FROM CONSUMERS TO CREATORS : USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

States that Social Media are tools for sharing and discussing information. With the introduction of Social Media including Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, microblogging, wikis, podcasts and social bookmarking, the world has become smaller. It is being used as a tool to increase the awareness levels of all Netizens around the world. The social media environment is evolving rapidly in India as the Facebook, Orkut, MySpace, twitter, etc. are becoming a part and parcel of the Internet users in India. Highlights some such social media sites in India and studies their impact on the social, cultural, political and business activities in India.

KEYWORDS : Social Media, Social Networking, Social Networking in India.

Introduction

The Internet since its inception has provided an increasing number of opportunities for accessing and exchanging information to the current information society. Initially, Bulletin Board System was used to exchange software, data, messages and news with each other. With the emergence of social media applications, which encourage a more active and interactive internet usage, this trend is developing further. Earlier, the information used to be passive and required the user to actively find it, now with the introduction of social media, information is available to us in many different ways through RSS feeds, Twitter, friends' links, video clips etc. It has changed the way we obtain information and knowledge. The world has become smaller as the social media has brought people together irrespective of their nationality thereby making them global citizens who are continuously interacting with each other.

Social Media

According to Wikipedia, "Social media is media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques"(Social Media, 2010). According to Search engine partner, "the term social media describes media that is posed by the user and can take many different forms. Some types of social media are forums, message boards, blogs, wikis and podcasts. Social media applications include Google, Facebook and

YouTube."(Search English, 2010) In social media, communication takes place through messages, status updates, voice chats etc. or through photos/ videos sharing, games, virtual goods etc. Antony Mayfield in his e-book titled "what is social media?" has defined social media as an online media, which encourages contributions and feedback from everyone who is interested, is open to feedback and participation, is a two-way conversation, allows communities to form quickly and communicate effectively to share common interests and thrive on their connectedness. It includes Social networks, Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, Forums, Content communities and Microblogging.(Mayfield, 2008)

Use of Social Media Around the World

Since the first blog engine called Blogger by Pyra Labs came up in 1999, the growth of social media is phenomenal. It is being used by the netizens all over the world to a great extent in all areas including business, government, fashion, etc. A research conducted by the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS)(Redecker, 2010) indicates that the high take up of social media applications outside formal educational settings provides new opportunities for innovation and modernization.

With this growing trend, political leaders have also realized its importance as an effective tool to spread awareness and to reach out to their voters. Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama used it during the Presidential elections.(Social Network, 2009) Since then, social media is being highly used by a number of politicians all over the world. MySpace has more than 7,400 discussion groups related to politics. According to a survey by Manpower, 29% of companies in the America and 20% of companies worldwide have a social media policy.(Mecollum, 2010)

According to Don Middleberg, CEO of Middleberg Communications, "while the companies are increasingly paying more attention to social media for revenue generation, employee productivity and enhanced consumer loyalty, many do not yet understand the true scope and depth of these new communications tools for journalistic usage. Social media presents a new opportunity to communicate and develop relationships with a whole new generation of journalists through these new channels of choice."(Jose, 2009) According to the 2nd Annual Middleberg/SNCR Survey of Media in the Wired World, nearly 70% of journalists consider online resources and social media as the most valuable tools, 48% are using Twitter or other microblogging sites and tools, nearly 80% believed that bloggers have become important opinion-shapers in recent years and 91% agreed that new media and communications tools and technologies are enhancing journalism to some extent. (Machure, 2009)

Apart from this, people even update themselves through micro-blogging on every aspect of human life including the natural and human disasters. In China, Twitter became the first media in the world to break the news of the WenZhou earthquake.(Aug, 2009) Social media is being used in fashion industry as well to generate interest in a brand through publicity across online communities and websites. Von Furstenberg is the most popular designer on the Twitter. A Russian born fashion

designer, Ziv, gained considerable global popularity through her blog MyItThings.(Sanand, 2010) Rotarians throughout the world are also finding ways to use social media to build fellowship and get new ideas about running their clubs.(Grahl, 2010) Social media is also being used to recruit patients for clinical trials. Major cancer hospitals such as M.D. Anderson, Roswell Park and the Mayo Clinic are leading the way as they have their Twitter account.(Chursh, 2009) Sony Ericsson used Twitter to engage fans months before the World Cup began. (Leberecht, 2010) Research GATE is a scientific network where scientists can interact with their peers to discover new methods, papers and people and to collaborate with them.(Research Gate, 2010)

Social Networking in India

India, a Union of 28 states and seven union territories, is a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic with a Parliamentary System of government. It is one of the most culturally, linguistically, and genetically diverse regions having more than one billion people. It is ranked third in Asia in terms of the Internet users (Asia, 2010) and quite a number of them are using social media. The way Indians are communicating online has gone through a sea-change over last few years. In fact, approximately 60 million to 65 million netizens in India spend most of their time on social Media/Networking sites.

