



Research Article

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Surrogate Advertising in the 2019 and 2024 Indian General Elections: A Van Dijk's Discourse Analysis of Selected Songs

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ABSTRACT

The dawn of the 21st century transformed the political landscape that witnessed two phenomena—an increase in poll expenses on account of a rise in focus on publicity and the beginning of surrogate campaigns, which is an attempt to indirectly propagate information without explicitly disclosing its political affiliation. India has witnessed surrogate advertising in several election campaigns in the past six years, including in the General Elections 2019 and 2024. Several media forms were used for surrogate advertising in recent years. But for the purpose of study, Teun A Van Dijk Discourse Model is utilised to critically analyse the discourse propagated by the select surrogate songs. The study purposively selected two songs each from 2019 and 2024 General Elections from YouTube based on selection criteria and then are analysed following an analytical framework based on Van Dijk's Discourse Model.

The study found that several genres like devotional, folk, rap were used either for personal glorification, re-branding or counter messaging making songs functions as constructing individual leader identity, lodging protest and seeking accountability. The analysis further reveals that songs function as powerful surrogate tools for political advertising in Indian elections by embedding ideological messages in their text and visuals. These findings demonstrate that musical content circulated through digital platforms i.e., YouTube operates as an indirect yet influential mechanism of political persuasion.

INTRODUCTION

Surrogate advertising is a mechanism or the strategy of using indirect communication for promotion and marketing of a product using another one, which closely resembles it. The modern surrogate advertising originated in 20th-century Britain, when manufacturers began promoting their liquor concealing it behind advertisements of a similar brands like juices and beverages after the declaration of prohibition on the promotion of alcohol (Verma, 2021; Debnath, 2025; Pollins, 2023). The phenomenon of commercial surrogate advertising for promotion of liquor transcended geographical boundaries to different parts of the globe including Canada, Norway, the United States of America (1920 to 1933) and India

from 1948 (Pollins, 2023). Songs, music, and compact discs remained a dominant form of surrogate advertising in the 20th century however, the advent of Web 2.0 transformed not only the form of promotional strategies into short films, reels, short videos, etc but also transcended into the boundaries of other spheres including influence to the mechanism of the modern day political campaigns.

Surrogate Advertising in Political Campaigns

An indirect form of political endorsement was first witnessed during the mid-20th century in the USA through campaigns of labour unions, civil rights groups and issue-based advocacy organisations on issues aligned with a particular political candidate or party (McAdam, 1985; Walker, 1991; Malbin & Gais, 1998; Alexander, 1992). Those

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political activities laid the foundation for modern-day surrogate political campaigns. The modern framework, however, evolved in the USA of the 1970s through the emergence of Political Action Committees (PACs) using indirect influence through different media- print, television, etc. (McAdam, 1985; Walker, 1991; Malbin & Gais, 1998; Alexander, 1992). The political actors- political parties and leaders, across the globe, has deployed these strategies during elections and other campaigns.

Indian political actors also followed the suit. The modern-day surrogate political advertising in Indian elections began in 2004, when the Indian Government advertisements themed on 'India Shining' acted as a surrogate for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the General Election (Kapur & Vaishnav, 2019; Jayal, 2006). The surrogate campaign strategy evolved between 2004 and 2014 along the lines of the 20th century USA. The civil society groups and Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs), including India Against Corruption (IAC) acted as surrogate campaigns, making hue and cry over alleged corruption and policy paralysis in the functioning of the Indian National Congress-led Indian Government, indirectly endorsing a political party (Ninan, 2012; Chakravartty & Roy, 2017). In the corresponding period, the Indian electoral landscape witnessed another phenomenal change as well, as the electoral expenditure rose to Rs 1308.75 crore during the 2014 General Election from Rs 269.42 crore in the 2004 Lok Sabha Election, and poll expenses rose to Rs 2000 crore in 2023-24 from Rs 1100 crore in 2013-14 (ADR, 2015; Pankaj, 2024). Further, the rise in electoral expenditure can be attributed to spike in media publicity, including advertising, which constituted a major share of the annual poll expenditure of national parties as 52.3% of Rs 6500 crore, i.e., the cumulative electoral expenditure of 18 political parties between 2015 and 2020, was spent on publicity (Pankaj, 2024; Jacob & Doshi, 2021).

