

Twitter as Branding Tool: An Analysis of Tweets of Indian National Political Parties

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Abstract

For decades, political parties in India were mostly dependent on mass media to communicate with their target group. Despite this, Politicians often would accuse the journalist and media houses, accusing that media has been bias against them and their statements have been twisted. This love-hate relationship between media and politician took a new turn when Twitter changed the scenario. Now political parties got the opportunities to do the direct branding with their consistent tweets. Considering the changed scenario, researchers decided to delve into the situation and determine the way the so called major national political parties, i.e. BJP and Congress, are handling this new tool. For this purpose, researchers analyzed the content of tweets sent through the official Twitter handle of these political parties during the recent election held of five states. The result showcases how petty issues are getting leverage over the real problems in this branding exercise.

Keywords: Communication Tool, Social-Media, Image Building, Branding Tool, and Political Communication strategy.

1.0 Introduction

In democracy, common masses are the deities. And political parties are expected to serve them with best of their ability. Hence the political parties are expected to convince the common

masses about their policies, welfare schemes, achievements and agenda. They try to do this by directly addressing via rallies and door to door contacts. For reaching easily to their voters, they need the support of mass media, like newspapers, TV, Radio etc. Usually, they expect that the media will serve just as a carrier. They feel media is helpful in strengthening the political ideology. (Schroeder, 2018) and all their messages must reach without any change or alleged distortion.

Whereas the role of media in democracy is like a watchdog. Hence it can not publish/ broadcast all the expected content as it is. Journalists perform the role of gatekeeping, which discards most of the press releases. The reasons include- shortage of space/time, policy of the newspapers, legal/ethical issues etc. Broadly the reasons look's rational but at the same time this is also true that media is also blamed to have vested interest. Capitalist control of media regulates political content politics. (Schroeder, 2018). Whatever the reasons may be, most of the political parties in India have accused that certain media houses are biased against them or their party or any particular political leader and their opinion.

Amidst such argumentative conditions, suddenly social media emerged in India and became popular medium because it equipped the user with production and storage of content. (Chen, 2013). Some scholars questioned about its actual impact. Prier argued that people are influenced by social media who have a previous belief in the given information. People share only that information on social media which are according to their prior faith. (Prier, 2017). But these doubts did not deter the growth of social media and it grew leaps and bounds within two decades.

Twitter, became more popular amongst political parties and politicians as it offered them a parallel platform which can carry their message as it is. (Unless as an exceptional case twitter takes some punitive action). Political parties can easily now influence the people of the country without the interference of the state and non-state actors. (Prier, 2017) or propaganda is easy

now with the advent of the internet and social media (Reuter & Szakonyi 2015, Fuchs, 2018)). Both the versions are before us. Hence, continuous research can bring forth the reality.

1.1 Twitter: A brief introduction

Twitter, a microblogging platform, has been a mobile messaging app, but now any persons can access it on desktop and laptop. It is trendy among the youth and educated people. Previously tweets were restricted to only 140 characters, and now a registered user can tweet 280 characters. A user can send an audio and visual message via tweet. In October 2021, 24.45 millions Indians were using Twitter, placing India on Number Three' position in the world as per the users. (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/242606/number-of-active-twitter-users-in-selected-countries/>). Recently Indian citizen Pargag Agrwal has replaced Jack Dorsey as CEO of Twitter.

1.2 Branding and Political Communication

According to Murphy, branding consists of imposing one's will on the consumer. Branding is a tool for identifying the product among the other similar products produced by the other producers. It gives a chance to feel pride in their development. The concept of branding has some specific sort of relationship with political communication. In this segment branding is not about the product but its about the politician's image building (Murphy, 1992).

It is specifically proven that now voters rely on flashy branding. On the basis of branding, people decide the perfect politician to vote. People get inspired by commercial branding and political advertising. Commercial branding and political advertising are both used in the image building process of a politician. Branding is the practice of intimating about any product, service of people until it gets caught in the mind of the people (Spelliscy, 2019). Robertson defined, branding is a powerful and unique way to unite people for common thought, cause, or belief. Branding is a fundamental concept that is applicable in political campaigns today (Robertson, 2018).

