

**SOCIAL MEDIA  
AND THE  
ARMED FORCES**



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# SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE ARMED FORCES

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*“Whoever controls the media, controls the mind”*

*Jim Morrison*

“Social Media” has become an oxymoron in itself in the contemporary world. The social has made us unsocial, isolating individuals, while at the same time connecting the world bringing it closer. It is a dichotomy that defines the world we inhabit together. Nonetheless it has altered the very ethos of our existence, changing the way we write, talk, study, do business, even how we play out our relationships. This disconnect that connects us has altered the worlds landscape and we cannot wish it away or insulate ourselves from it.

The last two decades of digital revolution and communication explosion has evolved so rapidly that social media almost seems like another entity from what it was at its inception. It has influenced and shaped many major events around the world, since its inception, whether it was the Arab spring, the Japan Tsunami or the 2016 US elections. Before the Internet existed, media was all about television, newspapers, magazines, etc. But with creation of World Wide Web, media

was no longer confined but took wings. It kept redefining how we interact and communicate with each other, creating a one-on-one relationship with the advent of various social forums like WhatsApp, Facebook, Snapchat etc. Social media has created a buzz that has permeated all strata around the world.

Some people often use Social media as a phrase, to describe posts on sites and apps like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and others. The term is being used so vaguely that almost any website can fall under the gamut of Social Media, based on a few common features they come with. However, if one was to define "Social media" as a term it could be summed up in either of the two ways: "collection of online communications channels dedicated to community based input, interaction, content sharing and collaboration"<sup>1</sup> or as "web-based communication tools that enable people to interact with each other by both sharing and consuming information"<sup>2</sup>. It brings sites such as wikis, blogs, forums and both social and professional networking sites under the gamut of social media. Different types of social media have their own features that differentiate them from one another while still having many features given in the definition. Another definition states Social media as the colonization of the space between traditional broadcast and private dyadic communication, providing people with a scale of group size and degrees of

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1 Wigmore Ivy. "Social Media". <http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/social-media>.

2 Nations Daniel. "What Is Social Media? Explaining the Big Trend". "Lifewire". 30 May 2017 <https://www.lifewire.com/what-is-social-media-explaining-the-big-trend-3486616>.

privacy that we have termed scalable sociality”<sup>3</sup>.

### **The Origin of Social Media**

In bygone eras communication was conducted over great distances with the help of written letters or documents delivered by hand. The earliest surviving piece of mail dates to 255 BC. A leap in technology occurred when the Gutenberg printing-press was invented in the 15th century, followed by the telegraph in 1792 delivering short messages over long distances. Pneumatic post in 1865 and the inventions of the telephone in 1890 and the radio in 1891 created important milestones in the history of communication<sup>4</sup>.

The 20th century saw fast changes in communication technology, with the creation of the internet by DARPA of USA. The invention of computers revolutionized the way human beings interacted with their environment and world. Slowly home computers became more common and social media more sophisticated. Internet relay chats or IRCs were first used in 1988 and continued to be popular well into the 1990s. MIRC for MS Windows and X chat for LINUX and MS Windows were the most popular IRCs. Others included EPIC, FLOW CHAT, and WEE CHAT & COOL SMILE.

Six Degrees, the first recognizable social media site, was created in 1997 and lasted from 1997 to 2001. This was based on the Web of Contacts model of social networking. It was

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3 Miller, Costa....etc. “How the World Changed Social Media”. Chapter 2, Pg 9. 2016. UCL press.

4 Hendricks Drew. “Complete History of Social Media: Then and Now”. [www. smallbiztrends.com](http://www.smallbiztrends.com) (Origin of Social Media).

named after the six degrees of separation concept and allowed users to list friends, family members and acquaintances both on the site and externally. Users could send messages and post bulletin board items to people in their first, second, and third degrees, and see their connection to any other user on the site. It was one of the first manifestations of social networking websites in the format now seen today. Six Degrees was followed by social networking sites based on the “social-circles network model” such as Friendster, MySpace, LinkedIn, XING, and Facebook<sup>5,6</sup>. Blogging sites became popular in 1999, creating a social media trend that is popular even today. Sites like MySpace and LinkedIn gained prominence in the early 2000s, and sites like Instagram, Imgur, Photobucket and Flickr made online photo sharing de rigueur. YouTube came out in 2005, creating an entirely new way for people to communicate and share visually with each other<sup>7</sup>. Facebook and Twitter became available to users throughout the world by 2006 and till date remain amongst the most popular social networks on the Internet. Twitter has even more popular and trendy by political leaders like Prime Minister Modi and President Donald Trump. Sites like Snapchat, Tumblr, Spotify, Foursquare and Pinterest began popping up to fill specific social networking niches<sup>8</sup>. New social networks have kept abreast with changing tastes and needs with encrypted, instant messaging apps like WhatsApp

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5 Six Degrees. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SixDegrees.com>.

6 Hale Benjamin. “The History of Social Media: Social Networking Evolution”. June 16 2015. [www. historycooperative.org](http://www.historycooperative.org) (History of Social Media).

7 Hendricks Drew. “Complete History of Social Media: Then and Now”. [www. smallbiztrends.com](http://www.smallbiztrends.com) (Origin of Social Media).

8 Ibid.

and Telegram. As of January 2017, the mobile messaging app announced more than 100 million monthly active users. Telegram a cloud-based instant messaging service provides optional end-to-end encrypted messaging with self-destruct timers<sup>9</sup>.

Users today have access to tremendous variety of social networking sites, and many of them can be linked to allow cross-posting. This creates an environment of maximum reach and person-to-person communication. We cannot even speculate about the future of social networking, for in the fast-paced evolving scenario it has become one of the foremost ways of communication both personal and official. The rules of engagement have shifted with people expecting a more multidimensional experience.

### **Social Media and Social Networking**

Many times, people use the terms social media and social networking as if they mean the same thing. Although the difference is subtle, they're not the same. Social networking is actually a subcategory of social media. The easiest way to understand the difference between social media and social networking is by thinking about the terms "media" and "networking" separately. Media refers to the information users actually share, whether it's a link to an article, a video, an animated GIF, a PDF document, a simple status update or anything else. Networking, on the other hand, has to do

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<sup>9</sup> Kemp Simon. "Digital in 2017: Global Overview". "We Are Social". "History Cooperative". 24 January 2017. <https://wearesocial.com/uk/special-reports/digital-in-2017-global-overview>.

with who the audience is and the relationships users have with them. A network can include people like friends, relatives, colleagues, anyone from past, current customers, mentors and even complete strangers. There is a lot of commonality between the two, which is why it is confusing. For example, users can share media with their social network to gather likes and comments a form of social networking.

### **Traditional Media and Social Media**

Traditional media like TV, radio and newspapers are not a part of social media. The line drawn between the two is however slowly blurring as both continue to evolve and grow. Social media doesn't just give information, but interacts while giving information. This interaction can be as simple as asking for comments or letting the user vote on an article, or it can be as complex as Flixster recommending movies to the user based on ratings of other people with similar interests or TripAdvisor rating travel information along with traveler reviews. Regular media is a one-way function where user can read a newspaper or listen to a report on television, but have very limited ability to give his/her thoughts on the matter. Social media, on the other hand, is a two-way function that gives you the ability to communicate too.

### **Social Media Features.**

- **User accounts.** Social Media sites allows visitors to create their own user accounts without which he/she is not allowed access to online interaction or information sharing.
- **Profile pages.** Profile pages are necessary as they represent individuals and often include information like profile photos,

bio, website, feed of recent posts, recommendations, recent activities and more.

- **Friends, followers, groups, hash tags.** Social Media enables individuals to use their accounts to connect with other users, create friends, followers, open or close groups and hashtags. They can also use them to subscribe to certain forms of information, which have multiple advantages. They can range from employment opportunities, income generation to creating a platform to be heard.
- **News feeds.** Social Media is used primarily to gain desired information and updates while also socializing in real-time.
- **Personalization.** Social media sites are designed to provide flexibility for user setting, configuration, customization of profiles, management of information and feedback.
- **Notifications.** Notifications are integral part of Social Media sites ensuring that users do not miss any update on their accounts.
- **Information updating, saving or posting.** Social Media sites allows posting of text-based messages, photos, YouTube videos, links to articles or anything else with or without a user account.

- **Like buttons and comment sections**. ‘Like’ button or comment sections are easiest way to interact on Social Media, without wasting much time.
- **Review, rating or voting systems**. Views & Feedbacks by online communities allows users to review, rate and vote on information that they know about or have used. Shopping sites or movie review sites are a few examples of sites those benefit immensely from this feature of social media.

### **Types of social media / classification**

Social media has expanded over the years to include under mentioned six primary categories, each with its own unique set of characteristics<sup>10</sup>: -

- **Social Networks**. A social network site is a social media site that allows users to connect and share with people who have similar interests and backgrounds. Facebook is the most popular example of a social network site. Other examples are Classmates.com, LinkedIn etc.
- **Bookmarking Sites**. Links can be saved and organised on websites and online resources through bookmarking sites. The sites also enable tagging of links making them more accessible and easier to search. ‘Stumble upon’ is a popular example of a bookmarking site. Other examples are ‘News vines’, ‘My bookmarks’ etc.



