

Gender Gap in Indian politics through the lens of Facebook: Visual Portrayal of women candidates by Indian media in Facebook

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Abstract: Women political candidates across the world are under-represented in public offices. Apart from the cultural, social, political and economic influences, mass media also contributes to the global crisis of gender imbalance in leadership roles. The situation is not much different in the biggest democracy of the world, India. In a recent report published by the IPU (Inter-Parliamentary Union) on Women's Representation in Parliament, India ranks 108 among 150 countries. The juxtaposition of social media networking sites and news media has not resulted in a significant change in the portrayal of women candidates. The purpose of this study is to assess the visual portrayal of women candidates in India by the Indian media newspapers on their Facebook page, in the period of January 1, 2014 – May 11, 2014, during the campaign and elections of the 16th Indian Parliament and three years later during the Uttar Pradesh assembly elections from January 15, 2017 -March 8, 2017 (the biggest state in India). For this study, Netvizz, a Facebook app identified and downloaded 40 images of female political leaders in 2014; and 15 images of female political leaders in 2017. The analysis identified that stereotyping of female political candidates remain the same on Facebook too.

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The debate on the under-representation of women leaders in public offices across the world is not new to policymakers, advocacy groups, and journalists. In the past decade, there seems to have been the little shift in the representation of women in public offices. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (Women in National Parliament, 2014), the global percentage of women MP has risen from 11.6 to 21.7 in 19 years (1995 to 2014). In February 1997, the Inter-Parliamentary Union organized a Roundtable on the image of women politicians in the media. Among the key highlights, it also identified that "The media are less open to the concerns and achievements of women politicians than to those of their male counterparts. If they understand that the integration of women into politics strengthens democracy, the media, which have a crucial and increasing role in the democratic process, should try to convey this message in all possible ways." Even after 17 years of that roundtable, the media seems to have paid little heed to the recommendations. The media only raises the distress alarm on the widening gender gap in public offices on women's day. It further trivializes the issue of under-representation of women political leaders and limits it as a monolithic concern as "one of the global gender concerns." The situation is not much different in some of the leading democracies of the world. One would expect near equal representation of women in public offices in democracies, upholding the democratic ideals of equality. But unfortunately, the crisis in the gender gap in leadership in democracies has been in status quo.

In the past few years, social media networking sites have been hailed as the new space to source and promote news stories. One would hope that the juxtaposition of media and the Internet would lead to a democratic space for women political leaders, leading to an egalitarian portrayal in the media. News media effectively use the limited characters and images on social media networks, in a bid to influence the audience. Often the media shapes the image of women candidates unflatteringly in their portrayal of women political candidates in social media networks. On the one hand, there is an increase of activism owing to the digital space, on the other hand, women's space in this spectrum remains quite the same. For long, women candidates for public offices have been primarily portrayed regarding their gender attributes; they are either domesticated and sexualized or overtly masculinized, making their political and professional accomplishments secondary.

Globally the mass media visual and textual framing diminish women political leaders in their campaign to garner support from voters. The recently concluded Uttar Pradesh Assembly Elections in March 2017 and the 16th Parliamentary elections in India in April-May 2014 witnessed similar framing by newspapers. But the framing was not limited to news media only, women political candidates were poorly framed visually in social media platforms (Facebook) too. Quantitatively, women, political candidates received fewer visual representations as compared to male political candidates during the campaign. In the 2017 Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections, 61 women candidates contested out of 403

candidates, only 41 women candidates finally won, which is 10% of the policymakers would be women (Verma, 2017). Finally, at the end of the elections for 543 seats, where 636 women candidates contested out of 8136 candidates, only sixty-one women made it to the Parliament. Thus, marginally increasing the earlier tally of fifty-nine women in 2009 (Gupta, 2014). The crisis of women political leaders is a persistent problem in India and the media advertently or inadvertently contributes to this crisis due to the stereotypes and framing.

This study stems from the experience of an Indian journalist, who was keen to cover a story on the number of women candidates selected to contest from a political party, which was against the women's reservation bill in 2009, during the campaign of the 15th Parliamentary elections in India, which was against the women's reservation bill. The contentious bill is proposed legislation to reserve 33.3 percent seats in Parliament and state legislatures for women (Rediff, 2010). Surprisingly, the editor was not interested to take it forward, and it took the journalist a while to convince the newsworthiness of the story to the editor. Finally, this story was the only one published on the low number of women political candidates in the 15th Parliamentary elections in India in 2009. This incident indicates how some sections in the media still do not think this issue to be a concern. The study, however, is not based on how the women political leaders have been covered but rather how they have been visually represented by the news media in Facebook. For this study, I have restricted my data to two sets, and the first one is from January 1st, 2014 to May 11, 2014, and the second set is from January 15th, 2017-March 11th, 2017.

