

THE KEYBOARD WAR: EXPLORING BJP VS. CONGRESS RHETORIC ON X DURING THE 2021 ASSAM ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to understand the election rhetoric of the Indian National Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party in X during the Assam Assembly Election, 2021. The election was marked by intense political rivalry and diverse campaign methods. The growing use of social media has made it crucial for political parties today to establish a positive presence on these platforms. Political parties employ various strategies to appeal to voters in order to achieve this. The study collected X posts from both the Indian National Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party to analyse the discourse on social media during the Assam Assembly Election, 2021. The posts were analysed and themes were identified utilising the six-step guide by Braun and Clarke. The study found that both political parties endeavoured to undermine each other while seeking to persuade the audience in their favour. The study illustrates a contrast in using X for election discourse between the two political parties. The results contribute to the wider field of political communication by offering valuable insights into the dynamics of electoral campaigns in a region known for its complex identity politics and rapid socio-economic shifts.

Keywords: Assam Assembly Election, BJP vs Congress, Election Communication, Politics of Assam, X

1. INTRODUCTION

Political actors leverage both traditional and modern media platforms during elections to disseminate their ideologies and political commitments, and to sway public opinion in their favour. A product of the internet, social media has become a fact of civil life, and a tool for political movements to communicate and spread information throughout the world (Shirky, 2011). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), Flickr, among others, have led to increased public participation in politics. This has facilitated the increasing usage of social media during election campaigns to disseminate information more effortlessly and interactively (Amirullah et al., 2013).

The successful integration of social media by Barack Obama in the 2008 Presidential campaign led to the inception of the term 'social media election' to represent the significant role of social media in elections (Enli, 2017). Although Rajiv Gandhi initiated the IT revolution in India, BJP was the first political party to utilise technological advancements for election communication. BJP dedicated its efforts towards developing the campaign website and utilised various communication channels, such as text messages, pre-recorded voice clips, and emails, to reach out to over 20 million people in the 2004 General Election. Despite losing the election, the campaign established a pioneering model for future election campaigns (Gowda & Gupta, 2010). Moreover, BJP was the amongst the first major political parties to introduce its own mobile application, named "Bharatiya Janata Party App" (Khan, 2019).

Rodrigues (2020) noted the 2014 General Election in India as the first 'social media election'. BJP launched "India 272+" app in the 2014 General Election, and "Narendra Modi app" prior 2019 General Election to propagate the party ideology and communicate the election promises to the mass. The party also used the microblogging sites to engage with young electorates, leading to a successful election outcome, whereas the new-and-upcoming parties used it for self-aggrandisement and media validation (Ahmed et al. 2016). Other political parties followed suit and implemented similar tactics during the elections.

The first notable effect of social media on the political landscape in Assam can be identified as the social media initiative to rally people after the infamous molestation incident on GS Road in Guwahati, Assam in 2012 (Deori & Behera, 2014). Subsequently, youths have driven multiple social media campaigns in Assam. The movements of #SaveDehingPatkai, CAA and NRC have brought the issues of Assam into the limelight of national and international forums. In Assam, IRIS & IMAI (2013) report a significant impact of social media on the election outcome in the Dibrugarh, Silchar, and Tezpur constituency during the 2009 General Election, while a moderate impact was observed in the Gauhati, Jorhat, and Karimganj.

2. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

After sweeping Congress from Assam in 2016, BJP established government in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Tripura and formed a coalition government in Meghalaya and Nagaland as junior partner. Prior to the Assam Assembly election, 2021 (hereafter *AAE, 2021*) the political environment of Assam underwent significant changes:

- 1) The signing of Bodo peace treaty in 2020
- 2) BJP ending its alliance with the BPF and forms an alliance with the UPPL for the BTR and assembly elections
- 3) All Indian United Democratic Front (AIUDF) and Bodoland People's Front joining the same alliance with Congress
- 4) NRC and the CAA movement
- 5) Death of former Congress CM Tarun Gogoi in November 2020

In the AAE, 2021, 1.9 crore voters participated in electing 126 MLAs from a pool of 946 candidates. The election was dominated by three alliances: BJP led NDA, Congress led "Mahajot" (grand alliance), and Rajior Dal-Asom Jatiya Parishad alliance. NDA emerged victorious with 75 seats, while Mahajot and Rajior Dal won 50 and 1 seats, respectively.

