



Impact of Social Media's Use by the Government of India-Benefits and Limitations

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Abstract

Government agencies across the globe have started connecting themselves with people through different forms of social media. These connections have increased many folds owing to the development and rapid use of digital media. With technological developments at the forefront, connecting with people through these social networking platforms has become inevitable for the government. Through various modes of social media, the government can convey its messages to the intended people as well as improve decision-making for the welfare of the people. Even though the government can connect to a different stratum of people in society, and many among them benefit, with the rampant usage of social media by all sectors of people, many government agencies have crossed the regulatory framework concerning the dispensing of information, even though the legal framework has kept many controls on it. This paper studies the impact of social media's use by the Indian government to create awareness about various programs designed by it and to know their efficiency. This study also highlights both the negative and positive aspects of the same.

Keywords

Social media platforms, Government, welfare programs

Need for the study

India has over 560 million internet users and stands second and next only behind China in the world. It is estimated to cross the 650 million user mark by 2024 in the country. More than half of the Indian population will have access to the internet by that year. Social media in India reaches out to nearly 60 per cent of the online Indian audience. It was estimated that by 2025, this penetration of social networks would be 70 per cent of the country's population. A booming telecommunication industry, which is providing cheap mobile data, has fuelled this growth. This made the Indian government realize the potential of social media platforms and started promoting its welfare schemes through them. There is a need to know whether this interface is beneficial to the government and people in terms of connectivity.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this research is a description of the current status of social media use by the government of India, its advantages, challenges and impact on social perception.

The study also focuses on the following among other relevant objectives:

- To study the governmental digital integration with social media platforms.
- To critically examine the social media use by the Indian government for citizen engagements.
- To identify the gaps in the existing social media strategies of the Indian Government.
- To suggest improvements for better customer engagement.

Limitations of the study

The present study is confined to identifying the impact of the usage of various social media platforms by the Indian government only. The study is purely based on secondary data. The data is mainly collected from the Indian government websites and some research articles, and compiled concerning the available sources.

Introduction

Information Communication Technologies through various applications on computers and mobile devices are increasingly becoming very important in the day-to-day functioning of our lives- whether personal or official. This is mainly due to the rapid development of internet technologies over a while. These technologies have not only influenced the business and commercial sectors but also laid a strong network of communication between the government and the people. People these days spend more time on their computers, laptops, and smartphones, whether to carry out their personal or official work. They are actively engaging themselves through various social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. to name a few. The government is communicating various aspects regarding its governance, and also advertising and creating awareness about its welfare programs aimed at different segments of people.

Various departments in the government have identified the importance of communicating through social media and started interacting with different stakeholders in a better way. The government has formulated a framework and guidelines to regulate and use different means of social media to convey messages to them.

Government of India and its activities through some of the famous social media platforms

The government of India is reaching out to various sections of society through social media platforms. Below are some of the famous platforms which the government is using:

Facebook:

Facebook is a favourite social networking platform of millions. The government of India is using this platform to efficiently communicate with the people. Both the central government and various state governments are increasingly using this platform to inform about their achievements, welfare schemes and many more aspects. MyGovIndia page on Facebook highlights various measures taken by the government for the benefit of the people. This page aims to promote 'JanBhagidari' or participative governance. Various ministries in the central government such as the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Railways, Ministry of Finance etc have their Facebook pages through which they communicate with people about various measures taken by them for the welfare of the people and also advertise their achievements.

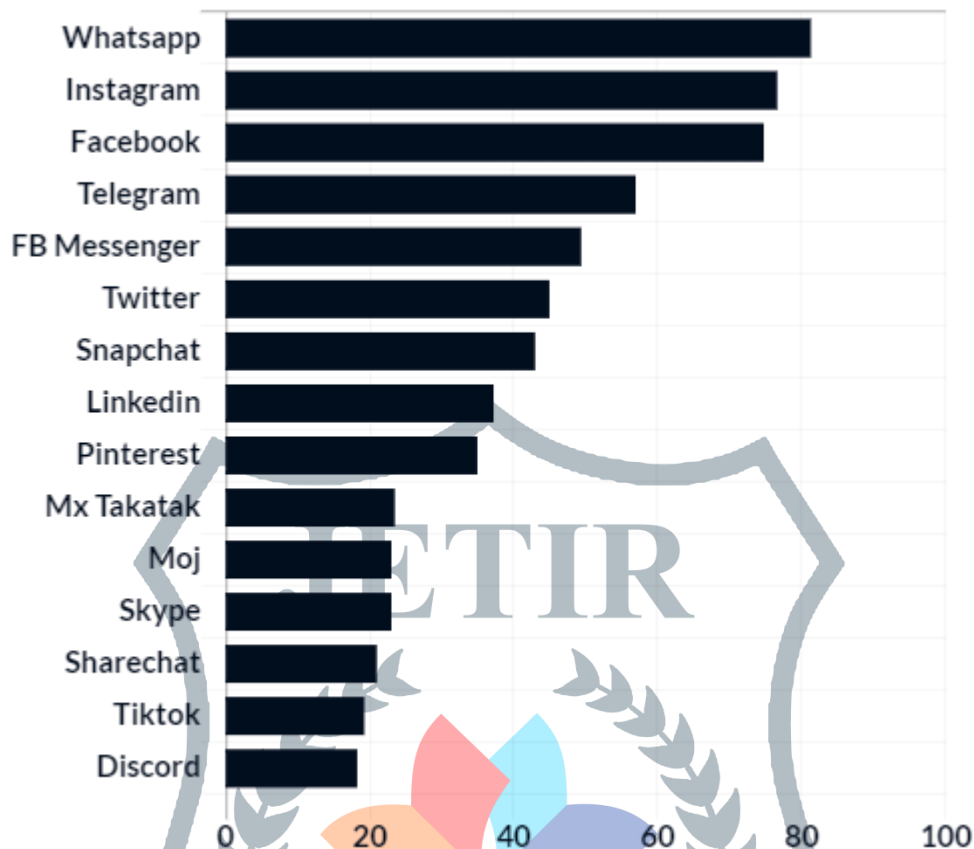
Instagram :

