

# POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN INDIAN DIGITAL MEDIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RANVEER ALLAHBADIA AND DHRUV RATHEE'S PODCASTS"

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## ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the political podcasts started by Dhruv Rathee on his YouTube channel, *Dhruv Rathee*, and *The Ranveer Show*, hosted by Ranveer Allahbadia, also known as *Beer Biceps*. This paper helps in understanding how micro-expressions and non-verbal communication play a significant role in perception building. Content analysis through a systematic codebook was used to examine podcasts focused on Indian politics by Beer Biceps (Ranveer Allahbadia) and Dhruv Rathee. Content analysis is suited for highlighting the appropriate work of a scholar of mass communication: it is an analysis of messages (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). Purposive sampling was used to select the podcasts of these YouTube creators. The period from March 2023 to February 2024 was selected, as it was one year before the election, when political parties use various strategies for their PR and political activities are at their peak. The variables or parameters of the systematic codebook were primarily focused on categories of framing, linguistics, and audience engagement. The results show that audience engagement depends upon the communicative style and design of the hosts. Rathee talks about recent controversial topics of high intensity, with strong emphasis on government accountability. Due to this, people with different opinions create a polarized comment section.

**Keywords:** Podcast, YouTube, Dhruv Rathee, Ranveer Allahbadia, Political Discourse

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Digital Transformation and Political Communication in India

Increasing digitization in India has impacted the cyber ecosystem and fundamentally altered the structure of political communication, as more people—particularly youngsters—have started switching from traditional to digital ways of seeking information (The evolution and impact of digital media in India, 2025). The availability of affordable smartphones and access to cheap, high-speed internet, with India ranked 16th worldwide (Prit, 2025), has resulted in social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube emerging as significant spaces of political discourse. This shift has transitioned the gatekeeping function to a platform-centric field. In Indian democracy, where votes shape the future outcomes of the country, this transition is important to study. It raises important questions about influence, accountability, and authority.

Political discourse on YouTube has become more prevalent over time. There are no time constraints, and arguments may occur on screen or in the comment section.

The transformation from traditional media to digital platforms is occurring as youngsters increasingly rely on digital commentators for easier interpretations of policies and related information, as the credibility of traditional media has been compromised over the decade, with India being ranked 151st in the Press Freedom Index (Gupta, 2025).

## 1.2 Political Influencers and the Question of Democratic Responsibility

The increasing popularity of political influencers or political podcasters raises major normative issues regarding responsibility and accountability. Within classical models of political communication, the media function as a watchdog, a forum for deliberation, and a provider of verified information (Habermas, 1989). However, platform-based communicators operate within algorithm-driven attention economies, where visibility is often tied to engagement metrics rather than journalistic standards.

Consequently, these podcasters shift from democratic responsibility to advocacy roles. They blur the boundaries between opinion, fact, judgment, and ideological advocacy, and this positioning makes it difficult to distinguish between facts and opinions.

## 1.3 Contrasting Models of Digital Political Communication

Within this evolving landscape, Ranveer Allahbadia and Dhruv Rathee represent two distinct yet influential models of political communication on YouTube.

Ranveer Allahbadia, widely known as BeerBiceps, began his digital journey in 2015 as a fitness and self-development content creator. Over time, particularly from 2019 onwards, his platform—*The Ranveer Show (TRS)*—expanded to include political and socio-cultural discussions (Wikipedia, 2026). His format is predominantly guest-based, relying on conversational interviews with politicians, intellectuals, and public figures. Authority in this model is co-constructed through dialogue, personal storytelling, and relational credibility.

In contrast, Dhruv Rathee is recognized as one of the early Indian YouTubers to use the platform for structured political analysis. His communication style is largely issue-centric and explanatory, often incorporating data, visual aids, and argumentative sequencing (Wikipedia, 2026). Rather than facilitating guest narratives, Rathee constructs interpretative frameworks around political events and policies, positioning himself as an analytical commentator.

These contrasting formats—guest-centered conversational discourse versus issue-based analytical exposition—provide a compelling comparative framework for examining how political narratives are constructed in digital spaces.