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

X (formerly Twitter) serves as a means to dynamic modes of communication. The word limit of X promotes strong opinions and encourages social and political engagement (Guran & Ozarslan, 2022). However, the research on its influence on election campaigns is still in its nascent stage (Ahmed et al., 2016). Scholars have examined the role of X in political campaigns from three distinct standpoints: its usage within political campaigns, its usage by individuals, and its usage as a response to an event (Jungherr, 2016). This paper presents an analysis of the utilisation of X for political campaigning and examines the dominant themes disseminated by political actors on this platform during the AAE, 2021.

The objectives of the study are:

- 1) Usage of X by the political parties during the AAE, 2021
- 2) To find the dominant themes propagated by the political parties during the AAE, 2021

4. METHODOLOGY

This descriptive study is focused on comprehending the usage of X by the Indian National Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) during the AAE, 2021. For this purpose, posts from select accounts in X from the day the election was announced (26th February 2021) to the last date of the voting (6th April 2021) were collected. While selecting the X accounts of leaders from both political parties, careful consideration was given to their significance and relevance in Assam politics. For the study, data from X accounts of Assam Congress (@INCAssam), then President of Assam Pradesh Congress Ripun Bora (@ripunbora), and former minister Rakibul Hussain (@rakibul_inc) were gathered to acquire insights into the rhetoric of the Congress. For the same purpose, the X accounts of BJP Assam Pradesh (@BJP4Assam), the then Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal (@sarbanandsonwal), and then minister Himanta Biswa Sarma (@himantabiswa) were selected.).

After collecting the data, Atlas.ti software was utilised in generating codes and code groups. From the codes and code groups, the six-phase guide by Braun and Clarke (2006) was employed to identify themes and draw an analysis.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

Five key themes were identified in the usage of X during the AAE, 2021 by the BJP and Congress. The themes are discussed below as strategies employed by the political parties during the election.

Strategy one: Discredit each other

BJP characterised Congress as deceitful, lacking leadership, and their grand-alliance '*Mahajot*,' as a "Mahajhooth" (grand falsehood).

You have to remember, this is not Congress's 'Mahajut', it is Congress's 'Mahajhooth': PM Shri @narendramodiji (@BJP4Assam, March 24)

The alliance between Congress and AIUDF was criticised by the BJP, referring to the infamous comment made by former Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi in 2006 about AIUDF president Badaruddin Ajmal - "Who is Badruddin?"

Once former CM Tarun Gogoi used to ask 'Who is Badruddin Ajmal?'. But the Congress has tarnished his legacy by getting into an alliance with the same Ajmal: HM Shri @AmitShahji (@BJP4Assam, March 26)

The BJP discredited the five guarantees presented by the Congress party manifesto as false promises.

Congress means guarantee of false manifesto Congress means guarantee of confusion, instability Congress means guarantee of guns, blockades Congress means guarantee of violence, separatism Congress means guarantee of corruption, scams - PM Shri @narendramodiji (@BJP4Assam, March 21)

Congress alleged the BJP lied about creating job opportunities and showed a preference for the interests of capitalists over the welfare of Assam.

Given how BJP delivered not even a chicken's egg to keep its 2016 promise of 25 lakh jobs, it has now been reduced to promising a mere 1 lakh jobs. But the people of Assam have had enough of empty promises. (@ripunbora, March 15)

In BJP's 'hum do, hamare do sarkar', there is no place for 'Joi Aai Axom'- AICC General Secretary @priyankagandhiji highlights how BJP has promoted its capitalist friends at the expense of the Assamese people. (@INCAssam, March 03)

Oh, so we have the ever faithful 'mama' of his Gujarati bosses campaigning for our guarantees! Applause! But his efforts are uninvited because people have given the 'guarantee' of showing his party the exit door! (@rakibul_inc, March 30)

Congress levelled allegations against Sarbananda Sonowal, claiming that he allowed corruption and syndicates. The Congress party also referred to the BJP as a *jhumla* (charlatan).

