

Online Social Networking: Usage in Adolescents

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Abstract

Online social networking (OSN) has played a significant role on the relationship among college students. It is becoming a popular medium for socializing online and tools to facilitate friendship. Young adults and adolescents are the most prolific users of OSN sites. The frequent use of OSN sites results in addiction toward these sites and simultaneously influence students' daily life at large. The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent of usage of OSN sites by students of professional colleges in terms of duration and dependency and to find out the association of selected variables with OSN usage. A questionnaire was used to explore this issue and 350 college students participated in the survey. The findings revealed that most of the students logged in to OSN sites for more than 30 minutes a day and many of the students were dependent on these sites.

Keywords: Online social networking sites (OSN sites), Reasons for use, Dependency

Introduction

Communication is inscribed in human nature. It is an essential human need and a fundamental social necessity. While communication practice has improved during its history, the growth of the Internet provided a new combination of all the communication applications that humans used including interpersonal conversation and broadcasting extensive information to numerous audiences (Bargh & Mckenna, 2004).

According to Boyd & Ellison, 2008 social network site can be defined “as a web-based service 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”.

College students are considered heavy users of Internet compared to the general population. Use of the Internet has become a part of college students' daily routine. College Internet users are twice as likely to use instant messaging on any given day compared to the average Internet user (McBride, 2006).

Based on Pew Internet & American Life Project 2010 statistics, use of online social networking sites by the teens had increased significantly. Usage of OSN sites among American teens had increased to 73% and major users were young adults of 18-29 of age. Facebook was considered most commonly used online social network website used (Wikipedia. 2012).

In India the use of OSN increased rapidly. There are almost 76 million users for OSN sites according to statistics by Social bankers on 2013. Social networking statistics showed that **Facebook use in India** was **5.43%** compared to the country's population and **69.35%** in relation to number of Internet users. The **total number of active Facebook Users in India** were **63692540 with majority being males** and about 30474220 users belonged to the age of 18 to 24 years (Social bankers, 2013).

Facebook was considered the most popular OSN site with majority of students using it almost every day. Making new friends, updating photographs of them, maintaining current social networks and friendship were the key factors for using OSN sites (Zwart, Lindsay, Henderson, Phillips, 2011).

Social networking websites are popular for it is easy to use and easier to meet new people online. It allows the user to learn information regarding other users, help to seek new friends, and can be accessed without charge. (social networking, 2015)

A study in a selected Nigerian University undergraduates stated that that 31.0% of the respondents accessed their Facebook account every passing hour. About 22.3% accessed their account every two hours and 22.0% accessed their account every day, while only 15.4% access their account weekly. Almost 76.7% of undergraduates were categorized as having low addiction to Facebook, 21.7% moderately addicted and 1.6% had high addiction to Facebook (Alabi & Folaranmi, 2013).

OSN sites have been showing a considerable influence on students. The effects include overuse of these sites causing dependency and addiction to these sites. Studies related to OSN use in Indian context are rare. Hence this study would give an understanding regarding the usage pattern of OSN sites in terms of duration and dependency.

Materials and Methods

The objective of the study was to assess the extent of usage of OSN sites in terms of duration, reasons for use and dependency among undergraduate students. The primary outcome variable was online social network usage and the extraneous variables were Gender, place of stay, main mode of Internet access and mode of living.

The study was done in a selected colleges of University. The university has a campus with total Wi-Fi connection and has 21 professional colleges from which samples were selected. After obtaining the administrative permission from the authority ethical clearance was obtained. The research settings were randomly selected using a chit method.

Appropriate data collections instruments were developed and validated. Online social network usage was measured by Online Social Network Usage Scale which was constructed by the researcher with a reliability of 0.806. The scale measured duration of use, reasons for use and dependency. The measures for dependency were developed and modified from internet addiction scale and Facebook addiction scale. The OSN users were classified into nondependent category, dependent category and high dependent category.

The data were collected from 350 subjects of different professional colleges from a selected district using consecutive sampling technique. Consent was taken prior to study and the tool was administered. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage were used to interpret the data.

Results

Data was collected from 350 undergraduate students from selected professional colleges of Udupi District. The findings show that, majority were females (66.3%). Most of the students were staying within the campus (61.1%). Major forms of internet access were personal computers (58.6%) and cell phones (25.4%) and majority stayed with friends (70.9%).

