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A systematic literature review to understand the difference between critical factors affecting the national election and state elections in India

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Introduction: This study aims to understand the dominant factors of political marketing strategies to influence voters in the national and state elections in India. To identify them, we have reviewed literature of different nations (both developed and developing) across the world and India.

Methods: We have defined specific criteria and search terms to first identify the relevant studies that have focused on the influencing factors in the global and Indian political marketing landscape. After identifying these factors, we gleaned the key takeaways in terms of the influencing factors from all those studies and discussed the different emerging trends of shifting power from party brand to leadership brand in the national elections. We have also analyzed the impact of different factors such as party leader or candidate's personality, party policy and ideology, use of social media as a campaigning tool, and campaign messaging and platform on the national and state elections over the years.

Results and discussions: We found that for the national elections, party leadership and use of social media are critical factors, while for the state elections, party policy and ideology with on-ground campaigns have a significant influence on voters.

KEYWORDS

election, politics, political marketing, voter behavior, literature review

1 Introduction

Political marketing has been a popular topic of study in developed nations in the West since the 1950s (Carlson and Blake, 1946; Berelson et al., 1986). Over the years, many studies have covered the different aspects of political marketing like components of voter's choice—issues and policies, social imagery, emotional feelings, candidate image, current events, personal events, and epistemic issues (Newman and Sheth, 1985); use of different traditional marketing tools and techniques by political parties and candidates (Shama, 1976; Niffenegger, 1988; Kotler and Kotler, 1999); the role of the candidate's different traits—intelligence, leadership, honesty, caring, and experience to win any particular election (Fridkin and Kenney, 2011); the importance of proper messaging during the campaign marketing (Westlye, 1991; Kahn and Kenney, 1999); and the importance of targeted marketing to increase the voter turnout in favor of the candidate or the party (Clinton and Lapinski, 2004). Till the early 2000s, most of these studies were limited to mainly the developed economies, with the US and UK elections holding the center stage of all these studies. According to Henneberg (1996, p. 777), political marketing wants to “establish, maintain and enhance long-term voter relationships at a profit for society

and political parties, so that the objectives of the individual political actors and organizations involved are met.” Political marketing is a combination of politics, marketing, and campaign messaging and examines political parties and voter behavior (Scammell, 1999, p. 718). At a macro level, political marketing can be conceptualized in terms of two major aspects: political party or candidate and voters. The behavior of the voters has been studied from the perspective of consumer behavior (Newman and Sheth, 1984). In a similar way, the political party, their candidates, and party policies combined have been categorized as a political brand (Reeves et al., 2006). There are multiple factors that can affect a voter’s decision to select a political party and different marketing frameworks have been used to understand and measure the brand equity of a political party or the candidate (French and Smith, 2010). These factors vary significantly in terms of different regions, cultures, economy, age, and gender and one particular campaign messaging or promotion does not decide the election results (O’Shaughnessy and Henneberg, 2009). So, political parties and candidates also started to shift their strategy from engaging in a vigorous campaign before the elections to creating a regular and continuous relationship with the voters (Grossman, 2006). Though mostly these studies deal with the concept and execution strategies of political marketing in developed nations, this article would also discuss some prominent studies in developing countries, especially in South Asian countries like India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, just to highlight the need to adapt to a different framework to understand the factors affecting voter’s decisions. In recent years, social media has come to assume an important part in the field of political marketing (Harris and Harrigan, 2015; Leclercq et al., 2016). One of the best examples of the adoption of social media in political marketing can be seen in Barack Obama’s political promotion in 2008 (Moufahim and Lim, 2009). In the 2008 presidential elections in the United States, Obama first introduced Web 2.0 and social media to attract the young voters (French and Smith, 2010) and this consistent and continuous social media strategy helped Obama become one of the most powerful politicians in his time (Fraser and Dutta, 2009). This kind of brand-building exercise demands both credibility of the candidate and control over the campaign messaging (Milewicz and Milewicz, 2014). Interestingly, by assuming voters as consumers by adopting a branding perspective, the engagement of such consumers through different social networks like Facebook and Twitter can work as very impactful tools to create a greater bond between the candidate and their followers (Bijmolt et al., 2010; Libai et al., 2010). In recent times, politicians and political parties all over the world are using social media to reach out to the masses (Hong and Nadler, 2012). The technology-based media, on one spectrum, are heavily used in the national elections in both developed countries like Obama, Trump (Juma’h and Alnsour, 2018; Grover et al., 2019), Boris Johnson in the UK (Suzanne, 2019) and developing countries such as that adopted by Narendra Modi in India (Kapoor and Dwivedi, 2015; Rodrigues and Niemann, 2019) and Imran Khan in Pakistan (Ashraf, 2013). On another spectrum, local or state elections still rely on “voters originated marketings on candidates—word of mouth” (Argan and Argan, 2012), character, scholastic background, political position, and social relation of the candidate (Adams and Agomor, 2015).

