

Marketing In Politics: Case Of Congress And Bharatiya Janata Party

**Prasad Begde*

INTRODUCTION

The 2009 elections are considered to be the costliest elections in the history of independent India; it was a battle between 'Jai Ho' versus 'Bhay Ho'. And the results clearly indicate that the congress campaign of India on the road to development won over BJP's highlighting the shortcomings of the incumbent.

CONGRESS

July 1889 Formation of British Committee of the Indian National Congress with Offices in London to put pressure on Parliament in Great Britain 1892 Dadabhai Naoroji elected to British Parliament in Great Britain. 1892 India Councils Act a major victory for Congress but it still did not envisage elected representation. It fails to us to work for India's greatness. A great country is not one which merely has a great past, Out of that past must arise a glorious future. Pandit Nehru, Smt. Indira Gandhi had put mile stone of "Naya Bharat".

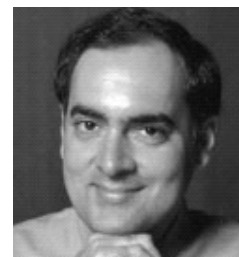
TOWARDS THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

In 1984, Shri Rajiv Gandhi lead the Congress to an unprecedented Victory of 401 seats in the Lok Sabha. First steps were taken towards changing the political and economic climate in the country, with an emphasis on *"Let us build an India"*. In his Presidential Address at Bombay in 1985, Shri Rajiv Gandhi emphasized upon the following points to build a great nation. He wanted to build a nation that was :

- ✿ Proud of her independence;
- ✿ Powerful in defence of her freedom;
- ✿ Strong, self-reliant in agriculture, industry and front-rank technology;
- ✿ United by bonds transcending barriers of caste, creed and region;
- ✿ Liberated from the bondage of poverty, and of social and economic inequality;

An India

- ✿ Disciplined & efficient;
- ✿ Fortified by ethical and spiritual values;
- ✿ A fearless force for peace on earth;
- ✿ The School of the world, blending the inner repose of the spirit with material progress;
- ✿ A new civilization, with the strength of our heritage, the creativity of the spring time of youth and the unconquerable spirit of our people.



ADVENT OF SMT. SONIA GANDHI-THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, the seventh And Former Prime Minister of India, took place in Sriperumbudur in Tamil Nadu, India on 21st May 1991. It was one of the first uses of suicide bombing for the purposes of political terror. Rajiv Gandhi's assassination was carried out by Thenmozhi Rajaratnam, a female member of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). At the time, India was embroiled, through the Indian Peace Keeping Force, in the Sri Lankan Civil War. Smt. Sonia Gandhi, the widow of Rajiv Gandhi, was persuaded to take over as Congress President on 14th March 1988.

BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY

Bharatiya Janata Party is today the most prominent member of the family of organisations known as the "Sangh Parivar". And RSS has always been dubbed "communal", "reactionary" and what not by its detractors. Sanghs of

* Assistant Professor, FMS, MITS (Mody Institute of Technology & Science), Lakshmangarh, Sikar, Rajasthan.

E-mail: prasadbegde@yahoo.co.in

swayamsevaks have of course always shaken off that criticism like so much water off a duck's back. They have never had any doubt that the organization is wedded to national unity, national integrity, national identity and national strength through individual character and national character. And today, this organization is poised for a great leap forward. Even its long- time detractors think and say that now BJP is "unstoppable". Due to the British policy of "Divide and Rule" and the politicians' proclivity to compromise and temporize, the country suffered the trauma of the partition. But the Sangh Parivar has no doubt that before very long, the unities, the varieties and the strengths of our ancient civilization will prevail. RSS has been continuing the task of nation building since its inception. It did it through the tumultuous period of 1930s and 40s. But it was rudely shaken by Gandhiji's killing and the Government's political exploitation of that national tragedy.

The BJP is a direct successor of The Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS, *Indian People's Union*), founded in 1951 by Syama Prasad Mookerjee, a nationalist leader, former Union Minister and freedom-fighter. It was considered the political wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. But the fortunes of the young party took a dip in 1953, when Mookherjee was jailed in Kashmir by then Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. After his death in custody, the BJS lasted for 24 more years, but never seriously challenged the power of Indian National Congress. It did, however, groom future political leaders like Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani.

THE FACTORS BEHIND THE SUCCESS OF THE CONGRESS PARTY IN THE 2009 ELECTIONS

The election results, when they came in, confounded the critics. Against the odds, Congress swept to victory, winning some 250 seats and falling just short of an absolute majority. The party's strong showing in Uttar Pradesh was seen as evidence that it had regained its traditional support among Muslims, high-caste Brahmins and the poor.

