Inside The Mind Of The Voter: The Strategy Of BJP And INC Cognitive Framing In The 2024 Indian General Elections

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Abstract

In today's India, political communication depends heavily on social media to connect with voters. Political parties carefully design their online messages to appeal to people's emotions, strengthen what they already believe, and highlight "us versus them" differences between groups. This research project looks at the official social media posts of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) during the 2024 General Election, from May 1, 2024, to June 1, 2024. Using both quantitative analysis and interpretation qualitative analysis, the research project explores how each party used certain cognitive biases such as emotional language, confirmation bias, framing, and in-group/out-group messaging. The findings show that both parties used these techniques, but in different ways. The BJP focused more on emotional appeals and "us versus them" language, while the Congress used framing and confirmation bias to strengthen its support base. These strategies influence how people think about politics, reinforce existing divides, and shape voting behavior. So, there is a growing need for media literacy so that citizens can better understand and critically evaluate political messages shared on social media.

Keywords: Political Communication, Social Media and Elections, Cognitive Manipulation, Cognitive Biase

Introduction

The 2024 Indian General Election was one of the most technology-driven elections in India's history. With more than 400 million people using social media in the country, platforms like Twitter (now X), Facebook, and Instagram became powerful tools for political parties to connect with voters. Unlike the old days, when political communication mostly happened through rallies, posters, newspapers, and TV ads, today it also happens on people's phones and personal social media accounts.

Social media has completely changed how political campaigns work. Political parties can now directly reach people, share updates instantly, and target messages to specific age groups, regions, or interests. They can also react quickly to what their opponents say online. This has made political communication faster, more personal, and more emotional.

However, this new way of communication also has some risks. Political messages on social media are not always shared to give true or complete information. Many times, they are made to change how people think or feel. This can lead to something called cognitive manipulation, which means people's choices are influenced by emotions or tricks used in the message instead of clear, logical thinking. Because of this, voters might support or oppose a political party not based on facts or policies, but because of how the message sounds, what feelings it creates, or how it presents an issue.

Cognitive biases are patterns in the way people think that can lead them away from logical or balanced judgment. In simple terms, they are mental shortcuts that affect how we understand and react to information. In politics, these biases often show up in the words, pictures, and emotions used in campaign messages. Types of cognitive biases in political communication are:

In-group/Out-group Bias: This means supporting and speaking positively about one's own political party or group, while showing the other side in a negative way.

Confirmation Bias: This happens when people pay more attention to information that agrees with what they already believe and ignore facts that go against their opinions.

Emotional Appeals: Political messages often use strong emotions like fear, anger, or hope to make people react quickly rather than think deeply.

Framing Effects: This means presenting an issue in a certain way highlighting the good side for one's own party or the bad side for the opponent.

Problem Statement

Social media has become one of the main tools for political campaigning in India, but there is still not enough research on how political parties use it to influence public thinking. In particular, very few studies have examined how cognitive biases such as emotional appeals, framing, and group based messaging are used in political communication. Without such understanding, it is difficult to see how these shape voter opinions and strengthen political divisions.

This research project is to address this problem by analyzing how the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) used social media messages during the 2024 Indian General Election , From May 1, 2024, to June 1, 2024. By identifying patterns and frequency of cognitive biases, the research hopes to provide insights that can improve public awareness, promote critical thinking among voters, and contribute to fairer and more informed democratic participation.

Research Objectives

To identify the different types of cognitive biases used in the social media posts of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) during the 2024 Indian General Election , From May 1, 2024, to June 1, 2024.

To measure how often each type of cognitive bias appears in their online communication.

To explain with case studies how both parties use these biases in their messages to influence voters.

To discuss how these communication strategies may affect the way voters think, feel, and make their voting decisions.

Research Questions

I.   How do the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) use language in their social media posts that can create or trigger cognitive biases?

II.   Which types of cognitive biases appear most often in the social media messages of these two parties?

III. How do these cognitive biases affect the way voters think, form opinions, and make decisions during elections?

Significance of the Study

Academic Contribution: It helps researchers and students understand how political parties in India use social media to communicate and influence voters. This research project adds to the growing field of research on political communication and digital campaigning.

Practical Implications: The research project shows how political parties use different techniques to shape public opinion. These findings can help policymakers, media and civic organizations create better rules and awareness programs to ensure fair and responsible use of social media in politics.

Media Literacy: The research project also helps voters learn how to think critically about political messages they see online. By understanding how biases work, citizens can make more informed decisions and avoid being easily influenced by emotional or misleading content.

Hypothesis

The frequent use of cognitive biases such as in-group and out-group language, emotional appeals, confirmation bias, and framing in political campaign strategies significantly shapes voter perception and attitudes by influencing their emotions, reinforcing pre-existing beliefs, and guiding how they interpret political messages.

Methodology

Research Design

This research project uses a mixed-methods research design, which means it combines both quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (descriptive) methods to get a complete understanding of how cognitive biases are used in political communication.

The quantitative part of the research focuses on counting how often different types of cognitive biases appear in the official social media posts of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) during the 2024 Indian General Election , from May 1, 2024, to June 1, 2024. By coding and categorizing each post, the study can measure the frequency and percentage of posts that display specific biases such as emotional appeals, in-group/out-group language, confirmation bias, and framing. This helps to identify which types of biases were used most often and whether there are noticeable differences between the two parties.

The qualitative part of this reserach project takes a closer look at selected examples from these posts to understand how and why these biases are used. It examines the language choices, tone, imagery, and framing techniques used in the posts. For instance, qualitative analysis helps explore whether a post uses emotional language to inspire hope or fear, how it frames an issue to favor one party, or how it builds a sense of unity among supporters while portraying the opposing party negatively. By combining both methods, this mixed approach offers a more balanced and reliable picture. The quantitative data shows the overall trends and patterns, while the qualitative data explain the deeper meanings behind them.

