

Modi 2.0, An Analysis of the Media-Coverage of BJP's 2019 Electoral Victory

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Abstract: *Given the political climate of India in BJP's last tenure, many of the national news outlets resorted to self-censorship, yet many dared to stick with the ideal. As BJP's rule spilled over on May 23 2019 for a consecutive term, the paper attempted to analyze how Indian print media covered the first news of the Party's new period, mainly focusing on the frames used and how much different was it from the international media. The research study used content analysis method to evaluate the news articles. The results reveal that majority of the National and a few among the international media outlets depicted Modi as powerful leader of India and portrayed his image in positive manner. The rest of newspapers, which included only a few in comparison, raised questions over him and his party.*

Keywords: Indian Elections 2019, BJP's Electoral Victory, Media Coverage, Content Analysis, Framing

1. Introduction

In a democratic society, mass media plays a pivotal role. Linking people and the government, it informs, acts as a watchdog, raises questions, and makes the powerful accountable. The end result of all these functions paves way for a powerful society. During elections, its ideal function is to make people aware about the contesting parties' manifesto, their ideology. Apart from that, it cuts apart the past tenure of the incumbent party, discusses its successes and failures, and hence informs the public of how effectively it has met the promises made before. While transmitting such information almost instantaneously to national audiences, it makes the people eligible to take an informed decision of who to bring to power next.

However, it is not necessary that media would stick to the norm. Beyond the ideal form of its working, the mass media does other things as well. Shunning objectivity and fairness, it rather aligns itself to a particular side. The reasons could be many. The affiliation with a certain political party, or simply, the latter would pay to get free news coverage or for political advertising, or the political culture at the moment etc. Then newspapers and news magazines devote comparable space to what campaigners are saying while emphasizing or de-emphasizing themes, carefully choosing words to subtly suggest the heroes and villains of the events they are reporting (Kelley, Jr, 1962).

In India, the link between media and politics dates back to pre-Independence. Its crucial role during that period was associated with the freedom struggle as well as movements for social emancipation and reform. Nevertheless, there were certain deviations of stand certain newspapers take regarding issues of ideology and politics; the trend manifests itself in the contemporary times as well. In the present India, the media scene has taken on a different hue. The corporatization of the institution, political sponsorship, ideological affiliations, and curbs, decides in whose favour the media biases would be (N. Ram, 2011). Since these tendencies grew qualitatively worse over the past decade

(ibid), were again apparent after 2014 election in which Modi government got an absolute mandate to rule India.

2. Modi and Media

Prime Minister Modi's relationship with media has been of variety. To those close to other political parties and critical of him and his party, his stance has been harsh. The broadcast ban for a day on NDTV, a congress supporter, is a case in point (Nag, 2016). The force of his oratory and his general intimidating demeanour resulted into a *conspiracy of silence* in large sections of the national media that have chosen to look the other way where his many transgressions are concerned (ibid). Second, a total de-legitimation of mainstream media (Ninan, 2019). Modi preferred his Twitter handle, with more than 11 million followers, over press interactions, to convey day-to-day developments. His tweets then became a source of news for the press. Or, his address to the countrymen through the radio programme, *Mann Ki Baat*. Moreover, under his tenure, the threats and violence against journalists, like the murder of Gauri Lankesh, editor of the Bangalore weekly *Lankesh Patrike*, also merits a mention. Relevant to it, media-tracking "war rooms" set up pre-2019 general elections reported by *The Wire* offers deep insights of how a tab was kept on "pro-BJP" and "anti-BJP" news coverage. Moreover, how files were maintained on media personnel based on their anti-Modi sentiments. The fallout of such strategies led to media censorship; the news organisation took off published news items from websites; TV channels dropped interviews or stories done by their correspondents (ibid).

But the relationship wasn't always confrontational. Modi has sympathetic acolytes in the fraternity. Regarding demonetisation, how he manipulated public opinion through sympathetic journalists irrespective of the fact that the move created huge problems for the ordinary people proves the point (Nag, 2016).

