



## THE GROWING USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN POLITICS: HOW THE INDIAN POLITICIANS USING THE TWITTER IN POLITICAL INFORMATION SHARING

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined two national leader's social media communication with social media users. The researcher studied political leaders' use of social networking site Twitter in political information sharing in India. Politicians are realizing the power of social media for communicating political information and interacting with citizens. Content analysis method was used in classifying message types and sentiments from the most frequently tweeted messages including the names of two top political leaders. The analysis comparing politicians' use of Twitter in political information sharing online. The new media environment is dynamic and continues to develop in novel, sometimes unanticipated, ways that have serious consequences for democratic governance and politics. New media have radically altered the way that government institutions operate, the way that political leaders communicate and citizen engagement. This chapter will briefly address the evolution of new media, the tweets by the two politicians and re-tweets, likes and comments by the followers and users of both leaders.

**KEYWORDS :** Social Media, Political communication, information sharing, tweeting,

### INTRODUCTION

Social Media mirrors the real world and is all about conversations. Social media facilitate the interactive web by engaging users to participate in, comment on and create content as means of communicating with social graph, other users and the public. Social media has emerged as a major tool where citizens are able to talk about the issues of day to day life and also of national importance. In 21st century, Facebook, Twitter and You tube are not just innovations in the internet world, but are fast emerging as influencers and opinion creators.

New political media are forms of communication that facilitate the production, dissemination, and exchange of political content on platforms and within networks that accommodate interaction and collaboration. They have evolved rapidly over the past three decades, and continue to develop in novel, sometimes unanticipated ways. New media have wide-ranging implications for democratic governance and political practices. They have radically altered the ways in which government institutions operate and political leaders communicate.

The rise of new media has complicated the political media system. Legacy media consisting of established mass media institutions that predate the Internet, such as newspapers, radio shows, and television news programs, coexist with new media that are the outgrowth of technological innovation. While legacy media maintain relatively stable formats, the litany of new media, which includes websites, blogs, video-sharing platforms, digital apps, and social media, are continually expanding in innovative ways. Mass media designed to deliver general interest news to broad audiences have been joined by niche sources that narrowcast to discrete users (Stroud, 2011). New media can relay information directly to individuals without the intervention of editorial or institutional gatekeepers, which are intrinsic to legacy forms. Thus, new media have introduced an increased level of instability and unpredictability into the political communication process.

### The Evolution of New Media

New media emerged in the late 1980s when entertainment platforms, like talk radio, television talk shows, and tabloid newspapers, took on prominent political roles and gave rise to the infotainment genre. Infotainment obscures the lines between news and entertainment, and privileges sensational, scandal-driven stories over hard news (Jebril, et al., 2013).

Politicians turned to new media to circumvent the mainstream press' control over the news agenda. The infotainment emphasis of new media at this early stage offered political leaders and candidates a friendlier venue for presenting themselves to the public than did hard news outlets (Moy, et al., 2009).

Political observers and scholars contemplated the advent of a "new media populism" that would engage disenfranchised citizens and facilitate a more active role for the public in political discourse. New media had the potential to enhance people's access to political information, facilitate wider-ranging political discourse, and foster participation. Initially, the public responded positively to the more accessible communication channels, calling in to political talk programs and participating in online town hall meetings. However, new media's authentic populist potential was undercut by the fact that the new political media system evolved haphazardly, with no guiding principles or goals. It was heavily dominated by commercial interests and those already holding privileged positions in politics and the news industry. Public enthusiasm eventually gave way to ambivalence and cynicism, especially as the novelty of the first phase of new media wore off (Davis and Owen, 1998). The next phase in the development of new media unfolded in conjunction with the application of emerging digital communications technologies to politics that made possible entirely new outlets and content delivery systems. The digital environment and the platforms it supports greatly transformed the political media system.

A number of explanations can be offered for the shift in the quality and quantity of political information. The technological affordances of new media allow content to propagate seemingly without limits. Social media have a dramatically different structure than previous media platforms. Content can be relayed with no significant third-party filtering, fact-checking, or editorial judgment. Individuals lacking prior journalism training or reputation can reach many users at lightning fast speed. Messages multiply as they are shared across news platforms and via personal social networking accounts (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017).

