

From Evolution to Present: A Comprehensive Analysis of Political Consultancies in India

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Abstract

Political consulting has come to become a central component of the electoral processes in modern elections, influencing strategies of campaigns and the way politicians deal with voters. This paper produces an overall review of the development and the status quo in political consultancies in India, and their transformative role within the democratic framework of the country. Political consultancy has historically developed from informal advisory positions towards becoming an industry, especially in the past two decades. This paper traces the global roots of political consultancy, citing its professionalization after World War II to its adoption in India, which turned it upside down for campaign management. Professional political consultancy in India has been characterized by data analytics, targeted communication strategies, and advanced media management techniques. The 2014 national elections thus formed a significant turning point wherein the expert-managed campaigns of Narendra Modi succeeded by harnessing the innovative applications of technology along with data-oriented methods for communicating effectively with the electorate. Consulting firms like I-PAC and Political Edge proliferate the methods they introduce to align with international best practices. Despite their successes, the increasing reliance on political consultants raises ethical issues in relation to their impact on democratic engagement and grassroots participation. Critics argue that if these consultants strengthen voter outreach and campaign effectiveness, they may also introduce a more centralized and less participatory political landscape. This analysis ultimately points to a dual role of political consultancy in facilitating modern electoral successes as well as in undermining traditional democratic principles. By discussing these dynamics, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of the

implications of professional political consulting on the shaping of election strategies and election outcomes in India.

Keywords: Political Consulting, Global Emergence, Campaign Strategies, Media Management, Democratic Engagement, Ethical Issues.

1. Introduction

Political consulting has now become an essential part of the modern democratic processes, highly affecting electoral outcomes and public policy. The field covers several activities, such as campaign promotions for particular candidates or agendas. Political consultants, often termed political strategists, specialize in campaign strategy, campaign staff coordination, and organization of events in promoting candidates or causes. Ultimately, they focus on influencing perceptions and behaviours in voters to serve their desired political objectives. Political consultants are the people driving politicians to win. They craft the strategies of campaigns and specialize in constructing a good story and tactical approach. These are the experts responsible for managing everything about a campaign, where they bring together creativity and analytical capabilities. They do the writing of press releases and speeches and also the management of data-driven digital campaigns. Political consultants are considered counselors and help guide candidates through the intricacies of contemporary politics toward winning.

Political consulting, while not in itself a new concept on the world stage, has evolved dramatically over the last century into an organized and specialized industry within the world order and, over the last two decades, within India. Political advisers have, of course, long been an informal feature of politicking, and the last few decades have made campaign management and strategy more formalized and professionalized in its structure. Sabato (1981) describes modern-day political consultants as campaign professionals who are mainly engaged in offering services, such as polling media production, direct mail fundraising, and strategic counsel to candidates and political committees. Political consultants have a high influence on elections and, by extension, the democratic process. Traditionally, parties managed their campaigns. Modern professional consultants have transformed the very nature of contests into highly complex operations. These consultants use voter data analytics, micro-targeting, social media, digital media, public relations, and opinion research to reach voters accurately (Plasser, 2000). Since they are relatively newcomers to electoral politics, questions still linger about whether their impact is on inner-party democracy, policy cohesion, and grassroots political activity (Karlsen, 2010).

The development of political consultancy has significantly transformed election campaigns, with external experts playing an increasingly central role in the formulation of strategies, voter engagement, and the construction of campaign narratives. As Farrell et al. (2001) have argued, the professionalization of political campaigns has introduced a systematic, data-driven approach to electoral competition. Political consultants possess unique expertise in opinion polling and voter segmentation, helping campaigns allocate

their resources in ways that can actually connect with these key demographics. Combining creative strategies like focus group research and micro-targeting, consultants may develop tailored messages that speak specifically to the particular voter demographics being targeted (Farrell et al., 2001). They are also essential for creating powerful storytelling that brings to the forefront a candidate's positive attributes, weakness, and emotive connection to voters. They also use online tools and internet-based resources for increased outreach and fine-tuning of campaign strategy. This approach is professionalized as modern campaigns increasingly rely on technology. Such an example is quite visible in the case of U.S. presidential elections, where billions of dollars are spent on consultants who shape messaging, advertising, and outreach strategies. Internationally, figures like James Carville have extended their influence by advising leaders in various campaigns, thereby redefining political landscapes around the world.

