



## **Reuters Institute Fellowship Paper**

### **Changing Paradigm: Social Media and Political Communication**

#### **A Situation in Delhi<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> The sub-title is taken from Nayantara Sehgal's novel "A Situation in New Delhi"

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# Part I

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 From Hollywood to Delhi via Manchester and Mumbai

What is the link between the 2012 dark fantasy Hollywood film *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*<sup>2</sup> and Delhi provincial elections? Or between the same elections and a poster designed in faraway United Kingdom; or a twitter hash tag created in Mumbai?

November, 2014.

The winter is slowly setting in north-India. But for the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and its leaders there is little respite from the political heat turned already up by the opposition Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) just before an impending election. AAP is an insurgent political outfit which has established itself well within a very short time in Delhi, the capital of India.

The elections to the provincial assembly of Delhi could be called anytime (finally held on 7<sup>th</sup> February, 2015), and AAP's main vote catcher and leader Arvind Kejriwal is struggling to break free of a perception vortex which seems to be sucking him in by each passing day. On social and legacy media, his common-man anti-corruption crusader image has come under repeated and direct assault. He is fast becoming an object of mirth and ridicule<sup>3</sup>. His constant battle with a persistent cough; the way he wraps a muffler (scarf or neck-wrap) around his ears and neck as protection against the cold has become the popular meme in opposition attacks. In what appears to be a very concerted and planned political campaign, Kejriwal is depicted by his adversaries as someone who for all his claims to wipe out corruption could not even cure himself of common flu!

The contrast is starker if the closest competition, the BJP draws a comparison between its leader and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and a coughing and wheezing Kejriwal. Modi over the years has carefully crafted and cultivated an image of a strong decisive leader and an efficient administrator. Riding on its leader's popularity, BJP has won power in all provinces

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<sup>2</sup> *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*, 2012 American film directed by Timor Bekmambetov

<sup>3</sup> The Hindu, 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2014, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/satirical-poster-war-rages-on-in-the-capital/article6219745.ece> (Last Accessed 31st May, 2015)

since its historic victory in May, 2014 general elections- the elections which also catapulted Modi to the prime minister's post.

In Delhi too, opinion polls are showing a clear lead for the BJP. Time is fast running out for AAP.

## 2.2 Atlas Shrunk

What happened then is now part of a popular lore amongst AAP volunteers.

Amidst all this gloom and despondency, a Muffler Man arrived. He arrived from the industrial town of Manchester in United Kingdom. He was dressed like the vampire hunting Abraham Lincoln in the 2012 Hollywood movie *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*. And he resuscitated a new life into AAP's election campaign.



Figure 1.1: AAP poster designed by Mohammed Shadab



Figure 1.2: Poster *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*

The facts of the case are however, as follows: in the face of falling popularity, AAP had started to experiment with ideas in Nov. 2014 to recast its leader in a new mould. In the process, a poster of Kejriwal was designed by an AAP sympathiser and supporter Mohammed Shadab (Fig 1.1). Shadab, a businessman living in Manchester, UK is an avid watcher of Hollywood movies. In his spare time he designs online posters. Shadab has been a regular contributor to AAP's social media initiatives and campaigns. "Raj Radij-Gill (an AAP supporter in London) introduced me to an artwork from one Nehal Vaidya from Mumbai. Both the artwork and *Vampire Hunter* (Fig 1.1) inspired me to make the Muffler Man poster"; says Shadab.

The muffler man of Shadab was the new avatar of Kejriwal, waiting in the wings with the party symbol broom in hand to sweep away corruption from the streets of Delhi.

Initially within AAP there were divergent views on using a poster inspired straight out of a Hollywood cinema. In the third week of November though, the party decided to bite the bullet. An AAP social media activist in Mumbai, Aarti Chadha- a self-employed volunteer-created a twitter hash tag #MufflerMan corresponding to the meme conceived by Mohammed Shadab.

The hash tag generated nearly one hundred and eighty thousand tweets within one week.<sup>4</sup>

It trended far, far more than popular hashtags like #NaMo, #Modi generally used by BJP to trend a story on twitter.

This political re-incarnation of Kejriwal was extensively covered and commented upon in the media<sup>5</sup>. Some analysts felt it was perhaps one of those turning points in Delhi polls which stemmed the tide against AAP.

At the onset, we do not claim that the hash tag MufflerMan singularly decided the outcome of the polls. But it certainly is a fascinating example of an online intervention from faraway Manchester disrupting a political situation thousands of miles away in Delhi.

For many years now, research on online political activism by social scientist and media academics has yielded rich literature on the impact of digital interventions in mass mobilisation in developed economies. Studies at the intersect of media, politics and technology have mapped both electoral and non-electoral movements in demographics with high internet penetration: from Barack Obama's presidential bid<sup>6</sup> to Put People First protects which rocked London in 2009<sup>7</sup> delving into information dissemination "*by rapid diffusion of new communication technologies and mobilisation in societies where internet penetration is spread deep and wide alongside an already well entrenched legacy media*"<sup>8</sup>.

The Delhi elections are strewn with many examples of online activism like the MufflerMan intervention making it a compelling case study to analyze the impact of social media in a low income economy with a limited internet penetration.

In this research paper we will attempt to find out whether the spreading tentacles of technology and internet are affecting the political discourse in developing economies with a

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<sup>4</sup> Parikh, Rakesh, (27<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2014), *Why MuffleMan is still Trending? An Analysis*, <http://drrakeshparikh.com/why-is-mufflerman-still-trending/> (Last Accessed 31st May, 2015)

<sup>5</sup> BBC News, (27<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2014), 'MufflerMan' Kejriwal creates Twitter buzz <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-30205289> (Last Accessed 31st May, 2015)

<sup>6</sup> Kreiss, Daniel, 2012. *Taking Our Country Back: The Crafting of Networked Politics from Howard Dean to Barack Obama*,

<sup>7</sup> Bennett W Lance, Segerberg Alexander (2013 ), *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and Personalization of Contentious Politics*, Page 65

<sup>8</sup> Chadwick, Andrew (2013), *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*, Page 3

relatively low internet penetration (but a much higher user base in terms of absolute numbers vis-à-vis western democracies).

For example in India - with an average 20% internet penetration - anecdotal evidence of the impact of social media in politics has been in discussion for some years now.<sup>9</sup> Empirically analyzing the Delhi provincial elections of February 2015, we will attempt to answer broadly the following three questions:

1. Do social and digital media play a role in the process of political discourse- especially electoral mobilization- in societies with a restricted digital footprint?
2. If it does, then what is the process by which the discourse is disrupted/influenced?
3. And what is/are the most effective ways to disrupt/influence the discourse to one's advantage?

For another reason, Delhi elections were a rich example in this genre. The campaign strategy of the three main parties in contest stood in sharp contrast to their respective understanding and use of internet. At one pole, we had the Indian National Congress or Congress which has been rather reluctant to explore new media opportunities and acclimatize itself to the fast changing communication paradigm. The second serious contender- the BJP- not only understood but had successfully used the new media to its advantage in the past. In Delhi however, it faced a stiff challenge from an insurgent outfit AAP which experimented with innovative affordances in the digital media space for political mobilization and resource generation. When the results were announced after a month of a high pitched and bitterly contested elections, the political greenhorn emerged victorious trouncing its opponents to win almost 95% percent seats up for grab in the provincial assembly.

The contrast in Delhi will help us develop a better understanding of the process of political mobilisation in developing societies. Four big countries in the region alone- India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia are home to a quarter of the world's population<sup>10</sup>. All four and many others in Asia and Africa currently have less than twenty percent internet penetration. This research will also shed light on ways to harness technology for getting the message across to the masses in countries where majority population remains un-connected.

The paper will probe whether technology can be used for running low cost but effective political campaigns in the face of a resource crunch faced by many upstarts and insurgent parties like AAP.

And lastly, we will attempt to analyze if social media incentivizes transitions in closed compartmentalized political systems prodding them to adapt to more participatory models of communication. And as for the unconnected, can effective and intelligent use of social media

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<sup>9</sup>Webb. M. (2014), *Aesthetics of Protest: Media and Martyrdom in India*, In Werber, Webb, and Spellman-Poots, *The Political Aesthetics of Global Protest: the Arab Spring and Beyond*, Page 205-216

<sup>10</sup> Internet Live Stats, <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/> (Last Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2015)



breach the wall between internet haves and have-nots in the process of information dissemination?

### **2.3 A Situation in Delhi<sup>11</sup>: Elections 2015**

Politically speaking, Delhi is just a small speck in the large geographical expanse that is India. But electoral battles in this seat of power willy-nilly attract much wider media coverage and attention than its political significance per se. Delhi elections are a fiercely contested affair with parties pulling out all the stops and mobilising every resource at their disposal, for the reverberations of this electoral battle are felt far and wide.<sup>12</sup>

In February 2015, the three main political contestants in the fray for the elections in Delhi were: the two usual suspects, Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), the Indian National Congress (INC) or Congress; and a relatively novice and insurgent political outfit, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

Defying all political pundits and predictions, this political greenhorn, AAP, trounced both BJP and INC to win 67 out of 70 seats up for grabs. Congress failed to even open its account while the BJP was reduced to just three.

For the BJP, it was the first electoral setback - and a huge one at that - after a string of successes in the recent past. The party had recently completed a fabulous home run by winning in all provinces wherever elections had been held in the last ten months. This was the backdrop to a huge victory registered in May 2014 general elections which also elevated its leader Narendra Modi to the office of Prime Minister. BJP was back in power at the centre after having spent a decade in opposition. It was a historic mandate in every sense. A political party for the first time in thirty years in India had won an absolute majority in parliament. The last time it happened was in 1984 when Congress led by the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi swept to power in a communally surcharged polity after the assassination of Indira Gandhi. Ironically the same year, BJP touched a political nadir, when its tally in parliament plummeted to a single digit.

While the BJP was having a dream run, the India National Congress - hereafter referred to only as Congress- was facing its worst crisis. In a reversal of fortunes, Congress which had ruled at the centre for ten years beginning in 2004 registered its lowest ever tally in parliament in the same elections which catapulted BJP to power. In every subsequent election to provincial assembly it lost power in states where it was in government. Congress is the oldest political party in India with its genesis in the anti-colonial campaign led by Mahatma Gandhi. Post-independence from the British in 1947, it has been in power for more than five decades - its dominance interrupted for short periods interspersed over the last four

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<sup>11</sup> The title taken from Nayantara Sehgal's novel *A Situation in New Delhi*

<sup>12</sup> The New York Times, (10<sup>th</sup> February, 2015), *India's Aam Aadmi Party Sweeps Elections in Delhi*[http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/11/world/asia/indias-governing-party-heads-for-crushing-defeat-in-delhi-elections.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/11/world/asia/indias-governing-party-heads-for-crushing-defeat-in-delhi-elections.html?_r=0) (Last Accessed 31st May, 2015)

decades beginning in 1977<sup>13</sup>. It has been a dominant political force in provincial politics as well, but over the years the grip has slackened with the rise of regional parties. In the province of Delhi though, it remained a force to reckon with till December 2013 when it lost the elections after winning three consecutive five year terms from 1998.

And now we come to the surprise element in the Delhi assembly elections of 2015: the Aam Aadmi Party or AAP. The literal translation of its name from Hindi or Hindustani (the predominant language of communication in North India) to English would be: the Common Man's Party. Interestingly, the acronym AAP in Hindustani also stands for the English pronoun 'You'. AAP was formed out of the sedimentary remnants<sup>14</sup> of the anti-corruption movement of 2011-12 led by an apolitical front under the umbrella of what was named India Against Corruption (IAC)<sup>15</sup>. AAP was formed in October 2012 by a section of the IAC led by an engineer turned civil servant turned social activist, Arvind Kejriwal. AAP entered electoral politics in the 2013 Delhi provincial elections. It surprised many by winning 29 seats in the house of 70, standing a close second behind BJP and relegating the then incumbent Congress to a poor third with just 8 seats. In the same assembly, AAP led a coalition government with outside support from Congress. Kejriwal headed the government as the chief minister but the alliance collapsed in a mere 49 days. Later, AAP unsuccessfully contested the general elections of May 2014. Attempts to spread wings too early and too far proved disastrous. The party won only four parliament seats across the country and none in Delhi. Even Kejriwal who challenged Modi in Varanasi lost by a huge margin.

In the same general elections, BJP won all the seven parliamentary seats in Delhi. A projection of votes polled in general elections would have given BJP a comfortable two-thirds majority in the Delhi assembly (60 out of 70 seats in contention).<sup>16</sup>

But that was not to be. An interesting picture emerges if we take a hard look at statistics. BJP's vote-share in 2013 and 2015 is almost the same. But if one were to draw a comparison with the 2014 general elections, its vote share dropped significantly in February 2015. For AAP, the real gains in the 2015 elections came from a huge 15% dip in Congress's votes vis-a-vis the 2013 elections which also explains an exponential conversion of votes into seats in first past the post system (Fig 2.1 and Table 2.1).

