‘NaviUmed’ – A Refreshing Novelty on the Social Media. https://www.facebook.com/sampark.net.in/

The Marathi page of positive human interest stories `Navi Umed’ meaning New Hope is run by Sampark. The page is a part of our engagement with UNICEF to promote the cause of Child Rights among Maharashtra legislators. On the backdrop of the vicious, aggressive atmosphere in the social media, readers feel hopeful when they read Navi Umed page. It started in April 2016 and is continuing till date without a break. All this has been made possible on account of the support of UNICEF.

Since there has been no such Marathi facebook page acting as a platform for positive stories coming straight from the field and addressing a spectrum of readers ranging from Metro residents to draught-prone areas of interior Maharashtra, there was no ready model or Sampark to follow. The page and its various aspects evolved with time and experience.

Navi Umed is a Maharashtra-centric non-celebrity page where the common man with a conscience is the hero. The page treats politics and bureaucracy as integral parts of social structure and accommodates their better aspects in its posts. The language is Marathi which produces an emotional link with the Marathi ethos of Maharashtra legislators and also of the aspiring rural youth. According to the page statistics, among our readers 74% are between age group of 18-44. The page doesn’t talk only about problems. It talks about the problems along with solutions found and applied by people, villages, teachers, bureaucrats, elected representatives, NGOs etc.

Team ‘Navi Umed’ comprises of young women and men representatives from 22 districts of Maharashtra, 5 from Mumbai and one Editor cum Coordinator. Human interest stories from the districts in form of text / photo features / videos are sent for publication. No story is published without cross verification: authenticity is important. The representatives are local journalists who know the district, geographically, culturally and socially. They look for socially relevant initiatives in their areas and collect information through visits and interviews. They send their stories in form of text, photos or videos to the Editor who trims them to size. She also verifies and supplements these stories if need be. They are then scheduled for publication on the page. One or two fresh stories are published every day on the page. The teaser of the next day’s story is published earlier evening, which too receives good response from the readers. The issues such as child education, girl child, menstrual hygiene, parenting, farming, drinking water and sanitation, drought etc are covered. We don’t make the stories artificial and propagative. But the innocence and genuineness in the story is well preserved. Later, a cartoon on some contemporary issue was introduced to add spice.

Features of Navi Umed

a. Reach: All the stakeholders in the story are tagged. The stakeholders include the organisation or the personalities responsible for the activity, the beneficiaries, the local Government machinery and the people’s representatives. In many places the elected representatives have their followers / associations who further disseminate the story. Right from its inception, Sampark has been more of a network of socially aware activists, journalists and voluntary organisations. All of them are tagged. They, in turn, share or ‘like’ the stories and also make comments. Each of these actions helps take the reach to the corners of the State of Maharashtra and beyond. Currently, organic likes of the page has crossed 14 thousand and post reach has crossed the figure of 2 lakhs.

b. Timing: Our research has revealed that the movement on facebook reaches its peak a little before noon and continues into the progressing day. Accordingly, the posts are scheduled to be published at 11 AM every morning and 6 PM in evening.

c. Form: Facebook statistics tells us that a majority of the visitors use their smart phones to access Facebook and to read Navi Umed stories. The average time span devoted by a reader is short and so the Navi Umed stories too are not much more than 400 words long.

d. Profile of the visitor: It is important to note that 74% of the readers of the NaviUmed page fall in the 18 to 44 years age group. They come from 35 countries and 42 cities. It is common knowledge that the social media are frequented more by the youth; but it is a revelation that they are attracted to positive, constructive stories too. Further, the majority of the visitors belong to the interior Maharashtra, a section not reached by the mainstream print media as intimately. As a result, stories on Navi Umed are shared later by the mainstream print media; whereas Navi Umed has a rule not to publish a story which has already appeared in print.

e. Response: The response is overwhelming and now we are being approached directly by the innovators farmers, parents, etc. The authenticity and the work-culture approach helps tremendously to boost the image of the legislators when their activities are highlighted on the page.

f. Impact: The District Administration takes notice. Corrective measures are adopted. Individuals offer their help, both in the form of financial aid and expertise. And the common readers are happy to note that there are people who keep working at improving the social and economic fabric of the society no matter what. Those who take the initiative are happy to have received exposure and to have attracted appreciation.

We are happy to conclusively prove that the social media is not just a virtual world indulging in gossip, war of words and self-promotion; it can also be productively used to promote positivity in the community. A weighty gratification indeed.