The age is indeed candidate-centered, according to Wattenberg (1990), with the policy of politics no longer framed by the political parties themselves. Thus, with the series of trends that dictate these strategies, professional competency in campaign management has drastically increased globally. Formal campaigns have surfaced, with major academic institutions offering graduate and professional degrees in policy campaigning to meet high demand for competent political consultants. In the past three decades, the political consultant profession has established itself as something of a 'specialty' profession, guided by its importance on strategic management, voter outreach, and quantitatively developed methodologies.

The role of political advisors is always surrounded by controversy. Critics often debate whether these strategies actually enhance democratic engagement or only manipulate public opinion, which creates ethical concerns over their influence. However, despite all these challenges, the significance of political advisors cannot be ignored. They play a vital role in modern politics by gathering information, creating persuasive arguments, and adapting to changing circumstances. Political consulting is one of the aspects that has seen elections become increasingly complex, shaping future governance with its expertise.

2. Historical Roots and Emerging Trends of Political Consultancy

2.1. Global Evolution of Political Consultancy

The political consulting industry grew radically worldwide during the 20th century rapidly developing in the United States. The general growth started with the establishment of the first modern consulting firm in 1934 and the entry of the first marketing professionals into presidential bids via the Alfred Landon case in 1936 (Baumgartner, 2000; Friedenber, 1997). Modern consultancy in politics is said to have started in the middle of the 20th century, exactly after World War II, via the introduction of modern polling techniques and innovative strategies in campaigns. The John F. Kennedy presidential campaign of 1960 marks a defining point, where the strength of efforts in campaigning lies in strategic communication and good management of media outlets (Johnson, 2018). Early scholarship

on political consultants was sporadic and based largely on anecdotal information from the professionals themselves and not on a systematic approach to research (Johnson, 2018).

The professionalization of this industry was further solidified with the formation of the American Association of Political Consultants in 1969, which has grown to include over 4,000 members, underscoring the rapid expansion of the field (Baumgartner, 2000). Political consultancy was brought into the fray through the actual establishment of, for example, the American Association of Political Consultants-AAPC (AAPC). The Federal Election Campaign Act, 1974 was also at this time which recognized campaign managers as key election players. And the academic engagement started to sprout by using social science as a methodical approach to gauge campaign strategies or effectiveness (Johnson, 2018). Scholars such as Barkan and Bruno focused on reaching particular voter demographics, where data-driven approaches made possible modern campaign strategies (Barkan & Bruno 1974).

Political consultants came into the limelight in the 1980s as political parties started losing control over candidates and campaigns. In this regard, the field began to have professionalized trade publications. For example, scholars like Larry Sabato were doing research that emphasized how consultants were changing the landscape of American electoral politics through the use of innovative technologies and strategies that avoided party structures (Sabato 1983). The growing use of consultants brought up questions regarding their impact on democracy, with arguments surfacing as to whether they were helping or hurting the democratic process (DeVries 1989).

Political consultancy has spread beyond American borders in the last few decades, influencing electoral processes worldwide. The globalization of media and communication technologies has allowed consultants to operate on an international scale, advising campaigns in various political contexts. This global reach has led to a more homogenized approach to political campaigning, where strategies developed in one country can be adapted for use in another (Johnson 2018).

2.2. The Emergence of Professional Political Consultancy in India

The emergence of political consultancy in India is very young yet profoundly revolutionary. India, as the world's largest democracy with a multifaceted socio-political terrain, has emerged as a conducive environment for the adoption and application of contemporary political consulting methods. The growing dependence on data analytics, focused communication strategies, and media management has transformed the conceptualization and execution of political campaigns. The professionalization of political consultancy, influenced by global trends and India's distinct political dynamics, has transformed electioneering in the country, rendering it an essential element of modern politics.

