CHAPTER 1

NEW MEDIA AND POLITICIANS

1.1 Introduction

New media is rapidly growing in importance, bringing swift changes in the modes of communication. The process of communication has become an ever evolving field with the advent of technology. The impact of new media is such that it has helped in redefining the world’s economic order, changed many aspects of social life and helped in spreading information and knowledge in a democratic and cost-effective way.

New media and social media are being increasingly used in political campaigns with youngsters constituting a majority of the voting population in India. Politicians are trying to get a footing in the cyber world to reach and engage with the voters. Slowly but steadily, traditional media is facing stiff competition from new media. Convergence of traditional and new media is taking place in both developed and developing countries. Political activism is slowly shifting from conventional media to social media.

Political leaders, government leaders and political parties are getting closer to the masses with new media and social media platforms turning into mass media. However, the usage of digital platforms by politicians is not uniform. Those who are active in politics are also found to be active online. Political engagement with technology interface is going to increase. The impact of usage of digital forums has set the trend for personalisation of politics. Comparisons between politicians who use social media and those who do not have online presence inevitable in this e-world.

1.2 Growth and Development of New Media: New Media Concept, Meaning, Characteristic Features and Significance

New media, simply put, is new form of mass communication. Another term for it is digital media. Relatively, it is recent media based on new information technology, a 21st century’s people’s media. It is dynamic as the Internet-based tools and technology keep changing in unpredictable ways, and evolving too.
Oxford dictionary defines new media the “Means of mass communication using digital technologies such as the Internet.” The dictionary also defines it “As productions and services providing information or entertainment using computers or the Internet and not by traditional methods such as television and newspaper.”

Robert K Logan, a professor of physics and media ecologist in his book, Understanding New Media: Extending Marshall McLuhan (2010), has written that the “new media” will in general refer to those digital media that are interactive, incorporate two-way communication, and involve some form of computing as opposed to “old media” such as telephone, radio, and TV. Those older media, which in their original incarnation did not require computer technology, now in their present configuration do make use of computer technology, as do so many other technologies that are not necessarily communication media…”

Wikipedia defines new media as, “Content available on-demand through the Internet, accessible on any digital device. Common examples given are websites such as online newspapers, blogs or Wiki, video games and social media. It transmits content through connection and conversation. Most technologies described as new media are digital, often having the characteristic of being manipulated, networkable, dense, compressible and interactive.”

New media has redefined, given a new dimension to the very concept of communication, whether internal, intrapersonal, one to one or one to many. New technologies, which are emerging on a daily basis, are enabling new media to evolve. Term new media has been around since the 1970s. All new media objects are digital code, subject to “algorithmic manipulations”, where content is on demand and delivered instantaneously.

The digital world, which has a history of about two decades, includes various communicating forms, including compact discs (CDs), digital versatile discs (DVDs), on the Internet. Content is received through different gadgets like desktop computers, laptops, iPads, tablets and smartphones. It is rightly billed as the “network of networks”.

While digital media has revolutionised people’s lives, it has also effected many social and cultural changes at a swift pace in society and the changes and its impact are
mindboggling. There have been significant changes in the very concept of thinking, communicating, interacting, sharing, networking, reading, listening, working, and understanding situations, developments, and human relations, among other things.

Smaller groups and like-minded people come together online to share information and interact and sometimes just chit-chat without any specific purpose. A pointer to the popularity of new media is its upward growth with consumers becoming more adaptive and hungry for consumption, be it news, information or entertainment. The urge to share content is also growing. It can be said that communication is now synonymous with information and communication technology (ICT).

However, the challenge to define the characteristics of new media comprehensively remains. To define what is ‘new’ isn’t easy. New media, over a period of time, turns into new-old media or becomes obsolete/irrelevant or altogether disappear because technology is constantly updating digital platforms and electronic gadgets. New must turn old. Certain fields, however, stay new. One is new media. And, this is mainly because it is technology-driven.

New media is inextricably linked to social media. Though social media is derived from new media, both are dissimilar. Merriam-Webster dictionary offers the definition of social media as “electronic communication (as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos).”

Online encyclopaedia Wikipedia defines social media as computer-mediated tools that allow people to create, share and exchange information, ideas, and pictures/videos in virtual communities and networks. A group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content, it says.

Social media, like new media, differs from traditional media. Its quality, reach, frequency, usability, immediacy and permanence are different from conventional media. Social media operates in a dialogic transmission system (many sources to many receivers), while traditional media is a monologic transmission model (one source to many receivers).
Facebook and Twitter are among the two of the many social media platforms or tools which are popular.

Social media is interactive, while new media need not be. The tools for usage too differ. However the distinction is narrow. In defining new media, traditional media is the benchmark. Social media is best understood when it’s contrasted against new media. The integration is good. Both forms of media have emerged as an integral part of daily life for many people, for governance, for business, for the corporate sector and daily routine. It’s rare to find an active organisation which has no presence on social media. ‘Be in touch’ (meaning digitally) is the catchphrase today.

With electronic commerce, popularly known as e-commerce, reaching out to consumers across the globe, new and social media are the inevitable platform for conducting business for business houses. Interestingly, even traditional media like newspaper, television, radio and advertisements are nicely integrated with the ever-evolving new and social media. For example, if an advertisement on the sale of immovable properties appears in newspaper, the same or a video of a virtual tour of the properties can be hosted on the website of the advertiser or the publisher.

The trend is to link conventional media like newspaper to Internet- based platforms. There’s hardly any mainstream newspaper in India which does not have an e-version of its dailies. Both English dailies and vernacular dailies have websites for news updates besides the Internet editions of the dailies. A few years ago it was a matter of prestige matter for traditional media houses to have an online presence but now it is almost inevitable with youth increasingly becoming online consumers.

Concepts such as interactivity, hypertextuality and virtuality, among others, are used to distinguish between new and old media. But technology and innovations are blurring the differences between traditional and new modes of communication.

If people are using social media tools, it does not mean that they have a presence on social networking. There are differences between social media and social networking. According to Merriam-Webster, social media is forms of electronic communication. Users create online communities to share news, information, ideas, comments, messages,
photos and videos. In social networking, service is built online. It is a platform that helps in building social relationships or networking among people.

Communication styles differ for social media and social networking. In social media, one can talk and download what one desires. In social networking one needs to listen and talk or react or give feedback. There’s no monologue. Talking, listening and reacting are the main features of social networking. Both are important to promote oneself and to conduct business.

It’s a vastly overhyped world, projected as all-knowing, provider of solutions to every problem that mankind faces. But then, technology can only function the way humans design and programme it, be it for good or bad. The human brain and warmth can never be replaced. In this wired world, human interaction on digital platforms is increasing phenomenally, no doubt. But that is not all. There’s a flip side: isolation, even as personal interaction becomes a thing of the past with devices getting the tag of places and people. The computer plus the Internet or mobile phone plus the Internet is adequate for communication, to be in touch with the world. But there’s more to life. A device can’t define or replace an individual. It can only add another dimension to life, at the most. The benefits of technology are obvious: easier life and better communication. But the art of living can never be taught. There’s no substitute to human touch. A device or machine can enhance life, but cannot become life itself because it is programmed with no emotions and spontaneity.

**Characteristic Features**

Some of the defining characteristics of new media are digital data, variability, dialogue and customisation among others. The use of words, images, videos and sounds make new media distinguish itself from other media. These are incorporated into devices of all shapes, sizes and price besides being personalised. Digital communication, conversations and debates are both personalised and *en masse* besides being cost-effective. The activities can be in one mode or many, and the content can be hyperlinked to enhance the value of the content.
Digital communication is configured and transmitted in different ways depending on the requirement of provider and user. There are wired and wireless devices. If a desktop computer requires cables and wires to be linked to power supply and the Internet, a cellular phone, laptop with battery backup and an iPad serve the purpose without landline connections. While optical transmission is the key to digital new media, conventional electronic media transmission is dependent on magnetic pulses. Optical fibre is more versatile in efficiency and capacity compared to an electromagnetic system. The 21st century, billed as the Information Era, is witness to places being linked to one another across the globe cost-effectively without a physical presence, thanks to optic fibre networking.

In new media, the sky is the limit for ideas and content generation. It is non-sequential interpretation with more than one source connecting or intersecting on a single platform. It is different from conventional formats such as printed versions, and its reach is overwhelming. Even the world’s economic order has been transformed, thanks to technology and the cyber world. With data being accessed through networks, commerce and trade get a moniker. Accordingly, the needs, requirements and aspirations of consumers are subject to change. It is not just data being restructured swiftly, the lives of people are also getting a new dimension, on that is reshaped and restructured. At times, it could be for good or bad.

Another defining quality of new media is the hyperlink facility. It basically serves as a link. A hyperlink connects or leads content or a document to another specific text, file, graphic or object. One needs to navigate on a web page or a digital site to get hypertext. According to Webopedia, a hyperlink is an element in an electronic document that links to another place in the same document or to an entirely different document. Hyperlinks are an invaluable part of hypertext systems, including the World Wide Web (www). The hyperlink is significant and its implications are huge. It is not uncommon to find traditional media too providing links in text to hyperlinks for different reasons: as a reference point, providing additional information or as endorsement.

New media is also marked by one more unique character - the data storage facility with a binary numeral system. Information in the form of text, picture, graph and audio can be stored in bits and bytes. Data storage can be done at different levels, and usually depends
on the users’ requirements and configuration of the device. The stored data serves as a mine of information, and can be used at any time. Besides, the data can be revisited to carry out deletions or additions or just check. Data can be transferred to other locations for sharing or storing and this can happen in no time. The stored data can serve as material for reference. The shared and hyperlinked information become accessible to every individual who has a device to access it. This only underlines the might and power of digital media.

Information is power. New media freely offers unfettered information. There are no set rules in the way information or data can be offered and shared. Not conforming to a standard is both an advantage as well as a disadvantage but nonetheless new media has multi-utilities.

**Significance**

Assessing the importance or the significance of new media is a tough challenge and sometimes the result of assessment may not reflect the reality. It is difficult to fathom new media - therein lies its power as it is constantly changing the dynamics of power, information flow and sharing.

New media like videos, videoblogs, blogs, Facebook and Twitter and the like have turned into forums that empower people by allowing them to share their voice, concerns and creativity. Herbert Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian philosopher of Communication Theory, speaks about the concept of a global village through technology. And new media proves that he was right. Communication technology has emerged as a voice of the globe. Of course, the digital world has also built walls among people. And this aspect cannot be glossed over by those who use hyperbolas to highlight the significance of digital media.

With convergence being the hallmark of the digital world, it has redefined and reinvented communication skills, goals and strategies. The media may not have seen significant changes in terms of its broader approach to part with content, but it has converged. The best example is mails. The reason or concept of writing mails is to communicate or share. This remains the basic idea even now when mail has become synonymous with e-mail.
Only the mode of sending mail has changed. The shift is from physically posting mail to sending it online using electronic devices.

Similarly, new media has changed the communication strategies of the entertainment field. Going to a theatre to watch a movie is slowly becoming passé. Today, one can watch a movie on a handheld device like smartphone. But a point to be noted is that the basic functions like directing, acting and singing remain. Another example is the book publishing industry. This particular industry has seen many rapid changes with both publishing and reading becoming user-specific. E-publications, e-books and e-reading devices are here to stay. Newspaper and magazine reading are done online. But the very concept of writing, whether one uses a writing instrument or a keyboard, hasn’t changed. Ideas have to be articulated and only then can they be reflected, be it in traditional book form or on digital platform.

Another simple example for convergence is a smartphone that functions like a phone, a news source, a music player, a camera, a video recorder, a voice recorder and interactive forum among other things. The same functions are possible in a tablet computer, a laptop, an iPad and even a desktop computer. The online route is slowly and steadily becoming an accepted modus operandi for communication, dissemination of information, entertainment, infotainment, social networking and game plan. This versatility is largely due to convergence, and beyond that because of technology.

