks. The movie projected Atal Behari Vajpayee as a seasoned politician and ideal candidate to become Prime Minister of India. The congress party campaign was based on

projecting Sonia Gandhi, linking the congress party with Indiraji, and Rajiv Ji, the Gandhi family factor. BJP launched its website www.bjp.org and became the first political party in the country to launch a website. With her gesture and postures, Sonia Gandhi is portrayed with a glimpse of Indira Gandhi. 1998 elections were marked very important for advertising business boom also. 'During the 1998 elections to the 12th Lok Sabha, political advertising in India came of age. Several political parties- BJP and the Congress in particularly engaged consultants and ad agencies and pulled out all stops to project their leaders and programmes and perspectives' (Aggarwal, V. B., & Gupta, V. S., page 383).

THE ELECTION OF MULTIMEDIA AND PERSONALITY PROJECTION

1999 general elections were new in numerous ways from an advertising perspective. Both Congress and BJP had girded multiple PR and Advertising agencies to conduct their publicity campaign. The first time, at a large scale, marketing techniques, analysis, and advertising tools were used to reach and convince voters across constituencies. Video ad films, banners-posters were utilized along with roadshows, video-on-wheels, folk dances, street theaters, and so many non-conventional tools. For the first time in the history of Indian politics, Atal Behari Vajpayee was proposed in elections as Prime Minister Candidate, and the election turned into a clash between Sonia and Vajpayee. This election also witnessed feel-good strategy used by BJP to go with good message and connect with voters positively.

MAGIC OF TECHNOLOGY AND FALL OF INDIA SHINING

The 2004 general election was named the most high-tech election for political campaigns and political advertising. Scope for TV and Radio advertising was limited due to restrictions imposed by the Election Commission of India; therefore, political parties and their strategists turned to direct marketing techniques. 'Political parties used prerecorded voicemails and SMS messages from Prime Minister Vajpayee, urging them to vote for his BJP party. Overall, as many as 400 prerecorded 42-second messages were disseminated by the BJP throughout the 2004 election' (Willnat & Aw, p.205).

In this election, people saw the use of theme-based advertisements. For the first time, electorates

witnessed corporate-style advertising campaigns where BJP spent around 600 crores on India Shining's campaign theme. Despite its shrinking treasure, Congress countered BJP's campaign with 'Aap ko Kya Mila' campaign. Critiques blamed the India shining campaign on the urban population and ignored the ground reality, social division, and mass backwardness; it backfired on NDA and BJP. 2004 elections should also be remembered for the use of TV ads in Indian elections. Election Commission of India vide its order dated 15/04/2004 permitted advertisement spots of political parties for elections (www.eci.nic.in). 'This was India's first national election which featured political advertising on television, and its cornerstone was an expensive BJP media campaign India Shining..... The BJP's campaign manager, the late Pramod Mahajan, proudly proclaimed before the election: This is the first election of the 21st century.... slowly, in 20-25 years maybe not in the next 5-10 years – roadshows, yatras, public meetings and other traditional forms of campaigning will all be done on the electronic media' (Mehta, N., page-54). By making this statement, Mr. Mahajan was giving the blend of the strategic changes in campaigns by political parties. Though his predictions have deviated a bit, the emergence of new media, social media, and multimedia in coming years have proved the vision of Mr. Mahajan.

2009 ELECTIONS

2009 elections have seen the campaign and counter-campaign; JAI HO from Congress and BHAY HO from BJP. The budget for the advertising was increased as around 800 crore rupees were spent by political parties on advertising. In 2009 elections, the electronic media was the key player as 'Congress spent 56% of their publicity expenditure on electronic media while the BJP spent 58% on the electronic media (<http://www.indiaspend.com>).'

