



Entrepreneurial Marketing and Digital Political communication – a citizen-led perspective on the role of Social Media in Political discourse.

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Title – Entrepreneurial Marketing and Digital Political communication – a citizen-led perspective on the role of Social Media in Political discourse.

Purpose of this paper: The paper intends to explore the role and function of citizen-led social media forums in the marketing of political discourse. Using the Entrepreneurial marketing perspective of ‘co-creation of value’, this paper explores the manner in which consumers of political communications have created user generated value by setting up Facebook forums to manage the risk created by fake news and to address the trust deficit between citizens and mainstream media.

Methodology: The paper adopts a ‘netnographic’ approach to investigation and the data is analysed manual coding (Kozinets, 2015). Facebook groups form the virtual research field in the context of this study. This approach is adopted because in a social media environment, netnography capitalizes over a growing virtual and online communities and allows researchers to study the richness of these online communities (Mkono and Markwell, 2014).

Findings: The study provides insights on how administrators and moderators of Facebook groups create value for other users by identifying and communicating the risks emerging from Social media based political communication. The study finds that such citizen-led initiatives act as online social aggregators. The value that such groups offer its users/members resides within a well-bound, controlled and moderated online medium that encourages users to counter fake news and misinformation - thereby solving a key problem within the user market i.e. citizen-media trust deficit.

Research limitations: The emergent findings of this study are specific to the context of this study and researchers are encouraged to further test the propositions emerging from this research in varied contexts.

Social implications: The study helps highlight the role citizen-led Facebook forums can play in informing the political discourse within a region. The general distrust among the citizens over information produced by mainstream media has meant vocal critics have taken to Social media to provide their subjective opinions. Although the findings of this study show that such forums can help identify ‘fake news’ and help citizens discuss and debate the truth, it can also become an avenue to manage propaganda among the ‘unaware’ citizens. This paper flags up the issues and benefits of using Facebook forums and in conclusion relates them to similar occurrences of the past to make society aware of the pitfalls of managed propaganda.

Originality/value: The paper takes initiative in investigating the use of Social media in Politics from the citizens perspective, which is comparatively marginalised against the number of studies taking place which investigate the Political party end use of Social media for Political marketing.

Keywords - Social media, Hybridised New media, Political Marketing, Citizen initiated forum, Entrepreneurial Marketing.

Article type - Research paper.

Introduction

The paper begins by exploring the entrepreneurial communication strategy employed by the victorious Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leading up to the 2014 Indian General Elections and recognises that most research within this area has been centred towards the communication led by the political organization. The exploration of the entrepreneurial role of citizen-led forums on Social media however remains comparatively un-explored. This paper addresses this gap and attempts to understand the role of Facebook based, citizen-led discussion forums in the national political discourse. With Social media playing an increasingly active role in shaping the political discourse within various countries, it is becoming important to explore issues pertaining citizen and media relationship such as the citizen-media trust deficit (Whiteley et al., 2016) and fake news. The study allows the authors to identify the purpose and antecedents that drive creation and use of citizen-led social media forums and their impact on political discourse. The interesting aspect of this study is the parallels it draws to Herman and Chomsky – especially the Manufacture of Consent (1988) and how Fromm’s work on freedom (1941). As the society expects digital communications to lead the world towards a digital utopia, the study finds that social media led political discourse is heading towards a dystopian future world (Orwell, 1949).

The significance of this study is highlighted by the active and prominent role Social media has been playing in social and political discourse such as the Coronavirus pandemic (De La Garza, 2020), George Floyd Protests (Emont and Wen, 2020) Black Lives Matter (Mundt et al., 2018), Snowden-NSA story (Anderson and Caumont, 2014). It hence becomes crucial to understand the motives of the citizen-led social media forums in their active contribution to social causes and more importantly in the context of this study – political causes.

Literature review

Ravi and Vasundara (2015) posit that Social Networking Sites (SNS) like Twitter and Facebook have become ideal tools for the reluctant young Indians to actively engage in discussions concerning Political, Economic and Social issues. The authors use the word ‘reluctant’ because although the Indian youth are voracious users of Social media from a ‘material’ consumption perspective (Sharma et al., 2019), they do not reserve a similar appetite for politics (Pande, 2014). Within the last decade, studies have identified the competitive advantage SNS can offer in shaping Political discourse in a country. For example, Simba (2009) highlights that besides Obama’s ability of public speaking and inspiring people, his use of Social media and Internet to engage voters provided him with the support that most of the other candidates never saw.

