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SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AND INDIAN STUDENTS: A STUDY ON THE USAGE PATTERN

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ABSTRACT

Social networking has become an inevitable part of our routine life. Such media open up a wide variety of tools that facilitate communication with fellow beings. This study tried to understand the use of social networking sites by the youth; especially the engineering students. Data was collected through survey method using a structured questionnaire. The results show that students keep profiles on multiple social networking sites, but use only one site actively. Majority of the students use them at least once a day, major purpose of visit being keeping in touch with their existing friends and finding old friends. Chat and Photo sharing are reported as the most used features. The respondents also reported using social networking sites for discussing study and class related activities and having fun.

KEYWORDS: social networking, social media, interaction, sharing, communication, virtual communities, engineering students, Indian students

1. INTRODUCTION

Starting from the second half of past decade, the world has been witnessing an astounding growth in popularity of social networking sites (SNSs). These websites allow social interaction and networking of individuals, thus making possible online communities beyond any physical and geographical limitations. Apart from their basic objective of serving as a tool for networking of human beings, SNSs also serve as a strong medium for information communication. Their varied features such as messaging, chat, e-mail, discussion groups, photo- video sharing, file sharing, blogging etc allow users to interact with each other and share information online.

Social networking sites (SNSs) form an essential part of the web attracting a wide range of people to it. Reports show that millions of people visit and register on such sites every day. Facebook has 1.52 billion daily active users on average as of December 2018 (Facebook, 2019). SNSs have

gained massive popularity, particularly among the youth, as the finest way to stay connected owing to its wide reach and mobile accessibility. It is in this context, it becomes very important to know how the youngsters in India are using such sites. The present study tries to shed light on the pattern of use of SNSs by undergraduate engineering students in Delhi.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since their inception, SNSs have become a topic of discussion and many studies have been carried out on different aspects of online social networking. Very high usage of SNSs such as Facebook and Myspace among teenagers and college students, especially among undergraduate students has been reported by various researchers (Aquisti and Gross, 2006; Arrington, 2005; Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007; Gardner, 2010; Stutzman, 2006). A study conducted by Cassidy (2006) found that, on an average, two thirds of the Facebook users log on at least once a day and a typical user spends twenty minutes a day on the site. Dwyer, Hiltz and Passerini (2007) also made similar observations that 55% of Facebook members and 60% of MySpace members use them every day and about 82% of Facebook members and 72% of MySpace members update their profile very so often. A recent Indian study (Hussain, Loan and Yaseen, 2017) conducted on the use of SNSs by post graduate students of Kashmir University also revealed a similar trend, that students make wide use of SNSs, and spend an average of 1.43 hrs on SNSs per day.

The major purposes of using SNSs that disclosed from the observations of Hussain, Loan and Yaseen (2017) were to acquire knowledge, to be in touch with family and friends, to share information and to promote social, religious, political and environmental awareness. This is in line with the findings of Eke, Omekwu and Odoh (2014) that mostly all the students of University of Nigeria were using SNSs for interaction with friends, connecting to their class mates for online study and for discussing serious national issues and watching movies etc. Students regard SNSs as a tool that strengthens interpersonal relationship, self-esteem and well-being and encourages virtual meeting with co-research scholars, research and learning, and enhances read and write web skills.

Nazia (2018), in a study conducted in Jahangirabad Institute of Technology, Uttar Pradesh found that engineering students use SNSs with a primary intention to establish contacts with professionals and experts. They also use SNSs to keep updated of the latest developments in their field as well as related areas. It is also found that almost all students use SNSs for their curricular as well as research activities. At the same time, another study carried out by Khan (2012) on students from Khyber Paktoon khwa, Peshawar observed that graduation students mostly prefer SNSs for entertainment. Gender differences in the usage of SNSs have also been reported (Acar, 2008). It is also found that SNSs usage differ among people from various cultures (Chapman and Lahav, 2008).

3. METHODOLOGY

This paper reports data from a survey conducted among undergraduate engineering students studying in different engineering institutions in Delhi. The major data collection instrument used was a structured questionnaire. A total of 600 questionnaires were administered, where 502 participants responded and took part in the survey, a response rate of 83.6%.

4. RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the study based on the analysis of the responses collected from students on the general aspects of use of SNSs. It covers facets such as number of social network sites used, frequency and extent of use, purpose of use etc.

