# Political Participation in Digital World: Transcending Traditional Political Culture in India

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**Abstract**

Information technology and communication has reshaped the existing socio-economic and political systems. Change in Political Participation is explicit especially among the youth and women in this age of ITC. This is because digital age provides ample opportunities for public response in a lightening pace. Public discourses taking place through website have evolved into not only a medium for personal expression and mutual support but also challenges the old political cultures.   Now citizen is not shear listener but also a speaker who can influence the public decision making. In the Delhi Rape case the public protest through internet has influenced justice Verma Committee which finally led to Criminal Law Amendment Ordinance 2013 providing death penalty in case of rape. Transforming the ways and means of interest aggregation and interest articulation, ICT has strengthened the inputs of political system.  A shift from representative democracy (prone to elitism as observed by Mitchels) to participatory democracy in the digital world is expected by certain scholars.  However, Digital divide arising out of poor accessibility and affordability of hi-tech devices and cyber crimes such as hacking create formidable challenge to digital democracy.  The future and continuing well-being of level of political participation and civic engagement falls on the shoulders of its youngest citizens. Despite the apathy of youth towards the traditional democratic practices and the cultural displacement some scholars view that the young people may become politically socialized with in the media environment. The expected change in the Political spectrum would be visible by the participation of women and youth.  Demographic reports show that by 2020 India would become the youngest country with an average age of 29. As a result of this overwhelming change in the political life a decisive shift in the political culture is certain.

**Key words**: Digital Democracy, Political Culture, Social Network, Digital divide

## 1. Introduction

Political participation has been undergoing changes from the early Greek city states to the post modern nation states. The Greek city states were very small and could ensure the participation of almost all citizens, providing a kind of direct democracy. Nation states are vast and political participation is limited mainly to periodic election and there exists representative democracy. Decentralization through local governing institutions like Panchayat Raj has improved the level of participation but limited to regional levels. Political affairs of national significance are rarely considered here. The influence of ICT has brought about extensive changes in the levels and style of political participation. Internet is the most capable medium that enhances political participation.  Political issues are raised and discussed through social networking sites like Face book, You Tube, Twitter, Link-den etc. However, Digital divide arising out of poor accessibility and affordability of hi-tech devices and cyber crimes such as hacking create formidable challenge to digital democracy.

The future and continuing well-being of level of political participation and civic engagement falls on the shoulders of its youngest citizens. Despite the apathy of youth towards the traditional democratic practices and the cultural displacement some scholars view that the young people may become politically socialized with in the media environment. The expected change in the Political spectrum would be visible by the participation of women and youth.  Demographic reports show that by 2020 India would become the youngest country with an average age of 29. As a result of this overwhelming change in the political life a decisive shift in the political culture is certain.  Wide range application of ICT in the political sphere in political discourses and decision making has given a different face to democracy-digital democracy.Any attempt to map the tessellations of the Internet into these political processes is embedded not just in the recent discussions about the net, but also in a longstanding and common assumption of media and cultural studies that the media are both produced by and reflect and reproduce political systems and processes

## 2. Digital democracy

The notion of digital democracy can refer to a fairly wide range of technological applications including televised 'people's parliaments' or citizens' juries, e-mail access to electronic discussion groups, and public information kiosks. "Digital democracy" refers to the integration of Internet technologies into the functions of government and the apparatus of democracy, i.e., making govern- mental information accessible through web sites; online

political mobilization; and, now, Internet voting (Solop, Frederic I.; 2001: 289). Internet voting is the latest innovation in digital democracy. As a whole, digital democracy reflects the shifts in the democratic process in the digital world. Influence of ICT in political Sphere is referred different names – Cyber democracy, Electronic democracy, Digital Democracy, E-governance and M-governance.

## 3. Political Participation

Political participation can be defined as those actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or to support government and politics. It is not mere the Participation in electoral processes like campaign and voting. It is the ability to take part in the conduct of public affairs. The participation of people in the political process can be generally classified into two types. Conventional: routine and added behaviour that uses the channels of representative government. It could be supportive behaviours like expressing allegiance to government and country. It could be influencing behaviours seeking to modify government policies. Unconventional: relatively uncommon behaviour that challenges or defies government channels or the dominant political culture. They include practices like civil right movements, violent and powerful struggles against the government. Sometimes they are abrupt and capable enough to overthrow the existing regime, political culture and system.

