



SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES DEPENDENCY AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

Dr. Beulah Rachel Rajarathnamani

Associate Professor, Dept. of Journalism & Communication, University of Madras.

ABSTRACT

The social networking sites offer a wide range of features and opportunities for its members. These sites fulfil young people's strong desire to connect with friends, maintain relationship, identity formation, belongingness, express opinions, stay in touch, and share experiences. These aspects provided by social networking sites can draw youngsters and can make them become dependent on these sites. This study tries to analyze the dependency college students express with regard to social networking sites. A survey method was adopted for this study. The study reveals that the members of social networking sites express that they are drawn into these sites and are unable to control the time they spend on these sites.

KEYWORDS: social networking sites, dependency, college students, youngsters.

INTRODUCTION:

Social networking sites (SNS) have entered the lives of youngsters and have grown in popularity. A majority of individuals utilize social networking sites and the number of memberships in these sites has grown over the years. Among college students the use of such sites is nearly universal.

Social networking is defined as a web-based service that allows its users to construct a profile that other users can see, and list connections with other users (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Some of the latest social networking sites include Facebook, Google Plus, BharatStudent, MySpace, Hi5, LinkedIn, and Bwithyou. Connection with people on social networking sites is established through activities like presenting an ideal persona, updating others activities of self, sharing photos, getting updates on activities by friends, showcasing a large social network, sending messages privately, and posting public testimonials. These activities can easily make youngsters spend a lot of time on social networking sites.

MEDIA DEPENDENCY THEORY

This study works from the premise of media system dependency theory (Defleur and Ball Rokeach, (1975), that assumes that the more a person depends on having his or her needs gratified by media use, the more important will be the role that media play in the person's life. This theory proposes an integral relationship among audience, media and the larger social system.

The social networking sites offer a wide range of features and opportunities for its members. These sites fulfil young people's strong desire to connect with friends, maintain relationship, provide a platform for self presentation, self disclosure, identity formation, belongingness, express opinions, stay in touch, and share experiences. Being drawn to these possibilities, youngsters can become dependent on social networking sites.

Social networking sites have the ability to attract youngsters using various features exhibited in their sites. Spending enormous amount of time on social networking sites appears to be part of most college students' daily activity. A study found that college students reported using Facebook on an average of 10 to 30 min daily (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). A study conducted by Lenhart & Madden (2007) among teens reported that about 55% of teens use social networks and 48% of them log on to social networking

sites daily, 22% logged on to social networking sites several times per day, 26% once a day, 17% three to five days per week, 15% one or two days per week, and only 20% every few weeks or less.

Young people want to be in the company of friends. The social networking site makes this possible for its members. They can be in touch with friends anywhere and anytime. Members use these sites for connecting with friends. Surveys indicate that people join and partake in social networking sites for reasons, such as to stay in touch with friends, make plans with friends, and make new friends. (Lenhart and Madden 2007).

A survey of college students showed that social networking sites are used for social interaction with offline acquaintances in order to maintain friendships rather than to make new friends (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). The researchers found that this social networking site was used to maintain existing offline connections rather than to form new relationships. Facebook use was associated with more perceived social capital. The usage of Facebook was related to all three kinds of perceived social capital that include bridging social capital, which consists of the resources that stem from one's weaker ties, bonding social capital, which consists of the resources that stem from one's more intimate ties, and maintained social capital, which consists of the resources that stem from one's prior ties.

Another study by Lenhart & Madden (2007) on teens and college students with social networking site membership reveal that youth primarily use these sites to stay in touch with friends, they see often and those whom they see rarely. Also, about half of teens use social networking sites to make new friends.

Social networking sites are based on the premise of relationship creation and maintenance, either with existing members of a social circle or connecting people with similar or shared interests (Boyd and Ellison, 2008). Members using social networking sites can learn about others, making initial contact, sharing common experiences/interests, and make available information about their activities, and then perhaps initiate a stronger relationship management of ongoing relationships. College students could become dependent on the social networking site since it gratifies the need of being constantly in touch with friends old or new and help in relationship initiation and maintenance.

Presentation of the self on the social networking site is important since this is the way one can communicate news to friends, and stimulate interest from others who are seeking new relationships. This is an important activity that members do on the social networking sites. Studies of the first popular social networking site, Friendster, (Donath and Boyd, 2004) describe how members create their profile with the intention of communicating news about themselves to others. Presentation of the self is time consuming. College students spend time creating a presentable self on the social networking site. Sometimes a false self could be presented as the real self on the social networking site.

Buhrmester and Prager's (1995) suggest that members can resolve issues through social input or feedback from others. Firstly, self-disclosure can serve the purpose of identity development, where external feedback from peers may help the individual to clarify his or her sense of self, and secondly, through intimacy development, where the relationship with the disclosure partner is strengthened. In fact, the researchers add that self-disclosure with peers may promote personal identity and intimacy. These social networking sites provide an easy, accessible way to interact with friends and gather feedback. These self disclosures enable peer feedback and acceptance, at the same time there is growing evidence that personal disclosure facilitates communication risks. Profiles are the cause of much public concern with respect to the use of social networking sites, due to their exposure of private information to unknown audiences. Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe (2007) studied Facebook members and reported that members reveal a lot of information about themselves. Youngsters' use social networking sites for self disclosure particularly with friends. Older teenagers (especially girls) are more likely to reveal detailed personal information. An overall, 49% included their school and 29% their email address (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). An Irish survey of 10-20 year olds found that while 49% gave out their date of birth, only 12% gave their mobile phone number and 8% their home address (Anchor, 2007). Despite clearly expressed privacy concerns, members of social networking sites routinely reveal many types of personal information.