Despite this, the form of surrogate strategy didn't change much and remained in the form of fan clubs, campaign surrogates, etc., before 2019 Indian General Election. However, the surrogate strategies witnessed digital transformation by the 2019 Indian General Election as spending on digital political ads on meta platforms rose to Rs 3.82 billion in 2024 from Rs 296 million in the year 2019, which not only provided a new avenue for the political campaigns but also helped in transforming the form of advertising (Google Ads Transparency Centre, 2025).

Hence, the political surrogate advertising has been on the rise since 2019 as evident from a media report by Sambhav et al. (2022), which noted that on Facebook, at least 23 ghost and surrogate advertisers placed 34,884 advertisements for 58.3 million rupees (\$761,246) for the BJP, gathering a whopping 1.31 billion views between February 2019 and November 2020. In comparison, the

article found only two surrogate advertisers for INC spent 2.3 million rupees (\$30,032) on 3,130 advertisements, getting around 73.8 million views (Sambhav et al, 2022). Such usage of surrogate advertising further intensified during the 2024 General Election, beginning from 17 March 2024, when the top 20 advertisers on Facebook and Instagram spent INR 85 lakh for pro-BJP ads till 23 March 2024 (Barik, 2024). Similar tactics was used from 5th April to 4th May, 2024 by labelled digital creator pages like 'Phir Ek Baar Modi Sarkar' advertising indirectly for the BJP and the top 20 advertisers, including 15 surrogates, spending INR 17 crore between April 23 and May 6 on Facebook and Instagram (Mishra, 2024). Similarly, surrogates for INC used Meta pages like 'Humari Priyanka Didi', 'Kharge Fan Club', 'Aa Rahi Hai Congress', 'Amethi aur Raebareli ki Kahani' on Instagram and Facebook targeting masses for broader reach in second half of 2024 General Election before polling in Raebareli and Amethi- the congress bastions in Uttar Pradesh (Kar, 2024). The discussion above points towards the growing prominence of surrogate advertising in the Indian elections. This form of campaign isn't limited but uses several media forms, formats and genres because of their potential to invoke emotion affecting cognition but music and songs because of their cultural values are used for subtly embedding political messages among Indian voters in several elections. A study highlighted that political actors employed strategically designed songs intertwined with dominant religious or caste-based film music during the 2021 Tamil Nadu Assembly Election in order to subtly shape the voters' perceptions and affect the electoral outcome (Neelambari & Jeyapal, 2024). Similarly, another study noted that usage of aesthetics, especially music and clothing, carries a message about a campaigner's closeness to the imaginations and needs of local populations (Guenauer, 2016). Similarly, the musical ad of Chandrababu Naidu, subtitled as 'emotional song', was viewed as a Facebook ad some 800,000 to 900,00 times in Andhra Pradesh and the YouTube cover of Jagan Reddy's viral campaign song gathered six million hits in a little over three weeks (Varughese et al., 2021). Moreover, several singers-cum-digital influencers are also playing a key role in electoral campaigns, helping in shaping opinions, raising awareness about political issues and even mobilising the public. Purohit (2023), in his work titled *H-Pop: The Secretive World of Hindutva Pop Stars*, through select case studies, traced how Hindutva pop slowly inserted into popular culture, functioning as an ideological tool by normalising Islamophobia, demonising minorities and vilifying critics without even coming to focus. Such usage of songs, music and popular culture, which functions as an ideological tool, is a new phenomenon in the Indian political landscape just like surrogate advertising using social media platforms.

