

Battle between BJP and Congress on Twitter

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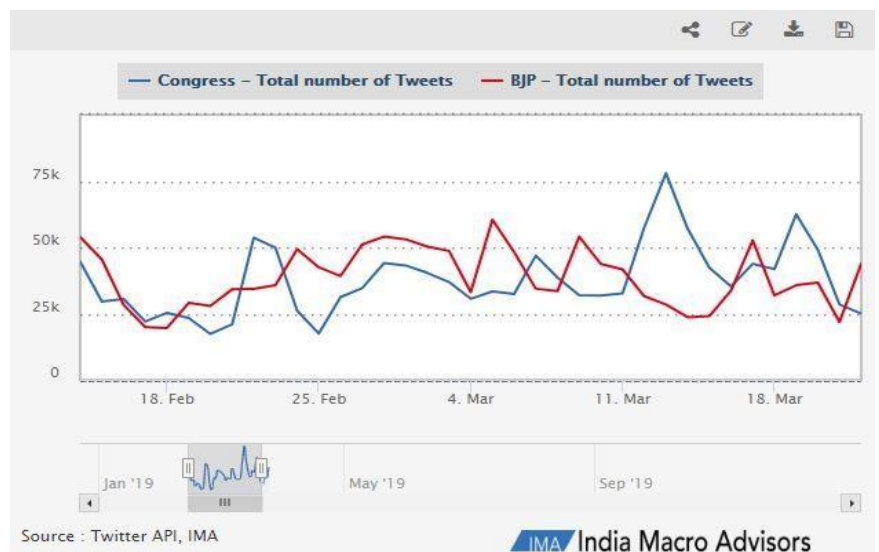
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Executive Summary

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp increasingly represent a higher volume of national conversations, including politics. We extracted tweets from Twitter API since February 14, 2019, focusing on those mentioning BJP or Congress. With less than a month left before the first vote on 2019 general elections, we see that the Congress party has become much more competitive on Twitter compared with what they managed in 2014. When Rahul Gandhi held rallies on February 24 and on March 13, the number of tweets mentioning Congress saw significant spikes. The air strikes at Balakot in the last week of February did help BJP in getting more tweets, but only temporarily. Unlike in 2014, BJP is facing a much tougher opponent in the SNS space. India Macro Advisors will be conducting weekly analysis on the Twitter battle between BJP and Congress in the coming weeks.

BJP no longer dominant in Twitter space

In the previous general election in 2014, BJP enjoyed a dominant position in the social media space. This was partly due to the lack of attention on the part of the Congress party. As a symbolic example, the then vice-President of Congress Mr. Rahul Gandhi did not have a Twitter account. Things have changed since then. Mr. Gandhi has tweeted more than 4000 times since he opened his account in April 2015 and garnered 9 million followers. In our analysis, the number of tweets mentioning BJP and Congress have been neck and neck in the past few months. The average number of tweets and retweets between mid-February and mid-March has been around 38,000 for Congress and 39,000 for BJP. Unlike in 2014, the Congress party is giving tough competition to BJP on Twitter in this election cycle.



Note: The above graph includes both total number of tweets and retweets

Airstrike helped BJP, but the boost was temporary

Since we started our daily coverage of Twitter activities, we notice two turning points, the Indian airstrike against terrorist camps in late February and Rahul Gandhi rallies in mid-March.

Between February 14 and February 25, we see BJP and Congress running neck to neck. Then, the air strike by the Indian Airforce at Balakot attacking a terrorist training camp inside Pakistan, the BJP seem to have gained some momentum. Hashtags such as #SurgicalStrike2, #Indiastrikepakistan, #Indiastrikesback, #Airstrike, #Balakot, #JaiHind and #IndianAirForce along with BJP started trending on Twitter. These contributed for BJP's lead over Congress. However, in our analysis, the boost was only temporary.

