

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

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, p. 13) argued that the media “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.” Agenda-setting (1963) 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. Therefore, scholars worldwide have easily linked agenda-setting theory to the guidance of public opinion or effective propaganda. As the media exert such an influential role on awareness and even opinion formation, the question of who influences the media becomes central, especially during the election period (Baumann, 2016; Zhou, Kim, & Kim, 2013).

To answer this question, I will emphasise 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, p. ix). The propaganda model (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. xiii) contents that “media organisations interlock with other institutional” sectors through ownership, management, and social circles, effectively circumscribing their ability to remain analytically detached from the other institutions of power in society. Herman and Chomsky (1988, p. 2) 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” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 2). Pedro-Carañana, Broudy, and Klaehn (2018, p. 9)

“These filters allow for identifying the economic, political and ideological conditions of media production in milieus marked by a powerful alliance between capital and Political-State forces.”

According to Hermann and Chomsky (1988), public opinion in democratic societies is manufactured by manipulating the public.

In this study, I apply 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 (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs, 2004)—or diverting public attention away from some stories and news items while concurrently directing attention towards others (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

The reason behind using these critical theoretical lenses to analyse “So Sorry” politoons is the current state of Indian news media. The “political pressure on media in India” in the 21st century has become more noticeable. Political influence on the media may not be direct, but it is exercised in opaque and delicate ways. In India, which is theoretically a democratic country, it is difficult for journalists to raise their voices over controversial issues (Raza, 2020). The freedom of journalists is increasingly undermined. According to the Reporters Without Borders 2022 index report, India secured 150 positions in the freedom index and 142 in 2021. This report mentioned that the Indian press is a massive machine with clay feet. In the book *Indian Media*, Athique explained that the history of India’s media is situated in a broader narrative of economic agendas and political ambition of colonial powers and the nationalist movement led by the Congress Party (Athique, 2012).

According to New-York based democracy monitoring organisation *Freedom House* which annually assigns ranking on political rights and civil liberties to every world-recognised country, India’s score in political rights and civil liberties has dropped considerably in past few years. For freedom of expression and belief, India scored 2/4 in 2022 (Freedom House, 2022). There is a decline in journalistic standards in India,

particularly in electronic media (ibid). Referring 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” (Freedom House, 2022). In 2021 (Biswas, 2021), 67 journalists were imprisoned, and almost 200 were physically assaulted. In India, journalists are not adequately shielded from legal action and harassment. According to Oldenburg (2010), courts can order editors to attend to respond to defamation claims made by regular people or for “hurting the sensibilities of a particular community” (Oldenburg, 2010, p. 83–87).

In this study, I have followed 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). In addition, Herman and Chomsky’s Propaganda Model postulates that “media routinely make selection choices that define ‘worth’ and ‘unworthy’ issues.” I have explored these predictions in this study and applied the model to “So Sorry” politoons. The contribution of this thesis will be the agenda-setting effect of “So Sorry” politoons during the “2019 Lok Sabha elections” and the application of Herman and Chomsky’s Propaganda Model. Beyond that, this study also aims to contribute to a “better understanding and assessment of the independence” and performance of the Indian news media, which will advance critical media and political studies and aid in understanding how widespread acceptance of economic, social, and political policies—both domestic and foreign—will attain in India in future.

I have chosen the political cartoon series “So Sorry” politoons because this series engages with relevant political issues of contemporary India and thus provides essential insights into the ideology of the media group. The “So Sorry” politoons series has recently received many honours and national and international awards (Babu and Nagarathinam (2015); Sharma, 2020). The “So Sorry” politoons is one of the top-viewed and famous series among Indian audiences. The series has a large following because it presents Indian political affairs in a humorous and approachable way. The study analyses the “So Sorry” politoons using the Agenda-Setting theory and Propaganda model to make sense of the issues and understand how the series is related to the broader development in India.