Humans enjoy talking, conversing, listening, sharing and viewing. In new media, these activities can occur immediately and on a real-time basis without spending much money. In a nutshell it can be said that interactivity and immediacy are the prime advantages of digital media. For example, video conferencing through the Internet can connect two individuals to see and talk to each other. At the same time, same things can be done by an individual with many persons by spending almost the same money and time. This also means that both narrowcasting and mass contact and dissemination can occur. One need not be physically present at a meeting/programme/event anymore. For example, the webcasting of weddings which is catching on with the present generation. A wedding ceremony that is performed in any part of the globe can be watched live from anywhere. Such events can become interactive too.
Spoken webs and vlogs (videologs) have turned into virtual classrooms. Learning is being slowly equated with e-learning, even in the villages of India. But there are views that interface is the most effective way of communication. Opinions reflect the mindset and level of knowledge of people who analyse and judge the type of media and technology.

Learning to use new media platforms is not rocket science. They are, by and large, user-friendly. But sometimes, not knowing the English language can be a problem because, usually, the text and data in digital forums are available in that language. While accepting this argument, a point to be noted is that China has proved otherwise by using the official language Mandarin for social media.

Another important aspect of new media is the easy way with which content is changed, edited and updated. Within minutes content can be revised, deleted and made consumer-specific. All these and more can be done in a cost-effective manner. Time saved is money gained. This is true of new media when it is used in day-to-day work in a meaningful and smart manner. The massive use of Internet-based information and communication are the compelling reasons for the world to give up the old order and adopt, and adapt, to the new world which is digital and quick.

It is not that at the individual level or at the private enterprises/company level that new media is put to use. Even governments are trying to make use of it though not to the maximum. Government and private companies are extensively using cloud computing. It is a method of storing and processing data besides providing access to the same on-demand. It delivers data, information, sales, business etc., on demand using the Internet. One need not have a personal e-mail account to access content. The account exists on the services’ provider’s computer cloud.

From the business point of view, online has become a boon for business houses which have become online-dependent because it is a powerful cost-effective marketing forum. With netizens increasing, social media sites have emerged as prominent tool to promote brands, to make consumers change brand loyalty, and to influence people in brand choices. Social media is also a companion for travellers, especially to those who are travelling in unfamiliar places. One example is Google map which is serving as a guide
for travellers. A handy device with Internet access is like carrying an equipped office in hand.

Another strong point of new media coverage is that it is free. This is an advantage for community groups and organisations with limited funds and hoping to expand their activities to maximise reach. Again, all that one needs to get coverage is a device with Internet connectivity.

Inarguably, social media is shaping opinion, helping to build profiles of people, companies and government. Moreover, it is helping to get people ‘connected’ and draw moral support sometimes. People tend to be impromptu, informal, spontaneous and curious on social media, and so it’s easier to feel the pulse of the people.

Of course there are ways new media is looked at. The manner in which the USA, a technologically and financially sound country looks at the evolving media is different from the manner in which India perceives it. About 70 per cent of India’s population live in villages and the literacy rate is 74 per cent, much lower than the world’s average literacy rate of 84 per cent. But the youth literacy rate in India is 90 per cent. The haves and the have-nots do not have equal access to digital tools. While the online community is growing, and people are connecting and reconnecting quickly in urban areas, villagers are still undergoing transformation. This does not mean that villagers or smaller townspeople have no desire or inclination to use new media, but the usage also depends access to media. That new media influences and shapes opinion is undeniable. At the same time, for many with a presence online, it is more a fad than a utility.

Despite all the pros and cons of new media, it must be said that new media has greatly impacted media thought and presence. New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman was once quoted by American Thinker, an online newsletter, as describing Internet news sources as an “open sewer of untreated, unfiltered information”. He mocked new media, suggesting that the American public was incapable of distinguishing between facts, fiction and opinion, when he said that modems should have a warning label from the surgeon general that read “judgement not included.” Reacting to Friedman’s cynical comment, Paul Miller, communication expert, “Friedman is right that information should be filtered, but the process should be left to the individual to decide what is credible and
what matters. Journalists have an obligation to their profession and the public to disseminate the facts, especially when they involve government officials whose actions greatly impact the country.” In a way, this sums up the arguments for and against new media and journalism.

As the saying goes, knowledge is power. The Internet has opened the door for people to get knowledge in subjects of their choice and to be able to share it too. This has, indeed, led to losses in media business houses. Citizens are turning into journalists, photographers and videographers. They do not have to wait for anyone to publish the content they produce because they can become publishers themselves in the digital world. It’s common to see amateur artists uploading their documentaries, movies, plays and music albums on YouTube. If there’s an interesting work or if sellable piece, then it not only goes viral but it also goes into conventional media. This is the power and utility of new media.

1.3 New Media and Mass Media, Readership and Coverage

In simple terms, mass media, till recently, was media which included tradition or technology-based communication that reached a large number of receivers. New media, on the other hand, if narrowed down, is target-specific and reaches out to a larger audience depending on the base. Mass media no longer needs to reach the masses. Many forms of personal communication are used to reach the masses. There could be a large number of senders in the mass media world, but the moot question is whether there are receivers or consumers in large numbers.

For example, the radio. A few decades ago, government-controlled All India Radio was labelled as mass media, and even today, the tag persists. However, with fast diminishing listeners, the radio is no longer serving as mass media because listeners have decreased significantly. In sharp contrast, a post on Facebook or a Tweet or a blog, reaches the masses through new media as well as conventional media. If an influential personality such as the Dalai Lama expresses his views on social media networking, it would reach the world through the various ways of communication because all forms of media would reproduce or reflect his words. Content targeted for specific audiences reaches untargeted groups too wantonly or otherwise. Sometimes, this can have an adverse effect also.
Traditionally, mass media included print media and broadcast media. Wikipedia says that mass media can be classified into eight mass media industries – print (book, pamphlets, newspapers, magazines etc) from the late 15th century; Recordings (gramophone records, magnetic tapes, cassettes, cartridges, CDs and DVDs) from the 19th century; Cinema from about 1900; Radio from about 1910; Television from about 1950; the Internet from about 1990 and cell phones from about 2000.

The history of communication is rich, going back to Babylonian and Egyptian writings, before 5th Century BC. The module of communication, Sender-Message-Receiver, is a paradigm for research work. The modern age of communication is believed to have its roots in the time when printing was invented. Though the Age of Print began in 1455 in the city of Mainz, Germany, for centuries, printing was the medium for the elite. In the 19th Century, this medium became a mass medium, and it continues to be so. The first newspaper was published in 1665 in England. In India, the printing press was set up in 1578 and the first newspaper was published in 1780.

The advent of telephone and telegraph also contributed significantly to the communication world. Even as recently as up to the 1990s, journalists were found using telephone to send news but however the same cannot be said about telegraph. The first public telegraphic message was transmitted in 1844, between Washington DC and Baltimore, Maryland, marking the beginning of telecommunication. In 1876, the era of telecommunication was marked by the invention of sending messages by wire. In 1895, transmitting and receiving wireless messages set another milestone.

Next to the postal system, the telephone has been the largest interpersonal communication network for centuries. It also serves as an interpersonal communication system. Then came the invention of films around 1839, radio in 1906 for broadcasting music and talk in an experimental way, and television that was invented in 1878 and 1926. The brain behind the invention of the Internet was a group effort. The Internet is a generic term for interconnected works. Tim Berners-Lee, a British scientist, invented the World Wide Web (www) in 1989. It is a service operating over the Internet, making access to pages and hypertexts possible.
Each medium has its own character and charm. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses and each has a different appeal on receivers. And each is dependent on technology in order to function. It creates short, intermediate and long-term effects on audiences or consumers.

Before the extensive use and reach of radio, the print medium like newspaper, periodicals and books were the prime source of information for the literate masses. And through the literate masses that read, even the illiterate masses learn about the content. But the radio, in an extremely cost-effective manner, reached diverse audiences in large numbers. Radio has helped in overcoming physical barriers. For example, many globally reputed radio stations such as the BBC radio reached many countries. This particular station as well as All India Radio has been designing programmes for all ages, needs and tastes. If listeners are not involved in the act of listening, then the very purpose of radio programmes fail.

A powerful and influential visual media like television has snatched audiences away from radio as well as print. Sight and sound have always had a huge impact on all kinds of audiences and the impact cannot be compared with other traditional media. Of course, the influence has been both positive and negative. Compared to radio, television sets are expensive, and they are not easily portable like radio. Till recently, television needed electricity. Now, television and radio can both be accessed through the Internet on many digital devices. One such device is the smartphone which is handy. Over the years, even television has become interactive with the use of device TiVo, a digital video recorder which serves as an on-screen guide of scheduled programmes. This is only one example of how a conventional medium has turned interactive without losing its main characteristic.

The Internet has changed the very concept and character of mass media. It seems to have made every possible mode of communication available on the Internet. All that’s needed is a device to receive content. Nevertheless, there are some distinct differences between the two.

Mass media, which encompasses traditional media like print, radio and television, enjoys credibility because the branding has existed for many decades. Receivers are all age
group, including the older generation. For advertisers, time-tested media like newspaper is still advantageous because advertisements can be placed at vantage points and it remains a physical document. But one striking difference is that the reach and feedback are not instantaneous unlike on social media platforms.

In contrast, social media channels, at lightning speed, reach the audience/consumers though not the masses unless it is decided to make it available for the masses. Online media do face a trust deficit because credibility of the content, at times, becomes questionable. This is mainly because the faceless keep posting content, sometimes to defame which poses a threat or it could be mindless act. The content on social media outlets may catch eyeball movement or may not, because users may not access their account or login to a website for various reasons. But in the case of conventional mass media, even if the receiving devices are not hi-tech, it can still attract a lot more attention.

Any form of media, whether technology-driven or otherwise, can stand the test of time and win the trust of the audience provided the content is good. Even in the 21st century, content continues to be king. A useful piece of information, printed, broadcast or posted, is appreciated by people. Simply because information is downloaded on digital platforms it does not mean consumers pay attention or express trust. Online community sites are growing and embracing even conventional media forms. Websites have turned into convergence points for both types of media. Every evolving media technology has helped media increase its mass base.

Readers or audiences have turned into resources in both new media as well as in mass media. To consume mass media one need not have any special ability except eyes and ears, while to utilise new media ability matters.

Marshall McLuhan propagated the idea that the medium is the message. Robert K Logan, while writing his blog on Mediashift website in 2007, analysed McLuhan’s message. Logan underlined five messages of the Internet: 1. Two-way communication, 2. Ease of access to and dissemination of information, 3. Continuous learning, 4. Alignment and integration and 5. Community. Though one or two of these characteristics apply to traditional mass media, McLuhan observes that the uniqueness about the Internet is that all five of the features also apply to the general class of new media. While mulling over
the five messages, he found nine additional properties of new media. They are: portability and time flexibility, convergence of many different media, interoperability, aggregation of content, variety and choice, the closing of gap between producers and consumers of media, social connectivity and co-operation, remix culture and the transition from products to services. He draws a comparison between landline phones and cell phones. The telephone permitted two-way communication, but it was non-portable till the emergence of the cell phone. The very first type of cell phone embraced two-way communication and portability but did not incorporate 12 messages of new media. The smartphone because of interoperability and convergence with other media like the digital camera and the Internet, aggregates content, provides variety, choices and promotes social collectivity.

Logan says that if McLuhan were around today, he would see the impact of new media as an extension of his observations on the impact of early electronic media. In fact, the effects seem to be even more intense with new media than they were for electronic media. Hypertext, the Internet and search engines have speeded up the flow of electronic information.

The invasion of privacy and the hybridisation of digital forums are a concern. Hacking into e-mail accounts and losing hand-held devices also pose the risk of invading privacy as well as losing data.

**1.4 New Media --Types of New Media**

The latter part of the 20th century witnessed rapid technological changes which redefined and reinvented communication and media. The process is continuing. It’s easy for those with Internet connections to be aware of the types of new media, especially networking sites. New media has got a new dimension with the inventions in cellular communication.

There are not less than 39 social media tools, according to Jay Bear, the author of Convince and Convert Digital Marketing Advisors. And the market is a witness to the launch of new tools, including Apps, on a daily basis. There is no comprehensive list or directory of Apps though one wishes to have one such.
Following are some types of new media. (The list is not exhaustive.)

**Websites:** “A website is a location connected to an Internet which has one or more pages that can in turn connect to other pages and sites. A website is served from a single web domain which can be accessed through browsing. It is a related collection of the World Wide Web (WWW) files; the opening page is called a home page. A website with too many pages could be spread over many servers with different geographic locations. Usually, the pages can be accessed from the Uniform Resource Locator (URL), called the web address.”