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<sup>13</sup> BBC News, (3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2015), *India Profile- Timeline*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12641776> (Last Accessed 31st May, 2015)

<sup>14</sup> Kreiss, Daniel, 2012. Taking Our Country Back: *The Crafting of Networked Politics from Howard Dean to Barack Obama*, Page 87

<sup>15</sup> Pinney, C. 2014. *Gandhi, Camera, Action! India's "August Spring"* In Werber, Webb, and Spellman-Poots, *The Political Aesthetics of Global Protest: the Arab Spring and Beyond*, Page 179

<sup>16</sup> The First Post, 19<sup>th</sup> May, 2014, *Saffron surge puts Delhi out of AAP's reach in fresh assembly polls*, <http://www.firstpost.com/politics/saffron-surge-puts-delhi-out-of-aaps-reach-in-fresh-assembly-polls-1532393.html> (Last Accessed 31st May, 2015)

## Delhi Elections<sup>17</sup>

Party	2008 Provincial Elex		2013 Provincial Elex		2014 Gen Elex		2015 Provincial Elex	
	%Vote	Seats	%Vote	Seats	%Vote	Seats	%Vote	Seats
BJP <sup>18</sup>	23	36.33	32.07	31	46.50	7	32.10	3
AAP <sup>19</sup>			29.49	28	32.90	0	54.30	67
Congress	43	40.30	24.55	8	15.00	0	9.80	0

Table 2.1

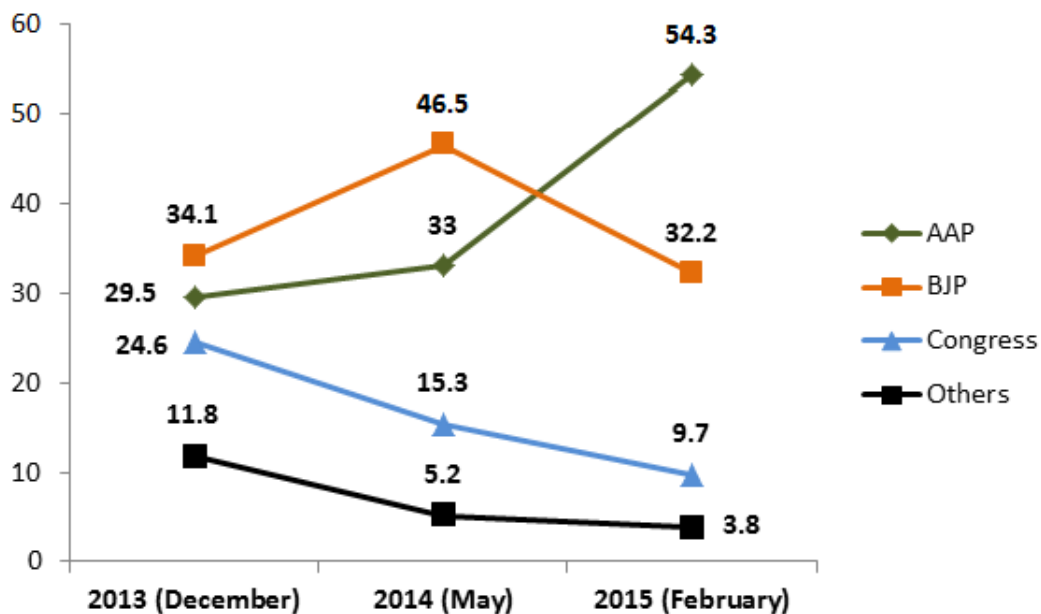


Figure 2.1<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> 2013, 2015 provincial assembly polls data and 2014 general elections data curated from The Times of India 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2015, *Delhi Elections: Huge loss in seats but BJP's vote share almost intact*, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/elections/delhi-elections-2015/top-stories/Delhi-elections-2015-Huge-loss-in-seats-but-BJP-s-vote-share-almost-intact/articleshow/46186474.cms> (Last Accessed 31st May, 2015)

<sup>18</sup> 2013 Provincial Elections: 3 seats were won other parties, 2Shiromani Akali Dal (Pre-poll ally of the BJP) and 1 Independent)

<sup>19</sup> AAP for formed in 2013, did not exist in 2008.

The above mentioned data tells us that:

1. BJP shrunk to its core vote bank of 32% in Feb 2015 after registering huge gains in the general elections.
2. The Congress' downslide continues, as it has been relegated to the status of a fringe player in 2015.
3. AAP is the only party which has added new votes to its kitty in each of the last three elections.

## **2.4 Campaigns: A Comparison from 2008 to 2015**

When Congress under Sheila Dikshit in Delhi sought a fresh mandate from voters in 2008 after two consecutive five year terms, the party faced double anti-incumbency- against its provincial government compounded by four years of Congress-led government at the centre. Despite all the odds and defying all speculations, Congress won its third consecutive elections in Delhi winning 42 seats by polling four per cent more votes than the rival BJP. The campaign in 2008 in Delhi was mostly confined to the legacy media with television playing a dominant role. With less than 5% internet penetration, even in urban centers like Delhi use of social media for mass communication was un-heard of.<sup>21</sup> The fact that at the time of the general elections in May 2009, Congress candidate Shashi Tharoor<sup>22</sup> was the only Indian politician active on social media bears testimony to the almost non-existent role of the new media in the political discourse.

In 2008, Congress contested the elections on an un-ambiguous agenda of development, reminding people of the work it had undertaken over the last ten years in the national capital. That included a very successful completion and expansion of a public transport system in the fast burgeoning capital city. BJP had pitted its veteran leader VK Malhotra to take on Dikshit. In a one on one fight, Congress romped home by a comfortable margin. Congress' home run continued for the 2009 general elections with the party winning all seven seats from Delhi.

By the time the 2013 provincial elections were called, a lot had changed in Delhi and outside. Internet penetration had increased almost three times. Smartphones and better connectivity, especially among the youth in urban areas like Delhi had changed the rules of the game. Both the provincial and national governments led by Congress were mired in corruption allegations culminating in mass apolitical movements and protests by IAC. AAP, as mentioned earlier, was formed out of the sedimentary remnants of the IAC just before the 2013 provincial elections. Much like IAC, AAP targeted Sheila Dikshit for corruption

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<sup>20</sup><https://factly.in/aaps-thumping-victory-numbers/> (Last Visited 15<sup>th</sup> June, 2015)

<sup>21</sup>[www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/india/](http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/india/) (Last Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> June, 2015)

<sup>22</sup>Sardesai Rajdeep, (2015), *2014: The Election That Changed India*, Page 235

making extensive use of the social media in its campaign. The BJP on the other hand was led by an affable medical practitioner Dr Harshvardhan, veteran legislator and former minister. Congress's predicament in these elections is well spelt out by Pawan Khera, a close aide of Sheila Dikshit.<sup>23</sup> Khera says "What AAP was doing and was doing very cleverly was attacking us using social media. But whatever they tweeted would go viral, whenever Kejriwal tweeted on power tariff would go viral. And when you are incumbent government of the last 15 years all that you can do is defend yourself. BJP of course was much better organized than us on social media. They have Niticentral and various other websites and portals and groups of like-minded people who would work on an agenda."

It was as if the Congress had completely lost touch of the changing media landscape and realized very late to its detriment that the goalposts had completely shifted.

On the other hand, the 2015 general elections were a massive exercise in comparison to Delhi provincial polls. BJP with a pan India image and with a much larger political footprint appeared well positioned to capitalize on anti-incumbency against the Congress at the national level. It had a strong leader in Narendra Modi. The party in general and Modi in particular made good use of social media, dove-tailing it well with a strong organisational network in the hinterland.

Interestingly, AAP which decided to spread thin and fielded candidates in more than 400 constituencies out of 543 in contention, could win a paltry 4 seats countrywide. Despite being organisationally well entrenched, all its nominees lost to BJP in the seven seats of Delhi.

However, ten months later, in a complete turnaround the party returned to pulverize both BJP and Congress.

What led to such a spectacular change in fortunes could be due to multiple reasons. In this paper, however, we confine our analysis to the limited issue of political communication by key players in reaching out to the electorate, and especially the role and the use of digital and social media.

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with the author

### 3. Political Democracy in India

Before proceeding further, let us make some sense of political democracy as it works in India.

India is a union of states or provinces in a multi-party, bi-cameral polity. National parliament comprises of two houses: the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.

The general elections to the lower house or the Lok Sabha (LS) are held every five years. In a first past the post contest for 543 seats spread across the country, the party or an alliance (both pre/post poll) which commands the majority of this house (irrespective of the strength in the upper house of parliament) forms the government at the centre. The Prime Minister is the head of the elected executive leading a council of ministers.

The Upper House of parliament is called the Rajya Sabha (RS) or the Council of the States. Elections to the 245 members of the council of states are through indirect preferential voting by the members of provincial assemblies (a few eminent people from all walks of life are also nominated to the RS by the union government). In the constitutional scheme of things, the RS is a conscience keeper of the provinces in a federal polity<sup>24</sup>.

Unlike the federal parliament, not all provinces in India have a bi-cameral polity. The constitution empowers provinces to dispense with the upper house in their respective states. Delhi for example has only one house - that is the state assembly for which direct elections are held every five years.

Whether a state chooses to have uni- or bi-cameral polity, the process of government formation in provinces is akin to that at the centre. The elections to the provincial assemblies or the lower houses are direct as for the Lok Sabha. The constituencies are much smaller though but the party or alliance which wins majority in the direct elections forms the government in that province. The elected executive is headed by the chief minister. The party which commands a simple majority in the provincial assembly remains in power for the next five years or till the time it enjoys a majority of the house, whichever is earlier.

The constitution of India very clearly demarcates legislative powers of the federal parliament and provincial assemblies under what was conceived to be a system of co-operative federalism by the constitution makers.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> [http://rajyasabha.nic.in/rsnew/about\\_parliament/rajya\\_sabha\\_introduction.asp](http://rajyasabha.nic.in/rsnew/about_parliament/rajya_sabha_introduction.asp) (Last Accessed 31st May, 2015)

<sup>25</sup> Jain SK, (1994,) Party, Politics and Centre-State Relations in India, Page 28

### 3.1 Media and Democracy

Elections in India are a fiercely contested exercise held under the supervision of the Election Commission of India<sup>26</sup> which is an independent statutory body. In the multi-party polity that India is, parties campaign vigorously using different modes of mass communication to reach out to the electorate with their agenda, policies, programmes and promises. Elections are a festival of sorts, often referred to as the ‘Dance of Democracy’<sup>27</sup>. Candidates and activists campaign door-to-door and through mass media in a milieu where more than 90,000 newspapers and periodicals<sup>28</sup> cater to a population of over 1.2 billion people with a huge appetite for news, especially political news. There are 800 channels in operation out of which almost half are broadcasting news and current affairs content, catering to an panoply of audience in both English and regional languages<sup>29</sup>.

Since the first elections in 1952, political process and elections in India in terms of media coverage has been compartmentalised by some analysts into three distinct phases.<sup>30</sup>

Prannoy Roy calls the first thirty years post-independence as the ‘*docile phase*’ when media was at its weakest; and high illiteracy resulted in 80% of governments being voted back to power. The second phase beginning in 1977 Roy refers to as the ‘*volatile or angry phase*’ when 60% of governments were thrown out of power in the face of an aggressive media. In the third phase panning the growth of satellite television, Roy argues, a deluge of information to the electorate through radio, TV and mobile has led to a more informed decision making by the voters replacing a blind anti-incumbency of the “*volatile or the angry phase*”.

There is evidence to suggest that since 2011, political communication in India through mass media has entered an interesting and a highly complex fourth phase where internet and online communication has emerged as an independent variable influencing political communication running parallel to the legacy media.

**We call it the Hybrid Phase in Connective Action Networks.**

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<sup>26</sup> Election Commission of India website, [www.eci.gov.in](http://www.eci.gov.in), (Last Accessed 31st May, 2015)

<sup>27</sup> The Times of India, 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2014 *Dance of Democracy: The Power of One*, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/news/Dance-of-Democracy-The-power-of-one/articleshow/31500983.cms>, (Last Accessed 31st May, 2015)

<sup>28</sup> Registrar for Newspapers in India Report 2013-14

<sup>29</sup> Zee News, 7<sup>th</sup>, (Dec, 2014), *Number of TV Channels rises by 37 in one year*, [http://zeenews.india.com/news/india/number-of-tv-channels-rises-by-37-in-one-year\\_1510793.html](http://zeenews.india.com/news/india/number-of-tv-channels-rises-by-37-in-one-year_1510793.html) (Last Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2015)

<sup>30</sup> Roy Prannoy (2013) *More News is Good News: Democracy and Media in India*; Painter James, *India's Media Boom*, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Page 3

## 4. The Hybrid Phase and Connective Action Networks

In India, we get the first glimpse of technologically enabled political mobilisation in the anti-corruption protests of 2011-12. This was precisely the time revolutions were being “tweeted” in the Arab world and insurgent outfits were successfully mobilising against anti-austerity measures in Europe. Similarly, a loosely-knit conglomerate of disparate NGOs and social activists had come together in Delhi under the umbrella of what was named: India Against Corruption (IAC) seeking strong anti-corruption legislations be enacted by parliament.

IAC activists’ extensive use of social media during the anti-graft protests has been well documented by Martin Webb in his anthropological analysis of the movement. He writes:

*“In a 2013 interview, with Shivendra Singh Chauhan, an influential figure in the development of IAC social media campaign, he described to me how it was 30<sup>th</sup>, January 2011 that marked a profound shift in the campaign for the Lokpal Bill (anti-corruption bill). This was the day on which large number of people emerged onto the streets in cities around India in response to a call which has been broadcast across social media, particularly Facebook since late previous year”<sup>31</sup>.*

Similar accounts of the use of social media have been rendered by Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain in their assessment of the Arab Spring<sup>32</sup> where “...*Digital media changed the tactics of democratization movements, and new information and communication technologies played a major role....*”

The above mentioned examples are reasonably successful cases of collective actions for a common cause but do not confirm to the classical concepts of political mobilisation on account of an effective use of technological affordances by protesters in each instance.

W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg argue that such digitally enabled mobilisations can be better understood in terms of new connective action logic where technological affordances play a critical role in bringing together personalised action frames. This is in contrast to the conventional collective action logics which rely upon Resource

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<sup>31</sup> Webb Martin, (2014) In Werber, Webb, and Spellman-Poots, *The Political Aesthetics of Global Protest: The Arab Spring and Beyond*, Page 204

<sup>32</sup> Howard PN; Hussain MM (2011) , *The Role of Social Media, Journal of Democracy*, Volume 22, Page 46



Mobilisation Theory; the latter laying emphasis on capacity and resources which are more likely to be available to large organisations for successfully mobilising people.<sup>33</sup>

Bennett and Segerberg also draw up a typology of connective and collective action networks. According to this categorisation, the Arab Spring or even the IAC, for that matter, would be fine examples of Crowd Enabled Connective Action Networks. Such organic movements do not grow around organisationally coordinated actions or “lead actors”.<sup>34</sup>

On the other end of this categorisation are Organisationally Brokered Networks with strong organisational coordination. And in between the two frames are Organisationally Enabled Networks with a loose organisational coordination of action enabling personalised participation through technology.

In this paper we will draw upon the network frames of Bennett and Segerberg from their analysis of mobilisation in high income economies in Europe and North America to study campaigns of the three main parties in Delhi elections. Using these frames we will try to extrapolate what sort of connective action network work best in low income demographics and whether there are any lessons to be learnt from the case study.

But before doing that, we are to settle the larger debate of the impact of the new media on political mobilisation per se, which some skeptics have often dubbed as “*a gigantic exercise in collective transcontinental wishful thinking?*”<sup>35</sup>

Andrew Chadwick sums this debate up in his exposition of the Hybrid Model Theory reconciling diametrical opposite and extreme views on the role of social media and technology in political communication and mobilisation.<sup>36</sup> He claims:

*“....much of the work on the internet and politics has been problematic. It has often been blind to non-internet media forms and too often dominated by assumptions about “revolutionary” change or by a too narrowly drawn frame of “politics as usual.”*

Through multiple case studies from United Kingdom and US Chadwick demonstrates that media does not work in separate silos like TV, radio, print and digital. The creation of content and dissemination follows a highly complex Hybrid Cycle.

