Rethinking New Media and National Identity in the Context of Contemporary Nationalism

The Case of Film Censorship in India

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International Relations Thesis | Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs
THE PUZZLE OF CONTEMPORARY NATIONALISM
NEW MEDIA & NATIONAL IDENTITY

How do new media **enable** the **assertion** of national identity?

Ted Talk on April 16, 2019
EXISTING THEORETICAL APPROACHES & CONTRIBUTION

- National identity as discursively constructed
- New media and the public sphere
- Identity formation through mass media

CONTRIBUTION
Digital technologies expand **mass media consumption** beyond a single event in time towards multiple points of interactive and interconnected engagement in ways that are both reflective and productive of **national identity**
## RESEARCH DESIGN

### Case Selection & Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>India — intrinsically important case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent Variable:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>National identity</em></td>
<td>Discourses — societal groups (women, religious minorities) and content areas (history, politics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intervening Variable:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Mass media</em></td>
<td>Censored Bollywood films — a ‘hard’ case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent Variable:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>New media platforms</em></td>
<td>Online discussion (social media) and consumption (pirated sites, streaming services such as Netflix)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESEARCH DESIGN

Sources & Methodology

● Data sources
  ○ Press reports
  ○ Online discussion
  ○ Govt. data on censorship
  ○ Interview with filmmaker

● Methods
  ○ Discourse and content analysis
  ○ Comparative approach
EMPIRICAL FINDINGS: THE IMPACT OF NEW MEDIA ON NATIONAL IDENTITY

1. Bottom-up construction of national identity

![Bar chart showing total associated word count for Film industry, Non-state actor, and State actor.](chart.png)
EMPIRICAL FINDINGS: THE IMPACT OF NEW MEDIA ON NATIONAL IDENTITY

2. Hinder the ability to find common ground between competing visions
EMPIRICAL FINDINGS: THE IMPACT OF NEW MEDIA ON NATIONAL IDENTITY

3. Normalize extreme visions that were originally outside of the mainstream

Ranveer Singh @RanveerOfficial

Our humble tribute to the valor, legacy & courage of the Rajputs #Padmaavat releases in 2 days. Book NOW! #2DaysToPadmaavat.
EMPIRICAL FINDINGS: THE IMPACT OF NEW MEDIA ON NATIONAL IDENTITY

4. Not only influence the construction of national identity by others but can directly construct national identity themselves
IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY

Rethinking new media and national identity

- Expand focus on how non-elite/non-state actors shape national identity

- Rethink causality in theories of new media
  - Models interactions of technology with social context
  - Influence other actors but also manifest as important players in their own right
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE
Regulation of new media platforms

● Expand approaches
  ○ **Who**: from the government to users themselves
  ○ **What**: include more types of content and platforms
  ○ **How**: from legislation to economic strategies
NEGOTIATING DIFFERENCE IN OUR SOCIETIES

WHO DECIDES WHO BELONGS AND HOW?
RESEARCH DESIGN
Comparative Approach

Compare the discursive construction of national identity across:
- Timeline of mass media (production through consumption)
- Time (2009-2018)
- Societal actors (film industry, state actors, non-state actors)
- Platforms of discussion and consumption of mass media (news media, social media, streaming platforms)