

## Market Strategy in an Indian Election Campaign: A Case Study

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### Abstract

*In the era of virtual reality, the old way of reaching out to people (urban as well as rural areas), is no longer going to work. Especially in a country like India where 65% of the population is below 35 years of age, the new age strategy to meet, greet and treat people is on or through the internet. This paper aims at assessing the Narendra Modi's Election Campaign from the time he was nominated as a Prime Minister Candidate till he became the Prime Minister of India. It was although a new style of campaigning, which included a massive use of technology in order to reach the masses and spread all over the world. His campaign was one of the most viral campaign ever in the Indian History and competed with the one, that of Barack Obama. Using the same strategy, the other political parties have gained ground in the year 2015. Aam Admi Party (AAP) in Delhi extensively used the same tools and the Janata Parivar group also gained advantage in recent Bihar legislative assembly elections.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

A **political campaign** is an organized effort which seeks to influence the decision making process within a specific group. In democracies, political campaigns often refer to electoral campaigns, wherein representatives are chosen or referendums are decided. In modern politics, the most high profile political campaigns are focused on candidates for head of state or head of government, often a President or Prime Minister.

The **campaign** is the period when the political parties put forward their candidates and arguments with which they hope to persuade people to vote for their candidates and parties. A **campaign team** (which may be as small as one inspired individual or a heavily-resourced group of professionals) must consider how to communicate the message of the campaign, recruit volunteers, and raise money for the campaign. Campaign advertising draws on techniques from commercial advertising and propaganda.

The planning and strategy which takes account of a campaign's goal, message, target audience, and resources available is one the most difficult and hardest challenge a candidate has to successfully complete to win the elections. Taking into consideration the amount of planning, hard work and tactics associated with the campaign and the journey from being nominated as the party's candidate and the lack of studies on the context, this study attempts to fill this gap by taking the most influential and successful case of Shri Narendra Modi.

### 1.1 Shri Narendra Modi's Journey

Narendra Damodardas Modi, born on 17 September, 1950 is the 15th and current Prime Minister of India, in office since 26 May 2014. Shri Narendra Modi, a leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), was the Chief Minister of Gujarat from 2001 to 2014 and is the Member of Parliament (MP) from Varanasi.

### 1.2 Chief Minister of Gujarat

**First term (2001-02)** - On 7 October 2001, Modi was administered the oath of office. He then won a 24 February 2002 Rajkot- assembly election, defeating Ashwin Mehta of the Indian (INC) by 14,728 votes.

**Second term (2002-07)** - After accusations of anti-Muslim rhetoric during the campaign, during Modi's second term his emphasis shifted from Hindutva to Gujarat's economic development.

His 2002-07 changes have led to Gujarat's description as an attractive investment destination. According to Aditi Phadnis, "There was sufficient anecdotal evidence pointing to the fact that corruption had gone down significantly in the state. If there was to be any corruption, Modi had to know about it". He established financial and technology parks in Gujarat and during the 2007 Vibrant Gujarat summit, real-estate investment deals worth ₹ 6.6 trillion were signed in the state.

Shri Narendra Modi's continued to complete his **Third term (2007-2012)** as well as his **Fourth term (2012- 2014)** too in Gujarat.

### 1.3 Prime Ministerial Candidate

On 31 March 2013 Modi was appointed to the BJP parliamentary board, the highest decision-making body in the party, and at the party's 9 June national executive meeting he was appointed chair of the BJP's central election campaign committee for the 2014 general election. Senior leader

and founding member Lal Krishna Advani resigned his party posts after the appointment in protest of leaders who were "concerned with their personal agendas". His resignation, which was described by The Times of India as "a protest against Narendra Modi's elevation as the chairman of the party's election committee", was withdrawn the following day at the urging of RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat. In September 2013, the BJP announced that the chief minister Sri Narendra Modi would be their candidate for prime minister in the 2014 Lok Sabha election. Modi was a candidate in two constituencies: Varanasi and Vadodara.

## **2. OBJECTIVES OF THIS PAPER**

The main objectives of this paper are:

1. To examine the campaign's design strategies.
2. To evaluate the rallies, campaigns and mass meetings organized by the party.
3. To critically evaluate various development and nurturing support systems of BJP.
4. To examine the fund raising structure and funds related controversies associated with the party.

The data for the research was collected using extensive primary and secondary research. The primary research included interviewing 500 people associated with the party as well as the voters. The secondary research was based on data collected from newspapers, websites and other related public documents available on the internet.