A Government which came to power promising to curb coal syndicate has now taken illegal coal syndicate to new heights in Assam. Is this the corruption free, syndicate free Assam you promised, Sonowal ji? (@INCAssam, February 27)

As elections draw closer and BJP is ready with a new set of jumlas, here are a few examples and reminders of how BJP government betrayed and destroyed Assam, step by step in the last 5 years. (@INCAssam, February 27)

The Election Commission found Himanta Biswa Sarma guilty after he made a threat to employ NIA in the investigation of the BPF supremo Hagrama Mohilary. Congress leaders accused Sarma of bullying and misuse of power to win the election.

BJP is known to blatantly abuse power because its politics of divide & rule is not working anymore in Assam. @HimantaBiswa violating the code of conduct & EC issuing him a notice shows how they are perturbed by the strong winds of change, which shall show them the exit! (@rakibul_inc, April 01)

Everyone knows that when BJP is losing, it resorts to bullying and arm-twisting, as is visible in the case of @HimantaBiswa threatening Sh.@HagramaOnline with utter misuse of power, who has been served a show cause notice by EC! (@ripunbora, April 01)

You know why Dirty Tricks Mama (Himanta Biswa Sarma) has to threaten to have opponents arrested under false charges? It's because he can't keep tall promises of creating 25 lakh jobs or raising minimum wages of tea workers. (@ripunbora, April 03)

Congress raised allegations of misconduct with regards to the EVM machine, questioning the Election Commission and urging prompt action.

What could be worse than the state of democracy that EVMs were found in the car of the BJP candidate? If there are doubts about the voting machine, who can be trusted? (@INCAssam, April 2)

News of EVM theft raises serious questions on the role of EC as an impartial body. @rsshurjewala ji demands answers from the EC on the emerging disturbing details of malpractices. (@INCAssam, April 2)

This is a question on the credibility of elections, the investigation should be independent and fair. It is very important to identify who is the real culprit in this big conspiracy. (@INCAssam, April 2)

Assam will not allow the mockery of democracy, as is BJP resorting to, in the wake of an impending defeat! Protested against the looting of #EVM by a BJP leader outside Manabendra Complex, Dispur, Guwahati today, asking for strict action against the culprit! #EVM_theft_Assam (@ripunbora, April 03)

5.1. STRATEGY TWO: SHOW OF STRENGTH

BJP arranged mass gatherings during their rallies, bike rallies, public meetings, and nomination filing. Daily schedules of BJP leaders were also regularly shared.

Glimpses from Minister Shri @himantabiswa's rally in Dhemaji where he campaigned for Dr. @ranojpegu, BJP candidate for upcoming #AssamElections2021 (@BJP4Assam, March 20)

People's love for Adarniya Pradhan Mantri Shri @narendramodiji and faith on @BJP4India continues unabated. This was evident as youth, in large numbers, joined CM Shri @sarbanandsonwal for a bike rally from Chabua to Tinsukia. (@BJP4Assam, March 20).

Took part in a public meeting and accompanied @BJP4Assam candidate Shri Paramananda Rajbongshi as he filed his nomination from Sipajhar constituency for #AssamElections. (@sarbanandsonwal, March 11)

I shall be attending nomination programs of HCM @sarbanandsonwal and @BJP4Assam Secretary @tarangagogoi on Tuesday, March 9, 2021. Also, I shall attend BJP Meeting at Silchar. Sharing my schedule (@himantabiswa, March 08)

BJP shared the live streaming of launching of the party's election manifesto 'Sankalpa Patra' and posted their *sankalpas* (pledges) in X.

Watch live Launching Ceremony of SANKALPA PATRA, Assam Assembly Elections - 2021 from 10 AM from Official Facebook Page of @BJP4India @BJP4Assam (@BJP4Assam, March 23)

The political party asserted that the electorate's desire for development can be realised solely under the governance of the BJP. The party communicated details regarding the "Pariyal Sampark Abhiyan" to facilitate interaction between party members and the public.

Honorable State President @RanjeetkrDass has urged the District Presidents, Constituency Supervisors, Coordinators, Extension Officers, Mandal Presidents, Booth Presidents and 4 lakh pristhapramukh of the party to ensure that the 'Family Relations Campaign' is extended till March 5, 2013 and take blessing of the people. (@BJP4Assam, March 02)

Congress shared their success in gathering mass in their public rallies and enticing them with their promises. The political party also live-streamed from several public rallies.

