

# Facebook Posts : Exploration and Comprehension of Sensationalism

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## Abstract

The research was done to explore and ratify sensationalism in Facebook posts as is present in the mass media. The question is whether the news through Facebook posts evokes sensationalism in the same way as it happens in case of mass media. To check the degree of sensationalism, 150 posts from three genres of crime, politics, and social interest were chosen as a stimulus in the form of news. Fifty respondents responded to 150 posts on a 7 - point Likert scale. The research tried to understand whether there is any difference in sensationalism towards sensational Facebook posts among people, or is it the same ; is there any difference in sensationalism towards Facebook posts from three different areas of crime, politics, and social interest; and whether people responded differently to foreign crime and Indian crime posts. The study also examined whether pro - BJP and anti - BJP posts evoked a different level of sensationalism. The research concluded that people exhibited a different degree of sensation towards sensational posts on Facebook ; while crime posts were found to be more sensational than social interest posts and political posts, the crime posts from the US scored higher than the Indian crime posts on being sensational.

**Keywords :** sensationalism, social media, Facebook posts, sensational news, political posts, crime posts

**JEL Classification :** M3, M31, M37

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When an enraged Information and Broadcasting Minister of India, Smriti Irani castigated state-owned Prasar Bharati ("Smriti Irani: Is content of DD and AIR worth Rs 2,500 cr ?", 2018) over the improvement of the content in comparison to foreign players, she actually was hinting towards the bland and dry form of presentation of news which the state-owned DD and other affiliate TV channels, Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha, run. Indian adult viewers take news by DD as the most rustic form of news-telling, which now is worth nostalgia only.

In a hyper competitive, multi-genre, multi-channel scenario, it's not easy to grab the attention of viewers (Durant & Lambrou, 2009). Unless and until the news is interesting, nobody would grant attention to a particular news channel and the news. This interest is created by embedding some elements of sensationalism in the news. It's an art to create such news pieces, which trigger emotions without forsaking believability (Pantti, 2010).

Sensationalism could be an essential element as it triggers emotions (Rosas & Serrano-Puche, 2018 ; Slattery & Hakanen, 1994). It's about elements which induce an emotional response from the audience. However, sensational stimulus creates an emotional response which is not positive (James, Kavanagh, Jonason, Chonody, & Scrutton, 2014). On the positive side, it could be thrilling and on the negative side, it titillates the nerves. At the

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same time, Slattery and Hakanen (1994) found it to be unwholesome and unfit. It has been emphasized that it is the execution, tone, and treatment which digresses people to evaluate it from an affective perspective (Molek-Kozakowska, 2013 ; Pantti, 2010 ; Peters, 2011). The cognitive ability of people is bypassed to process it emotionally. Television, with its multisensory stimuli, can make the news more sensational. Some similar antecedents were present in the research on Dutch Television (Vettehen, Beentjes, Nuijten, & Peeters, 2010). When Indian cinestar Sridevi died on February 24, 2018 because of accidentally drowning in her hotel's bathtub in an inebriated state, the Indian media went abuzz with spicy coverage of news. News of her death was sensationalized across various national Hindi and English channels. An Indian Hindi news channel played it as '*Maut ka Bathhtub*' (bathtub of death) (Aaj Tak, 2018). According to Broadcast Audience Research Council of India (BARC), the total weekly impressions of Aaj Tak that week were 118,716,000 (IndianTelevision.com, 2018), which is an indicator of how many viewers would have been exposed to this sensational news.

## **Effects of Sensationalism**

Like tabloids, whose basic premise is to sensationalize news like evening hawkers shouting in the streets ; some similar pitch has been adopted by the news media as well (Burgers & De Graaf, 2013). It has been empirically proved that sensational news increases the viewers' involvement (Stanca, Gui, & Gallucci, 2013). Audience prefers news from channels with some sensationalism induced into it (Vettehen et al., 2010).

The high viewership of sensational news by different channels only adds to further testimony. There is a marked increase in sensational news over the decades (Slattery & Hakanen, 1994 ; Umbrecht & Esser, 2016). The sensational form of news is more popular than the old traditional type of news (Kalsnes & Larsson, 2018). With private channels competing for viewership, there is tremendous pressure upon news channels to present news in the form of a consumer product (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999 ; Jones, 2012 ; Umbrecht & Esser, 2016).