According to Norris, political communication is a collaborative process concerning the transmission of information among political leaders, the mass media, and ordinary people. The method of communication flows downward it means from governing institutions to ordinary citizens. It also flows horizontally in linkages among politicians and, upward like citizens opinion toward the higher authority of the Government. Political communication is a critical aspect that deals with elections and the policymaking process (Norris, 1997). Denton and Woodward defined Political Communication as "the strategic use of communication to influence public knowledge, beliefs, and action on political matters" (Denton & Woodward, 1998)

Political communication is associated with the formation and exchange of thoughts and feelings between ordinary people, public authority, political parties, and related institutions like media organizations. It includes dialogue in political process in regional, state, nationwide, and worldwide political systems (Political Communication, n.d. www.mastersincommunications.com).

2.0 Review of Literature

Maurya & Parihar (2020) analyzed the use of social media to disseminate fake news during COVID lockdown. Researchers find out that so much phoney information is spread on social media. It has created confusion among the government and people. It becomes complicated to inform people about the truth as they get misinformation and disinformation from various sources.

Sharma & Goyal (2018) studied the use of Twitter, a social media for political communication. Researchers conducted content analysis of tweets tweeted on the official account of BJP to meet the research objectives. The result indicates that Twitter is a powerful medium to communicate with some specific cadre of public. BJP's official tweets have positive agenda . But few tweets having controversial opinions and false information are primed by the

mainstream media.

Reuter & Szakonyi (2015) tried to find out the use of social media in political awareness. Researchers surveyed the 2011 Russian parliamentary elections. The result indicates that Twitter and Facebook meaningfully improved people's knowledge regarding electoral fraud and the election process. Social media messages are impactful if they are campaigned by opposition leaders.

Kriesberg (2014) analyzed the use of Twitter in community learnings. The researcher opted for quantitative research and content analysis method to collect 1880 tweets. The result indicates that institutions are significantly using Twitter for communication purposes. Now, institutions are making decisions on demand as per the request of people on social media (Twitter). With the high involvement of people on social media, the whole community collectively learns with it.

Mutz (2001) elaborated on the role of communication media to bridge political differences. The researcher used data from the representative national telephone survey. The researcher used snowball sampling and surveyed to know the respondents' perceptions and did content analysis of the relevant newspapers section. The result indicates that media plays an essential role in exposing people's views on political issues more than interpersonal communications. Media have the power to make people aware about the political perspectives and public political incorporation.

Neuman (1996) tried to elaborate on the new political communication tools and their use. Researcher finds out that new media technology has both negative and positive effects on political communication.

3.0 Method and Materials

The present part of the study consists of research problems, objectives, the theoretical framework, research design, sample design, and duration of the research work, limitation of

the study.

3.1 Research Problems: Twitter is now a well-known tool of political communication all over the globe. Its importance has been shown in the US Presidential election. It emerged as a powerful tool for political communication during the Indian general elections 2014 and 2019. The present study attempts to understand the use of Twitter for political campaign by the leading national political parties like BJP and Congress in India.

Research problems statement are as follows:

- a. What is the nature of tweets tweeted on the Indian national party's official Twitter handle?
- b. What kind of the topics are being raised in the tweets tweeted on Indian national party's Twitter handle?
- c. Who is involved as the face in the tweets tweeted on the Indian national political party's Twitter handle.
- d. What are the objectives of the tweet tweeted on the national political party's Twitter handle?

3.2 Research objectives: The research objectives of the study are as follows:

- RO1- To know issues raised in the tweets of the national parties on Twitter.
- RO2- To know the types of tweets of Indian national political parties.
- RO3- To identify the political personalities in tweets of Indian national political parties.
- RO4- To find out the objectives of tweets of Indian national political parties.

3.3 Research Hypothesis: The null hypothesis for the present research are as follows:

- Ho1: There is no association between political thought in tweets and its main objectives.
- Ho2: There is no association between political thought in tweets and main political person in the tweets.
- Ho3: There is no association between ideology in tweets and main objectives of the tweets.
- Ho4: There is no association between ideology in tweets and main political person in the tweets.

3.4 Theoretical framework: The present study is based on Agenda Setting Theory. This theory was given by famous researchers Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in 1968. The

concept of agenda-setting is related initially to political communication. This theory talks about the political communication among the people and political parties. Agenda setting also caters to the need for information flow and how the media can change the mindset of people for purposes like image building and branding. It is used as an image building tool and propagating the positive image of political parties or politicians. Along with this, researchers used Grounded theory, which is considered as the base of content analysis.

3.5 Variables of the study: Researcher used both independent and dependent variables in the study. They opted independent variables like the main issues, tweets type, the political person, and the objectives. At the same time, dependent variables like the tweet topic depend upon issues raised also considered as a part of the study.

