



SEMINAR REPORT

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE ARMED FORCES

Social Media has created dynamics with far reaching consequences by pervading both personal and professional spaces. Militaries, which were till recently, largely insulated from such open form of communication have also been widely impacted and thus of necessity must be live to the omnipotent reality of this all-pervading medium.

In its continual efforts to engage various stake holders on issues pertaining to Social Media regards the Armed Forces and to generate discussion for better understanding of the subject and to make recommendations for the future direction in this field, DEFSTRAT conducted the fourth edition of the symposium on 'Social Media and the Armed Forces' on 04 Sep 2018 in the DRDO auditorium. The next day was utilised to impart training on online initiatives for small business enterprises. It was gratifying to see the attendance growing year on year. This year we saw a large attendance from the three Services, CAPF, the Industry and Academia, a far departure from the first such symposium which was held, in Feb 2015, in a small hall with only forty odd attendees. We were honoured to have amongst us the COAS General Bipin Rawat, UYSM, AVSM, YSM, SM, VSM, ADC, besides many other distinguished speakers. We also feel privileged that with the COAS attending this year's seminar, we have had Chiefs of all the three Services gracing the Social Media Seminars with the Air Chief and Naval Chiefs having attended the second and the third editions respectively. It was both heartening and encouraging for us to learn that many of the issues that had come up during the previous seminars have acted as beacons providing direction in the field of Social Media for the Armed Forces.

Inaugural Session

Welcome Address. The Welcome Address was delivered by Lt Gen Vinod Bhatia, PVSM, AVSM, SM (Retd) Director CENJOWS. He stated that Social Media has changed society and the way we live. New age warfare will be multi domain and fought largely in cyberspace with linear warfare forming a subset. This new paradigm has resulted in virtually everyone having access to a keyboard becoming a warrior. To be able to take the threat head on we need to have appropriate structures and policies in place.

Inaugural Address Lt Gen Satish Dua, UYSM, SM, VSM, the Chief of the Integrated Defence Staff delivered the Key Note Address. He started off by saying that it was Social Media that gave a larger than life image to Burhan Wani. Social Media is interactive and therefore it is necessary that we put out our views to nip rumours in the bud, otherwise it will give rise to perceptions based on speculations and factually incorrect inputs. As Social Media has become all pervasive it begs the question, are we in the Forces doing enough or we need to do more to be adequately prepared. The inherent

contradictions between the media and the military about openness need to be harmonised. In addition, the military needs to decentralise so that our responses are timely and accurate- hierarchical processes are bound to cause delays and make the inputs susceptible to inaccuracies. We must use the power of numbers on our side to our advantage as also take help of Social Media managers where necessary.

Keynote Address. Chief of the Army Staff at the outset stated that Social Media is gaining momentum. If we do not keep pace, we will be left behind and thus constrained to fire fight during a crisis. Information is a pillar of national power and the armed forces cannot be left behind. Information Warfare is an important component of present-day conflicts and Social Media a vital adjunct thereof. We must use it to our advantage to gain ascendancy over the enemy and defeat his efforts at waging psychological warfare. Our policies must aim at educating our officers and men to make responsible use of Social Media and not impose restrictions as these would be counter productive. The Forces are trying to facilitate the use of Social Media by making relevant Apps. The Chief also said that we are revisiting our organisational structures and it will be ensured that Information Warfare is given due importance.

Special Address on Managing Perceptions: Exploiting Capabilities of Social Media was delivered by AVM Mohan Rao, AD Cdr, WAC. The AVM stated that the Social Media footprint is becoming bigger by the day because of rapid advances in technology. Due to its vast reach, ease of use and availability of visual aspects it offers tremendous advantages. We must exploit it gainfully by making favourable use of it for psychological warfare and managing perceptions. For this we need to impart the requisite skills to the concerned personnel. We also need to remove the disconnect between do's and don'ts by laying down enabling policies.

Special Address- Ashwani Rana, Head of Connectivity & Policy - Central & South Asia, Facebook.. 'Social Media and Internet in India: How does it change the World Around Us'

- Changes in the way we communicated came about with the advent of internet.
- Social Media has accelerated the changes manifold.
- We must encourage people to use Social Media and not impose restrictions.
- With new technologies like AI coming in and rapid advances taking place in the technological sphere, it

is important that we keep abreast of the same.

- Social Media must be used intelligently, and institutions must leverage it to their advantage.
- Facebook is committed to help defence veterans and their families with their business enterprises.

