

Significance of social networking media in higher education - An empirical study among the students of Panjab University

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ABSTRACT

Used by millions of people worldwide, social networking sites have altered human behaviour on the web, resulting in reduced personal inhibitions of sharing information online. The most popular social media include blogs, wikis, photo-sharing sites, Internet forums and extend to social networking utilities like personal blogs, Ning, Twitter, Bebo, MySpace and Facebook. There are three basic types of social networking websites: 'free-for-all' social websites, including Facebook, MySpace, and Friendster; professional websites, including LinkedIn, FastPitch, and Plaxo; and industry-specific websites like I-Meet.

Social networking site, Facebook, gained over 100 million users in the United States from 2009 to 2010: a 145% growth rate within a year (McCorvey, 2010). Also, some corporations are increasingly experimenting with the use of social networks to improve business operations (Schwarz, 2008). It should be noted that the use of social media doubled from 11% to 22% between 2008 and 2009 (Sarrel, 2010).

Usage and importance of Social Networking Sites are increasing day by day.

The present study has made an attempt to study the extent of usage and importance given to the social networking sites by the students of different departments of Panjab University. Various on-campus students were invited to take part in the survey. Final sample constitutes students from all the departments of Panjab University. Analysis has been done using SPSS 16. Further, analysis of data has been presented in the forms of charts as well. Results of the study revealed that majority of respondents are aware of SNS. More than 50 percent of the respondents use SNS more than once a day.

Key Words: Social networking sites, Online behavior, Social networks

1. INTRODUCTION

Social Networking Sites (SNS) provides a platform for social, emotional, and cognitive development of youth (Roberts et al., 2005). SNS have infiltrated people's daily life with amazing rapidity to become an important

social platform for computer-mediated communication (Tapscott, 2008; Correa et al., 2010). SNS is a cyber environment that allows the individual to construct his/her profile, sharing text, images, and photos, and to link other members of the site by applications and groups provided on the Internet (Boyd and Ellison, 2008; Tapscott, 2008; Pfeil et al., 2009; Powell, 2009). Generations today are experiencing a new wave of interpersonal communication as “the use of social networking tools and practices has considerable impact on scholarly communication at colleges and universities” (Penzhorn, 2009). These SNSs are helping students evolve with the current trends in technology and the changing face of the world of communication.

SNSs are profile-based websites that allow users to maintain social relationships by viewing, visiting, and sharing their lists of social connections with other members (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). SNS allow their users to create a personal profile that displays information about the user and articulate a network of “friends” or others users between whom profile information is shared. These sites provide multiple services to its users. Users begin by creating a personal profile, which generally includes information about their education and work experience, birth date, location and contact information, hobbies, personal interests.

Social Network Sites have offered a wide variety of technical features. Visible profiles that display an articulated list of

friends who are also users of the system are the backbone of social networking sites. SNS are popular for a variety of reasons, such as to stay in touch with friends, make plans with friends, make new friends, or flirt with someone (Lenhart and Madden, 2007). Other reasons may include feelings of affiliation and belonging, need for information, goal achievement, self-identity, values, and notions of accepted behavior (Ridings and Gefen, 2004). Just after joining a social network site, users are prompted to identify other people in the system who are known to them in any way. On such sites, popular terms include Friends, Contacts and Fans. Most Social Network Sites require bi-directional confirmation for Friendship, but some do not. These one-directional ties are sometimes labeled as Fans or Followers, but many sites call these Friends as well. The term Friends can be misleading, because the connection does not exactly mean friendship in the everyday vernacular sense, and the reasons people connect are varied (Boyd, 2006).

SNS appear in many forms including blogs and micro-blogs, forums, message boards, social networks, wikis, virtual worlds, social bookmarking, tagging, writing communities, digital story telling, scrapbooking, content, image and video sharing, and collective intelligence.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Uses of SNSs among students in universities and colleges have been a topic of great discussion among researchers throughout the world. Numerous studies have been conducted to see what positive and negative impacts these sites have on users. The 2001 report from the Pew Internet and American Life Project (**Lenhart, Rainey, and Lewis, 2001**) was an early indication of the increasingly social role that communications technologies would play in the lives of young people. It found that more than 75 % of teens were using the Internet, 76% of online teens said they would miss the Internet if they could no longer go online and 48% said that use of Internet improves their relationship with friends. When the Pew Internet and American Life Project updated the results in 2007 (**Lenhart, Madden, Smith, and Macgill, 2007**), it was found that the nearly 93% of teens use the Internet, and most of them treating it as a venue for social interaction.