The communicative power of “So Sorry” politoons is their ability to deliver “often complex issues, events, and trends in a simplified form” (Refaie, 2003), which are politically revealing and shape public attitudes. Political cartoons are one of the utmost compelling ways of “signalling opposition in political communication” (Refaie, 2003). Cartooning is easy to “deliver political messages to society concerning critical issues, influencing the public’s stance on such matters.” According to Harriuson (1981), “political cartoons frequently lead power elites to interfere” directly or indirectly with them. However, suppose the powerful groups control cartoonists and publications/ media outlets in which cartoons appear. In that case, “the cartoons may become a tool for the power elite” (ibid). Lambourne (1983, p. 43) said that “during World War II, caricature was used as a powerful weapon of instruction and persuasion, primarily in the form of propaganda.”

Thus, the thesis focused on analysing the performance of “So Sorry” politoons during the “2019 Lok Sabha elections.” The study will also expand knowledge of the state of contemporary Indian news media. 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)” (McCombs, 2018). I endeavour to explore the themes, representation of political parties and imageries constructed in the episodes of “So Sorry” politoons.

1.2 Background of the study

In this section, I have discussed the current state of Indian news media to give the background why I chose the critical theoretical lens to analyse the “So Sorry” politoons. This section deals with the profile of the “So Sorry” politoon, which is the study’s focus.

1.2.1 Contemporary Indian News Media

The media’s role as a “political watchdog is essential for the functioning of a democratic society” (Baumann, Zheng & McCombs, 2018). Voters rely on the media’s portrayal of parties and candidates, particularly in the run-up to elections, to make educated, ethical voting decisions. According to empirical research from the United States and Europe, election coverage in the news media and political party campaigns appear to be related and impact one another. The issue which affects the media becomes crucial, especially

during the election period, knowing how effective it is on public awareness and even opinion formation (Zhou, Kim, & Kim, 2013; Baumann, 2016). As far as we know, these consequences have never been extensively studied in India, the largest democracy in the world that is playing an increasingly assertive and aspirational role on the international scene (Baumann, Zheng & McCombs, 2018). The independence of the media serves as a measure of the calibre and development of democracy in India, where rising literacy rates and quickly rising newspaper sales go hand in hand with calls for more political engagement (ibid) from an ever-expanding middle class.

In India, the news media is one of the most complicated forms of communication to be found elsewhere (Athique, 2012). In a nutshell, when seen from the outside, the most noticeable feature of India's media system is its sheer size and complexity. In India, the media sectors – television to telecommunications, films to software, radio to the internet – have all undergone fast development. India's interaction with globalisation begins with the watershed year of 1991, when the Soviet bloc collapsed, causing a seismic upheaval in international relations. In the same year, the Indian government announced its intention to pursue a path of economic liberalisation. International satellite broadcasting began transmitting over and above the old terrestrial state broadcast system, which was significant for those interested in the media's role in this new era. Indian news television, over the past two decades, has significantly developed and expanded (Pandit and Chattopadhyay, 2018). In India, 397 “news and current affairs” channels have been registered as of 2016, (TRAI, 2016).

Studies on the evolving television news media in India and how these changes are shaping political and social problems and practice in the largest democracy in the world, however, are still somewhat lacking (Jeffrey 2000; Ninan 2007; Kohli-Khandekar 2013). This grand tradition can easily be painted as the victim of cross-ownership, post-liberalisation commercialisation, and the current political and business elites in a collapse narrative. Significant policy changes in the broadcaster's operation occurred during the 1970s and 1980s, including hardware expansion, the introduction of advertising, colour transmission, and entertainment-focused programming. There was also a lot of political intervention and political propaganda on the public broadcaster (Devi, 2019). In 2022 in post-liberalisation, the news media is in trouble in the (nominally) world's “largest democratic” (Jeannine and Schwalbe, 2013, p. 294) country. India's mainstream media is losing its credibility under the direct influence of

elite power. One of the biggest failures of India is the media, which is increasingly incapable of asking critical questions of the Government and scrutinising its actions. Sandeep Bhushan, in one news article (Ajith, 2019) has commented on the working of Indian English news channels;

“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 and running agenda journalism full-time is not worth the money.”