While scholarship on digital political communication in India has expanded in recent years, limited academic attention has been paid to long-form podcasting as a distinct mode of political influence. Existing studies often focus on electoral campaigns, misinformation, or social media activism, leaving influencer-led podcast discourse underexamined.

Furthermore, comparative qualitative analyses of individual digital communicators—particularly examining linguistic strategies, non-verbal cues, guest selection patterns, and audience engagement techniques—remain relatively scarce in the Indian context.

This study addresses this gap by systematically analyzing fifty YouTube episodes (March 2023–February 2024) from *The Ranveer Show* and Dhruv Rathee's channel using a structured codebook. By focusing on narrative construction, communicative style, and engagement strategies, the research contributes to broader debates on mediatization, influencer politics, and the transformation of the public sphere in digital democracies.

The primary objective of this research is to comparatively examine the styles and strategies of political communication employed by Ranveer Allahbadia and Dhruv Rathee, with particular attention to linguistic framing, non-verbal communication, guest selection and thematic emphasis, and audience engagement mechanisms.

Through this analysis, the study seeks to understand how digital political podcasters shape audience perception and contribute to contemporary political discourse in India.

## 2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### RQ1:

How do linguistic and non-verbal cues in YouTube political podcasts contribute to narrative construction and audience perception?

### RQ2:

What structural and communicative factors influence audience engagement in digital political podcasts?

## 3. Research Methodology

Researchers adopt qualitative method of research for this paper. Content analysis through systematic codebook used to examine the podcast focused on politics of India by *Beer Biceps* aka *Ranveer Allahbadia* and *Dhruv Rathee*. Content analysis is suited for highlighting the appropriate work of the scholar of mass communication: it is an analysis of messages (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken, 2002). Purposive sampling has been used to select the podcasts of the YouTube podcasters. Period of March 2023 to February 2024 has been selected as it was one year before the election where political parties use all the strategies for their PR and the political activities are at their peak. 50 episodes from 2 podcasters has been analyzed- 20 from *Dhruv Rathee* and 30 from *The Ranveer Show*.

Consistency has been ensured through the development of the structured codebook so the bias can be minimized. Parameters of codebook are Theme, Guest selection, Linguistic style, Audience engagement, and Non-verbal cues. Gestures, body language, pitch, tone, and pace considered as the Non-verbal cues in the research. Every sample has been closely observed and coded as per the predefined categories. This type of analyses gave the researcher an in-depth interpretation about the communication strategy of the podcasters.

## 4. DATA INTERPRETATION

### 4.1 Operational Indicators of *Dhruv Rathee's* podcast

*Table 4.1 shows the operational indicators of Dhruv Rathee's podcast*

Episode	Source of Political Authority	Self-Positioning	Use of Expert References	Citation of Sources	Visual Data Support
Episode 1 – End of Democracy	Constitutional values, Democracy	Watchdog/Critical Analyst	High	High	High
Episode 2 – Satyapal Malik/Pulwama	Insider testimony, Investigative	Facilitator/Interviewer	High	Medium	Medium
Episode 3 – Kerala Story	Fact-checking, Historical narrative	Debunker	High	High	High

