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## The role of media in the 2014 general election in India

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### Abstract

After the election results of 1984, Bhartiya Janata Party became the first non-congress party in India to sweep the poll in the 2014 general election and emerge as the single largest party with an absolute majority. It did not only win the majority of seats rather it managed to increase its vote share in almost every state of India. It especially attracted the young and first-time voters who played a key role in changing the total scenario of the Indian Political system. Overall, the objective of the study is to find out how Indian media contributed to the victory of the Bhartiya Janata Party and How it made it possible for Narendra Modi to become the 14th PM of India.

**Keywords:** India, election, BJP, congress, 2014, media, Narendra Modi, Anna Hazare

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### Introduction

The 2014 general election is considered a milestone in Indian politics and it will always be in discussion in academic and non-academic spheres because of the loss suffered by the Indian National Congress, a party whose history is associated with the independence of India. The then ruling party INC ended up with the lowest number of seats in its own history since independence. The INC defeat of 2014 was unlike the defeat of it, earlier in March 1977, November 1989, May 1996, September 1998, and September 1999. The INC has never been reduced to a number of 42 seats out of 543 seats in the lower house of parliament. This number was a sharp decline from its previous election held in 2009 <sup>[1]</sup>

During the 2014 election, Narendra Modi held the centre stage because the BJP itself was happy and proud of his Gujarat growth model that attracted the citizens, especially the middle-class people. Sambuddha M. Mustafi, in a perceptive analysis in the New York Times, put it compactly that Modi was a 'hero' of the Indian middle class who 'don't really care about democracy, free speech or religious tolerance, as long as they help people get richer' <sup>[2]</sup>. And he was officially presented by the party as its Prime Ministerial Candidate and this helped the party to realize its mission of winning the majority in parliament on its own. Narendra Modi became the 14th PM of India in May 2014 with an absolute majority of 282 seats out of 428 seats, a result not witnessed since 1984.

The result makes this election remarkable and necessary to study and analyse how the Indian media reported the 2014 general election. Whether the Indian media contributed to the victory of Narendra Modi and his party, the BJP?

For the above purpose, the content analysis of the media reports during the 2014 general election from 5 English language newspapers that is the Times of India, Indian Express, The Hindu. The Telegraph and The Hindustan Times will be done here.

### Analysis of media reports during the 2014 general election.

When no. of corruption was highlighted during congress rule like corruption in the 2G spectrum scam, Commonwealth games scandals, and Adarsh Housing society and all this made big headlines in the Indian media, where Anna Hazare movement (anti-corruption movement) became another important highlight in media in 2011, that time English news channel Times Now broadcasted a program called "who is Anna Hazare" <sup>[3]</sup>, in this program they gave the detailed story of Anna Hazare and his past just to inform the viewers about his involvement in the Indo-Pak war of 1965. This is an example of how the news channel tried to build a negative image of Anna Hazare among the people of the nation.

Similarly, on another channel, a report was carried on as "Anna Hazare: The man who can't be ignored" <sup>[4]</sup> where they informed its readers about the sacrifices, he made to fight against the corrupt government i.e., Congress-led UPA government for the rights of the people in India. As a result, he and his campaign got immense support from different sections of Indian society like college students, Bollywood, etc. Soon, the pages of English dailies were filled up with the support of Anna Hazare. This new channel built a positive image of Anna Hazare. By this news, many were left in the belief that the UPA government was the most corrupt government in India since independence.

As a result, Congress also started losing the state assembly elections in the states like Rajasthan and Delhi. These were the states where Congress was in power before the 2013 state assembly elections. In Rajasthan, the BJP secured 163 seats out of 200 which was more than in previous elections in 2008; whereas the Congress could

manage only 21 seats which was a decrease of 75 seats from its existing strength. Similarly, the Congress party, in Delhi state assembly elections, was reduced to merely 8 seats in the 70 members strong assembly; its strength fell from 43 seats it won in 2008. All the scams, rise in the prices of essential commodities, and ineffective leadership worked together in losing faith in the central government. We have seen how the media participated in this movement through its reporting and made congress unpopular among people at the centre and state as well. The Anna Movement and his movement received extensive coverage by the media, it created a vacuum in the political landscape. Slowly this vacuum got deeper over time and then prime minister Manmohan Singh was called a puppet leader. BJP leaders during election rallies also reminded people that the then PM is a puppet and is used by the Gandhi family. Then the Hindustan Times had the headline PM Manmohan Singh was used as 'puppet' by Cong, Gandhi family: Jaitley.

### **Modi as Prime Ministerial candidate and the media**

After losing faith in the Congress-led UPA government and the need for a strong leader was built in the minds of the people, the BJP on 13th September 2013 declared Narendra Modi as their Prime Ministerial candidate. As expected, it got extensive media coverage.

Almost all news channels telecast the announcement live from the BJP's headquarters in New Delhi on 13th September 2013. During this, the most important issue was L. K. Advani's dissatisfaction over the name of Narendra Modi as the party's Prime Ministerial candidate.

At the same time another news channel, like ABP news<sup>[6]</sup>, telecast a special program called ABP Live Special: The story behind Modi's declaration as BJP's PM candidate. The program was based on the name announcement events that occurred on 13th September 2013, before the announcement of Modi as the party's Prime Ministerial face. In the middle of the program, viewers were informed about L. K Advani's letter to the BJP president Rajnath Singh, where Advani conveyed to the party president his decision not to attend the meeting before the announcement was made.