### Watchdog Press or Politicians' Mouthpiece

The notion of the press as a political watchdog casts the media as a guardian of the public interest. The watchdog press provides a check on government abuses by supplying citizens with information and forcing government transparency. Public support for the media's watchdog role is substantial, with a

Pew Research Center study finding that 70% of Americans believe that press reporting can “prevent leaders from doing things that shouldn't be done” (Chinni and Bronston, 2017).

New media have enhanced the capacity of reporters to fulfill their watchdog role, even in an era of dwindling resources for investigative journalism. Information can be shared readily through formal media sources, as local news outlets can pass information about breaking events to national organizations. News also can be documented and shared by citizens through social networks (Vernon, 2017). There is evidence to suggest that the new media allow political leaders to do an end-run around the watchdog press. In some ways, the press has moved from being a watchdog to a mouthpiece for politicians. This tendency is exacerbated by the fact that there is a revolving door where working journalists move between positions in the media and government (Shepard, 1997). The media act as a mouthpiece for political leaders by publicizing their words and actions even when their news value is questionable. President Donald Trump uses Twitter as a mechanism for getting messages directly to his followers while averting journalistic and political gatekeepers, including high ranking members of his personal staff. Many of his tweets are of questionable news value, except for the fact that they emanate from the president's personal social media account.

Social media tools such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are now considered as politically transformative communication technologies as radio and television. There are predictions that social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter will transform democracy, allowing citizens and politicians to communicate, connect and interact in ways never before thought possible (Grant, Moon, & Busby Grant, 2010). Increasingly, politicians and elected officials are realizing the power of social media for communicating political information and interacting with citizens.

#### Twitter as a Social Media Tool

Twitter is a popular social networking and microblogging site where users can broadcast short messages called 'tweets' to a global audience. A key feature of this platform is that, by default, each user's stream of real-time posts is public. This fact, combined with its substantial population of users, renders Twitter an extremely valuable resource for commercial and political data mining and research applications. Twitter, created in March 2006 and officially launched in July 2006, is a fast growing real-time social media tool allowing people to find and share information on what is happening worldwide (Chang, 2010). Twitter defines its service as “a real-time information network that connects you to the latest stories, idea, opinions and news.” (Twitter, 2012). As of the second quarter of 2018, the microblogging service averaged at 335 million monthly active users. In 2016 the microblogging site is projected to reach 23.2 million monthly active users in India, up from 11.5 million in 2013. Every second, on average, around 6,000 tweets are tweeted on Twitter, which correspondents to over 500 million tweets per day (Twitter, 2017).

Twitter messages allow a maximum length of 140 characters, and average 11 words per message (O'Connor et al., 2010). Messages, known as “tweets,” can be made public or hidden, directed at another user by including the “@” symbol followed by another user's account name, i.e. @Friend\_Username. Users can also share others' messages by “re-tweeting” (RT) them; which copies and disseminates the original message to the user's followers (Zhao & Rosson, 2009). Any message can be annotated with a topic or subject using hashtags, i.e. #Topic; clicking on or searching on a hashtag displays a choice of top tweets or all current tweets on Twitter that share the same hashtag. However, Twitter hashtags still suffer from

their fragmentary and redundant nature (Chang, 2010). Therefore, this study excluded hashtag keywords (#Keywords) in the data collection process.

#### Literature Reviews

Alongside blogs and sites such as YouTube and Facebook, Twitter by now seems to have established itself as an everyday part of the arsenal of political communication in many parts of the world. Campaigners, lobbyists, companies, NGOs, as well as activists commonly use the platform to spread their messages, or to connect with and receive feedback from potential voters or clients. Researchers have approached the political uses of Twitter in a number of different contexts. Attention has been given to the use of Twitter during uprisings in totalitarian countries (Gaffney, 2010; Lotan et al., 2011), but also in more stable, democratic contexts. Beyond attempts to predict election results using Twitter data (Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner, & Welpe, 2010), studies have primarily focused on political Twitter use at the hands of politicians.

The increasing presence of individual Australian politicians on Twitter is a notable change in their use of online communication platforms. Although politician Websites are commonplace, few active members of federal parliament ever started blogging, for example (Highfield & Bruns, 2012). This has changed with the advent of more recent social media platforms: a study examining tweeting patterns by politicians at federal, state, and local government levels in 2009 drew on a sample of 152 Twitter accounts (Grant, Moon, & Busby Grant, 2010); by July 2012, at least 146 of the 226 members of the federal Upper and Lower Houses had Twitter accounts.