On the other hand, confronted by an increasingly cynical and distrustful electorate (Whiteley et al., 2016), political parties and candidates have now started to adopt digital communication tools as a mean to engage with the public. Consistent with Whiteley’s observation, several international publications earmarked the 2014 Indian general elections as ‘India’s first social media elections’ (Pandey, 2015). Over 500 million voters turned up to exercise their right in the world’s largest democracy which also recorded a record voter turnout of 66.38% beating the previous record on 1984 polls. Results showed that the BJP won the biggest victory by any party for 30 years (BBCnews.com, 2014). Finnigan (2019) highlighted the role SNS played in the Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro’s campaign to influence voters as well as the Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte’s campaign to amplify his support. The Indian context becomes important mainly due to the country’s 340 million plus Facebook users (Goel and Frenkel, 2019) who remain an ideal digital segment for political parties to target with their ideology and

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3 policy intentions. Facebook's Head of public policy Katie Habarth has acknowledged that the
4 sheer variety of languages and extended period of voting time as "unique set of issues" facing
5 their India operations. Goel and Frenkel (2019) report all the major Indian political parties have
6 sophisticated disinformation strategies which has put Facebook in an awkward position.
7

8
9 Authors such as Sambandan (2014) and Ravi and Vasundara (2015) have explored and
10 discussed the approach of Indian Prime Minister Modi and his party i.e. Bharatiya Janata Party
11 (BJP) in their use of social media for communication. These studies focus on the
12 communication initiated from the political party end. Despite the significant appetite
13 demonstrated by Indian citizens to engage in the electoral process, very limited mainstream
14 literature discusses the citizens' role which limits the scope of the literature reviewed in this
15 paper. This paper hence begins by discussing literature that highlights the factors that have
16 caused social media to emerge as a tool of choice in political dialogue between BJP and the
17 citizens in India. But more importantly, the purpose of this paper is to explore the role of rapidly
18 emerging region-centric Facebook based discussion forums in the political discourse as the role
19 of SNS and its users grows in prominence. The intention of the authors is to gain clarity over
20 'why' social media is emerging as an alternate medium of political dialogue to Mainstream
21 Media (MSM), what is the rationale behind social media forums like Goa+ (which is leveraged
22 as a dataset in this study) emerging? The paper conducts a netnographic study using
23 Administrators and Moderators of Goa+, a Facebook based Political discussion forum
24 originating in Goa, India and consisting of over 80,000 members. However, in order to limit
25 the scope of this study and ensure data remains manageable in terms of analysis.
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27

28 *Entrepreneurial marketing and Innovation*

29
30 Entrepreneurial marketing has been defined as "*the pro-active identification and exploitation*
31 *of opportunities for acquiring and retaining profitable customers through innovative*
32 *approaches to risk management, resource leveraging and value creation*" (Morris et al., 2002,
33 p. 5). Innovation is considered a key aspect of Entrepreneurial marketing (EM) wherein Hills
34 and Hultman (2006, p. 227) argue that "*provided that an innovation supplies potential buyers*
35 *with better value than existing solutions, it can be used to provoke change*". The trust deficit
36 between citizens and mainstream media in the political media communications domain has
37 meant citizens have innovatively leveraged the symmetrical communication option offered by
38 social media to create an alternative to mainstream media. From an EM perspective, this study
39 explores the innovative role citizen led social media forums can play in the context of
40 marketing of political thought. This approach helps the authors identify the 'value' created by
41 citizen-led Facebook forums for the consumer of political thought.
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45 Gardner (1994) posits that the role of marketing within innovation is to proffer concepts, tools
46 and infrastructure to create a competitive advantage by bridging the gap between innovation
47 and market positioning. The ability to deal with change and to wield change as a medium of
48 securing competitive advantage is argued to be the central aspect of EM. EM is expected to
49 'lead the customer' wherein the marketers' role is that of a 'change agent' or the creator of a
50 new category through the identification of unarticulated and undiscovered customer needs
51 (Morris et al., 2002). The following section illustrates how the BJP's social media
52 communication strategy entrepreneurially 'leads the customer' by effective presentation of
53 arguments against the performance of the incumbent Government. Thereby, BJP facilitated
54 engagement of the local electorate with key social and economic issues, moving critical
55 discussion on politics from the newsroom to online.
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57

58
59 The customer is known to play an active role as a 'co-creator' in the EM approach as new
60 'products' are developed. Whereas the role of marketer is to discover untapped sources of

customer value and to create new unique combinations of resources to produce value. The following section also provides examples of how the BJP's use of two-way communication platform of social media in the 2014 elections triggered and encouraged formation of 'citizen-initiated forums' on Facebook. The purpose was to co-create 'value' for the party by integrating the 'customer' (in this case the public on social media), into its communication strategy. Such a move presented an opportunity to develop an alternate medium of communication during the elections, which placed control of discourse in hands of the BJP rather than third parties like the independent mainstream media outlets. Risk management is another key dimension of EM framework, wherein it is argued that marketing needs to lessen uncertainty by finding ways to mitigate and share risks (Morris et al., 2002). The BJP's move to adopt SNS was intended to lower the risk of the party communication being interpreted by independent media during the election, this paper will explore whether creation of such alternative mediums of communication has instead created risks for the ordinary consumer of online political communication as they are exposed to party driven content. The following section reviews the limited existing literature on the role of social media in politics with a focus on the use of social media by the BJP in the 2014 Indian general elections.