A website may be maintained by a single person or many or an organisation or a group of entities. It may be designed as a single subject-specific or more than one and also have hyperlinks.

**Cyber chatting:** “Chat or interaction on the Internet, which is done by opening a chat room or via messaging. Net chatting means real-time talk or interacting through text, conversation and video-based (webcams) methods. The chatting can happen from a person to person or multicast communications from one sender to many receivers. Video chat is a feature of a web conferencing service. Chat usually refers to informal talks or conversations.”

The first online chat system, created in 1973, was called Talkomatic. Since then there have been many improvisations making rapid real-time talk in cyberspace popular.

**Blogs:** “A site published on the World Wide Web (WWW) is called a weblog, commonly called a blog. A blogger is a person who writes on blogs. Content on blogs are called posts. A blogger can be an individual or a small group of people. A blog can reflect anything a blogger desires. However, usually, a single subject is taken for a post. There is no capping on wordage. A blog serves as a personal diary too. There is a response section too. The content is arranged in reverse chronological order.”

Wikipedia says the emergence and growth of blogs, in the late 1990s, coincided with web publishing tools that helped the posting of content even without the knowledge of
technology like HTML and FTP. Blogs are hosted by dedicated blog hosting services, or run by using blog software, on regular web hosting services.

The collective community of all blogs is known as the blogosphere. Blogs have to be on the Internet. The trend is to see product and service reviews on blogs. People are upfront, make suggestions, and articulate their views freely, critically, which sometimes can embarrass product manufacturers and service providers. At the same time, commercialisation of blogs is also on the rise. Advertisements are placed on blogs so that commercially too the sites can be exploited.

In media houses, staff journalists as well as freelancers contribute to blogs. Blogs also serve as news sites. There is no filtering of content on blogs unless of course they belong to a company or a forum. A defamatory post and information factually incorrect can trigger a legal case. Broadcast and print media are regulated while blogs have turned into free flow of expression for all. Self-restraint is the unwritten norm.

Locating blogs is difficult despite there being directories for them. Even so, if a popular forum or a personality has a blog, then the hits increase greatly. There are so many kinds of blogs. To name a few – microblogging, personal blogs, political blogs, music blogs, health blogs, science blogs, art blogs and education blogs. Any subject can be prefixed to a blog which is then categorised.

Political blogs of prominent politicians become popular as the content are usually of public interest, and sometimes controversial too. Politicians, political commentators, reporters, analysts and the common man have turned into bloggers. The trend, which began in early 2000, is now here to stay and grow. It is a tool or a conduit for candidates during elections to reach out to voters. Bloggers in 2002 took the controversial remarks of a US senator seriously, and aired their views. Finally, it snowballed into a political crisis and led to the senator stepping down. The Israel government was the first to set up an official blog. It had a video blog and a political blog. Even a press conference was held through a microblogging where the entire world media posed questions to the foreign ministry.
One type of blog is log. It is a blog in which the postings are usually in a video form. It is also referred to as a video log. For travel bloggers, this form of blogging is handy. It turns into visual media, a category that is popular on YouTube. The first video log was in 2000. Video sharing and live streaming have become a trend.

**Podcast:** “A type of digital media that consists of audio or radio or a video, subscribed to and downloaded on the Internet through web syndication or streamed online to a device. Usually it is a theme-based series. There are podcast sites.”

**RSS Feed:** “Rich Site Summary, RSS, is also called Really Simple Syndication. It is a web feed which uses standardised formats where published information is available. It offers blog entries, news headlines, audio, video and serves as links to other services like e-mails and e-files. It holds information in an organised way with the published date and author’s name. It is compatible with other formats and serves as aggregate data from many sites – it’s a library of sorts.” One must subscribe to avail of the service. There are many variants of RSS. However, RSS feeds are yet to grow in popularity.

**Widget:** “A generic term. A web widget displays information and allows users to act in various ways. It is a computing device which helps in downloading applications using web technologies. It can be embedded into sites like web pages and blogs. Personal content can be shared with many by installing a prescribed code. Any digital content, including advertisements, are displayed in a widget.”

Buttons, dialog boxes, pop-up windows, pull-down menus, icons, scroll bars etc, are examples of widgets. A widget gives easy access to information and links to Apps. For smartphone users, android widgets are extremely useful, especially while travelling.

**CD-Rom:** “Compact Disc is the generic term. Rom means Read Only Memory. CD-Rom is basically an optical disc with pre-pressed content. The storage capacity is large; its form can be anything - text, data, audio, video or graphic. The content can be written only once. It can’t be modified.”
There is writeable disc–CD-R, where R indicates recordable. The content on CD-R cannot be deleted and can be read only on CD-Rom players. The compatibility of CD-Rom is an issue.

**Streaming Media:** “Streaming media is a boon with regard to supply of video and audio content live through the Internet. It’s almost like seeing in real an event. The content need not be saved on hard drive. The question of downloading a file to see or play content does not arise. Media is continuous.”

Media can be pre-recorded or live. If it is not live streaming, then it can be paused, rewound or fast forward. A single file can be accessed by multiple users simultaneously. A device’s Internet connection speed matters greatly if the streaming has to be continuous.

**Social Media Networks**

**Facebook:** One of the top social networking sites in the world – a young user-friendly platform established in 2004. The office of Facebook is headquartered in California, US. Mark Zuckerberg is the founder, chairman and chief executive officer of Facebook. The home office page of Facebook says the mission of Facebook is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what’s going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them.

Facebook is living up to its stated aim. One needs to register on the Facebook website to become a user. The user can build a profile, add ‘Friends’, post messages, react to other people’s messages, post photos, videos and texts in any form. Groups with common interest or educational institutions, cultural forums, employees at a workplace, civic groups etc., can be formed so that information can be shared only among the members of that particular group. The rule says that only those who have crossed a minimum age of 13 years can open a Facebook account. The company says it is working towards making universal Internet access for everyone in the world a reality. It says the Internet access is essential for achieving humanity’s global goals.
According to the company, on June 30, 2015, it had 968 million daily active users on Facebook and 844 million monthly active users. Approximately, 83.1% of daily active users are outside the US and Canada. India has 112 million Facebook users, which is the largest after the US, as per the records. One of the fine features of this networking is that is multilingual. It is available in 70 languages, including Kannada and Hindi.

Like any social media, free flow of comments on Facebook is a challenge. Facebook’s posts and conversations are scanned for criminal activity. If suspicious behaviour is noticed, then it flags the content and informs the police. The ‘Like’ button is one the interesting features of Facebook. If a user likes something, then his/her can express opinion by pressing the button. The company, in 2015, announced that it would introduce a ‘Dislike’ button.

Facebook has some subsidiary social media tools. They are:

1. **WhatsApp**: The world’s largest messaging App (application). It is a “personal real-time messaging service” which can be used on smartphones with the Internet connection. Group chats, sending photos, videos and sharing locations are the prominent features of WhatsApp. “It is a cross-platform mobile messaging App for exchanging messages without payment for short service message (SMS)”. Unlimited messages can be sent. Being multilingual, Facebook is used in many countries even where English language is not known. According to the Statista portal, between August 2013 and November 2014, there were 70 million monthly active WhatsApp users in India. And this mobile messenger is only increasing in number. The backup of activities on the App can be saved in Google Drive. Blogs are also created on this messenger.

2. **Instagram**: It’s an online mobile phone photograph service and can be accessed on the Internet by downloading the relevant App. Photo-sharing and video-sharing are possible on this site. The duration of a video is up to 15 seconds. Taking a selfie, a self-portrait photograph, has become popular on Instagram. Members can send the content to social network platforms such as Facebook and Twitter using smartphone. In 2015, it was reported that 400 million people use Instagram every month.
3. **News Feed:** Facebook says News Feed regularly updates the list of stories from friends, pages, and other connections. People are free to like or comment on what they see. It is like offering news according to the likes and interest of a consumer. Each person’s News Feed is personalised based on his/her interests and the sharing activity of his/her friends.

4. **Profile:** This helps users to talk about themselves. The account holder can say who he/she is and what’s going on in his/her life. Profiles, photos, videos, and personal information in the individual’s current city and hometown can be posted.

5. **Messenger:** Facebook introduced the Messenger mobile phone App in August 2011. Users can reach people instantly on their phones. They can send private messages, stickers, chat with groups, and make free calls, from anywhere in the globe. The network can be used only on mobile phones with high-end features.

6. **Events:** This feature on Facebook helps people in organising gatherings, managing invitations and sending notifications and reminders to their friends on Facebook.

7. **Facebook Lite:** A new version of Facebook android that uses less data and works across all network conditions. In some areas, where the Internet availability is slow and unable to support all the functionality found in Facebook for android. Even in such situations, Facebook Lite can function.

8. **Creative Labs:** It is an App to support the diverse ways in which people want to connect and share.

**Twitter:** Twitter is a popular online social networking service that facilitates the account holders to read and send short messages not exceeding 140 characters. The message is called Tweet. Users can re-Tweet other people’s message. But unregistered visitors can only read Tweets.
Tweets can be accessed through the website interface, SMS or App. One can send text messages, photos and videos. A video recording, up to 30 seconds, can be done on Twitter, edited and immediately Tweeted or shared either on mobile phone or desktop. Twitter Inc, the founder of the social network site, is located in San Francisco, USA. According to Statista Portal, in mid-2015, the Twitter microblogging service was used actively by 304 million people.

According to eMarketer, a US research company, Twitter accounts for only 17 per cent of Indian social network users. India had 22.2 million users as on 2014. Japan has the largest Twitter population in Asia Pacific, the company says in its report. Based on the request by countries, controversial Tweets are deleted by the company.

**Twitter Mirror:** It functions as a backstage at major award shows and events; it allows celebrities to take selfies and tap to Tweet.

**Google +:** The Google+ social networking site is backed by the most popular search engine – Google. Compared to Facebook and Twitter, it is young. But it has combined the best features of both the sites. New content can be added, topics can be highlighted with hashtags, and separate groups of users can be created. Google+ comes under the five top social media networks in the world.

**YouTube:** It is a video-sharing website located in California, US. The service was founded in 2005 and is now managed by Google. The site allows users to upload, view and share. The content includes video clips, TV clips, music videos, video blogging, and short original videos.

The content is usually uploaded by individuals. Many service providers conduct their activities, for example, teaching, via YouTube. In 2014, the YouTube Company said that 300 hours of new videos were uploaded to the site per minute. Video games are very popular. Even 3D videos can be uploaded.

YouTube does not allow downloading of videos, except to eminent personalities. However, third-party websites, applications and browser plug-ins allow downloading. Smartphone can access YouTube videos. YouTube can be accessed offline too.
Google India office stated in a newspaper in Sept 2013 that YouTube had crossed 55 million unique users a month in India. It had a library of 10,000 full-length Indian movies and 95 per cent of India’s music catalogue in vernacular languages. The growth was projected at 300 per cent year-on-year. Still this is just 5.5 per cent of the global visitors to YouTube. Now movies are being offered on rental basis. About 38 per cent of the YouTube traffic in India was from mobile phones, according to Google India.

**LinkedIn:** This professional networking site was launched by a California-based company in 2003. It’s the world’s largest professionals’ networking site with 364 million users across the globe. Of the total users, 24 million are in India, according to the company in its post on 2014. The highest users are in the US. The site is available in 24 languages.

The site allows users to create their profiles and make them accessible to others. Users can invite anyone to be connected with them. It helps in finding employment, getting connected to people and business houses. Head-hunters keep visiting this site. They can see the visitors to their page. It also has a presence on Facebook and Twitter.

**Reddit:** An entertainment social networking and news website. Registered members can submit contest as texts and links. Content is organised subject-wise. Questions can be posed and images can be shared. It is multilingual, primarily English. The office of Reddit is located in San Francisco, US, and was founded in 2005.

**Google Hangout:** It is an Internet-based social network created and operated by Google. It was launched in 2011. It allows conversation between two or more users. The service can be accessed online through Gmail or Google+ websites or mobile Apps. Chat or conversations are saved online. Photos can be saved during conversations.

