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BRUNCH

THE OTHER VOICES

From politics to Bollywood, here are the virtual movers
and shakers who wield the maximum online clout



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walk”**

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The Other Voices



From politics to Bollywood, here are the movers and shakers of this new, social era where your celebrity matters less than your wit (and no rules apply)

by Mahesh Murthy



LONG, LONG ago in a year far, far away, all of India stopped everything it was doing on a Sunday morning and watched a Ramanand Sagar TV serial on Doordarshan with extremely bad special effects. And then listened to Lotika Ratnam, Komal GB Singh and Salma Sultan for relief. This was the sonic blast-off for our golden age of television.

Satellite TV then brought a second mother-in-law into each of our homes, with a level of acting that could well have counterpointed Mr Sagar's pedestrian computer graphics. All of this was piped into our homes via cables that local mafiosi regularly fought and killed each other over – and subsequently, through little 18-inch dishes that sucked signals out of the skies. We also moved on to staring at Barkha Dutt, Arnab Goswami and the occasional Prannoy Roy on our small

screens.

But the golden age of television, along with its attendant hero-journalists, is fast fading away.

The number of Internet users in India – estimated at around 140 million today – exceeds the number of TV sets in our homes. Facebook, with its 44 million Indian members reaches more of us than any single TV channel, Doordarshan included. While YouTube, with over 31 million Indian viewers a month, is far and away our largest English television channel. Meanwhile Twitter and Google Plus each get to about 14 million of us in a month – a number that is twice the circulation of India's largest newspaper.

This eclipse of what we now call traditional media has been as certain as it has been sudden.

And what is amazing is that none of these "new" media vehicles have a single journalist working for them.

It's all social, it's all viral – and the new age has brought with it a generation of citizen journalists who are mostly armed with nothing much more than a Net connection and a supply of wit and wisdom – and who have built substantial readerships among their countrymen.

So who are our Clark Kents for this social media age?

AGE OF CITIZEN JOURNALISM

Few of you may have heard of R Srivats. This IIT and IIM graduate runs a tiny firm in Bangalore that builds desktop and mobile apps for marketers. But he's far better known to his 32,000+ fans on Twitter by his handle @RameshSrivats where he dissects

POLITICS, POLITICS ALL THE WAY

IT SURPRISED us – but four of the top six social media superstars were directly involved in politics and the other two are typically seen as political figures by others around them. Our list of top Indian political figures in the blogosphere:

■ SHASHI THAROOR

The member of parliament from Thiruvananthapuram (right) is not just far ahead in the Indian-politicians-who-



Kiran Bedi

get-social sweepstakes – but also the current numero uno when it comes to social media influence of any sort across India.

Blog/Site: <http://tharoor.in>

Twitter: @shashitharoor

PII score: 80.6; **Readers:** 12.6 lakh

■ KIRAN BEDI

About as far as you can get from The Tharoor Syndrome is the lady who calls herself Crane Bedi (left), and is playing the role of self-appointed ombudsman of India along with her colleagues in the Anna Hazare movement.

Blog/Site: <http://kiran-bedi.blogspot.in>

Twitter: @TheKiranBedi

PII score: 76.3; **Readers:** 3.7 lakh

■ SUBRAMANIAM SWAMY

The gadfly has risen, and how. His recent airing of the 2G scam has brought him significant social currency, and he's getting bigger all the time.

Blog/Site: <http://swamy39.blogspot.in>

Twitter: @swamy39

PII score: 72; **Readers:** 50,000

■ NARENDRA MODI

One surely expected him to do better than his south Indian counterpart. But the CM of Gujarat rolls onward, relentlessly.

Blog/Site: <http://narendramodi.com>

Twitter: @narendramodi

PII score: 71.5;

Readers: 4.9 lakh

■ PRAGMATIC DESI

The man whose name shall not be uttered continues his quiet, persuasive political activism. Writing under a pseudonym, he still manages to sway the many with his finely-argued points.

Blog/Site: <http://pragmatic.nationalinterest.in>

Twitter: @pragmatic_d

PII score: 63.9;

Readers: 14,000



Shashi Tharoor

the day's news in 140 side-splitting characters.

How about Tinu Cherian? This jovial gent helps edit Wikipedia entries – but has over 68,000 people following his every tweet via his @TinuCherian handle on the micro-blogging service.

Stars like Amitabh Bachchan and Priyanka Chopra have been quick to recognise where their audience is headed, and have moved with the trend, each now boasting of over 2 million followers and readers online. Once upon a time, Shahrugh Khan needed Filmfare's 30,000 readers. Today, Filmfare needs @iamSRK's 1.8 million readers.

SO WHO ARE THE STARS?

We set out to identify the movers and shakers of this new era. There are lists and lists of Indian bloggers. But we didn't just want the long-form writers – we wanted those with significant day-to-day readership and influence on what Indians do.

To find out, we turned to the Pinstorm India Influencer list which measures influence of about 5,000 Indians every single day using global metrics like Klout and PeerIndex – which in turn measure a person's activity and reach across Blogs, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and more. (Time for a disclosure: the author of this piece helped create the methodology – and the list, if you'd like to see it, is at Pinstorm.com/ii)

We used the list as a base and then catalogued the 100 top influencers who were adept bloggers, and grouped them by what they typically talked about. Making sure that they were still blogging though – they needed to have made a post in the last three months.

