In the Wake of People: Facebook Activism by the Bangalore Traffic Police

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Abstract

Social media is evidently changing the landscape of communication to a great extent. It has initiated the participatory communication approach evolving the concept of digital democracy. The rapid communication persona of social media is promising new opportunities for the public sector. The public service sectors are embracing the social media to revitalize their operating mechanisms and connect to the people. From just being the advisor and sometimes dictator, the public service sectors are turning facilitators by articulating their approach and creating a sense of omnipresence to serve public. An exemplary for this would be the Facebook activism by the Bangalore Traffic Police (BTP), a forum for people's voice and a platform to resolve people's issues through immediate communication. It is an eye-opener to road safety measures, a podium for opinions and suggestion laterally addressing complaints. BTP's initiative is encouraging citizen to be socially responsible and pledge for road safety. Bangalore Traffic Police Facebook approach is proving to be intriguing and phenomenal community driven change with certain deficiencies to be addressed.

Keywords

participatory communication approach, dialogic communication, Bangalore Traffic Police (BTP), social media, activism, digital democracy, active citizenry

Introduction

The technological advancements in the latter part of 20th century have revamped the communication. Earlier, like Laswell's Communication theory (1948), communication was in linear fashion in a foreseeable step by step strategic

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communication process with no participatory elements. *Paulo Freire*, one of the influential proponents of Participatory communication theory and practices emphasizes that participatory communication is more of dialogical communication stressing on participatory and collective processes in research, problem identification, decision making, implementation and evaluation of change. This form of communication is reinforced by the evolution of social media making the world a Global Village as dreamt by Marshal McLuhan. Today, social media is turned an inevitable tool of communication in an individual's life and as well crept in to the Public sector to create a community driven change. Adhering to the popular slogan 'For the people, of the people and by the people' by Public Service Sectors had failed to great extent in our country due to the communication gap between the government organization and the citizens. There is concern within democratic societies that a growing number of individuals are disconnecting from their role as citizens (Dyrenfurth, N., 2005). The tedious process of information flow disconnecting people has been obliterated by the plethora of social media creating a participatory communication. Social media being an intriguing phenomenon of our times and its multidimensional approach for communication is promising opportunities for the public service sector to start an interaction with citizens introducing digital democracy. This period has been described as the era of social networking, collective intelligence participation, collaborative and borderless distribution (Warr.w.2008).Consequently tapping to the era, Bangalore traffic police department has embraced Facebook as a tool to interact with citizens, create road awareness and better traffic management. In this paper we would analyze the face book page of Bangalore Traffic police and the initiatives undertaken through the page. The opinion of the Traffic commissioner and followers of the page is considered for the understanding the relevance and success of the Bangalore Traffic Police Facebook initiative.

Social media

Internet gives the chance for "like-minded" people to form communities despite their location, or geographic position on the physical global map (Gauntlett, 2000). "The web offers people an opportunity to produce creative, expressive media products (or text or art works, if you prefer) and display them to a global audience. Without question, this is a new and significant development" (Gauntlett, 2000). Social media, one such technological innovation has revolutionized the concept of communication and its interactive nature has provided a platform for the Bangalore Traffic police to network with Bangalore people. "Social Media" are "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the Ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 60). Its exceptional characteristics of fastening information transmission and commanding larger audience also designated various tools of social media appropriate for communication. It is an internet-based platform where individuals and communities share, discuss, and co-create (Kietzmann et al. 2011). Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Whatsapp are the popular social media tools extensively used. On the whole 'social media is

seen as an arena for engaging in networks for sharing, dialogue and connecting with peers or resource persons' (Kietzmann et al. 2011). It well is a fusion of sociology and technology transforming monologue to a dialogue giving birth to an active society. It is considered as an "interactive phase of modernity" (Hartley, 2005: 10) where everyone has the opportunity to communicate with one or many (Hartley, 2005: 10).

