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# Tweets speak louder than leaders and masses

## An analysis of tweets about the Jammu and Kashmir elections 2014

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – Twitter as a social tool allows people to express their views, emotions or communicate information within brevity of 140 character limit. It has provided an opportunity to researchers to tab users' expressions on social or political issues, be it natural calamity, elections and alike. The purpose of this paper is to assess how people explored Twitter to express their views regarding state assembly elections of Jammu and Kashmir (India).

**Design/methodology/approach** – The authors performed content analysis of 4,537 tweets that were posted by 1,420 different Twitter users over a period of 78 days (October 30, 2014 through January 15, 2015).

**Findings** – Users were found to be active on the days of polling while post-polling period witnessed a huge influx in particular on the day of voting and declaration of results. Nearly 94 percent users have posted around 50 percent of tweets and there were only 81 handles which posted remaining 50 percent tweets. In additions to people, news agencies, anonymous groups and social/political groups have expressed their views on this event. Nearly one-fourth tweets were retweeted and one-fourth tweets were marked favorite. Users have mostly providing news updates or personnel commentaries about the election process.

**Originality/value** – The study is first of its kind using Twitter to represent the sentiments of people during floods.

**Keywords** Sentiment analysis, Social media, Descriptive analysis, Jammu and Kashmir elections-2014, Twitter – content analysis

**Paper type** Research paper

### Introduction

Micro blogging sites as a conversational platform have been found to play an active role to highlight the social issues, political events and aftermath of natural calamities. The ideological differences regarding different events can be observed via various types of social networks and Twitter has also found its utility in sharing the global ideologies. Twitter, one of the social networking micro blogging sites has been used by people for participative discourses during various events that happen from time to time across globe. Examining the online behavior of the Twitter users during various global



events through their participation and communication has been carried out to look for the ideological differences of the people (Goh and Lee, 2011; Humphreys *et al.*, 2013; Kalsnes *et al.*, 2014; Lee and Goh, 2013; Lorentzen, 2014; Small, 2011; Vidal *et al.*, 2015). Twitter has now become a new medium for campaigning the perspectives of the people associated with it. Technology and the globalization of communication have significantly altered the spatial-temporal scale at which information is disseminated, and tools like Twitter have made control over information more decentralized and democratic (Korson, 2015).

Though Twitter has become one of the most important online spaces for political communication practice and research (Graham *et al.*, 2014), but there is a little scholarship on the political aspect of Twitter use as a democratic activism platform. The current study reports the political dialogues of Twitter users who have commented over state assembly election of Jammu and Kashmir state (India) that was conducted in 2014. The study highlights the perceptions of the audience over social media for capturing a political event in a politically disturbed state, Jammu and Kashmir, India. The trends in the tweets over Jammu and Kashmir elections using a quantitative and a qualitative approach through content analysis is performed in order to critically scrutinize the ideas between different groups using Twitter.

### Review of literature

Hashtags contribute to relevance by adding a layer of activation to certain contextual assumptions and thus guiding the reader's inferential processes (Scott, 2015).

Many studies have been conducted over the use of Twitter for monitoring the public activities during various political activities. Khan *et al.* (2014) explore Twitter use by Korea's central government by classifying the government's Twitter-based networking strategies into government-to-citizen (G2C) and government-to-government (G2G) strategies. Frame and Brachotte (2015) use qualitative approach to political communication, by looking in depth at the way Twitter is used as a PR tool by five French. The study suggests that the micro blogging service plays a specific role in allowing them to monitor public opinion and current affairs, to interact with voters, journalists, stakeholders and other politicians and to disseminate information. Raof *et al.* (2013) confirmed the importance of social networking in contemporary society by reviewing the literature on social networks usage in politics and its growth in political life from past few years. Social media is used as a communication channel between voters and the candidates. Social networking sites are found to be effective in electoral processes to bring together candidates and to provide political updates to the users of social networking sites. Trilling (2015) investigates the relationship between a political debate on TV and simultaneous comments on Twitter commenting Twitter as a complement to draw attention to topics neglected in the official debate. Though, some studies have examined the diverse role of social media platforms as a channel of information diffusion, although characteristics of each medium may shape the way information is disseminated and shared by users (Nam *et al.*, 2014; Rogers, 2000). Tumasjan *et al.* (2011) investigate the sentiments of the Twitter users in the context of the 2009 German federal election in order to identify whether the messages on Twitter validly mirror the political landscape off-line and can be used to predict election results. Choi and Park (2014) provide an empirical account of how Twitter can be used to mobilize people for a political goal. The study demonstrates the role of Twitter as a new form of collective activism through the mediation of technology in everyday life. Park (2014) has also made use of Twitter for mapping election campaigns through