## **Dynamics of Sensationalism in Digital Media**

Social media has become ubiquitous in all domains. Its use by businesses and professionals has become a norm (Padival, Michael, & Hebbar, 2019 ; Yadav, 2017). Using it for the dissemination of news has also become very popular. The journalistic boundaries are hazy and generally are not following journalistic norms (Headman & Djerf - Pierre, 2013 ; Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012). They are of less journalistic quality than the traditional media (Barthel, Moon, & Mari, 2015). The commercial compulsion compels the reporters in native media to make the news more sensational (Murtha, 2015). The audience is drawn by making the posts on Facebook and Twitter more sensational (Frampton, 2015) to the extent of adding a fear element, which can alter the behaviour of people (Ajit & Raj, 2012). The art of amplifying any issue is the most sought-after characteristic to be looked into most of the writings (Frampton, 2015), and the other is its ability to get viral because of ease of sharing and its multimedia content (Kaur & Sharma, 2018). Most youngsters and audience in the developed nations pick-up their news from social media (Purcell, Rainie, Mitchell, Rosenstiel, & Olmstead, 2010) and many subscribe to the online version of the traditional news publishers, thus providing a diverse meaning to the digital media (Arrese & Kaufmann, 2016). The unique enterprise of such news blogs is the setting which allows the readers to give their viewpoint. Manufactured sensational news showing the French Prime Minister Macron touching the feet of Indian PM Modi had about 13 lakh views on Youtube. Fake videos thus can be sensationalized, which makes people view them to this extent (Arora, 2018). This can be because of the unusual and unique content of the videos.

Online versions of reputed publishing brands basically rely on notifications on any digital platform. At the same time, the native media, for the traffic on their websites, have to be present as a snippet of news in all possible social media platforms (Chen, Conroy, & Rubin, 2015 ; Pengnate, 2016). If we consider Facebook, it is home to

diverse types of audience, and native media leverages this by diverting them to the news on their sites through this snippet news (Domingo, Quandt, Heinonen, Paulussen, Singer, & Vujnovic, 2008 ; Klinenberg, 2005). For the known publishers, making the news snippet posts sensational is more of a compulsion as the trick of click baits works without fail (Kilgo & Sinta, 2016). Social media originally was created to be in touch with each other, but now, it seems, its purpose is to spread biased confirmation information. It's affecting society and has become a study of concern in social sciences (Whelan, Moon, & Grant, 2013).

## **Sensationalism - Embedded and Created**

News can be written as flat as possible where it resembles to be a notice from the government. Private channels try to enhance the newsworthiness, which at the primary level can be identified as an attempt to capture the interest of the audience (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Next level of sensationalism can be understood through embedding and sprinkling conflict and controversy, human interest, and tinge of unusualness in the news (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017; Kilgo, Harlow, García-Perdomo, & Salaverría, 2018). Sensationalism can also be understood through the content of the news : Crime and sex automatically come out to be the most scandalous topics (Chan & Chan, 2012 ; Wang & Cohen, 2009 ; Wang, 2012) of all the news forms. The content, per se, provides a lot of sensationalism to it. People, who in the past were influenced through mass media and personal address, are now targeted through social media (Satya, 2012). This research tries to delve in observing the difference between the respondents' understanding of sensationalism in Facebook posts related to crime and politics and other unusual types of topics.

News reports of crimes, celebrities, human toils are more sensational as they trigger emotions in larger quantum than other non-sensational topics (Curran, Salovaara-Moring, Coen, & Iyengar, 2010 ; Wang & Cohen, 2009). In developed nations, many news channels found their business viability in playing sensational topics (Arbaoui, De Swert, & Van der Brug, 2020 ; Vettehen et al., 2010 ; Volek, 2009). With high competition in the news channel media spectrum, the same is now being followed by news channels in developing nations. Certain topics are not worth sensationalizing. Politics and economy oriented topics are presented in the stalest and dry form, however, politics off-late has come out from being presented in a bland manner. Political involvement of the public in India is increasingly been done via social media platforms (Kaur & Verma, 2018). Publishers are now treating political topics as sensationally (Kilgo & Sinta, 2016) as they have been treating topics related to crime and society. There is increased coverage of scandalous news from the political field (Lengauer, Esser, & Berganza, 2012 ; Vliegthart, Boomgaarden, & Boumans, 2011). Its sensational treatment has engaged youngsters and women too.