<sup>10</sup> “The 6 Types of Social Media”. <http://seopressor.com/social-media-marketing/types-of-social-media/>.

- **Social News**. Social news sites allow users to post news links and other items to outside articles. Such sites allow voting on the news items posted and based on voting the items are displayed on the site. An item with more number of votes is displayed more prominently. A good example of a social news site is Reddit. Other examples are Digg, Propeller, etc.



- **Media Sharing**. Media sharing websites allow users to share different types of media, such as pictures and video. Most of these sites also offer several social features, like user profile creation and comment section. YouTube is the most well-known media sharing site. Other sites are Sportslobster, Clowdy etc.



- **Micro Blogging**. Micro Blogging sites allow users with account on the site, to submit short written entries, which can include links to product and service sites, as well as links to other social media sites. These are then posted on the walls of everyone who has subscribed to the user's account. The most commonly used micro blogging website is Twitter. Other sites are four square, tumblr, friendfeed, plurk etc.



- **Blog, Comments and Forums**. An online forum is a site that lets users engage in conversations by posting and responding to community messages. A blog comment site is more or less a forum with specific focus. The comments are



usually centered on specific subjects of the attached blog. There are a large number of niche based blogging sites for marketing to a particular niche market, Niche Blogs appeal to geographic areas, specialty industry, ethnic or age groups, or any other particular group of people. Blogger is Google's popular blogging site. Other sites are Free Meditation, Life on a Balcony, Nerd Fitness, Makeup and Beauty etc.



### **Social Media Platforms**

- **Facebook**. Facebook is a social networking site that allows people from around the world to connect with friends, companies and organizations. One can share text, pictures, videos, links and other contents with friends or friends of friends depending upon one's choice. Anyone looking to build overall brand awareness uses Facebook by frequently posting contents, including videos, photo albums, event listings, links to news stories and more. Today an individual can stay updated about the environment by customizing his/her Facebook page for the same.
- **Twitter**. Twitter is one of the popular social media sites that provides real time reach to get messages out in form of Tweets. Tweets however have very short lifespan. It is social media's broadcast system used to monitor what is being said on it by the environment about oneself, discover customer questions and problems. One can build personal Twitter community to engage with followers and sharing other people's content. It has been used effectively during 2015 Indian elections by PM Narendra Modi and by US

President Donald Trump to engage with the masses.

- **LinkedIn**. LinkedIn is a business oriented social networking site; founded in 2002, used for professionals networking, job searching and personal or commercial branding. It allows users (workers & employers) to create profiles and connections to each other on online social network.
- **Google+**. Google+ also written as Google Plus is an interest-based social network launched in June 2011 by Google Inc. Its features include the ability to post photos and status updates to the stream or interest based communities, group different types of relationships into Circles, instant messaging, text and video chat called Hangouts, events, location tagging, and the ability to edit and upload photos to private albums (cloud based).<sup>11</sup>
- **YouTube**. You Tube is the most common video sharing media and the second biggest search engine. Video requires specialized resources, human efforts and finances, making You Tube more expensive than other forms of Social Media. Further, with the growth in online video viewing across devices, You Tube has become more relevant now.
- **Pinterest**. Pinterest is a free website, requiring registration, used for uploading, saving, sorting, and managing images—called pins—and other media content through collections known as pinboards. Users can browse the content of others in their feed. Users can then save individual pins to one of their own boards using the “Pin It” button, with

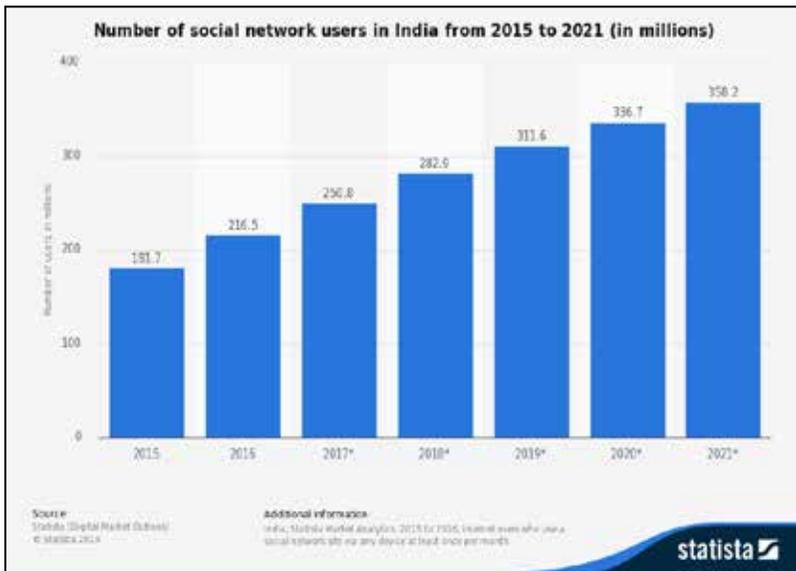
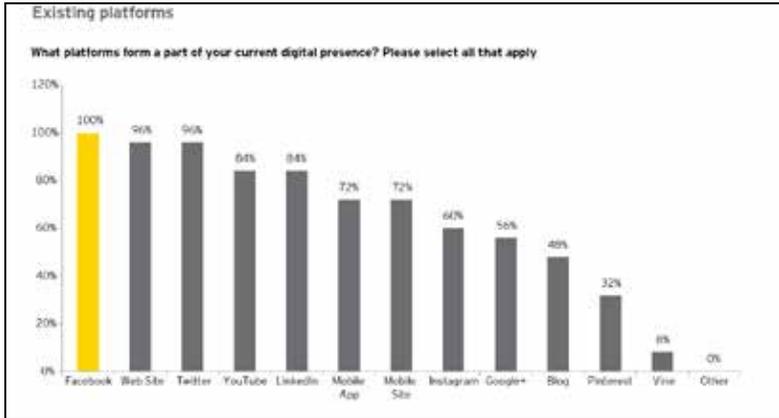
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11 “Google+”. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google%2B>.

Pinboards typically organized by a central topic or theme.

- **Instagram**. Instagram is an image and video sharing mobile app owned by Facebook. Pictures and videos can be taken, edited and shared with friends publicly or privately through Instagram or other Social Networking websites like Facebook etc.
- **SlideShare**. It is the website for professional. Presentations and other types of content (videos and PDFs) are posted on SlideShare to Build following. Businesses make a lot of money from SlideShare. It provides wide range of ideas and researched material for augmenting presentations.
  - **Forums**. Forums have dedicated focus and loyal following. Participants gain authority through real time and live participation and transparency. Threads provide talks and conversations on topics of interest to members. FlyerTalk is forum for discussion of airline frequent-flyer programs, hotel loyalty programs and other issues related to air travel.

## Indian Trends<sup>12,13</sup>



12 Ernst Young. “Social Media Marketing- India Trend Study 2016”. [http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY-social-media-marketing-india-trends-study-2016/\\$File/EY-social-media-marketing-india-trends-study-2016.pdf](http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY-social-media-marketing-india-trends-study-2016/$File/EY-social-media-marketing-india-trends-study-2016.pdf).

13 “Statista” The Statistics Portal. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/278407/number-of-social-network-users-in-india/>.



## **Social Media Content Analysis**

Social media has become a vital part of social life. It affects the beliefs, values, and attitudes of people, as well as their intentions and behaviors. Meanwhile, social media enables governments and organizations to engage people while allowing consumers to make informed decisions.<sup>15</sup>

The most considerable barrier to social media usage is the lack of a versatile methodology for selecting, collecting, processing, and analyzing contextual information obtained from social media sites. However, several software companies have developed proprietary text mining systems for data visualization, and researchers have developed expert systems for sentiment analysis<sup>16</sup>.

Thus, we can infer that Social Media Analysis is study of the data flowing across the internet on all types of Social Media sites. Social Media analysis brings to fore trends, Impact, opinions, feedbacks, competitive analysis, strengths and weaknesses, new uses reactions and information of intelligence, counter intelligence and investigative values. The establishment of a systematic methodology is important in gathering, analyzing, and grouping descriptive information available in social media into interpretable concepts for various decision support applications, such as crowd sourcing, profiling, web mining, social recommendations, and social reputation modeling.<sup>17</sup>

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15      Lai Linda S.L, To W.M. "Social Media Content Analysis: A Grounded Approach". Page 138. [http://www.jecr.org/sites/default/files/16\\_2\\_p05.pdf](http://www.jecr.org/sites/default/files/16_2_p05.pdf).

16      Ibid.

17      Ibid.

Decision-makers employ various software to understand the contextual information available on the Internet<sup>18</sup>. Many excellent programs and services (some free and some commercial) have been developed for the analysis of social media data. The focus of the vast majority of these tools is to provide summary statistics of the data. Web analytics can provide valuable, up-to-the-minute snapshots of Web content.

