



AGP in the Digital Age: Social Media, Political Communication and Regional Identity

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Abstract

With the rise of digital media, political communication, election campaigns and building political identities have greatly evolved. For a region like Assam which has seen a rise of regionalism and identity politics, the increased presence of social media can provide regional political parties new means of communication and organisation to connect with the general populace. This article attempts to explore the shifting nature of the political communication of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP). It looks at the ways in which the digital age and social media have enabled the political party to build and project its identity in relation to its regional identity, appeal to youth voters and campaign. The article focuses on the changing role of the political communication of AGP and its changing relevance in the overall context of Assamese politics and media. Adopting a qualitative and analytical method, the article uses secondary resources, academic articles, election related literature, media resources, and online articles as sources of data collection to argue that social media provides an alternate political space for AGP to promote its regional identity and historical ties to the Assam Movement and target younger voters. However, it argues that in Assam, the traditional modes of political communication still hold importance and do not get overshadowed by the digital space. The article further argues that rather than just focusing on increasing visibility in the digital sphere, AGP must leverage its regional identity to reshape its relevance in contemporary Assamese politics. The study concludes that for AGP, digital media can supplement its role as a regional political party, but organisational rejuvenation and focus is needed to reinvigorate its campaign and build a contemporary relevance based on its regional identity.

Keywords: Asom Gana Parishad, regionalism, social media, political communication, regional identity, electoral politics

1. Introduction:

The relationship between politics and communication has evolved significantly with the rising of digital media. Political parties that once relied on public meetings, newspapers, pamphlets, posters, rallies and interpersonal networks now use websites and social media to connect to their audience. Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, X and WhatsApp have created

alternate spaces for political mobilisation and communication. Political communication is no longer confined to the institutions of media as the public has a direct way of connecting to political parties and their representatives. Political parties have also gained the ability to directly post messages, videos, pictures, speeches and manifestos without relying solely on traditional media.

This digital turn has specific implications for Assam as political identity has been historically linked to questions of language, culture, migration, territory and regional autonomy. The Assam Movement (1979-85) became the political backdrop against which the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) arose as one of the most important regional political parties of Assam. The regional identity of this political party has been strongly linked to Assamese regionalism and the historical legacy of the Assam Movement.

The communication landscape in which the AGP operates now has changed considerably since the 80s and the 90s. Traditional methods that relied on personal meetings, student and social organisation, newspapers, radio, television and local networks are now supplemented with digital networks. The AGP itself has embraced the digital turn as it created a website in 2004 that showcased the history of the party, objectives, achievements, candidates, election manifestos and membership to people in Assam and outside ("AGP website launched," 2004, Hindustan Times).

While the website marked the entry of the AGP in the digital space, the current social media environment has changed considerably with more possibilities and complexities than the early website. Social media has created a two-way communication channel in which political parties can upload videos, pictures, manifestos and statements while also allowing the audience to comment, share, reshare and criticise the messages put out by political parties. Contemporary studies of electoral politics in Assam show that social media is now a significant part of the political communication strategies that political parties adopt. Analysis of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and 2021 Assam Assembly elections show that political parties used a combination of traditional and digital media as their campaign tools while also acknowledging the value of traditional face-to-face communication due to the varied digital savviness of the public (Sarma and Hazarika, 2022).

With this background, this article analyses the changing role of digital political communication in relation to the AGP. While the role of social media as a tool for election campaigns is important, this article tries to focus on how digital space can be used to recreate the regional identity and strengthen the political relevance of this regional political party.

2. Literature Review:

Political parties and scholars have long argued that regional identity in Assam cannot be dissociated from the historical experiences of the Assamese people and the larger Northeastern region. Guha (1980) explored the concepts of nationalism and regionalism and created a typology of "big nationalism" and "little nationalism". His work has been useful in understanding the nuances of regional identity and the relationship between Indian nationalism, Assamese regionalism and the Northeastern separatist movements. Baruah (1999) has written extensively on the themes of nationality and identity in Assam which can be useful in analysing the political and social contours of regional identity. The Assam Movement was one of the earliest manifestations of the Assamese regional identity that took roots in the early 80s. The movement and its fallout became critical in shaping Assamese

regional identity. Scholars such as Hussain (1993) have written about the Assam Movement, its history and impact on the politics of Assam.