For example, a story emanating in print may be picked up by the digital media and may at a later stage resurface on TV with a much larger or lesser impact through an online intervention by an independent blogger. This circuitous route of information transmission

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<sup>33</sup> Bennett Lance W, Segerberg Alexandra (2013), *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalisation of Contentious Politics*, Page 31-32

<sup>34</sup> Bennett Lance W, Segerberg Alexandra (2013), *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalisation of Contentious Politics*, Page 45-47

<sup>35</sup> Morozov Evgeny, *Iran: Downside to the “Twitter Revolution”* [http://www.evgenymorozov.com/morozov\\_twitter\\_dissent.pdf](http://www.evgenymorozov.com/morozov_twitter_dissent.pdf), Page 4 (Last accessed 31st May, 2015)

<sup>36</sup> Chadwick, Andrew (2013), *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*, Page 87

follows a very complex route; and power in the process is wielded by those who intervene at the right moment.

But as in the case of Connective Network Frames, Chadwick's assessment of the Hybrid Model is based on his examination of news cycles in democracies which have more than 80% or almost 90 % internet penetration - the high income economies. Let us first test this theory in the context of Delhi elections.

#### 4.1 Internet and India

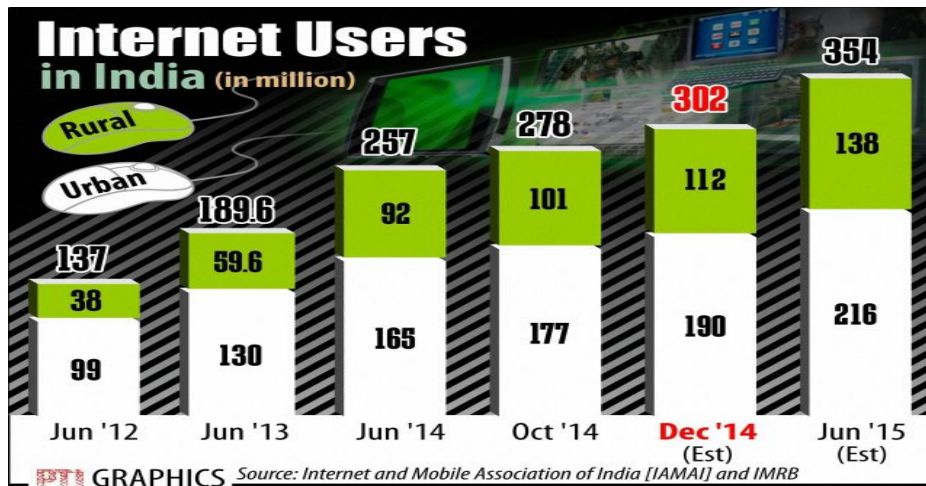


Figure 4.1<sup>37</sup>

The Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) has been predicting that India in 2015 will have more internet users than the United States. (Figure 4.1)

But in terms of internet penetration as a percentage of its population, it still lags far behind democracies in North America and Western Europe.<sup>38</sup> (Table 4.1)

<sup>37</sup> The Hindu 19<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2014, *Internet Users in India to Cross 300 mn by Dec:* Report <http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/technology/internet/india-set-to-become-secondlargest-internet-market-by-decemberend-report/article6614417.ece> (Last Accessed 31st May, 2015)

<sup>38</sup> Internet Live Stats: <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/> (Last Accessed 20th June, 2015)

	Population	Internet Users	Penetration
China	1,393,783,836	641,601,070	46.03%
USA	322,583,006	279,834,232	86.75%
India	1,267,401,849	243,198,922	17.50 %
UK	63,489,234	57,075,826	89.90 %

Table 4.1

Less than 20% internet penetration in a country translates to an even smaller fraction of the population being exposed to the social media platforms. Market research firm *eMarketer* estimates that “the low Internet penetration rate in Asia-Pacific’s second-largest country means that a mere 1.8 per cent of the population uses Twitter in India, which will barely budge reaching only 3 per cent by 2018”.<sup>39</sup>

Though the availability of cheap low cost smart-phones in rural and semi-urban markets are bringing in a new vertical of online communication through chat apps<sup>40</sup>, other disparities both in terms of internet speed (Figure 4.2), income and social indicators underscore a sharp contrast between high income economies of the west and those in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Program for the year 2014 ranks India 135 out of 187 countries<sup>41</sup>. According to the provisional findings of the latest Socio-Economic Caste Census in India, nearly three-quarters of the total households in the country are in rural areas. Nearly 74% of these rural households survive on a monthly income of less than 80 dollars per month. And what is more worrying is the fact that about 24% of the households do not have a single adult literate member above the age of 25.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> The Hindu (28<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2015), ‘Twitter accounts for only 17% of India’s social network users’<http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/technology/internet/twitter-accounts-for-only-17-of-indian-social-network-users/article6830300.ece> ( Last Accessed 31st May, 2015)

<sup>40</sup> Shah Hasit, Berkman Centre for Internet and Society, (5<sup>th</sup> May, 2015), *Cheap Smartphones, Digital News & the World’s Biggest Elections*, <https://cyber.law.harvard.edu/interactive/events/luncheons/2014/05/hasit>

<sup>41</sup> The Times of India, (24<sup>th</sup> July, 2014), *India ranks 135 in human development index*, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-ranks-135-in-human-development-index-UNDP/articleshow/38959685.cms>, (Last Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2015)

<sup>42</sup> Socio Economic and Caste Census, Data Released by Government of India on 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2015, <http://www.secc.gov.in/staticReport>, (Last Accessed: 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2015)

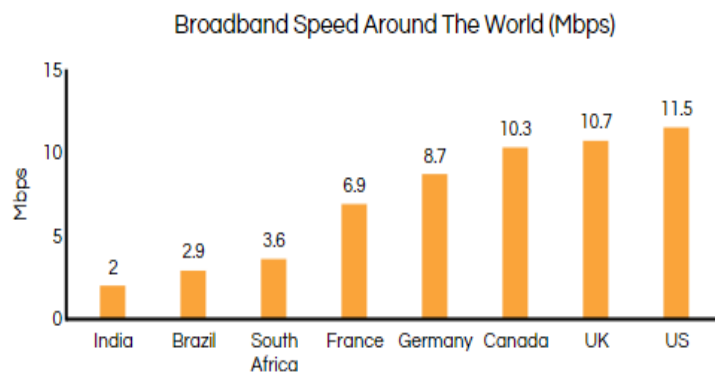


Figure 4.2 (Akamai's State of the Internet Report)<sup>43</sup>

## 4.2 Internet and Delhi

The social indices including internet connectivity are comparatively much better in urban India than in the rural hinterland.

For example, most of the Delhi is highly urbanized or semi urbanized demography with close to 70 percent of households residing in urban areas. The remaining 30 percent comprise of pockets of low density rural population residing in the outskirts.<sup>44</sup>

According to the IAMAI-IRMB Report of 2014, Delhi with 12.15 million internet users has the second highest internet penetration in India after Mumbai (though these figures are said to be market oriented optimistic projections).<sup>45</sup>

In terms of population Delhi is the second largest city in the world after Tokyo. The United Nations World Urbanization Prospect Report of 2014 puts its population at 25 million.

Assuming IAMAI's 'market oriented' assessments in terms of absolute numbers to be on the high side, internet penetration in Delhi should be somewhere between 30 to 40 percent. This figure is quite on the expected lines considering that the four metros including Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and Bengaluru account for almost 23 percent of the total internet penetration in the India IAMAI Report of 2014.

This means that highly urbanized pockets in India like Delhi have nearly half the average internet penetration in US and UK where nine out of ten people have access to the internet.

<sup>43</sup> State of the Internet Report- 2014, Akamai, <http://www.akamai.com/dl/content/q3-2014-state-of-the-internet-report.pdf> (Last Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2015)

<sup>44</sup> Socio Economic and Caste Census, Data Released by Government of India on 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2015, [http://www.secc.gov.in/staticReportData?getReportId=S\\_2](http://www.secc.gov.in/staticReportData?getReportId=S_2), (Last Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2015)

<sup>45</sup> IAMAI Press Release 4<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2014 [http://www.iamai.in/PRelease\\_detail.aspx?nid=3487&NMonth=11&NYear=2014](http://www.iamai.in/PRelease_detail.aspx?nid=3487&NMonth=11&NYear=2014) (Last Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2015)

### 4.3 Elections Case Study

We have already explained in some detail the three key parties in contest in Delhi for 70 seats in the provincial elections of Feb 2015. Campaigning for the elections ended on the evening of the 5<sup>th</sup>, and polling took place after two days on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February. Votes were counted and results declared on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Feb, 2015. In the build-up to the elections:

The Congress: nominated former minister in the union government Ajay Maken as its chief minister (CM) candidate. The nomination was announced less than a month before the polling. Congress party by convention and in general does not announce its leadership before elections. In terms of the use of the social media for campaign and otherwise, Congress leadership has been rather reluctant and lethargic. Both congress president Sonia Gandhi and her son and vice president Rahul Gandhi were neither on Twitter or Facebook at the time of Delhi elections. The party though has maintained a pro forma presence in the digital space.

AAP: the insurgent party was led by its leader Arvind Kejriwal. Kejriwal being the convenor and former CM for 49 days was the natural choice for CM for AAP. The entire AAP campaign was knit around Kejriwal who along with his candidates had hit the road well in advance of their political adversaries. AAP was metamorphosed into a political entity by a section of the IAC, and thus retained both a decentralized and flat communication structure of its former avatar, especially in its use of social media for mass communication. AAP as a party and its leaders like Arvind Kejriwal have a huge presence on Facebook and Twitter.

BJP: In all the provincial polls post general elections of May, 2014 BJP did not announce CM candidates for any of the electoral contest. BJP entered the fray projecting Prime Minister Narendra Modi as its chief campaigner and vote catcher. Delhi was the first exception. BJP in Delhi first inducted a key participant of the IAC movement Kiran Bedi into the party. Bedi a former colleague Arvind Kejriwal in the IAC movement was announced the BJP CM candidate on 19<sup>th</sup> of January less than a week after she joined the party. She was to contest elections from the party stronghold of Kirti Nagar constituency in East-Delhi. BJP in general and Modi in particular have shown a marked alacrity in adopting technology for political mobilisations. Modi has millions of followers on Twitter.

### 4.4 Content Analysis: Methodology

The methodology applied for this study includes interviews, and both qualitative and quantitative analysis of content during the election campaign.

For the content analysis of political communication and news flow, news related to the elections in both legacy and new media was monitored from 19<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2015 to 7<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2015.

# Twitter handles of all the three major parties and their candidates were constantly monitored.

# Facebook Page of all the three parties (both provincial and national) were regularly monitored and followed for interventions.

# Twitter handle of NDTV TV prime time anchor Ravish Kumar was followed.

# Twitter handle of Hindi news channels ABP News, NDTV India and India TV were followed.

# News channels both Hindi and English were followed during key political events. (ABP News, NDTV India, CNN-IBN, Times Now)

# News and current affairs site [www.firstpost.com](http://www.firstpost.com) was monitored for important news breaks and interventions.

# National English daily The Indian Express and The Hindustan Times were monitored for content including political advertisement.

# Data thus collected was then corroborated with detailed interviews with key players from all the three parties as well as those who had effectively intervened in this entire process.

The interviews carried out were with:

- **AAP**

Dilip Pandey- Party leader and strategist

Ankit Lal- In-charge of social media team

Deepak Bajpai- Legacy Media deputy head

- **BJP**

Sanjay Kaul Delhi BJP leader

B1, an anonymous source involved in BJP campaigns for the last three years

B2, a BJP social media strategist who also wants to remain anonymous

- **Congress**

C1 a close associate of Ajay Maken who does not want to be identified

C2 a congress national spokesperson who does not want to be identified

C3 an anonymous congress volunteer closely associated with the 2015 assembly campaign

Pawan Khera, a close associate of former Delhi CM and congress leader Sheila Dikshit

Other:

- NDTV Anchor Ravish Kumar

- Pratik Sinha of the Truth of Gujarat (an online content generator from Ahmedabad in Gujarat).

## 4.5 Key Events

Our analysis of the Delhi elections of 2015 will be based on both the content analysis of the legacy media and social media. To tie loose threads in the narrative we have also interviewed key players whose interventions disrupted the discourse.

For this study, the election campaign was monitored for almost a fortnight from the 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2015 (the day Bedi was declared CM candidate by the BJP) to the polling date. We have however whittled down the analysis to certain incidents or events which had a palpable influence on the discourse during the peak of the campaign.

For example, just a day after she was declared CM candidate, AAP leader Kejriwal used social media to challenge Bedi for an open debate. The story dominated prime time discussions on TV channel on the 20<sup>th</sup> of Jan with Bedi shying away from an eye-ball to eyeball confrontation. NDTV India discussed the issue prime time in its most watched 9pm talk show.<sup>46</sup>

Another top Hindi channel ABP News the same day did an evening show on the same issue.<sup>47</sup>

English news channel CNN-IBN: a half an hour call-in show with viewers in the evening.<sup>48</sup>

Times Now hosted a prime time discussion, in which they interviewed Bedi where she is again grilled for refusing to debate with AAP leader.<sup>49</sup>

The story meandered its way from TV to print with the Hindustan Times carrying it as its main story on page one the next day.<sup>50</sup>

A similar story with tweeter screen shots of all the key participants in the ‘online debate’ was also carried by the India Express.

The event also helped AAP to take control of the discourse right at the beginning of the final phase of the campaign.

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<sup>46</sup> NDTV India, (20<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2015), 9PM IST, *Why Shouldn't Kejriwal and Kiran Debate?* <http://www.ndtv.com/video/player/prime-time/prime-time-should-kiran-bedi-arvind-kejriwal-have-a-public-debate/353220> (Last accessed 1st June, 2015)

<sup>47</sup> ABP News, (20<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2015) *Kejriwal's Public Debate Challenge to Bedi and Maken* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSZul2XbcNM> (Last accessed 1st June, 2015)

<sup>48</sup> CNN-IBN 20<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2015 *Kejriwal vs Kiran Bedi: Should CM faces debate?* <http://www.ibnlive.com/videos/politics/call-in-show-34-736862.html> (Last accessed 1st June, 2015)

<sup>49</sup> Times Now 20<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2015 News Hour, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pkd3i1JhwyM>

<sup>50</sup> The Hindustan Times 21<sup>st</sup> Jan, 2015, *Kejriwal comes out looking for a fight, Bedi will not oblige*, <http://paper.hindustantimes.com/epaper/showlink.aspx?bookmarkid=XI6CJG1006Y2&linkid=3eee9b67-9bcb-4442-af5a-d38a43c788fd> (Last accessed 1st June, 2015)



A cursory look of other newspapers (Fig 4.3) the next morning shows very clearly that Kejriwal had dealt the first blow right at the beginning of what had been expected to be the precursor to a bitter and high voltage war of words.