THEME-BASED ADVERTISEMENTS OR ADVERTISING BLITZKRIEG

Advertising Blitzkrieg, shortly used as Advertising Blitz, is a strategy of advertising campaign used intensively for a short period. It is defined by Oxford reference as "a technique used in advertising in which an advertising placement is concentrated in the media for an intensive and short period of time. This is used to gain rapid awareness or a quick response from an audience' (<http://www.oxfordreference.com>). In a theme-based advertising strategy entire advertising campaign is designed to promote a selected theme.

The core message is presented in numerous ways to establish one-line political communication during elections. Though in every election, we can find a major line or theme for communication but in a strategic way, we saw it the first time during the 2004 general elections in our country. It started in February 2004 under the campaign government spent more than 600 crore rupees on a huge ad campaign with mixed objectives of image building and election advertising. The government released advertisements on all major TV channels, including regional ones, newspapers, and magazines were also used and glossy full color posters prominently pasted up.

Despite the failure of the NDA government to retain the power and criticism of the campaign, this ad campaign has opened the door of massive and expensive campaigns in Indian elections. In last elections, such as in 2009 Congress went into the election with the concept of 'Bhart Nirman', which was further used to polish the image of UPA. Congress came for 2014 elections with the theme of Kattar soch nahin Yuva Josh (Youthful energy, not hardline views).

MODI MAGIC; INCREASING USE AND INFLUENCE OF ADVERTISING STRATEGIES

In the 2014 elections, we have seen the emergence of PM Modi; as a national icon from a regional leader, a person who is determined, devoted, progressive, and able to bring change and development. With the help of dedicated and expert professionals and advertising legends such as Ogilvy & Mather's Piyush Pandey, McCann World group's Prasoon Joshi, and Sam Balsara of Madison World lent their skills at various levels. Advertising agency Soho Square, part of the WPP group, handled Television, Radio, and print campaigns with catchy slogans such as 'AB KI BAAR MODI SARKAR' (<http://www.businesstoday.in>). What Modi did in the last elections is not a new phenomenon in the history of parliamentary elections. Elections in India were always a manifestation of the best advertising techniques. The emergence of a political party or candidate is influenced by promoting the manifesto in the most relatable way. But, the first time we have witnessed the influence of digital media in campaign strategies; technology factor.

'In 2014 elections, advertising campaign strategies were chosen to suit the needs of the digitalized world. Social media and other digital media have shaped the image of the political leaders and parties

as a line was drawn between digital-friendly leaders and leaders more relied upon the conventional means. This digital technology has worked in favor of political parties, and BJP, which emerged as the big winner in the elections, was ahead in use of digital media also. BJP and Narendra Modi had explored all popular social media platforms and digital media technologies' (Misra, R., & Others, 2019, p. 123).

Advertisements have appeared broadly across various mass media platforms. TV ads extensively appeared in public. On TV, the BJP ad focusing on only one theme was broadcast twice every 30 minutes every day between 7 PM to 1 AM. BJP used attacking and extensive advertisement to woo the voters with striking slogans i.e., AB KI BAAR MODI SARKAR, JANTA TUMHE MAAF NAHIN KAREGI, and ACHHE DIN AANE WALE HAIN. As per the record submitted by BJP and disclosed by the Election Commission of India party had spent 714.28 crore rupees on elections, out of which 304.5 crores was spent on advertisements (www.eci.nic.in).

Congress also spent a considerable amount on elections. However, the party had submitted just 500 + crore expenditure during 2014 elections but initiated its massive election advertising campaign with the reported expenditure of more than 700 crores. 'The Congress has launched a massive propaganda blitzkrieg in the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections projecting Rahul Gandhi prominently. Rahul and not Congress president Sonia Gandhi appears to be the face of the campaign. Well-before the poll code of conduct comes into force, the party has initiated a nation-wide Rs700 crore mass publicity drive aimed at wooing various sections of the electorate. The advertisements were aired through television, radio, newspapers, hoardings etc. In Mumbai, the party has purchased space on hundreds of BEST buses to display its ads featuring Rahul Gandhi (<http://www.dnaindia.com>).'