The crowd in Jorhat is all smiles and hope as arrive in large numbers to listen to AICC General Secretary @priyankagandhi's public rally. (@INCAssam, March 21)

Live from Smt.@PriyankaGandhi's rally in Bordowa, Nagaon. (@INCAssam, March 22)

The event of Rahul Gandhi launching the election manifesto was also circulated in X, along with a hyperlink for live streaming.

Live: Shri @RahulGandhi releases #AxomCongressorJanManifesto at PCC Office, Guwahati. (@INCAssam, March 20)

Videos featuring party leaders and youth dancing to the campaign song were also shared in X.

Have you ever seen Congress leaders breaking into an impromptu dance? Well, here's a first from Sh. @JitendraSalwar, Sh. @RSSurjewala and Sh. @GouravVallabh, during the launch of Assam Congress's campaign song (@ripunbora, March 18)

Smt. @PriyankaGandhi cheers the young dancers & joins them, as they dance to the tunes of Assam Congress's official campaign song at the rally in Jorhat today. (@ripunbora, March 21)

5.2. STRATEGY THREE: SUCCESS VS FAILURE

BJP cited their unwavering commitment and “double engine government” as the foundation for progress. The development was attributed to Upadhyaya's philosophy and the vision of PM Modi and HM Amit Shah.

The double engine govt of NDA, is committed to take Assam to greater heights to progress: PM Shri @narendramodiji (@BJP4Assam, March 24)

BJP govt in Assam has been following Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay's philosophy of “Integral Humanism”, which has 4 pillars of personal integrity, political inclusiveness, ethical governance and people's participation. #BJPinAssamAgain (@BJP4Assam, March 10)

Bhaktipeeth' Majuli is always with @BJP4India. People believe it is only due to the developmental vision of PM Shri @narendramodiji & HM Shri @AmitShahji, the isolated island has found it's place in the global map. (@BJP4Assam, March 22)

The party affirmed its dedication to undertaking activities aimed at promoting employment prospects for youths.

Skilled youth, safe Assam: The government led by the Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Sarbananda Sonowal has implemented measures to enhance the skillset of the youth in the state through the “Assam Skill Development Mission”. (@BJP4Assam, February 28)

Assam's women are now more empowered and self-reliant. All credit to @BJPAssam in the state. (@BJP4Assam, March 10)

They claimed success in empowering women and tea garden workers.

Assam's women are now more empowered and self-reliant. All credit to @BJPAssam in the state. (@BJP4Assam March 10)

Congress has kept the Tea Garden workers in neglect for years. The BJP Govt has taken all steps for Padhai, Kamai & Dawai of the Tea Workers: PM Shri @narendramodiji (@BJP4Assam, March 21)

They posted their efforts towards empowering farmers and enhancing agriculture and the fishery sector.

Our government has always worked in the interest of farmers, and this message is spreading throughout Assam today. This has enabled many of our youth to achieve success in agriculture. (@sarbanandsonwal, April 2)

Assam has the potentiality to become India's organic hub. Now farmers in Assam can directly export their produce globally. This is how the NDA Govt is empowering the farming populace: PM Shri @narendramodiji (@BJP4Assam, March 20)

Fish production has increased by a record high in the journey to build a self-reliant Assam. Such success of our initiative to further empower fishermen in the economic system of Assam is truly gratifying. (@sarbanandsowal, March 17)

The enhancement of railway connectivity, construction of roads, and the inauguration of Bhupen Hazarika Setu were also shared in the posts.

Tourists are praising NDA Govt's work in Assam. With the mission mode widening of railway, the number of trains reaching the Barak Valley has doubled in the last few years: PM Shri @narendramodiji (@BJP4Assam, March 18)

In this year's Budget, Rs. 53,000 crore have been provided for constructing roads. In the last 5 years, we have constructed around 20,000 km of roads in the state and 6 bridges over the Brahmaputra river: HM Shri @AmitShahji (@BJP4Assam, March 22)

In the last 5 years Bhupen Hazarika Setu, Bogibeel Bridge were built. Besides, construction work of half a dozen bridges are going on in the state: PM Shri @narendramodiji (@BJP4Assam, April 03)

Posts on accomplishments in developing waterways, oil and gas industry, commerce, and tourism were shared.