Although Orkut, Facebook and twitter are being used to a great extent (Figure 1), yet many Indian social networks including bharatstudent.com, bigadda.com, ibibo.com, fropper.com, indiashines.com, etc. have also proliferated. However, the Indian Blogging became more popular only during 2008-09. There are now more than 150,000 blogs covering topics like politics, social issues, Bollywood celebrities, Indian culture and technology trends. Although a significant number of Indian bloggers communicate in English to reach a global audience both in India and abroad, yet they also represent a rich diversity of regional languages and local issues.(Debashis, 2000)
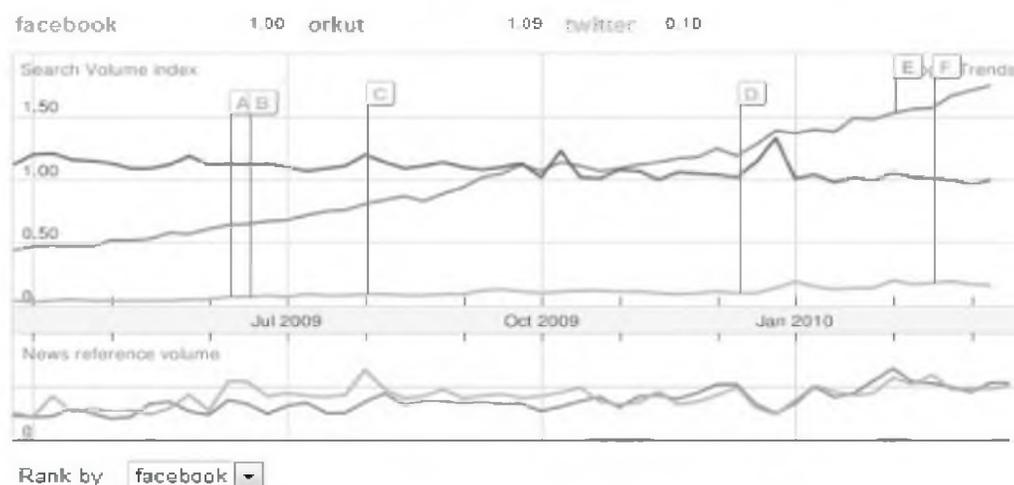

Figure 1: Facebook, Orkut and Twitter Traffic in India (Sinha,2010)

In one of the surveys, it has been found that social media users in India are young, predominantly male and have well paid occupations. They use social media to build relationships as well as for guidance on buying decisions. However, the privacy issues are of the biggest concern for the users of social media. (Swami, 2009) Since the social media in India is being used in business, journalism, government, etc., a rising numbers of viewers and advertisements are pushing top portals to take India very seriously.

Social Media and Business in India

The Indian corporate community is slowly waking up to the light of new media and its power to drive business to them. Now, the Indian brands are making their presence felt on social media through YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, etc. (Figure 2). According to a Retail Horizons study co-authored by the National Retail Federation Foundation and accounting and consulting firm KPMG LLC, about 48% of the e-retailers are on Facebook and Twitter so as to enable them to track feedback, trends and other indicators that can inform them about their product and marketing strategies. (News Bureau, 2010)

Figure 2: Indian Brands on Youtube (Adhvith, 2010)