3.6 Research Design: The present research is analytical. The content analysis method is used to collect the data from the official Twitter account of India's leading national parties, which are the Bhartiya Janta Party and the Indian National Congress. A cross-sectional research design has been used for data collection during the election campaign. The present study is non-experimental.

3.7 Sample Design: Purposive sampling technique has been used for tweet collection in the present study. Researchers collected 428 tweets which were tweeted on official Twitter handle of the Bhartiya Janta Party and, the Indian National Congress. 214 Tweets each from the BJP's and Congress's official Twitter have been taken. Bhartiya Janta Party's Handle <https://twitter.com/BJP4India> has 16.7 million followers, the highest among all national political parties in India. While Congress's official Twitter handle <https://twitter.com/INCIndia> has 4.4 million followers who are also the second-highest. The researcher has chosen prime political parties BJP and Congress, as a sample because of the highest number of followers on Twitter. They collected 428 tweets as per the Cochran formula of sample selection.

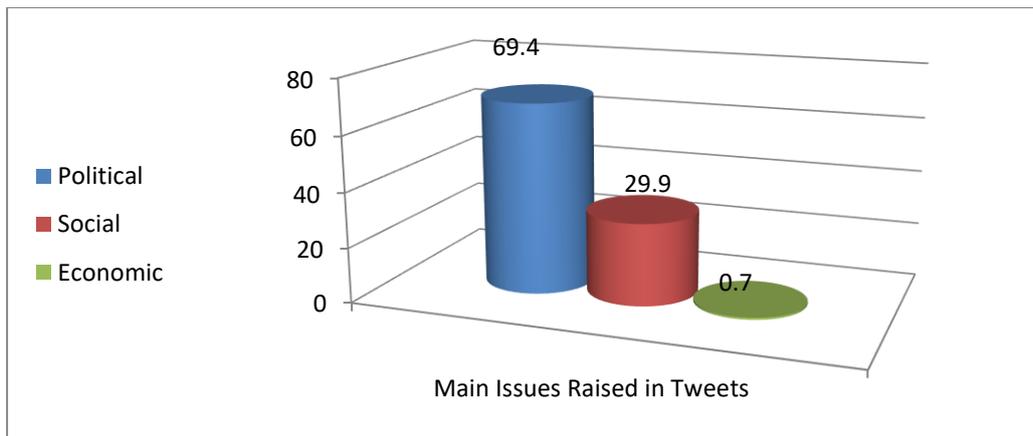
3.8 Duration of the study: For the present study, researchers have collected tweets from the

official Twitter handle of BJP and Congress in March, April, and May-2021. Alternative days and weeks have been chosen for the sample collection. During this period, the election campaign in five states of India, i.e. Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, were held. Both national political parties BJP and Congress, were in the election campaign.

4.0 Data Analysis:

Data is analyzed based on simple percentage analysis. Total five variables are included in the study, which is as follows-

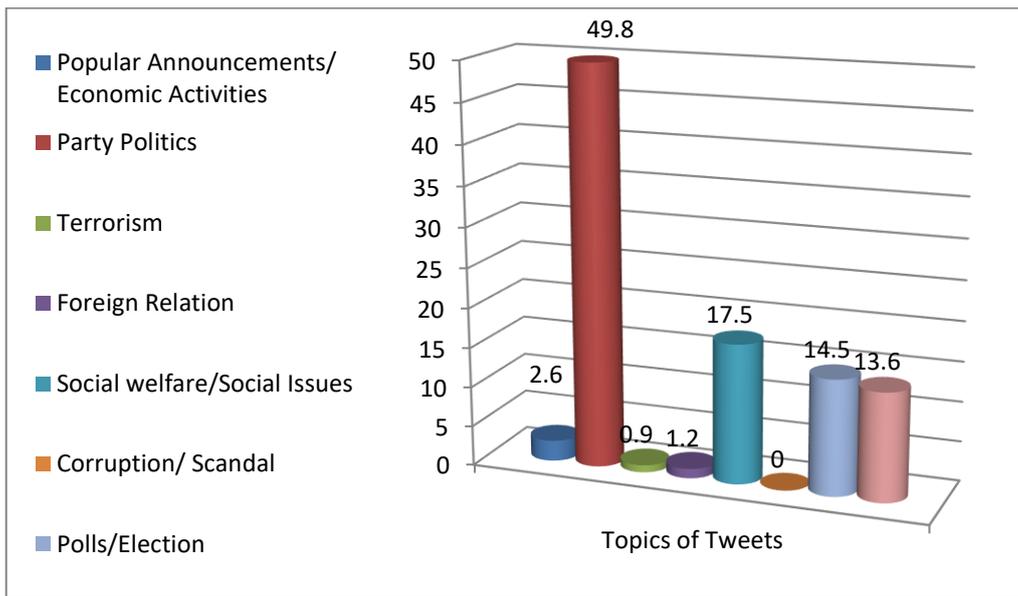
4.1: Main issues raised in the tweets on the Indian national party's Twitter handle