Waterways always was a strength of Assam, but Congress never realise this potential as a result Assam's export was limited. We are working strengthening inland waterways of the state: PM Shri @narendramodi (@BJP4Assam, March 20)

In the last 6 years, more than ₹ 40,000 crore has been invested in the Oil & Gas sector only: PM Shri @narendramodiji (@BJP4Assam, March 21)

Boosting trade & commerce with ASEAN & BBN countries has always been the top agenda of @BJP4India Govt in Assam. In line with the same, the first ever Global Investor Summit 'Advantage Assam' was organised in 2018. (@BJP4Assam, April 02)

We have worked and resolved many long-standing problems. And we will continue to find solutions for all other issues. Assam has a lot of opportunities to become a 'Tourism Hub' which can generate huge employment in the state: PM Shri @narendramodiji (@BJP4Assam, April 4)

They claimed to find success in safeguarding bio-diversities in sanctuaries and reducing the poaching of Rhino at Kaziranga.

All our sanctuaries, including Kaziranga, our forest areas, are also our heritage, our responsibility towards the environment and also the means of livelihood. I am happy that the forest area in Assam has increased in the last 5 years: PM Shri @narendramodiji (@BJP4Assam, March 21)

Due to @BJP4India Govt's tough stand on rhino poaching, today poaching cases has reached unprecedented low. This is how we are protecting the iconic one-horned rhino: HM Shri @AmitShahji (@BJP4Assam, March 31)

BJP asserted their success in making Assam "free from corruption, illegal immigration, insurgency, and pollution" and bringing back the working culture to Assam.

People of Assam voted the BJP led alliance Govt to power with the mandate for Parivartan - for a better tomorrow - free from Corruption, Pollution, Terrorism & Illegal Foreigners, which has been delivered by the Govt. (@BJP4Assam, March 10)

Behind the journey of 'Corruption Free Assam' lies our firm determination to free the system of governance from the grip of corruption, chaos and nepotism. We have been and will continue to fight corruption to create an environment of peace and work culture. (@sarbanandsonwal, March 11)

Development of the education sector and providing financial aid for the renovation of namghars in Assam was also highlighted.

The BJP Govt. has taken steps to preserve heritage of the state. ₹2.5 lakhs financial assistance have been provided to Namghars. Namghar is not only a religious center, but also a center of propagation of the culture of Assam: HM Shri @AmitShahji (@BJP4Assam, March 15)

BJP also claimed to provide welfare schemes for the benefits of the journalists of Assam.

Despite being the fourth pillar of democracy-Journalists of Assam were often neglected by the state government. However, in the @BJP4Assam regime they saw a new ray of hope with the launching of welfare various schemes benefitting them & their family members. (@BJP4Assam, March 10)

Congress maintained that the BJP government had failed to deliver in a range of areas, including employment, floods, law and order, safety of women, demonetisation, and price hike. They censured BJP for its inability to fulfil its commitment to generate 25 lakhs of employment opportunities for the youth of Assam.

While BJP sells off Assam's state assets one by one, Assam has 60 lakh unemployed youth who have to go outside the state to look for jobs. Where are the promised 25 lakhs? Assam demands immediate answers. (@INCAssam, March 01)

BJP's commitment to making Assam flood-free and providing compensation and rehabilitation to those impacted was also questioned.

Where is the promised flood-free Assam? Where is the promised rehabilitation and compensation? Why was there no additional funds from the Centre given to Assam in 2016-18? Assam demands immediate answers to these issues. (@INCAssam, March 01)

Congress claimed women suffered limited opportunities and increased crime under the BJP's rule. They accused the BJP government of divesting the assets of Assam to capitalists.

Women have been at the receiving end of the Jumla party's anti-women policies. Women empowerment & pro-poor policies are priority areas for Congress when it comes to power, as emphasized by Smt.@PriyankaGandhi while addressing the women of Assam today. (@rakibul_inc, April 01)

The people of Assam will surely answer to the Modi government which has sold the resources of Assam one by one to the capitalists. (@INCAssam, February 27)

The posts also discussed issues such as the price hike of amenities and the impact of GST and demonetisation.

Fuel prices, just like prices of other essential commodities, have skyrocketed under BJP and the common man and woman are struggling to survive. Is this the acche din that BJP promised us? (@INCAssam February 27)

Demonetisation, GST and now exorbitant price hikes. BJP has been dealing blow after blow to the common man and woman as they struggle to make ends meet under this anti-poor Government. (@INCAssam, March 01)

Congress rated the BJP regime's development as a mere façade, highlighting the lack of necessary amenities for children from tea gardens.

