

Websites as a Communication Channel for Political Parties

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Abstract

A recent trend among political parties is to establish a web site to communicate their messages to the public. It also affords them a new and creative way to engage with the electorate. Political parties establish this web site as a supplement to the traditional media of television, radio and newspaper. This is because a lot of the electorate especially the youth and women tends to go to these political web site to solicit for information to make an inform decision. The purpose of this study was to investigate how political parties are using the Internet to serve their stakeholders. To reach this purpose, three research questions were stated: How the objectives (benefits) of political party web sites can be described; how the stakeholders served on these web sites can be described; and finally how the web sites design can be described. To answer these research questions, four case studies (two political party websites from the US and two from India), were investigated. In order to collect the data, direct observation/interaction with the web sites was used. The findings indicate that the stakeholders and the content of each web site differ from party-to-party as well as from country-to-country, indicating both a political as well as cultural differences.

Keywords: Communication channel, web site, political parties, stakeholder.

1. Introduction

Throughout the world, organizations are realizing the need and potential in serving its stakeholders through the web Flak et al., (2003). According to Moon (2002) the functions and utility of the web in public management can be grouped into two main categories namely the internal and external. He stated that internally, the web site is used as an effective and efficient tool that collects, store, organize and manage large volume of data and information. On the external front, the web is used in facilitating linkages between the political party, voters, supporters, journalist, and volunteers.

2. Problem Discussion

According to Selm et al. (2002), supporting promotional activities of the party such as the sales of the party merchandise and the promotion of citizen-to-party and party-to-citizen communication are key objectives, why political parties establish a web presence.

The design of the web site is also one of the main issues to consider when developing organizations web pages. Kent (1999) said that the content of the web site should be textual rather than graphics. Also the type of style to adopt, structure and the

purpose of creating the web site are of paramount.

In discussing the issue of political parties, identification of stakeholders cannot be ruled out Rowley (1997). For the organization, the web site provides them the opportunity to communicate with their stakeholder public and the media.

3. Research Purpose and Research Questions

From the above reasons, the purpose of this thesis is formulated as: "To provide a better understanding on how political parties are using the public (outer) internet layer to serve its stakeholders". The research questions are formulated as:

1. How can the objectives (benefits) of political party web sites be described?
2. How can the stakeholders served on political party web sites be described?
3. How can the design of the political party web sites be described?

4. Literature Review

Objectives of Web Sites

Political parties have varied objectives in establishing a website. According to Kent et al., (2003) web sites provide a controlled channel through which political parties can communicate with various stakeholders. It also serves as a two-way communication channel (Breitenbach and Van Doren, 1998). According to Djupsund and Carlson (2002), the website provides political parties with new ways to reach out to the voters. They further stated that the website helps to do this at low or reasonable monetary cost without any interference from the traditional news media. Boogers and Voerman (2002) were of the view that the website gives the citizens the opportunity for political debates and contacts. Another objective of party website is to strengthen the position of the political party and also to establish new relationship between the party and its supporters.

According to Norris (2001), web site provides the best hope for reviving political parties, the core structure which mediates between the state and its citizen in the contemporary world. Gibson et al., (2004) argued that while having a web presence is a strategic tool, peer pressure is also considered as a factor driving these parties to the web since other parties have it and so they should also have it. They further outlined some objectives for political parties on the web and these include:

- Information provision to public and old media
- Campaigning through direct email
- Fundraising
- Targeting the youth audience
- Symbolic significance, that is: the mark of modernity
- Virtual infrastructure
- Soliciting voters
- Member feedback and participation

Furthermore, Gibson et al., (2004) stated that minor or small parties lacking a presence in the traditional media tends to have great value in the web since it gives them credibility, thus making them look larger and more professional in cyberspace than in reality. Ward and Gibson (2003) said that one of the objectives in using the web is the delivering of information unmediated to voters. Norris (2001) said that the website helps in the

decentralization of campaign program of the political party. She further stated that incorporating multimedia features on the web encourages people who are mostly disengaged in political activities, especially the younger generation to have interest in politics. Selm et al., (2002) said that the website is created to support promotional activities of the party.

