INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND GOVERNANCE

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Modi's digital diplomacy: A comprehensive analysis of social media as a political communication and governance tool

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.33545/26646021.2023.v5.i2b.258

Abstract
This research paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the use of social media as a political communication tool by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It examines the evolution of social media in political campaigning, from its early adoption by leaders like Howard Dean and Barack Obama to its pivotal role in Narendra Modi's election campaign. The study delves into Prime Minister Modi's extensive presence on various social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, and highlights his remarkable engagement with millions of followers worldwide. It analyzes his strategic use of social media to showcase government achievements, promote initiatives, and encourage citizen participation. Furthermore, the paper examines the role of social media in governance, emphasizing how Modi's administration leveraged these platforms to foster transparency, accountability, and public engagement. The research also investigates Modi's use of social media as a tool for international communication, discussing his interactions with world leaders, promotion of bilateral relationships, and the impact on India's soft power. It explores the concept of Twitter diplomacy and its effectiveness in establishing personal connections with global leaders.
This research paper contributes to the scholarly understanding of the transformative role of social media in political communication and governance. It offers insights into the strategies employed by Prime Minister Modi to effectively utilize social media platforms, and the implications of his digital influence on shaping public opinion and engaging with citizens in the digital age. The findings of this study have implications for policymakers, political leaders, and researchers interested in the intersection of social media, politics, and governance.

Keywords: Digital diplomacy, political communication, governance tool

Introduction
Social media as a political communication tool
Social media is mainly used by politicians for their direct communication with their workers and citizens of the nation. Social media has been acknowledged for its role in dismantling the barriers that once separated politicians from the general public during elections. It has facilitated the free exchange of information, enabling the ruling party to effectively communicate its priorities and goals to the nation's populace.

The political campaign has a long history ranging from door-to-door campaigns to television appearances. In every election and by every candidate, some innovative efforts are made to make the campaign successful. But as far as the digital campaign is concerned, the first attempt was made in 1960 by American President John F. Kennedy during his presidential campaign. He was often called 'Television President' because of his strategic use of Television in his campaign (Bimber, 2014) [2]. But this television era ended with the come of social media as a new player in the picture. The first social media as a campaigning tool was used in 2004.

Dean's ground-breaking presidential campaign in 2004 utilized platforms like blogs and online forums to mobilize supporters and raise funds. His innovative approach marked a turning point in political campaigns, demonstrating the potential of social media for grassroots organizing. Dean's use of these digital tools paved the way for future politicians to harness the power of social media for connecting with voters, engaging in real-time conversations, and amplifying their messages. The impact of Dean's social media strategy has had lasting effects on the political landscape, influencing subsequent campaigns and

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transforming the way politicians engage with the public (Hindman, 2005) [6].

However, the first use of social media as a political campaigning tool then by Howard Dean but it was Barack Obama who used social media as an election-winning tool. The election of Barack Obama as president, much like John F. Kennedy, marked a significant shift in political communication. Both leaders harnessed new mediums to transform the political landscape. While Kennedy utilized television, Obama leveraged the power of the Internet. This paradigm shift in communication has forever changed the way politics is conducted, highlighting the profound impact of digital platforms on shaping public opinion and engaging with the electorate. The Internet has emerged as a vital tool, enabling politicians to connect directly with citizens, fostering greater transparency, and expanding the scope of political discourse.

The latest best use of social media for political campaigning counted the 2016 presidential election of the United States by Donald Trump. The advent of social media in the 2016 campaign ushered in an era of unparalleled disruption and unpredictability. Traditional campaign norms were upended as communication strategies underwent a radical transformation. Michael Slaby, the Chief Integration and Innovation Officer for President Obama's campaigns, observed a profound shift in campaign communications, highlighting the unprecedented nature of this change (Slaby, 2016) [17].

Social media offers several advantages for political campaigns. Firstly, it allows politicians to directly connect with a large number of people without any intermediaries. Through platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, political candidates can share their ideas, policies, and campaign messages in real-time, creating a sense of personal connection and authenticity. This direct interaction can help foster a sense of trust and engagement between politicians and voters. Social media usage by politicians allows them to engage directly with voters and bypass the agenda-setting role of traditional news outlets. This enables politicians to deliver their message unfiltered and un-analyzed to the electorate. As a result, traditional media is compelled to cover social media posts, shaping the news cycle and influencing the speed and duration of news stories. This shift has led to a constant stream of breaking news, with topics rapidly changing within a 24-hour period (Hendricks & Schill, 2017) [5]. Furthermore, social media platforms provide a cost-effective alternative to traditional campaign methods such as television advertisements or billboards. Running a social media campaign is relatively inexpensive, allowing politicians with limited resources to compete with well-established candidates. This leveling of the playing field promotes democratic participation and equal opportunities for all candidates.

