

PENETRATION OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN INDIAN DEMOCRACY

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PURPOSE
INDIAN elections 2014 have strongly used digital media in their campaign. In fact, it is assumed that the key to BJP's success was the engagement achieved with supporters, through the use of social mediums. Therefore, this study aims to understand the influence of digital political marketing among youth. Study also helps to identify the political objectives achieved through digital marketing. Although things started late in India but geared up very soon and surpassed many benchmarks in the world of digitization.

Methodology: *The research is based upon Questionnaire. Sample included 80 youths from different spheres whom set of few questions would be asked. Research questions would depend upon the following objective: (i) To understand the influence of digital political marketing among youth, (ii) Effectiveness of online tools in targeting youth for political purpose, (iii) Identification of political objectives achieved through digital marketing, (iv) Assessment of implementation of various policies through digital media, (v) Assessment of accessibility of such digital marketing tools.*

Findings: *It would be subject to further empirical research.*

Research Limitations: *The accuracy of analysis is dependent on accuracy of data. Respondents might answer superficially.*

Practical Implications: *Digital media is playing a considerable role in Indian democracy so this study would probably help to understand more, the use of digital media in different corporations especially in politics. This study might facilitate academicians to get the perspective of digital political marketing among youth.*

Originality: *There has been sufficient research articles focussing upon impact, growth, effect, etc. of digital media on youth. Even talking about digital literacy wouldn't be new. But through this paper we found that how much digital political marketing is influential among youth. This study would probably be the first to identify political objectives achieved through digital marketing and also help to assess, if this media is really helpful to implement the various political policies.*

Key Words: *Digital Hiteracy, Digital Marketing, Digital Media, Political Marketing.*

Introduction

Indian elections 2014 have strongly used digital media in their campaign. In fact, it is assumed that the key to BJP's success was the engagement achieved with supporters through the use of social media.

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Therefore, this study aims to understand the influence of digital political marketing among youth. The study would also help to identify the political objectives achieved through digital marketing. Although things started late in India but geared up very soon and surpassed many benchmarks in the world of digitization. It is interesting to note that July 1 onwards the Bharatiya Janata Party declared the 'Digital India Week' in order to launch a campaign of connecting 2,50,000 villages by 2019. Hence, their drive to increase their digital presence continues as the technological progress of the Indian democracy is on. The paper argues that the influence of digital political marketing among youth is immense and that it can influence decision-making in ways which can affect political participation in a huge way. Hence, this study explores the impact of such digitalization.

The 2014 general elections (GE) marked the dawn of a new century in the history of digital India and have been termed as the world's biggest exercise in democracy. Over 551 million votes were cast out of which 20% (168 million) of total electorate was first time voters. This was a contest that could not be won by doling out sops, what the public needed was a leader of substance. To provide general public with that substance, they knew just being a mere politician wouldn't help. They needed to become something more and involve people. During these elections many records were set in the political history. The politicians endeavoured to become marketers.

Philip Kotler defined Marketing as an "exchange process between the customer and marketer" (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Studying the Indian GE 2014, I found Kotler is true in his words but the exchange is just not enough. To attain 100% success involvement of people plays a crucial role. So what better way to engage or involve the 21st century Indian citizens than targeting the unique users of Digital Country?

The total population of India is 1.25 billion of which 190 million have direct access to internet (as on June 2014); 130 million being urban users and the remaining 60 million rural users. 40 million of users are spending 40-45 hours on internet per month, making India the second largest market for social networking giants (Facebook/Linked In). 58,000 new users get connected every day.

The three parties Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), Aam Admi Party (AAP) and Indian National Congress, but instead of three I'd rather say two as congress and its prime ministerial candidate Mr. Rahul Gandhi became insignificant between the social media combat of BJP's Narendra Modi and AAP's Arvind Kejriwal. The channels used by these parties include 74% of microblogging sites, 25% of social network and remaining 1% of images, videos, forums, and news.

BJP or Narendra Modi has become the pioneer in tapping new age media to its full potential. Interactive websites, dedicated volunteer's dashboard, mobile apps, Google hangouts, Face book page, Twitter handle, YouTube channel, What's App, etc., he used it all. His election juggernaut in the Lok Sabha polls is an example of how to prepare and successfully implement a marketing and branding campaign. His image and in-your-face messaging have overshadowed all other brands; even that of his own party (Businesses Today, 2014).

Pitching leader as a driver of change and moving the masses to vote for him isn't a new age strategy. Since age old times this has been used, the fine examples are - BJP's 'Ab Ki Bari Atal Bihari' in 1996 and Congress's 'Indra Lao Desh Bachao' in 1970. An article in business today quoted 'Narendra Modi has rewritten the rules of the game and redefined Indian politics'.

Modi's transformation over the past years, from a regional leader to the national leader cannot be credited only to him. Senior BJP leaders Piyush Goyal and Ajay Singh handled the overall media strategy and a task force was constituted to handle Modi's campaign in Varanasi. Advertising legends such as Ogilvy & Mather's Piyush Pandey, McCann Worldgroup's Prasoon Joshi and Sam Balsara of Madison World lent their skills at various levels. Advertising agency Soho square, part of WPP group handled television, radio, and print campaigns with catchy slogans like 'Abki Bar Modi Sarkar'.

David Aaker, American Marketing guru and author of several books on branding, wrote in April 2012

in his blog post, the Prophet, that every person has a brand that affects how the person is perceived and whether he or she is liked and respected. This brand, he says, can be actively managed with discipline and consistency over time, or it can be allowed to drift.

Narendra Modi undertook the largest mass outreach in India's electoral history by travelling about 3 lakh km addressing 437 public meetings in 25 states besides 1350 innovative 3D rallies connecting cities in the country. Use of technology had been one of the highlights of BJP's campaign and the 3D rallies through which the BJP leader Narendra Modi connected with people in multiple places was a big hit. Modi had interacted with people on issues such as agriculture and women empowerment at the chats held across 4,000 locations in 24 states in several rounds and, internationally, across 50 locations in 15 countries. Some 10 lakhs people had participated in this innovative programme.

BJP earmarked 2-5% of their election budgets for social media, according to IAMAI report in October 2013, the percentage of expenditure was expected to increase with the increase in the smart phone market and also on the number of users following and participating in conversations related to politics or elections on social networking sites and blog posts.

Facebook included an 'I am a voter' feature on its page. Users 18 and above would see a message at the top of their Face-book news feed on their mobile phones and on the day of election a message and 'I am a Voter' button will become visible to the Facebook user, only on the day of polling in their region. On Facebook, BJP leads with 3.4 million followers as against Congress with 2.5 million and AAP's 1.8 million on their official pages. Tata Consultancy Service (TCS) tied up with twitter to launch an app – iElect, which would help users to gain insights into the Lok Sabha polls.

Apart from these two social media giants, BJP and AAP also took to LinkedIn and Google + on a daily basis. This time BJP left no stone unturned and it did its branding even on the pin board style photo sharing website that allows users to create and manage theme based images and videos – www.pinterest.com. Apart from Pinterest, Modi also made his presence on the android phones through mobile games. A mobile game on Narendra Modi called 'Modi run' had been trending those days and was made available at Google Play Store for free. The game was based on the classic Mario series. Modi had to cross hurdles and collect diamonds at different stages. The stages were named after Indian states. The main goal was to reach the ballot and count votes in BJP's ballot box in the backdrop of parliament. Another game called 'Kursi Cricket' was also available on Play Store. This game offered users to choose from the three characters – Arvind Kejriwal, Rahul Gandhi, and Narendra Modi. The users score goes to the character they have selected.

