

The New 'Snapchat Democracy'



Source: <http://www.idigitaltimes.com/snapchats-update-adds-personal-username-urls-heres-how-get-one-507404>

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Lead Essay

The New ‘Snapchat Democracy’

Tanmay Bhatt’s spoof on Sachin Tendulkar and Lata Mangeshkar occupied space on prime time debates for far more time than it did as a *snapstory* on the Snapchat application, the original upload platform. Enough has already been written about the ‘not so funny’ video in question and the ironically ‘funny’ reactions against this video.

While the Shiv Sena urged the Maharashtra CM to take strict action against Tanmay Bhatt, a MNS leader thought it would be right if he was also additionally “caught on the road and beaten up”. Arguably the Censor Board Chief Pahlaj Nihalani wanting Tanmay Bhatt to be arrested under the draconian Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (created to combat organised mafia crime and terror) topped the absurdity chart. (Offense is the best defence 2016)

A popular news anchor leaves us with a question whether it is probable that Tanmay Bhatt wanted to set a precedent that our celebrities and icons are not above questioning, although he clarifies that manner of ‘presentation’ of the same is liable to be open to condemnation due to the kind of content posted. (Now 2016) This could be a rhetorical question but there is other definite learning that we can take from this episode. Such as interpretation of the limitations of freedom and speech and expression this time was left to the mob disregarding Tanmay Bhatt’s right to speak and a strong warning of sorts, in a way, was issued to all and sundry regarding the acceptable manner in which individual heroes should be addressed. (Tripathi 2016)

But the most glaring revelation of all from this episode is that most of us still do not know how information relayed through social media platforms like Snapchat is to be dealt with.

Changing nature of social media platforms

Writing a few opinionated lines for a Facebook status update or while sharing a post involved pouring of heart with far greater visibility for it. But when there is a cap of 140 characters for relating information on an even faster platform, things can get tricky. What would happen if this cap is reduced to 10 seconds of image or video sharing, one can only imagine.

That there was a national outrage because of content- that had no political significance or national emergency potential- shared on the ephemeral Snapchat platform is telling of the fact that there is a huge gap, generational or otherwise in adapting to the changing nature of the emerging social media platforms. The government and Mumbai police, in particular, and large parts of society, in general, who did not shy away from condemning the ‘horror’ Tanmay Bhatt unleashed, have revealed their failure in understanding the intended audience of this application and how the content shared here is to be viewed.

The Mumbai police, who have accepted their ability to use technology to catch criminals, asked Google and Youtube to remove the controversial video from Orkut! Not only was Orkut a popular social networking site of Google at least a decade ago, it was pulled down by it in 2014. And further there would have been no locus for Youtube (another Google product) to ask Orkut (if it were to exist) take down the video. This conduct of the police speaks of their understanding of how aware they are of the workings of online social media communication.

What is more disturbing than the conduct of the police is the furore created by political parties on this issue filing FIRs against Tanmay Bhatt for posting the video; which if not downloaded and circulated by the media or the political parties involved, would have ‘disappeared’ within 24 hours, as snapstories always do on Snapchat.

How could then anybody putting up a single snapstory want to engage in debates regarding questioning of status of our icons or imparting knowledge about ‘legends’ of India’s cricket and Bollywood industry or even intend to create public disorder? (Tanmay Bhatt gone too far with his mocking video? 2016)

Lead Essay

Are we making the best of these changing social media platforms?

From what we see of the reactions to a snapstory, the answer to the above question would be no.

Relatively new sharing platforms like Twitter and Snapchat allow users to have quick opinions and thoughts and share them even quicker. In a recent survey it has been found that Snapchat has 150 million daily users making it more popular than Twitter in that regard. (Snapchat has more daily active users than twitter: Report 2016) Even though exact number of daily Indian users is not available it is uncontested that the application has gained currency with Indian teens and millennials. (Mathur 2016)

Reprimand on these platforms is also rampant in the form of *trolling* or simply *unfollowing* the account¹, which is a major backlash considering the growing clamour for popularity of the account holders. There is an inherent code of behaviour 'decided' by the users themselves. Here too collective of majority opinions gains precedence in deciding what is acceptable.

Why then did the political parties consider it appropriate to take up this issue outside this platform and solve it, so to speak, on the ground? Are they truly being representative of the concerns of the people who can very well express their discontent at these open platforms? Was it correct for the MNS and BJP to demand action against Tanmay Bhatt for his video?

The answer probably lies in the fact that such controversies provide help to political leaders and parties to hit the coveted headlines especially in this case since municipal elections are around the corner in Maharashtra. (Tanmay Bhatt, AIB 'mentally deranged', take action against them: Shiv Sena 2016)

Apart from understanding what it means for the artist himself and the future of comedy or political satire in this country, it is pertinent to consider if we have fathomed the power that lies in these fast means of disseminating capsulated information in an attractive form. And if yes, then by whom and how can this power be appropriated.