MODI MAGIC: 2019 ELECTIONS

2019 Lok Sabha elections witnessed the emergence of Narendra Modi as one of the most popular politicians of Indian politics. 2019 election saw intensified use of digital media platforms to reach maximum voters interactively. Social media played a crucial and central role in the image building and setting of the narrative. Political parties spent huge money on social media campaigns. 'Political parties have also spent over Rs. 53 crores on digital platforms like Google and Facebook between

February and May 2019' (Manu, D., et. El., 2020, p.23). Digital advertising spent was increased as 'from February 19 to May 19, political parties posted 124,094 ads on Facebook to reach out to their audiences' (www.ndtv.com). This election was named the most expensive election ever conducted in our country as 'election expenditure in India has gone up by nearly six times in 20 years (1998-2019)- from Rs 9,000 crore to over Rs 55,000 crore' (www.newindianexpress.com).

Main Bhi Chowkidar campaign nurtured the image of PM Modi as a true custodian of the public interest. Social media was extensively used by political parties such as Twitter to set narratives, Facebook, and WhatsApp to motivate supporters and impress undecided and first-time voters. Social media outlets such as WhatsApp and other platforms were used to spread election propaganda, and the poor filter mechanism of such platforms promoted fake news syndrome also. BJP's success in 2019 elections was highly based on hyper-personalized campaign (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2020). Social media tools such as small videos, memes, hashtags, and many more are used to create buzz on virtual platforms and establish new-age communication with youth voters. This Lok Sabha election has established digital and social media platforms as the main channels of election communication and publicity. BJP won the elections with a great majority ahead in its digital media and social media presence.

SURROGATE ADVERTISEMENTS

Surrogate stands for substitute or proxy. We usually relate this term with surrogate motherhood. Surrogate advertisement is taken as the strategic move in brand expansion, but it becomes suspicious when it is used to overcome the restrictions and ethical obligations. During elections, surrogate advertisements are used to indirectly influence the voter by propagating schemes and contributions of the party in power, defaming opponents by giving objectionable ads with fake names, defeating election commission restrictions by using other's name as the advertiser.

Most political parties have used surrogate advertisements for a benefit during elections. Though the election commission has banned such practices to provide a level playing field, it is still in use. Now political parties use this strategy ahead of election notifications, and by doing this, they cannot be challenged by the election commission of India.

REGIONAL PARTIES AND THEIR ELECTIONS ADVERTISEMENTS

Till July 2015 there were 1866 political parties registered with the Election Commission of India. In 2014 Lok Sabha elections, 464 political parties were contested. These political parties vary strength-wise, impact wise and expansion-wise. There is a massive difference in approach, expenditure, and different advertisement tools used by various political parties. In the Indian political scenario, national political parties always lead in terms of the use of media advertisements, innovative advertising methods, and expenditure on media advertisements.

Table- Expenditure pattern of various political parties on election advertisement and publicity in 2014 elections as per ECI records (in Indian rupees)

S. No.	Political Party	Total Expenditure 2014	Expenditure on Media advertisement (print and electronic, bulk sms, cable, website, TV channel, etc) figure & percentage	Expenditure on Publicity Materials including posters, banner, badges, stickers, arches, gates, cut-outs, hoardings, flags etc for general party propaganda figure & percentage
1.	BJP	4,87,03,91,516.00	3,04,50,38,995.00 (62.52%)	14,61,75,398.00 (3.01%)
2.	Cong	3696072829.00	2312412018.00 (62.56%)	113255157.00 (3.06%)

	res			
3.	CP I (M)	1490654.00	430003.00 (28.84%)	2750.00 (0.18%)
4.	BS P	300,584,822.00	39,022,767.00 (12.98%)	Nil (0%)
5.	SP	641,158,351.00	256,193,968.00 (39.95%)	8,914,500.00 (1.39%)
6.	T M C	15,22,83,617.00	397,83,617.00 (26.12%)	NIL (0%)
7.	A G P (Assam only)	8,48,802.00	1,66,500.00 (19.61%)	NIL (0%)
8.	Biju Janta Dal (Odisha only)	10,48,73,843.00	49,065,784.00 (46.73%)	10,136,012.00 (0%)
10.	AA P	25,485,958.30	5,853,807.00 (22.96%)	NIL (0%)

