

ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING IN RECENT ERA

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ABSTRACT

We are living in Cyber or Networking Age. The advancements in the field of communication technology created a world with no boundary or limitations. We have witnessed the immense power of the internet and now, with the launch of Web 2.0, social networking sites are redefining the communication field of communication.

In India, social networking sites are getting more popular and it has become a vital part of our social life. This study seeks to find out the various dimensions in which social networking sites are used by the student community. Students use social networking sites for their personal and curricular activities.

The study shows that the social networking sites are an integral part of their social life. They use it to maintain and strengthen their offline connections and primarily for communication rather than entertainment. The study also points out the popularity of mobile social networking among the students community.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decades of the 20th century world saw the rapid advancement of information and communication technologies. During this era “communication” is perhaps the most popular term. Today the communication revolution has brought us together regardless of geographical boundaries.

From time to time, we invented new communication technologies for better individual as well as mass communication. First, by the invention of the *Printing technology* the mass communication began its history. Then came the invention of wireless communication; *Radio* was a big leap in the field of communication. Later, the birth of *Television* has made an immense impact all over the world. And, recently, *Internet* or *World Wide Web* has been perhaps the outstanding innovation in the field of communication in the history of mankind.

The rapid expansion of internet has changed the whole scene. It has brought the world into a single room. Right from the news across the corners of the world, wealth of shopping knowledge, a huge scope for job information, lots of opinions to find life partner and information available about any sort of things in the universe known to mankind is at our fingertip. Internet is now used for communication, entertainment and information. This contemporary period has come to be labeled variously as information Age, Communication Age and, the present, Cyber or Networking Age¹. The internet offers a wide variety of communication tools. Billions of people use facilities like search engines, web pages, e-mails, Really Simple Syndication (RSS), e-books, e-journals, e-newspapers, internet banking, internet telephony, conferencing, multi-media

Kumar, Keval J. (1994) *Mass Communication in India*: Mumbai, Jaico Publishing House, p. 1 sharing, online news rooms, gaming, shopping, blogging, social networking etc. Today internet is an essential communication medium in professional as well as personal life.

Among these various tools *Social Networking* is a global phenomenon. Millions now go online to engage in social networks. According to Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia, there are more than 300 *Social Networking Sites (SNS)* and 1.5 billion members worldwide². In recent decades, social networks have grown rapidly. It took 38 years to attract 50 million listeners, 13 years for television to attract 50 million viewers; in 4 years the internet has attracted 50 million surfers³. iPods took 3 years to reach 50 million users, but Facebook, one of the leading social networking sites, added over 200 million users in just 12 months⁴. This shows the penetration capability and popularity of social networking sites.

Social Networking Sites are a type of virtual community that has grown tremendously in popularity. Through social networking people can use network of online friends and group memberships to keep in touch with current friends, reconnect with old friends or create real-like friendships through similar interest or groups. Besides, establishing social relationships, social networking member can share interests and their ideas with other like-minded members by joining groups or forums. They can also participate in discussions through SNS. Members will be updated instantly about their friends and groups. It also offers micro blogging facility. In short, a SNS is a hub for communication, entertainment and information.

This paper includes a broad introduction to *Social Networking Sites*; which includes its definition, origin and development, global and Indian context and brief description about various SNS. This followed by Review of Literature, essential to have a picture of the various studies conducted in this field. Methodology, Findings and Analysis, Discussions and Conclusion, Bibliography and Appendix are the following chapters.

WHAT IS SOCIAL NETWORKING?

Before going to the further details of the study we must understand the phenomenon called *Social Networking* and *Social Networking Sites (SNS)*.

“Social network is a social structure made of individuals or organizations called ‘nodes’, which are tied up by one or more specific types of interdependency, such as friendship, kinship, financial exchange, dislikes or relationships of beliefs, knowledge or prestige⁵.”

Social network analysis has emerged as a key technique in modern sociology. It has also gained significance in communication studies, economics, geography, information science, organizational studies and social psychology. However, our concern is with the internet-based social networking. Here, the ‘nodes’ are the individual actors within the networks and ‘ties’ are the relationship between them. There may be one or more ties between the nodes. In this sense, these individual actors interact or share their interests, ideas or information with others.

⁵ Dutta, Ankuran and Ray, Anamika (2010) *E-Tools: A New Vista for PR*, Vidura, Vol. 2, Issue.3, p. 46.

There are literally thousands of social networking sites available on internet with various technological affordances, supporting a wide range of interests and practices. While their key technological features are fairly consistent, the cultures that emerge around SNSs are varied⁶. Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia, lists more than 300 major social networking sites⁷. These sites give their members a platform to build their own network on the internet.

“Generally we define social networking sites as 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 connection and those made by others within the system⁸.”

As we know, today social networking is no longer a niche phenomenon. Millions of people, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or geographic boundaries, access social networking sites to communicate, share information, thoughts or ideas, keep in touch with friends, find new friends, dates and jobs. Thus, social networks are online service, platform or sites that focus on building and reflecting of social networks or social relations among people⁹.

At the basic level an online social network is an internet community where individuals interact through profiles that represent themselves to others¹⁰. When a person joins a social networking site, he/she begins with creating a profile, which is a list of information about the person.

It may include the person’s name or pseudonym, photograph, birthday, relationship/marital status, hometown, current location, religion, ethnicity, political view, personal interests, activities, hobbies etc. User can post blog entries or updates for others to read or watch. User generated contents (UGC) are the significant feature of SNSs.

⁶ Boyd, Danah M. and Ellison, Nicole B. (2007) *Social Networking Sites: Definition, History and Scholarship*, Journal of Computer Mediated Communication (JCMC), Vol.13, Issue.1.

⁷http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites

⁸ Boyd, Danah M. and Ellison, Nicole B. (2007) *Social Networking Sites: Definition, History and Scholarship*, JCMC, Vol.13, Issue.1.

⁹ www.meetingtomorrow.com/cms-category/computer-glossary

¹⁰ Acquisti, Alessandro and Gress, Ralph (2006) *Imagined Communities: Awareness, Information Sharing and Privacy on the Facebook*: Cambridge, UK, Springer, p.36-58.

The user may search for people they know or other users with similar interests and compile and share a list of contacts, usually as *friends list* or *contact list* or *fans*. They make contacts with other users by sending a *friend request*, which must be accepted by the other user in order to establish a link between them.

‘Friending’ another user gives them access to the information shared in the network and adds them to one’s network and vice versa. The term ‘*friend*’ can be misleading, because the connection does not necessarily mean friendship in the everyday vernacular sense, and the reasons people connect are varied (Boyd, 2006). This is a typical structure of social networking.

