

Use and Misuse of Social Media among Indian Youth

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Abstract: With its seamless reach and power of penetration among youth in our country, social media has assumed great deal of significance since its inception. Apart from providing opportunity to people for connectivity and mutual interaction, social media was found to be effective in providing opportunities for reaching out to useful information and entertainment sources and in building cultural and social capital for the user community. The proposed study attempts to explore the use and misuse of social media among youth in India.

Key Words: Internet, Social Media, Facebook.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Indian society is a blend of multiple cultures, languages, castes and tribes along with regional disparities. Since independence, our country has registered enviable growth in areas beginning from infrastructure to information and communication technologies. In a world dominated by technology, information and communication technologies along with social media have significant roles to play in the generation and dissemination of information among people in our country. Social media has highly influenced the youth in our country since its very inception. Social media in fact refers to web based tools and services that permit users to personally and informally interact, create, share, retrieve and exchange information and ideas on virtual communities and networks. Social media includes social networking sites, blogs and microblogs, online forums, discussion boards and groups, wikis, socially integrated text messaging services, videos and podcasts, mobile applications and many more. Being a powerful media for social transformation and integration of youth in our country, study of social media hence assumes academic significance.

II. OBJECTIVES

The study attempts to analyse the pattern of use and the potential uses of social media for constructive purposes among youth in our country. The study also attempts to trace the misuse and the possibilities of misuse of social media among youth.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Preliminary literature surveys were conducted online and offline to know the current status of the subject. Information available from research papers and books were used to obtain general and more detailed secondary information. For primary information, a written session of maximum ten minutes duration was conducted for student respondents in a professional college near Kochi. The students were asked to recollect and populate maximum number of uses and misuses of social media among youth in our country. The sampling methodology adopted was convenience sampling.

IV. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Secondary data was derived through reviews of articles and research papers available in the subject. Besides, responses received from a sample population in the same locality were used for the study. The study can be extended by including more respondents from different locations. A structured questionnaire may be prepared and distributed to respondents to know their responses.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

The World Wide Web is a rich repository of secondary information with dozens of articles and research papers available online. Offline information was obtained from print journals and magazines. Eric Gilbert et. al.^[1] in their work addresses the concern that we know little about how rural communities use modern technologies as they investigated behavioural differences between more than 3000 rural and urban social media users. The conclusion was that rural people articulate for fewer friends and that women occupy a much greater

segment of rural users than urban user base. Debarati Halder et. al.^[2] in their report have attempted to explore the popularity of social networking habits among semi-urban and rural youth. The level of awareness among students on cyber crimes was also studied in detail. Rai et. al.^[3] in their work attempted to establish a relationship between rural development in our country and social media networks. The study concludes with the statement that social media networks must realise their potential and responsibility for rural development. Alassiri et. al.^[4] in their work have shown that social networking sites have become an important communication platform appreciated and used by students, employees, organisations and the Government alike to provide cheap and efficient services. As they point out, the technological features of online networking sites support information sharing, posting of images and allow users to socialise with other distant users. Ekta Bansal^[5] in her work quotes examples such as Graam Vaani, an organisation for providing social networking in rural areas, Snapdeal.com nagar and the like to project how social media has helped improve the standards of living of rural people. Bansal at length explains how Facebook has helped farmers to raise the price of turmeric in Sangli district of Maharashtra. Hiremath^[6] in his work points out that the trend of using social media is common among all age groups, especially the youth who devote much of their time and skills to open up channels of change. Gupta^[7] in her work explains at length how social media can be used for the benefit of the farmers to make crop selling easy through online programmes. Shava et. al.^[8] in a study conducted among South African youth concludes that a habitual social media consumption behaviour exists among youth. They have observed a positive correlation between Facebook usage and youth habits. Zulkarnain et. al.^[9] in their work explores the use and abuse of social media. The paper visualises social media as a platform for information sharing. Chew et. al.^[10] in their work have investigated the use of social media among rural youth and attempted to explain its effects on community attachment. To explain how community attachment is affected by social media use, the authors relied on social capital theory. However, they do admit that social capital theory is not without its own ambiguities and limitations. Madhavan et. al.^[11] in his attempt to study the impact of social media among youth in Tamilnadu explains how Facebook had triggered youth action during cyclone and floods in Chennai and how Jallikkattu protests in Tamilnadu gained momentum through social media. We have read in leading dailies how social media propaganda against carbonated beverages gained momentum and brought to the notice of the authorities and the people, the exploitation of water resources from Thamarabharani river. Mass media for communication such as social media has often helped the state and the political leaders alike to reach people residing in remote corners of the globe. In a comparative study of rural and urban people in our country, Kaur et.al.^[12] have found that lack of infrastructure, awareness and technical skills along with other socio-economic factors limit the use of digital media in rural areas. However, advances in digital media have increased the number of people using mobile phones and internet, as they quote. Rachakonda^[13] has found that in semi-urban areas surrounded by many number of villages, the impact of social media networking and internet usage is very less. Even in rural areas, the usage is gradually increasing as student adolescents are encouraged to use internet for academic purposes. Social media, as Kucchal^[14] quotes serves as a platform for quick dissemination of information and allows the user to release pressure and relax by connecting with loved ones online. Raju et. al.^[15] in their work have analysed the extent of use of online social networking sites among students of professional colleges in terms of duration of use and dependency and traced the association of chosen variables on the use of online social networks. Besides the above mentioned works, several researchers have attempted to expose the benefits and pitfalls of social media as is evident from the quantum of works that can be found both online and offline. A general statement that can be made is that it is up to the individual user to decide the method, extent and purpose of use of social media.

