



Journal Homepage: - www.journalijar.com

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

Article DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01/13844

DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/13844>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

RETHINKING THE LEADER'S EFFECT: PERSONAL AND NATIONAL APPEAL OF MODI-ELECTION 2019

Prof. Archana Sawshilya

Aditi Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi.

Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 30 September 2021

Final Accepted: 31 October 2021

Published: November 2021

Key words:-

Brand Modi, Mann Ki Baat,
Incorruptible Man, Weak Coalition

Abstract

The 2019 General Election was a landmark victory for BJP and for Narendra Modi in particular. One major factor that led to the historic landslide victory for BJP was brand "Modi" himself. The brand "Modi" was carefully weaved by the BJP and their digital media team, around his very successful and an aggressive foreign policy building a sense of National Pride for Indians. The Brand Modi was also built around the **Man Ki baat** and his image of an **incorruptible man**. His digital team was so powerful during the 2019 elections that even the Macro economic issues took a back seat. More than anything else a very strong factor that contributed to the landslide victory of Modi led BJP in 2019 was a **weak coalition of the opposition and lack of a strong leader** that people could look up to as an alternative to Narendra Modi.

Copy Right, IJAR, 2021,. All rights reserved.

Introduction:-

The 2019 General Election was a landmark victory for BJP and for Narendra Modi in particular for this was a victory that not many political pundits had predicted. To my opinion it was Modi led BJP victory where personal and National appeal by our P.M played an important role. In 2014, mobilizers moved to the party because of its chances of winning and not much because of Mr. Modi. But this strategic decision changed in 2019 when BJP's partisanship was seen loyalty to Modi, In my research I have dissociated the Modi effect from the BJP effect.

In the early part of 2019, months preceding the General Election, BJP faced defeat one after the other in state elections and that too in states as Chhattisgarh, MP and Rajasthan which were states that had brought BJP to power in 2014. The voting pattern in state elections reflected a strong shift towards voting for local issues and local leadership.

In addition to the above, the negative impact of demonetisation and GST had led to huge unemployment problem, topped with the accusation that government was trying to suppress these figures. All pre-election surveys predicted that NDA may come back to power but no one predicted the landslide victory that BJP got in 2019.

Narendra Modi called himself a "chowkidar", India's watchman while there were scandals of defence contracts during his tenure. The minorities felt unsafe with him at the helm of affairs and his Hindu Nationalism despite his promise to leave the "Ram JanmBhoomi" decision to the Supreme Court. He boasted of being a "chaiwala", a person from humble origins, but fingers were raised at his connection with Reliance and Adanis. He promised "acche din" but could not deliver enough jobs to Indians.

Corresponding Author:- Prof. Archana Sawshilya
Address:- Aditi Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi.

Despite all these contradictions, Narendra Modi, took his party to a stunning victory in 2019 proving all political pundits wrong.

There were several factors that led to this iconic victory

More than anything, one major factor that led to the historic landslide victory for BJP was **brand “Modi” himself**

The brand “Modi” was carefully weaved by the BJP and their digital media team, around his very successful policies which touched the life of each common man making them feel special, and an aggressive foreign policy building a sense of National Pride for Indians which was something that had not been the case for long.

During his first tenure as Prime Minister Modi launched some excellent schemes which touched the lives of every common man. These schemes as building millions of **toilets, Jan DhanYojna, cooking gas connections, direct cash transfers to individual accounts, Swachh Bharat, Rural Gas Connection**. These schemes touched the lives of the common man and especially the **women** of the household who felt that for the first time someone had thought about them on a national platform and supported the same not merely on paper but through actual action. The 2019 election saw the maximum turnout of women voters and that has been one of the major contributors to the success of BJP in 2019. In fact even in his election speech Narendra Modi said that this was a victory for mother who was longing for a toilet.

It cannot be denied that Narendra Modi is an excellent orator with an intense speaking style and through his speeches he emerged as a leader who would defend his nation at any cost and pursued an **aggressive foreign policy** against China, Pakistan when we stood up to China and almost went to war with Pakistan. His foreign policy also got India closer to the United States and brand India was built across the world. Brand Modi ensured that the sense of National Pride was highest in decades for Indians, both in India and abroad. Every country that Modi visited had a huge turnout of Indian population living in those countries with the crowd chanting the name of Narendra Modi. While he was criticised for being in foreign land for more days in his tenure than being in India, but his aggressive and yet embracing foreign policy paid off when India became a name to be reckoned with and Indians after a long time felt a strong sense of national pride. Many Indians felt he was the best leader to raise India’s standing in the world. After the Pulwama attack in Jammu and Kashmir that killed 40 India soldiers in February 2019, Modi chose an aggressive course of action with airstrikes against militants on Pakistan territory and proved himself as a decisive and a nationalist leader and thus ensuring that people voted not for political parties or any other issues but for national pride and national security which he proved he could defend and safeguard. Modi proved himself to be the leader who could **deliver national security and national pride to the people of India**.