Social media in Political Communications

The use of social media in Indian digital democracy has been explored by several authors (Ravi and Vasundara, 2015; Simba, 2009) who argue that the use of social media in political campaigns gained momentum in the last decade with a) Obama's use of Internet to engage with voters and b) Howard Dean's use of social media in his Democratic campaign in 2004 (Murray, 2005). Parceiro (1999) argued that there is a need to create platforms for diverse mediums and credible voices for democracy to thrive. Parceiro's concerns mainly originated from the growing political power of press, and the attempts of politicians and pundits to influence and control media. Ravi and Vasundara (2015) and Mandhana (2015) similarly argue that the micro-management of political discourse in India by the Mainstream Media (MSM) led to emergence of diverse platforms of communication that would allow democracy to thrive. Chadwick (2013) however highlights that the arrival of new media does not render older media obsolete, but rather facilitates the emergence of a 'hybridised' media system. This in turn makes it difficult to identify the creators and sponsors of news or events (Neyazi et al., 2016) which in turn further cements distrust between media and citizens (Whiteley et al., 2016). A growing consensus was emerging that media campaigns can be 'stage managed' (Chakravartty and Roy, 2015).

Sambandan (2014) investigated the role of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) in the 2014 Indian General elections using Hellriegel and Slocum's (1981) model. They identified that the presence of Prime Minister (PM) Modi on Facebook and Twitter summarised the transformative ability of the internet during elections.) Chopra (2014) cited in (Sambandan, 2014) argues that the traditional political "high command control style" is not effective in social media as social media is guided by those who "use" social media. Chopra hence asserts the importance of establishing a two-way communication model. However, political discourses are often sensitive in nature and the authors of this study raise questions regarding the validity and reliability of the information shared by citizens on social media (fake news and fake social media accounts). This position further highlights the need to explore the dynamics of Facebook based citizen initiated political discussion forums considering that there exists a gap within this area with regards to the functioning and purpose of such social media-based forums.

The role of Social Networking sites (SNS) in the political scenario was initially explored by Boyd and Ellison (2008) who highlighted the ability of SNS by stating that SNS allows individuals to a) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, b) articulate

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3 a list of other users with whom they share a connection and c) view and transverse their list of
4 connections and those made by others within the system. Such virtual platforms are
5 increasingly becoming a new reality in 'democratic debate' and are emerging as alternatives to
6 mainstream media. Such forums allow netizens to initiate, participate in or observe discussions
7 concerning local Socio-economic and Political issues. The following section will provide
8 examples of the BJP's social media strategy leading up to 2014 Indian general elections that
9 encapsulate several aspects of the literature reviewed till this point.
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12 ***BJP – PM Modi and the use of SNS in 2014 Indian General elections***

13
14 The use of media and new social media by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and PM Modi in the
15 2014 Indian elections is documented by authors such as Neyazi et al., (2016), Mandhana
16 (2015); Pandey (2015); Pande (2014) – w.r.t. Social media and Ohm (2015) – w.r.t. Traditional
17 media. They argue that 2016 marked a new era in political communication practice within India
18 which demonstrated similarities with the democratic elections of the United States. These
19 authors have presented various arguments as listed below that highlight how the
20 'entrepreneurial' use of SNS by BJP and PM Modi in the 2014 elections resulted in the 2014
21 elections being marked as India's first social media elections (Pandey, 2015). The dimensions
22 of Entrepreneurial marketing such as proactiveness, value creation, risk management, resource
23 leveraging, innovativeness and customer centricity are demonstrated in the examples.
24
25

26 *The Youth Factor*

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28 The digital campaign gained importance wherein the young and digitally savvy first time voters
29 made up a large part of the Indian electorate and the traditional media in-turn began reporting
30 on the 'online debate'. In 2014, the median age of Indian population was 27 and over 60 per
31 cent of Indian citizens were under the age of 35 – which constituted the 150 million first time
32 voters (Pande, 2014). India in 2014 had more than 280 million Internet users – approximately
33 the same number as online users in the U.S in 2014 but it only accounted for a fourth of India's
34 population (Mandhana, 2015). Pande (2014) posits that leveraging the use of Social media to
35 engage youth within the political discourse of India proactively provided BJP the edge in the
36 2014 Indian General elections. Young, educated voters reluctant of the traditional mainstream
37 media based political debates were now refreshingly exposed to political discourse via a
38 medium of their choice which led to creation of previously untapped value for BJP.
39
40

