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A REVIEW ON SOCIOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF SOCIAL NETWORKING

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Abstract— The evolution of networking and social networking has altered the way in which people interact in the real world. There has been a great impact of these modern technologies on the basic structure, psychological aspects, sociological aspects, behavior and nature of human personality. In this paper, focus is laid on the aspects of social networking including the impacts on various domains of society. This paper presents advantages and disadvantages of social networking to derive an overview of sociological impacts of social networking. A research study is also framed at the end of this paper which shows the social media gender gap and usage of social networking sites by people of different age groups.

Keywords— Networking, Social Networking, Social Networking Services (SNS).

I. INTRODUCTION

We are witnessing the beginning of a new era of Networking over internet called social networking. “The creation and maintenance of personal and business relationships especially online is what is known as SOCIAL NETWORKING” [1]. Generally, we think of social networking as the interconnection of different users where they are connected in order to share their opinions or simply to be connected socially. Internet is bringing in a large number of novel applications that promise to improve the quality of our lives. Nowadays, a person can remain connected to any other person sitting in any corner of the world. Two remotest people require at maximum four intermediate connection nodes to be connected in a social network over any social networking site (SNS). The use of social networking sites has its own advantages and disadvantages based on the usage. Social networking has brought with it the entirely new way of socializing with people over internet. Since social networking provides us better platform of employing the diverse applications as and when required, we ought to check its disadvantages as well. Particularly in the case of social networking we observe that excessive use and its negative influence is creating many worse effects on the society. The structure of the paper is organized as follows. Social networking and its components are discussed in section II. Also, detailed overview of sociological aspects and social

networking and the pros and cons of using SNS is discussed in the same section. In section III, impacts of social networking on users of different age groups and genders are focused. In section IV, overall analysis is given based on statistics and research regarding social networking.

II. OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL NETWORKING

Social networking is the practice of expanding one's business and/or social contacts by making connections through individuals. While social networking has been there almost as long as societies themselves have existed, the unparalleled potential of the internet is now being fully recognized and exploited, which is being done through Web-based groups established for that purpose.

Technology introduces advancements and information that plays an important part in helping a society to fulfill its various objectives. No matter what those goals are, it is always a prime focus to accomplish them. Nowadays, people seem to be making connections on a much broader scale with the help of advanced and extremely sophisticated technology. They are interacting in many different and creative ways [2]. However, it is important to understand that if sociology and its relationship to technology fails, the fault lies with the people. Technology is created and maintained by humans but if something goes wrong on the side of technology, it is irrational to blame the technology itself. The responsibility here lies with the people. Also we are aware that the people are the ones who deserve the credit when everything works out well. No matter how technologically advanced the social media channels are, progress is not possible without human involvement.

A **social networking service** (also social networking site or SNS) is a platform to build social networks or social relations among people who share similar interests, activities, backgrounds or real-life connections over internet. A social networking service consists of a representation of each user profile, his or her social links, and a variety of additional services. Figure 1 shows an overview of social network structure. Social networking sites are web-based services that allow individuals to create a public profile, create a list of users with whom he has to share connections, and view and cross the connections within the system. Most social network services provide means for users to interact over the Internet,

such as e-mail and instant messaging (like Facebook, Whatsapp, Viber etc). The varied Social networking sites incorporate new information and communication tools such as mobile connectivity, photo/video/audio sharing and blogging. Online community services are also sometimes considered to be social networking service, though in a broader sense, social networking service usually means an individual-centered service whereas online community services are group-centered. Social networking sites allow users to share various ideas, pictures, posts, activities, and events with the people in their network [3].



