SOCIAL MEDIA for EMPOWERMENT
POWER OF PEOPLE & PARTICIPATION

citizen media & journalism | communication, advocacy & development activism | community mobilisation | crowdsourcing, crowd economy & crowd funding | online safety | public relations | social commerce & enterprise | women empowerment

Social Media
▶▶ people ▶▶ voices ▶▶ power ▶▶

CELEBRATING SOCIAL MEDIA MILESTONES

It's incredible how social media has been able to bridge the gap between citizens and governance, society and social issues, victims and help, and service-seeker and service, among others. The power of social media is hard to dismiss today. What was once a platform to share photos with friends or follow celebrities has now also become a platform for accessing services, raising grievances and advocating for a cause. This is because social media has the power to connect and organise individuals and communities to disseminate information or views independently and in a free-flowing manner to billions of people, across different parts of the world, at an extremely fast pace and at no cost. Social media, in more than one way, adds to the democratic nature of a nation and strengthens it.

Digital Empowerment Foundation in partnership with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF) hosted the 4th Social Media for Empowerment Awards (SM4E) 2017 at India Habitat Centre, New Delhi, on April 29, 2017.

The Internet has become an increasingly powerful medium today to raise a debate, inform people about their rights person, create awareness on social issues, challenge stereotypes and change mindsets. We see a new hashtag every few weeks, trying to question a social, political or environmental evil. In so many cases, we have seen the power of crowd on social media forcing the authorities to take decisions to change laws, bring amendments and take cognisance of issues that they had perhaps been ignoring for far too long. **Read more**

SM4E 2017 started with a welcome note by DEF Founder-Director Osama Manzar who shared that though he gets three newspapers every morning, he only reads the headlines while he depends on the Internet, particularly social media, to read the stories.

With that thought, SM4E 2017 was opened for a high-powered and energised panel discussion. The panel on 'Social Media & Polarisation' was moderated by Mint Editor Sukumar Ranganathan, and members in the panel were Change.org Country Director Preethi Herman, GoNews Founder-Editor Pankaj Pachauri, Indian Railways DG(PR) Anil Saxena, Huffington Post India Editor-in-Chief Sruthijith KK and Digital India Foundation Co-Founder Arvind Gupta.

The discussion raised varying and interesting points, with a divided house on whether or not social media is polarising communities and if imposing Internet shutdowns or social media bans, particularly in the conflict state of Jammu & Kashmir, is the right way to tackle dissent and spread of possible rumours.
Sukumar stated that we are all mostly interacting with/following those on social media who share the same views as us or whose ideas resonate with ours.

Sruthijit pointed out that violence happened in the country even before the advent of social media but it cannot be denied that social media gives people anonymity to be aggressive. He said, though polarisation has increased in recent times, he thinks social media cannot be blamed for it. Pachauri, however, disagreed and said that if social media was not polarising communities, it would not have been banned in Kashmir. Preethi, meanwhile, pointed out that social media is an inclusive platform that allows dissent, and comes with its pros and cons. Seconding that, Gupta said anything emanating from social media should not be trusted without having verified the same. Representing the government and its utilisation of social media, Saxena pointed out that social media, especially Twitter, has been a particularly useful tool for the Indian railways to address grievances in real time.

The panel discussion managed to create a lot of buzz on Twitter and, at one point of time, **#SM4E2017** was trending at No. 5 in India. Tweets from the day are available in this Storify.

In the afternoon, eight roundtable discussions were held simultaneously to allow Finalists of each category to interact with other finalists in the same category in the presence of a social media Expert/Jury member.

These eight roundtables focused on future of Citizen Media & Journalism; Communication, Advocacy & Development Activism; Community Mobilisation; Crowdsourcing, Crowd Economy & Crowdfunding; Online Safety; Public Relations; Social Commerce & Enterprise; and Women Empowerment using social media.

Some of the key points discussed in these sessions were:

▶▶ Citizen journalism via social media is helping the society in creating awareness in areas and on topics that often go unnoticed by mainstream media houses.

▶▶ Since everyone has easy access to mobile phones today, people should learn to verify information before its consumption.

▶▶ Social media has become the latest tool of advocacy and activism, with thousands of campaign taking up the virtual space to make a difference.

▶▶ Lack of access to social media platforms for rural youth is an important challenge in information dissemination that must be addressed.

▶▶ Non-profit organisations that earlier struggled to get funding now have access to crowdfunding, courtesy social media and the Internet.

▶▶ Users need to be sensitised about online safety so that they can keep themselves secure in this age of increasing digital footprints.

▶▶ There is a wide information gap in India. With India moving fast towards Digital India, the marginalised communities are getting marginalised even further due to lack of access to information available online.

▶▶ There is a need to train rural youth in Internet-based entrepreneurship.

▶▶ Social media is proving to be a vital tool for sales, marketing and promotion for small, medium and big enterprises of all kinds.

▶▶ Patriarchy in the offline world has moved to the online world too. Women are often judged, trolled and attacked on social media — much more than their male counterparts are — for what they share.

These discussions allowed Finalists to get a wider view of what all innovations are happening in the world of social media by their peers in the same area of interest as theirs.

One of the highlights of the day was the Keynote Address in the afternoon by Rajeev Mehrotra, Founder & Managing Trustee of Public Service Broadcasting Trust and Trustee-Secretary of The Foundation for Universal Responsibility of HH The Dalai Lama. A comment of his that resonated with all in the audience was that "social media is all about I, Me and Myself". Mehrotra addresses several philosophical issues of social media in a changing world, and had the audience in a thinking mode throughout.

Mehrotra's session was followed by an engaging show by mind reader, magician and hypnotist Nakul Shenoy; before Manzar took the stage to announce Winners, Special Mentions and Chairman's Recommendations and felicitate them. SM4E 2017 had received 162 nomination this year from all over South Asia. Fifty-two of these initiatives were shortlisted as Finalists. **Of these, 16 were awarded as Winners, seven received Special Mentions and three were recognised for Chairman's Recommendation.**

A complete list of winners can be seen here and photos from the day can be accessed here. The awards book, Social Media: People | Voices | Power — which was launched earlier in the day — can he **read here**.