It also means that, for a more extended period compared to most other democracies, India's politics remained relatively unexposed to professional campaigning even when hiring consultants became widespread. In India before the 1990s, campaigns were run by party operatives and volunteers in a way where they resorted to old methods like door-to-door canvassing rallies, and posters. Even though there were certain campaign operations, such as advertising and media purchases, outsourced to independent organizations, the

integration of professional advisors in strategic planning and election management was limited Plasser (2009).

During the early 2000s, India saw the emergence of professional political consultancy, led by companies like Chintan, which specialized in political research and campaigning. By the mid-2000s, Indian political parties began adopting international best practices, such as data analytics and media plans, and drawing lessons from Western models of consulting. It became evident how powerful global consulting companies like Cambridge Analytica were.

Following 2014, political consultancy became an influential force in determining electoral tactics in India. The 2014 national elections were a turning point, affirming the significance of professional political consultants in campaign politics. The Narendra Modi campaign is a good example, highlighting the success of expert-led approaches. The organization Citizens for Accountable Governance (CAG) and I-PAC, established by Prashant Kishor was key to organizing crucial aspects of the campaign, including voter mobilization, strategy, and the implementation of sophisticated data analytics (Price, 2015). Their use of advanced technology, like holographic rallies and social media campaigns, highlighted the advanced strategies common in Western political campaigns. The BJP's success in 2014, aided by consulting efforts, spurred the wider acceptance of professional political consulting in India. This change has been adopted by various political parties, setting new standards for contemporary campaign management (Palshikar et al., 2014).

Following the success of political consultancy in the 2014 elections, the sector in India expanded rapidly, with many firms and advisors offering expertise in data analytics, media strategy, and voter engagement. Notably, I-PAC, founded by Prashant Kishor, introduced data-driven, technology-integrated strategies that transformed campaigns in the 2014 and 2019 elections. Other firms, such as Political Edge, LeadTech, Varahe Analytics, and IFSSS, enhanced the field with a focus on voter segmentation and social media strategies. These consultancies have reshaped electioneering in India, allowing political parties to run professional, data-centric campaigns that are crucial for success in both national and regional elections.

As comparatively new contenders in the arena of elections, political consultancies have generated successive controversies regarding their influence on both party politics and democratic processes. According to opponents, political consultancies increase political participation at the grass-roots level by enhancing voter outreach and revealing important information regarding voter behavior. Nevertheless, people are worried about the growing predominance of professional consultants, worrying that this process might result in the over-professionalization of campaigns. The change could strip campaigns of participatory, people-oriented ideologies and replace them with more centralized top-down approaches instead. This debate poses significant concerns regarding how one can reconcile current campaigning methods with the fundamental democratic principles of citizen participation and inclusion.

3. Shaping Electoral Strategies: The Role of Political Consultancies

In India's vibrant political arena, political consultancy is key to campaign and strategy formation. Political consultants are at the forefront of reshaping how candidates engage with voters. They create messages, formulate strategies, and coordinate campaign logistics to increase a candidate's popularity. Their knowledge not only shapes voter opinion but also has an impact on election results. Studies show that professional consultant-led campaigns raise more money and gain higher percentages of votes than those led by amateurs. Through a combination of solid political knowledge, data analysis, and communication, political consultants enable candidates to attain a competitive advantage, particularly in elections. A major part of their job is conducting grassroots-level research to determine voter opinions. This research, coupled with data analysis, shapes the formulation of targeted campaign plans. In addition, consultants apply digital marketing to increase outreach and interaction, allowing the party message to reach a wide audience effectively.

