

# **Performance of Indian News Media During the 2019 Lok Sabha Elections: A Study of “So Sorry” Politoons**

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## **CHAPTER 8**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter discusses the research findings outlined in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I have highlighted the significant findings concerning the research objectives and briefly comment on the points presented in the earlier chapter. This section summarises the main arguments associated with political cartoons, “So Sorry” politoons, the theoretical framework, and the methodology used in the study, to address applicability for future research. In the second section of this chapter, I have summarised the study’s limitations and provided recommendations for future research.

#### **8.1 Conclusion**

Political cartoons (Ashfaq and Hussein, 2013) are crucial for shaping public opinion on important political and social topics (Evertte, 1974; Vinson, 1967; Abraham, 2009). Political cartoons are regarded as “both opinion-moulding and opinion-reflecting” (Caswell 2004, p. 14). Coupe (1969) wrote that “like other journalists, the cartoonist is concerned with the development and manipulation of public opinion” (p. 82) because cartoons provide a safe forum for social criticism to express viewpoints and elevate public voices (Ashfaq, 2008). It influences how readers perceive politicians. Politicians may or may not benefit from the impact. It is a humorous, light-hearted, and fun kind of communication that can shape public opinion.

The “So Sorry” politoons is one of India’s most watched political cartoon series. With their preferred outfits, the colour of the dress, and party emblems, political figures are accurately portrayed to make them attractive. Based on the sensation of the event that occurred during the 2019 Lok Sabha election, they choose the news or the narrative. Most of the episodes of the series were made with Narandra Modi, and Rahul Gandhi’s election campaigns as its primary subjects. Babu and Nagarathinam (2015, p. 73) state that in “So Sorry” politoons, “the characterisation of Modi has created a huge response towards the viewers for the motion and the content how it delivers.” The top most watched episode of the “So Sorry” politoons is “The adventurous road to Bihar elections”, which has 7.4 million views. With this enormous popularity, I claim that “So Sorry” politoons are being able to (re)-shape public opinion. The dominant themes and

patterns discovered in the study support the prediction of the established of pro-BJP political agenda by the “So Sorry” politoons.

I conclude that the theoretical framework of this study — McCombs and Shaw’s agenda-setting effect and Herman and Chomsky’s propaganda model (1988) — is very appropriate for investigating political cartoons and election coverage. The corporate media is playing its part in the machinations of the BJP. The plurality of voices among journalists is in decline. India is thus becoming a more rigid regime, with the media being increasingly restricted. The primary arguments of McCombs and Shaw, and Herman and Chomsky put up for empirically validating the Agenda-Setting theory and Propaganda Model have been put to the test in this thesis.

I have explored the traditional 1980s agenda-setting theory, which focuses on how candidate images – their attributes – are constructed and how the attribute agenda-setting affects the news coverage of political candidates on the public’s image of those candidates (Baumann, Zheng & McCombs, 2018). I also have examined the impact of the “five filters, identified propaganda tactics and strategies,” and offered qualitative evidence based on case studies of “So Sorry” politoons. The analyses of the study have confirmed the prediction postulated by the agenda-setting theory that the mass media and perceived as important by their audiences. The media transfer salient issues from the media agenda to the public agenda (Baumann, Zheng & McCombs, 2018). The prediction of propaganda model (Klaehn, Pedro-Carañana, and Broudy, 2018, p. 279) that

“when the interests of the economic and political elites are strong, when there is consensus among them and oppositional forces are weak and disorganised, the most influential media will strongly support such consensus and their projects for imperial, class and racial domination both nationally and internationally.”

I acknowledge a tremendous difficulty in measuring the propaganda model in political cartoons but applied content and political economy analyses to identify different types of interests concerning elite consensus. For their presence in the media, these types include those who support the pro- BJP, those who portray the BJP image as the most powerful party in India, and those who depict no alternative to Narendra Modi.

The media’s agenda-setting and propagandistic role have been empirically confirmed in “several geographical areas, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Latin America, and Spain” (Baumann, Zheng & McCombs, 2018). In the

context of India, I can confirm the validity of the agenda-setting and propaganda model to explain news reporting in other countries different from the US, where the original analysis was conducted. Compared to Western liberal democracies, India's media and journalists are given only a modicum of legal protection from governments.