As a departure now, the execution of the news is made sensational in comparison to when sensationalism emanated from the content (Hong, 2018 ; Slattery & Hakanen, 1994). Refuge of this style is based on the premise that people started giving more importance to the news presentation and not the message (Kleemans, Vettehen, Eisinga, Beentjes, & Janssen, 2017). When news channels have the job to create 24 × 7 hours of news content, it can only be achieved by sensationalizing all possible boring and flat genres of news, and political news is one of them (Kramer, 2013 ; Thomas & Mariswamy, 2017). The identification of the degree of sensationalism, which a respondent would identify in a Facebook post, primarily has the headline as one of the main elements in comparison to the TV news. There lies umpteen number of production elements to build sensationalism through different styles (Dor, 2003 ; Wang, 2012 ; Zhou & Shen, 2009), which has a call, curiosity, or claim. Other production value used to highlight headlines can be the typeset, amplification, or the colour (Hanser, McKevitt, Lunney, & Condell, 2010 ; Randev, 2014).

Research on exploring sensationalism seeks to find out differing responses of sensationalism in the news across different genres (Bednarek & Caple, 2012). One of the research questions tried to find out the universality of sensationalism in a genre like crime that whether social-cultural backdrop affects the identification of

sensationalism (Curran et al., 2010 ; Kilgo et al., 2018). Although McLachlan and Golding (2000) created 38 categories of news in British Press, this research has a primary classification of genres like – crime, social interest, and politics. Suspense and thrilling aspects which were built in the popular press (Chadwick, Vaccari, & O'Loughlin, 2018 ; Spillane, Hoe, Brady, Wade, & Lawless, 2020) in the 1990s now can be found in social media news too.

## Methods and Materials

As evident from the literature review, a lot of research studies have been conducted on sensational news on TV and newspaper media. This research aims to find the paradigm of sensationalism used in sensationalizing the news on Facebook posts by different genres of Facebook pages. Primarily, Facebook posts were sourced from Facebook pages of reputed newspapers like – Indian Express, Dainik Jagran, and The Guardian. For social interest-based sensational posts, The Lallantop, The Logical Indian, Bernie Sanders, and Brigitte Gabriel were sourced. For a particular analysis on comparing the sensation in Indian and US crime posts – Dainik Aaj and U.P. Police were used for Indian crime posts, and Cop Block and Coast to Coast AM were used for US crime posts. For measuring sensation for political posts in the Indian context between two different political ideologies, PM Modi Fan Club, Modi Real Fans Club, I support Narendra Modi, I am with Barkha Dutt were used as the source (refer to Table 1 and Table 2).

**Table 1. Samples of Headlines of Social Interest Posts**

Srl.	Samples of Headline of Social Interests Posts
1	Bridegroom reached on helicopter to take bride
2	First time on-screen daughter of Ajay Devgan was seen at the airport – Left for honeymoon
3	Throne is waiting for its heir since 7 years
4	Girl fell in love because of missed call – Lover revealed – was of her father's age
5	When snake was dropped on Sunny Leone
6	Court rules can legally execute your dog if it does anything but sit silently
7	American wants cops tested to see if they are on drugs
8	Heart wrenches on seeing the brutality over the monkey

Source : Facebook Pages of The Lallantop, The Logical Indian, Bernie Sanders, and Brigitte Gabriel.

**Table 2. Samples of Headlines of Crime Posts**

Srl.	Samples of Headlines of Crime Posts
1	Girl gets handcuffed, thrown on the ground & arrested in Texas for jaywalking
2	This cop is falsely arresting Black men and trapping them in prison
3	Police officer just got away with brutally killing an unarmed man again
4	Police arrests 9-year old for failure to appear in court
5	11 year old held at gunpoint and handcuffed by police after stepping out of house
6	January retrial set for New Orleans Officer accused of raping 7-year old girl
7	Cop rapes woman at gunpoint, Now says he shouldn't get life in prison
8	Police breaking man's leg. Slamming head into pavement

Source : Facebook Pages of Dainik Aaj, UP Police, Cop Block, Coast to Coast AM.