The Indian online advertising market is decently growing at $200 million annually. Recently, YouTube made $4 million on display ads for its live Webcast of the Indian Premier League cricket championships.(Amar, 2010) A number of Indian multi-nationals including Dell (Figure 3), Infosys (Figure 4) and Wipro Technologies (Figure 5) have started corporate blogs and are promoting such media within and outside their organizations. Dell has launched Ideas: IdeaStorm, Blogs: Direct2Dell, Blogs: DellShares, Forums: Dell Forums, Videos: StudioDell, RSS: Syndicated Feeds and is present on twitter, Facebook and Flickr. People following Dell on Twitter get messages when discounted products are available in the company's stores. Dell also uses Twitter to service its customer requests and support queries. Infosys has a number of blogs including Business Platforms, Cloud Computing customer Relationship Management, Engineering Software Products, Infosys Certification for IT Project Management, Livewire, Manufacturing Talk, etc.
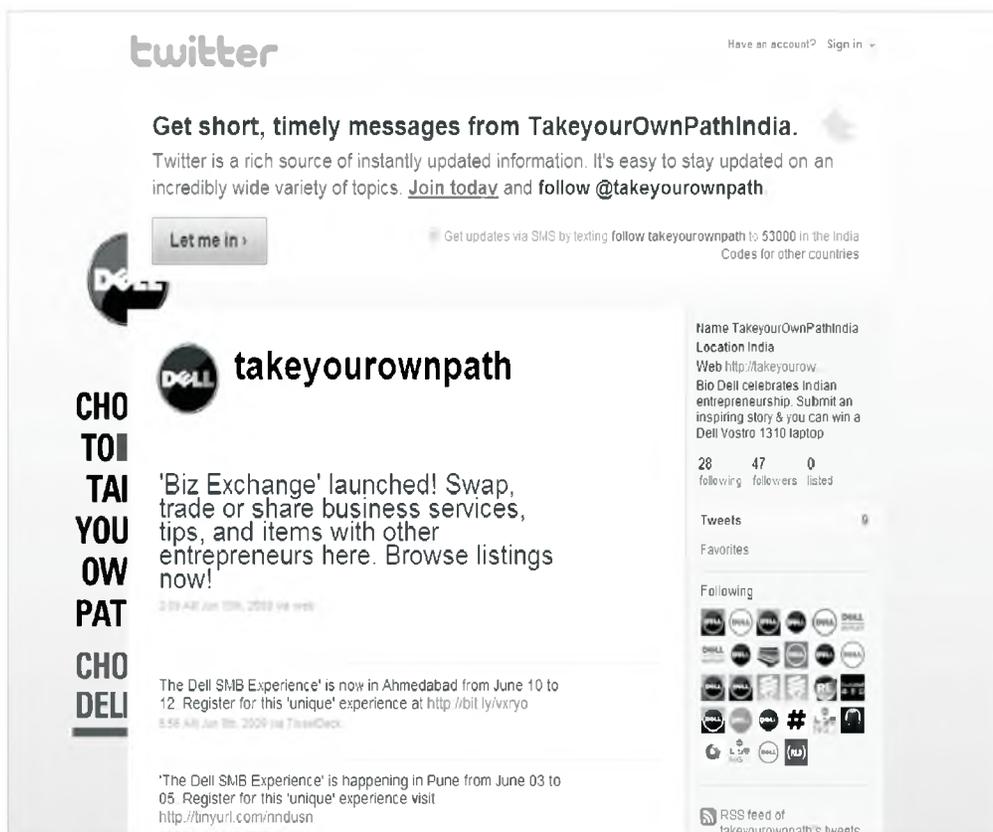

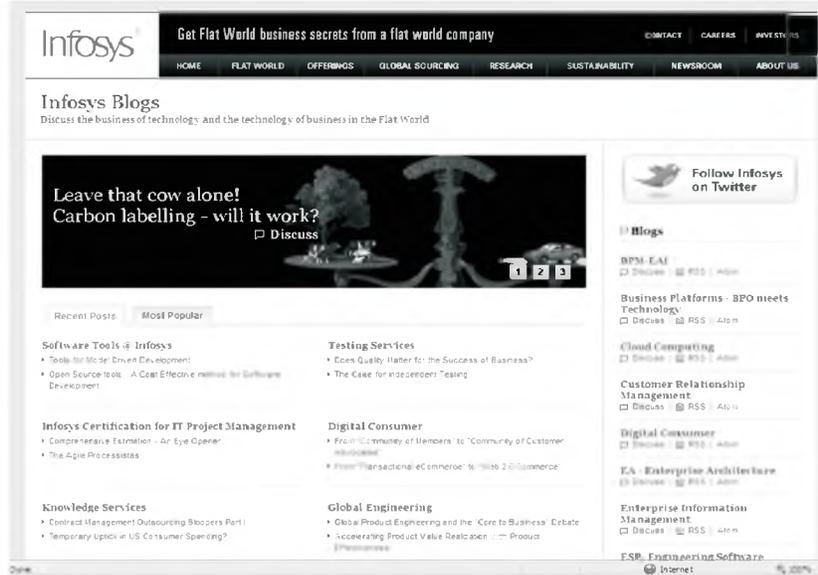Figure 3: Take Your Own Path at Twitter (Twitter, 2010)