Boogers and Voerman (2002) said that the website serves as the sole source of information for groups especially the women who follow much of the political situation from the party website. Also, the web offers citizens a two-way interaction with political parties where issues are raised and discussed. Norris (2001). On the web voters can get into contact with the parties by using e-mail, that is: down-top communication. In addition to that the parties can also reply to voters' e-mail (top-down communication). The web also enables voters to discuss with each other (down-down communication). Djupsund and Carlson (2002)

Generating resources for the party according to Conway and Dorner (2004) is another paramount objective why political parties tend to create a web presence. Hansen et al., (2005) said, political websites performs three main objectives and these are to swing voters, to raise money and to mobilize activism. Web sites also provide users the opportunity to receive free information through web mails (Kent et al., 2003, Breitenbach and Van Doren, 1998) and helps in building customer base (Breitenbach and Van Doren, 1998).

Stakeholder Served

According to Hansen et al., (2005) political parties are responsible for the dissemination of information to the general public and its stakeholders as a whole through their website. They further said that there are some key stakeholders that this information must be geared towards and these include journalist, student, employees and pupils. They further lamented that website should provide journalist with information regarding their manifesto, activities, and speeches. Employees of the party can be said to be individuals working for the party either on full or part-time basis but not on voluntary basis but receives salary and wages for work done. Another stakeholder is students who basically are more or less involved in political activities. The last stakeholder in this category is the pupils. These are people who are too young to vote, but information is provided to them so as to get them acquainted with politics.

Boogers and Voerman (2002) identified a group of stakeholders and these are voters, supporters, young people and candidate. With regards to voters, they said there is the need to provide relevant information both to the decided and undecided voters in an election. Regarding the supporter of the party, they argue that supporters mainly go to the website to look for information about the political party and about election campaign. The third group is the youth and women group of people. These people are generally less involved in politics but are more represented by those who visit political website. The last group represent the internal stakeholders of the party. Information is made available on biographies of the candidate, the mission and vision of the candidate as well as statements and speeches. He argued that most web sites contain the external link to the personal web site of these candidates.

Web Site Design

In looking at the content of political web sites, Jensen (1999) modified the theories that were initially proposed by Bordewijk and Van Kaam in 1982 and came up with four main component or theories that can be adopted to analyze the content of political party web sites. These theories are transmission, consultation, registration and conversation. (ibid)

The transmission theory is said to be where “information is produced and owned by a central information provider and this centre also controls the distribution of information”. On political party website, this theory signifies news, current political standpoint, announcement of events, temporary headings and informational text.

The consultation theory is when “information is produced and owned by an information provider, but the consumer retains control over what information is distributed and when”. On the political party web site, the use of email or other electronic ordering systems such as search tools, phone, fax etc. to contact party representatives who are present on the web site signifies the consultation aspect of this theory.

The conversation theory is where “information is produced and owned by the information consumer who also controls distribution”. On the political party web sites, the debate platform enables citizens to discuss political topics among each other and with the representatives of the party. This can be accomplished for instance by the use of chat forums. (ibid)

The registration theory occurs when “information is produced by the information consumer, but processed and controlled the information providing centre”. On the web site, the use of electronic forms by citizens to register as a member of the political party or to register for an event of a political party signifies this theory. He also mentions the use of polling and voting tools.

Norris (2001) argued that the content of a political party web site should serve as both a communication and information functions. He created a list of 32 variables that analyses the content of a political party web site in terms of communication and information provision.

Components of the communication function	Components of the information function
• Can email party officials • Join party • Political party candidates contact details (e.g. mail address, fax, phone or email) • Email contact address for webmaster • Submit message form • Join discussion/ list serve • Volunteer services • Search facility	• Party history • Party organization • Press releases and media section • Political candidate information (e.g. biographies) • Program, manifesto, statement of principles • Links to external web sites • Party congress, conference or convention

• Search facility • Email party leader • Can sign up to receive a regular electronic newsletter • Email elected candidates • Donate money • Buy party goods	• Constituency information or election results • Schedule of events • Constituency information or election results by districts • Party constitution and rules • What's new section/page • Website in English • Leadership information or speeches • Other affiliated organizational section • Youth section • Multimedia video or audio • Woman's section • Union section • Web site in other non-native language
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5. Methodology

Research Purpose: Most of the research purpose will be predominantly the exploratory and descriptive approaches since much emphasis will be laid on understanding of the research questions as well as describing the phenomenon to be studied.

