

Social Media: Connecting People Or Dividing Society?

—By Wing Commander Dinesh Mathur, VSM (Retd.)

Group Discussion (GD) provides a formal or informal platform for a group to exchange thoughts on a predetermined topic. More often than not, participants are given the opportunity to speak freely, and the moderators refrain from interfering during the discussion. But the significance of Group Discussion lies in its role as a powerful tool, often utilised to evaluate an individual's suitability for a particular role within an organisation or to participate in an educational program. While the candidates express their views on a topic, moderators get a much-needed opportunity to assess participants' various personality traits, including general awareness, power of expression, critical thinking, teamwork, problem-solving capabilities, leadership qualities and active listening, etc.

During the Group Discussion, candidates also demonstrate their ability to handle others' opinions, which may sometimes differ substantially from their own. While expressing views on the given topic, there is no need to dominate the GD proceedings; one must display maturity by maintaining a cordial atmosphere and allowing others to contribute as well. Candidates are expected to possess knowledge of their subject of study, current affairs—both national and international, and general awareness of the environment in which they live. While expressing their ideas during a competitive GD, candidates should demonstrate adequate self-confidence, as both overconfidence and under-confidence are not desirable.

To participate in a Group Discussion during the selection process for Probationary Officers (PO) at a large public sector bank, a group of candidates was called. This GD was taking place after the Main examination and before the Personal Interview to filter candidates. As expected, candidates arrived in formal attire and, after verifying their identities, were made to sit in a semi-circle. This was done to ensure that all candidates could see each



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other and that the three moderators could hear and observe the body language of all candidates as they expressed their ideas. Thereafter, the moderators conducted a briefing to explain the do's and don'ts for this GD. Candidates were specifically told to maintain discipline. They were also told to ensure that all candidates should be given an opportunity to speak. After the above topic was assigned for discussion, candidates were given 3-4 minutes to recap and jot down some points to refer to during the discussion. Candidates were asked to conclude the discussion on the topic within 25-30 minutes.

Subsequently, the Group Discussion commenced as follows:

Candidate No. 4: Friends, the topic given to us is perhaps one of the most discussed topics of our times, as it now concerns every member of our society in some way or another. You would recall that social media, which arrived about 20 years ago as a digital novelty, has now become one of the most powerful forces shaping our interactions, communication and society. As of April 2026, authoritative sources like DataReportal report

approximately 5.79 billion social media user identities worldwide. This equates to about 69.9% of the global population, which is around 8.3 billion. Digital connections have transformed societies. Instant connections, chats, and comments ensure you can reach everyone you know or have ever met. In addition, platforms like Instagram, Facebook, X and others have connected billions across countries, continents, cultures, and languages. With the widespread use of social media, a natural question arises: Is it uniting people or dividing our society? In my view, it may not be so easy to answer this question. The fact remains that social media has certainly connected people and has made global communication easy. But at the same time, it spreads misinformation, promotes polarisation, and also divides our society. Therefore, we need to discuss all these aspects in detail to appreciate the impact of social media. You may express your views now. Thanks.

Candidate No. 7: I think Number 4 has introduced the topic quite appropriately.

Candidate No. 6: Friends, I suggest that, to comprehensively discuss this topic, we should channelise our discussion. Let's first talk about how social media connects people, then discuss how it divides our society. Subsequently, any other issues related to this topic may also be discussed, and finally, we should aim to reach a conclusion on the impact of social media on our society. Do you all agree?

Candidate No. 5: Yes, that's a good suggestion. I fully agree with Number 6 that we must follow the sequence of our discussion as he suggested.

Candidate No. 8: I would like to talk about how social media connects our society. You would agree that before the digital age, connecting people, especially over long distances, was a major challenge. It was both expensive and time-consuming. But now, through video calls, messaging, and social platforms,

immediate communication has become so easy. Billions of people now log in to social media regularly and share information, experiences and emotions with their business partners, relatives and friends, irrespective of their geographical locations. This is all the more relevant in the present era, as due to migration, students go to study abroad, and a large number of people have settled in foreign countries away from their kith and kin. That is why it is apt to say that social media has now created a "global village", where distance is no barrier to interaction. That's a big plus for social media.

Candidate No. 3: Yes, I agree, Number 8 has clearly explained how social media helps connect people from all over the world.

Candidate No. 1: In this regard, I would like to remind you that social media had played an extremely significant role during the Covid-19 pandemic only a few years ago. Owing to lockdowns, connecting with people had become a major issue. In such a difficult situation, social media platforms were widely utilised to conduct online classes, organise virtual gatherings and provide telemedicine consultations to those who needed them. This immensely helped the community connect with others during this most difficult time of isolation.