3. Towards 2019 Elections

The last electoral campaign of BJP in 2014 was rife with promises of rectifying the declining economy under UPA rule rather much insistence on Hindutva, their core ideology. But as their rule advanced, economic progress under Modi fell short of expectations, anxieties about the lack of job creation led to massive popular protests in state after state, and disquiet rose among rural voters (Vaishnav, 2018) rather the tenure was rampant with controversial issues related to Hindutva itself like cases of lynching and intolerance etc. In such a scenario, the BJP's 2019 electoral campaign was supposed to make a tactical change since it was hard to defend its record as a ruling party (Shastri, 2019). Vaishnav had predicted of invocation of Hindu nationalist card more expressly and more intensively, which actually did take place. From development in 2014, the focus shifted to national security in 2019's electoral campaign (Shastri, 2019). Taking full advantage of the strong public mood created after the Pulwama attack and the 'surgical strikes' in Balakot, the Prime Minister focussed attention on his government's efforts to defend India's territorial integrity adding a tinge of nationalism and patriotism to the appeal (ibid).

In these circumstances, the media's ideal role to question the government over the situations suffered a great deal because of Modi's non-cooperative relationship with media evident during his previous tenure wherein he didn't address a single press conference. However, in the final weeks before the 2019 elections, he gave a few interviews. And in one of such interviews, he accused media of not being credible, rather mere oppositional.

Against this backdrop, when Modi government made a new coming in 2019 elections, this study attempts to analyse the national and international media coverage of the incident. The entire study focusses on a single day of the coverage of the event, which is May 24th 2019, a day after the landslide victory.

4. Research Questions

RQ1. How the national and international media covered BJP's 2019 electoral victory?

RQ2. What kind of news frames were used to cover the story?

5. Sample

The selected sample comprises of a corpus of fifteen news stories and an editorial. One major text which particularly covered the 2019 election victory of the BJP from different print media platforms, both national and international, representing a variety of political and ideological lineages, are analysed. Around nine major national newspapers are selected on the basis of their popularity and circulation (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2018). Nine major international newspapers of selected countries, sharing geo-political relations with India are also chosen – the sample reflects one newspaper among the major English dailies of the respective countries. The list comprises of:

<i>National Newspapers</i>	<i>International Newspapers</i>
1) Times of India	1) The New York Times (USA)
2) The Hindu	2) The Guardian (UK)
3) Hindustan Times	3) Shanghai Daily (China)
4) The Telegraph	4) The Dawn (Pakistan)
5) The Pioneer	5) Hürriyet Daily News (Turkey)
6) The Indian Express	6) Khaleej Times (UAE)
7) The Asian Age	7) Afghanistan Times (Afghanistan)
8) Deccan Chronicle	8) The Sydney Morning Herald (Australia)
9) The Economic Times	9) Haaretz (Israel)

Not able to locate a news report on BJP's 2019 election victory, the researchers have analysed an editorial from Afghanistan Times newspaper.

6. Research Approach

In the current study, the approach of content analysis is being followed. Berelson (1952) defines content analysis as the systematic study of the content of communication. Holsti, (1967) stated that it is a systematic and objective method for the analysis of the content of communication (Krippendorff, 2004). Within the framework of content analysis, textual analysis method has been used. In a systematic order, the analysis is specifically carried out about the: **a)** information sources in the news reports, which shows the importance the issue has received by the particular newspaper, **b)** the headlines, which gives a quick and brief indication about the nature of the article and the stance of the newspaper towards the story, and **c)** the framing analysis of the various actors in the media reportage of the BJP's 2019 electoral victory. Media's role amounts a significant consideration in the ever shrinking world (McLuhan, 1964). Apart from mere information, it has a significant impact on thought processes, which occurs due to frames that media generates (Goffman, 1974). A news frame gives emphasis to certain aspects of a topic in comparison to others. This research method allowed for a broader and a systematic understanding of the coverage of the event.

7. Results and Discussion

The Hindu

Reported by Correspondents.

The banner headline *India Gives Modi a High Five* gives emphasis to the popular decision.

