



The PM's brand shines on, as an *ET Magazine-MavenMagnet* study of online conversations over the past year indicates, although it's respected more than it's trusted – and the expectations are only piling up

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

:: Suman Layak

For much of the past year Poonam Mahajan, BJP Lok Sabha Member of Parliament (MP), has had to be content spending weekends with her family in Mumbai. When she's back after a hectic week in Delhi, it isn't unusual to find her 11-year old son Aadya dropping by on a Saturday at her ground floor office in Worli's Bhima Building, sometimes with his father in tow, trying to whisk the first-time parliamentarian away from work. The family lives upstairs in the building overlooking the Arabian Sea. "I have created this office so that people can meet me easily," Mahajan says, and adds: "My son has given up on me".

As Aadya settles down beside her, Mahajan starts talking about another first time MP, Babul Supriyo. The singer-turned politician was made a minister in the Modi government's first reshuffle. A resident of Mumbai for his Bollywood career, Supriyo now has to shuttle between Delhi and his constituency, Asansol, in West Bengal. "He

has to sing, he has to tend to his constituency and also do his ministerial work. I was telling Babul this is the Modi Sarkar and none of us have any time [for anything else]," Mahajan says.

She's right. Narendra Modi usually sets a scorching pace. Not just for his party's MPs or ministers but often for the Opposition.

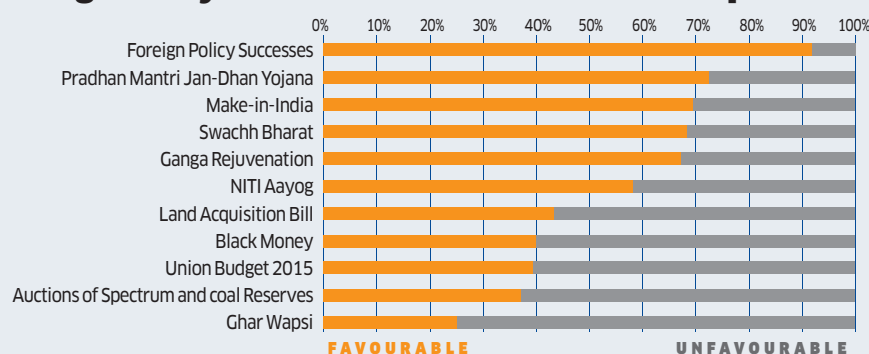
Therefore, it was no surprise that when a study by *ET Magazine* and conversational research firm MavenMagnet found that of the 11 themes that dominated online conversations over a 12-month period, at least nine were those either coined or created by Modi himself (go to page 12 for the entire study). It is a different matter that not every

theme elicited a positive response, but clearly Modi was largely setting the agenda.

Mahajan, 34, says she finds the Modi approach refreshing: "I always talk about a public-politician partnership. The past year has given me a lot of opportunity to make the public stakeholders in governance – be it the Jan-Dhan Yojana or Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. People want to be part of the system. There is a culture of positivity since the last Lok Sabha polls. This is different from the populism of the last 10 years."

The *ET Magazine-MavenMagnet* study looked at online conversations (see *How we Did it*) from April 7, 2014, when campaigning started for the Lok Sabha elections up to April 7, 2015. The overall vibe was 48% net positive with 74% favourable and 26% unfavourable (turn page for the pie chart).

Foreign Policy has Got the most Favourable Response



A Mixed Bag

The study is a mixed bag of strong positive vibes for some triggers and strong negatives for others. Ritu Ghuwalewala, managing partner at MavenMagnet, compares the Modi brand to a cult label such as Apple. "We have observed a very high polarity in conversations – they are either strongly for or against Modi Sarkar. The fans are a zealous lot of evangelists who not only vehemently support prime minister Modi and his government, but also furiously defend



Speak No Evil

What the Modi government's handling of criticism says about the way it is headed

by Zahir Janmohamed

In Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay's excellent biography of Narendra Modi, published in early 2013, the author asks Modi what he thinks of the widening religious divide in Gujarat. Mukhopadhyay sets up the scene perfectly and clues us in on how difficult it is to interview Modi, especially on a topic like communalism.

