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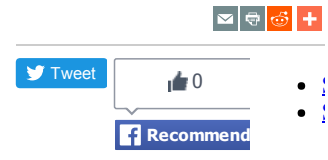
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## Online woes: Inappropriate status messages may land you in jail!

Harsimran Singh, ET Bureau Jan 22, 2010, 07.00pm IST



NEW DELHI: Could you get arrested, fired, or even get divorced because of a humorous status message or innocuous tweet? You just might, say cyber lawyers, as status messages and tweets are admissible as electronic evidence under Indian IT laws.

Even as Microsoft's Bill Gates and Barack Obama joined the Twitter fraternity this week, a dozen other celebs have been creating controversies over the Web. People are even getting arrested for creating contempt of court, by tweets or wall posts, or creating trouble for governments, notwithstanding the Desi Tharoor saga.

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However, for the common Tweeter or Facebooker, daily updates about what's on his or her mind may lead to robberies, thefts, arrests, break-ups and of course a divorce, suggest statistics.

UK-based Divorce-online last month said that 20% of all divorce petitions it is handling currently contain references to Facebook status messages. "One can also take a print out or screenshot of a Twitter or Facebook post and can use it in any court proceedings either against or for you. Cases where social interactions on internet are used as evidence will only rise in the near future in India," says cyber lawyer Pavan Duggal.

But more than courts and spouses, your innocuous Tweet or status messages are being scanned by employers, before doling out job offers. While LinkedIn is a common social networking tool for professionals, employers sneak on the Facebook or Twitter personality of the candidate to read — "what's on his mind".

"Assessing the soft skills of a person is very important both for the HR manager and the recruiter. It shows how a candidate communicates to people around him. It also shows his interests on a daily basis. Often the demand for profiling social networking behaviour comes from the client's side," says Vikram Bhardwaj, CEO of executive search firm Redileon.

On the other hand, just updating your location every time on web 2.0 sites and sharing it might not be a great idea. While you might be busy posting the beach photos while on a vacation with family, your house may be getting burgled in the meantime. A man in Arizona recently blamed his social updates, as a reason behind the theft at his house.

Experts, however advise, that it's best not to add your boss on your network, and even if you have already done, its best to put her in a separate list. Close family members like a spouse, should be avoided. A status message implying single even though you are married or in a relationship can definitely cause a turmoil in your home network, if not the social network, says Bangalore-based Parvati Kumar, an avid social networker.

Defence personnel and spies too are not allowed to reveal their field location or unit or its commander's name. Posting pictures in a uniform is not allowed. But many army and intelligence officials are often seen on Facebook with their profile and photo completely hidden.

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Ironically, discussion forums related to Indian intelligence works and their job postings are available on some Facebook groups. Even though a user may post any objectionable or anti-national content or even organise a rally against the state, on Twitter or Facebook, the new laws make them immune to action.

"The social networking sites hosting such content are not liable to penal action under the recent amendments to Section 79 of the Indian IT Act notified in October, last year," says Vivek Sood, a Delhi-based cyber lawyer.

Meanwhile sociologists say that the web 2.0 behaviour will increase in coming years. "Human beings are generally gregarious. Since, now the shackles of family are breaking down, people want to express themselves more often, even what they are thinking. It is a compensatory mechanism for the non-existence of face-to-face communities. The phenomenon will increase," says Dipankar Gupta, professor of sociology at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University.

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**Prabhat (Mumbai)**  
22 Jan, 2010 02:51 PM

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