Some social networks have additional features, like creating and joining groups that share a common interest or affiliations, upload or stream live videos, hold discussions in forums and post links of other web sites. A *friend* can access this information one shared with his/her network and comment or share it.

Some SNSs allow users to enhance their profiles by adding multimedia content, modules, such as *Facebook Apps*, or modifying their profile's look and feel. What make SNSs unique is not that they allow individuals to meet strangers, but rather that they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks.

This can result in connection between individuals that would not otherwise be made, but that is often not the goal, and these meetings are frequently between “latent ties” (Haythornthwaite, 2005) who share some offline connections. On many of the large SNSs, participants are not necessarily ‘networking’ or looking to meet new people; instead, they are primarily communicating with people who are already a part of their extended social network. To emphasize this articulated social network as a critical organizing feature of these sites, we label them “social networking sites”¹¹.

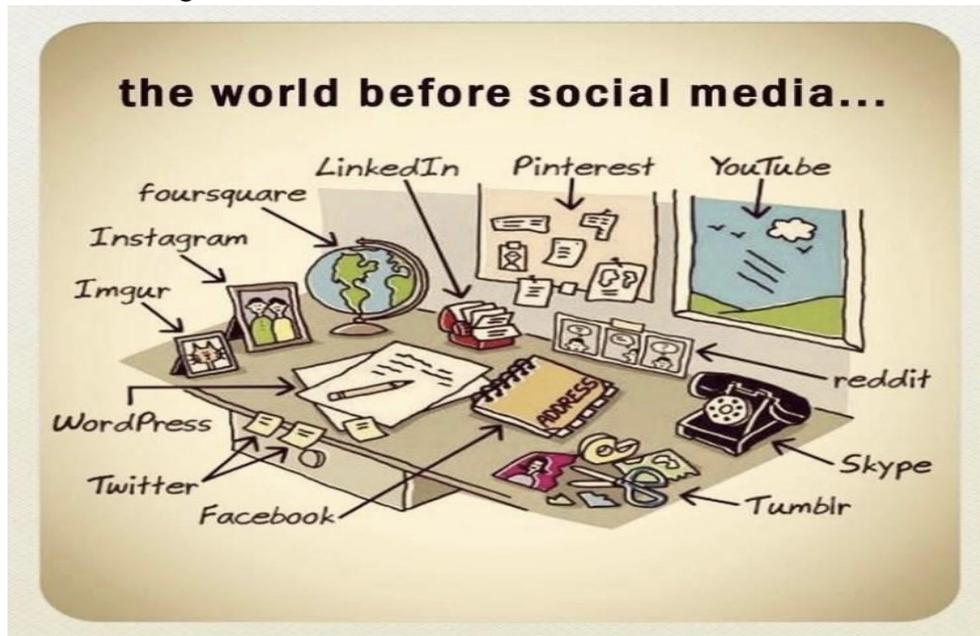


Image source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/G8SgvZP1EZA9hSf9>

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES (SNS): ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

Although the concept of computer based communities dated back to the early days of computer networks, only some years after the advent of internet, social networking have met public and commercial success. Computer network was initially envisioned in the heydays of The Beatles as a military- centric command and control scheme. But as it expanded beyond just a privileged few hubs and nodes, so too did the idea that connected computers might also make a great forum for discussing mutual topics of interest, and perhaps, even meeting or renewing acquaintance with other humans¹².

a. *The Infant Years*

In the 1970s, efforts to support social networks via computer-mediated communication (CMC) were made in many online services, including *Usenet*, *ARPANET*, *LISTSERV*, and *Bulletin Board Services (BBS)*. These online meeting places were effectively independently produced hunks of codes that allowed users to communicate with a central system where they could download files or games and post messages to other users. There were also many other avenues for social interaction, with prototypical features of *SNS*, such as *America Online*, *Prodigy*, and *CompuServe*. Though the technology of the time restricted the flexibility of these

systems, and the end-user's experience, to text-only exchanges of data that crawled along at glacial speed, these services, continued to gain popularity throughout the '80s and well into the '90s, when the internet truly kicked into gear.

¹¹ Boyd, Danah M. and Ellison, Nicole B. (2007) *Social Networking Sites: Definition, History and Scholarship*, JCMC, Vol.13. Issue.1

¹² <http://www.digitaltrend.com/features/the-history-of-social-networking/>

b. *The Adolescence*

The two inventions boosted up the internet were the creation of hypertext in 1990, a system that links together electronic documents, including texts and graphics, which resulted in the establishment of the *World Wide Web* (WWW), and the invention of web browsers in 1993. The first phase of web represents the *Web 1.0*, which according to Tim Barners-Lee could be considered the “read-only” web¹³.

Early social networking on the *World Wide Web* began in the form of generalized online communities such as *Theglobe.com* (1994), *Geocities* (1994) and *Tripod.com* (1995). Many of these early communities focused on bringing people together to interact with each other through chat rooms, and encouraged users to share personal information and ideas via personal web pages by providing easy-to-use publishing tools and free or inexpensive web space. Some communities - such as *Classmates.com* (1995) – took a different approach by simply having people link to each other via e-mail addresses. *Classmates.com* is a social media website created by Randy Conrad. The site helps members find, connect and keep in touch with friends and acquaintances from school life but users could not create profiles or list of friends until years later. In the late 1990s, user profiles became a central feature of SNSs, allowing users to compile lists of “*friends*” and search for other users with similar interests

¹³ Getting, Brian (2007) *Basic Definitions: Web 1.0, Web 2.0 and Web 3.0*, www.practicalecommerce.com/

The Biz Grows Up

In the beginning of the 21st century, the technological refinements brought a new version of web, *Web 2.0*, which helped the boom of internet and social networking. Terry Flew, in his 3rd *Edition of New Media*, describe what he believe to categorize the differences between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0: “...Move from personal website to blogs and blog site aggregation, from publishing to participation, from web content as the outcome of large up-front investment to an ongoing and interactive process, and from content management system to links based on tagging (*folksonomy*)”.

