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Rodrigues, Usha M. 2014, Women stay away from Indian politicians online, *Thehoot.org*, pp. 1-4.

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Media And Gender

Women stay away from Indian politicians online

An analysis of some of the popular Twitter accounts of Indian politicians, political parties and journalists show that women voters do not follow them, finds USHA M RODRIGUES

Posted/Updated Friday, May 09 10:36:16, 2014



Indian politicians and their parties boast of hundreds of thousands, if not millions of voters, but women voters stay away from them. An analysis of some of the popular Twitter accounts of Indian politicians, political parties and some of the prominent journalists show that Indian women voters do not follow them.

If the aim of Indian political parties contesting the 2014 General elections is to reach their voters, then they are failing to

attract women voters' attention with average gender division of followers for prominent political leaders and their three political parties (the Congress, BJP and AamAadmi Party) being around 70% male followers to 30% female followers.

The BJP prime ministerial candidate NarendraModi@NarendraModi has nearly 3.85 million followers in total, including 35% female and 65% male followers.

One of the early adopter of Twitter, Congress leader ShashiTharoor--@shashitharoor-- has 2.15 million followers with 29% female and 71% male fans.

The AAP leader ArvindKejriwal's @arvindkejriwal Twitter account is followed by 25% female and 75% male followers out of the 1.7 million.

The Indian Congress Party Vice-President Rahul Gandhi's Twitter handle@RahulGandhi2020 has 55,000 followers with 27% female and 73% male twitter followers, while the Jammu & Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah @Abdullah_Omar has 22% female and 78% male followers amongst a total of 490,800 followers, according to Twitter data analytics provided by Twtrland.com.

The Twitter handle for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh @PMOIndia has 1.2 million followers with 29% female and 71% male followers, whereas senior BJP leader SushmaSwaraj's twitter account @sushmaswarajbjp has 1.06 million followers with a gender ratio of 23% female to 77% male.

The three main parties at national level have also not been able to attract women voters to their 140-character messaging Twitter accounts. The AAP @AamAadmiParty has 654,000 followers with 8% female and 92% male fans; the Congress party @INCIndia with 173,000 has 24% female and 76% male followers; whereas the BJP @BJP4India with 467,000 followers has 15% female and 85% male following.

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Qatar Tribune, a Doha-based (Qatar) daily broadsheet newspaper has the following vacancies. 1 Chief copy editor (Business Section). Requirements: The ideal

Among prominent journalists and commentators, social activist KiranBedi@thekiranbedileads the group with 1.8 million followers of whom 40% are female and 60% are male; NDTV's BarkhaDutt @BDUTT has about 1.3 million followers with 33% female and 67% male followers; while CNN-IBN's RajdeepSardesai @sardesairajdeep has 1.26 million followers with 18% female and 82% male division.

Among other journalists, PritishNandy has 543,000 followers (43% female and 57% male) and Sagarika Ghose has 330,000 followers (with 22% male and 78% male followers), as per Twtrland.com analytics based on the entire population of the Twitter accounts of these popular personalities.

Indian Leaders	Twitter followers approximate	Male followers	Female followers
NarendraModi @narendramodi	3.85 million	65%	35%
ArvindKejriwal @arvindkejriwal	1.7 million	75%	25%
Rahul Gandhi @rahulgandhi2020	55,000	73%	27%
ShashiTharoor @shashitharoor	2.15 million	71%	29%
PM Manmohan Singh @PMOIndia	1.2 million	71%	29%
SushmaSwaraj @sushmaswarajbjp	1.06 million	77%	23%
KiranBedi @thekiranbedi	1.8 million	60%	40%
Omar Abdullah @abdullah_omar	490,000	78%	22%
BarkhaDutt @BDUTT	1.3 million	67%	33%
RajdeepSardesai @sardesairajdeep	1.26 million	82%	18%
PritishNandy @pritishnandy	543,000	57%	43%
SagarikaGhose @sagarikaghose	330,000	78%	22%

In view of the lack of online interaction between politicians and Indian women voters, it is significant to note that the ratio of females per 1,000 males in India is around 943 as per 2011 Census. Although, the ratio of women voters to every 1,000 men voters has been [steadily increasing](#) from 715 in the 1960s to 883 women voters in the 2000s, a gender bias in the exercise of basic human rights in Indian democracy still remains. Similarly, despite a rapid increase in the number of Indian internet users, [only a third](#) of these are women, limiting their access to new media technologies and socio-political debates on social media platforms.

There is also an under-representation of women in politics with only 59 sitting members of parliament being women in a 543-member house for which elections are being held between April 7 and May 12.

The level of trust in politics and politicians is low among women, particularly considering the utterances of some of the politicians following the 2012 Delhi gang rape, and in the 2014 election campaign. Recently, Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh promised to reconsider death penalty introduced against brutal rape by stating, "boys will be boys... [they make mistakes](#)". Similarly, another leader from the same party, [Abu Azmi](#), says that women who have sex before marriage should be hanged. AshaMirje, a Nationalist Congress Party leader, says [rape victims](#) invite attack by their clothes and behavior.

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POLL

Is this government seeking to restrict reporting?

- Yes
- No
- Cannot say

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Although, four prominent women politicians – the Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi, Tamil Nadu's Chief Minister Jayalalitha, West Bengal's Chief Minister Mamta Benerjee and Uttar Pradesh Bahujan Samaj Party's leader Mayawati – are expected to play a crucial role in the formation of the new government in Delhi, none of them are active on social media.

The median age of the Indian population is 24 years. About 80% of all followers on Twitter for the above “power users” (politicians, journalists and political parties) are between the ages of 18 and 34 years. Hence, it has become crucial for the political parties and their leaders to engage with the younger educated middle classes on social media platforms.

The most prolific tweeters are journalists including Barkha Dutt posting on an average of 41 tweets a day; Pritish Nandy around 30 tweets a day; and Rajdeep Sardesai about 16 tweets a day.

Amongst the political parties @BJP4India posts on average about 75 tweets a day, whereas @INCIndia posts 10 tweets a day; and @AamAdmiParty posts 30 tweets a day on average.

Meanwhile, on Facebook, BJP has 4.2 million ‘likes’, the Congress 3.1 million and AAP has over 2 million ‘likes’.

There are **213 million** internet users in India. Of these about 90 million are active users of Facebook and **33 million active twitter users**. The number of people following many of the above “power users” of Twitter has been rapidly increasing in recent weeks of 2014 election campaign. For example, in the last month of April, @NarendraModi account has had more than 200,000 new followers added to his tally of 3.85 million, according to Twtrland.com analytics.

However, although social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube have become significant platforms in the current political campaigns, they remain but one such medium for communication with 814 million voters.

Please note the above numbers have been rounded to the nearest zeros. The data included above is courtesy Twtrland.com, a social media analytics service.

Dr. Usha M. Rodrigues is a journalism lecturer and researcher at Deakin University, Australia. Her twitter handle is [@umanchanda](https://twitter.com/umanchanda).

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