

Proceedings of Seminar on “SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE ARMED FORCES: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES”

1. A seminar on Social Media and The Armed Forces – Opportunities and Challenges, was conducted on May 12, 2017, at the Manekshaw Centre, Delhi Cantt under the aegis of Centre for Joint Warfare Studies (CENJOWS). The seminar had two sessions, to solicit views from the stakeholders; serving and veterans. While the first session was dedicated to view from eminent serving and veterans the second session was conducted as an interactive session in which the audience wholeheartedly opined their views. The Welcome Address of the seminar was delivered by Lt Gen Vinod Bhatia, PVSM, AVSM, SM (Retd), Director CENJOWS. The Special Address was delivered by Lt Gen Satish Dua, UYSM, SM, VSM, CISC & Chairman CENJOWS. The following speakers deliberated on issues as mentioned :-

(a) “Threat and Risk Management of Social Media” – Lt Gen VG Khandare, PVSM, AVSM, SM, DG DIA & DCIDS (Int), HQ IDS.

(b) “Incident Management and Damage Control” – Lt Gen Rakesh Sharma, UYSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd).

(c) “Social Media: Effects on Operations” – Air Vice Marshal Manmohan Bahadur, VM (Retd).

(d) “Policy and Procedures: Social Media in the Defence” – Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM (Retd).

2. Welcome Address by Lt Gen Vinod Bhatia, PVSM, AVSM, SM (Retd), Director

CENJOWS. Lt Gen Vinod Bhatia, PVSM, AVSM, SM (Retd) welcomed everyone present. He highlighted the importance of the topic in today’s scenario especially for the Indian Armed forces. He informed everyone that this seminar was being held at the direction of the CISC and Chairman CENJOWS as a closed door seminar comprising only of serving and veteran armed forces officers. He emphasized that Social Media is all pervasive and at the professional level it impacts operations, administration, motivation, morale, functioning and fighting at all levels from the lowest to the highest. He wondered whether the armed forces are ready to face this new warfare and said that the truth is somewhere in between. He emphasized that for the Indian Armed Forces to effectively exploit Social Media there was a requirement to look into the existing procedures, policies and structures. He thanked the CISC for sparing his valuable time for being here and requested him to deliver the special address.

3. Special Address by Lt Gen Satish Dua, UYSM, SM, VSM, CISC and Chairman

CENJOWS. Lt Gen Satish Dua, UYSM, SM, VSM, CISC and Chairman CENJOWS thanked CENJOWS for organizing this seminar on such an important issue. He said that there are two ways to handle a subject. First is by pondering over the problem, analyzing its pros and cons, weighing all options and then taking a decision. Second way is to grab the issue by its horns and do whatever it takes to handle the situation. He emphasized that the growing power of Social Media, its spontaneity

and invasive reach shapes our perceptions every day. We are fed information even on those topics in which we are not interested. Its use is only increasing and hence Social Media has become more relevant. The Social Media has a push model and it shapes our perceptions, hate it or love it but there is no getting away from it. The US army encourages its personnel to use Social Media and educates them how to use it. It is thus imperative that we educate our soldiers how to exploit the potential of Social Media. He wished that the seminar is disruptive so that ideas can be generated how to best leverage Social Media.

4. Threat and Risk Management of Social Media by Lt Gen V G Khandare, PVSM, AVSM, SM, DGDIA & DCIDS (INT). The aspects covered by the speaker are elucidated below :-

(a) Social Media War. The Social Media should be looked at as Social Media War, which is already riding at a fast pace and we are lagging behind. There is an urgent need to catch up.

(b) Reach & Effect. Social Media introduces anonymity which reduces accountability. 10 percent of the users are nationalist or good guys, 10 percent are bad guys and remainder 80 percent are fence sitters or fastest finger experts, who are just forwarding the messages. It is the 10 percent bad guys who take the limelight and carry the influence.

(c) Requirement of Organization/Structure. The Social Media war is our own war and there is no requirement of a separate organization / structure in place. We have approximately 45000 officers in army and another 25000 in Navy and AFT. They should all be “information warriors”. There should be a charter of duties for them. Similar skill should be harnessed for men. Entire Armed Force personnel are Front Line Information Warriors and the remainder country is the second Line of warriors.

(d) Facebook/Twitter. All the trends are on Facebook and Twitter and hence these two platforms matter most. However, a large number of persons don't know how to operate Twitter. Everyone should go and tweet and post comments on these platforms to further our cause.

