

Government of Assam

Draft Social Media Policy

1. Introduction:

Social media has transformed the society like never before. It helps in connecting people easily and also emerged as one of the most convenient mode of sharing of information. It is different from traditional media tools like newspaper, magazine, radio and television, with more depth, vibrancy and immediate effect. With social media, common citizens are not only a consumer of information, but also the generator of content.

Highlighting the importance of social media and in a bid to encourage and enable government agencies to make use of this dynamic medium of interaction, a Framework and Guidelines for use of Social Media for Government Organisations has been formulated by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology Ministry of Communications & Information Technology, Government of India. These guidelines have enabled the various Government agencies to create and implement its own social media strategy.

2. Necessity:

Social media gives voice to the unheard, with immediate and non-stop reach. It offers the governments and its initiatives a platform to engage with their stakeholders — especially citizens in real time and get a pulse of the mood among the public without any bureaucratic or political filter, which later can be used to make policies citizen oriented. Many government agencies across India use various social media platforms to reach out to citizens, businesses and experts to seek inputs into policy making, get feedback on service delivery, create community based programmes etc. However, many apprehensions remain including, but not limited to issues related to authorisation to speak on behalf of department/agency, technologies and platform to be used for communication, scope of engagement, creating synergies between different channels of communication, compliance with existing legislations etc. It was therefore felt that Guidelines for use of Social Media were required which would enable project owners/implementers to effectively use these platforms.

3. Defining Social Media:

Kaplan and Haenlein in 2010 defined Social Media as, "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content." He further classified social media into six different types — collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia), blogs and microblogs (e.g. Twitter), content communities (e.g. YouTube), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, virtual game worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft), and virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life).

4. Principles for Government Officials Using Social Media (In Official Capacity):

The interactive nature of social media ensures multi-dimensional communication and response time is often immediate. With the speed of communication not offering the luxury of differentiating between official and personal content, using social media for official purposes should be follow some guiding principles to keep conversation and interaction smooth:

Identity of the User: Always identify clearly who you are, what is your role in the department and publish in the first person. Disclaimer may be used when appropriate

No Unauthorised Comment: Do not initiate a conversation, comment or respond to a reaction unless authorised. This must be the firmly adhered to especially in the matters that are sub-judice, draft legislations or relating to other individuals

Maintain Relevance: Comment only on issues relevant to your area and make pertinent comments.

Professional Approach: Be polite and respectful during all discussions. Never make personal comments for or against any individuals or agencies. Stay away from political discussions.

Be Open to Criticism: Always react to comments (positive or negative) with grace. It is NOT necessary to respond to each and every comment.

Follow the Rule: Always keep relevant rules and regulations first. Never infringe upon Intellectual Property Rights or Copyright of others.

Respect Privacy: Never reveal personal information about other individuals or your own private and personal details.

Law of the Land: Information Technology Act, 2000 and its amendments thereafter and all other applicable laws governing the territory of India.

5. Social Media Framework & Guidelines for Government Organisations:

The Framework and Guidelines for Use of Social Media for Government Organisations by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology Ministry of Communications & Information Technology, Government of India has enabled the State Government and its agencies the use the Social Media platforms more effectively and reach out to their stakeholders and understand their concerns and hear their voices. The Framework comprises of the following 6 elements:

Objective: Why an agency needs to use social media?

Platform: Which platform/s to use for interaction?

Governance: What are rules of engagement?

Communication Strategy: How to interact?

Pilot: How to create and sustain a community? Need to take a leadership role in keeping the community created through social media platform alive and vibrant.

Engagement Analysis: Who is talking about what, where and what are the main points of conversations?

Institutionalisation: How to embed social media in organisation structure? Need a sustainable governance structure for social media.

5.1. Guidelines for Using Social Media by Government Organizations

The Framework and Guidelines for Use of Social Media for Government Organisations by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology Ministry of Communications & Information Technology, Government of India (MeitY) highlights a set of guiding principles that may be used while making use of Social Media.

The State Government will be adopting the same Framework and Guidelines drafted by MeitY with minor modifications for the following reasons:

- It is a comprehensive document taking care of the sensitive nature of the presence and interaction of government agencies in social media;
- The concerns, structure and requirements of the State Government and its agencies are taken care of by the Framework and Guidelines;
- MeitY is a full-fledged ministry under the Union Government. It has the expertise in issuing guidelines and make amendments.

