



Research Paper

From Legacy to Aspiration: Thematic Analysis of India's 77th Independence Day Address

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Abstract

Using a thematic content analysis approach, this paper examines the 77th Independence Day Address delivered by Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi on 15th August 2023. The study analyzes the annual speech as a significant piece of political communication and identifies 30 thematic elements encompassing historical reflections, present challenges, and a future-oriented vision. Each of these thematic items has been categorized into one of five distinct categories, including identity, vision, potential, challenges, and achievements as they pertain to the past, present, and future. The analysis reveals a forward-looking address that presents a long-term vision of the nation and of the world at large. 53% of the themes are future-oriented, while 83% are positive and associated with long-term vision, national identity, potential and achievements. The address therefore emphasizes an ambitious and compelling narrative that seeks to address challenges and aspirations through long-term large-scale initiatives to propel India to greater national prosperity and global leadership.

Keywords: Thematic Content Analysis, Sentiment Analysis, Political Communication, Independence Day

Received 08 August, 2023; Revised 21 August, 2023; Accepted 23 August, 2023 © The author(s) 2023. Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. Introduction

The annual Independence Day address by the Prime Minister of India to the nation is a quintessential example of political communication. For over seven decades, on every 15th of August, different Prime Ministers have addressed the nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort in Delhi and talked about a wide range of issues that are of national significance. Apart from the obvious reason of celebrating the nation's independence from the British colonial rule in 1947, the speech provides a direct line of communication from the government's highest authority to the citizens, enabling the dissemination of crucial information without intermediaries. The Independence Day speech is widely covered by media, reaching a vast audience across the country and beyond, and different Prime Ministers have expressed their message in their own unique ways. Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri in his 1964 address, stressed the importance of force of character and moral strength, and urged the young people of the country to inculcate self-discipline and work ethics for a bright future (Press Information Bureau, 1964, p. 5). The address can set the tone for the government's priorities and agenda for the coming year, signaling its commitment to specific policies of national importance. Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao, in his 1991 address, declared the government's grand plans to address urban overcrowding by discouraging the migration of workers from rural to urban areas. This would be achieved by providing "modern tools" to rural craftsmen, which would enable them to "enhance their income in the villages" (Press Information Bureau, 1991, p. 6).

The Prime Ministerial address often includes a vision for the future, inspiring citizens to work towards collective progress and development. In his 1998 address, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee announced a new slogan, "Jai Vigyan" as the mantra for making India "a strong, self-reliant and prosperous nation." He stressed the importance of science and technology and announced long-term strategic initiatives so that "India could become a superpower in information technology" (Press Information Bureau, 1998, pp. 2-4). The annual Independence Day address by the Prime Minister is therefore a powerful instance of political communication that holds symbolic, informative, and inspirational value. It serves as a vital platform for the government to communicate directly with citizens, shape perceptions, and rally support for its policies and vision.

In this paper, an in-depth exploration of the 77th Independence Day Address delivered by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 15th August 2023 is conducted using a thematic content analysis approach. This case study analyzes the speech as a significant piece of political communication and aims to uncover temporally categorized thematic elements encompassing historical reflections, present challenges, and a future-oriented vision. An

attempt is made to analyze whether the speech is forward looking and futuristic, or dwells on past problems, challenges and achievements.

II. Literature Review

Political communication is the deliberate and systematic process of conveying political information, ideas, and messages to the public and stakeholders through various communication channels. The domain of political communication is vast and there are theories exploring different dimensions like social construction (Edelman, 1964; Edelman, 1988; Mead, 1991), message effects (Sherif and Hovland, 1961; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986), and media effects, including agenda setting and framing (Entman, 2007; Schuefele and Tewsbury, 2007). McNair (2011, 4) suggests three characteristics of political communication, of which the first encompasses all forms of communication “undertaken by politicians and other political actors for the purpose of achieving specific objectives.” The other two characteristics are communication addressed to these actors and communication about these actors. For this study, the focus will be on the application of the first attribute in order to gain an understanding of the underlying political objectives conveyed through the Independence Day speech.

From a communication standpoint the Lasswell’s model of communication, which tries to answer the question of who says what, to whom, in what channel and with what effect has greatly influenced the study of propaganda and of media (Lasswell, 1971). It remains relevant in communication studies, especially as it pertains to one-way transmission as seen in presidential addresses and political speeches. One way of addressing the “what” in the above paradigm is content analysis, which is defined as “the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics” (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 1). As a technique, content analysis has traditionally been applied to the study of text and documentation, including reports, speeches, published reports, newspapers, journals among others. However, it has also been extended to include analyses of photographs, billboards, and even films (Prior, 2014, p. 359).