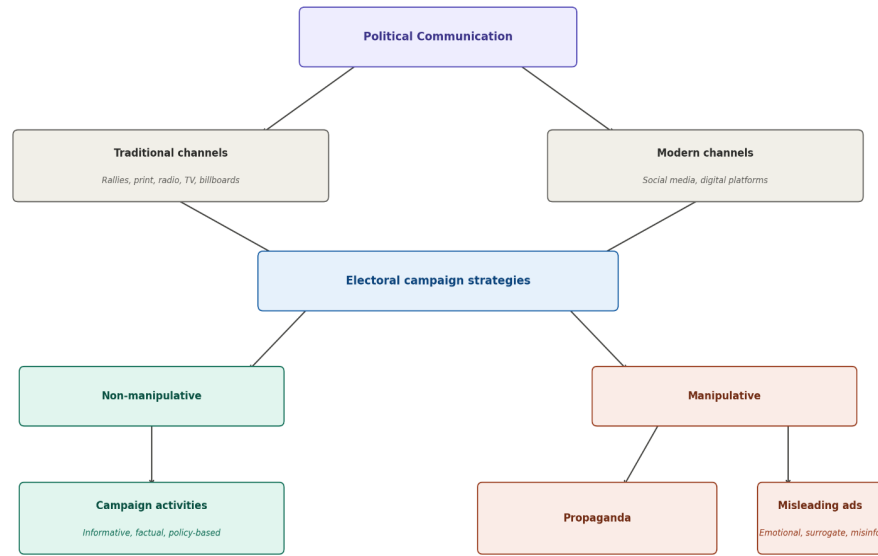


Fig1: Conceptual Framework contextualising Political Surrogate Advertising, Source: Author1

The surrogate advertising operates at intersection of traditional political communication, campaign advertising and propaganda having similarities of being a persuasive technique and differing on front of affecting rationality of a human affecting their capacity to make informed consent (Godber & Origgi, 2023). Political Communication includes news, commentary, debates, discussion, rallies and daily political talk mentioning details of political actors and sharing of information by them while campaign advertising is subset of political communication, which is a paid, concise, emotionally framed controlled messages for influencing voters' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour (Ranjan & Upadhyay, 2024; Duggal, 2023; Batrynychuk et al., 2022; Petitpas, 2022). The main difference between traditional political communication and propaganda is in terms of tactics, whether it is manipulative or not and surrogate advertising falls in domain of the manipulative tactics by proxies of political actors (see fig1). Surrogate political advertising uses all kinds of manipulative tactics like emotional appeals, misleading information to persuade voters. The modern day digital political communication gathered substantial scholarly attention on how digital political communication and online manipulative strategies are playing out in electoral campaigns, but there is still lack of academic literature attempting to understand the phenomenon of surrogate political advertising.

However, there has been enormous literature on surrogate advertising from commercial context i.e., marketing, branding, promotions etc, which has laid foundation for this study. Hence, in this context, the study attempts to analyse select songs to understand how they acted as political surrogates during the General Election 2019 and 2024 and contribute to this gap in existing

literature. Therefore, the study aims to

- To identify, list and categorise the select songs acting as surrogate political advertising employed in India during the General Elections of 2019 and 2024.
- To critically analyse embedded strategic messages using Van Dijk's Discourse Analysis in songs functioning as surrogate political advertisements during the 2019 and 2024 General Elections.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)- a method to understand and interpret language, originated from the works of Fairclough (2013), Van Dijk (1998) and Wodak (2001), laying the foundation for understanding methodological and conceptual frames to understand the deployment of language in social practices carrying complex systems of power, ideology and institutional discourse. The CDA framework considers language as an active agent for reality construction (Fairclough, 2013).

Songs utilised during the campaign operate at the intersection of language, music, and ideology while functioning as key electoral instruments for focusing on certain issues while leaving others. It helps in making these songs an identity distinguisher, serving to aspirations, motivation and mobilisation and other functions. Therefore, the songs are a means of agenda-setting for mobilising the public, influencing opinions, attitudes, polarisation, and legitimisation of political parties, candidates and the issues they raise (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Several studies focusing on campaign songs utilised the CDA approach using Dijk's discourse analysis framework for analysis (Neelambari & Jeyapal, 2024; ElDaly, 2023; Ntiba, 2014; Ozcan, 2025).

Table1: Details of Selected Songs for the purpose of Study

SNo	Title	Creators	Date	Views Count (In Millions)
1	Main Bhi Hoon Chowkidar (I am Watchman, too)	Prerna Panchariya	02-Apr-19	21.7
2	Chowkidar Chor Hai (Watchman is a thief)	Independent youth artists (Rap Battle)	Apr-19	Several versions (a few thousand to over 0.1 M)
3	Abki 400 Paar Hai (This time 400 cross)	Prerna Panchariya, Pardeep Boora, etc.	26-Mar-24	3.2
4	Saheb Chanda Chor Bade Ho (Saheb is a thief of the donation money)	Neha Singh Rathore	04-Apr-24	1.00

