Impact Of Social Media On Ia & Future Challenges

“Social media is addictive precisely because it gives us something, which the real-world lacks; It gives immediacy, direction, and a value as an individual.” - David Amerland

In the contemporary socio-economic environment, social media is undoubtedly one of the most challenging domains with an evolving nature with a profound impact on human psychology & behavior. While it has connected people separated by distances, a sense of social insecurity has also developed thus isolating individuals. The last two decades of digital revolution and communication proliferation have further transformed it beyond the idea of its inception. It has steered many major events around the world, notably the Arab spring, Japan Tsunami or the 2016 US general elections. Hence every organization around the world needs to get involved to best exploit the effectiveness of Social Media, the Indian Army being no exception.

Evolution of Social Media

By definition, Social Media is the social interaction among people in which they create, share or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. It can be very broadly defined as any web or mobile based platform that enables an individual or agency to communicate interactively and enables exchange of user generated content. These are internet-based technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks. There are a large number of these services currently available have certain common features as indicated below

- Are interactive Web 2.0 Internet-based applications.
- Have user-generated content, such as text posts or comments, digital photos or videos, and data generated through all online interactions.
- Usrs create service-specific profiles for the website or app that are designed and maintained by the social media organization.
- Facilitate the development of online social networks by connecting a user's profile with those of other individuals or groups.

The birth and spread of internet has been the pioneering step for social media as it connected societies, organizations and individuals like never before. Internet relay chats (IRCs) based on erstwhile super computers were developed in 1980’s and continued to be popular till 1990’s. This was followed by the earliest known social media site, Six Degrees, created in 1997. In 1999, as the popularity of blogging sites increased, social media revolution came into being and sites like MySpace and LinkedIn gained prominence in the early 2000s. The creation of ‘Facebook’ in 2004, can be considered as a watershed moment in the development of social media. Its appeal and popularity has only risen ever since to the extent that today, social networking is synonymous with ‘Facebook’. Today, there is a tremendous variety of social networking sites, and many of them can be linked to allow cross-posting. This creates an environment where users can reach the maximum number of people without sacrificing the intimacy of person-to-person communication.

Based on the Global Digital Report for the year 2019, social media use across the world

continues to increase rapidly. The number of people using the platforms in each country has increased by almost 1 million new users every day during the past 12 months as of November 2019. More than 3 billion people around the world now use social media each month, with 9 in 10 of those users preferring mobile devices. The number of internet users in 2019 is 4.023 billion, up 7 percent year-on-year. The number of social media users in 2019 is 3.098 billion, up 13 percent year-on-year. The number of mobile phone users in 2019 is 5.535 billion, up 4 percent year-on-year. The statistics for India is equally attractive. With over 270 million users, India has the world's largest Facebook user base, overtaking US by 30 million subscribers. Not surprisingly, there are close to 200 million You Tube viewers, 200 million Whatsapp users, 71 million Instagram users and 8 million Twitters followers in India out of total 282 million social media users.

Characteristics of Social Media

Social media has come a long way & evolved through the time with certain distinct qualities. Some of the properties that characterize social media are

1. Quality. Compared to traditional media, which is mediated by a publisher, the normal range of quality is substantially narrower than in niche, unmediated markets.
2. Reach. Social Media has a greater reach being more decentralised, less hierarchical, and distinguished by multiple points of production and utility.
3. Frequency. A post or advertisement can be displayed on social media platforms for a number of times & can be controlled.
4. Accessibility. The means of production for traditional media are typically government and/or corporate (privately owned), whereas social media tools are generally available to the public at little or no cost. There is no constraint on any type of content being created or circulated.
5. Usability. Traditional media production typically requires specialised skills and training while originators being a select few. Conversely, most social media production requires only little skills. In theory, anyone with basic internet access can operate the means of social media production.
6. Immediacy. The time lag between communications produced by traditional media to reach its intended audience can be in days, weeks, or even months; compared to social media, which is capable of instantaneous responses.
7. Permanence. Traditional media, once created, cannot be altered whereas social media can be edited/ amended almost instantaneously by comments or editing. As a corollary, social media is so dynamic that content once shared is forgotten quickly and keeps on changing with passing time.

