Role of Social Media in Creating Godmen’s Public Image

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Abstract

In the hypertech world, spiritual godmen have made an attention-grabbing space into the ‘inner net’, stimulating enthusiasts to see technology as a way to find peace and harmony. With the augmentation of handheld devices and the inescapability of the internet, these i-Godmen are capitalizing on creating their virtual wallop. However, there are still a number of limitations such as - not much studies have been conducted on how profound i-Godmen utilize online life to connect with masses, improve and proliferate their lessons and how they use the marketing tools to project themselves as concrete persons with compassionate therapeutic intelligence. The present study holistically approaches the problems identified. It critically reviews and synthesizes existing literature, compare different godmen-wise influence indicators to understand role of People analytics, performs case study method of the social media tools (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) used by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, Asaram Bapu, Amritanandamayi and Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh Insan. The study provides solution to utilize social media as a tool for better commitment, significant content sharing, and successful correspondence to accomplish social advancement objectives by using questionnaire for determining the convergent and divergent validity. The paper discusses the factors behind the advent of self-styled Godman in India, the place where Gurus of impeccable character had originated; simultaneously the implications of these spiritual i-Godmen on modern Indian society

Keywords: i-Godmen, People Analytics, Case Study, Questionnaire, Society Change.

“Social media will be so powerful that electronic and print media will be unable to do anything”– Baaba Ramdev

Introduction: It was only few years ago, when the only way to identify a godmen was through word of mouth. Many times it used to be some far-off place away from the civilization – in a forest or in a cave where godmen could be found. The notion was to remain away from the societal & emotive attachment to discover the inner peace. Though, it does not mean that all the spiritual priests were in search of self-realization. Some are more avaricious and brand cognizant, and in return, the self-proclaimed gurus too, started developing themselves as a brand. In the Hypertech world, spiritual godmen have made an attention-grabbing space into the ‘inner net’, stimulating enthusiasts to see technology as a way to find peace and harmony. Today’s godmen judiciously design their social media profiles and online publicizing strategies. With the intensification of handheld devices and the inescapability of the internet, these i-Gods are capitalizing on creating their virtual wallop. With the
augmentation of handheld devices and the inescapability of the internet, these i-gods are capitalizing in creating their virtual wallop. This has resulted in the establishment of internal technology, creative design teams with proper designated full-time staff at these ashrams. Social media apart, godmen all over are focused on consolidating their outreach efforts on apps, often combining e-commerce and spirituality in an approach somewhat resembling the double bottom line philosophy of social impact start ups.

These spiritual godmen has accumulated millions of virtual followers across YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, phone apps, and also voice an expertise on the cybernetic associate Amazon Alexa. SadhguruJaggiVasudev tops the Youtube followers chart with 2.29 million followers, Mata Amratanandamayi has over 15 million Facebook followers and Shri Shri Ravi Shankar has 4.04 million Twitter followers.

For godmen, social media is not just a mode to create a brand or a platform where they can connect with their disciples but also provides a forum that permits them to project their thoughts and feelings.

Review of Literature:

The upheaval in knowledge and communiqué know-hows, market’s deregulation and globalization have led to substantial variations in social life. There is an over-all sense of attrition of “out-of-date” ethics and life style patterns, and superiority of certain individuals over society (Belliappa, 2013).

When the world’s top economies like Europe, South Korea, US, Japan are maturing, India can claim of having an augmented working inhabitants. This demographic probability can offer enormous support to the societal and fiscal progress of the country. However, if loads of people involving youth adults are looking for some sort of liberation in the lap of self-styled spiritual Godman and follow the unscientific path flagged by fads evolving swiftly, the potential edge could turn into a catastrophe. The drift of mystical Godman who asserts themselves as God personified and offers immediate gratification is a serious matter as the inquisitiveness and vigor of the public must be fed by technical and optimistic thinking as compared to the philosophy of dissemblance. (Rana, 2017).

The social media platform has transformed the control-structures in the global markets. It has provided consumers a means to share text, pictures, audio-video data with the virtual group members. (Shekhar, Bindu, 2017).

