

Social Networking Sites (SNS) and Right to Information (RTI) Act : A study on Facebook and Twitter

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ABSTRACT: Social networking enables networks of online friends and group memberships to keep in touch with current friends, reconnect with old friends or create real-life friendships through similar interests or groups and share their social experiences. Social networking sites are not only popular for providing a platform for chatting, sharing scraps, videos, pictures etc. but also for discussing social issues. There is a pool of social problems which requires attention of majority so that we can fight against them as a united country and make the society more peaceful. Social awareness brings more maturity, unity and thoughtfulness when it comes to making important decisions for them or for society.

The Right to Information Act 2005 is the recognition of the people's right to information which is proclaimed as a fundamental right in our Constitution. The Act aims at bringing transparency in governance and promoting accountability in the functioning of public authorities. Social Networking sites also play a vital role for discussing and creating awareness on this Act.

In India, the most preferred social networking sites are Facebook and twitter. This study proposes to study these social networking sites and their contribution to the RTI Act.

KEY WORD: RTI, Social Networking sites, Awareness

I. INTRODUCTION

A social networking service is an online service, platform, or site that focuses on facilitating the building of social networks or social relations among people who, for example, share interests, activities, backgrounds, or real-life connections. A social network service consists of a representation of each user (often a profile), his/her social links, and a variety of additional services. Discussions on various issues, news articles are most common topics on these SNSs. Most social network services are web-based and provide means for users to interact over the Internet, such as e-mail and instant messaging. Online community services are sometimes considered as a social network service, though in a broader sense, social network service usually means an individual-centered service whereas online community services are group-centered. Social networking sites allow users to share ideas, activities, events, and interests within their individual networks. The classification and nature of these connections may differ from site to site. Hence there exists connections between individuals which otherwise is not possible through any other media already existing. At many times the social networking sites are used to communicate with one another who are already their friends or acquaintances in the social network sharing similar interests and views. Social Networking sites gives a platform for discussion on issues as it is this media which majority mass rely.

There are many topics being discussed on Social networking sites and there is a wide spread awareness too. No doubt the citizens have got a powerful weapon in their hands, but its responsible use is called for. Many social changes are brought through these sites, one of them is the discussion on Right to Information (RTI) Act and thereby awareness creation is done about it.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sekhar (2010) in "Right To Information in strengthening participatory democracy" says that the Official Secrets Act (1923) enacted during the British Rule governed the disclosure of information held by public authorities in India and this Act became a weapon in the hands of politicians.

RTI is taken as the fundamental right, the objective of RTI act can be achieved when there are certain changes need to be done in the existing system of providing the information sought by the Act, this was explained by Kundu (2010) in his article "Democratic need of Right To Information Act in India". Standing against corruption which has been a major anxiety for our country for decades has an answer potentially in the hands of RTI.

Tiwari (2010) in his article "Right To Information: An important tool of social development, good governance and strong democracy" explains that RTI Act can be effective in informing crores of grassroots

people whose development is flawed due to corruption. According to him the greatest challenge of today's India is the bad governance. The use of RTI at the lowest level of the administrative arrangement, ie, at the village, block and district levels has shown tremendous possibilities in making democracy dynamic, energetic and useful for the public. The right to Information will encourage journalists and society at large to question the state of affairs.

James (2009) in his article on "Is Technology Networking Changing Childhood?" says that for past 5 years, usage of social networking sites has increased among youth. According to a latest poll, 22% of teenagers log in more than 10 times a day on to their favourite social media sites.

Social networking sites discuss various topics that lead to social change by creating awareness on the topics it discuss. One of the topics is the RTI Act. The information shared by the users of the social networking sites this may lead to a positive impact, but there are also negative impact of these technologies which is being discussed by Banisar (2011) in his paper "The Right to Information and Privacy: Balancing Rights and Managing Conflicts". According to him the recent communications technologies create and collect substantial records about individuals in the process of providing communications.

Although there is misuse of technology, majority of users are inclined to use technology for discussion. Internet can be used for seeking information and this is dealt on a paper released by the UK government on "The Guide to Freedom of Information". The Act may be valid when the request must be in writing and it can be letter or email. Also if there is chance of making the request via web or through social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter it is relevant if the public authority also has the access to these tools.