Facebook

Facebook one of the most opted social networking site for community building, networking with friends and family. Being an interactive site it provides a platform express, share, comment, debate, discuss, post picture from personal to profession life. Facebook a social networking site was launched in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg. As of December 31, 2013 (Facebook News), it has 1.23 billion monthly active users and 757 million daily active users on an average. Facebook is not just confined as a forum of fun and frolic but has a serious facet serving as a podium of activism, voice-out for relevant social issues, and create awareness in the path to create social change. Many believe that these new ways of communicating can help to create social change. Twitter co-founder Biz Stone went so far as to say that social media lowers the barrier for activism (Mainwaring, 2011). It is acting as an important forum to mobilize people to support cause which was evident with causes like Anna Hazare protest against corruption or for the Nirbhaya case. Bangalore traffic police adoption of Facebook to create road awareness and safety measures is certainly an activism for better and safe society.

Bangalore Traffic Police (BTP)

Bangalore is the most admired city for its moderate weather and friendly atmosphere around. While this attracts people from other cities to settle here, it is IT and BT industries that force people to fall in love with Bangalore. The rise in population is resulting in the increase of two and four wheelers adding to the traffic pressure of the city. According to the BTP statistics personalized mode of transport has immensely increased. Two wheelers along with cars comprise the 90% of vehicles on road in the city. In an effort to manage the traffic, BTP has resorted to the technological favor by launching the Traffic Management Centre (TMC) to manage traffic efficiently with the available human resources. The first of its kind in India, TMC receives live video coverage from 160 major junctions through surveillance cameras. All the 301 traffic signals are linked to the TMC which is constantly monitored by the police officers in the Centre. Black berry operations is one more technological teeth to keep a tab on the habitual offender which on spot provides the police official the violation record of the particular vehicle number. Addition to this the BTP website has initiated the concept 'Public Eye", an initiative to involve Bangalore people to curb traffic violation as a responsible citizen by just posting the vehicle number and a picture of particular vehicle violating the traffic rules. If perfect, an immediate action on the vehicle would be initiated through

releasing violation slip/fine slip. Stepping forward BTP is establishing a network with people by entering into Facebook.

Bangalore traffic police Facebook page

'You are watched round the clock' could serve as an apt tagline for Bangalore Traffic police. As a public service sector unit, its step to work for people and with people has been fastened by BTP embracing social media. This initiative of BTP falls into the purview of *Bertolt Brecht's* two core visions inherent in participatory communication, first technologies possess the potential to improve the lives of many people by giving them a voice and second the educational principles inherent in many of today's participatory communication models – dialogical communication. BTP's presence in the Facebook since April 2011 is displaying its new facet and the social responsibility toward Bangalore citizens. BTP started this activism on Facebook with an objective to have a meaningful dialogue with citizens, spread awareness on road safety measures, remove misconceptions and involve community in the task of improving road user behavior. BTP is facing the challenge of managing 4 million vehicles and 8 million commuters with just 2500 policemen and officers and effective use of the technology. It shoulders the responsibility meeting the expectations of various stakeholders and road users. "Facebook is a communication channel between BTP and Bangalore people. It has initiated transparency in our work atmosphere and medium for people's involvement and people's participation" opines Sri B Dayananda, IPS, Additional Commissioner of Police, Traffic.

BTP Facebook page has garnered 99,568 likes, who are regular followers of the page and initiated 6,515 (as on Feb 01, 2014) to have a dialogue appreciating, suggesting and posting their problems. The highlights of the BTP Facebook page along with opinion survey of 95 active citizens of the page are as follows:

Traffic updates - is an important element of this page. BTP updates traffic details on regular basis to ease the problem of traffic congestion. An update about slow moving traffic is helping the commuters to avoid such roads during their travel contributing for the traffic management by police officials and aiding the citizens to evade the traffic congestion roads. 98% of the respondents appreciated this factor as it acts as a travel planner to office and so on. A prior update about a rally causing traffic congestion helps them avoid such roads

Morning greetings: An attractive feature of BTP Facebook is *Morning greeting with a road safety message*. Safety messages like "Good Morning Bangalore...."Broken tools can be replaced. You can't", follow traffic rules and be safe ..."; "Take care of your friend! ... Do not let your friends drink & drive... Always have one non-drunk friend to take you safe... "When DRUNK..., keeps self AWAY from steering"...! Have a safeeeeeeweeeeekend..." is weaving a comfortable relationship between BTP and people.96% of the respondents find it to

be an innovative way of BTP to greet people with a warning beat to follow traffic rule for their safety