4.1. Students are members of multiple SNSs, but actively use only one

Figure 4.1.1 and Figure 4.1.2 show students' response regarding the number of SNSs they use. Majority (75.3 per cent) of the students are members in two or more SNSs, but most of them (62.35 per cent) use only one SNS actively. Some students (28.68 per cent) use two SNSs actively. Very less number of the students uses three or more SNSs actively. Thus it can be said that though students have membership in multiple social networking platforms, majority of them use only one SNS actively.
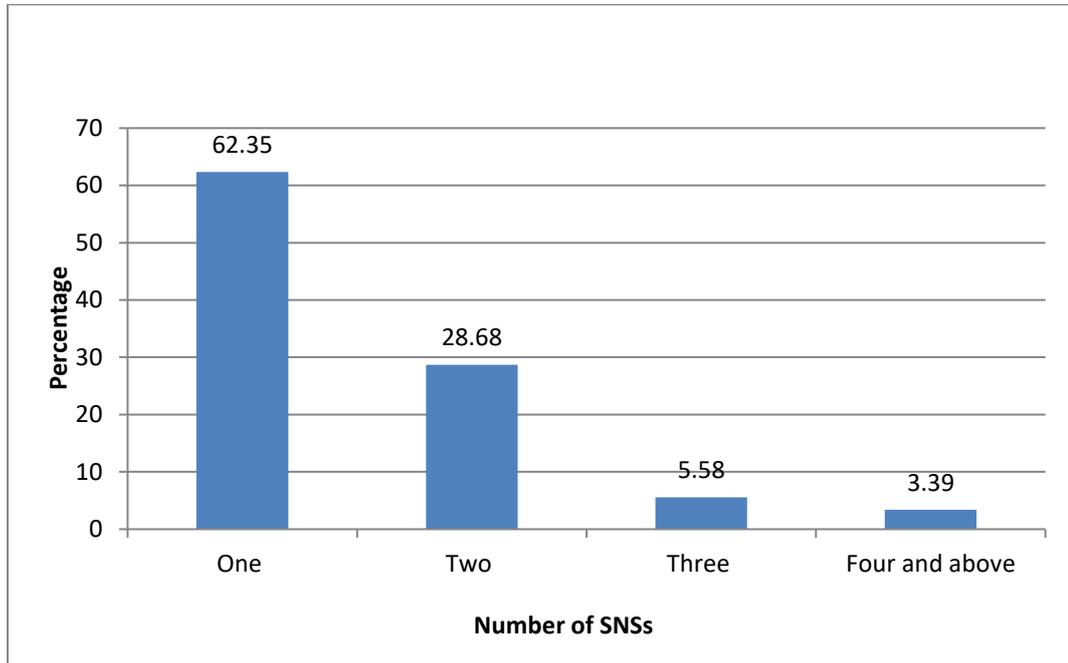
Figure 4.1.1

Number of SNSs in which Students have Membership
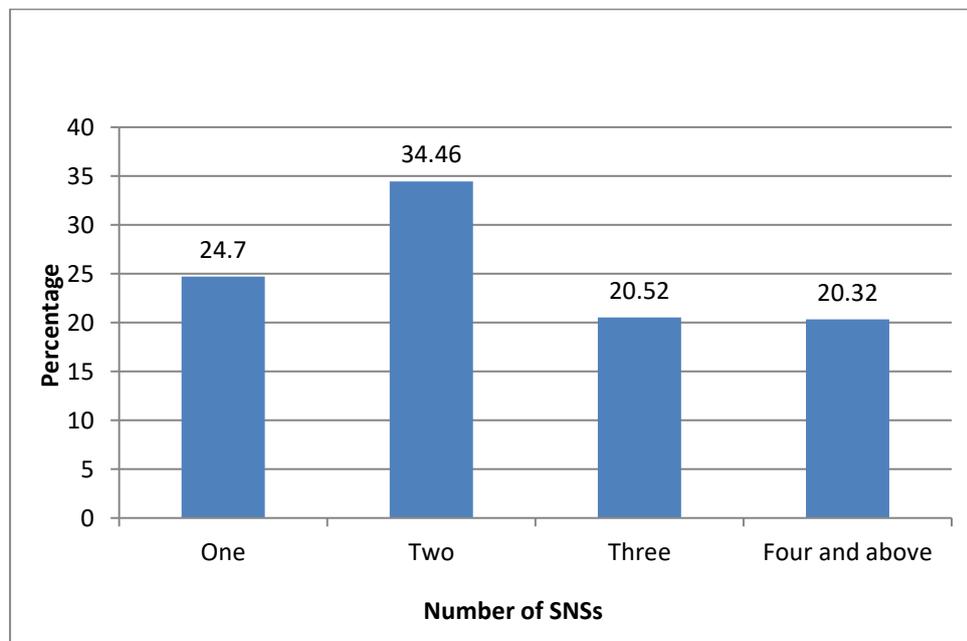
Figure 4.1.2