2 Why political marketing is important, especially in India?

India is the world’s largest democracy and maintains a federal-state structure since its independence in 1947. India has a total of 28 states and eight union territories. The Election Commission of India (ECI) serves as an autonomous body, vested with the responsibility of conducting elections at all levels in the Republic of India. There are two exclusive legislative bodies at the national level: Lok Sabha (lower house of the Indian Parliament) and Rajya Sabha (upper house of the Indian Parliament). While members of the Lok Sabha are directly elected by the voters, members Rajya Sabha are elected by the elected representatives of Lok Sabha and various state assemblies. While the national politics in India are dominated by two major parties—Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Indian National Congress (INC)—since the last 30 years (Cole et al., 2012), there are hundreds of regional parties in the country (Elections.in, 2014). Out of those regional parties, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Communist Party of India (CPI), Communist Party of India—Marxist (CPM), the National Congress Party (NCP), All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), the Samajvadi Party (SP), and the All India Trinamool Congress (AITMC) have a very strong presence and impact in their own regions (Cali and Sen, 2011). There have been many studies in the South Asian region to understand the differences in the voter’s perspective, based on geography—urban and rural areas (Chowdhury and Naheed, 2022), demography (Banerjee and Ray Chaudhuri, 2018), but there are only limited studies to understand the voter’s perspective differently for national and state elections.

3 Literature search and selection

Political marketing, as a research subject, has been of interest to scholars since the 1950s. Over the years, the changing social, political, and economic landscape has given rise to different strategies of political marketing. Earlier, studies on political marketing were mainly carried out in mostly developed countries like the United States, UK, and other European countries. In the last few years, researchers have extended their horizons to developing nations like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and other African countries. However, all political marketing-related literature does not fall within the scope of our study as this study mainly focuses on the effect of different factors in the Indian political marketing landscape in the national and state elections. So, there is a need for a selected and systematic review of studies to focus on the relevant data and understand the critical factors that impact elections in India. The objective is to summarize evidence from past studies reliably and accurately. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework provides a 27-item checklist and four-phase data flow diagram to carry out this literature review systematically. This PRISMA approach is useful for authentic and reliable analysis in a systematic review. We followed the four-phase data flow diagram of PRISMA to systematically select literature at each stage (identification, screening, and eligibility) and finally ended with 89 relevant studies for this review. We reviewed all the 89 articles and gleaned key

insights from them in terms of the critical factors that impact the voter's choice in the national and state elections.

To start with, we searched keywords like “political marketing,” “party leader,” “voter behavior,” “election,” and “political party” in the following databases: Taylor & Francis, Scopus, SAGE, Google Scholar, Business Source Complete, Emerald, and ScienceDirect. We found a total 179 studies from the above search and selected an additional 133 studies from the reference list of earlier studies. In total, we located 312 studies in the identification stage following the PRISMA four-phase flow diagram. In the next screening phase, 69 duplicates were removed, and the number of studies came down to 243. The exclusion criteria were defined at the eligibility stage: (A) Not related to our study objective—the exclusion of those studies that do not focus on critical factors of political marketing ($n = 76$); (B) no proper study framework used—the studies that did not follow any proven framework for analysis ($n = 31$); and (C) no proper results demonstrated—no definitive or relevant conclusions are found from the study ($n = 11$). A total of 118 studies were excluded based on the above criteria. From the remaining 125 studies, we removed another 36 studies based on our inclusion criteria: (A) Published in peer-reviewed journals or in good conference related to political marketing discipline (20 articles published in non-peer-reviewed or different discipline journals were excluded); (B) mention of response bias in the primary survey method (11 articles did not mention how bias was handled in the survey questionnaire); (C) robust methodology is described to derive the conclusions (the conclusions are underdeveloped in five articles). [Figure 1](#) demonstrates the entire process of PRISMA four-phase flow diagram. Based on the above inclusion criteria, finally 89 studies qualified for the review. [Figure 2](#) shows the distribution of top-reviewed journals in these 89 studies.