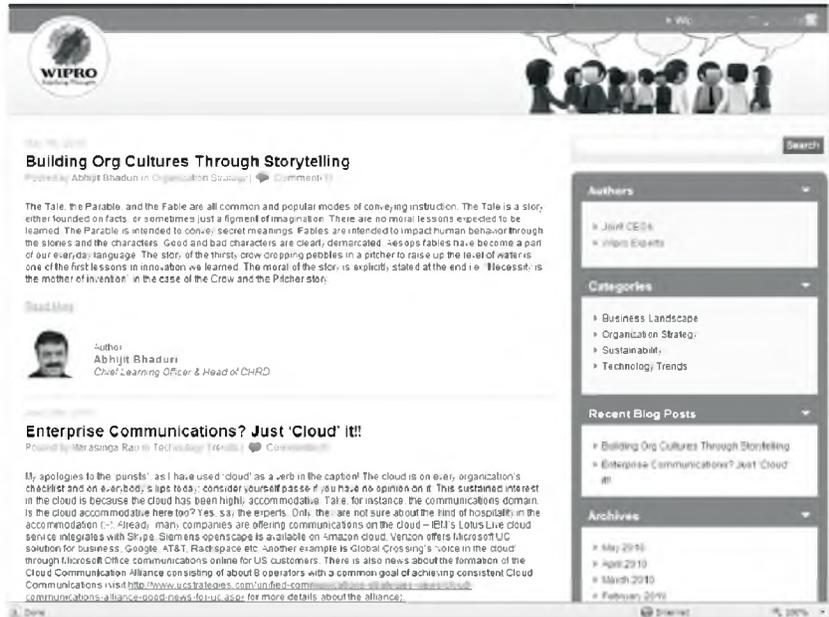**Figure 4: Infosys Blog (Infosys, 2010)**

Figure 5: Wipro Blog (Wipra Blog, 2010)

Brands are not only creating communities on Facebook, Ibibo and others but are also creating content specifically for promotion. The Zoozoo ads by Vodafone have become very popular and it has a huge fan following in You Tube. Some brands for example, Tata Docomo, have also used social networking platform (Figure 6) to create brand champions. Tata Motors Ltd used Facebook, Twitter and Orkut to launch Tata Nano.
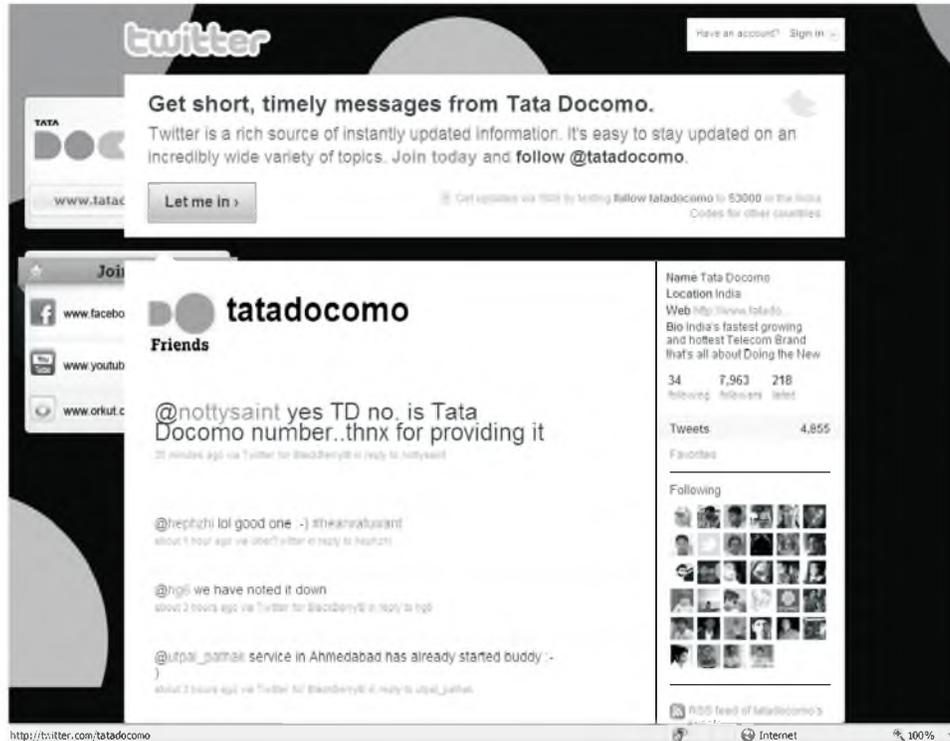

