Credibility Crisis a Major Stumbling Block in The Future Path of social media: A Critical Study

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ABSTRACT

Social Media, a unique gift of aspirational mankind"s technological innovations, has brought revolutionary changes in every walk of life. Thanks to its characteristic features like immediacy, wide reach and cost effectiveness, social media is scaling new heights of popularity with each passing day. Its success story is so influential that experts hail social media as the media of future. Undoubtedly social media has led to paradigm shift in ways people work, learn and obtain knowledge, do business or entertain themselves. The information flow on social platforms has proved to be very helpful for people across all ages and sections of society.

However, this information flow has also put a question mark on the credibility of social media. Today social media is facing a serious crisis of credibility. The severity of crisis can be understood from the fact that no one trusts the information on social media without verification. It is a major challenge for social media, which is eulogized as 'the baby with immense potential' and which aspires to become the media of future.

This research study makes vigorous efforts to find out the stumbling blocks in the future path of social media and suggest measures to remove those blocks, so that this media could reach new heights of glory and serve the humanity with all its benign force.

KEY WORDS: Paradigm Shift, Unique Gift, Crisis of Credibility, Information Flow, Benign Force

INTRODUCTION

Credibility is the most valuable asset for a media industry. The fourth estate is fit and fine only if its credibility quotient is very high. Media strives hard to gain this credibility by maintaining accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, restraint, fair play and a strong commitment to the society and the nation against all odds. However, nowadays mainstream media is also facing the crisis of credibility, thanks to the quality of news they circulate in newspapers and broadcast on Television channels. Experts say it is high time for media organizations to step in and take effective measures to restore media's credibility and esteem in the eyes of the public.

So far social media is concerned, despite all pitfalls, presently it enjoys an esteemed place in society. Due to social media's wide reach and immediacy factor people rely on it. But these characteristic features themselves pose a serious challenge before social media. These features attract evil- doers for spreading misinformation and rumors, who got a boost by the Internet revolution of the late 1990s, which allowed users to interact, communicate, and generate content without reference to sources. As a

result, today social media audiences and readers have become skeptical about the information available on social networking sites. The statements or visuals we come across on social platforms, could have been edited and distorted several times before being shared. People with vested interests do so to propagate their ideology, caring little for the society and the nation. Many times, extremists and terrorists take advantage of social media to instigate youth or mislead the society.

Social media enjoys all the freedom given to the mainstream media, but is least concerned with the inherent responsibility nor has it to do anything with media ethics. It is a heaven for unsocial elements and rumor mongers. People with vested interest, who want to divide the society on caste or class lines or spread communalism, use social media as a tool to serve their purpose. Moreover, social media has emerged as a platform to spread false information and fake news.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: Sample survey, Interviews & Content Analysis

LITERATURE REVIEW

In social media, where there is neither any gate keeper to monitor the content nor any concrete information about the source of news, maintaining credibility becomes a crucial task.

In the paper titled "Measuring User Credibility in Social Media" authors have focused on the vulnerability of social media. People increasingly use social media to get first-hand news and information. During disasters and natural calamities, social media becomes an important platform to report injuries as well as to send out requests to the agencies involved in relief and rescue operations. This media also plays a key role during social movements in organizing events and spreading the news. As more people rely on social media for political, social, and business events, it is more susceptible to become a place for evil doers to use it to spread misinformation and rumors. Therefore, users have the challenge to discern which piece of information is credible or not. They also need to find ways to assess the credibility of information. The problem becomes more serious when the source of information is not known to the consumer.

To understand the importance of credibility of social media, it is important that the factors influencing Information credibility should be evaluated. The study titled "Factors Influencing Information Credibility on Social Media Platforms: Evidence From Facebook Pages" is an effort in this direction. This study examines the factors that influence individuals' perceived information credibility on social media. Five factors from two dimensions of credibility (medium and message credibility) have been identified as key ingredients in the online information assessment, and for developing a research model that predicts individuals' perceived information credibility on social media platforms. These include three factors---medium dependency, interactivity, and medium transparency from the medium credibility dimension and two factors--- argument strength and information quality from message credibility dimension.