The Brand Modi was also built around the **Man Ki baat** where in a simple yet very effective style, Prime Minister Modi touched the lives of young and the old, and spread a message of positivity and hope amongst them which was getting lost in a sea of corruption all around.

Narendra Modi also stood for a man whose first choice in life was to live the **life of a monk** and therefore his image was that of a man who was **incorruptible**. For the common man who had been frustrated with scandal after scandal of corruption, Modi was a man who provided hope of a clean government. He was someone who did not have a family and had renounced everything to take care of the larger family, his country. Just before the elections when Narendra Modi went to pilgrimage in the Himalayas and wore the saffron robes to sit in meditation he reinforced that image of a monk who was pure and incorruptible.

The appeal of Brand Modi was also built around his **Hindu Nationalist beliefs**, his careful continuous reference to the our Hindu heritage during his speeches, his visit to the cave for prayers just before the elections, all these further helped him to the Hindu population which formed 80% of the Indian population. While the opposition sought to counter this with their secular coalition but the weak coalition was no match for Brand Modi.

While Modi expressed his Hindu nationalism, he also took the bold step of abolishing **Triple Talaq**, as a result of which for the first time Muslim women came out and voted for Modi in huge numbers and had a huge contribution towards his spectacular win.

Brand Modi and his digital team was so powerful during the 2019 elections that even the Macro economic issues took a back seat.

Data from Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy released in April 2019 had shown that unemployment had increased to 7.6%.the highest point since October 2016. It had also highlighted the fact that 11 million jobs were lost in 2018 alone largely due to the after effects of demonetization and introduction GST. Stress of the MSME sector and farmer indebtedness was also highlighted in several quarters.

The Opposition sought to highlight these in its election campaign but team BJP had their narrative ready. The social media campaign and election speeches of team BJP highlighted the steps that BJP had taken to end the ill effects of 70 years of corruption under the Congress rule. Demonetisation and GST had initial starting teething troubles but these were necessary first steps needed to end corruption, end black money, and bring transparency and more accountability in the working of the government machinery which was the major issue with the common man. The campaign team also highlighted that all these steps were in the national interest and in fact BJP had identified and deregistered 338000 shell companies which was a major step in checking fraud and corruption by recovering 130,000 crore of black money. They claimed that this also doubled the tax base.

Even the claim of rising levels of unemployment in India and which had reached an alarming level, could not help the opposition for a strong media team and Prime Minister Narendra Modi claimed that there were no dearth of jobs and in fact data was not correct and skewed as these did not cover the data of the unorganised sector which accounted for 85-90% of jobs in the country.

More than anything else a very strong factor that contributed to the landslide victory of BJP in 2019 was a **weak coalition of the opposition and lack of a strong leader** that people could look up to as an alternative to Narendra Modi; Brand Modi loomed large, The strong oratory style of Mr Modi, backed by his Media team which took the social media by storm, made sure that BJP came back to power. The personal appeal of Narendra Modi was once again the main tool used by his formidable campaign team as they ensured that Mr Modi was all over the traditional, mainstream as well as the social media. There was no match for Modi among the opposition parties. His popularity was all time high and his charisma, his oratory skills, his dynamism, made people repose their faith in despite not being very happy with the economic side of the government performance.

A survey released by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies found that nearly one-third of people who voted for the BJP did so in support of Brand Modi, rather than the party or their local candidate. Narendra Modi's popularity had actually grown compared with 2014, when he led his party to **the first majority victory in 30 years, the researchers said.**

Weak Opposition party and lack of leadership

Another masterstroke that the Mr. Modi and his campaign team played was very successfully portraying the **2019 election as an election between Modi and Rahul. This** was very beneficial for Mr. Modi who was a powerful orator and could speak the language of the masses, connect with them and turn every negative satiation into a favourable one while Rahul Gandhi was very weak and could never back up his statements and data emphatically. He appeared as a weak leader who could not even control the loose coalition.

Not only was Rahul Gandhi viewed as a weak leader for not building the coalition together but it was the **flawed election strategy of the Congress** which contributed to the win of BJP. The Congress campaign failed on two front. **First**, instead of criticising the government for its economic failures, they attacked the government for being corrupt. This was a big mistake for it only reminded the people of all the corruption scandals that the Gandhi family and Congress had been involved in. That coupled with Narendra Modi's image of a monk, benefitted the BJP as people lost trust in the Congress.