The creation and rise of the AGP as a regional political party saw the transformation of Assamese regionalism from a movement to a political party. Baruah (1999) and Mahanta (2013) highlight the nuances and challenges of Assamese nationalism and the difficulties of political parties such as the AGP in navigating the complexities of their identity. The electoral performance of the AGP in subsequent elections showed the difficulties of the party in leveraging its movement-turned-party tag in its political rhetoric and strategy.

Studies on digital politics offer another set of literature that is useful in analysing the role of social media and communication in Assamese politics. In Assam, political parties have been using both traditional and digital media as tools of campaign and communication. Sarma and Hazarika (2022) show that in the 2019 Lok Sabha and the 2021 Assam Assembly elections, political parties used a hybrid media model that relied on both traditional and digital media. Similarly, Saikia (2023) highlights the increased role of social media in Assamese election campaigns.

Sarma and Nath (2023) further show that social media can be a useful tool for constructing and projecting Assamese nationalistic sentiments. Their study demonstrated the ways in which Assamese online spaces were used to build and foster Assamese nationalistic identity. While these studies have demonstrated the usefulness of social media as a tool for Assamese political parties to connect to the audience in new ways, there seems to be a gap in understanding the role of social media and communication in relation to the AGP. Most of the studies analysed either focus on the historical aspects of Assamese regionalism and the Assam Movement or look at the ways in which social media has been used in Assamese election campaigns generally. Hence, this study attempts to focus specifically on the online communication of the AGP and assess the role it plays in reshaping the political relevance of this regional political party.

3. Research Objectives:

1. To examine the changing nature of the political communication of the AGP in the digital age.
2. To analyse the ways in which the AGP's social media communication engages with Assamese regional identity.
3. To explore the opportunities and challenges the digital age presents for the electoral and organisational relevance of the AGP.

4. Research Questions:

1. How has digital media changed the way in which the AGP communicates?
2. How is Assamese regional identity constructed and projected through the AGP's social media communication?
3. How can social media boost the contemporary electoral and organisational relevance of the AGP?

5. Methodology:

The article adopts a qualitative and analytical research approach. It primarily employs secondary sources such as books, academic journal articles, election-related documents, newspaper reports and publicly available digital materials. Academic literature on

regionalism, Assamese nationalism, political communication and social media were reviewed to establish the conceptual foundations of this study.

The study also takes into account publicly available political communication associated with AGP including online statements, party-related digital content and media coverage. Election data published by the Election Commission of India are employed to provide a contemporary electoral context. The data from the 2026 Assam Assembly results is particularly relevant as the party won 10 of the 126 Assembly seats, thereby demonstrating that the party maintains an identifiable electoral presence despite operating within a broader alliance-based political configuration.

The study does not attempt to measure the precise causal effect of individual social media posts on voter behaviour. Instead, it analyses digital communication within the broader political and organisational process. This approach is appropriate as political communication in Assam continues to operate within a hybrid media system that includes social media, television, newspapers, public meetings, party workers and interpersonal networks.

6. Analysis and Discussion:

6.1 From Movement Communication to Digital Communication

AGP's political communication has historically been rooted in movement politics. During the Assam Movement, political mobilisation relied upon student organisations, public meetings, demonstrations, pamphlets, newspapers and face-to-face networks. The resonance of this communication relied upon the ability to link political demands with concerns associated with identity, citizenship and political representation.

After its formation in 1985, AGP has transformed this movement-based communication into electoral communication. Election campaigns, public rallies, party meetings and conventional media became key mechanisms for communicating the party's political agenda.

The digital era has created an additional layer of communication. AGP can now communicate with audiences beyond the organisational network of its traditional operations. Digital communication allows political messages to reach Assamese communities living outside Assam as well as younger citizens who consume political information primarily through smartphones and social media.

The significance of this transition should not, however, be exaggerated. Studies on Assam's elections demonstrate that digital media operates parallel to traditional political communication. Sarma and Hazarika (2022) found that face-to-face interaction, public meetings and conventional media remained important during the 2019 and 2021 campaigns. Thus, AGP's digital communication should be understood as an extension of its political communication system rather than a complete replacement of its grassroots network.