The news report focuses on the improvement in vote bank of BJP in different states including South and northeast, "shrugging off its north-centric tag".

The report reasoned Modi's victory on his "campaigning relentlessly" on Balakot strike in Pakistan. The same turned the page over on issues of demonetisation, GST or the Rafale purchase. Furthermore, the multiphase poll in U.P, Bihar and West Bengal which helped Modi to concentrate on these states worked in his Party's benefit.

The news report advocates Modi as a "strong leader" and someone who could bring "stability" in India.

Hindustan Times

Reported by a correspondent.

The banner headline *India Keeps Faith in PM Narendra Modi* portrays Modi as a trustworthy person.

The news report focuses on the results of the Lok Sabha elections – who won, where and by how much margin. Elaborating on the reasons of Modi's win, it says that witty campaigning was used which overwhelmed the social, economic and other limitations of the BJP's last tenure. For instance, the party played up its "pro-poor welfare agenda" but meanwhile sought to avoid the trap of being seen as elitist, the term it refers the opposition (congress) with. It mixed its campaigning with strands of Hindutva like "awarding a ticket to terror-accused Pragya Singh Thakur in Bhopal, or a commitment to remove the special provisions with regard to Jammu and Kashmir in the Constitution".

Unlike past, it also had won over large segments of backward and Dalit communities. Moreover, the incapacity of Rahul Gandhi, "not seen as prime ministerial by a large section of the electorate" also run in Modi's benefit.

The Telegraph

Reported by a Correspondent

On the front page of the newspaper, three words *He Is Back* occupy the whole space, from top to bottom. *He* (Modi) is in orange and *Is Back* in red. There seems to be a warning hidden in these words as the red signifies danger.

On page 3, the lead, in extra big fonts, *Thunder Of Majority*, again seems depicting concern as the word Thunder denotes loudness, anger, or bad-weather forecast.

Critical instance, the news report focuses on the reasons of Modi's victory. It discusses a few: "a master at manipulating and fashioning a narrative", the topmost is his "relentless propaganda" of projecting himself as a colossal figure in last five years; this compensated for the other socio-economic limitations of NDA rule. Apart from the benefit of Hindutva ideology on his victory, the news report doesn't rule out Modi's own wit of "repeated allusion" towards his "humble" background and his ascetic life with "no family to bequeath his wealth or legacy for." The same made common people to identify with him.

Times of India

Reported by TOI Team

The kicker head *Chowkidar's Chamatkaar* (the watchman's magic) makes Modi a person of special powers. The headline *Nationalism, Hindutva and welfare schemes for the poor* mentions his magic mantras, the reasons for the BJP victory.

The report elucidates on this campaigned-powerful-figure of Modi, particularly his "aggressive military retaliation" in Balakot, which "flattened opponents (congress and others)". It also benefitted him in overcoming their "allegations" on him "over the Rafale deal and issues of unemployment and farm distress".

Apart from the above, the news report credits Modi's rapport with the poor as another reason for his victory, which includes the "implementation of welfare schemes" for them and "his success in reining in inflation and corruption".

The future of NDA 2.0 by Modi is delineated as "accelerated focus on reforms, infrastructure, welfare and a "right wing" political agenda like the citizenship bill and the national register of citizens, and an "expected harder policy" towards separatism in Jammu and Kashmir, "unrelenting focus on terrorism", which the party accuses Pakistan with.

The Indian Express

Reported by Correspondents.

The kicker head *Modi 2.0* and the headline *Vote surge from 17 to 22 crore scripts BJP's historic victory* gives a numerical figure of the election results. Further, the news report objectively delineates on these numbers.

Exploring the reasons of Modi's victory, the report suggests that the campaigning which revolved around "national pride" and "Modi's popularity" determined the choice of electorate and not the "narrative of rural distress, effects of demonetisation, depressed commodity prices, joblessness, sluggish private investment and sliding consumption pattern" put forth by the opposition.

Analysing the numbers, the news report suggest a few things: the acceptance of Left parties has reduced and that of cultural nationalism of BJP has grown; the BJP has prospects of making further inroads into areas in South India.

