

Junior College Students' Usage of Social Networking Sites for their Personal and Academic Work

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Abstract

The world indeed is a small place. This goes perfectly with the fact that communication today has brought people very close. One way of communication is the use of social networking sites. Statistics indicate that it is the youth who use these sites to a great extent. The present study aims to study the use of social networking sites among junior college students for their personal and academic work and compare the use of these sites on the basis of gender. The sample was selected using random sampling techniques. The sample included 202 males and 278 females studying in junior colleges in Greater Mumbai. The tool used for this study was a questionnaire constructed to measure the use of social networking sites for personal and academic work and the data obtained was subjected to statistical analysis (descriptive analysis and t-test). Findings suggest that male students used social networking sites more than female students for both personal and academic work. Further, findings also indicate that Facebook and YouTube were the most preferred social networking sites for personal work while Google and Wikipedia were preferred for academic work. An important finding was the increasing use of the mobile messaging application, WhatsApp, for both personal and academic work.

Introduction

A look at the number of users gives an idea of the popularity of social networking sites among people all over the world. What is striking about this is that the users of these websites are the young, productive generation, mostly college-going youth.

The reasons that the youth of today resort to social networking could be numerous. Apart from getting “connected”, it is also possible that young students use these sites for academic purposes as well. Posting queries, looking up relevant videos, searching or posting information has been enabled, thanks to these sites.

Considering that the focus today has shifted from the conventional, formal set up of a school or university to non-formal education, social networking sites are gaining more and more importance. These sites make it possible for a student to possibly acquire notes, solve his/her doubts, complete and post assignments, reply to queries and do many more things in addition to getting connected to a whole lot of people having varied interests and likes.

Thus, social networking, apart from making our youth social is also in a way helping them with their personal and academic work.

Need of the Study

An increasing trend seen today is the use of social networking sites not only for socializing with one another but to do a whole lot of other tasks. These tasks could include anything from using social networking sites for academic purposes, planning informal gatherings, sending festive wishes and to a great extent even finding relationships online.

In the present context, there is a growing dependence on social networking sites among the youth. Studying the ways in which the youth, especially the adolescents, use social networking sites will give an insight into understanding if social networking sites do indeed have an impact on the lives of the youth and if it is a positive or a negative impact. This needs to be studied and therefore, the present study focuses on the use of social networking sites by the youth.

The present study helped in understanding how social networking sites can be used for academic purposes. There are some who prefer to learn in solitude or those who are independent learners. There are those who would prefer not to attend college but study from a place which they find comfortable like their own homes. Therefore, the outcome of this study could help in knowing if social networking sites can indeed be used for academic purposes and in which ways.

The focus of this study is to compare the use of social networking sites for personal and academic work on the basis of gender. It is generally assumed that males are more technology-savvy as compared to females. Also, when it may come to the use of technology including social networking sites, females may have certain restrictions on their use for unhealthy reasons such as fake profiles, threats, and problems such as these. Therefore, this study helped to understand if this really is the scenario, whether a difference in the use of social networking sites between males and females exists or not. Another focus of this study was to know whether both male and female students use social networking sites more for personal or academic work.

Definitions of Terms

Conceptual Definitions

Social Networking Sites

These are 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.

Abbreviated as SNS, a social networking site is the phrase used to describe any website that enables users to create public profiles within that website and form relationships with other users of the same website who access their profile.

A social networking website is an online platform that allows users to create a public profile and interact with other users on the website.

Junior College Students

Students at the plus two stage of education in the 10 + 2 + 3 pattern of education conducted either in standard XI and XII attached to secondary schools or to the degree colleges.

Personal Work

Personal work is defined as having to do with or belonging to a particular person or concerning a person's private life.

Academic Work

Academic work is defined as having to do with education or study.

Academic work refers to study.

Operational Definitions

Use of social networking sites for personal work

This is defined as the use of social networking sites such as Facebook, Orkut, Hi5, Netlog, MySpace, Flickr, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr and any other websites by students for their private work such as:

- displaying personal information
- putting up a status
- chatting and messaging
- playing games
- reading general literature
- watching videos and listening to music
- searching for people
- uploading photos and videos
- downloading various types of media
- sending wishes
- finding useful information
- creating and being part of interest groups and promoting hobbies
- following a celebrity
- looking for jobs or a relationship
- buying things online

Use of social networking sites for academic work

This is defined as the use of social networking sites such as Facebook, Orkut, Hi5, Netlog, MySpace, Flickr, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr and any other websites by students for their private work such as:

- looking up and posting assignments
- acquiring academic information
- discussions on academic topics
- watching educational videos/movies
- checking grades on assignment
- passing on notes
- being part of academic circles/groups
- collecting academic data and filling out educational surveys
- taking a quiz/test
- posting queries
- participating in conferences
- looking for latest developments in an area of study
- accessing online libraries
- downloading study materials
- promoting college events/activities

Aims of the Study

The following aims were identified for this study:

