

CHAPTER 7

MAJOR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter summarises the study's significant findings based on the data analysis done in the previous chapter. The study examined the performance of Indian news media during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. This chapter provides a detailed overview of the findings, which fulfil the research objectives. There are five sections in this chapter. The first section introduces the major findings concerning the research objectives. The second section provides a comprehensive summary of themes featured in "So Sorry" politoons. The third section gives a detailed overview of the representation of political parties in "So Sorry" politoons. The fourth section uncovers the imageries constructed in the episodes of "So Sorry" politoons. The last section leads to the discussion, where I have illuminated the key notions of the propaganda model and filters in connection to the TV Today Network that produces and broadcasts the "So Sorry" politoons.

7.1 Major Findings

The attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of people today are influenced by a wide range of factors, including the news media. Three extensively researched ideas and methods of influence are summarised in this entry: Agenda-setting, which happens when an issue receives more media attention and people perceive it to be more critical; priming, in which the importance of an idea is used as the basis for evaluation and judgement; and framing, a set of procedures by which news content is produced and influences people's perceptions and actions. The research objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the themes featured in "So Sorry" politoons
2. To explore how the political parties in India are represented in the "So Sorry" politoons
3. To investigate the imageries constructed in the episodes of "So Sorry" politoons

The major findings of this study are discussed in length in the next section of this chapter. The study's findings resemble the results of several previous studies reflecting the role of media in electoral politics and setting the agenda.

7.1.1 Themes Featured in "So Sorry" Politoons

In the "So Sorry" politoons, dominant themes differed during pre-elections episodes

compared to post-elections episodes. In pre-elections episodes, themes focused on votes, the political party's depiction, politically important state or constituency, the party's manifesto and schemes, political alliance and relationships, and the political leader's aspiration to become prime minister. On the other side, the dominant themes observed in post-election episodes were the BJP's victory, the Congress party's defeat, and the Modi government's second tenure. There is a total of nine dominant themes discovered from the data. The details of the themes are given below:

The first theme is the "2019 Lok Sabha Elections." This theme is the dominant theme in all the episodes. Under this theme, all those episodes mentioned where the discussion about the 2019 elections is directly and indirectly (for example, in visuals, conversations, actions, dialogues, lyrics, etc.) have been observed. There are some episodes where this theme is rightly visible. In this theme, the primary focus is on how the BJP and the Congress party, specifically Narendra Modi and Rahul Gandhi, tried to convince the voters to vote for their party. For that, they mention the work done by their party in the previous years. They are also trying to tempt the voters through new schemes they will implement if they win the elections.

For example, there is a mention of INR 72,000 per year under the Nyuntam Aay Yojana (NYAY), or minimum income guarantee, which Rahul Gandhi promised to the people. Gandhi also asked Modi about his promise during the 2014 elections that 15 lakh INR per annum would be credited to every person's account. On 6th Feb. 2015, Amit Shah, the BJP's president, said that Narendra Modi's 'promise' as the party's PM candidate that when black money is repatriated from abroad, each Indian will receive INR 15 lakh is an idiom that should not take literally. Whereas from the BJP's side, Modi also talked about the *Swachh Bharat Mission* and the benefits of the *Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana*. In some episodes from the BJP side, confidence has shown that the BJP will win in the 2019 elections, for example, "*abki baar chowkidar*" (this time it is watchman).

The second is "Aspiration to become the Prime Minister of India." This is one of the dominant themes noticeable in many episodes. In this theme, I have mentioned those stances where political leaders have shown aspiring to become PM. I have further categorised this theme with the prominent political leaders' names. In this theme, Narendra Modi has been given more space in the episodes and portrayed in such a matter that he has a very high prospect of becoming the next PM. In the case of Rahul Gandhi,

Akhilesh Yadav, Mayawati, and Mamata Banerjee has also been depicted as other powerful contenders for the PM race.

The third theme is “Political Alliance.” An alliance means “a group of countries, political parties, or people who have agreed to work together because of shared interests or aims,” (Cambridge Dictionary). Whereas political alliance (definitions.net.) is define as

“A political alliance also referred to as a political coalition or political bloc, is an agreement for cooperation among different political parties on common political agenda, often for purposes of contesting an election to mutually benefit by collectively clearing election thresholds or otherwise benefiting from characteristics of the voting system or for government formation after elections. These may break up quickly or hold together for decades, becoming the de-facto norm, operating almost as a single unit. A coalition government is formed when a political alliance comes to power, or when only a plurality (not a majority) has not been reached, and several parties must work together to govern.”

In “So Sorry” politoon episodes, the political alliance is one of the significant themes to discuss. On many occasions in the episodes, cartoonists have tried to reflect the relationship between alliance parties. Data has shown some conflicts are under the grand alliance of political party leaders. They have issues of trust, power, support and care for each other. The leaders tried to push each other behind so that they move forward to become the suitable Prime Minister candidate among the ally parties. Besides that, the BJP’s relationship with the ally parties has shown distrust. In the later episodes, the BJP claimed that the party alone was sufficient to fight against the grand alliance. Modi is saying that they alone would win the elections with the majority.

The fourth theme is “Depiction of BJP leaders.” In the theme, I have discussed those frames of the episodes where the portrayal of Modi, Shah and other BJP leaders is significant. The categories I have included under this theme are songs used for them, the characters they portrayed, prominent expressions, powerful emotions they expressed, and dialogues. I have conferred this theme with examples in the analysis chapter. In most episodes, Modi is depicted as a strong, heroic, and confident personality who always comes to save his party and country.

The fifth theme is “Depiction of Indian National Congress Party.” I have discussed those frames of the episodes where Congress party leaders’ depiction is significant. The

categories I have included under this theme are the crucial events, topics, songs used for Congress leaders, the Characters they portrayed, prominent expressions, powerful emotions they have expressed, and dialogues. In most episodes, Rahul Gandhi is described as a child who gets happy, angry, and sad over small things. The personality of Gandhi is depicted as weak, kiddish, helpless, and foolish. The most common expressions used for Gandhi are agitated, helpless, vulnerable, sad, excited, and frightened.