Data Sources

This research uses both primary and secondary sources of data to ensure accuracy and depth in the analysis. The combination of these sources helps in collecting reliable information and verifying the context of political communication during the 2024 Indian General Election , from May 1, 2024, to June 1, 2024.

The primary data for this study comes directly from the official social media accounts of the two major political parties ; the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC). Specifically, posts from Twitter (now X) and Facebook were collected and analyzed.

These platforms were chosen because they were the main channels used by both parties to share campaign messages, interact with the public, and respond to political events in real-time. The selected posts include text, images, videos, and hashtags shared during the 2024 Indian General Election , from May 1, 2024, to June 1, 2024, a period when campaigning and voter engagement are at their highest.

Collecting data directly from the parties' verified accounts ensures that the material studied truly represents official communication, not content created by supporters or unofficial pages. This makes the analysis more focused and reliable.

The secondary data supports and gives context to the primary data. It includes Academic articles, research papers, and policy documents that discuss trends in Indian political communication, social media influence, and cognitive biases. These sources help situate the study within existing literature and support interpretation of the findings.

Data Collection Procedure

The process of collecting data for this research project was carried out in a systematic and organized way to ensure that the information was accurate, relevant, and representative of the parties' official online communication during the 2024 Indian General Election , From May 1, 2024, to June 1, 2024.

The data was collected from the 2024 Indian General Election , From May 1, 2024, to June 1, 2024, which is the most intense and crucial period of campaigning. During this time, political parties actively post content to attract undecided voters and swing voters strengthen support among followers, and respond quickly to opponents. Focusing on this phase provides a clear picture of each party's communication strategy when voter attention and political engagement are at their highest.

To maintain the quality and focus of the data, only specific types of posts were selected :

Original Posts Only -The study included only the official posts created by the parties themselves. Retweets, shares, or reposts without any added comment or message were excluded, since they do not represent the party's own words or framing.

Language Selection - Posts written in English or Hindi were considered. In cases where Hindi posts were used, only those that could be accurately translated were included to ensure consistency and avoid misinterpretation.

Relevance - Only posts directly related to the election campaign, such as those discussing candidates, policies, achievements, or opposition criticism, were included. Non-political or unrelated posts were excluded.

A comprehensive sampling method was used in this research project. This means that all social media posts from the selected date from May 1, 2024, to June 1, 2024, that met the rules (such as being original and relevant) were collected and studied. This helped make sure that every kind of message and communication style used by each party was included in the research.

Each post was carefully verified for authenticity and relevance. Only content from the official, verified social media accounts of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) was included. This step helped to eliminate the risk of using posts from unofficial or fake accounts. In addition, posts were checked for context and timing, ensuring that they were indeed published within the May 1, 2024, to June 1, 2024 ,window before the election and that they directly related to campaign communication.

Development of Codebook

To make the analysis clear and systematic, a codebook was developed. A codebook is a detailed guide that defines each category of cognitive bias and explains the rules for identifying them in social media posts. It helps ensure that every post is analyzed in the same way, reducing personal judgment or confusion during the research process.

The codebook in this research project included four main types of cognitive biases: *In-group/Out- group Bias*, *Emotional Appeals*, *Confirmation Bias*, and *Framing*. Each bias was given a clear definition and a set of coding rules that describe how to recognize it in the text.

One prevalent technique is In-group / Out-group Bias, which is defined by a party expressing strong support and unity for its own group (the "in-group") while using negative language to create distance and criticism toward its rivals (the "out-group"). This concept, rooted in *Social Identity Theory* (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), explains how political communication strengthens group belonging and intensifies opposition toward outsiders. Posts are identified by the use of unifying terms like "we," "our," and "us" for supporters and distancing terms like "they" or "them" for the opposition, exemplified by statements such as, *"We are the only party that truly cares for the nation, unlike them who have failed the people."*

A second strategy involves Emotional Appeals, designed to bypass logical thinking and trigger strong feelings in the voter to motivate quick support or reaction. Emotions such as fear, anger, and hope are often used as persuasive tools to influence voter behavior (Brader, 2006). This category codes posts based on the dominant emotion they attempt to evoke: *Fear* (e.g., "If they come to power, the country's security will be at risk"), *Anger* (e.g., "How long will we tolerate their corruption?"), or *Hope* (e.g., "Together, we can build a stronger and brighter India"). Research shows that emotional messaging can significantly increase political engagement and message sharing (Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000).

Thirdly, Confirmation Bias is utilized when a post exclusively repeats or reinforces the existing beliefs and narratives of the party's followers. According to Nickerson (1998), confirmation bias leads individuals to seek, interpret, and recall information that supports their pre-existing beliefs, while dismissing contradictory evidence. Such posts are coded when they highlight only the

information supporting the party's achievements or narrative while deliberately ignoring any counter-evidence, making followers more confident in their current opinions, such as: *"Our government has always delivered growth and progress; no other party can match our record."*

Finally, Framing Bias refers to the structural presentation of an issue to systematically make one side look superior or the other look inferior. As Entman (1993) explains, framing influences perception by emphasizing certain aspects of reality while excluding others, shaping how audiences interpret issues. Posts under this category are labeled either *Positive Framing*, which promotes the party's own successes or values (e.g., "Our government has empowered millions through welfare schemes"), or *Negative Framing*, which focuses on criticizing, blaming, or highlighting the failures of the opponent (e.g., "Their policies have only increased unemployment and poverty").

Coding Procedure

Each social media post was carefully reviewed and analyzed to identify the presence of different types of bias based on the codebook described earlier. The coding process followed a systematic and transparent approach to maintain consistency and reliability throughout the study.