BJP's Prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi is the world's second most popular Leader on Facebook with 12 million followers. The pecking order repeats in the Twitter world with Modi having 3.6 million followers as against Kejriwal's 1.6 million. Modi was the first Indian Politician to use the Google+ Hangout application for group video chats. In August 2012, with the live interaction broadcasting on YouTube and his Google+ page, he answered to the questions from people across the world. During election campaign, the party used hangouts to address questions about its movements and agendas for the election. Hangout is an effective means to reach the masses and establish the fact that we are available for the masses via advanced tech support. All their calls will be heeded, queries answered, and grievances heard. BJP projecting leader's image larger than life, making hashtag debuts daily like *#NaMoInUdhampur*, *#KejriwalInVaranasi* becoming the topic for conversation for the day, Google hangouts, Online Sneezer, games and social media creeping into mainstream media's political decision; a sweet tweet by an individual, hurray!! News for the day and all things kosher has led Modi winning the elections.

Digital media gave way to public thoughts and is the most effective. People rise and fall here in seconds. In limited time period, it allows you to reach across the world, without a dime spend, having to actually travel to those places and facilitates your meeting the leaders of the country or world while you sit in the luxury of your home or office.

Howard (2005) says that 'digital media strategies are a crucial component of contemporary political campaigns'. He examines the role of digital technologies in the production of contemporary political culture with ethnographic and survey evidence from four election seasons between 1996 and 2002. He says:

Democracy is deeper in terms of the diffusion of rich data about political actors, policy options, and the diversity of actors and opinion in the public sphere. Citizenship is thinner in terms of the ease in which people can become politically expressive without being substantively engaged (Howard, 2005: 153).

He says that between 1996 and 2002 the proportion of the adult American population, who reported that the internet is very important to helping them decide how to vote, increased from about 14 to 20 percent (*ibid*). It is interesting to note that television is still the single most dominant medium for election news. People argue their understanding of current events, research records of political candidates or deepen their understanding of political issues by visiting the websites of national and local news organizations, commercial online services and government, candidate or issue-oriented websites.

From socializing to becoming the most potent weapon of advertisement in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, social media has come a long way since its inception and its pertinence is only increasing with the passage of every day. Gone are the days when medium like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter were considered only to socialize; now it has become a tool which is capable of transforming the perception of the 239 million Internet users in India.

Social Media was bound to be a powerful tool in a country like ours where a majority of population is youth or middle age and where carrying a Smart phone has become a trend, realizing the potential of it, Bhartiya Janta Party used it sumptuously to their advantage in the election campaign. A staggering amount of 300-500 crore was spent by the party in election campaign.

Modi's victory tweet after the election results were declared, promising a better India, was re-tweeted over 70,000 times, making it a Twitter India record. This epitomizes how fervently the elections were followed on social media. Modi is certainly one of the most prolific lawmakers on Twitter and has just crossed 1.8 million followers this week, usurping the throne of Human Resource Development Minister Shashi Tharoor as the most followed politician on Twitter and when it comes to the number of likes on Facebook he is second only to the Barack Obama, he has close to 2 crore likes on Face book and he used this popularity of his, massively to his advantage in the elections. His election speech was projected in 3D holograms simultaneously at 100 locations. An intensive social media campaign across the all imaginable channels was launched by BJP. All this money spent on social media by BJP in promoting Modi has reaped in massive rewards for Indian Prime Minister; it not only made him win a staggering 282 seats out of 540 but has also made him one of the most talked about Political leaders in the world.

Reach of Social Media

Before splashing the cash on a particular medium of advertisements, its reach is analyzed to determine whether spending money is worth or not? In case of digital media, the chance of it being successful were quiet high as there are 100 million users of Facebook in India, out of which majority of them turned to vote on the voting day. Besides this, around 23 million voters were of the age of 18-19. These first time voters were naive and they probably did not have inclination towards any political party so luring them or winning their trust through post and videos on social media was the main motive of the BJP, in which they were successful.

Key Points of the BJP online strategy of the 2014 Lok Sabha Election

1. A website mission 272 was launched which had the poems, songs, and jingles of the party in it. This site proved to be a success as BJP surpassed their dream figure of 272.
2. Party used the technology to scientifically monitor the ever changing trends of elections.
3. Every significant line of the speeches of MODI was uploaded on his twitter and Facebook

accounts.

4. On YouTube, BJP rules the roost with 65,410 subscribers. The party has been able to use the channel as a second screen for all its activities. The AAP is inching closer with 44,617 subscribers.
5. Once the election results were declared, a 'Victory Wall' was created online, to wish the new PM. Tweets, Facebook posts, and messages from supporters and colleagues were displayed on a digital 'Victory Wall'.

Games on Play Store

Another way of publicizing the campaign was to introduce games such as "MODI RUN" on the play and Apple store. The name of the game is derived from a renowned mobile game "Temple Run". In it, Modi is seen as crossing hurdles and collecting diamonds at different stages. The stages are named after Indian States. The first state is fittingly Modi's Gujarat followed by Rajasthan, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, and Madhya Pradesh.

The average age of users playing these apps are between 18 years to 30 years. To be on the safer side, the developer has posted the disclaimer, "This game is not endorsed by Modi or BJP".

Modi's Social Media Men

Such a successful digital campaign requires great minds and Modi had these minds in his team in the form of two astute Gentlemen, Rajesh Jain, and B.G. Mahesh. Rajesh Jain, an entrepreneur who helped revolutionize Internet use in India with his India World Web portal – a collection of India-centric websites, comprising news, sports, entertainment, and education – ran Mr. Modi's political campaign alongside technology entrepreneur B.G. Mahesh, the founder of Greynium Information Technologies Pvt. Ltd., which owns OneIndia, one of India's first regional language news portals. Mr. Jain, a 46-year old, based in Mumbai and Mr. Mahesh, based in Bangalore, have gathered a team of 100 techies in Bangalore to drive Mr. Modi's campaign across social media platforms including Twitter and FACEBOOK.

Mr. Mahesh, a post graduate from Alabama University in Birmingham, U.S., was named as one of the icons of India's digital ecosystem by Impact Magazine in December. He is an avid blogger and a post-graduate from Columbia University, has been a vocal supporter of Mr. Modi in recent years. In a blog posted on his website in December 2010, Mr. Jain hailed from Gujarat as a "shining example" of a state that has put integrity and development above everything else.

Social media impacted around 160 Millions in 2014 elections. In the next general elections this figure is deemed to increase to about 300 millions which means some thousands of crores of Rupees will be spent on digital media campaigning in the next general elections. The other political parties namely Congress, AAP, etc., will look to take a leaf out of the BJP's books when it comes to campaigning on Social Media and even they would not leave no stone unturned in using DIGITAL MEDIA as a catalyst to boost their election campaign.

Role of the Internet and Democracy

Scammell (2007) argues that the world is moving towards a consumer model of political communication and 'branding' is the hallmark of parties and candidates. In his paper 'Political Brands and Consumer Citizens: The Rebranding of Tony Blair' he says that branding is the new form of political marketing. He further adds:

The strategy to 'reconnect' Tony Blair with disaffected voters prior to the 2005 U.K. General Election offers a sharp illustration of the centrality of brand thinking in politics (Lilleker & Scullion, 2008).

Caywood & Preston (1989) argue that despite the growth of political advertising as a political marketing technique and new legal freedoms for commercial advertising, a 'jeopardy theory' is developed from seven socio-political variables which threaten political advertising's protected status. 'Jeopardy' as used here means a threat to the protected status of political advertising, which would mean increased regulation

of this ever more controversial type of marketing communication.

Carlisle & Patton (2013) examine the political activity of Facebook users during the 2008 Presidential primary and general election. They find that individual political activity in Facebook is not as extensive as popular accounts suggest. The authors say:

Facebook, for example, cosponsored with ABC News a presidential debate on January 5, 2008, and provided users the ability to become actively involved before, during, and after the debate in its “US Politics” application (Facebook, 2009a).

Their research also uses the resource model to test whether the same factors helpful in understanding offline political participation are also useful in explaining online political participation, especially in the context of Facebook.

Studies suggest that such increased political participation through the internet has not done much to lower disparities between levels of political engagement. Bimber (2003) says that the ‘new information environment has not changed levels of engagement in any substantial way’. Several findings also suggest that the internet can propel individuals into political life especially in terms of allowing them to gather political information, connect with others, mobilize, and recruit individuals to causes and actions because the Internet can significantly reduce the costs of participation (Bonchek, 1995).

