Are ICT/Web 2.0 Tools Influencing Civic Engagement in Modern Democracies? An Exploratory Analysis from India

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ABSTRACT

Web 2.0 tools, while mobilising citizens to make informed choices, may also manipulated public opinion. This hypothesis forms the central theme of this research investigation through the historiography lens. Based on concurrent research from decade, the authors take a closer look at citizen-to-citizen engagement, so as to trace the role of web 2.0 tools, in perhaps manipulating public opinion or enabling democratic governance through reversal of some existing defects in the Indian context. Specifically, they raise these questions: Has ICT enabled civic engagement manipulated public opinion in this developing democracy? Has it succeeded in reversing apparent defects in the electoral system, which is regarded pivotal in democracies? Focusing on the elections, the authors present a synopsis of the use of web 2.0 tools which were seemingly efficiently and prolifically used during the elections albeit to reach out to the large population base in this country.

Keywords: Civic Engagement, Democracies, Elections, Electoral System, Facebook, Historiography, Public Opinion, Twitter, Web 2.0 Tools, Youtube

INTRODUCTION

Civic engagement is crucial for sustaining representative democracies. The seminal allusion in modern democratic governance highlighted the criticality of citizen participation, in today’s representative democracies, particularly in the pivotal elections process wherein “…citizens elect representatives in a free and fair electoral system, to make policies for them and to ensure sustained development direction” (Norris, 2003). In theory, the electoral process allows citizens to have equal weight of their preferred choice of a representative in the conduct of governance. In modern times, there is increasing advocacy for participatory democracy (Kramer, 1972), a process that highlights broader participation of constituents in governance processes. While the etymological roots of any form of democracies imply civic assignation, the
advocates of participatory democracy strive to create opportunities for all citizens to make equal and meaningful contributions (Fraunholz & Unnithan, 2007b).

The influential work of King (2006) assests that electronic governance is often expressed through the use of technologies to provide new avenues for voting – a crucial process in selecting representatives through elections. Since 2001, Web 2.0 tools including social networking utilities, have progressively been deployed in e-governance, particularly during elections – to mobilise citizen participation. These tools including e-voting, weblogs, YouTube, Google and lately Twitter. As Gaynor (1996, p. 1) pointed out, “the ritualistic capability for expression increases the participatory nature of democracy in cyberspace...through the power of citizen-to-citizen (lateral) communications which benefits themselves and their communities.”

Previous body of research (Fraunholz & Unnithan, 2007, 2008) explored the role of ICTs and particularly Web 2.0 tools, in the pivotal elections process, within developed economies of France, Australia and USA. The findings revealed extensive use of Web 2.0 tools as an anti-apathy approach in e-governance in these developed nations, where there is an effort to re-engage apathetic citizenry in the elections process thus enabling them to participate in their governance. Concurrently, a preliminary examination of developing democracies had revealed that they are often confronted with intricacies of equal distribution of wealth, may it be access to electronic communications, ignorance, non-acceptance of ICTs etc., resulting in furrowed citizen participation. The lack of infrastructure, accessibility combined with low literacy rates in developing nations made the effort to reach out to as many citizens using ICTs, rather debatable.

However, at the beginning of this decade, when the ICTs were gaining momentum in the e-governance processes, Unnithan (2002) explored its drivers and initiatives in India, the self-professed largest democracy in the world. The preliminary findings found that India was on a conduit towards a revolutionary change, leveraging the pervasive power of ICTs in e-governance. Subsequently, Fraunholz and Unnithan (2009) found that the accessibility using cybercafes coupled with many government services becoming electronic (Dogra, 2005) had helped India to reach out to its large population base. Ostensibly, India had pioneered e-voting to reduce the costs as well as to engage more of its large voter base in the population. In the 2004 federal elections, over 1 million electronic voting machines were used to engage approximately 672 million voters, which constituted a large literate/semi literate population (Ace, 2004) with an almost 50:50% spread between the two sections (Fraunholz & Unnithan, 2006). While the semi-literate population was the outcome of government initiatives in literacy using ICTs, the literate population of voters were the ‘digerati’ generation (Bagga, 2004) mainly situated in the metropolitan cities as professionals – riding the BPO boom. The election results in 2004 indicated no doubt, an increase in informed citizenry. As Wilkinson (2005) contend, perhaps these techniques had reversed the defect in the electoral process, as the literate voters became better engaged, while the semi-literates made an effort to participate by voting in the elections. A concurrent analysis of presidential elections in 2007 (Fraunholz & Unnithan, 2009) revealed increased citizen-to-citizen engagement including Internet based debates, speculation and partisan opinion exhibited via Blogs. Nevertheless, the question remained as to whether Web 2.0 tools, while mobilising citizens to make informed choices, had also manipulated public opinion?