Figure 6: TataDocomo on Twitter (TataDocomo, 2010)

As the Indian corporate houses are joining the social media bandwagon, they are increasing their digital media budgets to promote brands and products through online networks. Mahindra and Mahindra Ltd, India's largest maker of utility vehicles, is spending about 5-8% of its marketing budget on social media outreach.

Social Media and Journalism in India

A large section of the Indian news audience regularly use Twitter, photo and video sharing sites, wikis, blogs for breaking news and commentary. News begin with Twitter, make its way through Facebook to Blog and then merge with the traditional media. During November 2008, breaking news

of the terrorist attacks in Mumbai featured on blogs and Twitter. The mainstream media sources covered the news extensively and the citizen journalists equally unfolded the event (Figure 7). Hundreds of people shared firsthand information about what is happening using Flickr, Twitter and YouTube (Figure 8). Similarly during Tsunami, videos were uploaded on YouTube (Figure 9).
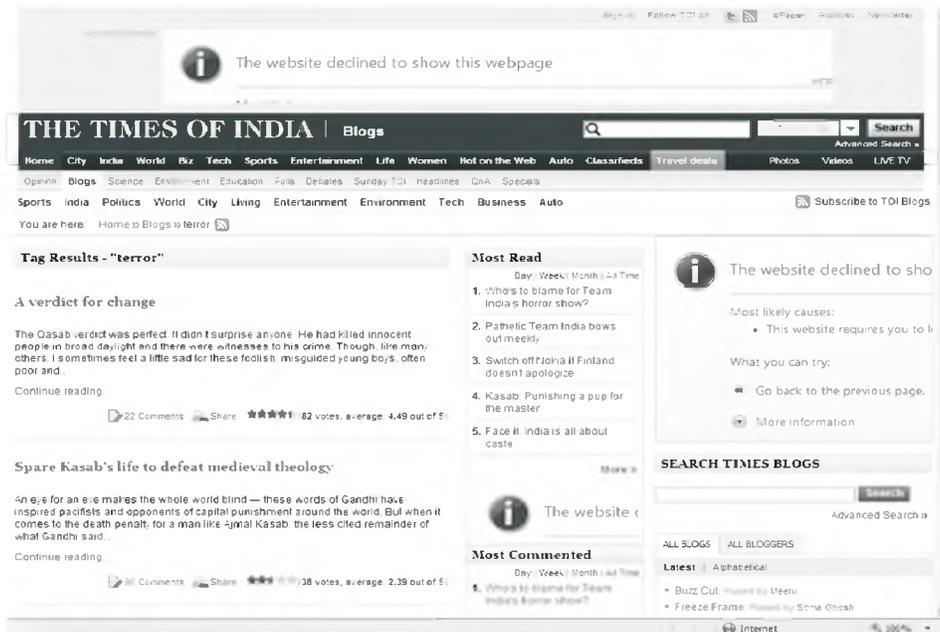

Figure 7: The Times of India Blog(Times of India Blog, 2010)

Figure 8: Mumbai Terror Attack at flickr (Dhar, 2008)

Tsunami India – India

mcab1993 [ ] 65 videos [Subscribe] [Edit Subscription]
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Figure 9: Tsunami Video at YouTube (Mcab, 1993)

Apart from such emergency situations, the mainstream media in India, like IBN Live (Figure 10), is also integrating citizen journalism for day to day information, both by creating citizen journalism platforms on their websites and by actively tracking social media for stories and sources.

