

Social Networking and Cultural Impacts: Insights from Indian University Students

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Citation: Uttam Kumar Panda, et al. (2023), Social Networking and Cultural Impacts: Insights from Indian University Students, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 29 (4) 3955-3959

Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v29i4.8715

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received Date: 2 August 2023 Accepted Date: 6 October 2023 Published Date: 14 December 2023	India is one of the world's fastest-growing nations in terms of information and communication technology advancement, which is connected to three major technological components: computers, mobile phones, and the internet. The introduction of broadband internet services has led to the widespread usage of Social Networking Sites (SNS) such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and others. These SNSs have also impacted the social, cultural, and economic lives of Indian university students. This paper uses social media (SM) and SNS interchangeably. SNSs have occupied many students' valuable time and have had varying degrees of impact on their social, personal, cultural, and economic lives. It was vital to ascertain the extent and way SNS has culturally affected the university students of Raipur City, India. The study was carried out with a sample size of 380 students. According to the survey, 84.2% of students believe that SNS as a potent medium has contributed to today's educated youth's socio-cultural integration and camaraderie. SNS is, therefore, valid for fostering social cohesion, cultural integration, and social integration. The study found that most students (77.7%) use social networking sites to meet people worldwide and gain knowledge about their diverse cultures. As a result, it demonstrates the contribution of social media to students' cultural integration both within and outside the national borders, regardless of their social and cultural backgrounds. Most students (78.4%) think that social media helps value integration among youth and promotes local cultures around the world. Therefore, societies are evolving into a global society via such integration and promotion of values.
	Keywords: social networking, social media, SNS, university students, cultural impacts

Introduction

Media includes print, electronic, and social media in a broad sense. Print media such as books, newspapers, and magazines existed in the late fifteenth century. Electronic media such as gramophone, magnetic tapes, radio, TV, Internet, and cassettes were available from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Conventionally, listening to the radio started in the first decade of the twentieth century (1910). Watching television began around the mid-twentieth century (1950), the internet in 1990, cellular phones in around 2000, and smartphones in 2012. Social media, otherwise, SNS as online media, came into reality in 1997 and became trendy in 2005. In the last few years, the expanded media and advanced technology have greatly influenced people's communication in their everyday lives. The use of SNS today has tremendously increased worldwide. Over the years, students' social networking has become more popular through various social media platforms. Networking through social media platforms makes people feel affiliated with a superior community. Social Networking Sites usually influence education, entertainment, friendship, health, crime, culture, etc.

Growth of Social Media

Social media, SNS, or online media, appeared in 1997 and became popular in 2005. The first social media was "Sixdegrees.com." There are hundreds of SM/SNS available these days. Some social sites like LinkedIn (2003),

YouTube (2005), Facebook & Twitter (2006), WhatsApp (2009); Instagram (2010), Tik Tok (2016), MX Taka Tak (2020), etcetera have become very popular among youth and university students worldwide. According to Tupat and Panda (2021), "the connection between university students and social media has enormously increased worldwide " over a period. Consequentially, social media has had several creative and adverse impacts on college and university students regarding their academic performance, well-being, health, personal interaction, etc. As per the current statistics released in January 2021, India has 320 million Facebook users, the highest among all countries globally.

Almost 71 percent of the Indian Facebook users belong to the 18-34 years of age group. YouTube is the second most popular social media platform, with two billion users globally, and India has 225 million active YouTube users. This trend speaks a volume about the usefulness of these online platforms. Undoubtedly, social media, more often recognized as Social Networking Sites, have created a virtual community feeling for its users. SNS provides a platform to make new friends and contacts, not only on the campus but also outside the university and college campus. The students are involved in social capital formation for their future motives and career." The world population in 2021 is almost 7.9 billion, of which 4.5 billion are internet users. In addition, 4.3 billion people have social media accounts, and 99% of social media users visit these sites through mobile apps. This data equally talks about the penetration of smartphones. According to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) Report 2021, there are 450 million SNS users in India. The most popular SNS in India is Facebook, which has 320 million users. The second most popular is YouTube, which has 230 million users. As TRAI reveals, about 170 million of the teenage population in India use SNS/social media. The legal age to join social media is 18 years in India. However, many school-going children before age 18 join these platforms because of their easy access and availability in mobile apps. 31% of internet users belong to the age group of 12-19 years in India. It is visible that social media has a vast cultural impact on people irrespective of age, gender, and education.