6.2 Social Media as a New Political Space

Social media has changed the relationship between political parties and citizens. Traditional political communication was hierarchical: political leaders produced messages and citizens received them through newspapers, television or public meetings. Social media allows a more interactive environment.

For AGP, this has created several opportunities. The party can immediately respond to political developments, publicise organisational activities, circulate speeches and

communicate its position on issues relating to Assam. Photographs and videos from party meetings can also give visibility to grassroots workers and local leaders.

Digital platforms can also help a regional party overcome limitations of traditional media coverage. A party may not receive continuous coverage in mainstream national media, but its own digital platforms would allow communication directly with its supporters.

The importance of this shift is evident within the general Assam political environment. Studies on the 2021 Assembly election have found that platforms such as Twitter were used for agenda setting, communication of campaigns and political messaging. The configuration of this political environment means that regional parties need to maintain an active digital presence.

6.3 Reproducing Assamese Regional Identity Online

The central challenge for AGP is how to recreate its historical regional identity in contemporary digital language. The party's political identity evolved from a movement that emphasised Assamese political rights, cultural identity and concerns relating to migration and citizenship. These themes continue to be critical, but younger voters experience these issues within a substantially different political and technological environment.

Social media can offer a mechanism to reconstruct regional identity through images, historical references, cultural symbols, language and political narratives. Digital content related to Assamese festivals, language, literature, historical personalities and cultural practices can link political communication with broader notions of regional belonging.

However, identity communication also has risks. Social media can reduce complex political questions into emotionally-powerful slogans. It can encourage binary depictions of "insiders" and "outsiders" and may reinforce polarisation. Studies on Assamese cyberspace have demonstrated how online spaces can reproduce specific forms of Assamese nationalist identity and political imagery (Sarma & Nath, 2023).

Thus, AGP's digital politics entails balancing the preservation of regional identity with the creation of an inclusive contemporary political narrative. A regional identity that focusses exclusively on historical grievances may find limited resonance amongst younger voters whose political concerns also include employment, education, entrepreneurship, infrastructure, climate change, digital connectivity and economic opportunities.

6.4 Youth and Digital Political Engagement

Youth represent an important audience for digital political communication. Younger voters are more likely to encounter political messages on smartphones, social networking sites, short videos and online discussions. For a party that emerged from a student-led mass movement, youth engagement has special significance.

Challenges arise because historical legitimacy does not automatically translate into contemporary political support. Young voters who were not born during the Assam Movement may have limited direct experience of it. Consequently, AGP cannot rely only on historical narratives to retain political relevance.

Digital communication can overcome this intergenerational gap through appropriately framed historical narratives. The party's history could be presented through short videos, movement participant interviews, archival photos, documentaries and interactive

discussions. Historical memory can be transformed into a valuable political asset through creative digital content.

AGP's capacity to engage youth therefore depends not simply on social media accounts but on compelling content. Online discussions, youth-oriented campaigns, issue-specific digital programmes and young people's ability to communicate with party representatives can create a more participatory political culture.

6.5 Digital Media and Electoral Mobilisation

Social media can contribute to electoral mobilisation in multiple ways. First, it enhances candidate and party visibility. Second, it enables rapid dissemination of campaign messages. Third, it creates opportunities for supporter-party interaction. Fourth, it allows parties to quickly respond to opponent claims.

It is important to recognise, however, that digital visibility does not necessarily equal electoral success. The 2026 Assembly election results testify to AGP's continuing electoral relevance as a party that won 10 seats, but it is a relatively smaller force compared to the BJP which won 82 seats. The results therefore indicate that digital communication alone is insufficient to determine the political position of a regional party.

Electoral mobilisation ultimately depends on candidate reputation, organisational networks, alliance dynamics, local issues, caste and community connections, leadership, government performance and voter perceptions. Social media simply operates within this wider political context.

For AGP, the most effective digital strategy may therefore be one that integrates online communication with offline organisation. Social media can advertise a village meeting, but local party workers are needed to maintain political relationships. Digital campaigns can generate awareness, but electoral support requires sustained engagement.

6.6 The Importance of Hybrid Political Communication

The Assam experience demonstrates the interconnectedness of digital and traditional political communication. Political parties operate within a hybrid media environment where social media, television, newspapers, meetings and interpersonal communication interact.