Description of online social network usage in terms of duration and dependency and Reasons for use:

The findings of the study showed the time duration among the OSN users in a day. Majority of the users (43.10%) use OSN sites from 30 minutes to two hours a day. Almost 24% use it for more than 2 hours and the rest (32.90%) use OSN sites below 30 minutes per day. Majority of the users fall into the category of being dependent on OSN sites. Highly dependent are 1% and 59.40% belong to the dependent category. About 40% report that they are not dependent on any OSN sites (Table3).

The main reasons for the students to use online social network sites were to have access to many friends at a time (89.7%), for time pass (85.40%) and to maintain relationship with friends (72.90%). About 62.95% used OSN sites to socialize with others and 57.70% used OSN sites to maintain privacy. Of the whole subjects, 38.90% experienced better self-disclosure with peers than face to face communication and 27.40% were able to forget their personal problems by using OSN sites (fig 1).

The Chi square values presented in table 2 depicted that extraneous variables such as course, gender, age and mode of living had no association while main mode of internet access ($\chi^2 = 10.44$, $p = 0.034$) had significant association with online social network usage at 0.05 level.

Discussion

According to Steinfield, Nicole, & Lampe, 2008 the students use OSN sites for an average of 21 minutes per day. A study by (Pemek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009) among 92 college students stated that OSN use ranged from 2.00 to 117.00 min per weekday and from 0.00 to 165.00 min per day on weekends. The mean amount of OSN use during weekdays was 27.93 min per day and weekend days were 28.44min per day 28. These findings were supported by present study findings that most of the students used OSN sites from 30minutes to 2hours.

Schaefer (2008) from University of Karlsruhe, Germany did a survey to identify the motives behind the use of OSN sites among people. The sample consisted of 284 subjects and were administered the Internet questionnaires. The main motives were for maintain contact. The other main reasons were managing existing contacts, communication, establishing self-integrity and for entertainment (Subrahmanyam, Reich, & Waechter, 2008) The present study supports these findings as it states that the students use OSN sites for maintaining friendship, as means for time pass, to maintain relationship with family and for socializing with others. The other important reasons include as a means for forgetting personal problems and for social disclosure.

Social reasons were the most important motives for using social networking sites (Kujath., 2011). The motives reported were : using them because all their friends had accounts (61%), keeping in touch with friends they do not see often (81%), keeping in touch with relatives and family (48%), and making plans with friends they see often (35%). Another study found that a large majority of students used social networking sites(SNS) for the maintenance of offline relationships, whereas some preferred to use this type of Internet application for communication rather than face-to-face interaction (Kim, Sohn, & Choi, 2011). Social support, information, seeking friends and entertainment were found to be the most significant motivations for SNS usage in a sample

of 589 undergraduate students.

Wan (2009) measured SNS addiction among 335 Chinese college students aged 19 to 28 years using modified Young's Internet Addiction Test and the results indicated that 34% of the college students were addicted. It proved that many young teens are addicted for online social network sites. Present study found out that 59.4% were dependent on OSN sites which supported the findings.

Harhettai (2007) conducted a survey among 1,060 first-year students at the University of Illinois, Chicago to identify the demographic factors affecting the OSN usage among college students. The variables included were gender, ethnicity, parental education and staying with parents and with friends. The estimated time spent to visit web sites weekly was 15.5 hours. Overall, 88% of respondents were OSN users. There was a significant association between genders. Females were found 1.6 times more likely to use OSN sites (at $p < 0.1$ level of significance). Students staying with parents reported lesser OSN usage.

In Johnson and Wales University, a survey was conducted among college students to understand the methods of accessing online social network sites. Of the samples, 68% reported use of laptops while 20% used cell phones to check social media sites. About 45% of the college students spent 6 to 8 hours/ day to check a social media site, 23% spent more than 8 hours, 20% spent 2 to 4 hours and only 12% spent less than two hours [16]. The present study even though could not find any association between genders mode of internet access had an association with usage of OSN ($p=0.034$)

Dependency on online social network sites has become a major problem among youth populations. It is important to raise awareness about the emerging problems of dependency on online social network sites and help the youth to find strategies to stay safe while using social network sites.

Self-reported questionnaires and self-construction of tool may contribute to minor errors in findings. A non-probability sampling could decrease the generalizability of the findings.

Conclusion

Online social networking is the latest trend for virtual communication throughout the world. It is inexpensive, free and easy to use. The adolescents find solace in these sites as they are able to express their ideas and concerns freely. Due to the easy availability of these sites there can be a high chance for the users to get psychologically dependent on these sites. Students of 18 to 24 years of age are considered to be the most prolific users of OSN sites. Lack of supervision, availability and inadequate knowledge regarding the effects of OSN use can result in dependency and other effects in an individual's life.