What is amazing is that none of these "new" media vehicles have a single journalist working for them. It's all social, it's all viral

Here's what we found.

WHERE IS ALL THIS GOING?

As television channels lose viewership and as print magazines continue to bleed readership, we are seeing a rise of a new breed of individuals who have more influence and reach than corporations and their media do.

If Gul Panag reaches almost 3 lakh people every day through her blogs and updates, and these are

upwardly mobile, urban young men and women that advertisers dream to reach out to. At that point she stops being just a pretty face in the media – and instead becomes media herself, considering she can directly reach about 20 times the number of people that most glossy luxury-themed print magazines do in India today.

And you don't need to start as a celebrity on the ground to be one online. People like AR Karthick,

Tinu Cherian, Ramesh Srivats, Nitin Pai and even yours truly have made it to the top 100 social influencers list in India with little in the way of any prior fame or "family connections."

Remark-worthiness is the new currency. If this is true, how rich can you be?

(Mahesh Murthy is a marketer and investor with Pinstorm and Seedfund. He tweets as @maheshmurthy. The views expressed by the author are personal)

THE BADSHAHS OF ENTERTAINMENT

FROM THE sublime to the ridiculous, though we're not sure which is which, we'll head to our favourite passion, Bollywood.

Here, like the new hits of today, are surprises galore. Most of the reigning royalty have actually stopped blogging, and moved on to just tweeting. One supposes this suits their time, or lack thereof, as well as the content of their updates – it's better to say "Hi, I'm going to the gym" in 140 characters than

in 140 words – and it suits the IQ of some stars. In other words, there's far less material where Shahid Kapoor will mangle the spellings.

If you're wondering if 21st century social maven Gul Panag is going to be on this list, she's actually graduated elsewhere, as you'll see later. That said, there are still the entertainers who blog, and those who blog about entertainment. Our top five here are:

■ SHREYA GHOSHAL

The songbird (right) still updates her site, but it's obvious she doesn't care much for it, given its spectacularly ugly design and AdSense ads strewn about. Go over to see videos of her perform obscure songs at even more obscure live shows.

Blog/Site: <http://Singer->



Shekhar Kapur

ShreyaGhoshal.com

Twitter: @ShreyaGhoshal

PII score: 65.6; **Readers:** 7.9 lakh

■ TARAN ADARSH

Going by current gossip, the recent passing of a film critic made it harder for film producers as it leaves just one person who gives their movies the star-ratings they like – no matter how crappy the movie. This is that person.

Blog/Site:

<http://bollywoodhungama.com>

Twitter: @Taran_Adarsh

PII score: 62.7; **Readers:** 1.3 lakh

■ SHEKHAR KAPUR

The man (left) who has been threatening to make a movie for well over a decade keeps somewhat better time online with his regularly updated blog on his thoughts, his movies, his thoughts and, well, his thoughts.

Blog/Site: <http://ShekharKapur.com>

Twitter: @ShekharKapur

PII score: 61.8; **Readers:** 1.6 lakh

■ CHINMAYI

Chinmayi who, you'll ask, and Chinmayi Sripada would be the equally puzzling answer. This babe from south of the Vindhyas is less known for her playback singing and more for her meticulously updated online diary of every single thought she's ever had.

Blog/Site:

<http://ChinmayiSripada.com>



Shreya Ghoshal

Twitter: @Chinmayi

PII score: 59; **Readers:** 58,000

■ RAJAN RADHAMANALAN

The wonders of the blogworld throw up interesting cases now and then, and this certainly is one. RajanLeaks, as the gent calls himself says he's proud to "piss off" the entire Tamil film industry. He does so apparently by disclosing stories and secrets of films under production – and he does so in Tamil – in itself a rarity among bloggers.

Blog/Site: <http://RajanLeaks.com>

Twitter: @RajanLeaks

PII score: 58.3; **Readers:** 3,500

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BE A SPORT

OUR MAIN drivers, as even a wet-behind-the-ears MBA-turned-analyst will tell you, are Bollywood and cricket. And we do have some shining examples of bloggers from our sports fields. But, then again, not the usual ones. Sachin, as one would expect of God, does not have time to blog. But, strangely, neither does Harsha Bhogle. Here are some who do:

■ **SANJAY MANJREKAR**
Yes, the man who managed to make his way from the 22-yard strip to the commentator box by making a little more sense than Ravi Shastri and using fewer clichés – while also, admittedly missing out on several equine-looking women along the way – writes.
Blog/Site: <http://ESPNcricinfo.com>
Twitter: @SanjayManjrekar
PII score: 66.5; **Readers:** 59,000

■ **KARTIK MURALI**
Or is it Murali Kartik (right)? The confusion over what his name actually is aside, this all-rounder extends his talents to be genuinely friendly on Facebook and other social networks. Will it help him get back into the Indian team? You'll have to get N Srinivasan on there first, we guess.
Blog/Site: <http://facebook.com/muralikartik>
Twitter: @KartikMurali
PII score: 60.2; **Readers:** 84,000