## **3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter analyses the entire political campaign of Shri Narendra Modi from the point he was voted as the prime minister of India to the time he was selected as a prime ministerial candidate. It discusses its campaign's design strategies, its communications and media strategies, various supporting organizations and research teams. It also focuses on rallies and campaigns conducted by BJP, its funding structure and the innovative use of technology.

### **3.1 Campaign's Design Strategy**

1. **Shri Narendra Modi's campaign's vision and mission:** Right from the outset, the party under Modi set itself stretch targets which focused the efforts of all the stakeholders to one central objective: Mission 272+. This was the ultimate goal of getting the BJP a majority of its own even while focusing on building the right alliances in the right states and voter niches.
2. **Making a regional brand national** - Shri Narendra Modi who was itself a brand name in Gujarat sought a vision to spread the brand to entire India. His style, working philosophy and the achievements he had made in Gujarat were already very popular in India and in abroad. He wanted to propagate the Gujrat model and his work to become a national brand through the campaign.
3. **Clean up tainted past** - Shri Narendra Modi was blamed for the Gujarat riots that happened in the past. His vision for the campaign was to remove that stained image and portray himself as a clean figure that is apt for the position of Prime Minister.
4. **Focus on growth agenda** - Focusing on the growth plans he had developed for the nation, was a part of Shri Narendra Modi's vision for the campaign. He wanted to spread his future plans for India to bag maximum votes in the elections.

5. **Connect with urban voters** - One of the statements which formed the vision for Shri Narendra Modi's election campaign was to connect with the urban voters.
6. **Use of Analytics as a tool** - A bunch of engineers and statisticians analyzed data of the past six elections, fused it with demographic, socio-economic and their own opinion poll data, and sliced it to the level of polling booths across 400 constituencies. This is analytics, a tool employed by hardcore market research and digital companies, and the Modi team said it helped them get a nuanced picture of patterns, issues and voters' inclinations. "At any point in time, we have exact information on which vehicle is placed where and who is driving," said a member of the team.
7. **Using the big brains** - The Citizens for Accountable Governance was a think-tank spearheading Modi's marketing and communication push. It was a central research team of policy analysts, economists, foreign policy experts and graduates from leading institutions across the world. The team had prepared reports on national policies and social and economic issues that had been discussed in the election. It provided constant inputs for Modi's speeches, social media conversations and chai pe charcha.
8. **Mind reading** - On-ground surveys and interviews spot electoral patterns and preferences – in short, internal opinion and exit polls. The information gathered was passed on to the analysis' team that fused it with its own data and other inputs from the research team. The team then analyzed the data for trends and aberrations. This effort resulted in a Rapid Action Report, which presented a constantly evolving picture of a constituency. These inputs were passed on to Modi's team and they used it to fine-tune his campaign.
9. **Fanning out** - Beyond TV commercials, print ads and radio jingles, the strategists conducted several events and programs across the country, especially in rural areas, to build a direct connection with people.
10. **The mainstream** - A team of professionals operating out of New Delhi supervised commercial messages released to the mainstream media, besides buying space and time on various media platforms. It released a 75-second (the norm is 10 seconds) TV film during nine shows on Star Plus. Called 'Roadblock' in ad lingo, it was the only ad aired on those shows, blocking all other commercials. "It was an excellent way of capturing consumer mind space without getting lost in the cacophony of commercial messages of various brands," said a Star Plus insider. Besides, Modi's messages play during popular TV shows on youth channels such as Channel [V].
11. **The IT factor** - A dedicated IT cell at the party level and Modi's own team use Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp and YouTube to spot friendly voices, reach out, train them and make them stakeholders of Brand Modi. Twenty lakh volunteers worked to keep the Modi buzz alive online. Many were young and mid-career professionals from financial services, marketing, media and IT who had quit, taken sabbaticals or were simply devoting a few hours every day to the cause. 'Modi4PM', 'NaMo4PM', 'NaMoChaiParty', 'Pledge4Modi' were some of the campaigns they ran.
12. **On the ground** - Several exercises helped to reach out to voters, such as chai pe charcha; the 'Statue for Unity' project; Sankalp, an initiative to address gender disparity; Manthan, an online and on-ground event with students asked to present "innovative solutions" to 14

“critical challenges the country faces”; Samvad, where volunteers interact with farmers; and Ivote, an initiative urging people to vote. The team running the project is also filing RTIs and organizing online petitions to keep the buzz going.