Number of SNSs being Used Actively
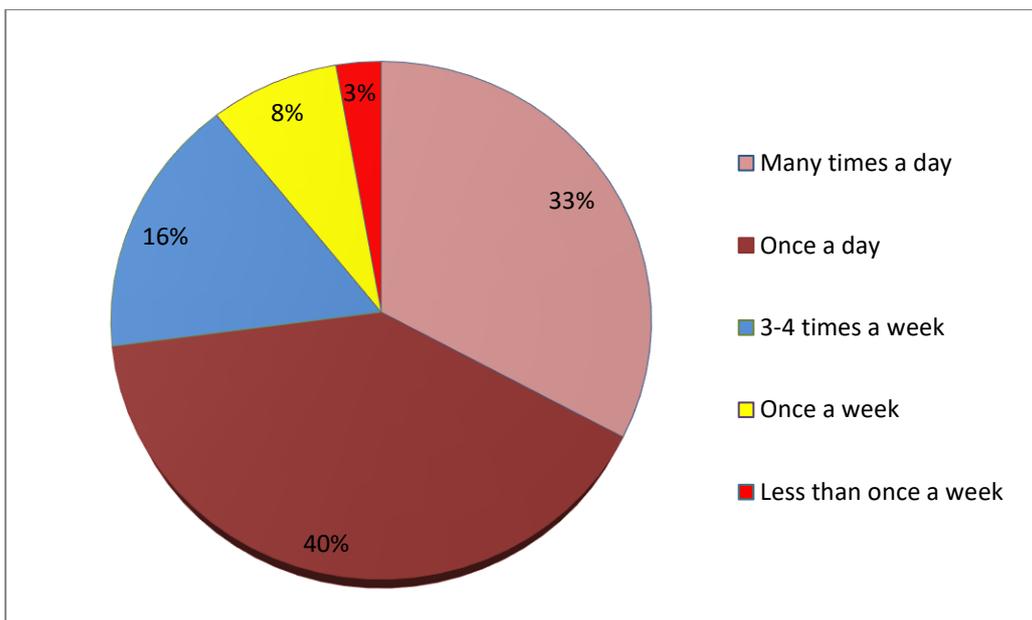

4.2. Students use SNSs at least once a day

Students were asked about how frequently they use SNSs. Figure 4.2.1 shows that while nearly one third (33 per cent) of the students use SNSs many times a day, 40 per cent use them once a day. Hence it can be said that a majority of the students (73 per cent) use SNSs at least once a day.

Figure 4.2.1

Frequency of Use of SNSs

4.3. Students spend less than 5 hours a week on SNSs

Figure 4.3.1 shows that comparatively higher number (44.82 per cent) of the students use SNSs less than three hours a week. 28.29 per cent use them three to five hours a week. Though a few students use them for 10 hours or more, the overall analysis shows that majority of the students use SNSs less than five hours a week.

Figure 4.3.1

Time Spent on SNSs
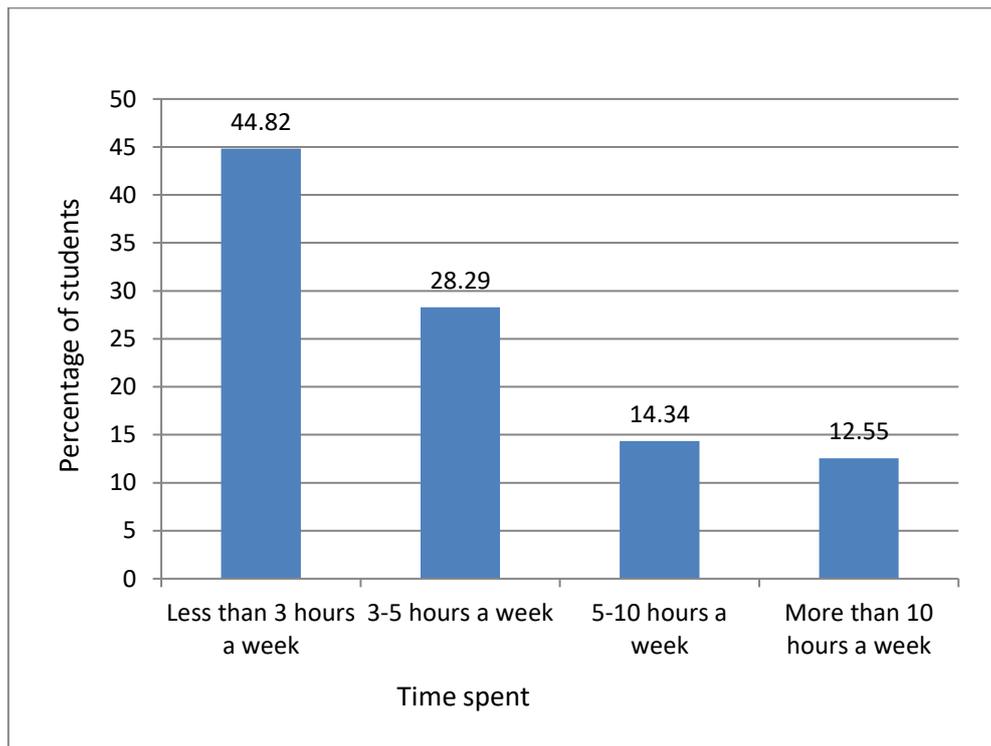
4.4. Students use SNSs primarily to maintain previously existing connections

