

Abstract

This thesis undertakes a study of “So Sorry” politoons (an Indian political cartoons series) drawing on the work of four American scholars, Maxwell E. McCombs, known for his work on journalism and political communication; Donald Lewis Shaw, a social scientist, Edward S. Herman a social critic and political activist Noam Chomsky. The thesis aims to investigate the “So Sorry” politoons through the prism of McCombs and Shaw’s “Agenda-Setting” theory (1972) of mass media and Herman and Chomsky’s “Propaganda Model” of media operations, formulated in the book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988). McCombs and Shaw (1972) discussed the agenda-setting role of media, which Bernard Cohen first summarised. Cohen (1963) argued that the media might not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. Agenda-setting theory focuses on the issues emphasised by the mass media and perceived as important by their audiences. The media transfer salient issues from the media agenda to the public agenda. As the media exert such an influential role in awareness and even opinion formation, the question of who influences the media becomes central, especially during the election period.

To answer this question, I have discussed the propaganda model. The model argues that the mass media are instruments of power that “mobilise support for the special interests that dominate the state and private activity” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). Herman and Chomsky (1988) argue that the news must be passed through a series of five interrelated constraints (ownership, advertising, sources, flak and anti-communism), and only the finest one is fit to print. These filter elements continuously interact with and reinforce one another and have multilevel effects on media performance.

In this study, I have applied the key notions of agenda-setting theory and propaganda model to critically analyse the performance of “So Sorry” politoons during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Thus, the thesis has investigated the editorial policy of the “So Sorry” politoons. The study has provided significant insight into how the “So Sorry” politoons routinely make public consensus on the subjects of the day, changing their perceived salience in public discussions—or diverting public attention away from some stories and news items while concurrently directing attention towards others. This study focuses on the pre-and post-election coverage of India’s most famous political cartoons to identify

the salience of the major political parties. Ethnographic content analysis has been used to analyse the “So Sorry” politoons and examine the portrayal of each party and leading candidate and the depiction of the respective adversaries (the candidates of the two opposing parties). I endeavour to explore the themes, representation of political parties and imageries constructed in the episodes of “So Sorry” politoons.

The sample of the study is the episodes of “So Sorry” politoons. The study’s sample size is the episodes of “So Sorry” politoons broadcast three months before the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, three months after the elections and two months during the elections (the elections were held in seven phases from 11th April to 19th May 2019). A total of eight months of episodes from 1st January 2019 to 31st August 2019. The data has collected through online mode. A total of 33 episodes have been downloaded from the India Today website. The study’s methodological approach is Qualitative Content Analysis, also called ethnographic content analysis (ECA). Ethnographic content analysis is a media-oriented form of qualitative content analysis focused on identifying frames within media discourse (Altheide, 1996).

The study concludes that ethnographic content analysis works well for qualitative data analysis of media visuals. In this thesis, I have explored the Indian political cartoon series “So Sorry” through the Agenda-Setting theory and the 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 the 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.

Keywords: Political Communication, Indian News media, Agenda-Setting theory, Propaganda model, Cartoons, Political Cartoons, and “So Sorry” Politicians.