41 *The Symmetrical Solution*

42
43 Martin Sorrell, the CEO of WPP group explains that using social and digital media to get a
44 strategy across is a modern and sophisticated way forward. He argues this approach is better
45 than presenting a muddled message which are otherwise characteristic of Indian election
46 campaigns (rediff.com, 2015). Sorrell claims that in India, political campaigns are often too
47 fragmented and social media offers a medium to develop an umbrella campaign (much like a
48 corporate brand under which sister brands operate). Willis (2014) echoes this sentiment by
49 explaining that it's not just the 1.2 billion people of India, but a deliberate strategy to use social
50 media platforms to bypass traditional media outlets and reach supporters directly that provides
51 the electoral backbone. Such a strategy helps manage the risk of a political thought being
52 hijacked by third party independent media outlets. This ensures greater control of
53 communication and its interpretation is retained by the party and the co-creating social media
54 user thereby ensuring 'customer centricity'.
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The Citizen – Media trust deficit

Proactive and extensive use of Social Media in communication and public relations is triggering a change in the traditional modus operandi of the Indian press which was used to cosy relations with previous leaders (Mandhana, 2015). According to Mandhana, with almost no press briefings and fewer interviews, reporters are now pouring over a stream of government press releases and tweets. Mandhana quotes one of the political editors of a major Indian news channel (who requested confidentiality) saying “*we don't really know or understand the Prime minister's thinking on this policy or that issue is, until he announces it himself*”. Mandhana argues that due to the existing mistrust between public and mainstream media, the direct communication offered by BJP and PM Modi was a welcome change. It convinced the public of the validity and reliability of emerging communication, minus the often accused ‘biased’ interpretation by MSM. This demonstrates the customer centricity in the Social media approach of the BJP. Facebook forums could point out any misinterpretation of emerging communication by MSM by simply referring to the original Facebook post or Tweet. This is further evident in the following sub-section.

The Online Army

According to Mandhana (2015), a couple senior members of the BJP Digital Operations team were reported saying they relied on a ‘massive database or army of online volunteers’ who re-tweet and comment to ensure Mr. Modi’s messages are ‘viral’. Dr. James Chiriyankandath of the Institute of Commonwealth studies – University of London notes the importance of the grassroots efforts of the 45,000 nationwide branches of RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh – the ideological parent of the BJP) and thousands of its members that help communicate the message to corners of the country (the guardian.com, 2014). This demonstrates the BJP’s strategy to leverage existing, trusted resources in their communication strategy.

The above examples illustrate the emerging significance of social media in Indian Political debate by identifying how BJP crafted and executed an Entrepreneurial social media communication strategy. However, research is yet to explore the mediums through which such extensive communication was possible and sustained. This brings attention to the functioning and purpose of citizen-initiated Facebook forums - are these groups independent or auxiliaries of the political parties strategically embedded on social media to facilitate their communication?

Methodology

The research adopts a netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2000) to study virtual, online based communities. Jones (1999) highlighted that the internet is creating new social constructs and communities. Rheingold (1993) defines virtual communities as social aggregations that emerge from the Internet when enough people carry on public discussions long enough with sufficient human feeling to form personal relationships in cyberspace. Kozinets (2000) further distinguished such communities into Boards, Rings, Lists, Dungeons and Chat rooms. Grossnickle and Raskin (2000) posit that online ethnography or netnography has emerged over the past decade as an important tool to add to the existing market research portfolio (Kozinets, 2000). Netnography capitalizes over a growing virtual and online communities and allows researchers to study the richness of these online communities (Mkono and Markwell, 2014).

The data collection process involves the researcher reviewing publicly shared posts within the selected online community (in this case - Goa+). Goa+ played and continues to play during and post 2014 Indian general elections. The Goa + Facebook forum consists of more than 84, 000 members until publication of this research. The protocol suggested by Kozinets (2015) in order to capture, collect and store data was followed and keyword searches were also adopted to scan archive and active posts. This consisted the stage 1 of netnography wherein general posts on the forum were explored, this introspection was necessary to decode and contextualize the 'language', practices and rituals of the selected online forum and is an essential part of data analysis (Kozinets, 2015). This also allowed the authors triangulate and validate the outcome of interactions within stage 2.

In stage 2, an online field (Facebook group) was set up by inviting the 'moderators and administrators' of the Facebook group Goa + - which allowed the researchers to interpret online communications (Maclaran and Catterall, 2002) and the intentions behind the purpose and functionality of Facebook forums such as Goa+. The research field gathered informed consent by firstly 'connecting' with the admins and moderators (A&M) via PM (private messaging) on Facebook to explain the nature of this research. The moderators and admins then provide their consent to participation by accepting the invite to the 'field' addressing the informed consent debate in private versus public online communications (Waskul and Douglas, 1996). All posts were transcribed into word processing output where they were thematically coded, reflections upon these were made in authors field notes throughout the research period (Canaven, 2018).

Use of admins and moderators of the group as participants instead of wider members was made to ensure that the scope of the study was limited for effective analysis. Also, the admins and moderators of the group hold the control over what is allowed to be published on the Goa + Facebook forum, and hence their participation as an active 'control panel' of Goa+ offered interesting insights. Research questions were then posed within the field in order to generate 'Archival data' (Kozinets, 2002). This data is collected from Facebook but is also archived on the internet providing evidence of data collection. The data was then analysed via manual coding (Kozinets, 2015; Kozinets, 2010). The names of the participants are kept confidential upon their request and only initials are used (RG, SV, VM etc).