Guillen & Suarez (2005) say that the global digital divide, as measured by cross-national differences in Internet use, is the result of the economic, regulatory and socio-political characteristics of countries and their evolution over time. Using data on 118 countries from 1997 through 2001 they explore the implications of this new, powerful communication medium for global political economy and for the spread of democracy around the world. While Norris (2001) argues that the greater civil liberties of democracy would be consistent with greater access to and use of the Internet.

Research Objectives

The following research objectives were decided:

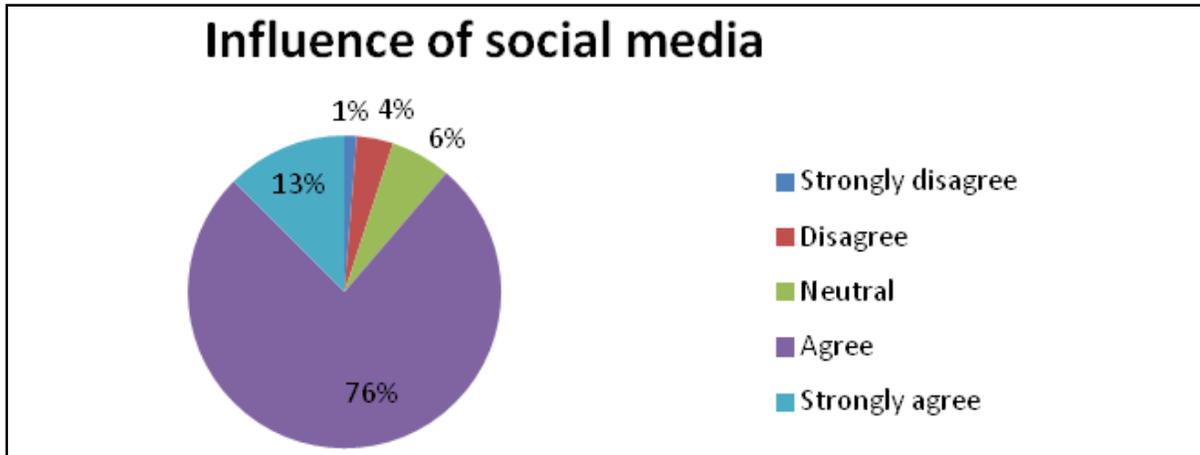
- To understand the influence of digital political marketing among youth
- Effectiveness of online tools in targeting youth for political purpose
- Identification of political objectives achieved through digital marketing
- Assessment of implementation of various policies through digital media
- Assessment of accessibility of such digital marketing tools.

Based on this, questionnaires were sent to 80 respondents who were suppose to answer every question by choosing one option out of the few provided. Respondents include students, professionals, young entrepreneur from different backgrounds. Respondents are from rural and urban areas from the Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

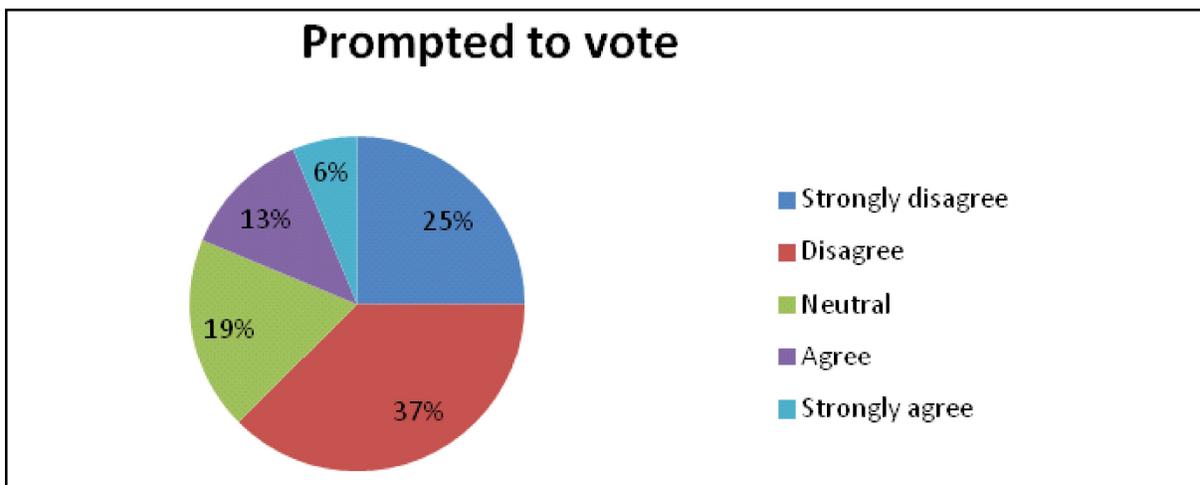
Analysis and Discussion

- 1) It proves youth was not at all influenced by the digital marketing campaign by different political parties. Although social media has lot to contribute in the awareness platform but youth still has control over their decisions.
- 2) According to BCG (Boston Consulting Group) in June 2014 there were 190 million internet users and according to Internet and Mobile Association of India, the number of internet users crossed 300

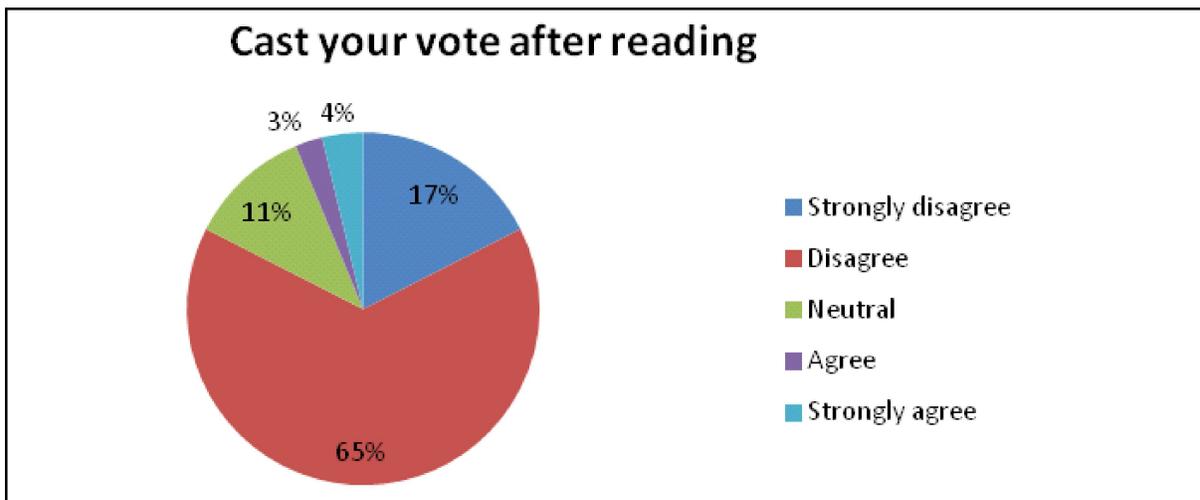
1. You got influenced by what was shown in the social media about political candidates?



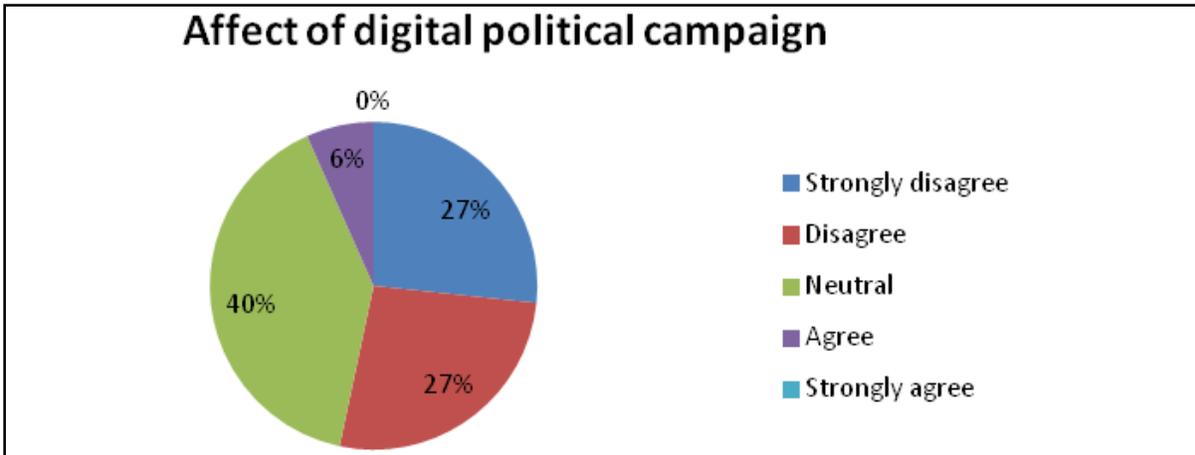
2. You were prompted to vote affected by what you saw in the social media?