### **Impact of Social Media On Defence**

Like it or not “Social Media” and its numerous digital tools are here to stay. The internet has acted as a catalyst in helping it infiltrate every nook and corner of the society and penetrate all levels of organization. However, Scott Berkun<sup>19</sup> has a different view of it and says that, “We have always had social networks. Call them families, tribes, clubs, cliques or even towns, cities and nations. If anything has happened recently it’s not the birth of social networks, it’s the popularity of digital tools for social networks, which is something different”. Tom Standage<sup>20</sup> in his book “Writing on the Wall: Social Media - The First 2,000 Years”, draws comparison between the function and purpose of “Twitter” and the “Papyrus rolls” of the Roman Empire, stating that both were each generation “signature means of instant” communication. We might agree or disagree that certain means of communication existed historically or are distinct

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18      Lai Linda S.L , To W.M.“Social Media Content Analysis: A Grounded Approach”. Page 138.    [http://www.jecr.org/sites/default/files/16\\_2\\_p05.pdf](http://www.jecr.org/sites/default/files/16_2_p05.pdf).

19      Berkun Scott. “Calling bullshit on social media”.<http://scottberkun.com/2009/calling-bullshit-on-social-media/>.

20      Standage Tom. “Writing on the Wall: Social Media-The First 2,000 Years”. Bloomsbury Press. September 16, 2014. Pg2,3.

products of the digital revolution, the fact that the impact of the social media on every aspect of life has increased manifold is irrefutable.

The ever-present, instantaneous nature of social media with its deep penetration makes it perfect for application in numerous areas of military establishments. In addition, the internet has high lightened the power of information operations. Internet fueled social media platforms are the most seamless, swift and substantial, thus making them the most influential tools of communication. The opportunities provided with such a medium comes with its own set of challenges for defence organization the world over. In the contemporary scenario, conniving adversaries, like the ISIS, using social media tools and information-led strategies have proven to be unstoppable and potent opponents. The geo-strategic environment, both present and potential, is in urgent need for training in a battle space in which gains in the information domain may accelerate strategic effects equivalent to, or greater than, on ground operations. This raises the critical need for cultural and organizational changes within the security agencies so as to adapt to the world of digital inhabitants.

Swift and easy access to information has become a vital factor for success in battlefields of today. The knowledge obtained from social media platforms, if appropriately used can multiply the effects of success or if mishandled can lead to catastrophic failures. Today's battlefield environment has many levels of engagement, making it necessary for governments to employ all components of influence to transform perceptions

and beliefs regarding its stand and actions in the world. The access to social media has put the soldier at the frontline in the spotlight and under immense global and public scrutiny as has never been seen before.

Social Media platforms hold a serious sway on the effect of propaganda in the military domain. The greatest advantage social media has vis-à-vis traditional media is that it hardly needs any infrastructure for communication and the speed of transmission of information is instantaneous cutting across all kinds of borders and barriers. Also, the dissemination of information takes a direct route over the internet reducing the dependence on traditional channels like broadcast services, print media. Traditional media can create delays as it evaluates the credibility of the source or edit, omit that it sees as provocative. In contrast social media is instant, playing out in real time as it unfolds an aspect that can be utilized by the defence organisations to its advantage. The direct connection with the targeted groups, if leveraged properly can help underline the philanthropic face of the defense forces, resulting in huge dividends at time of conflict.

Social media's uniqueness in reaching targeted audiences is especially valid in case of adversaries in hybrid domains. Terrorists use social media primarily for spreading propaganda, in the form of multimedia communications providing ideological or practical instruction, explanations, justifications or promotion of terrorist activities. The terrorist organisations have been regularly using virtual messages, presentations, magazines, treatises, audio and video files and video games developed

by their organizations or sympathizers. The internet is used for promotion of violence by such entities encouraging the audiences to engage in role-play or act as a virtual terrorist. Thus, social media platforms being used especially for propaganda are very vital to control as it has major ramifications for the defence.

Across the world defence forces are using social media platforms most effectively for educating the populace about their job content so as to entice them in joining the organization. In India, too the armed forces are using social media platforms like Facebook, twitter and WhatsApp to reach out to both the public and its own members. Social Media has the ability to reach sections of society where traditional media is unable to do so due to logistical constraints. Facebook, YouTube are being used to upload videos of the culture, ethos and modus operandi of the Indian armed forces giving a clearer picture to the public as to what a career in defence forces entails.

However, just like the defence forces and common man, the terrorists, radical activists and revolutionaries too use social media for furthering their cause. Militant Groups operating in Jammu & Kashmir and North East India, do so quite effectively by targeting vulnerable and marginalized individuals with tailor made propaganda. They take advantage of an individual's disenchantment with institutions, society and prey on feelings of injustice, segregation and degradation. Websites hosted by terrorist groups or their shadow organisations splash vivid images of injustices, biographies of martyrs, successful operations, discussion forums and messages for promoting and glorifying

their cause. They also have video games in multiple languages aimed at diverse audiences, to be used as recruitment and training tools with the intention of inciting violence against the State and rewarding such virtual successes. Angela Gendron has observed in her article “Trend in Terrorism Series”, that “Internet has bestowed terrorist groups with two key features—highly decentralized franchises or freelancers. Similar to information age businesses, these groups use the Internet to create a brand image, market themselves, recruit followers, raise capital, identify partners and suppliers, provide training materials and manage operations. The above method of operation empowers these groups to become more numerous, agile, and well-coordinated. The result of this situation is such groups are becoming harder to stop. Terrorist groups have become expert at using the Internet to manipulate both public opinion and media coverage<sup>21</sup>”.

YouTube channels and Facebook pages of ISIS, Taliban and Al Qaeda supporters may radicalize Western-based sympathizers, and also provide a means for communication between these “lone wolf” actors and larger organized networks of terrorists<sup>22</sup>. In India too, the presence of links between terrorist organizations has been established whether it is from media reports or intelligence sources and investigations. The role of

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21 “Special Operations”. Joint Publication 3-05, Special Operations, 16 July 2014, Joint Chiefs of Staff USA. [www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new\\_pubs/jp3\\_05.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_05.pdf).

22 Catherine A. Theohary & John Rollins, “Terrorist Use of the Internet: Information Operations in Cyberspace” pg2. Congressional Research Service. March 08, 2011.<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/R41674.pdf>.

ISI of Pakistan in terrorism in India is well known and borne out by conventional analysis. Internally, India grapples with violence in Jammu and Kashmir and the North East. These militant organizations have links to external international agencies that not only provide the support, training but safe havens too. For example, one of the terrorists freed by India to live in Pakistan in the Kandahar hijacking in 1999 and was suspected to have financed a hijacker in the 9/11 bombing of the World Trade Towers. Social Media has united these factions like Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed with ISIS, Taliban and Al Qaeda from across the world, characterized by flows of funds, personnel, ideological and military support. They are able to exist under the radar as communication through secure social media chat platforms are not traceable or extremely difficult to hack. This makes the job of the defence forces that much more arduous as it becomes difficult to unearth the sources and links between individuals and players.

In the Indian context, one has seen examples of youths from some Indian states who have been brainwashed into joining ISIS. Radical Groups freely use social media for their propaganda and the authorities are unable to stop them as the servers are located outside India, beyond their control. Also, any attempt at curbing social media creates a furor in the civil society, making the task of the authorities and the armed forces that much more difficult. Technically there are no algorithms or artificial intelligence mechanism with which these social platforms can put a check on the bulk of posts being made every day. Furthermore, Section 79 of the Indian Information Technology Act 2000 says that Intermediaries, like

Google, Yahoo, Facebook and Twitter are not liable for third party information if they observe due diligence while discharging their duties. Also, the lack of stringent application of this act further exacerbates the issue of proper and swift enforcement.

Social Media has changed the world and battlefields have to adapt and reshape to this new scenario. This was highlighted by a letter in July 2005 to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the late leader of Al Qaeda operations in Iraq, by senior Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri who wrote, "We are in a battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media." A copy of the letter was released by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence on October 11, 2005<sup>23</sup>.

The influence of these terrorist organisations over Indian masses through social media continues to grow at an alarming pace and the authorities are slowly waking up to the impending menace. Examples like the 26-year-old MBA from Hyderabad who after watching videos and interacting with radicals was ready to leave his pregnant wife for the Caliphate in Syria in exchange for the lure or dream attaining "jannat" (heaven). According to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), cases of young men from Telangana, Kerala, Maharashtra, Bengaluru etc radicalized online through Facebook and virtual handlers are growing every year. Indians working in the Gulf countries are believed to have gone to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS. Even some like Abdul Qudus Turki from Bijapur, and Mohammad

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23 "Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi". October 11, 2005. Office of Director of National Intelligence. [http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2005/zawahiri-zarqawi-letter\\_9jul2005.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2005/zawahiri-zarqawi-letter_9jul2005.htm).

Umar Subahan from Bengaluru have been killed there. Social networking sites that are a threat to national security as tools for drug trafficking, money laundering and match-fixing, terrorism, instigating violence and spreading rumors have to be monitored and neutered by the authorities. To achieve this, inter agency coordination and sharing of information is imperative between intelligence agencies, armed forces and the police. Education and creating awareness regarding using social media and its pitfalls amongst not only the masses but within governmental institutions and organisations is essential part of countering cyber terrorism and indoctrination. The Indian armed forces are held in high esteem by the masses and should use this goodwill through the social media in connecting with the people in furtherance of their objectives of national security<sup>24</sup>.

