Use of Social Networking Sites by AUMP Students

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Abstract

The paper aims to study the reasons of students of varied age groups to use social networking sites. It will cover data from Amity University Madhya Pradesh including undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD students belonging to age groups 19-36. Primary data was gathered through a questionnaire and analysed. It was found that majority of university going students and/or candidates used Social Networking Sites for entertainment, staying connected with their friends and families, and friends of friends along with using the same for knowledge-gaining purposes.

The paper has also attempted at establishing other areas of new media like blogs, used by students belonging to different age groups. It will entail the popularity of the internet, in general and social networking sites in particular. What also comes out as findings is that social networking sites tend to be addictive with students spending a stipulated number of hours on the same, for various purposes. There is also a set of students that uses social networking sites for the sole purpose of entertainment and maintaining contacts with their friends list.

Students’ involvement in society and people therein is also shown with their usage of the social networking sites. Another aspect that one comes across after analyzing the data collected and inspecting the survey, is that, different age groups will have different usage of the social networking sites. In addition, their sense of use of the new media will vary. However, it should be quite understood as they belong to various ages, their inclination toward their professions, and academia will also mould their internet and social networking sites’ usage.

The study aims at observing these elements and to try to understand the reasons and inclinations of internet users in doing so.

Keywords: social networks, addictive, internet users’ inclinations

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Introduction

Social Networking Sites (SNS) like Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn have become one of the major tools for people to stay connected with friends and families and share their lives through pictures or words. Some of them also utilize social networking sites to stay updated vis-à-vis happenings in the society. Social networking sites, and in general, the new media have become zen for a number of people irrespective of their age. It is a medium that draws attention and people have started considering it a pivotal part of their lives, and for a lot of them their daily lives are almost connected rather governed by social media, of any sort.

Social networking sites have also been understood as a significant medium to the practices, norms, implications, cultural diversity of people belonging to varied backgrounds. It can create a deeper, better comprehension among cultures, enhance the levels of tolerance of people, and bring communities together. Hereby, SNS aren’t just a medium to connect people; they rather connect social sects, and can bring about significant positive changes in the social setup too. After all, these are media of communication, and if used aptly they can get the right message across to the right audiences, thus helping in escalating people’s social life index, also termed as satisfaction with life index (White, Adrian, 2007).

To begin with, there is a need to understand the term social networking sites in general, and in the context of the present study.

Social Network Sites- defined

Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site. (Boyd and Ellison, 2007)

Social networking sites allow users to create a personalised account that includes the information like; date of birth, hobbies, preferences, education status, relationships status and personal interests, etc. (Zywica and Danowski, 2008, p.2.).

The term ‘social network site’ has been used to describe this trend, instead of the term, ‘social networking site’, as the latter is majorly understood as networking with regard to maintenance of relationships with friends or people know personally and/or via the social
network. Social network sites provide a lot of networking for people, but that is not their prime concern, as it appears. Social network sites let people connect to others, and enable them to speak their thoughts.

This results in associations between individuals which are often described as ‘latent ties’ (Haythornthwaite, 2005). Another aspect that we come to know of the social network sites is that people don’t necessarily want to meet new people, rather they want to stay connected to the people who are already there in their social circle, or extended social circle. Since, people are not precisely ‘networking’; these are better termed as ‘social network sites’.

Social network sites vary with regard to the features they offer and the user-base they have. There are social network sites that allow users to share personal content, comments, photographs and more with their online friends, or extended social circle, for instance Facebook, Orkut, Instagram. Apart from private conversations, commenting, sharing thoughts, videos and more, some social network sites only allow you to only share photographs, like Instagram. This has inbuilt feature of editing photographs before posting them online. Another content sharing network is Pinterest, Twitter and Google+. This not only allows users to share photographs, but other content too. Other social network sites allow you to create your professional space online, where you can connect with employers and employees, and/or prospective employers or employees like LinkedIn and Flickr.

Other ways of building your social network is by creating your own webpage or blog, which has become a very utilitarian way of staying connected to people. Blogging is a very well known activity in the field of social network. An individual who wants to share his or her ideas on a web portal can easily come up with a blog, which might as well become a platform for discussions on any said topic. Hence, blog posts are an extremely well-received form of social network too.

With the way social media space is booming, people think it has become extremely essential for them to create their own space on the social media, and there is no dearth of content, comments, pictures, videos, links or webpages people are ready to share, to do so.

**Social Network Sites- An addiction**

An evident fact about the social network sites is that they tend to be addictive. The number of times people log into their social network accounts and the number of hours they spend on them is seen to have increased over time too. For the focus of the current study, it is understood that students are addicted to social media in general and social network sites in particular.
The word ‘addiction’ literally understood would mean “a condition that results when a person ingests a substance (e.g., alcohol, cocaine, nicotine) or engages in an activity (e.g., gambling, sex, shopping) that can be pleasurable but the continued use/act of which becomes compulsive and interferes with ordinary life responsibilities, such as work, relationships, or health. Users may not be aware that their behavior is out of control and causing problems for themselves and others” (Psychology Today). While some addiction is physical where the body adapts to the presence or usage of a particular drug, other addiction might not mean consumption of a physical substance. Consuming intangible entities like media or social media is also understood in the context of addiction.

With regard to social media addiction, people feel a pull towards indulging into certain activities—sharing comments, statuses, photographs, checking profiles of others, to the extent of stalking, for hours at a stretch. Users of social media may be just fond of a certain activity, which later becomes a habit, and they become dependent on it.