Political analyst Paranjay Guha Thakurta spoke for many when he said: *'We pretend to understand the views of 700 million people... We turned out to be worse than astrologers'*.

One commentator attributed the success of the Congress party to *'an astute balancing of the middle-class and underclass demands'*, which included pay increases for millions of government workers along with a US\$5 billion rural work scheme and the waiver of loan repayments for indebted farmers. Five good monsoons in a row and a booming rural market also helped.

❖ IMAGE BUILDING

The image of the Congress party- that of cleanliness, honor and integrity in Manmohan Singh created hope among millions of people and they voted for him and the continuation of that clean image in government.



❖ STABILITY

The funny thing in the arithmetic of stability vs change is that while opposition parties have to strive for unanimity, to reduce the number of candidates representing change, those in power has to do nothing apart from sitting back and fomenting trouble in the ranks of the opposition. The New Indian Express' political editor, Neerja Chowdhry, called the election result *'A Vote For Political Stability'*.

❖ BRAND BUILDING

❖ **Rahul Gandhi is the man of the series of Indian Political League (IPL) 2009** : Congress performed well and stunned

Indian Journal of Marketing • January, 2011 37

all in the political sphere, even its own people by its magnificent performance in the Lok Sabha elections. And, many political pundits believe that credit goes to the *Yuvraaj*.

It is said in media that it was Congress wave across the nation but no one can deny Rahul's charismatic and innovative campaigning, which brought sweet fruits for the party. A Harvard and St Stephen's alumnus, Rahul entered in the political arena in March 2004 by declaring to contest from Amethi. His performance is really appreciable within the five years of his political career. Rahul started his pan India journey to swing votes in favour of the congress and held maximum number of rallies during canvassing amounting to 106 rallies across the nation. Rahul did not leave any stone unturned and reached every nook and corner to impress every section of the people.

He went to university campuses, attended Muslim, Hindu and Sikh worship places; and worked with the labourers under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in Rajasthan. At the start of campaigning, political intellectuals believed that Rahul was naive and would be of no use for Congress in the elections. Priyanka Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi were adorable for the **Aam Aadmi**. This love and affection for the dynasty turned into votes and resulted in Congress' bravura victory in the elections over National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and other political fronts. But, love for the dynasty was not the only reason. Congress performed well in Punjab, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh (MP) and Uttar Pradesh (UP) on its development plank.



Youth factor of Rahul worked nicely in the country with more than 200 electorates aged 18 to 35. He proposed his idea in Congress meetings to give more tickets to young leaders. The effect of this can be seen in the results. India have more young MPs like Rahul, Sachin Pilot, Naveen Jindal, Jiten Prasad, Milind Deora, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Deepender Hooda, Sandeep Dikshit, Ahmad Hamdullah Sayeed, Mausam Noor, Nilesh Rane and Dr Jyoti Mirdha.

It is expected that Rahul would propose few names to be included in the cabinet or at least for MoS (Minister of State) seats to encourage youths in the politics. But his youth magic was limited to the son and daughters of the politicians. Most of the youth candidates came from political families. It would be more motivating for the youths if he would have thought beyond political families. However, the youth factor fared well for the congress.

❖ PROMOTION

Rahul Gandhi went from one village to another village in the far flung areas of UP and MP and had *dal*, *roti* and *chatni* with Dalits. Despite Mayawati's claim that Rahul Gandhi washed his hands with a special soap; and took bath after visiting any Dalit family, Dalits turned into support the party. Her accusations did not seem to work in the state. The state registered swift Dalit and Muslims votes for the Congress.

Rahul decided to go alone in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand after the party's allies offered a few seats to contest in these states. Rahul's political intuition was right and Congress performed very well in Uttar Pradesh by doubling its figures. The fair weather friends of Congress had to repent for their mistake to not support the Congress. Lalu Prasad Yadav of Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) accepted his blunder after the declaration of the results. It was the victory of Rahul over the big political mascots.

❖ PUBLICITY

Rahul gave some controversial statements about the Babri Mosque demolition and division of Pakistan. He said, *"If anyone from the Gandhi-Nehru family had been active in politics then, the Babri Masjid would not have fallen."* His statement was offensive to many Congressmen and also demeaned the then Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao. He came in to controversy when he ignorantly uttered politically incorrect statement on Pakistan division saying, *"If Gandhi family decides on something, it makes sure that is accomplished - whether it is throwing out the British, breaking up Pakistan or taking India into the 21st century."*

Above all, the Congress Party's resurgence was attributed to the astute guidance of 38-year-old Rahul Gandhi and of his mother Sonia, the Italian-born widow of Indira Gandhi's assassinated son Rajiv Gandhi. Sonia Gandhi was the Congress Party president. Rahul handpicked many candidates and campaigned energetically on a platform of good governance, ongoing economic reform and a secular polity. He is said to represent the new India and looks likely to become a future prime minister.