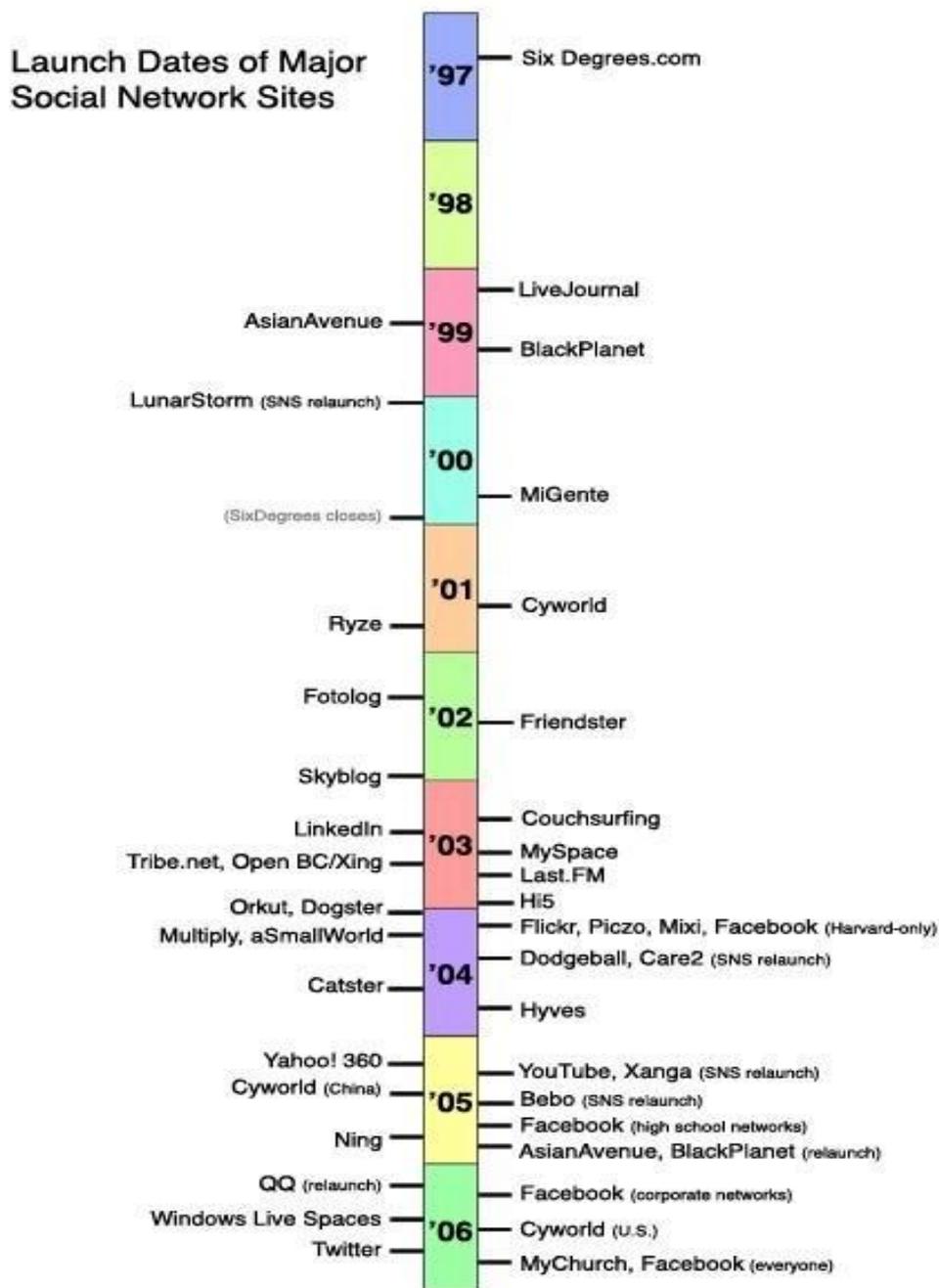
The newer generation of SNS began to flourish with the emergence of the *Friendster* in 2002, which used a degree of separation concept similar to *SixDegrees.com*. Just after its launch, *Friendster* has got more than three million registered users and a ton of investment interest. Though the service has since seen more than its fair share of technical difficulties, questionable management decisions, and a resulting drop in the North American fortunes, it remains a force in Asia, curiously, a near-necessary in the Philippines¹⁷. *LinkedIn*, which took a more serious and sober approach, was launched in 2003. Rather than being a playground for former classmates and teenagers, *LinkedIn* was, and still is, a networking resource for business-people who want to connect with other professionals. A study says that as on 11 February 2010, *LinkedIn* is having more than 60 million registered users from more than 200 countries¹⁸. By 2003, there were numerous SNSs but most of them

did not attract too much attention especially in United States (US) market. For instance, *Xing* were formed for business persons while services like *MyChurch*, *Dogster* and *Couchsurfing* were formed for social service.

¹⁶ Boyd, Danah M. and Ellison, Nicole B. (2007) *Social Networking Sites: Definition, History and Scholarship*. JCMC, Vol.13, Issue.1

¹⁷ <http://www.digitaltrend.com/features/the-history-of-social-networking/>

Table 2.1 Time-line of the launch dates of some of the major Social Networking Sites. (Boyd and Ellison,2007)



SOCIAL NETWORKS: A PLATFORM-UNLIMITED

c. Rewards:

People are communicating more things to more people than ever before. Many of the scholars predicted that 'communication' factor of SNSs will serve as an anchor component for social networks. Today, as we know, people use SNS primarily to be connected with his/her friends and family and to share interests and activities across political, economic and geographical borders. Social networks, which are rapidly becoming the portals of the generation, giving rise to a new form of leisure built around talking, sharing and providing opinions and perspectives.

According to *comScore.com*, approximately two-thirds of the world internet population is regularly visiting social networks²³. This trend is universal. Social networks have become a primary destination for rapidly expanding world of online users for managing and enriching a digital life style. Users are not just communicating through social networks, but they use it to develop their identities, to build a network of real-like relationships, to find information, to share experiences, and self-generated content, to buy products and more. With numerous communication tools, social networks are becoming integrated communication hub. The communication pattern are changing from point-to- point and two-way communications to many-to-many and collaborative communications, augmented with videos, photos and multimedia content that substantially enrich the user experience. Another shift taking place is the shift of control over communication from telecom providers to open internet platform service providers

It's interesting to note that how the telecom companies are responding to the challenges and opportunities of social networking. Many have developed technologies to enable online social networking sites to extending their offerings to the mobile communication environment, to even building their own, proprietary social networks, such as *Aircel Apps* and *Vodafone Connect to Friends*.

²³ <http://www.comscore.com/>

.The so-called *Net Generation* – the digital natives who have grown up in a technology-enabled and internet-connected environment – is at the forefront of shifting social communication patterns. Their preference is for staying connected, sharing, creating content, multitasking, assembling random information into patterns, and using technology in new ways. They are native speakers of technology, fluent in the digital languages of computers, internet and mobile phone, and often living in a state of continuous partial attention. But, still, the shift is not limited to this generation.

d. Dangers:

On the other side of the coin, there are huge threats for SNSs such as issues of identity, control of data, privacy, social capital, youth culture, cyber crimes and education. There have been growing concerns about users giving out too much personal information and threat of sexual predators. Users of these services need to be aware of the data and identity theft and viruses. Recent attack of the virus called *Bom Sabado* on *Orkut* has once again raised the question of safety in cyberspace. Another controversial social networking site, *Quenchup*, harvested email address from users' email accounts for use in a spamming operation. Most of the sites send out notifications if the user is added to another's *friends list*, but they will not notify the user if he/she is removed from a person's *friends list*.