In an extremely active and diverse India, many sociological ideas stand effective even today, for an enhanced understanding into the spurt of the novel movements’ like- religion and spirituality. Today’s god has entered into the new sphere of religion. (Gavankar, 2016).

Spiritual godmen gained fame and people fall prey to their pranks and are known to ascend people, mysteriously belch out heroes of god and few of them even demanded that they can treat somatic incapacities of their passionate followers. Although the claims made by them were far-fetched, they were persistent on gaining fame and their supporters increased day by day due to the irrational behavior of religious people. Despite of large number of exposed godmen being bogus, the people have full faith in them like AsaramBapu,Premanand, Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, Nithyananda, etc
were all caught by the police under the charges of sexual assault but still due to their followers, government had to face a lot of security measures while passing a final verdict in the court of law. (Raghuram, 2018).

Social media platform is furtively the expression of the mystical ideals of its inventors and users and thus tacitly holds out the potential of making us better communicators, better at relating to one another, and therefore perhaps even more human and more devout. Confounding stocks is the way that the web and its related know-hows have infused everything. (Brandon, 2016).

The main advantage with all the spiritual divines is that because they are considered to be sacred men, masses are unwilling to consider them with clear disrepute. The brasher they use this “holy” position to have access to the mighty and the affluent. (Sanghavi, 2017)

**Objective:** The objective of the research study is to study how profound i-Gods utilize online life to connect with, improve and proliferate their lessons and image.

**Research Method:** The study is an exploratory research that tries to investigate whether social media platforms have an effect on the exposition of merits that are important and helpful in the building of relationships with the devotees.

For the purpose of data collection, case study of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, Asaram Bapu, Amritanandamayi and Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh Insan has been done. Questionnaire method is also adopted because it is an appropriate method for exploring usage of Internet among users and has showed to be an effective way to collect data from a large number of respondents. The study is piloted among 500 people chosen by accidental sampling in Delhi-NCR. The main purpose to select Delhi-NCR as the area of study is because it is the capital city and masses have majority of the masses have media exposure. Primary and secondary data is used in the study as variables connected with the study are masses media exposure and research study’s time frame.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation:**

- **Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh Insan:** Accused of murder and convicted of rape, the controversial Rockstar Baaba born in Rajasthan got married and has four children but had renounce his family life at 23 and joined Dera Sacha Sauda in 1990. On 25 August 2017, Panchkula’s special CBI court found the self-styled godmen guilty of raping 2 Dera female followers and consequently the court sentenced him 20-year imprisonment on 28 August 2017. Approximately, 1,50,000 Dera’s followers gathered at Panchkula at the time of hearing. After the verdict, riots took place in which 38 people died and 250 people were seriously injured. Now, on interviewing twenty followers gathered in Panchkula, 86% got information to come on the venue from social media.
The Baabahad 3.74 million twitter followers but five days later on 28th August his account was suspended after he was convicted in the rape case. He followed none on twitter. The so-called mystic jailed head of the Dera joined twitter in October 2014 and approximately tweeted 2,899 times. His facebook page @SaintDrMSG7 has 7.68 lakh subscribers and 7.58 lakh followers liked the social account. It is way higher than Sri Sri Ravi Shankar who is having 2.26 million followers and Baabaramdev- The yoga guru having 938000 Twitter following. On Facebook, he has 683,192 followers and 673,278 people have liked his page. It is to be noted that he does not follow anybody.

He defines his social media bio as a “spiritual saint/philanthropist/versatile singer/allrounder sportsperson/film,director/art,director/music,director/script,writer/lyricist autobiographer/DOP”.

His movie MSG, again created a buzz when he projected himself as a divine leader with loads of supporters, fighting against all social vices and gender bias in the society. He is shown performing wonders and curing fatal ailments, thereby encouraging fallacy, blind trust and shown himself as ‘God’. When the CBFC referred the film to the Appellate Tribunal for reviewing, his followers invaded Twitter and #isupportMSG was at the top of the twitter trends.