This growing adoption of social media has the potential to increase interactions between citizens and politicians, by putting these different voices in the same space. Prior to Twitter, citizens could already communicate with politicians via Internet-mediated platforms. However, in Australia, using such means as email to contact politicians was done primarily by those with higher levels of engagement with both politics and the Internet (Gibson, Lusoli, & Ward, 2008). Similar patterns have been found in a national election context in the United Kingdom (Broersma & Graham, 2012); however, the same study found that Dutch politicians at the national level were more likely to interact and engage in dialogue with other Twitter users.

The social media site, Twitter, and its use by politicians have recently emerged as the subject of many studies. According to Smith and Brenner (2012), 15% of Internet users used Twitter in February 2012, which is a 3% increase from August 2011. And, of the 15% of users, 31% are between the ages of 18-24 years old. Twitter's increasing popularity has made it a platform through which politicians influence, inform, and engage their publics while gathering feedback.

As is the case with this study, Aharony (2012) studied how this politician-to-public exchange is created, used, and managed. The researcher examined all tweets that appeared during the set period, August through October, 2010. The research was guided by questions like (1) Do the leaders differ regarding their number of tweets, and (2) Does the content of the tweets from the three leaders differ? This study used the same methodology that Aharony (2012) used with some modifications: content analysis as the sole means of analyzing the tweets, and only the second research question addressed. Recent history has demonstrated that social media has a very powerful impact on politics and its scope continues to broaden as the actors on the political stage discover new manners in which this valuable tool can sway opinions, trends, options and, most importantly, votes. The linguistic dimension of political discourse has been extensively analyzed (Chilton and Schaffner 2002, Cap and

Okulska 2013).

### Research Purpose

What about the role of Twitter in politics and political information sharing more generally, as a tool for public communication by citizens? General user statistics for a range of countries tell us that Twitter is used only by a specific subset of the wider population. But how is this use fashioned during periods of heightened attention to politics? Who uses Twitter, and how does this use differ among user groups? An interesting question is whether or not new and larger user groups join when much is at stake, and, if so, how such users behave in relation to more frequent users.

The purposes of conducting this study are twofold: to explore tweeting information behavior for political messages on Twitter by politicians in India, and to compare the number and types of re-tweeted, likes and comment messages. This research allows us to better understand the role of Twitter within politicians' political information sharing with citizens in India, and offers insights into relationships between the message types and citizens' sentiments as expressed on Twitter. This paper examines how politicians in India used Twitter in sharing political information with citizens, and also investigates relationships between citizens' use of Twitter and their response to politician's tweets. This study investigates Indian citizens' re-tweeting, likes and comments of political messages tweeted by top two politicians.

### Research Methodology

The main intention of this research is to get feedback from the two main politicians concerned by the use of social media in politics. The wished outcome of this study is getting a better understanding of the actual position of social media in the political life. The researcher examined two national leader's social media communication with social media users. The researcher aimed to examine and comparison the presence of two selected political leaders the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and opposition leader Rahul Gandhi tweets which were published on twitter and also re-tweets, likes and comments by the followers and users of Twitter were examined during one month period from 1st January to 31st January 2019. The researcher has divided all the tweets into different subject categories.

### Objectives

1. To ascertain the frequency of political leaders on Twitter.
2. To study what type of tweets are tweeted by the politicians, and analyzed the followers' and users' re-tweets, likes and comments to the tweets of the leaders.
3. To find out the comparison of tweets between the leaders.
4. To examine the comparison of likes and comments on each political leader.

### Content Analysis

To conduct this study, the researcher used content analysis to collect, categorize, and code the recent Twitter posts, or tweets, shared by each candidate. The resulting findings provided insight into how distinctively cultivated Twitter to attract the users or followers. Content analysis is essential to creating a basis upon which we can methodically evaluate social media sites and their effectiveness; in turn, this allows for the comparison of viewers' perceptions of effectiveness. The politicians' tweets have each been evaluated for four different attributes: frequency of posting, re-tweets, likes and comments by the followers and users. The politicians' tweets have each been evaluated into different attributes: content quality, frequency of posting, re-tweets, and the number of likes and comments by the followers and users on each politician.