Karlin (2007) reported that almost 60% of students who use social networking talk about education online. **Subrahmanyam et al. (2008)** reported that the majority of participants in their sample reported were having a profile on a SNS. SNS provide a platform for individuals to express their feelings and opinions. **Klein (2008)** reported that SNS have improved communication between students and faculty member. Educational institute now have an effective vehicle for delivering news, updates, forms, and files to the staff and students. SNS uses

are also beginning to emerge in college classrooms. **Mazer, Murphy, and Simonds (2007)** found that SNS is increasingly being used not only by students but also by faculty members. According to facebook data, more than 297,000 Facebook members identify themselves as faculty members. Many organizations are using SNS as tool that allows them to recruit new employees and attract potential applicants. **Mahajan (2009)** said that social networking focuses on building online communities of people who share interests and/or activities with others, SNSs appear to be in the process of entering to other areas of teen life, including education.

There are also studies dealing with how privacy issues have changed over time and that many users now-a-days restrict access to their profile. The **National School Boards Associations (2007)** found that safety policies remain important for SNS users. **Utz and Kramer (2009)** found that the majority of users changed the default privacy settings to more restrictive settings. **Young and Quan-Haase (2009)** also reported that people use other privacy protection strategies.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The core objective of the present study is to examine the use of Social Networking Sites (SNS) by the students of Panjab University.

The study aims to fulfill some additional objectives which are as follows:

- To study SNS's usage habits of students
- To find out of specific purpose(s) of using SNS
- To understand the significance of SNS in academic/research
- To find out most preferred SNS
- To find out risks and problem faced due to SNS
- To check relationship between risks faced and usage of SNS
- To check relationship between usage and information sharing

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Following methodology has been used to fulfill the objectives of the present study:

4.1 Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is limited to 334 students of Panjab University. In this study, an attempt has been made to study the extent of usage of social networking sites by the students of different departments of university.

4.2 Sample Selection

Random sampling method was used for the present study. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed among the students and research scholars of Panjab University. Out of 500, only 334 questionnaires were filled completely. Size of the sample is now 334 which constitute students from all the departments of Panjab University.

4.3 Data Collection for the Study

The data for the study has been collected through primary as well as secondary sources. The primary data has been gathered in the form of online and offline questionnaire. Various on-campus students were invited to take part in survey by stationing personnel in the university's various departments and hostels. The secondary data has been collected from published and non-published sources.

4.4 Tools for analysis

Due to nominal nature of data from questionnaire, data has been presented in the forms of charts. SPSS 16.0 is used to analyze and interpret the collected data. Frequency, crosstabs and percentage methods were used during analysis along with t-test, correlation and regression analysis.

5. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Findings of the present study have been divided into the following sections:

5.1 SNS usage habits of students

5.2 Purpose of using SNS

5.3 Significance of SNS in academics/research

5.4 Preference of SNS

5.5 Risks and problem faced due to SNS

5.6 Relationship between risks faced and usage/knowledge of SNS

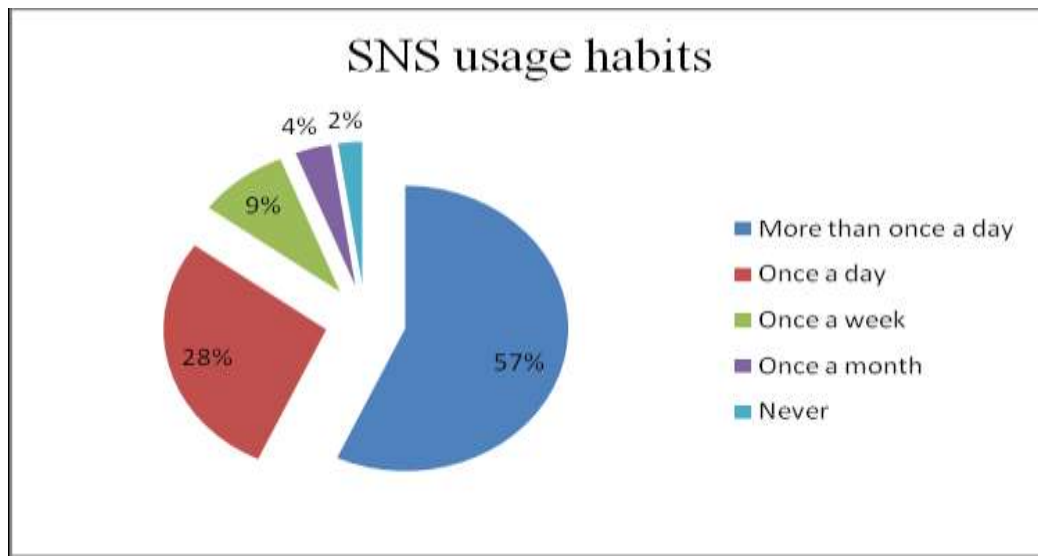
5.7 Relationship between usage and information sharing

The responses received from students are illustrated in the form of figures as discussed below:

5.1 SNS usage habits of students

SNS usage habits of students of Panjab University can be seen in figure- 5.1. It is very clear from the figure below that most of the students use social networking sites more than once in a day. Total 284 out of 334 students use such sites daily, 190 (56.88%) students use these sites more than once a day and 94 (28.14%) students use these once a day. Further, there are 30 (8.98%) students who visit SNSs once in a week, 12 (3.59%) students visit such sites once in a month while only 8 (2.39%) students stated that they never visited social networking sites. Students who never visited SNSs have been excluded further analysis.