**Tumblr:** A microblogging site: Characters up to 140 can be posted. It allows users to share multimedia, links, and any other content. A user can create his/her profile as blog.

**Quora:** An online community where people interact besides asking questions from other users. Users can join a community they like to share information and pose questions.
**MySpace:** This website offers interaction; users can submit content and post personal profiles. Blogs, groups, photos, music and videos are the other features. It has a gaming platform. It was founded in 2002 in California, US. It has revised its features several times. But Facebook has overtaken MySpace.

**Orkut:** It was a website which was owned and operated by Google. It was designed to help and meet new and old friends. It was founded in 2004 and became dysfunctional in 2014.

**Wikis:** Wikis are web pages that can be modified by deleting or adding by anyone without altering the basic design of the pages. It basically provides free information which is voluntary and decentralised.

The information provided on Wikipedia, founded in 2001, may not be fool-proof but it is relatively authentic. There is probably no important issue or personality being profiled on Wiki. One of the important features of Wiki is that it gives links to hypertexts which are related to the main subject. But it is not interactive. Anyone registered on the site can create an article for publication.

**1.5 Recent Trends in New Media**

The digital world is here to stay and expand. Content, like never is being produced in excessively large quantities. For its distribution or to ensure that it reaches the target groups, there are several platforms, including Apps (applications). These are only showing signs of increasing.

Personal news, information and content delivery have begun and can only grow upwards. Apps such as SnapChat and WhatsApp have been exclusively providing news. Another App, Pinterest, is a web and mobile application where registered users can ‘Pin’ their favourite photos or images. One can subscribe to the specific boards on the website. Some websites have Pin buttons which help people express their likes. This could also help in diverting business to a site.
Those in the conventional print business are turning into ‘digital only’ publishers. Advertisements and business are also getting routed to digital platforms. However, digital publishers may also get into print to catch readers and for advertisement revenue. Public and private sharing of content is increasingly becoming an Internet-based exercise. Virtual newsrooms and business houses are slowly becoming a reality; these fields are set to grow with more and more people becoming netizens.

The trend is to get connected – not physically, but on the Internet platforms, and those who have no online presence will increasingly feel left out in many fields. Modern consumers are on the Internet. The ‘visual’ is taking centre-stage with many companies launching mobile Apps to market their products and services.

It’s obvious that people are depending more on technology today for daily life and business. Technology is a conduit to test people’s tastes and for getting feedback. There are reports that Facebook, through an App, may allow cash transactions. If this happens, one more record in convergence will be created.

When consumers or users become tech-driven, then media houses and journalists will have to sharpen their digital skills. Catching, and catering to, a scattered diverse audience is a challenge and suitably met by some reputed media houses.

The Pew Research Centre, an American think-tank based in Washington, says in its April, 2014 post that the growing digital new world largely made up of hundreds of smaller sites, often local in scope, is working to fill gaps left by the legacy of reporting. Emarsys, a digital marketing company of Austria, while listing seven social media trends dominating 2015, quoting a study, states that one-quarter of the world’s population uses social media. They are posting, pinning, Tweeting, vining and Instagramming. Every 60 seconds 4.7 million posts are produced to Tumblr; 277,000 snaps are shared on SnapChat, and more than five million videos are viewed on YouTube.

Anonymous social media platforms are growing and being hacked too. The data of users entering public domain or being misused is not a rarity. This is a matter of concern, and Facebook-like reliable sites are working on a solution.
In October 2015, Twitter launched ‘Moments’ feed of curated Tweets. It also promotes popular Tweets. Under the ‘Moments’ section, news is offered subject-wise. These trends, among others, indicate that media-sharing sites are growing. Brand promotions, be it a commercial or otherwise, will continue on social media. New users, usually youngsters who get a kick or a high out of social newness, are defining new media and changing the old order. Innovation, self-promotion, projecting themselves as doing well in life and career - self publicity for social service, philanthropy, display of emotion, exhibiting talent, limitations, constraints and problems - are all reflected on social media. Even many government departments, non-governmental organisations and individuals, including politicians are the players in this change. There’s sufficient data to show that new media has grown and is going to continue growing.

The growth of social media depends a lot on customising content to the needs and demands of users. Social media is turning into search engines, opinion moulders and at times, for ‘time pass’ too. With consumers becoming choosier, more Apps will be launched. And old and new players will not survive unless they reinvent themselves in tandem with technology and demand. With mobile broadband connections growing faster, the divide between the digital world and non-digital world is going to be reduced further. Interactive media will continue to attract more traffic.

1.6 New Media and Political Communication

Political communication, which is a sub-field of communication, has dramatically changed in the last decade. New media platforms and social media tools have made democracy more vibrant, at least in the cyber world. This does not imply that the quality of governance has improved and society at large is happier because the quality of life has improved.

But with the media becoming more and more interactive, public communication has increased which in turn has an impact on policy makers. Many traditional media as well as new media have changed politics which is inclusive of governance and players involved in it. Maybe this is seen in patches.
Greek philosopher and scientist Aristotle of the fourth century was the first to use the term 'politics'. He called it the “master of science”. The word is derived from the Greek word Polis, which means state or community. But over a period of time the meaning has been distorted by making it synonymous with politicians and party politics. At times, it just gets equated with elections.

For politics to exist there should be a state comprising population, territory, government and sovereignty. Among the forms of government, democracy is also one. The term democracy is derived from the Greek words, demos (people) and kratos (power). It is a form of government where people rule either directly or indirectly. The late president of the USA, Abraham Lincoln, had remarked, “Democracy is the government of the people, by the people, for the people.” India follows indirect democracy. The people do not directly formulate their will but through their representatives to whom they delegate the power.

Distribution or delegation of power at various levels is one of the main dimensions of politics. Policy process becomes part of politics. Politicians, who become legislators or Parliament members, turn into decision-makers and policy-makers. This also implies that politics is power though both are not the same. Politics should also go with responsibility. Often wrongly, politics gets equated with politicians and elections. The word politics brings to mind corruption, circumvention of rules and misuse of authority, which only attracts public abhorrence.

Politics has to run within a constitutional framework. A politician is also a citizen who has rights and duties like any citizen in a democratic set-up. This is discussed rather than followed.

Plato, a philosopher and mathematician of the fourth century, in his work (more of a dialogue) ‘The Republic,’ describes the ideal state and the means to achieve it. It is more of a theoretical approach than actual. He believes in the idea of philosopher rulers because they have knowledge and thus hold the form of the good.

While explaining why the formation of states cannot be avoided, Plato says humans are not self-sufficient and so need a social environment to live. Each person has a natural
aptitude for a specific task and should concentrate on developing it. He believes in separation of power amongst three classes – rulers, auxiliaries and commoners, and each is assigned different political roles. The auxiliaries are of the military, police and executive duties, and the philosophers take part in government. The commoners, the lower classes, do not take part in politics because they are not mentally able to. He promises that there will not be any disruption in the harmony of the state.

Aristotle, contrarily, holds the view that politics is the art of ruling and being ruled in turn. Balance is the main word in discussing matter. Aristotle believes it is a necessary element of creating a stable government. In his work, “The Politics”, while defining politics, he raises the question as to why there should be a state, and he answers it too. The state is the culmination of natural associations that start with joining of man and woman, a household, villages and finally, the state. It provides for the needs of all individuals.

Aristotle says that man is a political animal by nature and thus cannot avoid the challenges in politics. Polis (state or community) should create a space where its people can live a good life and perform beautiful acts, he says.

Both Plato and Aristotle do believe that a person is not self-reliant. They also agree that some people are not capable of practising an active role in political life. Plato is of the view that the lower class is not mentally adept for the intricacies of higher knowledge of the good. Aristotle believes that only those who fully participate in their government should be considered citizens of the state. He excludes workers as citizens because they do not have the required time to openly participate in politicking. Both Plato and Aristotle believe in slavery.

The political philosophies of Plato and Aristotle have survived for centuries, and they enjoy historical value. All the philosophy they propagated by them and their arguments are not relevant today though they make a good reading. This is because individual rights matter in democracy, which is the most accepted form of governance. Those who are incapable of participating in governance should be made capable and this is the challenge for those at the helm of affairs. It is a participatory democracy which is required and collective decisions have to be taken for the good of the majority.
There is no ideal society but the effort should be to have a better one. Conflicts are a reality which has to be accepted. But resolving them in time for the good of people is the challenge. Discussions, dialogues and participation of people, community, civil society and people in power are the means to achieve a meaningful democracy. For this to be achieved, authority should be vested with politicians who become part of governance. Authority should not be construed as absolute power to do what one wants.

If there is no communication, then neither would politicians feel the pulse of the people nor would people understand politicians and governance. Communication can influence both the entities. Information should be made available and it should be spread widely. Political environment can be created and altered through communication.

David L Swanson, an American activist and writer, and Dan Nimmo, political science professor, in their book, ‘Political Communication: A Resource Book’, define political communication as the strategic use of communication to influence public knowledge, beliefs, and action on political matters.

In this context, communication, both media communication and political communication, attains significance. Reality has to be explained and truth should be conveyed. Whether receivers are capable of understanding is a different debate altogether. It is immaterial to consider the mode of communication and the medium that is used. The goal should be to reach out to the masses effectively and extensively. For example, the government takes many important decisions which directly affect the lives people. If the decisions are made through legislation, it gets reflected in the media. Sometimes, even the media ignores or fails to understand the significance and implications of legislations. But there are chances of people noticing legislations through the media.

Many decisions are taken by gazetting government orders. Legislations are drawn up in legislature and Parliament. But rules framed under the legislation are drawn up by politicians and officials. There are several examples to show how a bureaucrat or a group of officers have taken decisions which can have ramifications across India. Public objections and suggestions are invited by government whenever it decides to implement a new norm. But this is mainly for the purpose of record and to complete the formality. Government orders, draft bills and notified rules are usually not widely publicised.
People remain both unaware and ignorant of rules and regulations. Such types of situations are deliberately created to avoid discussions, debates, questions and consensus on crucial policy decisions. If the media is alert, then it can throw light on government decisions and rules. Hence, communication becomes a very important tool in democracy.

Political communication could be through the media, interpersonal and even through action. Even silence and inaction can communicate message. Silence also speaks, at times. Even attire, make-up and body language become part of communication.

Marshall McLuhan, communication theorist, says, “Today we are beginning to notice that the new media are not just mechanical gimmicks for creating worlds of illusions, but new languages with new and unique powers of expression.”

Jacques Chirac, former French President, says, “If our language, our programs, our creations are not strongly present in the new media, the young generation of our country will be economically and culturally marginalized.” While McLuhan was a theorist, Chirac belonged to the political class. Both had realised the power of new media.

Politics and media are entwined. Here media includes both conventional and new media. The global village concept has become a reality. Online media is speaking and is being heard. Citizens themselves are breaking news and disseminating information on social media. So, a new order of communication, independent of the media houses, has developed. This shows the significance and power of new media.

**Internet Development**

New media goes hand in hand with technology. When the Internet technology emerged in the early 1960s, no one could make an educative guess that it would rule the world one day by being an instrument for economic empowerment and social change.

The Internet is the brainwave of some visionaries in the early 1960s who could see the potential in computers - in sharing information on research and development, in scientific and military fields. In 1962, JCR Licklider of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in America first proposed a global network of computers. Later he moved to the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DPRPA) in 1962 to continue the work.
Leonard Kleirock of MIT, and later, of the University of California, developed the theory of packet switching, which formed the basis of the Internet connections. Lawrence Roberts of MIT connected a Massachusetts’ computer to a California computer in 1965 over dial-up telephone lines, paving the way for wide area networking. Simultaneously, it showed up the inadequacy of the telephone line’s circuit switching. In 1966, Roberts developed his plan for an Advanced Research Projects Agency Network in 1969. It provided a secure communication network for defence-related research, but later there were interconnected computers in certain laboratories at Stanford Research Institute and the University of Utah, among others.

The contract, which was carried out by the BBN School of Cambridge under Bob Kahn, went online in December 1969. By June 1970, MIT, Harvard, BBN and Systems Development Corp in Santa Monica were added. From then on the list only grew. The Internet was designed to provide a communication network that would function even if some sites were destroyed in a nuclear attack. After several experiments, research and improvements, the Internet became a reality.

