

**I**N THE NERDY CORNERS of the Net, there is a debate going on that would seem Double Dutch to most of us. Visiolibriphobia vs Prosopibliophobia. One is Latin, the other Greek. Translated, they both mean the same thing: fear of Facebook.

In his 1909 short story *The Machine Stops*, E.M. Forster wrote about a world where people are “almost exactly alike”. They live in small rooms and never meet each other. Food and other material necessities come through tubes (perhaps Domino’s pizzas are delivered by DomiCopters). Then, one day the machine stops.

Today’s concerns about Facebook focus around privacy. But there is a deeper danger. “We build a following on Facebook and wonder to what degree our followers are friends,” writes MIT professor Sherry Turkle in her book *Alone Together*. “We re-create ourselves as online personae. In all of this, there is a nagging question: does virtual intimacy degrade our experience of the other kind?” The irony is that you don’t have to read the book to learn her views; they are on Facebook.

Facebook is today intruding into our lives even as Google in its prime never did. The social media giant has around 1.32 billion users, 110 million of them in India. Recently in Delhi, founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg put his India target at 1 billion. India has 243 million Internet users now. According to Internet Live Stats, India – growing at 14 per cent – will overtake the US (280 million, 7 per cent) very soon. China is ahead with 642 million, 4 per cent. Another unrelated statistic dealing with large numbers: Facebook has just offered fresh Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) grads a salary of ₹1.55 crore per annum.

Large numbers like this, particularly of the latter kind, have made our B-schools perk up. The current batch at the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIM-A) has 94 per cent engineers, most from IITs. What mere engineering grads can achieve, they should do better. Among others offering high salaries at the IITs are Amazon, Yahoo Japan, Microsoft, IBM and Oracle. Some may be principally IT companies, but they all have a strong presence in social media.

So what are Indian B-schools doing about social media? Strangely enough, not very much. They have a golden opportunity given the country’s rapid online adoption. India is a mobile country; it doesn’t have the legacy desktop PC problem of,

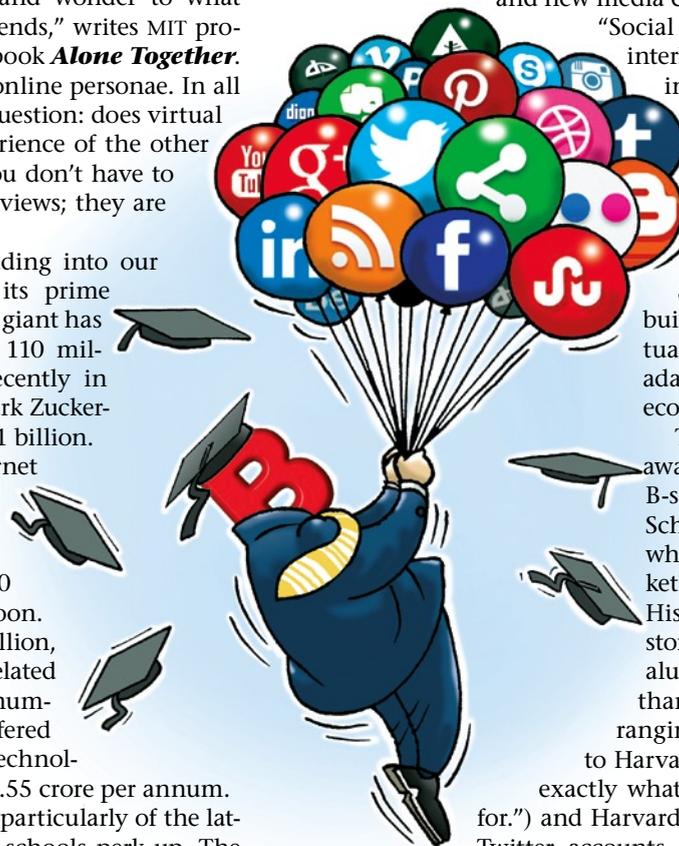
say, China. According to We Are Social, a social media agency, there are 106 million active social media users in India. Some 70 per cent of Internet page views in India originate from mobile devices, while 87 per cent of all Facebook users access the platform through their mobiles. Facebook is adding one subscriber every second in the country.

So has top school IIM-A put Facebook on its ‘Like’ list? No. What you get instead is the line: “We do not have any official Facebook page or account.” There is some confusion here; there is also a Facebook page that claims to be official and many others put up by students and alumni. “If the leader amongst Indian business schools lags on the social scene, the others still have many more miles to go,” says Sandeep Goyal, adman and new media evangelist (*see page: 52*).

“Social media and education should interlink with all strength considering that youth is the backbone of this medium of communication,” says Apeksha Harihar, editor at Social Samosa, a social media consultancy. “Opinions, discussions, theories, networks and almost an entire classroom can be built through this world of virtual connections. The faster we adapt this within the education ecosystem, the faster we win.”

The transition to social media awareness took time in US B-schools too. Harvard Business School took the first step in 2008, when it appointed a chief marketing officer for social media. His brief: to tell the Harvard story to prospective students and alumni. Today, Harvard has more than 200 official Facebook pages ranging from HBS and HBS Alumni to Harvard Bookstore (“Excited to find exactly what I didn’t know I was looking for.”) and Harvard Library. There are a 100-plus Twitter accounts, 25-plus Flickr accounts and several forays into YouTube, Google+, LinkedIn and Instagram. Most of the institutions also have independent Websites. The B-school itself would account for a small portion of this. But it is much more than all the top 10 Indian B-schools put together.