- **SadhguruJaggiVasudev**: The saint depends upon the volunteers for his media updates as well his organization Isha Foundation which range from his videos to live tweeting around events. The organization uses Facebook's commercial forum to endorse their content. Sadhguru talks about thousands of issues and his video page receives thousands of likes.

Twitteratis tattered him apart when he congratulated PM Narendra Modi in his twitter account and showed the video of an elephant putting the litter in the bin. Moreover, the elephant was from a national park in South Africa. The "atrocity" dribbled over to abuse and accusations which streamed determinedly. For this, he was labelled as 'Liar. Modi supporter. Money-spinner. Fraud. Dishonest'.

The other day, Sadhguru responded on Twitter clarifying:

Now, the negative thing about social media is that the conversation is missing on social media that can be dangerous sometimes.

The Spiritual godmen has 2 million followers on twitter, 4.3 million on facebook, SadhguruTv has 139K followers. He follows two on Twitter that too his own organisations- Isha Foundation and Isha USA.He also has a Hindi language Page on Facebook by the name Sadhguru Hindi and having 764K followers. He has 1.3 million on Insta. The Sadhguru app released in 2012 has videos, posts and podcasts and has over 1 million downloads The app that was first released in 2012 also has regular updates on the various programs offered at Isha with detailed descriptions of the different kinds of ‘inner
engineering’ courses offered. Users register and pay for programs like Guru Pooja, Shoonya and Samyanma through the app.

Isha Foundation has Amazon Alexa, a voice proficient cybernetic assistant. It has over a 100-member digital team of media volunteers, working full and part-time, that cautiously curates as well as shares the content among various media forums.

The approach followed at Isha is positioned decisively around Sadhguru who is young at heart. His mobile application has inspiring videos, articles, videos, apprises on his latest meetings and travel, relations with his twitter feed projecting his ‘astuteness bits’ and also depictions of him playing golf. The list of videos shows headlines like ‘Is homosexuality against religion?’, ‘Is time travel possible?’, ‘Why are youth drinking more today?’, ‘How to be ON all the time?’, and so on. He has a very dissolute, unpremeditated digital facade sharing depictions of embracing a dog, riding Ducati in the hills, and exchanging Insta stories of his forthcoming live interaction with personalities.

**Sri Sri Ravi Shankar:** He started a new spiritual model based on easy yogic steps and an ethical instruction of neo-veganic motivation. The mystic guru proposes to link together an international community across a worldwide devoutness, exceeding individual spiritual experiences. His Twitter bio explains him as “to see a smile on every face”.

He has 4.5 million on facebook, 4 million followers on Twitter with 0 following and has 379000 followers on Insta with 0 following.

His organization Art of Living’s digital team have a 45-member team including the software experts JanakiramKoka, Sushil Nachnani and an investment specialist Arjun Singh who handles all the technology for the organization from digital payments to ecommerce, development of mobile apps to framing online content and participating in social media engagements. AOL stronghold is that they have hosting servers in China and the content is published in India.

AOL already had its own internal social media platform ‘soulbook’ that they wanted to expand and reach out to the world.

The profits from its mobile app Sumeru Software are channelized towards the organization’s social projects like - river transformation, education programs, ecological conservation etc.

**AsaramBapu:** The white bearded godman AsaramBapu was trending on twitter after he was held guilty of rape by Jodhpur’s special court. In an unusual development, AsaramBapu. Out of the top ten Twitter trending Indian updates, eight were associated to Asaram. Such a dominance of a particular issue is relativelsporadic or unique on Twitter. After the judgement of the court, Twitter blasted within minutes with posts on the guru. He has 0 following on Twitter, facebookpage has 285000 followers and Insta has also nil followers. His social media accounts are unverified.

Even today, AsaramBapu’s devout till today keep the godmen trending with topics like 'AsaramBapunirdoshhain' and 'AsaramBabpukorihakaro.His phone call from jail, recent audio clip
containing rape convict and self-proclaimed godman Asaram was also recorded and went viral on social media in which he was saying that his days in jail are short-lived and good days are about to come.

In case of Nirbhaya Case, AsaramBapu’s comments incited fury when he said that ‘A mistake is not happened from one side’.

