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How Governments Can Keep Ears to The Ground with Social Listening

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We all know how social media is a disruptor in our lives. Social networks like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are immensely sticky platforms that have millions glued to them. You realize how brands unlock the power of social platforms to engage better with their customers in the digital territory. And, as a pandemic rages on worldwide, locking people indoors, the engagement in the virtual mode is rocketing by the day. But if we dive into how governments are leveraging social media for looping in citizens' feedback, we discover how a new world of participative democracy is unwrapping. On the social, the people anywhere can have a direct dialogue with the ministers and officials and ventilate their grievances. Engagement in the social has catapulted to a new high with **social listening** tools. Propped up by **emerging technologies** such as **Machine Learning (ML)**, social listening goes beyond mapping conversations and mentions on social media. It gauges the mood and sentiment of the

people behind those social media feeds and enables real time response.

Why Governments Need Technology to Calibrate Social Media Strategy

Social media offers a huge opportunity for governments to connect ‘real time’ with citizens to build trust and humanize government agencies. The strength of the social media lies in its ability to connect large populations and remote groups. In the same vein, social media does pose an immense challenge for governments to manage a deluge of posts and conversations occurring every minute, say on Facebook or Twitter. To illustrate, India has 300 million+ social media users and a largely young demographic. It is unfeasible for any government or agency to manually read and interpret every single post. Also, for a government, the bigger challenge to navigate in the social is to differentiate a genuine complaint from a frivolous suggestion. More, if governments lack a Standard Operating Procedure (SoP), it gets tough to map conversations and prepare responses with alacrity. With social listening, governments can perform **sentiment analysis**. Technology makes it convenient for a government department or agency to loop in public feedback during the incipient stage of a policy or campaign. This, in turn, enables a government department to craft outcome oriented policies that spell a positive impact on the lives of citizens. Social listening also promises to bolster the government’s efforts at crisis communication- for example, tackling spread of fake news and checking the circulation of malicious propaganda. Unless this crisis is handled real time, it can impair the government’s image within minutes.

How Social Listening Dissolves the Problems

Infodemic management by the WHO is an eye opener to the benefits social listening can bring on board. Throughout the early stages of the Covid-19 epidemic, WHO has developed sophisticated approaches, including the one to take advantage of **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** to identify rising narratives.

WHO has developed a platform called EARS, or the Early AI-supported Response with Social Listening tool, that allows health decision-makers to view a real time analysis of narratives in public online forums in multiple countries and languages. EARS is currently running an analysis on 41 narratives, in 20 countries, in French, English, Spanish and Portuguese. The AI platform that powers EARS is combing all kinds of publicly available online sources. It’s pulling publicly available data from the major platforms—Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.—but it’s also mining comments on publicly available blogs, news articles and online forums to see what people are talking about based on keywords and hashtags.

When a government office deploys an intelligent social listening tool, it can offer visible benefits like

- Enabling real time social media response mining and timely grievance management by using technologies like AI, ML and **Natural Language Processing (NLP)**
- Consolidate grievances and complaints from all sources like E-mail, SMS & IVRS
- Ensure response to grievances within 24 hours
- Auto escalation feature makes sure the grievance is escalated to the next level if unattended by the designated official on time
- Capturing and **monitoring feedback** from inbound and outbound calls on a robust platform
- Data rich MIS reports providing insights into nature of grievances and their outcomes

Breakthroughs in technology would reset the matrix for social listening in the future. As technology evolves, social listening tools can be paired with **blockchain technology** to check if a person has actually posted on the social media instead of a robot. Evolving technologies mean more ‘light bulb’ moments for governments that lend a closer ear to the ground with social listening.



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