



A STUDY OF SOCIAL MEDIA ECOLOGY AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS OF COIMBATORE

Mr. Ciby S. Kumar¹ and Dr. P. Govindaraju²

¹Assistant Professor and Head, Department of Visual Communication, Noorul Islam College of Arts & Science, Kanyakumari.

²Professor, Department of Communication, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli.



ABSTRACT

Ecology is a term associated with biology. It is a biological 'petri-dish' medium in which any organism lives and grows. Social media ecology is the environment provided by the social media that is utilized by the social media users for their growth and development. The environment offered by various social media act as a medium of growth and development of the users. Any content that passes over the social media users is not just being stored in digitally it is getting registered in the minds of the users creating an ecology that makes them feel, think, act, express and experience it psychologically and behaviorally which differs or varies among the gender. This paper focuses on the usage of social media ecology among the college students of Coimbatore district, Tamil Nadu. Quantitative methodology was undertaken to meet the needs of the study.

KEYWORDS: Social Media Ecology, College Students, Media Environment, Coimbatore, Social Media.

1. AN INTRODUCTION

For decades human lives are interdependent over the environments they live in. These environments are not just artificial but are almost mediated ones. Human's now live in an era where their day-to-day activities are shaped by these environments. The emotional and cognitive activities of all levels and segments of the society is concentrated over the information-rich venues i.e., our media (Allen, Otto & Hoffman, 1996, p.215). Even in remote areas people depend over the environment provided by the information-rich screens. This environment created by the media is theoretically known as 'Media Ecology'. That emphasis on the environment created and provided by the Television, Radio, Telephone, Smart Phone and Social Networking Sites.

The earlier screen was Television screen. But, now these screens have got smaller in size and are in the hands of every people. Social Networking Sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube etc., have occupied a larger space and time in human life. These Social Networking Sites or the Social Media creates a different environment for the users. This environment is otherwise called as Social Media Ecology or Digital Media Ecology.

Any medium is an environment until it supports both the perception of opportunities for anyone to act or for any means of action to occur (Allen, Otto & Hoffman, 1996, p.215). The environmental metaphor i.e., the ecology of a media can help in understanding the way in which the media users exercise their power of perception, mobility and agency within the boundary offered by the particular media technologies. The boundary or constrain imposed also includes the conventions established by various media cultures. The environment offered or constructed by the Social Media is the Social Media Ecology, which has been an important metaphor for theorising changes in the global media and communication environments (Lekakis, 2017, p.31).

Social Media Ecology is the study of new media and emerging technologies as environments. It specifically focuses on the way in which the conversations and interactions happen within the mediated

environments i.e., Social Media and how it creates an impact on human life (user's life) and their affairs (2009, p.3). Media ecologists consider and observe the new media as environments rather than just as a tool or means of communication, as they are capable of shaping the culture and conversation.

When individuals get involved in social media ecology, the digital existence of the contents captives the human memory, where it takes a biological existence as the contents are being preserved and disseminated. This biological existence alters and shapes the psychology and behavioral aspect of the user. Any content that passes over the social media users is not just being stored in digitally it is getting registered in the minds of the users creating an ecology that makes them feel, think, act, express and experience it psychologically and behaviorally which differs or varies among the gender.

This study attempts to study the use of social media ecology and the elements that play a vital role in creating an environment of growth among the college students of Coimbatore district, Tamil Nadu.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Any medium is powerful as it is itself the message. This statement emerges from the works of McLuhan (1964), who emphasized on the media regardless of its contents, as they are the tools that "...reshape human experience and exert far more change in our world than the sum total of the message they contain." (McLuhan, 2005). McLuhan briefed this point in his most famous Playboy magazine interview in 1969: "The content or message of any particular medium has about as much importance as the stenciling on the casting of an atomic bomb".