E-mail was adapted for ARPANET by Ray Tomlinson of BBN in 1972. He used the @ symbol to line the username and address. The telnet protocol, enabling logging on to a remote computer, was published as a Request for Comments (RFC) in 1972, which helped share development work through the community. The File Transfer Protocol (FTP) - enabling file transfers between the Internet sites - was published as RFC in 1973. As the government had funded the Internet in the initial years, it was originally limited to research, education, and government uses. Commercial uses weren’t strictly restricted. This policy was in place till the early 1990s when commercial networks moved to the field.

In the last three decades, growth has been overwhelming. Wireless has grown and wi-fi (wireless fidelity) hot spots aren’t a rarity even in a developing country like India. Wimax (Worldwide Interoperability for Microwave Access), which offers broader ranges than wi-fi, EV-DO, 4G, and other formats, are transforming the communication scene in developed countries and is slowly catching up in India too. The space for grabbing opportunities in this field is both for economic and political gains.
India saw the Internet entry only in the early 1990s. Similar to the US, in India too the Internet growth was at the government level. The ERNet (Educational and Research Network) and the National Informatics Centre Network (NICNet) were the first two government projects. The ERNet project was intended to provide Internet connectivity among certain prime educational and research institutions in India, while NICNet connected government departments.

The ERNet, with its low bandwidth, was not reliable. Later, in 1993, the UUCP-based Internet service provided TCP-IP access to dial-up modem customers, followed by the V-SAT network and more reliable networks in 1996. The UUCP is an abbreviation of Unix-to-Unix Copy, programs and protocols of computer which allows transfer of files, while TCP-IP, meaning Transmission Control Protocol- Internet Protocol is a communication language of the Internet. Even the NICNet was not a definite form of networking with limited access. But over a period of time, it has become reliable though it does not match up to the best in the world. In 1995, Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited (VSNL) in India launched the Gateway Internet Access Service (GIAS) which allowed access to the Internet for the public. It was limited to four metros in the country.

With cellular communication advancing rapidly, new media too has grown in connecting people and platforms. The advantage is clear; many tools have become interactive, and provide a platform for people to express their views and ideas unabashedly, to think aloud without having to spend too much money and time. The availability of content or information on-demand, from anywhere, where wire connectivity is available, has been a game-changer. The world of information, knowledge, interaction and networking itself is different. New media, unlike traditional media, has been more democratic by its act of making available, information, use of information and content consumption. This does not imply that even government leaders are democratic even if they are employing new media for governance.

The concept of cell phone shaped up only in the late 1940s, in the US and UK and that idea today has triggered a revolution in the new media field itself. The police mobile car phones of the time gave researchers a germ of an idea to develop something bigger – to conceptualise higher radio frequency phones. But the lack of computer technology at the time was a major obstacle to taking the idea further. The American government policy
allowed only a limited spectrum of radio frequency for use of mobile communications, and in 1982, permission to small broadcast towers to have a reach over a small area was granted.

The credit of launching the world’s first commercial cellular network services goes, not to the US, but to Japan. In 1979, the first fully automatic, first generation cellular network (1G) was developed by Nordic Mobile Telephone in 1981. It was based on analog radio signals. The second generation (2G) digital cellular networks arrived in 1991. The credit of rolling out 3G high-speed cellular networks also goes to Japan, going by the record.

Today, India’s mobile phone industry is growing faster than expected, thanks to the growing money power and tech-savvy urban youth. Mobile phones came to India only in 1995. Over the years, cellular phone became mobile phone with interactive features. In 1992, a primitive-type touch screen phone was introduced. Mobile phone evolved over the years and smartphone with various user-friendly features hit the market in 2000. The pro-active measures by different licensors and regulators promoted mobile phone usage in rural India too because business houses knew how the youth are addicted to smartphone which is also serving as an entertainment gadget.

India mainly follows global GSM and CDMA technologies in the mobile communication field. While GSM is the global system for mobile communication, CDMA is based on code division multiple access. Mobile tariffs are cheaper in India as compared with the cost in many other countries. This has been possible because the users’ or purchasers’ base is large in proportion to the country’s population.

About three decades ago, media communication was restricted to print, radio and television. With the advent of technology, even printing technology has changed for the better. The online publication of vernacular books, newspapers, periodicals and books holds no surprises for anyone in India.

Till the 1980s, media communication relied primarily on print and analog signal models such as those of television, radio. The last 25 years have seen the rapid transformation of media which are predicated on the use of digital technologies such as the Internet,
computer games and animation. However, these examples are only a small representation of new media.

Politics and media are an intrinsic part of society; they can never be separated. Even before the invention of writing, news spread by word of mouth and the beat of drums. Today technology has only made communication easier. In traditional media, news and propaganda materials were fed separately as well as intermixed. New media is no better. Truth, lies, myth, rumours, speculation and reality all go in the form of news in all types of media.

Communication is meant to articulate both the politicians’ and the people’s opinion. But defining public opinion is a challenge. Debates have defined public opinion across the globe. But there is no unanimity of views. Public opinion is as important to politicians as it is to news media because of its influence over governance and policy. Public opinion is the outcome of interaction and communication through any form. Of course, in no medium and media does a large number of people’s opinion get reflected unless surveys are carried out with a huge sample base without prejudice and bias.

Walter Lippmann, an American newspaper commentator and writer, was the most influential columnist for decades in the US. His weighty opinions through columns could change the policies of the US. In his most influential book *Public Opinion*, published in 1922, he observes that the power of the press and publicity agents to control or manipulate news is great. Journalists put emphasis on the event that unfolds, rather than the issue and the reasons for the cause. The newspaper is the result of a series of selections with no objective standards. A partnership of readers is established with the purpose of engaging the reader. So it is difficult to change opinions even in face of mounting evidence to the contrary. Mass communication media is vulnerable to manipulation, Lippman says.

Lippmann’s reflections on newspapers are applicable to new media houses too. However new media forums, where the users are the writers and publishers, have emerged as the voice of the people although their knowledge and level of competence to understand subjects and issues is questionable.
Lippmann, while talking about the ‘manufacture of consent’, says that the exercise is capable of great refinements. “…A revolution is taking place, infinitely more significantly than any shifting of economic power… under the impact propaganda...It has been demonstrated that we cannot rely upon intuition, conscience, or the accidents of casual opinion if we are to deal with the world beyond our reach.”

Daniel J Boorstin, a prolific American writer, in his works on early American history, professes that America’s political life was not peculiar, and successful because of its history and geography and not because of government. In his work *The Image* – A guide to Pseudo-Events in America, published in 1961, he described events as ‘pseudo-events’, press conferences as ‘photo opportunity’, presidential debates as manufactured just to report. He says news-making had replaced news-gathering, celebrities had replaced with heroes and images had replaced ideals.

Boorstin’s frankness has only become louder with the advent of new media. He was identified with books. He says the book was man’s greatest technical innovation, never surpassed. “The computer can help us find what we know is there. The book remains our symbol and our resource for the unimagined question and the unwelcome answer,” he says.

Even now his observations remain relevant; though e-books are available and the Internet has turned into publisher, writing has to be done. Earlier, it was a writing instrument, now it is a key-board. The packaging and marketing of news, theories, politicians, politics, celebrities, and businessmen is more intense and extensive on new media platforms than it used to be on conventional media.

Avram Noam Chomsky, one of the America’s greatest political activists, media critic par excellence and linguist, and Edward S Herman, finance professor and media analyst, in their book, “Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media”, published in 1988, talk about their Propaganda Model. Media serves the ends of the dominant elite because of the monopolistic control over the media and official censorship. This is more evident where the media tries to adhere to free speech and the interest of the general community. What is not evident is the limited nature of such critiques, as well as
the huge inequality in the command of resources, and its effect both on access to the private media system and on its behaviour and performance, the authors say.

The writers, in their propaganda model, focus on this inequality of wealth, power and its effects on mass media interests and choices. In this context they talk about five news ‘filters’ – the size, concentration of ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the media firm; advertising as the primary income source; the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business and funded ‘experts’; flak as means of disciplining the media and anti-communalism as a national religion and control mechanism. They say that the raw material of news passes through successive filters, leaving the ‘cleansed’ residue to print.

In an interview to Byline, a crowdfunded independent media platform of the UK, in May 2015, Chomsky says the basic analysis made in ‘Propaganda Model’ has still not changed. Decline in the number of independent print media is striking. “It is true that the Internet does provide opportunities that were not easily available before, so instead of having to go the library to do research, you can just open up your computer. You can certainly release information more easily and also distribute different information from many sources, and that offers opportunities and deficiencies. But fundamentally, the system hasn’t changed very much,” Chomsky says.

His attention was drawn to Emily Bell, Director at the Tow Centre for Digital Journalism at Columbia Journalism School who had said that, “news spaces are no longer owned by newsmakers and the public sphere is now operated by a small number of private companies based in Silicon Valley with nearly all content being published on social platforms.”

Chomsky did not agree. He says it was the general statement. If he wanted to find out what was going on in Ukraine or Syria or Washington, he would read The New York Times and other national papers. But he would not look at Twitter because it did not tell him anything. It told him people’s opinion about lots of things, but very briefly and necessarily superficially, and it did not have the core news. However, the sources of news had become narrower.
Chomsky, referring to a news run by Silicon Valley, says, “…say Google, I am sure they are trying to manufacture consent. If you want to buy something, let’s say, you look it up on Google. We know how it works. The first things on the list are the ones that advertise. That does not mean that they are the most important ones. But it is a reflection of their business model, which is of course based on advertising which is one of the filters, in fact.”

While Chomsky and other media critiques talk the truth, the ground reality is that digital media is growing in popularity. An example of how Facebook groups have a political impact is ‘One million voices against FARC’. In 2008, scores of Colombians, who had a group on Facebook, took part in a protest against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, identified as FARC.

During the Arab Spring, Facebook played a significant role in generating the 2011 Egyptian revolution. The protestors could get connected on Facebook. Facebook played the role of a catalyst in the American political process in January 2008. It became a forum for political debates. The group users engaged in debates and expressed their mind through voting. The Facebook application ‘US politics on Facebook’ was installed on the users’ account to express comments.

There are many more such examples to show how Facebook groups worked as pressure groups to effect revolution, governance and policies. Social media usage has become a part of regular administration for certain politicians including US President Barrack Obama and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Obama leads with the highest followers on Facebook with 43 million followers, while Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi follows with about 25 million as on November 2014. Barack Obama had 43 million followers on Twitter, while Narendra Modi had eight million followers on Twitter microblogging site as on November, 2014. Narendra Modi became the first prime minister in the world to take a Twitter-Mirror along with the Australian Prime Minister during his Australia tour.
1.7 Arab Spring, Tunisia and Social Media

The Arab world witnessed a series of civil and armed wars on streets as a vehement mass protest against the old order of dictatorship. The unrest began in Tunisia in 2010 questioning the authoritarian rule and later spread to the neighbouring countries. And, there was no stopping for months. Unemployment, spiralling prices, corruption, misuse of authority, anarchy in governance, harassment by men in government and more made the common man, especially the younger generation, rebel against political and economic orders.

The anti-government protests in the form of civil disobedience, protest camps, riots, silent protests, and group congregations in public, self-immolation, and insurgency, the Internet activism using social media tools, armed strikes and the like had become order of the day in the Arab countries from 2010 to 2011. These were aimed at throwing out the dictators and rebel was billed as Arab Spring, by the Western Media. The civil war in Tunisia was labelled as Jasmine Spring by the media, and Jasmine is the national flower of that country.

Arab Spring, the democracy movement in Arab League and surroundings, was also called as Spring and Winter, Arab Awakening, Arab Uprisings, Islamist Spring, Islamist Winter, all to denote the protests against the old order of monarchy. The term Arab Spring, is said to be an allusion to the Revolution of 1848, the political upheavals in Europe. It is also said that political science professor Marc Lynch was the first to refer it as Arab Spring, in one of his write-ups.

The serious unrest in the Arab countries left scores of people injured and dead. The outcome of the uprisings is being debated even now. The tension seems to continue though latent. Wikipedia has listed countries where dictatorship regime in violation of human rights and dignity was questioned included – Tunisia, Algeria, Jordan, Oman, Egypt, Yemen, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, Iraq, Bahrain, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iranian Khuzestan, the UAE and Palestinian Authority.

