

Modi tweets least negative, Diggi's the most

A study of tweets by politicians found if the Twitter campaign was significant, then Indian voters did not appreciate negative tweeting

Ahmedabad Mirror Bureau
amfeedback@timesgroup.in
TWEETS @ahmedabdmirror

Politicians campaign often in raucous, dusty and scorching conditions. In speeches, they invoke age-old themes of economic resurgence, national identity, and public accountability through hot issues: unemployment, secularism and corruption.

For many politicians, it was also their first campaign mediated by Twitter, with loud outdoor rallies supplemented by air-conditioned indoor tweeting. Twitter was an efficient tool to reach tech-savvy urban voters.

A case study by Dr Nikhil Moro, a scholar and teacher of digital media law, examined all tweets and retweets posted by the six most-followed Indian politicians over a 30-day campaign period beginning April 16, 2014. Together, the posts accounted for virtually all of the mainstream-media coverage of political tweets in the month preceding May 16, the day



Prime Minister Narendra Modi has the highest Twitter followers (5.19 million) while Digvijay Singh has two lakh. The study by Dr Nikhil Moro looked at 30 days' tweets

election results were declared.

The six politicians in order of Twitter popularity were: Narendra Modi (BJP, 5.19 million followers), Shashi Tharoor (Congress, 2.25 million followers), Arvind Kejriwal (AAP, 2.07 million followers), Subramanian Swamy (BJP, 681,000 followers), Arun Jaitley (BJP, 470,000 followers) and Digvijay Singh (Congress, 202,000 followers).



The six stood out for sophistication of range, earnestness and strategy. They displayed a Twitter-focussed mindset, expertly mobilising supporters by using data to personalise as much as to localise. They seemed to have found a winning formula, if one ever existed in Twitter-mediated politics, Moro said in his study.

All except Swamy and Singh were also candidates in the election. All

were male, aged 45 (Kejriwal) to 74 (Swamy). They represented five states: Gujarat, Kerala, Delhi, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh respectively.

THE FINDINGS

The most-followed politicians as a group were surprisingly non-negative. The most frequently negative tweeter was Digvijay Singh; more than a third of his tweets were negative. Of Singh's 72 tweets, 26, or a full 36 per cent, were of an attacking nature. Singh used more ad hominem criticisms than the other five politicians put together. His labels "communal," "fascist," "Hitler" and "desparadoes" most frequently targeted Modi.

Ad hominem is a general category of fallacies in which a claim or argument is rejected on the basis of some irrelevant fact about a person.

The least negative tweeter was Modi, of whose 343 tweets, 20, or only 5.8 per cent, were negative. He took one name in criticism: that of the Abdullah family of Jammu and Kashmir.

Of the others, Tharoor posted 67

tweets, of which 13, or 19.4 per cent, were negative. Tharoor's eloquent criticism targeted none but Modi. Swamy posted 280 tweets, of which 28, or 10 per cent, were negative. Swamy used mocking monikers for the Nehru-Gandhi family and nicknamed another opponent "rascal." Of the politicians examined, Swamy used the most tweets for interpersonal communication, engaging frequently, and often curtly, with his followers. Jaitley posted 47 tweets, of which 4, or 8.5 per cent, were negative. Jaitley took no names in criticism.

Kejriwal posted 187 tweets, of which 13, or 7 per cent, were negative. Kejriwal's tweets belied his TV reputation of making sweeping attacks on opponents' honesty.

Later, the election results held a lesson for elevating the Twitter-mediated discourse. Modi and his party won handsomely and Singh's party lost miserably, suggesting that if the Twitter campaign was significant at all, then Indian voters did not appreciate negative tweeting.