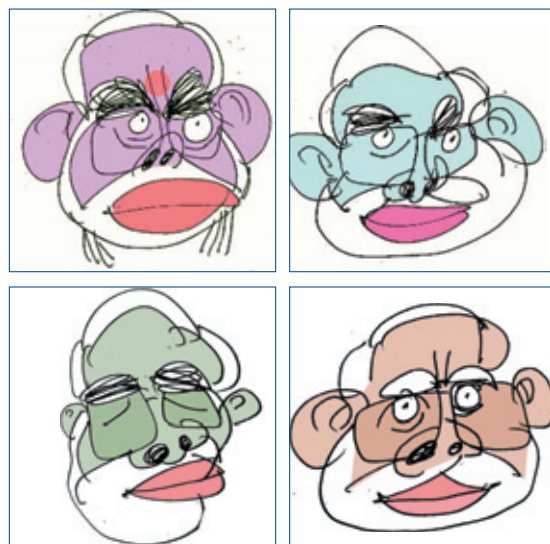
Modi's response is telling. "There is one conspiratorial group which keeps this emotional hurt alive by digging up the wounds," Modi told Mukhopadhyay. "When that group stops their work, the wounds will automatically get healed."

The problem, Modi seems to be suggesting, is that people are talking about the problem. A year into his tenure as prime minister, there have been articles debating what Modi has and has not achieved. This is an important discussion, no doubt, but we should also be asking: what is happening to the space in India to raise critical questions of this government? And what does Modi's handling of criticism say about the way the new government is heading?

One of the most exciting things about last year's election was watching Modi evolve as a politician. I remember hearing him speak in Ahmedabad in December 2012, shortly after he won his third term as Gujarat chief minister. He clearly had a national audience in mind: he spoke in Hindi, softened his jabs at the Congress, abandoned his overt references to Hindu nationalism, and made allusions to other states. What he also did was to tell his own story, something he did more and more of as the campaign advanced.

When I worked in the US Congress, I often sat in on meetings where elected officials gave advice to young constituents who wanted to run for office. Only come to Washington, they would say, if you already have a famous name (or better yet, a tonne of money). If you do not have this, then you better be able to tell a powerful story.

Modi understood this and did this brilliantly. He told an irresistible tale: a boy who worked at a *chai* stall, with no family in high places, rising to the highest position. It perfectly echoed his campaign's message that India deserves better and



can do better. As political scientist PB Mehta observed, "The central anxiety that Narendra Modi honed in on, with persistence and clarity, was that there was a yearning to defeat defeatism."

Today, that optimism has largely dissipated and Modi seems bent to defeat any criticism. In April, Modi addressed a meeting of High Court justices and chief ministers and cautioned them against being swayed by "five-star activists." Earlier this year, Modi spoke of the importance of healthy criticism in a democracy but also added, "The more we allege, the more we lose our strengths, and weaken democracy."

Modi's comment echoes what he once conveyed to Mukhopadhyay: that India will progress only when it does not talk openly about its problems. It is a clever strategy. If you stigmatise criticism, you divert attention from your own guilt and

shift blame to the complainant. It is this type of argument – that India should not be given a bad name outside – that many used to justify blocking the powerful anti-rape documentary "India's Daughter" from being shown in India.

Equally alarming, Modi is now considering implementing a programme, modelled after one used in China, where thousands of journalists would receive training to encourage them to fall into line with the state. But it is not just journalists who fear the ire of speaking against Modi. Last week, the crackdown on NGOs like Greenpeace, the Ford Foundation, and the Gates Foundation, drew rebuke from the US Ambassador to India, Richard Verma, who said he had "deep concern" over the targeting of NGOs and warned about the "chilling effect" this may have on Indian democracy.

Of course Modi is not the first to rein in criticism or to control foreign NGOs. The British magazine *The Economist* pointed out that former prime minister Manmohan Singh "accused American NGOs of being the black hands behind anti-nuclear protests."

Modi fans love to argue that everything bad happening in India today was once done before by the Congress. It is largely true, as well as an important point, but it is also a diversionary tactic. What Modi promised was a break from the Congress style of politics. So far this has not happened.

Granted, it is unfair to expect all that given the economic mess he inherited from the UPA government, as well as the tall nature of his promises. But what Modi could have achieved in his first year was to keep the spirit and the optimism of his campaign alive. Instead, we see a man throwing punches at all those trying to enlarge critical discussions about India.