Top hashtags day by day

	BJP		Congress	
	Hashtag	Count	Hashtag	Count
1/Mar	#NoMoreNameo	9524	#CongressPakistanUnited	7959
2/Mar	#BJPVijaySankalpBikeRally	5979	#AaplaRahulGandhi	3383
3/Mar	#ModiAtConclave19	9773	#PakistanJihad	1786
4/Mar	#MahaShivratri	3791	#FakeNews	535
5/Mar	#GujaratSaysNaMoAgain	12949	#ExposePakLovers	2431
6/Mar	#ModiMattome	5120	#Balakot	1121
7/Mar	#TNWelcomesModi	2710	#FileChorChowkidar	4604
8/Mar	#NewIndia4NariShakti	2876	#GayabHoGaya	3511
9/Mar	#NewIndia4NariShakti	1120	#AmchoRahulGandhi	3207
10/Mar	#PhirEkBaarModiSarkar	2264	#NammaRahulGandhi	4748
11/Mar	#PhirEkBaarModiSarkar	6117	#DelhiMaangeCongress	1972
12/Mar	#PhirEkBaarModiSarkar	2964	#BJPTerrorism	2310
13/Mar	#GoaMining	2147	#VanakkamRahulGandhi	20888
14/Mar	#PhirEkBaarModiSarkar	639	#VanakkamRahulGandhi	5618
15/Mar	#PhirEkBaarModiSarkar	1724	#RahulGandhiWithFishermen	1814
16/Mar	#MainBhiChowkidar	7335	#DevbhoomiWithRahulGandhi	4076
17/Mar	#MainBhiChowkidar	10243	#DevbhoomiWithRahulGandhi	2836
18/Mar	#MainBhiChowkidar	2587	#NammaRahulGandhi	3101
19/Mar	#MainBhiChowkidar	2514	#RahulTakingIndiaForward	10550
20/Mar	#MainBhiChowkidar	4599	#RahulDemocracyDialogue	9986
21/Mar	#MainBhiChowkidar	3146	#TripuraWelcomesRahulGandhi	2426
22/Mar	#PhirEkBaarModiSarkar	4351	#RahulDemocracyDialogue	570
23/Mar	#MainBhiChowkidar	6945	#HridMajhareRahul	3003
24/Mar	#MainBhiChowkidar	10217	#HridMajhareRahul	2709
25/Mar	#MainBhiChowkidar	3871	#RahulForBehtarBharat	9418

Note 1: The #MainBhiChowkidar started off with the Prime Minister of India's tweet. The main aim of the tweet was to launch a campaign to expand the role of chowkidar (Watchman). A chowkidar is now responsible to fight corruption, dirt and social evils.

Note 2: The #VanakkamRahulGandhi (Welcome Rahul Gandhi) hashtag became popular when Rahul Gandhi visited Tamil Nadu.

Congress giving tough competition

In mid-March, we see a real surge in the number of tweets and retweets for Congress when Mr. Rahul Gandhi visited Tamil Nadu on March 13, 2019. #VanakkamRahulGandhi (Welcome Rahul Gandhi) was mentioned more than 20,000 times leading the total tweets and retweets activity for Congress to 77946 on that day.

Again on March 19, 2019 #RahulTakingIndiaForward was mentioned more than 10,000 times and the total number of tweets and retweets activity surged to 62477. The Congress party President, Mr Rahul Gandhi kick-started the 2019 Lok Sabha campaign by addressing the youth in Delhi. The #YoungIndiaRising hashtag received a total of 14565 tweets and retweets in three days during the month of February 2019.

Chowkidar the new buzzword on Indian Social Media.

Another key aspect in the Twitter battle is the use of key phrases by both BJP and Congress. Since the first week of March 2019, Congress supporters along with the party President Rahul Gandhi started tweeting against the Prime Minister of India using hashtags such as #FileChorChowkidar ('File the thief' - a reference to the scandal surrounding the Rafale Deal) and #ChowkidarChorHai ('watchman is a thief'). In response, Prime Minister Narendra Modi drew the attention of people with the #MainBhiChowkidar ('I'm a watchman too') campaign. #MainBhiChowikar has been trending since March 16, 2019 with total count reaching more than 47000 times. In the tweets mentioning #MainBhiChowkidar, unique words such as Vikas and Sudharnar ('development') were used more than 15000 times, perhaps reflecting PM Modi's attempt to switch the subject from military issues to social and economic issues. Hashtags such as #PhirEkBaarModiSarkar ('once more Modi governemnt') and #MeraParivarBhajapaParivar ('my family is BJP family) are the most used by BJP Supporters after #MainBhiChowkidar in the last one month.

Conclusion

Through our analysis, it is clear that Congress is on equal footing with the BJP on Twitter. It will not be easy for BJP to dominate unilaterally on social media platforms as Congress has stepped up their presence. Unlike the scenario in 2014, this time we can say that dominance of BJP on twitter is over.