

# Social Media and West Bengal Political Parties: A Brief Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

The rise of the social networking sites in the early 2000s, has led to the increase in the world's networked population. Social media ensured that people have greater access to information, content and opportunities to engage in public sphere to undertake united action. Social media has entered into our daily lives and it influences people and organizations all over the world involving many actors -- regular citizens, social activists, non-governmental organizations, telecommunications companies, software service providers, and also governments at large. Social media revolution in Indian politics is real and its impact can be assessed by General elections of 2014 and 2019. The General election of 2014 was regarded as the 1st social media election of India due to the ever increasing use of social media by political actors. Nevertheless, Social media has also impacted politics in all major states including West Bengal. No doubt social media is now being seriously considered by the West Bengal political parties as a mean to reach out to the electorate, but will it influence the 2021 Assembly Elections in the same way as in Obama's Presidential elections? This paper analyses the reach of West Bengal based parties in various social media platforms.

**KEYWORDS:** Social Media, Political Parties, West Bengal Politics, Political Communication

## I. INTRODUCTION

Essentially social media incorporates the online technology and methods through which people can share content, personal opinions, swap different perspectives and insights in the world issues and generally discuss the evolution of media itself., Social media can be referred to as those online platforms, applications and websites that are programmed to allow its users to share content, data or news quickly, efficiently, real-time and mostly free of cost. Many define social media as an application on their mobile phone or tablet, but the reality is, this communication tool started with personal computers. This misconception emerges from the fact that most social media users access their tools via apps.

### Here are few social media platforms:

Social networks: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn  
Media sharing networks: Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube  
Blogging and publishing networks: WordPress, Tumblr, Medium

As a tool of communication social media is a 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon. Off late, social media platforms has become battleground for political fighting, bickering and campaigning. The phenomenal rise of social media networks raises significant doubts related to political information and its effect on political knowledge and participation.

One issue that had intrigued political scientists and scholars is to figure out is, whether social media delivers news and political information in a similar fashion as traditional media sources such as print media (news papers), TV, and radio,

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and how this information is consumed thereby contributing to political knowledge, which is linked to voter turnout.

In 2019, it is estimated that there will be around 2.77 billion social media users around the globe, up from 2.46 billion in 2017. When it comes to India the number of social media users stood at 326.1 million in 2018. This increase is relatively lower as compared to the growth that occurred between 2016 and 2017. Nevertheless, the social network users in the country were expected to be almost 448 million in 2023. Facebook remained the popular choice among the social media platforms as of 2017. Due to the metaphorical rise of social media, it has been subject of scientific analysis. Social media are increasingly used in political context recently, both by citizens and political institutions (e.g., politicians, political parties, political foundations etc.).

From the perspective of political institutions, it is important to actively participate in the political communication based on the use of social media, especially during election campaigns. Social media thereby represents the ideal vehicle and information base to gauge public opinion on policies and political positions as well as to build community support for candidates running for public offices. Social media provides opportunities to create and expand audiences, increase geographical reach, respond more quickly than ever before to news events and issues, and interact with news consumers in more immediate and direct ways. Nowadays Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter etc. become the battleground for political parties in India. It becomes an essential part of campaigning. Viral videos, Cartoons, Memes related to

politics are circulated through these new media known as social media.

In India, the largest sections of social media users are youth voters. So, the political parties targeted these youth voters through the use of these media. The political parties form their own social media teams and they generate propagating content such as cartoons and memes. By this way the political parties are giving social media users many moments to laugh also. Launching digital campaigns, the political parties set up some election war rooms. This field has also become a tool for common people to voice their concern. Through the platforms of social media political parties can communicate directly with the voters. Now political parties are spending crores of rupees on social media campaigns and on war rooms. But they refused to give details about the expenses. With the increasing usage of smartphones, use of social media is also growing rapidly.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. **DIGITAL VIDYA**, "Role of Social Media in Indian Politics" 2017, According to Vikrant Patil, The 2014 general elections in India was revolutionary. It saw social media as a new battleground. Narendra Modi emerged as India's Obama. The conventional ways of sending messages, recorded calls and public gatherings were not seen much.

This election saw politicians leveraging. Social media used to reach out to constituents like never before. Many of them were reluctant earlier. But they have now become active. It's either out of necessity. It helped to keep up with their peers. Many political parties also made it mandatory. Thus, it won't be incorrect to say that the role of social media in politics has been inevitable over the years.

2. According to **Dr. T. Sadashivam**, due to the emergence of social media, it gives voices to voiceless and fractured common people, which is negligible in the conventional and stereotype media. It also emerges as an important source of news for the people. One main reason to the growth of social media is youth, because they dedicated most of their time to social media; and political parties are now very well aware of the fact that social media will influence the younger generation.

3. According to **Manpreet Kaur**, Political campaigns in today's era are not limited to rallies, speeches to deal with crowds and masses rather social media is an emerging tool

## III. SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEST BENGAL POLITICAL PARTIES

Off late, Political parties in West Bengal are eager to harness the power of social media and use it to their advantage. This is evident by the ever increasing presence of West Bengal based political parties and leaders on various social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Not only are political parties more visible in social media but there is also ever growing presence of Bengal leaders on these social media websites.