In this paper, we report the ensuing research, focusing on the last federal elections in India and civic assignation. We take a closer look at citizen-to-citizen engagement, so as to trace the role of social media tools, in perhaps manipulating public opinion or enabling democratic governance through reversal of some existing defects. Specifically, we raise these questions: Has ICT enabled civic engagement manipulated public opinion in this developing democracy? Has it succeeded in reversing ap-
Focusing on the elections, we present a synopsis of the use of web 2.0 tools which were seemingly efficiently and prolifically used during the elections albeit to reach out to the large population base in this country.

LITERATURE REVIEW: CONTEXTUAL TAXONOMY

Many ICT tools have been deployed in recent years in the e-governance arena. This section captures those tools, which were increasingly deployed for civic engagement during Indian elections in 2009. It also includes the key definitions and themes that buttress this paper.

The concept of electronic democracy or E-democracy refers to the processes and structures that encompass all forms of electronic interaction between elected government and the electorate or citizenry (Backus, 2001, p. 1). Participatory democracy as defined by Kramer (1972) is the process that emphasises broader participation of constituents in the governance operations. Gupta (2006) assert that e-democracies use ICTs, may it be to strengthen and improve democratic processes, engaging citizens in public policy making via e-forums, e-consultations, e-referenda, e-voting and other form. The use of ICTs particularly in communications via Web is emphasised for extending citizen participation in public policy making, so that the influence will lead to smarter policies, increasing accountability and political legitimacy. Technology tools that enable community narratives and results in accretion of knowledge are very significant in citizen empowerment (Fraunholz & Unnithan, 2009). In the following paragraphs we attempt to define the ICT/Web 2.0 tools considered in this paper.

A blog is the contraction of the term web log, which is a site maintained by an individual or groups, with regular entries of commentary, description of events, graphics or video (Rebecca, 2000). Entries are in reverse chronological order. The ability of readers to leave comments in an interactive format is the most significant part of Blogs. The blogosphere refers to a space with many blogs and their interconnections. The term implies that blogs exist together as a connected community or as a collection of connected communities, or as a social network in which everyday authors can publish their opinions.

The concept of social networking has evolved on the World Wide Web. Among these, the most common social utilities are Facebook and Twitter. Facebook is a social utility that empowers people to share information, add numerous photos or share links/videos and also learn more about people they meet on the Internet. Its mission is to make the world more open and connected (Facebook, http://www.facebook.com). Conversely, Twitter is a real time information network powered by people around the world that lets them share what is happening on the spot. Specifically, Twitter asks the question “what’s happening” and spreads the answer message across the globe, to subscribers (or followers of Tweets), immediately. It is particularly useful in “breaking news,” as it keeps people informed by the minute. As Twitter site claims, “the timely bits of information that spread can help you make better choices and decisions, and should you so desire, creates a platform for you to influence what is being talked about around the world.” Twitter can provide voice to even weakest signals through SMS via mobile phones in rural areas. It can be accessed through more than 50,000 third party Internet and mobile applications (Twitter, 2010).

YouTube was founded in 2005, as a leader in online video via the Web. It allows for upload and share of video clips via http://www.youtube.com and across the Internet through websites, mobile devices, blogs and email. Firsthand accounts of current events and quirky videos highlight this utility. As people capture more special moments, becoming broadcasters, many politicians use them for campaigning during elections. YouTube was purchased by Google Inc. in November 2006 (YouTube, 2010). Google, which began as a university project a decade ago has now become the largest online
A mashup is a web page or application that uses or combines data or functionality from two or more external sources to create a new service (Crupi & Warner, 2008). The term implies remixing of digital data and easy, fast integration, data sources to produce enriching results which were not the original reason for producing the raw source data. Usually, these are client applications or hosted online. In the past few years, these sites enable software developers to easily integrate data and functions instead of building them. Mashups are considered to play an active role in the evolution of social software and Web 2.0.

The previously mentioned tools were deployed in the recent elections held in India. To analyse the use of these tools in e-governance, we present the methodological frameworks used in the next section.

**METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

_Historiography_ (Berg, 2004) or an examination of rudiments from history that purposefully attempts to collect information from the past, reconstruct and weave them into a meaningful set of explanations, has been used as an underlying methodology for this research. It is rooted in the perspicacity (Salkind, 1996) that advances made in knowledge, or technologies cannot be fully leveraged without understanding the conditions within which these developments have occurred. The renewed interest in this method can be ascribed to the move towards a broader perspective in research as against objective positivism (Sarnecky, 1990). Berg (2004) assimilated myriad objectives for deploying this method including answering questions, seeking implications or relationships of events from the past, so as to broaden our understanding of advances etc. Previous work (Fraunholz & Unnithan, 2007) had utilized this methodology studying Web 2.0 as an anti-apathy tool of e-governance in developed economies. The method, as we maintain, helped us in analyzing the impact of Web 2.0 on societies, based on the context of elections, in each respective nations. Primary sources of this method are documents, events experiences as depicted in the media, and original artefacts, while secondary sources are written testimonies of people. We find that Web 2.0 tools such as Blogs form secondary sources of data, while the experiences as depicted in the media, or “as it happened” via Internet sites become primary sources.

While the methodological approach provided the philosophical foundation, we deployed the _critical discourse analysis_ technique (Blommaert, 2005) to interpret the media discourses. Thompson (2004) had elicited meaning from a developmental discourse on ICTs and their power in emerging economies. We had also utilized this technique in our previous analysis on varied economies, to discover if e-governance facilitates citizen empowerment in democracies (Fraunholz & Unnithan, 2009).

**DECONSTRUCTING THE DISCOURSES**

India is a unique democracy where the power of media is significant in reaching out to the masses. The elections process usually involves targeted advertising by political institutions, exchange of information between citizens that is dominated by celebrities. In this section, we study two perspectives: (1) the efforts of political parties to engage citizens in the elections process and (2) the efforts of citizens to reach out and inform other citizens. From our previous preliminary research of the Indian scenario (Fraunholz & Unnithan, 2007), we had found that there was a literate to semi-literate spread of population, which covered the voter population, during 2004 elections. At that time, the use of Internet and Web 2.0 were progressing rapidly. Therefore, an updated appraisal of the Internet usage and mobile communications was relevant to set the milieu.

A survey conducted jointly by Indian Market Research Bureau and Internet and Mobile Association of India found that there were 45.3
million active Internet users and 62.5 million claimed Internet users as of September (I-Cube, 2008). Figure 1 depicts discouraging trend in the proportion of Internet users to the total literate population.

The survey suggested that more than 50% of the 17.9 million active Internet users in urban India were in the age group of 18-25 comprising of university students (27%) and young males (30%). The survey also found that the lack of awareness, particularly among the masses of rural poor, is the reason for discouraging trends. Thirty seven percent of all Internet access in urban areas with dense population was done via Cyber Cafes. The survey also indicated the five major barriers of Internet usage in urban areas, as depicted in Figure 2. Broadband subscribers reached the 5.05 million mark and overall tele-density reached 31.50%. In the metropolitan cities the mobile broadband (TRAI, 2008). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that to reach out to the large population base, Internet access has to reach out to the semi-literate population, situated in the rural areas.

A very small but significant role has been played by the mobile phones in enabling citizen participation. First, mobile phones had overtaken landlines in India at the beginning of this

Figure 1. Internet usage trends in 2008
decade. According to Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, the total wireless subscribers base stood at 325.73 million in October 2008 (TRAI, 2008).

Google pitched in to track the Indian elections and partner with a media giant such as Hindustan Times to bring up to date information about Indian elections with a Mashup Site to solve one very fundamental issue – information. It launched the India Elections Centre that enabled Indian voters to go online and confirm their registration status, locate their polling places and view their constituency on a map. Some of the things that were on the mashup site were latest election news, MP profiles, constituency statistics, candidate quotes, polling booth locations and more, personalised to your location. Specifying any city or town made the relevant election information available. One of the interesting statistics the site provided was the developmental work in each constituency from the 2004 elections. Google had partnered with many Non-Government Organisations NGOs for this purpose (Google, 2009).

**Political Shepherding via Web 2.0**

Major political parties were running Google Adwords campaigns which run via Adsense ads across millions of sites (ReaderZone, 2009). During the crucial months before elections, most of the site pages showed these ads only for Indian visitors, as they were targeting them with big budgets on broad key words. Google AdSense is an ad serving program run by Google where Website owners can enroll in this program, to enable text, image and, more recently, video advertisements on their sites. These ads are administered by Google and generate revenue on either a per-click or per-thousand-impressions basis.