INDIAN SCENE

While we study the Indian scene we should take some peculiar things about the India into consideration. In India only 81 million are internet users as of 2010, i.e.; 6.9% of penetration according to ITU²⁴.

Orkut is the most popular social networking site in India. According to a report on traffic to SNS in India, released by *comScore.com*, *Facebook* grabbed the no.1 ranking in the social network category for the first time in July 2010, with

20.9 million visitors. The report says 84% of total internet users age 13 and above in India visited SNS in July²⁵.

India, now, ranks as the 7th largest markets worldwide for social networking, after the US, China, Germany, Russia, Brazil, and United Kingdom (UK). The total Indian networking audience grows 43% in the past year, more than tripling the rate of growth of total internet audience in India. According to the report, *Orkut* ranked second with 19.9 million visitors and *BharatStudent.com*, a social utility that aims to bring together young Indian students living across the globe, ranked third with 4.4 million visitors, followed by *Yahoo! Pulse* with 3.5 million visitors and *Yahoo! Buzz* with 1.8 million. *Twitter* is growing fast in India, at 239%, but still only had 3.3 million visitors in the country putting it with 5th place.

A recent study by Analysis Mason shows that the number of mobile social network users is expected to reach 72 million by 2014, driven by the reduced costs of smart-phones and the launch of 3G services, which will enhance the

²⁴ <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm>

²⁵ http://www.comscore.com/Press_Events/Press_Releases/2010/8/Facebook_Captures_Top_Spot_among_Social_Networking_Sites_in_India

user experience. The increased number of social network users is driving the number of mobile social network users, representing around 2.2% of the total mobile subscribers²⁶.

The *Net Generation*, we discussed earlier, is only a few compared to the total population of the country. But, still, rising growth rate shows the acceptance and popularity of social networking sites among Indians. “*Social networking phenomenon continues to gain steam worldwide and India represents one of the fastest growing markets*”, says Will Hodgman, Executive Vice President Asia-Pacific of *comScore.com*²⁷. In the words of Amit Kapur, CEO of *MySpace.com*, “*India is at critical point right now where you are going to see internet usage take off*²⁸.”

USES AND GRATIFICATION THEORY: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As an interactive media, social networking sites are generally regarded as suitable for applying the Uses and Gratification theory. The approach views that people use media for many purposes. As media users become increasingly confronted with choices, this approach takes over attention to the using of the audience. According to E. Katz, J. G Blumber and

M. Gurevitch, the central question posed is: *Why do people use media, and what do they use them for?*

²⁶ <http://www.analysismason.com/About-Us/News/Press-releases/mobile-social-networking-in-India-PR/>

²⁷ <http://www.comscore.com/>

²⁸ Tehran, Kulveen (2010) *Power of Social Media*, Article, Vidura.

- Media and content choice is generally rational and directed towards certain specific goals and satisfactions (thus the audience is active and audience formation can be logically explained).
- Audience members are conscious of the media-related needs which arise in personal (individual) and social (shared) circumstances and can voice these in terms of motivations.

STUDENT

Social Network is one of the fastest growing segments of the internet. Students are the majority of the users of internet. They use it for personal and curricular activities. Most of the schools and colleges have internet enabled computer facility for their students. Besides the *Net- Generation*, students are one group that is eager to know the technological advancements and latest trends. They accept these changes with open mind.

²⁹ McQuail, Denis (2005) *McQuail's Mass Communication theory Fifth Edition*: New Delhi, Vistaar Publications, p.423-424.

SCOPE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In recent times, social networks have become very popular. Its social implication can be varied. The social networking has tremendously developed in this era, and has now, become a part of the mainstream culture and daily lives of people. SNS has given a new public space for communication to diverse group of people. As we discussed earlier, communication pattern is also changing from point-to-point and two way communications to point-to-many, many-to-many and collaborative communication. This pattern of interactivity of these online networks facilitates inclusion in the cyberspace compared to the mass communication.

As distance cast shadows on interpersonal communication and mass media becoming increasingly biased, the role of social networks in debates, discussions and dissemination of information need to be given a serious thought particularly among youngsters. This study gives a picture of various dimensions in which *SNSs* are used by the students and thus, it's titled as "*Social Networking among Students*". This study can serve as a guideline for those who involve in future research in this topic. The result of this study will help people to understand and analyze social networking sites.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Online social networking is increasingly the subject of scholarly research. Scholars in many fields have begun to investigate the various aspects of social networking services and the impact of social networking sites. Many studies have been conducted around the world to investigate how these sites may play into issues of identity, privacy, social capital, youth culture and education. An attempt has been made in this chapter to review studies and articles related to the topic. The review of literature allows us to study the trend of similar studies

conducted in the same field. This will give a proper direction to the work and enable integration of the past research leading to the expansion of knowledge.

Alessandro Acquisti and Ralph Gross (2006) conducted a study, titled “*Imagined communities Awareness, information Sharing and Privacy on Facebook*”, to understand underlying demographic or behavioral differences between the communities of the network’s members and non-members and impact of privacy concerns on member’s behavior. In this research, the researchers found out that age and student status are the most important factors in determining the *Facebook* membership, though the privacy concerns also play a role, but only for non-undergraduate students. Majority of the members are aware of the visibility of their profiles and they rely on their own ability to control the information they disseminate. However, they document significant dichotomies between specific privacy concerns and actual information revelation behavior³⁰.

³⁰ Acquisti, Alessandro and Gross, Ralph (2006) *Imagined Communities: Awareness, Information Sharing and Privacy on the Facebook*: Cambridge, UK, Springer, p.36-58.

although blog searching was a useful new technique, the results were sensitive to the choice of search engine. The parameter used and the date of search, quantity of the spam also varies by search engine and search type. Blog searching and web searching are significantly different from each other. Hence information professionals need to understand its strength and its weakness, this study is very helpful for that purpose³³.

Lars Backstrom, Dan Huttenlocher, Jon Kleinberg and Xiangyang Lan (2006) discussed some interesting factors about the evolution of online groups in web communities and *SNSs*. The study conducted to find out (a) the structural features that influence individual to join a community, (b) which communities will grow rapidly and how does the overlapping among pairs of communities change over time? The result tells us that the tendency of individuals to join communities, and of communities to grow rapidly, depends in subtle ways on the underlying network structure. The liking of individual to join a community is influenced not just by the number of friends he/she has in that community, but also crucially how those friends are connected to one another³⁴.