The research findings provide an initial step in understanding what factors influence information credibility on Facebookpagesso that information providers and users can evaluate information credibility more effectively.

In the study titled "Credibility in Online Social Networks: A Survey" the authors stress on knowing the value of information as it is essential for the decision-making processes. A challenge before the authors was that a great deal of literature has developed different credibility dimensions during recent years.

Different articles and research papers acknowledge that credibility crisis is a major issue for social media. They refer to various factors influencing credibility of social media platforms. Survey at large level has also been conducted. Each study has its findings. But what is the possible way out of this burning problem needs to be communicated in simple terms. And therefore further research is needed in this field.

SURVEY, INTERVIEWS & DATA INTERPRETATION

A sample survey was conducted on the topic. The area of research was the national capital & NCR. The research area in question assumes special significance. Since Delhi is a cosmopolitan city, people of almost all the states of the country reside here, making it mini-India. Therefore the research findings of this sample survey could be viewed in the national perspective. Two hundred and fifteen respondents of various age groups, genders, educational qualifications and income brackets took part in this survey. The data collected from this survey revealed many interesting facts. The analysis of this sample survey gave a new perspective to this research study.

Social Media provides credible information

| Do you think Social Media provides credible information? Cross tabulation				
Count				
		Do you consider Social Media provides credible information?		Total
		Yes	No	
Gender of the respondent	Male	53	93	146
	Female	31	38	69
Total		84	131	215
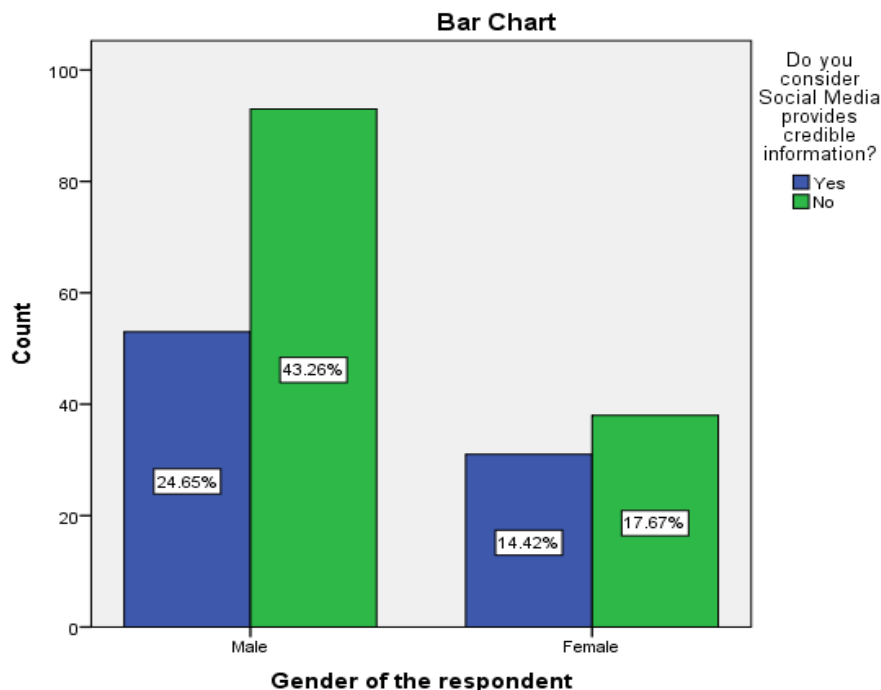
In the above bar chart and cross tabulation, the respondents have been analyzed on the ground of their gender and their response to the question if they consider that social media provides credible information or not. Concluding the analysis, We find that out of the 215 valid respondents, 146 respondents are male and 69 respondents are female. If we discuss about the response of male respondents then out of 146, 53 respondents said that "Yes, social media provides more credible information" whereas 93 respondents said that "No, it doesn't provides any credible information.

Similarly, when this question was asked from female respondents then out of 69 respondents, 31 said that "Yes, it provides credible information" whereas 38 respondents said "No, it does not provides any credible information".

