

Press release

Media Framing and 2014 Indian Election Campaigns

York University, Canada and Centre for Culture, Media and Governance, Jamia Millia Islamia's collaborative project funded by Shastri Indo-canadian Institute, New Delhi examined the role of social media and mobile technology along with mainstream media in the Indian election campaign of 2014. This study cuts across an interesting intersection of political campaigning and its framing by the media, which played out in the Indian general election and Delhi assembly election.

The key questions of the study were: How effective were the mainstream media in the 2014 federal election at representing the diverse interests of the public? Was mainstream press reporting largely captured by the campaign dynamics of the Modi 'wave'? How pivotal was the growing importance of Twitter and other social media to Modi's victory?

The study stresses that the growing use of Internet and mobile telephones has dramatically altered the dynamics of political communication and helped political candidates appeal to voters directly and over the heads of the elites. The report examines ways in which mainstream media helped frame the 2014 election by buying into the narrative, which positioned Modi as the Prime Minister to lead India into the 21st century. The press played a critical role in creating a 'bandwagon effect,' propelling Modi into India's highest office. This study also examines the growing importance of Facebook and Twitter as communication platforms used for many diverse purposes during elections.

Key highlights of the study:

- The interface between the mainstream print media and social media is highly fluid, volatile and complex.
- Political campaigning has become professionalized, is increasingly run by dozens of experts, is financed by corporate India, and has become dependent on U.S.-style 'on the message' tactical campaigning.
- For smaller alternative parties like the AAP, with its anti-corruption message, social media was an important resource to finance its activities in the election.
- The 2014 election emphasizes the uniqueness of the Indian mass communications model with print media and television at its core and with social media plugged into the mix at all levels.
- Old and new communication technologies created new media spaces and possibilities not only for the massively funded BJP but also for India's alternative parties.
- In a positive sense, social media helps reduce the distance between the elites and the masses because it opens a new discursive channel, particularly for young urban dwellers who have access to the Internet.
- The rise of social media such as Facebook and Twitter has complicated the complex relationship between media and diversity, challenging conventional understandings of the 'gatekeeper' and 'watchdog' functions of the news media.