Source: Election Commission of India website

most political parties with effective presence in more than four states (BJP, Congress) spent more money on the media advertisements than the regional political parties or parties limited to one state. BJD is exceptional, but its expenditure was also limited to under 50% of total expenditure. Both BJP and Congress had spent more than 50% of their total election expenditure on media advertisements. Decreasing trends of expenditure were observed in

2014 general elections on publicity materials including posters, banners, badges, stickers, arches, gates, cut-outs, hoardings, and flags, etc., as the figure lies between 0 to 4% only. The growing importance of the mass media channels for advertisement in elections observed. Most of the big political parties have started shifting on advertising channels and multimedia modes of communication. Regional and small political parties may be due to their supporter's social background or the conventional mindset of the party leadership, depending more on the conventional means of publicity.

BJP and Congress took the lead in using technology in their campaigns and advertisements on digital platforms. Increasing use of ads in elections was evident by industry figures also. During 2014 elections, India experienced a growth of almost 13%, with the flow of nearly 50,000 crore rupees floated in the advertising world. The main reason for this vast money was for spends advertisements on the digital platform in the elections. India, for the first time saw the political parties advertising so extensively (<http://www.digihooks.com/advertising-in-india/>). Even in the 2019 elections, no significant change was observed in the statement of expenditure submitted by a few of the listed political parties. Digital media is a new weapon in election campaigns bypassing all other conventional means of advertisement and propaganda.

COVID-19 AND FUTURE OF ELECTION ADVERTISING

COVID-19 has a substantial and immediate effect on the conventional style of political communication and advertising. In the period of social and physical distancing, digital virtual modes have emerged as the main platform of election communication. The 'new normal' of political communication during COVID-19 and afterward is expected to demoralize physical gatherings, rallies, massive and extensive field publicity as election communication. The use of digital media as a replacement for such tools will be on the rise.

Digital technology with artificial intelligence and online campaigns would lead the election communications. 'Shift to digital, like in other works of life, will be hastened. Parties which lagged in previous elections, will now spend more money on social media campaigns driven by big data analytics. Parties which already had been using social media space, will invest more into in'

(<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>). Political parties have started using digital technologies to surpass lockdown restrictions. Through social media platforms, Twitter, meeting apps, and YouTube, virtual rallies are a new choice and tool of political campaigning and communication. Social media is a favorite spot for people during disasters. During COVID-19, social networking sites have become the most liked destination to eliminate loneliness caused due to pandemic-related restrictions.

Bihar Assembly Election 2020 has become the first battleground of digital advertising and publicity, where BJP launched its campaign through the virtual rally. Digital campaigning has been taken as the new normal to conduct elections amid pandemics by the election commission. Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra's statement "parties will have to rely on virtual rallies and to campaign through social media" (<https://indianexpress.com>) indicates the necessity of digital media for election publicity during the pandemic. COVID-19 and fear of contagion will change the face of political advertising and use of digital and social media platforms for holding lives and advertising, bulk SMS, television advertising, apps, and service portals will be on the rise. With the increasing use of digital media platforms, it will become cost-effective and ubiquitous also, therefore, will be established as the primary tool of advertising and campaigning.

In the recently concluded Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Assam, Kerala, and West Bengal assembly elections, traditional means of campaigning were targeted by the people. They have considered as a major factor in the dangerous spread of Covid, and especially the Prime Minister's rallies were the target. Panchayat elections that came forward remained at the center of criticism due to this reason. There is no reliable prediction about when this epidemic will end, but elections will continue. In such a situation, there is a possibility of increasing the use of alternative means and publicity mechanisms.