In conclusion, it is analyzed that out of total 215 respondents, 84 respondents said that "Yes, social media provides credible information" whereas 131 respondents said that "No, it doesn't provides any credible information.

Amount of credible information provided by social media platforms

How much credible information do social media platforms provide? Crosstabulation					
Count					
		How much credible information do social media platforms provides?			Total
		100%	50%	Not at all	
Gender of the respondent	Male	15	101	30	146
	Female	7	52	10	69
Total		22	153	40	215
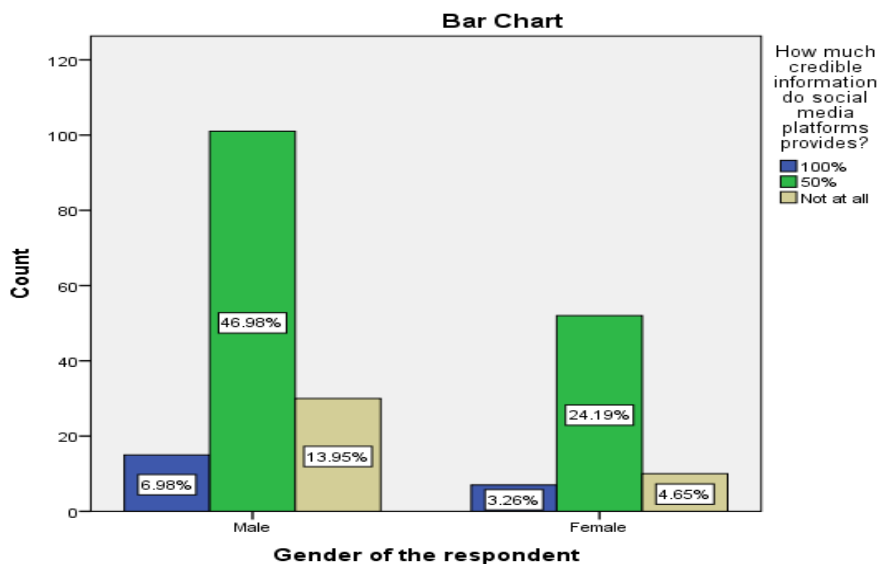
In the above bar chart and cross tabulation, the respondents have been analyzed on the ground of their gender and their response to the question that "How much credible information do social media platforms provide?" Concluding analysis says that out of total 215 valid respondents, there are 146 male respondents and 69 female respondents. When the question was asked from male respondents then out of 146 respondents, 15 male respondents said that social media provides 100% credible information, 101

male respondents said that social media provides 50% credible information whereas 30 male respondents said that social media doesn't provide any credible information at all.

Similarly, when this question was asked from female respondents then out of 69 respondents, 7 female respondents said that social media provides 100% credible information, 52 female respondents said that it provides 50% credible information whereas 10 female respondents think that it doesn't provide any credible information at all.

In conclusion, out of total 215 respondents, 22 respondents said that social media provides 100% credible information, 153 respondents said that it provides 50% credible information whereas 40 respondents think that it doesn't provides any credible information at all.

Responsibility for lack of credible information on these platforms

If your answer is B and C, in that case whom do you hold responsible for this platform?		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Society	122	56.7	56.7	56.7
	Police	5	2.3	2.3	59.1
	Government policy	54	25.1	25.1	84.2
	Yourself	34	15.8	15.8	100.0
	Total	215	100.0	100.0	