Graph 4.1

Graph 4.1 indicates that 69.4% of total tweets raised political issues while 29.6% raised social problems. Only 0.7% of tweets have raised economic issues. So, political parties mainly raised political or social problems in its tweet, but they gave preference to the political issues.

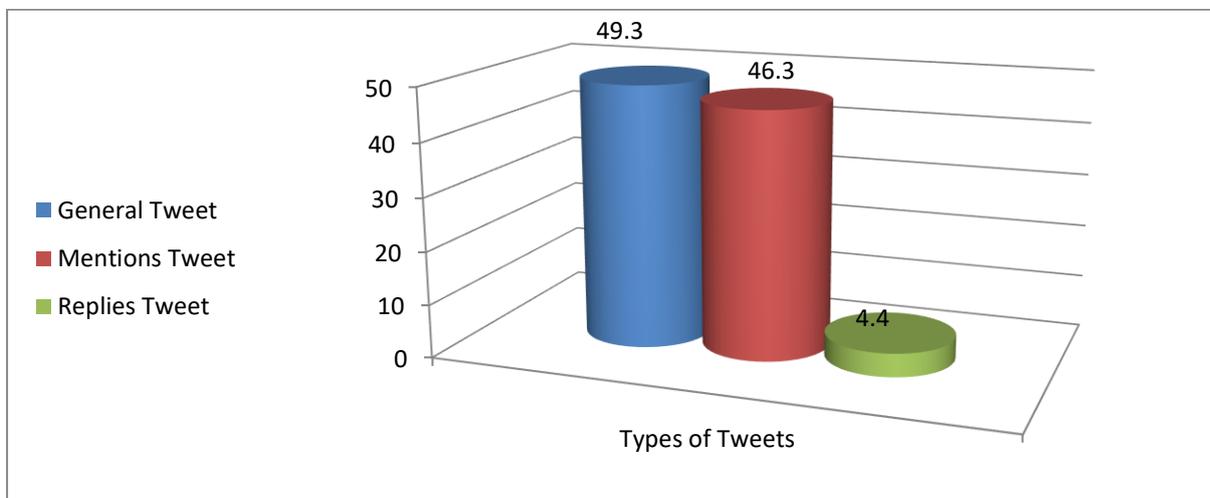
4.2: The main topic of the tweets tweeted on the Indian national party's Twitter handle



Graph 4.2

Graph 4.2 indicates that the maximum of 49.8% of the total tweets were based on party politics. The next 17.5% of tweets are based on social issues, and 14.5% are based on polls/elections-related matters. 2.6% of total tweets are based on popular announcements or economic activities. Rest topics like terrorism, foreign relations, corruption/scandal are given very little importance.

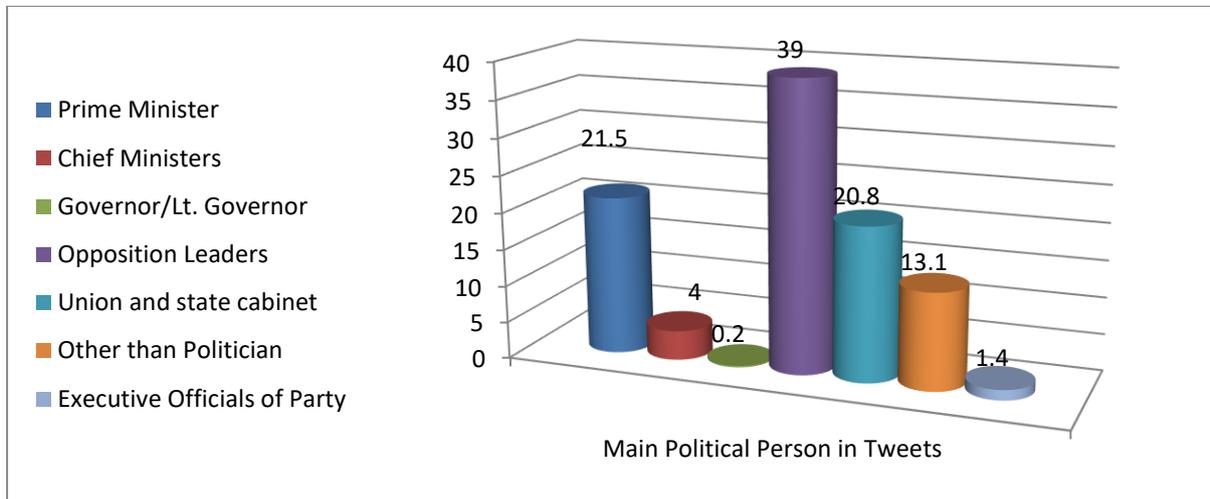
4.3: Types of the tweets which are tweeted on the Indian national party's Twitter handle