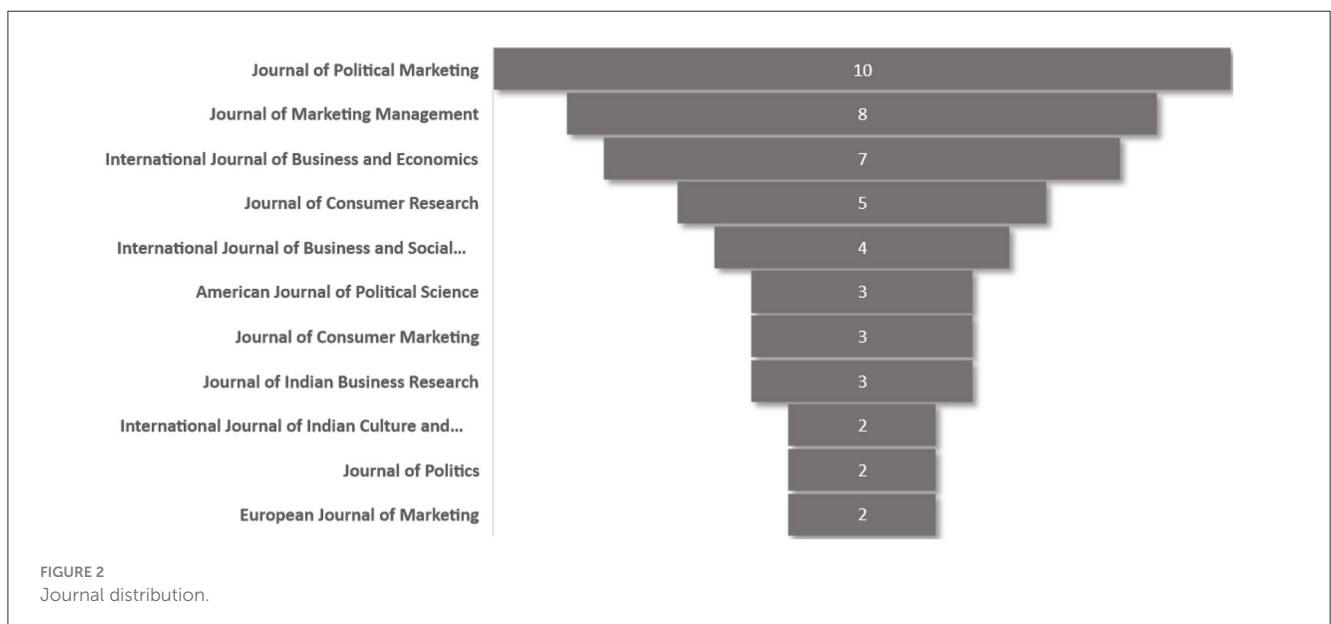
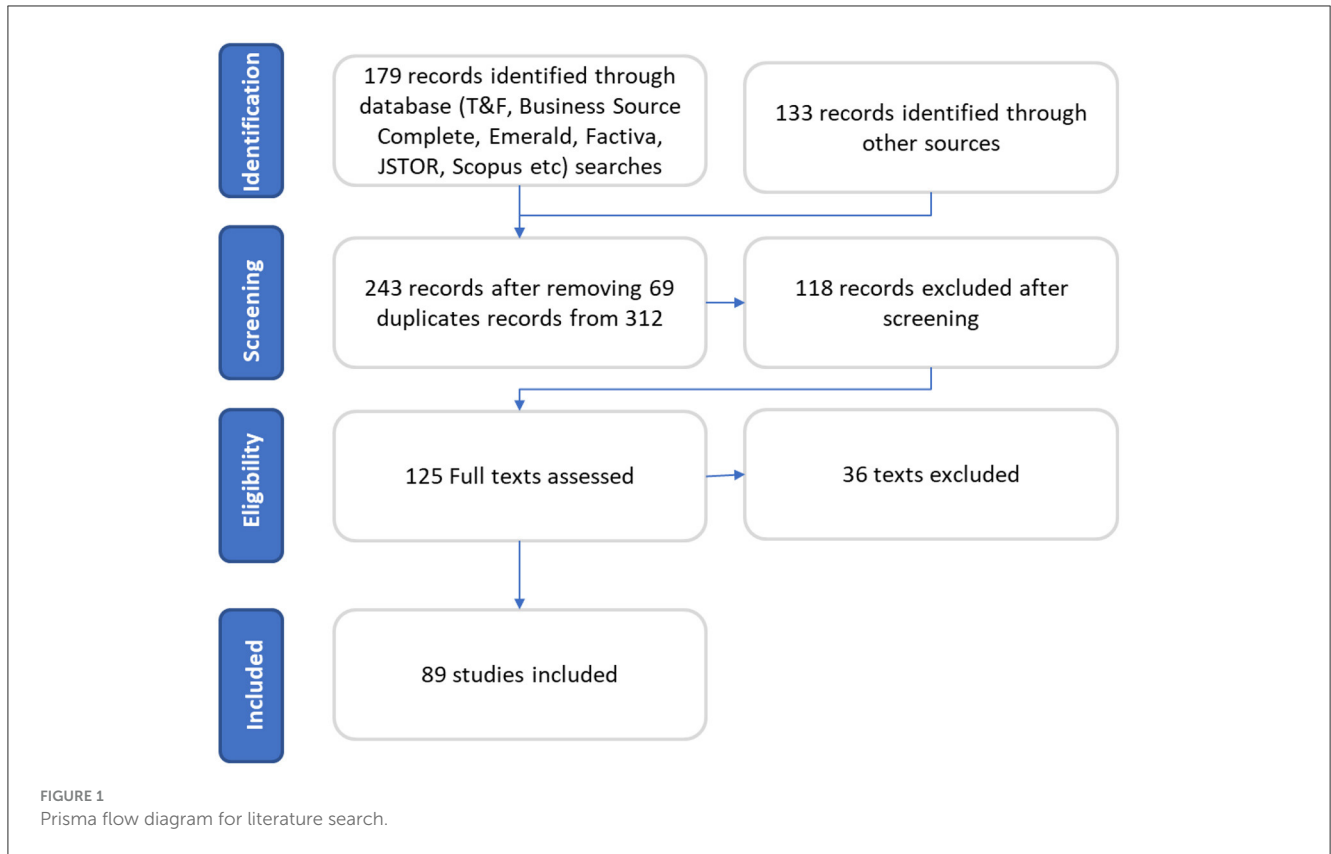
4 Broad factors of political marketing