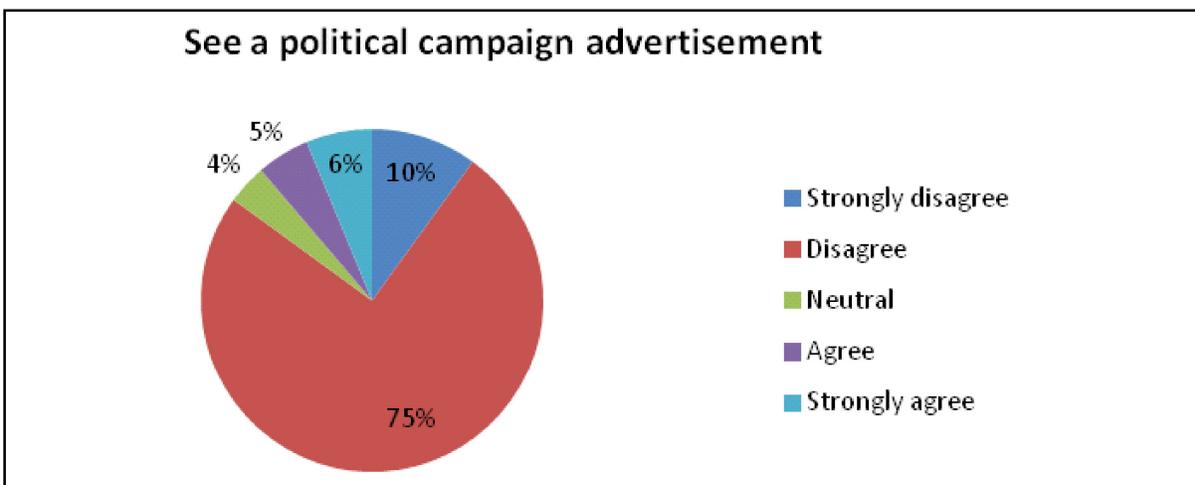
3. You cast your vote in the elections 2014 after reading about political parties on the internet.



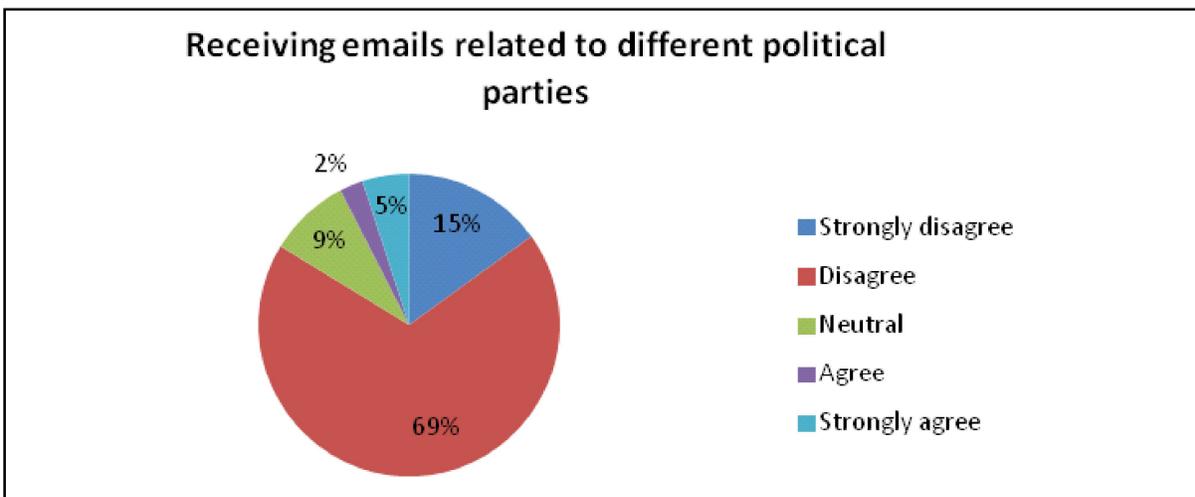
4. Digital political campaign affected the way you viewed these elections of 2014.



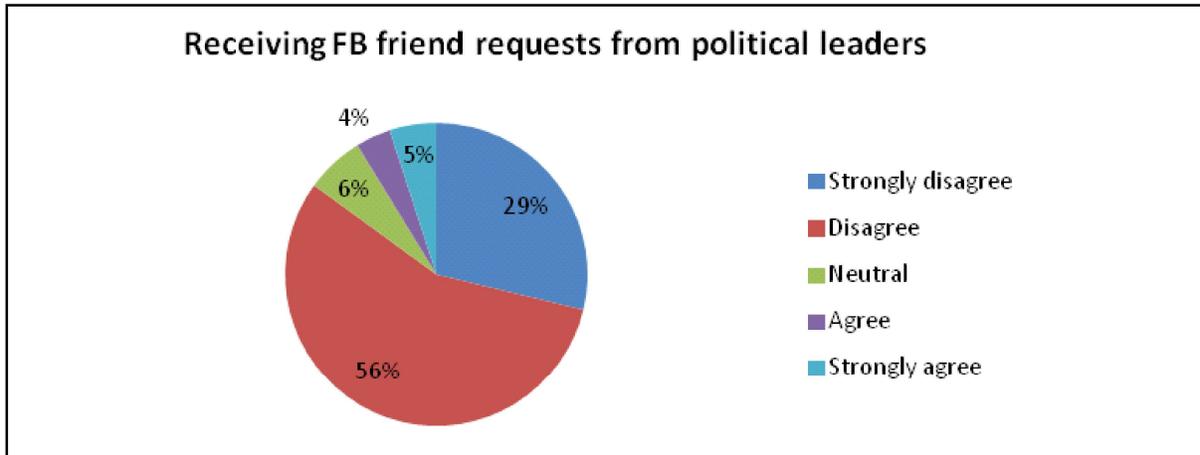
5. Every time you shopped you would see a political campaign advertisement on that website.



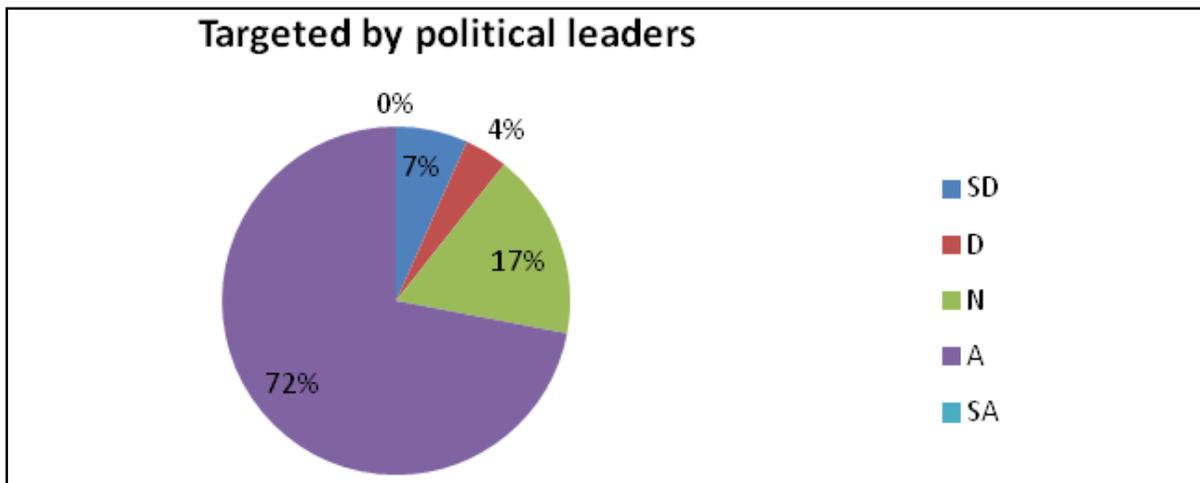
6. You were receiving emails related to different political parties in your inbox.