3.1. From Research to Strategy: Ground-Level Insights for Campaigns

Political consultancy informing election strategies through detailed ground-level research. Consultants send out teams to directly interact with voters through surveys, interviews, and focus groups in urban and rural settings. Through this in-depth research, consultants gain insight into the electorate's concerns, likes, and dislikes of political parties. Data collected through these interactions gives valuable information about voter behavior and attitudes, such as what issues appeal most to the public. Based on this grass-roots feedback, political consultancies are able to craft strategies specifically targeting voter concerns.

Once data is gathered, political consultancies use sophisticated data analysis and mining methods to extract meaningful trends. Regression analysis and sentiment analysis tools are employed to forecast election outcomes, pinpoint vital demographic patterns, and design specific campaign tactics. Local staff familiar with data collection also make certain that the study is representative and accurate. Such a combination of field work and data analysis allows political parties to effectively invest their resources so their messages become pertinent and effective. Through on-ground research and data-based recommendations, political consultants empower parties to construct compelling and successful campaigns that influence voters. Based on such research, political consultancies can help parties build tailored campaign plans as per the issues, priorities, and successful communication strategies to connect with certain constituencies.

3.2. Revamping Political Campaigns through Digital Marketing & Data Insights

Political consulting plays a significant role in modern political environments by assisting in shaping media advertising and digital campaigns. Conventional campaign strategies

have been transformed due to the integration of digital technologies, enabling consultants to maximize communication and interaction through the application of data mining and sophisticated analytics. The impact of political messages on digital media is amplified by this data-driven approach, which also enhances fundraising efforts and accelerates volunteer mobilization and voter mobilization. According to Howard (2005), the development of digital media strategies has enabled both long-standing political elites and grassroots activists to efficiently distribute information, making it possible to have a richer public discourse while raising concerns regarding privacy and the ethical dimensions of data use in campaigns.

Additionally, political consultancy's role in politics goes beyond data gathering; it involves constructing narratives favorable to the interests of candidates and constituents alike. Political consultants are capable of controlling the narrative through the management of interactions between candidates and the public and responding strategically while keeping a desirable image. With the advent of digital technology, this has become easier as new platforms for immediate communication and feedback have emerged. Campaigns have been able to change strategies according to the reactions of the populace in real time. As indicated by Howard (2005), the relationship between technology and consultancy is changing how campaigns are done, making campaigns more responsive and data-driven than ever. The dynamic is proof of the necessity of knowing about the production as well as the consumption of political content in today's digital landscape since it effectively determines democratic citizenship and participation.

3.3. Expanding Roles of Political Consultants: Advocacy Beyond Campaigns

Indian Political Strategists are also advocates who serve as strategic intermediaries for their clients, policymakers, key stakeholders, and the general public. Their overriding objective is to shape public policy or attain legislative reforms consistent with their client's agenda. Political consultants first target and map crucial decision-makers like lawmakers, government officials, and prominent business or community leaders, among others. Next, they form and foster alliances with the aforementioned stakeholders in a bid to champion their client's interests effectively. Through strategic networking, political strategists meet policymakers to plead on behalf of proposed policy alterations or to mold the public to rally behind particular causes. In so doing, the consultants often craft research-driven policy recommendations, testify in legislative hearings, or convene meetings between clients and powerful political figures.

Apart from direct lobbying, political consultants plan and conduct advocacy campaigns that seek to impact both public opinion and decision-maker actions. The campaigns can be a combination of media advocacy, public protests, social media mobilization, and grassroots mobilization. Utilizing their skills in communication and public relations, consultants develop persuasive arguments that emphasize the significance of the proposed changes. They further mobilize supporters and ensure that public pressure is mounted on policymakers in a manner that appeals to both the populace and those in office. At its core, the role of political consultants in advocacy is more than lobbying for policy reform, they

assist clients in developing a wide base of support, which is key to maintaining long-term political power and effecting meaningful change.