Multiple studies have argued the importance of different factors or variables that can influence a voter's decision to choose a political party or a candidate. Recent theory suggests that the voter prefers the party and the candidate who takes a firm position on issues similar to the voter's choice ([Macdonald et al., 2001](#); [Cho and Endersby, 2003](#)). The credibility of the candidate is a very significant factor to the voters ([Dumeresque, 2012](#)) as it helps to establish a direct and emotional connect with the voters ([Jain et al., 2017](#)). The voter's decision is affected by many other influencing factors, apart from the candidates' stance, such as their preferred ideology or characteristics ([Coughlin and Nitzan, 1981](#); [Coughlin, 1992](#); [Dow and Endersby, 2004](#)).

Apart from the party leadership, voters are also influenced by the proposed party policy standards (ideology like left or right, social identification like caste-based politics) of the candidates or parties ([Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989](#); [Jessee, 2009](#)) and whether their material self-interest is in line with the proposed policy standards or not ([Sears et al., 1980](#); [Sears and Funk, 1991](#)). Humans are not cognitively able to consider all of the possible factors in a typical campaign and election simultaneously ([Simon, 1979](#); [Redlawsk and Lau, 2013](#)) and therefore opinion about the past performance of any party can be significantly influential to

form the voter's choice, especially when the ruling party seeks a re-election ([Fiorina, 1981](#)). The social context also plays an important role in a voter's decision regarding the political party and the candidate ([Verba and Nie, 1972](#); [Eliasoph, 1998](#)). Social discrimination and standard influence voters to have relevant discussions in their own circles, which helps to increase their involvement with politics ([Walsh, 2004](#)). [Gibson and Römmele \(2009\)](#) found that telemarketing, opinion survey of voters, direct mail, Internet, more party offices, and research about opposition political party and candidates as influential indicators in Germany. [Wring \(1997\)](#) study indicated that survey, party policies and their fulfillments, election manifestos, direct mail, and public marketing with grassroots voters as some of the key influencing factors for voters.

In the context of South Asian countries, especially India, 2014 had been a landmark year when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Narendra Modi, came to power after 10-year rule of the Indian National Congress (from 2004 to 2014). India is the world's largest democratic country, not just because it is the world's second most populous country but also because of the mammoth electoral process and the high level of voter engagement in all aspects of the elections ([Tekwani and Shetty, 2007](#)). The Lok Sabha elections, held once in 5 years, are the biggest voting exercise in India and in the world. [Prabhu \(2014\)](#), in his book *Taking Pride in Public Relations*, that “He [Shri Narendra Modi] won a historic election but public relations won as well.” For Lok Sabha elections in 2014, the entire concept of election campaigning and political marketing went through a complete change, a never-seen affair in the Indian election scenario. Almost all national and regional political parties micro-targeted various segments of voters by using the latest tools and technology by sending personalized messages through mobile phones and social media ([Pathak and Patra, 2015](#)). The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) (alliance of BJP and a few more parties) wanted to design their campaign messaging as a pro-development party and hence shared the Vision 2020 document ([Deshpande and Iyer, 2004](#)) based on the issue of abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu Kashmir, building Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, and enforcing a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) ([Kumar, 2014](#)). [Malik and Singh \(1992\)](#) mention the aggressive campaigning strategies adopted by Narendra Modi (like addressing 185 Bharat Vijay rallies across 295 constituencies of the country, creating “*chai pe charcha*” (“discussion at tea stall”) campaign to discuss the previous government's failure in commodity inflation and bad governance, reaching out to youth through social media with “*Ab ki bar Modi Sarkar*” (“Next time Modi Government”) slogan) as one of the many reasons for his victory. Social media helps to have transparent marketing between the candidates and their voters; one of the major issues revolving around effective reach and engagement is the wide social gap existing between the political candidates and the voters ([Bligh and Kohles, 2009](#)). With Narendra Modi's aggressive use of social media (like creating separate social media cell of BJP to run the digital campaign, frequent messages/tweets from his personal Facebook and Twitter handles, propagating one common slogan “*Ab ki bar Modi Sarkar*” (“Next time Modi Government”) from all party handles and party) in his prime ministerial campaign, and consequent historical win across the country, the impact of using of social media to reach voters has emerged as an important aspect of study.



Similarly, [Gadekar \(2011\)](#) studied the voter perception of Gujarat and Maharashtra, but the scope of the study was not the state elections of Gujarat and Maharashtra. The study focused only on the national elections. Along similar lines, [Banerjee and Ray Chaudhuri \(2018\)](#) studied the impact of demographic factors in a voter's decision in the Indian national elections. But they have also taken a particular state (West Bengal) population as the scope of their study and did not highlight whether there are any differences in the influencing factors while voting for state or national elections.