Candidate No. 8: Yes, you are right. In addition, social media has enabled people and communities to reach the mainstream media to represent themselves, something that was not feasible earlier. Using social media, people can now share their experiences, improve awareness and even mobilise support for social and other significant causes for the public good. In this context, you would recall that movements such as # MeToo could attract worldwide attention, mainly due to the support they received on social media. This led to campaigns which brought attention to racism and sexual harassment, leading to policy discussions and societal changes. Thus, social media can play an important role in mobilising public opinion for the good of our society.

Candidate No. 2: These are very pertinent points in favour of social media. I agree.

Candidate No. 4: I want to add that recent research indicates that many people believe social media helps give underprivileged or under-represented groups a voice in our society. This has substantially helped challenge traditional

power structures, strengthening grassroots activism. As a result, suppressing news with regard to underprivileged groups has become quite difficult.

Candidate No. 8: Let me point out yet another plus point of social media regarding education and awareness. Educational institutions and experts in various fields use social media platforms to educate and share information, making them powerful tools for dissemination. We now observe that Instagram and YouTube are frequently used to share educational content across subjects, from Science to Financial Literacy. Further, during emergencies like natural disasters, social media provides real-time updates and safety information. Social media is also frequently used to share information about global issues such as human rights, climate change and public health, etc.

Candidate No. 4: Friends, I want to point out yet another major opportunity offered by social media for economic growth and business expansion. This is especially relevant for small businesses and individual entrepreneurship. A new avenue in digital marketing and e-commerce has emerged, enabling people to reach global markets with minimal investment. This has enabled small-time businessmen to reach customers directly on Facebook and Instagram, avoiding middlemen, earning higher profits, and expanding their businesses. According to reports, social media advertising accounts for a significant share of global digital advertising spending, underscoring its economic significance.

Candidate No. 1: Friends, unless someone wants to add more points to support the idea that social media is a unifying force, let us now discuss how it is also a dividing force. Do you agree? If you all agree, please go ahead and discuss how social media also divides our society.

Candidate No. 8: Yes, while social media has many benefits, as we have pointed out, it has also contributed to many divisions in our society in various ways. In this regard, I feel, one of the most negative impacts of social media is its role in increasing political polarisation. As we observe, social media is being widely used to evoke strong emotional reactions in our society, leading to anger and outrage and causing even loss of life and property which is certainly a very serious issue. Social media is used to reinforce hardcore views. This results in people forming strong opinions and becoming unwilling to consider opposing

points of view, leading to huge polarisation in our society. Do you agree?

Candidate No. 7: Yes, I completely agree with you.

Candidate No. 4: Not only this, social media is being blatantly used to bring down the image of political rivals and, with the help of Artificial Intelligence (AI), to attribute highly controversial statements to them that they never made. Therefore, because users rely heavily on social media for news, they are more likely to get exposed to polarised political views, or even false statements, than those who consume traditional media. During election time, misuse of social media is even more prominent. In fact, political parties openly indulge in the so-called "social media war" during election time to malign each other. That is the state of affairs.

Candidate No. 6: Yes, unfortunately, it is quite true. Elections in several countries have shown that social media's role in spreading biased content is clear and has widened huge ideological divides, impacting even election results.

Candidate No. 8: Friends, I will go a step further and say that social media is also used to spread misinformation and false propaganda. We know that false information travels much faster than factual content owing to its sensational nature. This is supported by studies that found that false news items reach more people than factual news on social media platforms. In this regard, you would recall how misinformation about Covid-19 vaccines had led to public health challenges.

Candidate No. 1: Yes, you are right. We are also aware of how rumours impact voter behaviour during elections, and online conspiracy theories are instantly grabbed by people. Since the volume of social media content is now so large, people do not have time to verify its veracity and often forward it to others in a jiffy. Given this societal trend, it is difficult to control the spread of false information or propaganda on social media. It is also well known that some political parties are now operating IT Cells, manned by highly qualified technocrats, to generate such content and create counter-propaganda to safeguard their interests.

Candidate No. 4: I want to point out yet another issue with social media, which is that it is being used for cyber-bullying and online harassment of people. Our young people are often the victims

of these crimes. In the recent past, a good percentage of our teenagers have experienced such cyber-bullying, which also leads to anxiety, depression, low-esteem and even mental health issues. Not only young people, but also public figures and activists have been victims of online trolling and harassment and, therefore, concerns are also being raised about the psychological impact of social media on people the world over. For this reason, Australia has become the first country to ban the use of social media by children under 16 while several other countries are mulling to take similar restrictive steps. The problem is dependence or obsession with social media.

Candidate No. 5: Quite right. I agree with you.