Graph 4.3

Graph 4.3 indicates that a maximum of 49.3% of total tweets in general tweets. Another 46.3% of tweets fall under the category of mentioned tweets. Only 4.4% of total tweets are replied tweets in nature. It is proven that most of the national political party's official Twitter handle tweets the general or mentions tweet; they generally ignore the replies tweets.

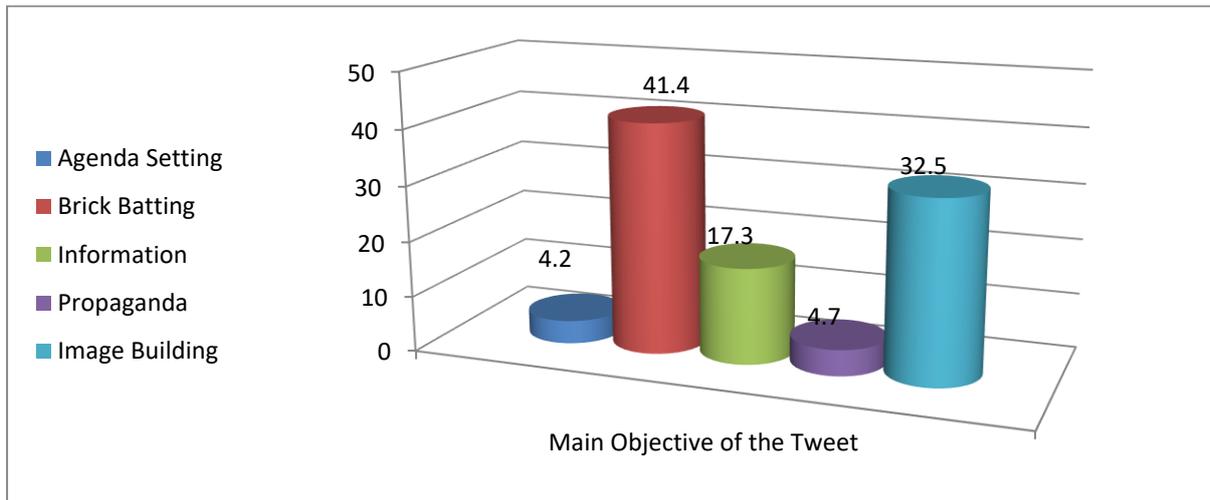
4.4: Main political person in the tweets of Indian national political party's Twitter handle



Graph 4.4

Graph 4.4 indicates that opposition leaders are the main political person in maximum of 39.0% of total tweets. The prime minister and Union and state cabinet are the prominent political people in 21.5% and 20.8% of the total tweets, respectively. Chief Ministers of various states are the main political person in 4% of total tweets. Very little preference has been given to the party's executive officials. Just 1.4% of total tweets are tweeted in which they were presented as a leading political person.

4.5: Main objectives of the tweets tweeted on the national political party’s Twitter handle



Graph 4.5

Graph 4.5 indicates that brick batting is the main objective of 41.4% of total tweets. In another 32.5% of total tweets, image building is the primary objective. In about 17.3% of total tweets, information sharing is the prime objective. Only 4.2% and 4.7% of total tweets have the aim of agenda-setting and propaganda, respectively.

4.6 Chi-Square Tests: In the present study, hypothesis have been tested with the help of Chi-Square Test (Pearson Chi-Square). ‘Ha’ indicates the alternative hypothesis and ‘Ho’ indicates null hypothesis. As per the need of Chi-Square Test, the researcher conducted only null hypothesis testing.