Often, SM is as popular as SNS everywhere in India. Prominently, selected few like Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram are the most popular among university and college students in India. These networking sites have adverse and advantageous cultural impacts on students. These sites are cost-effective and comparatively less controlled than print and electronic media. Social media gives world exposure to an ordinary person. Social media penetration has always been an increasing trend across countries. Social media has become helpful for students on many fronts, starting with their interaction patterns, careers, and public life. At times, these platforms also have an extraordinary impact on their users. Students make friends within the university, college, and outside the national boundaries with just a click, which has its sui-generis cultural impacts on them. This paper is an empirical work exploring how SNS has culturally impacted the university-level students in Raipur City.

Views from literature

Various studies have identified both the pros and cons of social media on students' academic performance and their social, economic, and cultural aspects. Putnam (2004) says that spending time on social media sites may be beneficial in various ways. Individuals who invest time in social networks build trust and reciprocity standards, which are essential for successful community involvement. In other words, trust makes it easier to collaborate with others on similar problems. Williams (2006) investigated the temporal displacement theory, which ignores the distinctions between conventional and new interactive media. According to him, people cannot speak with one another when watching television. People can communicate using e-mail, chat services, and social networking sites. He went on to say that the interactions people do inside social networks can predict distinct types of social capital. Individuals in weak-tie connections do not reap the benefits of bonding social capital, such as emotional support, arising from strong-tie networks' interdependence and similarities. Valkenburg and Peter (2007) stated that online communication fosters intimacy among friends, which improves well-being. As a result, although numerous studies have found detrimental societal consequences, virtual contact cannot be ignored. Cain (2008): SNS gives users a more extensive range of options. Users may freely communicate their opinions to many people on this worldwide platform. News, educational materials, and similar things, such as movies and photos, can be posted here. It is free to excite students in terms of communication and data exchange. This is how social media affects students' financial well-being. Mahajan (2009) sought to explore the implications of SNS in Indian society. She looked at some of the most popular SNS and found examples of individuals using them to speak out against harmful parts of their culture. Ahn (2011): Quoting Wellman et al. in his study, he stated that "hypothetically, social networking sites can widen a person's social networks and provide access to valuable resources, information, and social support. Ahmad (2011): SNS has several "advantages for their users, it enables the community to keep in touch with their peers and link with old ones and help to find new friends according to the user's interest from all around the world, and a large number of persons are linking with these networks." Jain et al. (2012): Students benefit from chatting through Facebook with other students, teachers, and external sources to acquire knowledge. Therefore, there is a cost-benefit economic link. Sponcil M. et al. (2013) stated that SNS users can manage their interactions within their schedule by choosing when they want to read and respond. Tayseer M. et al. (2014) predicted that students who spent more time on social sites would have low-Grade Points. "Students with high GPAs spend more time on social sites. They thought this might be due to good time management. Hsu, Meng-

Hsiang, et al. (2015) focused on the moderating effects of cultural differences and socio-economic status on the relation between these motivational factors and continuance intention. The results show that information-seeking has a stronger effect on users' continuance intention from individualistic cultures. At the same time, socialization has stronger influences on the continuance intention for users from collectivistic cultures". Lakitta D. et al. (2016): Their study found that "the undergraduate students have experienced cyberbullying. Raut and Patil (2016) observed that social media had negatively impacted students regarding political, economic, educational, and social behaviours. Lad, H. (2017) believed that social media facilitates the formation and sharing of information and thoughts of students with virtual communities and networks. Patiyl and Bala (2018) affirmed that social networking sites help students build their career, personal and professional relationships. Peled (2019) observed a significant relationship between cyberbullying through instant messaging and undergraduate students' academic, social-cultural, and emotional development. Stegner (2020) noticed some of the negative impacts of social media on students' physical and mental health. The adverse effects are depression, anxiety, unhealthy sleep patterns, cyberbullying, unconstructive body image, general infatuation, etc. The study also mentions some of the positive cultural impacts as well. Gola, M. (2020) found that social media is a great online learning platform for students. "Social media helps the education systems and students in many ways. It offers opportunities to share knowledge and experience fun and excitingly. Social media is a collaborative platform which promotes independent learning in students, news and updates, digital literacy, communication, reading, and presentation skills". Prajapati (2021) observed that youth and teenagers are especially susceptible to potential harm from social media usage. If not recognized and handled on time, the negative impacts of social media can be risky to health and social well-being. Wade (2021) argued in favour of social media use in the education system. School, college, and university staff should be encouraged to use digital technology for student and parent communication.

