Indian urban population's perception regarding "Mann Ki Baat"

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The paper seeks to present the perception of the Indian urban population regarding the radio programme aired by the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Structured interviews are conducted with 75 individuals via email and face-to-face communication. Thematic analysis is used for analyzing the interview transcripts.

Findings: Three themes emerged from the analysis: a. continuance/discontinuance of Mann Ki Baat; relevance/irrelevance of Mann Ki Baat and political/non-political gains of Mann Ki Baat for the incumbent government. For a section of the urban population, Mann Ki Baat holds utility in terms of the myriad topics being shared and discussed by the Indian Prime Minister. Some respondents express the need for airing the programme in local languages. Other respondents are not keen to listen to the programme owing to their preoccupations. Some respondents perceive that the programme shows the dictatorial leadership style of the Prime Minister. Some respondents perceive that the programme should not be aired at all while others express the intention of greater percolation of the programme by letting the States' Chief Ministers air similar radio programmes.

Originality/value: The present research is a significant contribution to the literature on offline mode of political communication where a major emphasis has remained confined to online communication channels.

Keywords: Mann Ki Baat, India, Urban population

INTRODUCTION

Political communication has remained a significant mode of expression by the political parties and political leaders in a country (Scherpereel et al., 2018). Political leaders tap diverse communication media (radio, television, meetings and gatherings, internet, etc.) to influence the citizens. In fact, political marketing has an important role of "perception management" of the citizens (Thrassau et al., 2011). Thus, political marketing impacts political salience which is representative of "how prominent politics and political issues are in the minds of the eligible voter" (Veer et al., 2010). Apart from projecting their image in a positive light, the political leaders present a critique of the opponents. Discussion of their key policies and their political successes via political advertisements

are being elaborated and all efforts are made to entice the citizens (Robinson, 2010).

In the Indian context, the incumbent Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, hosted and deliberated upon the Mann Ki Baat radio programme since 2014. In this radio programme which is aired every weekend, the PM discusses about the political, social, economic andother issues. Diverse subjects are chosen in this hour-long programme. The PM aims to connect with the citizens of the rural as well as the urban areas of the country. With this background, the present study seeks to analyze the perspectives of 75 Indian urban citizens on the Mann Ki Baat programme. Implicitly, the research question guiding the present study is: "What is the perception of Mann Ki Baat among the people residing in Indian urban areas?" The study's contribution may be gauged in two respects: first, no academic study has been conducted on the Mann Ki Baat programme; and second, the study provides an example of how political leadership influences the sentiments of the people in a developing country.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a brief on the political communication; Section 3 elaborates on the research approach wherein details are provided on the Mann Ki Baat programme and the interviews conducted with the respondents are being analyzed; Section 4 provides a discussion on the findings; Section 5 concludes the study with academic and practical implications, limitations and suggestive pointers for further research.

Literature on political communication

Political communication is a marketing tool which serves as a mode of improvement in the delivery of political offering to the society (O'Cass, 2001). Government communication has been regarded to have critical importance in influencing the citizens in multiple ways (Bernhard et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2012). For instance, political communication helps in providing information about political issues (Hofstetter and Gianos, 1997; Nulty et al., 2016). For instance, by providing information regarding a natural or manmade disaster, politicians participate in intense media debates and this helps them to build their profile (Evart et al., 2016). Political communication helps in political branding as well (Jain et al., 2017).Traditional (for instance, radio, television, newspapers, word of mouth) and new age technologies (for instance, internet) are being tapped for political communication. Thus, we find instances where weblogs, social networking media, mobile technologies, etc. are being used in a liberal manner. This is suggestive of the enhanced role of Information and Communication Technologies by the governments (Challen, 2001; Slaton and Becker, 2000). Such diverse set of communication channels impacts the verbal, visual and vocal dimensions of individual voters in myriad ways (Nagel et al., 2012). For instance, emotional content of the messages impacts the sentiments of the voters in a major way and this influences the decision-making of the voters (Kusen and Strembeck, 2018). Likewise, by discussing public affairs with their peers and acquaintances, citizens display a positive stance towards the value of political debates in the society (Lee, 2007).

Traditional media is significant even today as it serves as a gatekeeper and agenda setter for political parties (Kalsnes et al., 2014). Traditional communication methods include party politics, rallies, meetings, constituency visits and traditional media like television, radio and newspapers (Hamajoda, 2016; Lee and Cappella, 2001). For instance, political leaders showcase

their policies outlined in the manifestos via traditional media (Saxena, 2016). Among the traditional communication modes may be counted the word of mouth communication to reach out to the citizens, especially during the election period (Iyer et al., 2017). Such word-of-mouth communications impact the manner in which citizens evaluate, believe and react towards the messages. Implicitly, the attitudinal disposition of the citizens is influenced through word-of-mouth communication. Similarly, TV and radio have been put to skilful use by politicians and political parties for projecting themselves and their policies for a long time (Ward, 1999).