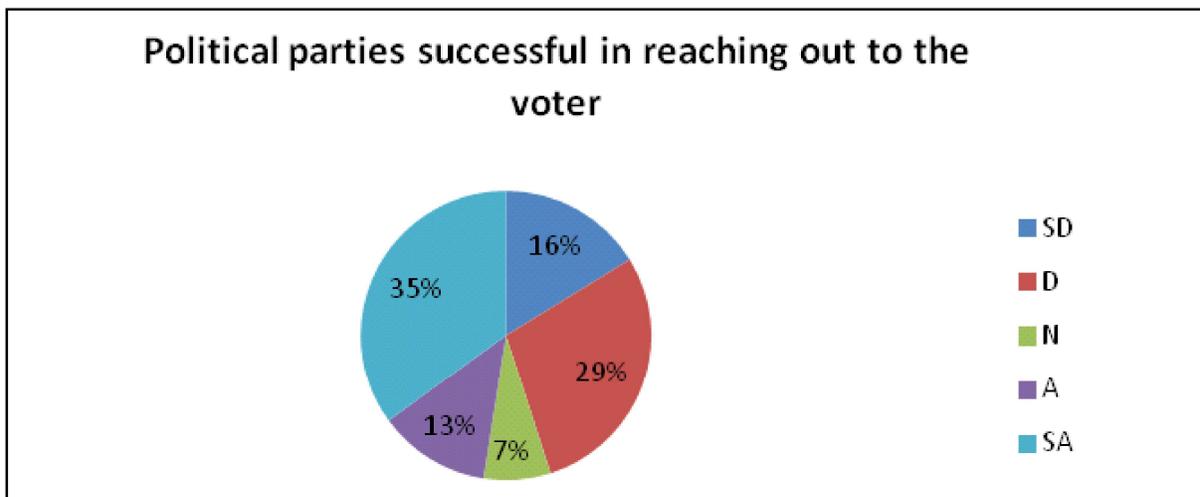
7. You were getting Facebook friend requests from ids of political leaders to vote for them.



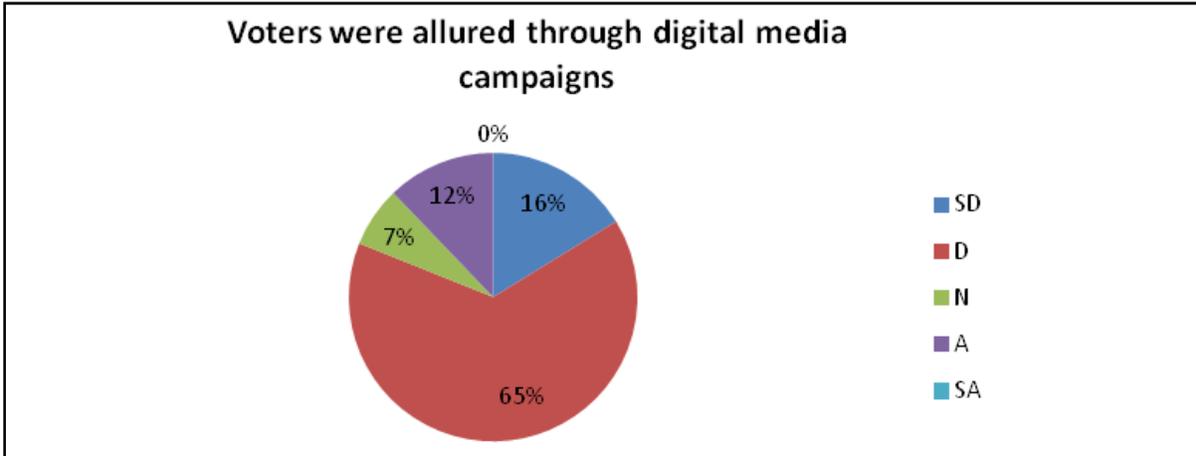
8. You were targeted by political leaders even on other social networking websites.



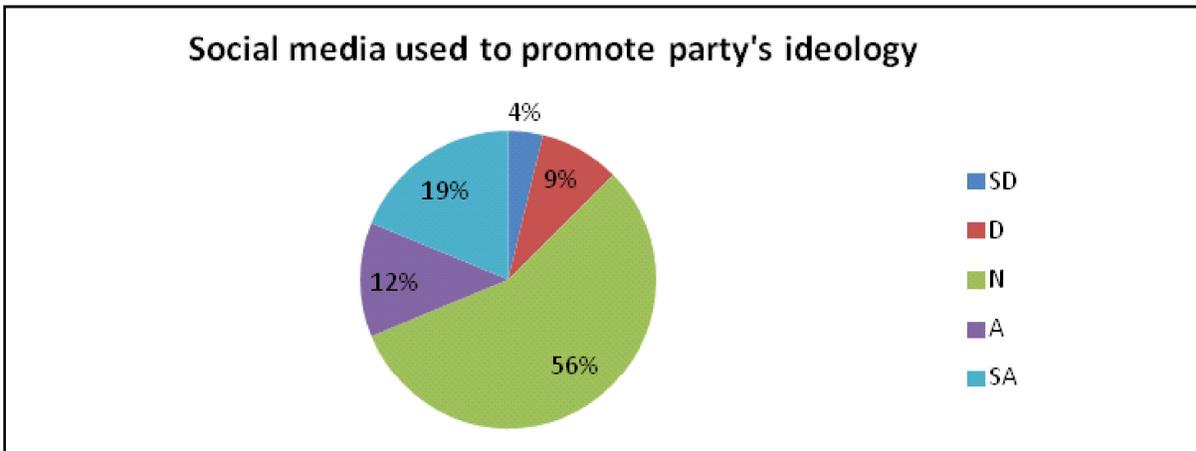
9. Political parties were successful in reaching out to a number of voters through digital campaign.



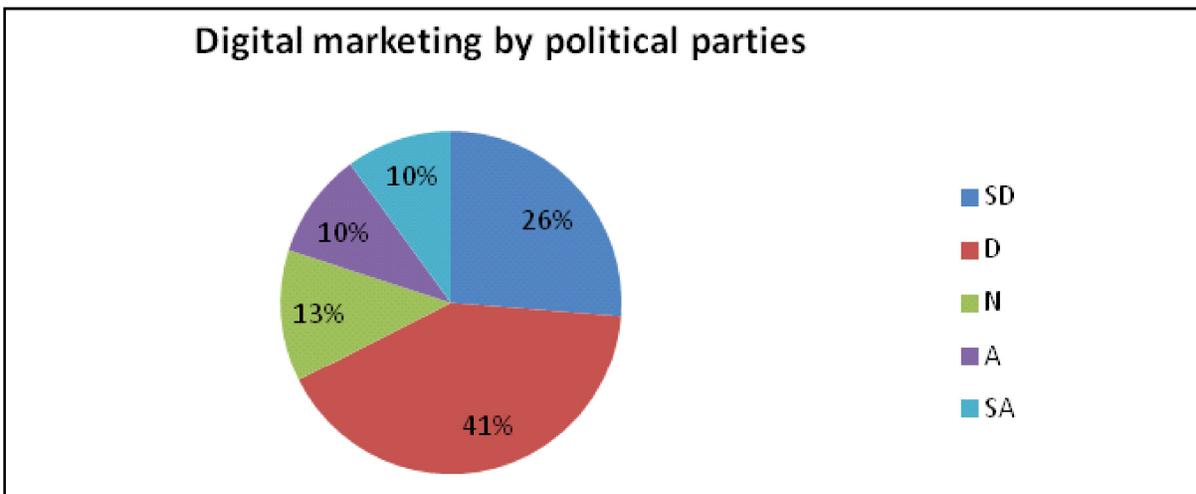
10. Voters were allured through digital media campaigns so that political parties increase their reach to them.