Research Approach: A qualitative approach is the most appropriate for my study; this is due to the fact that I am not using numerical data and statistical tests to reach the purpose of the study. Instead I am investigating the phenomenon more in depth and the aim is to interpret and understand it.

Research Strategy: I have adopted a case study approach. This is due to the fact that my study focuses on contemporary events and does not require control over and access to actual behavioural events.

Data Collection Methods: I undertook an interactive observation of the web site of political parties to ascertain the design and content of their web sites. I also adopted documentation such as brochure from the parties and were used as a secondary source of information.

Sample Selection: I have chosen to study four political parties website and these are chosen from the United States of America and India. The choice of political parties from the USA emanated from the fact that most researches have been conducted on US politics using the web sites while that of India was due to the fact that I live and study in India and therefore choose to study the political parties in this country and also to determined if this new approach are been adopted in India which is considered as one of the top most countries in the world in the use of technology and the internet as a whole. I also chose the two biggest parties in each country representing the leftist and rightist groups from the two countries so as to compare and contrast their web site design.

	Leftist	Rightist
U.S.A.	Democrats	Republican
India	CPI (M)	BJP

Data Analysis: When analyzing the data collected, I applied the within and cross case analysis. Conclusions were drawn from the analysis of the various case studies where I took into consideration the pattern of similarities and differences from these analyses using data reduction and data display.

Validity and Reliability: In increasing the construct validity of this thesis, the author used multiple source of evidence in the form of observation and documentation. On the external validity, I generalized my findings through analytical basis where theories were compared with the empirical data gathered. I have tried to improve on the reliability of this study by

documenting all the necessary steps I have followed in conducting this case study. Also, web masters were contacted for them to provide more insight into the relevant field of study.

6. Findings and Analysis

Objectives of Web Site

I developed a coding system to find pattern regarding the variables under consideration in the empirical data to make it easier when analysing the variables for the four parties. These are:

+ / + = found on the web site as direct objective

- / + = not found as a main objective, but considered relevant

- / - = not found as an objective

Table 6.1 depicts the objectives for political party's establishment of a web site regarding the communication and support aspects alongside the data gathered from the four political parties investigated.

Variables	U.S. Political Parties		Indian Political Parties	
	Case One: Democrat	Case Two: Republican	Case Three: BJP	Case Four: CPI (M)
Providing a controlled channel to communicate with various stakeholders	+ / +	+ / +	+ / +	+ / +
Serve as a two way communication channel	+ / +	+ / +	- / -	+ / +
Afford citizens the opportunity for political debate and contact	+ / +	- / +	- / +	+ / +
Provides a new way to reach voters	+ / +	+ / +	+ / +	+ / +
Fundraising	+ / +	+ / +	- / -	+ / +

Kent et al., (2003) said that the web site provides a controlled channel through which political parties can communicate with various stakeholders. All the four cases verified this theory.

Another objective of the web site for political party is to serve as a two-way communication channel between the party and its stakeholders, Breitenbach and Van Doren, 1998, Djupsund and Carlson 2002, Norris 2001. This is also supported by all the cases except for BJP where the web site does not enables the party to respond to users question and collect feedback from users on specific subjects by the use of e-mail.

Boogers and Voerman 2002 were of the view that the web affords citizens the opportunity for political debate and contact to

political parties and its candidate. All the four cases attested to this fact and provide contact details of the party and its candidate on the web site.

The web also provides new ways to reach voters Djupsund and Carlson (2002). All the cases supported this view. This implies that getting in touch with voters are nowadays not limited to the use of phone but emails are used to reach voters and the electorate as a whole.

Raising of funds through the web site is stated by Coway and Dörner (2004) and Gibson et al., (2004) as one of the main objectives for the establishment of the political web site. Case One, Two and Four makes use of this medium to raise funds for the party except for case three.

Table 6.2: Shows the objectives for political party's establishment of a web site regarding the party awareness and information provision and also the data collected from the four parties examined.