An example of this can be seen in handling the demonetisation policy debate. In November 2016, many influential media houses failed to ask critical questions of the Modi Government when they announced the demonetisation to fight corruption. In many media houses, journalists followed the government line and helped spread the incorrect perception that phoney economics could solve big problems (Kumar, 2019). Secondly, in February 2019, after the Pulwama attack, the media overwhelmed the public with jingoistic sentiments, unquestioningly publishing the Government line in print and broadcasting on TV that the Indian Air Force had killed a “huge number” of militants from the Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorist group (Kumar, 2019). Thirdly, government mismanagement in handling the Covid-19 pandemic — where the media could not speak the truth and barely covered the migrant worker’s plight, precarious workers, and the self-employed. On 24th Mar. 2020, when India announced a lockdown, with the looming threat of starvation, men, women, and children were forced to start arduous journeys back to their villages — cycling or hitching rides on tuk-tuks, lorries, water tankers and milk vans (Pandey, 2020). That “left tens of thousands of daily-wage migrant workers without employment or a means of income” (Pandey, 2020).

As the examples above demonstrate, the Indian media failed to ask critical questions of the Government. It is a significant 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 opposed to the ruling BJP [the dominant party of Prime Minister Narendra Modi] or affiliated organisations (Bhat and Chadha, 2020). Since 2014, when they came into power, Modi’s government has tried to control the media. During the coronavirus pandemic, the Modi Government has become more aggressive in responding to criticism from the media about its handling of the crisis. 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 of *Danik Baskar*, 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 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 India, journalists are not adequately shielded from legal action and harassment. According to Oldenburg (2010), courts can order editors to attend to respond to defamation claims made by regular people or for “hurting the sensibilities of a particular community” (p. 83–87). This practice forces journalists to seek attorneys, appear in court, and receive criticism.

This government has weakened India’s democracy through its brand of “dominant repertoire - Modi’s national-populism – ethnic” politics (Jaffrelot and Verniers, 2020, p. 169). This popularism has been weaponised through its control of the media. In the Indian constitution, Article 19 (1)(a) guarantees the freedom of speech and expression. It 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. Nevertheless, government control over media fosters attacks on press freedom, and uncritical media “reveals the close relationships between politicians, business executives and lobbyists” (Freedom House, 2021). Media independence from political parties may be weak if the parties are able to influence how their candidates are portrayed in the media in the nation (Baumann, Zheng & McCombs, 2018).

Agenda-setting (1963) theory has considered how candidate images, or their qualities, have been produced since the early 1980s. The influence of “media coverage on public opinion has taken precedence in the majority of agenda-setting” research to this day (e.g.

McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, & Rey, 1997; King, 1997). The ability of the media to influence political agendas depends on several factors, including both media and political context elements, when it comes to the relationship between the mass media and political parties (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). More substantial influence on the political agenda is produced when there is “high congruence between the reporting of various media outlets and media types” (Eilders, 1997, 2000, 2001). In India, “before the 2009 general elections, the ‘paid news scam’ became public” (Thakurta & Reddy, 2010). During the BJP’s 2019 election campaign, there was “widespread online disinformation” (Thakurta & Reddy, 2010). Self-censorship has intensified after ring-wing Hindu nationalist party movements aimed at discouraging free speech, which is considered “anti-national”. Some media analysts have indicated that reporting has become less ambitious recently. In a study of the 2019 Indian general election, Jafferlot and Verniers (2020, p. 168) argued that:

“the use of religion in politics (in an unprecedented manner if one goes by the discourses of Pragma Singh Thakur on Gandhi) and not only has electoral competition become more uneven than before in terms of financial resources and access to media (from shares of prime-time programs on TV channels to social media), but the BJP got away with it because of the marginalisation of key institutions like the Election Commission of India...The 2019 election campaign may remain in history as the moment when India transitioned from national populism to political authoritarianism.”