Snapchat, a political campaigning tool?

It is being widely debated if 2016 will be the year of 'Snapchat Election' in the United States of America, which is in the midst of a Presidential election campaign. The application's presence in the social media ecosystem is undeniable, with maximum number of 18-24 year olds following the Republican debate through it rather than television. While Twitter is fast, with updates every second, Snapchat is fast and ephemeral; leaving only the most attractive bits of information to stay behind. (Rutenberg 2016)

It caters perfectly to this new age short attention span for understanding political debates and news. An incident may garner attention today and will be lost tomorrow as it is pushed aside by another new and interesting event. Politicians who understand how to capitalise on this kind of churning of information and policy updates have the maximum to gain. Specifically designed election filters are being used to *troll* other political candidates or to advance one's own campaigning in agenda in the US.

Snapchat is tailor-made for disseminating information to the younger generation of voters, who form a majority of its user base. This can be crucial for turning the outcomes of election, especially in India as was evident from the way 2014 elections panned out banking on the aspirational youth vote.

¹ *Trolling* refers to deliberately posting off-topic, often sarcastic and inflammatory comments, on posts either to start arguments or upset users in general.

Unfollowing the account of a person on any of these platforms would prevent their posts from showing automatically on the homepage, costing the account holder a loss of 'followers'. The higher the number of followers the more popular an account is considered to be.

Lead Essay

We have already had our Prime Minister 'import' campaign ideas from the US to lead him to election victory in Gujarat; the idea of Modi masks worn by his supporters as he campaigned for the Chief Ministerial position was borrowed from masks made for Hillary Clinton and George W. Bush as they campaigned in 2007. A strategy, which he perfected in an almost-Presidential-style campaign, in 2014. Thus, it would not be surprising if he capitalizes on what Snapchat has to offer for the next national elections in 2019 or even the assembly elections in 2017.

With the love for clicking *selfies* among people and politicians, desirability of having the youth vote keeping the demographics in mind² and the current endeavours of digitizing India it wouldn't be far-fetched to envisage a situation when politicians buy their own custom made filters from Snapchat and advance to fight the 2019 elections in India.

What next?

The major take-away from the Tanmay Bhatt spoof episode is more than him offending sensibilities of a particular few who have proven adept at raising hue and cry for the same. It is how volatile information sharing platforms have now become. They lie like open mines waiting to be utilised by the first person who understands them.

Should we then be focussing on the content of the Snapchat video that has caused this furore? Or should we take our lesson from how it is being used as a campaign tool in the current US elections and be on the alert? For whoever captures this space, and uses it to their advantage surely will have a better chance at connecting with young voters.

Will the government be able to control the information that is shared on these social media platforms? The striking down of the controversial Section 66-A of the Information Technology Act, 2000 last year is telling of the fact that society will not accept strait-jacket rules over the internet. Especially since as discussed above the virtual society knows how to 'reprimand' whom it dislikes and does not need the government to be its representative for doing the same.

It would be prudent for political parties and civil society activists to take a step further from evaluating what is considered to be offensive content posted through these new information sharing mediums. Rather than that it would be better to understand the concerns these platforms can raise if they are used for important causes. Surely, none bigger than democracy?

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² Latest census data of 2011 reveals that 41 percent of India's population is below the age of 20 years

Lead Essay

Tanmay Bhatt, AIB 'mentally deranged', take action against them: Shiv Sena. May 30, 2016.

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/tanmay-bhat-aib-mentally-deranged-take-action-against-them-shiv-sena/> (accessed June 6, 2016).

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Headlines

Water for Life

(The Telegraph, June 7, 2016)

Two draft bills have been put in the public domain by the ministry of water resources, river development and Ganga rejuvenation. Both bills touch upon a crucial aspect of democratic governance (by Central and state governments as well as by local authorities) in relation to local communities and individual citizens. They conceptualize, in terms that are still rather general and therefore vague, how the State would hold water in "public trust" at all levels "for the people".

Read More: http://www.telegraphindia.com/1160607/jsp/opinion/story_89640.jsp#.V1ZtnPI97IU

Date Accessed: 7.6.2016

Governance & Development

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

The Road to Empowering City Governments

(Sonali Rohra, *The Livemint*, June 7, 2016)

The two-year anniversary of the Narendra Modi-led National Democratic Alliance government has been something of an extravaganza. And, certainly, given the decent macroeconomic indicators and signs of green shoots in the economy, the government has something to celebrate. But there was a mismatch between the over-the-top tone of the publicity blitz and the relatively limited ambitions of the government with regard to future policy reforms.

Read More: <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/4sE8MtHPm7spyS8ycLwnHN/The-road-to-empowering-city-governments.html>

Date Accessed: 7.6.2016

EDUCATION

Education- Is the Government Repeating Old Mistakes?