Fig. 1. A Social Network Structure

A. Components of Social Networking –

Over the time from ages, the present system has evolved from Information Age to Communication Age and the present Networking Age. The internet offers a wide variety of communication tools. People use facilities like search engines, web pages, e-mails, e-books, e-journals, e-newspapers, internet banking, internet telephony, conferencing, multimedia sharing, online news rooms, gaming, shopping, blogging, and social networking. Today internet is an essential communication medium in professional as well as personal life [4]. Fig 2 shows the various components of social networking. Some of the basic components of social networking are mentioned below:

- Relationship networks (Facebook, Viber, Hike etc).
- Media sharing networks
- Discussion forums
- E-commerce

- Bookmarking sites
- Online reviews
- Interest based networks (Personal Blogs)

With the huge number of people involved with social networking, it becomes a prime concern to note how they are influenced by each other in many different ways. Human beings need to communicate over different networks. It is one of the major sources of happiness and fulfillment, and the more they interact, the more satisfied they are going to feel.

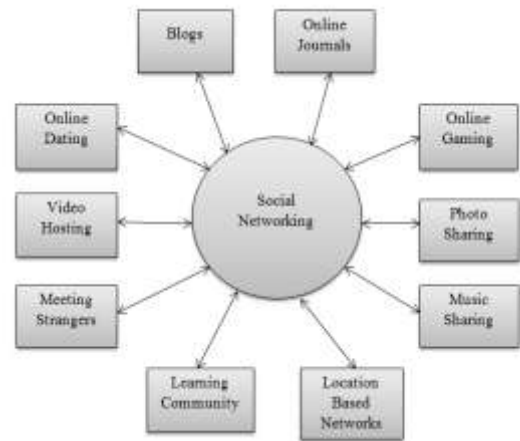


Fig. 2. Components of Social Networking

When people engage in social networking, there is no doubt that they have a tremendous impact on each other. The discussions that come out of the networking experiences very often affect the decisions that they make in life and in business on themselves.

It is very important for people to recognize and appreciate how much other people influence them and how much that enriches their own experience. It has been proven to be a fact that conscious and subconscious behaviors of people dramatically increase when they are involved through social networking. Many people will share qualities, both positive and negative because humans are emotionally dependent on each other [2].

With its ease of access and huge participation of users it is very easy to get carried away with social networking. However, it is better to tread carefully and be aware of the policies including pros and cons before connecting with SNS.

B. Sociological Aspects and Social Networking –



The increasing usage of SNS has huge impacts on interpersonal relationships of people, which is the major concern of the present article. SNS influence the interpersonal relationships in many ways. Through SNS, users come to meet other people and these people can affect the user's relationships and this influence can either be positive or negative. An interpersonal relationship is a long-term association based on emotions like love, liking, regular business interactions, or some other type of social commitments. Interpersonal relationships take place in a great variety of contexts, such as family, friends, marriage acquaintances, work, and neighbourhoods. They may be regulated by law, custom, or mutual agreement. Their increasing impacts on human relationships caught the attention of social scientists worldwide [4].

When used effectively, social networking can have all the benefits as desired. It can also help to reach a high number of potential customers in business domain.

a. Pros of Social Networking -

Potential advantages of social networking can include [5]:

- **Inexpensive means for socialising-** A Social Networking Site is a virtual place where people chill out and share their experiences and thoughts about anything. Most of such sites offer free of cost membership.
- **Creation of positive self-image-** On social networking sites one has to create his profile. People can showcase the best image of themselves by putting their best qualities online.
- **Online presence-** By being a part of online site, a user can flaunt his/her abilities by being active in different social activities. This boosts one's self confidence or self-esteem.
- **Source of self-promotion-** Some people use networking sites to promote their blogs or to post bulletins and updates. Some may also use them to promote their skills and showcase them to larger number of people following them over these sites. Those looking for a job may also put their resume over these sites to attract different firms that may come across.
- **Business promotion-** One can also promote his/her business to a greater extent by being a part of social networking sites.

b. Cons of Social Networking -

The use of social networking sites has alarmingly increased

from past few years. Social networking sites have tremendous users who derive utmost advantage from them. However, its use has had many negative impacts on the people of all ages, from a child to an elderly person. Some of the possible disadvantages we should be aware of are [5]:

- **Social networking addiction-** Using social networking sites can turn a user into an addicted user as it has a tendency to become an addiction. Establishing social connections online consume a lot of time. It adversely affects a person's health and productivity.
- **Privacy issues-** Keeping your personal information on your profile can be dangerous as it may lead to identity theft also.
- **Spamming-** On social networking sites anyone can sell somebody's personal information to some other person. There are many online predators who always do something illegal.
- **Copyright infringement-** Copyright policies are violated by many people by using other person's data or work.
- **Online Bullying-** Some people may also become victim of online bullying.
- **Spreading Negative sentiments-** Some people who may share some negative news or anti-social information to its online audience and it can spread like a bush-fire.