Neil Postman was the scholar who exemplified the practice of media ecology analysis through the public intellectual engaging in social criticism. In his one of the work, *Teaching as a Conserving Activity* (1979) stated that, "Media ecology is the study of information environments. It is concerned to understand how technologies and techniques of communication control the form, quantity, speed, distribution, and direction of information; and how, in turn, such information configurations or biases affect people's perceptions, values, and attitudes".

McLuhan, Ong and Postman constituted the prime nodes for the field and study of media ecology during the beginning and later were taken forward by various researchers. According to the definition of Ong (1977), the media ecology is a perspective that embodies 'ecological concern'. Ecological concern is a sort of new state of consciousness and it is the ultimate or superior in open-system awareness. Ong brings the root of ecological concern from the works of Darwin, where he said that the ecological concern is echoed in the earlier thinking process of the species that made them think to be associated to a closed-system base of life. It was considered as a major element of philosophical thinking that developed through natural selection process bring about the open-interaction system "... between individuals and environment" (Ong, 1977). Ong (1977) suggested that this new philosophical attention towards the openness was not unrelated to "... the opening of previously isolated human groups" with one another which was nurtured through the electronic communication media such as telephone, radio and television.

3. METHODOLOGY

Study aims to explore and analyze the ecology created by the social media among the active millennial users i.e., College going students of Coimbatore district, Tamil Nadu.

Descriptive survey method was chosen for the purpose of this study for which Quantitative Approach was employed by the researcher to meet the needs of this study. The research area chosen for the study is Coimbatore.

The purpose of this study was to discover the impact of word – of – mouth - recommendations, gender, Marital Status, Educational Qualification, Department and usage frequency of Social media etc.,.

3.1. Objectives of the Study

The specific aims and objectives of the study were:

- To study the frequency of students experiencing social media ecology.

- To analyze the elements that plays a role in providing the students with social media environment.
- To compare gender wise involvement in social media.
- To find the social media which enrich the students with maximum social media ecology.

3.2. Population & Sample

The population for the study includes only the college going students of Coimbatore district, Tamil Nadu, who are active users of social media.

Five colleges were picked through Simple Random Sampling technique using lot-picking method. A questionnaire with eighty set of questions were distributed to 200 students of the selected college. Among which 191 filled questionnaire were undertaken for the analysis.

4. FINDING OF THE STUDY

The following are the various finding of this study.

4.1. Demographic Profile

The study sample included both male and female respondents, of which 47.1 percent were boys and 52.9 percent respondents were girls. Considering the age group of the respondents, 12.6 percent of the students were below the age of 18. Majority of the respondents' i.e., 53.9 percent fall between the age range 18 to 20 years. 31.9 percent of respondents are between 20 to 25 age group and only 1.6 percent of the respondents are above 25 years.

97.9 percent of the respondents are single whereas, 2.1 percent of the respondents are married. Majority of the respondents are Undergraduate students contribution to 94.8 percent to the study. Most number of respondents are from Arts department contributing 68.1 percent and the rest 31.9 percent are Science department students.

Table.1. Demographic Profile of the Samples

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	90	47.1
	Female	101	52.9
Age	Below 18	24	12.6
	18 to 20	103	53.9
	20 to 25	61	31.9
	Above 25	3	1.6
Marital Status	Single	187	97.9
	Married	4	2.1
Educational Qualification	UG	181	94.8
	PG	8	4.2
	Others	2	1
Department	Arts	130	68.1
	Science	61	31.9

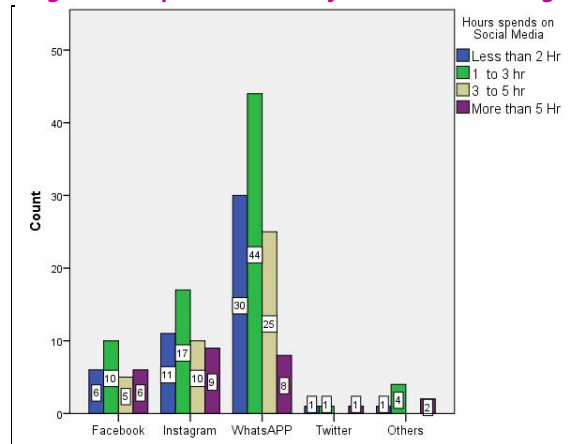
4.2. Social Media Usage among the College Students

Whatsapp is the most used social media by the respondents, where 44 percent of respondents spend 1 to 3 hour in Whatsapp, 30 percent of them use Whatsapp less than 2 hour. Next to Whatsapp,

Instagram is second widely used social media with 17 percent of respondents engaging in it for 1 to 3 hour. Only, 4 percent of respondents engage in other social media.