The figures for these states that came in the middle of March 2021 also indicate towards same. Social media has emerged as a significant platform for election advertising, and every political party has spent a lot of money here. 'As per data available on Facebook's Ad Library, West Bengal has seen the maximum political ad spends at Rs 3.8 crore closely followed by Tamil Nadu with spends on Rs 3.4 crore on poll-related campaigns which fall under Facebook's advertisement category of 'social issues, election or politics'.....In term of political ad

spends, Assam is at the third position with political ads worth Rs 64.89 lakh followed by Kerala (Rs 43.8 lakh), and Puducherry (Rs 3.83 lakh). The data is for a 90 day period from December 24 2020 to March 23 2021' (www.exchange4media.com). Soon, digital and social media platforms will become a significant arena of political advertisements if epidemics continue. Along with this, it will be even more intensive to provide speeches and rallies with the help of digital broadcasting in rural and remote areas, sending recorded messages with the use of mobile vehicles. In the coming time, digital publicity will lead to elections.

CONCLUSION

Political publicity has been part of our election system since the beginning. Political parties and leaders have always used different tools and techniques to reach the target audience effectively. Initially, most advertising and publicity were controlled by political leaders and workers, which later and gradually shifted to professionals. Technology has always played an important role, and political advertising in our country is fast adaptive to new means and methods. Despite criticism from many stakeholders, positive growth has been recorded in this sector. One significant criticism blames it as a costly affair that is unbearable for small parties and independent candidates; thus, disparity existed.

Some experts suggest ban or imposing restrictions on political advertising because the fruits of the users are not very sure, but the implications are more. 'Simply intensifying the exposures to political ads does not ensure passive decision making tilting the voter's choice for the candidate or the party or both. Rather, their decision-making is more considerate and involving, giving more weightage to news-based information than repetitive political ads. Thus, because of differences found in voting decision involvement, the idea of using a selective approach for intensifying ad exposures might work in the direction of restricting the large, wasteful expenditure on political advertising. The selective approach calls for identification of right type of target audience, the media and the message' (Sharma, K. 47). But, is it possible to restrict advertising in a country like India where even the Election Commission of India uses it as an effective tool to spread awareness among voters? The answer is no. Advertising is not the only tool of election campaigns, but because of its importance, gradually, the budget and use are increased after every election.

Demographic features and socio-economic variables such as caste, religion, and region play an important role in elections in India. These factors affect advertisements also. Political parties have used both 'soft sell advertising' and 'hard sell' advertising during elections. Positive advertisements follow the strategy of soft sell, and negative advertisements follow hard sell. Advertising agencies in recent polls have planned and executed customized advertising campaigns that suited the socio-cultural environment and caste-based divisions. It was very recently in 2015 wherein BJP's TV advertisement was loudly added as a voice-over that if an Ati-Pichda can become PM of the country, why not thousands of Ati-Pichda children can develop the Bihar? These embellishments in the advertising strategy indicate that advertising campaigns are found suitable by political parties to hit the mindset of voters in their socio-cultural frames.

After the emergence of social media platforms and their extensive use in 2014 and 2019 elections, digital advertising will rise. COVID-19 has firmly established the requirement of digital advertising tools to reach voters in a time of social and physical distancing. Here, it can be said that the future of political advertising is very positive in our country. It is positive because advertising has adopted a new digital platform, and its impact is multiplied. Digital media and multimedia have put a lot of creative imagination into the ads with three-dimensional presentations. This unique interactive experience involves the audience more and more. Apart from that, advertising agencies offer a complete package where the number of PR and branding activities complement advertising efforts and multiply the overall impact. Thus, we can conclude that the romance of advertising in elections will continue because elections occur in our country on an almost very short and regular interval. Leaders come through parachutes, not through the path of long rigorous political training, majority electorates rarely participate in the process of governance, and professional support must reach vast, diversified mass by utilizing sophisticated, advanced, secured, and diverse media platforms.

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