Variables	U.S. Political Parties		Indian Political Parties	
	Case One: Democrat	Case Two: Republican	Case Three: BJP	Case Four: CPI (M)
Provide users the opportunity to receive free information through web mails	+ / +	- / +	- / -	+ / +
Building customer base	+ / +	+ / +	- / -	+ / +
Strengthen the position of the party and also establish a new relationship with its supporters	+ / +	+ / +	- / -	+ / +
Reviving political parties and its structures	- / -	- / -	- / -	- / -

A campaign platform	+/+	+/+	+/+	+/+
Decentralization of campaign activities of political platforms	+/+	+/+	-/+	-/+
Provides support for promotional activities	+/+	+/+	-/-	-/-
Encourages disengaged people in political activities	+/+	+/+	-/-	-/-
Delivering of unmediated information to voters	+/+	+/+	+/+	+/+

With regards to the interactivity aspect of the web site as an objective, authors such as (Kent et al., 2003, Breitenbach and Van Doren, 1998) said the web site provides users the opportunity to receive free information through web mails. This theory is supported by all cases except case two and case three. In case two personalized emails are sent only to members of the party detailing all information and activities of the party.

Building customer base is another objective according to Breitenbach and Van Doren, (1998). This makes it easy for the parties to identify its members thereby communicating with them by sending e-mail to only registered members of the party. This is supported by all cases except case three.

In building and strengthen both new and old relationship between the party and its members through the use of web site, case one, two and four agreed with Boogers and Voerman (ibid) as the web provides members and the public the opportunity to have access to the leadership and candidate of the party. Case two do this by providing chat forums and other online questionnaires.

Reviving political parties and its structures according to Norris (2001) is one of the main objectives why political parties tend to create a web site. However, this theory is debunked by all the four political parties.

Web site according to Gibson et al., (2004) is also being used as a campaign platform due to the advent and nature of the internet. All the parties agreed to this fact. However, case One and Two uses the web more for campaign activities than the other two cases since most stakeholders in these countries has access to the internet facility and providing information and communication with these stakeholders is more easier.

All the web sites of the four political parties supported the view by Norris (2001), that the web site is used as decentralization of campaign activities of political parties as the information is put

on the web site to depict all activities and programs that are organized by the local chapters of the party. In case one each local catchments area or constituency has its own web site where news and other information are provided about that constituency. This is done by providing a link on the main page of the central web site of the party.

Another objective of the web site according to Selm et al., (2002) is to provide support for promotional activities of the party. Here, the theory is been supported by two parties with the exception of case three and four. The two cases used the web to sell the merchandize and other paraphernalia of the party. These items are mostly displayed on the web and links are provided for payment purposes. Information concerning local stores and areas where these merchandize can be bought is also provided so that it will make it easy for its members to order the product either online or offline.

Again, web sites of all political parties except three and four agreed to the theory that was proposed by Norris (2001) that the web site encourages disengaged people in political activities to become more involved in party politics. Relevant information are provided to certain segment of the society who are less or not interested in politics namely, the women and the youth.

Delivering of unmediated information to voters according to Ward and Gibson (2003) is another objective why political parties tend to establish a web presence. This notion is fully supported by all the cases.

Stakeholders Served

I developed a coding system to find pattern regarding the variables under consideration. These are:

+/+ = found on the web site as an important stakeholder

-/+ = not found as an important stakeholder, but considered relevant

-/- = not found as a stakeholder

Table 6.4: Shows the internal stakeholders mentioned by Hansen et al., (2005) and Boggers and Voerman (2002), by which political party web sites aims to serve. Data collected from the observations made on the web sites are shown below.

Internal Stakeholders	U.S. Political Parties		Indian Political Parties	
	Case One: Democrat	Case Two: Republican	Case Three: BJP	Case Four: CPI (M)
Candidates	+/+	+/+	+/+	+/+
Employees	+/+	+/+	-/-	-/-
Party members	+/+	+/+	+/+	+/+

With regards to the candidate, Boogers and Voerman (ibid) stressed the importance of this group of stakeholders. They said political parties need to provide information concerning the biography and the vision of its candidate. All the four parties share the same sentiment on this on their web sites. The Democrat and the Republican Party goes on to further provide an external link to the personal web site of its candidate.

Hansen et al., (2005) defined and explained the employees as those working either full or part-time for the party not on voluntary basis but who receives salary for the work done at the end of the day. The BJP and the CPI (M) do not seem to agree with Hansen.