Figure 1. Some Sample Facebook Posts of the Three Genres

## Sample Facebook Posts

### Crime Posts

**Cop Block** shared **Filming Cops**'s post  
27 Nov

**GIRL GETS HANDCUFFED, THROWN ON THE GROUND & ARRESTED IN TEXAS FOR JAYWALKING**



**POLICE CHIEF RESPONDS BY INSISTING THAT AT LEAST HIS OFFICERS DON'T SEXUALLY ASSAULT PEOPLE. SERIOUSLY.**

**Cop Block**  
December 12, 2019  
verified

He took out his gun, aimed it at an innocent schoolteacher, and began raping her. Then argued that he is a victim of unfair punishment. #digginginthefiles



**Cop Rapes Woman at Gunpoint, Now Says He Shouldn't Get Life in Prison**

He took out his gun, aimed it at an innocent schoolteacher, and began raping her.

FILMINGCOPS.COM

### Political Posts

**PM Modi Fan Club**  
December 8 at 11:25am

अभी-अभी : रूस ने उठाया सबसे धमाकेदार कदम, भारत की दोस्ती की खातिर चीन को मारी बड़ी ठोकर



अभी-अभी : रूस न उठाया सबसे धमाकेदार कदम, भारत का दोस्ती की खातिर चीन को मारी बड़ी ठोकर | TrilokNews

TRILOKNEWS.NET

**PM Modi Fan Club**  
26 Nov at 21:02

अटल बिहारी वाजपेयी की किसने की थी सरेआम बेज्जती, तब वाजपेयी ने...



अटल बिहारी वाजपेयी की किसने की थी सरेआम बेज्जती, तब वाजपेयी ने... | TrilokNews ...

Support PM Modi

### Social Interest Posts

**MODI REAL FANS CLUB**  
November 29 at 3:49pm  
not verified

जब सनी लियोनी पर छोड़ा गया सांप, कुछ ऐसा था उनका रिएक्शन



वीडियो जब सनी लियोनी पर छोड़ा गया सांप ऐसा हो गया हाल

m.bhaskar.com

BHASKAR.COM

**PM Modi Fan Club**  
December 12 at 10:31am

गोभी खाने वाले हो जाये सावधान, गोभी ने माँ-बेटी को पहुंचाया मौत के मुहाने फोटो को जूम करके देखने पर उड़ जायेगे होश



सावधान - गोभी के एक फूल ने पहुंचाया माँ बेटी को मौत के करीब खुद जूम करके देखे फोटो..

गाभा खान वाल हा जाय सावधान, गाभा न मा-बटा का पहुंचाया मात के मुहाने | TrilokNews

TRILOKNEWS.NET

Source : Facebook Pages of Dainik Aaj, UP Police, Cop Block, Coast to Coast AM, PM Modi Fan Club, Modi Real Fans Club, I am with Barkha Dutt, The Lallantop, The Logical Indian, Bernie Sanders, and Brigitte Gabriel.

Respondents chosen for the research were university post-graduates who were on Facebook and were continuously exposed to posts floated by acquaintances and Facebook pages by being online through 4G or wi-fi connections. The number of respondents chosen was 50, and 250 sample posts were collected from 35 different Facebook pages. Presence of sensation was confirmed by five experts, and thereafter, 250 posts were finally brought down to 150.

A PowerPoint presentation of these 150 posts was shown to these 50 respondents. Sensational messages invoke emotional arousal. This emotional arousal on seeing the stimuli is quick, sudden, and does not involve logical thinking (Globisch, Hamm, Esteves, & Öhman, 1999 ; Maxwell & Davidson, 2004). Reagh and Knight (2013) specifically contended for quick emotional reaction on the presentation of images with negative content. One of the research studies indicated that there is a rapid response to emotional stimuli (Osborn & Derbyshire, 2010). Thus, to elicit a quick response, respondents were given 5 seconds to mark against each post on a 7 - point Likert scale about their perception of 'degree of sensation' ingrained in a post.