<b>Episode</b>	<b>Source of Political Authority</b>	<b>Self-Positioning</b>	<b>Use of Expert References</b>	<b>Citation of Sources</b>	<b>Visual Data Support</b>
Episode 4 – Wrestler Protest	Democratic rights, Judiciary	Supportive/Critical	Medium	Medium	Medium
Episode 5 – Manipur (Aug 6)	Human rights, State accountability	Critical commentator	High	High	High
Episode 6 – Manipur (Aug 10)	Government responsibility	Critical analyst	High	High	High
Episode 7 – Project Cheetah	Environmental policy	Policy analyst	Medium	Medium	Medium
Episode 8 – Nehru’s Mistake	Historical authority	Revisionist/Corrective	High	High	High
Episode 9 – G20 Summit	International diplomacy	Analytical explainer	Medium	Medium	High
Episode 10 – Bharat vs India	Constitutional identity	Critical commentator	High	High	High
Episode 11 – History	Historical scholarship	Educator	High	High	High
Episode 12 – Politics of Cricket	Institutional politics	Analytical	Medium	Medium	Medium
Episode 13 – Subhash Chandra Bose	Archival/historical authority	Historical interpreter	High	High	High
Episode 14 – Maldives/Lakshadweep	Foreign policy	Policy explainer	Medium	Medium	High
Episode 15 – Ram Mandir	Constitutional secularism	Critical commentator	High	High	High
Episode 16 – Budget	Economic policy documents	Policy analyst	High	High	High
Episode 17 – Dictatorship	Democratic theory, Global indices	Watchdog/Democracy defender	High	High	High
Episode 18 – Farmer/Modi	Protest politics, Public policy	Critical commentator	High	High	High
Episode 19 – Ladakh	Regional governance	Investigative analyst	Medium	Medium	High
Episode 20 – Electoral Bond	Supreme Court, Transparency law	Accountability watchdog	High	High	High

#### 4.2 Dataset of the themes in Dhruv Rathee’s episodes

**Table 4.2 Thematic presentation of Dhruv Rathee’s podcasts**

Theme	Frequency (No. of Episodes)	Intensity	Observations
Election Politics	5	High	Dictatorship, Electoral Bonds, Farmer/Modi, Ram Mandir, Bharat vs India
Governance & Policy	12	High	Budget, Manipur, Wrestler protest, Project Cheetah, Ladakh
National Identity	8	High	Bharat vs India, Ram Mandir, Nehru, Bose
Economy	3	Medium	Budget, Electoral Bonds (financial transparency)
Religion & Culture	4	High	Ram Mandir, Kerala Story
Youth Issues	1	Low	Indirect references only
International Politics	3	Medium	G20, Maldives, diplomacy themes
Controversy-driven Topics	14	High	Pulwama, Dictatorship, Manipur, Electoral Bonds

Table 4.1 interpreted as; in podcast of *Dhruv Rathee*, meaning of Source of Political Authority is the legitimacy of the speaker. As per the data collected the Source of Political Authority in the podcasts are public policy documents, court rulings, testimonies of opinion leaders. *Dhruv Rathee* neither portray himself as an advocate nor a journalist but more like a *watchdog*. He provides reference of data available publicly like CAG (Comptroller and Auditor General) reports, economic data etc. He frequently uses the visuals as screenshots of data, graphs, clips, photos, official document, which makes it authentic.

Table 4.2 shows that thematic prioritization of *Dhruv Rathee’s* podcast from March 2023 to February 2024 episodes majorly focused on accountability of the government, controversial topics like elections, issues related to youth and democracy were critical of the government.

#### 4.3 Operational Indicators of *The Ranveer Show*

**Table 4.3 shows the operational indicators of TRS**

Ep	Guest Type	Ideological Leaning	Use of Expert References	Citation of Sources	Visual Data Support
1	Public Intellectual	Right-of-centre	High	Low	Low
2	Diplomat (German Ambassador)	Centrist/Institutional	Medium	Low	Low
3	Journalist	Centre-right (Strategic)	Medium	Low	Low
4	Government Economist (Advisor)	Right-of-centre	High	Low	Low
5	Former RAW Chief	National Security/Right-leaning	High	Low	Low