Dijk's discourse- text structure (macro, super, micro), social cognition, and social context approach is frequently chosen over other alternatives to analyse discourse in political songs as his method links lyrics to both audience minds and wider social structures (Zaenuri et al., 2024; Hermawan et al., 2022; Fathoni et al., 2023; Hasminur et al., 2024). Dijk models discourse into three key structures: macro, super and micro. Macro structures is the broad theme or meaning of text, schematic (super structure), while micro structures focused on words, sounds, sentence patterns, and meanings, in a sense focused on linguistic structure (Van Dijk, 1988a; Van Dijk, 1988b). In this manner, the Dijk model theorises shaping of knowledge and ideology by discourse, which aptly fits for analysing discourse propagated by surrogate songs aiming at influencing perception of voters (Pham, 2024; Fathoni et al., 2023; Sujatmiko, 2020; Matytsina, 2019). Hence, in this context, the Dijk's CDA framework became significant for the analysis of songs utilised during the Indian election, allowing an opportunity to explore it from the discourse perspective.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study is based on a qualitative descriptive research design employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a theoretical framework to examine and analyse songs functioning as surrogates during the 2019 and 2024 Indian General Elections. The sampling unit for analysis is a song, which was selected using the purposive sampling method following a selection criteria. The study utilised an extensive web-based and academic searches using keywords like "Surrogate advertising, Indian Election, General Election, Political Campaign, Election Campaign, Shadow Campaigns, Surrogate, Songs as Surrogate" for identification of samples. The search resulted in several literature sources, including articles, reports, journals, and research papers, which are used as secondary sources to identify the songs based on their relevance (popularity and virality). In order to limit the study, the study purposively selected songs based on the following criteria:

- Songs created by artists not directly associated with any Indian political party

- Publicly available songs on YouTube
- Songs released during the election, i.e., from announcement till the last phase of voting in the 2019 and 2024 Indian General Elections
- Songs with a view count of 50,000 or more on YouTube
- Two songs each qualifying the above-mentioned criteria from the 2019 and 2024 Indian General Elections

Wutich et al. (2024) has noted that studies using reflexive thematic analysis or qualitative content analysis rely on set of procedures for deciding sample size rather than any statistical formula. Wutich et al. (2024) also highlighted that qualitative studies have smaller sample size, which is based on its nature and specificity. Further, several qualitative studies focusing on unveiling discourse propagated by electoral campaign songs focused on only one song (Zaenuri et al., 2024; Hermawan et al., 2022; Fathoni et al., 2023; Hasminur et al., 2024; Fathoni et al., 2023). However, this study selected two songs from each election and hence included four songs for the analysis based on the listed inclusion criteria (See table 1). The study utilised YouTube for collection of songs because of its nature facilitating it as a hub for user-generated content and community engagement. The popularity of YouTube in India is at its maximum, as evident from 500 million users--the highest in a country in the world, who utilise the platform for infotainment purposes (Elagina, 2025).

The study further developed an analytical framework, wherein each song is critically analysed at all three

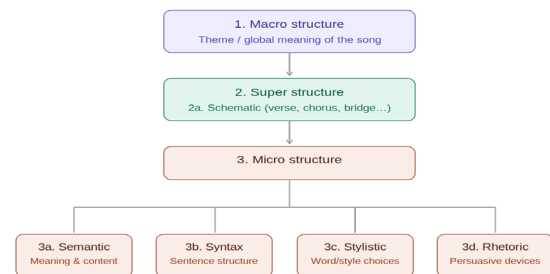


Fig2: Analytical Framework: Van Dijk Discourse Model, Source: Author1 (Developed based on readings of Hasminur et al., 2024; Sujatmiko, 2020).

Table2: Findings based on Van Dijk's Disourse Model in Surrogate Songs from the 2019 Indian General Election

SNo	Category	Sub-Category	Main Bhi Hoon Chowkidar (I am Watchman, too)	Chowkidar Chor Hai (The Watchman is a Thief)
1	Macro Structure	Theme	Glorification of an Individual leader as Indispensable Hero	Counter Messaging Targeting an Individual Leader Image
2	Super Structure	Schematic	Devotional Hymn Form with repeated verses and refrain	Protest Song in traditional Indian folk form a repeated accusatory refrain
3	Micro Structure	Semantic	Deification of a political leader, National Motherhood, Enemy Framing, Slogan Insertion	Slogan Inversion, Broken Promises, Communal Polarisation, Press Freedom and Silencing Critics, Anti-National Labelling
		Syntax	Declarative Sentences, Syntactic Repetition, Third Person Construction	Interrogative Opening, Anti-thesis, Accumulative Structure
		Stylistic	Devotional Register, Martial Masculinity, Civilisational and Religious Symbols,	Satirical Register, Folk/Colloquial Register, Death Ritual Imagery, Agricultural Metaphor
		Rhetoric	Hyperbole, Metaphor, Anaphora, Fear Appeal, False Consensus, Symbolism	Irony/Sarcasm, Rhetorical Questions, Allusion, Antanacsis, Appeal to Collective Memory, Parallelism (persuasive effect)