BJP claims that tea gardens have seen tremendous development under its govt. Yet, more than half of the tea gardens have no access to schooling facilities, leaving tea garden workers without basic amenities for their children. This is the facade of BJP's development. (@INCAssam, March 02)

5.3. STRATEGY FOUR: SOCIO-POLITICAL IDENTITY OF ASSAM

BJP accused Congress' alliance party AIUDF of endorsing illegal immigration and promoting communalism, deeming their alliance a menace to Assam's cultural identity.

The credential of secularism claimed by @INCIndia is nothing but hypocrisy. Their friendship in Assam with Badaruddin Ajmal's communal party AIUDF, which has ties with terrorists, is proof: @sambitswaraj (@BJP4Assam, March 03).

BJP stated in their posts that during the Congress regime, the satras of Assam fell victim to encroachment. The party emphasised its efforts towards preserving indigenous traditions and culture in the region.

This election is to save the existence of Assamese society. The @BJP4India led Govt has not only abolished bad governance & corruption, but also provided security to the indigenous. Only BJP can protect interest of the people of Assam: CM Shri @sarbanandsonwal (@BJP4Assam, March 17)

Those Satras and Namghars of Assam, were captured by illegal immigrants during Congress rule are now free from encroachments: PM Shri @narendramodi ji #AssamProgressingWithModi (@BJP4Assam, March 24)

@BJP4India is committed to preserve Assam's culture & tradition: National President Shri @JPNadda Ji. #VijaySankalpWithBJP (@BJP4Assam, March 30)

The image of PM Narendra Modi donning an Assamese Gamosa while getting vaccinated for COVID-19 was circulated in X as a symbol of his admiration for Assamese culture.

PM @NarendraModiji taking #MadeInIndia Vaccine with Assamese Gamosa on his shoulder shows his commitment for Aatmanirbhar Bharat and love for the Assamese culture. A leader who leads by example! (@himantabiswa, March 01)

BJP also highlighted the conferral of the Bharat Ratna upon Gopinath Bordoloi and Dr Bhupen Hazarika during their tenure in the centre.

BJP has always worked to increase Assam's pride. Then it was Atal Ji's Govt which gave Bharat Ratna to Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi Now, it is PM Shri @narendramodiji's Govt, who honoured Sudhakantha Bhupen Hazarika -HM Shri @AmitShahji (@BJP4Assam, March 26)

They stressed on their determination to restore peace in the region by drawing attention to the Bodo Peace Accord and Karbi-Anglong Peace Accord.

The historic Bodo Accord signed on January 2020 has dissolved the decades long dispute between Bodos & Non-Bodos: HM Shri @AmitShahji (@BJP4Assam, March 15)

I along with a delegation from Karbi Anglong, including leaders who recently laid down arms, met Hon Union Home Minister Sri @AmitShah. We discussed how the Accords to be signed, shall pave way for development of the region. @HMOIndia @TuliramRonghang (@himantabiswa, March 05)

Congress charged that the BJP government failed in safeguarding the interests of the Assamese people and failed in making Assam immigration free.

The failure of the BJP Government to make Assam immigrant free only shows their complete disregard towards actually protecting jati mati bheti of the Assamese people. (@INCAssam, February 28)

The Congress Party will ensure that Assam's land and It's resources are given to its own people. The fight against illegal immigration of the state shall continue. (@INCAssam, March 14)

The party accused BJP of violating Assamese identity and culture and making a mockery of Assam Accord.

Assam's cultural capital will not forget this blatant attack on Assam culture and identity. (@INCAssam, March 02)

Assamese identity and culture have become the biggest victim of the BJP government in Assam. In 5 years, BJP has made a complete mockery of the Assam Accord and along with it, years of Assamese people's struggles and hard-fought rights. (@INCAssam, March 04)

Congress accused the BJP of promoting division and communalism in Assam.

@OfficeOfKNathji on how the people of Assam have understood the DNA of the BJP and their divisive & communal politics. While PM Modi talks about nationalism, BJP cannot name a single leader of theirs who participated in the independence movement. (@INCAssam, March 26)

By bringing attention to the death of five people in the CAA protest, Congress raised concerns about BJP's commitment to safeguarding Assam's culture and curbing illegal immigration.