### Sampling

The study included Twitter the most popular social media network. The study was based on the complete census during the 31 days time span from 1st January 31st January 2019 of twitter of 246 tweets presence of two political leaders on social media. The two leaders are the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi and opposition party leader Rahul Gandhi.

Narendra Modi: Modi led the BJP in the 2014 general election, which gave the party a majority in the Lok Sabha, the first time a single party had achieved this since 1984. Since taking office, Modi's administration has tried to raise foreign direct investment in the Indian economy, increased spending on infrastructure, and reduced spending on healthcare and social welfare programs. Modi has attempted to improve efficiency in the bureaucracy, and centralized power by abolishing the planning commission and replacng it with the NITi Aayog. He has begun a high-profile sanitation campaign, and weakened or abolished environmental and labor laws. Credited with engineering a political realignment towards right wing politics.

Rahul Gandhi: Rahul Gandhi is an Indian politician and is the President of the Indian National Congress and a member of the 16th Lok Sabha. Rahul entered politics in 2004, having stayed away from public sphere prior to that. He successfully contested the Indian general elections, 2004 from Amethi, a seat that was earlier held by his father; he won again from the constituency in 2009 and 2014. Amidst calls from Congress party veterans for his greater involvement in party politics and national government, Gandhi was elected Congress Vice-President in 2013, having served as the General Secretary previously. Gandhi led Congress campaign in the 2014 Indian general elections.

### Unit of analysis

The researcher studied the tweets by the two politicians and re-tweets, likes and comments by the followers and users of both leaders.

Tweets: Tweets are publicly visible by default, but senders can restrict message delivery to just their followers. Users can tweet via the Twitter website, compatible external applications (such as for smartphones), or by Short Message Service (SMS) available in certain countries. Users may subscribe to other users' tweets this is known as "following" and subscribers are known as "followers", a portmanteau of Twitter and peeps. Individual tweets can be forwarded by other users to their own feed, a process known as a "retweet". Users can also "like" (formerly "favorite") individual tweets. Twitter allows users to update their profile via their mobile phone either by text messaging or by apps released for certain smartphones and tablets.

Likes: The like button is one of twitter social plug-ins, in which the button can be placed on third-party websites. Its use centers around a form of an advertising network, in which it gathers information about which users visit what websites. The twitter like button is a feature on the social networking website twitter. The like button enables users to easily interact with status updates, comments, photos and videos, links shared by friends, and advertisements. Once clicked by a user, the designated content appears in the News Feeds of that user's friends, and the button also displays the number of other users who have liked the content, including a full or partial list of those users. The like button was extended to comments in June 2010.

Re-tweet: A retweet is when you republish a post that another Twitter user has written, to spread the word among your own Twitter followers. It is a way of amplifying the signal so that more people read the original message. You might want to retweet a political statement

that you agree with, a tip that you think your followers might need, or a link to an interesting article. You might also want to retweet something that you disagree with along with your own opinion about the subject. Retweeting is not only great for your followers, it is also a way to build a relationship with the original poster, who can easily see who has retweeted him or her. That poster may be more likely to retweet your posts in the future, exposing your writing to a broader audience. People who post and repost effectively can build a following of millions of people.

Comments: You probably knew you could post photos to twitter in a status update, but did you know you can post a picture in a comment you make on someone else's post on twitter. It hasn't always been possible though. It wasn't until June 2013 that the social network began supporting photo-commenting and it's built right into the website and mobile app. Now you can make a photo comment instead of just standard text, or post both a text comment and a photo to illustrate it. Whatever image you choose to upload shows up in the list of comments beneath the post to which it refers. Previously, to add a photo to a comment, you had to upload a photo somewhere on the web and then insert the code that linked to the picture. It was messy and not as easy as it is now.

**Data Analysis**

The data collected from Twitter over 31 days has been the Narendra Modi tweets divided into different categories they are wishes, publicity, science, states, district, India security, openings, India Growth, Conferences, Diaspora, Sports, Youth, Economic Meetings, Country's PM Meeting, Political, International, ASEAN, Nature, Plenaries & Meetings, Future Dreams, Women's, Men's Awards, NSS, Beating retreat, Religions, Humanity. They total tweets 26 categories are divided.

Rahul Gandhi tweets divided into different categories, they are Political, Meetings, wishes, Science, People, Growth, Election publicity.