Many SMS messages from politicians from each constituency were sent on to mobile phones. As bulk mobile number lists are easily available for sale at cheap rates in India and bulk SMS rates had become cheaper than the time of previous elections, most politicians aimed to reach targeted individual mobiles. The BJP had recruited companies to set up kiosks in malls and cinemas where messages were beamed wirelessly or via Bluetooth to people with mobile phones. The party has also worked on developing SMS-based contests and targeted ads on Indian social networking sites. Most of the political leaders developed a Facebook presence to get personal with the voters (for example, see the Congress India page). Twitter use of prolific as political parties twittered with their fans (Find @bjp_ on Twitter, @tartoor), though it was often difficult to establish if it was the official or personal Tweet. Local leaders were active on other social networking sites.
such as Orkut. Barack Obama’s Twitter usage had seemingly inspired major political figures such as LK Advani of BJP – a prime ministerial candidate. As broadband Internet has spread throughout India, online videos have become popular media and politicians used Youtube for maximum propaganda and voter reach. The BJP Channel on YouTube was seen as continuously uploading new insider videos.

A study of blogosphere brings out that all major political party candidates had made their own blogs through which they were communicating with the electorate. They allowed leaders to express views and communicate with voters on a personal basis bypassing the official party pages. By Indian standards, analysts estimated financial outlays of USD 12 – 14 million. As Indian political groups do not have to reveal either the sources of their fundraising or what they spend their cash on, it was really hard to segregate the amount spent on media campaigning via ICTs and Internet. The Business Week reported (Srivastava, 2009) on the way in which the fundamentalist parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had utilized the Internet, following the lead from Barack Obama and his elections. Any online newspaper article from a computer in India portrayed LK Advani with his slogan, “as strong leader, a decisive government.” The image of the leader in bright saffron and orange posters dominated YouTube. According to Historian and author, Ramachandra Guha, the BJP was inspired to take a page from Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign, to encapsulate the most elusive of Indian voters, namely urban elite. Targeting the highly literate, rather apathetic urban elite voters – the BJP felt it had an edge. Among the 712 million registered voters in India, the masses of rural poor perhaps had never used the Internet, however, in urban India the Web is ubiquitous in offices, homes and cell phones. It was apparent that the BJP was appealing to the 20 million middle class, cosmopolitan group. In addition to a blog and blogger outreach programs, which were one most aggressive online campaigns ever seen in India, an ambitious SMS campaign that was to reach 250 million of India’s 400 million mobile subscribers were launched (Jain, 2010). Rajesh Jain’s Netcore Solutions which ran the SMS campaign for BJP, has bought an inventory of 1 billion SMSes. Rajesh Jain is also a part of the Friends of BJP group, which is running a social network and an opt-in MyToday based SMS channel to support BJP’s campaign (Financial Express, 2009).

Other parties are running similar mobile campaigns and, overall, telecom operators expect to make an additional revenue of USD10 million from the extra traffic of 3-4 billion SMSes sent by all the political parties, in addition to revenue generated from multimedia messages, songs and wallpapers (Philip & Singh, 2009). Despite these efforts, there was scepticism raised even before the elections that the Internet push may not be worthwhile. In the words of Dipanka Gupta, a professor of sociology at the Center for the Study of Social Systems at New Delhi’s JNU University, “...if they think that it will change how people will vote, they are going to be very mistaken.” It is to be noted that Indian voters population is more swayed by local issues than national themes. However, seemingly the target for the ICT based campaigning was mostly the 25 million non-resident Indians. While the voting process itself was complicated, embassies had to process absentee ballots; it has to be noted that these non-resident Indians actually finance the ICT based campaigning of political parties. The BJP for example, had targeted a large percent of Indians who lived and worked in USA, ethnically originating from Gujarat, a State that was a stronghold for BJP since a decade (Srivastava, 2009). And volunteers and friends of the political parties across the country blogged constantly, tracking news reports and updating sites of political leaders.

Civic Assignment Web 2.0

In this section, we take a closer look at efforts to engage citizens via Web 2.0 tools such as blogs, Twitter, social networking tools etc, by other citizens, civil society organizations and corporates. There was an apparent flurry of
activity using the Web, may it be for awakening social consciousness or calling out to common citizenry.