This is an era of modern India when “fake news” is rising. Consequently, trust in the media is declining, negatively affecting Indian democracy (Kumar, 2019). Ravish Kumar has put it well when claiming that “a fake public makes a fake republic, a fake political consciousness, a fake democracy” (Kumar, 2018). Sandeep Bhushan has further argued that the media, especially during the elections, approaches politics as a game and thereby trivialises it (Ajith, 2019).

Maheshwari (2019), Saeed (2015), Neyazi (2017), and Bhushan (2019) have argued that the Indian news media functions to support the political and economic elite. More partisan news outlets are already emerging, like “Republic TV, India TV, and Zee News, among others, that support and advance the ideologies of the BJP, the country’s current ruling party” (Ninan, 2019). Maheshwari and Saeed term such an arrangement “crony capitalism.” As Saeed (2015, p.676) writes, in a crony capitalist system,

“News production makes the profession susceptible to control and manipulation by powerful

political and capitalist powers, creating a conflict of interest with its role as a public sentinel in modern democracies.”

Furthermore, Maheshwari (2019, p. 4077) has argued that the expansion of the news media, with its deep ties to the state and market, is increasingly significant in the political and cultural processes and has contributed to strengthening the governing elite’s dominant alliance. Neyazi’s and Bhushan’s work sheds light on the ramifications of the corporatisation of the media and ownership concentration for democracy. The significant ramification is the growing media commercialisation in India (Chakravartty and Roy, 2013).

In this study, I take our cue from the political thought of Chantal Mouffe (2020). Mouffe endeavours to invigorate liberal democracy through her vision of agonistic pluralism — a form of engaged and critical democracy where dissensus is vital. Many scholars (Jeannine and Schwalbe, 2013) have commented that the media plays a substantial role in pluralistic democracies (Carpentier and Cammaerts (2006); Trappel, Meier, and d’Haenens (2011); Louw (2005); Habermas (1989); Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007); Kleinschmit (2012); Raeijmaekers and Maesele (2015); Christians, Glasser, and McQuail (et al.), (2009)). Mouffe (2006) states that

“ideally, the role of the media should precisely be to contribute to the creation of agonistic public spaces in which there is the possibility for dissensus to be expressed or different alternatives to be put forward.”

For “agonistic media scholars,” it is essential to re-conceptualise the media sphere “as a space of true ideological struggle and conflict” (Mouffe, 2006). This, in a nutshell, is how we view the role of the media in a democratic society; it is my point of departure for investigating the Indian media Karppinen (2013); Pepermans and Maesele (2014); Maesele (2015).

1.2.2 TV Today Network/ India Today Group

The “So Sorry” politoons series is produced and broadcast by the TV Today Network/ India Today Group. Living Media India Limited owns TV Today Network, also known as India Today Group. TV Today Network was founded in 1975, during the 21 months of “emergency from 1975 to 1977 when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi” (Congress party leader) had a state of emergency declared across the country. The “TV Today Network (TVTAN) is one of India’s most” varied media empires, with a significant presence on

television, radio stations, and the internet. TVTN has five television channels: *India Today television and Good News Today* are English-language news channels, whereas *Aaj Tak, Tez,* and *Delhi Aaj Tak* are Hindi-language news channels. Headlines today was the original name of India Today's television channel. They have FM radio stations under *ISHQ 104.8 FM*, which is operated in Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata. The digital channels on TVTN are *Bharat Tak, Life Tak, Astro Tak, Fit Tak, News Tak, Food Tak, Sports Tak, Tech Tak, Mobile Tak,* and *Kids Tak*.

In February 2019, India Today's television channel was named Best English News Channel of the Year at the 11th Exchange4Media News Broadcasting Awards (ENBA). At the same awards event, the channel's anchor "Rahul Kanwal" was named best anchor, while "Shiv Aroor" was named best reporter – English. "Aroon Purie," the Chairman of the TV Today Network, is the third-largest shareholder in "Living Media India Pvt Ltd." He is the Chairman of "Living Media India Pvt Ltd." and the Group's "Editor-in-Chief." He received the Padma Bhushan, India's third highest civilian honour, from the Government in 2001, during the NDA government in India.