Methodology

This paper is based on an empirical study conducted in 2019 using partly quantitative and partly qualitative techniques. Quantitative data was obtained through the interview technique, and an interview schedule was used as a significant tool in the study. Some qualitative analysis was conducted to analyze the respondents' attitudes to specific research questions. The study was conducted in Raipur, the capital city of Chhattisgarh State of India. Both government and private higher education institutions were part of the study. The students were interviewed to determine the cultural impacts of social media on them. The students of UG and PG were considered unit students in this study. The students belonging to the age group of 18-25 years were part of the study. A simple random sampling method determined the sample size (380). A Likert-type five-point scale was used to understand the attitudes and opinions of the respondents on how social media has impacted university students socially and culturally.

Outcomes

- A significant percentage of Indian university students (84.2%) approve that SNS as a powerful platform has played its role in the socio-cultural integration and solidarity of present youth. Thus, social media can be considered a social and cultural integration tool.
- Considering the empirical facts, it can be generalized that most college and university students (77.7%) use social networking sites to make new friends from different cultural backgrounds, which helps them learn about other cultures. Thus, it can be believed that social media and social networking sites enhance the integration of students from different social and cultural backgrounds within and outside the national boundary.
- Most college and university students (86%) affirm that students use social networking sites for entertainment, refreshment of mind, and fun. Thus, it can be said that social media has enough for entertainment, mind relaxation, and fun.
- Based on the field data, it could be interpreted that many students (44.8%) believe that social media has failed to uphold morality in contemporary society. Therefore, it can be said that social media is also responsible for the degradation of moral values in society.
- It was observed that most university students (77.4%) recognize that social networking sites have been promoting the ability to think and express in English more often than in any other language of India. Thus, it can be interpreted that social media, on the one hand, has positively contributed to enhancing students' thinking ability and expression. Conversely, social media have ignored the enhancement of regional languages and focused on English.
- Further, most university students (69.2%) believed that social media had influenced students' dressing styles and appearance in the public sphere.
- Many students (60.5%) admitted that social media had influenced their public behaviour patterns and attitudes.
- People recognize the role of social media in cultural value addition. In this study, most university students (78.4%) believed social media promotes many cultures globally, creating value integration among the youth. So, society is becoming a global society through such value integration. Very little difference was observed between the professional and non-professional students on this point.

- Several students (68.4%) believe social media has promoted a culture of integrated world civilization through its users. However, almost 22% of students were ambiguous that social media has fostered a culture of integrated world civilization through its users
- Most students (66.8%) believed that social media platforms were comparatively less regulated than other forms of media. That's why a lot of illegal content is visible on social media. Notably, most students (87.6%) found social networking sites helpful in their academic activities. Only a few of them (3.7%) either did not find social networking sites helpful for their educational activities or were not sure (8.7%) whether social networking sites were beneficial or not beneficial to them in their academic activities. The websites the students used most for academic purposes (71.6%) were Google and YouTube (12.4%).
- Most university students (93.9%) agreed that they used social media platforms like many others for searching/sharing study materials and video lectures. Many respondents (92.3%) agreed that SNS had become a significant source of information, discussion, and knowledge-sharing platform for them. Thus, social media allows everyone to discover knowledge and contacts as they exchange information and collaborate, making it an ideal complement to knowledge management.
- Based on the field data and facts, it is observed that most university students (63.9%) still prioritize interaction in person over the virtual mode of interaction even though SNS has occupied a significant space in their lives. Thus, the virtual way of interaction can't be a total replacement for interactions in person, either with family members or friends. However, about 66.3% of students admitted that social media has somehow reduced their face-to-face interaction with others and has made them addicted to virtual interaction. Thus, the virtual interaction model is the new normal in contemporary times.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Students acknowledge that social networking sites have enhanced their social status, well-being, self-esteem, and happiness and created their digital identity. Interaction through social networking sites has enhanced the ability of students to think and express themselves in the public sphere. It is concluded that social media has played a positive role as an agency for social integration, cultural integration, and social solidarity in the local to global sphere. Students believe that social media helps them to imbibe qualities like tolerance, responsibility in public life, and changing stereotypes and attitudes. It is also necessary to say that social media platforms must regulate unwarranted, sexual, violence-provoking, and defamatory content within a very minimum time, and the user's account must be deactivated immediately. Artificial intelligence technology may play a role in bringing transparency and legitimacy to SNS content control.

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