negative entropy having a triple and quadruple Helix approach to South Korea's 2012 presidential election. In a retrospective analysis of the Iran national election protests, the meteoric rise of the Twitter platform as a purported tool of dissidence has become a subject of debate and importance in the burgeoning field of online activism. By using methods of data collection novel to Web 2.0 social media applications, can a finer granularity be achieved in directly measuring the impact of the internet on politics and society? (Gaffney, 2010). Conway *et al.* (2013) examine Twitter use by presidential candidates during the 2012 primary election. Twitter use during the 2010 Swedish election has also been showcased by Larsson and Moe (2012). Larsson and Moe (2014) have also studied the Twitter use at the hands of political actors during two Norwegian elections, 2011 and 2013. The presidential campaigns' use of Twitter during the 2012 electoral cycle has also been researched by Kreiss (2014). Rauchfleisch and Metag (2015) have studied the use of Twitter in political communication in Switzerland. Bekafigo and McBride (2013) have researched on the political participation of Twitter users during the 2011 Gubernatorial elections. Relation between Twitter and elections has also been ascertained by Lassen and Brown (2011). Golbeck *et al.* (2010) have highlighted the role of Twitter in facilitating the direct communication between US Congress people and citizens. Hosch-Dayican *et al.* (2014) explore how Twitter was used by voters to participate in electoral campaigning during the Dutch election campaign of 2012. Twitter political index-Twindex was launched by Twitter to analyze the sentiments of people toward US President Obama and his Republican rival Mitt Romney. The Twitter Political Index is a computer search of social media posts to determine users' attitudes (Moore, 2012). To annotate the sentiments of public regarding the election processes, tweets by the tweeters were analyzed by Bakliwal *et al.* (2013) in their study in which they had performed a series of sentiment classification tests during the Irish general elections in February 2011. Ceron *et al.* (2013) used sentiment analysis of citizens' tweets to forecast the outcome of elections. Twitter as a political campaigning tool has also been researched by Vergeer (2015). Twitter as a political communication and campaigning tool during Indian elections 2014 has also been studied by Ahmed *et al.* (2016); Burnap *et al.* (2016) also researched on Twitter data to forecast the outcome of the 2015 UK general election. Kavanaugh *et al.* (2016) have also studied the information seeking and political efficacy during the 2012 Mexican elections via various media.

### Methodology

A preliminary investigation was first conducted to identify hashtags people have mostly used to express or share views regarding assembly elections of Jammu and Kashmir state. Hashtags are often utilized by Twitter users to clearly show that the content of their message is specifically related to an intended or established topic (Kongthon *et al.*, 2012). Four hashtags were found to be most relevant which were: "#Jkelections," "#Jkelection," "#Kashmirelections," and "#Kashmirelection."

The Election Commission of India, an apex body to monitor elections in India, conducted polling in J&K state in five phases starting from October 30, 2014 through November 25, 2014, i.e., for a period of 26 days. To make the study more comprehensive, pre- and post-election periods were also included. The pre- and post-election periods were represented by the same number of days as that of election period. The three stages of the study thus formed are in Table I.

Thus, the study involves tweets that people have posted for a period of 78 days, i.e., from October 30, 2014 through January 15, 2015. Through advanced search facility

of Twitter, identified hashtags were searched. The study was confined to tweets that were posted in English and Urdu languages only. However, tweets that were English-transliterated from languages other than Urdu and Kashmiri (native languages of author) were excluded. For each tweet, details, like actual tweet content, month and day of posting tweet, number of times retweeted or marked favorite, hashtags used, etc. were tabulated in Microsoft Excel for further data enrichment. Assessment of tweets involved both descriptive statistical analysis and qualitative content analysis. While descriptive analysis was performed with aid of Microsoft Excel, content analysis involved thorough examination of each tweet. Further, classification of tweets into different self-devised set of categories was performed by authors themselves, though Goh and Lee (2011) study was instrumental in this regard. To begin with, 200 randomly chosen tweets were first examined and as we moved forward from one tweet to another different categories gradually got evolved. This practice resulted in the emergence of 16 categories, however, after much deliberation among authors, a final set of ten categories were chosen for the study. These categories were:

- (1) personnel commentaries: people express their personal views and opinion about the election process;
- (2) expressing descent toward election: people raise their voice against the credibility of election process;
- (3) provide news update about election process: people provide information about the election process in real-time manner;
- (4) share news or opinion of others: people share the news or opinions of others;
- (5) ask a question: people ask question;
- (6) expressing humour: jokes, fun, sarcasm, etc.;
- (7) extending support to a political party: expressing support to or appreciating a political party;
- (8) raising voice against a political party: criticizing or raising voice against a particular political party;
- (9) raising voice against anti-election elements: expressing resentment against those who were against the election process; and
- (10) spam or irrelevant: tweets that were irrelevant were included in this category.