13. **Extensive, Innovative and Satisfying campaigning using media, marketing and branding strategies** - Reach out to larger audiences through 360 degree, full-fledged campaign that includes mass media such as print, television, radio and outdoor, new media such as online and social media, and events and on-ground activities (rallies and other appearances, consumer touch points at tea stalls) and much else were part of Shri Narendra Modi’s mission.
14. **Conduct campaigns in almost every state** - BJP aimed at conducting campaigns and rallies in almost every state. Hundreds of rallies were carried out of which many were attended by Shri Narendra Modi personally.
15. **Register people to Vote for Modi** - They convinced the people and registered them to vote for Shri Narendra Modi.
16. **Market Modi in earlier Congress based areas** - Many states had a long history of being ruled by Congress with BJP having minimal or no seat in that state. They marketed Modi in these Congress based areas and saw very good turnout in the rallies they conducted.
17. **Propagate the agenda of good governance to the masses** - The main focus that BJP laid on post its selection as the winning party was good governance and the development they would bring to the nation.

### **3.2 Campaign Planning**

Modi campaign planning revolved around the 4P’s of marketing strategy. These P’s of marketing were very fundamental in designing an apt election campaigning strategy for the Lok Sabha elections.

1. **Product** - In Shri Narendra Modi’s case, from day one it was clear that the product on offer was Modi himself, not his party. Collective leadership and team work is fine, but these are about how a brand is produced – and important for back-end operations. These features do nothing for the brand itself. For the consumer, the product is what she is buying, not the factory and the supply chain. This was the thought process of Shri Narendra Modi’s campaign design. He focused on showing him as the individual leader. BJP was selling Shri Narendra Modi rather than any other product was clear from its slogan: Ab ki baar, Modi Sarkar.
2. **Place** - BJP figured out that the next election is going to be driven by young people – with nearly 10 percent of the electorate being first-time voters. That’s nearly 80-100 million first-time voters. Hence there was huge reliance on social media and internet advertising. Shri Narendra Modi’s first public address after the Gujarat election was at Delhi’s Shriram College of Commerce – another youth connect indicator.
3. **Price** - Product Modi has been positioned as the problem-solving, hard-working people’s agent to get things done. It was filling a clear need in the consumer for effective governance – exactly the ingredient missing in competing products like the Congress, which offered more features at a lower price – more freebies, more rights, etc.

4. Promotion - This is probably the best part of Shri Narendra Modi's marketing, for his promotion was world class, with different messages being given differently to the micro-markets where he expected to gather votes – all within the overall brand message of change and improved governance.
5. **Agenda setting:** Shri Narendra Modi and his team had always set the agenda before every rally based on oppositions and the need of the hour. He and his team always planned meticulously before and even after the campaign to design the future plans.
6. **Primary agenda for the party was Gujarat Model** - They made sure they propagated the model well to reiterate the success and fortune Shri Narendra Modi had brought to Gujarat.
7. **Tried to make it presidential style** - Shri Narendra Modi's campaign was designed in a manner which was somewhat comparable to Shri Barack Obama's campaign. He became the first ever politician to focus on use of extensive research and new technologies in his campaign.
8. **No issue raised by opponents should go unanswered** - He made sure each every question asked by the opponent or media or any allegation put by them was timely answered. His agenda included to never let his image to be stained by the allegations put on him.

Shri Narendra Modi used 3 point propagation agenda to clearly define the goals of its party. These agenda as stated by him were as follows:

1. We need Action not Acts
2. Red Carpet, not red tape
3. Sabhka Sath, Sabhka Vishwas

Over the time, Modi itself became the main issue in the election. He had not only set the agenda, he became the agenda.

### 2.3 Leadership Philosophy of Modi Campaign

1. **Right product at the right time:** It is important to remember that successful products, services and people generally make their appearance when the market, and in this case the country, needs them. The time was opportune for Narendra Modi and that is precisely the reason why he has been so phenomenally successful.
2. **Change the rules of the game:** Modi changed the rules of the battle by making the Indian election similar to the US presidential elections where leaders like Bush, Clinton and Obama have been the face of their parties. People vote for the individual even more so than the party they represent. Clearly the BJP had the edge in leadership that was stated well in advance.
3. **Modi, the Sachin of the BJP:** This time round the BJP realized that people wanted to vote for Modi more than the BJP.
4. **Strategy is sacrifice:** Brands that are focused, single-minded and clear in their communication and offering succeed. Modi kept talking about development and good governance. Clearly the prospect of jobs and prosperity went down well with the millions of young Indians who were voting for the first time. Contrast this with the diffused claims of the Congress party.
5. **Inspire Others:** Modi got hundreds of educated people, lawyers, MBAs and accountants to take sabbaticals from their work for three months as they worked day and night for his success. A leader inspires people to follow him.