Figure 4.3: The Hindustan Times, New Delhi Edition, 21<sup>st</sup> Jan, 2015

The next news item that we have picked up for analysis finds much larger resonance both in the legacy and new media. It was a story first carried by The First Post challenging the very legend of Kiran Bedi as a no-nonsense and upright police officer who dared to challenge the high and mighty in the line of the duty.<sup>51</sup> This story was filed a day after Bedi was nominated CM candidate. It did not find much traction in the legacy media initially, but a wagging tail somehow kept it alive in the social media to haunt Bedi a week later in a TV interview where Bedi was confronted on her claims of having once towed away former PM Indira Gandhi's car for illegal parking. This interview by NDTV anchor Ravish Kumar trended more than US president Barak Obama and Narendra Modi's joint radio address to the nation (Obama was on a visit to Delhi at that time).

Similarly, AAP was also tested by the media on many occasions. It faced its toughest challenge when a breakaway group of the party leveled allegations of money laundering and accused AAP leaders of accepting political donations from fictitious companies.

<sup>51</sup>The First Post, Sharma Sandipan, (21<sup>st</sup> Jan, 2015), *BJP's CM candidate: the story of Kiran 'Crane' Bedi is more myth than facts*, <http://www.firstpost.com/politics/bjps-delhi-cm-candidate-story-of-kiran-crane-bedi-is-more-myth-than-fact-2056451.html> ; The Story was re-published with the same URL on the 29<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2015. (Last accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2015)



The story drew traction through the day (2<sup>nd</sup> of Feb, 2015). News Channels discussed it in prime time, and papers carried it prominently.<sup>52</sup> *The India Express* the next day (Fig 4.4) carried three stories on the raging controversy on the Delhi edition of page one.<sup>53</sup> PM Narendra Modi raked the issue up during his public meeting in Delhi and hit out at AAP.<sup>54</sup>



Figure 4.2, The Indian Express, Front Page Delhi Edition, 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb, 2015

And just when everyone thought the dust had settled down on the evening of the 5<sup>th</sup> Feb with the end of campaign (election campaigns in India end 36 to 40 hours before the polling begins), an interesting intervention by an influential Imam of Delhi lightened up the arena once again.<sup>55</sup> We have selected this particular incident to study the response of various parties, especially AAP, to a fast developing political situation when the one presiding over the biggest mosque in Delhi (and in the country) issued a decree to his followers to vote for AAP.

## 4.6 Understanding the Hybrid Model

<sup>52</sup> ABP News, (3<sup>rd</sup> Feb, 2015), Half Hour Discussion on Allegations of Dubious Funding, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pi3YesFvgNY> (Last Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2015)

<sup>53</sup> The Indian Express, (3<sup>rd</sup> Feb, 2015), *Mud Flies on who is Clean*, <http://epaper.indianexpress.com/430733/Indian-Express/03-February-2015#page/3/1> (Last Accessed 1st June, 2015)

<sup>54</sup> The Hindustan Times, 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb, 2015, PM Modi attacks Kejriwal over 'dubious funds', takes on congress 'corruption' <http://www.hindustantimes.com/newdelhi/modi-taunts-aap-congress-over-corruption-in-delhi-election-campaign/article1-1313162.aspx> (Last accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2015)

<sup>55</sup> ABP News, (6th Feb, 2015), *Big DEBATE, Who is playing Shahi Imam Card? BJP or AAP*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cd4VBtpdOxs> (Last Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2015)

### *Kiran Bedi or Crane Bedi*

Kiran Bedi, a former police officer, has been known in Delhi as an able administrator and a tough cop. She was launched as the CM candidate within a week of being inducted into the party by the BJP on 16<sup>th</sup> January, 2015. The task before her was clear: take on her former colleague of IAC days, Arvind Kejriwal.

21<sup>st</sup> Jan, 2015 08.00 Indian Standard Time (IST)

The First Post publishes a blog by Sandipan Sharma questioning the entire legend of Crane Bedi and dubbing the story an un-adulterated myth.<sup>56</sup>

Sharma in this online article first quoted Bedi speaking during a program in the central India city of Bhopal. In the purported speech, Bedi claimed to have towed away the PM's car. Sharma even provides an online link to the aforementioned video. He quotes Bedi recounting to the audience:

*"I knew that I will be transferred when I decided to lift Indira Gandhi's car (for wrong parking). I gave a thought to it and decided to do what was right then"*

Sharma further writes:

*"Nothing could be farther from the truth.*

*Here are the facts of the case, sourced from Bedi's own website<sup>57</sup>. A white ambassador car (DHD 1817) was parked outside a shop in Connaught Circus on August 5, 1982. When a sub-inspector of the traffic police saw it parked in a no-parking zone, he issued a challan (sic)—not to the driver but to the owner of the shop— and refused to withdraw it even after being told that it was from the PM's fleet.*

*The PM and her family were not even in India. The driver had gone to CP alone, perhaps for buying some accessories for the car. 'Crane Bedi' was not around either at the time of the incident. But later she took credit for the whole incident, edging the inspector out of the narrative."*

The story generated close to a 1,000 comments. It was picked up by other news sites as well.<sup>58</sup> By evening the story had reached the popular election discourse with local Hindi language daily Navbharat Times carrying it on its web edition.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>The First Post, Sharma, Sandipan, 21<sup>st</sup> Jan, 2015, *BJP's CM candidate: the story of Kiran 'Crane' Bedi is more myth than facts* <http://www.firstpost.com/politics/bjps-delhi-cm-candidate-story-of-kiran-crane-bedi-is-more-myth-than-fact-2056451.html>; The story was re-published with the same URL on the 29<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2015. The latter version incorporated Bedi's response made in Ravish Kumar's interview; (Last accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2015)

<sup>57</sup> Kiran Bedi's website quoted by Sandipan Sharma <http://kiranbedi.com/formerminister.htm> (Last Accessed 1st June, 2015)

<sup>58</sup> India Today, ( 21<sup>st</sup> Jan, 2015), 3 *'Crane' Bedi myths the BJP's CM candidate doesn't want you to know* <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/kiran-bedi-delhi-polls-chief-minister-crane-myths/1/414479.html> (Last Accessed 1st June, 2015)

## 4.7 AAP Latches On

In an interview with the author, AAP social media in-charge Ankit Lal recounts the entire episode:

*“Q: This story was done by Sandipan Sharma for First Post, wasn’t it?”*

*A: Yes, we first picked this story up by Sandipan Sharma of The First Post. It did not have any visuals and we just used the text for our social media campaign. We converted it into graphics and asked a couple of cartoonist friends to draw cartoons on the issue.*

*What is Kiran Bedi known for? She is known as a very good administrator, anti-corruption crusader and as someone who did not care even for the PM in the line of her duty. When this story was circulated, it dented her image for people came to know that the then PM was not even involved in the incident.”*

But the social media interventions by AAP did not yield perceptible audience traction. It remained in circulation - at least within the journalistic fraternity which continued to discuss it over social media. The Hindu correspondent Jatin Gandhi tweeted about the story on his personal Facebook page on 22<sup>nd</sup> January.

New Delhi Television (NDTV) anchor Ravish Kumar however picked up its threads from a Hindi newspaper<sup>60</sup>. His assessment of the entire controversy was that *“...this story certainly did cast some shadow on Bedi’s claims; AAP had however failed to capitalize on the revelation the first couple of days after it appeared in the public domain.”*

The reason perhaps was the mismatch between Bedi’s on camera claims and off-camera counter claims (Sharma’s article was in print). The imbalance between the two media led to an ineffective juxtaposition.

As the story began to fade out over the next few days, an intervention by Ravish Kumar re-kindled the debate. In an interview with Bedi on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January, Ravish persisted with a flurry of questions seeking Bedi’s response to the truth behind the Legend of Crane Bedi.

Bedi was forced to admit that it wasn’t she who had towed-away PM’s car.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Navbharat Times (21<sup>st</sup> Jan, 2015), *Kiran Bedi did not tow away Indira Gandhi’s car*, <http://navbharattimes.indiatimes.com/india/kiran-bedi-was-not-directly-involved-in-challaning-indira-gandhis-car/articleshow/45966291.cms> (Last Accessed 1st June, 2015)

<sup>60</sup> Ravish Kumar’s interview to the author

<sup>61</sup> Ravish Kumar interviews Kiran Bedi for NDTV India, 27<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2015  
<http://www.ndtv.com/video/player/news/the-kiran-bedi-interview-that-has-ravish-kumar-trending/354396>  
(Last Accessed 1st June, 2015)

The admission now was on camera. The impact of this interview could well be judged from the fact that it became the top-trender on social media on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January, pipping another high profile political event of the day: the much publicized joint address to the nation on radio by PM Narendra Modi and Barak Obama who was on an official visit to Delhi at that time<sup>62</sup>.

The story does not end here. Far away in the western part of the country, a young software engineer in the city of Ahmedabad watches Ravish Kumar's interview and decides to add his own bit to the controversy. Pratik Sinha is the son of Mukul Sinha, a famous city lawyer and social activist who passed away last year. Sinha, a vociferous critic of PM Narendra Modi, had been at the forefront of many legal battles for the victims of the 2002 Gujarat Communal riots.

Pratik runs a website and a Facebook page called the Truth of Gujarat. The content on this site is primarily targeted at Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Modi was earlier the chief minister of Gujarat province.

Even as the Bedi admission was drawing traction on social media and TV, Sinha posted a video juxtaposing Bedi's earlier claims and the recent admission to Ravish Kumar.<sup>63</sup>

I spoke to Pratik Sinha about the entire episode:

*Q: How was this video content created on Crane Bedi?*

*A: I remember now. So what happened was if I remember Kiran Bedi talking at some conference and then this interview by Ravish Kumar happened. I found the two links and then edited and juxtaposed and put them up on Truth of Gujarat.*

*Q: How did the idea occur to you? What was the intent?*

*A: Actually Truth of Gujarat started sometime before the Lok Sabha elections. It started sometime in July 2013. And since then our content has been used by multiple political parties and not just AAP. This intervention happened if you have noticed that Truth of Gujarat is a sort of anti BJP page more or less. We are from Gujarat and there was lot of information flowing out of Gujarat and Gujarati is an independent vernacular and we started to send out information not going out through the main stream media. We kept following various elections.*

*I happen to notice both these clips and put them together and post it online.*

*Professionally I am a software engineer. But I also run the Truth of Gujarat from Ahmedabad.'*

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<sup>62</sup> Ravish Kumar claims in his interview to the author

<sup>63</sup> <http://www.truthofgujarat.com/> (Last Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2015)

This video created by Sinha was in turn lifted by AAP and its social media volunteers and posted on the Facebook page of a group called the Final War Against Corruption<sup>64</sup>. From there, it just went viral. It generated thousands of views (more than 79,000 till Feb end).

This cycle of news flow completes a full circle when based on Kiran Bedi's admission, the First Post republishes Sandipan Sharma's article on 29<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2015 with fresh inputs and Bedi's response to Ravish Kumar.

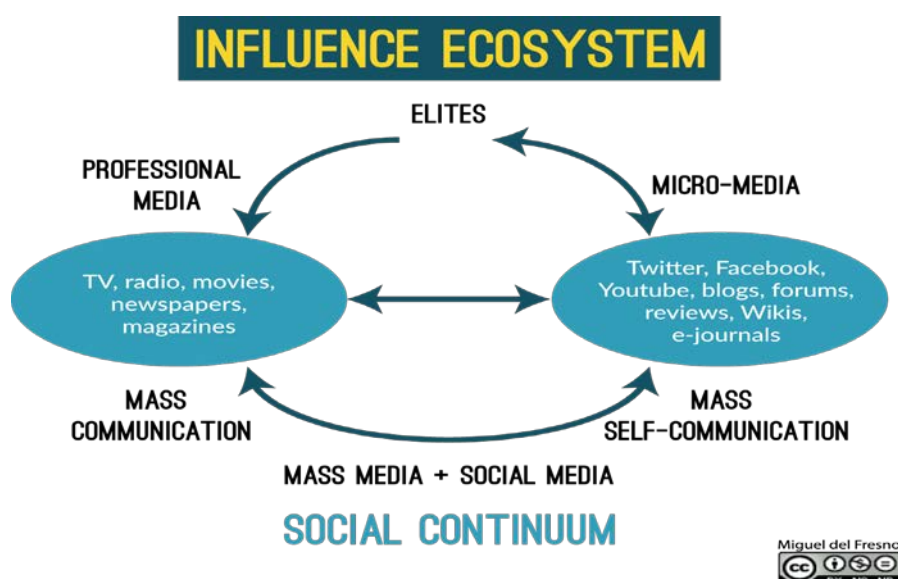


Figure 4.5 The Hybrid Model

News, as shown in the case study, does not disseminate through independent and impervious silos. The 'Crane Bedi' controversy is a characteristic example of a news cycle in the Hybrid Space also referred to by some authors as the Social Continuum (Figure 4.5)<sup>65</sup>. It demonstrates that news or information grafted in the digital media has a high probability of reaching an audience having no access to technology and vice-versa.

This cycle also demonstrates that powerful interventions can also be inflicted by insurgents operating independently. Pratik Sinha and the content he generated from faraway Ahmedabad (the Truth of Gujarat clip) became a powerful tool in the hands of AAP to target Bedi at the peak of the election campaign.

<sup>64</sup> Final War Against Corruption, (29<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2015), <https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=879165915482297> (Last Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2015)

<sup>65</sup> Del Fresno M, *We are the media: The Ongoing Of Social Space By Social Media*, <http://www.hashtagcommoncore.com/content/we-are-media-ongoing-disruption-social-space-social-media> (Last Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2015)

## 5 Effective Interventions: Influencing the Influencer

### *5.1 Effective and Timely Interventions on Social Media*

We have shown in the last chapter that the information flow in both low and high internet penetration demographics takes a circuitous route. The next obvious corollary to this assertion is what makes for an effective intervention in such a scenario?

Daniel Kreiss in his analysis of the last US Presidential campaign<sup>66</sup> quotes Obama staff on how “...discourse on Twitter among political elites shaped journalistic perceptions of the race and ultimately how they covered it, much in the same way that informal talk at the bar and campaign bus did during previous cycles”

To understand the power and effective and timely interventions in Hybrid Models in low internet penetration demography, we will now take up another case study from the Delhi election campaign.

*Kiran Bedi is nominated CM candidate by the BJP central election committee.*

Kiran Bedi joined the BJP on 16<sup>th</sup> of January, 2015. Though speculations were rife, her nomination as CM candidate was kept under the wraps by the party for the next few days. BJP’s Central Elections Committee (CEC) finally met late in the evening on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January, 2015. Close to midnight, that is, well past the prime time news broadcast in the legacy media, Bedi’s candidature was announced by BJP national president Amit Shah at a press conference at party headquarters in New Delhi.

BJP leader Sanjay Kaul who worked closely with the organization during the polls, claims that Bedi’s anointment caught AAP on the wrong foot.<sup>67</sup> But in the same breath he also alludes to how the party could not capitalize on the element of surprise and novelty that was generated by Bedi’s nomination as CM candidate. He says:

“In fact it was AAP which was trying to recover ground in this particular case. Subsequently of course we did fall back for different reasons. On that particular occasion though, AAP was frustrated enough to strike back.” And strike back they did.