In Conclusion, Social media has transformed political campaigning, offering politicians unique opportunities to engage with voters and shape public opinion. The advantages of direct communication, wider reach, and cost-effectiveness make it an indispensable tool for modern political campaigns. However, challenges such as misinformation, privacy concerns, and the potential for polarization must be addressed to ensure the responsible use of social media in the democratic process. By promoting transparency, fact-checking, and responsible data practices, policymakers can harness the potential of social media as a force for positive political change. Furthermore, individuals must cultivate media literacy skills and critically evaluate the information they encounter on social media to make informed decisions. With the right approach, social media can serve as a catalyst for informed discussions, democratic participation, and good governance in the digital age.

Presence of Narendra Modi on social media
Narendra Modi successfully leveraged the available social media platforms to his advantage, demonstrating his aptitude as a digital influencer. While others believed they were progressing adequately without digital means, Modi recognized the immense potential of social media and harnessed it to its fullest extent (IIDE, 2023).

In an effort to enhance his interaction with well-wishers on social media, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made his debut on Instagram on November 12, 2014. His inaugural post featured a photo taken during the 25th ASEAN Summit in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar. Before joining Instagram, the Prime Minister had already established a significant presence on various popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google+. Through frequent tweets, Facebook posts, and engagement on other sites, he effectively connected with millions of followers and supporters worldwide. Narendra Modi actively utilized platforms like StumbleUpon, Pinterest, Tumblr, and LinkedIn, in addition to sharing photographs on Flickr. The Prime Minister consistently encouraged the use of digital platforms and recognized their value in connecting with the public. He utilized social media to showcase the government's achievements and motivate individuals to contribute to the nation through initiatives like the Swachh Bharat Mission. This strategic use of social media not only disseminated messages directly from the Prime Minister but also fostered strong leadership by establishing a direct channel of communication between the people and their leader (pmindia.gov.in.)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has garnered immense popularity on social media platforms, making him one of the most influential politicians globally. With a staggering 44 million followers on Facebook, 77.8 million followers on Twitter, 47.5 million Facebook likes, 57.2 million Instagram followers, and 9.2 million YouTube subscribers, he has achieved remarkable engagement. Notably, PM Modi holds the distinction of being the most-followed Indian on Twitter and the most-followed world leader on Instagram. His active presence on these platforms involves sharing personal photos and expressing his thoughts. Notably, former US President Donald Trump acknowledged that Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg informed him of PM Modi's remarkable following, positioning him as the second most followed figure on Facebook globally (The Economics Time, 2020).

Use of social media as a political campaign tool
Obama is widely recognized as the first social media president of the USA, and Modi has similarly earned the distinction of being India's first social media prime minister. Modi's election campaign team devised numerous innovative methods to captivate the Indian citizens, offering them intriguing insights into Modi's vision for a more prosperous India in the event that he assumed power. The strategies employed by Modi during his campaign for prime minister were notably influenced by the presidential campaign of Barack Obama (Das, 2014).

In India's social media history, the most widely shared and liked message can be traced back to May 15, 2014. It was a

tweet from the account @narendramodi, where he declared "India has won." This momentous occasion marked the Bharatiya Janata Party's triumph in the elections, securing the largest mandate in thirty years and paving the way for Narendra Modi to become the next prime minister. The tweet, carefully crafted to acknowledge and appreciate the dedicated online supporters who had served as his virtual soldiers throughout the campaign, garnered significant attention. At that time, Modi ranked as the third most followed politician on social media (Raguhunathan 2014) [16]. Journalists and critics of Narendra Modi also believe that it was social media that made it possible for Modi to win the election in 2014 (The Guardian, 2014). In his electoral campaigns, Modi's team actively engaged renowned advertising powerhouses like McCann World Group, Ogilvy, and Mather, among others. The inclusion of these esteemed advertising experts is widely acknowledged to have played a significant role in Modi's electoral triumph (Pandey, 2014).

The social media team of Prime Minister Modi faced several unique challenges while managing his online presence. Firstly, as the leader of a state, their task was to elevate Modi's image to that of a national-level leader. Secondly, considering his limited proficiency in English, they strategically utilized social media platforms to communicate with the English-speaking urban population in India. Lastly, despite being a 63-year-old individual, social media provided an avenue for Modi to effectively engage with the youth demographic in the country (Pandey, 2014). During the election campaign, Narendra Modi gained significant popularity, often referred to by the acronym "Namo." His political campaign team effectively utilized social media to engage with voters and created catchy phrases that resonated with the public (Business Today, 2019).