You can try and sidetrack the issue as much as you like, but our (and Assam's) questions remain the same- Do you deny that 5 innocent people were killed during CAA protests? Do you deny that hundreds of innocent were injured because of your Govt's apathy? (@INCAssam, March 06)

The failure of the BJP Government to make Assam immigrant free only shows their complete disregard towards actually protecting jati mati bheti of the Assamese people. (@INCAssam, February 28)

5.4. STRATEGY FIVE: PROMISES TO THE VOTERS

BJP posted ten promises to the electorates for its commitment to "sabhyata, suraksha, vikas".

Through our 10 Sankalp For Assam, we reiterate our commitment to uphold the state's 'Sabhyata', 'Suraksha', 'Vikas'. (@BJP4Assam, March 23)

The party promised to focus on various areas including making Assam flood free, empowering women, generating employment, distributing land pattas, protecting namghars and satras, free education for children, and promoting entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency in food.

Our Sankalp. A Flood Free Assam. We will launch the multi-pronged Mission Brahmaputra which will eliminate all losses to lives, livelihoods and property due to annual floods. (@BJP4Assam, March 23, 2021)

Our Sankalp. To Empower Assam's Women. Orunodoi payments, which are now Rs 830/month will be increased to Rs 3,000/month. (@BJP4Assam, March 23)

Our Sankalp - to become India's Fastest Job Creator We will provide 2 lakh Government jobs to the youth of Assam. Of these, 1 lakh jobs will be immediately provided before 31st March, 2022. (@BJP4Assam, March 23)

Our Sankalp - to empower Assam's citizens with Land Rights. We will distribute Land pattas with requisite rights, to all landless Indian citizens of the state in a phased manner. (@BJP4Assam, March 23)

Our Sankalp. To strengthen & protect Namghars & Satras. We will form a Task Force to recover lands of Satras and places of worship of tribal communities from illegal encroachments. (@BJP4Assam, March 23)

We are committed to provide quality education to children from Assam. Under 'Mission Shishu Unnayan', free education of every child in state govt run institutions. Free bicycles to all school students from Class 8 onwards: Shri @JPNaddaJi highlighting BJP's 10 Sankalp for Assam. (@BJP4Assam, March 23)

Our Sankalp - to make Assam India's Entrepreneurial Hub 10 Lakh youth entrepreneurs will be created through the Swami Vivekananda Assam Youth Employment Yojana (SVAYEY). 2 lakh youths will be supported each year through this scheme for the next 5 years. (@BJP4Assam, March 23)

Our Sankalp - to make Assam self sufficient in production of essential produce. We shall launch the Assam Aahar Atmanirbharta Yojana which will drive the state towards self sufficiency in essential food items within the next 5 years. (@BJP4Assam, March 23)

Furthermore, their commitment entailed safeguarding Assam through the processes of delimitation, as well as rectification and reconciliation of entries in the NRC.

We will speed up delimitation process to safeguard political rights of Assam: Hon'ble National President Shri @JPNaddaJi on BJP's 10 Sankalp For Assam. (@BJP4Assam, March 23)

We will protect Assam's rights through corrected NRC. A process of correction & reconciliation of entries under the SC mandated NRC will be initiated to protect genuine Indian citizens and exclude all illegal immigrants: Shri @JPNaddaJi on BJP's 10 Sankalp For Assam (@BJP4Assam, March 23)

Congress posted the unveiling of their manifesto, which comprised five guarantees. These guarantees are: the revocation of CAA, the provision of 5 lakh government jobs, the assurance of Rs 365 daily wages for tea garden workers, the provision of electricity free of cost up to 200 units, and the allocation of Rs 2000 for every homemaker.