Ha1: There is an association between political thought in tweets and its main objectives.

Chi-Square Tests	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.223 ^a	8	.324

Analysis: There is no association between political thought in tweets and its main objectives because p value: 0.324 is more than the standard p value (p- 0.05). Hence we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Ha2: There is an association between political thought in tweets and main political person in the tweets.

Chi-Square Tests	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	25.442 ^a	12	.013

Analysis: There is an association between political thought in tweets and main political person because p value: 0.013 is less than the standard p value (p- 0.05). Hence the null hypothesis is rejected.

Ha3: There is an association between ideology in tweets and main objectives of the tweets

Chi-Square Tests	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	292.725 ^a	12	.000

Analysis: There is an association between ideology in tweets and main objectives of the tweets because p value: 0.000 is less than the standard p value (p- 0.05). Hence the null hypothesis is rejected.

Ha4: There is an association between ideology in tweets and main political person in the tweets

Chi-Square Tests	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	251.982 ^a	18	.000

Analysis: There is an association between ideology in tweets and main political person in the tweets because p value: 0.000 is less than the standard p value (p- 0.05). Hence the null hypothesis rejected.

5.0 Discussion:

The present study establishes the fact that political parties mainly raise political or social issues in their tweets. Indian national political parties' tweets are focused on political issues during the election campaign. Tweets are used to propagate party politics and image building during the election campaign. Aragón, Kappler, Kaltenbrunner, Laniado & Volkovich (2013) also conducted a study to know the communication dynamics in Twitter during the political campaign. They analyzed the re-tweet and replies of the main seven political parties. They found out that major traditional political parties used Twitter just as a one-way flow communication tool.

The present study pointed out that party politics, social issues, and polls/elections are given more preference on the official tweeter handle of main national political parties. National political parties of India use Twitter as a tool for political campaign promotion and propagation of the party's ideology. At the same time, Ezeh & Mboso (2019) conducted a study to measure the usage of Twitter in Nigeria's 2015 Presidential Election. They found that Twitter disseminates information regarding voters' interaction with political candidates. People are unable to recall Twitter's persuasion for voting behaviour.

It is considered that politicians used Twitter for self-promotion. But the present study elaborates that national political parties prefer opposition leaders as the main political person in their tweets. They try to criticize the other party's leader on their platform. Bruns & Highfield (2013) studied the role of Twitter in the Queensland state election held in 2012. They find out that politicians use social media for self-promotion and making people aware of social activities.

This study indicates that the main objective of tweets of national political parties is brick-battling. However, tweets are shared with the purpose of image building and awareness. A smaller number of tweets are based on agenda-setting and propaganda. Kumar, Sharma &

Verma (2021) researched the use of social media for political awareness. They find out that social media platforms are essential tools for spreading political awareness among the youths.

6.0 Conclusion:

National political parties raise political or social issues in their tweets, but they give preference to the political issues. Indian national political parties' tweets are focused on political issues during the election campaign. It indicates that tweets are used to propagate party politics and building image during the election campaign.

Party politics, social issues, and polls/elections are given more preference on the official Twitter handle of main national political parties. In contrast, very few choices are offered to popular announcements or economic activities, terrorism, foreign relations, corruption/scandal, etc. So, during the election, the prime focus of the official Twitter BJP and Congress is to share information related to party politics and elections. It indicates that national political parties use Twitter as a political campaign promotion and propagation of the party's ideology.

Mostly general or mentions tweets are tweeted from the national political party's official Twitter handle. They avoid the replies tweet. It indicates that main federal political parties (BJP and Congress) disseminate party politics during elections. They try to get support from the already published information on Twitter.

It is considered that politicians used Twitter for self-promotion. But this research has given a different result. Both main national political parties like BJP and Congress prefer opposition leaders as the main political person in their tweets, but not for promotion. It is an attempt to criticize the other party's leaders on Twitter. Although, the Prime Minister, the Union, State Cabinet, and Chief Minister are also given preference as the main political person in the tweets. Very little preference is given to the party's executive officials. It indicates that elected party members are promoted more on Twitter as the public figure. Twitter is used as a tool of image building and branding for the political actor of Indian national political parties.

Brick batting and image building are the main objectives of maximum tweets of national political parties like BJP and Congress. Although, information sharing is also the prime objective of the tweets of both national political parties. Very few tweets have the aim of agenda-setting and propaganda. It indicates that Twitter is a tool of image building and communication among the national political parties of India during the election campaign.

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