SOCIAL MEDIA AND AWARENESS IN GLOBAL SOCIETY

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Social media has been defined as "a group of internet- based applications that allow the creation and exchange the user-generated content, 'Furthermore, social media depends on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platform through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content. It introduces substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities and individual''.

To appreciate the significance of those statement above one needs to take a quick look at a certain set of reasonably well-authenticated statistics relating to internet usage and penetration that pertain to June 2012. If one compares these numbers with a similar set of figures pertaining to the situation that prevailed twelve years earlier at the beginning of the new millennium, internet use globally has grown by over 560 per cent in this period. Still, the penetration of the internet in the total population of the world is just over 30 per cent; in other words, two out of three individuals on the planet still have not used the internet, leave alone benefit from it.

Social media includes the ability and the facility to discuss, create cooperate on, share and modify information in text, image, audio and video forms among users of social networking website such as face book, Twitter flicker, you tube linked in interest my space sound cloud and a host of other similar sites.

The role of social media in the creation of what is called 'shared awareness' is immense. This awareness can be used for political mobilization as witnessed in 2001 in the impeachment trial of Philippines president Joseph Estrada, one million Signatures Campaign to secure women's right in Iran, Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia or the might lead Arab Spring, movements in India and Bangladesh recently etc. But it has also that might lead to anarchism and damage to the socio-political fabric of a country. Not long go, communal tension was generated in a number of states in South India due to sharing of morphed photographs on the internet and spreading of rumour though text messages.

The power and democratizing potential of this medium is now being widely recognized by the governments across the world. Social Media is seen to be a platform to engage people in the developmental programmes of the government, seek feedback, check corruption and empower the people. However, it may not be quit correct to say that this medium in itself can achieve the goals enumerated above since its reach is still limited to less than 10 percent of the population. In India the number of people activity using social Media is about 66 million but it is growing fast with the availability of cheaper broadband connection and internet enabled mobile handset at very low prices. This opens up immense possibilities for policy makers and public bodies to reach the grass root for the formulation and implementation of the programmers of the government. it is indeed enriching and deepening the democratic ethos of the country.

The Social Media is also transforming the contour of social interaction, changing the way we look at love, friendship, family, intimacy, language and expression, liking or disliking something etc. with of personal data like photographs, video, music, document and all kinds of information being just a click away, a number of ethical and moral questions are arising that need to be tackled. Children and young adults are often unaware of the dangers behind the reckless use of face book, You Tube, Instagram, file sharing programmers etc. Parents and teachers are slowly waking up to the reality of the Social Media as a fact of life that needs close attention.

Social media can become a very effective policy tool for Government if they learn to leverage it in the best possible manner. Governments across the world need to communicate more effectively, engage citizens, garner feedback on polices and programmers in real time, and demonstrate a commitment to a more participative governance model. In all these areas social media platforms can offer the right interfaces and tools. Further, as internet penetration increases manifold and it becomes more localized, social media will enable more and more people to get connected.

A part from our office initiatives in the Government of India are committed to harnessing social media. An ever increasing number of Ministries/ organization are on social media platforms including the Ministry of External Affairs, the planning Commission and the Prime Minister's Office. For instance, the finance Minister conducted a Google hangout to explain the budget to

the people of the country, a first of it kind at national level. The planning commission has also taken some creative steps towards leveraging social media which was demonstrated in its efforts to communicate the 12th plan via social media. The Deputy Chairman and Members of the Commission discussed. The plan and answered questions from the public on a Google Hangout for the first time. The Planning Commission in collaboration with our office also organized. A Hackathon on the Plant to receive feedback, visualizations, animations, etc. On the subject matter of the 12th Plan. This Hackathon also highlighted the power of this medium to crowd source creativity, talent and new solutions.

In march 2013, the planning commission went live on Twitter simultaneously, the commission's old account on facebook was reactivated and accounts were created on Google + Slide share and YouTube. The idea was to make the 12th Plan more accessible and easy to read, and available in different depths for the audience.