Figure 10: IBN Live (CNN)

Social Media and Politics in India

The Indian politicians have also realized the usefulness of social media to reach out to their voters and supporters. In fact, the Internet played an important role during 2009 elections. Almost every national party launched its website for its campaign, political leaders started blogging to communicate with voters and even opened Facebook accounts to appeal to the voters. Peer-to-peer discussions, chatting with candidates, photos/ videos sharing, etc. were commonly used by the urban voters. Some politicians including BJP's L.K.Advani (Figure 11) also used social media to communicate with voters.

Figure 11: LK Advani Blog (Advani, 2010)

Recently, Minister of State for External Affairs Shashi Tharoor used Twitter for airing his personal views on visa regulation as well as on IPL League on the popular micro-blogging site which was appreciated by his followers (Figure 12). He became the symbol of new India where people had the right to express their views and the technology to be heard.

Figure 12: Shashi Tharoor Support Blog (Shashi Tharoor)

Social Media and Sports in India

Sports person in India have also started using Twitter and other social media tools to reach out to their fans. Consumers are equally using social media to express themselves as is seen in case of the Indian Premier League (IPL) matches (Figure 13). YouTube also went live with the videos of the matches. (Figure 14)

Figure 13: Official IPL Community at Orkut (IPL, 2010)

Figure 14: IPL live at YouTube (YouTube, 2010)

Commercial companies (Figure 15) as well as the traditional media (Figure 16) are also not lagging behind and have created blogs to discuss Indian sports.
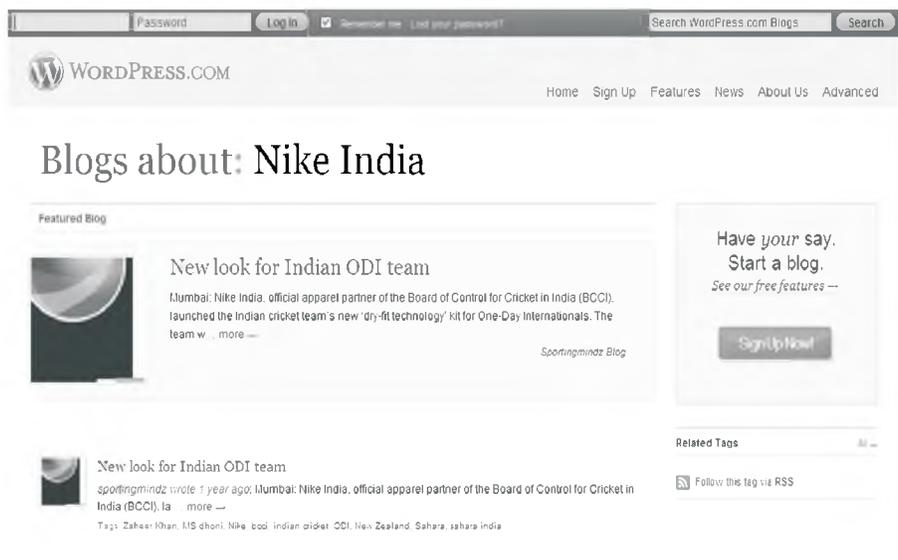

Figure 15: Nike India Blog (Niki India, 2010)

Figure 16: The Times of India Blog (Times of India, 2010)

Social Media and Indian Culture

India is a country which is blessed with a rich culture which is one of the oldest cultures in the world. Cultural diversities in form of dances, languages, religions, people, their customs and festivals prevail in India. Despite the cultural diversities, Indian's are closely bonded and makes India a great country. The Indian society, however, is now witnessing a cultural change which is fast affecting the powerful and crucial areas of society like marriage and moral and ethical values. Some of the most obvious cultural conflict at familial and social level has arisen out of the use of social media by urban India. Indians are constantly discussing topics on social evils including eve teasing, dowry system, caste system, etc. through blogs. Jaagore.com, which was launched around 2009 general assembly polls in India to give the necessary information to the user on how to become a registered Indian voter, also awakens people on matters pertaining to civic issues, health, education, corruption, etc. (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Jaago Re Blog (Taba Tea, 2010)

Bell Bajao (Ring the Bell!) (Figure 18), a high profile national campaign with 124 million people, uses innovative media outreach to bring domestic violence to a halt thereby creating a culture of human rights. Blank Noise Project is a campaign to combat casual sexual harassment in Indian cities. (Figure 19)

