

Social media during times of unrest

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The invention of the Internet has brought about major changes in the lives of people in the 21st century. The versatile nature of Internet is making every individual more and more dependent on it--from buying clothes, paying bills, being updated with news to organising people for political protests.

This is because advancement of technology and communication system allows one to freely interact and mingle with others across the globe. Social media encourages sharing of ideas, concepts, thoughts and information by building virtual networks and communities. It ensures melding of social interactions on e-commerce sites. All over the world, people come across friends with similar interests and this also aids them to network career opportunities.

Nowadays, almost everyone has a Facebook or Twitter account and most often people come to know about several happenings in their surroundings from the status and posts of their friends. News now reaches our fingertips in a jiffy and we no longer have to wait for newspapers or even open our television sets.

Initially, the purpose of social media was to interact with friends and family only but eventually several business networks wanted to take advantage of the popular new communication mode. Social media is aiming at making people more aware for one cannot miss the popular or trending updates, posts, images, videos, hashtags and tweets. This ever-changing and ever-evolving web-based platform allows people to not only share their opinions, but also to comment on others' posts

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and share it to the whole world. And this is what makes it powerful and particularly more relevant at times of social unrest. Words, opinions and news spread like wildfire. The voice in social media can be regarded as the voice of the public.

It was observed during the recent social unrest in our country that both Indians

and Pakistanis were found fighting a war on social media. We quickly came to know about the suicide bombing on 14 February in Pulwama through people posting about 'Black day for India.' Ever since, there has been a turmoil among people of both the countries trying to maintain its supremacy over the other. We came to know about var-

ious public opinions where some called for war and some for peace with the hashtags 'SayNoToWar' and 'SayYesToWar'. The common public were as much engaged in this as were the people in position and power. The hashtag #Indiastrikesback has been seen to receive more than 6,25,000 mentions on Tuesday when India targeted training camps of the Jaish-e-Mohammed group in Pakistan. When Nobel peace laureate Malala Yousafzai tweeted with the hashtag #SayNoToWar, it was retweeted immediately and liked by over 30,000 people.

Charles Leadbeater in 'We Think: The Power of Mass Creativity' rightly says, "You are what you share." Social media is powerful and whatever has power must be used wisely. Our posts can have a worldwide reach capable of influencing the opinion of others. In recent times of

instant communication, we can find emoticons being replaced by words, gestures replacing language and visuals replacing text. The use of media must fulfil the purpose of being a 'medium' of publishing and broadcasting information that helps in bringing truth and peace for all. Social media must ensure that people have a voice to make through the democratization of content and ideas so that people can unite around constructive passions, inspire positive changes in our society.

As a vital member of the virtual media, one must learn how not to accept whatever is produced before us, but use our reason, scrutiny and only then, accept that which is true.

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