levels- macro, superstructure, micro, as proposed by Dijk following a systematic step by step process. The analytical framework for the study based on Dijk CDA framework is provided below (See fig 2):

For the purpose of the study, before applying the analytical framework for analysis, each song is watched and listened multiple times on YouTube and each song is transcribed using an open-source online tool. The transcribed text was translated and checked for accuracy and then multiple readings were done for familiarisation. The study then applied the analytical framework mentioned above beginning from the identification of macrostructure (theme). It was followed by the systematic approach specified in the analytical framework for

analysing the songs. Hence, the study traces how these songs indirectly promote a political actor and ideology during the 2019 and 2024 Indian election.

Findings and Analysis

The study applied Van Dijk Discourse Model for critically analysing song to understand the discourse propagated by them in a step-by-step process. The study first identified the elements related to Macro structure, Super-structure and Micro-structure in the verses of each song and later analysed them. The comparative findings are provided below (see table 2 and 3).

The findings highlight how surrogate songs focused mostly around an individual leader, wherein on a side

Table3: Findings based on Van Dijk Disourse Model in Surrogate Songs from 2024 Indian General Election

SNo	Category	Sub-Category	Abki Baar 400 Paar (This Time, cross 400)	Saheb Chanda Chor Bade Ho (Sir is a Donation Thief)
1	Macro Structure	Theme	Re-branding Individual Leader aligning with his electoral goal	Satirical Expose of Corruption by an Individual Leader
2	Super Structure	Schematic	Campaign Anthem using relentless repetition mimicing advertising jingle	Folk Satirical Ballad using accusatory refrain resembling folk tradition of accountability songs
3	Micro Structure	Semantic	Re-Framing Individual Leader as Humble, Divine/Sacred Attributes, Constructing National Mandate, Slogan Recycling, Challenge Vs Wave Binary,	Coded Address (Saheb), Weaponisation of Institutions, Crisis Exploitation, Collusions in Donations through Electoral Bond, Dismissive of Educational Qualifications
		Syntax	Repetitive Chorus Structure, Parallelism (structural repetition), Declarative Certainty	Call and Response, Accumulative Indictment, Declarative Repetition
		Stylistic	Devotional Register, Nationhood Symbol, Familial Language	Folk Satire Register, Ironic Deference, Specifications as Credibility
		Rhetoric	Bandwagon Appeal, Hope Appeal, Epistrophe, Security Appeal, Guarantees as Ethos	Irony/Sarcasm, Rhetorical Question, Moral Outrage Appeal, Anaphora, MetonymyAd

it brands and re-brands the individual leader using several symbols, metaphor, slogans of political party and structural usage of language. However, the songs on the other side criticises the individual leader for his alleged failure on several governance issues including rising inflation, unemployment, usage of polarisation tactics etc. The study would now further delve into to highlight how the elements highlighted in both the findings table is utilised in selected verses of included songs.

Discussion

Main Bhi Chowkidar (I am a watchman)

Song has an overarching theme of personal glorification of incumbent Prime Minister Narendra Modi during 2019 General Election portraying him as a heroic, indispensable, guardian of the nation. Song utilising genre of devotional hymn attempted to make this individual glorification into devotional narrative using Rhetoric (hyperbole) (see excerpt) *"Namo Namo, Damodar Modi, the whole world is echoing. The entire world is ready to follow him."*