VI. MAJOR FINDINGS

Apart from literature survey conducted both online and offline as many as 50 student respondents chosen through convenience sampling methodology were asked to list down the maximum number of uses and misuses of social media among Indian youth within time duration of ten minutes. Their responses made it clear that social media which include social networking sites creates both positive and negative impacts in our society though respondents were keener to project positive impacts. Some of the positive impacts of social media pointed out to by the respondents include the following:

- (a). Social media is good source of news and information.
- (b). Social media helps in brand advertising.
- (c). Social media helps create and maintain friends.
- (d). Social media helps one stay in touch with family and relationships.
- (e). Social media helps you socialise more easily.
- (f). Social media provides an economical way for interaction.
- (g). Social media serve as tools to express user emotions.
- (h). Social media helps employers find employees and job seekers find jobs.
- (i). Social media can serve as tools for organising events and inviting people.

- (j). Social media allows professionals to create professional networks.
- (j). Social media are the best tools for artists and artisans to promote their work.
- (k). Social media helps promote performing art bands and theatre companies.
- (l). Social media carries specific uses that benefit the society at large.
- (m). Social media is useful for law and enforcement agencies to trace criminals.
- (n). Social media helps empower business women and other disadvantaged classes.
- (o). Social media helps increase voter participation in democratic processes.
- (p). Social media permits entertainment and distant gaming.
- (q). Social media helps companies obtain customer feedback to improve their services.
- (r). Social media permits knowledge workers learn more about their target audience.
- (s). Social media permits sending messages and uploading multimedia content.
- (t). Social media promotes E-Governance and citizen participation in governance.
- (u). Social media helps students in academics.

Respondents were not hesitant to point out the negative impacts of social media. Some of the drawbacks of social media pointed out by the respondents include the following:

- (a). There is lack of privacy in social media.
- (b). Social media addiction can lead to lower student grades and poor academic performances.
- (c). Social media absorbs productive time and time for socialisation outdoors.
- (d). Social media facilitates cyber bullying, hacking, criminalism and cyber terrorism.
- (e). Social media permits posting of inappropriate content, spread rumours and defame personalities.
- (f). Social media can provide covert connections and spoil family relationships.
- (g). Social media can serve as platform for drug trafficking and money laundering.
- (h). Social media permits scammers trick people into downloading malicious software.
- (i). Social media can serve as platforms for abuse and nasty conversations.

Social Media Uses	
By Companies	By Individuals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Track, monitor and analyse conversation about product and services ▪ Public relations management and advertisement campaign ▪ Marketing research ▪ E-Commerce ▪ Social media mining ▪ Hiring of employees ▪ Monitoring employee activities ▪ Informal employee learning ▪ To project CSR initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Manage self-image/identity related information ▪ Tips for betterment ▪ Source of information and sharing of information ▪ Build interpersonal relationships ▪ Entertainment ▪ Job seeking and professional assistance ▪ Access to remote areas ▪ Education ▪ Disaster communications
By Educational Institutions	By Law Enforcement Agencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sharing and seeking information ▪ Regulate student activities ▪ Learning ▪ Projecting Institutional image ▪ Information on cultural and technical activities ▪ Strengthen student-teacher relationships ▪ Facilitate delivery of add-on courses ▪ Blogs/Moodle/Notice Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Advertise and track missing persons ▪ Bring together citizens and police force ▪ Create awareness and generate warnings ▪ Show the progress of the situation to the community they are dealing with ▪ Platform for common man to raise their concerns and bring to the notice of legal authorities ▪ Track violation of law and order situation ▪ Information on pending cases with the court/police ▪ Participatory Democracy