III. IMPACTS OF SOCIAL NETWORKING

Social networking has had impacts on many aspects and domains of society. The impacts are discussed below:

1. Impacts of SNS on Society -

By now, we are all aware that social networking has had a tremendous impact on our culture, in business, and on the world at large. Social networking sites are increasingly used to keep up with close social ties. Some of the social networking sites are the most popular threats on the Internet. They have totally revolutionized the way people communicate and socialize on the Internet [6]. Social networking affects our lives in many ways, including our communication, self-expression, bullying, isolation, friendships, and even our very own sense of humanity.



Social networks, such as Facebook, were created for the sole purpose of helping individuals communicate. It is also seen that Facebook revives “dormant” relationships. Many people use social networks to talk to their friends in other cities, states, or even other countries. These networks not only allow communication between friends, but allow you to meet new people. With the constant use of SNS, less people are communicating in person. Many people are becoming more isolated due to the lack of personal interaction. It is becoming easier to go through life with less personal confrontations. Many people are becoming used to only conversing through their computers or mobile phones [7].

2. Mental Impacts of Social Networking -

While there are several reasons for being a part of social networking, it appears that its main function is to increase contact with friends and family along with increased engagement in social activities. However, research has shown that young adults with a strong inclination towards Facebook were more likely to exhibit antisocial behavior; while excessive use of social media was also found to be strongly linked to underachievement at school. Several studies have shown that social networking – Facebook in particular – can have detrimental effects on our wellbeing. Researchers from the University of Michigan assessed Facebook usage over a fortnight and found that the more people that used it, the more negativity they experienced; as well as over time, it resulted in higher levels of dissatisfaction with their life overall [8].

People, especially youth, use social network tools such as Facebook to maintain existing relationships and establish new ties with like-minded others. Furthermore, social network users influence one another as their identification and emotional attachment with the group increases. Frequent social media use may take a toll on a young person's psychological well-being. The research from Ottawa Public Health, the city of Ottawa's agency for health information, programs and services finds that teens who use social media sites for two hours or more per day are significantly more likely to suffer from poor mental health, psychological distress and suicidal thoughts [9].

3. Impact on Politics -

Every politician needs assistance of social media/networking to promote himself and be an active participant in other social dealings. Also social websites have played an important role in many elections around the world, including in the U.S., Iran, and India. They have also served to rally people for a cause, and have inspired many mass movements and political unrest in many countries [6]. Social networking sites have become an important additional arena for politics. They are a resource for political news, information, finding like-minded issue-oriented people, and a tool for voter outreach in the run-up to elections.

4. Impact on Business -

Companies are using social media to advertise their products, build customer loyalty and many other functions. Interactions and feedback from customers help businessmen to understand the market, and organize their products and strategies. Many firms organize contests and give away prizes to enthruse consumers to visit their social website page more often. Compared to television advertisements and other expensive forms of marketing, social media presence is a cheap and effective means to enhance brand image and popularity [6].

5. Impact on Socialization -

Social networks offer the opportunity for people to re-connect with their old friends and acquaintances, make new friends, trade ideas, share content and pictures, and many other activities. Users can stay abreast of the latest global and local developments, and participate in campaigns and activities of their choice. Professionals use social SNS like LinkedIn to enhance their career and business prospects. Students can collaborate with their peers to improve their academic proficiency and communication skills. User can learn about different cultures and societies by connecting with people in other countries.