The sixth is “Depiction of Arvind Kejriwal, Akhilesh Yadav, Mayawati and Mamata Banerjee.” I have discussed the representation of Arvind Kejriwal, Akhilesh Yadav, Mayawati, and Mamata Banerjee in this theme. The categories I have included under this theme are the characters they portrayed, prominent expressions, significant emotions they expressed, and dialogues. In this theme, I have talked about how the other political party’s leaders have been designated and represented in these episodes. Arvind Kejriwal has been portrayed as an insignificant figure in Indian politics, and he has been treated like a someone outsider who does not know anything. In the case of Akhilesh Yadav, he has always been depicted as a child. A person who does not have an understanding of any topic. Whatever correct work he does always turns wrong. Mayawati has represented as a mature neutral woman who is always busy fighting and discontent with Akhilesh Yadav. In comparison, Mamata Banerjee is depicted as clever and wants to win the election with her smartness and diplomacy. She is also portrayed as an angry woman who gets irritated when the BJP interfere with her party matters, and things do not work according to her.

The seventh theme is “Important states/constituencies for the elections.” The theme focuses on those states/constituencies that had given special space and frames in the episodes. In this theme, I have spoken about those places whose state affairs were represented in the episodes. Seven episodes are entirely focused on state/constituency subject matter. Two episodes are concentrated in Karnataka, in which “*Karnataka ke sholey*” has also mentioned Madhya Pradesh; two are on Patna, two are on West Bengal, and one is on Madhya Pradesh. Episodes focused on Karnataka have raised the issue of state elections with the fall and rise of the BJP. “*Karnataka ke sholey*” had shown the pain of BJP leaders when Congress made Government in the state with the coalition. In the episode, “*operation kamal*” had celebrated when in 2019, BJP formed the

Government after the collapse of UPA. Episodes focused on Patna had represented the issue of Shatrughan Sinha when he left the BJP and joined the Congress party. In the episode, “*Patna Sahib ki Jung*” imitated Patna’s voting day scene. The episode is about a fight between two candidates that is Ravi Shankar Prasad (BJP) and Shatrughan Sinha (Congress). Both tried to convince the voter the vote with their *logical* reasons.

The VIP security status of Akhilesh Yadav and Shatrughan Sinha was clipped, and in the episode, “*VIP security*” cartoonists made fun of Akhilesh Yadav and Shatrughan Sinha. Episodes focused on Madhya Pradesh represented the issue of when the BJP challenged Kamal Nath that they would destabilise his Government. Later in March 2020, BJP formed the Government in MP. In both episodes, Kamal Nath is portrayed where he is telling Amit Shah, do not keep your eyes on my state because he is very much concerned about this, and he does not want the same as happened in Karnataka. Episodes focused on West Bengal have also presented the same issue, where the BJP got the MLA of Banerjee’s party and joined the BJP. All seven episodes regarding the state/constituency have rejoiced the fall of Congress and the congress leader. Through these episodes, they have highlighted the rise of the BJP and indirectly have set the propaganda.

The eighth theme is “Noteworthy topics illustrated in the episodes,” or we can also say miscellaneous. In this theme, I have discussed all those significant events, objects, and issues illustrated in the “So Sorry” politoons episodes. All those events, objects, and issues that do not fall under any other theme have been mentioned under this theme. In the episodes, there are some reflects where cartoonists have tried to pay attention to topics like upper-class, casteism, reservation, article 370, triple talaq, terrorism in Kashmir, the Pulwama attack, the Balakot airstrike, India’s GDP, Budget, and inflation. I explained the context in which issues have been represented in the data analysis section. The argument has been made in the discussion section to understand these issues in the context of the propaganda model.

The last theme is the “Modi government 2.0 (second tenure).” In this theme, I have talked about the second tenure of Modi’s Government administration. All the topics and events illustrated during Modi’s second government tenure have been covered under this theme. Under this theme, the Government’s image has been created as hard-working, disciplined, and strict for BJP leaders. It has shown that the Government has done many good works in the country, such as the tiger population, awareness about the animal

protection act, and nature friendly. In the case of Kashmir, the Government has worked hard to fight against terrorism in Kashmir and made people happy after repelling article 370 from J&K. Overall, the Government's image has been shown in a positive light.

7.1.2 Representation of Political Parties in “So Sorry” Politoons

In this section, I have provided an overview of the representation of political parties in “So Sorry” politoons episodes from 1st Jan. 2019 to 31st Aug. 2019.

Strong Jugalbandi (partnership) in the ruling party and infighting among opposition parties

The study's findings suggest that there is strong *Jugalbandi* (partnership) among the “ruling party,” and the difference is in “opposition parties” leaders. In data analysis, I have observed that strong collaboration has been portrayed in the ruling party—for example, no aspiration to become PM of India. No leader of the BJP has been shown fighting for or aspiring to become PM. All the members and leaders of the BJP has been portrayed as a supporter of Modi. They have demonstrated harmonising with Modi's decision. The ruling party have been represented as a stable Government with no conflict. In the case of the BJP alliance or ally parties, only one episode has shown that Modi and Shah are unhappy with the absence of the ally party. In most episodes, it has shown that the BJP is a strong party. Before the 2019 Lok Sabha election, BJP was not in a good relationship with its ally parties like the opposition. But in the “So Sorry” politoons, the cartoonists had focused more on showing infighting opposition parties. In contrast, portrayed BJP is the party that alone is sufficient to win the elections with the majority.