The Pioneer

Reported by a Correspondent

The kicker head *India Incredibly Modi-Fied* emphasises on the majority viewpoint. Below the story headline *Anti-BJP Forces Bite Dust, Party Better Its 2014 Feat* reflects BJP a better strategist against the opposition.

PM Modi's victory is reported in the following terms: 'outshone every competitor', 'emerged as a pan-India force', unstoppable 'Modi's juggernaut'.

The news report makes 'charismatic' Modi a person with whom "a powerful India that is both a strong economic and military power" could be linked.

Interpreting the poll outcome, the news report has drawn a few inferences: the middle class and trader community has sided with the BJP; war cry slogans against Pakistan have played in Modi's favour among youth; there is a desire of change, and that change could be brought by "muscular", pro-poor, pro-development and honest pro-Hindutva regime" of Modi and not by the "stale goodies of social justice and secularism" of congress.

The New Indian Express

Reported by a Correspondent.

In two words, *Triple Ton* the title of the lead story refers to the magnitude of the mandate acquired by BJP. The report terms "the nationalism card" and BJP's "organisational heft"

reasons for Modi's victory which played down the economic crisis of the government's past tenure.

The news report is upbeat in tone regarding the Modi government. During the election campaign, Modi had already seen "huge goodwill among the people for his government; after the victory, he is committed to 'sab kasaath, sab kavikas'. Furthermore, he is referenced as "charismatic" and someone "people could repose faith in".

The Asian Age

Reported by a Correspondent

The headline *Hindutva Surge Hands Modi A Bigger Mandate Than 2014* with the kicker *TSUNAMO 2.0/makesHindutva* the reason for Modi's huge acceptance in comparison to his previous election.

Against the opposition, the news report crafts a strong and colossal figure of Modi using metaphors of destruction: 'a tsunami', 'a tornado', 'an earthquake'.

The chief focus of the news report is on the reasons of Modi's victory, which include his campaign of "muscular nationalism, aggressive Hindutva and anti-Pakistan rhetoric", which triumphed over the opposition's campaign of "caste politics, regional aspiration and economic hardship".

Deccan Chronicle

Below the kicker head *Modi Blockbuster*, the headline *PM Dedicates Party's Massive Victory To Nationalism, BJP Tally Rises*, credits Nationalism for Modi victory, the rest of the news report is written verbatim to that of Asian Age news report with the same by-line.

The Economic Times

The banner head *Yes! Prime Minister* gives away the excitement and pleasure about the results of the election.

The news report interprets the Modi victory in following terms: the end of Mandal politics, rejection of dynasty-based politics in the heartland (quoting political observers), a political shift towards a centrist, nationalist political force. The report gives Modi's "charisma, his "administration's focus on welfare schemes for all segments of society as reasons for consolidating a common person's vote, including women and first-time voters.

The International Coverage

Dawn

Reported by a Correspondent.

In the middle of the front page, the headline reads *Modi Wins Second Term By Landslide, Pledges Inclusive Govt*; the second part of the headline hints towards the minority issues in Modi's India.

The news report explores reasons behind Modi's victory. It gives credit to his disposition, like in projecting himself the brain behind the Balakot air raids in Pakistan on February 26, 2019 and a "leader of choice against a confusing array of claimants in the opposition" like Rahul Gandhi.

The news report focuses on the improvement of votes in BJP's favour in different states. It also talks about the growing mass acceptance of BJP over communist-led left front parties.

The New York Times

Reported by Correspondents.

In the left corner of the front page, the headline *Modi Wins Second Term, Routing Gandhi Party* refers towards the lesser acceptance of secularism; the subhead *A Victory Empowering Hindu Nationalists* explains why. Further, it alludes to the likelihood of more Hindutva-sponsored policies.

The news report critically explicates the contradictions between Modi's words and his actions; instead of inclusivity and prosperity which he had promised before the start of his last tenure, he forsook minorities, favoured billionaires, failed to deliver enough jobs.