In this study, thematic content analysis (TCA) has been used as a tool to analyze the speech and identify various themes. Anderson (2007, p. 1) defines TCA as a descriptive qualitative analysis technique, which “groups and distills from the texts a list of common themes” and where researcher’s adopts an objective or objectivistic epistemological standpoint. This paper builds upon a specific speech content analysis approach suggested by Prior (2014, p. 362) of analyzing a speech temporally by looking at the past, present, and the future. After identifying the themes, a high-level sentiment analysis approach is utilized to classify the themes as ‘positive’ or ‘negative’. Sentiment analysis, which is defined as a numerical evaluation of people’s “opinions, sentiments, evaluations, attitudes, moods, and emotions” is being increasingly used in “management sciences and social sciences due to its importance to business and society as a whole” (Liu, 2017, p. 11). In this study, not only are the themes identified and categorized, but also classified as positive or negative in order to analyze the extent to which the speech is backward-looking and pessimistic or forward-looking and optimistic.

III. Methodology

This research undertakes a thorough examination of the 77th Independence Day address delivered in India, utilizing the English transcript obtained directly from the official website of Press Information Bureau (PIB) of the government of India. Utilizing thematic content analysis as a methodological approach, the present study thoroughly examines the speech in order to reveal its lying thematic structure. At a high-level, the themes are classified temporally as it allows for a thorough examination of the narrative's evolution. Within each theme, the study investigates detailed sub-themes related to identity, challenges, developmental policies and achievements. The study therefore undertakes a critical analysis of the thematic landscape of the speech, with a focus on identifying trends, shifts, and emphases within each time frame. In addition to identifying thematic elements, the study classifies them as either ‘positive’ or ‘negative.’ A negative theme is one which focuses mainly of problems and challenges, without offering concrete solutions. A positive theme is one which focuses of either achievements, or solutions or is forward-looking. In this manner, the research goes beyond the surface to uncover the strategic underpinnings of the speech's content, shedding light on how it aligns with national priorities, global aspirations, and the socio-economic landscape.

IV. Analysis and Discussion

A total of 30 thematic elements have been identified across three temporal dimensions—7 themes for the past, 11 for the present, and 12 for the future. Each of these themes has been categorized into one of five distinct buckets as applicable: identity, vision, potential, challenges, and achievements as they pertain to the past, present, and future. Each theme is classified as either positive or negative, and summarized across the temporal divisions of past, present, and future, offering a comprehensive overview of the discourse's overarching themes and their associated sentiments.

A. Understanding the Past

Seven key thematic elements are identified which deal with the ancient past, pre-independence era and recent past. Of the 7 items, 2 are classified as negative (A.1.1 and A.1.2) and 5 are classified as positive (A.2.1 through A.2.5) in terms of the explicit and implied messaging.

A.1 - Challenges

- A.1.1 - Reflecting on India's thousand years of subjugation by foreign powers, the Prime Minister sheds light on how seemingly inconsequential historical events can cast a long shadow over a nation's destiny (Press Information Bureau, 2023, para. 11).
- A.1.2 - The historical baggage inherited from those times has led to the inheritance of many challenges. However, the focus of the speech is not on the past challenges but on the achievements (Press Information Bureau, 2023, para. 5).

A.2 - Achievements

- A.2.1 - The Prime Minister talks about positive developments like the significant reduction of poverty as almost 13.5 crore (135 million) people from the bottom of the pyramid moved to the middle-income group (Press Information Bureau, 2023, para. 56).
- A.2.2 - He acknowledges India's notable advancements across diverse sectors. These include strides in renewable energy and green hydrogen adoption, as well as remarkable developments in space technology (Press Information Bureau, 2023, para. 64). He mentions the pioneering Vande Bharat Bullet Train project to underscore the nation's commitment to infrastructure transformation (Press Information Bureau, 2023, para. 65).
- A.2.3 - The introduction of initiatives such as the "One Rank One Pension" and the Mudra Yojana reflect the government's historical efforts to bolster economic conditions for soldiers, veterans, and budding entrepreneurs alike (Press Information Bureau, 2023, paras. 47, 48).
- A.2.4 - The nation's prowess is being recognized on the global stage, with recent events like the Prime Ministers participation in the G-20 Summit. The international acclaim garnered by India's Digital India initiative is indicative of the nation's journey toward technological prowess (Press Information Bureau, 2023, para. 26).
- A.2.5 - Another important achievement has been technology inclusivity; the fact that youth from Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities have contributed actively to the Digital India campaign serves as a poignant example of how technology is transcending urban boundaries, marking a remarkable shift from the past when technological advancements were primarily associated with urban centers (Press Information Bureau, 2023, para. 26).