Table 4.4.1 depicts the response of students when they were asked about their motives of using SNSs. Students mainly use SNSs for keeping in touch with existing friends (89.04 per cent) and finding old friends (79.28 per cent). Interestingly, only 36.65 per cent of the students use them to find and befriend new people. Other major purposes include 'discussing study and class related activities' and 'having fun'. Some students also use them to develop and maintain professional contacts.

Table 4.4.1

Purposes of Using SNSs

Purpose	Percentage of students (%)
Keep in touch with existing friends	89.04
Find old friends	79.28
Have fun	60.56
Discuss study and class related activities	55.98
Develop and maintain professional contacts	44.02
Find and befriend new people	36.65
Interact with people having common interests	34.86

4.5. Chat and Photo sharing are the most popular SNS features among students

Chat (79.88 per cent) and Photo sharing (60.96 per cent) are found to be the most used features of SNSs (Refer Table 4.5.1). A considerable number of the students also use Public messaging (48.01 per cent), Private messaging (47.81 per cent) and Groups/Communities (46.02 per cent). The least used features of SNSs among engineering students are Events, Games and other applications and Video sharing.

Table 4.5.1

Use of Different Features of SNSs

SNS Feature	Male	Female	Total
Public messaging	52.94	37.65	48.01
Private messaging	51.47	40.12	47.81
Photo sharing	60.59	61.73	60.96

Groups/Communities	45.00	48.15	46.02
Video sharing	27.94	17.28	24.50
Chat	81.47	76.54	79.88
Events	33.82	28.40	32.07
Games and other applications	32.35	31.48	32.07

5. DISCUSSION

Students are profound users of SNSs. They keep profiles on multiple SNSs, but are more likely to use only one SNS actively. A research conducted by the Pew Research Center among the American teens and young adults showed a growing trend among the youth to keep profiles on multiple SNSs. 52 per cent of the respondents had profiles on multiple SNSs in 2009 in place of 42 per cent in 2008 (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith and Zickuhr, 2010). The result of the present study shows a similar trend among the Indian youth with majority having membership in two or more SNSs. The frequency of use is high as one third uses them many times a day and majority at least once a day. Despite of the high frequency of use, students seems to spend less time on SNSs with majority spending less than 5 hours a week.

Respondents indicated that they mainly use SNSs to keep in touch with their existing friends and to find old friends. Comparatively less number of the students use them to find and friend with new people. A similar trend has already been observed by earlier researches (boyd, 2004; Coyle and Vaughn, 2008; Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007) that SNSs are mainly used to maintain existing relations, rather than creating new ones. This shows an 'offline to online' trend in the use of SNSs among the youth. Lampe, Ellison and Steinfield (2006) termed it as "social searching". Chat and Photo sharing are found to be the most used features of SNSs by students.

It is notable that more than half (55.98 per cent) of the students use SNSs to discuss study and class related activities, and a considerable number (44.02 per cent) of students use them to develop and maintain professional contacts. This indicates that in the view point of students, SNSs are not only a virtual space for hang out, but also a place for academic discussions and professional development.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has presented the results of a survey done among engineering students in Delhi on their use of social networking sites.

Engineering students use SNSs extensively, the primary purpose being maintaining and reinforcing the existing connections rather than establishing new ones. However, one of the major purposes includes 'discussing study and class related activities'. This calls for the attention of academicians as well as librarians on how to tap the best of social networking into learning and education. Indeed, with its inherent characteristics of interaction and sharing, SNSs are wonderful media for communication of information.

7. ABBREVIATIONS

SNSs - Social Networking Sites

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