✿ TARGET MARKET

One commentator attributed Congress's 'success to' an astute balancing of the middle-class and underclass demands', which included pay increases for millions of government workers along with a US\$5 billion rural work scheme and the waver of loan repayments for indebted farmers. Five good monsoons in a row and a booming rural market also helped.

BJP IMAGE BUILDING

But BJP's own campaign too seems similar to the Congress one.

While the Congress party patented the *Jai Ho* tune, the BJP seems to have borrowed heavily from A R Rahman's version of *Vande Mataram*. Also, there was a clear attempt to project a collective leadership as one sees images of major BJP bigwigs, succeeded by images of BJP allies and common folks representative of the nation's population.

It is clearly an effort for an image makeover, a move to reach out to the different sections of the society, both urban and rural. It also touches upon the minorities.

BJP'S ONLINE AD

The Prime Minister candidate of BJP, LK Advani started his website and a blog to share his views online. One can find information in Hindi as well as English, but according to survey, less than 5% users of internet all over India visited the website.

WHAT BJP DID WRONG?

As we look back at the past six months, here are two key things which stand out:

1. 26/11 terror attacks in Mumbai and the assembly election results of Delhi and Rajasthan completely turned the momentum away from the BJP. Till then, its twin planks were terrorism and the economy. Both got neutralised in the past six months - or perhaps, the BJP was not able to convince voters how it would handle the two areas differently and better. Even as food prices have increased and jobs have been being lost, the message that the BJP is the better alternative did not get through. The negative campaign around terrorism in the Delhi assembly elections was seen by the electorate an attempt by the BJP to exploit a vulnerable situation.

2. The campaign itself had the right ideas (good governance, development, security with the need for strong leadership), but the message went off-track for multiple reasons.

a. LK Advani (LKA) was not seen as strong and decisive in the two opportunities that he had to make a mark: the Jaitley-Rajnath argument, and the Varun Gandhi moment. This in some ways undermined the main plank of the campaign.

b. The "weak PM" argument backfired when Manmohan Singh, along with Sonia, and Rahul hit back with a vengeance, and Ayodhya and Kandahar were brought up.

c. Most importantly, the BJP let the old fears re-surface with its decision to not drop Varun Gandhi even after the advice from CEC (Gopalswami). In contrast, the Congress decision to drop Jagdish Tytler and Sajjan Kumar was seen as positive (and gained in Punjab.) Basically, the Varun Gandhi incident coming on the back of what happened in Mangalore (and the ensuing media coverage) turned away moderate Hindus and youth (approx 40mn new voters) in urban areas for whom harmony matters more. For many, between the slippery road of religion and the slippery road of dynasty, the former is a definite No-No. Mr. Advani should have used the Varun moment to make a decisive statement on the inclusiveness of Hinduism, and taken the discussion completely away from the "secular-communal" issue - just like what Obama did with his race speech in Philadelphia at the height of his campaign.

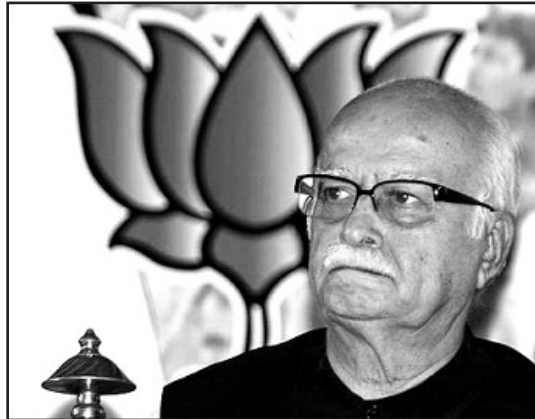
There are many other factors which can also be thought of:

✿ **Disconnect With The Voters:** What explains the huge gap between expectations (160+ seats) and reality (120 seats). The party - and its cadre - are seen to have lost touch with on-ground realities in many parts of the country, and the disconnect with Urban Middle India is especially deep. (Of course, it could be argued that the Congress too did not expect its result. But that is not the answer.)

✿ **Selection of Candidates:** This issue is more important than it is given credit for. If the party thinks it can thrust someone a month before voting day and they can win, there is something wrong. In many cities and states, the BJP lacks leadership and suitable candidates. It didn't even experiment this election - and it was the Congress that fielded different, younger candidates.