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<sup>66</sup> Kreiss Daniel, (2014), *New Media and Society, Seizing the Moment: The Presidential Campaigns’ Use of Twitter during 2012 electoral cycle*, New Media and Society, Page 10

<sup>67</sup> Sanjay Kaul’s interview with the author



Early next morning, Kejriwal from his official Twitter handle congratulated Bedi on her nomination; and also challenged her to an open debate. (Figure 5.1)

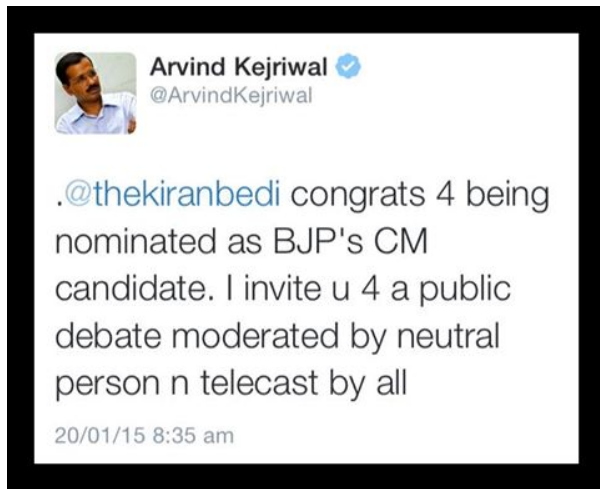


Figure 5.1 Facebook grab of Kejriwal's tweet

Soon after making this online intervention, Kejriwal speaks to TV journalists on camera re-iterating the same challenge to Bedi.

Surprisingly, it is not Bedi but Congress CM candidate Ajay Maken who takes up the gauntlet. He tweets his consent to join other CM candidates for an open debate.

With both legacy and social media agog with the debate triggered by Kejriwal's tweet, the pressure mounts on Bedi to respond. While Kiran Bedi contemplates her response, Kejriwal actively engages TV hosts and editors on social media almost prodding them to bring Bedi on board for a debate which can be broadcast on all channels (Figures 5.2 and 5.3). He re-tweets NDTV-India prime time anchor Ravish Kumar's offer to moderate the debate.

[Arvind Kejriwal](#) retweeted



[ravishkumar](#) [@ravishndtv](#) ·

[@ajaymaken](#) [@ArvindKejriwal](#) [@thekiranbedi](#) अजय और अरविंद तैयार हो गए हैं। बस आपका इंतज़ार है। मेरा दिल कहता है कि आप मान जायेंगी।

Figure 5.2: Kejriwal re-tweets Ravish Kumar: "@ajaymaken @ArvindKejriwal @thekiranbedi Ajay and Arvind are ready. Just waiting for your consent. My heart says you will agree"



**Arvind Kejriwal** @ArvindKejriwal ·

@abpnewstv .@thekiranbedi Thank u ABP News. I am ready

Figure 5.3: Kejriwal replies to ABP News which had offered to host a TV debate of CM candidates

The AAP social media team in the meantime scavenges archives and digs out more material to embarrass the BJP leader and drive home the point that Bedi was shying away from debating Kejriwal. (Figure 5.4)

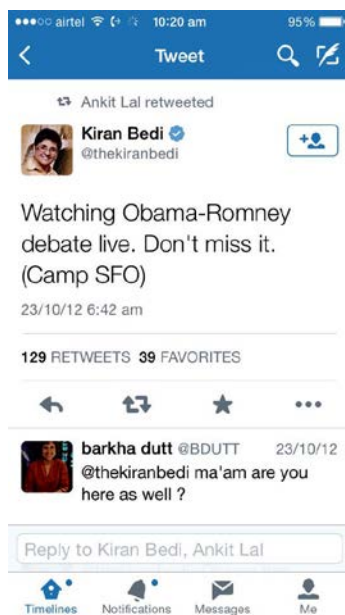


Figure 5.4: AAP social media in-charge Ankit Lal re-tweets Bedi's take on Obama-Romney debate

Under pressure Bedi is finally forced to react when TV journalists seek her response. She refuses to join issue with Kejriwal before elections and says she would rather debate post polls on the floor of the house.<sup>68</sup>

AAP, however, is not giving up just yet. The party launches an aggressive social media drive citing Bedi's earlier tweets on political debates between top leaders during elections (Figure 5.5).

<sup>68</sup>Ibn Live, (20<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2015), *Kiran Bedi accepts Kejriwal's challenge but says debate on the floor of the Delhi Assembly*, <http://www.ibnlive.com/videos/india/kiran-bjp-cm-facekejriwal-nominationaatish-736761.html> (Last Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2015)





Figure 5.5: Facebook poster generated out of Bedi's tweet of October, 2012. Sonia G in this tweet is referred to Congress president Sonia Gandhi while Nitin Gadkari was the BJP president in 2012.

Soon it also transpires that Bedi has blocked Kejriwal on Twitter. Taking the cue or perhaps seeking a fresh angle to the story NDTV starts an online poll seeking audience opinion whether Bedi should start reading Kejriwal's messages again.<sup>69</sup>

By evening nearly all the news had zeroed in on the Bedi-Kejriwal confrontation as the topic for their prime time news discussions. Most debates that evening on the national media focused broadly on two issues: whether there should be a public debate between CM candidates in Delhi; and whether Bedi was running away from face-off with Kejriwal and Maken? For example, NDTV India in its 9pm Prime Time Show debated Kejriwal's challenge to Bedi.<sup>70</sup> The same evening ABP News did a half hour program of the same subject.<sup>71</sup>

So did Times Now.<sup>72</sup> In the flagship late evening show hosted by its aggressive anchor Arnab Goswami, Bedi quits the program half way on being persistently questioned on her reluctance to debate other CM candidates.

Once the lights were switched off in the TV studios, the discourse spilled over to the internet with websites analysing the day's political developments for the online audience.<sup>73</sup>

The impact of this meandering discourse in both legacy and online media is evident in the print media. Newspapers the next morning prominently carried stories on how BJP's CM

<sup>69</sup> Scroll.in, (20<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2015), *What a Bedi vs Kejriwal debate would look like if Twitter users had their way* <http://scroll.in/article/701445/what-a-bedi-vs-kejriwal-debate-would-look-like-if-twitter-had-its-way> (Last Accessed 1st June, 2015)

<sup>70</sup> NDTV India, (20<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2015), *Why Shouldn't there be a debate between Kejriwal and Bedi?* <http://www.ndtv.com/video/player/prime-time/prime-time-should-kiran-bedi-arvind-kejriwal-have-a-public-debate/353220> (Last Accessed 1st June 2015)

<sup>71</sup> ABP News, (20<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2015), *Kejriwal's Public Debate challenge to Bedi and Maken*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSZu12XbcNM> (Last Accessed 1st June 2015)

<sup>72</sup> Times Now, *News Hour Direct: Kiran Bedi on Arvind Kejriwal*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pkd3i1JhwyM> (Last Accessed 1st June 2015)

<sup>73</sup> The First Post, (21<sup>st</sup> Jan, 2015), *#IRunBedi: Kiran Bedi's Times Now interview shows she is right not to debate Kejriwal*, <http://www.firstpost.com/politics/irunbedi-kiran-bedis-times-now-interview-proves-shes-right-not-to-debate-with-kejriwal-2056917.html> (Last Accessed 1st June, 2015)

candidate was running away from debate.<sup>74</sup> Thereafter, the sedimentary remnants of this intervention first triggered by Kejriwal on twitter continued to haunt Bedi on social media for a long time.<sup>75</sup>

This case study is a rich example of how effective social media interventions can steer political debates. The striking feature is Kejriwal's direct interactions with anchors and news editors on twitter in setting the news agenda for prime time TV shows. He is seen to be almost holding the news elites by hand guiding the discourse to his advantage towards a particular end.

A BJP social media strategist concedes that in this situation Bedi should have "quickly and effectively" responded to the challenge posed by Kejriwal.<sup>76</sup>

Andrew Chadwick in *The Hybrid Model*<sup>77</sup> while elucidating the disruptive power of insurgent interventions quotes British political blogger Adam Biekov. A blog by Biekov based on information seeking details under Freedom of Information Request of letters sent by Prince Charles to the London Mayor Boris Johnson was "*picked up and splashed across the front page of the Evening Standard, complete with a quote*" from the blogger.

In Kejriwal's case the influence exercised is not by an independent insurgent, but by someone who is an integral part of the story.

Biekov calls the phenomenon "influencing the influencer".

Co-incidentally or otherwise AAP's social media in-charge Ankit Lal uses this exact phrase to explain his party's online strategy<sup>78</sup>:

"Even mainstream media is using tweets these days. The total reach of twitter in India is just 2.2 million. But when these tweets are picked up by newspapers, or go live on TV it is here that the social media gets exposed to a much larger audience. In the current scenario it is important to influence the news editors or news generators on the social media. ***Influencing the influence makers is very important.*** <emphasis added> For example Rajdeep Sardesai, Sagarika Ghosh or Rahul Kanwal (TV anchors) are on twitter. In their respective organizations they are in a position to decide content and editorial line of a particular news story. If on twitter you are able to influence their decisions by a margin of 5%, the gain is all yours."

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<sup>74</sup> The India Express, (21<sup>st</sup> Jan, 2015), *Maken picks up Kejriwal's debate gauntlet, Bedi will see him in the house*<http://epaper.indianexpress.com/421764/Indian-Express/21-January-2015#page/23/1> (Last Accessed 1st June, 2015)

<sup>75</sup> Social Media Spoof: *Kiran Bedi vs Alia Bhatt vs Rahul Gandhi*, (29<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2015), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4T8aQpEEUwM> (Last Accessed 1st June, 2015)

<sup>76</sup> BJP social media strategist earlier referred to as B2 to maintain anonymity.

<sup>77</sup> Chadwick, Andrew (2013), *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power* Page 167

<sup>78</sup> In an interview with the author

## 6. PERFORMATIVE POWER

Daniel Kreiss in his analysis of Obama's second Presidential campaign<sup>79</sup> has drawn upon Reed's theory of "performative power". Kreiss argues quoting Reed:

"In performative power, well-timed acts, "in tune" with the situation, provide actors with another route to a "quantum of social force," and to "making B do something he would not otherwise do." Power is performative to the degree that it rests in the particular "eventness" of a specific set of concrete actions. It often works by transforming actors' expectations and emotions, and thereby (contributing to the) control or coordination of their future actions."

Kreiss cites an instance when the Romney camp shored-up fundraising in the aftermath of a televised debate in which Romney was seen to have performed better than Obama.<sup>80</sup>

In the context of the Delhi elections, we will now test the performative power of the social media campaigns by qualitative analysis of a case study.

### 6.1 Allegations of Dubious Funding Against AAP

2<sup>nd</sup> Feb, 2015

A break-away faction of AAP called AAP Voluntary Action Manch (Platform) or AVAM holds a press conference in Delhi. The rebels accuse AAP of getting donations worth twenty thousand pounds from fictitious companies whose bona fides were doubtful.

The issue found significant resonance both in the legacy and social media in the wake of AAP's much vaunted claims of having put in place a clean and transparent process of political fundraising through crowd sourcing. The news dominated content in nearly all news channels, both English and Hindi, over the next three days.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Kreiss Daniel, (2014), *New Media and Society, Seizing the Moment: The Presidential Campaigns' Use of Twitter during 2012 electoral cycle*, New Media and Society, Page 5

<sup>80</sup> Kreiss Daniel, (2014), *New Media and Society, Seizing the Moment: The Presidential Campaigns' Use of Twitter during 2012 electoral cycle*, New Media and Society, Page 14

<sup>81</sup> India TV, (2<sup>nd</sup> Feb, 2015), *Bogus Companies Made Donations to AAP: Alleges volunteer group 'AVAM'*, <http://www.indiatvnews.com/politics/national/bogus-companies-made-donations-to-aap-volunteer-group-avam-25705.html> (Last Accessed 1st June, 2015)

Sensing an opportunity just days before the polling, Kiran Bedi tweeted her response taking an indirect swipe at AAP's claims on political integrity. Soon after, BJP fielded two union ministers seeking explanations from AAP. Congress, though belatedly, also joined in.

Once again, AAP got into damage control mode. In a series of 15 tweets and re-tweets, AAP not only defended its position but also accused opponents of having orchestrated the episode to defame the party just before polls. The party demanded allegations be investigated by a Special Team under the supervision of a sitting Supreme Court Judge.

The most interesting element of this case study developed much later in the day when the party launched a special social media campaign seeking funds and donations (Figure 6.1). To everyone's surprise, it shored up its highest per day collection for the entire campaign.

[Aam Aadmi Party](#) retweeted

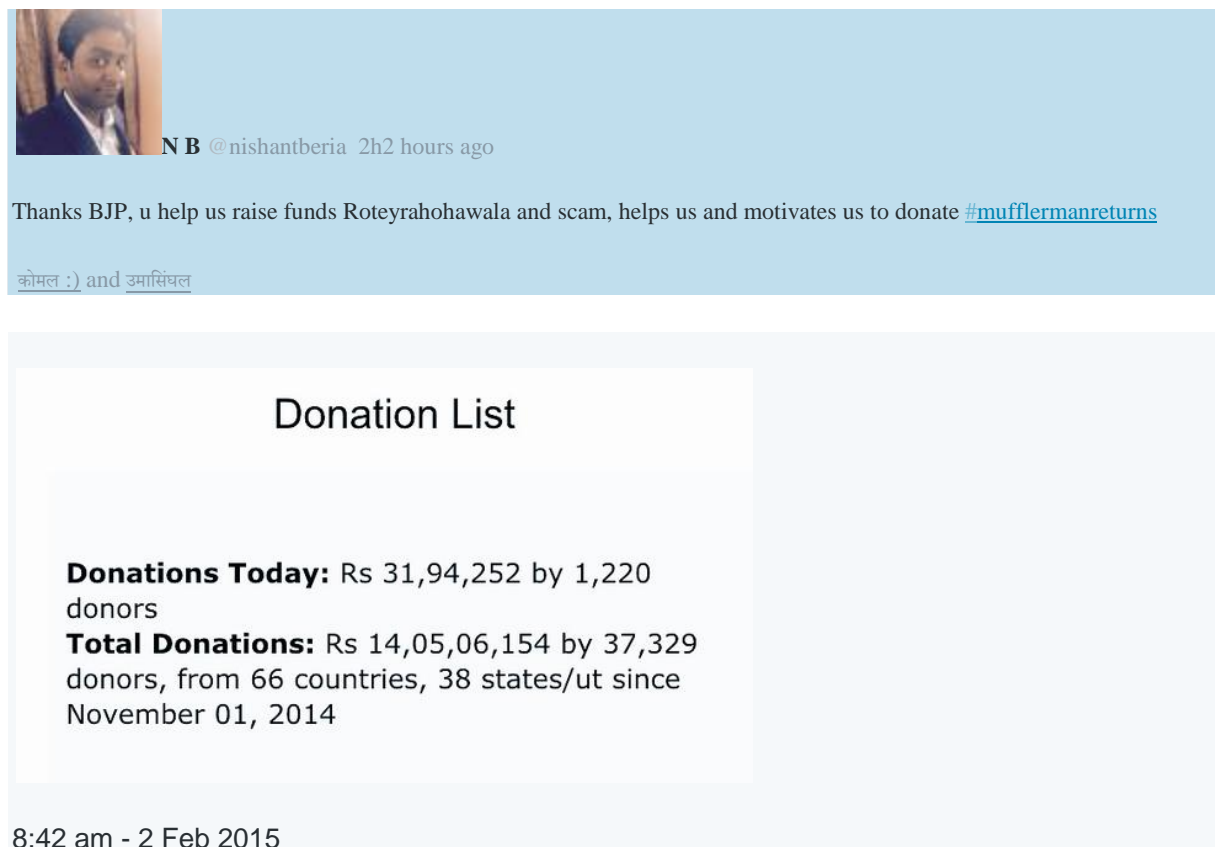


Figure 6.1: A Grab of re-tweet by AAP

This case study helps us understand the performative power of social media in electoral campaigns. Clearly the ‘dubious funding’ saga - as it was called by the legacy media - was one of the most critical moments in the elections. It struck at the very roots of AAP’s existence for the entire genesis of AAP is moored to the twin planks of corruption-free politics and probity in public life. The allegations by AVAM challenged the very fundamentals of what the party stood for all these years.