Need for Using Social Media

The urge for being connected round the clock is gradually becoming a default requirement with ever refreshing technology. Connectivity manifests both its opportunities as well as challenges. From the perspective Government of India, the following represent some of the popular reasons for using social media

1. Enhanced Outreach. Taking cue from the recent event worldover, social media has emerged as a powerful platform for propagating opinions & generating mass support for

a cause. Sites such as Facebook & Twitter have provided a platform for these voices like never before.
2. Real Time engagement. Social Media can connect policy makers to stakeholders in real time. In the recent Libyan crisis, Ministry of External Affairs used Twitter as aid to locate and evacuate Indian Citizens from Libya.
3. Individual Interaction. Social Media platform offers the ability to connect with each and every individual, which the traditional media could not. Such an interaction enables the commoners to participate in discussions and present their point of view. It is specifically useful when seeking genuine feedback on services rendered.
4. Managing Perceptions. Propagation of unverified facts and frivolous misleading rumors with respect to government policies remains one of the greatest challenges for the Government agencies.

Effects of Social Media on Society

Social media has assumed a role of being indispensable for social life. It has a profound effect on the morals, values, and behavior of people, as well as their intentions. In the society, social media facilitates organizations to engage with people while allowing consumers to make informed decisions. On the negative side, it is one of the prominent platforms being used by inimical elements to deteriorate national security.

Impact of Social Media on The Armed Forces

It is axiomatic that anything that has an effect on society, will have a corresponding impact on the armed forces too. However, the ways of such impact may differ, given the peculiar & isolated eco-system. Of all technological advancements, perhaps, the accessibility to mobile phones has changed the dynamics the most, with social networking now on a click of a button. This has somewhat freed the soldier and brought him not just closer to the world but has made it possible to interact with it. While the earlier means of interaction such as letters & telephone are now close to redundant, Social media has revolutionized how personnel in uniform stay in touch with their families and friends.

Uses of Social Media by Military Personnel

The members of the Armed Forces primarily use the social media for the following reasons: -

1. To Be in Touch with Family and Friends. While preferring mobile internet over the erstwhile used telephones & letters, social media is the most preferred means to remain in contact with the near & dear ones.
2. Policies and Information. Social Media is often used to disseminate unclassified information in both ways and inform defence personnel. The aim of such communication is to spread awareness amongst the most by the fastest means.
3. Professional Development Resource. With the improved means of data communication, it is also used as a learning tool in the military.

Scope of Use of Social Media in Armed Forces

Social media is characterized by low cost and high impact. There still remains enough room for study of the impact of Social Media on military aspects. As per a study carried out by Rand Corporation, while social media facilitates communication between soldiers & their families, the nature of these communications, as well as their effects has not been fully examined. Some apparent impacts of social media are covered in succeeding paragraphs.

Psychological Dimension

Individual Aspects

1. Social Media removes the feeling of isolation in unit/deployment through a feeling of being in constant communication.
2. It also brings problems within the family right into his mind in near real time, which may cause disturbance. Given the complex psychological environment, this may have a bearing on his performance. It has been found that individuals with stronger family bonds cope better with such stresses while the others tend to break down.
3. Another worrying aspect is addiction wherein the individual spends considerable time on Social Media, thus negatively impacting his physical interactions & behavior.
4. Social media use is making some people more egotistic/ individualistic.
5. It is actively used by inimical elements to lure those who are unaware to get out-of-proportion dividends.
6. Many individuals who feel to have been wronged/have a grudge, use these platforms to further their cause for petty gains.