Independent Coding , each post was coded independently for all four types of bias: In-group/ Out-group Bias, Emotional Appeals, Confirmation Bias, and Framing Bias. This means that every post was checked separately for signs of each bias, instead of assigning only one label per post.

Multiple Biases per Post , since political messages can contain more than one kind of bias at the same time, multiple biases could be coded within a single post. For instance, a single post might use emotional words to influence feelings (Emotional Appeal) while also focusing only on positive points that support the party's own viewpoint (Confirmation Bias). Allowing more than one type of bias to be marked in the same post helped make the analysis more complete and true to how political messages actually work.

Ethical Considerations

This study followed strict ethical guidelines to ensure fairness and privacy. Only posts that were already public on official social media pages of the political parties were used , no private or personal accounts were included.

Literature Review

Cognitive Biases: Definitions and Theoretical Background

Cognitive biases are patterns in human thinking that cause people to make decisions or judgments that are not always logical or fair. In simple terms, they are mental shortcuts that the brain uses to make sense of complex information quickly. While these shortcuts can be useful in daily life, they often lead to mistakes in judgment or biased ways of thinking.

Cognitive biases are patterns in the way people think that can lead them away from logical or balanced judgment. In simple terms, they are mental shortcuts that affect how we understand and react to information.

The concept of cognitive bias was first introduced by Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman (1974), two famous psychologists who studied how people make decisions under uncertainty. Their research showed that humans do not always act rationally or make decisions based on facts and evidence. Instead, people rely on

emotions, experiences, and mental shortcuts to decide what is right or wrong, true or false.

In the context of political communication, cognitive biases play a major role. Political leaders, campaign managers, and media strategists understand that voters do not always make choices based only on facts or policies. Instead, voters are deeply influenced by how messages are presented, how they make them feel, and how well the messages fit their existing beliefs. As a result, political campaigns often use these biases deliberately to shape public opinion, strengthen group loyalty, and influence voting behavior.

Below are some of the main types of cognitive biases that are commonly used in political communication:

In-group/Out-group Bias

This means supporting and speaking positively about one's own political party or group, while showing the other side in a negative way.

This bias happens when people show preference for their own group (the "in-group") while seeing other groups (the "out-group") as different, wrong, or even threatening. In politics, parties use this bias to build unity among their supporters by creating a strong sense of belonging "us versus them" feeling.

For example, a political party might highlight how its supporters represent "true patriots" or "the voice of the nation," while describing the opposition as corrupt, anti-national, or disconnected from the people. This makes supporters feel proud of their group and distrustful of the other side.

According to Tajfel and Turner (1986) in their Social Identity Theory, people naturally seek a positive sense of identity from the groups they belong to. Political parties use this tendency to strengthen loyalty, increase emotional attachment, and make their supporters more resistant to opposing ideas. However, while this can increase unity within a party, it can also create division and hostility between political groups, making open debate and cooperation more difficult.

Confirmation Bias

Confirmation bias occurs when people focus only on information that supports what they already believe, and ignore or reject information that challenges their views. In politics, this means that voters are more likely to believe messages that fit their existing opinions about a party or leader.

Political campaigns often take advantage of this by creating messages that repeat familiar ideas and values. For example, if a party's supporters already believe their leader is honest, the campaign will keep showing posts, videos, and news that strengthen that belief even if opposing information exists.

Nickerson (1998) explains that people use confirmation bias to avoid **cognitive dissonance**, the uncomfortable feeling that comes when facts do not match their beliefs. As a result, political communication becomes an echo chamber, where voters see and share information that only supports their side. This makes it harder for them to evaluate information fairly or change their opinions based on new evidence.

Emotional Appeals

Political messages often use strong emotions like fear, anger, or hope to make people react quickly rather than think deeply.

Emotions are one of the most powerful tools in political communication. Politicians and parties often use strong emotional language, images, or music to connect with voters on a deeper level. These emotional appeals can create feelings of fear, anger, hope, or pride.

For example, a political ad might use fear to warn voters about the dangers of electing the opposition, or hope to inspire belief in a better future if their party wins. According to Brader (2006), emotions can override logical thinking and push people to act quickly. for example, by attending a rally, donating money, or voting impulsively.

Emotional appeals work because they reach people's feelings before their minds have time to think deeply. While they can be effective in motivating action, they can also be manipulative, especially when emotions like fear or anger are used to divide people or spread misinformation.

Framing Effects

This means presenting an issue in a certain way highlighting the good side for one's own party or the bad side for the opponent.

Framing means presenting information in a particular way that influences how people understand it. The same fact or event can be described differently to create a positive or negative impression. For example, a policy can be framed as "helping the poor" or as "wasting taxpayers' money," depending on what message the speaker wants to send.

Entman (1993) describes framing as the process of selecting certain aspects of an issue and making them more noticeable, so that people interpret the issue in a specific way. In political communication, framing is used to control the story around key topics such as economic growth, national security, or social welfare and guide voters' opinions toward the party's goals.

Framing can be seen in how political parties talk about their achievements and failures. Positive framing highlights successes ("record job growth," "strong leadership"), while negative framing focuses on the opponent's weaknesses ("corruption," "policy failure").

Social Media as a Political Tool

In today's world, social media has become one of the most powerful tools in politics. Platforms like Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram, and YouTube allow political parties and leaders to talk directly to people without needing newspapers, TV channels, or journalists as middlemen. This direct connection helps them share their messages instantly, reach millions of people, and even shape public discussions.

One of the biggest strengths of social media is its ability to spread information very quickly. A single post, video, or tweet can be shared thousands of times within minutes. When supporters like, comment on, or forward these posts, they help spread the message even further and often much faster than traditional media could ever do. This process is known as message amplification, and it allows parties to reach a wider audience

without spending much money.