(e) Big Data Analytics. The Americans are using big data analytics and the entire world data is lodged in USA for Facebook and Twitter. India should also have its own version of facebook and Whatsapp and own servers in India as well as also invest in Data Farms.

(f) Threats. Using maps and images from google, which gives away our location. Moreover our procurement process is also being targeted by the enemy by using defamation tactics in the Social Media. There are also attempts being made to create clear wedge between officers and the men, between the colours of uniform and colour of lanyards. A divided armed force and the country cannot win a war.

(g) J & K. Social Media has been used to rally people against the State and the Armed Forces. Speeches at the Masjid / Funeral procession are also part of Social Media. ISI continues to be active and malware embedding campaigns are on. Moment the links are clicked our laptop / cellphones are compromised immediately.

5. Incident Management and Risk Management of Social Media by Lt Gen Rakesh Sharma, UYSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd). The aspects covered by the speaker are elucidated below :-

(a) The talk commenced with the risks that the social media and the tool i.e. the mobile phone garner. To start with, each individual is empowered and can proliferate his opinion at a lightening pace. He cautioned that this phenomenon was here to stay and official ban on smart phones and restrictive policies to access social media sites are unlikely to produce the desired results. The next issue was the omnipresent linkages of the social media to national media. Any news that is trending is picked up by the journalists and aired in the national network thereby multiplying its reach albeit with scant regard to confirming the authenticity of the news byte. Gen Sharma stressed upon the issue of the defence forces being compartmentalized in silos and a response to be generated takes inordinately long which becomes counterproductive in most cases. The aspect of information void following an incident causes the defence forces to cede ground to conjectures which are at best avoided. He summed up the risks by stating that the defence forces have been reticent by nature and loath to transparency, this mindset has to change with time where every man is a virtual information warrior.

(b) While deliberating on the aspect of incident management the Panelist lamented the lack of a clear and concise information dissemination policy. He suggested that a Department of Sentiment Analysis must be set up to gauge the sentiments and thereafter choose the best methodology to shape the sentiments favourably. He opined that there should be pre-crisis planning at each stage with clear cut responsibilities and authority delegated to the subordinates to ensure that real time response can be generated.

(c) However, once the security forces are sucked up into a crisis situation, they must acknowledge the same and bring out relevant details which do not jeopardize the ongoing operations. Silence and failure to involve the media may lead to conjectures which may cause immense harm in the long run. The Defence Forces must host a permanent site in which all detailed information must be cleared at appropriate level and uploaded, micro sites and web pages must bring out descriptive photographs and images which convey our point. It is imperative that the defence forces remain ahead in this race of information dominance and match platform to platform. However, the same may not be convenient at all times there must be a pressure relief valve in the system i.e. to say if a mistake has occurred it must be acknowledged. Most important in the whole game would be to draw an assessment at the end of the incident as to draw post incident analysis for future.

(d) He summed up his speech by enumerating seven advises to the Defence Forces as follows:-

- (i) Speak to your core audience.
- (ii) Details matter.
- (iii) Acknowledge mistakes.
- (iv) Be straight don't lie.
- (v) Respond with overwhelming force.
- (vi) Go hard against misinformation.
- (vii) Find out what people do not want to see.

6. Social Media: Effect on Operations by Air Vice Marshal Manmohan Bahadur, VM

(Retd). The speaker discussed the direct and indirect effect of social media and the actions to be taken by us. As part of direct effects Social Media has security implications on operations as posting of comments may compromise operations. The Social Media also has effects on the safety of the pilots due to distraction by being on the mobile. The Social Media also has a direct impact on morale and can be used against the enemy as part of psychological operations. As part of indirect effects campaigns can be run using carefully selected hashtags. Thus, there is a requirement to harness the

power of Social Media as its power will only accentuate. There is a requirement to commission genuine research / studies to study the effect of Social Media in the Indian context. People need to be trained and defaulters should be dealt with harshly. Lastly, we should have a vibrant 24X 7 active PR setup.

7. Policy and Procedures: Social Media in the Defence by Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM (Retd). The speaker brought out the following points:-

(a) Though it has been advocated by earlier speakers that we need maximum number of officers in defence forces to act as info warriors on social media, this may be counter productive as everyone does not have adequate knowledge on critical issues. There is a lot of training and research required to get our information warriors ready, and without this, issues may snowball out of control. Social media can be used both offensively and defensively and it is time now that Information Warfare and Social Media operations are given a greater focus and classified as special operations.