Sarma and Hazarika (2022) highlight that traditional political communication and face-to-face campaigning continued to play an important role in Assam despite the rise of social media. This is particularly pertinent to AGP because its historical strengths have been rooted in grassroots political networks.

AGP should thus avoid replacing its grassroots organisation with digital communication. Instead, digital platforms can complement organisational structures. District-level meetings, constituency activities and grassroots campaigns can be documented and disseminated online. At the same time, online engagement can help mobilise people for offline activities.

This integrated approach might be especially valuable in rural and semi-urban Assam where digital accessibility and communication patterns vary considerably across communities.

6.7 Challenges of AGP's Digital Politics

Despite its possibilities, digital political communication entails serious challenges. Firstly, there is the issue of competition. AGP operates in an environment where bigger political parties can invest significantly more resources in professionalised digital campaigning.

A second challenge relates to content creation. Sustaining an active digital presence requires regular, visually appealing and issue-oriented content. Infrequent communication reduces online visibility and allows other political narratives to dominate.

A third challenge concerns misinformation and political polarisation. Social media enables rapid circulation of inaccurate information, doctored images and emotive claims. Recent research on Assam's 2026 election environment has identified concerns regarding misinformation, disinformation and manipulated political narratives in digital spaces.

A fourth challenge involves the relationship between regional identity and online polarisation. Digital platforms can enhance cultural consciousness but also contribute to division. For a regional party like AGP, this poses a delicate balancing act: how to defend regional interests without enabling digital identity politics to become exclusionary.

Finally, digital communication requires organisational adaptation. A party cannot build a digital presence simply by establishing social media accounts. It needs trained communication teams, content strategies, rapid response capabilities, multilingual communication and coordination between central and grassroots units.

6.8 Rethinking AGP's Regional Political Identity

The digital age offers AGP the opportunity to rethink its regional political identity. Regionalism cannot be restricted to the concerns of the 1980s. While historical issues continue to be important, contemporary regional politics needs to encompass economic development, employment, education, environmental concerns, cultural preservation, technological advances and federal relations.

AGP's regional identity could therefore be reinterpreted in terms of a broader conception of Assam's political, cultural and developmental interests. Such a framework could enable the party to maintain its historical identity while addressing new generations.

The party's continuing electoral relevance demonstrates that regional politics has not disappeared from Assam. The 2026 Assembly results in which AGP won 10 seats attest to this electoral presence. At the same time, its position within a wider alliance system means that its autonomous political identity needs to be carefully articulated.

Digital media can become a crucial terrain for this exercise. Through consistent communication, historical memory, cultural content and contemporary policy debates, AGP can depict regionalism as a vibrant political project rather than a moribund historical idea.

7. Conclusion:

The evolution of political communication through digital media has created both opportunities and challenges for the Asom Gana Parishad. As a regional party that emerged from the Assam Movement, AGP has a unique historical identity that can provide a solid foundation for digital political communication. Social media enables the party to communicate directly with citizens, especially younger generations, and to share political, cultural and organisational messages without being entirely dependent on traditional media.

However, digital presence alone cannot guarantee electoral revival or organisational revitalisation. Evidence from Assam suggests that political communication continues to function within a hybrid system where social media interacts with television, newspapers, meetings and grassroots networks. The continued electoral presence of AGP in the 2026

Assembly election further demonstrates that regional politics remains relevant, albeit from a significantly different position than during its times of electoral ascendancy.

The major challenge that lies ahead for AGP is therefore not a technological one but a political one. The party needs to effectively reinterpret the historical values associated with Assamese regionalism into a contemporary political agenda that appeals to younger voters. Social media can facilitate this process by connecting historical memory with current concerns and by enabling more interactive forms of political participation.

AGP's vulnerability to misinformation, polarisation and exclusivity should nevertheless be recognised. A sustainable digital strategy needs to focus on regional identity while being sensitive to Assam's social and cultural diversity.

AGP's future political relevance ultimately depends on its ability to combine its online communication with grassroots organisation, contemporary policy concerns and ideological clarity. Digital media can provide the medium, but political significance will continue to depend on the party's capacity to build trust, represent regional interests and engage citizens beyond the electoral cycle.

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