Sun Tzu has highlighted the importance of waging psychological warfare: *“One need not destroy one’s enemy. One only needs to destroy his willingness to engage...”* *“For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the supreme excellence.”*

Social media can be exploited very easily and effectively by the Indian armed forces to conduct social media psychological operations across the complete spectrum of conflict in Jammu and Kashmir and North East. PsyOps is defined “as planned operations to convey selected truthful information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately, the behavior of

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24 Simran IAS, “Use of Social Media by Terrorist Organisations”. 29th July 2017, <http://ablazeiasacademy.com/uses-social-media-terrorist-organizations/> .

their governments, organizations, groups, and individuals”<sup>25</sup>. PsyOps is considered an important part of diplomatic, military and economic activities. Social media networks are flooded with particularly crafted content and numerous discussions are opened to involve an increasing number of users. The discussions are structured with ad hoc comments and posts are used to sensitize and influence the user’s perception of events.

In the digital environment of today, information is disseminated instantaneously and its speed and reach are unrivaled. A small incident or event can be blown out of proportion and context in no time, resulting in knee jerk reactions at all levels. The incident of a Kashmiri youth tied to front of an army jeep spread like wild fire creating furor and negative publicity for the Indian army even before the context and purpose could be determined. This just showcases that the party who is quick enough to exploit the power of social media and post in its point of view first is able to sway public opinion and sentiment irrespective of the facts.

The defence apparatus can use the social media for cyber espionage through data mining, linked networks for malware attacks, identity spoofing etc. This would set the stage for the PsyOps, reconnaissance aimed at targeted regions, group of persons, or political party, etc. However, advantages come with their share of disadvantages too i.e. there are security risks in social media space as its tools like cell phones can

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<sup>25</sup> US Army Special Operations Command, Military.com Engage. [http://www.military.com/ContentFiles/techtv\\_update\\_PSYOPS.htm](http://www.military.com/ContentFiles/techtv_update_PSYOPS.htm).

be hacked. Soldiers and family members having handsets that are GPS enabled or smart phones can unintentionally capture and disseminate sensitive information which can be distributed rapidly around the world. The enemy gathers such information from social media joining it like pieces of puzzle and building it into a complete strategic image. Thus, staying connected with your family and loved ones through chats, texts, social networking sites increases the potential of security risk by manifolds. Lack of awareness and knowledge exposes defence personnel and their families to cyber-attacks.

The Indian Defence establishment needs to draw up an advisory for the families of its personnel stating the dangers of posting information on social media that can pose potential threat to national security. The Fleet and Family Support Centre of the US Navy advised on use of social media by families of military personnel as follows: “It is not unprecedented for spouses and family members of U.S. military personnel to be targeted for intelligence collection. This is true in the United States and especially true overseas. Navy family members all know some bits of critical information. It may not be classified, and it may even seem insignificant. But, to the potential adversary, it is a piece of the puzzle. The power of emerging media tools is a two-edged sword: It makes information exceptionally accessible when posted—for anyone who is interested, including potential adversaries”<sup>26</sup>.

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26 Garside Debbie , Ponnusamy Arjun , Chan Steve , Picking Richard. “Secure Military Social Networking and Rapid Sensemaking in Domain Specific Concept Systems: Research Issues and Future Solutions”. ‘Future Internet’, 12 March 2012.ISSN 1999-5903. <http://www.mdpi.com/1999-5903/4/1/253>.

The plague that threatens the future of social media and its technology are trojans or worms, fake news, malware, misuse of information like data mining, identity theft, phishing attacks, hacking and hijacking servers. The need of the hour is to create awareness and educate those involved so as to curb inadvertent leakage of sensitive information.

### **Environment Scan**

The present trend points to a growing number of armed forces all over the world imbibing social media for a variety of functions such as recruiting soldiers, gathering intelligence, spreading propaganda and even communicating with their own and other military groups. The situation has come to the fact that the broad spectrum of social media is identified as the newest international military battleground with its inbuilt challenges. In the year 2015 the British army created its own special force known as the 77th Brigade for social media warfare. It is based in Berkshire and comprises reservists and regulars with journalistic skills who are social media savvy. The Israeli military are pioneers of using social media going back as far as 2008 during its war on Gaza. They are active participants on almost all prominent platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Capability of Israel/ US/ UK indicates a potential for all nations to engage with an audience it couldn't reach in any other way.

The potential of these platforms is enormous and their control, monitoring and use are a must. Modern social media networks are actively used by governments all around the world. US, China, Russia are some of the countries that are active in this

field with several other countries reflecting keen interest in this sphere. Security agencies are mainly attracted by social media due to the possibility of being able to support military operations such as - Psychological Operations (Psy Ops), Open Source Int, Cyber espionage and other similar offensive tactics.

The United States (US) has been the front runner in promulgating guidelines, policies and various strategies on the usage of social media platforms by the members of the Armed Forces and their families. The US Department of Defense (US DoD) and the US Army has dozens of social media policy resources that has been made available as documents both in the offline and online modes for the managers, soldiers and their families. The US Army releases its Social Media Handbook<sup>27</sup> which is an annual feature and besides highlighting the various nuances of the usage of social media by US Army personnel, it also brings out the pitfalls in unregulated use of the social media by amplifying every aspect with adequate real-life examples. Apart from the above, the US Army also releases an annual document titled 'Military Community and Family Policy – Social Media Guide'<sup>28</sup>. This document spells out the benefits and disadvantages of usage of social media by leaders, soldiers and family members in addition to giving out a list of Dos and Don'ts in lucid and user-friendly manner.

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27 US DoD Social Media Handbook. <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a549468.pdf>.

28 Military Community and family Policy: Social Media Guide, MC&FP Office of Military Community Outreach .<http://www.419fw.afrc.af.mil/Portals/67/documents/AFD-141024-071.pdf?ver=2015-11-03-121048-743>.

The US Department of Defence Social Media has embraced social media and a brief summary of the SWOT analysis of their social media policy carried out by three US naval Officers is given below<sup>29</sup>.

*Analysis of the DOD social media policy yielded two strengths. The first and greatest strength is the acceptance of social media by the DOD as prohibition of social media would have likely encouraged clandestine use by personnel without having received any education on safe practices. The second strength of the DOD's policy is its authority to regulate personnel conduct by laying down policies which meets the organizational expectations as well as exert control over personal conduct, which permits enforcement of DOD social media policy.*

*Analysis of DOD social media policy produced three weaknesses. The first notable weakness is a lack of operational security consideration and guidance, a major threat to social media use, largely unaddressed by DOD policy. The second identified weakness is an inherent lack of oversight. Oversight provides a mechanism to detect policy violations, with the desire that internal detection occurs before information can be gathered and exploited by adversaries. DOD social media policy does not require oversight of personnel using social media, which leaves the DOD vulnerable to breaches in OPSEC. Lastly, social media usage is tied to personal rights. Despite the liability*

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29 Leonhardi Eric, Murphy Mark, Kim Hannah. " Analysis of Department of Defense Social Media Policy and its Impact on Operational Security - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT), Terrorism", Progressive Management Publications. June 2015.

*created by DOD personnel using social media, the DOD policy is limited in actions it can take to address the liability.*

*Two significant opportunities exist for improving operational security through changes to the DOD's social media policy. The first opportunity is policy change aimed at promoting DOD collaboration with private industry to develop a policy that addresses OPSEC and technical solutions, which can aid the DOD in monitoring the social media activity of members. The second opportunity is the addition of a directive to DOD social media policy that requires online monitoring of DOD personnel using social media. which would not be hidden from DOD personnel.*

*DOD social media policy does not provide policy users with an adequate picture of the threat environment. What's more, the DOD's policy does not adequately address the threat that hackers, geo-tagging, data mining, and social engineering pose to OPSEC through social media.*

The Australian Department of Defence on 16 Jan 2013 released its Defence Instructions titled 'Use of Social Media by Defence Personnel'<sup>30</sup>. The *ibid* document dwells upon the responsibilities for monitoring and evaluation of violations in usage of social media by defence personnel. It also gives out the compliance requirements including measures for record keeping. Several instructions, legislations, regulations and

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30 Use of Social Media by Defence Forces, Canberra Act, Defence Instructions, Department of Defence, Australian Government, 2013 (DoD, Australian Government, 2013). <https://www.defglis.com.au/resources/SocialMediaPolicy.pdf>.

policies promulgated by the Australian Government have been interlaced within the document so as to give it certain amount of legality.

China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) has banned its 2.3 million soldiers from using social media. According to a News article dated 15 June 2011<sup>31</sup>, the PLA feels that making online friends could play into the hands of the "enemy" and have notified its servicemen and women that it will strictly enforce the ban to "safeguard military secrets and the purity and solidarity." The social media ban not only prevents usage of sites similar to Facebook and Twitter, but also prevents soldiers from launching websites or writing blogs. The ban was included in regulations that were announced in 2010, but it was being ignored. Now, the military is reinforcing the restriction, warning of a "grim struggle" on the Internet. According to the article, the PLA has stated that officers and soldiers must be made to understand the "real dangers" of making friends online and to "strengthen their knowledge of the enemy situation."