## Analysis

### *Election stages*

With the involvement of 1,420 different Twitter handles, Jammu & Kashmir elections were discussed in 4,537 tweets during study period of 78 days. From the notification of election dates to actual polling and finally to counting and declaration of results, Twitter provided a platform for people to express their view in the form of tweets

Stage I	Pre-polling	October 30, 2014-November 24, 2014	26 days	<b>Table I.</b> Study period and data collection stages
Stage II	Polling	November 25, 2014-December 20, 2014	26 days	
Stage III	Post-polling	December 21, 2014-January 15, 2015	26 days	

regarding the election process. However, majority of tweets or participation of different Twitter handles could be traced in post-polling stage. Before the casting of vote in first phase of election, i.e., in pre-polling phase, one could witness lesser participation of users and subsequent posting of tweet. As evident from Table II, almost similar pattern is observed between the proportion of tweets that were posted in different stages of election and the proportion of different Twitter handles that were active during those stages. In pre-polling stage, 6.99 percent handles have posted 6.7 percent of tweets and in post-polling stage, 68.76 percent handles have posted 63.08 percent tweets.

#### *Active election days on Twitter*

People have tweeted on all the days of study period. However, distribution of tweets is found to be highly skewed. In total, 46.13 percent of tweets were posted on December 23, 2014. On this day, counting of votes across all constituencies of J&K was conducted and results were declared at the end of day. People were busy to share news updates, express their views and options. Among the other 12 busiest days, five days were those on which people actually casted their vote. Due to political reasons, social pundits and people at large were uncertain about participation of people in election process. However, after unprecedented response to polling in Phase-I (on November 25, 2014), people expressed their views on its next day, i.e., November 26, 2014. Thus, leading it to rank among top 13 busiest days. After declaration of results, it becomes obvious that political parties have received fractured mandate and no political party was in position to form the government on its own. As such people were making speculations about coalition of political parties regarding establishment of stable government in the state. Thus, top busiest days also included four days of post declaration of results. Regarding October 30, 2014, a news handle “@TheMetroLive” posted 87 tweets regarding constituency-wise results of previous Parliamentary (2009 and 2014) and Assembly (2008) elections. Each tweet posted a link to a news website (<http://themetrolive.com/>) where one could find detailed information about results of previous elections in that particular constituency (Table III).

#### *Other hashtags*

With 140 characters limit a Twitter user can built any number of hashtags to express his/her view or opinion. Other than the four studied hashtags, users have created 835 different hashtags in their tweets. However, a maximum of 526 hashtags have been used only once. In total, 96 hashtags were used twice, 152 hashtags in the range of 3-9 and there were 40 hashtags in the range of 10-49. Hashtag “#Kashmir” was found in a maximum of 1,092 tweets followed by “#BJP” and “#Jammu” in 325 and 216 tweets, respectively (Table IV). The occurrence of “#BJP” and “#Jammu” among top most hashtags were evident from the fact that during election days unlike other political parties, BJP (Bharati Janta Party, national and ruling party now) was very much in media circles and because of political reasons, they were considered to have strong hold on Jammu region of J&K state.

**Table II.**

Tweets and  
involvement of  
Twitter handles

Election stages	No. of handles involved	No. of tweets
Pre-polling	98 (6.99%)	304 (6.7%)
Polling	541 (38.59%)	1,371 (30.21%)
Post-polling	964 (68.76%)	2,862 (63.08%)