B. Navigating the Present

Eleven key thematic elements are identified spanning sub-categories like national identity, development and policies, and challenges. Of the 11 items, 2 are classified as negative (B.3.1 and B.3.2) and the remaining 9 items are classified as positive.

B.1 - Identity

- B.1.1 - The Prime Minister underscores the essence of India's national character as a pivotal driving force for progress. Acknowledging the nation's diverse fabric, he emphasizes the concept of unity in diversity (Press Information Bureau, 2023, paras. 19, 33, 77).
- B.1.2 - A significant highlight of the address is the emergence of a strong national consciousness. He emphasizes the collective responsibility of citizens as a family to combat challenges and build a prosperous nation (Press Information Bureau, 2023, paras. 5, 31).
- B.1.3 - There is acknowledgement of the contributions of various sections of society, including laborers, farmers, professionals, and small business owners (Press Information Bureau, 2023, para. 47).
- B.1.4 - The Prime Minister emphasizes the significance of the present time, referred to as "Amrit Kaal," an era of opportunity and potential for India's future (Press Information Bureau, 2023, paras. 99, 108, 122).

B.2 - Vision

- B.2.1 - The Prime Minister stresses upon the concept of "Zero Defect, Zero Effect" for achieving excellence in all aspects, from products to decision-making processes (Press Information Bureau, 2023, para. 77).
- B.2.2 - The speech touches upon various initiatives focused on skill development, water management, health care, holistic wellness, fisheries, animal husbandry, and dairy, indicating the government's current policy priorities (Press Information Bureau, 2023, paras. 40-42).
- B.2.3 - Another important area that the Prime Minister touches upon is the empowerment of women in various fields, including civil aviation, space missions, and self-help groups (Press Information Bureau, 2023, paras. 78-79, 87).

- B.2.4 - The need for balanced and all-round development across all regions of the country is emphasized. The concept of "Vibrant Border Village" is introduced, focusing on transforming border villages from being seen as the last to being considered the first, contributing to balanced development (Press Information Bureau, 2023, paras. 79, 91).
- B.2.5 - The creation of ministries like Jal Shakti, AYUSH, Fisheries, and Cooperative Ministry signifies the importance of collective efforts, holistic healthcare, environment protection, and inclusion of marginalized sections in the nation's growth (Press Information Bureau, 2023, paras. 42, 102).

B.3 - Challenges

- B.3.1 - The Prime Minister touches upon major challenges like corruption, appeasement and dynastic politics (Press Information Bureau, 2023, paras. 101-102).
- B.3.2 - He also touches upon the crisis of natural calamities and reassures support from both the state and central governments in addressing the issue (Press Information Bureau, 2023, para. 7).

C. A Bright Future

Twelve key thematic elements are identified spanning sub-categories like vision, potential, and challenges. Of the 12 items, 1 is classified as negative (C.3.1) and the remaining 11 items are classified positive.

C.1 - Vision

- C.1.1 - The speech sets a vision for a developed India by 2047 and emphasizes the need for collective efforts to realize this vision (Press Information Bureau, 2023, paras. 76-77).
- C.1.2 - The Prime Minister emphasizes the mantra of "Sarvajan Hitay, Sarvajan Sukhay" in order to herald a golden age for India for the next 100 years (Press Information Bureau, 2023, para. 18).
- C.1.3 - The Prime Minister talks about the importance of "reform, perform, transform" as a mantra to shape India's future, discussing government initiatives, transformation, and the potential for a stronger foundation for the coming thousand years (Press Information Bureau, 2023, paras. 40, 110).
- C.1.4 - The speech envisions India as a global leader in various fields, such as renewable energy, disaster resilience, and environment, emphasizing a commitment to global welfare.
- C.1.5 - The concept of interconnectedness and global cooperation is stressed through initiatives like "One Sun, One World, One Grid," "One Earth, One Health" and "One World, One Family, One Future" (Press Information Bureau, 2023, paras. 95-96).
- C.1.6 - The Prime Minister emphasizes the importance of renewable energy and biodiversity management and the role of massive initiatives like Mission LiFE, Solar Alliance and Big Cat Alliance in the upcoming years (Press Information Bureau, 2023, para. 96).
- C.1.7 - The aspiration to make every aspect of India's presence globally supreme is reiterated, from products to services, institutions, and decision-making processes (Press Information Bureau, 2023, para. 77).