Effects of Media Framing

In the past, there have been studies on the coverage of women political candidates by the media in the US. Scholars have discussed the effects of media framing on the unfavorable coverage of women political candidates and how it creates a public perception of them. Media framing promotes the established ideology by shaping institutions that are essential tools to maintain the political order and values. Media report on the male and female candidates guide the voter perception of women political candidates. Authors (Chang & Hitchon, 1997) discussed that voters, in general, perceive women candidates inferior to male candidates. Some of this coverage included the portrayal of; (a) "Women candidates portrayed as less competitive, (b) women were perceived as less viable candidates, (c) women were perceived as less viable candidates, (d) there is more issue coverage for men than for women, (e) "feminine issues" are discussed more frequently for female candidates, and (f) traits usually identified with women so-called feminine traits - are discussed more for female politicians than for male candidates." (Chang & Hitchon, 1997). This media framing resulted in the decrease of confidence in voters

to elect a woman representative. The difference in reporting contributes to building up of sexist perception, which negatively impacts the women candidates. The women candidates have the disadvantage of the sexist media coverage, which reduces their chance of winning (Chang & Hitchon, 1997). In certain cases, women political candidates may be assigned the same amount of coverage as compared to the male political candidates. However, differences persist in the framing of the candidates --- qualitatively women political candidates receive inferior coverage as compared to their male counterparts (Devitt, 2002). Therefore, the framing of women political candidates is instrumental in the electoral results and their representation in the public offices. Heldman et. al (2005) analyzed the case of Elizabeth Dole as a Republican nominee for the presidency. In their study journalists covering her political coverage chose to provide more coverage describing her physical attributes, appearance, and personality as compared to any other aspect of her candidacy. Dole's coverage was not only less in quantity but also the quality of her coverage was starkly different from her male counterparts. Women candidates are also stereotyped with novelty; like "first," "pioneer" or as different norm-breakers. This stereotypical representation undermined Elizabeth Dole's chances to contend for the Oval Office. Even in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Elections, Hillary Clinton's candidature became an essential issue in breaking the highest glass ceiling in the U.S. (Bryant, 2016). Stereotyping leads to false portrayal and objectification of individuals. Journalists engage in stereotyping to justify the process of communication to the audience (Enteman, 2003). In this context, journalists stereotype women, political candidates, to fit in with the acceptable social norms of the audience.

Women political candidates are relegated to the background in policy and issue-based discussions by the media. Meeks (2013) in her study on the coverage of New York Times of Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin in 2008 explains how the minority status of women political leaders in the US becomes a deviant norm. This leads to the gender labeling and uniqueness labeling by the media. Meeks calls the combination of these labels as "novelty labels." Women political candidates tend to receive more "novelty coverage" as compared to men. When newspapers use social media sites to promote news stories on political candidates, a similar trend of novelty coverage persists.

Women political candidates are also referred to by their first name in the news reported. Their titles (Senator, Speaker, Governor, etc.) are eliminated more often than their male counterparts. This is also a form of prejudice against the women political candidates. By referring to their first names, they fail to provide appropriate respect to the candidates, making them appear casual and informal. Issues like less total

coverage, less issue coverage, more physical description; portrayal as losing candidates, dropped titles lowers the chances of women political candidates to garner support (Falk, 2010).

Stereotyping and Visual Framing

Women political candidates have time and again faced this stereotypical coverage. One would hope that in the era of social media networks and digital activism, the stereotypical coverage of the women political candidates would see a definite shift. However, the online world is merely an extension of offline realities. News stories are promoted on the social media sites by focusing on the images and short messages like the Facebook status or Tweets. Therefore, in this context, the framing is no longer restricted to the textual media, but it has extended to unfavorable visual representation. This trend is not limited to the US, but the same can be seen in the context of other countries. The democratic ideal of equality doesn't seem to hold a place in the representation of women political candidates in the biggest democracies. Miss Magazine in 1972 published an overtly sexualized wonder woman with the caption "Wonder woman as the President." And who can forget the recently published Times magazine cover (January 2014) Can anyone stop Hillary? The cover shows a woman's leg in pants and heels and has a man clinging to the tip of the heel. This is indicative that not much has changed in the visual representation of women political candidates in these 42 years!