Further, several repetition of this refrain in multiple verses of the song attempted to frame PM Modi as worthy of reverence using 'guardian/enemy' analogy in verse one, national pride in verse two, 56-inch chest (strongman, decisive) in verse three, lion's roar (the most powerful) in verse five and 'development/lotus' analogy in verse six using symbolism to link delivery of aspiration to the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). The excerpt quoted above performs deification (act of making somebody or something into a god) at semantic level as 'Namo' in Sanskrit means 'to bow' or 'offer respect' and is part of several religious chants to worship Hindu gods and Damodar is one of the names of Lord Vishnu. Similarly, in other parts, *"He is the son of Mother India, he is the true watchman"*, *"Enemies tremble at his name."* / *"Traitors flee"*, *"Everyone's support, everyone's development — this is the essence of the lotus"*, the song frame him as true heir and protector of Indian motherland while implicitly stating opposition leader as disloyal, uses binary of 'us-vs-them (saviour vs enemy)' for political polarisation and using slogan 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas (Everyone's support, everyone's development)' to connect it with BJP symbol. The song further uses several stylistic and rhetorical elements in verses for evoking voter's emotion and attempting to connect them with the PM Modi.

- *"The whole world is ready to follow him."* / *"The army roars at his single signal."* (Declarative sentence as if these are undeniable facts; Hyperbole in first quoted part)
- *"He is the son of Mother India, he is the true watchman"* (Repeated four times attempting to make claims look self-evident and true; Anaphora for emotional recall).
- *"He speaks like a true man, like the roar of lions. The army roars at his single signal."* (Usage of third-person

pronouns to make it appears as consensus instead of partisan)

- *"Namo," "Damodar," "Mother India," "Ganges flowing through his soul"* (Attempting to make the song devotional, which can't be questioned through usage of civilisational and religious metaphors and symbols; Metaphor).
- *"56-inch chest," "roar of lions," "Enemy Trembles"* (Signifying hypermasculine qualities; Fear Appeal).
- *"He is spoken of with respect and honor in every lane"* (Worshipping tone: False Concious).

Moreover, the song uses several visual strategies like the Lotus-party symbol of the BJP, Indian Tri-Colour, details of the welfare housing scheme, Digital India, farmers, PM riding an Army Tank, sketch of Army men sitting alongside a fence with an Indian map in the background, for amplifying the work related to welfare, and evoking sentiments related to nationalism and social security. Similarly, there is a consistency in the colour scheme in the song, with saffron being the dominant colour throughout the video alongside red.

Chowkidar Chor Hai (Watchman is a thief)

Song is a counter-messaging styled in a rap form inverting the 'Main Bhi Chowkidar (I am watchman, too)' campaign slogan to raise the issues of unfulfilled promises, corruption, polarisation and capture of key institutions. Song used irony and sarcasm style to portray 'The Watchman' as 'thief' instead of guardian or protector. This portrayal is visible in excerpt *"There is noise in every lane, this watchman is a thief, this watchman is a thief."* When the except is used with *"Mann Ki Baat is boring, this watchman is a thief"* in the ending verse of song, it creates a rhetoric (parallelism) making it resemble a protest song, which is visible in its superstructure as it utilised a repeated accusatory refrain *"This watchman is a thief"* to highlight prevailing issues in economy, media, communalism, farmers suicide, example of killing of Gauri Lankesh killing to highlight law and order, silencing critics and press freedom, labelling government critics as anti-national, judiciary simultaneously reinforcing the accusation. The study found that at microlevel the song utilised several techniques to frame the discourse against incumbent prime minister during 2019 Indian General Election:

The song inverting the slogan, used Anti-thesis and Antanacsis (Word play) in an attempt to destroy the individual leader's self-image in the excerpt: *"This watchman sleeps while the citizens stay awake"*, *"There is noise in every lane, this watchman is a thief"*, and *"Those close to the PM enjoy themselves."*

The song highlighted broken or unfulfilled promises using interrogative opening of song to catch attention of audience as evident in excerpt: *"Black money will come, it will remove poverty, Jobs will come, he says good days will arrive. Your promises were lies, the thieves have run away."*

and “Should our hard-earned money come back or not? The public has a right over this money or not?”

The song styled in folk/colloquial register creates an intimacy with common man and uses an appeal to community memory in the excerpt: “That was the talk of the 14th, that was the night of hope, I saw it on the news, my mother was with me.” Similarly, the songs used Irony and Sarcasm in a satirical tone in excerpt: “Fancy shop but poisonous food, Pretending to be a hermit but owning a private plane”, “Mann Ki Baat is boring, this watchman is a thief.”