Topper (2007) discussed about the social networking in library. The purpose of the study was to understand the impact that social networking had on the public and academic library. Literature review was the important method adopted for the work and the study found that libraries will have to reach users in their preferred method of communication and they show the value of planning ahead for the future and the ways patrons were accessing information. The younger generation’s perspective on the internet generally

³³ Telwall, Mike and Helser, Laura (2007) *Blog Search Engine: Online Information Review*, Emerald Group Publishing Ltd. Vol.31

³⁴ Backstrom, Lars, Huttenlocher, Dan, Kleinberg, Jon and Lan, Xiangyang (2006) *In KDD '06: Proceedings of the 12th ACM SIGKDD international conference on Knowledge discovery and data mining*: Philadelphia, USA, ACM Press, p.44-54. and on social networking technologies in particular was identified from the study³⁵.

Ellison, Stainfeild and Lampe (2007) discussed about the use of social networking sites. The main objective or purpose of the work was to examine the relationship between use of *Facebook* and the formation and maintenance of social capital. A survey among undergraduate student was conducted and regression analysis was done on the result. Findings of the study revealed that *Facebook* was used more to meet new people or to

maintain and strengthen relationship with offline connection. This study disclosing the fact that online interaction does not necessarily remove people from their offline world but may indeed to be used to support relationship and keep people in contact even when life changes move them away from each other. Very often SNSs are used by the people to keep in touch with people known to us in the real world and to make new contacts in the virtual world³⁶.

Mark R Davis and Barbara A Lee (2008) conducted a study on “*The Legal Implications of Students Use of Social Networking Sites in the UK and US: Current Concerns and Lessons for the Future*”. This provides a comparative snapshot of the current state of the law in the US and UK with respect to potential liability of University and college students for use (and misuse) of SNSs. It reviews the limited case law on this topic, highlighted the differences in the two nations’ law of determination and the various possible legal claims available to individuals allegedly harmed by posting on these SNSs, and concludes that neither country currently offers a satisfactory legal or quasi-

³⁵ Topper, Elisa F. (2007) *What is new in Library: Social networking sites in libraries*: New Library World, Emerald Group Publishing Ltd. Vol.108

³⁶ Ellison, Stainfeild and Lampe (2007) *The benefit of Facebook ‘friends’: Social capital and college students’ use of online social networking sites*: JCMC, Vol.12 legal model for resolving these disputes³⁷. There is scope for such a study in Indian context too.

Anne West, Jane Lewis and Peter Curries (2009) conducted a study on “*Student Facebook ‘friends’: Public and Private Spheres*”. Findings suggest that social networking sites, such as Facebook are associated with new ways of constructing some of the notions surrounding the traditional public/private dichotomy. Notions of what are private and what are public is fuzzy, with no clear-cut public/private dichotomy. Computer mediated communication appears to make this fuzziness more apparent than has hitherto been the case³⁸.

In an article Michael Salter and Chris Bryden (2009) discussed on “*I can see you: Harassment and Stalking on the Internet*”. The authors further consider the potential liabilities of internet service providers (ISPs), web hosts and social networking and chat room forum sites, concluding that a shift in liability for internet harassment from progenitor to facilitator is inevitable³⁹.

Kevin P. Brady, Lori B. Holcomb and Bethany V. Smith (2010) conducted a study, titled as “*The Use of Alternative Use of Social Networking Sites in Higher Education Settings: A Case Study of E-learning Benefits of Ning in Education*”, on the educational benefits associated with the use of SNSs. The study was focused on the graduate students enrolled in distance education courses using *Ning in Education*, a non-commercial, educational-based SNS. The study was

³⁷ Davis, Mark R. and Lee, Barbara A. (2008) *The Legal Implications of Students Use of Social Networking Sites in the UK and US: Current Concerns and Lessons for the Future*: Education and the law, Taylor and Francis Publisher Group, Vol.20

³⁸ West, Anne, Lewis, Jane and Curries, Peter (2009) *Student Facebook ‘friends’: Public and Private Spheres*: Philadelphia, Routledge.

³⁹ Salter, Michael and Bryden, Chris (2007) *I can see you: Harassment and Stalking on the Internet*: Information and Communication Technology Law. Vol.18 based on the students’ attitudes towards the sites as productive online tools for teaching and learning. The researchers found out that education based social networking sites can be used most effectively in distance education courses. They are an excellent technological

tool for improved online communications among students in higher distance education courses⁴⁰.

In an article, “*Understanding the Uses of Social Networks*”, Mikolaj Jan Piskorski (2009) cites that people love to look at pictures, which is the killer application of all online social networks. Piskorski hypothesizes that the people who post pictures of themselves can show they are having fun and are popular without having to boast. Another attraction of photos is that they enable a form of voyeurism. Social networks enable a very delicate way to pry into someone’s life without really prying. He also found out deep gender difference in the use of sites. The biggest usage categories are men looking at women they do not know, followed by men looking at women they do know and women look at other women they know. Overall, women receive two-third of all page views⁴¹.

The present study is similar in nature to some of the studies cited above. The review of these studies by scholarly persons enabled the researcher to gain a better understanding and perspective of the subject.

⁴⁰ Brady, Kevin P., Holcomb, Lori B. and Smith, Bethany V. (2010) *The Use of Alternative Use of Social Networking Sites in Higher Education Settings: A Case Study of E-learning Benefits of Ning in Education: Journal of Interactive Online Learning*, Vol.9, Number.2

⁴¹ Piskorski, Mikolaj Jan (2009) *Understanding the Uses of Social Networks: Working Knowledge*, Harvard Business School

OBJECTIVES & METHODOLOGY

Various studies have been conducted in the field of social networking. Today, Social networking sites are an integral part of the mainstream culture in the western world. In India, SNSs is getting wide acceptance and it has been grew tremendously in the past few years. This study is designed to describe the various dimensions of in which SNSs are used by the student community. This chapter explains the objectives the study along with operational definitions of important terms and the methodology used for the study.

OBJECTIVES.

The broad objective of the study is to show light on uses of social networking sites among students and to find out whether the social networking is a means of entertainment rather than communication. The study also ranks the social networking sites based on their priority among students. To materialize the goal in a meaningful way, the researcher has set some research questions. They are;

1. Which is the most popular social networking site among students?
2. What is their use of various applications of SNSs such as photo/videosharing, status update, chat etc.?
3. Do the students use communities/groups for active participation?
4. Are SNSs predominantly used for entertainment purpose or for personal/group communication?
5. Why do they use social networking sites?