However, there was another group of internal stakeholders that was not mentioned in the theory but all the parties seem to serve through their web site the "members of the party". The difference on how the parties attempted to serve this group was

noticed. On the web sites of CPI (M) and the BJP this category of internal stakeholders consist of a single group of people and that is those who joins the party and becomes a party members. With regards to the Republican and the Democrat Party, the membership group is divided into various sub groups and these include: African American, Catholic Team, Faith and Values, Hispanic, Senior Team, Entrepreneur Team, Youth Team and Women Tea. With respect to the Democrat party, this membership group includes African American, Asian American or pacific American, Disability Community, farmers and ranchers, Hispanic, Native Americans, Religious communities, Seniors and Retirees, Small business community, Union members and Families, Veteran and Military families, Women and Young people and Student. The Republican and Democrats divides this group depending on the background and ethnicity of the individual.

Table 6.5: Depicts the External stakeholders by which the web sites of political parties tend to serve.

External Stakeholders	U.S. Political Parties		Indian Political Parties	
	Case One: Democrat	Case Two: Republican	Case Three: BJP	Case Four: CPI (M)
Voters	+/+	+/+	+/+	+/+
Supporters	+/+	+/+	-/-	+/+
Young people and women	+/+	+/+	-/-	-/-
Journalists	+/+	+/+	+/+	+/+
Students and Pupils	+/+	-/-	-/-	-/-

Important stakeholders when it comes to elections are the voters, according to Boogers and Voerman (2002). From the above, again, all the four parties seem to agree to the fact that the voters are a very important group of stakeholders for the party when it comes to elections.

Boogers and Voerman (2002) named the supporter of the party as another group of stakeholders. The web sites of all parties except the case Three conceded this fact and showed that it's important to communicate with the party supporters.

Women, youth, student and pupil form one group of stakeholders for the party according to Boogers and Voerman (2002) and Hansen et al., (2005). From the above, only Democrat agrees on the students being separate stakeholders and therefore

provide information purposely for the students. Case Three and Four does not provide any information on the web site for young people and women.

The media or journalists were another batch of stakeholders that the four parties made mentioned of on their web sites. This goes on to buttress the view by Hansen et al., (2005) who lamented that website should provide journalist with information regarding their manifesto, activities, and speeches.

Web Site Design

I developed a coding system to find pattern regarding the variables under consideration. These are:

+/+ = found on the web site and used

-/+ = found on the web site, but considered less important

-/- = not found on the web site

Table: 6.6 show the 32 variables that was mentioned by Norris (2001) and which analyses the content of a political party web site in terms of communication and information provision.

Variables	U.S. Political Parties		Indian Political Parties	
	Case One: Democrat	Case Two: Republican	Case Three: BJP	Case Four: CPI (M)
Communication				
Can email party officials	+/+	+/+	-/+	+/+
Join party	+/+	+/+	-/-	+/+
Political party candidates contact details (E.g. mail address, fax, phone or email)	+/+	+/+	+/+	+/+
Email contact address for webmaster	-/-	-/-	+/+	-/-
Submit message form	-/-	+/+	-/-	+/+
Join discussion/ list serve	-/-	-/-	-/-	-/-
Volunteer services	-/-	+/+	-/-	-/-

Search facility	+/+	+/+	+/+	+/+
Email party leader	+/+	+/+	+/+	+/+
Can sign up to receive a regular electronic Newsletter	+/+	+/+	-/-	+/+
Email elected candidates	+/+	+/+	+/+	+/+
Donate money	+/+	+/+	-/-	-/+
Buy party goods	+/+	+/+	-/-	-/-
Information				
Party history	+/+	+/+	+/+	+/+
Party organization	+/+	+/+	+/+	+/+
Press releases and media section	+/+	+/+	+/+	+/+
Political candidate information (E.g. biographies)	+/+	+/+	+/+	+/+
Program, manifesto, statement of principles	-/-	+/+	+/+	+/+
Links to external web sites	+/+	+/+	-/-	+/+
Party congress, conference or convention	+/+	+/+	+/+	+/+
Constituency information or election results	+/+	+/+	-/-	-/-
Schedule of events. Constituency information or election results by districts	+/+	+/+	-/-	-/-
Party constitution and rules	-/-	+/+	+/+	+/+
What's new section/page	-/-	+/+	-/-	-/-
Website in English	+/+	+/+	+/+	+/+
Leadership information or speeches	+/+	+/+	+/+	+/+
Other affiliated organizational section	+/+	+/+	-/-	+/+
Youth section	+/+	+/+	-/-	-/-
Multimedia video or audio	+/+	+/+	+/+	+/+
Woman's section	+/+	+/+	-/-	-/-
Union section	+/+	-/-	-/-	-/-
Web site in other non-native language	+/+	+/+	-/-	-/-