Findings and discussions

The themes emerging from the literature have been compiled using the process discussed in the methodology section of this paper. The literature review focussed on party driven communication strategy. The emergent findings however focus on how and why the users relate to and interact with party-initiated communications. This helps identify how users create value from these communications. As a result, the findings focus on the role of region-centric citizen-initiated Facebook groups that continue and trigger debate on political discourse in India – while providing critical commentary on the political state of affairs within India. However, more importantly, there are concerns raised about the nature, quality, reliability, and validity of political posts shared on Facebook. The creators and interpreters of Facebook posts in Goa + often accuse each other as well as the party of spreading ‘Fake news’ or using fake social media accounts. Facebook groups such as Goa + are seen to function as an emerging ‘Ministry of truth’ that critique and extend the debate happening on MSM. The following themes emerge from a netnographic exploration into Goa+. The themes are purely emergent and contextually specific to this study, names of the respondents have been anonymised on their request. The verbatim extracts from data are not corrected grammatically for authenticity.

Mainstream media - ‘views’ over ‘news’

RG – *“Social media gives us the opportunity to discuss and expose mainstream media. The tool involved here is logic. I feel bad for the rural parts of the country who don't have Internet access and who accept whatever the mainstream media says as Gospel truth...”*

SV – *“Many people on my TL (Facebook timeline) tell me that they first take a look at my wall and then decide to consult MSM. The trust deficit between the common people and MSM is largely the MSM's own doing though. Nowadays, no MSM deals with news, even on the front page. All they have are views”*

Findings suggest that social media is providing the public with an opportunity to ‘expose’ mainstream media (MSM). This finding further asserts Ravi and Vasundara (2015) and Mandhana’s (2015) claim that the mainstream media is seen to be increasingly manipulating what is seen and heard by ordinary citizens. It is observed that MSM is predominantly viewed to be involved in filling their newspapers with their own ‘views’ rather than news – which is being viewed questionably by the public. The literature review identified that parties such as BJP leveraged SNS in order to counter their distrust of MSM. Whereas the study highlights the rising ‘trust deficit’ between the triad of media, party and the citizens thus creating a triad of distrust. Such distrust is further cementing the place of SNS as an alternate medium for people to hear their own voices and speak their own minds helping each person develop a unique opinion. However, internet connectivity (especially in rural India) is identified as a barrier to receive a wider participation into the debate.

Overcoming ‘bias’ and ‘misinformation’

Admins and Moderators (A&Ms) of Goa + argue that forums like theirs attempt to provide a ‘politically neutral’ and independent platform for netizens to initiate, participate and observe discussions concerning contemporary topics of Political, Social or Economic importance.

VM – *“Goa+ was created to provide an independent platform for different views, after it was observed in 2013 that most of the Facebook groups existing prior to that period were showing biased colors and used to abuse those who used to counter their views / lies. Some of us were admins of the earlier groups too! Goa+ would continue its role of providing an unbiased platform for its readers / members in future”.*

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3 RG - *“Goa+ is just a discussion forum where people debate on various issues. Many lies get*
4 *countered and many facts get placed too. It's just an extension of the conversations we have in*
5 *our day to day life”*

6
7 It is found that Facebook forums that extend the party driven political communication are often
8 ‘biased’ or ‘planted’, functioning as extensions of the party driven communication machine
9 during elections. This has been reported within the literature. There remains a prevalent belief
10 that there is a lack of ‘independent’ Facebook platforms that help in bringing together people
11 with differing views. Goa+ for example is argued to have been created to counter such biased
12 Facebook groups and help contribute a moderated debate which is devoid of any affiliation or
13 influence of Political organizations. This presents the group participants with an opportunity to
14 counter what they term are ‘lies’ without being attacked and abused (which they assert happens
15 in case of groups being politically motivated). Such platforms are observed to serve as ‘truth
16 seekers’ by extending everyday conversations on SNS and allowing everyday users to counter
17 ‘lies’ by presenting a counter fact. The focus seems to remain on presentation of the ‘truth’ or
18 most accurate information that can counter misinformation.
19

20 21 22 **Symmetrical solution**

23
24 PG – *“Mainstream media "houses" are no more depicting the public mood n voice...”*

25
26 RG – *“The mainstream media is like one-way traffic. Social media is like extending*
27 *conversations to a larger platform, getting various inputs and reading reactions from various*
28 *groups. See, social media can never replace mainstream media since the news coming from*
29 *mainstream media is the very fuel that social media functions on. The Base for any debate is*
30 *created from reports from mainstream media”*

31
32 CB – *“mainstream media and social media are both businesses driven directly or indirectly by*
33 *profit so to expect a completely unbiased factual report of anything of consequence is too much*
34 *to expect”*

