

Role of Narratives in Building a Political Brand – A Case Study on Modi Government

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Abstract

Narratives or say storytelling in marketing and communication has played a vital role for ages and political parties can use the narratives in their campaigning processes in many other areas for strengthening and building their political brand. This paper describes the role of narratives that can help in building the brand for political parties with the case examples of past strategies of the Modi Government in three different scenarios in which narratives were utilized for effective communication and in general for building their own political brand. The paper also enunciates the three areas where narratives play an important role in defining the overall perspective like the involvement of narratives on Individual processes, in the policy processes, and the narratives based on cultures.

Keywords: Narratives or storytelling, political parties, brand

Introduction

Narratives create a positive, negative or neutral story which helps in identifying the essence of the brand and even a powerful constructive narrative can address the consumers' needs and wants by fulfilling their demands. Narratives try to connect the dots by addressing the issues in the fragmented world with the different thought processes of the beings (Hansen, 2010). Political Campaigns can be proven to be drivers of narratives as every human tries to find out the meaning behind every statement so that they believe the process ahead. Narratives or say storytelling in communicating the brands, generally have the potential for persuasive communication which can act as a promotional strategy by making the things indelible in human brains or say by increasing the impact over the loyalty. Political communication in the form of stories with minuscule information can tint a sensation by impacting the voter's brain. The studies have revealed that the news of politics which is debatable in nature can have a strong influence on the emotional and physical stability of well-being. The cost of politics can in fact beyond the personal relationship involves social, physical, and emotional being towards engagement of political narratives. (Smith, Hibbing, 2019). The researcher from Penn State Stated that involving personal stories from the voter's perspective can act as a great political narrative strategy and if narratives are used in advertising the political brands, then they can exert a great influence in large amount among the public (Swayne, 2018). Narratives generally involve the body of stories which generally include: Characters that are displayed in stories like heroes, villains, Victims, etc. These stories try to convey a common meaning which makes the world draw an interpretation towards it and how things work (Fisher, Walter, 1984). One cannot evaluate or challenge the narrative representation as reality is socially constructed which can be empirically coherent in nature.

In general, Narratives play a crucial role in three areas (Davidson, 2016):

- 1) Decision Making at Individual Level
- 2) In the processes of Policy
- 3) Narratives based on Culture

Decision Making at Individual Level: Researchers across the globe in the areas of sociology, psychology, political science, and various sciences related to cognitive theories represent that individual does not make decisions based on the purely rational way but the emotions and different gamut of cognitive biases play a major role in decision making when stories are encountered, Reported in World Development Report of the year 2015. Narratives influence decision making and behaviour by playing a central role between mental area (Stereotypes) and social beliefs. Thus, an individual when encountered by the narrative revolves around thinking spontaneously, thinking socially, and thinking based on mental perspectives such as stereotypes.

In the Process of Policy: In the book of theories of policy processes, it is remarked that the narrative process in policymaking represents the important aspects of policy advocacy and

narrative policy framework (Paul, 2015). The punctuated equilibrium theory exemplifies that the strategies through narratives can fundamentally reframe or redefine an issue by involving a large amount of change in the policy. The theory represents that process of politics being stable in general but a slight incremental change may take place. The narratives in political branding or avenues are redefined by adding new dimensions for debate and exerting a full amount of authority to increase public attention.

Narratives based on Culture: Some battles in the political journey are won while some are lost and one of the reasons can be the working of areas against framing powerful political narratives which are embedded in all-embracing broad-gauge cultures. Thus, political brands need to look beyond their spheres where narratives are immersed or say embedded in the vast culture. The policy or the policymakers involve themselves around public with interaction in complex ways and thus the narratives that are engrained in the culture within; may be detrimental for a long change of the process which may lead to branding.

In the book, *Re:Imagining the change*, the authors (Reinsborough, Canning, 2011) refers to the embodiments of narratives as the fundamental assumption by which one interprets the information and understands the world around them. Narratives convey the unawareness of the assumptions to reveal, confront and change the decisions. Thus, narratives play a vital role in categorizing and retreating by identifying the problems and priorities and viewing the solutions as acceptable and possible.