In dissimilarity, the character assassination of opposition leaders has been observed in the “So Sorry” politoons episodes. The grand alliance has been portrayed as unstable, and many conflicts and issues have been shown under the grand alliance of political party leaders. They have problems of distrust, and power has been highlighted the most under the grand alliance. Opposition leaders were shown in episodes as non-supportive and uncaring for each other. The leaders are trying to push each other behind, so they move forward to become the suitable Prime Minister candidate among the ally parties. The overall image of the opposition leaders is portrayed as unstable and weak.

Portrayal of Rahul Gandhi

The Indian National Congress had conquered Indian politics for approximately seven decades since independence from the British. The party lost its ability to deliver government and came to be seen as corrupt, distant, and unmotivated, particularly under the previous Congress-led administration that started in 2009. Throughout Manmohan Singh's second tenure as prime minister, corruption scandals involving top party figures and even cabinet members had dominated the news. Rahul's seeming unwillingness to assume political responsibilities has been depicted in the media ever since Sonia Gandhi made her son the party's unofficial choice to lead it in the 2014 elections. One of the key underlying causes of the Congress Party's disgraceful performance in the 2014 and "2019 Lok Sabha elections" was his seeming inexperience and discomfort in political affairs.

In the 2019 elections, the BJP emphasised Modi's strong leadership abilities and pledged that he would bring economic growth and governance to everyone of India. In comparison to the Congress Party and its front-runner candidate Gandhi, the BJP seemed assured. Gandhi was Modi's major opponent, but the BJP campaign could afford to overlook him and instead concentrate on cultivating a good image of its own candidate due to Gandhi's apparent neglect by the media before to the commencement of the elections and his perceived weakness and hesitation. The BJP under Modi used a "charm strategy" of self-promotion, mostly avoiding attack commercials against other candidates.

The Congress Party is operating under the opposing logic. The party attempted to divert as much attention away from its own candidate, who was already mostly ignored by the press, while knowing how poorly Gandhi fared in interviews and other public settings. Congress employed an aggressive attack approach in its campaign, concentrating almost solely on cultivating a bad image of its main rival, Narendra Modi, in light of the significant media coverage he got. In the episodes of "So Sorry" politoons, the same trend has been seen where they had made the appearance and action of Rahul Gandhi's ridicule.

In most episodes, Rahul Gandhi is portrayed as a child who gets happy, angry, and sad over small things. The personality of Gandhi is depicted as weak, kiddish, helpless, and

foolish. The most common expressions used for Gandhi are agitated, helpless, vulnerable, sad, excited, and frightened. He is depicted as a child (Rathee, 2020) who constantly needs pampering from his mother and sister in many episodes. In one episode, where he asked a sensible question about the proof of the airstrike to Modi, Modi started pulling Gandhi's cheeks as if he were a child. This kind of narrative about Gandhi is presented all over the Indian media. For example, in July 2018, UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath stated,

“the entire nation has already rejected Rahul Gandhi's childish acts. The no-confidence motion has exposed Congress. The statements & acts of opposition during the motion were immature & reveal their actual personality” (Sinha, 2018)

Dec. 2019, Sudhanshu Trivedi, a BJP politician, commented on Gandhi for Gandhi's remarks, alleging that it is part of his personality to make “childish statements” (ANI, 2019) and then refuse to apologise. Gandhi, according to Trivedi, made specific allegations about the Rafale deal and afterwards apologised for them. Even the *Shiv Sena* commented on Gandhi in the editorial published in *Saamana* (a Marathi-language daily newspaper), that the Congress had suffered a “humiliating defeat” because Rahul Gandhi does not have a personality that attracts people, and his speeches and style are unimpressive, Modi has Amit Shah, who has good organisational skills. Rahul Gandhi has childish things or pensioners' club, (Express News Service, 2019).

No land for Opposition parties

Akhilesh Yadav became the “youngest chief minister of the state of Uttar Pradesh” (Goyal, 2022) in 2012. He promised a break from his SP's Luddite politics and its baggage of affiliation with legendary history-sheeters. In comparison, Mayawati was Uttar Pradesh's chief minister for four different periods. She serves as the president of the “Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP),” a group that advocates for social change for Bahujans also referred to as members of other backward castes, scheduled castes, and scheduled tribes, as well as members of these castes who have become minorities. She served as chief minister from 2002 to 2003, from 2007 to 2012, and for a brief while in 1995, 1997, and again in 2002, (Agrawal, 2022).

After more than 20 years of conflict, the “Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)” and “Samajwadi Party (SP)” agreed to work together in Uttar Pradesh to stop their electoral decline,

which began with the 2014 parliamentary elections. Before the 2019 elections, the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) agreed to work together in the Lok Sabha elections. They made a formal declaration of their alliance in January 2019. The two parties and the Congress have been adamant that their main objective for the 2019 elections is to defeat the BJP in Uttar Pradesh and stop it from further undermining democracy and secularism. The BSP and SP's partnership increases the region's importance to the nation.

Additionally, it represents the claims made by the Dalits and Other Backward Classes, who helped regional parties gain popularity in India (Ashraf, 2019). There are 80 Lok Sabha seats in all of Uttar Pradesh. Both the SP and the BSP chose to run candidates for 76 seats. Each candidate had run for 38 seats. The Congress and others filled the final four seats. BSP-SP had not contested the seat in Amethi to show support for Rahul Gandhi to defeat the BJP from the state. On the other hand, local parties like the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and Trinamool Congress (TMC) have praised the SP-BSP partnership.

But, before the 2019 election, both Akhilesh Yadav of the SP and Mayawati of the BSP rejected the idea of allying. However, the SP and BSP combined received more votes than the BJP, ultimately winning the election and forming the new Government. The failure of the two parties, who support the rights of the marginalised, to win over their captive voters to one another is mentioned as the basis of the alliance's dissolution (*gathbandhan*). The two parties were able to transfer votes to each other, albeit to varying degrees; therefore, their poor performance in the 2019 elections was not due to their inability to transfer votes. Their poor performance has other external causes (Kumar, 2019).