1.2.2.1 Profile of "So Sorry" Politoons

The term politoons means political cartoons (Paul, 2019). This political series is broadcast on India's one leading television news network, TV Today Network. The series is presently airing on over four news channels, such as "*India Today, Aaj Tak, Tez, Delli Aaj Tak*" and the India Today website, as well as on YouTube and all social media platforms. The first promotional video premiered in the first week of August 2013 and has become "one of India's most popular." It has also received many honours recently (Sharma, 2021). Paresh Mehta is the father of politoons and the creative director of the TV Today Network (Paul, 2020). Mehta is a Veteran Animation Director and Filmmaker. He graduated from the "National Institute of Design (NID) in Ahmedabad, has been focused on designing," emphasising the aesthetic use of addressing any problem, and has popularised the genre of politoons. His quest led him to create "So Sorry" politoons, one of India's most popular animated political cartoons.

The "So Sorry" politoons series is the most award-winning Politoon series, having won the Noida International Film Festival 2017, BCS Ratna award Best Politoon 2014-2017, FICCI BAF Best animation award 2014-16, FICCIBAF Show of the year 2015, KOLKATA Shorts International Jury award 2015, ORBIT Live Industry Honour 2015,

ADMA Asian Digital media award Gold 2014, CG animation award Best animation TV Show 2014, ITA Indian, and many others.

This politoon series tackles the country's most contentious and pressing issues in the most amusing, imaginative, and engaging way possible. The "So Sorry" politoons series was created to disrupt India's traditional form of political news reporting, which is primarily seen as uninteresting. It brings a news story to life in the "most imaginative way possible." According to Mehta (Paul, 2020), the rationale behind the creation of this series is:

"The problem was how to get the news to the public interestingly and dynamically, across language barriers and age groups, and 'politoons' was the answer. This genre was pioneered to communicate news and political developments to everyone. The vision came from India Today's former editor-in-chief and former chief executive, Aroon Purie, who had the courage and insight to take a chance on this revolutionary concept, and the rest is history. So Sorry as a brand became instantly visible and has sustained itself for the last five years."

According to Paresht 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 was 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. When a situation is presented to cartoonists with some research and political expertise over an issue, it depends on how they use their creativity and imagination. The crew consists of brilliant animators who constantly innovate and produce high-quality animation for the episodes. Animation rendering, lighting, and texture wrapping were all part of the technical process. The imaginative interpretation of the character design is given special attention. The message must be genuine, sincere, and not made up on the spur of the moment. Technically, there should be some potential for animation fluidity that is believable. An expert team always sees the animation of eight to ten individuals. If the team believes the message has been delivered, it is good to go since it must communicate and reach out to the people.

TV Today Network publishes a new politoon on the most recent popular news issues weekly. Within hours after launch, the viral LIVE episode was shown on TV, on

websites, and on social media. The Politoon episodes are broadcast on “*Aaj Tak, India Today, Tez, and Dilli Aaj Tak*” on television. The social extensions, Politoon episodes, are released on Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. “So Sorry” released its first video on YouTube on 26th Sept. 2013. The most viewed episode of “So Sorry” politoons on YouTube is the adventurous road to Bihar elections, which was broadcasted six years ago and had 74 million viewers.

The series comprises primarily slapstick cartoons featuring parodies of Indian public personalities, politicians and international leaders, with the primary protagonist generally being India’s current prime minister, Narendra Modi, prompting some to label the animation as pro-Indian propaganda. Sharma (2019: 60) argued that “the “So Sorry” series is palpably supportive of the status quo stance as it reflects the ideology of the India Today media group.” According to the propaganda model, the elite media hires right-wingers to fill staff jobs. The elite control of the media and the marginalisation of dissidents that results from the operation of these filters happens so naturally that media news people, often acting “with complete integrity and goodwill, can convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news “objectively” and in accordance” with professional news values (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 2). It might be claimed that the “So Sorry” political cartoons, created and aired by the TV Today Network, represent the company’s philosophy and the cartoonists’ work within it (Sharma 2021).