Ep	Guest Type	Ideological Leaning	Use of Expert References	Citation of Sources	Visual Data Support
6	Political Commentator	Right-of-centre	Medium	Low	Low
7	Military Analyst	National Security	High	Low	Low
8	Cabinet Minister (BJP)	Right-of-centre	Medium	Low	Low
9	External Affairs Minister	Right-of-centre (Govt.)	Medium	Low	Low
10	Journalist	Strategic/National Security	Medium	Low	Low
11	Union Minister (BJP)	Right-of-centre	Medium	Low	Low
12	Political Commentator	Right-of-centre	Medium	Low	Low
13	Cabinet Minister (BJP)	Right-of-centre	Medium	Low	Low
14	IPS Officer	Institutional	Medium	Low	Low
15	Journalist	Centrist	Medium	Low	Low
16	Journalist (Govt-aligned)	Right-of-centre	Medium	Low	Low
17	Former Foreign Secretary	Institutional	High	Low	Low
18	Political Spokesperson (Congress-linked)	Left-of-centre	Medium	Low	Low
19	Strategic Analyst	Right-of-centre	High	Low	Low
20	Bureaucrat (G20 Sherpa)	Institutional	Medium	Low	Low
21	Government Economist	Right-of-centre	High	Low	Low
22	Politician (Congress → BJP shift phase)	Mixed	Medium	Low	Low
23	Strategic Analyst	Right-of-centre	High	Low	Low
24	Economist/Policy Analyst	Institutional	High	Low	Low
25	YouTube Policy Influencer	Centre-right	Medium	Low	Low
26	Geopolitical Commentator	Right-of-centre	Medium	Low	Low
27	Geopolitical Commentator	Right-of-centre	Medium	Low	Low
28	Economist (Govt critic)	Critical of BJP / Centre-left	High	Low	Low
29	Economist	Critical / Policy-focused	High	Low	Low

Ep	Guest Type	Ideological Leaning	Use of Expert References	Citation of Sources	Visual Data Support
30	Government Economist	Right-of-centre	High	Low	Low

#### 4.4 Dataset of *The Ranveer Show*

Table 4.4 Thematic presentation of *The Ranveer Show*

Theme	Frequency (No. of Episodes)	Intensity	Observations
Election Politics	6	Medium	BJP, Congress, Maharashtra politics
Governance & Policy	14	High	Civil services, economic reform, ministers
National Identity	10	High	New Bharat, nationalism, strategic India
Economy	8	High	Economic growth, PM advisor, manufacturing
Religion & Culture	2	Medium	Ram Mandir (historical framing)
Youth Issues	2	Medium	Civil services, career orientation
International Politics	15	High	India-China, Pakistan, G20, foreign policy
Controversy-driven Topics	5	Medium	Failures of BJP, war discussion

Table 4.3 depicts that *TRS* is opinion-based podcast than the information-based podcast of *Dhruv Rathee*. As the guest pattern of *TRS* was government officials, bureaucrats, and diplomats who are ideological varies from center or center to right except *Raghu Ram Rajan*, former Governor of Reserve Bank of India and *Tehseen Poonawala*, political analyst. It is a direct contrast to *Dhruv Rathee's* self-positioning as a watchdog, unlike that majority of the voices are more aligned to right or right of centre. Although the citations and references are not frequent as it is an opinion-based interview podcast. Same as the citation shown the visual data is also absent from the frames. The credibility depends on the guest opinions; it is not documents based. The authority in *TRS* is derived from guest legitimacy, not documentary evidence.

Table 4.4 shows; *TRS* devotes its fair share towards international politics, policies, and governance. In this show, subject of economy had a better treatment than *Dhruv Rathee*, it is more structure in the discourse. Unlike *Dhruv Rathee*; episodes of this podcast did not revolve around controversial topics.

#### 4.5 Linguistic pattern analysis of both the podcasts

Researchers categorized linguistic framing into four parts emotional framing, moral framing (Marttila & Koivula, 2025) data-driven framing (Kono & Tajima, 2025), and polarize framing for the objective interpretation. In podcasts of *Dhruv Rathee* usage of words like *Collapse*, *Danger*, *Exposed*, *Attack on*

*Democracy, Truth* are frequent which these kinds of words are categorized into emotional language and it creates a sense of amplified urgency among the viewers. Sentences like ‘*As per the data, as per the official figures, official documents shows*’ and screenshots of reports, judgements and figures are categorized under data driven framing. This kind of data increase the credibility of the content and the person who is presenting the content. Strong normative positioning with sentences like ‘*This is wrong, This is not good for democratic principles, This violates the democratic principles*’ contributes in moral framing. Divisions like Government vs Citizens, Propoganda vs Truth and Democracy vs Dictatorship establish the agenda and apply polarized framing. *Rathee* set the narrative of threats to democracy of India.