C.2 - Potential

- C.2.1 - The Prime Minister places great importance on the potential and capability of the youth to shape India's future (Press Information Bureau, 2023, paras. 19, 23, 100).
- C.2.2 - The speech envisions India as a hub of the world's top startup economies, leveraging technology to play a key role in the upcoming era (Press Information Bureau, 2023, paras. 23-24).
- C.2.3 - The speech emphasizes the importance of a strong middle class for a prosperous economy (Press Information Bureau, 2023, paras. 54-58).
- C.2.4 - The Prime Minister expresses optimism about the next five years being a period of unprecedented progress, urging citizens to strive for accomplishments by the next Independence Day (Press Information Bureau, 2023, para. 110).

C.3 - Challenges

- C.3.1 - The speech addresses the global issue of inflation and pledges future steps to minimize its impact on Indian citizens (Press Information Bureau, 2023, paras. 60-61).

Table 1 summarizes the findings in terms of temporality and thematic categorization. Out of 30 themes identified, 7 items (or 23%) are focused on the past, while remaining 23 items (77%) are focused on the present and on the future. Over 50% of the themes (16 out of 30) are focused on long-term vision and potential of various demographic groups in the country and the nation.

Table 1

	Thematic Elements	Identity	Vision	Potential	Challenges	Achievements
Past	7				2	5
Present	11	4	5		2	
Future	12		7	4	1	
Overall	30	4	12	4	5	5

As mentioned earlier, in this study, challenges classified as negative, while vision, identity, potential and achievements are classified as positive sentiments. Table 2 summarizes the positive and negative themes for the past, present and future. An overwhelming 25 out of 30 or 83% of the themes delineated in the speech are positive. Around 29%, 18% and 8% of the themes associated with the past, present and the future respectively are classified negative. This percentage decline in so-called negative themes over time indicate a focus on long-term vision, national pride, global leadership aspiration and hope for a brighter future for humanity.

Table 2

	# Sub-themes	Positive	Negative
Past	7	5	2
Present	11	9	2
Future	12	11	1
Overall	30	25	5

V. Conclusion

The annual Independence Day address by the Indian Prime Minister on 15th August from the ramparts of the Red Fort in Delhi, provides a platform for the Prime Minister to address the country in order to discuss the goals, achievements, and needs of the country. Over the years Prime Ministers have in their Independence Day speech touched upon the general state of affairs in the country, highlighted key issues, challenges and solutions, and frequently presented their vision for the future of the nation. This study examines the 77th Independence Day address delivered by the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi in 15th August 2023 and analyzes different thematic elements gleaned from the address. His address centers on themes of historical continuity, progress, and collective responsibility. Thematic content analysis reveals that the primary focus of the speech is on the long-term ambitions of India as a nation, and less than 25% of the ideas discussed focus on the past, including positive achievements. While acknowledging past sacrifices and contributions, he stresses the current juncture's significance in shaping India's future. The focus is on the future and the vision of a developed India by 2047 is central to the speech. In fact, as noted earlier, the Prime Minister also lays down a vision for the next 100 as well as 1000 years.

More than 80% of the themes are positive in the sense of being future-oriented, visionary and solution-oriented. The speech calls for youth empowerment, technological advancement, and a collective commitment to national development. It underscores achievements in technology, societal contributions, and an emerging national consciousness. The Prime Minister highlights economic progress, emphasizes the interconnectedness of growth, poverty reduction, and welfare, and envisions India's global leadership. The themes of responsibility, unity, and progress run throughout the speech, and focuses on the need for reforms and the role of the youth in realizing national aspirations. As India continues to move towards greater economic prosperity and social well-being, the need for long-term vision on a large scale and its implementation through policies, education, training and empowerment assumes more importance, and in this context the address of the Prime Minister presents a compelling vision of the future of India.

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