The UK has been more liberal when it comes to promulgating a policy/ guideline on the usage of social media by its service personnel. The 'Moderation Policy'<sup>32</sup> lays down that the Ministry of Defence (MoD) of UK encourages and welcomes involvement and support from all its audiences on social media

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31 China Bans Soldiers from Social Media ,Jun 15, 2011. <https://www.arma.org/r1/news/global-policy-brief/2011/06/16/china-bans-soldiers-from-social-media>.

32 UK Government , Ministry of Defense, Social Media Use. Moderation Policy.<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-defence/about/social-media-use>.

and lists out a total of ten unwanted activities by its members when using social media. It also emphasizes that, users who break such rules with a serious intent or break them repeatedly will be banned or blocked. The document gives out a list of authorized social media platforms that can be used by its service personnel to access/ upload various posts related to personal/ official communication.

Views on the unavoidability of social media technology are that the “government ignores social media at its peril”, and “failure to adopt social media tools may reduce an organization’s capabilities over time.” The aspect of inevitability has been suitably highlighted by Mark Drapeau and Linton Wells II in “Social Software and National Security: An Initial Net Assessment”<sup>33</sup>. Undoubtedly, social media is of strategic importance for military sectors, as they offer a mine of information that could be analyzed using different axes of analysis providing efficient and reliable instruments for the study of realities of interest. Both defence and offence could take advantage of social media introduction. Social media could be, in fact, used as powerful tool for information gathering and cyber espionage. The military needs an opening to social media, but it has to be consciously made. Military personnel and their families must be instructed on how to manage their exposure to social platforms. Social media platforms are powerful resources that can carry with them an incredible number of threats, so it’s

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33 Social Software and National Security: An Initial Net Assessment by Mark Drapeau and Linton Wells II. Center for Technology and National Security Policy, National Defense University April 2009. [www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA497525](http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA497525).

best to never let the guard down.

## **Force Multiplier Effects Of Social Media For The Armed Forces**

Well before the modern electronic age, Force Multiplication existed even if it was not defined as such in those words. There are numerous examples of force multiplication such as the 'swarming tactics' coordinated by the military communication flags by the Mongols to the use of the 'archer's stakes' that were driven into the ground for protection from mounted men at arms in the middle ages. These tactics though modest by modern military standards today were effective examples of 'combined arms' an ancient method of force multiplication<sup>34</sup>.

Force Multiplication is that capability, which when employed by a combat force, enhances the combat potential thus enhancing the probability of executing a mission successfully<sup>35</sup>. Force Multipliers can also give the combat force to achieve the 'same with less' and consequently 'more with the same' force. Force Multiplication can also enhance the very effects themselves<sup>36</sup>.

The transparent nature and reach of social media and internet has the capability to undeniably influence opinion in any

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34 "Force multiplication". Wikipedia . [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Force\\_multiplication](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Force_multiplication) .

35 "Force Multiplier". JP 3-05.1. Military Factory. [http://www.militaryfactory.com/dictionary/military-terms-defined.asp?term\\_id=2165](http://www.militaryfactory.com/dictionary/military-terms-defined.asp?term_id=2165).

36 Air Chief Marshal Major FH PVSM AVSM SC VM. "Force Multipliers and The Future of Aerospace Operations". Indian Strategic magazine, March 2010. <http://www.indiastrategic.in/topstories544.htm> .

domain. This distinctive characteristic of social media presents many opportunities as well as threats to the defence domain. Social Media has demonstrated in the recent years how even weaker and new adversaries equipped with strategies based on information warfare and social media have proved to be a challenge to the most powerful forces of the world. This emerging threat and power of social media was acknowledged immediately by militaries world over who started evolving procedures and counter measures to thwart its threats and weaknesses and influence its opportunities and strengths. However, these very nations and militaries realized that like other conventional threats, handling social media too requires a long-term strategy and vision to effectively manage the threats and leverage the strengths of this emerging domain.

The turmoil in the Kashmir valley demonstrated amply how social media can be misused by the anti-national elements to create unrest and disturb the peace and tranquility. The militants and their handlers across the border used social media to influence the innocent youth of the Kashmir valley with an aim to misguide them to achieve their nefarious designs. This clearly indicated the need to manage and control the social media space 24X 7 by our security forces. The turmoil in the Kashmir valley was followed by a flurry of videos on the social media by members of the Para military and armed forces using this platform to vent their frustrations against the system. All these videos created quite a stir in the media and the public and the fact that these videos were repeatedly aired on TV channels for up to four days continuously, it cannot be put past some anti national elements being behind this well-

coordinated and sensational attempt to show security forces/ government in poor light.

Regardless of the threats and weaknesses, social media has the power of making an Army stronger due to its transparency and fast speed of dissemination. Thus, the Indian Armed Forces need to leverage the social media space not only from the point of view of countering its use by anti-nationals but also use it to its own advantage by managing the perceptions of the masses in its favour. Leveraging use social media is a process, that requires strategy, goals, manpower and foresight. This is to ensure an appropriate balance where the safety of Army personnel and sensitive information is protected, while at the same time, our people and organizations continue to employ appropriate social media to engender transparency and a closer connection between the military and society<sup>37</sup>.

Social Media has a different role to play in the defence domain as it can be used by both state and non-state actors against the nation state. On the other hand, the military can use the strengths and leverage the opportunities of social media to make it as an effective force multiplier. The subsequent paragraphs highlight the force multiplier effects for the armed forces in the Indian security domain.

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37 Brigadier Ryan Mick, AM and Brigadier Thompson Marcus, AM. "Social Media in the Military: Opportunities, Perils and a Safe Middle Path". 'Grounded Curiosity'. August 21st, 2016. <http://groundedcuriosity.com/social-media-in-the-military-opportunities-perils-and-a-safe-middle-path/>.

- **Data Mining**

Data mining<sup>38</sup> is the process of analyzing data from a number of different perspectives and putting it into a useful format. Social Media allows the armed forces to mine data of the target audience as per the laid down strategy. Social Media is being used extensively by the service members and their families. Their lack of adequate knowledge of security practices can be leveraged by our intelligence agencies to obtain a huge amount of information from the social media platforms on which they are active.

Geo-tagging<sup>39</sup> is the process of adding geographical identification to photographs, videos, websites and SMS messages. It is the equivalent of adding a 10-digit grid coordinate to everything posted on the Internet. Some smartphones and digital cameras automatically embed geotags into pictures, and many people unknowingly upload photos to the internet that contain location information. A variety of applications are capitalizing on user desire to broadcast their geographic location. The use of geotagging by various applications makes it possible to track the location of the users. With the use of sophisticated technical tools which are now easily available in the market today, extensive data mining can be carried out on the

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38 Doug Alexander. "Data Mining". <http://www.laits.utexas.edu/~anorman/BUS.FOR/course.mat/Alex/>.

39 Nelson James. "What is Geo-Tagging? Securing Yourself, Your Family and Your Assets". 'Optiv'. January 20, 2012. <https://www.optiv.com/blog/what-is-geo-tagging-securing-yourself-your-family-and-your-assets>.

social media feeds being fed to the monitoring system. The information obtained by these data mining techniques can facilitate in building a comprehensive picture about the target under survey.

The increased popularity of location-based social networking is creating security concerns for the armed forces. One soldier exposing his/her location can affect the entire mission. Deployed Soldiers or personnel conducting operations in classified areas using location-based social networking services may bring the enemy right to their doorstep<sup>40</sup>.

Data mining can also reveal intelligence of activities of the enemy that were not known earlier. Posts on social media platforms about movement of personnel and vehicles, casualties, due to certain ongoing actions and photographs of the area under discussion when corroborated with intelligence obtained from other sources can build the complete picture of the activities going on. This will enable the armed forces to take any pre-emptive action if deemed fit to defeat the inimical designs of the adversary.

Data mining can also help in construction of a public or semi-public profile<sup>41</sup> of important leaders of the adversary. A close watch on the activities of the targeted leaders and

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40 Leonhardi Eric V, Murphy Mark, Kim Hannah "Analysis of Department of Defense Social Media Policy and its Impact on Operational Security" 'Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT), Terrorism', June 2015. Progressive Management Publications.

41 *ibid.*

their contacts through data mining will reveal patterns about these leaders. An analysis of information captured through data mining when used with Big Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence can disclose and predict important events and activities of these leaders.

An example of how geo tagging has been used in the operations is the recent case of Russian operations in Donbass where it was illustrated that social media usage can increasingly provide critical evidence of the reality of a situation in a combat environment. It was the ongoing position of the Russian government that Russian troops were not present in Eastern Ukraine. Organizations such as Bellingcat used data mining and geo tagging information from the social media accounts being used by the Russian troops to track individual soldiers and the Russian units that command them. This was particularly effective in building the case for Russian involvement in the shooting down of a Malaysian airliner<sup>42</sup>.

- **Social Engineering**

Social engineering<sup>43</sup> is a nontechnical method where a hacker attempts to manipulate individuals to gain access to confidential information or access to a network. The

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42 Romein Daniel. "MH17 –Potential Suspects and Witnesses from the 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade". February 23, 2016. [https:// www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2016/02/23/53rd-report-en/](https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2016/02/23/53rd-report-en/).