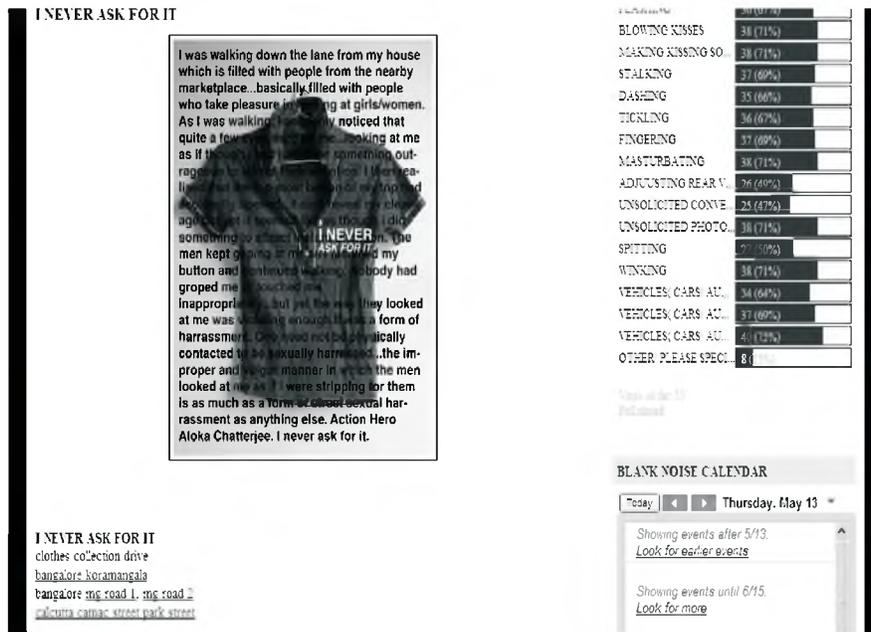**Figure 18: Bell Bajao Blog (Blog Bell Bagao, 2010)**

Figure 19: Blanknoise Blog (J, 2010)

Many of the Indian Bollywood heroes and heroines also are on Twitter and keep their fans informed about their day to day activities (Figure 20). YouTube is filled with videos from such celebrities. Even the media houses have their official channels over YouTube to promote their productions.
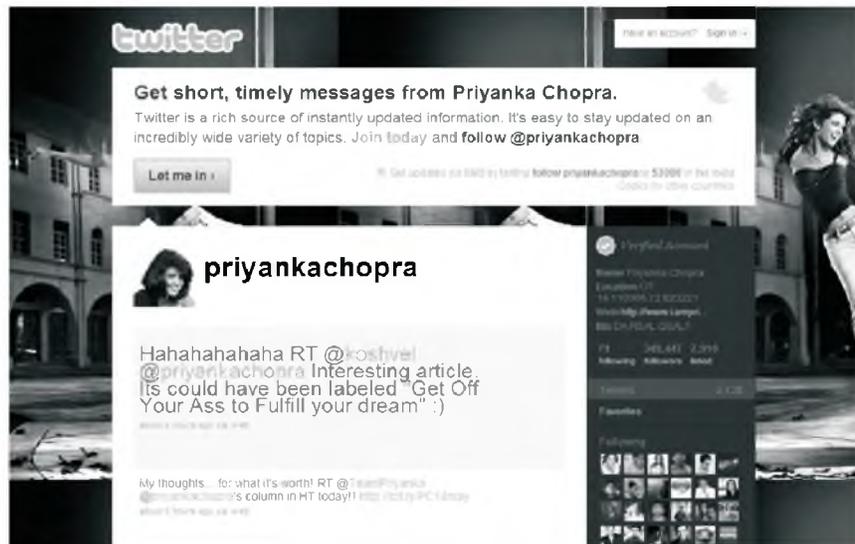

Figure 20: Priyanka Chopra at Twitter (Chopra, 2010)

Conclusion

The users of information today are no longer 'consumers, they equally participate in information generation using social media. Social media has already changed the way people find, create, share and learn knowledge. Ever since people started discovering about Social Media platforms in India, things have changed drastically. By 90's, only e-mail was being used as it was considered to be easier and a decade later communication has gone shorter on Facebook and Twitter. However, India still has miles to go in terms of adoption of the social media as a popular source of information. The reason for this is that the available infrastructure is limited to urban and semi-urban areas only. Maximum use of social media for information communication is possible in India only by making the people aware about its usefulness. For its future potential, the state as well as the central government, educational institutions, corporate sector, etc., should use social media to a greater extent.

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