

A Comparative Analysis of Political Communication Strategies Employed by BJP and Congress Parties in Jaipur, Rajasthan

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ABSTRACT

Political communication refers to the combinations of those communication practices which are intended to convey political information to the public. This study focuses on the strategies used by BJP and Congress Party in 2019 general elections. It is an exploratory study which has been followed by mixed research methods which includes content analysis and survey methods for collection of data. The aim of the study is to identify the communication strategies used by these two major political parties. The findings of the study are based on the data collected which has been divided into two categories, the first one includes the analysis of the data collected thoroughly by content analysis which are Inclusivity and Secularism, Urban-Rural Divide, Leadership Projection, Media Engagement, Narrative Building whereas the second part of findings includes the understanding of the political communication strategies used by these parties by the voters.

Keywords: Political Communication Strategies, BJP, Congress, Comparative Analysis, Indian politics, Mixed-Methods Research.

INTRODUCTION:

Political communication is a multifaceted process through which political actors, parties, and institutions convey their messages, ideologies, and policies to the electorate. It encompasses various strategies and tactics employed by political entities to shape public opinion, mobilize support, and influence decision-making processes (MCNair, 2019). In the dynamic landscape of Indian politics, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (Congress) have emerged as two of the most prominent national parties, each with its distinct communication approaches and strategies. The political parties adopt various digital and data technologies including social media, mobiles infrastructure and computational technologies for data analysis to refract and alter the political influence (Rao, 2019). In 2019, aforementioned methods were used to handle the parliamentary election movement, this was the largest electoral exercise in the world in terms of both electoral size as well as the financial resources exhausted – ‘worlds costliest’ election with estimate of approximately US\$8billion (Bloomberg, 2019). Consequently, these strategies ensured the winning of BJP for the second time with 303 out of 543 parliamentary seats (Centre for Media Studies, 2019).

Jaipur, the capital city of Rajasthan, has been a significant battleground for these two parties, with both vying for the support of the electorate. This research aims to comparatively analyze the political communication strategies employed by the BJP and Congress parties in the Jaipur, highlighting their strengths, weaknesses, and the effectiveness of their respective approaches.

Rajasthan holds significant electoral weight, making it an important battleground therefore, it has witnessed a dynamic political landscape, with the BJP and Congress parties alternating in power. The Congress party has a long-standing presence in the state, having ruled for several terms, including the period from 2008 to 2013 (REPORT ON MUNICIPAL GENERAL ELECTION - 2019, 2019). During this tenure, the party implemented various welfare schemes and development initiatives including local leadership emphasis, welfare programs and social initiatives, farmer's issues, youth engagement, environmental protection, disaster management, economic growth, etc., which formed a crucial part of its communication strategy to connect with the masses. Both BJP and Congress engaged traditional and modern communication strategies to influence the voters and to gather support. BJP has relished a significant support base in Rajasthan, having governed the state from 2003 to 2008 and again from 2013 to 2018. The party's communication efforts have often centered around themes of development, good governance, and the promotion of cultural and religious narratives. In the Jaipur City, both parties have employed diverse communication strategies to reach out to the urban and rural electorate, leveraging traditional and modern platforms to disseminate their messages effectively. For instance, BJP employed combination of strong governance, ideological communication, digital endowment and grassroots mobilization for advertising its political agenda. However, Congress utilized majorly media engagement, alliances and community outreach for advertising its political agenda (The Hindu, 2021).

On one hand, the Congress party's communication strategy in Jaipur has largely revolved around projecting itself as a party of inclusive development and welfare-oriented policies. They have focused on highlighting their achievements in areas such as education, healthcare, and social welfare schemes (verdhan, 2022). The party has also relied on its traditional grassroots network and door-to-door campaigning to connect with voters, particularly in rural areas. On the other hand, the BJP's communication approach in Jaipur has been multifaceted. The party has effectively utilized various media platforms, including social media, to propagate its development agenda and promote its leadership (verdhan, 2022). Additionally, the BJP has strategically leveraged cultural and religious narratives, aligning itself with the dominant Hindu identity in the region (Jaffrelot, 2020).