6. Cyber Bullying and Online Harassment -

If you are not careful enough, people can target you for cyber bullying and harassment on social sites. School children, young girls, and women can fall prey to online attacks which can create a lot of tension. Some people can harass and even threaten users over internet. If someone is a victim of cyber bullying, he must not show any negligence, try to take appropriate legal action against the attacker immediately [6].

7. Impact on Productivity -

If people are not careful enough, they can be targeted for cyber bullying and harassment on social sites. School children, young girls, and women can fall prey to online attacks which can create a lot of tension. Some people can harass and even threaten users over internet. If someone is a victim of cyber bullying, he must not show any negligence, try to take appropriate legal action against the attacker immediately [6].

8. Impact on Privacy -

If you are not careful enough, people can target you for cyber bullying and harassment on social sites. School children, young girls, and women can fall prey to online attacks which can create a lot of tension. Some people can harass and even threaten users over internet. If someone is a victim of cyber bullying, he must not show any negligence, try to take appropriate legal action against the attacker immediately [6].



9. Social Networking for Elderly People -

Seniors and their families often live far apart today, which can lead to anxiety on both sides, particularly when the elder family members are living on their own. We have all heard — and too many have even experienced — stories of senior family members falling in their homes, missing critical prescription drugs, or going without eating for days, all without anyone knowing until it became a serious problem. The importance of socializing as part of a community cannot be overstated, particularly for seniors spending much of their time living isolated at home. It can be critical for those unable to get out of the house to be with others [10]. Social networking gives seniors and their family caregivers a convenient way to check in daily, or on whatever frequency is desired, creating peace of mind on both ends of the communications. Besides this with growing age i.e. above 60 years, usually people start feeling lonely. After retirement from their jobs, when they begin to put up at home mostly, they fall sick of being idle and away from other human interactions. Social networking can not only become a way of interacting with people for them but can also help in eradicating various anxiety disorders that the elderly people may otherwise have to face.

IV. ANALYSIS

We recognize that there is a variation in how people use SNS, in the types of platforms that are available, and the types of people that are attracted to different sites. In a new survey conducted in September 2014, the Pew Research Center found that Facebook remains by far the most popular social media site. While its growth has slowed, the level of user engagement with the platform has increased. Other platforms like Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and LinkedIn saw significant increases over the past year in the proportion of online adults who now use these sites [11]. Fig 3 shows the varying percentage of users of social websites like Facebook, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Instagram and Twitter from 2012 to 2014.

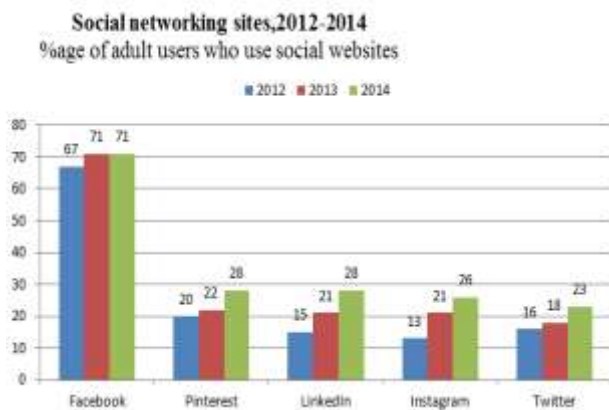


Fig. 3. Users of Social Websites

In the same statistical research project, it was found that between February 2005 and August 2006, the use of social networking sites among young adult internet users of ages 18-29 jumped from 9% to 49%. In May 2013, 74% of women were users of social networking sites, compared with 62% of men. Also the study shows that Internet users under 50 are particularly likely to use a social networking site of any kind, and those between 18-29 are most likely cohort to do so (89%). For users of age 30-49 the percentage counts to 82%. Women are more likely than men to be on these sites. People living in urban areas are also significantly more likely than rural internet users to use social networking [11]. There may be many reasons for the variations in use within different age groups like their interests, emotional variations, knowledge of using the applications etc.