Social media platforms use algorithms that collect data about users such as their age, gender, location, interests, and online activity. Political parties use this data to send customized messages to different groups. For example, they might show one type of post to young voters about job opportunities, and a different one to farmers about agricultural support. This strategy, called targeted messaging, makes political communication more personal and effective.

Politics today moves very fast, and public opinion can change overnight. Social media allows parties to react immediately to breaking news or statements from their opponents. They can post clarifications, counterarguments, or new slogans within minutes. This real-time communication helps them control the narrative and stay relevant in fast-changing situations.

Unlike traditional campaigning, social media offers clear data about how people react to messages. Numbers such as likes, comments, shares, and views show what kind of content connects most with voters. If a post gets a lot of engagement, parties know it's effective; if not, they can adjust their strategy. These engagement metrics act like quick feedback from the public.

However, studies have also shown that social media can have negative effects. Because algorithms show people more of what they already agree with, it can create echo chambers , spaces where users only see one side of the story. This often deepens political divisions and strengthens existing opinions instead of encouraging open discussion. A study by Bakshy et al. (2015) found that this kind of selective exposure can increase polarization, meaning people become more rigid in their political beliefs and less willing to understand opposing views.

Analysis & Findings

The number of posts the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) made on their official Facebook and Twitter (X) accounts during the 2024 General election campaign, from May 1, 2024, to June 1, 2024. It shows that the BJP was more active on Twitter (X), where it posted a total of 3,945 tweets from its official handle @BJP4India. In comparison, the INC made 1,959 tweets from its handle @INCIndia during the same period.

This finding reflects what previous studies have observed that the BJP has consistently prioritized high-frequency, short-form communication to dominate online visibility and agenda-setting (Kaur & Kumar, 2020; Udupa, 2019). This means the BJP used Twitter almost twice as much as Congress, suggesting it relied heavily on twitter tend to rapid, concise posts to reach voters instantly, react to current events, and create trending narratives (Chaudhuri, 2021). Social media research suggests that such real-time communication helps political actors influence public discourse and frame issues before traditional media can respond (Enli, 2017).

On Facebook, however, the situation was different. The INC posted more frequently, with 1,350 posts from its official page facebook.com/IndianNationalCongress, compared to 850 posts from facebook.com/BJP4India. This pattern indicates that the Congress Party focused more on detailed posts, longer captions, images, and videos to communicate its campaign messages and maintain engagement (Mukherjee, 2021). Scholars note that Facebook tends to favor storytelling and visual persuasion over quick updates, allowing parties to build emotional connections and explain policies more clearly (Chadwick, 2017; Kreiss, Lawrence, & McGregor, 2018). Thus, while BJP used Twitter as a fast-paced tool for trend-making, Congress used Facebook as a narrative-based platform for sustained engagement and policy framing.

BJP and INC per day posts on Facebook, May 1, 2024, to June 1, 2024

Source : prepared by author facebook.com/BJP4India & facebook.com/IndianNationalCongress

Table 3 presents how often the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) used four different types of psychological biases - In-group/Out-group Language, Emotional Appeals, Confirmation Bias, and Framing , in their posts on Facebook and Twitter (X) during the 2024 General election campaign, from May 1, 2024, to June 1, 2024.

In-group / Out-group Language

In political communication, the use of in-group and out-group language is a powerful strategy through which political actors divide society into two moral camps"us" versus "them." The "us" represents the virtuous, patriotic, and honest citizens, while "them" symbolizes the corrupt, selfish, or anti-national opponents. Tajfel and Turner (1979) in their *Social Identity Theory* argue that individuals build their self-esteem through group belonging, making such "us versus them" appeals highly persuasive in politics. Van Dijk (1998) similarly explained that political discourse often reproduces ideological divisions by highlighting the positive traits of one's own group and the negative features of the opposing group.

This rhetorical pattern was clearly visible in the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) Facebook communication during the 2024 general elections. The BJP frequently projected itself as the moral in-group committed to national service, while portraying the opposition,especially the Congress Party as the corrupt and divisive out-group. For instance, one Facebook post declared, "*Together, we are building a New India that leaves behind the politics of appeasement and corruption.*" The use of the pronoun "*we*" builds a collective moral identity of honest citizens working toward a national cause, while the mention of "*appeasement and corruption*" is strategically attached to the opposition. This reflects what Reicher et al. (2005) call "*identity entrepreneurship,*" where political leaders construct a sense of shared moral superiority to mobilize followers.

Another Facebook post stated, "*We work for 140 crore Indians; they work only for their vote bank.*" This framing reinforces BJP's image as selfless and people-oriented, while depicting the opposition as opportunistic and power-hungry. Such messaging strengthens a sense of unity among BJP supporters, fostering what Wodak (2015) describes as the *populist discourse of moral dualism,* where the people are positioned as pure and virtuous, and the opponents as corrupt betrayers of the nation. Some BJP Facebook posts also carried religious undertones that deepened the in-group/out-group divide. A notable post read, "*If Congress comes to power, it will take money from non-Muslims and give it to Muslims.*" This message converts political difference into religious division, positioning non-Muslims, especially Hindus as the threatened in-group and Muslims as the privileged out-group. Scholars such as Nanda (2009) and Jaffrelot (2019) have documented how such narratives of "appeasement politics" have been central to the consolidation of Hindu identity politics, portraying Hindus as victims of preferential treatment given to minorities. Through this religiously charged framing, BJP's Facebook communication not only mobilized political support but also reinforced communal consciousness by constructing a sense of cultural victimhood and moral righteousness among its followers.