Table 1: Use of Social Media

VII. RESULTS

A feedback session was arranged for students belonging to a professional college in Kochi. The samples were chosen at convenience. Around 50 respondents participated out of which 23 were male respondents and 27 were female respondents (See Figure 1).

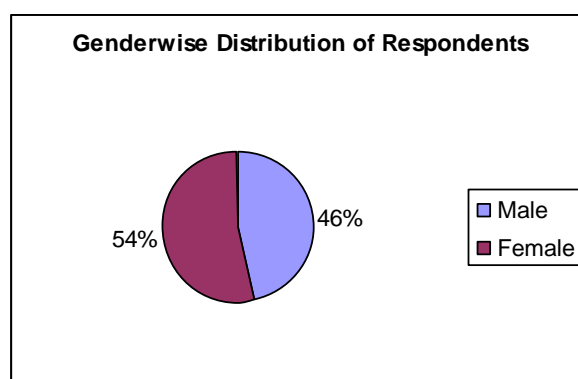


Fig 1: Gender wise Distribution of Respondents

The respondents were instrumental in identifying factors that reveal use and misuse of social media in our country based on the perception, experience and the information they have. A maximum duration of ten minutes was allowed for each respondent. Respondents were successful in identifying 25 uses and 23 misuses of social media (See Figure 2) based on their knowledge and experience. Respondents expressed a feeling of attending a brain storming session.

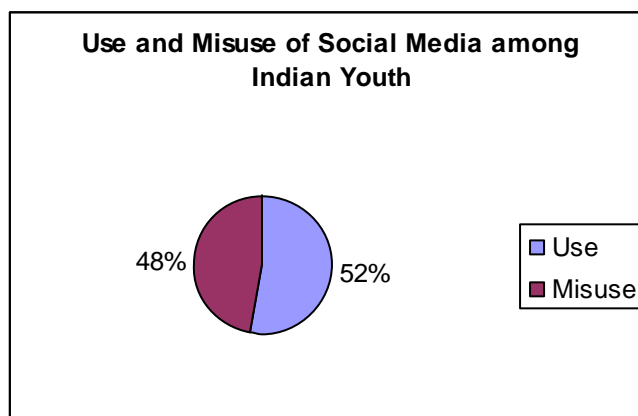


Fig 2: Respondent identified Use and Misuse of Social Media

Table 2 populates a list of potential uses of social media as identified by the respondents.

Sl. No.	Description	Frequency of Response					
		Male (23)		Female (27)		Total (50)	
		#	%	#	%	#	%
1	Better exchange of ideas.	8	34.8	8	29.6	16	32
2	Better connectivity.	13	56.5	15	55.6	28	56
3	Helps to voice opinions more freely.	2	8.7	11	40.7	13	26
4	To bridge the gap between public and private sector, E-Governance.	2	8.7	2	7.4	4	8
5	To augment communication, faster rural communication.	10	43.5	8	29.6	18	36
6	Enable social change.	1	4.3	3	11.1	4	8
7	To link to news, updates and information sources.	14	60.9	8	29.6	22	44
8	Increase knowledge and awareness, informed citizenry.	10	43.5	15	55.6	25	50
9	For education and studies, students gain knowledge, receive expert opinions.	10	43.5	3	11.1	13	26
10	To encourage action and provide interpretation.	4	17.4	6	22.2	10	20
11	Online works, submitting applications, banking.	2	8.7	1	3.7	3	6

12	Useful in disaster communication.	1	4.3	1	3.7	2	4
13	Useful in many social initiatives and campaigning.	1	4.3	1	3.7	2	4
14	Exposure to technology and outside world.	2	8.7	0	0	2	4
15	Information to farmers, farmer extension services, development communications.	2	8.7	11	40.7	13	26
16	Entertainment.	3	13.4	1	3.7	4	8
17	To showcase talents.	1	4.3	0	0	1	2
18	To bring out new facets of people interest.	1	4.3	0	0	1	2
19	In business, marketing.	2	8.7	3	11.1	5	10
20	Search for job opportunities.	1	4.3	2	7.4	3	6
21	Relationship management.	1	4.3	0	0	1	2
22	To increase social dialogue in the country.	0	0	9	33.3	9	18
23	To bridge gaps between rural and urban areas.	0	0	3	11.1	3	6
24	To fight for rights.	0	0	1	3.7	1	2
25	To attract tourists.	0	0	1	3.7	1	2