Last year, Modi managed to make many voters feel like he was right there with them, listening. Today I suspect few would still say the same. ■

(The author is a freelance journalist and is writing a book on Gujarat)

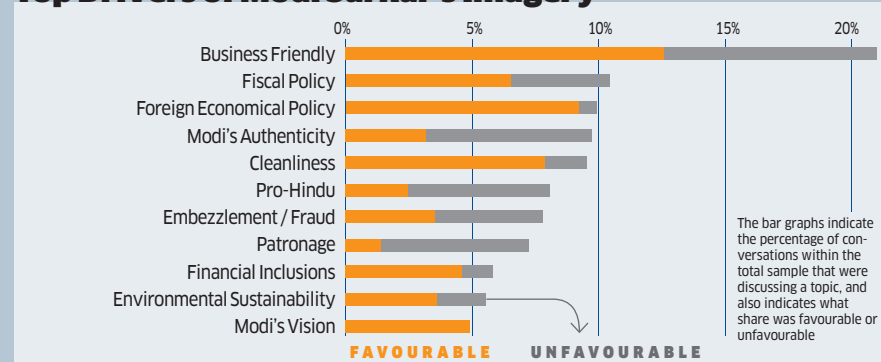
criticism by the skeptics."

One significant highlight of the study is that the aspirations and perceptions of the younger, internet and social media savvy population is often at variance with what industry captains expect and look out for. Take the Make-in-India initiative, for instance. While Grant Thornton's national managing partner Vishesh Chandiok feels industry is still looking out for clear incentives to boost manufacturing, the social media conversations do not reflect such expectations, with 70% of conversations on the topic having a positive tone.

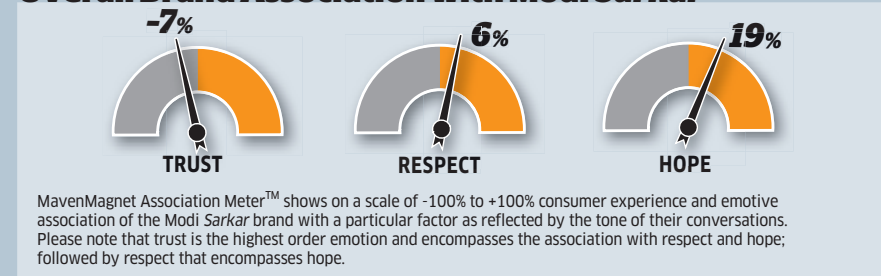
On the other hand, the Union budget proposals for 2015-16, and spectrum and coal auctions have earned kudos from investors and sections of industry. The young and aspirational middle-class on social media, however, fear the amounts bid during the auctions could be a trigger for inflation as companies will be forced to up prices to cover their costs; the auctions attracted a 63% unfavourable chatter, second only to the Ghar Wapsi issue.

The *ET Magazine-MavenMagnet* study also offers a Brand Association Meter, on which the Modi government scores a negative 7% on trust, a positive 6% on respect and a positive 19% on hope. Ghuwalewala explains: "Although many people respect the Modi government, not all of them trust it. And a large number are actually hopeful that the government will do something good even though they do

Top Drivers of Modi Sarkar's Imagery



Overall Brand Association with Modi Sarkar



not have either respect for it or trust in it."

A year after a sweeping victory that resulted in euphoria and massive expectations, there appears to be dawning a realisation that the NDA has no magic wand. Harsh Goenka,

chairman of RPG Group points out: "A sluggish economy, inadequate opportunities and an overall sense of gloom got the better of the voters and they expected the Modi government to trigger growth the way a missile

shoots into the sky."

Chandiok has few doubts about the current government having a roadmap, although he acknowledges that there have been some wrong turns. "We have never had a clearer vision, supported by amazing actions behind that vision in under 365 days from a new leadership before. Of course some errors of judgement have been made like the recent retrospective FII MAT issue. How swiftly mistakes are addressed is often more important than not making mistakes." Early this week, the Income-Tax department put on hold all fresh notices after setting up a committee to examine past cases of minimum alternate tax (MAT) on foreign institutional investors (FIIs).

Burden of Expectation

Adi Godrej, chairman of Godrej Industries, sees many positives: "Most sensible observers are convinced that the government is on the right economic path."