35
36 The findings are consistent with the literature which argues that the electorate remains cynical
37 and distrustful (Whiteley et al., 2016) with respect to Politics and MSM. This distrust and
38 cynicism resulted in citizens using Facebook groups to represent their views among the wider
39 public. However, an almost ironic observation remains that Facebook posts are often reliant on
40 the news created by MSM. It is at this point it is evident that such Facebook groups are not to
41 render MSM obsolete (Chadwick, 2013) but rather present a counter and challenge the views
42 emerging from MSM. A&M’s of Goa+ argue that both MSM and SNS are profit driven
43 businesses and expecting 100 per cent factual information is a tall ask. However, it is the
44 symmetrical communication medium that SNS offers that makes it appealing to users. The lack
45 of symmetrical communication opportunity (to wider public) provided by MSM further
46 enhances the role of such ‘new-hybridised media’ based (Neyazi et al., 2016) Facebook groups.
47

48 49 **Social over political - awareness building over propaganda**

50
51 RG – *“Social media can never be used for political marketeering in the exact sense of blatant*
52 *advertising. It can create awareness and give rise to debate which help people (both active and*
53 *the Silent readers) build an opinion”*

54
55 CB – *“if it is used by any political party people tend to disregard it but same propaganda*
56 *repeatedly shared by friends and family slowly starts being treated as facts especially after all*
57 *it is repeated ad nauseam”*
58
59
60

MS – *“There are groups specifically created as the elections approach & post elections they become dormant. We at Goa+ want to make a difference by creating a long term impact on improving the quality of life of people here”*

The findings suggest that the social implications of such Facebook groups are of paramount importance. It is observed that the key function of this group is to present the ‘ayes’ and ‘nays’ an equal opportunity to represent their opinion. This opinion is argued to build a critical awareness of key topics under discussion. The participants in this study asserted that the general user of SNS can identify groups used for political propaganda as such groups often cause ‘repeated ad nauseam’ and its users or control panel are not flexible with their views. It is observed that such groups tend to provide intellectual fodder for both the active and silent participants on SNS and allow them to carve out/build their own unique opinion on the national political discourse. The A&Ms suggest that users of SNS show characteristics of ‘online maturity’ by clearly identifying those groups which emerge solely during (and for the purpose of) the election times as activities within such groups do not tend to tolerate dissent. Prevalence of healthy dissent and flexible views hence are observed to be an identifier of a genuine group over a propaganda platform.

Fake news

CB – *“I think social media is going to be more and more disruptive as it can be used to disseminate patently bogus information. I casually follow US elections and the amount of bizarre lies that are spread is alarming. Only saving grace is that gives everyone a fair chance”*

VM – *“I feel Facebook posts can be used to spread lies than the truth more effectively. It is a fact that lies spread faster than the truth. Currently FB is used to spread negativity more than the positive things. However FB can be used and is used as a tool to spread political agenda”*

It is found that the effectiveness of such groups in facilitating a two-way dialogue on political discourse depends on the ‘management’ of the group by its administrators and moderators. Although users of SNS use their own discretionary criteria to distinguish genuine groups from others (as highlighted in the earlier theme), the ‘control panel’ of the group also need to act responsibly to counter fake news. However, the A&Ms feel that their interference in judging their group posts as true and false only amplifies the mistrust of given information among the users. There seems to be a consensus among the A&Ms of the group that suggests the decision of whether to influence or to be influenced depends on the members and users of the group. The following final theme extends the current discussion to explain ‘how’ this process happens.

Truth seekers

CB – *“I think social media is powerful because it is free, no one sided version can survive on the internet. Over time two sides of the story emerge. Now for someone who is genuinely interested in going into the truth it could be a starting point and one can then do more research. But for vast majority they dont have the time nor the desire to do that”*.

RG – *“It's just the plain simple truth about Modi and the need to defend him selflessly especially when he was unfairly targeted for riots and things like that stirred up passion in a majority of people. When a lie is repeated once too often, it often turns into the truth. People nipped the growth of this lie by merely asking questions and discovering their answers”*.

SV – *“Social Media is an effective tool. But at the end of the day, it is only a tool, and its effectiveness depends upon the person using it”*