Moreover, it has been shown that the model's five guiding principles or "filters" significantly influence India's market-driven media systems. Additionally, financial money has further infiltrated the media industry and is exerting increasing power over editorial decisions and content creation. Since the most significant media rely on advertising revenues, advertising also plays an important role. Product placement, branded content, and native advertising are now commonplace. Giant Data-based personalised advertisements encourage commercialism and its acceptance at the expense of privacy.

On television, advertisements make up around a quarter of the overall broadcast time. Depending on the media product, the sourcing filter may take on several forms. The conventional norms and regulations of production, which direct producers toward reliable sources, predominate. The prevalence of conventional kinds of criticism has increased on the internet, where they frequently take the form of hate speech. People who hold opposing views are frequently attacked by corporations, governments, parties, movements, and individuals. Bots are frequently used to exert this effect on the cyber sphere, whether explicitly or secretly. The "capacity to supply flak obviously depends on resources and structure" (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). A number of dimensions relating to the prevailing beliefs are presented by the fifth filter. The internet, entertainment, and news reporting all frequently reflect and are impacted by prevailing opinions. Furthermore, there is ample scope for the "Orwellian" concept of "the war on terror," "humanitarian interventions," and "them vs. us" to incite fear, anger, and blind obedience (Klaehn, Pedro-Carañana, and Broudy, 2018).

The Propaganda model foresees a tendency for critical media performance studies and commentary to be neglected and suppressed. This idea is addressed in this study, which demonstrates how media studies avoid critically analysing media performance in a way that emphasises structural power imbalances. Censorship does not accomplish this. Instead, the academic system prioritises large-scale, data-intensive research initiatives above smaller, more focused research. These research studies escape being precarious of

the media and the function of journalists and focus instead on small and de-contextualised micro-practices. These projects receive support from the academic system and publication in monopolistic, profit-driven journals. In other words, there is a political economy within academics.

In this study, I have found that ethnographic content analysis works well for qualitative data analysis of media visuals. Ethnographic content analysis aims to discover the signifiers/signs inside visual images and to comprehend their accepted meanings within the culture in which they are located, according to Grbich (2022) in *Sage Research Methods; Content Analysis of Visual Documents*. Ahern & Talens (2010, p. 321) state that “ethnographic content analysis (ECA) is a media-oriented form of qualitative content analysis focused on identifying frames within media discourse.” This method is excellent for identifying emergent patterns and dominant themes by focusing on their narratives (Altheide, 1996).

In this thesis, I have explored the Indian political cartoon series “So Sorry” through the Agenda-Setting theory and Propaganda Model. I have done this vis-à-vis the field of media studies and animation. Most of the Indian news media are becoming one-sided and biased, losing news authenticity and credibility. The media is not being critical of government due to the fear of retribution. In such a situation, cartoons are important because of their expressiveness and freedom with which they can approach controversial topics. However, the “So Sorry” series has a palpably pro-BJP stance. The series reflects the ideology of the TV Today network in relation to “So Sorry” politoons creation. The thesis undertaken in this study exemplifies this.

## **8.2 Limitations of the study**

Research is a continuous process. Every research work contributes to the existing body of knowledge and every research has its own limitations. Similarly, this study has some limitations. There are certain limitations in social science research, where the objective is to analyse and interpret the media product in form of text and audio- video visual. This kind of research, where the analysis of political cartoons can be influenced by researcher’s past experience, is a limitation of the research study. The time frame allotted for the study limits the scope to further identify more aspects of the political cartoons. The inclusion of semiotics analysis would have provided the detailed analysis of cartoons such as colours used, objects present in backgrounds of each frame of the

episodes of political cartoons. Researcher's inability to get information such as advertising partners, advertising revenue, selections of topic for politoons, source of politoons making, and flak. This information would have helped to analyse the propaganda model and five filter in more detail. The study could not ably to establish direct play between the "so sorry" politoons series creators/ broadcaster and the dominant political establishment with regards to the five filters of media operations. The circumvention of this relationship does not appear deliberate, due to the fact that the data could have posit another theoretical approach.

### ***8.2.1 Theoretical Exceptions***

In various nations, there have been attempts to give a wider variety of opinions a voice in the media. This is in line with the first tenet of the Propaganda Model, which holds that in the absence of an "elite consensus," the media will frequently present all sides of the elite debate and may even provide more voices a platform. In the case of India, it is very interesting to light the role of media during the Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement in 2011. Kumar (2011), The government's voice and other voices opposing Anna's brinkmanship tactics received little airtime on TV channels. Those that support democratic debate and discussion don't seem to have gotten much attention from the media. That time, Indian news media was (Kumar, 2011)

"providing round-the-clock coverage of the protest from the Ramlila Ground, where Hazare undertook his fast, the media has drummed up not just an anti-government mood in the country, but also an anti-politics atmosphere."