The intensity of protests in these countries was not uniform. But the intention behind rebel was almost uniform – shake the old order of rulers who were doing no good to the
people. The results were different in each country. In some countries like Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and Iraq the governments were overthrown, while in others the protests could change the legislations and release of prisoners among other developments.

Arab World or Arab nation consists of 22 Arabic-speaking countries. The two Islamic countries - Tunisia and Egypt - which witnessed insurgency and major political revolutions during the Arab Spring, are located in North Africa. Tunisia shares a border with Algeria and Libya. Egypt is also located in North Africa.

It is the civil protests in Tunisia which made other Arab countries unite and fight collectively against dictatorship. In December 2010, a road-side vegetable vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, 26, in Sidi Bouzid town, committed self-immolation in December 2010 as he was fed up with the confiscation of his wares from a cart and harassment by a municipal lady officer and police for not having an official vendor permit. His suicide act was before a government building. He died after 18 days in a hospital. In other countries many followed his steps by self-immolation as part of their protests.

This desperate act of Bouazizi in a public place was video recorded on mobile phone. The clip went viral and was shared on Facebook and broadcast by television channels. Scores of people joined the protest to express their solidarity with Bouazizi who had revolted against the authoritarian regime. The protests, protesters and the police's highhanded act were uploaded on YouTube.

The clips were watched across Tunisia, and the protests only grew. And, on a daily basis the videos were uploaded. In January 2011, Tunisians watched Bouazizi’s funeral on Facebook. Several international media agencies of repute too visited Tunisia to give coverage for the protests. Finally, the protests led to the ouster of the 23-years-regime of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, on January 14, 2011. He went into exile in Saudi Arabia. Fresh elections were held in 2014 to form a new Parliament which is working towards decentralisation of power and open administration.

After Tunisia, it was the turn of the common man in Egypt to ‘explode’ in public in 2011. Tahrir Square in Cairo became a common place for protesters to assemble daily. It used to look like a war zone. Called the Egyptian Revolution, it was part of the Arab Spring.
Through protests, riots, violence, strikes, disobedience and the like, millions of people demanded the ouster of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. They were questioning the state-of-emergency laws, police brutality, political policies, and demanding freedom of speech, corruption-free governance, employment and non-military rule.

The protesters defied all the regulations imposed by the police and military. Finally Mubarak dissolved his government and appointed Omar Suleiman as vice president. After much turmoil on the political front, Parliament was dissolved. In 2012, Mubarak was found guilty in a court of law of premeditated murder of civilian protesters but he was acquitted. The protests continued for two years. After much upheaval and churning, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi became elected civilian president in 2014.

For the Egyptian revolution, the contribution of the Internet activist Wael Ghonim, a computer engineer, is astounding. This 34-year-old Egyptian by birth lives in the US. He was a Google marketing executive when he was 29. While browsing Facebook in Dubai, he had the shock for his life when he saw the picture of the face of a brutally attacked man -Khaled Mohamed Saeed. He was a victim of Egypt police excesses. He was a young blogger.

Distressed, Ghonim immediately decided to plunge into action –and go online to express his fury. It was an instant decision. He took a big risk. He created a Facebook page -‘We Are All Khaled Said”. He wrote that many Egyptians’ plight including himself, was no better than Saeed’s. It took just took a couple of minutes for the Facebook page to get reactions from 300 people first and later it swelled to 2,50,000. The online fury spilled on to the streets of Cairo and rallies at Tahrir Square.

The online surge to take on the President Mubarak became an integral part of the protests. The Facebook page did not lead the revolution but it was a catalysing agent. Access to the Internet made Ghonim an activist, a concerned citizen and a leading force, overnight. At the same time, his responsive nature too mattered. He did not remain passive when he saw the gory picture.

Ghonim could connect online with young and educated Egyptians. Social media served as a platform to vent out people’s anger, frustration and opinion. He integrated the Facebook
users, publicised the rallies through printed fliers and text messaging. He lent his voice to the protests and finally he turned into one of the leading voices. He was arrested and released by the police.

Ghonim, in his book ‘Revolution 2.0’, captures the Arab Spring. In a television interview, he said his online activism should be seen only in the context of ‘hundreds of other pages, Facebook accounts and Twitter profiles,’ for the cause of Arab Spring. He polled the page users to seek their opinion. He represents the Egyptian youth who are growing up with digital platforms and look for solution in a bloodless way. In the book Ghonim says that the Internet penetration in Egypt is minimal. For the young, tools like blogs, Facebook and Twitter have become handy to express their aspirations and anxiety. The Internet, he says, was ‘instrumental in shaping his experiences as well as character.’

At no time did the social media network function overtime in the Arab countries as it did during the Arab Spring. The conventional media like print and television had to pick stories from social media. Facebook, Twitter and blogs were continuously getting updated. Political activism went hand-in-hand with digital activism. Online small groups could turn into powerhouses. The messages were sent both in English and Arabic. This was so despite repeated efforts by the authoritarian class to black out the Internet and social media. The platforms were probably used to the hilt because the traditional media is under government control in these countries.

The influence of social media on the democracy movement has been studied and is still being discussed to gauge the influence over the masses. Many data-based studies have been conducted to analyse the Internet’s potential, and the manner in which it works as well as survive in the times of crisis.

A comprehensive study is ‘Opening Closed Regimes’ by a group of six professors of American universities. The working paper is hosted on www.pITIP.org. The study paper says social media helped spread democratic ideas across international borders. The study focuses mainly on Tunisia and Egypt. It collects database from Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. It also includes prominent Egyptian political websites. Political conversations in the blogs were studied. The data shows that social media was extensively used to conduct, discuss and communicate by young, urban, relatively well-educated individuals.
including women. Social media tools were used before and during the revolutions to pressurise governments to move into democratic regime. Streaming videos were also used to shame men in power. Political organisations and individuals used Western new sites – such as BBC and CNN, to spread credible information, the study says.

The paper says that conversations about liberty, democracy and revolution on blogs and on Twitter often immediately preceded mass protests. On January 14, the day Ben Ali resigned, about 20 per cent of the blogs in Tunisia were evaluating his leadership. This indicated an increase of 15 per cent over the previous month. Governments tried to block social media sites besides arresting the users. “The democracy advocates were tech-savvy and had the help of hackers and talented computer programmers who were able to shutter government services online and provide protestors with workarounds to censors,” the study says.

The study using eCarin Conversation archiving and analysis service used to capture the flow of information through blog posts from RSS feeds to Tunisians’ key blogs. The captured data-streams begin on November 20, 2011, and end on May 15, 2011. A total of 475 key Tunisian blogs contributed a total of 26,000 posts during the period. There were 2,200 Tweets from Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, and Morocco on the day Ben Ali resigned. Before Mubarak’s resignation, the total rate of Tweets from Egypt, and around the world, about political change in that country went up from 2,300 a day to 2,30,000 a day, the report establishes.

In ‘The Role of Information Communication Technologies in the Arab Spring’, a research paper by Ekaterina Stepanova, Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences, says “…In this context, the use of ICT may be seen as the new ‘technical’ basis for reviving the phenomenon of mass, non-violent protest campaigns. This pattern is certainly one that merits further empirical and analytical investigation.”

Stepanova says the weakest link in the US policy on the matter is the automatic connection it makes between social media networks and a Western-style democracy agenda. Social media-based network activism may not be best suited for political competition at the stage of ‘post-revolutionary’ state-building, governance reform, and
institutionalised politics in general, compared to more institutionalised and better organised actors. Net–based information and communication tools may serve as powerful accelerating factors of social protest, but they do not themselves reflect or dictate the substantive natures (socio-political, value-based, ideological) and contextual forms of such protests, the researcher points out.

Motherboard.vice.com, an online magazine, in January, 2015, published an article, “How social Media Can Weaken a Revolution’, authored by Hamza Shaban. In the article, the author refers to a paper written by Zeynep Tufekci, an assistant professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which highlights the weaknesses of social media-fuelled movements, including those of Egypt, Turkey and Occupy Wall Street. While digital technologies offer movements a heightened ability to seize the public’s imagination, evade censorship, and mobilise the flock, the same advantages circumvent the difficult, long-term process of building political organisations. The author says novel communication inspires not only new forms of censorship, but propaganda and spying as well.

Malcom Gladwell, a well-known Canadian journalist, in one of his articles in The New Yorker says social media create only thin networks that do not have the ability to compel people to engage in high-risk activism. Facebook and Twitter are tools for building networks. But these tools are not controlled by a single central authority. Decisions are made through consensus, and the ties that bind people to the group are loose, he observes.

There are several arguments professing the power of the Internet media and debunking the same. But certainly new media will be part of the political, social, economic and cultural process. It will continue to play a catalyst role, whether for good or bad or for the both, of society. Lack of leadership for social media-based protests and revolutions are often discussed. This question partially gets answered in the manner in which people erupted against the rape and death due to fatal assault of a paramedical young woman in New Delhi in December, 2012.

People across the country were horrified on hearing and reading the details of the rape incident. It is not that rape incidents are new in India. But this particular Delhi rape case went viral and drew a lot of public interest, in particular media attention. Besides
traditional media, Facebook and Twitter worked overtime. There was no one individual to lead the protest movement across the country. Social media tools like Facebook and Twitter became a conduit for people to network, assemble and question the Indian Government over the lack of security for women and the flaws in law to punish rapists. The issue itself took centre stage and people themselves organised, both online and offline, to shake and question the government. They demanded justice for the victim. India Gate in Delhi witnessed massive protests for days.

Protestors were getting information constantly on their mobile phone. People expressed their contempt against the rapists and the government through SMSes, Tweets, re-Tweets and updates on Facebook. Several groups were formed on Facebook to condemn the rape. People posed questions to the president and prime minister of India. Ineffective policing was constantly highlighted. The whole globe was watching the media activism across the country, in particular, New Delhi. People stood united in questioning gender violence. Both print and television media too kept the issue alive for days.

The movement was so strong and consistent that finally led Indian Parliament to amend the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act in 2013. Among the many changes for the better, in the Act, the word ‘rape’ was replaced by ‘sexual assault’. Gang rape was redefined as an action committed by more than one person. Mass movement on streets and online against the rape incident has indeed brought changes in law. But this has not deterred men from committing crimes against women. Rape incidents are being reported on a daily basis across India.

The momentum of people expressing views on social media began when Gandhian Anna Hazare and social activist Aravind Kejriwal, a former bureaucrat, began a mass movement against corruption in public life, in 2011. They were staging a sit-in protest in New Delhi. Here too social media users strongly supported Hazare and Kejriwal. Both the leaders gained lakhs of supporters on Facebook and followers on Twitter. India gave the impression that it was fighting corruption on the Internet. Public rallies were also held in major metros. A Facebook event –“25,000,00 Missed Calls” got much support from the members. Within days, 60,000 people gave missed calls on a government telephone number to demand an end to corruption. Anna Hazare was trending on social network and microblogging sites. The 74-year-old Anna, who
represented the common man of India, had drawn support in the virtual world of social media. Fan pages were opened to support him. The videos of his speeches went viral. He was the hero for the young and old alike, across the country. Of course, his movement drew support from the public but political parties tried their best to exploit the situation to their advantage.

Through the anti-corruption movement, Team Anna was demanding a strong legislation, in the form of a Jan Lokpal bill, to tackle corruption in public life. The bill was drawn up by civil society activists seeking a Jan Lokpal, an independent body to investigate corruption cases. The Lokpal Bill was first introduced in 1968. Team Anna went on protest for ten days and later had to give up for various reasons. The United Progressive Government at the Centre and Anna had several rounds of talks on the proposed bill. But till November 2015, the bill was examined by a parliamentary committee. The mass movement against corruption also saw the birth of a political party, Aam Admi Party, floated by Kejriwal. The real leader or hero was Anna.

Despite conventional media, social media and huge public rallies in support of Anna, the dream of Anna to have a strong law to punish corrupt people at all levels in public life is still not a reality. This does not mean that the movement, both online and offline, was a failure. Because, people realised that even an ordinary man on street can question an elected government and demand changes in law for a better society. Such a movement was a first for India. While saying so, it has to be admitted that online movement, if it has to reach a desirable level, needs support offline too. For example, corruption can be reduced even if not weeded out, provided there is a strong law which can deter people from both offering bribe as well as accepting it. For this to happen, political will is required.

