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India's Lead in Government 2.0 ^[1]

What is Gov 2.0? Gov 2.0 is all about a new culture of open governance, greater citizen involvement through the judicious use of web 2.0. Gov 2.0 is about interactive democracy against representative democracy, it is about open administration that involves citizens participation against closed administration and it is about spirit of voluntarily sharing information against closely guarding it.

The world has started moving towards Gov 2.0 without even being conscious about it. What has made Gov 2.0 possible is the widespread availability of Internet connected desktops and hand held devices. At present India has 80 million Internet connections, and over 50 million people use social media. But the number of mobile phones in India is more than 700 million, and growing at 15 million per month. Thus there is the possibility of a great leap in numbers of Indians using Internet in the next few years on mobile platforms. The use of new media channels by government organizations and high ranking officials is on the rise.

Here is a brief chronology of the use of New Media by Indian government organizations and high ranking officials:

2009

- 2009: Shashi Tharoor, then Minister of State of External Affairs starts tweeting.
- Oct 2009: India Post joins Twitter becoming the first government department to use New Media.

2010

- March 2010: Indian Embassy, Argentina joins Facebook
- June 2010: Indian Embassy Argentina joins Twitter
- Apr 2010: Goa Tourism Development Corporation (GTDC) joins social media to attract tourists. GTDC, having a chain of 13 resorts of its own in the state.
- May 2010: Delhi Traffic Police launches a Facebook page.
- June 2010: Karnataka State CID joins Facebook & Twitter.
- Jul 2010: Public Diplomacy Division of MEA (Ministry of External Affairs) launches its Twitter page followed by Facebook, YouTube, Scribd, Issuu & Blogger.
- Nov 2010: Leader of Opposition Sushma Swaraj joins Twitter.
- Dec 2010: Kanpur Police joins Facebook.
- Dec 2010: Kanpur police lodges its first complaint through Facebook.
- Dec 2010: Hoshiyarpur (Punjab) Police joins Facebook.

2011

- Jan 2011: Embassy of India, Sofia joins Twitter
- Jan 2011: Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) launches its Facebook page to ensure effective monitoring of garbage lifting at areas under its jurisdiction.
- Jan 2011: J&K Traffic Police launches its Facebook page.
- Jan 2011: Census 2011 joins Facebook.
- Feb 2011: National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) makes a début on social networking site Facebook.
- Feb 2011: Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao joins Twitter.
- Feb 2011: Indian Embassy Washington DC joins Facebook.
- Feb 2011: India's biggest jail Tihar launches its Facebook.
- Mar 2011: Official Spokesperson Ministry of External Affairs joins Twitter
- March 2011: Head of the Consular, Passport & Visa Division joins Twitter
- March 2011: Indian Ambassador to Bahrain joins Twitter and becomes the first Indian Ambassador to have an official Twitter account

This is a very representative list of organizations and individuals from various cross-sections of the government making valuable use of new media to take governance closer to the people. As stated earlier, India has over 750 million mobile phones and each month it adds 15 million new ones. Internet connections are now available at much cheaper rates than even a year ago. Thus in a few years the whole adult population will have Internet-connected mobile phones.

These numbers put things in perspective. Government organizations and officials across the country will need to adapt to these changing realities with mind-boggling advances in communication and information technologies. In the process old and rigid hierarchies would give way to team spirit, culture of closely guarding data would give way to the spirit of sharing information as and when things happen and culture of exclusive privilege to corridors of power would give way to spirited zeal of crowd-sourcing i.e., directly involving public in policy making.

India's public diplomacy efforts have gained a huge boost from the use of the web 2.0 channels of the Public Diplomacy Division. The YouTube channel has over 60 very interesting short films. Over 2,1000 people across the planet have visited these films on wide ranging topics from culture to the economy, from ancient India to contemporary India. Several viewers have left positive comments. Thus new media has truly helped the Indian public diplomacy efforts reach a new global audience. Facebook page of the Public Diplomacy Division is a little window to the cultural universe of Indian diplomacy. It hosts photographs & videos of various cultural and business events happening at Indian embassies across the world. Indian Public Diplomacy uses Issuu to e-publish "India Perspectives," a magazine that is published in 17 languages. Though the print version is available only at the Indian missions and posts, the e-version can be accessed by any interested reader on the Indian Diplomacy website.

Several Indian embassies are already on Facebook: Argentina, Bulgaria, France, Suriname, USA and more. Each one has several hundred followers with whom they not only share information but also engage in dialogue.

The use of Twitter during the Libya crisis proved to be immensely useful in keeping instant channels of communication open, responding to queries on real time basis as well as implementing some of very valuable suggestions coming from the people on the ground. Some sample tweets:

simarp Simarprit Singh

@**IndianDiplomacy** Great Service to the nation, perfect communication too 😊

manivel_gk Manivel K

@**IndianDiplomacy** Its amazing to see the efforts you guys are making in helping Indians and keeping us updated. You guys rock!

samirsaran Samir Saran

Kudos to the Indian Govt's effort, transparency and professionalism in the entire Libya episode....@**indiandiplomacy**

These are just a few examples of the attention generated by India's lead in the Gov 2.0 sphere.