If your answer is B and C, in that case whom do you hold responsible for this platform?
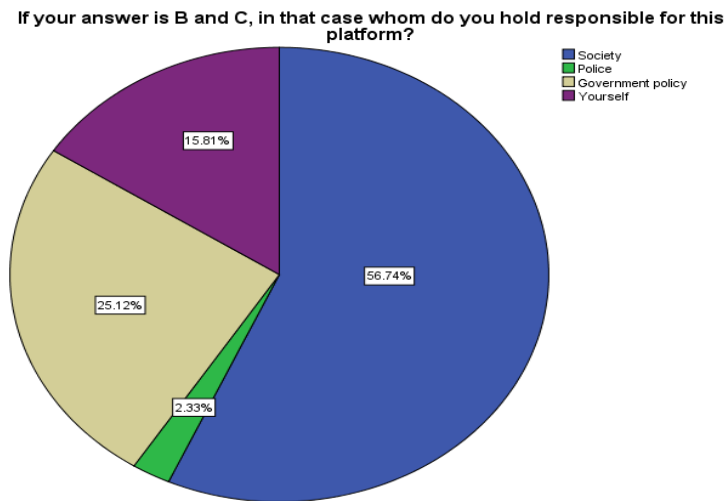
In this chart and cross tabulation, the respondents have been analyzed on the ground of their response to the question that "if your answer is B or C option of previous question then whom do you hold responsible for lack of credible information on these platforms. Concluding the analysis, We find that out of the 215 valid respondents, 122 respondents said that society is responsible for lack of credible information on these platforms, which is 56.7% of total respondents, 5 respondents held police responsible for this, which is 2.3% of total respondents. 54 respondents said, government policy is responsible for this, which is 25.1% of total respondents whereas 34 respondents held themselves responsible for lack of credibility on these platforms, which is 15.8% of total respondents.

In conclusion, it can be clearly seen that 122 respondents have held society responsible for lack of credible information on these platforms, which is largest among total number of respondents.

OPINION OF MEDIA EXPERTS

Experts from journalistic discipline and media education, who have been interviewed for this research study unanimously assert that this media is an extra ordinary development in the history of humanity, which has revolutionized the society. Referring to the uninterrupted flow of information on social media, experts say today narratives come to people through social media, not facts. They admit that social media has become a breeding ground for fake news and it is being used by the scrupulous elements at a large scale. However, they opine that fake news or spread of misinformation is not the dominant aspect of social media

Experts are divided in their opinion on credibility crisis in social media. Five of the eight experts don't agree that this media faces any credibility crisis. They say that credibility of this media is as much at stake as that of the formal media adding that formal media is also equally culpable on this count. However, other three experts admit that this media faces a crisis of credibility.

CREDIBILITY THE LIFEBLOOD OF MEDIA

Credibility is a core value of journalism. There are three aspects of credibility: clarity (how easily the article can be understood), accuracy (how well documented the information is), and trustworthiness (how believable the information is).

Therefore, credibility is defined as "the quality or power of inspiring belief".

USA's oldest organization representing media, the Society of Professional Journalists in its code of ethics states credibility is the most important asset of journalism.

The fourth estate is fit and fine only if its credibility quotient is very high. Research has established that credibility is a very important factor influencing the acceptance of a message. Media strives hard to gain this credibility by maintaining accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, restraint, fair play and a strong commitment to the society and the nation against all odds.

Born as an organ of the people against feudal oppression, Media embarked on its journey with a missionary zeal. In Europe the print media played a significant role in transforming a feudal society into a modern one. Media was extensively used during the French revolution and the American war of independence. The thoughts and preaching of great thinkers from various parts of the globe were available to the people through media.

In India, media played a key role in bringing the dawn of modernity to the traditional Indian society, badly trapped in the clutches of various types of social evils. The pioneer of Indian journalism Raja Ram Mohan Roy used press extensively to create mass consciousness against the social evils as well as the British authoritarianism. In India both the English and the vernacular press started by prominent leaders acted as catalysts to the freedom struggle.

Interestingly, a number of founder members of the Indian National Congress in 1885 were journalists. In fact, almost all the major political leaders in India either owned a newspaper or were contributing their writings   to   one   or   the   other. During 1870 to 1918 powerful newspapers emerged under distinguished and fearless journalists and leaders like G. Subramaniya Iyer, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Surendranath Banerjea, Sisir Kumar Ghosh, Motilal Ghosh, G.K. Gokhale, Dadabhai Naoroji, G.P. Varma, Mahatma Gandhi, Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi and other freedom fighters. The British were kept troubled by the national awakening caused by the press..