1
2
3 It is found that platforms like Goa+ can grow dysfunctional if they are the initial and the final
4 point of reference for the observer/reader of political discourse. There is a prevailing belief that
5 in terms of countering fake news, it is the 'effectiveness' of the user that determines the
6 effectiveness of a particular Facebook group. The nature of Facebook as an app is such that it
7 allows for a continuous and seamless flow of news and information, a substantial amount of
8 which is often 'digested' by the user in a short span of time before facts are checked. It is
9 observed that the A&Ms of Goa+ often (also recommend) treat controversial posts as a starting
10 point of research and encourages users to uncover facts. Provision of evidence is considered to
11 provide the rite of passage to posting messages within the group hence allowing the dormant
12 observer to ask questions to uncover answers. However, time constraints are often cited as the
13 reason behind which users do not engage in fact finding or questioning. The availability of such
14 a group is only one half of the equation, it is the extent as well as nature of participation and
15 depth of research by participating members that can help achieve the true purpose of such a
16 forum.
17
18
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20 RG – *“Social media will be actually considered mature if politicians start taking cognizance*
21 *of the citizens' woes and address the many specific issues which are pointed out. The only*
22 *hurdle is the constant whiners who will only criticise no matter what, and will do little*
23 *constructive to achieve results”.*
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25 As a way forward, the A&Ms of Goa+ suggest the legitimacy and effectiveness of such citizen-
26 initiated and managed Facebook groups will grow if political parties take cognizance of the
27 citizens' grievances and suggestions on politically neutral Facebook groups. They assert that
28 such groups are often 'hurdled' by the frequency of critiques and lack of constructive
29 discussions. They expect the political machinery to use SNS as a fodder source to get
30 qualitative and citizen driven data that can drive policies that may have a positive influence on
31 people's lives in the spirit of true democracy. To a certain extent, SNS applications are not
32 limiting themselves to the 2014 Indian general elections campaign. Their leverage continued
33 post elections with SNS being employed by the Indian BJP Government as a public
34 accountability tool (Union Power ministry), governance tool (Union Railway ministry) and
35 even a soft diplomatic tool (Prime Minister's office and External Affairs ministry). However,
36 further research is required to explore if these tools generate and incorporate citizen views or
37 like MSM are one-way presentation of 'views'.
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Conclusion

This paper has attempted to seek new and unique insight into the ways in which SNS have played a role in shaping and driving national political debate. It is evident that SNS hosts politically manipulated as well as politically neutral groups, both driven by their own agenda which is determined by the A&Ms of the group. The exploratory study identifies that Goa+ resonates the position of 'online social-aggregators' similar to the Rheingold's (1993) conceptualization of social-aggregators, who pull news reports from MSM, posts it on the online forum and then pulls diverse perspectives on the same from the group members. Besides addressing the citizen-media trust deficit by provision of a symmetrical communication platform to counter lack of peoples' voice, Goa+ has allowed users to detect and counter fake news and generate mass awareness/participation of public in political discourse and deal with MSM bias.

From an Entrepreneurial marketing perspective, BJP has demonstrated several characteristics of EM within their party end digital communication strategy as discussed in the literature review which explores examples of BJP's communication strategy against elements of EM. However, the Facebook based citizen-initiated groups also have been entrepreneurial. The Facebook groups have created a new 'market space' using the increasing number of party-driven digital political communications as their platform to trigger discussions on key issues within the national political discourse. The value that such groups offer its users/members resides within a well-bound, controlled and moderated online medium that encourages users to counter fake news and misinformation - thereby solving a key problem within the user market i.e. citizen-media trust deficit.

The citizens in this case can be categorised as (a) those who administer the forum and (b) those who actively participate in the group discussions and c) are inactive observers of the forum. The value is created by combining unique resources which are (i) taking control and making available a platform for consumers of political media to share their interpretation or version of the political discourse which happens in mainstream media and (ii) creating a platform that can help identify misinformation which is spread during political campaigns and replace it with the truth. The Facebook forum (which is the co-created product) acts as an aggregator of information thereby allowing the participants to manage or mitigate risk or being exposed to biased information, and reduce uncertainty created by the lack of understanding of what news is fake and what is true.

Implications for further research

The paper contributes to knowledge by exploring a previously unexplored aspect of the role citizen-initiated Facebook forums play within Indian political debate. The findings remain emergent and specific to the context of this study and the authors do not claim generalisation of results. The operational purpose of groups such as Goa+ tends to lean away from citizen-initiated campaign (CIC) criteria as posited by (Gibson, 2015). This is because the Goa+ activities are based on evidence do not include for example income generation or membership drives on party behalf. Instead, the group characteristics demonstrate more similarities with Rheingold's (1993) conceptualization of social aggregators. Although, the use of new social media and internet to generate citizen-self driven political dialogue also has commonalities with similar frameworks recently proposed by several authors (Chadwick and Stromer-Galley, 2016; Lilleker et al., 2015; Lee, 2015 and Copeland and Rommele, 2014). It is however important to note that these studies were contextually specific to Hong Kong and Germany. However, following the analysis of the generated data and placing this into context, we as authors are left with some nagging doubts. Doubts regarding how social media has been used,

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3 is being used and whether the goal of democratising democracy through social media has
4 become purposefully or inadvertently manipulated. Hence a broader study is hence proposed
5 in future. If the events post the 2014 elections in India are followed, Social media played a role
6 in aggravating extensively the rumours and fake news concerning sensitive social problems
7 such as lynching and cow killing. Such Facebook forums on Social media are also often
8 observed to create tensions among publics, even highlighting and magnifying isolated incidents
9 as a 'national problem'.