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Conflict of interest: nil

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Tables

Table 1: Description of sample characteristics in frequency and percentage

Sample characteristics	Frequency	Percentage(%)
n= 350		
Gender		
Male	118	33.70%
Female	232	66.30%
Place of stay		
Within the campus	214	61.10%
Outside the campus	136	38.90%
Major mode of internet access		
Personal connection	205	58.60%
Internet café	12	03.40%
Using other’s net	12	03.40%
Library	32	09.20%
Cell phone	89	25.40%
Mode of living		
Alone in a room	82	23.40%
with friends	248	70.90%
with family	20	05.70%

Table 2: Time spent browsing online social network usage per day

Duration of OSN usage	Percentage	Mean(hours)	Standard deviation	Standard error
n=350				
<30 mnt	32.9%	1.66	1.62	0.087
30 mnt- 2 hour	43.1%			
>2 hours	24%			

Table 3: Dependency of online social network usage

Dependency	Percentage	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error
n=350				
Non dependent	40%	28.13	7.064	0.378
Dependent	59.4%			
Highly dependent	0.6%			

Table 4: Chi Square computed between OSN usage and selected extraneous variables

Extraneous Variables	OSN Category		(χ^2)	df	p value
	<60.5	>60.5			
n =350					
1.Course					
college of dental sciences	36	42			
college of pharmaceutical sciences	47	37			
College of Nursing	24	39	6.309	4	0.177
college of allied health sciences	68	57			
2.Gender					
Male	56	62			
female	119	113	0.460	1	0.286
3.Mode of stay					
Within campus	107	107			
Outside campus	68	68	0.000	1	0.54
4.Main mode of internet access					
Personal connection	102	103			
Internet café	1	11			
Using other's net connection	6	6	10.44	4	0.034*
library	20	12			
Cell phone	46	43			
5. Mode of living					
Alone	35	47			
With friend	127	121	3.701	2	0.157
With family	13	7			

FIGURES

Figure 1: Description of reasons for usage of online social networking usage

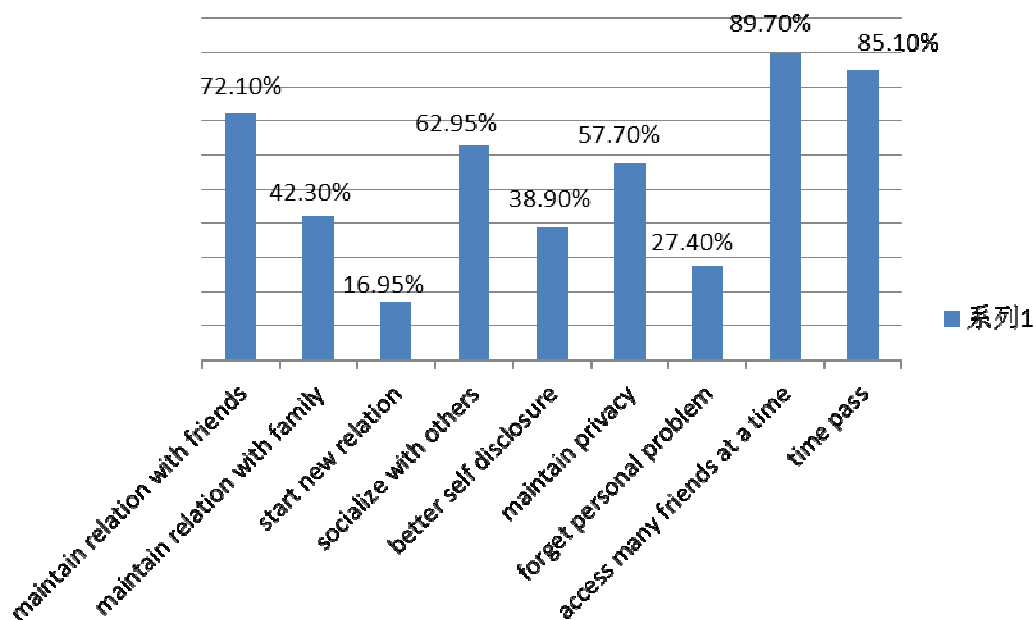


Fig1: Bar diagram showing reasons for using online social network sites

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