Candidate No. 8: Friends, while social media has been hailed for creating a unified world, it is seen that it can also cause cultural divides. As a result, differences in beliefs, identities and values can instigate hostility and even conflicts. To elaborate, we observe that people often engage in online debates over subjects such as religion, politics, identity and national policies, which may lead to conflicts and create real-world stress and tensions. This also causes misunderstandings across cultures and deepens divisions. We know many old friendships have broken, and family relations have developed deep misunderstandings due to online heated discussions on sensitive subjects.

Candidate No. 4: Yes, the fact remains that social platforms and digital media are the same tools that once united the world, but are now tearing it apart as well. This may be because politics largely drives and controls digital media and headlines. I am sure you would recall the role of Facebook and Cambridge Analytica in meddling in the U.S. elections. Moreover, social and networking platforms are now facing significant heat for falling short of their high-quality standards, and the digital community expects them to remain fair and avoid discrimination to prevent such negative repercussions.

Candidate No. 3: Yes, you have raised a valid point.

Candidate No. 6: Friends, don't you feel miserable by observing the inability of social media to unite people of the world subsequent to a humanitarian crisis, an unjust war, or an act of terrorism? With social media platforms largely focusing on crime, violence, and destruction

in their race to report first, the truth is often side-tracked. That is the irony.

Candidate No. 1: Friends, I feel we have discussed in sufficient detail quite a few issues that support the idea that social media connects people, as well as points that support the idea that social media divides our society. If you all agree, before we conclude, it would now be appropriate to briefly discuss how we can adopt a balanced approach to address this issue.

Candidate No. 2: Yes, you are right.

Candidate No. 4: Having discussed this issue thus far, we can say that social media has currently emerged as a potent force in shaping modern society. Different social media platforms connect millions of people worldwide, enabling information sharing and instant communication. At the same time, if one looks at its darker side, social media also contributes to divisions. False information and vicious propaganda can also be easily spread using social media platforms to influence public opinion and spread hatred in our society. It has also been used in cyber-bullying, causing depression and mental issues. In conclusion, one can say that social media is neither entirely beneficial nor totally harmful. The key issue lies in how we utilise social media. If we use it responsibly, spread digital literacy, and enforce stronger regulations, we can harness social media as a force for uniting our society and mitigate its negative impacts.

Candidate No. 6: Friends, in our enthusiasm to discuss this important topic, we have not realised that the time allotted to us for this discussion is now over, and we must conclude. Will someone from the group come forward to conclude?

Candidate No. 8: Yes, I can conclude if you all think it's okay.

Candidate No. 1: Yes, Number 8. Please go ahead and conclude.

Candidate No. 8: Thanks. I am sure you all would agree that we had an engaging and interesting discussion on this topic, as it concerns all of us. At the outset, we decided to channelise our discussion; first, speak about how social media connects people and then highlight how it divides our society. While discussing how it connects, we pointed out that it has become easy to share information, regardless of location, about everything, including education, global issues, and the suppressed in society. It has also helped in economic

growth and business expansion. Thereafter, while discussing how social media divides, we discussed how it leads to political and social polarisation, evokes strong emotional reactions among participants in online discussions on sensitive matters, and sees political parties engage in 'social media war' during elections. It also helps in cyber-bullying and harassing people, which has led to several nations taking steps against criminal misuse of social media, particularly with respect to children. Finally, we concluded by stating that we need to use social media responsibly, promote digital literacy, and enforce regulations to reduce its negative impact.

That's all, friends, have a nice day.

Critical Analysis Of Candidates' Performance:

Good: 4 and 8

These candidates have made a substantial contribution towards this Group Discussion. It was evident that these candidates spoke several times and highlighted key aspects of this important topic. It became possible since they possessed significant information and data on this topic, and brought the discussion to its logical conclusion on an optimistic note. In addition, they also adopted a logical and pragmatic approach to the various issues involved with this topic. Thus, they have displayed a mature outlook in dealing with this subject. Owing to these reasons, their effort has been graded as 'Good'.

Average: 1 and 6

These candidates also had some information about this topic and made a limited contribution towards this GD. Though their ideas were positive and they guided the discussion to proceed in the desired direction, their personal contribution remained quite limited. This was mainly due to their lack of preparation and effort. However, one could presume that they had the potential to perform better. Given these reasons, their performance has been assessed as 'Average'.

Below the Average: 2, 3, 5 and 7

It was observed that these candidates butted in once or twice to merely show their presence, but did not make much of a contribution towards this discussion. It was apparent that they adopted a casual approach and did not put in the necessary effort to prepare for this topic or to collect the required information and data on such an important current topic. Candidates need to remember that when they come to participate in a competitive Group Discussion in an effective manner, they must make an effort to adequately prepare the topic. In view of these reasons, their performance has been adjudged as 'Below the Average'. **CSR**