Let us consider what happened when ethnic clashes between the indigenous Bodo tribe and Bengali Muslim setters broke out in the district of Kokrajhar in Assam on July 25, 2012. Mainstream media, after choosing to not fully report clashes, were subjected to pertinent questions and adverse criticism on social media on their silence and/or inadequate coverage of the situation, offered various and perhaps curious reasons for this lack of reportage. While social media did step in with users reporting from the affected areas, and information about shelters, hospitals, relief facility also being made available on any websites, the flip side was the vicious and unwarranted rumors too were transmitted via social media. These rumors, which began to circulate in early August via social networking sites as well as through mobile telephone and messaging, caused panic among India's north-eastern ethnic people who were located in southern and western India, Mainly in Bangalore but also in Chennai, Mumbai and Pune. The Indian Railway had to cope with an unprecedented rush of these people wanting to go home as soon as possible as they had 'heard' that Muslim fundamentalists would target them in retaliation for the clashes that had taken place in particular areas in Assam where Bodos live.

This negative aspect of the social media has to be placed has to be placed in a wider context. There is one view that argues that the concept of the right to feel offended at everything. The

question then arises as to whether freedom should come first and ethic second. Why should Article 19 (1) (a) of the Constitution of India be restricted by Article 19 (2)?

Article 19 (2) of the Constitution of the India Lays down what considered 'reasonable restriction' on the exercise of the provision of Article exercise 19 (1) (a) which specifies that freedom of expression is a fundamental right of every Indian citizen. The problem essentially is one of defining who decides what is 'reasonable' and what is not. If it is the court of law that decide, one would not have too many reasons to complain. However, the definition of what is a 'reasonable restriction' to the right to freedom of expression is decided by various section of society (from the law enforcing authorities to fundamentalist groups) under different circumstances and often in an arbitrary manner, thereby causing situation of chaos and confusion. One can provide the following examples to illustrate this contention.

Shaheen Dhada and Rinu Srinivasan, two young women from Palghar near Mumbai were arrested in January after Shaheen posted a comment on face book wondering why there should be a bandh – like situation in Mumbai following the death of Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray and Rinu had liked the comment. The case was later dropped and the two police personal who had arrested the woman were transferred.

Cartoonist Aseem Trivedi was arrested on sedition charge in September 2012 because his cartoons offended people in power.

One of the main drivers of social networking and the growth of social media is mobile telephony. A C Nielsen's *The Social Media Report 2012 assesses that* 'More people are using smart phones and tablets to access social media. With more connectivity, consumer have more freedom to use social media wherever and whenever they want'. According to the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) report, the number of social media user in urban India reached 62 million by December 2012. Nearly three out of four (74 per cent) of the active internet user in urban India use the social media. It is interesting to see this data with the country's 2011 census statistics. India has more than 50 per cent of its population below the age of 25 and more than 65 per cent below the age of 35. It is expected that, in 2020, the average age of an Indian will be 29

years. The census indicated 74 per cent literacy among the entire population with the male literacy rate at 82 per cent.

A student as committed and passionate as Ekalvya could easily find a guru on a MOOC (massive open online course), or on an open educational resource like Academic Earth. Org. finding a virtual guru would be just the first step in the student's learning journey. Whole-hearted participation and commitment, evening a free online course has the potential to open many new doors as Amol Bhave, a 17-year-old student from Jabalpur discovered. On 14th March 2013 Amol got the news that he had been accepted to MIT after scoring 97 per cent on cent on MIT's MOOC (www.edx.org) on circuits and electronics.

Skeptics of social media in education also include many teacher and parents, who believe that just like television and video games, social media has only added to the pile of distractions that compete for learners' attention today. They also worry about the added problem of wrong influences, undesirable peer pressure, bullying and time wasting that sometimes happens on social media.

Social media has changed the life of Mumtaz Bibi a small entrepreneur and social activist belongs to Mandarpur village of east Midnapur district of West Bengal. This energetic and committed lady is now using social media to share her ideas with other groups and also expand her business.