Modi's adept use of social media platforms, such as Twitter, played a crucial role in crafting and maintaining his carefully curated online image. This image effectively straddled two spaces - representing values and tradition while also projecting a sense of globalized modernity (Pal, 2015) [15]. By utilizing various social media outlets simultaneously, Modi's campaign team was able to exercise control over the initial dissemination of news and imagery, reinforcing his desired image. Each platform served a specific purpose in reinforcing different facets of Modi's persona. For instance, his Facebook page showcased his family values by featuring photographs of his mother, while his Pinterest profile highlighted development initiatives. On Twitter, Modi shared banal but positive messages, offering glimpses into his campaign's image management strategy. (Pal, 2015) [15]. The success of Modi's online campaign is evidenced by the widespread dissemination of his content and the virality of certain posts, such as his selfies. The strategic use of social media allowed Modi to reach new audiences and reshape his public image from a controversial figure associated with the 2002 Gujarat riots to a symbol of modernity and development. The inclusion of merchandise featuring Modi's image, such as laptop bags and smartphone skins, further solidified his brand (Pal, 2015) [15]. Modi's adoption of social media as a communication tool further facilitated his engagement with the youth. Recognizing the power and reach of these platforms, he actively utilized channels such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to directly connect with young Indians. Through his social media presence, Modi leveraged the global narrative of technological progress to project an image of himself as a

forward-thinking leader, committed to steering India towards a future aligned with the modern blueprints of the global North.

During his address to the Shri Ram College of Commerce in 2007, Prime Minister Modi employed a captivating metaphor to depict a transformational vision for India's future. By stating that Indians in the past were "snake charmers," but the Indian youth of the future would be "mouse charmers," he strategically framed a narrative that resonated with the aspirations of the young generation. This statement represented a shift from traditional occupations to a technology-driven society, thereby positioning Modi as a leader who understood and embraced the global trends of progress and innovation (NDTV, 2013). Modi became the world's second most popular head of state on Facebook within a month of assuming the prime ministership. This early success signaled a significant shift in political communication strategies, where leaders could directly connect with citizens and bypass traditional intermediaries (Goyal, 2014) [4].

The subsequent years witnessed an even more remarkable development, as highlighted by Burson Cohn and Wolfe (2019). In 2019, Narendra Modi not only solidified his position as the most-liked leader on Facebook but also garnered a staggering 43.5 million likes on his personal page and 13.7 million likes on his institutional Prime Minister of India page. These statistics emphasize the extraordinary reach and influence that Modi's online presence has achieved, surpassing his counterparts around the globe (Cohn and Wolfe 2019). The popularity of Modi's Facebook pages underscores the power of social media platforms as a tool for political mobilization and engagement. It enables leaders to directly communicate their vision, policies, and achievements to a vast audience, transcending geographical boundaries and demographic differences. This level of accessibility and connectivity fosters a sense of inclusion and participation among citizens, strengthening the bond between the political leadership and the public.

Use of social media as a prime minister for Governance

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech at the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York said: "Social media can be used as a weapon for good governance and empowerment of the people and urged world leaders to adopt a 'global approach' to address the challenges of terrorism, climate change, and development" (The Hindu, 2019). The Prime Minister consistently encouraged the use of digital platforms and recognized their value in connecting with the public. He utilized social media to showcase the government's achievements and motivate individuals to contribute to the nation through initiatives like the Swachh Bharat Mission. This strategic use of social media not only disseminated messages directly from the Prime Minister but also fostered strong leadership by establishing a direct channel of communication between the people and their leader (pmindia.gov.in.)

The emergence of social media platforms enabled political leaders to bypass traditional media channels, effectively ignoring critics and directly engaging with their target audience. One prominent example of this phenomenon can be observed in the political style of Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India. Modi has skillfully harnessed the power of social media to develop a distinct style of interactive and continuous political communication,

allowing him to shape public opinion and advance his political agenda. (pmindia.gov.in.) By leveraging social media, Modi has successfully built and promoted pan-India campaigns, such as Swachh Bharat (Clean India) and the Fit India Movement. These campaigns exemplify Modi's adept use of social media for both agenda-building and policy crowdsourcing. Through his online presence, Modi has effectively connected with millions of citizens, encouraging them to actively participate in initiatives that aim to bring about positive social change. (pmindia.gov.in.)