Although specific information about the political communication strategies employed by BJP in Jaipur City is not provided, some key strategies can still be inferred. The party employs positive messaging as a strategy to build support for its candidates and policies in the City. Additionally, public relations are an important strategy used by the BJP to communicate with voters. The party has been successful in building support among essential influencers in Jaipur City, which is another key political communication strategy employed by the BJP. Furthermore, BJP uses targeted advertising as a political marketing strategy, which helps them to speak to the particular issues and goals of voters in the City. Thorough voter profiling is utilized to create communication that feels individualized and tailored to voter demands, going beyond clichéd political catchphrases to increase the impact of their appeal. By employing these strategies, the BJP is able to effectively communicate with voters in Jaipur City and build support for their party and policies.

Political communication strategies employed by Congress in Jaipur City have evolved with the advent of modern communication technologies. In particular, the party has started to incorporate internet-based communication technologies, including social media, into their campaigns. This is in line with the changing nature of political communication strategies in India, which have been shaped by the rise of new media channels. However, this is not a new phenomenon, as previous Indian leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi also utilized traditional media such as radio and print to communicate with their constituents and shape public opinion (Sen, 2021). On the other hand, BJP has a history of being adept at elections marketing, which has contributed to their success in recent elections. The party was founded in 1980 with the goal of creating a strong, prosperous, and self-reliant India and since then, it has grown in strength. BJP's communication strategy is highly effective, with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi being one of the world's most followed political leaders on Twitter. In contrast, Congress party is yet to catch up with BJP's successful communication strategies (Maheshwari, 2021). In hindsight, the Lok Sabha elections provide some clues on the difference between what BJP is getting right and what the opposition (including Congress) is getting wrong. Since the 2014 general election, two major political parties in India – BJP and Congress – have dominated the political landscape, with BJP currently leading the coalition government (Maheshwari, 2021).

The political communication strategies of BJP and Congress in Jaipur City are evidently different. The BJP has been at the forefront of using internet-based communication technologies to shape their party campaigns. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is one of the world's most followed political leaders on Twitter, with his tweets garnering a significant amount of attention. Furthermore, the BJP's marketing strategy, commonly referred to as "Modi Magic," has significantly influenced their campaign efforts. In the 2019 national election, the BJP won 303 seats, with Prime Minister Modi claiming a landslide victory. In contrast, the Congress party has struggled to connect with voters and lost touch with its base. A piece written about the Congress party's Chitan Shivir highlighted the fact that the party has lost its "connection with the people". One episode from the Lok Sabha elections also provided clues about what the BJP was doing right and what the opposition was getting wrong. The BJP's adeptness at the game of election marketing, not simply winning elections, has given them an edge over the opposition in Jaipur City and beyond. While this is not an endorsement of any party's content or message, it is important to study the process of communication to understand how political parties are connecting with voters (Römmele, 2023).

The aim of this study was to conduct a comprehensive comparative analysis of the political communication strategies employed by the BJP and Congress parties, for evaluating their effectiveness, strengths, weaknesses, and potential areas for improvement.

METHODOLOGY:

A mixed-methods approach was used to conduct a comprehensive comparative analysis of the political communication strategies employed by the BJP and the Congress in Rajasthan's Jaipur. This method required the collecting and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data, resulting in a comprehensive grasp of the subject matter.

Data Collection Tools and Techniques:

1. Qualitative Data Collection:

Content Analysis: A comprehensive content analysis of speeches and social media posts of the three months of 2019 which includes March, April, May 2023 was conducted using thematic and statistical analysis techniques. This analysis provided insights into the narratives, messaging, and framing employed by the BJP and Congress parties in their communication efforts.

2. Quantitative Data Collection:

Survey Questionnaire: A structured survey questionnaire was designed to gather quantitative information from a representative sample of 100 voters in the Jaipur City. The questionnaire included sections on:

Demographic information: Age, gender, education level, income, and location (urban/rural), religion.

Media consumption habits: Sources of political information, frequency of exposure, and preferred platforms.

Perception and awareness of communication strategies: Awareness of key messages, narratives, and campaigns employed by the BJP and Congress parties.

Effectiveness and resonance: Evaluation of the effectiveness and resonance of the communication strategies, including their ability to influence voting behavior.

