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APPLICATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY DEFENCE PERSONNEL FOR PERSONAL USE

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Today with the advancement in communication technologies, the virtual reality of social media has started to blur the boundaries between the real and virtual worlds. This not only brings with it new opportunities, but also different challenges. One such challenge is being faced by the organisations, which are involved in various critical areas, especially the security of the country. This article is important for those social media users who are working for the critical organisations, like defence or attached to them directly or indirectly. Although use of social media, is debated a lot, but one has to bear in mind the abuses also. Following are some suggestions:

- Whatever you share as update, be it on any social media platform you are making the message viral to all those known and “unknown” people who are connected to you directly or indirectly or, just by virtue of being a social media user. Any information on matters related to the organisation (Text, audio, videos) should not be shared on these platforms. A trivial piece of information may be of no relevance to you but can be the last piece of information required for “unwarranted” elements to complete a jigsaw puzzle.
- It is also not advisable to share your locations, frequent places of your visits etc. on social media because by sharing these locations as a user you might think there is no harm but for “unwarranted” elements it is easier for them to profile your day to activities and places of your interest.
- Social media had one tempting button of “share” which needs to be used with “caution.” Do not share any news items, or content designed like news items without verifying its authenticity.



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The authenticity can be checked through search engine of news websites. There are numerous of stories, which go viral and users continue to share it without confirming its authenticity.

- One of the advice given by Lisa Respers France, senior producer for CNN Digital's Entertainment section is that, "stop believing everything you see online. From Facebook privacy fakes to twitter death hoaxes, think before you share that link. Every time you post the story you legitimise it. Also check the dates of the story.... Here my rules to you, if you are going to share something 'Stop, Drop and Roll'. 'Stop' before you hit that share button, 'drop' over Google and 'roll' around the information there."ⁱ
- Be extremely careful with the viral hoax floating on social media platforms, especially Facebook. Sometimes these hoax news are pure, mischievous scaremongering, but some Facebook hoaxes were more malign: bait to get people to click through to malware-ridden websites. In January 2015, Facebook decided to annotate suspicious stories with a warning, but maintains it's still a platform not a publisher. Now the social network is cracking down with changes to its news feed that will ensure its users see fewer hoax and spam posts, while providing a warning of their potential falsity when they are seen.ⁱⁱ
- Social media has unquestionably altered the nature of private and public communication, which one has to bear in mind while using social media tools and applications.ⁱⁱⁱ Gagging and denial is not an answer. But to be careful with the economy of information passing on these platforms will be a right step in this direction. Instead of sharing personal information where it is visible to all, it is better to inbox your message or shoot off an email.
- Build your own social media policy and make sure you involve all stakeholders in it.



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What's the way out?

- Shunning the personnel is not an answer neither the gagging.
- Awareness about the lurking dangers on the social media platforms needs to be emphasised. Instead of making it an order of the day it should be incorporated in the lifestyle of the personnel.
- Information related to Defence personnel, personal life, families, posting details, unit details, troops location and movements, selfies giving away the location landmark or equipment, or details of inventory, telephones, mobile numbers should not be shared on social media platforms.
- A practical and empathetic social media policy is required which can balance between the organisation's sensitivities and personnel sensitivities.

Defence forces have continuously tried to evolve themselves, with the changing times, technologies and the threat, which emerges from the changing technologies. Communication technologies in general and media in specific are always evolving which does bring lot of challenges before the Defence organisations. Social media and its tools are another challenge but if tapped it can be utilised in a manner beneficial to the organisation.

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])



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ⁱⁱ Dredge, Stuart. "Facebook Promises Less Hoax Stories and Spam Posts in Users' News Feeds." *The Guardian*, January 21, 2015, Technology sec. <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/jan/21/facebook-news-feed-hoaxes-spam>. Accessed May 21, 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ Dijck, José Van. "Engineering Sociality in a Culture of Connectivity." In *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*, 5. Madison Avenue: Oxford University Press, 2013.