The import of the moment was not lost on the BJP which saw in these allegations a chance to deal a body blow to AAP’s credibility. Even Prime Minister Modi referred to these allegations to hit out at AAP in one of his elections rallies in Delhi.<sup>82</sup>

As for AAP, we see that during the course of this debate, the party not only defends its position aggressively but utilizes the moment to exercise extraordinary power over its supporters to raise more funds.

AAP Social Media in-charge Ankit Lal emphasises that the tone and the tenor of the fund-raising campaign was well thought out to influence the audience. In an interview with the author he said:

*“By evening (the day the allegations were levelled) we started a fund raising campaign. The pitch was: allegations against AAP were directed at those who had donated clean money to the party for honest politics. We urged people to give a befitting reply to such elements by donating more. It was purely an online campaign.”*

We are at no point trying to establish a co-relation between fund raising and electoral performance. A significant amount of money that poured into AAP’s coffers during this period was donated by people residing outside Delhi. The sole purpose of this case study is to demonstrate timely online interventions can accord extraordinary influence to social media campaigns.

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<sup>82</sup>The HindustanTimes, (3<sup>rd</sup> Feb, 2015), *PM Modi questions AAP on ‘dubious’ funds, takes on Congress on ‘corruption’*, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/newdelhi/modi-taunts-aap-congress-over-corruption-in-delhi-election-campaign/article1-1313162.aspx> (Last Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2015)

## Part II

### 7. Connective Action

AAP leader Dilip Pandey underscores the import of his party's media campaign against Kiran Bedi. "We knew her appeal was limited to a particular class which also is BJP's core constituency"<sup>83</sup>. Pandey, the soft spoken business analyst turned politician then backs his claim with figures and facts. "If you check the Google analytics of 20<sup>th</sup> February or the first two days after her mid-night nomination, you will see that she had peaked in those forty-eight hours. And then her popularity graph slowly came down".

We have illustrated earlier that Bedi faced her severest test in the first 48 hours of her nomination. First, when she blinked on being challenged for debate by Kejriwal and then when the very legend of Crane-Bedi came under the scanner.

On both occasions, AAP was able to set the agenda while others were forced to respond. Congress' sterile campaign and inept response can be explained in many ways by the general despondency in the party rank and file after two consecutive and comprehensive drubbings. A close aide of Ajay Maken<sup>84</sup>, C1, told me that this election was "an extension of the last mandate of 2013 assembly polls and general elections of 2014".

But the same can't be said of the BJP. The party approached Delhi polls in the backdrop of a string of electoral successes. It had both resources and motivation to take on AAP. A BJP insider closely associated with the campaign told me that for the Delhi elections the party almost replicated the well-oiled winning combination and campaign model established during 2014 Lok Sabha polls, both in social and legacy media<sup>85</sup>.

So what is it that led to BJP's rout in Delhi if nothing much changed over the last ten months? In the following section we delve into Bennett and Segerberg's logic of connective action (discussed in the introductory chapter) to test where and how party campaigns fit into network logics; and what sort of systems are most conducive to effective communication strategies.

Based on a series of interviews with key players and some case studies we endeavour to understand why things panned out the way they did culminating in an unprecedented verdict by the people.

#### *7.1 Social Media Campaign: A Comparison*

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<sup>83</sup> In an interview to the author

<sup>84</sup> The close aide referred to as C1 for the sake of anonymity

<sup>85</sup> Referred to as B1 for the sake of anonymity

A day before the votes were to be cast in Delhi, we compared the home page of the official websites of major parties in contention.<sup>86</sup> The aim was to figure out which party made a concerted effort to be more inclusive and interactive in its campaign.

That Congress lags far behind the rest is borne out by the Facebook page of the party linked to the website (Table 7.1). It had less than 50,000 likes as on 3<sup>rd</sup> of February, 2015. Both BJP and AAP are far ahead of Congress on this account:

Party	Likes
AAP	2,371,629
BJP	1,449,570
Congress	44,710

Table 7.1 Data Collected on 6<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2015 (Facebook page of the state unit of the parties)

Content analysis of the website home page of the three parties is another indicator of the thought process behind the respective campaigns. AAP offered 8 unique interactive<sup>87</sup> and multimedia affordances to the visitors on its main page. The corresponding figure for BJP and Congress was 5 and 4 respectively.

AAP also laid a lot of emphasis on online mobilisation of resources. AAP's home page had 8 separate affordances to channelize political donations, while BJP and Congress had none.

## 7.2 AAP

### *Chief Imam of Delhi's Biggest Mosque Supports AAP*

Syed Ahmed Bukhari, the chief Imam of Delhi's Jama Masjid derives his family name from the Uzbek city of Bukhara. His ancestors were invited by the Mughal rulers of Delhi in medieval times to preside over the biggest mosque in the country. In post independent India, the Bukharis have continued to dabble in politics - though indirectly. The Imams of Jama Masjid have in the past given calls in support of political parties. BJP with its right wing moorings in Hindu nationalism has often drummed up political opposition against the Fatwas, accusing the beneficiaries of indulging in vote bank politics and minority appeasement.

<sup>86</sup> Though all parties have both national and province specific sites, for the sake of parity, we evaluated the sites run by provincial units.

<sup>87</sup> We have included only unique affordances in this count. Facebook, Twitter and other social media affordances common to all the three sites have been have not been counted.



Just a day before the Delhi polling, the current Imam, Syed Ahmed Bukhari, gave a call in support of AAP just after the Friday prayers. This is how events unfolded thereafter:

TV stations were quick to latch on to the story.<sup>88</sup> BJP was on the offensive led by senior leader and finance minister Arun Jaitley. Jaitley ‘co-incidentally’ was holding a press conference in Delhi at the time of the newsbreak. On being asked by reporters to respond to Imam’s call, Jaitley said:<sup>89</sup>

*"The correct answer to such 'fatwas' is through the ballot. We are confident that people from all castes and communities will come out and vote for us."*

As his press meeting was being telecast live by many news channels, Jaitley’s response received wide and immediate media coverage.

AAP had to respond quickly to the fast developing situation (Figure 7.1). To begin with, it issued a terse statement on its twitter handle rejecting any offer of support from the Imam.



Figure 7.1: Tweets by AAP rejecting Imam Bukhari’s offer of support

Simultaneously, its leaders picked up their phones and were soon giving telephone interviews to news channels to iterate the party position.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Story of Imam Bukhari on CNN-IBN’s Twitter handle, (6<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2015).

<https://twitter.com/ibnlive/status/563645243023568897/photo/1> (Last Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2015)

<sup>89</sup> Ibn Live, (6<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2015), *Delhi Jama Masjid Shahi Imam Bukhari asks Muslims to support Aam Aadmi Party*, <http://www.ibnlive.com/news/politics/shah-imam-breaking-965848.html>

<sup>90</sup> NDTV Website, (6<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2015), *Reject Imam Bukhari’s Appeal says Aam Aadmi Party*, <http://www.ndtv.com/delhi-news/reject-imam-bukharis-appeal-says-aam-aadmi-party-highlights-737510> (Last Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2015)

The party media department in the meantime organised a formal press conference at its headquarters in Delhi. All this happened within half an hour of the news gaining traction in the legacy media, and especially TV. The swift and categorical response had an immediate impact on news content in the legacy media. AAP's rejection - and not the offer of support by the Imam per se - was soon trending on TV headlines.<sup>91</sup>

The people of Delhi woke up the next morning to cast their vote. And this is what they got to read in most newspapers.<sup>92</sup> The impact of Imam's 'unsolicited offer' - as claimed by AAP- had been rendered ineffectual with quick counter-interventions.

### *Modus Operandi*

AAP leaders give a vivid account of how this entire episode was handled by the party's media unit. A small team (3 to 5 people) of AAP volunteers monitors news channels round the clock during elections. Important campaign related stories or their gist are continually fed to key party functionaries through closed groups on chat apps like WhatsApp or Blackberry Messenger.<sup>93</sup>

In this case, the moment news broke on TV, leaders were alerted immediately.

Deepak Bajpai recalls; "The moment news flashed on TV, we were alerted on messenger groups. All the senior leaders on the group got to know about it and we immediately set up a conference call and decided to reject it to send out a very clear message".

The same message was communicated to the social media in-charge Ankit Lal. "I then forwarded the party line to the team through WhatsApp. I just provide the line of action. I only get from my leadership the line and pitch of the message. I elucidate it to my team. And then they generate the content, whether it is graphics, video or text, they do everything."

In this case we were ready and communicating our response within 15 to 20 minutes of the news break, claims Bajpai. "Within 20 minutes of the news break we were holding the press conference rejecting the appeal. It was that swift. The coordination was very good. The monitoring team informed us, we informed the leaders. Most of the leaders were in and round central Delhi. And we were able to hold a press conference in no time."

Critical to the quick response seems to be coordination between the leadership, legacy media and social media teams. AAP's legacy media setup for the elections was manned by Nagendra Sharma and Deepak Bajpai. Both are veteran journalists having worked for print as

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<sup>91</sup> NDTV Website ,(6<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2015), *Reject Imam Bukhari's Appeal says Aam Aadmi Party*, <http://www.ndtv.com/delhi-news/reject-imam-bukharis-appeal-says-aam-aadmi-party-highlights-737510> (Last Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2015)

<sup>92</sup> The Indian Express,( 7<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2015), *AAP rejects Bukhari Support: Not from man who invited Pak PM and not India's*, <http://epaper.indianexpress.com/433763/Indian-Express/07-February-2015#page/3/1>

<sup>93</sup> Deepak Bajpai's interview to the author

well as broadcast media. Sharma has also had a stint with BBC in London. The mandate of the legacy media team was to monitor news, coordinate party response to queries from print and broadcast media. They would also finalise a roster of spokespersons and leaders for TV debates and interviews. Moreover, the legacy media in consultation with the party leadership also coordinated advertisement campaigns.

The social media team on the other hand runs a very lean and mean operation and channelizes its activities in sync with the legacy media unit. Ankit Lal claims “The core social team, if you look at it in terms of physical presence, is just two people: me and Charanjeet. Some others however do join in during important events like elections. During provincial elections a total of sixteen people were working full time.”

The entire online activity is monitored and channeled by a group of 50 people including active social media volunteers and some prominent senior party leaders. Dilip Pandey and Kumar Vishwas are active within this group. This closed online group is the final arbiter on deciding the tone and tenor of the online campaign. We will call it the core social media group.

The content though is generated by a very loosely coupled group of 50 other social media volunteers spread over a vast geographical stretch across the world and connected through the internet. Mohammed Shadab, the one who designed the MufflerMan meme, is one such volunteer who isn’t formally associated with AAP.<sup>94</sup>

Thirty to thirty-five members of these 50 active social media volunteers are also members of the core group. They come from diverse fields: some are information technology professionals, whilst others are entrepreneurs operating out of their offices or work stations. Even home-makers and house-wives contribute within this group. Their main task is to generate and establish authenticity of content, gather and scavenge information.

Besides this loosely coupled group, AAP has a database of about 5,000 people who have in the past offered to do social media volunteering. This group is connected to the team through various chat groups like WhatsApp. Contingent upon requirements, this data base is used for a variety of online activity.

To sum it up, the social media team of the party is mandated with generation of resources, mobilization of volunteers; and with handling online campaigns, publicity and promotions before, during and after events.

Dilip Gandhi explains the modus operandi of the social media operations. A content generator creates the content. The content is put up for perusal on the closed core group. Changes, if any are suggested, are approved online. The final content is then posted on a platform by six or seven authorised administrators. This is an ongoing process. Timings are

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<sup>94</sup> Ankit Lal in his interview to the author claims Shadab is an active graphics designer

fixed. What sort of content will go in the morning or during peak hours<sup>95</sup> is decided in advance.

AAP's online content can be broadly categorized as scheduled and reactionary posts. The core group, which includes some senior party officials, checks the political alignment of the content. Interference is minimal; and the brief to the social media team broadly covers only the tone, tenor and pitch of the message. This de-centralised and participatory process and procedure makes AAP's social media operations flat and fast.

"In the last three years I have not had to get a post approved from Arvind Kejriwal"; claims Ankit Lal who also manages Kejriwal's Facebook page. Kejriwal however handles his own twitter account.

The loosely coupled volunteer system seems to have helped AAP in making its campaign more organics and inclusive. For example, BJP in the last week of January launched the much-publicised 'Selfie with Modi' in Delhi to connect with young voters.<sup>96</sup> Two thousand odd kiosks were put up across the city for public to click their pictures with a virtual Narendra Modi. To counter the BJP initiative AAP innovated to un-leash its own 'velfie' or video-selfie campaign on social media. Ankit Lal admits the move was inspired by a Mumbai based filmmaker Ram Subramaniam. The concept behind a velfie is crowd sourcing of videos and messages.<sup>97</sup> "What people generally watch during campaigns are videos which are pre-scripted and shot with high end cameras. Using mobile phone or any other tool to capture a candid moment or a messages is a velfie"; says Lal<sup>98</sup>.

AAP also experimented with monetary mobilisation using re-tweets for donations where any participant could offer a certain amount to AAP for every re-tweet of his or her post. Lal explains the concept behind the campaign: "We could generate some hundred thousand dollars from this campaign. But more importantly, the engagement value of a crowd sourced initiative has more net worth. Media is on the lookout for such stories. Even if we could have mopped up just a few thousand dollars, the air time the story captured in the legacy media is worth millions".