6. Are they familiar with mobile social networking?
7. Do they have a high awareness about the privacy issues in SNSs?
8. Is there any difference between professional and non-professional students in using the social networking sites?

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

9. Social Networking Sites (SNS): Social networking sites 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.
10. Student: According to Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, student is the person who is learning at a school or college or university. For the purpose of this study, researcher selected students from professional and non-professional colleges in the age group of 18-22 years.
11. User Generated Content (UGC): It is online content created by the users or members of social networking site. E.g. photos, videos, blog posts etc.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The nature of this study demands survey method. *A survey research studies large and small populations (or universe) by selecting and studying samples chosen from the population to discover the relative incidence, distribution and inter-relations of sociological and psychological variables*⁴².

The important goal of any scientific survey research is to describe the nature of a population. "A *population is any set of persons or objects that possesses at least one common characteristic*⁴³." The survey research focuses on the vital facts of people, and their beliefs, opinions, attitude, motivation and behavior. Studying the whole population is not possible for all researches. So we take a representative sample or a sample that reflects all major characteristics of the population you want to represent. It does not mean that the sample taken is a representative, but, rather we are considering it to be a representative of the population⁴⁴. Survey method is most suitable for understanding the users'

⁴² Kerlinger, Fred N. (1983) *Foundation of Behavioral Research*: New Delhi, Surjeet Publications, p.410⁴³

Busha, Charles H. and Harter, Stephen P. (1980) *Research Methods in Librarianship: Technique and Interpretation*: Orlando, FL: Academic Press Inc.

⁴⁴ Kerlinger, Fred N. (1983) *Foundation of Behavioral Research*: New Delhi, Surjeet Publications, p.118

SAMPLING

For the study a purposive sample of 100 respondents were taken. "In purposive sampling the organizers of

enquiry purposively chose the particular unit of a universe for constituting a sample on the basis that the small mass that they so selected out of huge one will be typical or representative of the whole⁴⁵.

The study is focused on the students of professional courses and non- professional courses. The student community is the one group, in our society, eager to know the new technologies and they adapt to it too fast. Out of the 100 respondents, 50 were taken from students studying in professional courses and another 50 from students of non-professional courses in the age group of 18-22 years.

The samples of professional students were taken from the students of Government Engineering College, Wayanad and Medical College, Calicut. The samples of non-professional students were selected from Farook College, Farook, Calicut and JDT Islam College of Arts and Science, Vellimadukunnu, Calicut. The survey was conducted in October 2010.

⁴⁵ Kothary, C. (1990), *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques*: New Delhi, New Age International Publishers, p.55.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

To gather the needed data for the research we used a printed questionnaire of 19 questions as data collection tool. The questionnaire is prepared with a brief description of the study and with enough directions to answer the questions. The questionnaire contained both open ended and closed ended questions.

Most of the questions are objective in nature but they are prepared to draw some descriptive answers. For example, the questions 1, 2, 4 and 5 are designed to judge whether the respondent is a heavy user or not and to give a basic knowledge regarding their memberships in SNSs, frequency of accessing the sites and time spent on these sites. The questions are designed to answer the research questions. The questionnaire includes questions regarding their preference of social networking sites, mobile social networking, and privacy concerns and also seeks their opinion about social networking.

Care was taken to avoid ambiguous, incorrect and biased questions while preparing the questions. The questionnaires were distributed among the students after a giving a brief explanation about the study and the questions.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The study on the various aspects of the social networking sites yielded interesting results and lights up various dimensions of users' perceptions on social networking sites. The study also helps to understand the use of SNSs among student community.

The study focused on students from professional and non-professional educational stream, in the age group of 18-22 years. The findings are as follows;

Table 5 1 Sample Selection

Sample	Male	Female	Total
Professional Students	31	19	50
Non-Professional Students	29	21	50
Total	60	40	100

Out of 100 samples, an equal number of professional and non-professional students were purposively selected, in which males constituted 60 and females were 40.

Table 5 2 Active membership in SNSs

No. of memberships	Professional	Non-Professional	Total %
One	21 (42%)	16 (32%)	37
Two	15 (30%)	19 (38%)	34
Three	6 (12%)	11 (22%)	17
More than 3	8 (16%)	4 (8%)	12
Total	50 (100%)	50 (100%)	100 %

The table 5.2 shows a majority (37%) of the population have membership in one social networking site only, in which 21 were professional students and 16 were non-professional students. But, almost an equal number (34%) have two social networking memberships. Only 12% of the total population has more than three active memberships in social networking sites. When we analyze the two groups separately, a majority (38%) of non-professional students have two active memberships, while 42% of professional students have only one active membership in social networking sites.

Table 5 3 Frequency of accessing SNSs

Time	Professional	Non-Professional	Total %
Daily	6 (12%)	17 (34%)	23
Twice a Weekly	7 (14%)	6 (12%)	13
Weekly	15 (30%)	22 (44%)	37
Fortnightly	7 (14%)	3 (6%)	10
Monthly	11 (22%)	2 (4%)	13
Less than monthly	4 (8%)	0	4
Total	50 (100%)	50 (100%)	100%

This table shows that 37% of the student community access social networking sites once in a week, which constituted by 15 of professional students and 22 of non-professional students. A total of 23% check their profiles daily. Thus, we can say, analyzing this table, the frequency of accessing social networking sites is considerably high. While 34% of non-professional students use it daily, only 6% of professional access it daily.

Table 5 4 Time spent for social networking

Time (Hours)	Professional	Non-Professional	Total %
0-1 Hr	24 (48%)	22 (44%)	46
1-2 Hrs	18 (36%)	18 (36%)	36
2-3 Hrs	6 (12%)	6 (12%)	13
More than 3 Hrs	2 (4%)	4 (8%)	6
Total	50 (100%)	50 (100%)	100%

Table 5.4 shows the duration of time spent in social networking sites. 46% of the population spent 0-1 hour for social networking and 36% spent 1-2 hours in social networking sites. Only a few (6%) use more than 3 hours for social networking. This shows that majority of the students use social networking purposefully.

Table 5 5 Ranking of SNSs based on student preference

SNS	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th
<i>Orkut</i>	78	19	3	0	0
<i>Facebook</i>	13	40	7	0	0
<i>Twitter</i>	0	9	16	1	0

The table shows majority (78) ranked *Orkut* in first place as their favorite social networking site, while *Facebook* ranked as second preference. It’s also noted that 100% of the students have an active *Orkut* profile. Majority of the *Twitter* users ranked it in third place.