According to [Aquirre and Hyman \(2015\)](#) study, in terms of political advertisement or campaigning, TV or radio commercials,

campaign messaging, language of the message, and key slogans of the campaign are a few more influencing indicators. [Newman \(1994\)](#) mentioned a few variables in his study such as the candidate's brand image to his voters, candidate's positioning and stance, extensive campaign in all spheres of society, and economic conditions of the candidate. [McDonnell and Taylor \(2014\)](#) argued that social and economic scenarios play a crucial role in politics and it should be taken into consideration while designing campaign marketing. [Scammell \(2007\)](#), in his study, reiterated the influence of a few indicators such as the candidate's leadership ability, performance of his/her

party, key messaging/slogan of the campaign, party policies, and acceptance at all levels of the society. Ustaahmetoglu (2014) mentioned campaigning through mass media and door-to-door, use of celebrity figures, and massive postering as campaign strategies in their study. Deželan and Maksuti (2012) emphasized more on the influences of election posters and pointed out some key attributes of posters like colors, fonts, messages, photos, and the effect of the local language. Fishwick et al. (2014) emphasized the importance of marketing and messaging during campaign as the key influencer of the voter's decision.

Based on the above studies, party leadership and party policies are two most critical factors to influence voters, irrespective of type (national or state-level elections), geography (United States, UK, or Asia), and era (past or present). The dimensions of the campaign platform (TV, radio, Internet, newspaper, word of mouth, election rally, etc.), and content (target audience, key slogan etc.) also play a significant role. The prominence of different platforms and type of content differ with type, geography, and era. There is an ~35% increase of social media users from 2018 to 2022 (Basuroy, 2018) and party leadership's heavy use of social media to increase direct connect has made social media another important factor of political marketing. Also, especially in India, a party's affinity toward a particular caste or religion also becomes an important factor. Therefore, this study would further delve to find out effect of these five factors in detail in national and state elections of India.

5 Effect of party leader or candidate's personality

The party candidate's credibility is one of the most (Speed et al., 2015) important factors to decide the different campaigning strategies. The candidate becomes the primary marketing symbol with the voters and his/her attitude and utterings influence the voters significantly. Apart from the predetermined party policy and campaign messaging, the political candidate has to manage some nuanced interactive elements to increase his/her trustworthiness (Scammell, 2015). The hedonic dimensions help to gradually develop the emotion, trust, and loyalty (Needham, 2006) between the political candidates and the voters. In the current context, to build this long-term loyalty, political candidates need to set up a direct emotional connect with the voters. Political candidates try to uplift their personality (Jain et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2018) as more honest and modest than the opposition candidates to increase their credibility (Milewicz and Milewicz, 2014). The credibility of the political candidate is a very significant factor for the voters to decide (Dumeresque, 2012) and it helps to establish the direct and emotional connect with the voters (Jain et al., 2017). In the Indian context, BJP has won two Lok Sabha elections, in 2014 and 2019, with an absolute majority and established the "fourth party system" (Chhibber and Verma, 2019). However, some studies (Pathak, 2014; Jain and Ganesh, 2020) credited these landslide wins more to the party leader Narendra Modi and not the party (ideology or policy). To demystify the above argument, a few studies delinked the Lok Sabha and state elections to determine

the greater influence among voters and between party and party leaders (Jaffreot and Verniers, 2020). After a convincing win in the Uttar Pradesh (UP) state election in 2017, BJP's winning streak stopped and they lost almost 10 (till 2021) elections that took place in major states to regional parties (for example, Aam Admi Party (AAP) and AITMC) and the Indian National Congress (INC). Ideally, there remains a spill over effect between national and state elections (Nellis, 2014), but in this case, the situation is different. Since the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP has lost five state elections—Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Delhi, West Bengal, and Punjab. More pertinently, the difference in vote share of the BJP party between recent state elections and the 2019 Lok Sabha elections is ~20% (Election Commission of India, 2021), which is significantly high. In the state elections, party brands are largely characterized by valence politics on social or caste-based issues and by identity politics on religious issues (Adhikari et al., 2022). For example, in states like Uttar Pradesh or Bihar, there are state-level parties like Samajwadi Party or Rashtriya Janata Dal, which represent one or two specific castes. Similar parties (AIADMK and DMK) with caste identity also exist in the southern part of the country. Even in state or in lower-level elections, candidates are also chosen based on their caste or religious identity, and not individual characteristics (Singh, 2023). This makes it evident that voters are influenced by different factors in state elections and the Lok Sabha election. While in 2019 Lok Sabha election, party leader (Narendra Modi) is the branding element (Jain and Ganesh, 2020), the BJP party (ideology and policies) along with party leadership are the primary branding elements in the state elections (Jaffreot and Verniers, 2020). In the recent Lok Sabha elections (2014 and 2019), though party ideologies hold a sway among different parties, BJP (and other alliance parties of NDA) is more dependent on the party leader (Narendra Modi) than party policy (Jain and Ganesh, 2020). In a democracy like India, traditionally political parties have been the main focal point of political branding than its leaders (Pathak and Patra, 2015). However, in the last two Lok Sabha elections (2014 and 2019), this situation has completely changed. According to Jain and Ganesh (2020), in both the elections, Narendra Modi has used seven approaches to create his personal leadership brand. Firstly, he projected himself an action-oriented leader with "#acchedin" or "good days" story. Secondly, he positioned himself as a global leader with good governance and economic growth model. Thirdly, he tried to synonymize himself with aspirations of the youth to connect with them. Fourthly, he used multiple digital initiatives to engage voters virtually. Fifthly, he opened a direct communication channel with voters through social media like Twitter and Facebook. Sixthly, Modi tried to deliver his speech in multiple languages, with the speak local, think global initiative. Finally, he created some high-energy slogans to amplify his brand energy. On the contrary, the Congress party, on one hand, tried to engage with the voters emphasizing on the party's 100-year legacy, but, on the other hand, the party tried to project Rahul Gandhi as a youth leader with global aspirations. Thus, the Narendra Modi brand has succeeded in both the elections as the BJP focused on the leader brand but the main rival, the Indian National Congress, tried to strike a balance between the party brand and the leader brand (Jain and Ganesh, 2020).