“Researchers at Chicago University concluded that social media addiction can be stronger than addiction to cigarettes and booze following an experiment in which they recorded the cravings of several hundred people for several weeks. Media cravings ranked ahead of cravings for cigarettes and alcohol.” (About Tech, Walker, Leslie).
Review of Literature

A study titled “The Usage of Social Networking sites Among the College Students in India” by University of Mysore, published in the International Research Journal of Social Sciences (2013) found out that 80 percent of the youngsters spent a major chunk of their day using social network sites. The reasons for the remaining 20 percent not using the same was that they were disinterested in creating an account on social media, did not find it helpful, were scared that their personal information, and the photographs would be misused. The study also detailed the number of hours they spent on social media, the kind of content they share, criterion for making friends, purpose for using social network sites, and their perception about social network sites.

Another study titled “The Influence of Social Networking Sites on the Interpersonal Relationships of Rogationist College Students” found out that students’ social network sites’ usage is escalating and social network sites developers are in huge competition to offer the best to the users. This study focused on asking if the usage of social network sites affected interpersonal relationships, because of the development of virtual relations.

According to Boyd and Ellison (2007) social network sites are “public web based services that allow users to develop a personal profile, identify other users (“friends”) with whom they have a connection, read and react to postings made by other users on the site, and send and receive messages either privately or publicly. Individuals may choose to send private messages, write on other users’ walls, organize social activities, and keep informed about other users’ daily activities. However, users can limit themselves on what information they would like to share publicly with others. Some items they may choose to include are: pictures, favorite books and movies, birthday, relationship status, and location (Tufekci, 2008).

Study entitled “Social Networking Usage and Grades among College Students” by the University of New Hampshire aimed to determine the correlation of social media usage and grades. It defined the usage of social media with light and heavy users of social media with respect to time spent on activities therein and found that 96% of university students used social media on any given day. The study also aimed at exploring the types of social network sites youngsters were using, and the percentage therein.
Research Methodology

The study was conducted with Amity University Madhya Pradesh students as sample. It was decided to conduct the study with university students pursuing under graduation, post graduation and PhD, and belonging to age groups 19-36 to see their usage of social network sites and their behaviours therein. A sample of 180 students was taken for the study, with an attempt to have equal gender representation.

The purpose of conducting the survey with different age groups and educational streams was to be able to gauge if social network sites’ usage varied with difference in ages or educational background or present state of academia.

A questionnaire was given to the participants, the results of which were later analysed. It is a descriptive research and hence aims to describe the current status of the phenomena of social network sites’ usage. The sample was selected after careful observation of the current trends in social media usage.
**Data analysis**

The survey shows that 50% of the respondents used internet and logged into social network sites from their laptops, while 44.44% used social network sites on mobile phones, while mere 5% used their desktops to log into social network sites. This helped the researchers understand the comfort level of the respondents for using internet and social network sites. Since, all the respondents used a smart phone with an internet connection and a majority of them own a laptop, either of these methods was found convenient by them. A similar 50% used internet for their personal work, 27.77% respondents used it to do university work, and 22% used it for either both the purposes, or generally to surf or browse. It was observed that 66.66% of university students used a 2G connection, 27.77% used a 3G connection and a minimal 5% used internet via GSM connection. This also shows that a 2G connection is more popular in the region of Gwalior, and 3G has less connectivity, even when it is quite popular in other regions in the country.

The survey also found out that 50% of the participants used internet and social network sites for 4-5 hours a day, while 33% used it for 2-3 hours a day, and few used it for more than five hours. The usage and consumption of social media would vary from individual to individual. It was further noticed that an equal amount of percentage i.e. 38.88% logged into their social network accounts 10 times a day and more than that, and only 22% respondents checked into their accounts less than 10 times a day. Another similarity was seen in the kind of usage the respondents had for their social network accounts, and it was found that 44% used it for staying connected to friends; and a similar percentage used it for uploading photographs, sharing videos, links and the like. However, only 11% used their social network profiles to search for jobs. This also shows us the current trend in social media among youngsters, and that not many use social network sites to search for jobs, and are less aware about the same too.

A majority (44%) also doesn’t use many blogging facilities, and 38.88% of them either have their own blogs or are into reading some other blogs; while 16% of the respondents weren’t aware of blogging. The study also showed that 39% of the respondents agreed that social network sites are of an addictive nature, and once they log into their sites, they are hooked there for hours. Furthermore, 50% of the survey participants believe that these sites are not addictive, while 11% thinks that it depends on what their desire for media consumption is.

A variation was also seen in the number of social network sites the respondents utilised. While 50% used one of the social network sites, 44% used two and only 5% had their accounts or profiles on three or more. This very well portrayed the popularity of one kind of social network site, and its preference over others. It nevertheless, shows the popularity of social
network sites among the youth, in general. Social network sites also prove to be useful to 44% of the participants, while another similar number does not find them of equal use.

**Conclusion**

The data analysis reveals that a major chunk of teenagers and university goers use internet and social network sites for both personal and professional purposes. We also come to know that social network sites have become phenomena in themselves and a huge majority finds them addictive too, so much so that their logging in frequency keeps on escalating. The results also show that a lot of youngsters in the university use social network sites to stay connected with friends, family and associates. They use the social network sites equally to upload pictures, videos, links and other content and their status updates with their friends’ list. However, they rarely use the same for job searching activities, which otherwise is an accepted and well-known phenomena in a lot of other cities.

Another observation of the survey was that a preponderance of the survey participants use one social network site and finds it gratifying and a very close number uses two social network sites. There are only a few of who have an active account or profile with more than two social network sites. Social network sites are also considered as assistive by the mass of candidates who participated in the survey. An overall perspective of the study reveals that social network sites are utilised on a great extent by the university students, and that they feel discontented without its frequent use.
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