Table 2: Use of Social Media

Out of a total number of 50 respondents, 23 were male respondents and 27 were female respondents. 56.5% of the male respondents and 55.6% of the female respondents, and thus 56% of the total respondents believe that social media provides better connectivity (See Table 2). 43.5% of the male respondents and 55.6% of the female respondents think that social media helps increase knowledge and awareness while providing better citizenry. 60.9% of the male respondents and 29.6% of the female respondents affirm that social media provides links to news, updates and information sources. 43.5% of the male respondents and 29.6% of the female respondents are of the opinion that social media augments communication and speeds up rural communications. 34.8% of the male respondents and 29.6% of the female respondents think that social media permits better exchange of ideas. 8.7% of the male respondents and 40.7% of the female respondents are of the opinion that social media is a platform to voice opinions more freely and fearsome. 43.5% of the male respondents and 11.1% of the female respondents perceive that social media is very useful for academics, helps students to gain knowledge and invite expert opinions. 8.7% of the male respondents and 40.7% of the female respondents say that social media permits communication between farmers and helps them share information on availability of seeds, access to markets and farming practices. Social media aided by agricultural extension services also permit farmers stay informed of availability of tools, techniques, fertilisers, weather and crop related information. Development communications will be an area where rural India can benefit through social media. 20% of the total respondents believe that social media encourages action and provides interpretation. 18% of the total respondents are of the opinion that social media increases social dialogue in our country.

Though uses and positive impacts outweighed in number, a few respondents did not hesitate to point out the misuse and possibilities of misuse of social media by the Indian Youth. Altogether, 23 numbers of misuses and negative impacts were identified by the respondents (See Table 3). 39.1% of the male respondents and 63% of the female respondents (a total of 52% out of 50 respondents) are of the opinion that social media is being misused to sow seeds of hatred through such propaganda by some fanatics in our country. 43.5% of the male respondents and 55.6% of the female respondents think that social media provides misleading opinions that may even cause an outbreak of violence in our country. Use of social media for cyber bullying was brought to notice by 26.1% of the male respondents and 48.1% of female respondents. Again, 39.1% of male respondents and 33.3% of female respondents believe that social media can pose threat to national and personal security. Creating false identity of people through profile pages is gaining in popularity over social media, as 36% of the total respondents think. 21.7% of the male respondents and 40.7% of the female respondents firmly believe that social media is being misused for activities involving hacking of data and information. Social media, as 30% of the total respondents think, opens doors for sexual, social and economic predation. 30.4% of the male respondents and 22.2% of the female respondents believe that automating features such as ‘geotagging’ is being misused over social media. Pornography and other addictions are areas of concern for respondents, as 16% of the total respondents point out. Excessive use of social media kills productive hours and wastes precious time, as 16% of the total respondents say. There are some people who roam over social media to harass and take advantage of other social media users, as 14% of the total respondents point out.

Sl. No.	Description	Frequency of Response					
		Male (23)		Female (27)		Total (50)	
		#	%	#	%	#	%
1	Hate speech and propaganda.	9	39.1	17	63	26	52
2	Misleading opinions even leading to violence.	10	43.5	15	55.6	25	50
3	Cyber bullying.	6	26.1	13	48.1	19	38
4	Threat to national and personal security.	9	39.1	9	33.3	18	36
5	Language barriers, illiteracy, poor infrastructure widen digital divide further and make 'haves' more powerful.	2	8.7	2	7.4	4	8
6	Opens doors for sexual, social and economic predation.	6	26.1	9	33.3	15	30
7	False identity pages.	5	21.7	13	48.1	18	36
8	Hacking of information.	5	21.7	11	40.7	16	32
9	Take advantage of non-suspecting victims, harassing.	5	21.7	2	7.4	7	14
10	Pornography, other addictions.	4	17.4	4	14.8	8	16
11	Misuse of automating technology (such as Geotagging)	7	30.4	6	22.2	13	26
12	Promotes sedentary life style among youth.	1	4.3	1	3.7	2	4
13	Wastage of time, loss of productivity.	5	21.7	3	11.1	8	16
14	Isolation and non-awareness of happenings in the surroundings.	1	4.3	0	0	1	2
15	Uploading unnecessary content.	1	4.3	1	3.7	2	4
16	Ruining reputation, defamation.	1	4.3	1	3.7	2	4
17	Excessive use leading to health issues.	2	8.7	2	7.4	4	8
18	Browsing unnecessary/unwanted content.	1	4.3	2	7.4	3	6
19	Conflict of ideas, abuse and heated exchanges.	0	0	2	7.4	2	4
20	Promotes normalisation of violence by playing violent games.	0	0	2	7.4	2	4
21	To impose foreign culture on local beliefs.	0	0	1	3.7	1	2
22	Can lead to brain drain, migration to other countries and wastage of national resources.	0	0	1	3.7	1	2
23	Illegal trafficking	0	0	2	7.4	2	4