Many members provide false information on the online profiles. The Pew Internet and American Life Project that looked at teen online activity reported that over 50 percent of teens post some false information in their online profiles (Lenhart and Madden, 2007). The study found that boys and younger teens are more likely to post false information. Many individuals give false information about their age, gender, occupation and behaviours.

Social networking sites generally allow a user to post sensitive personal information, such as relationship status, political affiliation, and various personal interests. College students are ready to display their identities. According to Arnett (2000), religion, political ideology, and work, are traditional markers of individual identity. These are the very aspects that are expressed by individuals on social networking sites to establish an identity for themselves. Although the public is regularly warned about the risks associated with social networking sites, a large portion of the population is still unaware of the potential privacy threats or even chooses to expose personal information despite these risks. The individual creating the profile determines the types of information shared in it. Although a profile may seem, on the surface, as a way to share real-world personal information, students may be using it to market their ideal identities. Students may want to portray their ideal self as popular. The social networking sites provide a space for identity establishment. This is an important gratification that social networking sites provide for young individuals.

A study by Valkenburg, Peter, and Schouten (2006) on Dutch social networking site members in the age group of 10 to 19 years found that users' self-esteem was directly related to the type of responses received about information posted on their profile. Their self-esteem was related to their overall well-being. Positive feedback was related to positive self-esteem and negative feedback to negative self-esteem.

Human beings have a strong desire to belong. Social networking sites members can gratify this need by using services provided by the sites that enable conversations and information gathering, along with the possibility of gaining social approval, expressing opinions, and influencing others. According to Schutz (1966) the need to belong is the basis of interpersonal relations orientation. People involve in group seeking behaviour with three basic needs. Firstly, they look for inclusion, which pertains to the need to belong to or include others in a circle of acquaintances, secondly, affection, or the need to love or be loved by others and thirdly, control, which encompasses the need to exert power over others or give power over the self to others. A member in the social networking site can fulfil all the three above said needs.

Social networking sites gratify various needs of individuals. Membership growth in these sites stands as evidence for the popularity of these networks. These needs gratification could make members dependent on the sites. This study proposes to analyze the dependency college students express with regard to social networking sites.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Do college students show dependency towards social networking sites?

Method

A survey method was adopted for this study. A questionnaire was distributed to the respondents who agreed to participate in the study. Data collected from 250 college students (126 male, 124 female) from Chennai was analysed for this study. Since this study was on social networking sites, only the students who were members of social networking sites were chosen for the study. The data of the 250 respondents was coded and analysed to arrive at the results.

Analysis

Table 1: How much time do you spend on social networking sites per day?

S. No.	Time spent	Percentage (Male)	Percentage (Female)
1	More than 3 hours	55%	52%
2	2 – 3 hours	33%	37%
3	1 – 2 hours	9%	7%
4	Less than 1 hour	3%	4%

The above table shows that 55% male and 52% female spend more than 3 hours on social networking sites per day, 33% male and 37% female spend 2-3 hours on social networking sites per day, 9% male and 7% female spend 1-2 hours on social networking sites per day, and 3% male and 4% female spend less than 1 hour on social networking sites per day. Most of the college students both male and female spend more than 3 hours on social networking sites per day.

Table 2: How many times do you visit social networking sites on a day?

S. No.	Visit	Percentage (Male)	Percentage (Female)
1	More than 5 times	58%	56%
2	3-5 times	37%	38%
3	1-3 times	3%	5%
4	Once	2%	1%

The above table shows that 58% male and 56% female visit the social networking sites more than 5 times on a day, 37% male and 38% female visit the social networking sites 3-5 times on a day, 3% male and 5% female visit the social networking 1-3 times on a day, and 2% male and 1% female visit the social networking sites once on a day. Most of the college students both male and female visit the social networking sites more than 5 times on a day.

Table 3: How often do you change your social networking sites profile?

S. No.	Change profile	Percentage (Male)	Percentage (Female)
1	Daily	3%	2%
2	Several times per week	9%	12%
3	Weekly	15%	18%
4	Monthly	52%	48%
5	Once in six months	7%	9%
6	Once in a year	6%	5%
7	Never	8%	6%

The above table shows that 3% male and 2% female change their social networking sites profile daily, 9% male and 12% female change their social networking sites profile several times per week, 15% male and 18% female change their social networking sites profile weekly, 52% male and 48% female change their social networking sites profile monthly, 7% male and 9% female change their social networking sites profile once in six months, 6% male and 5% female change their social networking sites profile once in a year and 8% male and 6% female never change their social networking sites profile. Most of the college students both male and female change their social networking sites profile monthly.

