# Chapter 43
# E–Engaging India:
## E–Democracy Strategies for Empowerment and Civic Participation

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## ABSTRACT

*E-Governance, inclusive of e-democracy, e-government, and e-business, has the power to improve processes, connect citizens, and build interactions with civil societies. The infusion of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) by the governments, civil society organizations, and political institutions to engage citizens, have promoted greater participation in the process of governance. E-Democracy encompasses all forms of electronic interaction between the elected government and the electorate. Examples include e-voting, e-consultation, e-representatives, e-campaigning, online deliberative polling, e-petitions, and e-referendums. India is the largest democracy in the world and a frontrunner in the use of ICTs for e-governance and e-democracy. The last few elections witnessed a surge in the use of new technologies inclusive of Internet, social networking, and mobile technologies, alongside the traditional forms of electioneering. This chapter examines the e-governance and e-democracy strategies, and the innovative new media technologies used by political parties, industrial corporations, and other organizations that have e-engaged the citizens.*

## INTRODUCTION

The infusion of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) by the governments, civil society organizations (CSOs) and political institutions to engage citizens through dialogue and feedback have promoted greater participation in the process

of governance and citizen interaction. E-Governance, inclusive of e-democracy, e-government and e-business (Riley & OkotUma, 2001) has the power to improve processes, connect citizens and build interactions with and within civil societies (Heeks, 2001; Fountain, 2001; Welch & Wong, 2001). E-government is a subset of e-governance, and its focus is largely on improving administrative efficiency, transparency and reducing administra-

tive corruption (Bagga, Keniston & Mathur, 2005; Bhatnagar, 2004; Choudhary Kala, Sarwan, & Kumar, 2007; Karan, 2004; Saith, Vijaybhaskar & Gayathri, 2008).

According to Warkentin, Gefen, Pavlou, & Rose (2002), governments are embarking on e-initiatives to improve the process and delivery of government services, transactions as well as communications with citizens and businesses. They recognize the potential of ICTs to bring changes and increase efficiency and effectiveness in the public and private sector (Layne & Lee, 2001; Karan, 2004; Mathison, 2003; UNDP, 2004; World Bank, 2004). India is on a threshold of information revolution and the World Wide Web has opened the global world of news and information platforms, easing the way for people to connect with the governments, other commercial and non-commercial organizations, and with each other. Despite the diverse barriers that emerge from its frontiers of diversity and divide, India is emerging as front-runner in terms of ICT users in the world. The country has adopted e-governance platforms, which is a paradigm shift over the traditional approaches in public administration in rendering of government services and information to the public using electronic means. This new paradigm has ushered in transparency in the governing process; saving of time with the government services being delivered electronically through the single window systems; simplification of procedures; better office and record management; reduction in corruption; improved attitude and job handling capacity of the dealing personnel (Menon, 2004; Mitra, 2004; Monga, 2008). Given the success at the e-governance levels, efforts are on to introduce similar electronic strategies in a move towards e-democracy.

Democratic processes incorporate not only voting but also citizen participation and engagement in the political process. E-Democracy refers to the processes and structures that encompass all forms of electronic interaction between the elected government and the electorate. Examples include e-voting, e-consultation, e-representatives, e-campaigning, online deliberative polling, e-petitions, e-referendum etc (Choudhury, et. all, 2007; Chadwick, 2009; Kluver, 2007; Mishra, 2009; Rahul & Sen, 2004). Bentivegna (2006) explored how the use of information communication Technologies (ICTs) brought in significant changes, where citizens have refocused their political attention outside the formal political arena. Online social networks, civil associations, single issue groups and even discussion groups can be considered indicators of what has been called "life politics" or "sub-politics". Internet has the potential to build social capital, interpersonal trust and political knowledge (Pasek, more & Romer, 2009).

Recent studies have found that political party Web sites, candidate Web sites, and weblogs have become major avenues for election campaigns, where the electorate are actively seeking information, interacting with fellow citizens and debating on economic and social issues (Anstead & Chadwick, 2007; Chadwick, 2009; Bimber & Davis, 2003; Davis, 2010; Grönlund 2001; Karan, Gimeno, & Tandoc, 2009; Kluver 2007; Tekwani & Shetty, 2007). Studies have established the use of Internet by youth and civic engagement (Shaw, Kwak and Holbert, 2010). Citizens gain political knowledge, develop partisan affiliations, and acquire a sense of civic duty as a result of political campaign messages. The advent of instant news and interactivity through mass and new media technologies facilitate novel forays into news and information dissemination, thereby cultivating fresh opportunities for civic involvement, dialogue and participation among the electorate. It is clear that the relationship between the new media technology, political communication and elections is complicated and dynamic.

In the largest democracy in the world with a dynamic political system, Indian elections have undergone several changes in the last six decades. Elections have become extremely high-powered with the use of high tech modern digital technologies including Internet websites, interactive media,

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