To weed out or minimise mistakes, Peer Group Verification is often used by AAP. A group of 20 to 25 people in a close group is assigned this task to check and cross check posts. And this group keeps in touch with those authorised to post on social media platforms. Interestingly, everything happens is in a virtual online world, a classical example of what

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<sup>95</sup> Dilip Pandey in an interview to the author

<sup>96</sup> The Economic Times, (24<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2015), *Delhi polls 2015: BJP launches 'Selfie with Modi' to woo young voters*, [http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-01-24/news/58408210\\_1\\_kiran-bedi-selfie-narendra-modi](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-01-24/news/58408210_1_kiran-bedi-selfie-narendra-modi) (Last Accessed 1st June, 2015)

<sup>97</sup> Velfie posted on the Facebook page run by the Non Resident Indian Supports of AA P, 29<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/AAPNRI/posts/790969590983181>, (Last Accessed 1st June, 2015)

<sup>98</sup> These velfie registered many views on social media: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D15JsJGPjI8>, 24<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2015, *An emotional and heartfelt message from a Delhi girl to Arvind Kejriwal*. (Last Accessed 1st June, 2015)

Bennett and Sergerberg have called the Organisationally Enabled Hybrid Connective Action Network<sup>99</sup>.

### *Chat Apps*

In this entire process, the use of chat apps for communication within and outside assumes an interesting proportion and dimension. Blackberry Messenger, WhatsApp and other chat apps were extensively used by AAP for communicating at three levels. It is most widely used for terse and frequent communication between closed groups like the one used by the TV monitoring team to flag Imam's offer of support to AAP. Assigned volunteers at an elections meeting frequently use WhatsApp messenger to continually feed pictures and video to Ankit Lal and his team. Lal, in turn, would process the input on his high end android phone and post it online.

At another level, chat apps are used to mobilise party volunteers on the ground for rallies or protests. And finally these apps have been useful in communicating directly with the electorate. For mass communication through chatapps, the party has relied upon the database generated by volunteers continually since 2013.

The proliferation of message using apps has two inherent advantages. Firstly, it allows for closed group communication and intended users can be selected to suit the purpose. And secondly, even while being used for the purpose of mass communication akin to social media platforms, the origin of a message on chat apps can be shrouded in anonymity. At the same time, once in circulation, the dissemination through apps lends the message a personal touch as it is communicated from one know person to another.

### *AAP: Organisationally Enabled Network*

AAP's mass communication apparatus bears an uncanny resemblance to Bennett and Sergerberg's Organisationally Enabled Connective Action Network. The "loose organizational coordination"<sup>100</sup> engenders a flat communication matrix with an in-built structural capacity to react fast to continually developing political situations during election cycles.

The "inclusive personal action frames" like Velfie lends a participatory character to the campaign. Affordances and avenues offered by AAP social media campaign for active or passive involvement in the electoral process were far more than the competition. It is no surprise that a survey conducted by Lokniti at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies has found AAP's vote share was the highest amongst young (aged 18 to 22) and

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<sup>99</sup> Bennett Lance W and Segerberg Alexandra Segerberg, (2013), *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics*, Page 48

<sup>100</sup> Bennett Lance W and Segerberg Alexandra Segerberg, (2013), *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics*, Page 47

economically backward voters.<sup>101</sup> The inclination of young people with a far greater exposure to the social media is in conformity with the assessment that loosely coordinated action networks make for the most effective political mobilisations in the hybrid media world.

### 7.3 BJP

Arvind Kejriwal challenged Kiran Bedi to debate at 08.35am Indian Standard Time (IST). His tweets were widely picked up by news channels. In the next one hour or so he had captured the entire news space in the national media even as he interacted with editors and channels online expressing his willingness to join a debate if Bedi concurred. Taking a jibe at the AAP chief, Bedi added “he only debates, but I believe in delivering.”<sup>102</sup>

But what seems to have caused damage to Bedi in particular in this case was the ferocity with which Kejriwal and his team moved in to set the agenda both in the legacy and social media by continually interacting with news elites on twitter. Within one hour of the first online intervention on Twitter, AAP and its leadership was successful in creating a perception that their adversaries were being evasive and running away from a debate that concerns the development of Delhi and its people.

A senior BJP social media strategist B2 who wants to remain anonymous concedes “...*Bedi should have reacted quickly and effectively to the challenge*”. But the fact is that she did not; and nor did the party which takes pride in its well-oiled communication machinery. B2<sup>103</sup> is candid enough to admit further that “...*What Modi could do during general elections Bedi could not be done in Delhi*”. In other words, B2 seems to be laying emphasis on the import of leadership in an electoral battle. The leadership he claims in this case was not Modi but Bedi (despite the fact the BJP started the campaign by projecting Modi and then inducted Bedi mid-way. We will revisit the leadership issues later in this paper).

Leadership issues notwithstanding, to the consternation of many closely linked with the BJP, coordination, planning and the narrative so characteristic of the party campaigns of the last one year was completely missing during the Delhi elections. An insider (B1)<sup>104</sup> associated with the party media machinery said “everything that BJP did during earlier campaigns was planned meticulously. In Delhi however, we were not sure who was coordinating. For example, in the last phase, who commissioned a serious of print

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<sup>101</sup> The Hindu, (13<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2015), *AAP owes it to the young and poor*, <http://m.thehindu.com/elections/delhi2015/aap-owes-it-to-the-young-and-poor/article6888673.ece/> (Last Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2015)

<sup>102</sup> ABP News Website, 20<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2015, *Kejriwal challenges Bedi to open debate, Bedi says on the floor*, <http://www.abplive.in/india/2015/01/20/article480277.ece/Kejriwal-challenges-Kiran-Bedi-to-open-debate> (Last Accessed 1st June, 2015)

<sup>103</sup> In an interview to the author

<sup>104</sup> In an interview to the author

advertisements launching a personal broadside against Kejriwal? Despite negative inputs the first day, it continued for a couple of days more”.<sup>105</sup>

This happened even though BJP did not tinker with much touted campaign machinery put in place during general elections. Analogous to AAP, BJP relies on a three tiered communication mechanism. Strategy is handled by the leadership, but execution is through continual coordination between legacy and social media units. B2 claims that even the social media operations of the two parties are quite similar. BJP has a permanent team of 20 social media activists who operate out of party headquarters. During elections, the party either mobilises an additional task/province specific team or coordinates with the social media unit of the poll bound province if one already exists. In addition to this infrastructure, the party gets a constant helping hand from a pool of social media volunteers/sympathizers spread from across the world.

In terms of broad principles, BJP like AAP seems to be operating its media campaign in an Organisationally Enabled Network. But with the depth of an ideologically-moored-cadre-based party, it is unlikely that BJP would have had as much flexibility in its campaign apparatus as AAP could display. With most of the top leadership in government, the communication between strategist and executors would also have been hampered.<sup>106</sup>

BJP’s dilemma in dealing with AAP is perhaps articulated by party leader Sanjay Kaul:

*“So typically BJP has its strength and the strength is size, its organization and its depth. If Congress would have challenged BJP in this case, BJP would have won hands down. But if you challenge the BJP on a different turf which the guerrilla tactics of the AAP did, the party cannot respond to you”.*<sup>107</sup>

This comparison leads us to a very interesting point of observation: that within the connective action frame in a hybrid media environment, networks are Organisationally Enabled or Brokered in relative terms. An operation is “Organisationally Enabled” only as much as in comparison to the other competing network apparatus. The Congress – as we go on to show later in the paper - which has lagged way behind competition in adapting to the methods of the new media has had a more conventional approach towards election campaigns bordering on collection action theory. Kaul’s observation explains the strategic advantage which BJP seems to have had over the Congress in most provinces outside Delhi in terms of the former’s capacity to run campaigns more conducive to positive outcomes in connective network frames.

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<sup>105</sup> The Indian Express, (30<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2015), Half-page cartoon advertisement by BJP accusing Kejriwal of swearing falsely by his children. <http://epaper.indianexpress.com/427880/Indian-Express/30-January-2015#page/1/1> (Last Accessed 1st June, 2015)

<sup>106</sup> Sanjay Kaul in an interview with the author

<sup>107</sup> Interview to the author



But real difference between the two parties, according to B2, was not the response and turnaround time during campaign. The difference, according to him lies in the party's inability to communicate its own development agenda to the people. Borrowing from the marketing lexicon, he feels BJP laid too much emphasis on the FUD factor. Fear, Uncertainty and Doubt (FUD) is a term used for strategic dissemination of negative information to create doubts in the minds of consumers. Both Dilip Pandey and Deepak Bajpai in their assessment "negative campaign" run by BJP was one of the crucial factors which helped AAP turn tide in its favour.

## 7.4 Congress

"I want to send an email. Can I send one to the United States also"? A spokesperson of the Congress party who does not want to be quoted recalls being asked last year by a senior general secretary who is quite well entrenched in the organisation.<sup>108</sup>

This one query of a veteran party leader to a middle aged spokesperson sums up Congress' dilemma, both at the organisational level and in terms of media management. The spokesperson admits how far the Congress has fallen behind its opponents in its understanding and use of the new media.

Pawan Khera has been a close aide of former Delhi chief minister Sheila Dikshit for fifteen years. Congress won three consecutive elections under Dikshit's leadership in Delhi from 1998 till it all came crashing down in December 2013.

Six months before the elections that year, Khera personally felt the need for Congress legislators to be on social media. A group was hired to train the lawmakers in handling their Twitter and Facebook accounts.

"But my experience was that most of them were just tweeting about their own activity or their own speeches like if someone had gone to attend a jagran (a religious congregation through the night) or light a lamp. He or she would post that picture." Khera says.

Fast-forward to 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 2015. Just a few days to go to the polls and there are a total of thirteen posts in Congress' Facebook page - both national and provincial taken together. Some of them are precisely the sort of posts that Khera felt are ineffectual on social media (Figure 7.2). It seems not much has changed within the Congress in the last twenty four months after its worst ever defeat in the Delhi provincial polls.

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<sup>108</sup> C2 is a congress spokesperson who wants to remain anonymous.



Figure 7.2: A post on Congress' Facebook Page, 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb, 2015

The same day BJP's national and state Facebook page together registered close to five dozen posts (BJP released its vision document that morning so it was fairly active on social media). (Table 7.2) AAP's page during that same period registered nearly times eight times the total posts by the Congress party in the same period.

### Facebook Activity

Party	Posts
AAP	89
BJP	56
Congress	11

Table 7.2: Cumulative posts on national and provincial Facebook pages of parties (3<sup>rd</sup> Feb, 2015)

The number of posts on a given day is an insufficient yardstick to gauge the impact of a social media campaign. But a cursory perusal of content makes it apparent that AAP was more diversified in its attempt to reach out to comparatively large sections of the society in far more innovative ways than its competition. As for the Congress campaign, there is hardly any narrative, or whatever remained of it in the last leg of canvassing.

For example, consider a YouTube link posted by the Congress party on its Facebook page on the 5<sup>th</sup> February, 2015.<sup>109</sup> It is a two minute seven second video shot and edited for the sole purpose of the elections; it was posted just hours before the campaign officially ended. A congress social media coordinator on the condition of anonymity said the “anthem was released much earlier during a rally addressed by the party vice-president Rahul Gandhi and was available on YouTube”. It’s just that nobody bothered to use it after that.

The same day, of a dozen odd posts on Facebook by the state unit, only one has a picture of party CM candidate Ajay Maken.<sup>110</sup> Even in that one picture Maken is standing beside vice president Rahul Gandhi in a group picture taken during a road show. By looking at the day’s posts, it is difficult to make out who was the party’s face or leader in the elections.

Data recorded on the 4<sup>th</sup> February, 2015 sheds some more light on the prevailing confusion in the Congress party rank and file.

#### Facebook Page (4<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2015)

<a href="#">AAP State FB Page</a>	<a href="#">Images</a>
Arvind Kejriwal	<b>35</b>

Table 7.3 Images on Facebook Page

<a href="#">BJP State FB Page</a>	<a href="#">Images</a>
Narendra Modi and Kiran Bedi (in one frame)	25
Only Narendra Modi	3
Only Kiran Bedi	3

Table 7.4 Images on Facebook Page

<sup>109</sup> Link to congress anthem posted on party’s Facebook page on the last day of the campaign, 5<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLT2IW6mE&feature=youtu.be> ( Last Accessed 1st June, 2015)

<sup>110</sup> Posts registered on the Facebook page of the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee, 5<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/DelhiPCC?fref=ts> , Data recorded during campaign.

Congress State FB Page	Images
Rahul Gandhi	2
Sonia Gandhi	1
Rahul and Lovely (in one frame)	1
Maken and Lovely (in one frame)	4

Table 7.5 Images on Facebook Page

The data tabulated above shows AAP was very clear about who its main vote catcher was. (Table 7.3) It translates into an unambiguous clarity in projecting Kejriwal as its main face. Irrespective of the outcome of the polls and despite initial hiccups caused by Bedi's surprise nomination, BJP seems to have settled down to a joint projection of Modi and Bedi (Table 7.4). As for the Congress, the confusion persisted till the very end. (Table 7.5)

A Congress social media volunteer attributes complete absence of purpose and intent to "the lack of any coordination whatsoever during the campaign" which was being managed at three disparate levels: the All India Congress Committee (national unit), Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee<sup>111</sup> and Maken's own office.

In the first phase of canvassing Congress laid emphasis on the development work undertaken by its government during fifteen years of party rule in Delhi till 2013. Surprisingly, this was a recurrent refrain in party posters till almost a fortnight to the day of voting. Congress would not have lost the elections in the first place in 2013 had its performance been a winner. Only very late in the campaign did the party start to underline own its agenda of governance for the next five years. By that time, AAP had already filled the space with a glut of promises on things tangible.

Lack of coordination within the party is also seen by some as a symptom of the ongoing power tussle between the old guards who have been loyal to President Sonia Gandhi and the younger ones owing allegiance to Sonia's son and heir apparent Rahul Gandhi. "Some senior individuals in a section of the party are creating a mind-set of insecurity"; says

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<sup>111</sup> Delhi Provincial Unit of the Congress Party

a spokesperson<sup>112</sup> who had been accommodated in Rahul Gandhi's new team. The difference in opinion within the party is spilling over to media management as well.

A Congress leader close to Ajay Maken<sup>113</sup> says Rahul Gandhi in a memo circulated to the Congress media team in January underlined the importance of the internet in political communication while emphasizing the need for the party to recover lost ground having already fallen way behind in the digital space.