4. Prominent Political Consultancy Firms and Their Impact in India:

India is often described as the world's largest democracy. India attained independence in 1947, after several decades of struggle. The first-ever elections in India were conducted in 1951, which is a significant milestone in the history of India. However, the advent of consultancies into the Indian political landscape happened approximately 2 decades ago. There aren't many political consultancies that have made a huge impact on the elections. However, Leadtech, Design Boxed, Nation with NAMO, and Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC) are some of the most established names.

4.1. Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC)

I-PAC was founded based on the need to turn political campaigning professionals in India by leaving traditional methods behind and pursuing a more structured and analytical technique. Ex-public health specialist Prashant Kishor came up with the concept of a platform that could bring together veteran professionals from all walks of different disciplines such as management, data analytics, and the social sciences to formulate a comprehensive campaign plan. This interdisciplinary approach has highly contributed to overhauling electioneering in India.

I-PAC's success can be attributed to its significant role in Narendra Modi's successful general election campaign in 2014. The BJP's landslide victory is largely credited to the firm's strategic efforts, such as the "Chai pe Charcha" campaign and the effective utilization of social media. This achievement brought I-PAC into the limelight and cemented its position as a highly successful political consulting agency that could deliver electoral victories.

The power of I-PAC lies in its multidimensional approach.(Sharma, 2019) By going beyond traditional campaign management, it goes deeper into understanding the specific political situation of each election. This involves conducting thorough research and data analysis to identify key voter groups, understand their concerns, and adjust campaign messages accordingly. Through a data-driven approach, I-PAC can develop highly focused campaigns that resonate with specific voter groups, making them more effective.

Moreover, the power of I-PAC lies in its ability to mobilize and manage large, highly motivated teams of field workers and volunteers. These individuals form the backbone of I-PAC's ground-level operations, engaging with voters at the grassroots level, taking their input, and communicating the campaign. I-PAC gains a definite advantage in elections due to this combination of data-driven approach and grassroots mobilization.

The reach of I-PAC extends beyond its early success in the 2014 general elections. The company has since worked with a diverse range of political parties with a diverse set of ideological orientations, demonstrating its adaptability and ability to alter its strategies to

suit different political landscapes. I-PAC has been central to the development of winning election campaigns, from Jagan Mohan Reddy's YSR Congress in Andhra Pradesh to Nitish Kumar's JD(U) in Bihar. I-PAC's involvement has repeatedly raised the bar for political campaigning in India, pushing parties to adopt more systematic and data-driven strategies, although not all campaigns have been successful (Jaffrelot & Kumar, 2019).

But there have also been some grumblings about I-PAC's ascendance. One of them is the absence of transparency in its operations. There are fears regarding the extent of I-PAC's reach and the methods it uses to influence public opinion because the organization's exact strategies and tactics are at times veiled by secrecy. This absence of transparency, critics say, makes it difficult to hold I-PAC accountable for its actions and raises questions regarding the potential for deception and manipulation.

The company's willingness to work with various political parties, regardless of their ideology, is the target of another criticism. Due to this, some have raised questions about I-PAC's own ideological underpinnings and if its primary objective is winning elections instead of an allegiance to any particular political ideals. There are ethical issues with the role of political consultancies in a democracy due to this "mercenary" attitude, as some critics have termed it.

4.2. Nation With NAMO

Nation with Nammo is not a typical political consulting organization like I-PAC. Instead, it is more of a network and a platform that provides opportunities for engagement in the political environment to those who are aligned with PM Modi's agenda. It enables interaction and engagement in the online space by acting as a bridge between the party and its supporters.

Organizing and managing Prime Minister Modi's massive social media fan base is one of the key tasks of Nation with Nammo. It entails handling his social media presence on various platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter and maintaining consistency of message, along with engaging with his followers. This is critical to Prime Minister Modi's role of remaining connected with the people and propagating his message, given his large popularity and being one of the most followed social media leaders in the world.

Apart from monitoring PM Modi's personal accounts, Nation with Nammo plays an essential role in the coordination of the BJP's broader digital campaign. This includes content creation and sharing of content, online campaign management, and conducting outreach activities across various social media platforms. This activity is important for reaching voters, shaping public opinion, and mobilizing support for the party in a country with a large and increasingly technology-savvy population.