Table 4: Number of friends at present on social networking sites

S. No.	Number of friends	Percentage (Male)	Percentage (Female)
1	Less than 25	5%	3%
2	26-100	12%	16%
3	100-200	15%	17%
4	200-300	23%	21%
5	More than 300	45%	43%

The above table shows that 5% male and 3% female have less than 25 friends on social networking sites, 12% male and 16% female have 26-100 friends on social networking sites, 15% male and 17% female have 100-200 friends on social networking sites, 23% male and 21% female have 200-300 friends on social networking sites, 45% male and 43% female have more than 300 friends on social networking sites. Most of the college students both male and female have more than 300 friends on the social networking sites.

Table 5: Social Networking Sites Dependency (Male)

S. No.	Social Networking Sites Dependency	Percentage (Male)	
		Agree	Disagree
1	One of the first things I do each morning is log on to social networking site	83%	17%
2	I find it hard to control my use of a social networking site	93%	7%
3	Social networking site has become a necessary part of my daily life	96%	4%
4	I feel lost when I cannot access my social networking site	76%	24%
5	I talk about social networking site when I am not using it	93%	7%
6	I postpone other activities for spending time on social networking site	73%	27%
7	I think about social networking site when I am not using it	92%	8%
8	It is important for me to access the social networking site daily	88%	12%
9	I spend a lot of time on social networking site	92%	8%

The above table shows that among male 83% agree and 17% disagree that 'one of the first things I do each morning is log on to social networking site', 93% agree and 7% disagree that 'I find it hard to control my use of a social networking site', 96% agree and 4% disagree that 'Social networking site has become a necessary part of my daily life', 76% agree and 24% disagree that 'I feel lost when I cannot access my social networking site', 93% agree and 7% disagree that 'I talk about social networking site when I am not using it', 73% agree and 27% disagree that 'I postpone other activities for spending time on social networking site', 92% agree and 8% disagree that 'I think about social networking site when I am not using it', 88% agree and 12% disagree that 'It is important for me to access the social networking site daily', 92% agree and 8% disagree that 'I spend a lot of time on social networking site'.

Table 6: Social Networking Sites Dependency (Female)

S. No.	Social Networking Sites Dependency	Percentage (Female)	
		Agree	Disagree
1	One of the first things I do each morning is log on to social networking site	80%	20%
2	I find it hard to control my use of a social networking site	89%	11%
3	Social networking site has become a necessary part of my daily life	97%	3%
4	I feel lost when I cannot access my social networking site	79%	21%
5	I talk about social networking site when I am not using it	92%	8%
6	I postpone other activities for spending time on social networking site	69%	31%
7	I think about social networking site when I am not using it	94%	6%
8	It is important for me to access the social networking site daily	84%	16%
9	I spend a lot of time on social networking site	90%	10%

The above table shows that among female 80% agree and 20% disagree that 'one of the first things I do each morning is log on to social networking site', 89% agree and 11% disagree that 'I find it hard to control my use of a social networking site', 97% agree and 3% disagree that 'Social networking site has become a necessary part of my daily life', 79% agree and 21% disagree that 'I feel lost when I cannot access my social networking site' 92% agree and 8% disagree that 'I talk about social networking site when I am not using it', 69% agree and 31% disagree that 'I postpone other activities for spending time on social networking site', 94% agree and 6% disagree that 'I think about social networking site when I am not using it', 84% agree and 16% disagree that 'It is important for me to access the social networking site daily', 90% agree and 10% disagree that 'I spend a lot of time on social networking site'.

DISCUSSION

The study reveals that college students both male and female show dependency towards social networking sites. They exhibit tendency of addiction to these sites. Most of them state that the first thing that they do early morning is log on to the social networking sites. They find it hard to control using social networking sites since they feel that these sites have become a necessary part of their daily life and they feel lost without it. They talk and think about these sites when not using it and postpone other activities for the sake of using these sites. They spend a lot of time on the social networking sites and think it to be an important activity. Both men and women are found to be similar in their usage of the social networking sites and the dependency they feel towards these sites. According to media dependency theory when a person depends on having his or her needs gratified by media use, the more important will be the role that media play in the person's life. Here social networking sites are used by the youngsters to keep in touch with friends, maintain relationship, self-presentation, identity development and as a medium of expression. The wide range of gratifications provided by the social networking sites has the ability of drawing youngsters towards it at the cost of many other activities.

CONCLUSION

College students are in a vulnerable age during which they compete with each other to have a place of their own in the social world. Social networking sites give them an alternative cyber world where they try

to excel and have a place of their own. When less value is attached to the social networking sites and its activities the situation is under control. But when excessive value is attached to these sites the situation goes out of hand. This leads to dependency on the social networking sites that affect other areas of life of an individual. Social networking site tries to occupy the mind, talk and time of the individual bringing the person completely under its control. Of late many members of social networking sites clearly express that they are drawn into these sites and are unable to control the time they spend on these sites. Usage of the social networking site starts just as a habit but slowly takes control. Members of these sites are expected to be aware of the concerns of the psychologists, counselors, and educators and use the social networking sites with discretion so as to avoid becoming dependent on it.

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