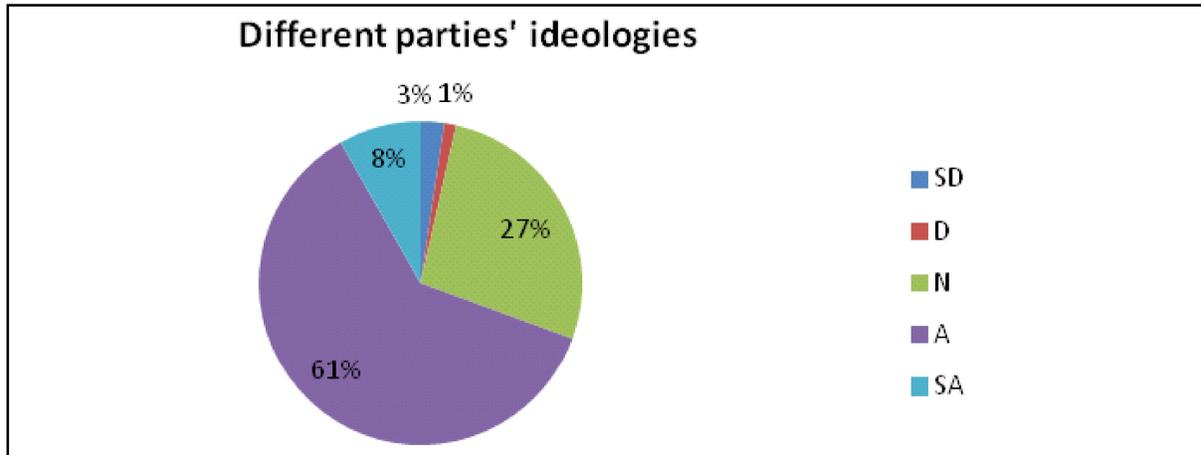
11. Social media was vehemently used to promote a party's ideology.



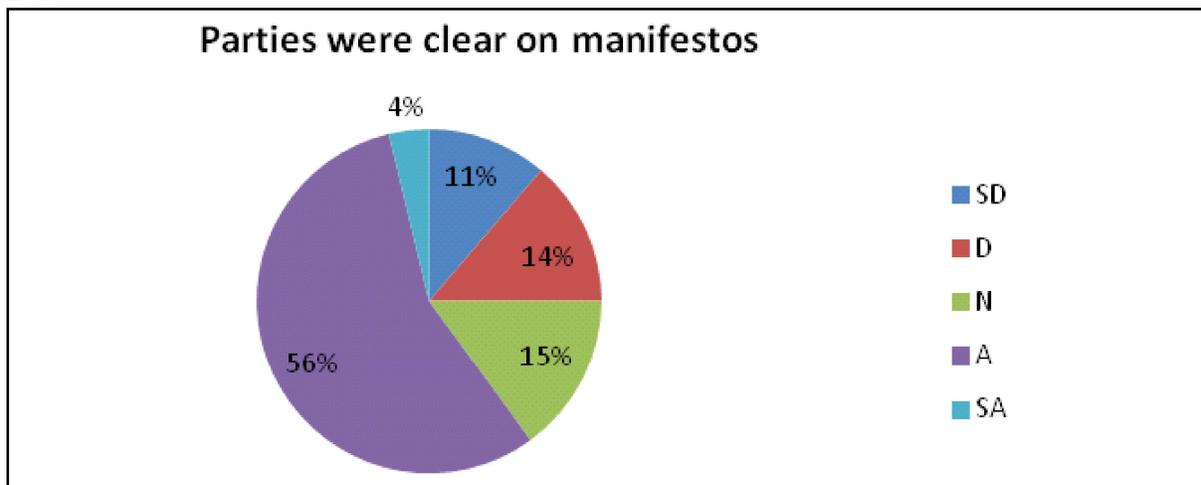
12. Digital marketing by political parties has managed to create a target segment of their voters and audiences.



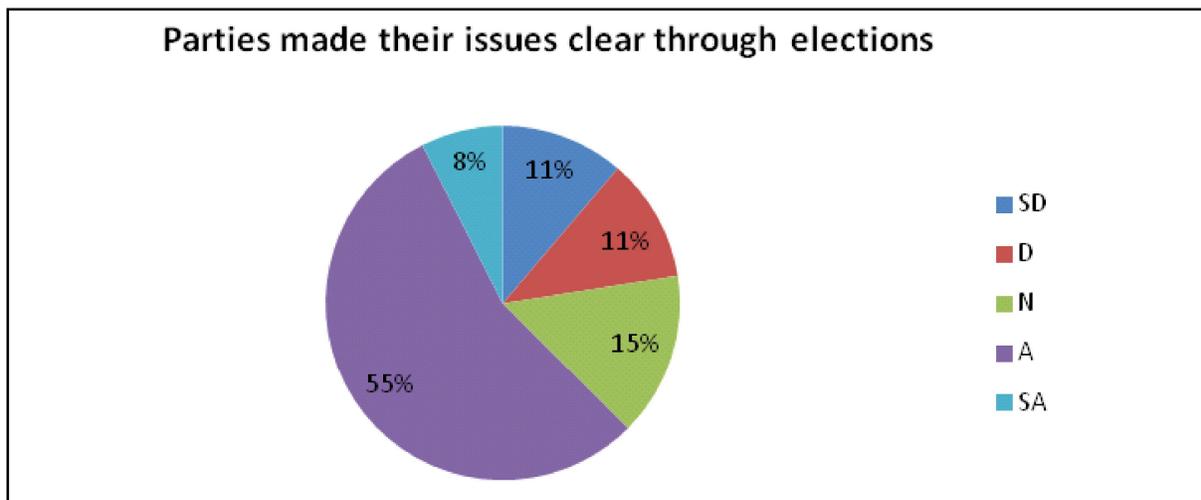
13. You are clear about different parties' ideologies through the use of the internet.



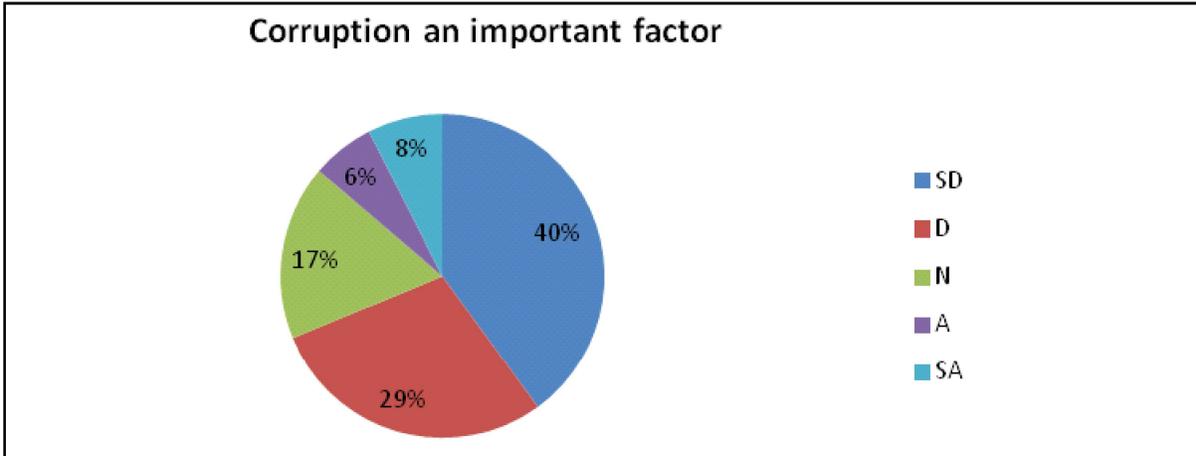
14. Different political parties were clear on their issues on election manifestos before the elections of 2014.



