

## Online social media comes alive during Mumbai attacks

Even as India stayed glued to television sets all night long to get the latest news on the terror strike, people addicted to the steady stream of user-generated content around the world were busy looking at their flickering computer screens.

At about 10.45 p.m., 27-year-old Vinukumar Rangnathan heard two loud noises when he was at the 13th floor of his Colaba apartment in Mumbai. 'Maybe there is a photojournalist in me, because the first thing I did was to get out with my camera,' said Ranganathan, who works with Netcore Solutions, an enterprise solution company.

Within 15 minutes, Ranganathan arrived at the spot outside Nariman House where he saw the remains of a grenade attack on a petrol pump - shattered glass was strewn on the blood splattered road, and people congregated on one side of the road.

'I stayed for about an hour-and-a-half trying to take pictures before I went back home to upload it on Flickr,' he told IANS, referring to Yahoo's popular online photo-sharing and storage website.

Ranganathan uploaded about 113 photographs, which were immediately viewed by people around the world. His Flickr set was shown on CNN, and he was also interviewed live on the international network later.

Later, Qatar-based broadcaster Al-Jazeera and Canadian Broadcasting Corp also came calling.

'I have been getting mails from several news channels and websites who wanted to host my pictures. I agreed,' he said.

But, after the late night foray, Rangnathan could not go out of his apartment, as his parents were worried about his safety.

However, he kept posting updates, known as 'tweets', through the social networking site Twitter. 'I could hear gunshots from Nariman House and see the Taj Mahal Hotel from my window,' he said.

Ranganathan's update at 4.20 p.m.: '25 gun shots in 30 s (seconds)! a navy copter on the top and loud whistle - that's what I am hearing from my room.'

Besides, there were blogs aggregating news reports and important phone numbers like 'mumbaihelp.blogspot.com', while some [Mumbai](#) residents were live-blogging the unfolding events on their local television for a worldwide audience.

Out of the top 100 search queries on Google at 4:12 p.m., 36 were related to the Mumbai attacks. Hemant Karkare, Mumbai's Anti-Terrorism Force chief, continued to be the number one searched query on Google for almost an hour soon after the news of his death was out.

CNN online's page on the Mumbai attacks continued to attract heavy daylong traffic. Web traffic analyser Alexa.com ranked the page number five on its list of pages with maximum hits while NDTV's page on the attacks was ranked number 10.

Technorati, a major blog search engine, rated blogs on the attacks number-one on its scale-based on 'fresh rising stories'.

But, Twitter had become the online tool of choice for netizens, who reached out to others on the web, receiving and distributing news on a real-time basis, as well as sharing appeals for donating blood at city hospitals.

Dina Mehta, an avid blogger and social media expert, has turned to Twitter after she gave up on her television. 'It was my birthday yesterday (Wednesday) and was planning to go to town, when a friend called up to tell me about it and asked me to stay home. My TV died on me, so I went online,' she said.

As she started to look for news, other people from Mumbai began joining her, updating with news from mainstream sources as well as from friends and relatives on the ground with a fast, constant stream of 'tweets'.

Netra Parikh, 42, another blogger, has not slept since she first heard the news and been 'tweeting'. 'I have a friend and an aunt in south Mumbai, who are providing me information, apart from updates from television,' said Parikh, an employee of Pinstorm, a digital advertising firm.

She felt online media tools and the mainstream news sources had been mutually feeding off each other. 'We take feeds from the news channels and papers and post it on our blogs and tweets, while news services also now refer to the fast dissemination of news,' Parikh said.

For example, in the evening, there were suddenly a lot of 'tweets' reporting that the Indian government had asked that there should not be online updates of military operations against the holed-up terrorists, citing a BBC news source.

But, the BBC actually quoted 'tweets', which in fact had no independent confirmation.

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