Furthermore, his fascist leanings, politics of polarization, and his reputation which dangles between blood (2002 Gujarat riots) and money (free enterprise, emphasizing on infrastructure, development and rooting out corruption) is talked about. Furthermore, he is projected as an 'authoritarian', who doesn't like to be put to question.

Some of the people quoted in the news report refer to the vulnerability to the fabric of social and religious diversity of India under Modi's tenure, rife with mob lynchings dropping of Muslim representation in Parliament to its lowest level in decades, crafting a Hindu-sponsored history unfavourable to Muslim identity, and right-wing Hindus have felt emboldened to push an extreme agenda, including lionizing the man who fatally shot the independence hero Mohandas K. Gandhi."

The Guardian

Reported by a correspondent

A jumper on front page, rest of the news report appeared on page 34. The headline *Modi Scores Huge Victory in Indian Election* simply reports the facts, but the subhead *The Hindu Nationalist Brushed Aside The Economic Woes And Strengthened His Grip On The Country With An Emphatic Win* refers to Modi's importance as Hindu-nationalist among voters over his failure on economic lines during the last tenure.

The news reports gives subtle insights about dark days in offing for the minorities, as Modi's ministry involves people like Amit Shah – who is set to root out unauthorised migrants, called as termites by him, in border states – and Pragya Thakur, a "terrorism-accused" lady.

Khaleej Times

Reported by a correspondent.

Absolutely Modi in big fonts with congratulatory notes from few world leaders occupies the first half of the front page with black background for emphasis. The actual news report comes on page 8 of the paper.

The news report seems more of a PR piece than a news report. The showering statements from the correspondent

himself like 'It's time for Narendra Modi 2.0', 'it's safe to say nothing but Narendra Modi', 'Narendra Modi alone, mattered in the end', and 'Narendra Modi alone and one that he well and truly conquered' proves the same. Furthermore, "for some people", not identified in the news report, it terms Modi's victory the advent of a new era in the history of an India that is ready to shed its "corrupt past" and step on to a "safe, secure and strong future".

Afghanistan Times

The editorial *Modi's Landslide Win* has a positive slant towards the BJP's 2019 electoral victory. It talks about Modi's promise of inclusive government in India. Expressing happiness with the vote results, it pins a great hope of continuing cordial relationship between India and Afghanistan. Acting neutral to the arch-rival relationship of its immediate neighbours, Pakistan and India, it expects Modi to facilitate the honourable survival of Afghans.

Shanghai Daily

Reported by Associated Press

A jumper, *Modi Set For Second Term As Indian Prime Minister* in the left corner of the front page, the rest of the news report appeared on page 3.

Apart from simply reporting the facts of the election, the news report mentions Modi's "popularity as a social underdog in India's highly stratified society" a deciding factor in the recent victory of BJP. The news report mentions a few words by critics about his party with ideology of "hindu-first", "exacerbating social tensions" in a vast diverse nation.

Hürriyet Daily News

Reported by Reuters

In the left corner of the front page, the headline *Modi Claims Victory In Massive Indian Election* simply reports Modi's victory.

Down in the news report, Modi's tweeting about inclusive India right after the victory is seen with doubt as the news report claims the BJP's campaign was "divisive", against Muslim minority. As such the party is implicitly shown as hypocritical.

However, his victory is described as optimistic for investors; second, the challenge before him would be to improve the economic situation in the country.

The Sydney Morning Herald

Reported by a Correspondent, Reuters, AP

The headline *Modi's nationalists secure historic election victory, promises inclusive India* focuses on the nationalistic character of BJP as being the reason behind the party's electoral victory. Furthermore, on the mention of Modi's promise of unity in diversity, questions are raised below in the news report, given the party's divisive electoral campaign, targeted at the minorities.

However, the news report briefs about the Modi's further course of action that would be "business-friendly policies", something the investors gave him thumbs-up for, "and a tough stand on national security and building the Ram Mandir at the place of Babri Masjid", which his party members want.