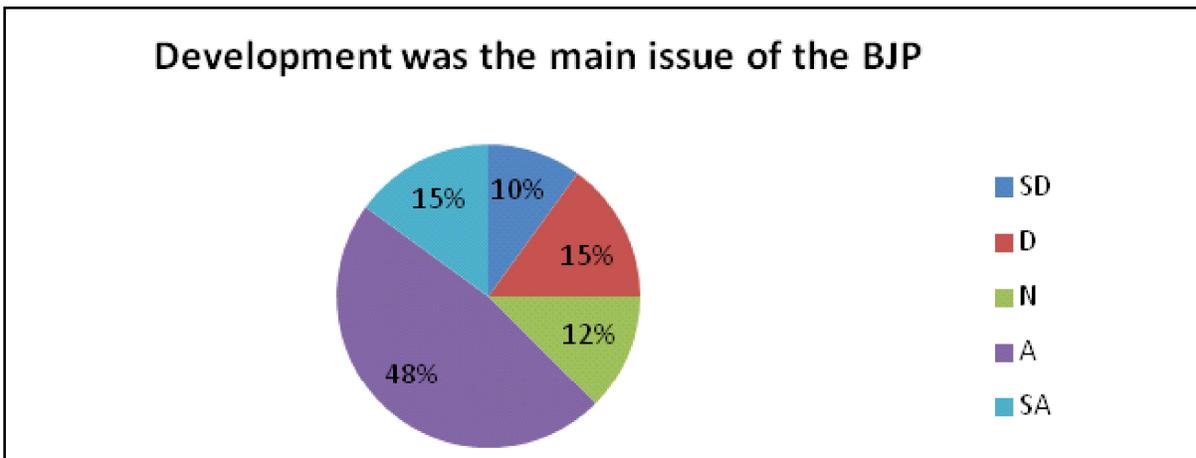
15. Aam Admi Party, BJP, and the Congress categorically made it clear through the internet as to what were their main issues in the elections.



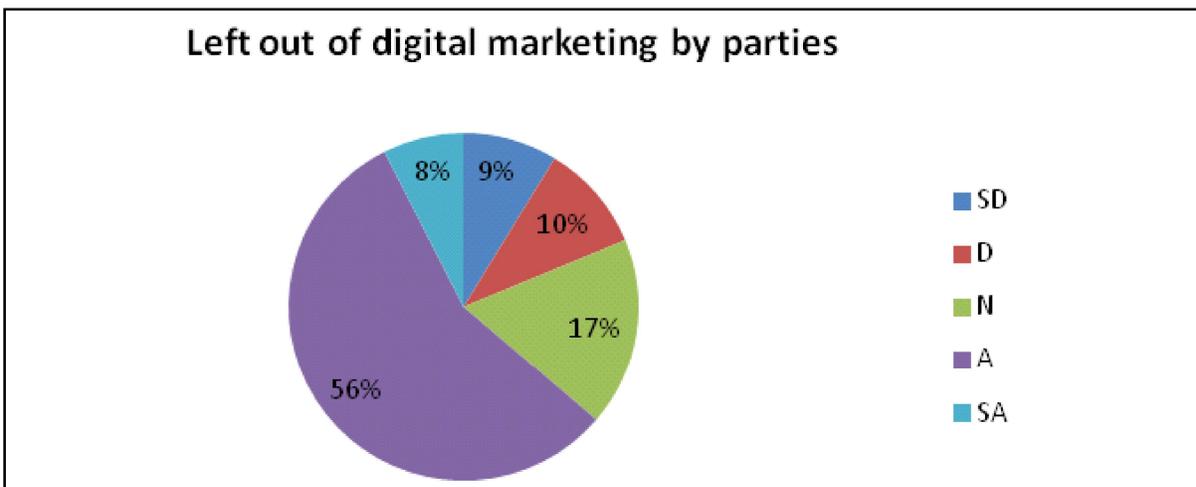
16. Corruption was an important factor in the downfall of the Congress and this was projected well through internet campaigning.



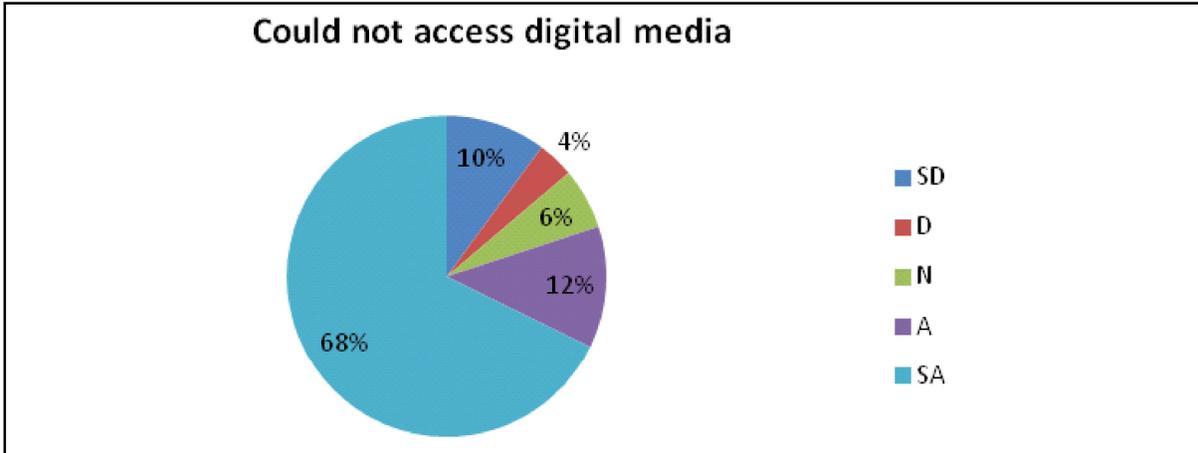
17. Development was the main issue of the BJP in the elections of 2014 and this was propagated well through digital media.



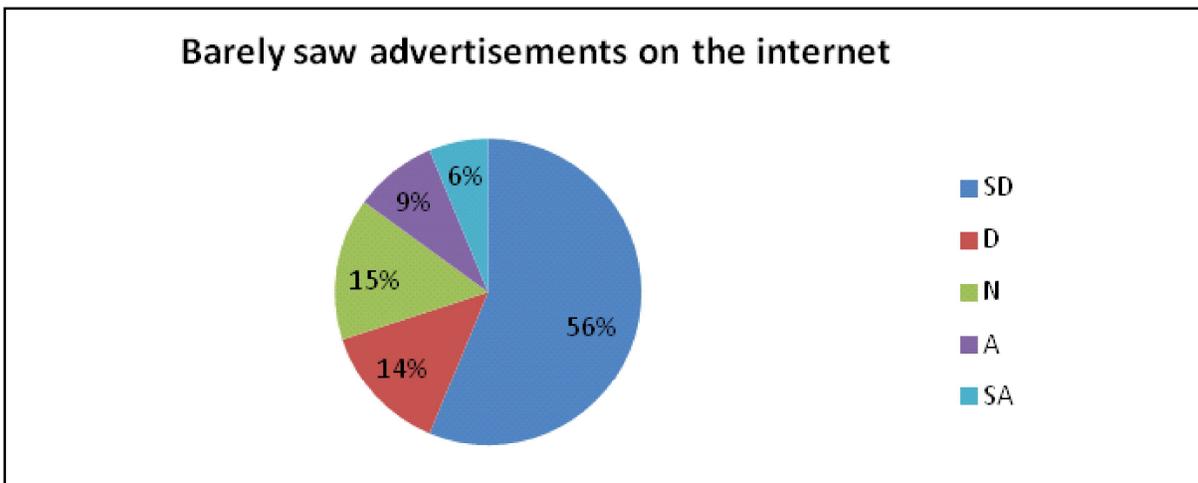
18. You were left out of the digital marketing by various political parties.