News has been categorized into two categories (Grabe, Zhou, & Barnett, 2001) – Non-sensational and sensational. Sensational news comprises of crime, sex, accidents etc. ; on the other hand, non-sensational news comprises of economics, politics etc. Politics being non -sensational is sensationalized through camera techniques and curiosity laden headlines (Grabe et al., 2001). Social interest news is more of a memoir of a person or society's life. It's emotionally arousing because of its concrete information in the first person, close-ups of the face, and the proximity of the camera with the subject (Kilgo, Lough, & Riedl, 2020). It's a soft news category (Kristensen & From, 2012). Actually calling it to be news would be wrong (Scott & Gobetz, 1992). Politics, otherwise being a non-sensational genre, is sensationalized. Kleemans and Hendriks Vettehen (2009) called this as 'embedded sensationalism,' which is not intrinsic in nature. Embedded sensationalism referred here includes all genres of news. So, it makes sense to find the sensationalism in political and social interest posts news other than crime posts (see Figure 1).

One hundred and fifty posts were chosen from different areas as crime (C), social interest (SI), and political (P). Political posts comprised of pro - BJP (PB) and anti-BJP (AB), where BJP is the biggest party of the NDA alliance, which is the ruling party of India, and which won the elections in 2014. Crime posts, in turn, comprise of foreign crime (FC) and Indian crime (IC) posts. At the same time, social interest posts have no such sub-division. Out of the data of 150 posts, social interest posts (SI) were found to be  $N_{SI} = 68$ , crime posts were  $N_C = 39$ , and political posts were  $N_P = 43$ . Degree of sensation for each post was attributed as the mean of 50 responses. The time period of the study is from February 2018 – April 2019.

The following issues related to sensationalism in Facebook posts are going to be explored :

- ↪ Is there any difference in sensation towards sensational Facebook posts among people, or it is same ?
- ↪ Is there any difference in sensation towards Facebook posts from three different areas of crime, politics, and social interest ?
- ↪ Do people respond differently to foreign crime and Indian crime posts ?
- ↪ Do pro - BJP and anti - BJP posts evoke a different level of sensation ?

## Analysis and Results

- ↪ **H01** : There is no difference in the degree of sensation among the five sub-groups for the same Facebook posts.

In order to prove that people perceive sensation differently in the same sensational Facebook posts, 50 cases were divided into five sub-groups of 10 each. The small size of the group ensures that there is no averaging out of

responses in the five groups. Here, the assumption is that if there is a difference in the respondents' opinion for 150 posts, it will indicate that people perceive a different degree of sensation for the same type of sensational stimuli. A stimulus in this research comprises of 150 sensational Facebook posts. Thus, in this hypothesis, we look forward to whether the degree of sensation exhibited by the respondents varies for 150 posts or not. We here would like to observe the difference in mean value among the sub-groups and whether it is significant or not. Therefore, instead of considering Tukey HSD post-hoc analysis, the significance value of ANOVA would be enough to substantiate the differences in the degree of sensation.

On performing the analysis in SPSS, the mean value of the five groups comes out to be  $\mu_A = 4.46$ ,  $\mu_B = 3.80$ ,  $\mu_C = 4.04$ ,  $\mu_D = 3.62$ , and  $\mu_E = 4.14$ . The  $p$ -value being 0.049, which is marginally less than 0.05, points towards the difference in the degree of sensation. Levene's test value of 0.01 indicates that homogeneity of variances condition is not fulfilled. To ascertain the difference between the group, Brown – Forsythe and Welch test are applied. Brown – Forsythe value comes out to be 0.058, which again is marginally near to the  $p$ -value of 0.05. Furthermore, to check for any difference, if present or not, the Welch test is applied, which supersedes the Brown – Forsythe test. The Welch test value of 0.015 finally establishes the difference between the sub-groups.

With the Welch test value being 0.015, we reject the null hypothesis H1 and accept the alternative hypothesis that there is a difference in the degree of sensation among the five sub-groups for the same Facebook posts. Welch test does not prove the difference between all the pairings of sub - groups, but certainly between some of the groups, which is enough an evidence for the difference in degree of sensation exhibited by the people. This difference proves that people exhibit varying degree of sensational responses towards the same stimuli. This points towards that the difference in sensation is intrinsic in nature, and could be because of people's exposure and learning about the sensational stimuli in their past.

↳ **H02:** There is no difference in degree of sensation for crime, political, and social interest posts.