43 Criddle Linda "What is Social Engineering?" <http://www.webroot.com/us/en/home/resources/tips/online-shopping-banking/secure-what-is-social-engineering>.

manipulation is aided by gaining an understanding of one's social circles, which provides insight into choosing the best method for exploiting a target.

The intoxicating nature of social media forces users to use social media platforms extensively and aggressively. These habits of the social media community are also a weakness that can be easily exploited by the armed forces when specific groups or communities are targeted. The nature of majority of social media users is that they are very fond of forwarding videos, messages, and links of web sites to their community with speed and without following security norms. This is the viral nature of social media which is different from the traditional media. This brings with it the opportunity to introduce malware into the forwarded links which when opened by the user gives access to the attacker to his smart device or computer. Subsequently immense information from the target of interest can be obtained and used by the armed forces for their use in subsequent actions.

- **Sentiment Analysis**

Social Media platforms are extensively used to run campaigns by both sides. These campaigns are initiated for perception management to suit the interest of the originator of the campaign. The armed forces need to leverage this advantage of social media platforms for their advantage. Sentiment analysis gives a clear idea of the sentiments in the area of interest. The sentiments on a particular topic can be an important input in deciding the

strategy for the operations in that area. Sensational news is very attractive and spreads like wild fire on the social media platforms with the aim of changing sentiments of the target populace. Such activities are very common by anti-national elements who create obstacles in the smooth functioning of the armed forces especially in counter insurgency and counter terrorist operations. These negative sentiments which have been spread on the basis of false news can be overturned by using technological tools as well as spreading the message to own cadre for posting the right message. Thus, analyzing the sentiments in certain areas of operations are certainly an important force multiplier for furtherance of operations.

The armed forces<sup>44</sup> could use a form of sentiment analysis when preparing to conduct a propaganda campaign, engage in diplomacy, or recruit citizens as intelligence assets—all of these operations benefit from an understanding of how the public feels on a particular issue. Sentiment analysis could also be used by the armed forces when they are planning out of area contingency operations. The sentiments in that country of interest need to be gauged to see if the support of the citizenry on the ground exists for the armed forces.

- **Identification of Key Influencers**

In the social media domain, there are key players who are the centre of gravity of the campaign. These individuals or

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44 Albright Dann “How Social Media Is The Newest Military Battleground”. February 19,2015. <http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/social-media-newest-military-battleground/>

group of individuals drive the campaign towards furtherance of their goals by spreading false rumours and news. The aim is to sensationalize the topic so that it can become popular. These key influencers can if not handled in time generate a vast movement. The social media platforms have the ability of revealing these key influencers by using appropriate software tools. The armed forces can identify these key influencers by corroboration from other sources and take action as deemed fit to stop these persons from creating chaos.

- **Perception management and Controlling the Narrative**

The greatest advantage<sup>45</sup> of social media for perception management is its reach and speed. It can reach even an audience that is otherwise difficult to reach using conventional means. Social Media allows the armed forces to manage the perceptions of the target audience thus allowing them to control the narrative. It allows dynamic modifications of the themes to shape the environment based on the feedback. Due to its interactive nature, it can act as an important tool to gauge the effects of the perception management endeavours. The social media platforms allow assumption of pseudo identities and thus remain somewhat anonymous which is a great positive in perception management campaigns.

### **Disrupting Adversary Operations**

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45 Maj Gen Umong Sethi (Retd). "Social Media - A Tool for the Military". 'Scholar Warrior', Spring 2013. Pages 125-129. [www.claws.in](http://www.claws.in).

The armed forces gain a lot if they can weaken or disrupt the adversary plans even before the start of an operation. Destabilizing an adversary during or before conflict situations arise, is an excellent way to gain an advantage and reduce the cost and time to end a conflict on satisfactory terms. Destabilizing involves a mix of deception along with physical means. Social Media can be part of a larger media campaign to make a more detrimental impact on the adversaries planning of operations. Destabilisation<sup>46</sup> is almost an art form and impeding an adversary's ability to use social media warfare tactics can lead to near – term chaos and confusion and long term collapse of communications and offensive social media warfare abilities. In the case of ISIS coalition forces were able to work with social media service providers to get accounts shut down. This slowed down ISIS social media warfare efforts. Meanwhile, various combinations of events in the theatre set ISIS back and hindered its ability to regroup and reclaim large amounts of territory. The Social Media warfare capabilities of ISIS never regained their bragged about status.

- **Psychological Operations**

Social Media gives a huge opportunity to the armed forces to influence operations, not just by spreading propaganda, but by actually influencing specific conversations. One of the methods that is used by the some militaries is the use of “sock puppets,” or fake accounts controlled by PsyOps

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46 Erbschloe Michael. “Social Media Warfare- Equal weapons for All”. Pg 62, April 2017. Auerbach Publications.

soldiers. Software allows users to create and manage large number of fake accounts based all over the world. These accounts can then be made to take part in conversations on various issues, and present what looks like a unified group of people who hold the same opinion. Suddenly, instead of a single agent trying to sway a conversation, you can have dozens or hundreds, all taking part in coordinated action—and each with a “convincing background, history, and supporting details”<sup>47</sup>.

There are numerous examples at the tactical level, where adversaries have operationalized social media particularly in deceptive operations. For example, during the battle for Deir ez-Zour in Syria in 2014, between ISIS and al-Nusra, fake videos were released onto YouTube purporting to be tribal elders switching allegiance to ISIS.<sup>48</sup> A small number of defection videos were also released—that may have been false—causing al-Nusra to make public statements that they were not true, which then confused the rather sparse and poorly connected communities caught up in the fighting.

Another example of how social media can be used as a force multiplier in psychological operations is the way ISIS used it in the battle of Mosul when they attacked it. “By continuing to

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47 Revealed: US spy operation that manipulates social media. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2011/mar/17/us-spy-operation-social-networks>.

48 Nissen, Thomas. “Terror.com - IS’s Social Media Warfare in Syria and Iraq”. Royal Danish Defence College. Military Studies Magazine. Issue 02, Vol 02. <http://www.stratcomcoe.org/thomas-elkjer-nissen-terrorcom-iss-social-media-warfare-syria-and-iraq>.

pump out massive amounts of propaganda, ISIS can seem to have more control, and appear stronger and larger than it is in reality<sup>49</sup>. One great example of this was the Twitter campaign, #AllEyesOnISIS. Before attacking Mosul, ISIS launched this Twitter campaign, and in a matter of hours it was trending throughout the Middle-East. Through the use of hashtag hijacking, the practice of gaming social media algorithms to promote one's hashtag, this campaign made the ISIS force seem monstrously large, and their victory inevitable. The Iraqi army, which outnumbered ISIS by fifteen soldiers to one, disbanded and left the city. They were terrified of the "massive" invasion coming their way. In the end, less than 2,000 ISIS fighters took over a city of 1.5 million people. This would not have been possible without their pre-invasion media attack . This attack also cemented in many people's minds the legitimacy of the group, and the physical power they possess-Even if in reality they have very little physical power<sup>50</sup>.

- **Instantaneous Communication**

Social Media platforms offer real time transmission of information without any infrastructure. All types of communities including the armed forces can make use of multiple social media platforms to communicate within

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49 Singer, P.W. and Brooking, Emerson. "Terror on Twitter". Popular Science, December 11, 2015. <http://www.popsci.com/terror-on-twitter-how-isis-is-taking-war-to-social-media>.

50 Lytton-Cobbold, Stilford. "Terrorism and Social Media: How ISIS is Fueled by Facebook and Twitter, and How to Stop it". 22 June 2017.

themselves or with the masses at near real time. It also provides a very convenient and effective medium for military families to communicate with each other which has a major impact on the morale of the armed forces personnel. Though this aspect brings vulnerabilities in that data being shared by the armed forces personnel can be mined by the adversary, however, training and education of armed forces personnel and families can reduce this vulnerability to a large extent.

This aspect of instantaneous communication can be used by the armed forces personnel to be well informed of the unfolding events ahead of them in the area of operations. With special reference to counter insurgency and counter terrorist operations it gives an opportunity to pass critical information to change strategy if required.

- **Motivation and Morale**

Social Media due to its wide and instantaneous reach can be useful for raising the morale and motivation of the armed forces members. Social Media can be effectively used to disseminate unclassified information relating to administration matters to the armed forces personnel. There are a large number of welfare schemes which the armed forces members are not aware of due to widespread deployment in difficult terrains and this information takes time to percolate down to the lower ranks in the armed forces. However social media can provide a platform for instantaneous dissemination of such information which

has a direct impact on the morale and motivation of the force members. There are a large number of defence magazines being printed for information of the members of the armed forces. These magazines too can be uploaded on the social media platforms for immediate dissemination to all. The “Sainik Samachar” or “Baatchheet” which are regularly printed can easily be propagated through social media as these magazines do not have any classified content. The Indian armed forces have very rich traditions which play a major role in the esprit de corps of the forces. The regiments can have social media presence uploading all their achievements and past history, which will have a major impact on social bonding and motivation of the armed forces personnel.