■ **AAKASH CHOPRA**
Where do ex-opening batsmen go after they retire? So become selectors, like Srikanth. And some writers, like the man who terms himself CricketAakash. Mr Chopra does well with on-the-front-foot writing, and his fans agree.
Blog/Site: <http://cricketnext.in.com>
Twitter: @CricketAakash
PII score: 59.8; **Readers:** 73,000

■ **VENKAT ANANTH**
The enfant terrible of Indian cricket writing goes from strength to strength – and he's not yet 25. Venkat writes for Yahoo Cricket – and is a bit of a phenomenon online, doing, by one calculation, a sustained average of over 100 updates a day on social media
Blog/Site: <http://cricket.yahoo.com/blogs>
Twitter: @VenkatAnanth
PII score: 59; **Readers:** 9,500

■ **KARUN CHANDHOK**
A welcome break from our cricket madness is in the form of one of our racing wunderkinds. Karun Chandhok (left), or KC, as he likes calling himself, takes his sport seriously, but doesn't luckily take himself too seriously. Given our recent showing on the cricket fields, it's perhaps time for us to follow someone other than just cricketers.
Blog/Site: <http://KarunChandhok.com>
Twitter: @KarunChandhok
PII score: 53.7; **Readers:** 76,000




Karun Chandhok **Murali Kartik**

OLD MEDIA HANDS

SO WHERE is the traditional media world through all of this? Not everybody, a la Murdoch, is wringing their hands wondering how to compete with Google and Facebook. Many, at least in their personal capacities, have dived into digital waters, and are doing pretty well actually. The queen of the scene, in some ways, is Barkha Dutt. But while Barkha is as loud-mouthed on Twitter as she is on TV, she has a blog that strangely is closed to the public and open only to the chosen few. That disqualifies her from this list. But her counterparts do well.

■ **RAJDEEP SARDESAI**
Mr Suave (below) stays relatively out of trouble compared to his compatriot Ms Dutt on the rival channel. But he does blog on the company's website, and expresses himself clearly. A relief, if seen in contrast to the super-loud-mouth Arnab Goswami.
Blog/Site: <http://ibnlive.in.com/blogs>
Twitter: @SardeepSaiRajdeep
PII score: 72.5; **Readers:** 4 lakh



Rajdeep Sardesai

■ **SAGARIKA GHOSE**
In perhaps the only showing of its kind for a couple in this list, Mr Sardesai's better half (right) expresses her somewhat-less respected views on the company blog too – and continues to infuriate people through her status updates the rest of the time. Of course it remains to be seen how the duo fare after the Mukesh Ambani takeover.
Blog/Site: <http://ibnlive.in.com/blogs>
Twitter: @SagarikaGhose
PII score: 58; **Readers:** 65,000

■ **SMITA PRAKASH**
This editor of Asian News International has muscled her way into the online bloggerati elite via her own site and tens of thousands of updates over the last few years.
Blog/Site: <http://www.SmitaPrakash.com>
Twitter: @SmitaPrakash
PII score: 55.5; **Readers:** 21,000

■ **SHAILI CHOPRA**
While one can imagine her colleague

■ **SHAILI CHOPRA**
Arnab's blog – if it existed – would have all text in screaming red, bold 72-point letters repeating themselves ad nauseum while not making much sense, Shaili does better.
Blog/Site: <http://blog.economic-times.indiatimes.com/businessbirdie>
Twitter: @ShailiChopra
PII score: 55.3; **Readers:** 3,000

■ **NIKHIL WAGLE**
The lone representative from non-English media on this list, the editor of IBN-Lokmat makes his mark as an aggressive persuader online too.
Blog/Site: <http://ibnlokmat.tv>
Twitter: @WagleNikhil
PII score: 54.3; **Readers:** 15,000



Shaili Chopra

OTHER LISTS

BUSINESS AND MARKETING

■ **ALOK KEJRIWAL**
Blog/Site: <http://RodinHood.com>
Twitter: @RodinHood
PII score: 59.6; **Readers:** 2,500

■ **KARTHIK SRINIVASAN**
Blog/Site: <http://itwofs/beastoftraal>
Twitter: @BeastOfTraal
PII score: 58.8; **Readers:** 7,000

■ **YOGESH M.A.**
Blog/Site: <http://Yogeshma.co.in>
Twitter: @GlocalSources
PII score: 58.8; **Readers:** 800

TECHNOLOGY

■ **RAJU PP**
Blog/Site: <http://TechPP.com>
Twitter: @RajuPP
PII score: 57.8; **Readers:** 6,500

■ **MAHENDRA PALSULE**
Blog/Site: <http://scepticgeek.com>
Twitter: @ScepticGeek
PII score: 56; **Readers:** 6,500

■ **ATUL CHITNIS**
Blog/Site: <http://AtulChitnis.net>
Twitter: @AtulChitnis
PII score: 55.6; **Readers:** 6,500

"I hear YouTube, Twitter and Facebook are merging to form a super Social Media site – YouTwitFace" – Conan O'Brien on *The Tonight Show*