Social Media Sites	Trinamool Congress	Bengal BJP	BengalCPI(M)	Bengal Congress
Twitter	338,000	226,000	128,000	45,000
Facebook	1,200,000	1,500,000	270,000	70,000

As of January 2021

If we look at West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's twitter profile we can see she has close to 5 million twitter followers. Her party i.e. All India Trinamool Congress has twitter following of 3.38 lakh followers. Again if we see the presence of Mamata Banerjee on Facebook profile we can see she has close to 3.6 million active followers whereas her party has more than 1 million followers. Now if we take the case of opposition parties in West Bengal we can see their presence in social media sites as well. For example if we take the case of Bengal BJP we can clearly see their huge presence in all of the social media platforms.

to share information, influence and engage people for political participation. Political leaders and officials are realizing the importance of social media as it becomes a powerful tool to spread political information as well as contacting citizens. Influence of Social media has been proved from its successful implementation in the US presidential election in 2008.

4. According to **Narasimha Murthy**, In recent years, social media have become an integral part of political communications during election campaigns. Since the Internet age began, communication has evolved from social media to chat rooms and instant messaging. Social media is the most recent and rapidly growing phenomenon in the context of Internet Communication. During the 2014 parliamentary general election in India all political parties and candidates have extensively utilized social media in order to mobilize voters. The recent explosive growth and popularity in use of social media drew a great deal of attention from political communication researchers. Of particular interest is to explore the political impact of social media as a new means that helps people obtain political information as well as interact with other people on the Web.

5. According to **Surjit Kaur**, Social Media mirrors the real world and is all about conversations. Social media facilitate the interactive web by engaging users to participate in, comment on and create content as means of communicating with social graph, other users and the public. Social media has emerged as a major tool where citizens are able to talk about the issues of day to day life and also of national importance. In the 21st century, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube are not just innovations in the internet world, but are fast emerging as influencers and opinion creators.

6. According to **Nandan Nilekani**, When political parties get down to conducting social media workshops as part of their business plan for elections, you know they are really serious about the new digital discovery.

Social media and new online technology tools have gripped politicians who till now were only accustomed to secretaries taking calls on their behalf. National leaders, election candidates and government organizations are now active on social media sites, a step beyond just being online through websites.

For example BJP's West Bengal official Facebook page has over 1.5 million active followers whereas their state president Dilip Ghosh has over 6.44 lakh active followers. In the case of twitter we can see that BJP Bengal's official twitter page has close to 2.26 lakh active followers whereas Dilip Ghosh has 2.28 lakh twitter followers. Now if we see the presence of the West Bengal Congress in social media it is very timid. On twitter the official page of the West Bengal Congress has 45 thousand active followers whereas its state president Adhir Chowdhury has 50 thousand followers on twitter. Now if we take the case of West Bengal Congress on Facebook we can see they have close to 70 thousand active followers whereas their president have close to 3 lakh followers.

Social Media Sites	Mamata Banerjee	Dilip Ghosh	Adhir Chowdhury	Biman Basu
Twitter	5,000,000	228,000	50,000	NA
Facebook	3,600,000	644,000	300,000	NA

As of January 2021

Looking at CPI(M) west bengal we can see that their Facebook Profile has close to 2.7 lakh active followers whereas their twitter following has close to 1.28 lakh active followers. Now we can see that All India Trinamool Congress and Bengal BJP clearly have the most significant and dominant presence in social media. Their respective leaders Mamata Banerjee and Dilip Ghosh also have vast presence in both of the social media platforms. On the other end of the spectrum we can see that West Bengal Pradesh Congress and CPI(M) have very low social media presence. It is also to be noted that political parties with higher social media presence are having significant electoral gains than the parties who have miniscule social media presence.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Social Media is already playing a key role in Bengal politics and there is no doubt it is going to play a crucial part in 2021 Bengal assembly elections. The importance of social networking sites can be understood by BJP's appointment of its IT cell chief, Amit Malviya, as the co-mentor to oversee party affairs in the state of West Bengal. Soon after his appointment, Malviya tweeted thanking the party's central leadership and said, "Bengal is an important state for the BJP. To be appointed co-incharge for this critical state is an honour for me." If BJP has appointed its top IT brass for 2021 assembly elections then the ruling Trinamool Congress government is also not far behind The TMC has spent nearly two million on advertisements on Facebook in the last three months. Facebook's advertisement library report reveals that between June 24 and September 21, the TMC has spent Rs 1.81 million on 93 advertisements on social media while the BJP has spent around Rs 1.22 million on 52 advertisements. But if one considers the data of last one month (August 23 – September 21), then the BJP has surpassed the TMC with such spending. While the BJP has spent 1.04 million on 26 ads during the last 30 days, the TMC has spent around 3.35 lakhs on 42 ads. This means 85% of what the BJP spent on social media advertisement had come in the last one month. So it can be understood that social media is here to stay in Bengal politics and will be used as a key battleground for swaying people in 2021 elections.

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