1. To study junior college students' usage of social networking sites for their personal and academic work
2. To ascertain the difference among junior college students' usage of social networking sites based on their gender in the following variables:
 - a. Personal Work
 - b. Academic Work

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were formulated as follows:

1. To study junior college students' usage of social networking sites for their personal and academic work based on gender
2. To compare junior college students' usage of social networking sites based on gender in the following variables:
 - a. Personal Work
 - b. Academic Work

Hypothesis of the Study

The following null hypothesis was framed for this study:

There is no significant difference between junior college students' usage of social networking sites based on gender in the following variables:

- a. Personal Work
- b. Academic Work

Sampling Technique and Sample

For the present study, the probability sampling technique was used under which simple random sampling method was used. The sample for the present study consists of 202 male students and 278 female students studying in junior colleges located in Greater Mumbai.

Methodology

The present research study is a descriptive research study, under which the causal comparative method was used. This study compares the use of social networking sites for personal and academic work among junior college students on the basis of their gender.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and the t-test.

Findings and Interpretations

Following are the findings of the present study:

a. **There is a significant difference between junior college students' usage of social networking sites for their personal work based on gender (t Stat = 6.93; P = 0.00; P < 0.05).**

This finding can be supported by the responses obtained from students for the items in the tool designed to understand the use of social networking sites for personal work. The results obtained for the use of social networking sites to display personal information revealed that it was the male students who used these sites more often than the female students to display personal information such as name, date of birth, etc. The students preferred to use Facebook to display such information followed by Twitter. Such a finding can be attributed to the fact that Facebook is quite popular among the youth, it is easily accessible and helps one to remain connected to their friends and family around the world. A reason why Twitter would be preferred is that it allows the users to follow anyone and also be followed by others.

In the same way, responses obtained for the use of social networking sites for varied activities such as listening to music, surfing, finding hobby related information and even seeking jobs again saw more responses from the male students as compared to the female students. Again, Facebook was found to be the most preferred site for this purpose probably because through Facebook, which is the most popular social networking site, one gets to remain connected to people, which, in turn, helps in acquiring more information related to hobbies, interests, jobs, etc. It was also seen that students preferred to use YouTube for listening to music mainly because YouTube allows users to listen to music of their choice and view videos of the same.

Similarly, responses obtained to check the use of social networking sites as a medium of "being connected," revealed that male students use social networking sites, mostly Facebook, to remain connected more than the female students. An important finding here was the increasing use of the mobile messaging application, WhatsApp, among students. The reasons why Facebook is a clear favorite is evident from the fact that it has easy access, free membership and a host of features such as chat and messaging, thereby, catering to the need of "being connected." The relatively new application, WhatsApp, proves to be a great alternative for sending free text messages and helps one to remain connected with others. WhatsApp also allows the sharing of photos, videos and audio files as well as creating groups of people.

Results also show that the male students used the social networking sites more often than the female students. Once again, the most preferred social networking sites were found to be Facebook and YouTube followed by the mobile messaging application, WhatsApp. The reason that these websites and application are being used so often could be because they are easily available at the click of a mouse and as the trend goes today, they are even available on mobile phones.

Several researches conducted on social networking sites also point out to the increased use of these sites. Though no research has been conducted on the differential use of social networking sites by males and females in India, research conducted by Manjunatha, S. (2013) indicates that the use of social networking sites among Indian college students has significantly increased. Also, Press Trust of India (2013) reported that India's youth prefer communicating through social networks and stated that 75% of students cited social reasons such as chatting and connecting with friends as the main reason to access the Internet.

Madden, M., Lenhart, A., Cortesi, S., Gasser, U., Duggan, M., Smith, A., and Beaton, M. (2013), through their research, revealed that the youth are sharing more and more personal information on their profiles than in the past. Also, Subrahmanyam, K. and Greenfield, P. (2008), through their study, have shown that adolescents are using online communication tools to reinforce existing relationships, both with friends and romantic partners.

A research conducted by Güzin, S. and Koçak, Y. (2011) revealed that significant differences were found between genders in the usage purposes of social networks indicating that males used social media, Facebook, to make new contacts while females used the same social media to maintain existing relationships.

This difference in the use of social networking sites among males and females can be substantiated by the fact that, even though, males and females are considered to be at par with each other today, there still exists differences, which extend even to the use of technology. This could be because males, by nature, are considered to be technology-savvy and use the computer and the Internet to a larger extent. Even if there is no computer at home, males are free to go to a cyber café at any time of the day for their work. On the contrary, there may be certain restrictions on a female such as staying indoors, house work, or even studying, limiting the access of the females to the computer and especially social networking sites.

A deeper reason to this could be the role that has come to be ascribed to the two genders. In the Indian context, a male has the freedom to use technology, be it a phone or a computer and he will not be questioned regarding his activities on these media. However, females, even though they have the freedom to use a phone or the computer, may be checked upon more often so as to verify the kind of activity they indulge in. Females would also be expected to remain indoors because of fear of being treated in the wrong manner, therefore, limiting the use of cyber cafés by females.

b. There is a significant difference between junior college students' usage of social networking sites for their academic work based on gender (t Stat = 7.25; P = 0.00; P < 0.05).