The research tries to find out whether there exist significant statistical differences between the degree of sensation for three different types of posts, that is, crime, political, and social interest posts. Here, the degree of sensation (DS) for any post is the mean of the degree of sensation marked on the 1–7 Likert scale by 50 respondents for each type of post. The three samples for the three categories of posts are unequal ( $N_C = 43$ ,  $N_{SI} = 68$ , and  $N_P = 39$ ). First, normality is checked for the three types of posts. Shapiro – Wilk value of 0.217, 0.041, and 0.155 shows that DS for crime is normally distributed, DS for political is not, and DS for social interest posts is also normally distributed. Running normality test for 150 values of DS gives the Shapiro – Wilk value of 0.121, which being non-significant indicates for the data to be normal. Levene's test for homogeneity of variance is significant with a value of 0.014, thus violating the assumption of homogeneity of variances. This makes us sceptical about the accuracy of the value of ANOVA between different groups.

Unequal sample sizes coupled with heterogeneity of variances make way for applying the Welch test. The  $p$ -value of 0.000 in Welch test indicates that there is a significant difference between the values of DS for the three types of posts, but this doesn't clarify about inter-differences between crime, political, and social interest posts. This difference, however, can be known by applying the Games – Howell post-hoc test, which is meant for the condition of heterogeneity of variances between the groups. The result shows that there is a significant difference ( $p = 0.000$ ) in the degree of sensation between crime and political posts. There is a significant difference ( $p = 0.003$ ) between DS of crime and social interest posts, and there is also a significant difference ( $p = 0.041$ ) between DS of social interest and political posts. The mean value of degree of sensation of crime posts is highest ( $\mu_C = 4.45$ ); for social interest posts, it is second highest ( $\mu_{SI} = 4.02$ ); and it is the least of the three for political posts ( $\mu_P = 3.63$ ).

The three values of significance between each pairing of crime, political, and social interests posts under

Games – Howell post hoc test being less than 0.05 leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis H02 and acceptance of the alternate hypothesis that there is a difference in the degree of sensation for the three different categories of posts. We conclude that the crime category in social media too is highly sensational as been with other counterpart media – television and print. Political posts, despite being sensationalized by the political parties, are still found to be less sensational than crime and social interest posts.

↪ **H03** : There is no difference in the degree of sensation between foreign crime and Indian crime posts.

There is an innate interest to know how people perceive sensation in crime posts of a foreign country and from their own country (India). Crime posts were purposely chosen from US-based Facebook pages and Indian Facebook pages. Out of the total crime posts ( $N_c = 43$ ), 24 posts were from US and 19 posts were from India. To analyze the differences between the two, independent sample  $t$  - test is applied. The  $p$  - value of 0.885 for Levene's test indicates fulfilling the assumption of homogeneity of variances for the two types of posts. The  $p$  - value for the independent sample  $t$  - test is highly significant ( $p = 0.019$ ).

The  $p$  - value being 0.019, we reject the null hypothesis H03 that there is no difference in the degree of sensation between foreign crime and Indian crime posts and accept the alternate hypothesis. This points out that there is a statistically significant difference as to how the people perceive sensation in the foreign crime and Indian crime posts. An interesting fact which emerges out of the analysis is that people consider FC posts to be more sensational ( $\mu_{FC} = 4.62$ ) than the Indian crime posts ( $\mu_{IC} = 4.22$ ). The reason attributable to this could be that since Indian crime news keeps appearing in the vernacular press and people have been reading it since their teens, this might have resulted in the conditioning of the brain. Maybe because of this, they no more find it to be stimulating enough to cross their absolute threshold level, which they might have developed for such type of news. On the other hand, people might be finding foreign news with different text and visuals to be more stimulating than the homebound crime news, which seems to have reduced to being usual and routine.

↪ **H04** : There is no significant difference in the degree of sensation (DS) between pro-BJP and anti-BJP posts.

