SOCIAL MEDIA IN A NETWORKED WORLD
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EDITORIAL

We know that social media is here to stay. We love it, and sometimes we hate it. We see it as a disease because we can never completely disconnect. We see it as a form of communication gone wrong because we have begun to engage more with the virtual world. It is hard to get one's head around the pace of new modes of communication today, and the advancements in technology that are necessary to keep up with them.

Initially intended as a means of connecting with friends and family, 'social media' has become 'social networking', giving us the power to communicate, share and connect with virtually the whole world, and most importantly, to connect simultaneously.

These essays examine some aspects of this field, both the positive and negative dimensions of social media. In his Introduction, Pratik Kanjilal gives us a concise overview of the volume, and the myriad debates surrounding fake news, privacy, law, Internet governance, mental health, technology, social network platforms, cybersecurity, among others. There are many other areas where social media has had an impact. For instance, the role and impact of social media in education; trade and business; and global security. However, it was not possible to cover so much in so little space.

Having been in publishing for over 30 years, what I find most fascinating about these (relatively) new modes of communication is their impact on language. From an English-speaking vantage, Wren & Martin was laid to rest a while ago. Then came the 'de-Britishisation' of English, starting with American English, going on to blends like Hinglish, Chinglish and Spanglish. It is the networked world that has completely changed how we use language. There are new words, and new meanings of old words. When I was young, I had a Troll, which was an ugly dwarf doll that I was given to amuse myself with. I wasn't posting offensive messages on social media sites. Wall, poke, handle too meant something different. Virus, viral and tablet are no longer only medical terms. We made

friends, and sometimes we fell out with them, but today we are 'friended' or 'unfriended'. A study conducted by University College London calls this a 'seismic generational gap' in how language is being used. Hashtag, selfie, belfie, felfie—social media has created a whole new lexicon. Although we started late, and technology is still at a young stage, India is also witnessing a rapid growth in regional language users.

Why We Post, published in 2017 by University College London Press, is a series of 11 books devoted to specific countries, including India. What is interesting about these books is that they do not evaluate social media, as is usually the case. Instead, the intention is educational, providing evidence of what social media has become in each place and the local consequences. The series is an eye-opener to the expanse of the field that is social media, and worth reading.

Non-verbal communication is not new, but it now has a new avatar in emoticons and ingenious uses of asterisks. Everyone is in a rush. Twitter helps by restricting the number of characters one can use to communicate a thought. Acronyms make communication even shorter. Why would you say 'rolling on the floor laughing' when you can use the less cumbersome ROFL?

We could go on. But the point is, is formal writing giving way to 'Internet-speak'? What then is the future of education, especially higher education? One of the most revolutionary developments has been search engines, especially Google. There is a temptation to get the gist of just about anything from this mammoth data base. Wikipedia is the biggest culprit, and anyone in academia will not hesitate to tell you that this is not research, merely a search.

Change is not always welcome, but it is inevitable. Maybe this is an exciting time to experiment with and develop a whole new language.

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OMITA GOYAL