The Swachh Bharat campaign launched in 2014, aimed to create a cleaner and more hygienic India. Through social media, Modi engaged citizens, mobilizing them to join the movement by sharing personal stories, photographs, and videos of themselves participating in cleanliness drives. This interactive approach facilitated a sense of ownership and collective responsibility among citizens, transcending geographical boundaries and encouraging participation from all corners of the country. Similarly, the Fit India Movement, launched more recently, emphasizes the importance of physical activity and sports in citizens' daily lives. Leveraging social media platforms, Modi has created an inclusive and participatory environment where citizens are encouraged to share their fitness journeys, inspirational stories, and personal achievements. By crowdsourcing ideas and experiences, Modi has effectively involved citizens in shaping the policies and initiatives of the movement, creating a sense of ownership and collective commitment towards a healthier nation. Through his adept use of social media, Modi has effectively bridged the gap between the government and the people, enabling a two-way communication channel that is interactive and continuous. By bypassing traditional media channels and directly reaching out to the masses, Modi has been able to effectively shape public opinion, build a strong political brand, and mobilize citizens toward his vision of a better India.

Social media has become an integral part of modern society, influencing various aspects of our lives, such as communication, education, entertainment, business, and politics. It is also a powerful tool for governance, as it enables the government to interact with the citizens, disseminate information, solicit feedback, address grievances, and promote policies. The Modi government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has been one of the most active and innovative users of social media for governance in India, leveraging its potential to reach out to the masses, showcase its achievements, counter its critics, and project its vision. One of the main advantages of social media for governance is that it provides a direct and instant channel of communication between the government and the citizens, bypassing the traditional media and intermediaries. Modi, who is known as India's social media star, has been using various platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn to communicate his messages, share his views, announce his decisions and celebrate his milestones. He has also launched his own mobile app, Narendra Modi App, which provides updates on his activities, initiatives and speeches. He has also used social media to engage with the people through various campaigns and initiatives, such as Mann Ki Baat (a monthly radio address), MyGov (a citizen engagement platform), Selfie with Daughter (a campaign to promote girl child education), Pariksha Pe Charcha (a dialogue with students on exam stress) and Fit India Movement (a campaign to

encourage physical fitness) (the conversation, 2017).

Modi has also used social media to interact with various stakeholders, such as celebrities, influencers, entrepreneurs, journalists, academics, and foreign leaders. He has also used social media to acknowledge the achievements and contributions of various individuals and groups, such as scientists, soldiers, farmers, teachers, and sportspersons. He has also used social media to express his solidarity and support for the victims of natural disasters, terrorist attacks, and other crises (the conversation, 2017).

Another benefit of social media for governance is that it enables the government to provide timely and accurate information to the public on various issues and policies. Modi has used social media to inform the people about the various schemes and programs launched by his government, such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (a cleanliness campaign), Digital India (a digital empowerment initiative), Make in India (a manufacturing boost initiative), Skill India (a skill development initiative), Startup India (an entrepreneurship promotion initiative) and Ayushman Bharat (a health insurance scheme) (the conversation, 2017). He has also used social media to explain the rationale and benefits of some of his bold and controversial decisions, such as demonetization (a currency ban), GST (a tax reform) and abrogation of Article 370 (a constitutional amendment on Jammu and Kashmir) (New Indian Express, 2021).

Modi has also used social media to enhance the transparency and accountability of his government, by sharing data and reports on various indicators of development, such as GDP growth, inflation rate, fiscal deficit, foreign exchange reserves, ease of doing business ranking, etc. He has also used social media to showcase the impact and outcomes of his policies and schemes on various sectors and segments of society (The conversation, 2017).

A third advantage of social media for governance is that it allows the government to receive feedback and suggestions from the citizens on various issues and policies. Modi has used social media to invite ideas and input from people on various topics, such as budget proposals.

Use of social media as a tool for international communication

Prime Minister Modi's unconventional approach to engaging with foreign audiences through social media platforms has gained international attention. His use of Weibo, a Chinese social media platform, before his visit to China in 2015 generated significant interest. His first post on Weibo, "Hello China! Looking forward to interacting with Chinese friends through Weibo," was widely shared and commented on by Weibo users. Similarly, his tweet prior to his arrival in Japan received an enthusiastic response. These messages were likely part of his efforts to promote the Act East policy.