Remember BJP's betrayal when it introduced CAA? Remember the attack on our people, identity and culture? Congress guarantees immediate revocation of the law that has been vehemently rejected by the Assamese people. (@INCAssam, March 03)

Under BJP, dreams, hopes and aspirations of Assam's youth have crashed. In 2020 alone, Assam had lakhs of unemployed youth. Congress understands this distress and guarantees 5 lakh government jobs. (@INCAssam, March 03)

It is Congress Party's guarantee to uplift tea workers from the abyss of despair by fixing Rs. 365/- as daily wages for them. A new dawn of progress awaits them on 2nd of May when what they rightfully deserve will come their way! (@ripunbora, March 09)

While electricity tariffs hit the roof and BJP continues its agenda of promoting corporates by privatisation of APDCL, Congress Party provides a helping hand to the Assamese people by guaranteeing 200 units of free electricity monthly. (@INCAssam, March 03)

Each housewife will get Rs 2,000 per month (@INCAssam, March 14)

The party vowed to prioritise women's security, environmental conservation, recognition of six ethnic groups as Scheduled Tribe (ST), granting land patta, and the development of the tourism industry.

"This election is a battle for women security, for jobs and for safeguarding Assamese identity"- Shri @JitendraSalwar on the core issues that Assam is fighting against and Congress' resolve to redress to take Assam back on the path of prosperity. (@INCAssam, March 14)

Protection of wildlife, our duty... (@INCAssam, March 03)

If Congress forms government in Assam in 2021, the six communities will receive the Scheduled Tribe (@INCAssam, March 20)

The Congress Party will ensure that Assam's land and It's resources are given to its own people. The fight against illegal immigration of the state shall continue. (@INCAssam, March 14)

Assam's cultural heritage is unique and unparalleled and the same shall be utilised to augment tourism in the state! (@rakibul_inc, March 22)

6. DISCUSSION

The election put emphasis on issues like employment, infrastructure, Assam Accord execution, immigration, preservation of Assamese culture, NRC and CAA movement. Both political parties attempted to assert their electability and advance their respective ideologies. They both labelled each other as incompetent, power-hungry and a threat to the Assamese culture. While the BJP boasted about its efforts in developing Assam, Congress accused the government of neglecting its responsibilities towards the state.

BJP framed the 2021 election as “*Astitya Rakshar Juj*” (Fight for survival), a notion that is reminiscent of their description of the 2016 election as the “Last Battle of Saraighat”. The party also proved to be the superior party in the AAE 2021 battle at X by posting 184% more content than Congress, and receiving nearly 800% more likes and 473% more reposts.

Hashtags proved to be an essential component of sharing information. The Congress and BJP employed hashtags #Congressor5Guarantee and #10SankalpForAxom, respectively, to convey their assurances in their manifestos. Whereas Congress organised a video competition, using the hashtag #AssamBasaonAhok, to bring attention to overlooked issues by the BJP government. The latter conducted #SelfieWithDevelopment to highlight developmental works. Congress used #BJPAgainstAssam, #Syndicatananda to attack BJP, and the BJP used #BJPinAssamAgain, #BJPDelivers to showcase their success.

In their slogans, BJP emphasised their commitment to holistic development of Assam while protecting the indigenous rights, while Congress reiterated their promise of development under their banner. Both political parties released official campaign music videos. Their respective leaders posted about them visiting satras, namghars, temples during the period.

7. CONCLUSION

The affordability of smartphones and low-cost data plans has resulted in a proliferation of social media usage in India, motivating political actors to employ it for propagation. BJP is significantly ahead of other parties in social media campaigning, particularly compared to Congress, according to Anant Goenka, the Head of New Media at the Indian Express (Crabtree, 2014). Similar findings were observed upon comparing the advertising campaigns of both parties on Facebook. In Facebook BJP Assam Pradesh (@BJP4Assam) page spent about 38 lakhs for 780 advertisements in between February 2019-December 2023, including 130 advertisements during the AAE, 2021. In contrast, during the same period, the Indian National Congress-Assam (@AssamINC) page invested nearly 3.12 lakhs in running 180 advertisements, out of which 170 were displayed during the AAE, 2021. The data shows a clear indication that the BJP placed a considerable emphasis on

social media and allocated a larger budget for advertising during AAE 2021, as opposed to the Congress.

The study highlights a contrast in using X for election discourse between the two political parties. BJP demonstrated a greater commitment to engaging with social media users, while Congress did not. The positive engagement with users may have contributed to BJP's political prowess during the election and potentially swayed voters to support them. Congress and other political parties may explore the idea of increasing their investments in social media campaigning strategies for future Assam elections, drawing on the knowledge gained during this election.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None .

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