III. OBJECTIVES

1. To map the level of success of social networking sites in creating awareness on RTI
2. To study the type of discussions/observation being made in social networking sites on RTI
3. To understand how RTI is discussed positively or negatively on Facebook and twitter.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for this study is content analysis. In social networking sites there are discussions on RTI. Facebook and twitter are taken for this study.

Content analysis:

The content analysis of two of the popular social networking sites of India, namely Facebook and Twitter was done. Content of discussions and posts in the month of August were taken for the study.

Facebook:

Table 1 – Groups on Facebook dealing with RTI:

There are four groups seen in Facebook for RTI.

S.No	Group name	No. of members
1.	Right To Information and anti-corruption, India	4032
2.	Right To Information and Consumer Protection is an open group	2606
3.	Right To Information	483
4.	Right To Information and anti-corruption	739

1. Right to Information and Consumer Protection is an open group. This group is formed to discuss the various issues related to RTI Act and Consumer Protection. There are discussions on the issues related to these subjects and help each other to achieve better governance and consumer service.
2. Right to Information is a closed group with admin named Anjan Bilal who is a RTI Activist this group deals with J&K RTI Movement is a non-profit, apolitical, and voluntary social organization dedicated to promoting the Right to Information and good governance in Jammu and Kashmir. The goal is to promote citizens' awareness of RTI Act, promote a meaningful understanding of the RTI law amongst government officials and advocate for stronger legislation, rules, and implementation, and finally to lobby for related legislation that will promote transparency and good governance in the state.
3. Right to Information and anti-corruption, India-This group is an open group and it has members from different background such as journalist, students, activists and professors.
4. Right to Information and anti-corruption- It is also an open group

Pages on Facebook dealing with RTI:

There are two pages in the same name “Right to Information” one is official and other is non-official

1. Right to Information (official page) - The Official Page of Right to Information page by government of India. Questions can be asked through <http://www.facebook.com/Right.To.Information.India> Right to Information Act, 2005
2. Right to Information-Non-official page. This page also contains information and posts on RTI

Table 2 – Pages on Facebook dealing with RTI

S. No	Pages	No. of Likes
1.	Right to Information (official)	329
2.	Right to Information (non-official)	24262

Twitter pages dealing with RTI:

The official page for RTI in twitter is RTI INDIA. There is also yet another page on RTI which is called RTI Anonymous (RTIA).

Table 3 - Twitter pages dealing with RTI:

S. No	Pages	Tweets	Following	Followers
1.	RTI INDIA	822	74	4227
2.	RTI Anonymous (RTIA)	289	10	907

Content on Facebook and twitter:

For analysis in Facebook the posts and content of the group with highest member (4032) Right to Information and anti-corruption, India is taken for the study. In twitter the tweets related to RTI from the official twitter page RTI India for the month of August is taken for the study

- **Related to RTI:** The discussions or post of the social networking site related to RTI
- **Not related to RTI:** The discussions or post of the social networking site which is not related to RTI

Table 4 – Posts related to RTI on Facebook and Twitter

Category	Facebook		Twitter	
	No. of Posts	Percentage	No. of Posts	Percentage
Related to RTI	453	94.4	149	93.1
Not related to RTI	27	5.6	11	6.9

There are totally 480 discussions on Facebook related to RTI and Twitter had 160 tweets for the month of August. When calculated for the discussions related and not related to RTI, Facebook had 94.4% discussions related to RTI and whereas twitter had 93.1% tweets related to RTI.

Factors of Content Analysis:

The factors are as follows

1. Awareness on RTI
2. Education related to RTI
3. Information related to RTI
4. Exposure of Scams through RTI
5. Positive Criticism of RTI
6. Negative Criticism of RTI

Categorisation of factors on RTI post in Facebook and Twitter:

1. **Awareness on RTI:** Awareness help the visitor to understand RTI and help them in filing RTI for seeking information they need.
2. **Education related to RTI:** RTI used for education purpose.
3. **Information related to RTI:** Information on RTI cases that may help the visitor to understand what is happening in the State Information Commission or Central Information Commission.
4. **Exposure of Scams through RTI:** When the scams are brought to the awareness of people, politician or government officials may have a fear that this Act may also bring them out if they involve in corruption

Table: 5 – Categorisation of post in Facebook and Twitter

S.No	Factors	Facebook		Twitter	
		No.of posts	Percentage	No. of posts	Percentage
1.	Awareness on RTI	138	30.5	84	56.4
2.	Education related to RTI	26	5.8	2	1.3
3.	Information related to RTI	203	44.8	58	38.9
4.	Exposure of Scams through RTI	86	18.9	5	3.4