## 4. ICT and Political participation

ICT has been an agent of political socialization in the digital world. Now political knowledge and governmental information are at the finger tip of citizens. They make quick response and become responsible citizens. The very moment of action there is the reaction. ICT causes cultural transaction competent of changing political culture. It has brought about demographic change in the level of participation. Youth and women are brought into the political sphere. Individual centred participation becomes more effective with internet. Media particularly the internet is helpful in ending the authoritarian regimes ( Hill & Sen;2005).

Almond and Coleman view that interests are usually articulated by organizations, or interest groups, which place the specified interest before relevant political actors, such as legislatures, executives, bureaucracies etc. Now with the use of the social networking sites it is possible to articulate the interest individually. Because, digital era provides accessibility for the citizen to connect to the political actors easily. Similarly interest aggregation traditionally done by the government and political parties powerful influence of the people. Various interests could be easily collected and categorize political parties and government. So as a whole the internet and other social media have given new ways and means to articulate and aggregate interest that highly influence the political system in the decision making process. Popular participation in decision making becomes the routine. Interest articulation and interest aggregation becomes more effective and efficient through ICT. Public response - fast and large are capable enough to influence the decision making units. Extra societal factors are also equally influential in the digital era. The decision of the government to issue Criminal Law Amendment Ordinance 2013 providing death penalty in case of rape through ICT after Delhi rape incident is clear example of public response. Thousands of e-mails were send to Justice Verma Committee

### 4.1 Political Culture and Political Participation

The political culture is considered as an indicator for political and democratic life progress and a reflection for political maturity, political participation, taking part in the political process and the nation's political awareness. 'The set of attitudes, beliefs and sentiments that give order and meaning to a political process and which provide the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behavior in the political system' (Almond and Verba; 1965).The dissemeantion of political knowledge through internet influences the political culture particularly of the youth. The Internet has a positive side in helping the youth particularly look at other political cultures. It also gives opportunities for the plurality of political opinions and knowing other political viewpoints through making fundamental information available which facilitates the way for citizens to express their opinions freely through voting on political issues on the Internet sites. Now social media influence the shaping of personal political attitudes of the political process of a nation. Political culture is the sum total of the behaviours of the people towards the political system. It is affected by the past history and tradition of the country. People's beliefs, symbols and values structure both their attitude to the political process and, crucially, their view of the regime in which they live

Participation of people in different culture is different. The three varied cultures on the basis of participation are put forward by Almond and Verba. Parochial- Where citizens are only remotely aware of the presence of central government, and live their lives near enough regardless of the decisions taken by the state, distant and unaware of political phenomena. They have neither knowledge nor interest in politics. This type of political culture is in

general congruent with a traditional political structure. Subject - Where citizens are aware of central government, and are heavily subjected to its decisions with little scope for dissent. The individual is aware of politics, its actors and institutions. It is affectively oriented towards politics, yet he is on the "downward flow" side of the politics. In general it is found in a centralized authoritarian structure. Participant - Citizens are able to influence the government in various ways and they are affected by it. The individual is oriented toward the system as a whole, to both the political and administrative structures and processes (to both the input and output aspects).