However, in independent India the approach of media has changed. Both electronic and print media have been giving excessive focus on what viewers and readers fall for. Knowing the fact that viewers are getting younger and have short attention spans, they don't like to read gloom and doom stories , often news on television turns into a spectacle show and even the irrelevant incident gains importance as 'breaking news'. This shift in basic role of media has been well described by one of the most influential American sociologists, Robert E. Park, who wrote in 1940 that 'news, as reported in American newspapers, has tended to assume the character of literature more so a fiction –and it is not confined to television alone. It is the preponderance of the 'narrative' in the construction of news that has led to 'accuracy of facts and their correspondence to an outside reality' being treated as little more than elements 'in a human ordering of elements'.

But these developments put a question mark on the credibility of media, which has become a cause of concern. This concern was reflected in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech at the 75th anniversary of a regional newspaper in Chennai.in November 2017. Prime Minister said "Today, every citizen analyses, discusses, and attempts to cross-check and verify the news that comes to him through multiple sources. Media, therefore, must make an extra effort, to maintain credibility."He observed that freedom of the press doesn't mean the freedom to publish incorrect reports. PM opined that Media organizations should put extra efforts to maintain credibility in the backdrop of technological changes and growing ability of citizens to verify facts.

Media will always have to keep in mind that it is the only bridge between the common people and the government. It's not only the voice of the rich and the powerful, but the last ray of hope for that deprived class, which is left behind in the development journey. However, media can discharge this constitutional duty only if it maintains its credibility.

Experts say it is high time for media organizations to step in and take measures to restore media's credibility and esteem in the eyes of the public.

CREDIBILITY OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Media is no more a luxury but a necessity today. Thanks to its unique features like immediacy, high speed and wide reach, it has become an essential part of one's daily routine. The popularity of this media is very high across the world. Social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and weblogs have become the most sought-after platforms for the people of all age groups and class of society. This all-powerful media has marked its presence in every sphere of life and virtually revolutionized the society.

In India, large scale use of online media was first noticed during the 2008 Mumbai attacks when information was shared through Twitter and Flickr. Later it became noticeable during the 2009 general elections. In 2011, Gandhian crusader Anna Hazare's 'India Against Corruption' became the first ever campaign to hit cyber-space to a great extent.

Moreover, in the general elections of 2014 and 2019, social media played a crucial role in the spectacular victory of Narendra Modi led BJP.

All these examples establish the fact that social media holds an important place in the society today.

However, since a large number of people trust Social Networking Sites for political, social, and business events, it is susceptible to become a place for evildoers for spreading misinformation and rumors. They got a boost by the Internet revolution of the late 1990s, which allowed users to interact, communicate, and generate content without reference to sources.

A large amount of User Generated Content diffuse through Social Media on a regular basis. Huge amount of data are created on social networking sites. For example, users on Twitter create 340 million tweets every day. Users on YouTube upload 72 hours of video every minute. In wordpress.com alone, bloggers submit 500,000 new posts and these posts receive more than 400,000 comments every day. Naturally the risk of running into misinformation remains very high.

On social media platforms anyone can generate and publish news. Anyone can become anchor, reporter or editor. No journalistic training is required to assume all these roles. As a result, the media audiences and readers have become skeptical about the information available on social networking sites. Now it's a a challenge for users to discern which piece of information is credible and which is not.. The unknown origin of content makes the problem more complex. There are scores of examples of communal violence, mob lynching and social unrest caused by rumors and uninterrupted flow of information on social media. Many people lost their lives due to provocative content circulated on social media platforms.

Absence of date stamp is a characteristic feature of social media. Even when there is a date stamp, people don't always bother to look at it before sharing or commenting. Some people even mess with date stamps while circulating old information. For them Social media is nothing but fun and frolic.

Many of the pieces of information floated around Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and other social media platforms are years old and out of context. But they are circulated as new pieces of information.

One of the negative aspects of Social Networking Sites is that the statements or visuals we come across, could have been edited and distorted several times before being shared. People with vested interests do so to propagate their ideology, caring little for the society and the nation. Many times, extremists and terrorists take advantage of social media to instigate youth or mislead the society.

Besides, there is a trend on social media to use headlines that have almost nothing to do with the article. They are used as the mouse trap technique, just to capture people's attention.

