

**Social Networking sites and Addiction: Impact on children
(Role of Communication in Media and Allied fields)**

Mousumi Manna

Asst.Prof

Chetana's H.S. College of Commerce& Economics,
Bandra, Mumbai

Abstract:

The Internet is often described as the 'Information Super way'. While books, newspapers, television and radio can be compared to a well-organized domain, access being provided at major intersections, it offers thousands of capillary junctions, giving access to obscure regions of mass media. A new emerging trend in this forum is the social networking sites. Facebook, Whats App, Twitter, Instagram allow users to create personal profiles on the popularity and demand for online communities. As information is provided by the users sometimes this information may be wrongly used by unethical people. Some people argue inspite of drawbacks this phenomenon would become more acceptable with new forms and dimensions in future. This article will study the SNS usage and the advantages and disadvantages of some of the social networking sites with emphasis on impact on Children.

(Sources: Books, Articles from Websites and Newspapers.

Key words: Ethics, Social Network Addiction, Social networking sites, personality and negative impact.)

Introduction:

A Social Network service essentially consists of a representation of each user, his/ her social links, and a variety of additional services. Most Social Network services are Web based and provide means for users to interact over the Internet, such as e-mail, and instant messaging. On-line Social network service usually means an individual-centered service whereas online community services are group-centered. Social networking sites allow users to share ideas, activities, events and interests within their individual networks. The main types of social networking services are those which contain category places such as former school years or class-mates. Popular methods are Facebook, Bebo, Twitter, My space, LinkedIn is widely used in America, Nexopia in Canada; Bebo, Hi5, Hyves in Netherland; Orkut and Hi5 in South America: Apna circle in India: Facebook, Twitter, What's App and now Instagram almost all over the world.¹

Many of these networks were founded on the notion of digitizing real world connections, some networks focus on categories from books, music to non-profit businesses to personal grooming and cooking to provide both services and community to individuals with shared interests. Social media tools remain informal, unregulated mechanisms for information collection, sharing, and

promotion, so the information is of varying quality and consistency.

The objective of this study is to find out:

- The risks arising from sharing information online and the consequences for confidentiality and privacy.
- The impact of social media on specific population groups, such as minority- children.
- The impact of social media on behavior change.

Social Networking features: Users can often upload pictures of themselves to their profiles, post blog entries for others to read, search for other people with similar interests, compile list of contacts. In addition users have a section dedicated to comments from friends and other users. To protect user privacy, social networks usually have control on who can view their profiles. In recent years, organizations have also started to create profiles to advertise products and services. People can upload videos and hold discussions in forums. Mobile phone users can also create their own profiles, make friends, participate in chat rooms, share photos and videos and also start blogs. Some companies provide wireless services which allow customers to build their own mobile community and brand it.

Emerging Trends:

At the forefront of emerging trends in Social Networking sites is the concept of 'Real time' and 'Location based'. Real time allows users to contribute, which is then broadcast as it is being uploaded—the concept is similar to live television broadcasts.

Twitter set the trend for real time services. Facebook followed suit with their live feed where users' activities are streamed as soon as they happen. While Twitter focuses on words, Clixtr, focuses on group photo sharing. Four Square and Gowalla allow users to check-in to places that they are frequenting. Yelp also joined them in this forum. Instagram is the new addition in this group of SNS, people claim that Instagram has a better security system.

Uses:

Of the many uses of this new technology, MNCs and smaller companies are also now using Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to build their brand image. These companies pull people to their online marketing sites and engage clients in discussions to change products or services.

The Social networks in Science communities share scientific knowledge and information. People join these sites not to become 'isolated and irrelevant'. Social networks are also being used by teachers and students as communication tools. Many students are using a wide range of social networking sites, even marketing their products. Teachers and students are creating chat-room forums and groups to extend classroom activities, posting assignments, tests and assisting with Homework and projects to disseminate knowledge on international matters and events. Social networks are also used to foster School-Teacher- Parents' communication for parents to voice their opinions without having to spare time and to meet face-to-face. These sites are also used by activists to reach out to grass root people and organizations. The online social networks by libraries is prevalent and a growing tool helping potential users and reaching out to distant remote

locations.²

But not all these sites are free of charge, some are charging money for providing user facilities.