- **Recruitment**

The worldwide social media scenario is evolving at a fast pace transforming into a mainstream activity and becoming a part of everyday life of major section of society. Global digital snapshot<sup>51</sup> reveals that half of the world’s population is now connected to the internet accounting for a 10-percent increase in the total number of web users compared to last year. Also, significant to note is that while laptop and desktop devices mark a 20-percent decrease in usage, mobile browsing currently accounts for half of the world’s

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51 Digital in 2017, Global Overview. A collection of internet, social media and mobile data around the world. A report by We are Social/ Hootsuite. <https://wearesocial.com/special-reports/digital-in-2017-global-overview>.

web traffic, noting a 30-percent increase in mobile usage year-on-year.

This aspect of social media enables it to reach almost all sections of the society. The armed forces can leverage this penetration to make the population aware of the organisational aims and functioning. This spreads awareness of the recruitment drives, their location, dates and procedures. In turn, the armed forces have the advantage to employ personnel with the right aptitude in the defence forces.

- **Connecting with the Masses for Furtherance of Operations**

The wide proliferation of social media and the its various platforms allows the armed forces to connect with the masses with speed and wider proliferation. The armed forces are able to send their message directly to the common man enabling them to garner support for their actions. Mass support for the armed forces is vital if they have to operate effectively. The support of the masses gives a huge operational advantage in the area of operations. For example, if through social media platforms the armed forces are able to spread awareness of the nefarious designs of the anti-national elements, critical information about the militants can be obtained and successful operations conducted against the anti-national elements.

The collaborative nature of social media provides the

military a new and direct way of engaging audiences, particularly the younger generation. However, the emphasis needs to be on creating an informal, open, and interactive approach, along with utilizing credible non-government voices wherever possible<sup>52</sup>. Social Media also affords the opportunity for militaries to connect with contacts within other military organisations, or with underground rebel cells<sup>53</sup> for furtherance of operational objectives.

- **Early Warning for Disaster Relief**

The armed forces are often called in aid for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR). It is one of the tasks inbuilt into their charter of the Indian defence. Social Media platforms can provide early warning to all responders of the impending disaster so that adequate response mechanism can be activated in time. Moreover, during disaster relief situation updates about the progress of the relief operations can be relayed in real time enabling smooth conduct of the processes.

- **Training and Education**

Social media holds the potential to be used as an integral part in new digital age education, training and doctrine systems<sup>54</sup>. The ability of social media to propagate fast and

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52 Tunncliffe Ian , Dr.Tatham Steve . “Social Media—The Vital Ground: Can We Hold It?” Strategic Studies Institute and United States Army War College Press. The Letort Papers. April 2017.

53 AlbrightDann “How Social Media Is The Newest Military Battleground”. ‘MUD’February 19, 2015. <http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/social-media-newest-military-battleground/> .

54 Brigadier Ryan Mick, AM and Brigadier Thompson Marcus,

wide makes it ideal for disseminating platform for training and education. These platforms can themselves be trainers of the threats of the social media space enabling people to use social media in an effective and safe manner. The social media platforms can also be used for disseminating unclassified training information saving huge cost time, money and resources.

### **Key Issues for Implementation of Social Media in the Indian Armed Forces.**

Whenever organizations rush into creating social media presence before determining what exactly the organization aims to achieve with social media platforms, they have faced failure or setbacks. Using social media effectively is a process and it requires strategy, goals, manpower and foresight. The effective use of social media has the potential to help the Armed Forces to better understand the environment in which it operates as it allows more agile use of information in support of operations. Finding clever and innovative ways to help achieve the desired ends may be the key to success in a continuously evolving social media environment. This demands cultural and organizational changes within the Indian Armed Forces to adapt to the world of digital inhabitants. Recommendations for implementation of social media by the Indian armed forces are given below :-

- **Change of Mindset.** The defence forces have been

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AM. "Social Media in the Military: Opportunities, Perils and a Safe Middle Path". 'Grounded Curiosity' August 21st, 2016. <http://groundedcuriosity.com/social-media-in-the-military-opportunities-perils-and-a-safe-middle-path/>.

reticent by nature and loath to transparency. The fast moving and changing world of Social Media requires the armed forces to also change its mindset towards operating in this new dimension of warfare. The change has to come from the top so that structures and policies are created which are enabling rather than restricting ensuring that every soldier is a virtual information warrior.

- **Organisational Structures**. The social media domain is expanding at a very fast pace leading to emerging complex dynamics of operation in this space. The present existing structures in the armed forces are neither optimal nor adequate due to the vast scope this emerging media. Effective handling of social media space thus requires establishment of a dedicated organization. There is a requirement to assess the organizational structure for effectively leveraging all aspects of social media. The aspects of Social Media, Psychological Operations (Psy Ops) and Public Information(PI) are closely intertwined with each other and hence need close coordination, synergy and management. Thus, it is recommended to that all these domains of Social Media, Psy Ops and PI should operate under one umbrella organisation.
- **Social Media Monitoring Centres**. Timely response mechanism needs the armed forces to be proactive on all social media platforms. To ensure that current issues are responded adequately, needs creation of monitoring mechanisms so that all platforms are monitored and the correct and true perspective is posted to defeat any false

propaganda. Monitoring also gives information of a likely developing situation indicated by sentiment analysis, thus giving lead time to prepare a timely response. Monitoring social media will enable the armed forces to be active than reactive. These social media monitoring centres could be established initially at the apex level of the three service Headquarters and in phases be opened down at subordinate formation Headquarters.

- **Training.** The social media space is fraught with dangers which can have adverse effects on the operational security. Meaningful and effective training thus needs to be carried out for all ranks educating them to use and be aware of the risks of social media. It is thus imperative that comprehensive and practical training be imparted from the lowest level to the highest level , ie, at all levels from category A to category B establishments. Effective training will ensure that all military personnel are aware of the pros and cons of the social media space leading to enabling military personnel.
- **Specialized Training for Sensitive Appointments.** Social media brings with it a host of vulnerabilities especially for persons who are tenanted sensitive appointments. Data mining by the adversary has detrimental effects on the smooth functioning of the armed forces. Accordingly, specialized training needs to be organized for such personnel on a regular basis for effectively using social media platforms without being susceptible to inimical designs of the enemy.
- **Education of Military Families.** The actions of our military

families have a direct impact on the operational environment of the security forces. There is thus a need to educate our military families so that they can contribute positively on the Social Media space and inadvertently not compromise the security of the armed forces personnel.

- **Leveraging Celebrities.** The impact of social media is felt by the changing sentiments and the hot trending topics which indicate the mood of the environment and specifically the targeted population. To run a successful social media campaign, it is imperative that a large section of the population tweet and post comments in our favour indicating a positive and a successful campaign. However, to manage huge crowds for running a successful campaign is not an easy proposition. However certain celebrities who are closely associated with the defence forces being honorary members of the armed forces need to be leveraged to carry our message to the masses. Their huge fan following will impact the sentiment towards the truth in our favour and defeat the evil designs of the enemies of the state.
- **Micro Websites and Webpages.** To ensure that information about any incident or action is brought to the fore at the earliest it is important that all the details, descriptive photographs and images depicting the truth are hosted on the website with speed to convey our point. It is recommended that micro websites could be brought up for a particular incident immediately so that the truth is brought to the knowledge of all concerned immediately. This will

ensure that false propaganda is defeated.

- **Usage of Social Media in Counter Insurgency/Counter Terrorist (CI/CT) Operations.** Social Media is also a weapon that should be used by the armed forces effectively to fight the false propaganda being spread by the militants and anti-national elements. Management and creation of innovative campaigns is thus vital in CI/CT operations to ensure truthful and factful reports about all incidents are brought to the fore for dissemination to the citizens with speed. Thus the aspect of leveraging social media in CI/CT operations is a facet which needs immediate and deliberate attention on priority.
- **Pre-and Post-Crisis Management.** Effective handling of crisis necessitates pre-and post-crisis management which is woefully lacking in the armed forces in the social media domain. There is thus a need for pre-crisis and post crisis planning at each stage with clear cut responsibilities and authority delegated to the subordinates to ensure that real time response can be generated. Most important in the whole game is to be able to draw an assessment at the end of the incident so as to draw post incident analysis for future. This needs incorporation of domain experts.
- **Centre for Army Lessons Learnt (CALL).** The CALL at ARTRAC is mandated to keep a record of all important case studies with an aim of disseminating lessons learnt to our armed forces. CALL needs to be incorporated to ensure all important lessons are recorded for posterity with aim to learn from them for better management of social media

campaigns and crisis situations. CALL is part of post crisis management which will help in pre crisis management.

- **Information Warriors**. There are diverse views on incorporating all members of the armed forces as information warriors to participate in the social media campaigns. However, it is felt that involving all personnel maybe counter – productive and fraught with dangers due to lack of adequate knowledge by all. Therefore, it is recommended that a mid-course could be adopted wherein the campaign is conceived by the core group and selected members who have been trained be incorporated in the campaign irrespective of their location. Slowly the number of trained information warriors will increase which ensure successful management of the social media campaigns.
- **Sentiment Analysis**. Among the main aims of a social media campaign is managing the sentiments of the target populace by running carefully managed campaigns. Victory goes to the player who manages the sentiments in his favour. Sentiments also indicate the corrective action needed if any to effectively turn the sentiments in our own favour. Hence sentiment analysis is a vital aspect of social media domain which needs specialized attention. The social media organization should use all means including technical to gauge and turn the sentiments in our favour.
- **Levels of Social Media**. For running successful social media campaigns, the campaigns have to be run at all levels of our hierarchy. The complete organization including the

veterans have to be incorporated in the campaign to achieve victory in this space.