1.8 New Media and Elections

In a democracy, people have the privilege of speaking out with reasonable restrictions. In India, people, roughly, in the two decades have a new platform to speak—the Internet-based communication channels. These are in addition to public forums and traditional media. With a range of versatile tools available in cyber space, democracy is getting a footing in the cyber world, and it is also influencing the conventional media. And, a
vibrant democratic country like India is fast catching up with these tools. The usage of Facebooks, Twitter and blogs, and websites reached a new notch in politics in 2014 when the country went for the Lok Sabha elections. The trend shows all the signs of growing in the coming elections too.

Before politicians began using social media in a noticeable way for election campaigns and for self-promotion, India had seen the power of social media networks as pressure groups. This was established in 2011 through the anti-corruption movement led by Anna Hazare and the protests to condemn the Delhi rape case in 2012.

The strides made in information technology are being harnessed by political parties and politicians in India. Of course, this is not a common trend among politicians. At the same time it may be difficult now to get a politician in Karnataka who might have not used the Internet for pursuing his/her political interest at least once in career.

Political campaigns, which are usually colourful in India, have taken a new hue with the usage of new media. No doubt politicians know the art of establishing themselves and engaging with voters or masses in real terms. Now they are doing it online too though the level of activities are different. With the digital age coming of age, politicians and political parties are using it to their advantage rather than focussing on people. The usage of ICT has been catching up with young politicians.

India has the largest youth population in the world. The census data of 2011 showed that half of the total voting population fell under the youth category. The country has more than 50 per cent of its population below the age of 25 years and more than 65 per cent below the age of 35. There were nearly 150 million new voters in 2014, who had the right to participate in the voting process for the Lok Sabha elections.

Facing this growth, politicians are willingly or otherwise trying to make their presence felt online. Politicians always find it difficult to engage urban youngsters in the electoral process. With youth taking to social media platforms, politicians are trying their best to reach this section through the Internet. Youngsters are increasingly taking a liking for English-medium education, reading and speaking. This is true in rural India also. The level of usage of English is only growing, though it could be at a peripheral level. Youth
of all strata of society are using mobile phone. This is indirectly exerting pressure on non-speaking English youngsters to learn English although, for a limited purpose. The vernacular is yet to make deep inroads into advertisements on social media forums. The trend has begun with big brands trying to push their advertisements in regional languages. A multi- and mixed-language approach could expand the business base in non-metros.

Gone are the days when youth used to depend on print and radio for news. Television, the Internet, mobile phones, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter are making available news and entertainment on demand anywhere, anytime cost-effectively. This is making youth more dependent on new media. Convergence of media platforms has become a reality. As a result, participants in the political process, politicians, bureaucrats and people, are making attempts to use new media.

There are examples to show even age is not a bar to take to social media in politics. But such politicians are far and few. For youngsters, those who prefer English reading and speaking, traditional media is not attractive anymore. Immediacy, freedom of expression, availability of voluminous information with just a click of the mouse or using a smartphone is what is making social media attractive to youth. The quest to know the developments in the world is also making them to get hooked on to the Internet. More than anything else, they can quickly react, express resentment, condone, and express their views on any issue of their liking. Usually, youngsters have strong views on politics and politicians. In platforms like blog, they can write lengthy views as there is no cap on word length.

All this shows that India is catching up with developments in cyber technology when it comes to usage of the Internet. According to the website India Internet Users – Internet Live Stats, in 2014, penetration of Internet usage by individuals through any device was 19.19 per cent of the total population. The country’s share in the world Internet users was 17.50 per cent. And, India is globally third in ranking when it comes to using the Internet. The usage was 0.53 per cent in 2000. China tops the list of Internet population followed by the US.

Of the total users, 38 per cent of users are in the age group of 25-34. Men dominate Internet usage with 61 per cent as compared to women’s share of 39 per cent. A report by
the Boston Consulting Group and Internet & Mobile Association of India points out that about 40 million Indians are online daily, spending 40 to 50 hours on the Internet every month. India has the second largest Internet user base in the world. India is the second largest market for social networking founders such as Facebook and LinkedIn, with 58,000 new users getting connected on a social network every day. E-Commerce is only growing with people shift to online shopping. The projected growth of Internet users by 2018 is 550 million, and of these, 210 million would be in rural areas. The report says mobile Internet users could be around 236 million by 2016, and may touch 314 million in 2017. There is decline in 2G user base with customers opting for 3G.

The growth of Internet use will increase from the non-metro and rural areas, according to Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) website. Mobile Internet is going to play a pivotal role in rural areas. Availability of not-so-expensive and not-so-high-end smartphones as well as flexi mobile tariff plans is making people across India use mobile phone. In 2012, 0.4 per cent of the total rural population was accessing the Internet through mobile phone. And, within the next two years, the usage would touch 4.4 per cent. But the biggest drawback in India is the low Internet penetration -19.19 per cent. If the network increases, the question of affordability will be answered.

Another problem India faces is slow Internet speed. In Akamai’s state of the Internet report for Q2 2014, India is ranked 114th in the world with an average Internet speed of almost 2Mbps. This is the lowest average Internet speed in the Asia-Pacific region. In comparison, the South Korea average Internet speed hovers around 24.6Mbps. Akamai Technologies, headquarted in the US, is a content delivery network services provider. The United Nations, UN Broadband Commission report -The State of Broadband, released in September 2015, says India ranked 131 of the 189 countries on fixed-broadband subscriptions in 2014, a drop from the 125th rank a year before. The report, however, says India has made slight progress in the percentage of individuals using the Internet.

The census report of 2011 says that Karnataka’s 12 per cent of the households has computers/laptops with the Internet. The state stands well below many states such as Goa, Maharashtra and Kerala. Reports of Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, in 2013, pointed out that Karnataka has the least mobile Internet penetration in India – 9.3 per
cent. However, Karnataka stood fourth in terms of broadband connection. Service providers have been trying their best to push devices for usage of the Internet in rural Karnataka.

Usually political parties, be it in India or the US, have media cells and IT cells. For example, in Karnataka both the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (commonly referred as the Congress party) have IT cells. The Janata Dal (Secular) too had an IT cell for some time. It is the BJP’s IT wing which is more active than others. The BJP is way ahead of other parties when it comes to political advertising on social media.

One needs to have an attitude to use technology rather than affordability and opportunity. If one tries to get immediate dividends, then they may be left disappointed. Like offline, even online branding, positioning and marketing of parties and politicians are time-consuming. Only sustained efforts will help to build the base.

When it comes to discussing usage of new media by politicians, it but natural the name of US President Barack Obama is mentioned often. Obama in 2008 set a trend for usage of social media for his presidential campaign. He was the first presidential candidate to use extensively and effectively social media as part of the campaign. Both offline and online campaigns supplemented each other. At that time, Facebook and Twitter were at nascent stage. He managed to reach out to youth in a substantial way through Facebook and MySpace. Generating electoral content on the web started with Obama, setting a trend for other politicians and future elections.

According to the Pew Research Centre report on, “The Internet’s Role in Campaign 2008”, more than half of the American adult population was online political users in the 2008 election. About 74 per cent of Internet users went online during the 2008 election to take part in, or get news and information about the 2008 campaign. This also implied that more than half of the voting-age population used the Internet to connect to the political process during the election. The overall size of the political news audience has more than doubled since the 2000 elections.
Some 35% of Americans had watched online political videos—three times as many as during the 2004 presidential election. And roughly 10% said they had logged on to social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace to engage in the election, the report points out.

When Obama won, it was evident that he knew the art of creating space in the cyber world. In addition to Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, he used MySpace, Flickr, BlackPlanet, and Linkedin among others. John Sidney McCain, who was the Republican presidential nominee against Democratic Party’s Obama, also had a presence on social media. But he was way behind Obama in terms of ‘Followers’ on social media. Even before the election, Obama was active on Facebook. His wife Michelle Obama, and his party colleagues were also engaging people on their Twitter account.

The content on social media platforms gave voters some idea of Obama’s position on various issues. He could also get feedback from a cross-section of people. The candidates, their stand, their claims, their arguments and counter-arguments against their rivals, the campaign mode and mood, the promises to people, photos of campaigns, videos and the polling day and more were captured on social media.

Obama took the cyber campaign to a higher level when he sought re-election to the president’s post in 2012. His team prepared a bigger digital canvas for him. Facebook was part and parcel of the campaign, and it emerged as the key campaign tool. His Facebook ‘Friends’ were asked to log on to his website which offered a lot of information on the polls. The media dubbed the 2008 elections of Obama as social media elections, while 2012 turned out to be the ‘data elections.’

His back office was managed by digital experts who handled the task professionally. Voters’ data bank was built. They were individually fed with information to give a personal touch while seeking votes. Recorded voice messages of Obama were made available on the platforms. There was no dearth for videos of his campaign on YouTube. His election website was a beehive of activities. The campaign, similar to 2008, generated funds in billions. Many a time, the platforms used to be two-way communication. It was not difficult for him to grab the headlines on a daily basis because
he was everywhere – be it on traditional media or new media. The campaign was more organised and the voters’ data collection was the highlight.

For any candidate, reaching his/her voters is the biggest challenge. And, that was well taken care by Team Obama, thanks to technology, planning and financial resources. The database had the personal details of the voters along with their e-mail. Hence, sending customised content was not a task. The databank was integrated with the Facebook ‘Followers.’ The exercise helped to ascertain to a certain extent possible supporters. Those who were giving affirmative replies, forwarding the message of Obama to their contacts and contributing financially were serving like feedback. Of course, the activities yielded huge material for researchers and helped advertisers. The content of his platforms and that of his opponent Mitt Romney were analysed, compared and measured in terms of absolute numbers. This also helped voters to understand the candidates better.

It was not only Obama who was digitally visible. Other party candidates too had their presence. But none could match Obama in terms of reach, connection, conversation, raising funds, more than anything make an impact. Political jargon was aplenty. He gave exclusive interviews to Reddit which attracted heavy traffic. The co-ordination of the different wings of his back office to position him and market him to voters was very impressive.

It is not that Obama restricted his political engagement with voters only online. He engaged with the offline too. However, young voters were in touch with him on the Internet media. He travelled extensively on his campaign rounds. He never gave up the time-tested method of campaign – face-to-face – with people and his party colleagues. Politicking on the ground did not take a backseat. People who had no time to watch his television programmes used to get updates online, and in America there is an abundance of Internet-based tools. He had nearly a dozen Facebook accounts, designed for demography. His ‘Friends’ on Facebook had crossed one million and he had Twitter ‘Followers’ close to about 16 million. Many a time, he had personally answered hashtagged questions. His signature used to be – bo (meaning Barack Obama). At times he used to make the messages personal by talking about his family, his role as husband and father, and these were all part of the tactics he chose to impress voters.
The election was branded as the Social Media Election of the US. And, of course, it was. But it was not just that. His tech-savvy approach, as a politician, was a plus factor, but his personality, his political decisions, his approach to problems like unemployment, bailing out some mega companies which were in distress and cashing in on the weakness of his opponents also helped him. A candidate has several reason to win or lose an election. If Obama had nothing substantial to say to people about his work and his vision, he would not have been able to make strides despite being all-pervasive on social media. But then, voters are vigilant. Even after the election, Obama has been hyper-active on social media. His political engagement as president is continuing in the digital world.

In India, discussion on social media and politicians has become synonymous with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. His love for technology-driven media is evident from his websites and social media platforms. It was interesting to read his conversation with Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg. In his capacity as the prime minister, Narendra Modi, during his official tour of the US in November 2015, visited the Facebook office in California to meet Zuckerberg. The prime minister was asked by Zuckerberg on his social media engagement. The prime minister said that he took to social media when he had no idea that he would be a chief minister or a prime minister.

His curiosity for technology led to using social media. Giving an analogy, he said people love guides rather than text books. Social media served as a guide to him. He said he could get what he wanted in a concise way. In addition, he said social media filled his lack of education. It also changed his thought process and connected him to the rest of the world.