Date	Election phase	No. of tweets	Event of the day
December 23, 2014	Post-polling	2,093 (46.13%)	Counting and results declaration
November 25, 2014	Polling	311 (6.85%)	Casting of vote in Phase-I
December 24, 2014	Post-polling	204 (4.5%)	First day after counting and results declaration
December 02, 2014	Polling	184 (4.06%)	Casting of vote in Phase-II
December 25, 2014	Post-polling	168 (3.7%)	2nd day after counting and results declaration
December 09, 2014	Polling	156 (3.44%)	Casting of vote in Phase-III
December 20, 2014	Polling	120 (2.64%)	Casting of vote in Phase-V
December 26, 2014	Post-polling	119 (2.62%)	3rd day after counting and results declaration
December 14, 2014	Polling	105 (2.31%)	Casting of vote Phase-IV
November 26, 2014	Polling	93 (2.05%)	Day after casting vote in Phase-I
October 30, 2014	Pre-polling	91 (2.01%)	Previous parliamentary and assembly results were posted in 87 tweets
December 22, 2014	Post-polling	78 (1.72%)	A day before counting and results declaration
December 27, 2014	Post-polling	56 (1.23%)	4th day after counting and results declaration

**Table III.**  
Active election days on Twitter (usage > 1 percent of total)

Rank	Hashtag	No. of tweets
1	#Kashmir	1,092
2	#BJP	325
3	#Jammu	216
4	#janadesh	192
5	#pdp	187
6	#Election2014	139
7	#Jharkhand	123
8	#Srinagar	113
9	#nc	77
10	#Jharkhandelections	69
11	#JK2014	68
12	#Verdict2014	67
13	#Modi	66
14	#Congress	65
15	#JKpolls	55
16	#India	52
17	#ElectionResults	50

**Table IV.**  
Top hashtags created by Twitter users

### *Active Twitter handles*

Twitter handle is a unique alphanumeric string that identifies Twitter account holder just like an e-mail ID. With an average of 3.2 tweets, 1,420 unique Twitter handles have expressed their view or shared information related to elections. A maximum of 321 tweets were posted by handle “@TheMetroLive” and there were seven handles which have tweeted more than 50 tweets each. On the other extreme, 928 handles have posted one tweet each while 191 handles have posted two tweets each. Nearly 94 percent handles have posted around 50 percent of tweets. There were only 81 handles which posted remaining 50 percent tweets (Table V).

### *Participation and type of Twitter handles*

There is no restriction on who can create a Twitter handle. It can be created by an individual, group, association, institution, agency, etc. For the purpose of study,

OIR 40,7	Rank	Tweeter handle	No. of tweets
	1	@TheMetroLive	321
	2	@owaistshah	166
	3	@ramindersays	124
	4	@LeadtechIndia	118
<b>906</b>	5	@FocusPolitics	81
	6	@drmfirdosi	60
	7	@kashmir_rise	57
	8	@FocusNewsIndia	49
	9	@TawqeerFocus	47
<b>Table V.</b>	10	@EveningMail	46
Active Twitter	11	@ayaanmaqsood	44
handles	12	@Gaamuk	40

handle creators were broadly categorized into four groups: individual: people who reveal their identity on Twitter and share their personal views, feelings or opinions; news agency: it includes news agencies and other organizations who reach to people on this platform to offer news updates; voice: those handles which tweet on a particular cause or reason on specific subject, be it political or social issue. It also include handles which share jokes, humour, satire, and alike. The creator may be individual, group or agency; and anonymous: due to privacy concerns, an individual or an agency may conceal their identity, act anonymous and tweet without fear of being recognized or identified. As evident from Table VI, there has been overwhelming participation of individuals in the election process, followed, respectively, by “anonymous” individuals or groups. “News Group,” though represented by 59 handles only, was found to be more active as on average they have posted 15.31 tweets each. With 1.78 tweets per handle, “anonymous” group was comparatively passive.

#### *Impact of tweets*

Retweets and favorites are one of the important features provided by Twitter. Retweet represents reposting of someone else’s tweet in order to share it with his/her followers. Marking a tweet as “favourite” indicates user’s interest in it and as has marked it so as to convey that he/she like it. On a positive note both features offer a sort of reward or acknowledgment of the work (tweet) of others. As such to assess the influence of a tweet, both may be used as a measure of influence or impact. In this study out of 4,537 tweets, a total of 1,209 tweets (26.65 percent) are retweeted while 965 tweets are marked favorite (21.27 percent). These tweets were mostly news

	Type of handle	No. of handles	No. of tweets	Average
<b>Table VI.</b>	Individual	1,069	2,973	2.78
Participation and	News group	59	903	15.31
type of Twitter	Voice	73	244	3.34
handles	Anonymous	234	417	1.78



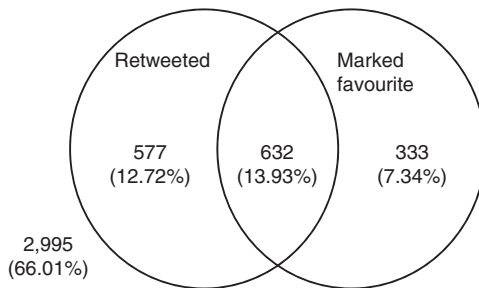
updates or personal opinions of people. As depicted in Figure 1, 13.93 percent tweets are both retweeted and marked favorite, 12.72 percent are only retweeted and 7.34 percent are marked favorite. However, there were 66.01 percent tweets that were neither retweeted nor marked favorite.