(Apoorva Shankar, *The Business Standard*, June 3, 2016)

While almost 100% enrolment in elementary education (standard one to eight) has been achieved, it has not translated into learning outcomes. But the truly debilitating gap lays elsewhere – the complete lack of attention on secondary education. Unlike elementary education, which is guaranteed as a fundamental right by the Right to Education Act, secondary education (standard nine to 12) is not backed by any legislation. Only about 50% of those meant to be in secondary schools are actually enrolled. In fact, nearly half of those that enroll in secondary schools drop out before finishing. Even if enrolment were the only measure of success, natural progression would have been to focus on maximizing enrolment in secondary education, after elementary.

Read More: http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/education-is-the-government-repeating-old-mistakes-116060300451_1.html

Date Accessed: 7.6.2016

DU teachers threaten to shun admission process

(*Hindustan Times*, June 7, 2016)

Delhi University teachers protesting the University Grants Commission's (UGC) third amendment regulation have now threatened to boycott the admission process. They have been already boycotting the evaluation process since May 24.

The protest could delay results of DU's undergraduate courses, which are usually out by June 30. The delay will also affect students who have to apply for postgraduate courses.

With teachers threatening to intensify their agitation and boycott the admissions, the issue may snowball into a bigger controversy.

Read more: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi/du-teachers-threaten-to-shun-admission-process/story-lbB9ezPikRKd7g7k7Ks9PP.html>

Date accessed: 07.06.16

HEALTH

Assam Launches New TB Drug

(Barnali Handique, *The Telegraph*, June 6, 2016)

Assam today became the first state in the country to introduce a new drug called bedaquiline against tuberculosis, to be offered exclusively to patients who have failed to respond to standard first-line and second-line anti-TB drugs. The US-based company Janssen has made the drug available free to the Indian government for use in hospitals in Guwahati, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Mumbai, and New Delhi only on patients who meet certain criteria for drug-resistant TB.

Read More: http://www.telegraphindia.com/1160607/jsp/frontpage/story_89737.jsp#.V1Zs0_197IU

Governance & Development

Date Accessed: 7.6.2016

TECHNOLOGY

As Net Use Spreads Cyber Crimes Up

(Chaitanya Mallapur, *India Spend*, June 2, 2016)

Cyber crimes reported in India rose 19 times over the last ten years (2005 to 2014), from 481 in 2005 to 9,622 in 2014, and India is now ranked third—after the US and China—as a source of “malicious activity” on the Internet and second as a source of “malicious code”. Arrests involving cyber crimes also rose nine times from 569 in 2005 to 5,752 in 2014, according to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) [data](#), even as more Indians logged on to the Internet.

Read More: <http://www.indiaspend.com/cover-story/as-net-use-spreads-cyber-crimes-up-19-times-over-10-years-49007>

Date Accessed: 7.6.2016

Society

CASTEISM

Jat quota agitation: Protests resume, security tightened in Delhi-Haryana border areas

(Zee News, June 7, 2016)

In the wake of Jat leaders in Haryana launching fresh stir over quota, prohibitory orders were imposed in several parts of the national capital, covering over one-fourth of the city, Delhi Police said. Haryana launching fresh stir over quota, prohibitory orders were imposed in several parts of the national capital, covering over one-fourth of the city, Delhi Police said. Most of the areas, in which prohibitory orders were imposed, are either located in the border areas near Haryana or inhabited by a large number of people belonging to the Jat community.

Read more: http://zeenews.india.com/news/delhi/jat-quota-agitation-protests-resume-security-tightened-in-delhi-haryana-border-areas_1892095.html

Date accessed: 07.06.16

India and World

INDIA IN THE WORLD

What Obama Will Try To Win From PM Modi : Foreign Media

(*NDTV*, June 7, 2016)

With President Obama hosting Modi at the White House on Tuesday before the latter addresses Congress on Wednesday, there are high hopes that Modi will firmly state his government's commitments to renewable energy. Judging by public statements both have made, Modi and Obama see combating climate change not only as an imperative that will shape their legacies, but also as a foundation for their personal bond.

Read more: <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/what-obama-will-try-to-win-from-pm-modi-foreign-media-1416288>

Date accessed: 07.06.16

MIDDLE-EAST

Nearly 60% of Qatar's population live in labour camps: Report

(*Hindustan Times*, June 7, 2016)

Almost 60% cent of Qatar's 2.4 million population live in what the government calls "labour camps", figures from an April 2015 census showed on Monday, highlighting the issue of the emirate's huge migrant workforce.

Figures from the Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics (MDPS) revealed that 1.4 million people live in what the department officially designates as "labour camps".

At the time of the survey, the official population was 2.4 million. That works out at just over 58% of the country's population. The overwhelming majority - 1.34 million - were male, the statistics found.

Read more: http://www.hindustantimes.com/world/nearly-60-of-qatar-s-population-live-in-labour-camps-report/story-X11KjUSOSD75f7vXMNJxgJ.html?google_editors_picks=true

Date accessed: 07.06.16

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