Address by DDG CAOI. Vikram Tiwathia, DDG, CAOI spoke about 5 G Technology and 'Tarang Sanchar'

- The Armed Forces must introspect whether they are fully exploiting the potential of Social Media.
- There is need for the Armed Forces to have the requisite infrastructure and enabling policies in place, so that technologies can be gainfully harnessed and exploited to their full potential.
- 5G would be available by 2020 or thereabouts and the Armed Forces should be prepared for the same.
- 5G Mobile Technology will encompass hyper-connected vision and next-generation radio access technology.
- Tarang Sanchar portal is a government portal which provides details about cell towers in different areas. The Forces should replicate the same.
- Some recommendations were made on behalf of the industry, these are covered in the takeaways below.

SESSION 1

Social Media Strategy: A Reality Check.

The session was chaired by Lt Gen VG Khandare, PVSM, AVSM, SM (Retd) and included very informative and interesting talks by various speakers besides a panel discussion. Salient aspects are as under:-

- Maj Gen Ashok Narula, AVSM, the ADGPI, spoke about Social Media strategy in the Army: Educating the Environment. It is neither feasible nor desirable to suppress the use of smart phones in the army, therefore we must exploit them fruitfully. Social Media is a great tool for shaping perceptions, it must be used to our advantage. It can be used for image projection and establishing truth. Our narratives must consider cultural sensitivities and hence it is imperative that influence group dynamics are fully understood.
- Ms Mahima Kaul of Twitter referred to Twitter as a digital lifeline which is an invaluable resource for broadcasting valuable information that can be used to coordinate multi agency efforts during crisis. The vast and instantaneous reach of Twitter can be used to quell rumours and prevent misinformation from spreading.

- Lt Col Nick Wood of the British Army gave out considerations for deploying Social Media effectively across defence forces. The exploitation can be passive (intelligence monitoring and threat assessment etc) or active through engagement (influencing attitudes- this could be done overtly or covertly). What is of the essence to succeed is to have appropriate infrastructure which is suitably hardened/protected, timely responses and enabling policies.

- Ms Tara Bedi of Instagram spoke about the advantages that Instagram offers to the Forces due to its largely visual content.

- Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM (Retd) spoke about 'Exploiting Social Media in the Indian Armed Forces – Policy Options'. He said that the basic principle of Social Media should be fleet footedness and nimbleness. Since our Army is tradition bound and follows the code of sharing information on a need to know basis, it has been largely impacted by the revolution in connectivity ushered in by Social Media, which due to the nature of the medium is non hierarchical. We must exploit the positives of Social Media to our advantage.

Panel Discussion. Broadband Access and understanding potential of Social Media for Armed Forces. The discussion was moderated by Vikram Tiwathia, COAI and the discussants were: Cdr DK Sharma, PRO Indian Navy, Sandeep Bhargava, EVP Corporate Affairs and Public Policy, Vodafone, Rahul Razdan, CEO, Jio Chat and Tara Bedi, Instagram. During the discussion, the panellists brought out the pros and cons of Social Media. Industry representatives on the panel emphasized the need for proper connectivity, especially in remote areas, so that the forces can derive full benefits. There is also a need to enhance the technical threshold and gear up for AI and futuristic technologies on the horizon.

SESSION II

Harnessing Social Media for Effective Communications

The session was chaired by the former AG, Lt Gen Rakesh Sharma, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM and the speakers spoke lucidly on relevant issues. This was followed by a panel discussion. Key aspects that emerged are:-

- Sai Arul, IBM spoke of Big Data Analytics and Social Media Mining. The amount of data available is huge and therefore to be able to sift, extract meaningful information and analyse the same is a humongous task. Technical aspects of the same were given out.

- The Chair spoke briefly about the IT Act 2000 and stated that it had been made stronger in 2008 with the addition of Section 69 A which pertains to forwarding of offensive information etc. We may be moving towards a Data Protection Authority and new IT Act.

- Maj Gen Bipin Bakshi, VSM, IG (Trg), NSG, raised the issue whether we are fighting information warfare correctly in terms of policies and structures.

Panel Discussion: The Extended Army Family and the Social Media Dynamics. The discussion was chaired by Lt Gen Rakesh Sharma and the panellists included Lt Gen Rakesh Sharma, former AG, Maj Gen Bipin Bakshi, IG (Trg), NSG, Sachin Kapur, Linkedin and Rajat Arora, Facebook.

- In the past the Forces have worked under a cloak of secrecy. However, the advent of Social Media has brought in a new normal.
- It is now incumbent on the Services to be live to the possibilities of the medium and use it positively.
- Instead of imposing restrictions there is a need to educate all concerned including families of service personnel.
- Facebook pitched in by stating how they could help small business ventures (run by veterans and families)



AVM Mohan Rao



Cdr DK Sharma



Lt Col Nick Wood



Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain

by providing them a digital platform to advertise and further their business.