The portrayal of Akhilesh Yadav and Mayawati in "So Sorry" politoons have shown their peculiar *Bua-Bhatija* relationship. In the case of Akhilesh Yadav, he has always been depicted as a child. A person who does not have an understanding of any topic. Whatever correct work he does always turns wrong. Mayawati has represented as a mature neutral woman who is always busy fighting and discontent with Akhilesh Yadav.

Arvind Kejriwal

India Against Corruption movement, which got its start in 2011, gave rise to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). Leading movement figures like Arvind Kejriwal, currently Delhi's Chief Minister, initially collaborated closely with the BJP to draw attention to the UPA government's corruption. They had media support and were adept at using social media. Prominent TV commentators compared it to the Arab Spring as they rallied millions to march across Delhi, seeking the resignation of the then-chief minister Sheila Dikshit.

The IAC (India Against Corruption) movement contributed to a perception of the Congress' impending demise, along with the Modi media blitz. The BJP and Modi were the biggest winners from this. Kejriwal led a faction of the IAC to become a political party, the AAP, despite the resistance of BJP luminaries in the movement. As a result, Kejriwal and his supporters became the BJP's enemies. With the campaign slogan "Modi for PM, Kejriwal for CM," Kejriwal accepted Modi's leadership in the 2013 Delhi assembly election. However, Modi and Kejriwal grew apart after the AAP initially formed a government with the backing of the Congress and won 67 of the 70 seats in a subsequent election, with the BJP taking the remaining three. His muffler-man persona, which embodies the name of his party (Aam Aadmi Party, which translates to The Common Man's Party), makes him appear sartorially identical to millions of Delhi's lower-middle class and destitute citizens, creating an exaggerated contrast with Modi, (Sinha, 2017).

But, during the Lok Sabha elections, unlike the Indian National Congress and the BJP, the Aam Adami Party lacked the funding necessary to conduct a national campaign. As a result, it focused on areas where it believed it had a chance of winning. The BJP candidates were frequently the AAP's most significant adversaries. Therefore, the party concentrated its campaign on harsh criticisms of Modi, especially in the second half of the elections when the resounding BJP triumph became apparent. AAP only succeeded in winning one of the more than 40 seats it competed for "across nine states and union territories in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. In Delhi, Chandigarh, Bihar, Goa, Punjab, Andaman and Nicobar, Haryana, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh" (Chandran, 2019), it fielded candidates.

The AAP's apparent haste to ally with Congress looks to have hurt the party's chances. The chief minister had warned that if an AAP-Congress alliance didn't materialise, it would result in a vote split in favour of the BJP. If the BJP triumphed in such a scenario, he had declared that he would hold Congress President Rahul Gandhi accountable. Alliance negotiations dragged on and ultimately fell apart, demoralising some AAP employees. Even the Muslims eventually defected from the AAP and joined Congress (TNN, 2019). But according to experts, Kejriwal has never had a robust platform for the presidential race. The electorate never anticipated the election between Modi and Kejriwal (Pandey, 2022).

But the image of Kejriwal that mainstream media created also made him unwise. The media's disappointment with the AAP and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal started after he became Delhi's CM. Still, it hit a crescendo when they saw this unlikely hero in an AAP cap and muffler coughing in the cold while lying under a blanket (Sen, 2014). Similar influences helped create the widespread middle-class notion that Arvind Kejriwal "is a dangerous anarchist." Journalistic and academic authorities planted the idea that he was an anarchist in 2014 for political reasons, and the middle class found it to be an intriguing notion for similar political reasons. People who don't read the newspaper or watch the news on television (Hagerty and Simond, 2007) retain much clarity. A cause for Kejriwal's success in the wake of two elections, despite losing the favour of the media (Joseph, 2016).

In the case of "So Sorry" politoons, Arvind Kejriwal has been portrayed as an insignificant figure in Indian politics, and he has been treated like an outsider who does not know anything. He is someone who somehow wants to be in politics and has been depicted as desperate to be in politics. No one cares about him and his existence in politics. He has been treated as ignored by the other politicians.

7.1.3 Imageries Constructed by "So Sorry" Politoons

In this section, I have provided the findings of the imageries constructed in the episodes of "So Sorry" politoons.

TINA ‘there is no alternative’ Factor

On the other hand, the prominent narrative observed in the episodes is the “TINA factor” which means “there is no alternative” to Modi and the BJP. Gandhi is portrayed as a child who gets happy, angry, and sad over small things. The personality of Gandhi is depicted as weak, kiddish, helpless, and foolish. The most common expressions used for Gandhi are agitated, helpless, vulnerable, sad, excited, and frightened. He is depicted as a child (Rathee, 2020) who constantly needs pampering from his mother and sister in many episodes.

“In the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the only opposing face is the Congress party, Rahul Gandhi. He not only had the baggage of his dynastic background but was also a victim of consistent social media propaganda and mockery, including those carried out by the mainstream media. All these factors destroyed his reputation. He is simply not a credible alternative and choice compared to Modi. Special thanks to a pliable, fawning media that conducted a series of scripted interviews full of nonsensical questions to lift Modi’s image and create a fake aura around him. So, it is unsurprising that people saw a better leader in Modi” (Ibid).

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A similar event happened in the 2020 Delhi election. Arvind Kejriwal’s Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has swept back to power for a third term in India’s capital Delhi (Biswas, 2020). Arvind Kejriwal is not met with any significant opposition. Public was wise enough to figure out that Manoj Tiwari was the only leader the BJP had to offer, no matter how much Home Minister Amit Shah and Modi attempted to project their faces forward, (ibid). Tiwari’s reputation has been tainted by his Big Boss antics and some of his older songs. Even Modi’s fans did not take “him seriously, just as many members of the Congress did not rally behind Rahul Gandhi” (Rathee, 2020). In the end, the “TINA factor, which stands for there is no alternative,” played a role in both the 2019 Lok Sabha and the 2020 Delhi assembly elections (Rathee, 2020). Also, research by political scientists Rahul Verma and Pranav Gupta shows that when it comes to Delhi, the BJP

has always gained impressively in general elections - 46% of the popular vote in 2014 and 56% of the vote in 2019. But it then slid back to its 'core base' - some 32% of the vote - in state elections. The once-dominant Congress party that has been eclipsed might also have helped Kejriwal's party grow. Kejriwal's victory offers a halt to a broadly "divided and demoralised opposition, proving that good governance wins' votes" (Biswas, 2020). People consider different parameters when they vote in the Lok Sabha and assembly elections. We expect the people to judge based on our development work when the city votes next year, AAP spokesperson Saurabh Bhardwaj (Jacob, 2019).