Strengths and weaknesses: Perceived strengths and weaknesses of the communication strategies employed by each party.

Suggestions for improvement: Recommendations for enhancing the communication strategies of the BJP and Congress parties.

Data Analysis:

The qualitative data collected through content analysis was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. This involved several steps:

Coding: The transcripts and content materials were systematically coded, identifying recurring themes, patterns, and concepts related to the communication strategies employed by the BJP and Congress parties.

Theme Development: The coded data were organized into broader themes, allowing for the identification of overarching narratives, messaging, and communication approaches used by each party.

Interpretation and Analysis: The identified themes were analyzed and interpreted within the broader context of the political landscape in Jaipur and Rajasthan, drawing connections to existing literature and theoretical frameworks on political communication.

The quantitative data gathered through the survey questionnaire and media monitoring were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques, such as:

Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample and provide an overview of the responses to various survey items.

RESULTS:

Qualitative Findings

Thematic Analysis of survey responses and publicity materials: The following mentioned are the findings based on the analysis of the data which has been divided into following mentioned themes:

1. Narrative Building:

a. BJP: Successful in crafting narratives around development, governance, and cultural/religious identities. BJP also employ slogans and catchphrases to compress its messaging for instance “Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas” (Development for All) and “Ache Din” (Good Days).

b. Congress: Struggled to counter BJP's narratives effectively, often reactive in their messaging to challenge the policies and performance of its opponents. Although, Congress also employs slogans like “Congress Ka Haath, Aam Aadmi Ke

Saath” (Congress’s hand is with the common man) to represent a party that represents the interest of all Indians, regardless of religion, caste, region etc.

2. Media Engagement:

a. BJP: Adept at utilizing modern communication tools especially social media platforms, particularly Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp for targeted outreach as well as to directly communicate with voters, shape public opinion and counter opposition narratives. Digital approach of BJP also allows it to bypass traditional media channels and connect with millions of supporters.

b. Congress: Slower adaptation to digital platforms, reliance on traditional media and grassroots networks such as newspapers, television channels and radio stations. Congress inadequately used the digital media platforms as compared to BJP.

3. Leadership Projection:

a. BJP: Effective in leveraging the charisma and popularity of Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a central and motivation behind the party’s vision and policies for the national leadership statistics.

b. Congress: Perceived lack of a cohesive and compelling leadership narrative as compared to BJP.

4. Urban-Rural Divide:

a. BJP: Perceived as urban-centric, potentially alienating rural voters.

b. Congress: Strong grassroots network and door-to-door campaigning efforts resonated with rural voters.

5. Inclusivity and Secularism:

a. BJP: Over-reliance on cultural/religious narratives, risking polarization and alienation.

b. Congress: Positioned as a party with a secular and inclusive agenda, appealing to minority communities, economic development, education and healthcare improvement.

Content Analysis of Communication Materials: The content analysis of party speeches, and social media posts revealed the following:

- 1. BJP: Emphasis on themes of development, economic growth, and efficient governance. Frequent references to cultural and religious narratives.
- 2. Congress: Focus on inclusive development, welfare-oriented policies, and secularism. Attempts to counter BJP's narratives, but often reactive.

Quantitative Findings:

Survey Questionnaire:

The survey questionnaire administered to a representative sample of voters in the Jaipur City yielded the following results:

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the study subjects

Characteristic	Percentage
Gender	
Male	52%
Female	48%
Age	
18-30	47%
31-45	28%
46-60	25%
Location	
Urban	100%

Table 2: Awareness and Perception of Communication Strategies

Statement	BJP (%)	Congress (%)
Aware of key messages and narratives	78%	65%
Communication strategies resonated well	62%	48%
Influenced voting behavior	55%	42%

Table 3: Perceived Strengths and Weaknesses of Communication Strategies

Strength/Weakness	BJP (%)	Congress (%)
Effective use of social media	72%	38%
Strong leadership projection	68%	42%
Resonance with urban voters	62%	48%
Resonance with rural voters	45%	62%
Inclusive messaging	38%	58%

Media Monitoring and Analysis: The media monitoring and analysis revealed the following observations:

1. BJP had a higher frequency of communication efforts across traditional and social media platforms compared to Congress.
2. BJP's communication efforts had higher engagement levels on social media platforms compared to Congress.
3. Congress had a stronger presence in local and regional print media in comparison of BJP.

Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Data:

The qualitative insights from content analysis corroborated the quantitative findings from the survey and media monitoring. The BJP's success in narrative-building, leveraging modern communication tools, and effective leadership projection aligned with the survey results indicating higher awareness, resonance, and influence on voting behavior. However, the qualitative data also highlighted the BJP's perceived urban-centric approach and over-reliance on cultural/religious narratives, which may have contributed to lower resonance with rural voters and concerns about polarization and inclusivity. On the other hand, the Congress party's strengths in grassroots campaigning and inclusive messaging were reflected in the survey results, with higher resonance among rural voters and perceptions of inclusive messaging. Nonetheless, the qualitative data pointed to the party's challenges in effectively countering the BJP's narratives and projecting a cohesive leadership image, aligning with the lower awareness and influence on voting behavior observed in the survey. These integrated findings provide a nuanced understanding of the political communication strategies employed by the BJP and Congress parties in the Jaipur City of Rajasthan, highlighting their respective strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.

DISCUSSION

In Rajasthan, BJP and Congress employ several political communicable strategies to connect and influence the voters. During the 2018 Rajasthan Assembly elections, BJP's campaign was focused on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership and the central government's achievements (Schakel et al., 2019). However, Congress campaign was on issues like unemployment, agrarian distress and alleges corruption (Schakel et al., 2019).

In the present study, the integrated qualitative and quantitative results provide valuable insights into the political communication strategies employed by the BJP and the Congress in the Jaipur City of Rajasthan. The findings highlight both convergences and divergences in their respective approaches, offering a nuanced perspective on their strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.

The thematic analysis of interviews, focus group discussions, and content analysis revealed that the BJP has been successful in crafting compelling narratives around development, governance, and cultural/religious identities. This finding is corroborated by the survey results, where 78% of respondents indicated awareness of the BJP's key messages and narratives. The party's ability to effectively leverage these narratives has resonated with a significant section of the electorate, as evidenced by 62% of respondents stating that the BJP's communication strategies resonated well with them.

This narrative-building approach aligns with previous studies that have highlighted the BJP's strategic alignment with cultural and religious narratives (Jaffrelot, 2020). The party has effectively positioned itself as a champion of development and efficient governance, striking a chord with those seeking economic growth and stability (Kumar, 2022;). Previously the campaigns are based on 'vote back' represents block wise voter that is a cohort of voters based on parameter such as caste, religion, etc. (Verma, 2012). BJP broke this trend using digital campaigns and evolved the thoughts of individual voter choices.

In contrast, the Congress party has struggled to counter the BJP's narratives effectively, often adopting a reactive stance in their messaging. The qualitative data suggests that the Congress has focused on promoting inclusive development and welfare-oriented policies, appealing to those seeking equitable growth and social justice. However, the survey results indicate that only 48% of respondents found the Congress's communication strategies resonating well with them, suggesting room for improvement in their narrative-building efforts.

The findings reveal a distinct difference in the media engagement strategies of the two parties. The BJP has been adept at utilizing modern communication tools and social media platforms for targeted outreach, as evidenced by the survey results showing 72% of respondents acknowledging the party's effective use of social media. This aligns with previous research that has highlighted the BJP's tech-savvy approach and its ability to leverage digital platforms effectively. In contrast, the Congress party has been slower in adapting to digital platforms, relying more heavily on traditional media and grassroots networks. This is reflected in the survey results, where only 38% of respondents perceived the Congress as effectively utilizing social media. This finding resonates with previous studies that have identified the Congress party's challenges in effectively leveraging modern communication tools (Sen, 2021). Moreover, BJP also used elected panna pramukha, these volunteers were responsible for communicating and covering 8-12 household's details like political preferences and case identify to provide tailored campaign messages to the voters, and therefore, ensuring the major winning (Roy, 2021).