Table 3: Misuse of Social Media

Like every coin has two sides, social media too can be used for productive or non-productive (destructive) purposes. The responsibility for use and misuse of social media vests with the user.

VIII. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was based on the review of articles, research papers and feedback received from a convenient sample of population. Since convenience sampling was used, responses may not exactly represent the entire population. Responses may also differ on a wider platform. Besides, respondents were asked to list down the factors on pen and paper within a limited time and no structured questionnaire was used.

IX. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is not surprising to see that respondents project more positive views regarding the use of social media. Social media without doubt has become an inevitable facet of modern lives benefiting millions of active users. With jaw dropping number of active users on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, social media is ever expanding and has become a reservoir of information and entertainment that sets no limits. However, owing to the democratic nature of internet and hence social media, antisocial elements too have access to it. In fact, social media appears in news only when it is at its worst. Mass media barks when predators poach potential preys online, when people are threatened by violence and when hate groups find a platform to co-ordinate their activities. Lack of training on the part of law and order personnel has only helped to perpetuate the issue. And of course, legal negligence is a crime!

Burglary and theft are some of the earliest crimes that are still happening over social media. Burglars scan social media to find people who have left their address online and who are constantly updating their holiday pictures. It is always advisable not to share one's personal information and travel plans on social media.

Avid users and over-sharers on the likes of Facebook and Instagram are providing criminals with more information than needed for their business. Harassing and bullying are hard to prevent over social media that even administrators have trouble in deleting comments. Links to sites containing viruses and malware still appear as comments on blogs and social networking sites. A huge amount of social malware is shared by users themselves, by way of links that end up in one's message box. Dirty jokes, stories and videos related to controversies, or impassioned debates appear over social media. Users have the freedom to think twice before posting such content or reading them completely. Morphed images and use of photographs without permission are part and parcel of social media activities. Social media does not own copyrights for user posts which may appear in public! Rude and antisocial behaviour cannot be regulated or curtailed when over social media. And remember, there are terrorist groups who use social media for recruitment. Private pictures shall not appear in public, online profiles shall not be fully comprehensive to avoid the possibility of identity thefts. Again, a strong and sufficiently complicated pass word can be easy to remember for its creator, but difficult for a hacker to reverse engineer.

Everyone likes to be popular, but friend requests are a way to source victim information. It is always advisable to check out the online profile before reciprocating a friend request. Social overload is a situation where a user's friend frequently asks for advice on things such as restaurants, shops for birthday recipes and dress shops for kids in a city. One can be selective with one's response. Logging into social media and going through the contents frequently are not advised as one is likely to fall victim to a syndrome known as the 'Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)' for which many people have already sought psychological advice. One shall be careful not to let social media updates distract you or interrupt your work schedules as this may result in reduced attention as well as lower productivity and efficiency. One must set limits on how long one will spend with social media and online friends.

It will be difficult to curb social media activities though many business firms and educational institutions have framed their own social media policies. The Information Technology Act, 2008 with its amendments has come into force in India. May be due to lack of training or negligence, the law and order personnel and the bureaucracy do not seem to be in a mood to control social media activities of the general public. There seems to be a lack of understanding on the proper use of social media as well. Penetration of internet and smart phones has further perplexed the situation. Social media awareness must begin at a school level. There is urgent need to organise media literacy drives in schools and other educational institutions. Present laws and regulations and associated people movements would help make social media a better platform for freedom of expression and exchange of information. Government has already taken some initiatives to remove obscene content and make social media a healthy platform, but there is still work to be done.

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