❁ **Media Management:** This has always been a challenge for the BJP. An important segment does tend to watch the English channels more and get influenced. The BJP gave them the Varun Moment.

In some ways, the out-of-the-box, disruptive thinking that the BJP needed to do this election did not happen. It started off as an underdog and ended as one. In some ways, nothing changed between the start and finish, except that the UPA cleaned up some of the states the BJP was not present in. (That was predictable in the sense that even if the Left or AIADMK had done well, the Congress would still have managed to get them. So, in some ways, 100+ seats for the UPA from these states were always in the bag for the UPA.)



TARGET MARKET

L.K. Advani forgot his party's target market. L.K. Advani was respected by most Hindus. He too felt that the dream of becoming the Prime Minister could be realised only when he became acceptable to the Muslims and allies who had Muslim support. The visible point of his transformation from a Hindutva warrior to a secular person was his visit to the Jinnah mausoleum in Pakistan and his controversial remarks during a visit to Karachi in June 2005. Advani, thus sought to become secular, as the Congress leaders have been, for over 75 years. This required him to ignore Hindu concerns and pain, overlook Islamic terrorism and Christian evangelism.

The promotion campaign **"Feel Good"** and **"India Shining"** used by BJP in elections in 2004 flopped because of opposition attack and used India's reality Poverty, unemployment etc. Mr. Advani writes in his autobiography: *"The phraseology of 'India Shining' and 'Feel Good Factor' hurt us. These phrases, though valid in themselves in a particular context, were inappropriate for our election campaign. There was indeed a 'feel good' atmosphere in the country over the past one year, prior to the 2004 elections, on account of a combination of factors: accelerating economic growth; sound macro-economic management; a good monsoon yielding an all-time high food production; praise for India on account of her shining achievements in sectors such as IT; a sharp dip in incidents of cross-border terrorism; the long-hoped-for turnaround in the situation in Jammu & Kashmir and the North-East; and anticipation of a new chapter of peace and cooperation with Pakistan. However, by making the 'Feel Good Factor' and 'India Shining' the verbal icons of our election campaign, we gave an opportunity to our political opponents to highlight other aspects of India's contemporary reality -poverty and uneven development, unemployment among the youth, problems faced by farmers, etc., which questioned our claim."* But the party did not learn any thing from the past mistake.

COMPARISON OF CONGRESS'S 'JAI HO' TROUNCES BJP'S 'BHAY HO'

It was a battle between 'Jai Ho' versus 'Bhay Ho'. And the results clearly indicate that the congress campaign of India on the road to development won over BJP's highlighting the shortcomings of the incumbent. The 2009 elections are considered to be the costliest elections in the history of independent India; the two national parties pulled out all the stops in their communication campaigns. Even as the BJP moved aggressively in its campaign in the initial phases, it was a consistent branding strategy involving TV, print, radio, outdoor and even online which delivered the goods for the Congress. When it comes to television campaigns of the two national parties, according to a survey conducted, the Congress campaign was a hit with the viewing public. The study assesses the effect of communication by political

parties amongst urban youth across Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Bangalore. The base panel were shown the Congress '*Jai Ho*' and '*Bharat Buland, Badte Kadam*' and BJP '*Bhay Ho*' and '*Dishaheen*'.

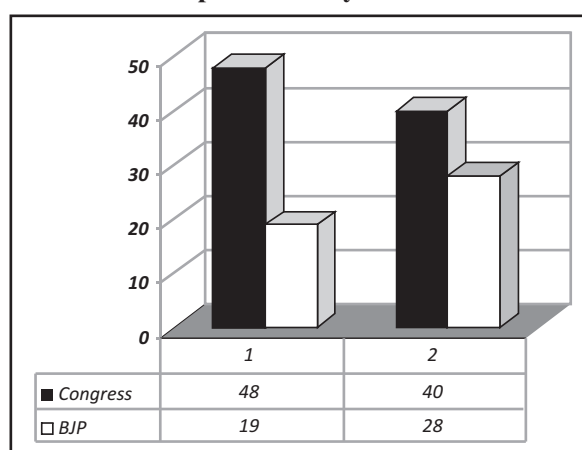
The study reveals that the Congress ads were liked more across centres with Bangalore the only exception, where BJP ads scored higher. Across the four metros,



✿ '*Jai Ho*' clocked 48% in ad liking, while '*Bhay Ho*' garnered 19%.

✿ Similarly, the saffron party's '*Dishaheen*' polled 28 % on likeability whereas Congress's '*Bharat Buland, Badte Kadam*' had 40% saying '*Jai Ho*' on the same parameter.