In another part of the world, in India, the visual representation of women political candidates in the social media networks by the media is no less unappealing. Fiske (1987) describes how selection and framing of news in different categories can lead to the categories of news. News categorization such as world news, entertainment, and sports — "constructs a conceptual grid within which "raw" events can be instantly located and thus inserted into a familiar set of conceptual relationships." (Fiske, 1987) Similarly, in the context of the visual representation of women political candidates in social media networks, the news media relies on visuals, which confirm the Indian social norm of "womanhood." Visually, women political candidates in India are depicted regarding their marital status and the Indian culture of covering her head. Stereotyping them as "married," "Indian" women, following "traditional Indian norms," visually symbolizes the acceptance of women political candidates.

Past research indicates that audience retains the visual images of the news. These images also reestablish the stereotypical frames present in the story. (Grabe & Bucy, 2009) Social media networks like Facebook facilitate the presence of visual images as a precursor to the article. Visual images become a part of the storytelling method in the limited available space in

social media platforms. Images can become "words" and narrate the "story." (Baetens & Surdiacourt, 2011). Graber (1996) discusses how visuals in television are underused and underestimated in the political sphere. Graber further discusses how journalists use visuals to convey powerful stories. The same holds true for the social media platforms. Journalists use images to attract the audience and convey their stories. Audiences are increasingly shifting to the social media platforms to consume news. The images provide them a preliminary idea of the story, its content, and its "framing." Political leadership is built on visual portrayals of candidates. "It facilitates different levels of intimacy between candidates and viewers, highlighting appealing or unappealing personal attributes of the candidates and potentially affecting electoral support." (Grabe & Bucy, 2009). The visual portrayal of Indian women political candidates also promoted the cultural norm of the domesticated "Indian woman," to appeal to the common audience "schemata." (Entman, 1993) Thus the significant focus is on the images of being married, wealth, color and traditional Indian clothes. Visual information is the most dominant form of information in political campaigns; the impression of the candidate is largely formed by the visuals presented by the media. (Nagel, Maurer, & Reinemann, 2012) Therefore, the image of the women political candidates constructed by the newspapers in social media creates popular visual "frames."

Method

I qualitatively analyzed the Facebook status messages with images, shared by the Facebook pages of media organizations of women political candidates from January 1, 2014, to May 11, 2014, and January 15, 2017, to March 11, 2017. I applied the frames that emerged from the literature review to the images shared by the news media in Facebook. The election campaign effectively began at the beginning of the year 2017 and 2014, when candidates were selected and announced for their respective constituencies. The campaigns ended on March 11, 2017, and May 11, 2014, two days before the last phase of the election. The last day to campaign before the last phase of the 16th Parliamentary elections was on May 11, 2014.

I collected data in two steps, once in 2015 for the Parliamentary elections and then in 2017 for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections. The Facebook interface and data collection through Facebook have undergone a lot of changes in the past two years. So, in 2015, I selected the five most circulated newspapers in India and searched for campaign images on their Facebook pages. In 2017, I used Netvizz to search for and download campaign images on Facebook pages of the media and news organizations.

Data collection procedure of 2014 Parliamentary election campaign: The resulted yielded about 40 images

and accompanying statuses of women political candidates in the Facebook pages of leading Indian publications. I checked the Facebook pages of the following newspapers:

1. The Times of India
2. The Hindustan Times
3. The Hindu
4. The Indian Express
5. DNA

I selected these newspapers based on their AIR (average issue readership), as reported in the fourth quarter of 2012. Average Issue Readership (AIR) of a publication is the number of readers of that publication who have claimed to have read it within a given time frame. This measure is a more relevant measure of 'real' or 'regular' readership, especially for newspapers, most of which is regularly read (BestMediaInfo Bureau, 2012). According to the Indian Readership Survey, the newspapers mentioned above are in the top ten English dailies.