1.2.2.2 Ownership Pattern of TV Today Network

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). “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. “World Media Private Limited” (48.15 percent), “IGH Holding Private Limited” (41.50 percent), and “Aroon Purie” and family are the shareholders of “Living Media India Limited” (10.35 percent). The Purie family owns 5.94 percent of “TV Today Network” Ltd through “Living Media India Limited.” Public Shareholding in TV Today Network Ltd. is 42.58 % (of which Institutional Holding is 15.48 %, Corporate Bodies is 5.03 %, Individual Shareholders (less than INR 100.000) is 11.25 %, Individual Shareholders (less than INR 100.000) (excess of INR 100.000 is 8.02 percent, and Non-Resident Indians are 2.75 percent), (Reporters without Borders).

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., 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, (Reporters without Borders). The family is involved in a variety of Group businesses including education (Vasant Valley School, New Delhi), publishing (India Today, Business Today, TIME, Reader’s Digest, Cosmopolitan), music (Music Today), printing (Thomson Press), and events (India Today, Business Today, TIME, Reader’s Digest, Cosmopolitan) (BT Events), (Reporters without Borders).

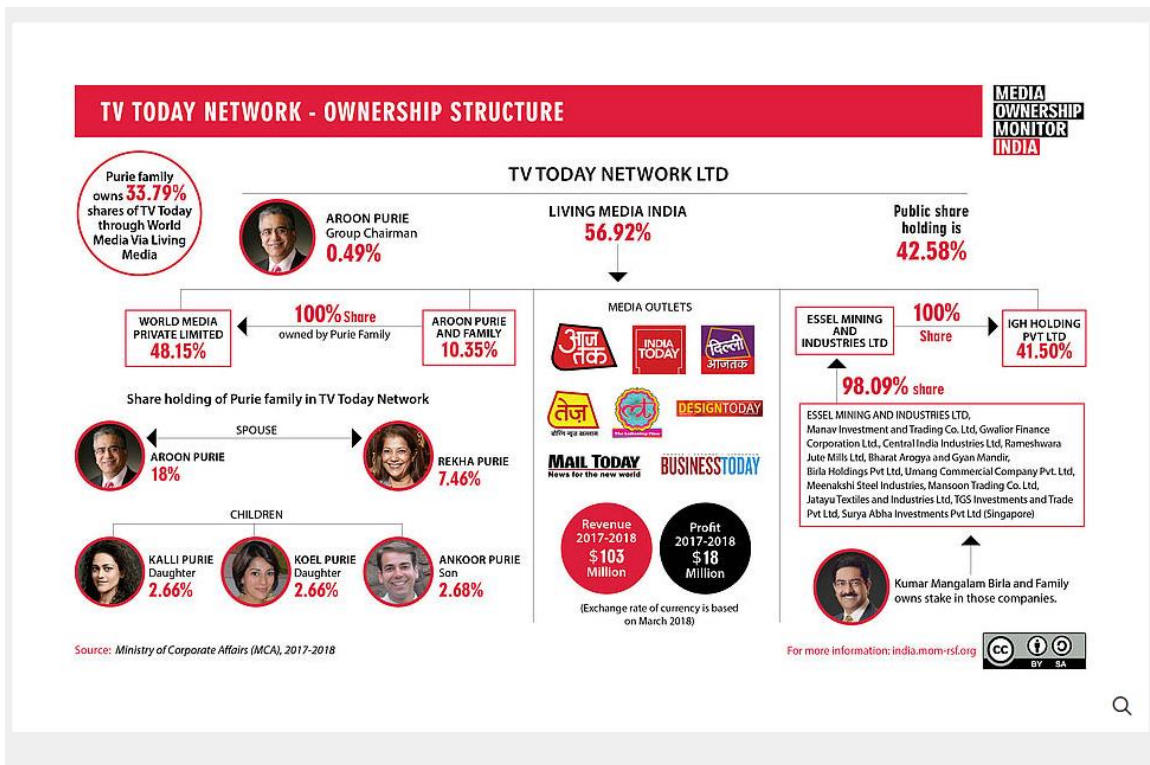


Figure 1.1: Ownership Pattern of TV Today Network

Source: Reporters without Borders <https://india.mom-rsf.org/en/owners/individual-owners/detail/owner/owner/show/the-purie-family/>