Times Now, in its NewsHour Debate<sup>[7]</sup>, kept the discussion around the Advani - Modi conflict. However, NDTV 24x7 did a good job. BJP's Trump Card?<sup>[8]</sup> The program brought into the debate the 2002 Gujarat mass murder, and also discussed the importance of RSS in the event. The anchor of the program, Barkha Dutt, smartly brought in the issue of justice for the victims of the Gujarat riot while Mahesh Jethmalani, senior lawyer and also the BJP's National Executive member and Swapan Dasgupta senior journalist and member of Rajya Sabha, were stating that the issue of 2002 Gujarat mass murder was just a 'motivated and deliberated alarmism.'

After the announcement of the name of PM, 13 news report was carried on by The Indian Express. The paper informed about Modi's PM candidature announcement in the report "Modi is BJP's Prime Ministerial candidate despite Advani's objection"<sup>[9]</sup>. The Times of India carried the news under the headline, Narendra Modi appointed BJP PM candidate, Advani disappointed<sup>[10]</sup>, and The Telegraph reported the event with the headline BJP hopes to reap NaMo windfall<sup>[11]</sup> Therefore, it is clear that different newspapers saw the event in different ways.

### **Modi and the Media**

The relationship between Modi and the media during the 2014 elections campaign was not similar to the relationship that they had during the 2002 Gujarat mass murder and in the weeks and months after that. There were vast differences in the approaches of the media towards him and the regime in Gujarat in 2002 and in 2014. The huge transition of the media's approach towards Modi from being critical and holding him accountable for the mass murder to glossing it over began to be found as early as in 2008.

The year 2008 was the year of economic crisis around the world. The economic crisis that had its geneses in the United States had its impact on the developing nations like India too. The report, Global Economic Crisis, and Its Impact on India tabled in the Rajya Sabha<sup>[12]</sup>, while

explaining the impact of the 2008 economic crisis on the industrial sector in India pointed out that 'In the manufacturing sector, the growth has come down to 4.0 percent in April-November, 2008 as compared to 9.8 percent in the corresponding period last year'. This decline, in the industrial sector, it added, had the 'waterfall effect' on the employment scenario in India.

During the elections, if any candidate gains support from the business elites, they can be promoted by exposing individuals or groups of voters, and the news that would, directly and indirectly, popularise these candidates. Not to mention that even the politicians themselves exercise control over the media through ownership.

Coming back to the corporate ownership of the media, the political decision of the voters can also be influenced by censoring the news that could damage the image of the candidate.

Keeping this in mind, we now need to look into the relationship between the business corporates and Modi as the Prime Ministerial face of the BJP and by extension the NDA. It won't be wrong to say that business corporates supported Modi during the 2014 elections more than anyone else. This can be easily substantiated by the fact that the BJP was the favorite of the corporate donors before the election. In 2013, it was reported that out of 100 corporate leaders, 74 percent supported Modi. Praful Bidwai, argues that the business corporates love Modi and his Gujarat model because,

*It gives huge tax write-offs (e.g., over 60% on the Tatas' Nano project). Business adores Modi for his ruthless decisiveness in granting super-fast industrial approvals. In promoting Modi, it's committing the same blunders*

that Hitler's and Mussolini's business backers made aggravating the grave threat to Indian democracy from the communal extreme-right<sup>[13]</sup>.

The media indeed contributed to the victory of the BJP led by its PM candidate Narendra Modi. This contribution came in three distinct but interconnected ways.

First, by giving extensive coverage to Modi, as the CMS Media Lab study report suggests<sup>[14]</sup>. According to this report, during the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, Modi got 2,575 minutes, which was 33.21 percent of the prime-time news telecast. The coverage of Modi on television was 7.5 times more than the coverage of Rahul Gandhi during the same period. Rahul Gandhi got 336 minutes, which was only a mere 4.33 percent of the total coverage. The Aam Admi Party leader, Arvind Kejriwal, interestingly, was in the second position with 799 minutes which was 10.31 percent, six percentage points more than the Congress vice-president.

Second<sup>[15]</sup>, while giving such extensive coverage to Modi, media outlets created his image of a pro-business leader. News outlets celebrating the announcement of the Tata factory in Gujarat were one of the earliest examples of it. Any news that could have damaged the image of Modi, like the 2002 Gujarat pogrom, for instance, was either filtered out or rendered into the margins. Moreover, the aspect of welfare schemes was not given space and time because doing so might have created a positive image of the UPA government in the minds of the voters. This was also the reason why, in the NES survey conducted by the Lokniti-CSDS, the respondents' choice of welfare issues as a major issue before and after the election was a negligible percentage. CMS Media Lab report found out that, despite extensive coverage, there was no qualitative shift in the priorities of coverage. Corruption, Election Commission, and opinion polls, in that order, received more coverage among issues next to the development and governance-related issues.

The third way<sup>[16]</sup> in which the media manufactured the consent for Modi, with the support from the business corporate leaders who own (completely or in shares) media outlets and the BJP was able to control and limit the issues that entered the national and regional election discourse. Plus, the media, under the tutelage of their corporate masters, did not try to challenge the discourse that was being set by Modi and his party; rather they participated in proliferating it.

## Conclusion

The role of media in the 2014 general election will always be in the limelight as the 2014 Lok Sabha election has witnessed a new way of campaigning with new tools and techniques like social media. A Charismatic personality of Narendra Modi managed to change the verdict of the election. After the 1984 election, it was for the first time that a non-congress party got a clear majority in independent India and this is also the first election that the media has reported in much more detail. The presentation of the 2014 election by the media makes it important to understand and analyze it. The sixteenth Lok Sabha election is the source of knowledge for us to know how media helped the party in securing the full-fledged majority and how Narendra Modi managed to secure his position as a prime minister and took an oath after becoming the 14th Prime Minister of India.

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