In his blog, Narendra Modi wrote on May 12, 2014: ...“We have to profusely thank social media – it has caused the downfall of manufactured lies and half-truths at a very nascent stage. Earlier during elections we had people whose lies would reach every section of society. In a time when means of communication were less, they could get away with their same old speeches and half-baked assurances. Social media has changed that! In this age of information and social media the lies that come out of their microphones cannot even get past the podium of their speech venues, forget reaching others. More power to social media in the days ahead.”
This is how Narendra Modi has in a way acknowledged the power of social media and complimented it. Another politician in India who knows the strengths of online media is Shashi Tharoor, the Congress party Member of Parliament and former Union minister. He too has an impressive online presence.

In the context of India elections, it was in 2014 that the country witnessed extensive usage of social media by a couple of politicians while they were contesting the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. One was Narendra Modi, as a BJP nominee from two Lok Sabha constituencies, who tried to maximise the usage. Another was Infosys co-founder-turned-Congress member Nandan Nilekani from Bengaluru. Usually politicians try to get the maximum footprints and visibility during campaigns. More than Nilekani, it was Narendra Modi who adopted all methods to reach the masses across the nation. He was the prime ministerial candidate of the BJP, and he had twin goals – to bring the party to power at the Centre and also become the prime minister. To attain both, he did not shy away from using all types of media in a calculated but extensive way.

In the case of Karnataka, there are 28 Lok Sabha constituencies spread over 30 districts. The prime contestants were from two national parties – the Congress party and the BJP. Both the parties contested all the seats. The two regional parties – the Janata Dal (Secular) had fielded 24 candidates, and Aam Admi Party (AAP) had 13 nominees.

The two national parties and one regional party – AAP - made use of commonly used social networking sites and web-based platforms for campaigning and providing information to the media. However, the efforts were not the same. The BJP was way ahead of two other parties. Among the candidates contesting from Karnataka, two had a noticeable online presence. One was the then sitting Member of Parliament Ananth Kumar of the BJP and the Congress’ nominee Nilekani. But at the national level, it was Narendra Modi who was more visible online compared to any other candidate. Nilekani as a candidate was hyper active on Facebook, Twitter, blog and website. However, his party could not match his activities or that of the BJP’s.

At the national level, the Congress and the BJP – mainly confined their activities to Facebook, Twitter, and Google Hangouts. The AAP, which was just a year-old party in 2014, was active on Facebook and Twitter. However, a point to be noted is that all the
parties were not equally active and the content not equally attractive and useful to voters. The parties did manage to generate a lot of reading material and they raised debates, expressed views, swiftly reacted to poll-related developments, made jibes against their opponents and issued clarifications on social media. The JD(S) candidates, in keeping with the party’s rural image, did not make any special effort to have digital presence except occasionally to post a press note or host the party’s election manifesto or upload the photos the candidates. Former chief minister H D Kumaraswamy, president of party unit of Karnataka, from his office, sent voice clips on both e-mail and WhatsApp, regularly.

Compared to the previous Lok Sabha elections and legislative assembly elections, the 2014 Lok Sabha elections saw social media being maximised. Each party’s investment on social media varied. The BJP’s estimated investment was in the range of two to five per cent of the total funds earmarked for the elections. The trend of spending was apparent though the parties were aware that Internet penetration was not extensive in rural areas. For it is the urban youth who are hooked on to the Internet-connected smartphones. Despite these hard facts, the parties did use social media for two reasons – they wanted maximum coverage through all types of media and they also knew that even conventional media would pick stories from Internet-based platforms. The parties, in particular the BJP, saw the emergence of new voters who were young and went all out to get their attention during the electoral process.

A welcome feature was the fact that the Election Commission (EC) involving civic agencies, citizens’ forums and non-government agencies and colleges in voters’ awareness campaigns. The website of the Election Commission, at the national level, and that of Karnataka’s, were on a daily basis getting updated with inputs for voters. It hosted a voters’ list to help voters to check their names on the list. Campaigns by the EC may have had played role in the good turnout of voters - 66.38 per cent. In the previous Lok Sabha elections, it was 58.19 per cent. The 2014 elections witnessed the highest voter turnout by India since 1952. For the first time, the EC gave voting rights to Non-Resident Indians (NRIs). And these additional voters group kept themselves informed of the poll-related developments mainly because of the Internet-based communication models.
The Press Information Bureau (PIB), the Central government wing, in association with the EC, Karnataka, was Tweeting results besides announcing the results of the polls real-time on its web portal. This government information agency had not done this earlier.

In 2009, Congress leader Shashi Tharoor showed that politicians could be well connected to the netizens through Tweets. He had about 6,000 ‘Followers’ in 2009, which crossed to 2.16 million in 2014. Interestingly, conventional media houses were using his Tweets as he made comments on topical and controversial subjects. He is a microblogger too.

Among the chief ministers, it was Narendra Modi as Gujarat chief minister, who had highest number of ‘Followers’ on Facebook and Twitter. This trend continued in 2014, and later, when he became the prime minister.

Facebook began working on the Indian elections at the end of 2013 and stepped up its efforts in March 2014 with an eye on the Lok Sabha elections. The election fever had gripped Facebook too. Twitter too expanded its business in India in 2014. The 2014 elections, in fact, were labelled Twitter elections. Candidates, parties, citizens and media were using Twitter to discuss, debate, react and overreact on electioneering. In 2013, India had the third highest Internet users in the world, next only to the US and China in terms of users. Of course, the users were mainly from the urban population.

Narendra Modi was not a candidate from Karnataka, but he was the most discussed and visible politician in the media. His exclusive IT cell worked overtime to ensure that he got maximum coverage. The BJP’s IT Cell – National Digital Operations Centre (N-DoC), New Delhi, was the IT war room. The Cell’s special focus was on 155 Lok Sabha seats where it had an edge over its rivals. The Cell had kept track of the voting pattern in the assembly segments in the selected 155 constituencies. This helped to understand the psychology of the voters and plan accordingly to position and market the BJP.

It is not that Narendra Modi used social media for articulating his position on various issues and development only during the elections. He began using it after the infamous Godhra train burning incident in 2002. As many as 59 people died in the fire in the Sabaramati Express near Godhra railway station in Gujarat, when Narendra Modi was the chief minister. Mainstream media, in its attack on Narendra Modi, held him morally
responsible for the incident. The incident drew even the attention of the international media. When he failed to counter the media-bashing, he turned to new media tools to express his views. Slowly, he struck a chord with the people of not only Gujarat but also outside. He extensively used Internet-based media as a conduit to reach people and media. As Gujarat chief minister, he used to put up the details of select government programmes and his public engagement on his website.

When he was the Lok Sabha candidate, he had two IT rooms, one in Ahmadabad in Gujarat and another in New Delhi, when he contested the Lok Sabha elections. As chief minister too, he had IT cells managed by young professionals for his digital forums. Through his social media networks, he not only disseminated what he wanted to say but also got feedback from the people. He reacted quickly to developments and his detractors.

His website www.narendramodi.in had his promotional material, including certain decisions taken by the Gujarat government. The content, mainly publicity material like campaign letters, audio, video clippings of the rally campaigns during the election campaign, increased considerably. News photographs and YouTube videos were uploaded; the responses to Narendra Modi were in thousands on a daily basis. At one point, it crossed 2.5 lakh responses a day. His hyper presence on Facebook and Twitter, website and blog offered the same content though the wordage was different.

In reaching out to the people, Narendra Modi handled Google Hangout, Flickr, Tumblr, Stumbleupon, Google Plus, among others. A group of Gujarat businessmen launched ‘Modi Android’ for a smartphone. Narendra Modi opted for 3D holographic speech delivery programmes across the country and earned a slot in the Guinness World Records by delivering a speech to 53 locations simultaneously through hologram and thus turned into a ‘virtual Narendra Modi.’

The election season overnight saw the birth of NaMo brigades in cities and villages. NaMo, meaning Narendra Modi, had youths as members who were involved in popularising him. These groups extensively used the Internet for publicity. Websites and accounts on Facebook and Twitter were created. Post-2014 elections, the groups have become inactive.
These were not the only publicity forums for the then prime ministerial candidate. Even an App was launched to promote him. The App ‘India272+’ for Narendra Modi was launched on Google Play store on January 1, 2014. There were caller tunes of his voice and SMSes besides a voice-based mass messaging system which helped the party volunteers to communicate with each other. His 477 polls rallies’ outcome was sent to the target groups. His office offered an exclusive NaMoNumber through which people could get details of the polling date, booth number and other voting details. This was considered an indirect way of assessing how many people would express solidarity with the BJP leader.

Like Obama, Narendra Modi too took to crowdsourcing of funds for the party offline and online. The party had a ‘YuvaiTV’ Internet channel through on which Narendra Modi’s speeches were telecast live. His reach to voters in pan-India was so extensive that the entire party and other contestants banked heavily on him to win. He did not limit himself to social media. He travelled extensively to attend 5,827 public rallies in 25 states. It was a blend of both physical campaigns and digital campaigns for him and his party.

In Silicon Valley of India, Bengaluru, Nandan Nilekani contested against BJP’s Ananth Kumar, who was a sitting MP of Bengaluru South in 2014. Even Kumar used Internet-based media to promote himself. He was active both on his website ananth.org and Facebook page http://www.facebook.com/ananthkumar.official. The bilingual content in English and Kannada, promoted both prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi, the party and himself. He had uploaded videos on YouTube on the campaigns. He has had a website since 1997.

Nilekani, on the other hand, who was testing his electoral fortunes for the first time and a new comer to politics, lost against Kumar. But Nilekani campaigned extensively, again both online and offline. His website was http://www.nandannilekani.in and the Facebook account was - http://www.facebook.com/pages/Nandan-Nilekani. Months before plunging into the campaign, Nilekani launched ‘Operation Agile’. In IT sector, Agile is a popular method to handle unpredictability in the business field. And Nilekani tried to use his business acumen during the campaign. He engaged Bengalureans on civic issues on his website – ‘Ideas for Bangalore.’ His Facebook focused on ideas for improvising
Bengaluru. He introduced the ‘Ask Nandan’ campaign on the web to elicit suggestions for improving the city.

The Bangalore South had 1.8 million voters. A large number of them were fairly young. The constituency included Electronic City, where a large number of software professionals reside. This was an advantage for Nilekani and Kumar to reach out to potential voters through social networking. It was said not less than 20,000 IT professionals were campaigning for the former IT giant.

The smartphone App – Hawkeye – was developed by his team to track information on issues that mattered to Bengalureans. Nilekani did not confine himself to online campaign alone. Like a majority of the contestants, he too extensively toured his constituency and interacted with civic and residents’ associations to discuss the problems related to Bengaluru. Eventually, Kumar retained the seat, but Nilekani showed how candidates could reach the masses through social media besides conventional media in a short span. However, high-decibel media campaigns need not make a candidate victorious.

Regarding the usage of new media by political parties in Karnataka during the Lok Sabha elections, the BJP was way ahead of its rival Congress party. To prepare itself to take on the BJP’s online hyper activism, the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) constituted a 90-member team to run its online campaign. Party national vice-president Rahul Gandhi had interacted on Google Hangout twice with workers of the party in Karnataka. Such an exercise was carried out in other states too. But the campaigns did not create a stir. The party’s presence in digital platforms, compared to the BJP, was lacklustre.

The AAP candidate was active on social media was Ravi Krishna Reddy who contested from Bangalore Rural constituency. He is a software professional-turned-non-conventional politician. He was active on Facebook; his constituency had three urban assembly constituencies. Probably this was the reason for him to use Facebook. On this social media, he campaigned for his party’s national president Aravind Kejriwal. His website: www.ravikrishnareddy.com.
Excluding Reddy, the other AAP candidates were not active on social media. AAP had maintained an exclusive website managed by NRIs, and an IT Cell. The party did not win even a single seat in Karnataka.

To sum up, it could be said that political parties, unlike individual politicians, did not make any effort to use new media and social media. A majority of the candidates in urban areas were keen on using social media because their target groups too, by and large, used it. Rural India, which actively participates in the voting process, has to go a long way before it can connect to social network. This must be one of the significant reasons why a majority of the politicians were not keen on spreading their campaign activities online. Politicians do not hesitate to use any platform, provided it helps them to win electoral battles.

Logos of various types of social media Apps