The data collected from Twitter over 31 days has been presented in the table below in terms of percentages.

**Table 1. Percentage Distribution of Narendra Modi Tweets Categories**

S. No	Subject	No. of Tweets	Percentage (%)
1	Wishes	37	17.5
2	Publicity	21	9.9
3	Science	6	2.8
4	States	2	0.9
5	India Security	8	3.8
6	India Growth	6	2.8
7	Conferences	3	1.4
8	Diaspora	3	1.4
9	Sports	9	4.2
10	Youth	15	7.1
11	Economic Meetings	4	1.9
12	Country's PM Meeting	29	13.7
13	Political issues	3	1.4
14	International issues	5	2.4
15	ASEAN	10	4.7
16	Nature	5	2.4
17	Plenaries & Meetings	4	1.9
18	Awards	21	9.9
19	NSS	6	2.8

20	Religion	4	1.9
21	Other	11	5.2
	Total	212	100.0

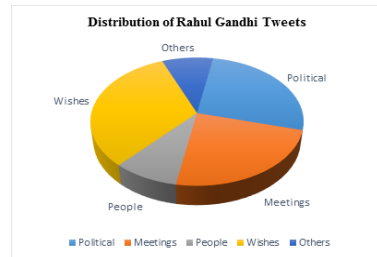
The above table explains the tweets of Narendra Modi during one month period. In the selected period Modi tweeted 212 tweets on different subject categories. Out of the total tweets of Modi more tweets on wishes (17.5%), country's meeting (13.7%), publicity (9.9%), awards (9.9%), youth (7.1%), and sports (4.2%) respectively.

**Table 2. Percentage Distribution of Rahul Gandhi Tweets Category**

S. No	Subject	No. of Tweets	Percentage (%)
1	Political	9	26.5
2	Meetings	8	23.5
3	People	3	8.8
4	Wishes	11	32.4
5	Others	3	8.8
	Total	34	100.0

The above table shows the percentage distribution of Rahul Gandhi's tweets on Twitter during one month period. He tweeted total 34 tweets on different subject categories. He tweeted more on wishes (32.4%), political issues (26.5%), meetings (23.5%), and people (8.8%) respectively in the selected period. The interesting thing is that if compare between these two persons they gave same priority to tweet on wishes to different things, and meetings on their twitter account.

**Diagram 1. Distribution of Rahul Gandhi Tweets**



**Table 3. Percentage Distribution of Tweets by the two Politicians**

Political Leaders	Tweets	Percentage (%)
Narendra Modi	212	86.2
Rahul Gandhi	34	13.8
Total	246	100.0

**Table 4. Percentage Distribution of Re-tweets by the Followers and Users**

Political Leaders	Re-tweets	Percentage (%)
Narendra Modi	7,06,596	78.8
Rahul Gandhi	1,90,260	21.2
Total	8,96,856	100.0

**Table 5. Percentage Distribution of Likes by the Followers and Users**

Political Leaders	Likes	Percentage (%)
Narendra Modi	33,38,985	83.9
Rahul Gandhi	6,41,625	16.1
Total	39,80,610	100.0

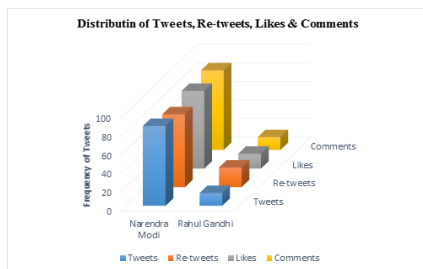
**Table 6. Percentage Distribution of Comments by the Followers and Users**

Political Leaders	Comments	Percentage (%)
Narendra Modi	4,41,231	86.1

Rahul Gandhi	71,485	13.9
Total	5,12,716	100.0

The above tables explain that percentage distribution of tweets, retweets, likes and comments by the followers and users of twitter. Narendra Modi tweeted total number of 212 tweets at the same time Rahul Gandhi tweeted 34 tweets during the selected period. For these two politicians' tweets got may retweets, likes and comments by the followers and users. Modi's tweets were retweeted more times than Rahul Gandhi's tweets. Modi's 212 tweets were retweeted by above seven lakhs users at the same time Rahul's 34 tweets were retweeted 1.90 lakh times. If we come to likes of their tweets Modi got above 33 lakh likes, and Rahul got 6.41 lakh likes. Modi's tweets received more comments (4.41 lakhs) and Rahul got above 71 thousand comments for their tweets. Overall it shows that Narendra Modi is very active in Twitter usage that Rahul Gandhi.