Only a minimum number of respondents use social media more than 5 hour with 8 percent of respondents engage in Whatsapp, 9 percent in Instagram, 6 percent in Facebook and 2 percent in other social media platforms.

Figure.1. Representation of Social Media Usage

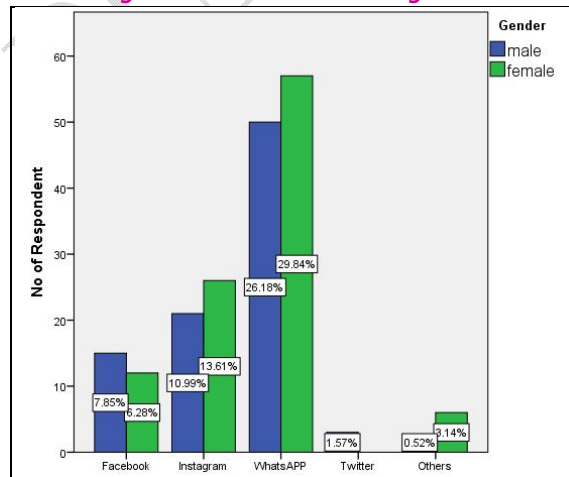


4.3. Social Media and Gender Comparison

Social Media usage varies based on the gender. Female respondents tend to use social media platforms more than male respondents. 29.84 percent of females activity use Whatapp over 26.18 percent of male respondents. When analyzing the Instagram usage it can be seen that 13.61 percent of female respondents use Instagram over 10.99 percent of male respondents.

The data varies only in Facebook usage where male respondents with 7.85 percent use Facebook over 6.28 percent of female respondents.

Figure.2. Social media and gender



4.4. Elements that create Social Media Ecology

Male respondents experience the social media ecology through Image contents in social media, which shows 20.3 percent. Whereas, 22.1 percent of female respondents feel that Video contents shared and posted in the social media provides them social media ecology.

Male respondents of 11.2 percent experience social media ecology through the context created by the social media. On the other hand, 12.8 percent of female respondents experience social media ecology through Image contents in social media.

Table.2. Elements that play a role in creating Social Media Ecology

Elements	Male	Female
Text	5.2	10.9
Image	20.3	12.8
Video	10.4	22.1
Context	11.2	7.1

5. CONCLUSION

Social media is an environment which has the ability to provide a space for the users to live and grow in it. The level of experiencing the social media depends solely on the users' psychological and behavioral attitude towards the media.

Whatsapp plays vital role in respondents' life. 44 percent of the respondents spend more time in using Whatsapp over other social media. Latest version of Whatsapp is capable of handling all the visual elements in the most effective way. Instagram is second used social media platform. This platform provides more importance for photographs or images over other elements. Respondents tend to experience social media ecology more through Whatsapp and Instagram compared to other social media platforms.

Girl students are the ones who use Whatsapp and Instagram more, whereas boy students spend more time in Facebook. It shows that girl students tend to experience their social media environment (social media ecology) more through Whatsapp and Instagram. Similarly, boy students tend to experience the social media ecology more through Facebook, which allows them to freely express their varied ideologies through share, like, comment etc. Girl students are into the expression of their life and others as Whatsapp and Instagram mostly focus only personal lives.

Visual elements such as text, image, video and context build the social media. Boy students are more into image contents which they feel to provide them with an environment of entertainment and knowledge. Whereas, girl students experience the social media ecology through video contents.

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