Table 5 6 Frequency of use of SNS applications

Applications	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	Total %
Status	33	22	24	21	100
Video Sharing	16	19	27	38	100
Photo Sharing	35	18	29	18	100
Chat	65	20	11	4	100
Comment/Scrap	88	10	2	0	100
Theme	27	19	29	25	100

The table shows frequently used SNS applications. From this we can know students’ main activity in social networking is to comment or scrap in other user profiles. 88% of students often comment or scrap in other user profiles and thus, this might be the main attraction of students to spend time in social networking. The comment might be about photos, blog posts, videos or status update. A significant portion (65%) use chatting applications very often.

This finding points out the interpersonal communication aspect of SNSs and its acceptability among students. Only a few (16%) often use video sharing, while 35% use photo sharing application.

Table 5 7 Membership in Communities/Groups

Category	Professional	Non-Professional	Total %
Members	44 (88%)	45 (90%)	89
Non members	6 (12%)	5 (10%)	11
Total	50 (100%)	50 (100%)	100%

This table shows 89% of the respondents are members in communities or groups in social networking sites. 11% of them do not have membership in communities or groups in social networking sites.

Table 5 8 Participation in discussions

Response	Professional (out of 44)	Non-Professional (out of 45)	Total %
Often	4 (9.1%)	11 (24.4%)	15 (16.8%)
Sometimes	6 (13.6%)	15 (33.4%)	21 (23.6%)
Rarely	28 (63.6%)	17 (37.8%)	45 (50.6%)
Never	6 (13.7)	2 (4.4%)	8 (9%)
Total	44 (100%)	45 (100%)	89 (100%)

The table shows the fact that out of the 89 members, who have membership in communities, 50.6% participate in discussions rarely. Only 16.8% of the members often participate in discussions conducted in online social networking sites. Here a slight difference can be seen between the professional students and non-professional students. While 24.4% of the students from arts subjects often participate in discussions, only 9.1% professional students often involve in discussions.

Table 5 9 Number of users created their own communities

User Category	Professional	Non-Professional	Total %
Owns	16 (32%)	15 (30%)	31
Not-owns	34 (68%)	35 (70%)	69
Total	50 (100%)	50 (100%)	100%

This table shows that 31% of the population has their own communities or groups in social networking sites.

Table 5 10 Use of gaming or entertainment applications

Category	Professional	Non-Professional	Total %
Users	14 (28%)	27 (54%)	41
Non-users	36 (72%)	23 (46%)	59
Total	50 (100%)	50 (100%)	100%

This reveals that most (59%) of the users do not use gaming or other mere entertainment applications in social networking sites. 41% of the student community use gaming applications. Some of the applications mentioned by the users in open ended questions are *Farmville*, *Quizaz*, *Cricket* and *Mafia War*. It must be noted that a major part of non-professional student use gaming application. Only 14% non-professional students use these applications.

Table 5 11 Reason for using SNSs

Reason	Professional	Non-Professional	Total %
keep in touch with friends	50 (100%)	50 (100%)	100
To find new friends	20 (40%)	26 (52%)	46
Professional/Workrelated	9 (18%)	4 (8%)	13
Dating	3 (6%)	3 (6%)	6

The table 5.11 shows that all of the respondents use social networking predominantly to keep in touch with their existing friends or offline connections. Among them 46% of students are interested in finding new friendship through the social networking site. 13% use it for business networking and a sheer 6% use it for dating also.

Table 5 12 Contacts with strangers

Preference	Professional	Non-Professional	Total %
Yes	16 (32%)	23 (46%)	39
No	34 (68%)	27 (54%)	61
Total	50 (100%)	50 (100%)	100%

This table shows that 61% of users do not have friendship with strangers. 39% have contacts through SNSs other than their offline connections. This reveals that majority of users do not make contacts with strangers rather they are interested in maintaining their offline connection, that is the people they know in the real world.

Table 5 13 Meeting online friends in real world (out of 39)

Preference	Professional (out of 16)	Non-Professional (out of 23)	Total
Yes	7 (43.8%)	10 (43.5%)	17 (43.6%)
No	9 (56.2%)	13 (56.5%)	22 (56.4%)
Total	16	23	39 (100%)

The table 5.13 suggests that out of the 39 users, who made friendship through social networking sites, 43.6% says that they have met their *online friend* in real world.

Table 5 14 Mobile social networking

Category	Professional	Non-Professional	Total %
Users	27 (54%)	30 (60%)	57
Non-Users	23 (46%)	20 (40%)	43
Total	100%	100%	100%

The table 5.14 suggests 57% of the respondents use mobile social networking. This shows that mobile social

networking is high among both professional and non-professional students.

Table 5 15 Awareness of Privacy Policy of SNSs

Response	Professional	Non-Professional	Total %
Read	22 (44%)	20 (40%)	42
Not read	28 (56%)	30 (60%)	58
Total	100%	100%	100%

The table 5.15 shows majority (58%) of the users have not read the privacy policy of social networking sites while creating their profiles.

Table 5 16 Loss of privacy

Response	Professional	Non-Professional	Total %
Yes	14 (28%)	22 (44%)	36
No	36 (72%)	28 (56%)	64
Total	100%	100%	100%

The table shows that 64% of the respondents think that there is no loss of privacy in exhibiting their profiles in social networking sites.

Table 5 17 Modification on default privacy settings of SNSs

Response	Professional	Non-Professional	Total %
Yes	27 (54%)	33 (66%)	60
No	23 (46%)	17 (34%)	40
Total	100%	100%	100%

A majority (60%) of the users made modification on default privacy settings while joining in social networking sites. 40% of the respondents use the pre-set privacy settings.

Table 5 18 Users' opinion on the impact on social networking sites

Response	Professional	Non-Professional	Total %
Positive impact	36 (72%)	45 (90%)	81
No/Negative impact	14 (28%)	5 (10%)	19
Total	100%	100%	100%

A greater part (81%) of the student community believes that the online social networking has made a positive impact on their social life and 19% of the student community thinks the opposite.

In the last part of the questionnaire, the researcher gave a chance for the respondents to mark their opinions about social networking sites. Most of the users opined that the social networking sites help them to keep in touch with their friends. Even if they move from one place to another, they can still contact each other and it helps to know how he/she is. They find it as a virtual place to hang around with friends and have fun by commenting, chatting and sharing photos/videos. It helps them to stay connected with their friends and family, around the clock, wherever they are. Perhaps, this might be the significant aspect of social networking site, which triggered the boom of online social networking.

On the other hand, they opined that the continuous use of such sites made them feel addicted to it. Instead of going out there in the real world, they are stuck up in the virtual world. They also shared their concern about the fake Ids and cheating through these sites. They think the chance for getting trapped in fake profile is also high. Only a few respondents commented that online social networking is a simply a waste of time.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study designed to understand the various dimensions in which SNSs are used by the student community, revealed interesting results. The study throws light upon some important factors regarding the uses of social networking sites among the students. To materialize the broad objective of the study the researcher had set some research questions. In this chapter we discuss these research questions with the results successfully collected from various colleges. A total sample of 100 students, in the age group of 18-22 years, purposively selected from professional and arts colleges.