The operations of Nation with Nammo extend beyond regular social media administration. Furthermore, it focuses on building a web of internet volunteers and encouraging them to participate in politics. A variety of schemes, such as volunteer initiatives, online forums, and internship programmes, are utilized to achieve this. Nation with Nammo adds strength to the BJP's cyber presence and makes its internet followers feel part of it by engaging with volunteers and providing them opportunities to participate.

With the population structure of India, the focus of the organization towards digital participation becomes particularly relevant. Connecting with the youth population, which constitutes a large part of the population and is increasingly becoming active on social media, becomes crucial for electoral success. Here, Nation with Namo's efforts have played an important role in bringing young people on board and building a strong support base among this vital segment.

However, the Nation with Namo's conduct has also come under criticism. The potential for misinformation and propaganda to spread through internet platforms has concerned critics. There are fears that groups such as Nation with Namo will be utilized in order to manipulate public opinion and spread disinformation due to how easy it is to share information on social media.

The absence of transparency regarding the operations and finances of the organization is the topic of another criticism. The organization's structure and how it relates to the BJP are not well understood since it is a relatively new organization.

Despite these criticisms, Nation with Namo's impact on Indian politics cannot be denied. It has been instrumental in assisting the BJP in getting its message across online and appealing to a large and increasingly important segment of the population. Entities such as Nation with Namo are likely to have even more influence in the future as online media continues to have an ever-more important impact on political discourse.

4.3. Leadtech

Founded in 2008, Leadtech has carved out a niche for itself by providing clients with analytics, strategic campaign management, and effective communications strategies. The firm's experience spans a wide range of areas, including voter research and analytics, digital marketing, and grassroots engagement. This comprehensive approach allows Leadtech to provide customized solutions that meet the specific needs of each client, whether they are a national political party or a local candidate.

One of Leadtech's greatest strengths is that it can carry out detailed voter research and analysis. With the data analysis and the Earth survey, the company gains an in-depth insight into the voters' preferences, important questions, and demographic trends. This is then utilised to create focused campaign strategies that appeal to targeted electorate groups. With a country as fragmented as India, where demographic and regional influences dominate election outcomes, this data-driven methodology is essential for success.

Apart from research and analytics, Leadtech is also proficient in campaign management. We collaborate with political parties and candidates to create extensive election campaign plans, such as determining key messages, crafting good slogans, and arranging rallies and events. Leadtech integrates our experience in handling large-scale campaigns with a robust network of field staff and volunteers to ensure these plans are implemented seamlessly. In today's digital world, an online presence is critical for any political campaign. Sensing this, Leadtech provides a variety of digital marketing services such as social media management, content creation, and online advertising. The company assists its clients in creating a robust online presence, interacting with voters on social media platforms, and disseminating their messages through digital media.

Leadtech's dedication to delivering complete solutions does not stop with elections. Leadtech also provides governance-related services to assist political leaders and policymakers in making informed decisions by understanding public opinion. The governance focus highlights Leadtech's dedication to contributing positively to the Indian political process. Although Leadtech has kept a relatively lower public profile than some other political consultancies, its efforts have been noticed and acknowledged by its clients. The firm's emphasis on data-driven tactics, tailored solutions, and boots-on-the-ground implementation has enabled many political parties and candidates to reach their electoral objectives. However, like every other political consulting firm, Leadtech is faced with some problems, most of which are the risk of misinformation being manipulated and disseminated through online mediums. As social networks are becoming increasingly significant to political campaigns, we are alarmed at spreading propaganda using firms such as LeadTech and manipulating public opinion.

Another challenge is ensuring transparency and accountability. With political consulting companies playing a larger role in the electoral process, there is a need to ensure increased transparency in their operations and funding. This holds the companies accountable for their actions and ensures that their operations are ethical.