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12 The research into the BJP's use of SNS during elections also carries practical implications for
13 Entrepreneurial marketing by bringing insights of a digital political campaign under the
14 dimensions of an Entrepreneurial marketing framework (highlighted in literature review). The
15 case of BJP presented in the paper illustrates the emerging significance of social media in
16 Indian Political debate by identifying how BJP crafted and executed an Entrepreneurial social
17 media-based communication strategy. The study extends the application of Entrepreneurial
18 marketing in political contexts using the seven dimensions of Entrepreneurial marketing which
19 will provide impetus for future political campaigns in terms of unique value creation for
20 consumers of political communication. The paper also emerges with the role citizen-initiated
21 forums can play in the effective dissemination of digital political communication as user
22 generated content is aiding political debate. Political communication strategies can leverage
23 such forums for further penetration and diffusion of their communication within set geographic
24 regions.

25 26 27 **Implications for society**

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29 The findings from this study highlight the positive contributions user-initiated Facebook
30 groups can potentially make within a society if they are managed well. However, social media
31 being viewed as a source to formulate public opinion remains concerning. Much has been
32 written of and about 'fake news' (BBC News, 2016) and 'PostTruth'. However, it is social
33 media that has enabled the spread of such concepts through the further development of what
34 media commentators have coined as 'hyperpartizan Facebook posts'. Whilst political History
35 tells us that personalised influence in electioneering is not new (for example see: Deacon 2013),
36 it is the speed and reach of digital social media that is potentially destabilising to the democratic
37 process. Especially when it is combined with a 24/7 news media, which has also become
38 partisan and in some cases has placed greater emphasis on partisan support rather than
39 journalistic accuracy. A combination of these can often trigger a sense of paranoia among the
40 public as there is no way to control the spread of misinformation without direct interference of
41 either Facebook or the Government (as recently seen in the questioning of Mark Zuckerberg in
42 the United States).

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46 The obvious danger hence is that the electorate will be more predisposed to fictional stories
47 that favour, or agree with their personal view – and therefore will be more likely to share them.
48 Thus, before the facts are checked, a redaction is made. As Jenkins et al., (2013) suggests the
49 power of social media and indeed all digital platforms are that they are highly personalised and
50 that they allow for transmedia exposure of messages. Thus, they remain appealing to different
51 parts of an audience.

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54 We are therefore drawn, not forwards into a political digital utopia, but backwards into a
55 dystopian 'futureworld' as created by George Orwell (1949); where the establishment of a
56 'Ministry of Truth' was created to enable facts to be deleted in favour of falsehoods, propagated
57 and shared by a populous unaware of the true dangers of democratic choice. What interests us
58 as researchers are the clear similarities that can be drawn between the rise of the 'popular'
59 political movements and the work of Herman and Chomsky – especially the Manufacture of
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3 Consent (1988) and how Fromm's work on freedom (1941) which we argue may be at play in
4 contemporary political communication. Thus, we have presented here a short-illustrated
5 perspective on the use of social media in political marketing, but we recognise that this also
6 represents a departure point for further research, which should not become seduced by the use
7 of social media in this context, but rather question if the hidden hand of propaganda has found
8 a new and disturbing mechanism.
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Reviewer comments	Action taken	Page number
Revise title	Title has been revised for better clarity.	1
Improve introduction		
Clarify “reluctant young Indians”	The use of term and its context has been clarified.	2
Refer to Sharma et al., (2019)	Reference has been added.	2
How is entrepreneurial marketing linked to the election?	The BJP's entrepreneurial approach to marketing using SNS during the elections has been extensively discussed.	3-4
Elaborate methodology in the abstract.	Methodology has been further elaborated within the abstract.	1
Justify how research of 2014 election is useful today.	This has been addressed	Highlighted in implications for society section - 13
Elaborate on the methodology process.	The methodology section has been considerably expanded to elaborate on the process followed. New references have been added.	7
Highlight implications emerging from the paper clearly.	Implications sections have been developed and implications emerging from the study are clearly articulated.	12-14
Proof-read and improve presentation.	The article has now been fully proof-read and issues have been addressed.	Full paper
Address given list of language issues.	These have been addressed in the given areas.	Full paper
Better explain choice of methodology.	This has been re-explained in para 1 of methodology section and also in the abstract.	7
Re-iterate how many participants were in this forum – clarify sample size. Clarify level of interaction, how many engaged (archival data ignored)	This is clarified in final para of methodology section. The study captures the insights of “admins and moderators” of Goa+ who create, manage, and drive the content of the 84000+ strong group. To limit the scope of the study it was advised to use admins instead of general members of the group as a whole which would have created copious amounts of un-manageable data.	Clarified in methodology section - 7
Improve presentation of results.	Results section has been fully re-written and sub-titles used	8-11

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	<p>to describe results have been revised and improved. Stage 1 of netnography explores general and wider public posts to identify user practices and rituals, whereas stage 2 involves an online field setup to interact with admins and moderators of the forum who manage and control content of the forum and hence their participation remains important.</p>	
Remove buzzfeed reference.	This reference has been removed	References plus 12-13