Literature Review

The studies are performed on narratives in political advertisement suggest that the narratives in advertisements, which communicate the political brand was found to be positive and focused fully on issues related to the agenda of politics and the candidate's character. Candidates who lost the elections were found to be using major negative attacks of advertisements in form of anonymous announcers and the candidates who won the election were found to be including narratives around family members and general issues. (Vafeiadis, Shen, 2018).

Research on narratives represents the fact from the literature, the role of narratives for the public in the area of Chinese ethnic community for their Confucian heritage. Narratives have generally politicized the culture by helping to sculpt the Chinese identity and diasporic nationalism over the timeline. The research presented the fact that the Chinese community with the help of narratives has tried to redefine their identity with respect to their relationship with the non-Chinese culture. It was a time when Australia became the federation and there was a revolving argument about Confucian heritage when a new agency was deploying for mobilizing the urban Chinese Australian communities. (Kuo, 2013)

The study through the meaning of transfer model represents the relationship of context in political marketing with that of brand endorsers, brand personalities, and their voting behavior rights in terms of political parties in India where leaders have their direct comparison with their developing countries. The finding suggests that the endorsers of the political brand directly

have an impact on the political brand personality and even develops a preference towards a political brand by developing brand equity for political brands. The paper suggested that marketing and communications have a significant impact on political parties. (Kaur, Sohal, 2020)

While creating advertisements for disseminating the message, one should understand from the perspective of strategic plan and involvement of characters in terms of brand identity which differentiates it from the competition, which is existing and it tries to build a powerful relationship with its audience. A narrative should be constructed based on what the brand defines, its relationship with the competition and, what the audience of the brand wants. The public generally trust the brands which deliver the promise by stimulating an emotional response (Landa, 2017)

Research Gap

A lot of research has been performed in the area of narratives and their use in advertisements for building brands, preferences, brand personality, and brand equity but a negligible amount of research has been found in the existing literature which represents the idea of using the narratives for building the brands for political parties. The research tries to identify certain important points from the literature to explore the idea of using the narratives which can influence the public and in turn can help in developing the brand for political parties

Research Objective

- To understand the idea of narratives in building the political brand.
- To understand the role of narratives for strategic marketing and communication purposes in building a brand for political parties.

Research Methodology

This research is based on the secondary data collected from various research journals and also from online database like Ebsco and ProQuest. This research involves the collection of some case examples of the Modi Government (Past Strategies used in narratives) in India and their usage of narratives in building a political brand.

Case Studies

Demonetization: On 8th November 2016 – The NDA Alliance in India announced the demonetization of all the Rs. 500 and Rs. 1000 notes and announced the issuance of new Rs. 500 and Rs. 2000 notes. The narrative that the NDA government used to justify the dramatic and historic decision was quite appealing to the people of India. The government in their

narrative claimed that the objective of this exercise was to curb black money, mainly the income which has not been reported and thus remained untaxed for a longer period of time, money that was gained through corruption, illegal activities like human trafficking and counterfeiting currency was also taken into consideration as a narrative for the historic decision. The other objectives of the narrative that were put forth were increasing the number of taxpayers and encouraging transactions to go digital. Among all of these, the most talked narrative that really had a great impact on the people of India and evoked a sense of patriotism among the Indians was that demonetization would help them to reduce the finances available for the terrorists and radical groups like the Maoists and Naxalites. Although what the government had promised, things did not go quite in that way: 1) According to the 2018 RBI Report, around 99.3% of demonetized banknotes were deposited with the banking system. But the banknotes that were not deposited were worth Rs. 10, 720 cr. (107.2 billion), which clearly shows that the demonetization for curbing black money for the economy has failed but the narrative impressed the people of India. 2) The number of Income tax returns filing increased from 43.3 million to 52.9 million between the financial year of 2016 and 2017 which was not that significant increase compared to the increase in the year 2015-2016. An analysis of the economic data shows that there has been no substantial increase in the number of new tax payers or direct tax collection due to demonetization. 3) Initially there was a decrease in the activities and attacks by Maoist and Naxalite radical groups, which was attributed to lack of finance following the demonetization. But terrorism remains a big threat as it was three years ago, with the recent attacks in Gadchiroli and Pulwama continuing to expose our vulnerability to terror rocks. A spokesperson of the government claimed that curbing black money and promoting digital payments and financial inclusion were the only two objectives which the board of directors of RBI was in agreement with the central government. Both the governments with their narratives started the agenda but deployed towards narrative fallacy by portraying various other motives on the basis of patriotism, nationalism and lured the people of India to fall prey to this narrative.