In 2009, over 714 million voters will elect 543 representatives and around 1,368,430 electronic voting machines have been deployed across the country. According to the Election Commission of India’s (EC) statistical report, over the last decade, the polling percentage had decreased from 61.97% (1998 General Elections) to 57.82% (2004 General Elections). Realising this fact in the 15th General Elections, civil society groups, non-government organisations, media agencies, and even corporates have come together to campaign and raise awareness among voters using these digital tools to increase voter registration and run campaigns to promote transparency and accountability. As Mishra (2009) reported, celebrities in India, particularly cine starts were seen as most active to encourage voters to vote and select the right people through their blogs, television channels and linked Mobile SMS campaigns. Some observers were calling the election, India’s first digital election as the range of activities encompassed civil society organizations, media houses and corporations.

One of the most effective and important campaign was the National Election Watch (NEW), a collaboration between 1200 NGOs led by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) (http://www.adrindia.org). NEW is a nationwide campaign that sought to increase transparency in Indian elections by combining information about constituencies and candidates with user comments and ratings on candidates. The purpose of the site was to provide information on representatives and constituencies, give a chance to general public to comment on the work done by elected representatives, rate people comments and improvement shown in their constituency during the tenure, provide feedback to the representatives so that they have a chance to work on the feedback. The NEW was founded by Professors of IIM and NID and they continue to work on electoral and political process reforms. Apart from NEW, ADR had also launched www.myneta.info that allowed citizens to view the candidate profile of their constituency. The candidate profile included the party’s name, educational qualifications, criminal record, their total assets and liabilities.

Vote Report India a collaborative citizen-powered election monitoring platform for the 2009 elections began where users contribute direct SMS, email, Twitter and web reports on violations of the Election Commission’s Code of Conduct. The platform aggregated these direct reports with news reports, blog posts, photos, videos and posts on Twitter related to the elections from relevant sources on an interactive map. Vote Report India managed by eMoksha, a non-profit organization that aims to enable stronger democracies through increased citizen awareness and engagement. The ‘Jaago Re! One Billion Votes’ (http://www.myobv.org) is a major initiative taken by Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy-- a Bangalore City based NGO that has been doing pioneering work in the areas of urban advocacy and governance along with Tata Tea in September 2008 to start a voter registration drive in colleges and corporates in 35 cities across the country and register four million voters. It was driven through an interactive application on their website and kiosks that helps people identify their constituency and guides them to the nearest voter registration centre and sends updates to them via SMS when their names are added to the voting list.

Voters also get updated via SMS when their names are added to the voting list. The campaign was successful with a huge number of stories and blog posts, resulting in much goodwill as well as managing to register 584,000 voters (Mishra, 2009). The election also witnessed two more citizen mobilisation campaigns, which are backed by corporate houses: My Idea (http://myidea.co.in) sponsored by Idea Cellular, and Lead India, backed by The Times of India. My Idea is an online space where citizens can submit and discuss their ideas related to issues in their cities, politics, society, economy, etc., in 150 words and get other users to vote on those questions. The campaign was a continuation of its participatory democracy ad campaign
where a politician, aided by her tech-savvy assistant Abhishek Bachchan – a popular film star, gathered the views of the citizens in her constituency using mobile phones. The campaign asks people to submit an idea that can change India and vote on the ideas submitted by others (Idea, 2009).

Lead India (was launched by the Times of India in 2007 to identify emerging leaders for the next generation of India. In 2009, Lead India enabled the Indian electorate to make the right voting decision by providing a platform for meaningful political debate and supporting the No Criminals in Politics campaign (Figure 3).

Basu and Madhukar (2009) reports on the engagement of citizens with political class. They suggest that there has been a distrust ingrained in the average citizen of India regarding politicians. As this distrust persists, they assert, that few groups have mobilized efforts for positive change in the democratic process. For some Indians the discourse on strengthening democracy has converged around ideas of encouraging greater participation in electoral process. For many apathetic citizens, the Mumbai terror attacks were the wake up call. It seems that the average citizens who were indifferent to voting realized that their own safety is integrally linked to politics and governance. In the elections, the civic society organizations mobilized citizens to vote. The campaigns came alive with interactive web presence and cell phone messages.

Using Internet as one of their strategic tools to create awareness about elections, the Public Interest Foundation launched the ‘No Criminals’ Campaign Idea (http://www.nocriminals.org). The nationwide campaign appeals political parties not to give ticket to persons with criminal antecedents. The data of this website is based on the affidavits submitted by the 2004 contestants. The campaign also has an active group on a social networking website, Facebook with almost 5000 members. Members of the campaign have also launched two videos to promote this campaign.