**Amritanandamayi**: The hugging saint is known to have given thirty three million hugsto her followers across the globe. She is not much active on social media and has 20900 followers on Twitter and is following only her own account Amma Chimes. She does not tweet much and has only 1982 tweets so far and has 5 likes. She also has a mobile app by the name Amma Amrita Mobile Media App and has 10,000 downloads.

**Now the question is how “I-Gods utilize online life to connect with, improve and proliferate their lessons and their image?”**

India has a glorious and rich past of magnetic mystical Gurus who educated the society with the route of kindness and amenity. Reconstruction, globalization and upheaval in info and communication knowledge have transferred radical alterations in our social life. The appeal of various possibilities providing by social media and contemporary life style has led to erosion of outdated ideals and social life. Previously, the social establishments like household were used to be accountable for emerging a sense of assimilation and firmness among the society members. Now the standards of care, open-mindedness, cooperation and facilities are misplaced in the brightness of the aims of contemporary life. Ambiguity and anxiety of uncertainty has taken over the spiritual peace and satisfaction of the persons.

- Approximately 64% of the respondents were below the age of 30 and are drawn towards devotion because of the traditional family support structures and due to decline of the healthy neighborhoods. Such spiritual communities are intentional groups and are formed to replace the traditional set up. Such individuals grew up denying, or, at the very least, thought-provoking the basic notion of religion. Spirituality gives reasons for happening to various existential queries and provides answers to common glitches in a fast-paced monotonous life.

- Approximately 94% of the spiritual followers follow their godmen through social media because use of Social media helps in interacting with the followers easily as they can participate in the exchange of ideas, sharing ideas and receiving info, remain in contact with friends, writing posts, uploading of videos and pictures and posting comments.

- Almost 100% of the respondents believed that spiritual expedition generally initiates when they face with conditions of predicaments, such as deteriorating health, matrimonial inharmoniousness, or monetary complications. Spiritual followers insist that it has helped them handle with emotive problems in a way they consider conventional treatment cannot help.
All the five godmen - Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, Asaram Bapu, Amritanandamayi and Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh Insan's existence on the social networking sites are trailed by links to their websites which more or less promotes the i-Gurus and does an awe-inspiring transcendent publicizing, pitching their respective virtual shops and relic items that was until lately only operated in US dollars. Their followers take it to the public forums to voice their opinion backing their gurus.

Almost all the five spiritual godmen under study professionally produce the content, communiqué is mostly epilogue with no response to reader remarks. The novel phonological of their gospel is articulated through the syntax of hashtags and latest updates. Sacraments on their networking pages range from incantation of the name of the Guru the whole day to venting how a perfect life should be steered on this world. The pages cater to commonly the aficionados and cohorts who are Indians and NRI's. The digital platform is thus used to shape reminiscences of the Guru transversely interplanetary and time.

All the five godmen, have followers but they follow none except for their own organizations.

All the five godmen under study, are using the tools of marketing sprouting with time claiming millions of followers and project themselves as concrete, persons with compassionate therapeutic intelligence with an intent to be caring. With social schmoozing, there is no traditional, ethnic or terrestrial boundaries.

All the five godmen under study have a following comprising of powerful political leaders. Social media can also streamline political influence. In a study of zealous leaders, their spiritual organizations were inhabited with devotees from across the big industries, political leaders, showbiz, and the gamut of higher education, and fervent leaders have used these grids to enlarge their impact and legitimate the place of evangelicalism in Indian society. Their endeavors at fetching about anticipated social change have not been completely efficacious, but through their systems, they have extended a place where their voice is unswervingly heard. Baba Ramdev, the yoga guru has actually encouraged millions of people to practice yoga. They not only watch him on TV but also on social media platforms to learn various medical practices.

Many a times, social media accounts of self-styled godmen, either deliberately or instinctively, however, encourages or strengthens illogicality and falsity. The content is available in almost all Indian lingos is abounding with accounts of the magnetic personalities and mystical abilities of godmen. Though, twitter is considered one of the best mediums to share information and give updates on one’s views. For example, in the case of Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh Insan, his adopted daughter Honeypreet's husband, Vishwas Gupta accused the spiritual divine in an interview with India Today of having illicit relationship with her. The video went viral and people accused Insan for having such a relationship.
The government also takes strong action against such spiritual godmen taking undue advantage of people's sentiments. In case of social media accounts, the accounts are withheld legally.