New study of the project conducted in 2015 shows that some 73% of online men use social media, which is on par with the 80% of online women who say they do so. Also the users of SNS between ages 18-29 were found to have increased from 89% in 2014 to 90% in 2015. Fig 4 shows the change in percentage of users of online networking sites depending on the gender. We can see that the social media gender gap has narrowed from 2010 to 2015.

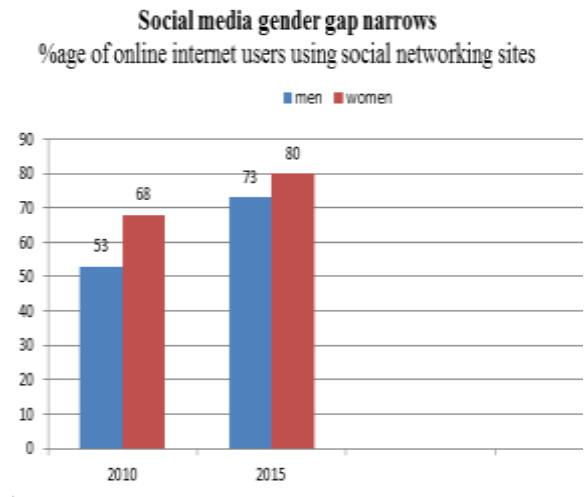


Fig. 4. Social Media Gender Gap

The percentage of social networking site users of different ages are shown in Figure 5. It includes majority of the data till year 2015. The analysis on this data helps us to evaluate the fluctuations in the usage of social networking in different age groups over the period of a decade.



Year	18-29	30-49	50-64	65 or older
2005	12	8	5	2
2006	41	6	3	0
2008	63	27	9	2
2009	72	44	22	7
2010	78	53	33	11
2011	80	60	37	13
2012	83	67	43	19
2013	88	73	52	26
2014	84	77	52	27
2015	90	77	51	35

Fig. 5. SNS Users from 2005-2015

In 2015, it was found that 90% of young adults use social media, compared with 12% in 2005, therefore showing a 78-percentage point increase. Also, there has been a 69-point bump among those of ages 30-49, from 8% in 2005 to 77% in 2015. The drift in the percentage of users of different ages from the year 2005-2015 is shown in Fig 6.

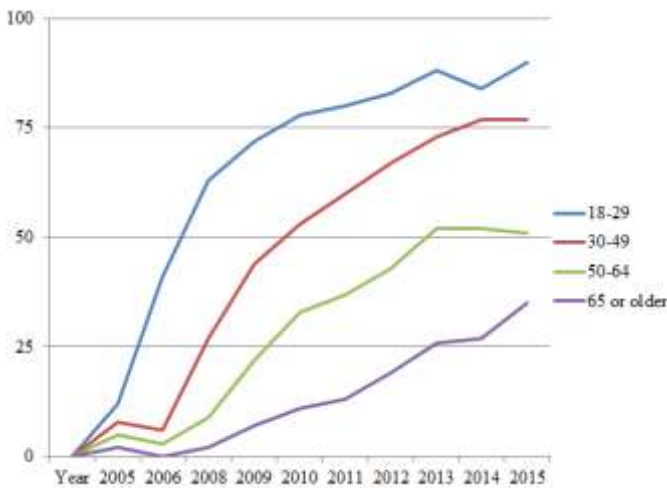


Fig. 5. Percentage of Social Networking Site Users

V. CONCLUSION

The use of SNS has become a necessity these days. Social networking allows users to save time and narrows the overhead of distance in order to connect to different people. The use of social networking can both be advantageous and disadvantageous to various sections of society. However, it simply depends on the usage. As discussed, there are many cons to social networking, yet the pros if manifested properly can make our planet a better and smooth place to live on. Users need to manage the usage properly to ensure that they are benefited completely without causing any adverse effects.

Therefore, we need to address to the negatives and extend the norms of positives to fullest both in the case of people and scientific technologies to make social networking a healthy environment. Sociological impacts of SNS are very important, particularly for humans, since they can enhance their life in a very better way and can also result in various ill effects.

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