The song further used Death Ritual Imagery, Allusion to highlight Press Freedom and Silencing and highlight prevailing issues of the time including Anti-National Labelling accusing the then government of silencing criticism in excerpt: “Killing someone like Gauri Lankesh has become easy.” “The murder of unity, just chant Ram Nam Satya”, “The murder of unity, just chant Ram Nam Satya”, “Whoever is an opponent is called anti-national, Whoever opens their mouth, send them to Pakistan”, “Killing someone like Gauri Lankesh has become easy, Whoever spoke up died, whoever is alive is silent.”

The song further highlighted use of communal polarisation using religion as tool to catch the vote in excerpt: “There is no human being now, just Hindu and Muslim, Whether it is a mob or the army, they are essentially Taliban.” The song uses all these techniques to explicitly highlight erosion in democratic values through prevailing issues and implicitly contrasting it with previous government. Moreover, several visual symbols like dark background colour with a shadow moving behind points towards bleak present and use of image of lotus, Modi at beginning and use of Saffron and green colour in lyrics to highlight specific portion are employed to catch attention and to channelise the anger, and dissent.

Abki 400 Paar Hai (This time 400 cross)

Song attempts to re-package PM Modi as a humble servant of common man during 2024 Indian General Election in response to opposition message of him becoming ‘arrogant’ due to huge electoral mandate in 2019 General Election. Song borrowed slogan of the BJP inserting it in a campaign anthem form using relentless repetition to declare that the party is coming back to power third time with a mandate of over 400 seats. It is evident from excerpt “This time it is not a wave but a challenge, this time crossing 400 is certain.” This verse is repeated multiple times which creates a binary in form of us-vs-them through wave vs challenge, using declarative sentence at multiple occasion to make the claim appear unquestionable and true, and repetitive structure chorus to re-enforce the message among voters. The broader theme of song is being individual leader centric connecting him to people’s hope across national geography, image of anti-corruption crusader, focused on development and national security

evident in several verses provided below

“He is the hope of every poor person, Modi is the trust of the public”, “Delhi chants Modi Modi, UP chants Modi Modi, From north to south everyone is chanting Modi” (Appeal to Hope; Across Indian National Geography; Bandwagon Appeal)

The song further reinforced message of Modi being a nation builder and protector, who can provide national security alongside using BJP Slogan Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas (Everyone’s support and everyone’s development) to portray him as someone fulfilling national development dream in the excerpt: “Modi is building a developed India, Modi is keeping the country secure”, “Everyone’s support and everyone’s development, This is the policy he follows.” / “The guarantee of fulfilment is certain, It is Modi’s guarantee.”

The song further uses declarative sentences to state that BJP is crossing 400 seat and the guarantees are definite to be fulfilled in the excerpt: “This time crossing 400 is certain.” “The guarantee of fulfilment is certain.”

Further, the study found that in a very nuanced manner the song framed PM Modi being of very humble and attached him to devotional/sacred attributes alongside nationhood symbols in the excerpts “Modi is the servant of the people, He is the family of all of us” and “Modi is the pride of India, He is the symbol of eternal truth” respectively. The study found that song uses the device of Epistrophe by ending multiple verses and the chorus with “Modi will come again this time” in order to close every unit of meaning with the same electoral message as evident from excerpt “Modi Modi Modi Modi, Modi will come again this time, Modi will come again this time.”

Moreover, on visual part, the study found that song uses several visual symbols like image of Modi, Army personal, Lotus- BJP party symbol, and excerpt from Modi speeches giving clarion call of “Abki Baar Char Sau Paar (This time 400 cross)” alongside image of common man, public waiting to see a glimpse and touch Modi in different rallies in an attempt to portray him as a very popular politician in India.

Saheb Chanda Chor Bade Ho (Saheb is a donation thief)

A satirical song sung in folk genre attempting for a political expose alleging that an individual leader is a ‘thief who has stolen donation money using electoral bond scheme of Indian government.’ Song accuses the individual leader of institutionalising corruption by taking bribe using the scheme through use of investigative agencies during SARS-COVID-19 pandemic time, when the country economy was reeling under pressure and going through a bad phase in the crisis time. It is evident from excerpt: “The Electoral Bond is a big scam; The economy of the country has gone bankrupt. The reins of the country are in the hands of two thugs; Sir is a donation thief”, “Sending ED, CBI, doing it by force, Sir is a donation thief”, “Blackmailing beef companies,