Aiming to counter voter apathy, an endevour known as Friendsofbjp.org (2009) was floated by youth, professionals, entrepreneurs as a subset of the educated civil society, leaning towards the party. This group believed that India required an alternative governance and this political party could provide the same. The wadanatodo.net (2009) was a national campaign to hold government accountable to its promises to end poverty, social exclusion and discrimination. It emerged from the consensus of human rights activists and social action groups, This

Figure 3. LEAD INDIA ‘09

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initiative aimed at the aspirations of the semi-literate and illiterate masses, by monitoring the activities during the elections and after. It was seemingly leaning towards the Congress party and its promises (Merinews, 2009). People across 400 parliamentary constituencies spanning 29 States and United Territories have come together to develop the All India People’s Manifesto making it the most extensive pre-election campaign organised by civil society in recent times, branching out from the Wadanatodo or “don’t break promises” campaign.

VOTEINDIA (http://www.voteindia.org) is a non-partisan people’s movement launched under the aegis of Lok Satta Convenor Jayaprakash Narayan. The movement that comprises civil society organisations and individuals, aims to make citizens realise the need for systematic reforms and bring about a significant improvement in the existing political system by overcoming the crisis in governance. Another initiative, Vote India (http://www.voteindia.in), was launched by some engineering students and professionals in May 2006, intended at raising awareness as it believed that “the country will change only if the educated exercise the power of the ballot.” VoteIndia.in offers downloadable copies of the forms required to register as a voter or to modify name/address in the voters’ list etc. The website has an active presence in the social networking website, orkut and on twitter. The iVote (http://wearthemark.org), is a project run by students with an aim to create politically active youth, by registering themselves as voters and practice their Right to Vote. The centre also has active presence in Facebook, Orkut, and Youtube. Along with creating this awareness, iVote also works on reforming the electoral system in partnership with the Mumbai based NGO, Agni, to make it more convenient for first-time voters to register themselves.

A group of technocrats and scientists in the United States launched a website called Bharat Votes (http://www.bharatvotes.org) that aims to create voting awareness among the educated middle-class citizens of India and engaging them in mainstream democracy. With a tagline, ‘Voting is not your Right, it’s your Duty!’, Bharat Votes is attempting to reach out to the global Indian audience. The website is on Twitter, Facebook and Orkut. State and city based organisations and websites like Macro Infotech (http://www.macroinfotech.com) and Smart Vote in Bangalore have also evolved themselves in creating awareness about elections across the region.

Smartvote (http://smartvote.in) is a campaign supported by different voluntary organisations and citizens, to provide information regarding candidates contesting elections at various levels, enabling the public to make an informed choice.

Even more transformative than the society-wide shift in civic consciousness is the work of some citizen groups to simplify this daunting voter registration process. MumbaiVotes. com (http://mumbaivotes.com), the website launched by citizens of Mumbai, informed citizens about the contestants across the city. Another category of websites aimed to encourage citizens into discussion and ideation on the civic issues and the use of online community to initiate offline collective action at a larger stage. Praja (http://praja.in), an Internet driven community, aims to build a community of engaged citizens who can be mobilised to participate in offline collective action. As a start, Praja.in aims to capture voices and opinions from the ground via web based tools of blogs and discussion forums. Conversely, some websites like IndiPepal (http://indipepal.com), India Voting (http://indiavoting.com), Engage Voter (http://www.engagevoter.com), India Numbers (http://www.indianumbers.com) and India Votes 2009 (http://www.indiavotes2009.com/iv09) were bringing election updates, predictions and analysis of election results. The media activity on Web 2.0 was polarized between urban middle class who believed in making radical changes, and civic organizations which have come forward to raise awareness, transparency and accountability.

Bubber (2009) reports on the birth of a new political activist, the web warrior. The “Youth for Milind Deora” Facebook group, which promoted the congress MP drew over
2000 members. A Campaign for Sashi Tharoor, who won from the Thiruvananthapuram Constituency, as a congress MP, focused on the politically neutral citizens. The “Bloggers for Shashi Tharoor,” recruited 60 other bloggers to write about him, and began to aggregate content related to their candidate from around the web. The managers used Twitter and social media to spread the word about Tharoor, as they retweeted all the articles and blog posts about Tharoor that could be found and posted them on the India section of Reddit, a popular aggregation website. The technical skills of the moderators were leveraged via creating “Vote for Shashi Tharoor” badges that bloggers could use to indicate their support and also sending out viral SMS’s and emails to reach those among the electorate that don’t read blogs or use social media (Bubber, 2009).