**Diagram 2. Distribution of Tweets, Re-tweets, Likes and Comments**



**Findings in frequency**

- The performances of Narendra Modi in Twitter total tweets 212 and re-tweets 7,06,596 likes 33,38,985 comments 4,41,231.
- The performances of Narendra Modi in Twitter total tweets divided into 26 subject categories.
- Rahul Gandhi in Twitter total tweets 34 and re-tweets 1,90,260 and likes 6,41,625, comments 71,485.
- The performances Rahul Gandhi in Twitter total tweets divided into 7 categories.

**Findings in percentage**

- Narendra Modi has 86% tweets on Twitter to compare Rahul Gandhi.
- Rahul Gandhi has 34% tweets on Twitter to compare Narendra Modi.
- Narendra Modi has 79% Re-tweets on Twitter to compare Rahul Gandhi.
- Rahul Gandhi has 21% Re-tweets on Twitter to compare Narendra Modi.
- Narendra Modi has 84% Likes on Twitter to compare Rahul Gandhi.
- Rahul Gandhi has 16% Likes on Twitter to compare Narendra Modi.
- Narendra Modi has 86% Comments on Twitter to compare Rahul Gandhi.
- Rahul Gandhi has 14 % Comments on Twitter to compare Narendra Modi.

Overall, Narendra Modi is very active in Twitter usage if compare Rahul Gandhi. And the users also are very faster to retweets, likes and comments for their tweets. In this comparison also Modi is far away than Rahul Gandhi.

**CONCLUSION**

While social media's role continues to evolve within the political realm, there are definitive relationships to be explored between a politician's use of these sites and the public's opinion. Facebook and Twitter have enabled people to access public figures at an unprecedented level. Online

discussions of Indian political issues are now commonplace; the pioneering work of early political bloggers and the development of commentary Websites run by mainstream media and independent groups have been supplemented by widespread use of social media platforms in India. Commenting on politics now takes place across a multi-platform media ecology, as social media are integrated into traditional media coverage.

The Internet and social media platforms, most significantly Twitter and Facebook, have brought with them an apparent opportunity to transform the way citizens and politicians communicate with one another. Their rise to prominence could have the potential to end the old 'top-down' model of political communication, and help close our democratic deficit. But are our political leaders up to the challenge? While the new media model of political communication has the potential to allow for increased dialogue between political representatives and the public and the opportunity to sculpt a more communicative and involving democracy, we are not there yet. A quick assessment of prominent political actors' use of social media suggests that politicians primarily use communication tools as instruments of broadcast and not generally in ways that could create a more engaging political communications environment.

Just as with the launch and spread of the Internet itself, the Web 2.0 paradigm has carried with it certain expectations regarding its potential for political activity. This study investigated political information sharing in social networking site of Twitter in India. New media have both expanded and undercut the traditional roles of the press in a democratic society. On the positive side, they have vastly increased the potential for political information to reach even the most disinterested citizens. They enable the creation of digital public squares where opinions can be openly shared. They have created new avenues for engagement that allow the public to connect in new ways with government, and to contribute to the flow of political information.

The two candidates, Narendra Modi and Rahul Gandhi, used Twitter to post information and tweet about their current activity. Gerardine DeSanctis' and Marshall Scott Poole's (1994) Adaptive Structuration Theory (AST) states that social media sites are a means of transferring information from one societal group to another and that this informational exchange is two-sided and circulates from structure to system and system to structure. The AST also makes the assumption that as this social networking device advances and there is an increase in "interpenetration of structure," it can impact an entire social organization and inspire change (DeSanctis and Poole, 1994).

In the political realm, Twitter creates opportunities for politicians to motivate and activate their followers and differentiate themselves from their competitor. Although the research showed that both candidates use Twitter to post information and update followers about their current activity, there are differences in the direct communication and personal messages posted by the candidates. There is a lot of interesting further work that is possible in the field of understanding effective use of social networks in a political or rhetorical context. Some such questions unexplored in this paper but within the scope of further work.

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