The data collected regarding the membership in social networking sites, frequency of accessing these sites and time spent for social networking helped to understand the basic facts about the users. Majority of the users have membership in one social networking and almost an equal number of respondents have two active memberships in social networking sites. While analyzing the frequency of accessing the SNSs and time spent in social networking sites, we could know that the majority of the users access these sites once in a week and spent 0-1 hour for social networking.

These data shows that a large part of student community uses these sites purposefully and thus, not just for mere entertainment or time pass. Though, there are a few members of heavy users, who have more active profiles and spent more time for online social networking.

While answering the first research question, we can clearly say that *Orkut* is the most popular social networking site among students, considering the fact that 100% of the population has active profiles in *Orkut* and most of them ranked it as their first preference. In the second place, *Facebook* attracts more students followed by *Twitter*. Most of the students ranked *Facebook* as their 2nd preference and *Twitter* as third preference.

In spite of this, a few members of student community have more than three memberships in *SNSs*. Some familiar sites for these heavy users are Hi5, MySpace and Zorphia. It's also noted that none of these students have membership in *Bharatstudents.com*, which is an upcoming Indian social networking site.

.On the contrary, though majority (89%) of the users is members in communities or groups in *SNSs*, only a few participate in discussions on various topics dealt in the groups. 50.6% of the respondents rarely participate in discussions. The groups or communities can be about anything. For example, there are a lot of communities in the name of celebrities, films, products and some communities are dealing with feelings, beliefs or social issues. Many researches have proved that social networking sites can be a platform for the people to express their views and comment freely without any restrictions. But this result shows that the youngsters join interested groups not for active participation in the discussions conducted in these groups.

The upcoming trend in social networking is the mobile social networks. The mobile social networks are gaining popularity in India. In this study, majority of students said they use mobile social networking. It is very viable for them to use social networking in their mobile phones when most of the mobile networks slashed internet charges. Perhaps, in the future, mobile social networking will be the hottest feature in mobile service sector with the opening of the 3G spectrum. This will enable them more faster and easy way to be connected with their dear and nears.

In addition, a greater part of the population believes that social networking sites have made a positive impact on their social life. It has become an integral part of their life and has a lot of influence in their personal and professional life. In this study, many of the students opined that it helps them to maintain and develop contacts all over the world. At the same time, they share their fear of the threat of fake persons or profiles. Some of them opined that in long run social networking can become an addiction and a waste of time.

While analyzing the research findings we can understand there was no significant differences between the professional and non-professional students other than non-professional students are more interested in social networking sites. But, considering over all response of these students, it suggests that the students from arts subjects use actively use social networking sites compared to professional students.

As a summing up, analyzing the research findings we can know that it has a great influence over the student community and they use it primarily for maintaining their contacts. It is critical to understand that the ease of communication and share thoughts is what keeps people in social networks. Social networking sites, which are rapidly becoming the hottest priority of the generation, must concentrate and develop their communication aspect as users are mostly interested in communication element of *SNSs*. In the near future, with the opening

of 3G mobile services, mobile social networking will be one of the popular features of mobile services. In the turn of the 21st century social networking is increasing in popularity by leaps and bounds.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study will help the future researchers on social networking sites and to understand the different aspects of uses of social networking sites. Though, the research has all limitations and limited facilities of a dissertation. We could not enhance the research with empirical studies and broad survey, collecting more samples, to get more accurate on generalization.

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APPENDIX

Sample of the Questionnaire:

Dear friend

You are invited to take part in this survey which aims to find some answers about your use of *Social Networking Sites (SNS)*. I ensure you that the information obtained from this questionnaire would be utilized only for the dissertation for an MCJ Degree and this document would not be misused. I humbly request you to help me by truthful participation. Please note that you will not be referred to by any personally identifiable information in any of the reports. Thank you.

Ramesh Chandran K. P4th Semester MCJ Farook College, Calicut

Age:

Male/Female:

Course:

Instructions: Please tick for objective questions.

1. How many Social Networking accounts you have?

One Two Three More than 3

2. Roughly how long have you been using Social Networking Sites?

Less than a month 1-6 months 6 months - 1 year 1-2 years 2-3 years
more than 3 years

3. Which are your favorite Social Networking Sites? (Rank your favorite 5 SNS in order of your priority, e.g. Orkut- 1, Facebook- 2...).

- Orkut
- Facebook
- Hi5
- MySpace
- LinkedIn
- Bharatstudents
- Bebo
- Twitter
- Zorpia

- Netlog
- Others: (Please Specify)

4. How frequently do you use Social Networking Sites?

Daily More than Weekly Weekly Fortnightly Monthly Less than that

5. How many hours do you spend for Social Networking?

0 – 1 hr 1 – 2 hrs 2 – 3 hrs More than 3hrs

6. Do you use mobile phone to access Social Networking Sites? Yes No

7. How many friends do you have in your Social Network accounts? (If you have more than one account, please tick an average of your contacts).

0 – 100 101 - 150 151 – 200 201 – 300

More than 301

8. Do you have online friendship through SNS with people you have **NOT** met in real world?

Yes No

9. Have you ever met someone in real world you have met only through social networking?

Yes No

10. Are you a member of any Community/ Page/ Group in Social Networking Sites?

Yes No

10. a) If 'Yes', how often do you participate in discussions/ comments through Communities/ Pages/ Groups?

Often Sometimes Rarely Never

11. Do you own any Communities/ Pages/ Groups in SNS? Yes No

12. Do you use Games or Applications in Social Networking Sites? Yes No

12. a) If 'Yes', which is your favorite game or application? 1. 2.

13. Why do you use Social Networking? (You can select more than one answer).

- To keep in touch with my friends
- To find new friends
- Professional/Work related
- For dating
- Others: (Specify):
-

14. How often do you use...

	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Status Update				
Video Sharing				
Photo Sharing				
Chats				
Comments/ Scraps/Wall post				
Themes				

15. Did you read the Terms of use/ Privacy policy while creating the SNS account?

Yes No

16. Do you feel that exhibiting your profiles in SNS to others is a loss of privacy?

Yes No

17. Did you modify privacy settings from default settings after creating the account?

Yes No

18. Has the usage of social networking made a positive impact in your social life?

Yes No

19. Write two *best things* and *worst thing* about social networking.

a) Best things:
.....
.....
.....

b) Worst things:
.....
.....
.....

Thank You for spending time to help me!