As far as the new technologies are concerned, a multiple of factors determine the extent to which the political parties maintain an effective online communication strategy (Brubaker et al., 2015; Jackson, 2007; Lev-on, 2011). Instances may be seen where political parties use weblogs for campaigning about themselves and their leadership (Jackson, 2006). While this is a one-communication channel, the use of weblogs impacts the vote share of the party besides being a promotional tool for the party and the leadership. Online tools like e-mail or websites promote two-way communication. Similarly, by posting personalized messages, social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook and Twitter are being used by the political parties to impact the political expression and political participation (David et al., 2016; Geber & Scherer, 2015; Vergeer and Hermans, 2013; Vraga, 2016; Wen, 2014). For instance, it has been clinched in recent research that Twitter communication increases the political involvement of the citizens (Kruikemeier, 2014; Kruikemeier et al., 2016). Being an interactive communication tool, Twitter furthers the possibility of individualized communication as well. SNS use is helpful in building citizen trust, image projection of political leadership and furthering transparency and outreach for the targeted voters (Aharony, 2012; Madestam and Falkman, 2017).

Research approach
Mann ki Baat
Mann Ki Baat is a monthly-conducted radio programme where the Indian Premier, Narendra Modi, addresses the people of India on diverse issues. The programme was first aired on October 3, 2014, a day after the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. As on 25th October, 2018, 50 episodes of Mann Ki Baat have been completed. All the episodes of Mann Ki Baat are available online (http://pmonradio.nic.in/). The PM airs his views on social, political, economic, educational and other issues. Table 1 summarizes the topics and issues discussed in the Mann Ki Baat episodes.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE
Apart from this, listeners may send letters to the PM to be discussed in the programme. Besides, there is a toll free number where the listeners may leave their offline messages. In the programme, new government schemes are being discussed. For instance, the Prime Minister Crop Insurance Scheme was discussed in one of the programmes and the PM underlined how the agricultural community could benefit from this scheme in the event of any natural calamity damaging their crops. The PM also discusses the success of government schemes. For instance, in one of the programmes, he discussed about the success of the "Jan Dhan Yojana" which facilitated financial inclusion to a greater extent. Likewise, the success of the "Swachch Bharat" scheme was being underlined where the need for cleanliness and hygiene was being emphasized. In these programmes, the PM has also been emphasizing upon the issues of national concern. For instance, in one of the programmes, the PM discussed about the Tamil Nadu floods that claimed 470 lives. In one of the

programmes, the PM discussed about the grouse of a listener regarding the challenges being faced by him in booking railway tickets on account of his disability. The PM also discusses about the challenges being faced by the students in facing examinations and ways to remain calm under strenous circumstances. International affairs are also being discussed by the PM. Likewise, issues on science and technology find space in his programme. For instance, he applauded the efforts of the scientists when the PSLV-31 (Polar Satelite Launch Vehicle) was launched by the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO). Similarly, he discussed about the utility of Artificial Intelligence in one of the programmes post-visit to the Wadhwani Institute for Artificial Intelligence, Mumbai. Issues related to sports, cultural heritage, women, children, health, armed forces, etc. are also being discussed in the programme. Finally, the PM also discusses about the successes of individuals across diverse fields.

Interview protocol

The present study deployed a qualitative research approach. We conducted structured interviews with 75 respondents. Questions pertained to the the Mann Ki Baat being successful in bridging communication between the government and citizens; the need for launching such programmes at the local levels; the extent to which there is awe while listening to the voice of the PM discussing various socio-political and economic issues; the probability of discussing the programme in social media; the need for referring or discussing family, peers and colleagues to listen the programme, etc. Interviewees comprised of men and women across a range of professional backgrounds (public servants, scientists, researchers, doctors, businessmen, etc.) and a range of age groups (21 to 66 years old). The entire interviewing process lasted between September, 2018 and November, 2018. Structured interviews were conducted via email or face-to-face interactions and pre-determined and standardized questions were posed to all the interviewees (Oates, 2006). Interview transcripts were recorded and notes were taken the same day when the interviews were held. Interviewees comprised of students, representatives from public and private sector, retired citizens, etc. who resided in urban cities. To select the interviewees, convenience, snowball and purposive sampling methods were invoked (Miles et al., 2014). In line with the recommendations of Mason (2010), the process of tapping additional interviewees was concluded when the study reached a saturation limit and the additional responses stopped providing unique insights (Corbin and Strauss, 1988). Some of the interviews were conducted in Hindi whereas others were conducted in English. Back-translation of interviews was conducted for Hindi respondents to ensure accuracy (Brislin, 1970). In all, the interviews were completed in 20-25 minutes.

Discussion

Thematic analysis informed the analysis of the interview responses (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As such, thematic analysis constitutes the base of qualitative analysis. It is "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, pp. 79). A theme may be understood as something significant about the data with reference to the research question chosen in the study. Furthermore, every theme is representative of a pattern of response that is derived from making sense of the data. Once the themes and sub-themes have been identified, they are coded and analyzed. Thematic analysis may be of two types: inductive and theoretical. Inductive thematic analysis is a 'bottom up' approach wherein themes identified are linked with data themselves and there is no need of fitting the themes in a pre-existing coding frame. Theoretical thematic analysis, on the other hand, is deductive in approach wherein themes are identified based

on the researcher's analytic interest and involves a quite detailed analysis of some aspect of the data. The present study is representative of the theoretical thematic analytical approach.