In India, social media and Facebook, in particular, is full of sensational posts by the ruling party BJP and its opponents. The research wants to find out that if there is any difference between the two. This difference could be assumed from the sensational posts manufactured by the pro and anti elements of the ruling party. Before applying for paired comparison  $t$  - test, the basic assumption for the normality of the variable DSPB (degree of sensation for pro-BJP posts) and DSAB (degree of sensation for anti-BJP posts) was tested. Shapiro – Wilk value of DSPB (sig = 0.047) is near to 0.05 ; thus, the data distribution can be assumed to be normal. For DSAB, the value (sig = 0.534) is clearly higher than 0.05, which signifies the distribution of the DSAB value also to be normal. Thus, the data fulfils the basic assumption of normality for applying the paired - comparison  $t$  - test. The test gives the  $p$  - value of 0.000 with the mean value of DSPB ( $\mu = 3.99$ ) and DSAB ( $\mu = 3.83$ ) being marginally different.

The  $p$  - value (sig = 0.000) being highly significant, we reject the null hypothesis H04 that there is no significant difference in the degree of sensation (DS) between pro-BJP and anti-BJP posts and conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the degree of sensation for anti-BJP and pro-BJP categories of posts. Thus, the volleys of pro-BJP political posts bombarded on the people are found to be marginally more sensational than the anti-BJP posts.

## **Addendum**

In the observation sheet, pro-BJP and anti-BJP stance was scraped through some indirect questions. Out of 50



respondents, 32 were found to be anti-BJP, and 18 were found to be pro-BJP. We were curious to know whether pro-BJP respondents found anti-BJP posts more sensational than the pro-BJP posts and vice versa. Does the inclination of political ideology affect the processing of the two types of stimulus, that is, pro-BJP and anti-BJP posts in a different manner?

**Case : Anti-BJP**

On the data set of 32 anti-BJP respondents, paired comparison *t* - test is performed between anti-BJP and pro-BJP posts. Here, the degree of sensation for the pro-BJP posts ( $DSPB_{anti} = 4.12$ ) comes out to be more than the anti-BJP posts ( $DSAB_{anti} = 3.97$ ). The *p* - value of 0.000 further ratifies the difference to be statistically significant.

**Case : Pro-BJP**

On the data set of 18 pro-BJP respondents, paired comparison *t* - test is performed between anti-BJP and pro - BJP posts. Although the *p* - value of 0.001 points towards the significant difference between the two, but the mean of pro - BJP posts is considered to be more sensational ( $DSPB_{pro} = 3.78$ ) by the pro-BJP respondents than the anti-BJP posts ( $DSAB_{pro} = 3.59$ ).

**Table 3. Anti and Pro BJP Posts**

	<i>N</i>	DS Mean of Anti-BJP Posts	DS Mean of Pro-BJP Posts	Statistically Significant Difference
Anti-BJP respondents	32	3.97	4.12	Yes
Pro-BJP respondents	18	3.59	3.78	Yes

Thus, we notice that irrespective of the respondents having anti-BJP or pro-BJP stance (see Table 3), they felt that the pro-BJP posts were more sensational than the anti-BJP posts. This may be because of the content of pro-BJP posts was made more sensational by its creators. Other reason maybe due to the difference in the sample size of the two types of respondents. So, the effect can be further studied with an equal sample size of 18. A random sample of 18 respondents was chosen from the 32 anti-BJP respondents.

**Table 4. Anti and Pro BJP Posts Responses – Equal Sample Size**

	<i>N</i>	DS Mean of Anti-BJP Posts	DS Mean of Pro-BJP Posts	Statistically Significant Difference
Anti-BJP respondents	18	4.04	4.16	Yes
Pro-BJP respondents	18	3.59	3.78	Yes

After bringing down the sample size of anti-BJP respondents to 18, principally the output remains unchanged (see Table 4). It is, however, a matter of further inquiry as to why the anti-BJP respondents found the anti and pro - posts to be more sensational than the pro-BJP respondents. This may be because of the perspective of the anti-BJP or anti-ruler sentiments of respondents, who feel more suppressed or oppressed and that is why remarks on the Facebook posts to them seem to be more sarcastic and acidic.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This research primarily delves into whether people find Facebook posts of certain categories as sensational as they

find it on mass media for similar categories. The categories addressed are crime, political, and social interest posts. The research concludes that there is a difference in the degree of sensation among people for a similar group of posts. Thus, there is something innate in people responsible for varied responses for different sensational Facebook posts. Therefore, future research can be conducted on the factors responsible for the difference in responses.