For this study, I manually checked the Facebook pages of the mentioned above newspapers to select the images and accompanying status messages posted by them on women political candidates. Since these accounts were unlocked and accessible publicly, the images and the accompanying status messages are publicly available for download. All newspapers in the top ten do not have a robust presence on social media networks; so, I selected my data collection from five newspapers (within the ten most-read newspapers in India), which are most active in social media platform. The search was exhaustive, but it may not be exclusive. In 2014, more than 50% of the voters in India were below the age of 30 years (Bhowmick 2014), who are more inclined to access news through the social media sites. India has 432 million users of the Internet and 241 million users of Facebook, the highest number of users in the world (LiveMint, 2017). Therefore, newspaper visuals in Facebook in the 2014 Indian elections are crucial to this study.

Data collection

I used Netvizz, a free app on Facebook to first download the total number of Indian news organizations, which has a Facebook page. There were 490 such Indian news organizations. The pages were listed under various categories --- non-profit, community, news and media website, media/news company, broadcasting and media production company, society and culture website, education, arts and entertainment and advertising and marketing. I decided to select the pages under the news and media company, broadcasting and media production company and news and media website categories; since the focus of this study is framing by news media. There were 186 pages on media/news company, 27 pages on news and media website and 13 broadcasting and media

production company. Out of 226 pages, only 48 pages were valid for this study, the other pages were either parody pages, or focused on fashion, Bollywood, cricket, and sports. I searched the timeline of these 48 pages using Netvizz for images of women candidates. Other than Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), three different states (Punjab, Goa, and Manipur) also had assembly elections at the same time, but I focused on the images of the candidates only from U.P. This further narrowed down the search results. In the end, I got 15 images of women candidates from the various news media pages on Facebook.

For this study, I am guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How did the media visually frame women candidates on their Facebook pages during the campaign of the 2014 Indian Parliamentary Elections?

RQ2: How did the media visually frame women candidates on their Facebook pages during the campaign of the 2017 Uttar Pradesh Assembly Elections?

RQ3: Were there any changes in the visual framing of women candidates in the years between the Parliamentary election and the assembly elections?

RQ4: Were the features stressed about women candidates consistent with findings from past research on women candidates in other countries?

Analysis

An analysis of the images in social media networks on Facebook and Twitter indicated patterns in the visuals and the accompanying status messages.

I have used the concept of visual framing to explain the analysis of some of the patterns, identified in these images and their accompanying texts. The science of visual framing is used in understanding the concepts of journalism. Some theories associated with visual framing are framing and collective memory. Framing is a process by which some aspects of an issue, event or person are emphasized over others to promote causal interpretation, problem construction or moral evaluation. News framing of the political campaign highlights some aspects of the candidates, and downplay some others (Grabe & Bucy, 2009) For instance, in the images and accompanying texts; the media is trying to create a myth of style on the women political candidates. Hindustan Times on two occasions shared the following status on their Facebook page, "We bring you the best-styled male and female politicians." The accompanying image on both the instances were of glamorized women political leaders (Refer to images 11 & 12).

On another instance, the same newspaper shared "86 crorepati in AAP and still counting" on their Facebook page. Crorepati in India means millionaires. The story was on the wealth of the political candidates, irrespective of their gender. But the accompanying image was that of a woman political candidate. Implying that the women

political candidates in India are all wealthy (refer to images 1-4). The same framing continued in the 2017

U.P. assembly elections, in which the wealthiest women candidates were featured in a news article.



Figure 1. Facebook status: The Hindustan Times - Aam Aadmi Party 86 and counting in the crorepati club

Another newspaper, The Indian Express shared the following status on Facebook, "MANY CORPORATE HONCHOS LAG BEHIND 'NETAS' IN ASSETS: Lok Sabha candidates with corporate background, such as Nandan Nilekani and Meera Sanyal, may rank much above their political rivals on wealth charts, but many others from India Inc who are contesting polls lag behind 'netas' in accumulating assets." Again, the accompanying image is that of a woman political candidate, implying that only women candidates are wealthy. Owing to the

digital upheaval in news media and its reliance on social media platform, most of the newspapers have gone digital, and they prefer to promote some of the most important news through the social media channels. Similarly, another newspaper discussed the cars used by political candidates in India, which include the expensive Mercedes, BMWs, and others. The accompanying image is a woman political candidate. Once again indicating that women from wealth are suitable to be political candidates (refer to images 1-4).



Figure 2. Facebook status: The Indian Express - LOK SABHA ELECTIONS: Corporate honchos lag behind 'netas.'