Three themes were identified from the interview transcript extracts: continuance/discontinuance of Mann Ki Baat; relevance/irrelevance of Mann Ki Baat and political/non-political gains of Mann Ki Baat for the incumbent government.

Continuance/discontinuance of Mann Ki Baat: Most of the interviewees perceive that Mann Ki Baat is a good medium of communication with the citizens. The respondents applauded the efforts of the PM for hosting the programme. With the launch of this programme, people in the rural areas were able to hear the voice of the PM and this was an achievement in itself. Likewise, many respondents perceive the need of airing more programmes like the Mann Ki Baat. This would lead to enhanced understanding of the government aspirations and the expectations of the people. For instance, it was awoved by many respondents that it would be better if the Chief Minister of their State also airs a programme similar to Mann Ki Baat where the issues specific to their State are being discussed. Similarly, the interviewees opined that such programes should percolate at the grassroots. In fact, one of the interviewees expressed the need of the programme to be telecast on all TV/radio channels. For instance, programmes like Mann Ki Baat should be aired at the Panchayat levels too. Likewise, some respondents felt that programmes like Mann Ki Baat should have been launched much earlier and it is important that the programme continues in future as well. On the other hand, there were some respondents who opined that Mann Ki Baat programme is not relevant and hence, it should be stopped. Furthermore, some respondents felt that Mann Ki Baat is more relevant for the rural areas and not the urban areas. One of the respondents opined: "Mann Ki Baat lacks honesty... It is simply a waste of time." Another respondent opined: "Please discontinue these talks and work on some real issues plaguing the country." Finally, one of the respondents opined: "I don't think monologues are the way ahead. Perhaps, non-doctored interviews/press conferences are much better."

Relevance/irrlevance of Mann Ki Baat: Some of the interviewees expressed the view that owing to their preoccupations, they weren't able to get the time to listen to the programme. However, there were many respondents who read and discussed about the programme with their family, colleagues and peers. In fact, some of the interviewees encouraged their peers, friends and family members to listen and read about Mann Ki Baat programme. In fact, they felt that the programme is preferred above other radio programmes. Therefore, they hear or read the text of the programme every time it is aired. Furthermore, some interviewees referred and discussed about the Mann Ki Baat episodes via their social media networks like LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, etc.

Political/non-political gains of Mann Ki Baat for the incumbent government: Some interviewees perceived that the Modi government would benefit from the Mann Ki Baat programme whereas others did not perceive such a case. The programme has been perceived as one where the PM shows "dictatorial tendencies." It was averred by one of the respondents that: "Mann Ki Baat is just the same kind of propoganda which doesn't hold much value... Direct dial-in is moderated and appears fake... Many issues linked with rural/urban areas are not addressed... It's like riding horses for political gain." Similarly, another respondent opined that the programme is nothing but "political

preaching on government cost." Likewise, another respondent was critical of the Hindi language used in the programme: "Don't impose Hindi language through this programme."

Conclusion

Radio has been viewed as a public, democratic medium (Delli Carpini, 1993) because it serves to enhance citizen engagement and has also become a source of political information (Moy, Xenos, and Hess, 2005). In this vein, the Indian Premier has successfully tapped the communication medium for showcasing the political achievements and discussing different subjects having implications for the citizen decision-making. The study invoked thematic analysis for analyzing the interview transcripts of 75 respondents. The study shows that in a developing country, radio serves as a powerful tool in terms of outreach in the rural hinterlands as well as the urban spaces. The findings from the study showed mixed responses wherein a section of interviewees responded favorably about the Mann Ki Baat programme and hence, expressed their intention of continuing to listen and promote such programmes. On the other hand, there were respondents who are averse to such "dictatorial" tactics. Likewise, for some of the respondents, the programme is an efficacious mode of communication and expressed the need of launching more such programmes at the regional and local levels. On the other hand, there were interviewees who neither have the time to listen or discuss about the programme nor they support such programmes in future. While some of the respondents discuss the Mann Ki Baat issues via social networking channels, others are reticent about the programme in toto.

The study leaves academic and practitioner implications. For instance, our study may be carried forward to assess the perceptions of the listeners of the programme in terms of their voting behavior in the impending General Elections of 2019. Empirical validation may be a good continuum wherein the utility of Mann Ki Baat programme may be gauged among the targeted voters. Another research direction is linked with the assessment of the programme from the perspectives of the rural population. Furthermore, further study may be conducted to assess the significance and preference for Mann Ki Baat programme in non-Hindi speaking areas of India. As far as practitioner implications are concerned, the study shows that politicians' marketing channels need to address the grievances of the people. Political branding and impression management may prove to be a turning point for the career progression of the politicians and hence, they should be wary of developing their political image via traditional and new media channels of communication.

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