Limitations of Social Media and Networking sites:

Issues exist with traditional Internet sites that are intensified by the interactive nature of social media, which allows lay-users to upload information regardless of quality. The lack of Internet censorship places a greater onus and threat on the individual and the media professionals to ensure the veracity of their material. It is imperative for servers to ensure that the standards of accuracy and fairness are protected from dangers inherent in internet usage and be cautious against misinformation. A further limitation is that postings can be a permanent record and be viewed by an increasing audience, and perhaps users are unaware of the potential size of the audience base and the magnitude of the negative impact! The absence of a regulatory body for the Internet, especially the SNS means, censorship must be exercised by the content provider. An ordinate amount of material commonly seen are considered to be obscene, indecent, pornographic or violent. The readily available online material with the freedom of choice by the user has resulted in a situation where indecent materials are accepted as norms, with unparalleled means of free expression and speech. While responsible adults can access information privately but this privilege is utilized by terror groups, unethical Adults and Paedophiles, causing harm to the children and the society at large.³

Another security lapse is Hacking. Opening an account, making fake profiles and ID's is simple and there is no limit to these profiles. Many cases have been reported about these fake accounts, bullying, stalking, blackmailing, due to which many lives are destroyed. Hackers send continuous emails asking for login data to check in news feed, photo and these sites look like the originals! Users don't even know that hackers are stealing their data and scammers are trapping them in through their Social networking sites! The nature of the virtual community is different from physical communities and hence, same set of social values and rules cannot be imposed on both the communities.

Misuse of the Internet can also affect various aspects of children's social lives:

One of the most pressing issues concerning the proliferation of obscene information on the internet is the circulation of Child pornography. It is a serious example of the dangers of the lack of internet regulation. Another unrestricted access is the use of chat rooms to groom underage children for sex. The adults conceal their identity in the virtual world and can fake easily. Young girls are easily lured by habitual offenders, their personal information is used as thorns and poison, photographs are morphed and then blackmailed: sometimes one moment of ignorance or bliss can cost perils to the life of the victim, driving them crazy, -leading to harming themselves, at other times they are sold to lucrative buyers from the west or are forced into prostitution or child trafficking. Many a times these vulnerable children are raped and the victims are then killed to wipe out the traces.

As Rutledge suggests, social media is not something to be taken lightly. "We aren't naturally born

with an innate sense of responsibility and an abundance of caution. Fire, for example, burns us at an early age, so we know to be cautious around it.”⁴

Another great concern is the violent imageries in television, film video, and computer games though has considerable short-term effects on arousal, thoughts, and emotions, increases the likelihood of aggressive or fearful behavior in younger children, especially in boys. As has been observed in many children when they used to watched games like ‘Pokemon’ or the adolescents going astray or adopting terrorism watching fearful Teleserials like ‘Breaking Bad’ or ‘Dexter’ and now the ‘Blue Whale game’, we have also witnessed the ‘obscene’ culture filtering in India through serials such as ‘Dynasty’ or the ‘Baywatch’. The evidence becomes erratic when considering older children and teenagers, and long-term outcomes for all ages. The multifactorial nature of aggression is emphasized, together with the practical difficulties of connecting with the real world. It is found that too much obsession with social media such as FB, WhatsApp or the Twitter etc affects Students academic grades and spoils their vision. Another distressing trait is that children who misrepresent themselves (e.g., pretending to be older) on the Internet had lesser developed social skills, lower levels of self-esteem, and higher levels of social anxiety and aggression. The frequency of Internet use also mattered. This inference was drawn from a study based on students aged 11–16 years from various classes. Questionnaires included a query of Internet behaviors, the Matson Evaluation of Social Skills with Youngsters Appropriate Social Skills and Inappropriate Assertiveness subscales, Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, and the Social Anxiety Scale for Children–Revised.⁵

Video game addiction among children and teenagers is another trait which is increasing rapidly throughout the world, is also associated with levels of animosity, social skills, and academic achievement. A study suggests that video game addiction can be statistically predicted on high measures of hostility. Both gender and video game addiction are negatively associated with academic achievement. Family function, sensation seeking, gender, and boredom have statistically positive relationships with levels of social skills. Games such as ‘Farmville’, or some popular quiz apps permits an application to be installed with the participants profile and then steal data and manage the victims private life, sell the information to a third party. Current models of video games have been improved based on this study.

Since this is a world where communities are separated by culture and geography with different social standards, it is not possible to devise a uniform code of ethics for all Internet users without curtailing freedom of speech and intellectual rights. Nevertheless India along with UK is now campaigning exposing the dangers of unsupervised internet use by the children that has a substantial effect on public’s mental and physical health.

What is more alarming is that nowadays social media apps are designed to keep people especially children and teenagers addicted. A report in Computer World claims that the notification icon we see on our social media app is so designed to make us tap on it compulsively, to keep us engaged, to draw us in and not let go.⁶ All this talk of algorithmic news feeds, auto-playing videos and

everything else is part of this process. Taking a quote from the report, “The tweaking of algorithmic filters for addiction means that in theory social sites get more addictive every day, and that the sites are in a war for survival where only the most addictive sites will survive.

This essay identifies four key conceptual problems in the uses and gratifications approach and, in so doing, calls attention to issues requiring resolution if this formulation is to be maximally productive. This essay identifies four key conceptual problems in the uses and gratifications approach hand.