- 6. Ab Ki Baar:** Finally, successful brands have powerful, visible multi-media campaigns that capture the imagination of the people. The line 'Ab ki baar Modi Sarkar' written by Piyush Pandey, and Madison's capabilities as the largest Indian-owned media buying agency took the country by storm. Let us not forget the online campaigns of Modi on Twitter where he has a phenomenal following, and his TV appearances. His media interview with Arnab kept the country enthralled. Contrast this with the poor showing of Rahul Gandhi who started with a whimper and continued to go downhill.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

##### **4.1 Winning factors for Shri Narendra Modi**

The campaign had the following points which they followed rigorously and because of which the party won:

- 1. A perfectly aligned force from teeth to tail:** From the one leader (Modi) who led the fight from the front, to the last karyakarta, the BJP and RSS foot soldiers, who felt they had a personal stake in this election. When there was such an alignment from top to bottom, it was no surprise that the end-results had been so gratifying.  
The boss put in a gruelling 20-hour day, cross-crossing addressing over 450 rallies in a few months, and addressing even larger audiences with his unique 3D projection technology which enabled him to be in several places at the same time.
- 2. Declare ambitions and goals clearly:** Clearly state what you want and what you hope to achieve if you get what you want. While others pussyfooted around the idea and act undevotedly, Modi had always been clear he wanted to be PM. This is the main reason why many voters were clear about giving him a chance.
- 3. Set stretch targets and align entire team to the final goal:** This time, the BJP's stretch target was Mission 272+ - getting a majority for the BJP on its own. Make every last workers feel this is his target - and every worker should forget his petty quarrels and works for the larger goal.
- 4. Break the final target personal targets into a set of smaller targets and milestones:** The targets should be broken down into set of smaller and achievable chunks and assign it specific teams to achieve them. Shri Narendra Modi played this card very rightly.
- 5. Demonstrate strength, then invite stakeholders: Showed the stakeholders that Modi is powerful enough to hold the nation strong and invited them to vote for him.**
- 6. Plan meticulously and in detail.** TV viewers watching Modi's speeches in various places thought it was all about oratory, but that was only one part of the Modi plan to communicate with the masses. The truth was there was an entire army of people working to support his rallies. There was a huge IT crew that monitors the buzz on social media. There was a huge contingent of on-ground researchers who thanked people who come to his rallies and seek feedback.

A Narendra Modi rally was never about just erecting a stage and giving the speakers a mike. There was water-tight security combing, there were LED screens to give everyone who attended a clear view of the man, there were speakers at vantage points to amplify every sound byte from the stage - the works. Plus there were feeds organised for the TV channels, and facilities for live streaming on the internet.

7. **Says an Indian Express report from the rallies:** "Narendra Modi rallies have, in recent times, gone on to become full-fledged stage productions involving light, sound, carefully chosen music, stage design and sky cameras - all intended to enhance viewer experience and build the Modi brand."
8. **An Economic Times report explained why a Modi rally was not just any event:** "At every Modi meeting, an army of volunteers' combs through the crowd, gathering feedback, profiling attendees and making a headcount. Later the party's IT cell collates all the data."
9. **Set the agenda and keep control.** The main issue in this election was Modi himself. All his detractors had taken him on - making him the focus of this election. This suited Modi well since this election then became a referendum on him. He had not only *set* the agenda, he *became* the agenda.
10. **Attack the enemy where he is weak.** This strategy was, of course, obvious. Modi's strength had been the UPA's economic failures, and the weakness of Manmohan Singh as PM. It did not need a Modi to discover where the UPA's chinks were, but it required genius to discover whom to attack, how to attack, and for what.
11. **Never play to your weakness:** Answering direct questions from aggressive TV anchors was an uncontrollable situation. As Rahul Gandhi discovered in his TV interview with Arnab Goswami in January, you can make a fool of yourself. Modi, in contrast, used only friendly interviewers for his Q&As in the initial time to build his credibility. He had learnt from bitter experience - as in the India Today Conclave in 2013, when he lost his cool following aggressive questioning about 2002.

## 5. FINAL RESULT

Eight months after the BJP named him its prime ministerial candidate, Narendra Modi proved he was worth the opposition the party originally encountered over its decision. Shri Narendra Modi had delivered the BJP's best result ever, giving it more than the 272 seats it needed to form a government. This was the first parliamentary majority by a single party since 1984.

With its allies, the BJP now had over 300 of the 543 parliamentary seats. The stunning numbers provided incontrovertible evidence of the "Modi wave" that the BJP name-dropped for months. The Shri Narendra Modi's phenomenal win was the colossal defeat that he had enforced upon the incumbent Congress.

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