Ironically in the 2009 the Lok Sabha elections, a flamboyant congress MP Shashi Tharoor was the only politician to have a Twitter account with six thousand followers<sup>114</sup>. Congress president Sonia Gandhi is still not on social media. Her son Rahul in May 2015 finally made his first indirect foray into the virtual world with his office signing in on Twitter attracting 40,000 followers in less than ten hours.<sup>115</sup>

“So yes, certainly we did not read the impact the new media would have on the traditional media. Not only the stories but the twists to the stories also come from the social media. What you see happening during the day on hashtags becomes the prime time discussion in the evening. Yes, Congress misread that certainly”; admits Pawan Khera.

So does C1, the close aide of Ajay Maken. “On a scale of 100, if AAP and BJP are at hundred, we are at two”, he says ruefully.

### ***7.5 Is Digital Media Necessary or Sufficient for Positive Outcomes?***

That Congress lagged far, far behind BJP and AAP is obvious. The BJP lost out, B1 feels, primarily for three reasons. The selection of CM candidate Kiran Bedi, the decimation of the Congress leading to the consolidation of non-BJP votes in favour of AAP in the first past the post system; and the negative campaign undertaken by the BJP in the last phase. AAP in their assessment laid a lot of emphasis on the leadership of Kejriwal and the ‘positive campaign’ party which was able to force BJP to react on most occasions.

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<sup>112</sup>Spokesperson C2 who wants to remain anonymous

<sup>113</sup> Close associate of Ajay Maken C1

<sup>114</sup> IAMAI Press Release, 6<sup>th</sup> May, 2014, [http://www.iamai.in/PCov\\_Detail.aspx?nid=3338&NMonth=5&NYear=2014](http://www.iamai.in/PCov_Detail.aspx?nid=3338&NMonth=5&NYear=2014) (Last Access 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2015)

<sup>115</sup>The Times of India, (8<sup>th</sup> May, 2015), *Rahul Gandhi 'office' finally joins Twitter*, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/tech/tech-news/Rahul-Gandhi-office-finally-joins-Twitter/articleshow/47199705.cms> (Last Access 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2015)

The above narrative is in conformity with Professor Vinay Kumar's analysis attributing AAP's victory to "leadership, issues and a ground campaign" which he says matter more than "anything, including mass publicity and media coverage"<sup>116</sup>.

Let us now analyse how the issue of real-politics played out in the run up to the polls in Delhi to influence the final outcome.

#### *Leadership:*

The confusion within the BJP and Congress was accentuated by the nomination of their respective chief ministerial candidates. It seemed unlikely at the time of the announcement of the elections that either party would settle leadership issues before the polls. Congress traditionally doesn't do it and BJP had dropped enough hints that it would once again be relying on Modi's charisma to see the party home.<sup>117</sup>

AAP leaders feel forcing BJP to declare a CM candidate - and a rank outsider too - was their first major strategic victory. And it was achieved by running a well-planned and concerted campaign accusing BJP of not having a suitable leader to administer Delhi. Modi, AAP hammered home, being the Prime Minister was never in contention for the CM's post.<sup>118</sup>

Deepak Vajpayee, AAP's media coordinator says "Bedi's announcement was their (BJP's) plan B. Initially they had thought of contesting the elections by projecting Modi but that did not work. They were defensive and had to declare a leader. When Kiran Bedi was nominated, we played on the front foot and said that if she was the leader then she had to spell out what she stood for".

If BJP indeed attempted to shield its top leader by making a scapegoat out of Bedi, her nomination in turn led to dissatisfaction among the party cadre. Even the president of the state or provincial unit, Satish Upadhyay, was denied nomination to contest the polls. Rebels protested outside the party office on being denied the party ticket. The cadre could never really be reconciled to an imposed leadership of Kiran Bedi.<sup>119</sup> B2 lists two factors which he feels led to the BJP's defeat in Delhi: late selection of candidates, and lack of coordination between the party, candidates and leadership. The confusion and leadership issues also gnawed at the Congress campaign which never really took off. The party announced its CM candidate Ajay Maken out of the blue when the entire local unit was preparing to contest

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<sup>116</sup>Kumar Anup, (11<sup>th</sup> February, 2015), *The media and elections*, <http://www.thehoot.org/web/The-media-and-elections/8083-1-1-10-true.html>, (Last Accessed 1st June, 2015)

<sup>117</sup>The Hindu, (4<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2014), *BJP not to project CM candidate in Delhi*, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/bjp-not-to-project-cm-candidate-in-delhi-assembly-elections/article6564240.ece> (Last Accessed 1st June, 2015)

<sup>118</sup>The Times of India, (5<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2015), *Why Jagdish Mukhi is AAP's candidate for BJP CM*, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/Why-Jagdish-Mukhi-is-AAPs-candidate-for-BJP-CM/articleshow/45040455.cms> (Last Accessed 1st June, 2015)

<sup>119</sup>NDTV Website, (21<sup>st</sup> Jan, 2015), *Amid Resentment Over Kiran Bedi, BJP warns against public dissent*, <http://www.ndtv.com/delhi-news/amid-resentment-over-kiran-bedi-bjp-warns-against-public-dissent-730260> (Last Accessed 1st June, 2015)

under the leadership of state president Amrinder Singh Lovely. A Congress social media strategist C3, who wants to remain anonymous, admits “the entire thing had been finalized with Lovely as the face of the campaign. We had planned it entirely around Lovely when all of a sudden the party leadership announced a CM candidate in Maken”.

On the other hand, AAP settled the leadership issues and announcement of candidates well in advance giving it a clear head start over other parties. BJP leader Sanjay Kaul associated closely with the campaign concedes the point. He says, “We decide tickets at the last minute. You are in limbo when you are dealing with a party which has announced candidates three months in advance. They can go to two hundred thousand voters in three months. How will your candidate do the same in 20 days”?

### *Issues*

Almost six out of ten voters in 2013 Delhi provincial elections decided their voting preference during the course of the campaign.<sup>120</sup>

Statistics speak for themselves. Robust and well planned campaigns knit around strong narratives are critical in electoral contests.

In Delhi, AAP announced its leader and candidates well in advance and so had enough time to plan a meticulous campaign. Adopting a bottom-up approach to thrash out its manifesto, the party launched a new initiative called the Delhi Dialogue almost two months before elections<sup>121</sup>. The Dialogue attempted to prepare a blueprint for governance by seeking inputs from various sections of society. Party media coordinator Deepak Vajpayee explains the thought behind the whole exercise: “We went to all sections of the people. We went to women, to youth, businessmen, farmers and we prepared the plan. We had constituted different cells. The cells organized the meeting with various groups, and we got to know what people wanted from us. The inputs from Delhi Dialogue were used both in the legacy media and social media campaign. We always kept our focus on what people expected from us.”

The first-mover advantage to AAP was quite palpable when the election campaign reached its full fervor. AAP had something very tangible to offer to the people of Delhi based on the inputs gathered through an elaborate dialogue process. When AAP was promising cheap power and water to the electorate, BJP in comparison could only re-iterate its agenda of good governance made at the time of general elections, and that too in the national context. Kiran Bedi further added to the welter of confusion by tweeting her own vision for Delhi.

AAP also utilized its army of volunteers to reach out to the electorate for a well-planned door-to-door campaign. BJP has a well-entrenched cadre in Delhi but in absence of a

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<sup>120</sup>Semetko, Holli A, Neyazi Tabarez A and Kumar Anup, *Framing of Campaign: the 2013 Delhi Assembly campaign and perceptions of 2014 Lok Sabha Elections in India Elections 2014: First Reflections* by Thorsen E and Sreedharan C, Page 67-69

<sup>121</sup>The Hindu, (12<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2014), AAP to launch Delhi Dialogue, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/aap-to-launch-delhi-dialogue%20campaign/article6590889.ece> (Last Accessed 1st June, 2015)



clear strategy and dissidence the network could not be put to effective use. A BJP leader associated with the campaign rued. “We did not have a strategy. If you have a strategy only then you can find fault with. Whom do you find fault with when there is no strategy?”

## 7. Conclusions

Our task at the onset of this paper was to prove whether social and digital media have an impact on political mobilisations in a low income demography with a limited internet footprint. In Part I of this paper we established through multiple case studies from the Delhi elections that social media indeed played a vital role in disrupting the political discourse.

Arvind Kejriwal influenced the media elites and drew them towards a certain story line even as he challenged his rival Kiran Bedi for an open debate. All this was triggered by two tweets he generated early in the morning a day after Bedi was nominated chief ministerial candidate. Would he have generated equal traction had he issued the challenge through legacy media, say if he had held a press conference daring Bedi to a debate? Journalistically speaking, I doubt he would have. The use of the medium to trigger the debate, its timing and then real time online interaction drawing in the media elites were critical to the power Kejriwal could exercise in the hybrid media environment. He used an interesting combination of both online and offline interventions to build the story over a period of time to set the agenda at the onset of the last and final leg of the campaign.

In the ‘Crane Bedi’ case study, news which was grafted exclusively by digital media blew up in the legacy media when Bedi was challenged by an interviewer on the ‘Myth of Crane Bedi’. Later, we demonstrated, even an insurgent online organization like ‘the Truth of Gujarat’ showed the capacity to leave a sedimentary footprint in the digital space by the simple juxtaposition of contents created in the legacy media.

In both instances, even if large sections of the electorate in Delhi had no access to internet, interventions made purely in the digital space take a hybrid route to influence legacy media audience and vice versa.

My assessment from the case study is that even with a 30 to 40 percent internet penetration, social media can have a tangible impact on the campaign and political discourse subject to the presence of legacy media which is competitive, robust, independent and well entrenched; and an un-censored internet.

However, the key to the impact of new media in a hybrid environment is the way digital affordances are exploited. In this respect, internet certainly can prove most handy for insurgent outfits which tend to face a resource crunch in competing with established parties. Dilip Pandey iterates this point when discussing media strategy of his party:

*“Contrary to what people were saying, we did not do much on the legacy media, it is just that we used our resources well and used our mind. Suppose if we had to plan an outdoor campaign, we took the heat map of the entire Delhi and figured out where the crowd concentration is more, where we would get maximum eyeballs, we knew we would not be able to win using money power, but we knew we could win using our brains.”*

Building on the Hybrid Model theory, we went on to show that online campaigns in low income economies show remarkable similarity to the ones witnessed in developed countries like US. The “performative power” of Twitter as defined by Denial Kreiss is as valid in Delhi’s context as it was during the last US presidential campaign. The party which could think out of box in Delhi (in this case AAP) was able to use the internet to generate maximum funds in the face of a very fierce political assault and media adversity.

The obvious corollary to the first hypothesis is: how and why are some political parties more successful in harnessing technology to their advantage? In order to compare the campaign strategy of the three key players in these elections, we have delved into Bennett and Sergerberg’s argument that citizens - especially the younger generation - have decoupled from traditional forms of collective actions like the party, church, trade union etc.<sup>122</sup> The politics of the DIY (Do It Yourself) class is thus articulated through more individuated modes in the digital space.

There is an important lesson in this for the Congress which seems to have paid a heavy price for its lethargy in adapting to the new media. Parties like Congress are averse to participatory models for the fear of losing their collective identity by accommodating individuated connective actions frames. This case study shows that organizations like BJP have experimented with connective actions frames of participation and yet retained their collective identity. So there is always an incentive for political parties to adapt to the new paradigm by making a transition from purely collective to connective mobilization with reasonable organizational control. The technology thus nudges closed compartmentalized political systems to open up to people who are increasingly articulating and connecting in individuated action frames. Congress strategist C1 tells us that party vice-president Rahul Gandhi in an internal memo to the media department earlier this year stressed the need to catch up with competition in the use of technology for mass communication.

Though both AAP and BJP have made social media an integral part of their three tier election apparatus, the former seems to have trumped a well-entrenched, resourceful and motivated BJP in the campaign and political communication in the Delhi elections on two counts: it demonstrated far greater flexibility to respond to the fast changing political situation; and its campaign was relatively more inclusive insofar as offering more participatory avenues to people.

The same BJP however, looks more sleek and agile when pitted against Congress in Delhi and elsewhere. That makes us question whether digitally enabled action networks are organisationally enabled and conducive to positive outcomes in relative terms? It seems the capacity of a network to yield a positive outcome is not independent of the other competing networks in the same media space. This is more likely to be the case in the hybrid media environment where power in a continual interactive field is wielded by “those who recognize

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<sup>122</sup> Bennett Lance. W and Sergerberg, (2013), *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics*, Page 6

*the importance of time and the circulation of information- when to act quickly, and when to delay, when to devote intensive attention to the pursuit of a goal, when to repeat, when to act alone, and when to coordinate”...”<sup>122</sup>*

But then the question arises why did AAP fail in general elections against the same set of opposition? The answer seems to lie in the fact that AAP with a limited political footprint could never project itself as an alternative to a party and leader with a pan-country image. Vice-versa, Modi the Prime Minister could not be projected as viable alternative to Kejriwal in an election for the chief minister of a small province. Congress in Delhi neither had a leader nor any narrative to emerge as an alternative. This also explains the huge exodus of traditional Congress votes - especially the minorities - towards AAP.

In his study of the media coverage of Barak Obama’s campaign in 2008 US presidential elections, Prof Anoop Kumar defines ‘empty signifiers’ of political communication as “high soaring” words “which often imbibe emptiness”. In this context he cites Obama’s political rhetoric which was replete with words like hope, audacity, change, we, one-people et al.

Now fast-forward to India, April-May 2014. The larger theme in the then BJP Prime Ministerial candidate Narendra Modi’s campaign in the run up to the general elections was hope. Ten months later for the Delhi elections, the party and its leaders attempted to replicate this very concept but met with stiff resistance.

An effective anti-dote to empty signifiers is inherent in another form of political populism. Exhaustive, targeted campaigns spelling out specifics of delivery and effective articulation of this agenda by the leadership can counter empty signifiers. AAP used this counter narrative to good effect. AAP’s manifesto for the elections pledged tangible solutions and concrete deliverables with specific timelines attached. The party designed multiple campaign frames (for example Delhi Dialogue) to reach out to a diverse demography. And most importantly, the counter political rhetoric was forcefully articulated by its leadership.

Congress, on the other hand, delved into the past by chronicling work done by its government under Sheila Dikshit’s leadership. That as a campaign strategy was quite surprising. If the electorate comprehensively rejected this argument in 2013, by any stretch of imagination why would they buy it fourteen months later?

Campaigns matter, and inclusive digitally enabled campaigns are more likely to result in positive electoral outcomes; but within the framework of political plausibility. We call this ‘the contextualization of elections campaigns’. Campaigns - legacy or digital - are built around leaderships and issues in a certain political context. BJP leader B2 articulates it well: “Communication and leadership are key elements in elections these days. But you can’t sell a bad product, can you?”

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## **Abbreviations**

AAP

Aam Aadmi Party

BJP

Bhartiya Janata Party

INC or Congress

Indian National Congress

IAMAI

Internet and Mobile Association of India