It is all about Modi

Narendra Modi had amassed widespread national support long before when he was selected as the BJP's nominee for prime minister in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. His right-wing Hindu nationalist philosophy, mastery of eloquence, humble upbringing, and leadership abilities made him a hero in the eyes of many Indians, notably among them (Baumann, Zheng & McCombs, 2018). It is one of the reasons Modi received a great deal of media coverage far before he formally entered the field of national politics. Making the BJP campaign essentially a "Modi-centric campaign," the BJP has taken advantage of Modi's media attention advantage. In the 2014 elections, BJP's doctrine appeared clear before launching its official campaign: supporting the BJP = supporting Modi. The image of Modi is essential to discuss because Modi has become prime for the BJP. There was a time when it was a famous saying among political pundits, "Indira is congress, congress is Indira." In the current scenario, the same has happened with the BJP.

The "So Sorry" politoons have followed this trend and stressed Modi's strong leadership qualities. He promised he would deliver good governance, national security and economic development for all of India. Modi's BJP followed a charm strategy of self-promotion, largely abstaining from attack ads against opponent candidates. The same trend has been observed in the episodes of the "So Sorry" politoons.

Image of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been portrayed as a vital, mature, intelligent, and most appropriate PM candidate for the country. In most episodes, Modi is depicted as a strong, heroic, and confident personality who always comes to save his party and country. Modi has portrayed a tough man who had seen many hurdles during

the elections but still won the elections by the majority. Most of the time, the expressions used for Modi are neutral, calm, composed, happy, mature, proud, powerful, and successful. Modi's facial expressions shown in the episodes were anger, agitation, and stress in very few places. The image of Modi is essential to discuss because Modi represents the BJP. Thus, discussing BJP without discussing Modi will be improper and incomplete in the contemporary political scenario.

Celebrity politics and Modi portrayed as a Big B of Indian politics

Celebrity politics has been noticed in episodes, and Modi is described as a Big B of Indian politics. "Amitabh Bachchan is known as the Big B" (Green Tea Blues, 2013) of Indian cinema. He is one of the finest, Iconic personalities and India's legendary actor. Since celebrities have a far larger following, this influences public perception of the politician and dominates the news agenda. Additionally, followers of celebrities frequently view their company as an endorsement, which may eventually influence their voting preferences.

Total of seven episodes where the leaders are portrayed as Bollywood film characters. In six episodes, Modi is one of the main characters. Out of six, three episodes, such as "*tum sabot doge yan hi, chunavi mohhobaatein, and saara zamaana Modi ka deewana*". Modi, portrayed the role of Amitabh Bachchan. Amitabh Bachchan is one of the finest, Iconic personalities and India's legendary actor (Times of India). He is affectionately known as Big B. On 15th Feb. 1969, he officially entered the film industry. Bachchan has worked with many of the industry's top directors and actors throughout his four-decade career. He has won numerous awards for his roles, and until now, he has been a superstar (Ibid.). In the episode "*abki baar chowkidar, tera budget ayega, and tension nhi lene ka Modi ji, Amit bhai hai*" Modi has portrayed the role played by leading Bollywood stars such as Salman Khan, Ranveer Singh, and Sanjay Dutt resp. To show his dominance in politics.

Whereas in the episode "*Karnataka ke shole,*" Amit Shah is represented as Gabbar Singh. A fictitious character appeared in the 1975 Bollywood film Sholay as the antagonist. Sholay portrays him as a dacoit with an evil chuckle who leads a group in stealing and ravaging the villages in the Ramgarh district. Amjad Khan plays the role. He has a hostile attitude and insists on killing whenever necessary to maintain his status and

vengeance on his foes (Sahai and Wimal, 1992). The character is regarded as one of Indian cinema's most famous villains (Times of India, 2010). Khan played a parody of Ramgarh Ke Sholay's character in the 1991 farce Ramgarh Ke Sholay (News18, 2010).

This kind of trend has been followed by the mainstream media previously. Sardesai (2020, p. 206) argued that Modi's agenda dominated the media, including having a far greater share of television airtime than Rahul Gandhi and his opponents, but also due to his negative campaign attacks on the opposition plus the whipping up of nationalist sentiment after the Pulwama attack and Balakot airstrikes against Pakistan. Nevertheless, the media undoubtedly gave him a significant edge because he could mobilise his supporters on social media to propagate aggressively unfavourable comments and turn out local voters. He also had a much bigger audience across all media, particularly in vernacular language media. Such a comprehensive advantage ought to have been anticipated; the fact that it wasn't shown how politics and, especially, digital media techniques had changed the way elections are conducted. One lesson learned is the need for fresh political thinking and new thinking about how to use new digital media during elections successfully.

Boasting Modi's second tenure of the administration

The Government's image has been created as hard-working, disciplined, and strict for BJP leaders. It has shown that the Government has done many good works in the country, such as the tiger population, awareness about the animal protection act, and nature friendly. In the case of Kashmir, the Government has portrayed that it had worked hard to fight against terrorism in Kashmir and made people happy after repelling article 370 from J&K. Overall, the Government's image has been shown in a positive light.

No Critical Questions

There is no critical questioning from the Government in the episodes. Some mention issues like unemployment, Rafale deal, petrol price hike, etc., but the treatment given to subjects shows that "So Sorry" Politicians lack definitional rigour.