Figure 3. Facebook Status: Indian Express - Mercs, BMWs, Audis hot favourites of Indian politicians. READ OUR LIST OF WHO OWNS WHAT



Figure 4. Facebook status: Dainik Bhaskar Uttar-Pradesh-election-women-candidates-richer-than-aparna-yadav

Another pattern is the use of colors in the images of women political candidates. In contrast, the male political candidates are represented in images, which have monochromatic colors, establishing a "serious look" at the male candidates as compared to the female. The female political candidates are smiling, which may be

viewed as positive (Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2005) but in comparison, their male counterparts have a serious and "no-messing" gaze. Eye contact and gazing directly in a visual portrays dominance in political candidates (Nagel, Maurer, & Reinemann, 2012).



Figure 5. Facebook Status –The Times of India

On #Newshour tonight: #AmethiFaceoff

* Smriti Irani vs. Rahul Gandhi vs. Kumar Vishwas – Who do you think will emerge victoriously?

* Triangular battle in Amethi: Can Smriti Irani pose a challenge to Rahul Gandhi in the Congress bastion?

Another common pattern of coverage is portraying women candidates as insensitive. For instance, in the following Facebook status shared by The Hindustan Times, the image and message are encoded as ruthless, insensitive candidate, who care the least about the welfare of the people (refer to images 6-9). In a similar

story on political candidates being insensitive to women, the newspaper had more cases of male politicians in the published article. However, when the story was shared on Facebook, the accompanying image had four political leaders, two men, and two women



Figure 6. Facebook status: The Hindustan Times - Sushma Swaraj cancels poll rally in MP after no worker comes to receive her



Figure 7. Facebook Status: Hindustan Times - Roads washed in perennially thirsty Bankura to protect Moon Moon Sen, daughters from dust



Figure 8. Facebook Status: The Indian Express - MAMATA BANERJEE SEEKS THE REMOVAL OF VINOD ZUTSHI FROM EC: Banerjee accused him of being a tainted official with criminal cases pending against him



Figure 9. Facebook Status: The Times of India - Vote for cousin Supriya Sule, or I will cut off water': Maharashtra deputy CM Ajit Pawar threatens villagers

Women political candidates are also associated with style, more than the male political candidates. Almost to the point of stereotyping, women political candidates are sexualized, glamorized and expected to look good to appease the voters. No such rule seems to be there for the male political candidates. The following Facebook statuses are on the dressing style of the political

candidates, irrespective of their gender. Surprisingly, it's the images of the women political candidates that accompany the style statuses. Focusing on physical attributes and appearances of women political candidates by the mass media has been common practice (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009). This practice resonates in the social media network platforms.



Figure 10. Facebook Status: The Hindustan Times - Who's the most stylish politician of them all?

Family dynasty plays a big role in the selection of political candidates in India. Relatives of the politicians, irrespective of their gender tend to get priority over others in their candidature. This existence of favoritism is a shameful reality in the Indian elections, which is often viewed negatively by the voters (Biswas, 2014). However, when the media discusses favoritism in their

social media networking pages, the image of the women political candidates are used to conveying the message. Ironically, the number of men political candidates related to existing political families in India is more than women. But the newspapers targeted the women political candidates in their social media networks in their visual portrayal of favoritism (Refer to figures 11 & 12).



Figure 11. Facebook Status: The Hindu - All the four major parties in the State put together (Congress, NCP, BJP, Shiv Sena) have fielded only seven women candidates, mainly those who have the strong family background or political links. Not a women's field in Maharashtra



Figure 12. Facebook status: Indian Express - Mulayam, Aparna vote in native Saifai

Women political leaders or candidates are also portrayed as a juvenile. First time women political candidates are more likely to be addressed as "kid" in the coverage or social media status as compared to first time, male political candidates. It also indicates

women political candidates can be trivialized because they need guidance and support. "Pet" or "child-like" are frames used to confirm the societal norms of being the second fiddle to male political candidates. (Falk, 2010)



Figure 13. Facebook Status: Hindustan Times - New kid on the block: Misa Bharti gets ready for big fight #LSpolls

In popular culture and news media, women political candidates are portrayed as leaders practicing exclusive gender governance. If women political candidates come to power, they would only create and support policies related to women and ignore the overall development of

their constituency. The images of women political candidates are mostly smiling and shown to be affable as compared to their male counterpart. The latter is mostly photographed to be in control of the situation, implying they mean "business" and "welfare" for the people.