(b) ISIS and Pakistan have realised the power of information warfare and have taken a lead in exploiting this field and this must be countered. Almost every department of the Government is affected by social media and should be a part of our information warfare campaign. An agency must be clearly nominated to lead our social media campaign. There is a lot of trained manpower required by each department and Defence Institute of Psychological Research (DIPR) should be incorporated to carry out and promulgate psychological research on social media issues. Appropriate legislations are needed for information warfare to become a warfare of domain in India.

8. **Interactive Sessions.** During the interactive sessions there was a huge enthusiastic response from the audience from veterans and serving officers of various age brackets. A large number of issues were highlighted by the audience which are enumerated below:-

(a) Organisation and Structures. The present structure of ADGPI is not geared up to handle the huge data of Social Media. Accordingly there is a need for a structured organization to effectively leverage the growing power of Social Media.

(b) Policies and Guidelines. The present policies on the use of Social Media by the personnel of the armed forces were not elaborate enough. There is thus a requirement of formulating comprehensive guidelines on the use of Social Media by all members of the armed forces.

(c) Micro Websites. To ensure that information about any incident or action is brought to the fore at the earliest it is important that all the details are truthfully put up on the website with speed. It was also suggested that micro websites could be brought up for a particular incident immediately so that the truth is brought to the knowledge of all concerned immediately. This will ensure that false propaganda is defeated.

(d) Education and Training. There is an urgent need to train our soldiers on the use of Social Media. It is vital to educate our armed forces members about the threats in the Social Media space so that they can operate freely and effectively without compromising the security.

(e) Education of Families. There is a need to educate our military families so that they can contribute positively on the Social Media space and also inadvertently not compromise the security of the armed forces personnel.

(f) Hiring of Experts. As Social Media operates on special platforms, there is a requirement to hire experts so that Social Media. Certain functions of Social Media need to be outsourced so that the specialized functions can be handled professionally.

(g) Leveraging Celebrities. Celebrities like Kapil Dev, Sachin Tendulkar who have a huge fan following and are also associated with the defence forces should be leveraged to carry our message to the masses. Their huge fan following will impact the sentiment towards the truth and defeat the evil designs of the enemies of the state.

(h) Response Mechanism. In today's time the response to any incident or tweet or comment has to be immediate. Any delay will benefit the adversary who is trying to propagate the false story. Our response should be truthful and without any delay and accordingly the structures have to be created for this immediate response mechanism. Presently we are very shy to respond which cannot work in the Social Media space.

(j) Usage of Social Media in CI/CT Operations. It was brought out that the AFSPA permits us to use all means to fight terrorism. Accordingly Social Media is also is weapon that should be used by the armed forces effectively to fight the false propaganda of the militants.

(k) Dissemination of Information. There is a need to disseminate information laterally to all effected in the social media network. Social Media is a battle of networks and information should be passed to all sector commanders and company commanders by the higher headquarters instantaneously so that the correct picture is known to all without delay.

(l) Content Generation. In the Social Media space content generation is a must to ensure running of successful campaigns. For this there needs to be a core team that generatesthe themes and campaigns which are then taken forward by the next level.

(m) Long Term Strategy. To effectively leverage the Social Media space a long term strategy has to be worked out to encompass all facets of structures, policies, training and oversight mechanism.

(n) Information Warriors. All the members need to incorporated as information warriors so that the campaigns by the armed forces are successful. However certain members were not in total agreement of the said idea as it was fraught with dangers too due to lack of knowledge.

(o) Smart Phones. Smart Phones are the weapons of social media and hence its usage in the armed forces need to be revisited. The present orders on the subject do not permit the usage of smart phones in the official work place and hence its utility in the social media space is restrictive. There is a need to re examine the orders on the usage of smart phones with adequate precautions so that social media can be effectively utilised by the members of the armed forces.

(n) Change of Mindset. The fast moving and changing world of Social Media requires the armed forces to also change its mindset towards operating in this new dimension of warfare. The change has

to come from the top so that structures and policies are created which are enabling rather than restricting.