This media's credibility also comes under shadow, when social platforms attribute various types of statements to people, who never made them.

Another major cause of concern is the cases of data breach that have increased in recent years. These incidents have forced many people to rethink their relationships with social media.

The credibility of social platforms like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp also get affected by many other factors such as biased approach, assumption, deletion, generalization, evil intentions and others.

In communication research, information credibility has three components

- message credibility
- source credibility and
- media credibility

While comparing with conventional media, assessing the credibility of online media is much more challenging. In the case of conventional media, the source and medium are known; in addition, the medium's owners take responsibility for the content. But in the case of social media, the source may be unknown thus no one takes responsibility about the content. In many cases a username is the only information that one may have to call its source.

Social media enjoys all the freedom given to the mainstream media, but is least concerned with the inherent responsibility nor has it to do anything with media ethics. It is a heaven for unsocial elements and rumor mongers. People with vested interest, who want to divide the society on caste or class lines or spread communalism, use social media as a tool to serve their purpose.

All these aspects of social media loudly profess that it is facing a serious crisis of credibility.

SOCIAL MEDIA INDISPENSABLE FOR JOURNALISTS

The online media has deeply influenced the entire world of communications and it has shaken the world of journalism as well. Today, news men all across the world use SNS to gather information and present news stories.. Today micro-blogging site Twitter is considered the most important source of breaking news.

Social media has become an essential part of the journalistic routines in all mass media. News organizations develop their strategies in the professional field keeping in mind the instantaneous nature and wide reach of social media.

. Social media's role in transforming journalism can be classified in the following way:--

- **INCREASED ACCESS TO CONTENT:**

Online media provides newsmen unprecedented access to their viewers, listeners or readers, putting them closer than ever to the content and story ideas that their target audience care about. Today's audience don't wait passively for a news anchor to tell them the news. Thanks to Social Networking Sites, many times they are aware of the content and sometimes they share stories even before a journalist picks them up.

- **FASTER MEDIUM:**

Social media platforms ensure that news travels at lightning speeds. Thanks to services like Twitter and Facebook—and the ability to publish news online at any time of day—the old practice of submitting a story for the morning's newspaper is all but dead. When news breaks, journalists are expected to cover it immediately without any excuse.

But many times this lightning speed leads to careless reporting which is a blot on journalism..

- **MORE PERSONAL**

. The social profile of a journalist allows readers to put a face to a name, and lets them get to know the journalist on a more personal level. However, there is a flip side as well. This media makes journalists particularly, the female journalists more vulnerable. They can be easily trolled by the dissatisfied readers, viewers and listeners.

CHALLENGES OF FAKE NEWS IN REPORTING

The phenomenon of fake news makes reporting a very challenging task, particularly if the source is from social media.

So, from journalist's perspective, it's crystal clear that social media enjoys an important place in the mainstream media. However, the irony is that journalists, who use social media as a source for their stories, don't trust these platforms. In the article "Twitter for Journalists", Scot Hacker and Aswhin Seshagiri, explains that "Twitter has appeared as a powerful news tool, alerting the world about natural disasters, hostage standoffs and even revolutionary uprisings". Naturally, social media has become an important source of news for journalists. But more importantly this media doesn't hold enough trust among journalists, despite the fact that they use it to look for information and to contact sources.

EFFECTS OF CREDIBILITY CRISIS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Social platforms have proved to be a heaven for rumor mongers and unsocial elements. Since there is no effective content monitoring system, these people use social media platforms as a tool for their vested

interests. They circulate false and fabricated information as per their sweet will. And social media pays the price of their misdeeds by losing people's trust, which is the most valuable asset for any media. Here are some of the noticeable effects of credibility crisis in the social media. Some of them are noticed today in our day to day life, while others might come to fore in the days to come.