In contrast, the Indian National Congress (INC) on Facebook adopted a different moral framing of in-group and out-group language. Instead of religious identity, Congress used social and economic identity to define its audience. The party positioned itself as the voice of ordinary citizens such as farmers, women, and youth; while portraying the ruling BJP as aligned with the privileged elite. For example, one Facebook post stated, "*Our movement is the voice of farmers, youth, and women, ignored for ten years by this government.*" Here, Congress creates an in-group of hardworking, neglected citizens and frames the government as the out-group responsible for inequality and indifference. Similarly, another post read, "*We stand with every Indian who*

works hard for dignity, while they stand with the rich and powerful." This contrast between the moral "we" and the unjust "they" . Such language reflects what Fairclough (2003) termed *"solidarity discourse,"* where political actors use inclusive moral vocabulary to connect emotionally with the public and present themselves as champions of the common people.

Emotional Appeals

Emotional appeals play a powerful role in political communication, as they connect with people's feelings . According to Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen (2000), emotions such as fear, enthusiasm, and anger strongly influence political judgment and voter behavior. Similarly, Brader (2006) explains that emotional language and imagery make political messages more memorable and persuasive, as they activate values like pride, hope, and belonging. On Facebook, both the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) used emotional narratives to influence how people felt about national progress, leadership, and justice.

BJP's Facebook campaign frequently used emotions like *pride, fear, and gratitude* to build trust and loyalty toward Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. For instance, one post said, *"If you care about your family's safety, stand with Modi Ji's strong leadership."* This uses fear appeal, implying that only the BJP can protect families from danger, a strategy that Nabi (2002) describes as fear-based persuasion where anxiety about loss or insecurity is redirected toward political support. Another Facebook post read, *"Every poor mother now has a roof, every farmer gets respect, this is Modi's guarantee."* This message evokes gratitude and hope, portraying Modi as a provider and protector. As Wodak (2015) notes, such narratives create "emotional legitimacy," where political authority is built through compassion and moral care rather than policy explanation. BJP's emotional messaging also invoked pride and belonging. The post, *"Join PM Modi's programme and come build New India,"* invited people to take part in a collective national mission. This reflects Anderson's (1983) concept of the *"imagined community"*, where political rhetoric constructs a shared sense of identity and purpose among citizens. By framing participation as patriotic duty, BJP positioned itself as the moral center of India's progress. Another emotional pattern emerged in nostalgia and fear of regression, *"Never forget the dark days when corruption looted your future, choose progress, not chaos."* Here, emotional memory of past instability is used to reinforce faith in continuity under BJP leadership.

In contrast, the Congress Party's Facebook emotional appeals focused on *hope, empathy, and moral responsibility*. A key example is the post, *"Together we can bring back hope, let's rebuild the nation with fairness and love."* This uses positive emotion to unite people around social justice and inclusivity. According to Lakoff (2004), such language works through *"moral framing",* it invites citizens to act on shared values like fairness and compassion, rather than fear or pride. The emotional tone here was softer and collective, aligning with Fairclough's (2003) idea of "solidarity discourse," where emotional inclusiveness strengthens moral legitimacy.

Congress also used sadness and urgency to highlight suffering and inequality. Posts referencing hunger, unemployment, and neglected communities aimed to create empathy and moral outrage. For instance, messages about farmers, women, and youth being ignored for years appealed to compassion fatigue theory (Chouliaraki, 2006), where emotions are used not to paralyze audiences but to motivate moral action. Unlike BJP's emotional appeals centered on strength and pride, Congress's emotional narrative on Facebook emphasized *care, fairness, and collective healing*, aiming to connect with citizens' sense of social responsibility.

Confirmation Bias

Confirmation bias refers to the tendency of political parties or individuals to share and believe information that supports their pre-existing views while ignoring contradictory evidence. On Facebook, this strategy plays a major role in shaping how political parties like the BJP and the Indian National Congress (INC) communicate with their followers. According to Nickerson (1998), confirmation bias reinforces one's beliefs by focusing only on selective facts and information. Similarly, Stroud (2010) found that users on social media platforms often engage with content that aligns with their political leanings, creating "echo chambers" where only supporting views are visible. In the case of the BJP, Facebook posts often highlighted achievements and used success stories to reinforce trust in the Modi government. For example, posts like "*Ten years, ten crore homes proof that Modi Government delivers what others only promise*" display only the positive side of governance while ignoring challenges such as unemployment or inflation. These posts are crafted to reassure supporters that their faith in the government is justified. This aligns with Bail et al. (2018), who observed that selective exposure to ideologically consistent content increases polarization and strengthens group loyalty. Similarly, BJP's posts such as "*India leads the world in growth and innovation under Modi Ji's leadership*" present selective facts that support a success narrative, confirming followers' belief that BJP is the only effective leadership.

On the other hand, Congress used confirmation bias on Facebook to remind people of its legacy and achievements. Posts like "*For decades we have fought for the poor; no other party has that legacy*" strengthen the emotional attachment of its base by reinforcing moral superiority and historical contribution. Another post "*Our Nyay for farmers guarantees fair prices and loan relief*" highlights Congress's role as a protector of the poor, ignoring policy failures or criticisms. This approach supports Entman's (1993) framing theory, where selective presentation of facts helps shape public perception by emphasizing certain aspects while omitting others.

Framing

Framing on Facebook plays a major role in shaping how political messages are understood and emotionally received by the public. According to Entman (1993), framing involves selecting certain aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a text to promote a specific interpretation or evaluation. On Facebook, where posts can include visuals, slogans, and short explanations, both the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) use framing to influence how followers interpret policies, leadership, and national issues.