Instagram is a very famous social networking platform among the youth. Many of the youngsters are connected through this Instagram. Its popularity has risen catastrophically owing to the content present in it. The government of India has taken a cue from it and has started communicating through this media. It has advertised various welfare programs through Instagram.

MygovIndia, the official Instagram account of MyGov, the citizen engagement platform of the Government of India has more than 1.9 million followers and has posted more than 12000 posts to communicate with them. Various government institutions are promoting their work and communicating with interested parties through Instagram. Mpeda, a government organization that is a nodal agency for the holistic development of the seafood industry in India through its various pages communicate efficiently and effectively the measures taken by the Ministry of Fisheries for

the welfare of the export community of seafood. At present there are more Instagram users in India when compared with any other social media.

The following chart presents the percentage (%) of social media platforms used in India for the year 2022.



Source Courtesy: oosga.com

Youtube :

Youtube is a very famous social networking channel among all age groups. Through YouTube videos, the government aims to have a participatory governance initiative involving the common citizen at large. The idea is to bring the government closer to the common man by the use of an online platform creating an interface for a healthy exchange of ideas and views involving the common citizen and experts to contribute to the social and economic transformation of India towards development. For example, the central government in the year 2016 In keeping with the NDA government's plan to reach out to people directly, has launched a YouTube channel for the Ministry of Finance. The government felt that there are a lot of announcements and explanations from time to time by the Ministry of Finance about the Indian economy which are continuously debated in public and therefore felt the necessity for a platform where the entire material of this ministry should be made available. The channel will feature videos on various schemes, messages, events, meetings and press conferences related to the ministry. Since this is an official channel of the Ministry of Finance, the general public, and investors, both domestic and foreign could get the official line of the government instead of looking at different news channels or papers which may give contrary information.

Twitter:

Twitter is a microblogging social networking platform that has acquired a lot of attention these days. The text written is referred to as tweets, where any common person can tweet or express their opinions. The government can fetch direct responses from the public and hence the data can be more realistic. @GovernmentIndia is the official Twitter account of the Indian Government.

<https://twitter.com/AgriGoI> is the official Twitter Handle of the Department of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Ministry of Government of India, and https://twitter.com/MoHUA_India is the Official Twitter account of the

Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. Every department in the central government has a Twitter account of its own and they are all acting as an interface between the public and government.

Advantages to the government for approaching people through social media

The government of India wants to reach out to people about various schemes and measures it is implementing through different social media platforms as they are more transparent, have better engagement with the different stakeholders etc. Some of the reasons why it wants to interact through social media are:

(a) To create awareness

Many stakeholders whether educated or uneducated, are unaware of the various schemes and welfare programs of government directed towards them. Social networking platforms offer the government a mechanism to create awareness about such programs rather than conventional methods of approach.

(b) To be more transparent

To be more transparent in its governance, the government of India has started communicating with people through social media platforms. They offer confidence in the minds of people and will feel all the schemes of government are more transparent as rules and regulations are well known to them.