The potential of social media for opening up new spaces for dialogue, debate, and issue-based deliberations, which are free from the mainstream hierarchical and bureaucratic tendencies of the institutionalized political process, has been often celebrated. There have been many experiments in Europe, in this regard, especially in the late 1990s and early 2000s- such as the series of interactive web-based discussions on environmental and planning issues pertaining to a new housing scheme, launched by a couple of independent researchers in the city of Esslingen, Germany; an interactive web-based game on city planning launched by the city planning department of Tampere, Finland; and the Hansard Society's e-democracy programme in the UK which has been running a series of periodic online citizen consultations on specific policy

matters for the UK parliament. However, the experience of most of these initiatives reveal that they are most likely to attract citizens who are already connected to institutionalized political processes, and have not proved to be effective as a means of attracting those citizen-group who feel alienated from mainstream political processes. Also, such initiatives have generally been most successful when they are used in conjunction with traditional, offline methods of citizen engagement. In the Global South of course, there are a host of other challenges that have to be overcome for effectively utilizing social media for electing citizen participation: particularly the low levels of literacy and the dearth of public access points to the internet. This would require the exploration of non-text based forms, as well as the designing of participatory governance processes that seamlessly bridge the online and offline worlds. However, what is clear is that social media does indeed open up a virtual public sphere, which offers the possibility of a hitherto unexplored modality of participation in public, political deliberation- one where citizens can raise their voice in the public sphere without being physically present.

However, activists resisting the coup, including Feministas en Resistencia (Feminists in Resistance), managed to successfully use the Internet as a space for challenging the official accounts of the coup. Feministas en Resestencia (Feminists in Resistance), documented the abuses conducted by the armed forces and broadcast them through a channel on YouTube. In other Latin American countries, women's groups organizes demonstrations at the Hondurian embassies in solidarity with the Feministas en Resistencia movement. These global ties that the activists in Honduras forged, saved many lives. In instances where participants in the resistance movement were arrested, their peers tapped into the online communication networks, to initiate global protests against the arrest and co-ordinate global action such as requesting groups from across the world to send in letters ad faxes demanding release of the detainees.

These experiences teach us that strong ties between network members are essential for high risk political activism. However, social media will not inevitably lead to only the creation of weak ties. If rooted in a political culture of on-ground mobilization and dialogue, and used in conjunction with on-ground deliberative, social media can be used to strengthen strong ties among group members.

In additional to facilitating mass mobilization and protests, social media can also serve as an effective platform for conscientisation, as demonstrated by the following example. Likhaan, a grass-roots organization based in the Philippines, which had been at the forefront of a decade-long struggle for a reproductive health law, decided to set up an online magazine in 2010, as a part o its exploration of creating a counter discourses on reproductive rights that was dominant in the Philippines national public sphere. Through this online magazine, Likhaan aimed at bringing in the accounts of women and youth from marginalized communities who were most in need of sexual and reproductive health services and rights (SRHR), through training grassroots activists in community journalism and ICT skills, and periodically interacting with them to help them channelise their experience into articles for the magazine. This process helped in enabling these grass-roots activists to build structural critique from their shared life experiences, and re-affirming their value as political actors. Along similar lines, there have been multiple experiments using Facebook, digital videos and YouTube for awareness-building and conscientisation.

However, not all possibilities opened up by this relaxing of the boundaries of the 'public' and the 'private', are not empowering. For, these new digital spaces may also open up new channels for regressive, fundamentals forces, furthering existing material and discursive oppression of women. The controversial 'Girls Around me' app is a case in point. This app, which was sold at the Apple App Store last year, until it was voluntarily removed, allowed people to use the location-based social networking service, 'Foursquare;, to find full names and profile photos of those women in the users' vicinity who had checked in (to 'Foursquare'), without acquiring their consent Clearly, the app is rooted in the stalker ethos.

Though it does not fall within the 'Social media' realm, the case of the 'Radio Mullah' in Pakistan is also insightful in this context. Radios, with their ability to breach the public-private divided, have been used by Mullah Fazullah and his Tehreek Talibanm Pakistan (TTP) in the Swat province of Pakistan, to build a constituency of women supporters, by-passing the authority of household patriarchs. However, this by-passing of household level patriarchal controls was only intended to co-opt women into a "perverted version of Jihad (holy war): that led to suppression of female education and the bombing of girls' schools in the region. Thus, the new

spaces opened up by digital technologies and social media platform are only as empowering as the ideologies guiding their design and use.

But, at last There must be well-established norms in obtaining informed consent from users for data sharing and clear guidelines on ownership of data generated. Arbitrary content censorship by corporate and/or by states must not be permitted. Most importantly, it is crucial to ensure that the global Internet and other digital architectures, which are foundational to social media architectures, remain egalitarian.

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