The blogosphere was a spell of activity. Praja used online tools to build a community of engaged citizens who can be mobilized to participate in offline collective action. Youth for Equality built a political movement to end caste-based reservations in India. Change India, channelised the energies of citizens, by building online and offline participatory platforms, to solve India’s many problems. India Banao aimed to provide a platform for young people to participate in public affairs. For many of these websites, online participation is limited, and their effectiveness in organizing offline action is not yet known. Yet another category of websites aim to become the default source of news and analysis related to the 2009 general elections. Indipepal.com - IndiPepal is perhaps the most ambitious of these with blogs from several well-known analysts, but India Voting (Indian Express/ IBN Live), Engage Voter, India Numbers and India Votes 2009 also have content rich websites. These websites, however, are directly competing with election microsites from mainstream media — TOI, TOI Your Voice, DNA, The Hindu, Yahoo!, Yahoo! Your Manifesto, MSN, Rediff, NDTV and IBN Live (via Sidin Vadukut at Live Mint). The Indian blogosphere has reacted positively to these grassroots initiatives, even though they have got limited traction. For instance, the

‘Indian Homemaker’ believes that campaigns like ‘No Criminals’ are a sign that we can still make a difference. Rajiv Dingra at WATBlog and Preethi J at Medianama have done good roundups of these initiatives. Gaurav Mishra (2009), a social media enthusiast created a database, a comprehensive wiki-based listing of digital initiatives, media coverage, and blog coverage related to the 2009 Indian elections.

**Analytical Discussion: The Upshots**

The analysis brought us to the question, did Web 2.0 tools work in creating informed citizens and the desired outcome for the e-democracy? Or did it manage to influence and manipulate the civic participation? To understand this further, we re-construct the post election sentiment through a discourse analysis.

**Web 2.0 – A Catalyst in Citizen Engagement?**

A study conducted by IMRB International reveals that online campaigning of political parties did not have the reach nor resonate with voters. Among the urban youth, where the Internet is expected to reach the fastest, the Jaago Re Campaign had low recall. Conversely, campaigns by celebrities among urban citizens had almost two percent recall. While 4% recalled visiting the websites of parties, only one percent visited websites dedicated to political leaders. The inspired campaign of BJP, to appeal to youth and urbane did not come through as results indicated. Figure 4 is an account of voter sentiments.

According to Mehta (2009) the medium was perhaps correct, but the strategy was wrong. While advertising online is merely translating from paper to online, the messages to be read have to be conveyed and sustained over a period. Interaction of political leaders through online medium, informing citizens about issues such as black money, reservations, government projects & policies, getting citizens’ feedback through online polls and comments, forming an active online support group, and many more activities are possible, via Web 2.0.
The election verdict of citizens (Figure 5) is seen as the aftermath of a literate/semiliterate population seeking new faces in politics, while the stable government provides a base platform for this transition (Mishra, 2009). It also depicts the voice of urbane professional, the youth as well as the rural masses to a significant degree. While the urbane professionals and youth opted for real changes and new faces, the masses voted for stability. It seems that the national vote had even appealed to the urban elite, who were concerned more about increasing fragmentation in politics. From the Indian blogosphere, the reactions are in alignment with the verdict (Global Voices, 2009). A summary of these responses as posted on Global Voices is depicted in Figure 6.

Twitter is perhaps one of the winners in this context. The Economic times ("Indian election results top," 2009) reported on May 16th that Indian elections emerged the top topic posted on the day, with the tag "#india-votes09" demonstrating the strength of Indians using new technology tools. A summary of tweets that were relevant is depicted in Figure 7. According to ViziSense, which analyses web visitor statistics, there are about 533,000 India-based users of Twitter. In fact, according to Alexa, India ranks third after United States and Germany in the number of twitterers ("Indian election results top," 2009).

Twitter conversations related to the Indian elections fell into a few distinct categories, including retweets of news reports on the elections results, exuberance over the Congress
CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

In the post election analysis of the Web 2.0 tools and reflecting on civic sentiment, we find that ICTs and Web 2.0 tools have been utilised to a significant extent by all political parties and leaders as well as the civic society organisations. ICTs and awareness campaigns by civic society groups have managed to awaken the apathetic and indifferent citizens. The rural masses have been connected in via these civic groups, may it be mobile SMSs or through blogs/twitters. While the Internet savvy generation today are poised to change the face of Indian politics, the effort meted out by civic societies has won over the rural masses. The campaigns, via Internet have been beamed in villages through cable and Internet TV— which has then visualised the experiences for the average semi-literate citizen.