(c) Building Public Trust

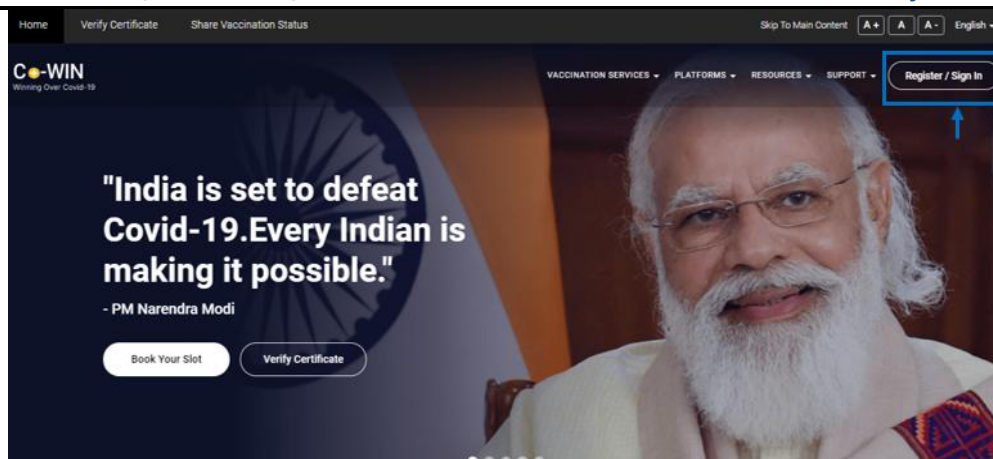
Trust in government and its agencies by citizens is an essential and crucial aspect of good governance and efficient policymaking. New-age governments across the world are investing in measures that create and nurture trust in them by the people. It has become imperative for these governments to do the same by connecting with the people through various modes and social media platforms have become one of the most important among all those modes of communication. The government of India is communicating its programs and messages to the public through various departmental websites and also through social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook etc.

(d) Better engagement

With the rise in recognizing the importance of public engagement internationally, the importance of engaging the prospects of various segments of society has become vital for the better functioning of any democratic country. This is the same for the Indian government too. Constructive relationships between various stakeholders of the welfare programs and the institutions of government make the process of engagement valuable and viable too. This is because such discussions will lead to more equitable, sustainable public decisions and improve the standard of living of the people. This is one important aspect that the government of India has adopted a proactive strategy in maintaining better engagement with people in crucial aspects regarding them through Twitter, Instagram etc.

(e) Crisis Communication

A government's capacity to communicate with people effectively in critical times is a testimony to its good governance. Public communication intends to inform all the stakeholders, persuade/ advocate them, and engage citizens in government activities during times of crisis. This was proved once again during the Covid-19 pandemic.



This crisis has helped the central as well as all the state governments to learn about the importance of preparedness and loss reduction during such calamities. They have developed and brought into place a beneficial crisis management policy, and set up strong institutional frameworks to control the spread of Covid -19 pandemic. The Government of India started using dedicated pages and accounts on social media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube and also used various departmental websites to post information regarding the pandemic. The central government has even developed popular mobile applications such as 'Arogyasetu' and 'Umang' which have been used intensely, and also created a website by the name 'Cowin' where anyone can access the full information about the pandemic. People can register themselves for COVID-19 vaccines; and get the latest updates about the government's initiatives etc about the pandemic. The use of different social media platforms has ensured that the crisis's communication efforts have reached the maximum number of people across the country.

(f) Disaster Management:

Most disasters whether natural or human-made can be mitigated through communicating with the people at the right time. For example, due to the technological advancements in satellite communications, we can predict cyclones, tsunamis' and many more disasters. The government of India through various communication channels including various social media platforms can mitigate the risk thereby reducing the death rate and property loss. The government was able to alert the people beforehand about these calamities and started evacuating them from the affected areas. In the year 2019, the state of Kerala was affected very badly due to the sudden floods and during that time, many social media platforms were used to pass on information regarding the updates about the flood situation. Many officials at the district level and state level, and ministers were using their Facebook and WhatsApp accounts to pass on information that was authentic to prevent the spread of fake news.

Challenges to the government for approaching people through social media

Social media is a double-edged knife. Apart from the various benefits the government and people are reaping through it, there exist a few challenges in this process, which are significant. Some of them are:

(a) Low literacy rate:

The low literacy rate in India is an obstacle for the government to create awareness among various stakeholders about its programs through social media platforms. There is general illiteracy as well as computer illiteracy among the people. General illiteracy is quite common among many people from rural areas, whereas, computer illiteracy is found in both rural and urban areas of India. This is a big challenge for the government as it is unable to communicate directly with these segments. Many beneficiaries of these segments are still exploited due to the lack of awareness about various programs launched by the government.

(b) Posting Political content

There are some complaints launched against the government's social media interface that the ruling party use these platforms for its political gains. Many of the opposition parties accuse the central government, that is the name of giving information and helping people, it is indeed advertising its achievements for political gains, and mishandling these social media platforms.

(c) Technological issues

Technology plays a very important role in communications. In many parts of India, there exist various technical issues which may cause disruptions to the smooth flow of information between people and the government. This is a bottleneck for the government's objective of connecting through social media.

(d) Limited control

The government will have limited control over social media platforms. Some people who oppose the government's schemes and ideas may try to mislead the people by giving their versions which are against the government. In such circumstances, the government's valuable time will be spent on defending its programs rather than serving the people.

(e) Limited help during natural disasters.

During natural disasters such as cyclones and earthquakes, the efficiency of connecting through social networking platforms is questionable. There will be mass destruction of telecommunications and electricity disruption during such calamities and there is less chance for the government to communicate with the people who are affected by these calamities.

Conclusion

Communicating through social media platforms is inevitable for any government across the world as more and more people are attracted to these networking interfaces as they offer a lot of transparency, and trust when compared with other modes of communication. The government of India is making the most of it by communicating with the people through different social media platforms crossing various hurdles in between.

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