Graph 1: Survey Results



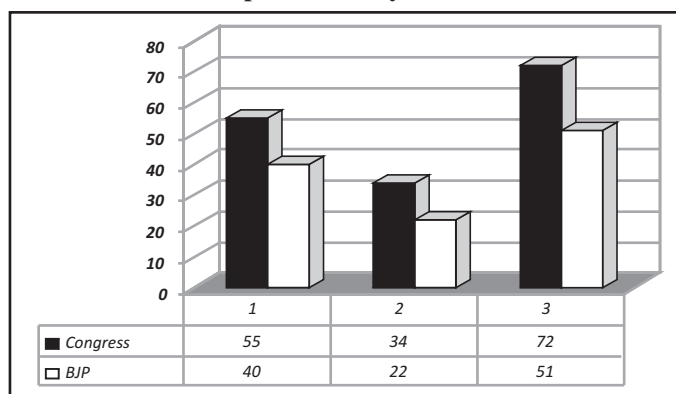
Indeed, the mood is reflected in the survey where

✿ 55% felt happy watching Congress ads versus 40% for BJP ads.

✿ 34% felt good watching Congress commercials against 22% for BJPTVCs.

✿ The Congress ads scored high on entertainment and enjoyment parameters with 72% voting for the Congress ads as very entertaining, compared to 51 % for the saffron party commercials.

Graph 2: Survey Results



The survey also reveals that :

- ✿ The Congress ad campaign shows elements around women, while BJP had no specific gender focus.
- ✿ It was the feel good and a sense of optimism generated by Congress ads which found favour with the respondents as compared to the negative shades and ads projecting LK Advani as 'Nidar Neta' (fearless leader) and the promise of a change.



- ✿ 'Bhay Ho', created as a parody to 'Jai Ho' by BJP highlights the failure of Congress in addressing issues like terrorism, unemployment, galloping inflation etc.

The perception was that BJP was trying to show a utopian world without problems, but they did not focus upon how they will do it.

"The smartest thing of the Congress campaign was not to give BJP ammunitions to shoot back at the incumbent. The entire communication strategy didn't gloat over achievements, it made the right soothing noises and didn't push the envelope too much." said Santosh Desai, CEO of Future brands and a former ad man.

Vivek Gupta, senior V-P, IMRB International, said the Congress communication gave a sense of hope in a scenario of inflation and unemployment. *"At the national level, unemployment and inflation are two big issues that most concern the youth of India. Terrorism is a big concern, but the two issues affect the masses directly."* said Mr Gupta.

Realizing the marketing potential during the mammoth election process,

- ✿ Various private companies had also started websites appealing voters to exercise their franchise.
- ✿ To seize the opportunity, major TV news channels had also set up dedicated websites to provide information related to the mammoth election.
- ✿ To cash on the opportunity, Google India had set up an online elections centre in association with a leading daily.
- ✿ Google had also launched an official community, The Voice of Youth, on its social networking site Orkut.
- ✿ These elections had witnessed a massive online voter awareness programme as websites like Indian-Elections.com, IndiaNumbers.com, Jaagore.com, IndiaVoting.com ran campaigns to encourage voters to vote.

As per the estimates of CMS(Centre for Media Studies), about ₹10,000 crore were spent during the Lok Sabha elections, which includes about ₹ 2,000 crore by the Election Commission and other government agencies and the remaining ₹ 8,000 crore by the political parties and candidates for campaigning. Even most of the leading media houses have reported higher revenue generation in the fourth quarter of the previous financial year due to elections.

The total advertisement spending by the political parties was around ₹ 800 crore, which is almost seven per cent of the total annual advertisement the media sector receives. The election results, when they came in, confounded the critics. Against the odds, Congress swept to victory, winning some 250 seats and falling just short of an absolute majority. The party's strong showing in Uttar Pradesh was seen as evidence that it had regained its traditional support among Muslims, high-caste Brahmins and the poor.

Political analyst Paranjoy Guha Thakurta spoke for many when he said: *'We pretend to understand the views of 700 million people... We turned out to be worse than astrologers'.*

Kuch bhi ho, Jo jeeta wohi Sikandar.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. <http://emergic.org/2009/05/20/elections-2009-what-the-bjp-did-wrong/>
Stability wins over change by Pritish Nandy Sunday November 01, 2009
2. <http://www.asianz.org.nz/newsroom/regional-matters/india-election>
Why BJP Lost by sudheer mahajan on Sep 15,
3. No India Shining, BJP ads play it safe on content
Sumit Pande/ CNN-IBN
4. Comparison of Brand Congress vs Brand BJP - General Election 2009
Wednesday, 20 May 2009
5. www.bjp.org
6. www.aicc.org.in