The BJP has been effective in leveraging the charisma and popularity of its national leadership figures, as evidenced by 68% of survey respondents perceiving strong leadership projection from the party. This aligns with previous research that has highlighted the BJP's ability to project a cohesive and consistent messaging across various platforms, owing to its central leadership. On the other hand, the Congress party has faced a perceived lack of a cohesive and compelling leadership narrative, which may have contributed to the lesser awareness and influence on voting behavior observed in the survey results. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have identified leadership projection as a challenge for the Congress party (Sen, 2021). Additionally, the qualitative data revealed concerns about the BJP's over-reliance on cultural/religious narratives like, nationalism and Hindu identity, risking polarization and alienation of certain sections of society. This is supported by the survey results, where only 38% of respondents perceived the BJP's messaging as inclusive. Conversely, the Congress party was perceived as a party with a secular and inclusive agenda like, unemployment, corruption and the challenges that farmers and rural communities face, with 58% of respondents acknowledging their inclusive messaging.

A notable finding from the study is the perceived urban-centric approach of the BJP, potentially alienating rural voters. The qualitative data and survey results suggest that the BJP's communication strategies have resonated more strongly with urban voters (62%) compared to rural voters (45%). This aligns with previous research that has highlighted the BJP's focus on urban development and infrastructure projects, potentially neglecting the concerns of the rural populace. In contrast, the Congress party's strong grassroots network and door-to-door campaigning efforts have resonated better with rural voters, as evidenced by 62% of respondents acknowledging their resonance with rural areas. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have highlighted the Congress party's traditional reliance on local networks and ground-level campaigning, particularly in rural regions due to strong manifesto about rural development based on strategic village planning, innovative watershed scheme, essential infrastructure, universal internet coverage, local revenue generation, affordable housing relaunch, empowered women representative, etc. (REPORT ON MUNICIPAL GENERAL ELECTION - 2019, 2019) (Sen, 2021).

Overall findings of this study have important implications for the political communication strategies of both parties. For the BJP, while their narrative-building efforts, media engagement, and leadership projection have been effective, there is a need to address concerns about inclusivity and urban-rural divides. Adopting a more inclusive messaging approach and addressing the needs and aspirations of rural voters could enhance the resonance and acceptance of their communication strategies. On the other hand, the Congress party needs to focus on strengthening their narrative-building capabilities, effectively countering the BJP's narratives, and projecting a cohesive and compelling leadership image. Additionally, leveraging modern communication tools and social media platforms more effectively could help them reach a wider audience and engage more effectively with younger demographics.

Both parties should consider diversifying and expand their communication strategies to cater to the diverse preferences and media consumption habits of the electorate. This could involve a balanced approach that combines traditional grassroots

campaigning along with modern digital outreach, tailored messaging for urban and rural audiences, and a stronger emphasis on inclusive and unifying narratives that resonate with all sections of society.

Although, this study provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The research was conducted within the specific context with limited people of the Jaipur City of Rajasthan, and the findings may not be entirely generalizable to different regions of Rajasthan or other states. Additionally, the study focused the political and media landscapes are constantly evolving, potentially affecting the relevance of the findings over time.

Future research could explore the political communication strategies employed by other parties, both national and regional, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play. Longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of communication strategies over extended periods could also provide valuable insights into the impact of changing socio-political and technological landscapes. Furthermore, examining the role of specific media platforms, such as social media and digital campaigns, in shaping political communication could contribute to a profounder understanding of the influencing factors of modern communication tools on electoral outcomes.

CONCLUSION:

This research presented a detailed examination of the BJP and Congress parties' political communication techniques in Rajasthan's Jaipur area. By combining qualitative and quantitative data, the findings provided a more nuanced understanding of both sides' strengths, flaws, and opportunities for progress. While the BJP excelled in story development, media engagement, and leadership projection, issues of inclusivity and urban-rural differences needed to be addressed. In contrast, the Congress party needs to improve its narrative-building ability, make better use of current communication channels, and portray a coherent leadership image.

Finally, effective political communication methods were critical in changing public opinion, rallying support, and affecting election results. By adjusting their tactics to the changing media landscape and the different tastes of the voters, both parties might improve their capacity to connect with the masses and build a more inclusive and participatory political discourse.

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