- Thanks to the uninterrupted flow of misinformation on SNS and messaging apps, today no one believes the information on social media at the first hand. Even before reading a message or watching a video clip on social media, it is presumed that the message is wrong and it has been circulated with ill intentions.
- Although claiming itself to be a part of media, Social media has become a big threat to the basics of journalism.
- Due to lack of credibility of this media, no one cares for the quality of information being shared on SNS or messaging apps.
- Social media is the outcome of a tech-revolution. It can serve the society in various ways and prove to be an ultra- modern tool in the hands of humanity in its development journey. But the lack of credibility may ruin its future prospects.
- Due to its instantaneous nature and wide reach, social media enjoys an important place in the planning and policies of the government. Big business brands also spend lots of resources on social media. However, if social platforms lose credibility, who would like to board a sinking ship?
- Social media has become an essential part of journalism. Journalists mainly use social platforms as a source of news and to check the developments in other news organizations. But the scene will change if social media would lose its credibility. In that case, journalists would be forced to leave these platforms; otherwise it may create serious problems for them.
- Social platforms have surfaced as an alternative media for the politicians and leaders of the world. Moreover, every political party has a separate social media wing. In the times of election, political parties make focused strategies for social media to mobilize the public opinion. Besides, most of the government departments have active social media wings, which communicate about the planning and policies of the government. If social media won't restore its credibility, how will it fulfill these tasks?

    It would be a very sad day, when a business brand or an individual would opt for this media for image building, but in return the brand in question or the individual would get disrepute and face humiliation.

STEPS NEEDED TO RESTORE CREDIBILITY

Credibility is defined as "the quality of being trustworthy" and the problem with social media is that it is losing the trust of users with every passing day, which is a cause of concern. Experts say social media platforms will have to take a number of measures for damage control and to restore its trust among customers.

- Data Privacy: Breach of data is a major cause of concern for social media. Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg claims to have taken a number of steps to maintain customers' privacy that includes end-to-end encryption of messages. But instances of data breach clearly indicate that more steps needed to ensure customers' privacy.
- Content Monitoring: Facebook claims it has a strong team of content monitors that include reviewers across the globe along with artificial intelligence. The reviewers are native speakers of 40 languages

of the world. Despite this claim, objectionable contents are being circulated on its platforms, which remain there for long time. This poses a grave threat to the targeted individual's repute as well as the peace and harmony in the society.

- Moderation: Social media platforms should follow a moderation policy, if it permits others to add their own content. The moderation policy should include matters related to copyright, rights to addition and deletion.

- Verified Accounts: Unverified accounts at social media are a big cause of concern. Through these accounts people often post objectionable content and easily escape the responsibility. In this backdrop the set of verified accounts on twitter can set an example to be followed by others.

- Traceability: WhatsApp is the biggest messaging App in India, but it lacks traceability. A WhatsApp message doesn't show where it originated from, whether it was forwarded or how many times it was shared. Nikhil Pahwa opines that WhatsApp is a very popular medium for communication, but lack of traceability is a very serious issue, which needs to be addressed

  Social networking sites claim that they are taking various steps to fix the problem that could ensure the restoration of their credibility. However, the situation on the ground would change only if social media platforms make sure that their strategies are empirically grounded. In order to move forward with its potential and prove itself the media of the future, it will have to take corrective measures to restore its credibility before it's too late.

CONCLUSION

Despite its shortcomings social media enjoys a place of pride in all walks of life today. Be it government sector, NGOs, business world, industries, journalism or one's day to day life, this media's powerful influence can be witnessed in each field.. However, it is equally important that social media is facing the crisis of credibility today. The findings of sample survey and content analysis clearly indicate in this direction.. Against this backdrop the million dollar question is if social media would be able to retain its prestigious position in future or not. The answer lies in the corrective measures taken by this media and its effects visible on ground that could restore people's confidence in this unique technological gift of mankind.

The sample survey findings also reveal that out of 215 respondents 122 hold society responsible for this crisis. Meaning thereby that society is largely accountable for this crisis. So the solution lies in raising the consciousness and awareness level of common man. To make it happen government will have to launch large scale awareness campaigns and the educated class of society will have to come forward with a commitment to sensitize common people and raise their level of consciousness. These measures would work as a genie in the bottle and ensure that social media would continue to rule the roost in future as well.

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