Email party leaders and officials: According to Norris (2001), political party web site content should contain the possibility to send emails to the party leaders and officials. All the party supported this notion of Norris (ibid). The democrat and the Republican Party provide a medium where people can send and receive feedback from the leaders and officials of the party. The Indian parties provide the names and addresses of their leaders and likewise the US parties.

Join party: There should be the possibility for people to join the party online according to Norris (ibid). From the four cases, all the parties except BJP provide a medium for people to be able to join the party in the online environment.

Political party candidate contact details: All the party provides contact details of its leadership on the web site. The US parties also provide the contact details state by state.

Email contact address for webmaster: According to Norris (ibid), the web site of political parties must include the possibility for members of the party and the general public to be able to send emails to the webmaster. However, only BJP contain the email address of the webmaster.

Submit message form: From the four cases conducted, it was found out that only the Republican Party and CPI (M) has this

feature on its web site. This enables the members of the party and the general public to write and submit their comments and views on issues affecting the party or on national issues. This also signifies what Norris (ibid) said about the web site having a feature to enable members to submit their messages to the party.

Join discussion/List serve: According to Norris (ibid), political party web sites must contain features that will facilitate discussion among the party and its stakeholders. However, all the party web site does not contain these discussion attributes. This therefore does not support the view by Norris (ibid).

Volunteer Services: Norris (ibid) maintains that party web site must be able to recruit volunteers for the party. From the four case study conducted, it was found out that only the Republican Party has this feature on its web site to recruit volunteers for the party. The other parties do not support this theory by Norris (ibid).

Search facility: Norris (ibid) was of the view that the web site must provide a search engine for visitors to search for archives news and information concerning the party. All the parties support this notion.

Receive regular newsletters: All the parties except BJP attested to this theory by Norris (ibid) that stakeholders of the political

parties should be able to sign up to receive free and regular electronic newsletters from the party.

Donating and purchasing party goods: With the exception of the BJP, all the other parties have a medium to raise funds for the party where members and other stakeholders contribute a certain amount to the party. The Democrat goes on further to sell bonds and books on their site to raise additional money.

Party History and Organisation: Norris (ibid) said that political party web site should contain the history of the party and the organization as a whole. From the observation, all the four parties' web site contains information about the history of the party and the organizational setup.

Press Releases and Media Section: All the parties supported this theory by Norris (ibid). It is where information of importance to the media and the press is disseminated by the party.

Political Candidate Information: Norris (ibid) was of the view that there is the need for the web sites of political parties to contain information such as biographies of its candidate and other officials. This theory is supported by all the four parties.

Programs, Manifesto, Rules and Constitution: According to Norris (ibid), there is the need for visitors and other stakeholders to have access to the programs, manifesto, rules and constitution of political parties on its web site. I found that only the Democratic Party web site does not contain the rules, manifesto and the constitution of the party. Other parties' web site contains this information.

Links to external web sites: All the four political parties except BJP support the theory of Norris (ibid) where she was of the view that the political web sites should contain external links of other individuals and organization that serve the interest of the party.

Constituency information: There is the need for party web site to contain information regarding the activities and schedules of constituencies of political parties. However, this is only supported by the US parties.

What's New Section: From the observation of the web sites of all the four political parties, only the Republican party supports this theory of Norris (ibid) that there is the need for the parties to have a section so as to provide up to date and minute-by-minute information to its stakeholders under this section.

Web site in native and non-native language: All the parties have the content of its web site in English. The US parties has the content of its web site in the Spanish language as well since it is regarded as the second language in the country. However, Indian parties' web site is not available in other non-native language.

Leadership information and speeches: All the four parties attested to the fact that they provide information and speeches of the leaders of the party on their web sites. This goes on to buttress the theory by Norris (ibid) who said there is the need for the web site to contain speeches and information about the party hierarchies.