*Expression of tweets*

As evident from Table VII, majority of tweets were posted to share news updates about the election process. The high percentage of news update tweets (32.03 percent) may be attributed to the fact that not only individuals but news agencies and other groups were also active in this regard. Personnel views or thoughts accounted 28.72 percent of total tweets. People have mostly preferred to express support to political parties rather than to criticize their opponents. In total, 8.2 percent tweets express dissent toward election process, only half of its score (4.1 percent) raised voice against anti-election elements. There were 5.73 percent tweets where people have shared jokes, made fun or provoked sarcasm.

**Conclusion/discussion**

The current study makes use of Twitter to explore what people express regarding assembly election of Jammu and Kashmir state (India). With 140 character brevity, Twitter makes posting easier to create and consume (Jansen *et al.*, 2009). With such simplicity, it is thus easier to assess the content and context of the postings. In this study, statistical and content analysis techniques were employed on 4,537 tweets that were posted in three stages of election process (pre-polling, during-polling; and post-polling) stretching over a period of 78 days (from October 30, 2014 through January 15, 2015).



**Figure 1.**  
Impact of tweets  
on J&K elections

Nature of tweets	No. of tweets	Percentage
Personnel commentaries	1,303	28.72
Providing news update	1,453	32.03
Share news or opinion of others	563	12.41
Asking a question	450	9.92
Extending support to a political party	380	8.38
Raising voice against a political party	206	4.54
Raising voicing against election	372	8.20
Raising voice against anti-election elements	186	4.10
Jokes, fun, sarcasm, etc.	260	5.73
Spam or irrelevant	392	8.64

**Table VII.**  
Nature of tweets

Twitter users were found to be most active in post-polling phase with nearly 46 percent tweets posted on the day of counting and declaration of results. Days on which people cast their vote in different constitutes of J&K contribute more than one percent of tweets each.

Other than four studied hashtags, tweet messages also included 835 different hashtags with “#Kashmir” found in majority of tweets followed, respectively, by “#BJP” and “#Jammu.” Individuals, news agencies and anonymous groups expressed their views or shared information about J&K elections. Though individuals represent largest set of users, but on an average News Groups have posted highest number of tweets. The active Twitter handle was found to be “@TheMetroLive” (News group) followed, respectively, by “@owaistshah” and “@ramindersays.”

Regarding the impact or influence of tweets, nearly 14 percent tweets were both retweeted and marked favorite. Approximately 13 percent tweets were retweeted only and 7 percent marked favorite. There were nearly 66 tweets that were neither retweeted nor marked favorite.

Further, the content analysis of tweets reveals that people primarily use this platform to share news updates and to express their views or opinions about the election process. People prefer to express their support to political parties rather than to criticize their opponents. There was almost double the number of tweets expressing dissent toward election process, rather than to raise voice against anti-election elements.

Social media gives public a platform to share in real time their views, experiences, information, or to express their opinions on specific subjects, social events or political issues. Facebook and Twitter, the most popular social media platforms with huge user bases have remained instrumental in this regard. A number of studies have shown how Twitter as a social tool is helpful to gauge the emotions of people, be it the death of any personality, natural calamity or activities of political figures during different political processes. The current study reflects how Twitter can be resourceful to assess the expressions of people during election processes. The study tries to depict the bursty nature of information related to Jammu and Kashmir elections that go viral across networks but the study has its own limitations of being a representative for a period of 78 days only with few selected hashtags. It tries to reflect various forms of conversations like knowledge sharing, activism, advocacy and promotion that witness their presence over Twitter. The communication structure of Twitter can best be used for expressing a diversity of information. The study can further be extended to delve deep in assessing the expression behavior of Twitter users from geographical and gender perspective. More intensive study of likes and re-tweets can add a stronger knowledge base to the study. The relevance and accuracy level of an event over a social media site like Twitter can also be researched. Whether the conversations are informative or accurate, and whether the people have sufficient credentials for knowledge diffusion can also be researched, since some might think 140 characters is too few to convey a sensible meaning and can make a person stupid and obnoxious (Absolute Radio, 2009).

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