During the study, it was noted that spiritual leaders should train their social network handling team and should better focus on analytical skills on their thoughts. For good or for bad, such beliefs and practices have had and continue to move the daily lives of people everywhere around the globe. They affect the stratagems embraced by social engagements, it impacts colonization configurations, it apprises policy deliberations, it plays a fundamental role in reconciliation exertions, and, regrettably, it inspires some to commit horrifying acts of revulsion like in the case of self-styled god, Baaba Ram Rahim when his supporters went on a rampage after the guilty verdict in the rape and sexual harassment case, angry supporters of Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh went on a rage and the subsequent ferocity left 36 people dead. Singh’s conviction has led to newspaper editorials and social media debate on why people have cult-like faith in godmen accused of rape and sexual harassment.

The motive to prefer and invest in social media tools to remain in contact with the disciples is basically for two reasons- propaganda and diversification.

Cyber experts say not all public figures or celebrities get this privileged status. Application for a 'blue badge' is subjected to various levels of scrutiny by social media platforms.

Social media platforms offer verified account to an individual in recognition of his or her contribution to society in their respective profession or area of interest.

Approximately 100% of the respondents are of the view that such digital forums and social media presence apart from promoting the guru's ideologies promote their products mystical offerings for not only making profits but to self-sustain itself.

Social media apart, godmen all over are focused on consolidating their outreach efforts on apps, often combining ecommerce and spirituality in an approach somewhat resembling the double bottom line philosophy of social impact startups.

**Conclusion:** Indians are acknowledged as worshippers of various gods; the refined fabric of our nation incorporates multi-religious and bilingual individuals. All the communities comparatively live in synchronization following communal laws, ethnicities, and traditions that have progressed with time. Godmen transpire from this crowd, with a distinctive image and relentless power to take the attention of various positive and occasionally naive supporters.

Social media is used by godmen as a tool for better commitment, important content sharing, and effective communication. The acceptance and economic significance of social media has augmented over recent years, empowering loads of users to share instant information. User-generated content
and the sharing web are presently the essence of the Internet. Social Media has moved all sorts of establishments across diverse magnitudes: organizations' inner communication, the devotees, the gurus, conversations with devotees, gurus' corporate style model innovation, and the guru's reputation and legitimacy. The godmen with their special social media handling team develops the content, promote it and earn goodwill as well as business for the godmen. The team creates their social media profiles on various platforms, produce hashtags and pins on Pinterest, make groups on whatsapp to proliferate the lessons of the i-Gurus. They also enable scheduling, planning and arranging the public meetings / celebrations at local, national and international levels. The same is publicized by the team well in order participation from people. The spiritual gurus are no more only limited to spirituality, in fact spirituality has become a medium to promote the godmen's personal endeavours. The messages are crafted after deep thoughts and are marketed well by applying marketing strategies to attract more and more devotees. Incase of crisis, social media accounts become a platform becomes a mode to converse and pass on the information. For example, in the case of Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh Insan Indian government actually had to close down all its social accounts so that no negative message is spread among the masses.

Karl Marx opined that “Religion is the opium of the masses” which is actually getting righter, accurate and getting more justification with every passing day. Even in this extremely cutting-edge world full of scientific prodigies, many people are not intelligent enough to relieve their mind from visionless trust which was indoctrinated by conviction. Spirituality/ Religion paralyses and obscures the approach of devotees, in fact an incorrect step towards such blind faith results in an intellectual blackout, a perceptual darkness, outflow of thoughts, absenteeism of veracity, erroneousness consuming reality, abhorrence consuming compassion while the only persistence of spiritual thoughts is sympathy and widespread brotherhood.

In today’s scenario, social media is no more an option, but a mandatory part of your digital marketing efforts. It does not matter in which business one deals in but escaping from social media is definitely not possible.

Bibliography