Objectives: The objective for the use of social media is not just to disseminate information but also to undertake public engagement for a meaningful public participation for formulation of public policy. Government organisations are exploring the use of social media for public engagements for disseminating information, policy making, recruitment, generating awareness, education etc. about public services. Therefore, Social Media may be used for:

- Seeking feedback from citizens
- Re-pronouncement of Public Policy
- Issue based as well as Generic interaction
- Brand Building or Public Relations
- Generating Awareness and education on National Action Plans and implementation strategies

5.2. Government departments and agencies can engage social media in any of the following manner:

- By making use of any of the existing external platforms, or
- By creating their own communication platforms. It will not only be cost effective, but also effective in penetrating messages across the target audience.
- The choice of the platform – whether owned or externally leveraged should be made based on the following factors:
 - Duration of engagement - whether the engagement sought is to be an ongoing activity or created for a specific time-bound purpose
 - Type of Consultation – whether the consultation is open to public or confined to a particular group of stakeholders e.g. experts
 - Scope of Engagement – whether the consultation requires daily, weekly, bi-weekly or even hourly interaction
 - Existing Laws – whether existing laws permit use of such platforms and the requirement under such laws regarding data protection, security, privacy, archiving etc.

5.3. Social Media Governance Structure:

Since use of social media is a round-the-clock engagement, traditional media rules and regulations do not apply in totality.

Two most important aspects of social media are its:

- viral characteristic – news spreads exponentially; and

- demand for instant gratification – queries, responses and counter-responses are posted instantaneously.

However, since the official pages of departments must reflect the official position, some measure of control must be included in the flexible design of communication.

Just as rules and regulations exist for interaction with traditional media, similar rules must be created for engaging with social media.

Some of the key aspects of such a governance structure include:

5.3.1. Account Governance:

Account Creation: A social media account establishes an organisation's online identity. Wherever possible, the same name for the different social networking accounts may be adopted to ensure ease of search on the internet. Another important facet of online identity is the need for it to be rendered effectively in either long form e.g. website address or in 15 characters or less (this is the Twitter maximum).

Account Administration: One or two officials handling the accounts (the social media expert handling the account in case the work is outsourced) will be responsible for the daft and sanctity of the accounts and handles.

Login and passwords: Each new account requires a URL, user name and/or email address and a password. A proper record of login ids and password must be maintained. This is critical as multiple people may be authorised to post on behalf of the department.

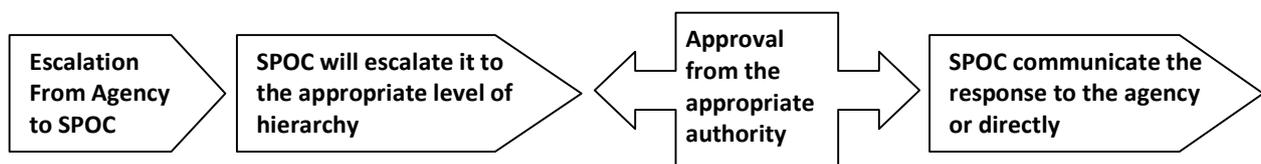
Account Status: It is important to define whether the engagement may be undertaken through official accounts only or the officials may be permitted to use personal accounts also for posting official responses. It determines who says what on behalf of your organisation and in what form it is published. It also outlines how each piece of published information is presented where it is published. The most important aspect is whether the responses are in Official or Personal Capacity.

5.3.2. Response and Responsiveness:

Responsiveness: This indicates the how often would the pages/information be updated, in what manner would the responses be posted, what would be the turnaround time of responses etc. The major attraction of social media is the spontaneity and immediacy of response and feedback and those visiting the site would expect the some kind of response within a pre-defined time limit.

Response: While creating a policy for responses, it may be noted that -

- Not all posts/comments need to be responded to immediately and individually. Also, wherever a response is required all posts should be kept short and to the point.
- While employees are free to post response in their personal capacity, it is mandatory that while they are doing so, they must clearly identify themselves, confidential information must not be divulged and should not be seen to represent “official view” unless authorised to do so.
- Another important aspect that needs to be addressed is the Escalation Mechanism. There has to be a defined hierarchy not only of responses but also of queries. An official from the department (not below the level of Joint Secretary) be made the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for any issues related escalation of any content/response related mechanism. The official will be solely responsible for escalation/resolution within the Department and co-ordination with the agency.
- Since Social Media needs quick reaction and traditional file based escalations can't work, any escalation via email should be considered valid and official form of document.



5.3.3. Resource Governance:

Allocation of Resources: Since using social media is a resource intensive exercise, it is important to ensure that resources and their responsibilities are clearly marked out very early. Many organisations have a dedicated team including outsourced resources to manage their engagement while others primarily uses internal resources. More often than not, it is advisable to create a dedicated team. One of the key issues that impacts the resource requirement is whether the conversation is moderated or un-moderated. In case of moderated conversation, dedicated resource/s is critical. One of the key resources is an internal champion within the system who can lead the strategy within the department. It is important to note that since the engagement in social media requires different skill sets, the champion and other resources identified would require orientation & training specifically for the tasks assigned to them and keep abreast of the fast paced developments in this media

Roles & Responsibilities: The roles and responsibilities of the team responsible for creating, managing and responding on social media platforms must be clearly defined.