Aroon Purie’s wife, Rekha Purie, is the Chairperson of Vasant Valley School. Universal Learn Today Pvt. Ltd., TV Today Network Business Ltd., and Radio Today Broadcasting Ltd. are her companies. The TV Today Network’s Vice Chairperson and Managing Director is Kalli Purie Bhandal, Aroon Purie’s daughter. She also serves on the boards of Today Magazine Lifestyle Pvt Ltd, Mail Today Newspapers Pvt Ltd, News Broadcasters Association, Vibgyor Broadcasting Pvt Ltd, and Radio Today Broadcasting

Pvt Ltd. Aroon Purie's daughter, Koel Purie Rinchet, is a Director at Thomson Press India Ltd. Aroon Purie's son, Ankoor Purie, is a Director at Thomson Press India Ltd., Hyper Space Music Pvt. Ltd., Impact Projects Pvt. Ltd., Thomson Digital (India) Ltd., Digiscape Tech Solutions Ltd., Integrated Databases India Ltd., and Uphil Media Pvt. Ltd, (Reporters without Borders).

1.3 Research Objectives

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.

1.4 Rationale of the Study

I have chosen to investigate "So Sorry" politoons because this political cartoon series is highly popular in India (Babu and Nagarathinam, 2015). The series has a large following because it presents Indian political affairs in a humorous, approachable way. The series can be said to shed light on the opinions and viewpoints of the TV Today Network on specific contemporary political issues and figures. It uses "caricature, analogy, and absurd juxtaposition to sharpen the public's perception of events" (Refaie, 2003). It is essential to study how electoral politics has been depicted through this series and what are the dominant themes and topics they have represented in the series. In this study, I am critically enquiring into the performance of Indian news media by applying Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model. My premise is that there is an interconnection between cartoons, politics, ideology and media institutions. This study has analysed the "So Sorry" political cartoons using the propaganda model to make sense of these issues and understand how the series relates to the broader media development in India.

1.5 Significance of the study

The significance of this study is that "So Sorry" politoons can often present complex issues, events, and trends in a simplified and humorous form, which are politically revealing and shape public attitudes. "So Sorry" politoons is one of the most potent series that signals and comments on political parties in satirical ways. This series delivers political messages to society concerning critical issues, influencing the public's stance on such matters. For the first time, this study applies McCombs and Shaw's Agenda-Setting theory of mass media and Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's Propaganda Model to

analyse Indian news media, particularly the “So Sorry” politoons. Agenda-Setting theory 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).

However, Herman and Chomsky’s Propaganda Model postulates that “media routinely make selection choices that define ‘worth’ and ‘unworthy’ issues.” *Manufacturing Consent* (1988) argues that public opinion in democratic societies is manufactured through manipulating the public. This idea is increasingly relevant in 2022 and especially in contemporary India because of the corporate ownership of media and right-wing pressure on television and print media. The study’s findings claim that 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, and set the pro-BJP political agenda” (Herman and Chomsky, 1998).

1.6 Scope of the Study

The critical nature of this study will contribute to digital literacy – a significant aim in education and higher education. Media literacy is a key tool for cultivating democratic maturity in digitalised societies. This thesis will also contribute to two knowledge-based focus fields – educational innovation and digital and media culture. By using cartoons as a means of discussing political and social issues. The study has shown how an analysis of cartoons can raise political awareness and provoke debate. The study is based on the propaganda model of media operations. Its results are relevant for discussing media performance in the context of Indian news media. In India, populist politics has risen (Müller, 2016), and “Indian news media are becoming one-sided and biased, losing news authenticity and credibility.” There is no extensive research has been done on the agenda-setting effect and propaganda model in the context of the “2019 Lok Sabha election” in Indian news media.