The initial assumption in the US – which continues in India – is that social media is essentially media. So the PR and communications people should take care of it. When it became apparent that the phenomenon was much bigger, US schools turned to professional marketing. In India, some professor was rustled up. He was put in charge of



external relations (which in India mainly means alumni relations – *see page 68*). Social media was regarded as part of his ambit. At some places, a small team was set up. At others, the ostriches won. An exchange faculty member confesses that he tried to push for a social media presence, but was told that the institute was offering courses in social media. A Facebook page wasn't necessary. They would have to set up a committee to decide what would go on it.

Only at Indian School of Business has there been some effort. The institute has 11 Facebook pages, 10 Twitter, three LinkedIn and one YouTube account. "We started using Facebook around three-four years back because that is when we realised we could achieve quite a lot in terms of communicating about the school through social media," says Chitti Pantulu, director, marketing & communications. "But more importantly we discovered it was a very effective platform to keep various communities engaged."

Harvard turned to social media also because it wanted its hoity-toity image changed. In India, the IIMs, for instance, have assumed that image is not an issue; they will never face falling demand for their courses. Newer institutes are coming up – Great Lakes, for one – and making it to the top 10 ahead of the newer IIMs. "In business education today, social media has become imperative for marketing, public relations, information sharing, developing alumni relations, engaging students and communities and in building the brand image," says Bala V. Balachandran, founder, dean and chairman, Great Lakes Institute of Management (*see page 60*).

The big challenge to the IIMs will come from the foreign B-schools when they set up campuses here. That needs some of the laws to change. Besides, as the IIMs continue to raise their fees, the cost of a two-year MBA course abroad is not looking that astronomical. Wharton's first year fee (which includes room and board) is \$97,542. At Stanford, it is \$99,435. Of course, there are other extras not related to the course. IIM-A has just hiked its fees to ₹18.5 lakh (for two years). That's still a fraction of the ₹60 lakh-odd charged by foreign B-schools. But there are cheaper places in the US; you don't have to go to Stanford.

Social media also matters because placements will get increasingly competitive. Alumni networks are keeping them alive through clubs, special interest groups, adventure trips and events (*see following stories*) are top of mind at foreign B-schools. In India, B-schools today see their alumni as a source of donations. It doesn't sit well because nobody asked for donations before and they have a vague air of capitation fees.

And, finally, social media will become the vehicle of choice for marketing. There are already

## TOP 10 B-SCHOOLS IN INDIA

Indian  
Institute of  
Management  
Ahmedabad



Indian  
Institute of  
Management  
Bangalore



Indian School  
of Business,  
Hyderabad



XLRI  
Jamshedpur,  
Jamshedpur



Indian  
Institute of  
Management  
Calcutta



Faculty of  
Management  
Studies  
New Delhi



Indian  
Institute of  
Management  
Lucknow



S.P. Jain  
Institute of  
Management  
& Research  
Mumbai



Management  
Development  
Institute  
Gurgaon



Great Lakes  
Institute of  
Management  
Chennai



more than 250 ad agencies and analysts in the field. They boast names such as Social Samosa, Saltmangotree, Digital Latte, Webchutney, Cookie Digital, Grapes Software and Blue Apple. And they are hungry.

It is important not to confuse social media with digital media. Clubs, alumni associations and bulletin boards all belong to the non-digital bucket. But are they relics of a dinosaur era? No, they started there. But imagine playing chess by post: it has been done. "Everything travels at almost the speed of light, thanks to multiple social media platforms," says Kaustubh Dhargalkar, associate dean at WE School, Mumbai. Imagine also setting up a field trip for 50 alumni from all over the world before WhatsApp or e-mail. Balachandran says Great Lakes uses all channels including blogs, discussion forums on information, and career-related platforms like PaGaL-GuY, MBA Universe and Careers360. "We have around a million registered users and we add around 150,000 new users a year," says Allwin Agnel, CEO, PaGaLGuY. "Our product is inherently viral in nature. The value of discussions increases once more people participate."

Social media is all about participation. So is Forster's nightmare world of *The Machine Stops* just another dystopian hallucination? Nothing lasts. Facebook, today's monster for some, will begin creaking very soon. The dead on Facebook will outnumber the living somewhere around 2065. Only India, with its demographic dividend, can ensure a longer lifespan.

Meanwhile, the University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications has launched a first-ever online master's degree to prepare professionals for the growing use of social media in the workplace. Keeping pace, Facebook is introducing Facebook at work, meant for enterprise customers. Research shows that academics use a lot of YouTube in their courses – and Facebook. But Twitter has not been as well-accepted. According to a Babson Survey Research Group study, only 2 per cent of professors reported using the microblogging site in class.

They must do things differently in India. At an IIM-C class, a guest professor asked his students to switch on their mobile phones. This was surprising; they were more used to stern injunctions to switch off their phones. Put them on silent, the professor continued. "Now use your Twitter accounts to send out everything I say." It wouldn't occur to anybody above 30, but the fast fingers in the class sent out the entire lesson. Over time, they are planning a full course on Twitter. Appositely, it will also be on Twitter – TWIT 101.

♦ PARTHASARATHI SWAMI AND MANSI MEHTA