But, in the case of Spain, where greater airtime was given to the fledgling political group Podemos to challenge the ruling party. By doing this, media firms hoped to persuade the government to favour domestic sectors over the demands of transnational digital behemoths like Netflix, Google, and Amazon. According to the propaganda model, the media tends to open up and present a wider range of viewpoints when elite interests are separated, when the responsibility for the engagements of one part of the elite (especially corruption) is not accepted by another part of the elite, and when powerful social and political movements emerge. However, there are more opportunities for journalistic autonomy, which creates a window of opportunity for radical forces to develop techniques of critical engagement in the media. The media frameworks still primarily reflect elite interests (reflecting the many sides). As a result, it's crucial to concentrate on

national and local elements, such as political tradition, the presence of powerful social movements, the level of hegemony exercised by neoliberalism, the State, and global capitalism, as well as the openness of the cultural and intellectual background. Although Herman and Chomsky did not fully consider the function of social movements and civil society, the basic premise is that, despite the fact that propaganda frequently succeeds, there will always be opposition and movements for change.

### **8.3 Recommendations**

This section enlists various scopes that this study leaves for further research. One of the biggest and most powerful growing powers is India, which has a substantial news media market as well as a distinctive cultural and media system. The association between political campaigns and media coverage has been well demonstrated by agenda-setting and propaganda-model research in western contexts, but such studies are still lacking for India. In general, there is a several imbalances in the regional distribution of research on propaganda models and agenda-setting. India can be used as a prime example to broaden the geographic reach of agenda-setting and propaganda model research, improving the theory's applicability across the globe (Baumann, 2016). A deeper and more complex understanding of fundamental democratic processes, such as public opinion formation and the interaction of politics, media, and elite forces, is made possible by agenda-setting effects and the propaganda model of media operations. It is particularly astonishing that India's vibrant, rapidly expanding, and dynamic media ecosystem has been completely left out of this body of research. It is interesting that there is no research on agenda-setting in India, a nation where "the online news readership expanded to 450 million in 2020." According to Kapoor & Bhambri (2022)

"With the changing digital landscape in India, the news channels are expanding their reach from television screens through DTH to mobile phones, tablets and laptops through digital channels as well as programming on YouTube and Facebook. According to the FICCI-EY media and entertainment report of March 2021, the online news audience grew to 450 million in 2020."

Future research should focus on mainly the agenda setting-concept – what media does to its audience or how the audience perceived media content; a study such as that would entail a study of the audience (not content). In the context of this study, the agenda-

setting function of media may be employed for its extrapolative rather than a deterministic function.

Future studies could concentrate on how digitalisation has altered the media landscape in India. The agenda-setting impact in India must be studied. However, they need go beyond this and concentrate on the factors that influence the media to endorse agendas, which can be covered under study the propaganda model. In addition, our attention should be on improving our understanding and evaluation of the news media's independence in India, where we ought to discuss about the working conditions of journalists and media people.

Futuremore, the most apparent and significant scope, which future researcher can opt is to examine how political subjects that are mediated—such as political organisations and leaders—or public issues—have an impact on election politics and campaign coverage in India and other democracies across the world. However, also examining and contrasting media logic and political logic in electoral politics and campaign coverage, particularly with regard to mediated poll buzz, with a view to evaluating the effects of these two factors on democracies around the world. The impact of mediated poll buzz during the campaign can then be compared, focusing on developing and democratic nations, to make conclusions about the goals of the media and political organisations in these nations. Analysing the role of the media during campaigns is another way to study the relationship between politics, governance, and the media.

Future studies need to investigate why, at a time when digital consumption is expanding quickly, the news website lags in investigating internet features. There are several opportunities to research how traditional newspaper websites were affected by “news aggregators,” “browsers,” “digital-born sites,” and “social media sites.” Researchers can look into the influence of fake news on readers or on news website subscriptions. How the calibre of the journalism attracts potential employees to the company or organisation or influences consumer spending? It is possible to investigate how easily accessible news is on mobile platforms and how this has an impact on the expansion of news websites. The millennial generation consumes more internet media than any other generation. A more in-depth investigation could shed light on millennials' news consuming preferences and habits.