The same trend has been in other media outlets in India, where media is increasingly becoming incapable of asking critical questions of the Government and scrutinising its actions. In the (nominally) world's "largest democratic" (Jeannine and Schwalbe, 2013,

p. 294) country, the news media is in trouble. India's mainstream media is losing its credibility under the direct influence of political power, which is one of the biggest failures for a democratic country. Sandeep Bhushan has commented on the working of Indian English news channels (Ajith, 2019);

“Television is a dead game now. Reporting is dying in India. I know people who have quit well-settled jobs and are freelancing because they say that getting squashed every day, running agenda journalism on a full-time basis, is not worth the money.”

An example of this can be seen in handling the demonetisation policy debate. Firstly, in November 2016, many influential media houses failed to ask critical questions of the Government when they announced the demonetisation to fight corruption. At that time, many media house and journalists followed the government line. Secondly, in February 2019, after the Pulwama attack, the media overwhelmed the public with “jingoistic sentiments, unquestioningly dissemination the Government line in print and broadcasting on TV that the Indian Air Force had killed a very large number of militants from the Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorist group” (BBC, 2019). The episode “*Imran ki notanky sir par aatanky*” followed the same trend as other media houses.

As each of the examples above demonstrate, the Indian media failed to ask critical questions of the Government. This is a major problem in India's mainstream media: they function as a government ally because of the fear of being targeted by the Government. The Government “attacks are often directed against those who are deemed to be opposed to the ruling BJP” or affiliated organisations (Bhat and Chadha, 2020). The working conditions of journalists in India have deteriorated. Thus, more than 50 Indian journalists who tried to show the government in poor light have been arrested or had police complaints registered against them, or been physically assaulted (Raza, 2020) in July 2020. Prominent media figures and journalists have resigned recently due to the controversy their investigative reporting caused (Bajpai, 2018). In July 2021, tax raids were carried out in the offices *Danik Bhaskar*, which is one of the widely read and popular Hindi “newspapers, after months of critical coverage of the Government's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic” (Petersen, 2021).

On 10th Sept. 2021, the Indian tax authority also raided the *Newslick* and *Newslandry* (independent news media outlets) offices. These are evident intimidation

techniques directed at two publications known to be critical of authorities. According to the 2021 World Press Freedom Index, India has been classified as a “bad” country for journalism and is “one of the most hazardous places in the world for journalists” (The Wire Staff, 2021). In 2020, 67 journalists were imprisoned, and almost 200 were physically assaulted (Biswas, 2021).

In the Indian constitution, Article 19 (1)(a), guarantees the freedom of speech and expression, and empowers the media to serve the people with news, views, comments, and information on matters of public interest in a fair, accurate, unbiased, sober, and decent manner (Tandon, 2020). This means that freedom of speech and expression gives the media the right to express their views fairly. But political influence over media fosters attacks on press freedom, and an uncritical media “reveals the close relationships between politicians, business executives and lobbyists” (Freedom House, 2021).

Inter-Media-Agenda-Setter

McCombs (2014, 2018) and Herman & Chomsky (1988), argued that elite media tend to set the media agenda for the lower-tier media. Therefore, those media outlets are “inter-media agenda-setters” (Roberts & McCombs, 1994; McCombs, 2014). In these elite media, those “parties and the candidates get more extensive and more favourable coverage are more likely to gain an advantage over their adversaries” and also in the eye of readers.

According to India Today news channel, news editor Rahul Kanwal’s claim, the “India Today media network had garnered nearly 40.2 per cent of the viewership ratings” from 26th Sept. Sept. to 2nd Oct. 2020. According to Java point report India Today TV is the third top TV channel on the list of top 10 news channel in India. TV Today Network Ltd, a subsidiary of Living Media, owns the channel. The station debuted in 2003 as a sister channel to the Hindi media outlet Aaj Tak. This is amongst the four news stations owned by the TV Today Network, along with other channels like *Aaj Tak*, *Tez*, and *Delhi Aaj Tak*, (Javatpoint, 2020).

7.2 Discussion

7.2.1 Propaganda Model, “So Sorry” Politicians, and Indian News Media

The purposeful manipulation of public opinion has been characterised as propaganda (Silverstein, 1987:51; Jowett and O’Donnell, 1992: 4; Bussemer, 2005: 28). Allan (2004: 55–56) argued that news and propaganda should not be confused; he seems to be starting from a similar premise: the propagandist, unlike the journalist... sets out with the deliberate intention of deceiving the public, of concealing ‘the truth’ to direct public opinion in a particular way. Propaganda Model is the “most widely used propaganda approach to the news media” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988; 2008). It states that the “mass media are powerful instruments that mobilise support for the special interests that dominate state and private activity” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: xi). The model claims that in “capitalist democracies, media serve as primary propaganda vehicles and that class interests have multilevel effects on mass-media interests and choices” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: p.2).

According to the propaganda model framework, the media do not need to be controlled or their behaviour to be patterned because they are assumed to be integral actors in class warfare, fully integrated into the institutional framework, and working in conjunction with other ideological sectors, such as the academy, to establish, enforce, reinforce, and police corporate hegemony (Klaehn, 2002). In the case of “So Sorry” politicians, I have seen some similar patterns. However, the PM’s focus is on media behaviour patterns regarding institutional imperatives. Due to these institutional constraints, the PM proposes that news media content is generally aligned with state-corporate elite interests in various time and space contexts (Thompson, 2009; Herman, 1986, 2000). According to Herman and Chomsky, at least five “filtering mechanisms guide news selection processes and lead to propagandistic output” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 2). The model emphasises how ownership, corporate control and advertising funding, as well as market forces shape the individual behaviour of managers, journalists and external actors/institutions that provide information to or put pressure on the news media (Herman 1986, 2000; Herman and Chomsky 1988, 2008).