### 4.2 ICT and Political Participation in the purview of Political Culture

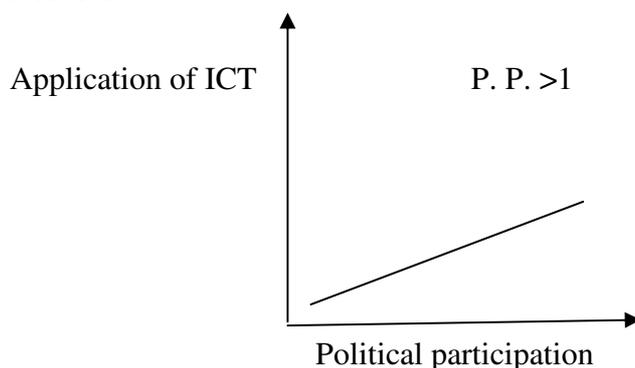Application of ICT

P.P. < 1

Political participation
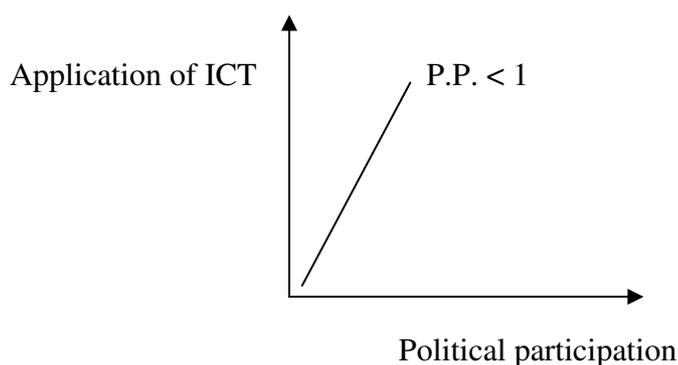
People are unaware of the government and the application of the ICT will make them known to the government and its activities. It will initiate response from the people in limited manner as they are on the process of getting politically socialized. In the diagram the application of the ICT is represented on the Y axis and political participation on the Y axis. It shows that the Political participation changes as people get used to ICT. But this change is in a low rate than the change in the application of ICT. So the political participation (P. P.) shows that it less than one.

Subject Culture

Application of ICT

P.P = 1

Political participation
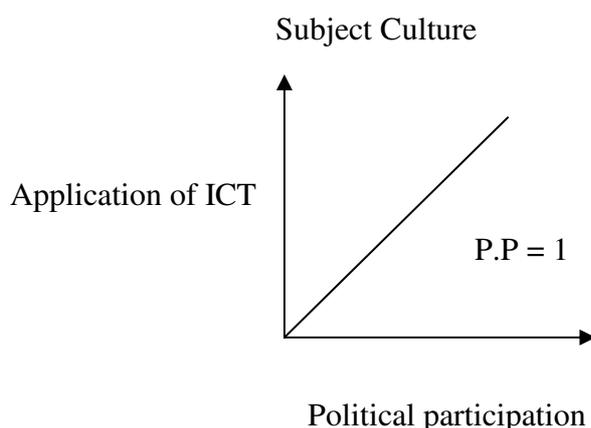
People are already aware of the government and political affairs. Either they are denied the medium of response or they are deficient of such a medium. The application of the ICT will provide them with adequate opportunity to response. Political participation would become equally effective. The change in political participation is at the same rate of the use of ICT. So the PP line is equal to one.

**Participant culture**



People are both aware and active in the political affairs. The ICT will make the involvement of people quick and large. The change in political participation is at a greater rate than the application of the ICT. So the P.P line is greater than one.

The influence of the ICT on the level and style of participation are not in the same manner. As a whole parochial culture and subject cultures will transform into participant culture provided digital divide, Cyber crimes and political apathy are not capable enough to influence the system.

**5. Conclusion**

The issue of the political culture also draws attention to extent to which the politics of modern societies is conducted through the media – newspapers, television, the internet, mobile phones and so on The Internet is a potentially powerful agent of political socialization because of the vast amount of political information available online and the fact that people actively engage with online platforms. Not only do people get information about government from news sites and blogs, they can post responses to stories and debate others through discussion forums. They also can use online media to actively take part in political processes, such as election campaigns. Young people, in particular, use the Internet to learn about and participate in politics, although older people are going online for politics at an increasing rate. Evidence suggests that young people are developing their political identities online as they learn about the differences between candidates and political parties and acquire information about issues and political events. They use social media to create collaborative online communities that organize for political causes, lobby government, and campaign for candidates. All of these activities contribute to the socialization of engaged citizens. From a study on the impact of social media in the political culture in Kosovo, Camaj Lindita , suggests that the more people use mass media for political information, the more they tend to participate in different forms of political actions (Camaj, Lindita; 2011). The same is also applicable in India. As India is fast advancing in her technology, a grass rout level transformation in the political scene is expected. The abrupt growth of AAM Admi Party in India and the involvement of residents of metropolitan cities in the administrative realms show that India would be suitable place for digital democracy.

Political Participation has enhanced in the digital era. In the digital world citizens who participate in the political affairs, feel that their influence on political authorities is necessary but also possible. Political alienation now becomes rare. Each culture gets transformed. As ICT reaches every corner of the country political participation and cultural shift would occur even in the remote places. A very notable change would be the increase in the level of participation especially by youth and women demographically and extension participation into the interiors of the country. Similarly the style of participation would also change such as elitist decision making would be replaced by popular decision making. As India becomes the youngest nation in the next decade with an average age of 29, digital democracy will flourish in the country.
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