The BJP effectively framed its policies and leadership as moral, patriotic, and people-centered. For example, a Facebook post stating, "*Tax relief for the middle class; Modi Government empowers every Indian family*" transforms a financial policy into a moral story of empowerment and care for ordinary citizens. This kind of framing connects economic governance with emotional values, aligning with Iyengar's (1991) concept of "episodic framing," where political issues are presented through relatable human experiences rather than abstract data. Another BJP post, "*Viksit Bharat 2050: every reform today builds the India our children deserve,*" uses a future-oriented frame that portrays current policies as investments for national progress and family well-being. According to Lakoff (2004), such moral framing activates emotional and cultural values like patriotism, security, and family responsibility to make political narratives more convincing.

Additionally, BJP's Facebook content often employed moral and religious framing to define political identity. Posts such as "*If Congress comes to power, it will take money from non-Muslims and give it to Muslims*" use fear-based religious framing to construct a narrative of threat and victimhood. This aligns with Fairhurst and Sarr's (1996) theory that framing can simplify complex realities into "good versus bad" contrasts, guiding

how people assign blame or virtue. Similarly, BJP's repeated statements like "*This election is not about politics; it's about protecting our culture and pride*"turn political participation into a moral duty, transforming voting into an act of cultural defense.

On the other hand, the Congress Party used justice and democracy framing on Facebook to appeal to moral responsibility and fairness. Posts like "*Our 'Nyay' plan means justice, jobs, and dignity for all*" reframed economic promises into moral obligations, presenting the party as a guardian of social justice. This strategy reflects Snow and Benford's (1988) idea of "collective action frames," which help mobilize support by connecting policies to shared moral values. Another Congress Facebook post, "*This election is about protecting our democracy and institutions,*" used institutional framing, portraying the election not just as political competition but as a defense of democratic integrity.

BJP and INC per day Posts on twitter (X), May 1, 2024, to June 1, 2024

The daily number of posts made by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) on X (formerly Twitter) during the 2024 General election campaign, from May 1, 2024, to June 1, 2024. This table helps in understanding how frequently both parties used X to reach voters, respond to issues, and promote their campaign narratives in real time.

In-group / Out-group Language (Twitter X)

On Twitter (X), the use of in-group and out-group language was even more direct and emotionally charged than on Facebook. The platform's short format encouraged slogans, hashtags, and sharp contrasts that amplified the "us versus them" divide. According to Tajfel and Turner's (1979) *Social Identity Theory*, individuals naturally categorize themselves into groups to maintain a positive sense of identity, which political leaders exploit by positioning their supporters as the moral in-group and opponents as the immoral out-group. Similarly, Van Dijk (1998) explains that political discourse on fast-moving media platforms like Twitter often reinforces ideological polarization through repeated moral labeling and emotional framing.

During the 2024 general elections, from May 1, 2024, to June 1, 2024, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) used Twitter as a digital battleground to reinforce patriotic loyalty and national identity. Posts frequently equated support for BJP with love for the nation and opposition with betrayal. For instance, one BJP tweet read, "*Those who insult our soldiers will never understand the spirit of Bharat.*" This statement creates a moral binary where BJP supporters are portrayed as patriotic defenders of the nation, and critics as disrespectful outsiders. Wodak (2015), in her *Discourse- Historical Approach*, identifies this kind of messaging as part of *populist moral dualism*, which merges national loyalty with political obedience. Another tweet stated, "*Those who question our armed forces stand with the enemy, not with Bharat.*" Here, dissent is reframed as disloyalty, creating what Reicher et al. (2005) describe as "*identity entrepreneurship*" the deliberate construction of a shared moral identity to mobilize followers by appealing to emotions of pride and fear.

This pattern extended to economic and religious narratives as well. BJP tweets often accused Congress of divisive politics and minority appeasement, such as posts claiming that Congress governments "rewarded vote bank politics" or "undermined Hindu festivals." By positioning Hindus as culturally threatened and BJP as their sole defender, such messages reflected the trend noted by Jaffrelot (2019) and Nanda (2009), who argue that Hindu nationalism draws strength from portraying Hindus as victims of "pseudo-secular" policies. These online narratives thus reinforced BJP's identity politics by emotionally uniting followers around religion, nationalism, and moral superiority.

Emotional Appeals (Twitter X)

Emotional appeals on Twitter (X) were a central tool for both the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) to influence public sentiment during the 2024 General election campaign, from May 1, 2024, to June 1, 2024. Twitter, as a fast-paced and interactive platform, is known for amplifying emotions that capture attention and trigger engagement. Papacharissi (2015) calls this the "*affective public sphere*", where emotions spread rapidly through likes, retweets, and hashtags, shaping collective feelings toward political events and leaders. Similarly, Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) found that emotional content especially pride, anger, and fear receives more interaction on social media, making it a persuasive strategy in digital campaigning.

BJP's emotional appeals on Twitter relied heavily on *pride, fear, and gratitude* to strengthen nationalism and trust in leadership. For example, the post, "*Every vote for the lotus is a salute to the sacrifices of our heroes,*" connects voting with patriotism, transforming political support into an act of national devotion. This aligns with Brader's (2006) concept of *enthusiasm appeals*, which motivate citizens through feelings of pride and hope rather than rational policy reasoning. Similarly, tweets such as "*Never forget the dark days when corruption looted your future ,choose progress, not chaos*"and "*Your one vote can secure your children's tomorrow*" evoke fear of instability and loss, creating an emotional link between personal safety and political choice. According to Nabi (2002), fear-based messages often work when they provide a clear "safe option" in this case, re-electing the BJP for security and stability.

BJP also framed emotion through heroic and moral imagery. Tweets like "*Every vote for Modi Ji is a salute to the sacrifices of our heroes*" merge political loyalty with patriotic pride, constructing Modi as a moral leader synonymous with national strength. This mirrors Ahmed's (2014) theory of "affective economies," where emotions circulate around symbols like the "lotus" or "soldiers" to bind political identity with emotional energy. By repeatedly invoking pride, sacrifice, and gratitude, BJP effectively turned emotional loyalty into political capital.