However, punters on Dalal Street are showing their disappointment by selling aggressively, resulting in an over 10% slump in the benchmark indices over the past two months. Nirmal Jain, founder and chairman India Info-line, feels there are downside risks in the short term. He told *ET Magazine*: "When the new government came to power, market euphoria was also fuelled by falling commodity and global oil prices. The sharp correction now is

The overall vibe for Modi Sarkar is **48% net positive**

Favourable **74%**

Unfavourable **26%**

on account of dismal corporate earnings growth, a spike in crude prices from low levels, forecast of weaker monsoon, amongst other factors."

Yet, Jain is quick to add that the Modi government has shown tardy progress in key areas such as public sector reforms including recapitalisation of state-owned banks and restructuring of state electricity boards.

And the huge controversy around land acquisition seems to have queered the pitch for the NDA on corruption (led by patronage). These two drivers (corruption and patronage) are also prominent in the discussions around auctions of coal and spectrum. Even as the government toms-toms its achievement of raising some ₹3 lakh crore via these auctions, the survey records 63% of unfavourable responses on this front.

Chandiook tries to dispel the inflation bogey associated with the auctions. "Inflationary pressures aren't necessary because market pressures mean higher input costs can't always be passed onto the consumer." Perhaps, but try explaining that to the hyperactive youth on social media.

No study built around Modi Sarkar can be complete without the conjoined twin subtexts of 'secularism' and 'pro-Hindu'. The trigger Ghar Wapsi scored the largest proportion of negatives for this government (75%).

But then these are first impressions of a government that has at least four more years to go. As Goenka says: "Let us not be overtly critical and prejudiced and throw the baby out with the bath water. Maintaining a balance between growth, fiscal prudence, divestment, subsidies, arresting corruption and meeting expectations of the people lowest in the economic strata requires the skills of a dextrous driver." It's clearly time to shift gears. ■

ONE YEAR OF MODI

If foreign policy initiatives have got the Modi government the most favourable response, Ghar Wapsi did the opposite. While trust may have waned a bit, respect has inched up.

relationship power promises growth religious RSS Adani investors corruption development hope clean benefit vision successful



deficit awareness companies manufacturing infrastructure FDI tax crony initiative corporate industrialists farmers red tape campaign VHP publicity implementation global middle class

Brand Aura™ for Modi Government
 (the bigger the size of the word, the higher the impact)

How we Did it

MavenMagnet is a Mumbai and New York based big data research agency that uses digital conversations to uncover consumer and market insights across a cross-section of demographic and psychographic segments. MavenMagnet's Conversational Research™ methodology aggregates and analyses data from a wide range of sources including the social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, and more broadly to include communities, forums, blogs, chat rooms, press, etc.

MavenMagnet identified the most impactful initiatives by the Modi government during the first year in government (until April 7, 2015). It analysed more than 10,000 conversations among 9,500 individuals around Modi government during the same period to understand its imagery on social media.