- **Matching Platform to Platform.** To remain ahead in the OODA loop every social media platform needs to be matched. Thus, we cannot be restricted to only WhatsApp or Facebook or Twitter. All social media platforms need to be leveraged to defeat the nefarious designs of the enemy.
- **Regional Forums.** Just like print media, social media is very active at large number of regional forums in various languages. Hence to restrict our campaigns in English or Hindi only would be ceding space to anti national elements on the regional forums. Hence exploitation of all regional forums is essential in the Indian context.
- **Special Operations.** Social Media operations need to be classified as special operations and handled accordingly. The fast changing nature of social media and its wide ramifications necessitate specialized supervision and management.
- **Defence Institute of Psychological Research(DIPR)** . Social media campaigns aim to manage the perceptions of the target audience and hence requires experts who can understand human behavior more deeply. DIPR is once such institute of the armed forces who need to be incorporated in conceiving campaigns and managing crisis for favourable outcomes.
- **Smart Phones.** Smart Phones are the weapons and tools of social media. The present orders on the subject do not permit the usage of smart phones in the official work place

and hence its utility in the social media space is highly restrictive. There is a need to re-examine the orders on the usage of smart phones building in adequate precautions so that social media can be effectively leveraged by the members of the armed forces.

- **Indian Social Media Platforms.** Using social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook which are owned and operated by foreign companies increases the vulnerabilities of our armed forces. The data being generated on these platforms is being used by foreign nations for leveraging it in the social media domain. India being the IT hub of the world should be able to launch a social media platform akin to WhatsApp with servers and data farms in India so that vital and sensitive data is not leaked out. Necessary collaboration between government departments need to be encouraged to generate this valuable tool.
- **Mobile Applications.** The wide proliferation of mobiles in the society has made mobiles an apt platform for disseminating information. The armed forces should consider launching mobile apps to engage with the serving and retired fraternity. These apps would be an easy way to spread the right message with speed and dispel any false propaganda by anti-national elements. These inhouse developed mobile apps by the armed forces will facilitate faster dissemination of information while ensuring operational security
- **Leveraging the Veteran Community.** The Indian Armed forces have a huge veteran community who can be leveraged for successful conduct of social media campaigns. The

defence forces need to reach out to the veterans so that the correct message is spread to the masses. This will go a long way in defeating the false propaganda of the anti-national elements. The veteran community should be an intrinsic part of our social media warriors.

- **Centre of Excellence for Non Kinetic Warfare**. The rapid changes and advancements in technology has huge spin offs in the defense domain. There is a need to establish a 'Centre of Non-Kinetic Warfare' to examine all the non-kinetic means of which social media is also an important domain.
- **Collaboration with Industry to Leverage Social Media for the Armed Forces**. Close collaboration with industry will pave the way forward to successfully leveraging the social media domain. Some of the aspects in which the industry can help out are :-
  - Glorifying our heroes using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter to run positive social media campaigns in support of the defence forces. Making 'Follow our Heroes Campaigns' in example of one such campaign.
  - Running campaigns highlighting the samaritan work by the defence forces in support of the common man as part of 'Winning the Hearts and Minds of the People'. Initiatives such as 'Sadbhavna' being implemented by the Indian Army in Jammu and Kashmir, need to be brought to the knowledge of the population by

collaborating with the industry. Such campaigns will go a long way in changing the perception of the armed forces especially in the Kashmir valley and across the whole nation.

- Collaborating with the industry for launching campaigns and advertisements on all social media platforms which will help in recruitment of suitable candidates.
- Employment of veterans by the Industry for running social media campaigns for the Indian Defence forces. The veterans have got in depth knowledge of the functioning and requirement of the armed forces which can be leveraged by both the industry and the defence establishment.
- **Policy Guidelines and Oversight Mechanism.** The use of social media is one of threats and opportunities, however there is a need to effectively operate in this space. Hence, the need to issue comprehensive guidelines encompassing all facets of social media including oversight mechanisms. This policies should be simple and easily implementable by defence personnel.
- **Dissemination of Policy Guidelines.** To ensure compliance it is essential that the guidelines are disseminated to the last man. The United States social media policies are available on the internet for all to see. Accordingly, the social media guidelines for our defence forces should be hosted on the internet which will ensure wide dissemination of policy guidelines leading to more effective policy implementation.

This will go a long way towards 'education and regulation'.

- **Hosting Unit Pages on Internet.** The Indian defence establishment should consider hosting of unit pages on the internet. These endeavors will go a long way in bringing to fore the rich history, traditions and accomplishments of our defence forces. Such actions will only bring more pride to the armed forces and raise the morale of the defence personnel. Such initiatives will also increase collaboration with our veteran community towards common goals.
- **Dissemination of Information.** There is a need to have a clear and concise information dissemination policy for the armed forces personnel in the social media space. Social Media is a battle of networks and information should be passed to all affected by the higher headquarters instantaneously so that the correct picture is known to all without delay. The policy for information dissemination needs to be made responsive to ensure fast dissemination of data to all our armed forces personnel.
- **Response Mechanism.** The aspect of information void following an incident causes the defence forces to cede ground to conjectures which are at best avoided. Silence and failure to involve the media may lead to conjectures which will benefit the adversary who is trying to propagate the false story. Our response should be truthful and without any delay. Accordingly, structures and policies must be created to ensure an immediate response mechanism. The speed of social media is too fast for handling by our structures and hence the need of the hour is to balance

our structures and have a critical look at our procedure of approvals for social media.

- **Creation of Core Groups for Content Generation.**

The secret to success in the Social Media space is content generation and management. The running of successful campaigns need content generation by experts and hence the need to create core groups for campaign management. The core group should have full knowledge of the requirement of leaders at the apex level which will accordingly be manifested in the campaigns. Designing themes for campaigns needs a high level of expertise. Hence the need to create a core team at the highest level for content generation which is then passed down to all selected levels for dissemination and further momentum. Experts from the armed forces need to be selected and earmarked for this vital job which is the start point of a successful social media campaign. The core groups should preferably be composed of serving defence personnel only.

- **Populating Text in Campaigns.** Conceptualizing and running successful social media campaigns requires detailed planning and content generation. To generate content and to populate, the social media space requires the assistance of experts who have in depth knowledge of that subject of which the content is being generated.

- **Big Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence.** Big Data Analytics coupled with Artificial Intelligence is the future of all data platforms in the world of computing. Social

Media platforms are a rich source of information which can be used by the defence forces in furtherance of their operational objectives. Important information can be mined using big data analytics and prediction analysis carried out using artificial intelligence. The armed forces need to step into these domains with urgency producing professionals who will be an asset for managing social media contents and platforms.

- **Hiring of Professionals**. The ever-evolving field of information operations requires in depth technical knowledge of using and leveraging various social media platforms. While the core group should remain with the defence personnel, specialized tasks should be carried out by hiring experts from the industry. Certain functions of Social Media need to be outsourced so that the specialized functions can be handled professionally. Thus, the organizational structure should cater for hiring and outsourcing of specialized functions for effective social media management.
- **Long Term Strategy**. To effectively leverage the Social Media space a long term strategy has to be worked out to encompassing all facets of structures, policies, training, human resource and oversight mechanism and its integration with the operational domain. Social media management needs an integrated approach and whole of government approach incorporating the academia, industry and ministries such as DIETY, MHA and NITI Aayog.
- **Installation of Mobile Towers in Cantonments**. Access

to mobile connectivity is the basic requirement for all defence personnel to be active on social media space. However, there is a void in mobile connectivity in many cantonments due to lack of installation of mobile towers. The armed forces need to address this matter on priority to ensure that mobile connectivity is extended fully in the cantonments.

## **Conclusion**

Future conflicts will occur in increasingly connected environments, which will be characterized using new communication and information technologies, social media included. It is this power of information that social media aims to leverage and aims to shape the minds and perceptions of the intended target audience. The utilization of social media during a conflict adds and enhances the conventional tools of mass media for propaganda, influence and deception activities. Thus, control and acquisition of data has become as vital as gaining new territory or dominance over a region.

The technological, security and social challenges it presents for the defence community have to be tackled with a well thought out plan, pathway and procedures. Social media is like a virus which invaded all realms and spheres of functioning be it communication, trade or medicine. The impact of social media on the defence sector is significant. Militaries all over the world have realized the importance of managing the social media space and have accordingly commissioned studies, based on which social media has become an integral part of their planning operations in various parts of the world. The armed

forces need to let in this invader but restrict its inroads by creating relevant barriers and moats.

There is a need to respond to the new operational realities by understanding and exploiting the social media space. The endeavor of the armed forces has to be in minimizing the negative impact of social media and find ways and means to harness the immense potential of this new phenomenon for furtherance of organizational objectives. However, the disconnect between the existing military policies and usage of social media is impacting the functioning of the armed forces in this domain. Rather than shying away from the reality and attempt to deny or curb the use of social media, the armed forces should embrace the social media space with an aim to leverage it as a force multiplier.