On the other hand, Congress's emotional appeals on Twitter used *anger, sadness, and hope* to highlight injustice and call for change. For instance, the tweet, "*Every hungry child and jobless youth reminds us why change cannot wait,*"creates moral urgency through sadness and empathy. This reflects Jasper's (2011) argument that emotions like moral outrage and compassion fuel collective political action. Similarly, the post, "*The Modi government has broken the backbone of job creation. YOUTH demands NYAY,*" uses anger as a mobilizing force, transforming frustration into a demand for justice. As Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta (2001) note, anger in political movements functions as an energizing emotion, it motivates protest and activism by framing injustice as intolerable.

Congress also used hope and pride to restore optimism about democracy. The tweet, "*This election is about protecting democracy and institutions,*" blends fear (of losing democratic values) with pride (in defending them). According to Lakoff (2004), such moral framing activates deeply held values like freedom and justice, turning political participation into a moral duty. This emotional framing makes voters feel that choosing Congress is not just a political act but a defense of the nation's moral foundation.

Confirmation Bias

Confirmation bias on Twitter (now X) is a key rhetorical strategy used by political parties to reinforce existing beliefs among their followers. Unlike Facebook, where posts are longer and more visual, Twitter relies on short, emotionally charged messages that spread quickly through likes, retweets, and hashtags. According to Sunstein (2009), platforms like Twitter encourage "information cocoons," where users engage mostly with content that confirms their prior opinions. Similarly, Bakshy, Messing, and Adamic (2015) found that social media algorithms expose users more often to ideologically consistent information, intensifying political polarization.

For the BJP, confirmation bias on Twitter often appeared through selective praise and statistics that showcased the success of government programs. Tweets such as "*Global leaders praise India's fastest-growing economy, thanks to visionary reforms*" highlight only positive assessments, ignoring areas of criticism like inflation or job shortages. Another example, "*Unemployment is at a historic low thanks to Make-in-India*", presents a one-sided claim that confirms supporters' belief in Modi's effective leadership. These messages mirror Stroud's (2010) findings that individuals prefer to consume information that supports their identity and political preferences. BJP's slogans like "*Ten years of trust, ten years of transformation, people's blessings prove our work*" use circular logic to suggest that popularity equals success, strengthening the emotional bond between the party and its followers.

Similarly, the Indian National Congress (INC) also used confirmation bias on Twitter to validate its ideological stance and achievements. Tweets such as "*Under Congress governments, India saw record growth and reduced inequality, facts they won't tell you*" highlight past successes while ignoring economic challenges or governance failures. This selective framing aligns with Entman's (1993) framing theory, where political actors emphasize certain facts to construct a favorable narrative. Congress's posts often employed nostalgic tones "*We built India's democratic foundations; others only claim credit*" to reinforce faith among its traditional voter base.

Framing

On Twitter (now X), framing served as a crucial communication tool for both the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) during the 2024 elections during the 2024 General election campaign, from May 1, 2024, to June 1, 2024.. Twitter's concise and fast- paced environment encouraged both parties to use short, emotionally charged, and morally loaded messages to influence how users interpreted political issues. According to Entman (1993), framing is about selecting certain aspects of reality and making them more prominent to promote a particular interpretation. On Twitter, where word limits demand brevity, framing becomes even more strategic , each phrase or hashtag acts as a cue to guide public perception.

The BJP used framing to project itself as the party of development, nationalism, and moral strength, often contrasting these values with alleged failures of the opposition. Posts such as "*Opposition only plays politics; we focus on development*" framed the BJP as action-oriented and responsible while portraying others as divisive and lazy. This reflects Fairhurst and Sarr's (1996) concept of *contrast framing*, which simplifies politics into binary moral choices. Another post, "*Viksit Bharat 2050: every reform today builds the India our children deserve,*" demonstrates prospective framing, where current actions are linked to a vision of a prosperous future, fostering emotional investment in long-term goals. As Lakoff (2004) explains, such moral framing activates deep-rooted cultural metaphors like family, progress, and duty to make political messages resonate beyond rational debate. The BJP also frequently used moral and national identity framing to turn policy debates into moral battles. A post stating, "*This election is not about politics, it's about protecting our*

culture and pride," converts political competition into a patriotic duty. Similarly, *"Those who question our armed forces stand with the enemy, not with Bharat"* uses what Wodak (2015) calls *the politics of fear and belonging* , constructing loyalty as moral virtue and dissent as betrayal. This strategy simplifies complex issues into a narrative of "patriots vs. traitors," reinforcing emotional attachment and moral polarization.

In contrast, the Congress Party used framing on Twitter to highlight themes of democracy, justice, and fairness. Posts like *"This election is a choice between democracy and dictatorship"* exemplify what Snow and Benford (1988) term *diagnostic framing* identifying moral threats and calling for corrective action. Congress frequently presented governance as a moral struggle, using frames such as *"Freedom or Fear. Prosperity for All or Wealth for a Few." .* *"This election is about protecting our democracy and institutions,"* invoked a crisis frame, using fear of authoritarianism and pride in democracy to mobilize collective responsibility.

Frequency of Cognitive Biases in Facebook and Twitter Posts from May 1, 2024, to June 1, 2024

How often four types of cognitive biases , in-group/out-group language, emotional appeals, confirmation bias, and framing were used in the Facebook and Twitter posts of the BJP and Congress (INC) during the 2024 General election campaign, from May 1, 2024, to June 1, 2024.