4.4. Design Boxed

DesignBoxed was founded by Naresh Arora as a digital marketing firm in 2011. But sensing the increasing role played by digital media in shaping political rhetoric and voter attitude, it shifted quickly to political consulting. It merged its intimate knowledge of Indian political dynamics with its experience in digital marketing and developed effective campaigns that could garner sizable backing for its clients.

One of DesignBoxed's greatest strengths lies in its ability to appeal to young voters. The company factors in the need to turn towards this demographic, which is more active on social networks and holds a crucial role in the training of elections. DesignBoxed was crucial in developing communication plans that appeal to the youth audience, assisting the congress party in engaging with this critical section of the electorate. Designboxed Expertise is not limited to digital marketing. The company also offers a number of other services, including campaign planning, voter research and analysis, and on-site mobilization. This comprehensive approach enables DesignBoxed to deliver tailored solutions that address the specific requirements of its clients, be they national-level political parties or local politicians.

DesignBoxed's work with the Indian National Congress Party is especially interesting. It helped to strategize and implement the party's communications campaigns in various elections at both the national and state levels. The Indian National Congress Party has struggled in recent years, but DesignBoxed's work has helped the party keep its online presence and reach voters nationwide. One of DesignBoxed's more prominent campaigns was its engagement with the Congress Party in the 2017 Punjab Assembly elections. The company's strategic inputs and effective communication strategies were crucial to the party's success, showing that it can produce results in a tough political climate. Yet DesignBoxed, like other political consulting firms, has had its own set of issues and

criticisms. One of them is the transparency of its operations and funding. As a relatively new company, the company's structure and its relationship with the Congress Party are not entirely transparent. This lack of transparency creates questions about his accountability and the scope of his influence on the political process. Another criticism relates to the manipulation and dissemination of disinformation through digital means. As social media becomes an increasingly key battleground for political campaigns, some worry that firms like DesignBoxed will be used to disseminate propaganda and manipulate the public.

5. Impact on Democracy

In the current political landscape, political consultancies are an undeniable force. Political consultancies have an important influence on elections, campaigns, and even the governance process itself due to their expertise in strategy, communication, and data. However, their rising popularity raises some ethical concerns that must be critically analyzed. The potential for manipulation, the lack of clarity about the line separating advocacy and reality, and their impact on democratic processes, transparency, and accountability of these consultancies are some key ethical concerns.

5.1. Manipulation: Shaping Public Opinion

The potential for manipulation is one of the central ethical dilemmas surrounding political consultants. Consultants often employ sophisticated tactics to influence public opinion, including micromessaging, targeted advertising, and even the spread of misinformation (Bartels & Jackman, 2014). By bypassing rational debate and undermining well-informed decision-making, these tactics can exploit voters' biases and emotions. Micro-targeting, for instance, can be employed by campaigns to tailor messages to individuals based on their online activity, potentially exploiting their vulnerabilities. The ethical responsibilities of consultants in shaping public opinion are brought into question because the line between manipulative propaganda and persuasive advocacy can be very thin. Are they crafting narratives designed to elicit specific emotional responses regardless of factuality, or are they spreading facts to inform voters? These are questions that do come to the minds of citizens who go into the tactics of these consultancies.

5.2. Truth vs. Advocacy

Furthermore, there are also ethical problems with advocacy. Consultants are hired to promote their clients' interests, which sometimes conflict with the common good. They may be tempted to prioritize winning over telling the truth, potentially leading to the dissemination of misinformation or suppression of facts that are uncomfortable (McGann, 2007). This undermines the integrity of the political process and the capacity of citizens to make informed decisions on the basis of reliable information. The pressure to win may result in the strategic withholding of important details or the magnification of an opponent's weakness, obscuring the boundaries of ethical campaigning.