The contribution of this thesis will be the agenda-setting effect of “So Sorry” politoons during the “2019 Lok Sabha elections” and the application of Herman and Chomsky’s Propaganda Model. However, agenda-setting as a “multidimensional theory” has developed, which represents and extends the wide range of viewpoints already found in the literature. Most importantly, introducing political cartoons into this will broadens the diversity of agenda-setting research. Beyond that, this study also aims to contribute to a

“better understanding and assessment of the independence” and performance of the Indian news media, which will advance critical media and political studies and aid in understanding how widespread acceptance of economic, social, and political policies—both domestic and foreign—will attain in India in future.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is comprised of eight detailed chapters. I start with the second chapter, which reviews the literature. The second chapter aims to provide the literature on Cartoons, Political Cartoons, Political Communication and Indian news media, which is the focus of the study. The first section talks about cartoons, where the literature on cartoons, the history of cartoons, the functions of political cartoons, and the communicative power of cartoons are reviewed and discussed. The second section is dedicated to Political communication and leading actors, where the role of media in political communication, Indian news media, diversity in Indian news media and electoral politics in Indian news media have been reviewed and discussed. Third section talks about the Agenda-Setting theory and Propaganda model in the context of India. Lastly, the research gaps identified in the literature have been discussed in the last section of the chapter.

The third chapter, Theoretical Framework, reviews the literature on the agenda-setting theory of mass media, the propaganda model, and the five filters of media operations- the theoretical framework adopted for the study. Besides, it briefly highlights the issues addressed by the agenda-setting theory and the propaganda model in the performance of media. It then justifies the theory and model chosen to guide the data collection to explore the research objectives. The study is based on McCombs and Shaw’s Agenda-Setting theory and Herman and Chomsky’s Propaganda Model.

Chapter fourth, Research Methodology, addresses concerns about the research methodology adopted to explore the “So Sorry” politoons. This chapter is summarised into six comprehensive sections, which helps us better understand the detailed design of the research. The first section deals with the research approach to explore the plan and procedures used in the study. The second section discusses the research design to examine the nature of the study, which also describes the philosophical assumptions underpinning the research. The third section explains the research methodology opted in the study for data collection and analyses the necessary data addressed in part after in order to investigate the research objectives raised in chapter one. The four section covers

the sample size and sampling technique. The fifth section deals with the scheme of data analysis. The last section reports on the measures taken to safeguard research reliability and trustworthiness, which is the embodiment of any research discussed.

Chapter fifth, Data Presentation, provides a detailed overview of the sample of the study, “So Sorry” politoons. The chapter encompasses two sections. The first section provides the details of the sample size, i.e. name of episodes, main political characters of the episodes, and time duration. The second section gives a detailed description and context of the sample size, 33 episodes of the “So Sorry” politoons from 1st Jan. 2019 to 31st Aug. 2019.

The sixth chapter deals with Data Analysis and Interpretation. The qualitative data analysis technique has been used to analyse the data as the research methodology adopted for conducting the research. Furthermore, the analysis of the nine dominant themes has been shown in this chapter. Supporting images from the episodes of “So Sorry” politoons have been provided to establish the arguments. The data has been analysed following the research objectives of the study. The chapter is comprised of one huge section, which is further divided into nine sub-sections concerning the nine dominant themes from the data coding conducted in the research methodology chapter of the thesis.

The seventh chapter summarises the study’s major findings, which came from the data analysis done in the previous chapter. The study was intended to examine 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 explored the key notions of the propaganda model and filters in connection to the TV Today Network that produces and broadcasts the “So Sorry” politoons.

The last chapter of the thesis is the Conclusion and Recommendations. This chapter concludes the research findings outlined in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I first

highlight 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.