The Daily Star

Reported by Agencies

The headline *Modi Wins Big Again* refers towards the growth in popular acceptance of Hindutva ideology. In the news report, the increase in the vote bank of Modi government, and its "fresh victories" in other states apart from its core ones, is referred to prove the point. The news report hints towards minority issues in the future, and forecasts an ill-relationship between India and Pakistan.

Haaretz

Reported by Reuters

The headline *Indian PM Modi Stuns Opposition With 'Massive' Election Win* seems referring towards the mass acceptance of Modi and his ideology amid poor economic record of his past tenure a matter of bafflement for the opposition. The subhead *Long-time foe Pakistan tests a missile as results come in*, suggests of furtherance in the fragile bilateral relations between the two countries.

The report offers a brief reference towards the BJP's policies that "put Hindus first, mainly business-friendly and take a hard line on national security".

8. Framing Analysis

The frames for this study were not selected prior to the study and emerged over the course of the analysis of the data. These frames were categorized according to the themes of the content of each story. Based upon the key words of the news story, the frames were categorized as follows: Major frames that dominated select national and international print media were:

8.1. Military frame

This frame was observed throughout the sample. Majority of the national newspaper included this as one of the prime frames while reporting on the central elections. Pulwama attacks was portrayed as an attack on the integrity of the state while Balakot strikes were presented purely as retaliatory. Moreover, these events were associated with the security of the Nation underlying the threat and Modi was portrayed as the sole leader able to deal with the threat.

8.2. Policy oriented frame

One of the dominating themes of this study, this frame dealt with the way language and keywords were used to portray Modi as the benefactor, who was solely focused on the implementation of policies that benefit the poor and lower sections of the society. It was observed that such language was used that presented Modi as a policy oriented Leader.

8.3. Exploitative frame

The frame was dominant in most of the International media and a couple of national dailies. This frame presented Modi as manipulative who was able to divert attention of masses during his election campaigning from the issues of "ill" governance of his past tenure. On the other hand, he was projected as having exploited the narrative of national

vulnerability from Muslim Pakistan and its extension within India, which includes the Muslim population of the country.

9. Conclusion

From the media coverage given to Modi 2.0 victory, it surely was an important issue. The analysis of the sample shows that on all the national and majority of the international newspapers, the news occupied the front page. Almost all the national and more than half of the sample of the international newspapers had tasked their correspondents to cover the story; the rest of the stories in the international section was agency-based.

The media reportage of Modi 2.0 victory touched different things. The main ones included the reasons and the expected results of the mandate. There was a consensus amongst all the news outlets, cutting across national and international media, about the main reason behind the victory that was relentless campaigning on Pulwama attack and subsequent Balakot strike in Pakistan of Modi government in February 2019. But there is a difference of frames used by the national and international media in the matter. Taking the episode as an example, all the national newspapers except a few put forth the frame of “muscularity” of Modi government. Modi, himself, was defined as a ‘strong leader’, who has the power to bring ‘stability’ in India. Further, frames of trustworthiness, dominance, pro-poor and backward are also used by national media to project Modi.

In the international section of sample, the analysis shows majority of the newspapers framed Modi as manipulative. To divert attention from the “rising anger over farm prices and unemployment” in his past tenure, Modi excessively campaigned about Pulwama attack in February and the subsequent Balakot raid. The other frames found, regarding Modi’s victory are of foreboding and fragile optimism. Showing Modi and his government as anti-minority, a subtle warning of dark days for minorities was made.

In both the sections of the sample, there were exceptions also. For example, the Telegraph used frames of propagandist and manipulation for Modi, whereas, in the International section, the Khaleej Times framed Modi as a purist and protector. Similarly, the Afghanistan Times used frames of amity for Modi.

Mindful of the role of news media as key ideological brokers, Van Dijk (1996) believes that newspapers endorse powerful people and organisations by supporting their positions and ideologies. This is reflected in the choice of language used by the journalists in their reportage about particular events. In reference to the national newspapers, the current study reveals a proof to such theoretical position. However, the international newspapers, possibly owing to their independent editorial policies in relation to the matter, showed a deviation.

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