And this is the crux of the issue. Humans are inherently susceptible to addictive things. Our brain rewards us with dopamine every time it thinks we’ve done something worthy of reward. Dopamine is a neurochemical that many scientists have dubbed the “reward molecule.” It’s designed to reinforce any activity that gives you dopamine. This activity, however, can be drugs like cocaine, and even social media.

Once addiction is established to FB and WhatsApp, victims start living in this virtual world and spend hours on unproductive sites. Due to this a new type of disorder is emerging, which keeps one away from real people eventually creating the problems with real-life relationships, relatives, school/college, or in their careers. Clearly, there’s a lot of evidence proving social media’s addictive nature. Pamela Rutledge, director of the Media Psychology Research Centre in California tells the *BBC*, “We give people driving lessons and swimming lessons, but everyone gets a smartphone and off they go.”⁷

Another report published, a San Francisco-based firm claims that we create expectation when we like, or comment or post something on social media. “We feel a sense of belonging,” states the report. You start to seek attention of the people and then it’s a vicious cycle you can’t come out of it. While American Marketing Association website claims that, “The same brain areas that are activated for food and water are activated for social stimuli.”

Mauricio Delgado, associate professor of psychology at Rutgers University in Newark says that even the predictor of a reward gets your dopamine up. This can include the buzzing of your phone, which can trigger a dopamine kick. You soon start seeking that kick.⁸The algorithmic feeds and filter bubbles that social media create further increase our dependence on the platform. After all, the news feed is designed to cater to our needs.

The problem with social media addiction, as with other forms of drug abuse, is that the initial dopamine hits are not as pleasurable over time. We seek more and we get more extreme in our demands. You’ll eventually reach a point where something snaps, mentally, and you either give in to your

When we give in, we do hurtful things, like **murder people live on Facebook or take the gun out to shoot someone or kill self.**⁹

And this is the world that we’re letting our kids into. Letting our children use smartphones and social media at a young age can be devastating as dusting their cakes with narcotics.

Lackadaisical behavior of Guardians:

Despite all of this media time and new technology, many parents seem to care less about use of media by their children and adolescents. In a recent study, two-thirds of children and teenagers report that their parents have “no rules” about time spent with media. Many young children see PG-13 and R-rated movies—either online, on TV, or in movie theaters—that contain problematic content and are clearly inappropriate for them.¹⁰ Few parents are strict about cell phone use for their children or adolescents. More than 60% of teenagers send and/or receive text messages after “lights out,” and they report increased levels of tiredness, including at school. One study found that 20% of adolescents either sent or received a sexually explicit image by cell phone SNS or Internet. In contrast, to studies linking media violence directly to crime, children call upon themselves violence by viewing or visiting restricted sites

Conclusions:

Social media, on the other hand, is simply rewarding:

Social media and communication isn't without its strengths and it's not always harmful. It can be put to good use, to save lives, to spread a kindly word, to inform and to seek help. Reliability may be monitored by responsible bodies using automated processes, to detect, significantly edit, and project automated quality subjects.¹¹ Further, work to improve the “media richness”¹² of social media for all types of communication, that may reduce ambiguity and uncertainty and would be valuable. In addition, combining more resources in one site could improve reliability of information. As viewers interact and share links, they could compare numerous social media networking sites and triangulate information to help them discern correct from incorrect information. Despite concerns, information found on some websites is reported to be generally factually accurate.¹³

Social media also brings a new dimension to health care, offering a platform used by the public, patients, and health professionals to communicate about health issues with the possibility of potentially improving health outcomes. To reap the benefits of social media for communication, the information needs to be monitored for quality and reliability, and the users' confidentiality and privacy need to be maintained. It is a powerful tool that offers collaboration between users and a social interaction mechanism for varied individuals. With increasing use of social media, there will be further opportunities in IT sector, Health care, Mechanics and advanced studies in all branches. Research into the application of social media for communication specially health purposes is an expanding area because increasing general use of social media necessitates that health communication researchers match the pace of development. Further research is taking place to establish healthy social media communication practices in both the short and long term usage.

Regulatory and security issues must be addressed to propose best-practices that allows the benefits of social media and networking to be utilized yet protect users' privacy and thus improve

use of these media in routine affairs. Free education is required for the general public, patients, and professionals to make them more aware of the nature and use of social media. Considering the dissimilarity in social media engagement according to personality traits, age, and gender, it¹⁴ would be valuable to modify education to meet the needs of myriad population groups.

Therefore, we need to learn to use it responsibly, to fight the urge to give in to its addictive nature. However, this can only happen when we recognize it for what it is, and through education and healthy practices **we monitor ourselves** to use it in a beneficial way.

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