The propaganda model contends that “media personnel internalise beliefs and attitudes that influence media performance” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. x), and the same has

been observed in the performance of “So Sorry” politoons. The representations of events in the “So Sorry” politoons effectively demonstrate how editors and cartoonists have ‘adapted’ the constraints of ownership, organisation, market and political power. The “So Sorry” politoons, selections of event/issue/topic reflects that it serves the interest of the dominant elite. “So Sorry” politoons, news workers, editors, and cartoonists are typically persuaded to omit certain voices. The *TV Today Network* is one of the elite media which plays an essential role in establishing a general “framework for news discourse typically followed by the lower-tier media. The elite media determine what topics, issues, and events are considered ‘newsworthy’ by the lower-tier media” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988).

In “So Sorry” politoons, the episodes were created by the cartoonist, but there is a team of experts who decide the content/script of the politoons. According to Paresh Mehta, the team is comprised of the researcher, political expert, and cartoonist. The series is a representation of reality with imaginative elements. The making of politoons is a complex process. It is made up of various parts that had to work together to form a politoon in a short amount of time. From conceptualisation to production, the creative side is given ample attention. In order to be converted into animation, research, political expertise, and conceptualisation come together (Paul, 2019). According to Herman and Chomsky, the filter limitations have substantial unilinear effects, causing media’ interests’ and ‘choices’ to support class interests consistently.

According to propaganda model, media behaviour is explained by mechanisms and policies by which the powerful protect their interests naturally and without overt conspiracy (Herman and Chomsky, 2000). PM assumes that controlling processes are often unconscious. As a result of the constraints built into the system, meanings are essentially ‘filtered’. According to Herman and Chomsky (1988, p. 2), meanings are formed and produced unconsciously, so conscious decisions seem natural, objective, and reasonable. Due to the operation of these filters, elite media dominance and marginalisation of dissidents occur so naturally that news people, who often operate with wholehearted integrity, are able to “convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news objectively” (ibid). (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 2) The assumption is that “elite media recruit right-minded personnel” to fill staff positions.

The propaganda model's predominant concern with social class sets it apart from the gatekeeper model. According to the propaganda model, media personnel internalise beliefs and attitudes that influence media performance. However, this model can assume that media personnel act to "serve the interests of dominant elites by appealing to psychological processes within individuals" (Klaehn, 2002). At the same time, it can infer various 'self-interested' or ideological motives from structural patterns in news coverage (Ibid).

In the case of "So Sorry" politoons, I would say that in TV Today Network, the people who work there have the same ideology and thinking. When the situation is presented to cartoonists with some research and political expertise over an issue, it depends on how they use their creativity and imagination (Paul, 2019). The end product of the politoons is in support of the ideology of the TV Today Network.

Propaganda model argues that the elite media's analysis, representation, and evaluation of events demonstrates how editors and reporters have adapted the constraints of ownership, organisation, market, and political power. It asserts that elite media are intertwined with other institutional sectors in ownership, management, and social circles, effectively limiting their ability to remain analytically detached from those sectors (Doyle et al., 1997, p. 243). As a result, the elite, agenda-setting media are viewed as serving the interests of the class. Based on this assumption, media typically 'protect' the interests of dominant elites. It claims that media will mobilise and divert, promote and repress, legitimate and embrace dominant elites and dominant social structures in such a way that it will be 'useful' for them (Schlesinger, 1992, p. 306-308). It is assumed that media material serves 'political goals' and is used to 'mobilise' (or not) sympathetic sentiment for victims and anger against perpetrators. It redirects public attention away from specific news topics toward others (Cohen, 1963, p. 13).

The propaganda model appears to assume both functional needs and media impacts that are consciously desired. It believes that news discourse is framed in such a way that interpretations that support legitimate and advanced elite interests are reproduced and that the media do indeed mislead audiences. Legitimise and promote elite interests and assumes that the media does indeed mislead the public. The model believes elite institutional sectors have common interests and a cohesive governing class and institutional nexus with shared political, economic, and social goals. According to the

concept, media behaviour will reflect these interests. The performance of the media is viewed as a result of market factors. In the case of TV Today Network, they represent the broader trend of media conformism.

One of the basic tenets of the propaganda model is that limiting the range of permissible opinions while allowing highly active debate within that spectrum is an intelligent method to keep people passive and obedient. Similar trends were discovered in the examination of “So Sorry” politoons. There have been instances where the media has failed to ask any institutions about a current topic. The majority of them backed up the mainstream media’s pro-BJP sentiment.

Furthermore, one of the features of the elite’s media hegemony is that filters come so naturally to media news people that they can convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news objectively and in accordance with professional news values, even when they are acting with complete integrity and goodwill (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). Elite media select right-minded persons to occupy staff roles, Klaehn claims. Sharma (2021, p. 60) has stated that “the majority of the Indian news media is becoming one-sided and biased, losing authenticity and credibility in respect to conveying the news” in the context of Indian media. Furthermore, media opinion is significantly more polarised.

7.2.2 Five Filters of media operation

In this section, I have discussed each of the five filters in the context of Indian news media, but regarding the “So Sorry” politoons and TV Today Network, I have discussed the first three filters.

Ownership

I proceed with ownership. The majority of Indian media is owned by (national and regional) media conglomerates due to a lack of regulatory media regulations. BCCL, the Essel Group, and Zee Media Corporation are examples of these conglomerates (Mehta, 2015; Chadha, 2017). Second, individual politicians, their families, and proxies have begun to buy and run newspapers and television stations (Chadha, 2017). For example, in Telangana, the state’s chief minister, K. Chandrashekar Rao, owns T News, a channel where political ownership was previously limited. In Kannada Kasturi, the former chief

minister's wife owns the station, and other politicians run *Suvarana News* and *Samaya TV* (Alapati, 2015; Roy and Guha, 2012).