6 Effect of party policy or party legacy

After the Indian National Congress won a single-party majority in 1984 (with Rajiv Gandhi as the prime ministerial candidate), BJP became the second party to win the 2014 Lok Sabha election (Jaffreot and Verniers, 2020) with a single-party majority. After a landslide victory for the BJP in 2019, Vaishnav and Jamie (2019) mentioned this phenomenon as the arrival of a fourth party system in India, following the earlier three-party systems of India since independence (Yadav, 1999). According to Yadav (1999), the first Indian party system was from independence to 1967 when the Congress dominated the elections both at the national and state levels. At that time, Congress was the only party of national significance and it not only dominated the national elections but also many state elections. Jawaharlal Nehru was the prime minister or strongest national-level political leader of the Congress at that time because of his nationwide influence, which was not limited to one or two states. However, there was no study to understand the influence of the Congress party or Jawaharlal Nehru separately on voter's minds. In the second phase, the Congress party mostly dominated from 1967 to 1989 with two major leaders—Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. But at the state level, many regional parties started dominating with some state-level leaders overshadowing the dominance of the parties (Yadav, 1999). The third phase of the party system (ranging from 1990 to 2014) saw a decline in the influence of both leadership and party level in the national arena, but increased power and influence by state-level leaders. That resulted in multiple coalition governments where state parties supported national parties like the BJP and Congress to run the government at the national level (Yadav, 1999). In these three phases of the party system, parties have varied ideological influence, with first phase having maximum dominance of party ideology in the national and state-level elections. Though the second and third phases saw the rise of strong leaders nationally (for example, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, and Atal Bihari Vajpayee) and at state levels, very few studies have attempted to understand the influence of the attributes of parties or leaders separately. From 2014 to the current date, one party (Chhibber and Verma, 2019) and one leader (Jain and Ganesh, 2020) have dominated the Indian electoral system in the Lok Sabha election. According to Chhibber and Verma (2019), the 2019 Lok Sabha election established the rise of the second dominant party system of India, namely, the BJP, after Congress party remained the first dominant party system from independence to 1967. Chhibber and Verma (2019) mentioned this as an ideological shift of the Indian voters. On the other hand, Jain and Ganesh (2020) discussed the impact or credibility of a party leader's brand image with the example of Narendra Modi in both 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections. According to their study, Narendra Modi has mostly used social media to directly connect with his followers and that helped him to build a credible, authentic yet personal political brand image, which overshadowed the party brand image. While in 2019 Lok Sabha election, party leader (Narendra Modi) is the branding element (Jain and Ganesh, 2020), in the state elections, BJP party itself (ideology and policies) along with party leadership are the primary branding elements (Jaffreot and Verniers, 2020). It seems that, at the national level, party leader is the broad factor influencing the Indian voters more

than the party itself. At the state level, party (ideology and policy) is the broad factor and National Election Studies (NES) data of 2014 and 2019 substantiate this observation. On the contrary, in the 1990s, when the BJP first became a political brand of national significance, party ideology was the primary driver to influence voter decisions (Malik and Singh, 1992). Although the BJP had formed the government twice in the 1990s, they were coalition governments with the support of other regional parties. In that era, contest was more between party brands (and not between leaders) where BJP's Hinduism and conservatism was pitted against Congress' liberal and tolerant mindset (Graham, 1990). Stereotypes and prejudice about the policy of any political party can unconsciously affect voter's decisions (Crawford et al., 2011; Lodge and Taber, 2013). Social or caste-based identifications with a political party and its policy can affect the voter's decision (Campbell et al., 1960).