Surgical Strike: on 29th September 2016 – India announced that it conducted the surgical strikes against militant launch pads across the line of control (LOC) in Pakistan – administered Kashmir (POK), and inflicted significant casualties. The surgical strikes came just before to the public when the elections were going to be contested in two major states of India: Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. A surgical strike is a tactical operation carried out by the military forces and obtains substantial evidence of the impact and damage inflicted by the strike is difficult and always does not reach the common people. Most of the time, people or say public is governed by the narrative or the story that is spread around such incident. At this critical period, some leaders from the opposition pointed out that the Modi government is using the surgical strike for electoral benefits. Some of the opposition party representatives also made claims that surgical strike is the result of the army's work and the government must not take the credit for electoral benefits. But various narratives related to the revenge of the URI attack in Kashmir, patriotism, United for India were framed around the strike by the government and

its representatives, and the people of India were made to believe that the surgical strike was by no means related to any political scenario and was just an act in response to terrorism or vice versa.

Article 370 and 35A: In the month of August 2019, the government stunned everyone by saying it was revoking nearly all of article 370, which 35A was part of. The article allowed the state certain part of autonomy – its own constitution, a separate flag, and freedom to make laws and other issues like foreign affairs, defence, and communications remained the preserve of the central government. This was again a historical event that whole of India witnessed and India's relation with the state of Jammu and Kashmir had been there for more than 7 decades was about to change. The people of India did not have any direct role in supporting or denying the bill in both the houses of parliament but their indirect support to this was of utmost importance to the ruling political party. Taking various points into consideration, the government quite efficiently narrated to the people about the brighter side of abrogation of article 370. Some of the most common narratives among those were: 1) To integrate Kashmir and put it on the same footing as the rest of India. 2) It's because of these sections that democracy was never fully implemented, corruption increased in the state, that no development could take place. 3) Removal of restrictions will encourage industry and private investment in the state that will return and create more jobs for youth and help in development. 4) Property and all other rights of women marrying outside the state will now be fully protected. 5) All the centers' act and law like child and women protection, compulsory free education, no to child marriage, etc. would be applicable to the state also. 6) The scheduled tribe (ST) that makes around 12% in the state of J&K and that is around 10% of the Indian population would now be getting benefits of reservation in J&K.

Other sensitive topics like the nesting of terrorism in Kashmir, local people being manipulated by radical organizations were also used as a narrative so that majority of people turn out in support of the abrogation of article 370. Was this abrogation of article 370 really beneficial for the state of J&K and has it really led to its development? Well, this is a never-ending debate.

But this idea of narrative has lost its charm to narrative fallacy in the situation of pandemic that occurred to form the year 2020 as the government was not able to explicitly associate a narrative around the situation of COVID-19, a deadly virus, and were not able to make their point in form of narratives on controlling the pandemic situation. The pandemic has equally affected all the members of the country and many countries of the world as well, it affected the rich, the poor, lower class, middle class, and upper class at the same rate and in fact, the people of all the religions and hence the narrative framing might not work in such a situation for building a brand for political parties as it has worked in other political scenarios.

Conclusion

All of the above examples of cases represent that how narratives around an incident in politics can be used to market the thoughts and ideologies of the political parties to a large number of people in the political scenarios using various aspects of the narratives. The narratives are also framed based on caste, creed, sex, and colour or religion for the brand building for political parties. Associating the story with the political agenda by the political parties or the government makes the people believe or support the agenda without thinking about its outcomes and consequences in the future. Narratives also play a vital role in framing a decision of individual members based on the preexisting stereotypes within, they can lead towards the process of change in the policies framed and the same can be redefined in different scenarios. The importance of culture was also seen as a part of narrative framing and it somewhere builds the brand for the political parties. The narratives are used around the three major processes stated as; The Individual, The Policy, and based on The Culture Processes. The surgical strike, demonetization, and article 370 was revolving around the three processes in the narratives of political communication.

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