In the case of *TV Today Network*, concentrated family ownership has been found. The news channel India Today is owned by "TV Today Network Ltd," a subsidiary of "Living Media India Ltd" (listed on the National Stock Exchange and Bombay Stock Exchange). Aroon Purie and his family formed and own the TV Today Network. The details of the shares holding have been provided in the data presentation chapter. However, "Living Media India owns 56.92" percent of "TV Today Network Ltd," Aroon Purie owns 0.49 percent, and the public owns the remaining 42.58 percent. TV Today Network was founded and is owned by Aroon Purie and his family. He, his wife Rekha Purie, his daughters Kalli Purie Bhandal and Koel Purie Rinchet, and his son Ankur Purie own 100% of World Media Pvt. Ltd. (Reporter without Borders), which owns a 48.15 percent share in Living Media India Ltd. It holds a 56.92 percent ownership of TV Today Network, which distributes Hindi news stations such as "*India Today TV, Aaj Tak, Delhi Aaj Tak, and Tez.*"

According to Chadha, ownership plays a crucial role in the contemporary Indian media environment and negatively impacts the country's news output and general journalism quality (Ibid., p. 139). It is also worth noting that media ownership is getting more corporatised and politicised. Both trends are dangerous to Indian journalism and the media in general. Corporate forces are not scrutinised; hence critical media coverage is dwindling. The news has become more 'advertising-friendly.' The emphasis on entertainment is growing, with local, regional, and international news receiving inadequate attention.

Advertising

The second filter is advertising. Advertising plays a political role in India's media landscape: government advertising revenue is now significant (Reporters without Borders). As Herman and Chomsky contend, advertising is a main stream of revenue, and the impact of advertising value on the news is enormous. According to 2017 data from India's Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity, the Government's print advertising budget is INR Rp.21.34 million / USD 0.32 million for Hindi print advertising and "INR 14.09 million / USD 0.202 million for English print advertising"

(Chadha, 2017). According to the “Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC),” the BJP ruling “party had 22,099” insertions in less than a week (between 12 to 16th Nov. 2018) before the assembly elections in India’s five states (number of times an ad is broadcast on TV) (Ibid.). According to the Reporters Without Borders 2022 index report, India secured 150 positions in the freedom index, which is 142 in 2021. This report mentioned that the “Indian press is a massive machine with clay feet.” Despite “huge stock market prices,” media firms generally rely on advertising contracts with municipal and regional governments. Because there is not a clear line between “business and editorial policy, media executives” typically regard the latter as a variable that may be tweaked to meet business objectives.

“At the national level, the central government has seen that it can exploit this to impose its own narrative, and is now spending more than 130 billion rupees (5 billion euros) a year on ads in the print and online media alone” (The Quint, 2022).

Sourcing

The third filter is ‘Sourcing’. In terms of the question of objectivity in news material, it is critical. “The enormous bureaucracies of the powerful the mass media, and acquire unique access (to the news), by contributing to reducing the media’s expenses of acquiring and creating the news,” Herman and Chomsky (1988, p. 88) contend. The Government is seen as a reliable source in India’s media as the primary public institution of authority (outside religion). This is partly due to a desire to save costs by acquiring information from less expensive sources (ibid., p. 19). As a result, they create a parasitic connection with a variety of information sources that cannot be questioned in terms of their trustworthiness for fear of offending people and jeopardising access to news sources (Neel, 2019). The most recent example is the Balakot air strike in 2019, during which the Government is the only source of information. At that time, the BJP (governing party) distributed information in a way that favourably portrayed the Government’s actions. Because there were no other options, the public is led to trust the information they were given. In the “So Sorry” episode, the title “*Imran ki notanky, sir pe aa tanki*” is also based on this issue, and the Government is the only source of information. This episode is highly propagandistic, and the episode is removed from the server later.

Flak

The fourth filter is known as ‘flak,’ which Herman and Chomsky define as a “negative reaction to a media statement or programme” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 26). Sharma (2021) has stated that the Government in India is a crucial source of criticism, as it regularly criticises, threatens, and ‘corrects’ the media narrative. When India’s Ministry of Information and Broadcasting switched off *The Media One* channel, it is one of the most telling examples of government meddling. The channel was stopped for 48 hours by the Government because it reported a news topic — mob attacks on Muslims in New Delhi that erupted into broader turmoil — in a way that appeared hostile to the Delhi Police Force (Goel and Gentleman, 2020). Another example is the farmers’ protest against three new agriculture measures passed by the Modi government in September 2020. Indian farmers have been protesting at the Delhi-Haryana Singhu border since 26th Nov. 2020. One farmer died during a tractor rally on India’s Republic Day [26th Jan., 2021]. The police in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, and Delhi” have filed ten charges against Mrinal Pande, a “journalist and editor of the *National Herald*; Rajdeep Sardesai of *India Today TV*; Zafar Agha, editor of *Qaumi Awaaz*; and three other *Caravan magazine* journalists, following the incident. They were accused of anything from criminal conspiracy to sedition (Jha, 2021; Mandhani, 2021).

Anti-Communism

Anti-communism is the fifth filter. The archenemy of Western capitalist democracies is communism. On the other hand, anti-communism takes on diverse meanings in different situations as threats to the status quo evolve through place and time. Anti-communism in India displays itself in the domestic demonisation of “anti-nationalists” and the exterior confrontation between India, China, and Pakistan. Anti-nationalists are individuals and groups who advocate for concerns such as social justice, corruption, human suffering, and pluralism. They pose a danger to India with the vision of a Hindu nation-state, which he describes as “harmonious and forward-looking” (Pedro-Carañana, Broudy, and Klaehn, 2018).

Regarding foreign policy, Pakistan and China are seen as adversaries, posing a threat to India’s very existence and peace. The right-wing BJP party instils fear of the ‘enemy’ in the population, domestically and internationally, and utilises nationalism as propaganda. In place of pluralism, Hindu nationalism is promoted through television and print media (Ibid.).