- The awareness on RTI is created at 30.5% by facebook and 56.4 by twitter
- Posts or tweets related to education, facebook has 5.8% and twitter has only 1.3%
- Providing information on RTI to other users via., sharing the updates of RTI happening and the information received through RTI by various users, facebook has 44.8% and twitter has 38.9%.
- Information on exposing scam through RTI in various parts of the country, facebook has 18.9% posts and twitter has 3.4% of tweets

Table 6 – Positive and negative criticism of RTI:

1. **Positive criticism:** RTI is discussed in positive way, like the powerful usage of the Act.
2. **Negative criticism:** SNS do have posts that say the negative side of RTI or sometimes they criticise that the government is not taking RTI to the right path.

S.No	Factors	Facebook		Twitter	
		No.of posts	Percentage	No. of posts	Percentage
1.	Positive criticism	429	94.7	143	95.9
2.	Negative criticism	24	5.3	6	4.1

Fig 1- categorisation of post in facebook and twitter Act by Facebook and Twitter

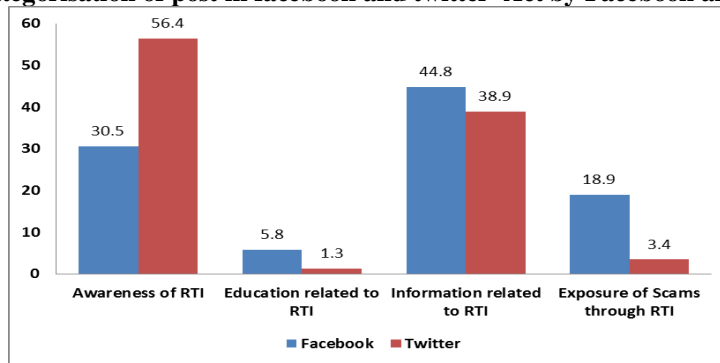
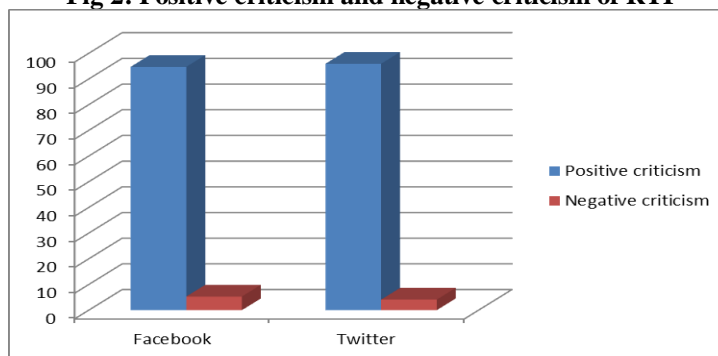


Fig 2: Positive criticism and negative criticism of RTI



Facebook and twitter has more of positive criticism on RTI Act. 94.7% of posts on facebook has positive criticism and only 5.3% has negative criticism. In twitter there is 95.9% of positive criticism and 4.1% of negative criticism

V. FINDINGS

- Awareness on RTI is created more through Facebook (30.6%) and less through twitter (56.4%).
- Education is discussed very less in twitter and facebook they have less percentage of 5.8% and 1.3% respectively.
- Providing information on RTI to other users via., sharing the updates of RTI happening and the information received through RTI by various users, facebook has 44.8% and twitter has 38.9%. Thus facebook shares more information and updates on RTI.
- Discussions on scams are done more by Facebook than Twitter, Facebook contains 18.9% posts and twitter has it only for 3.4% of posts related to scams.
- The positive criticism is done more by both Facebook (94.7%) and twitter(95.9%).

VI. CONCLUSION

Social networking sites have a beneficial effect on the way of life. They increase the social interaction and give more ways to make social connections. That connection increases positive relationships among those established relationships. Pictures and videos are shared between the connected groups which is a positive action. Also, the ability to build new relationships with people who share common friends and interests is another added benefit. Many social networking sites have interest groups on a wide range of topics and people can join those groups to discuss the subject with like-minded people. RTI is widely discussed in social networking sites and such discussions provide a healthy communication among the group members to share the information regarding their right and responsibility as a citizen and make everyone to enjoy the benefit of democracy on RTI which in turn promote the democracy.

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