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Use social media to get eco-friendly

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Human behaviour responds to built environments. Urban planners and architects have historically shaped and influenced societal aspirations through design of spaces. However, Governments can nowadays engage citizens through digital technologies to encourage many interest groups to participate simultaneously across different sectors. Soon digital technologies will become the lifeblood of our cities.

Technologies rapidly transform cities once they are wired to be 'smart'. The 'Internet of Things' (IoT), connect objects like the electric meter in homes or street lamp posts to the World Wide Web to form an urban network using Information and Communications Technologies (ICT). They then combine to collect and analyse data unobtrusively through sensors and cameras for elected officials and city administrators gain an unparalleled understanding of say, energy consumption patterns or policing requirements of a city; such permutations become virtually infinite.

Experts agree that stress-free living in a city with a cultural identity increases happiness. It takes coordinated efforts of multiple stakeholders and layers of unobtrusive technology manned by many institutions to serve people dependably, safely and efficiently. On the other hand, the robust participation of citizens in envisioning, implementing and maintaining systems and infrastructure can alone make the achievement of smart living a reality.

A recent study was published by The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), to investigate how citizens and businesses in 12 diverse cities around the world envision the benefits of smart cities. The study showed the most popular communication tools between city governments and citizens are social media and e-mail. It is even possible in smart cities to engage citizens for direct feedback on services or submit their ideas for improvements with just a smartphone and some apps! According to the EIU survey, 36% of respondents cite telecoms services as the digital technology that has impacted their lifeves over the past three years, followed by transportation (31%), crime prevention (21%) and social services such as healthcare and education (21%). Interestingly, despite the differences in challenges and the varying levels of economic development the responses show that across cities the same areas have seen improvements from the use of digital technologies– going to show that urban issues are somewhat consistent.

Do not walk past overflowing garbage feeling helpless. Any citizen could directly engage with Chennai Corporation; and not just call their City Councilor to complain. It may sometimes require effort to track down the contact information about the right department and the concerned official. In many cities across the world, this cumbersome hurdle has been eliminated. Using a mobile app, residents can register complaints with city governments by sending in a picture or description of anything from a broken sidewalk to a street light outage.

Social media sites such as Twitter could also be used to report or provide feedback to the government. Apps like SeeClickFix, sends images or descriptions of problems to appropriate government agencies. Geolocation technology can precisely map the problem locations to enable swift and precise responses.

Go digital with social media. You can really make the whole world flat!