For the BJP, 850 Facebook posts and 3,945 Twitter post were studied. The data show that framing (27%) and emotional appeals (26.6%) were the most common on Twitter. On Facebook, emotional appeals (27%) and framing (26.5%)appeared most often. This means that BJP's posts were usually designed to make people feel emotions and present issues in a certain way to guide how people understood events or rivals. According to Mir (2024), BJP's digital campaign used emotional language and strong visuals to keep people engaged. Kumar (2024) also found that the party used social media algorithms and emotional content to promote unity and strengthen its online presence. The use of in-group/out- group language (21.8% on Facebook and 24.1% on Twitter) showed that BJP often created a clear divide between "us" (supporters) and "them" (opponents). Sharma and Kaur (2024) noted that such group identity and nationalist messages were central to BJP's digital communication.

Confirmation bias appeared in about one-fourth of their posts (24.7% on Facebook and 22.3% on Twitter), showing that BJP mostly shared posts that supported its views and ignored the opposite side something also highlighted in Samosa (2025).

For Congress (INC), framing was the most common, appearing in 51.8% of Facebook posts and 46.9% of Twitter posts, meaning the party focused on presenting issues in a way that suited its story or criticized others. India Today (2024) reported that Congress used issue-based posts and focused on topics like welfare and governance rather than emotions.

Emotional appeals (21.5% on Facebook and 26.5% on Twitter) were also used, showing that the party tried to connect with voters emotionally especially on issues like jobs, price rise, and justice Congress used in-group/out-group language much less (8.9% on Facebook and 10.7% on Twitter), meaning it avoided divisive language and focused on unity. Confirmation bias (17.8% on Facebook and 15.8% on Twitter) was present but weaker than BJP's.

In general, both parties showed more biases on Twitter than Facebook, as Twitter is faster, more political, and encourages strong opinions. Rao and Menon (2025) explain that Twitter's structure often leads to more emotional and polarized content.

Overall, BJP used more emotional and identity-based messaging, while Congress focused on issue-based framing. These patterns show how both parties used social media strategically to influence voters, shape public opinion, and push their election messages (Mir, 2024; Samosa, 2025).

Conclusion

The research project study how different cognitive biases were used in political campaign strategies during the 2024 Indian general elections and how they influenced voter perception and attitude. By analyzing social media posts from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) between May 1, 2024, and June 1, 2024, it became clear that digital platforms played a very important role in shaping people's opinions. Both parties used various forms of communication that were not just meant to inform but also to persuade, emotionally connect, and influence voters' thinking patterns. Social media, being quick, wide-reaching, and personal, became the perfect ground for the use of cognitive biases such as in-group/out-group language, emotional appeal, confirmation bias, and framing. In-group and out-group language was used to create a sense of belonging and separation. BJP posts often built a strong "us versus them" narrative, calling their supporters "nation builders," "true patriots," or "those fighting corruption." INC also used this style, referring to themselves as "the voice of the people" or "protectors of democracy." Such messages made supporters feel part of a virtuous group while painting opponents as outsiders or threats. This technique helped strengthen loyalty among followers and discouraged them from questioning their chosen side. Emotions were one of the

strongest tools used in the campaigns. Posts by both BJP and INC were designed to evoke pride, anger, fear, or hope.

BJP's emotional appeals often highlighted national pride, development, and security. INC's messages, on the other hand, frequently focused on empathy, social justice, and concern for the poor and unemployed. Emotional appeals made the campaigns more relatable and memorable, allowing messages to stick in voters' minds. However, they also made it harder for voters to evaluate policies rationally, as emotions often overpowered logic. Both parties used content that matched what their followers already believed. BJP's posts reinforced ideas about a strong and corruption-free government, while INC's posts validated people's dissatisfaction with unemployment and inequality. By continuously showing information that supported existing beliefs, both parties ensured that their followers felt "right," reducing the possibility of attitude change. This bias made social media an "echo chamber" where people mostly saw what they already agreed with, leading to stronger polarization among voters. The way information was presented known as framing also played a big role. BJP framed their achievements using positive language like "Viksit Bharat" (Developed India) and "New India," while INC framed their messages around issues like inflation and unemployment, often blaming government failures. The same topic, such as "development" or "welfare," was shown in completely different ways depending on the party's goals. This affected how voters interpreted news and political debates, guiding them toward certain attitudes without directly telling them what to think. Quantitative data showed that INC was more active on Facebook (around 1,350 posts) compared to BJP's 850 posts during May 2024. However, BJP was far more active on Twitter (X) with around 3,945 tweets, while INC posted around 1,959 tweets. This indicates that both parties used different platforms strategically. They shaped how voters understood information, built emotional connections with parties, and even determined which facts they believed or ignored. The study showed that the use of cognitive biases increased emotional involvement and political loyalty among voters. However, it also contributed to confirmation bias, polarization, and reduced critical thinking.

Many voters were influenced more by emotional and group-based appeals than by actual policy analysis. The findings suggest that modern political campaigns rely heavily on psychological techniques rather than straightforward policy communication. By applying cognitive biases strategically, political parties can effectively influence how voters think, feel, and decide.

However, this also raises ethical questions about manipulation and the quality of democratic decision-making.

So, cognitive biases are not just psychological tendencies, they are powerful tools used in political communication. The 2024 election campaigns of BJP and INC showed that social media has transformed political messaging into a form of emotional and psychological persuasion. While these strategies are effective in shaping public opinion and mobilizing voters, they also highlight the need for media literacy,

critical thinking, and responsible political communication. A more aware and educated voter base can help reduce the impact of manipulative messages and focus attention back on real issues like development, equality, and governance. Therefore, understanding these cognitive biases is important not only for researchers but also for every citizen, to ensure that democracy remains driven by reason and awareness rather than emotion and division.

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