- In Indian context, they may also need to be aligned to roles and responsibilities defined for responding to RTIs.
- For most interactions, flexibility may be given to the staff to respond to regular queries or comments.
- Escalation mechanism defined in the governance structure must clearly define accountability at all levels.
- The role definition must not be limited just to responses, but also include responsibility for matters related maintenance of login ids and passwords, issues related to data security, archives, privacy, etc. For example, while the existing web content team may be assigned the responsibility for responding to usual queries; special technical expertise may be required to ensure appropriate levels of security.

Accountability: Clearance systems that distinguish between situations when an official position is required, and when open conversation is appropriate. This has to have at its heart a redefinition of accountability. The officials designated for engagement with citizen using the social media should be covered under a well defined immunity provision in consonance with the RTI Act and the IT Act and the IT Amendment Act 2008.

5.3.4. Content Governance:

Content Creation & Social media profiles overlap, therefore sharing consistent content on all social media platforms should form the bedrock of content policy. While the social media tools allow everyone to become a creator, for the official account, content will have to be specified and tailored to the site on which it is being published.

Accessibility: In order to enable wider participation, content creation and availability should be in English and Assamese and must not be limited to text alone. The content should adequately address challenges related to accessibility in other State Languages as well as accessibility of content for differently-abled.

Moderation: A moderation policy should also be published if the platform permits others to add their own content; this informs people what they can post whilst protecting others who may visit your platform. The moderation policy should include matter related to copyright, rights to addition and deletion etc.

Records Management: When any information is shared or guidance given online, it is necessary to ensure that all relevant records are captured, trail is generated and records are managed

appropriately. It is important that the rules regarding record keeping are stated upfront so that those seeking historical data are aware of statutes and limitations. Some of the important aspects that may be kept in mind while defining record management guidelines are as under:

- The requirements for existing legislations e.g. RTI etc. need to be kept in mind and are paramount in influencing decisions regarding record keeping
- Ordinarily, if online consultations do not impact decision making, lead to or influence policy making (e.g. seeking information about nodal officers, or any other public document, or responding to generic comments such as governance should be improved etc.) the agencies may decide that no record of such interactions will be maintained.
- However, if consultations are necessarily being undertaken on specific policy or governance issues or that may influence decision making (e.g. inputs into Plan Document, consultation on policy frameworks etc.) then all necessary records need to be maintained. If the agency is using a social media site that does not facilitate record keeping, then there are various other options that may be explored. Some of the options are given below and may be exercised based on need and resources available:
 - Records may be created on agency's internal platform and records be maintained with appropriate tags e.g. creator/sender, dates, posting site etc.
 - Screenshots may be captured and stored in soft or hard (copy) format and filed at appropriate place.
 - A summary may be created of the information/consultation and filed.

Since most of the social media platforms are based outside India and are not governed by Indian Laws, or managed and controlled by Indian regulations, specific policies may be drafted related to information security and archiving. If required the agencies may engage with the Social Media Service Providers to work out Service Level Agreements for

- Complaint and response mechanism between the agency and the Service Provider
- Content Storage
- Shared access of the content
- Archival mechanisms

Legal Provisions: In India, the legal implications must be viewed in accordance with the law of land e.g. RTI Act, Information Technology Act, 2000 and its amendments thereafter and all other applicable laws governing the territory of India. These policies must be circulated internally to ensure uniformity of response.

5.4. Communication Strategy:

- Some of key aspects of communication strategy include – Integration of Social Media into the day to day activity of the Department, connection with existing networks/users/followers, sharing content across sites and publicising use of social networking through traditional media.
- Social media can only be used by the Government to communicate existing Government information and inform official policy to the public.
- While the social media tools allow everyone to become a creator, for the official account, content will have to be specified and tailored to the site on which it is being published.
- Adequate care must be taken to avoid propagation of unverified facts and frivolous misleading rumours which tend to circulate often through miscreants on social media platforms.
- It must be reiterated here that social media should only be one of the components of the overall citizen engagement strategy and government departments must desist from using social media as the only medium to communicate with their stakeholders.
- Initially, the departments may just aim to post information regularly.

5.5. Engagement Analysis:

Social media monitoring must be an integral part of any social media interaction. Social media data is different from other data or information because organisations have no control over its creation or dissemination on the Web and in order to understand and analyse the data a structure has to be imposed externally on it.

Citizens and domain experts can share their suggestions at assamfin@gmail.com on or before **September 15, 2018**