Take the donation, do the business deal", "When corona came as a disaster in the country, Sir took advantage of the crisis"

The study found that the song used several elements from Dijk discourse model like satire, irony/sarcasm, used specificity as credibility, declarative repetition, made appeal to moral outrage, Anaphora, Metonymy to highlight institutional weaponisation and crisis exploitation by an individual leader. The song helped in furthering the alleged corruption in electoral bond scheme raised by opposition leaders during the 2024 Indian General Election. The study found that song used coded address in form of 'Saheb' (Sir/Boss) to address PM Modi and directly attacked him even on personal matter. Song tried to portrayed him being less educated and arrogant dismissing his education qualification and attempting to bust his humble image, which is evident in excerpt *"A little uneducated, a little ignorant, Just a bit, Sir is a donation thief"* and it used *"The reins of the country are in the hands of two thugs"* literally referring him and his deputy as being 'someone who acts violently especially to commit crime.' However, denotatively it may have a meaning of somebody who lies in order to get the votes. Similarly, the song used call and response structure in the excerpt, *"How is he a donation thief? Blackmailing beef companies, Take the donation, do the business deal."* Moreover, the song has very simple visuals with the singer draped in red-pink saree humming the song but utilised imagery of investigative agencies through the portrayal of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to highlight the accusation of institutional weaponisation for alleged extortion of money using electoral bond scheme and silence the critics of the government. The song, however, doesn't use any visual or hidden imagery.

The analysis reveals that songs function as powerful tools of surrogate political advertising in Indian elections by embedding ideological messages through its text and visuals employed in them. These findings demonstrate that musical content circulated through digital platforms operates as an indirect yet influential mechanism of political persuasion.

CONCLUSION

The study attempted to find how the macro, super and micro structure embedded in the text of political songs available on YouTube acted as surrogate during 2019 and 2024 Indian General Elections. The study using Dijk discourse analysis framework critically analyse the lyrics of included songs to found that these political surrogate songs have crossed their function of entertainment instead became a site for contestation of ideologies, narratives and agendas to form a discourse around an individual or issue. The study found that on a side songs focused on personal glorification and branding of an individual leader

connecting him to people's hope, aspiration, national security, development and sought vote in his name for stability of nation in all domains- political, economic, social etc. However, the songs from other side functions as counter-messaging attempting to highlight several prevailing issues like unemployment, rising inflation, unfulfilled/broken promises, silencing of government critics, killing of independent journalist, curbing press freedom, rising communalising etc to bust the image of the leader and its party's government. But, interestingly, discourse surrounds around a particular leader, who is Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi from both the side highlighting that he had not only emerged as one of the tallest political leaders but continued to be so and hence electoral discourse is individualised, though India being a parliamentary democracy. Therefore, it also highlights towards a trend of leader-centric politics, which became a normal phenomenon in a diverse democratic nation like India highlighting the mass appeal of PM Modi.

Moreover, an important thing needs to be noted here that these political surrogate songs are not uploaded by political actors instead by the people, either who are their ideological supporter or proxies, which may have severe legal and ethical issues. These surrogate songs can easily bypass the legal scrutiny and can go viral in very less time increasing the risk of disinformation, misinformation in a country like India, which is the most prone to such kind of information (The Global risks report, 2024).

Though the study included only those songs, which are uploaded on verified channels of YouTube users with substantial followers and view counts in order to reduce such issues. But there is a risk of such unregulated content causing effect to voter's opinion and attitude. However, whatever steps would be taken, it shall not restrict the free speech, so there is a need to have a fine balance between curbing such risk of disinformation, misinformation and not hampering free speech. The study made a substantial contribution to the existing literature by providing a systematic analytical framework developed based on Dijk discourse analysis model for further exploration of any kind of text including those of surrogates. It also contributes in increasing the understanding of how a song sung in devotional, rap, or any other genre act as surrogate and can reinforce voters biasedness, prejudices affecting their attitudes towards a political leader. Further, the study has several limitations as a very small number of songs are included for the purpose of study alongside limited visual analysis was carried out in the study. The study collected songs only from YouTube but the political actors

use diverse source of digital platforms including social media for the purpose of electoral communication. For the purpose of the study, the songs have to be translated for analysis, which may have affected some meanings limiting the analysis. Hence, the future studies shall try to overcome all these limitations for more deeper insights.

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