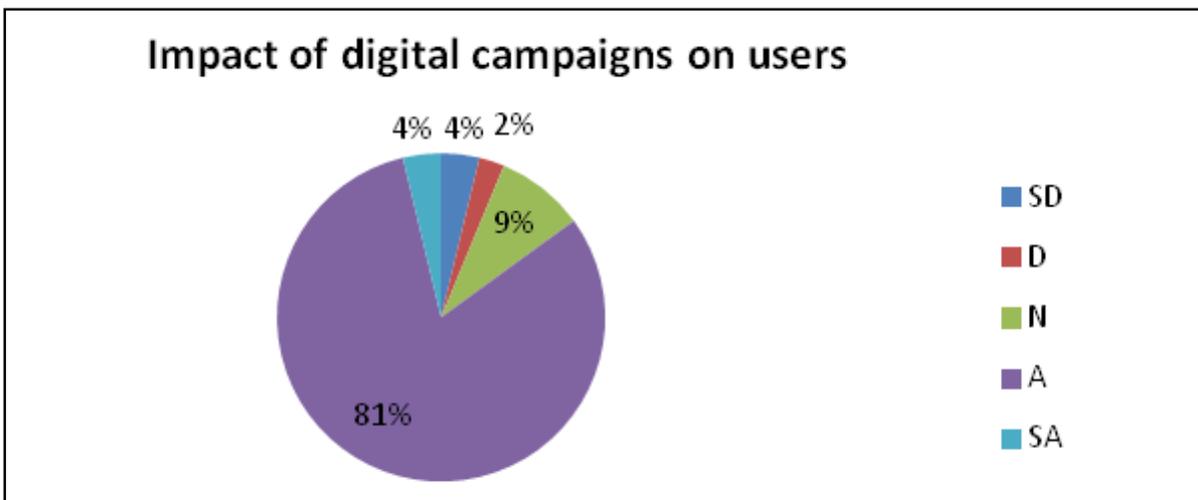
19. You could not access digital media campaigns due to lack of availability of technological gadgets.



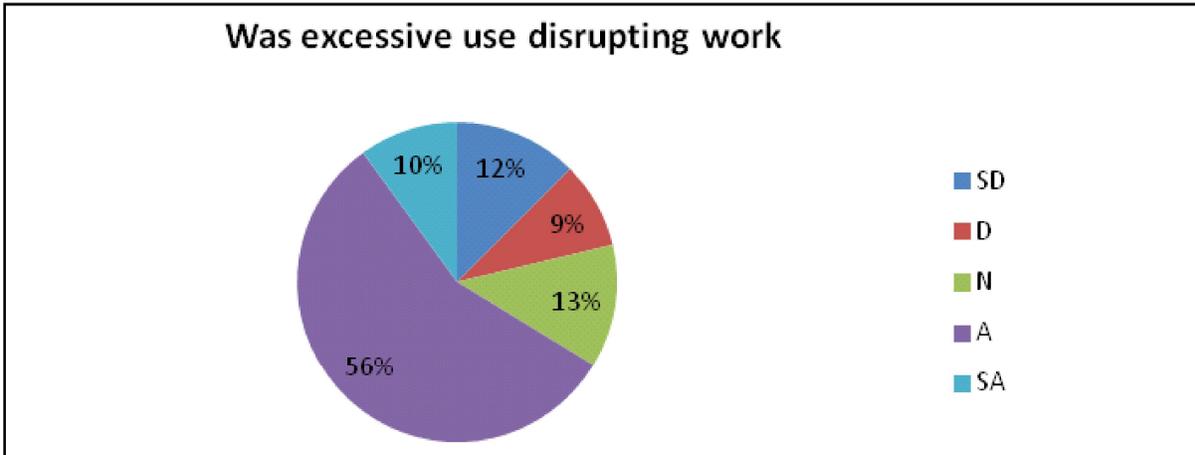
20. You barely saw any advertisements or campaigns of any political parties on the internet.



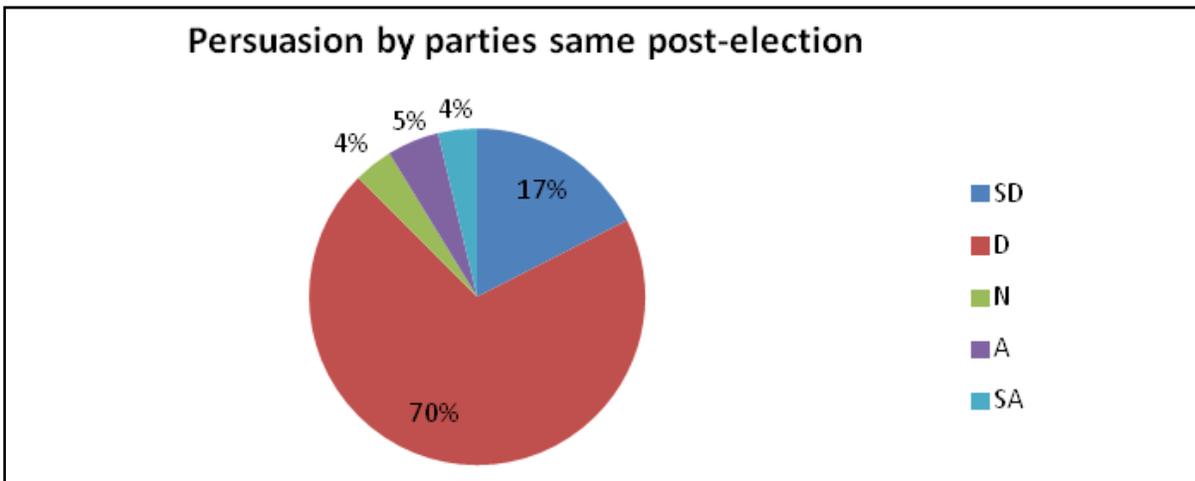
21. Do you think digital marketing campaigns by political parties had an impact on users?



22. Was excessive use of advertisements by political parties before and during the elections interrupting your work on the internet?



23. Do you think after the elections persuasion by the parties was the same through this medium?



million in December 2014 in which youth holds a larger share. So, it was easy by political parties to reach this particular segment. Researchers at MacArthur Research Network on Youth & Participatory Politics report that young people who are politically active online are twice as likely to vote as those who are not. But there is still far more way to go to use social media effectively as respondents disagreed that they receive mails or facebook friend request by any political parties.

- 3) Although it was just an inception of using social media for political campaign but political parties were successful in telling about their ideologies and they managed to create base of target audience which would definitely help in future.
- 4) Growth of internet is restricted to urban areas as people in rural areas still lack the accessibility of internet which is why they feel they were left out in digital marketing campaign by political parties. For larger penetration still print media holds the importance for such campaigns.
- 5) Respondents think that political parties have strongly used internet for the political campaign but this does not affect them in their decision to vote for which or to vote against which party. It was the first time political parties were using social media tool which helped them to state their ideologies in a better way.

- 6) Social marketing helped political party to make them understand in a better way. Internet has wildfire effect in terms of spreading messages and to engage with the audience rather than manipulating them in their decision making skills.

Conclusion

It may thus be said that while digital political marketing has an influence on the youth because of their knowledge of the social media and internet, tend not to get influenced by strong messages sent out by various political parties. A lot of them feel that social media marketing by various political parties is still in its nascent stage and not as mature and developed as it is in the western countries. However, they feel the need to be wary of such messages sent out by various parties as messages sent out through social media do get viral and have the ability to influence the larger electorate. Social media and internet has increased its influence in the Indian democracy today. Political messages are being sent via the internet- social media, email, websites, blogs, portals to the general public. People get influenced by such messages and behave in a way where they are influenced by such messages. Such online tools through which political messages are sent out are even stronger than television or print. While messages sent are strong, people imbibing such messages also have their developed sense of understanding such media messages. A few get influenced by such media while others do not. In this survey larger part of the youth does not get influenced by all such messages.

The paper argues that in urban areas such messages have a larger effect than in rural areas where accessibility of internet is still quite low.

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