Secondly, Congress was also very high handed in the manner in which they worked with their coalition partners as a result of which they could never present a strong united front. BJP on the other hand was extremely accommodating with its alliance partners in states as Bihar and Maharashtra.

When the opposition called Mr. Modi a "chor" and said "Chowkidar chor hai" Narendra Modi and his team turned the phrase to their advantage by changing the whole narrative and built on the national security narrative by framing

himself as a Chowkidar, or watchman, who would protect India. This built on his reputation as someone who would make India great and helped boost strong nationalist sentiments and a sense of national pride amongst Indians.

Another factor that led to the resounding victory was the **formidable election campaign machinery of team BJP**. For the first time during elections it was not the print or traditional media but the social media which played a major role in reaching out to the common man. BJP proved itself to be a party that kept pace with time and technology and used the social media through which it connected easily with the masses and could reach out to them. The use of WhatsApp, Facebook, You Tube , Google, Instagram, and other social media platforms brought BJP closer to the first time voters , the youth of India , and spoke their language , creating an instant connect with the party and contributed to a large extent to their victory. The opposition also used the social media but they stepped in late and while the BJP spent more than 260m ruppees on social media Congress spent only around 35m rupees.

The **Business Community also liked Modi**. This has often been seen as contradictory because the economy was not looking bright after the end of the first term of the NDA government but the markets liked Modi. They believed that another Modi government would be good for business and his victory would bring about stability in the government. A weak and **fragmented opposition** could not win the trust of the market which needed stability and continuity for business to prosper. The investors were also confident and were ready to invest in India as during his first term Modi simplified the complex tax system and cracked down on corruption. The markets were confident that while execution of the policy may have been defective, the policy of demonetisation and GST were best for the Indian economy to create a corruption free government machinery. Even the small and medium sized industries did not want a fractured coalition government run by small regional parties and not getting along with each other.

Many respondents to the survey said that they had seen positive changes being introduced by the NDA during their tenure as trying to build a corruption free government, cracking down on inefficient and corrupt government officials, building toilets, creating cleaner cities and therefore, despite all economic issues were ready to give Narendra Modi one more term to make the changes that India so badly needed. The Indian voter loved the dynamism and decisive leadership of Narendra Modi and were willing to give him the reins of the government for one more term

Narendra Modi has become a national icon for the people of India. He is someone who had the guts to stand up to China, threatened Pakistan with a war and brought us national pride on the international stage. He is the chowkidar of the nation who has no personal family and the only family he has is his nation. He represents all the Indian traditions and values in the manner he conducts himself in his speeches and his relation with his mother. He is everything that a common man looks up to. The BJP has built a personality cult around him. In fact when he talks about himself in his speeches he refers to himself in the third person, for e.g. after the airstrike on Pakistan in February he said at a rally “Are you happy that Modi killed by entering homes?” This statement is a nutshell is Brand Modi which was the biggest contributor to BJP winning the stunning victory in 2019

The 2019 election saw **the largest turnout during elections with more** than 600 million coming out to cast their votes. One came out to vote for Modi or because they felt so strongly against him. One way or the other they came to vote because of him and 67% of the population came out to vote, the largest ever and also the largest number of women voted for him. Some voted for him even though they did not like him for they said there was no alternative.

Modi was a man with a mission during the election process and he campaigned tirelessly and covered nearly 70000 miles and held more than 140 rallies. The Indian voter was awestruck with the energy of the man, his leadership style and his dynamism. They wanted a leader who displayed this charismatic character. They said the party may have flaws but not Mr. Modi., Modi hai to mumkinhai

The 2019 elections have often been compared to the **US Presidential elections** with the focus being on the personality of the leader and his track record than the party. Narendra Modi carried the entire election on his shoulders and unlike the US where a President can stand only for two terms, there is no such limit in India. Unless the opposition manages to reorganise and build a strong united front, BJP and Modi may well be looking at a next term once again.

Now it appears 2014 was no aberration, and that Indian politics has likely entered a new era of Hindu nationalist hegemony fuelled by Modi’s extraordinary popularity.

“We are in an era where you have, once more, a central gravitational force around which Indian politics revolves,” said Milan Vaishnav, the director of the south Asia programme at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. “I think 2019 will confirm that the BJP has replaced the Congress as that”¹

Unemployment and farmer indebtedness, on the contrary are issues that are relevant to a limited set of people who are actually unemployed or experiencing stress of farm debt. The overwhelming importance of inflation vis-à-vis other issues will guide incumbent governments in future elections.

1

<https://www.theweek.co.uk/101381/indian-election-narendra-modi-s-bjp-tipped-for-victory#>