Different categories of sensational posts, that is, crime, political, and social interest posts received a different level of responses. There exists a statistically significant difference between the three categories of posts. Crime, classically and inherently being a sensational category, scored high on the degree of sensation for Facebook posts too. Political posts, now being churned out by political parties in a sensational form, still scored less than the crime and social interest posts on the degree of sensation.

Further responses on degree of sensation by Indian respondents are checked against 'foreign crime' posts and 'Indian crime' posts. It is concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between to what extent people found the Facebook posts of 'foreign crime' sensational in comparison to 'Indian crime' posts. Here, the research reflects the very unusual insight whereby Indian respondents found Facebook posts from foreign crime scenes to be more sensational than posts from the Indian crime scenes.

The political posts of two categories – pro - BJP and anti - BJP (ruling party in India from 2014 – till date) being continuously bombarded on Indian Facebook users – are found to have a statistical significant difference. Pro - BJP posts are found to be more sensational than the anti-BJP posts by both types of people having pro - BJP ideology and anti - BJP ideology.

## **Managerial Implications**

Most of the managerial implications of this research somehow lie in harnessing the Facebook machine learning algorithm. These algorithms, however, are not in the ambit of common knowledge but certainly, Facebook follows one fundamental, which supersedes any other fundamental, that is, 'the concern of their users.' The posts which appear on any user's news feed are of those specific types for which that user has shown interest in the past. This interest Facebook gauges from the kind of posts people like or comment upon or see for more seconds. With this corollary, the newer posts of that Facebook page of whose post any user has given more attention to in the past would appear in the user's news feed.

Facebook pages of companies, therefore, can gather more traction among their Facebook fans by floating social interest posts having some sensational elements which involve them or compel them to click and land on the company's page, in turn increasing the weight of the Facebook page. This higher weight increases the ranking of that company's page in comparison to other pages any user has liked. Apart from corporates, different Facebook pages can make the provision of some genre of sensational posts in their total posts mix. This shall increase not only the exposure of their posts in general, but also garner 'likes' for their pages.

## **Limitations of the Study and Scope for Future Research**

The research, while on the one hand, tries to induce robustness by incorporating a variety of sensational stimuli by way of its 150 posts, and on the other hand, it might have induced fatigue among the respondents. Lesser control on elements was present of different Facebook posts ; other than that, it was sourced from various genres.

Future research, therefore, can delve on different aspects of the study in detail. First, the reasons for the innate difference in the degrees of sensation among individuals can be explored by fathoming out the extent of the exposure of sensational events and sensational stimuli in an individual's life. Second, the difference in responses can be studied if the exposure time of the post is increased from 5 seconds to 10–15 seconds and the hypotheses

can be tested on cognitive processing taking over affective processing with this increase in time. Third, the degree of sensation for different Facebook posts can be calibrated with various textual and visual elements of the post, thus deciphering the underlying factors responsible for evoking sensation.

## **Authors' Contribution**

On constantly being exposed to fake posts on Facebook in 2017, Dr. Shekhar Trivedi thought about researching sensationalism in Facebook posts, which is one of the elements of most of the Facebook posts. Dr. Shekhar Trivedi discussed the topic and did a literature survey about the antecedents of sensational news. In discussion with Shashi Kant Dikshit, both authors zeroed on three types of posts for the study. Both together discussed the objectives and the possibility of the type of analysis. Shashi Kant Dikshit did the bulk of the job of curating different types of posts from a variety of pages. Dr. Shekhar Trivedi analyzed the posts as well as the appropriateness of the presence of sensational elements and finalized certain FB pages for sourcing the posts. Dr. Shekhar Trivedi conceptualized the research design, and Shashi Kant Dikshit created the PowerPoint having a single post on each slide. Both together surveyed two classes of post-graduate students. Shashi Kant Dikshit did input and tabulation of data in excel. In parallel, Dr. Shekhar Trivedi started writing the literature review. Dr. Shekhar Trivedi finally suggested the type of analysis to be carried out on the collected data. Shashi Kant Dikshit imported the data in SPSS and ran statistical analysis and provided the output to Dr. Shekhar Trivedi. Dr. Shekhar Trivedi did the analysis and wrote the literature review. Shashi Kant Dikshit gave the final shape to the paper along with referencing.

## **Conflict of Interest**

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest, or non-financial interest in the subject matter, or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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