Figure 14. Facebook Status: DNA - EXCLUSIVE: Other parties purchase votes, I seek a change in governance from public: Rakhi Sawant



Figure 15. Facebook Status: The Hindustan Times



Figure 16. Facebook status: No country for women The Quint

The audience or the voters to be specific in this case, decode the images of women political candidates as weak candidates. They lack the ability and capacity to win the elections and work for the welfare of the people. The news media through the social media platforms are trying to create unflattering and mythic images of women political candidates. The primary features related to

wealth, style, favoritism, juvenile, insensitive and exclusive gender governance were used to describe women, political candidates. Much like the various textual frames like seductress, iron maiden, pet and others to define women political leaders (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009) visual frames are used to reinforce the Indian patriarchal cultural values and deviancy to portray

women political candidates by newspapers in social media platforms.

Discussion

Messages are now seen as commodities. This is relevant in the context of this discussion, where social media platforms are being used as commodities to highlight news. Audiences get news on their social media feeds, which include a link to the main story along with the images and tweets. Audiences may not even read the entire news story, leading to the formation of an idea of the story just by reading the tweet or message and the visual. This is very problematic, especially when the actual news stories are inconsistent with the visuals and accompanying the message. "These stereotypes are not accidents, but they are a product of individual's decision of "not to work harder than necessary to achieve a superficially acceptable result (Entman, 1993, p.9)." If male and female political candidates are covered differently, their evaluation by prospective voters will also be different, depending on the available information (Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991). Similarly, if male and female candidates are visually framed in contrast, the voters are more likely to associate power and efficiency with male candidates. In most of the visuals, the women political candidates are secondary to the male candidates (Images 17, 19), thus influencing prospective voters to apply interpretive schemas or "primary frameworks" (Goffman, 1986) to evaluate the qualities of the women political candidates. Media representation of any issue is not restricted to language or symbols, but it also extends to images and pictures. During the 2008 US presidential election, Sarah Palin's extensive photo coverage of her physical image undermined her and other women candidates by objectifying them (Wasburn & Wasburn, 2011). A similar trend of objectification is also noticed in the Facebook images and status messages of Indian women candidates, in which their style quotient is heavily focused (images 9 & 10). The Internet makes this visual framing complex and its interpretation open to global culture.

Images and texts are framed together by the media to transmit messages to the audience. The social construction of journalism is interpreted through visuals, images, and texts. The media in this context is building upon the social construction and confirming to them and, NOT challenging them. Images and texts are framed together by the media to transmit messages to the audience. Journalism is a powerful tool, and unfortunately, the juxtaposition of the social media platforms is promoting stereotypical framing of gender. This creates a ripple effect; political parties have less confidence on women candidates, the media visually associates them with negative stereotypes, reducing confidence in voters to choose women candidates as their leader. "One factor driving this is a bias on the part of

political parties, the notion that women candidates cannot be relied on to win elections. They are believed to lack access to the political networks and resources that men have" (Sarangi & Jha, 2014).

Bystorm (2006) points out the differences between the coverage of women political candidates in news media and websites (blogs, social media networks). Women political candidates have more agency in their coverage in websites (blogs, social media networks), as compared to news media. This might be the case in the US, but in India, social media networks of news media provide a similar value laden visual coverage to women political candidates. Whether in the Parliamentary election of 2014 or later in the U.P. Assembly elections of 2017, the visual framing of women candidates follows the same pattern of creating an unfavorable image of women political candidates. It was not surprising to find the recurring themes of the 2014 campaign coverage of women political candidates in 2017. There was hardly any image of the women political candidates in an aggressive position. Primarily they were relegated to the background; the prominence was given to the male candidates, irrespective of their caste and religious affiliation.

Conclusion

Indian newsrooms sparsely engage in discussions to provide fair and objective coverage to women political candidates and leaders. The reasons for selecting any image over another are either to convey a powerful story or support journalists in framing a story finding theoretical explanations. (Coleman, 2010). Even though journalists have access to Facebook, as a seemingly egalitarian storytelling platform, but the outcome remains the same for women political candidates. Instead, this platform coupled with visuals has worked against women political candidates in India. To assess the extent of audience perception of the visuals in Facebook, comments by the audience and individual interviews can be conducted. The interviews and discussion comments will provide an estimate of voter opinion of women political candidates based on these visuals in social media platforms by newspapers. They will also provide an insight to journalists and help in sensitizing them towards and provide an egalitarian image of women political candidates. Thwarting gender stereotyping and framing can make mass media and the social media platforms game changers in the global gender crisis at public offices.

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