Women, Youth and Union Section: All the parties except the BJP and CPI (M) provide information to women and youth. Also, it was found out that only the Democrat party has a section for the Union since it was found to be one of its stakeholders.

Multimedia video and audio: All the parties support the theory of Norris (ibid) that political party should contain multimedia features such as video and audio. These parties contain especially speeches, news and other information concerning the party and its leaders in the form of audio and video.

7. Conclusions

How can the Objectives of Political Party Web Sites be described?

From the findings above, I can conclude that the following are the objectives of political parties establishing a web presence:

- The more left or right the party is, the more communication and support objectives are created for their web sites.
- Both left and right party tend to raise funds through the web site.
- The more left the party is, the more they give room for the electorate to get in contact with the party.
- Similar information is provided on party web sites which operate in the same country as is evident in the case of the US and Indian party web sites.

How can the Stakeholders Served by Political Party Web Sites be described?

From the basis of the above analysis and findings for the second research question, the following specific conclusions can be drawn:

- That the stakeholders found in the empirical data confirms with what was mentioned in the literature review but the degree of acceptance differs from one party to the other.
- That the US parties are more successful in serving every category of stakeholder groups than the Indian parties by dedicating a separate web page for each stakeholder group.
- Stakeholders are served depending on the particular country they belong to.
- That member of the parties was found to be another very important group of stakeholders that are served by political party web sites.
- That the US parties regards their members as the primary stakeholder group of the party.

How can the Design of the Political Parties Web Sites be described?

From the above findings, I can specifically make these conclusions, that:

- The US parties' web sites are much more sophisticated in their content than the Indian parties' web sites.
- The Indian parties are using their web sites mostly to disseminate information rather than as a two way communication channel compared with the US parties, which shows to be stronger in both ways.
- That the US parties used their web site more as a campaigning platform compared with their counterparts, the Indian parties by exhibiting more campaign features on

its web site.

- That colour of political party web site is country specific.

Implications for Practitioners

The implications from this study to practitioners can be said to be contributing knowledge on how the content of the web site should be. First and foremost, there is the need to improve political web sites' communication features so as to facilitate communication between the party and the stakeholders but not only during electioneering years. Due to the level of internet users in the developed countries, there is the need for practitioners there, to channel most of their campaign strategies to the online world.

Again, practitioners should recognize the importance of providing separate but relevant information to the various stakeholder publics of the party, especially Indian practitioners.

More interactive features should be used on the web site while various channels should be created to raise funds for party activities.

Last but not the least, practitioners should recognize that these stakeholders and the general public will return to their web site due to how relevant the contents of its web site are and therefore, it is high time that more attention is given to the content of party web site.

Implication for Theory

This study contributes to theory by applying the theories considered and the empirical data to find their validity in the field of research. I am of the view that web site objectives are not only communication and information as in the literature, but goes beyond this sphere. I have therefore categorized these objectives into communication, information, political and others.

Communication	Information	Political	Others
Providing a controlled channel to communicate with various stakeholders • Serving as a two-way communication channel between the parties and the electorate • Affording the citizens the opportunity for political debate and contact. • Member feedback and participation	Providing users the opportunity to receive free information through web mails. • Platform for promotional activities. • Encourages disengaged people in political activities • Delivering unmediated information to voters	Providing a new way of reaching voters • Strengthening the position of the party and establish relationship among its members. • Used as a campaign platform • Decentralization of campaign activities.	Fundraising • Targeting the youth • Symbolic significance • Virtual infrastructure

Implication for Future Research

This study has provided me with insight of how political parties use the external public web site of the political parties to communicate with its stakeholders and through this I have looked into issues such as its objectives for the web presence, who are its stakeholders and the contents of its web site. Based on this, future research can also look into:

- The use of the internal web site as a communication channel for its internal stakeholders.
- The effectiveness of political party can also be looked at to determine how effective political party web sites are in terms of communication, especially during elections.
- The use of the political party web site as a public relation tool.
- This research could also be done by comparing political parties from other Asian countries.

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APPENDIX

Fig 1 : The Democratic Party Web Site in United States of America



Fig 2 : The Republican Party Web Site in United States of America



Fig 3 : The Bharatiya Janata Party Web Site in India



Fig 4 : The Communist Party of India (Marxist) Party Web Site in India