Web 2.0 seem to be a winner in civic assignment, which has managed to ring in a new revolution in the country, that of stability and progress. India is positioned in a unique premise where the large population base is concerned with stability and security, and progressive change through its educated youth. The efforts of progressive governments to deploy e-governance measures to educate the average citizen, has proved fruitful in the long term, in reversing the defects of a rather cumbersome system and managed to empower its citizens, in a progressive sustainable democracy.

Further in-depth research and analysis is envisaged to understand the impact of Web 2.0 in e-governance, on the citizens, political processes and make informed predictions for future.
Figure 7. Twittering via "#indiavotes09"

Congress winner from Thrissurunanthaparam Shashi Tharoor was keeping track of the margin level of his victory through Twitter. "Looking good! My lead has crossed 30,000 with half the votes counted," he tweeted from his Blackberry. An hour later, he messaged: "A lead of over 59,000 now! It's almost a done deal." Finally, the triumphal message: "I have won with a majority greater than any Congress candidate in Tvn in 30 years... Truly humbling. Now the real work begins." At 2:35 p.m., he again tweeted: "Still sinking in - a majority of over 100,000 votes!"

India's election result becoming the top trend did solicit puzzled reactions from other Twitter users around the globe, but most of them were positive. "Bill H" from Indianapolis wrote: "I personally love seeing #indiavotes09 as the top trending topic as it shows how much we are a global community!!" A few minutes later, an Indian, 'abhijitkumar' wrote: "It also shows how Indians are taking to social media seriously! First time an Indian topic is trending!!" Another user, 'pranay01' wrote: "#indiavotes09... the power of India... when India tweets it tops the charts..."

Meanwhile, Twitter was not just used to broadcast news from television and other media sources, there was also instant analyses and opinion in 140 words.

"No surprise in loss of BJP, they had no leader, agenda, aim, nothing. they looked lost. BJP says they are shocked. im not," said 'amit3d'.

According to ‘gauravkanooong’; "BJP is not losing as much seats as Third front n others are losing, Congress's gain is due to loss of others but not of BJP."

Seeing the interest online, 'indreshwit' wrote: "Just how many of you twitter birds voted anyway? Just curious."

("Indian election results top," 2009)

Figure 8. Twitter post elections

@MaheshMurtby: #indiavotes09 BJP would have had a better chance if it focused on the difference they would make that was relevant to us.

@MaheshMurtby: #indiavotes09 BJP campaign used the right medium: social/digital - but offered no relevant message. They were tuned out.

@MaheshMurtby: #indiavotes09 Googleer to me: Advani using them as he wants to connect with young. For that you need medium AND message.

@Dinoj: I don't buy that BJP tactics were brilliant. To add to @maheshmurthy 's response, there were no conversations. It was classic push advertising.

@NidhiNarayanan: The Bloggers for BJP has just 120 bloggers as per @advanin.in (count taken 2 days back). 120 is a very small number.

@AnilK: The issue with BJP campaign as I see it was they forget that most people looking at those ads are learned people unlike masses.

@Amit3D: 30 million people access internet daily in India. Approx 10 mil voted and saw BJP's digimedia campaign. Don't think that was enough.

@Amit3D: I guess JPPS digimedia campaign was big #FAIL. india is not US in numbers when it comes to internet.

@Sanidhi: Exactly what I just said. No body likes spamming. All those over the top in your face campaign backfired.

@amols: BJP poll results make me wonder if they'd lost by bigger margin had they not done their huge Social Media Marketing campaign #indiavotes09

@GasperDesouza: Advani tried an 'Obama' in India, online campaign, et al. Now his head is on the BJP chopping block #indiavotes09

@multid: BJP campaign managers are always disconnected with reality, they tried to do a Obama but got slapped in the face #indiavotes09

@NairAnu: BJP's online campaign was desperate and tacky. The intent was to replicate Obama's success, but the execution was poor. #indiavotes09

@AnnirRani: @ShashiTharoor Congrats! Hope the Congress party gives you a key cabinet post. India needs more professionals like you in politics.

@shashitv: I am wondering if the Indian cabinet might witness the highest % increase in literacy level with the inclusion of @shashiTharoor.

@manishk: @shashiTharoor, in all honesty, I didn't think you would win but congratulations. No the real test begins.

("Indian election results top," 2009)
REFERENCES


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