7 Effect of social media

In recent times, politicians and political parties all over the world are using social media to reach out to the masses (Hong and Nadler, 2012). As the current generation uses social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) heavily, the political candidates also use these platforms (Jain et al., 2017) to increase their visibility. The 2004 Lok Sabha election in India first saw the major use of new media by both national parties: BJP and the Indian National Congress. Tekwani and Shetty (2007) noted that "with this election, the big difference was to be the technological one. After all, this was the major election in the new-technology India, the India of booming economic growth and a rising educated middle class." There was very little opportunity to engage with voters through print media and TV. On the contrary, Internet was a cost-effective medium (Hara and Jo, 2007) and it provided an unlimited opportunity to reach out to the voters directly. In 2009, major candidates from both the parties showed inclination to the idea of using the Internet as a platform for political campaigning (Advani, 2009). But the 2014 elections changed the game completely. Not only in terms of margin and volume, this national election also saw some path-breaking strategies in terms of political marketing like focusing more on social media or digital campaign than on-ground campaign, keeping main slogan of the campaign in the name of party leader and not the party, targeting different age groups of voters with different campaign content, and engaging with the Indian diaspora of foreign countries. Almost all the national and regional political parties micro-targeted various segments of voters by using the latest tools and technology by sending personalized messages through mobile phones and social media (Pathak and Patra, 2015). India holds one of the biggest elections in the world, which includes numerous candidates and political parties seeking votes from approximately a billion citizens. Interestingly, 15 million voters in the age bracket of 18–19 years had voted for the first time in the 2019 Lok Sabha election and this age group is assumed to be more technologically equipped than other age groups. The above statistics prove that applying different tools and techniques across all the 542 parliamentary constituencies, by any political party, is a complex phenomenon and hence social media was used extensively (Hall, 2019) by all the parties to disseminate uniform

campaign messaging. During the same period, Internet and social media had penetrated the Indian population significantly. In 2018, only 19.93% of the total population used social media channels. That number increased significantly to 53.71% in 2022 (Basuroy, 2018) (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/240960/share-of-indian-population-using-social-networks/>). Multiple studies (Kapoor and Dwivedi, 2015; Jain et al., 2017; Hall, 2019) pointed out that political parties used social media to influence a voter's decision regarding their preferred political brand. However, according to Sen (2016), the tremendous rise of BJP as the preferred national party after 2014 can be attributed to either Narendra Modi's own social media campaign or BJP party's social media campaign around Narendra Modi with slogan like "Ab ki bar Modi Sarkar." Social media-based approach helped Narendra Modi to escalate from a regional branding (Gujarat Chief Minister) to a national-level branding as Prime Minister (Jungheer, 2016). Narendra Modi's live conversations through social media networks also influenced the young and tech-savvy voters significantly (Ghatak and Roy, 2014). Even in the 2019 Lok Sabha election, this trend continued and Narendra Modi's social media campaigns had a significant effect on the election outcome (Jain and Ganesh, 2020). Chhibber and Verma (2019) mentioned this as an ideological shift of the Indian voters, who primarily supported party identity and policy but shifted to the loyal voter base of a party leader, based on his digital and social media campaigns.

8 Effect of campaign messaging and platform

Apart from political candidate and party policy, effective campaign messaging holds a significant influence on the voter decision. As we do not have enough India-based studies to understand the effect of campaign platform on voter behavior in national and state elections, we have relied on studies in other developed and developing nations to review the effect of this factor. According to Aquirre and Hyman (2015), in terms of political advertisement or campaigning, TV or radio commercials, campaign messaging, language of the message, and key slogans of the campaign are a few more influencing indicators (Aquirre and Hyman, 2015). While campaigning, candidates cannot control two sources of information flow: one is the news media (TV, radio, print) and the opposition party campaign. The news media share a steady flow of information about all the candidates. Apart from that, a continuous and informative campaign by the opposition party also creates some image of the candidate's personality on the voters' mind. The opposition campaign is mostly negative and talks about the candidate's personal traits (Geer, 2008). While candidates often try to highlight his/her positive personality traits among the voters, the opposition tries to highlight the candidates' negative personality traits. News media is mostly factual or slightly biased and their information consists of both positive and negative traits (Fridkin and Kenney, 2011). However, information about the candidate's negative traits becomes more significant than his/her positive traits (Fiske, 1980). In the current era, platform for campaign messaging can be classified into two broad areas: proactive campaigning by the candidate through different platforms like Internet, TV, or live debate and word of

mouth among the voters. Though Internet is gaining popularity, the importance of word-of-mouth marketing cannot be ignored to provide a continuous flow of information through personal experience. The importance of word-of-mouth marketing also lies in the fact that political marketers have very low credibility and reliability among all marketers (Adams et al., 2011). Also, a very small percentage of voters trust the political campaign messages (messages conveyed through other platforms like Facebook, Twitter, or TV as paid promotion and marketing effort) that are advocated (Hopkins, 2013). In this kind of scenario, word-of-mouth campaign messages, passing through a credible group of voters, can be more reliable and credible than other methods, and this method has the ability to change voters' mind to take a decision on any political party (Iyer et al., 2017). Wring (1997) study indicated that party policies and their fulfillments, election manifesto, direct mail, and public marketing with grassroots voters are some of the key influencing factors on voters. The above studies discussed multiple factors of the campaign platform affecting voter perception, but none of them gave an insight into the differential impact on the national and state elections.