- LinkedIn provides a viable platform to veterans seeking other career options.

Valedictory Session

Valedictory Address. Opportunities, Perils and a Pragmatic Approach. The address was delivered by Vice Adm SN Ghormade, AVSM, NM, DG Naval Ops. The lines between conflict and competition are blurring, Social Media can be used to escalate issues to create adverse propaganda. He reiterated the aspect of positive use of Social Media by the Armed Forces and the need for formulation of policies so that we are adequately prepared for modern day wars viz asymmetric and those in the cyber space as these are now becoming the norm.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Importance of Social Media. Social Media has become a hugely important tool of communication in the present-day world. The Armed Forces cannot obviously remain divorced from this highly pervasive medium. It a very important adjunct of information warfare due to it being highly penetrative in terms of reach and appeal. The forces must harness its strengths and exploit it as a force multiplier - to be able to do this- we need to remove protocols of time and space barriers. At the same time, the forces must also remain live to the many challenges it poses and accordingly be prepared to negate the same.

Policy and Regulation. It is of the essence that policies and regulation, that facilitate the use of Social Media in the Armed Forces, are put in place. Our Armed Forces have been taking steps in this regard and there is a definite forward movement but we certainly need to do more to exploit the full potential of the medium in a meaningful manner. We must move away from the concept of centralised response and disaggregate so that responses are rapid. Social Media is horizontal and not hierarchical therefore time is at a premium and immediacy of response is required. To be



able to do this we need to empower the response teams.

Keep Pace with Technological Advances. Technology is advancing at a very rapid pace. The world is already seeing AI being introduced and the introduction of 5G in India is only a couple of years away. We need to understand contemporary technologies holistically and be prepared for the ones coming soon. It is only then that we will be able to leverage them to our advantage.

Attitudinal Shift. An attitudinal shift has already taken place in the Armed Forces, but certainly more is warranted. In the era of smart phones and their wide availability with most of us, we cannot impose restrictions on the use of the same. Instead the users must be educated with regards to aspects meriting confidentiality. This education should also be imparted to family members of serving personnel.

Organisational Structures. To be able to leverage Social Media to our advantage and negate the risks that it poses we need to appropriate structures in place. Besides trained manpower these organisations must have the requisite technical wherewithal.

Hiring Domain Experts. The Services must hire domain experts for handling Social Media issues and if required coopt NGOs, who could help develop content for the



Ashwani Rana



Sachin Kapoor



Vikram Tiwathia



Mahima Kaul



narratives. The Forces have been lacking, at times, in providing the right content to counter adverse news as also give out own narratives.

Considerations for Social Media in TBA. Some of the considerations for employing Social Media in the TBA are timely responses to control stories and bear in mind the fact that info operations at the tactical level must be in sync with operations at strategic level.

Appropriate Training and Skills. The Forces must impart necessary skills and technical wherewithal to monitor and analyse Social Media and react to all negative inputs with alacrity. It is imperative that the personnel dealing with Social Media aspects have the skills required to do so. They must be trained to understand the influence of Social Media as also have relevant language skills and the requisite cultural knowledge. And last but not the least people staffing Social Media cells must be tech savvy.

Perception Management. This can best be done by generating meaningful and result oriented messages. For this, it is necessary to adopt best practices such as a thorough knowledge of the target audiences. Sensitivities thereof must be fully understood about demographics and platforms. A broad approach must be followed by engaging multiple stake holders. The content must be localized with regard to the language and relevance to the audience. Positive narratives will help

Industry Perspective. Policies and regulations as at present are posing some challenges. These must be so tailored that the industry can provide best possible services. Enhancement of broadband connectivity in defence areas with deployment of telecom infrastructure and implementation of Gazette of India RoW Rules dated Sep 2016 in the MoD policy are the need of the hour. The Armed Forces must incorporate Big Data analytics tools for better utilisation of available data on Social Media platforms. Industry is willing to conduct Workshops for veterans and families of soldiers on the utilisation of Facebook for Self Help Groups and small businesses. They are also willing to organise visits of service officers to the Airtel Experience Centers at Manesar, Gurgaon, and Vodafone NOC at Pune, to give broader insights into the working of the service providers. Workshop on utilisation of LinkedIn to assist in reemployment of service officers can also be conducted by them.

Applications. The Forces have introduced Apps for their respective services, whilst this is a step in the right direction. There is scope for more. Custom made apps can be made to work in the space available between the private and the public spaces. These can be configured one to one or one to many for a particular group. This is in keeping with the Services requirement of sharing information on a need to know basis. SA