GHAR WAPSI

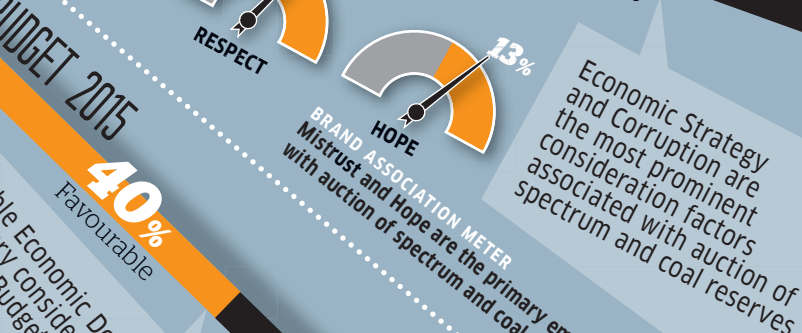
25% Favourable **75%** Unfavourable

Secularism is the primary consideration factor associated with Ghar Wapsi



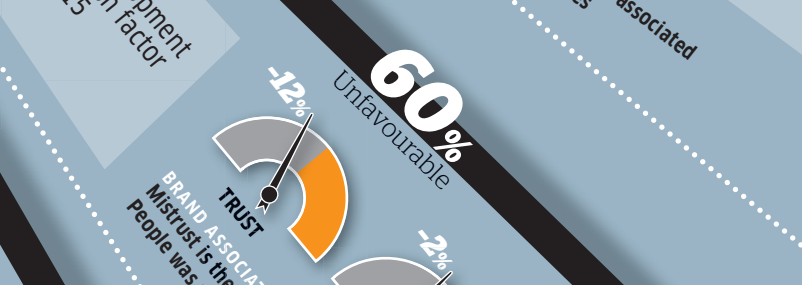
AUCTIONS OF SPECTRUM AND COAL RESERVES

37% Favourable **63%** Unfavourable



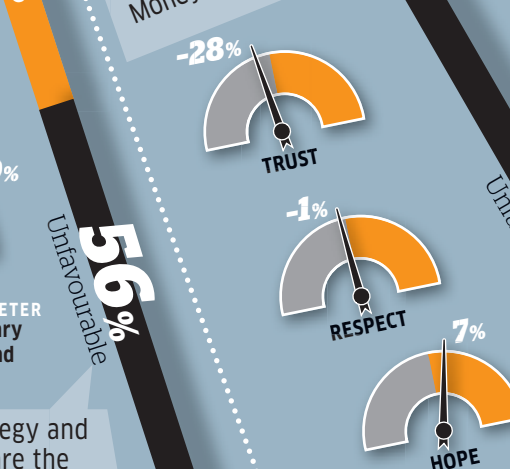
UNION BUDGET 2015

40% Favourable **60%** Unfavourable



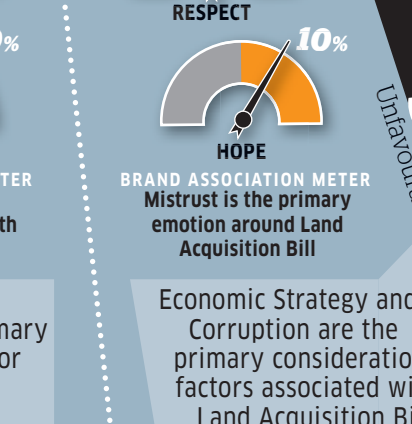
BLACK MONEY

40% Favourable **60%** Unfavourable



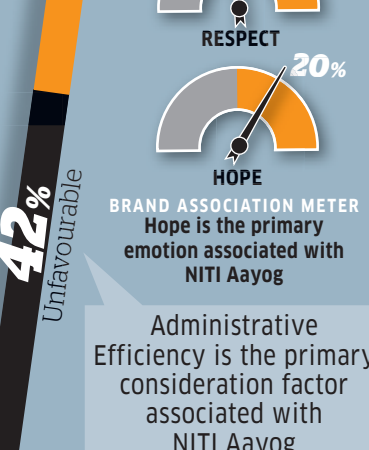
LAND ACQUISITION BILL

44% Favourable **56%** Unfavourable



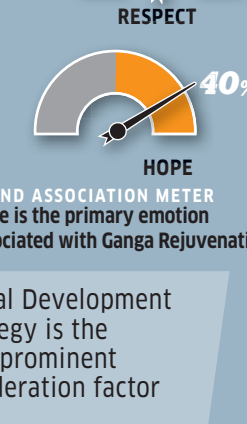
NITI AAYOG

58% Favourable **42%** Unfavourable



GANGA REJUVENATION

67% Favourable **33%** Unfavourable



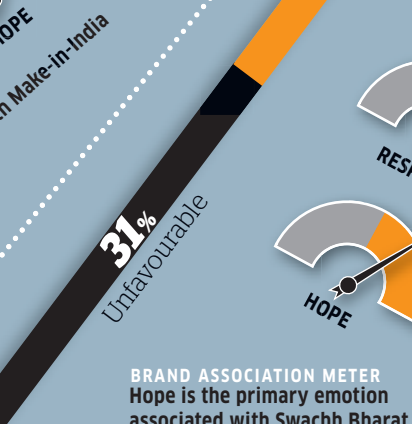
SWACHH BHARAT

69% Favourable **31%** Unfavourable



MAKE IN INDIA

70% Favourable **30%** Unfavourable



PRADHAN MANTRI JAN-DHAN YOJANA

73% Favourable **27%** Unfavourable



FOREIGN POLICY SUCCESSES

92% Favourable **8%** Unfavourable