Collective Aspects

1. It can act as a catalyst for promoting group psychological manifestations leading to an emotive upsurge, especially given that espirit-de-corps as well as camaraderie are nurtured in the military.
2. It also provides a sense of security and commonality of purpose to a group or organization.
3. There is also a trend of people moving towards established group identities, for example regional grouping, religious identity etc. where a soldier feels compelled to display such bonding which sometimes is detrimental to its apolitical and secular habitat.
4. It has had a negative impact on independent and creative thinking as there is abundance of opinions of unknown identities, which may be intentionally misguiding, thus shaping an individual’s opinion based on lies/ half-truth.
5. Addiction to Social Media in extreme cases may also result in reduction of efficiency in units and sub units.

Social Dimension

Earlier, the soldier’s exposure to the society, news etc was limited, within the enclosed space of units/ cantonments. Media and internet have systematically broken these walls. This has had a tremendous focus towards his social skills and adaptive ability to cope with this complex societal transition. The divergence between the older generation which is rooted in the adage of ‘naam, namak and nishan’ and ‘new generation’ soldiers who believe in ‘fast food and fast money’, amplifies the social problems. These changes have also started affecting the institution of

marriage, which has been a strong social pillar for the soldiers in social, psychological and emotional dimensions.

Operational Dimension/ Command and Control Dimension

It is important to highlight that Army Rule 21 permits the Indian government to notify rules preventing personnel from communicating/publishing in the media (press) any book, letter or document.

1. Social Media has also affected the concept of security. It is getting increasingly difficult to scrutinize and control the flow of information. The case of the Israeli soldier's Facebook post revealing time of a planned operation amply indicated the effect of such occurrences.
2. It allows easier access and enables commanders and the organization to reach out to a larger audience as well as the command in real time.
3. The ability to connect also provides a platform to collaborate and synergize the efforts of widely separated individuals, entities and organizations.
4. The ability to broadcast information in real time makes the command susceptible to misinformation, subversion and panic. It sometimes leads to indiscipline and consequently can tarnish the image of the organization. The human rights violations by US soldiers in Abu Ghraib prison are a case in point
5. The social media has now made families a part of the organization even during operational deployments, as they are increasingly aware of the happenings in the units/organizations located far away from them.
6. The wide reach of social media has made each individual a potential media reporter. Thus, any person without adequate knowledge of the event or of its likely impact, flags messages/ posts of events with an opinion whichever way he perceives it.

Adverse Impact of Social Media on Functioning of Indian Army

The major drawbacks of use of social media on functioning of the Indian Army are as under:

1. Impact on Efficiency. As per a facebook report, an average Indian spends about 3 hrs daily on social media sites. If the figures are so stark, the soldiers of the Indian Army also come from the same society. Hence, it is bound to have an adverse effect on his professional efficiency.
2. Tolerance Level of Troops to Undertake Stress. The prolonged exposure to social media has reduced soldiers' tolerance level to undertake stress. The issue gets exaggerated in areas where time for personal development or for families is less.
3. Officer-Men Relations. Given the inducement of individuality on social media accounts and the amount of time spent by each individual, it has reduced the vital communication between officers and men, thus adversely impacting the relations.
4. Inter-personal Relations. It has a corresponding effect on inter-personal relations too. There have been reports that soldiers look forward to exchange of ideas on social networking sites rather than face to face interaction which is detrimental to organizational ethos.
5. Discipline Standards of Troops. Few troops with negative tendencies tend to take recourse to social networking sites to vent out their feeling of dejection on petty issues

and project the organization in bad light.

6. Marital Discord Cases. At the social front, marital harmony has suffered due to excessive use of either of the partners of social media sites which is detrimental to the cultural fabric of the organization.

Summary

Social media is ubiquitous and cannot be wished away despite the issues of concerns it brings about. Therefore, the Indian Army has promulgated some guidelines keeping in view the security aspects. Maintaining a social media presence is very necessary for today's soldiers, thus it is important for them to abide by these social media policies. The benefits of social media use include social connections with family, friends, support groups, and networking opportunities with professional organizations. Its challenges include unacceptable political views, posting discriminatory comments or inappropriate material, participating in online fraternization, and copyright infringement. There are also serious threats like operational security violations, risk to family safety, and misconduct as opposed to the traditions of the Army.