Generally, it was observed from the responses obtained for the sets of items constructed for the use of social networking sites for academic work, that the male students used the social networking sites for academic purposes more than the girls.

The responses to the items in the tool indicate that males are more active users of social networking sites, especially Facebook and Twitter, with regards to activities such as posting changes in time table or information about college events. The reason for the increased use of Facebook and Twitter could be that these websites cater to many people and thus, posting information on these sites helps to pass on information to several people at one go. WhatsApp was also being used to a large extent to pass on such information probably because of its easy use through mobile phones.

Results also revealed that it was the male students who were more actively using social networking sites than the female students for conducting actual academic work such as reading academic literature, gathering information for research and downloading study matter. A very important finding here was the use of Google and Wikipedia for these purposes. These two websites were mainly preferred for academic work by students since these search engines probably help students acquire any and vast amount of information related to their academics.

An important finding related to understanding the use of social networking sites by students for "being part of academic circles and the activity therein" received negative responses, indicating that students do not majorly belong to academic circles on social networking sites. This can be attributed to the fact that social networking sites are not being used for academic purposes to a large extent in educational institutions. These websites are still being used mostly for personal work.

Similarly, poor results were also obtained when it came to using social networking sites for other academic-related activities such as checking graded assignments online, looking for jobs, looking up educational institutions, opportunities to study abroad, etc. This only corroborates the finding above that educational institutions are not using social networking sites for academics and the youth are using social networking sites majorly for personal work.

Research studies also support the use of social networking sites for academic purposes. However, a finding by Karimi, L. and Khodabandelou, R. (2012), through their research study, indicates that there is no significant difference between male and female samples in the academic use of Facebook. This finding is, therefore, in contrast to the finding of the present research study that there is a significant difference between males and females in the use of social networking sites for academic work.

The finding of the present research study can be supported by the fact that even today, in the Indian society, the academic growth of the females is being ignored as compared to males. Additionally, girls are less technology-savvy as compared to boys.

This finding may also be attributed to the fact that girls, even though, expected to have an email ID, may not be allowed to be part of social media. Cases of privacy infringement, stalking and online prank-playing may also be reasons why girls prefer not to be a part of social media or are rather not allowed to be a part of the same by their guardians.

Discussion

The findings of the study point to the fact that social networking sites are being used, for both personal and academic work, more by the male students as compared to the female students. The reasons that can be attributed in this case could be:

- Males are more technology-savvy than females.
- There are many restrictions on a female such as staying indoors, house work, or even studying, limiting the access of the females to the computer and especially social networking sites.
- In the Indian context, a male probably has more freedom than a female even in the use of technology due to cultural differences and societal values.
- Cases of privacy infringement, stalking and online prank-playing may be reasons why girls prefer not to be a part of social media or are rather not allowed to be a part of the same by their guardians.

Findings also indicate that the social networking sites Facebook and YouTube were the most preferred for personal work among the youth for the following reasons:

- The ease of communication
- Exciting virtual world
- Features such as chat, messaging, putting up a status, games, music, etc.
- Being connected to people around the world

Another important finding was the preference for Google and Wikipedia for academic work. The reasons why these sites were preferred over others could be:

- Availability of ample information related to any field of study
- Easy access

Another significant finding was the increasing use of the relatively new mobile messaging application, WhatsApp, by students for both personal and academic work. WhatsApp was found to be a favorite among the students for the following probable reasons:

- Free messaging
- Support for video, audio and picture messages
- Easy access

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the present study, the researchers have the following recommendations to make:

1. To reach global standards, it becomes imperative that social networking sites be adopted for academic purposes.
2. Facebook, being the most preferred social networking site among the youth, can be used more and more for academic purposes rather than just for personal work.

3. The female students should be encouraged to at least use social networking sites for academic purposes in the college.
4. Students, who prefer independent study, may benefit through the use of social networking sites for their studies. This may take care of the differential use of social networking sites between male and female students.
5. Study groups can also be created on the social networking sites to enable students to discuss their doubts or post their queries, either to each other or to their teachers encouraging collaborative learning.
6. Since, students today are technologically advanced, it also becomes imperative on the part of teachers to become technology-savvy. They must know how to operate a computer, its basics, and the use of the Internet including the use of social networking sites.
7. It is quite possible that students may express a lot about their emotional states on social media. By being connected to a teacher, this will help the teacher in providing the right kind of guidance to the students.
8. It also becomes important on the part of the teachers to guide parents to understand the increasing use of the social networking sites in academics and thereby, encourage them to allow their wards, especially the girls, to be a part of these sites.

Conclusion

It was seen that, based on the study, there was an obvious difference in the use of social networking sites between male and female students for their personal and academic work. However, in this technological world, it becomes imperative that anyone, whether male or female, must get technologically active and that may also include being part of social networking sites, so that one may not feel left out.

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