9 Effect of caste and religion

Caste system has been dominant in the Indian political system since independence and many state-level parties have been formed with primary ideology of casteism (Singh and Saxena, 2003). Even within one religion, there were many social groups (with different caste) that prefer political parties solely on the party's inclination to a certain social group or groups (Suri, 2019). Due to a notable rise in educational opportunities and the implementation of caste-based reservations, the representation of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in government employment has significantly improved since independence. In the 1980s, the Mandal Commission highlighted the disadvantaged position of backward castes in education and government jobs, who were lagging behind SCs and STs. The introduction of reservations for backward castes has led to considerable progress since 1990. For instance, in 1959, SC representation was 1.18% in Class I, 2.38% in Class II, 6.95% in Class III, and 17.24% in Class IV positions, which increased to 13.38% in Class I positions by 2016. The representation of SCs and STs across all government services was 13.17% and 2.25%, respectively, in 1965, rising to 17.49% and 8.49%, respectively, in 2016, approximately aligning with their proportion of population. Despite this progress, Backward Castes (BCs), constituting about 20% of the population, still have a long path to cover in terms of representation in government positions (GoI, 2018, p. 49). For the same reason, the rise of backward castes like SC, ST, and OBC in the Indian political system is an important phenomenon (Yadav, 1999) and their increased involvement in the political landscape has been termed as a silent revolution (Jaffrelot, 2003), which had a significant impact in the state elections, if not in the national elections. However, BJP's political agenda was to divert the direction from caste-based state-level politics to religion-based national-level politics (Graham, 1990). In the last two decades, the BJP has increased its support base in various Hindu social groups of different castes (Suri, 2019). Though the BJP has registered a significant increase in vote share since 2014 in the state elections

among the middle-level support states of the Hindi belt such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Haryana due to its Hindutva (Hindu nationalist) politics, its increased popularity in other state elections and national election are due to party's campaign content and party leader's (Narendra Modi) influence (Schakel et al., 2019). The above studies indicate that though caste and religion still play an important role among the lower strata of the society in the state elections, in the national election, party leader's (Narendra Modi) influence with targeted social media strategy plays an equal, if not more important, role to affect voter's opinion.

10 Discussion and findings

All the above studies discussed different factors affecting voter behavior in the national and state elections. Party and leadership are the most important elements of political branding (Needham, 2006), and it is difficult to quantify the effect of each of these elements. In this study, we adopted a systematic literature review method to study literature of different nations and India to find out the major driving force of voter behavior in respect to national and state elections. With respect to India, we have reviewed studies to understand the effect of four broad factors: (i) party leadership or candidate, (ii) party policy or legacy, (iii) use of social media, and (iv) campaign messaging and platform. Though traditionally India has witnessed party-based politics since independence, the trend has shifted to party leader-based politics (Chhibber and Verma, 2019) in the last 10 years in the national elections. If we analyse the journey of the Indian political landscape and the factors that affect its transition, we can say that for the initial 25 years, it was majorly dominated by one party brand in both national and state elections (Yadav, 1999). After that, with the emergence of state-level leaders, the control has shifted to the state-level party and their policies, which influenced both the national and state elections (Yadav, 1999). During this phase, even in the national election, mostly coalition governments (with multiple state-level parties) were formed and the major campaign platforms were door-to-door to campaign, on-ground campaign, and on-stage campaign, and the major voter-influencing factor was party-based policy and ideology (Malik and Singh, 1992). With the advent of social media, Narendra Modi began to dominate the national-level election since 2014 (Jain and Ganesh, 2020). While in the 2019 Lok Sabha election, party leader (Narendra Modi) is the major factor (Jain and Ganesh, 2020), in the state elections, the BJP party itself (ideology and policies), along with party leadership, are the primary factors (Jaffrelot and Verniers, 2020) to influence voters. It seems that, at the national level, party leader is the broad factor influencing the Indian voters more than the party itself. At the state level, party (ideology and policy) is the broad factor and NES. (2014, 2019) data substantiate this observation. On the contrary, in the 1990s, when the BJP first became a major political brand

of national significance, party ideology was the primary driver to influence voter decisions (Malik and Singh, 1992). So, we can conclude that in the national elections, party leaders have become the dominant factor of any political brand in the last 15 years due to advent of new-age media like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. However, in the state elections, party policies still dominate and the preferred campaign platform is on-ground campaigning and word-of-mouth publicity. So, political marketers should consider this information while designing campaign strategies for the national and state elections. This study would also add value to theory of political marketing as there are very limited studies with a systematic literature review process and our study would be an example of how to use PRISMA's four-phase data flow framework.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

JC: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Data curation, Conceptualization. GD: Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision.

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