9. Closing Remarks by Lt Gen VG Khandare, PVSM, AVSM, SM, DG DIA & DCIDS

(INT). The DG DIA thanked everyone on behalf of the CISC and expressed his gratitude to the veterans for their wisdom and contribution. He also thanked the younger generation for their bright ideas. He emphasized that there is need of having a comprehensive approach to tackle Social Media. In the end, he said the need of the hour is to approach the problem head on so that the armed forces can effectively use Social Media as a effective force multiplier in the security domain.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

10. The seminar on Social Media and the Armed Forces: Opportunities and Challenges could not have been conducted at a more opportune time when the social media space is changing rapidly and having a huge impact on all aspects of functioning of the Indian Armed forces. The key recommendations that emerged from the seminar are appended below :-

(a) Organizational Structures. The social media domain is expanding at a very fast pace leading to emerging complex dynamics of operation in this space. The present existing structures in the armed forces are not geared up to handle this emerging media. Effective handling of social media space thus requires establishment of a dedicated organization. The aspects of public information, media management, information warfare and social media are closely inter-related and need close coordination and management. Thus, it is recommended to bring all these under one umbrella organization under CISC/DIA. A suggested organization is given below :-

(b) Policies and Guidelines. The seminar clearly threw up the fact the existing guidelines are neither exhaustive nor enabling for military personnel for operate effectively in the social media space. Hence there is a need to issue comprehensive guidelines encompassing all facets of social media which should be simple and easily implementable.

(c) Training. The social media space is fraught with dangers which can have adverse effects on the operational security. It is thus imperative that comprehensive and practical training be imparted at all levels from cat A to cat B establishments. Effective training will ensure that all military personnel are aware of the pros and cons of the social media space leading to enabling military personnel.

(d) Education of Families. The actions of our military families have a direct impact on the operational environment of the security forces. There is thus a need to educate our military families so that they can contribute positively on the Social Media space and inadvertently not compromise the security of the armed forces personnel.

(e) Leveraging Celebrities. The impact of social media is felt by the changing sentiments and the hot trending topics which indicate the mood of the environment and specifically the targeted population. To run a successful social media campaign, it is imperative that a large section of the population tweet and post comments in our favour indicating a positive and a successful campaign. However, to manage huge crowds for running a successful campaign is not an easy proposition. However certain celebrities like Kapil Dev, Sachin Tendulkar, MS Dhoni who are closely associated with the defence forces being honorary members of the armed forces need to be leveraged to carry our message to the masses. Their huge fan following will impact the sentiment towards the truth in our favour and defeats the evil designs of the enemies of the state.

(f) Response Mechanism. The aspect of information void following an incident causes the defence forces to cede ground to conjectures which are at best avoided. Silence and failure to involve the media may lead to conjectures which will benefit the adversary who is trying to propagate the false story. Our response should be truthful and without any delay. Accordingly, structures and policies must be created to ensure an immediate response mechanism. Presently we are very shy to respond which cannot work in the Social Media space.

(g) Micro Websites and Webpages. To ensure that information about any incident or action is brought to the fore at the earliest it is important that all the details, descriptive photographs and images depicting the truth are hosted on the website with speed to convey our point. It was also suggested that micro websites could be brought up for a particular incident immediately so that the truth is brought to the knowledge of all concerned immediately. This will ensure that false propaganda is defeated.

(h) Dissemination of Information. The seminar clearly brought out the lack of a clear and concise information dissemination policy for the armed forces personnel. There is a need to disseminate information laterally to all effected in the social media network. Social Media is a battle of networks and information should be passed to all sector commanders and company commanders by the higher headquarters instantaneously so that the correct picture is known to all without delay. The policy for information dissemination needs to be revised and made responsive to ensure fast dissemination of data to all our armed forces personnel.

(j) Usage of Social Media in CI/CT Operations. It was brought out that the AFSPA permits us to use all means to fight terrorism. Accordingly, Social Media is also a weapon that should be used by the armed forces effectively to fight the false propaganda being spread by the militants and anti-national elements. Management and creation of innovative campaigns is thus vital in CI/CT operations to ensure truthful and factual reports about all incidents are brought to the fore for dissemination to the citizens with speed. Thus the aspect of leveraging social media in CI/CT operations is a facet which needs immediate and deliberate attention on priority.

(k) Pre-andPost Crisis Management. Effective handling of crisis necessitates pre-and post-crisis management which is woefully lacking in the armed forces in the social media domain. There is thus a need for pre-crisis and post crisis planning at each stage with clear cut responsibilities and authority delegated to the subordinates to ensure that real time response can be generated. Most important in the whole game is to be able to draw an assessment at the end of the incident so as to draw post incident analysis for future. This needs incorporation of domain experts.

