

Dear All,

Several things happened on social media in the last ten days which made me ask myself if social media is a force for good or is it something that's hurting us? The twitter debate on verified accounts is a good example. Here's my view on this hotly debated topic:

Social media as a force for good:

1. It can mobilize people and communities. For example, when the Nepal earthquake happened, people got to know the survivors via Facebook posts, Facebook could help trace people.
2. It gives us connections which we could otherwise have lost in a very busy world.
3. It helps build brands, people, and institutions. It helps the build at low cost.
4. Robert Dunbar the British historian said that a human being can have a maximum of 150 strong connections. This is true of Facebook groups too. Dunbar derived this number by watching village behaviour.
5. Information is freely available and traded on social sites.
6. Every person on social media is a creator, good or bad, so there is freedom of expression of a high order.
7. Governments can test ideas by floating concepts with public. Many legislative ideas are put out for commentary before the government acts. So, in a way government crowd sources ideas and responses.
8. You can talk 1 to 1 and even 1 to a billion. We have seen a new breed of influencers.
9. People tend to trust people they know; this works well when the message is positive and works badly when the message is negative.

Social media is a challenge when:

1. There are no verified accounts of people on social media. Anonymity gives people courage to say and do many things on social media.
2. Social media creates anxiety amongst children, so at what age should we allow children to come onto social media is a big societal question.
3. A lot of information goes unverified on social media.
4. There is little legal regulation on social media, governments will step in sooner or later to make this space more accountable.
5. There is a constant feeling of catch up, the need to keep up with the Khanna's, the Sens and the Swamy's!!
6. Social media world looks like an artificial world to many where designations and achievements have huge overclaims.
7. Social media seems to be binary, either something is loved, or something is ignored.
8. With deep tech, we see voices, images morphed to paint a different picture of what was said or communicated. The fake industry is a big concern and hence fact checking as a business is booming.
9. Confidentiality is a challenge when people post company sensitive information online to get views and likes.

In a social world, reputations are made and unmade every day, so please be careful.