Unlike *Dhruv Rathee*, *The Ranveer Show*’s linguistic pattern is different due to differential formats. Emotionally *TRS* used more motivational language rather than accusatory tone. Phrases like ‘*Naya Bharat, Rising India, Strong Leadership*’ proved the emotional touch along with the motivation. Data framing depends on the guest of the podcast when the guest is of more authority the data became structured at guest’s end. *Ranveer Allahbadia* in *TRS* is less judgmental more exploratory in the format. He emphasized on strategic narrative.

#### **4.6 Non-Verbal Communication Analysis (April 2023 – March 2024)**

##### **4.6.1 Non-Verbal Communication in *Dhruv Rathee***

Sturdy and confident eye contact with public through camera lens establish the persuasion and authority of the host. Controlled gestures while explaining the issues and pacing in speech shows the structurization of the content. Usage of animated infographics like maps, charts, speeches with jump cuts, and various transitions shows the visual reinforcement usage for the persuasion and cognitive retention.

##### **4.6.2 Non-Verbal Communication in *The Ranveer Show***

Open posture, relaxed posture with nodding to show that he is listening carefully, shows it is a guest centric show. Usage of multi cameras and studio lights show the sense of professionalism. Placing books on bookshelves provides it a premium podcast look.

#### **4.7 Performance Data during April 2023–March 2024**

Subscribers of *Dhruv Rathee* are 26 million and *TRS* are 8.07 million. Numerous videos of *Dhruv Rathee* crossed 10-26 million views which is a high engagement and strong virality for political content creator. On the other hand, most of the *TRS* videos ranges between 300K–3 million in views. Except the interview of S. Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister of India crossed 9.6 million views so the audience engagement is based on the profile of the guest.

In the comment section of *Rathee’s* episodes highly polarized discussions can be found with ideological debates which leads to the fact that *Rathee* stimulates argumentative engagement. Unlike *Rathee*, *Ranveer’s* comment section is more appreciative and less ideologically polarized. *TRS* engagement is more conversational than argumentative. *TRS* stimulates conversational engagement.

In *Dhruv Rathee* comment section, he does not reply directly most of the times, but he interacts through the follow up videos. *TRS* always pins the comments he or his team likes.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Indian youngsters are relying more on social media or digital platforms for information than on traditional sources (Slotta, 2025). This transition is due to the easy access and interactivity that these platforms provide, but it also raises issues such as credibility, sources of information, and how

algorithms play a role in creating a cyber-space filter bubble. This ecosystem raises serious concerns regarding confirmation bias and agenda setting.

This research paper highlights a significant point: maximum engagement on a YouTube channel does not guarantee the quality of the information or whether it carries truth or lies. It is more about the filter bubble or algorithmization; the algorithm decides the content of the video.

The findings of this paper show that non-verbal cues and linguistics play a central role in shaping perceptions. *Dhruv Rathee* uses a combination of moral, emotional, data-driven, and polarized framing, which creates a narrative of him as a data-backed watchdog of society. The non-verbal cues strengthen this perception: eye contact, the use of animation, and structured research support the cognition of the audience. In contrast, *TRS* is rather motivational and more exploratory in nature than accusatory. It relies more on the expertise of the guest. It is more nationalistic in its approach than documented. Frequent nodding and an easy, relaxed sitting posture show the positioning of the host. In *TRS*, the host is more of a facilitator than a watchdog.

Although linguistics and non-verbal cues support the ideologies that the hosts carry rather than any political perception, linguistics and non-verbal elements contrast the rigid positions of the hosts. The performance of authority in the shows shapes audience perception more than the delivery of the content.

The results show that audience engagement depends upon the communicative style and design of the hosts. *Rathee* talks about recent controversial topics of high intensity, with strong emphasis on government accountability. Due to this, people with different opinions create a polarized comment section. A major difference that has been observed is that even with an easy and conversational style, *TRS* targets the young audience by using the Hypodermic Needle model of mass communication. With consistency and ease, *TRS* injects opinions through experts without even providing any proof or documents for the same.

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