Road safety initiatives and events: As the sector working for the people's safe life, BTP has felt the need to launch various *safety initiatives* for the commuters. The initiatives like 'don't drink and drive'; wear your helmet – protect your head,; ' Reducing road accidents, deaths, and injuries is in your hands', and so on echo in the Facebook page to garner followers attention indulging them to follow safety measures as responsible citizens. Laterally *several events* are introduced like "Road safety week", "No Honk Day" and Bangalore City Saptavarna Suraksha Sugama Sanchara (BC4S) - for the disciplined and an effective service of autorikshaws. *Sri B Dayananda, IPS, additional commissioner of police states* that "Facebook is serving them as a one of the platform to promote events and update events information for citizens". 42% of respondents active involve in the events organized and are whelmed with the talks, painting competitions organized to create awareness while 58% are following the event updates regularly.

Comments and complaint forum: Facebook since its inception is a forum to voice out and share opinions on various issues. BTP Facebook page is no exception, the page is showered with appreciation for the work and concurrently complaints about police personnel, and inconvenience's caused on road and doubt clarification. If the complaints are in the purview of traffic violation or traffic police, it is addresses and acknowledged with a short span of time. If the complaint is beyond traffic violation and is the inconvenience in certain areas, such complaint will be directed to respective area police station which follows the process for the course of action. Any complaint of traffic rule violation with photo evidence posted by public will heed to immediate action by issuing violation challans. Very less number of respondents i.e. 38% feel that their complaints are addressed while majority complains of their problems being not addressed. *Additional commissioner, traffic comments* that 'Facebook is a forum to interact and communicate information to commuters to manage traffic better way. It is generic in nature and not a complaint readdress forum as it has certain mandatory process. Facebook is extensively used for endorsing initiatives and events, and to know Bangaloreans opinions and suggestions'.

Bangalore Traffic police's distinctive effort to collaborate with Bangaloreans with a vision to be the city with traffic sense is achieved to a great extent through social media, Facebook. This innovative approach is accolade with 'National e-governance award' by Govt. of India (Feb 2011), 'Award for Excellence' from Ministry of Urban Development Govt. of India (Dec -2011), 'Golden Peacock award' for Innovative product/service (Jan – 2012), and 'Namma Bengaluru Award' (Mar – 2013).The approach is appreciated and applauded by the citizens in Bangalore, while pointing out certain deficiencies like to fasten complaint addressal process, English language to be used for communication, and to create road awareness among school and college students.

Inferences

The BTP's dialogic communication approach is creating a positive change in the traffic management of the Bangalore city. The initiative and the Facebook as a medium, is acting like a catalytic agent articulating the communication approach and erasing the communication gap between the citizens and the Traffic Police. The monologic communication (One-way) is adopted by BTP for information dissemination, campaigns and awareness creation while the dialogic communication has initiated in collective problem identification and drawing solutions. The prevalence of BTP in Facebook is creating a people friendly image of this public sector; laterally showcasing it has the socially responsible sector. While BTP on Facebook is great effort bringing community driven change, it does need to penetrate to the larger masses of Bangalore. 99,568 followers and just 6,515 people actively corresponding with BTP indicate that more awareness about BTP on Facebook needs to be initiated to involve more citizens in dialogue for betterment of services.

Conclusion

Public service sector like Bangalore Traffic Police adopting social media, Facebook to reach Bangalore citizens is phenomenal. Its step to create active citizenry has strengthened the democratic policies supporting citizens to express their views on relevant issues shaping the decisions or policy making. BTP Facebook activism is encouraging participatory communication and people's involvement in various initiatives. It indeed is educating people about traffic norms and simultaneously making them socially responsible to report traffic violations of their fellow beings pledging for road safety. This remarkable initiative is shaping people's perception and attitude towards Bangalore traffic police. BTP sector though enterprising lacks in creating awareness about its presence in Facebook to a larger audience. An effort to be known and improvement on certain lacks would definitely have a greater impact on Bangaloreans foreseeing a great traffic sense. A step ahead Bangalore Traffic Police are now on Twitter and the traffic updates can reach you through SMS. Social media's role in public service sector is certainly a revolution asserting on democracy.

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