Another example is the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mr. Mark Rutte, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi exchanged unique greetings on social media during Mr. Rutte's ongoing visit to India. Prime Minister Modi extended a welcome to Mr. Rutte in the Dutch language, to which Mr. Rutte responded in Hindi. Both leaders conveyed their excitement to meet and enhance the bilateral relations between their respective nations (pmindia.gov.in.) The Prime Minister has effectively utilized Twitter as a means of conducting foreign policy by establishing positive personal relationships with global leaders. Through this form of digital diplomacy, he expressed congratulations to British

Prime Minister David Cameron following his election victory, engaged with US President Barack Obama by tagging him in tweets, and held Twitter conversations with Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (BBC, 2015). During his visit to Japan, the Prime Minister leveraged Twitter to emphasize his close friendship with PM Shinzo Abe, a relationship that was playfully referred to as a "Twitter bromance" by CNBC. Additionally, the Prime Minister expressed gratitude to President Obama for writing a short profile about him in Time magazine, using Twitter as the platform for his thanks. Notably, Mr. Modi and his team made a deliberate choice to tweet in different languages, depending on their travel destinations, using Japanese in Tokyo, French in Paris, and Mandarin in China.

The Prime Minister's affinity for selfies is widely recognized, as he even managed to convince the usually formal Chinese Premier Li Keqiang to take a selfie with him. Twitter serves as a medium for the Prime Minister to extend festival wishes, exchange messages with celebrities, and engage with his cabinet colleagues.

In summary, the Prime Minister's adept use of Twitter diplomacy has enabled him to cultivate strong personal connections with world leaders, showcase his international friendships, and effectively communicate on global platforms (BBC, 2015). Scholars argue that Prime Minister Modi's charismatic interactions with world leaders now serve as a strategic advantage for India's soft power in the region. According to Heng (2016), communication aimed at building Brand Modi and Brand India primarily targets the diaspora. Modi's tweets, such as "Our diaspora is our 'Rashtradoots.' We are immensely proud of their accomplishments and their passion towards India & India's progress" in 2017, highlight the significance of engaging with the diaspora. Engaging the diaspora has been a consistent aspect of Modi's foreign policy communication, driven by the belief that well-structured diaspora bonds can directly finance key development priorities. This approach allows individuals in the diaspora, beyond entrepreneurs and financiers, to contribute to India's growth story and benefit economically, as encouraged by Modi (Subramanya 2015) [19]. Initiatives like e-visas and MADAD (meaning "help") are specifically tailored to address the grievances of overseas Indians online, further emphasizing the focus on the diaspora. These initiatives, as highlighted by Jain (2015) [12], aim to facilitate the diaspora's involvement and support in India's development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, social media has emerged as a powerful tool for political communication and campaigning, revolutionizing the way politicians connect with constituents and shape public opinion. It offers several advantages, including direct interaction with voters, wider reach, and cost-effectiveness. Social media allows politicians to bypass traditional media channels and engage with the public in real-time, fostering transparency and promoting democratic participation.

However, the use of social media as a political campaigning tool is not without challenges. The spread of misinformation and fake news poses a threat to the integrity of political campaigns, requiring responsible information sharing and fact-checking. Privacy and data security concerns also arise due to the collection and use of personal data for targeted advertising and micro-targeting. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensure the responsible use of social media in the democratic process.

The impact of social media on democratic processes is a subject of ongoing debate. While it can enhance political participation and empower marginalized voices, it can also contribute to echo chambers and polarization. The algorithms used by social media platforms may reinforce filter bubbles, limiting exposure to diverse perspectives. Striking a balance between inclusivity and responsible information sharing is essential for leveraging the potential of social media as a political communication tool.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has successfully utilized social media to connect with citizens and shape public opinion. His active presence on various platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, has allowed him to engage directly with millions of followers. Through social media, Modi has showcased government achievements, promoted initiatives, and encouraged citizen participation in various campaigns.

Modi's strategic use of social media for governance has facilitated direct and instant communication with the public, provided timely and accurate information on policies and initiatives, and enabled feedback and suggestions from citizens. Social media has enhanced transparency, accountability, and public engagement in governance processes.

Furthermore, Modi's use of social media as a tool for international communication has allowed him to engage with global leaders, promote bilateral relationships, and enhance India's soft power on the international stage. Twitter diplomacy has played a significant role in establishing personal connections with world leaders and showcasing India's global friendships.

In conclusion, social media has transformed political communication and campaigning, providing unique opportunities for politicians to engage with voters, shape public opinion, and promote good governance. However, responsible information sharing, addressing challenges such as misinformation and privacy concerns, and promoting inclusive dialogue are essential for harnessing the full potential of social media in the democratic process. Narendra Modi's effective use of social media demonstrates the power of these platforms for political leaders in connecting with citizens, disseminating information, and fostering public engagement.

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