5.3. Data, Technology, and Privacy

The growing dependence on data and technology in political consulting also has ethical alarm bells. Data analysis enables consultants to appeal to specific groups with tailored messages, thereby exacerbating societal fragmentation and eroding the idea of a common public space (Pariser, 2011). The voters can become even more polarized due to the capacity of algorithms to create “filter bubbles” where individuals are only presented with data that reinforces their existing views. In addition, there are serious privacy concerns with the utilization of personal information in political campaigns because it can be utilized to sway voters’ choices without their awareness or consent. The Cambridge Analytica scandal is a stark reminder of the misuse of data in the political sphere.

5.4. Accountability and Transparency

In addition, one of the biggest ethical challenges posed by political consultancies is the opacity of much of their business. It is difficult to hold consultants accountable for their actions since the identities of donors, the strategies employed, and the extent of influence wielded are often hidden from the public eye (Lessig, 2011). Besides creating an uneven playing field where some actors have access to resources and information that others do not, this lack of transparency can erode public trust in the democratic process. This issue is underscored by the role of “black money” in politics, which is often facilitated by shady consultancy deals.

5.5. Conflicts of Interest Between Consultants and Clients

The risk of conflicts of interest is another moral consideration. Consultants can have multiple customers, some of whom share competing interests, and thereby find themselves in situations where conditions other than the needs of the specific client can influence their recommendations or conduct (Thompson, 2017). This can undermine trust in the impartiality of the consultant and raise questions about their commitment to serving each client’s interest. When providing advice regarding policy stances, for example, a consultant who represents a lobbying firm operating within the same industry as well as a political candidate can face a conflict.

5.6. Free and Fair Elections

The primary goal of the Election Commission of India is to organize free and fair elections in the nation. The Indian constitution assigns some powers and authorities to the Elections Commission so that it can perform its tasks with maximum precision. However, the political consultancies’ strategies always work against the goals of the election commission. The campaign strategies may be of any type since there are no strict laws to monitor the campaigning process. Therefore, we can conclude that the lack of strict monitoring of political consultancies would work against the goals of constitutional bodies like the Election Commission.

Political consultancies pose a number of complex and subtle ethical concerns. The place of political consultancies in contemporary politics is brought into serious question on account of the potential for manipulation, the vagueness of boundaries between advocacy and fact, the impact on democratic processes, and the absence of transparency. A multi-faceted approach to the resolution of these ethical concerns involves greater openness, tougher legislation, and a reassertion of concern with moral conduct in the profession. Setting moral standards and promoting best practices might be a matter for professional organizations. In the end, ensuring the fairness, transparency, and accountability of political consultants to the public whom they seek to influence is crucial to the integrity of democratic processes.

6. Conclusion

Political consulting is relatively a new concept in the field of political science and management. Since its emergence, it has played a crucial role in professionalizing electoral campaigns, which immediately side-lined the traditional campaigning methods. The increasing reliance on professional consultants in political campaigns raises significant ethical concerns. Centralizing campaign strategy may inadvertently marginalize grassroots movements and dilute the voices of ordinary citizens. While consultancies can enhance campaign efficiency, it is essential that they do not undermine fundamental democratic values such as participation and representation. Striking a balance between leveraging professional expertise and preserving democratic integrity is crucial.

As technology continues to advance, the role of political consultancies is expected to expand further in the future. Upcoming election campaigns will likely place a greater emphasis on data-driven strategies, making it vital to continuously evaluate the impact of these practices on voter participation and public confidence.

If this is the case, we can say that without political consultancy, political parties may struggle to navigate elections and electoral politics. To strengthen democracy in this evolving landscape, all stakeholders including political organizations, regulatory bodies, and members of civil society must prioritize transparency and accountability within the consulting industry. In the present-day political environment, consultancies are an added privilege to the dominant political parties. If this situation continues, political consultancies will become an undeniable need for every political party. In order to curb the widespread impact of political consultancies in elections and politics, several regulations should be introduced by the government. These regulations should ensure that the political consultancies do not overpower the functioning of any constitutional bodies like the election commission. Introducing these regulations will uphold the values of democracy.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author(s) declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article, "From Evolution to Present: A Comprehensive Analysis of Political Consultancy in

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