(l) Centre for Army Lessons Learnt (CALL). The CALL at ARTRAC is mandated to keep a record of all important case studies with an aim of disseminating lessons learnt to our armed forces. CALL needs to be incorporated to ensure all important lessons are recorded for posterity with aim to learn from them for better management of social media campaigns and crisis situations. CALL is part of post crisis management which will help in pre crisis management.

(m) Content Generation. The secret to success in the Social Media space is content generation and management. Designing themes for campaigns needs a high level of expertise. Hence the need to create a core team at the highest level for content generation which is then passed down to all selected levels for dissemination and further momentum. Experts from the civil street as well as the

armed forces need to be selected and earmarked for this vital job which is the start point of a successful social media campaign.

(n) Information Warriors. There were diverse views on incorporating all members of the armed forces as information warriors to participate in the social media campaigns. However, it is felt that involving all personnel maybe counter – productive and fraught with dangers due to lack of adequate knowledge by all. Therefore, it is recommended that a mid-course could be adopted wherein the campaign is conceived by the core group and selected members who have been trained be incorporated in the campaign irrespective of their location. Slowly the number of trained information warriors will increase which ensure successful management of the social media campaigns.

(o) Sentiment Analysis. Among the main aims of a social media campaign is managing the sentiments of the target populace by running carefully managed campaigns. Victory goes to the player who manages the sentiments in his favour. Sentiments also indicate the corrective action needed if any to effectively turn the sentiments in our own favour. Hence sentiment analysis is a vital aspect of social media domain which needs specialized attention. The social media organization should use all means including technical to gauge and turn the sentiments in our favour.

(p) Matching Platform to Platform. To remain ahead in the OODA loop every social media platform needs to be matched. Thus we cannot be restricted to only whatsapp or facebook or Twitter. All social media platforms need to be leveraged to defeat the nefarious designs of the enemy.

(q) Special Operations. Social Media operations need to be classified as special operations and handled accordingly. The fast changing nature and its wide ramifications require of Social media necessitate specialized supervision and management.

(r) Hiring of Experts. Social Media operates on special platforms, there is a requirement to hire experts so that Social Media. Certain functions of Social Media need to be outsourced so that the specialized functions can be handled professionally. Thus, the organizational structure should cater for hiring and outsourcing of specialized functions for effective social media management.

(s) Defence Institute of Psychological Research(DIPR). Social media campaigns aim to manage the perceptions of the target audience and hence require experts who can understand human behavior more deeply. DIPR is once such institute of the armed forces who need to be incorporated in conceiving campaigns and managing crisis for favourable outcomes.

(t) Smart Phones. Smart Phones are the weapons and tools of social media. The present orders on the subject do not permit the usage of smart phones in the official work place and hence its utility in the social media space is highly restrictive. There is a need to re-examine the orders on the usage of smart phones building in adequate precautions so that social media can be effectively leveraged by the members of the armed forces.

(u) Indian Social Media Platforms. Using social media platforms such as whatsapp and facebook which are owned and operated by foreign companies increasing the vulnerabilities of our armed forces. The data being generated on these platforms is being used by foreign nations for leveraging it in the social media domain. India being the IT hub of the world should be able to launch a social media platform akin to whatsapp with servers and data

farms in India so that vital and sensitive data is not leaked out. Necessary collaboration between government departments need to be encouraged to generate this valuable tool. The armed forces should also develop in house social media platforms akin to whatsapp which will facilitate faster dissemination of information while ensuring operational security.

(v) Big Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence. Big Data Analytics coupled with Artificial Intelligence is the future of all data platforms in the new world of computing. Social Media platforms and their content are also impacted by these technologies. The defence forces need to step into these domains with urgency producing professionals who will be an asset for managing social media contents and platforms.

(w) Long Term Strategy. To effectively leverage the Social Media space a long term strategy has to be worked out to encompassing all facets of structures, policies, training and oversight mechanism. Social media management needs an integrated approach and whole of government approach incorporating the academia, industry and ministries such as DIETY, MHA and NITI Aayog.

(x) Change of Mindset. The defence forces have been reticent by nature and loath to transparency. The fast moving and changing world of Social Media requires the armed forces to also change its mindset towards operating in this new dimension of warfare. The change has to come from the top so that structures and policies are created which are enabling rather than restricting ensuring that every soldier is a virtual information warrior.