Figure- 5.1: SNS usage habits



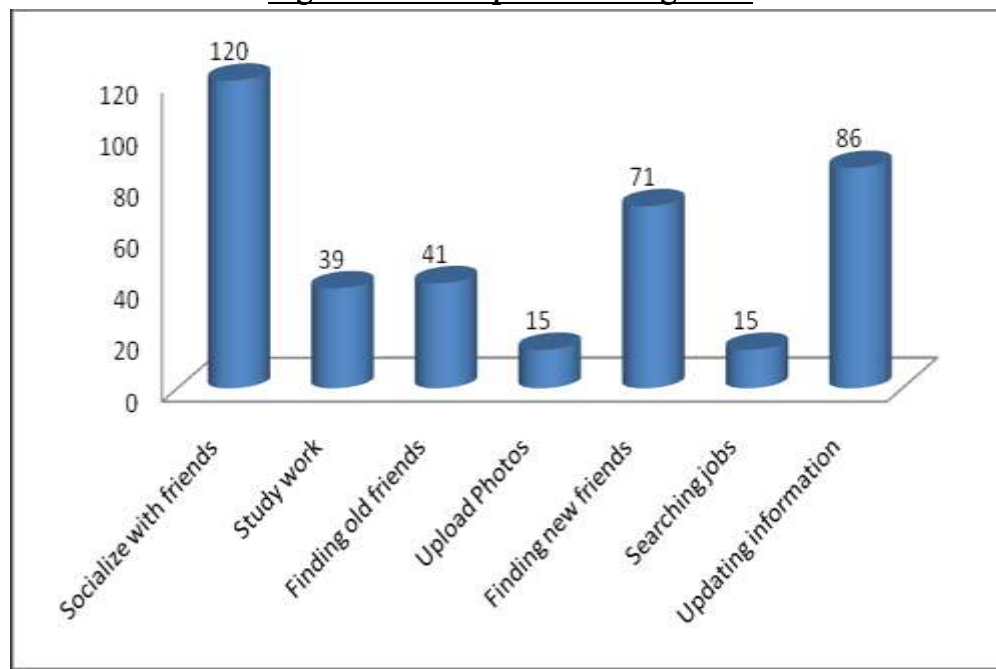
Source: Researcher's Compilation

5.2 Purpose of using SNS

Figure- 5.2 shows that most of the students use SNSs for either finding an old or a new friends or to socialize with them. Some students are using SNSs for studies (11.96%) and information sharing (26.38%).

Very few students have used such sites for uploading photos (4.60%) and searching jobs (4.60%). In all more than half of the students use SNSs for socializing, not for the studies.

Figure- 5.2: Purpose of using SNS



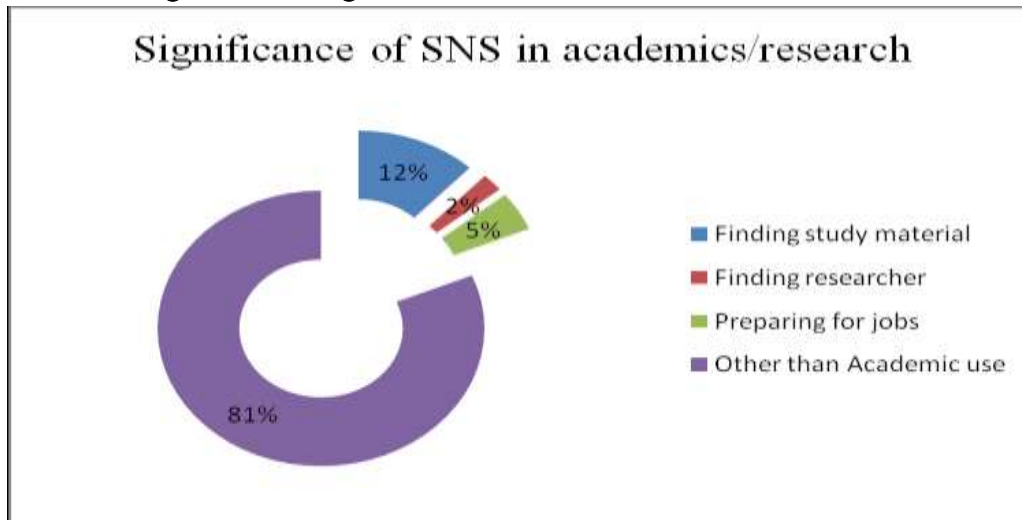
Source: Researcher's Compilation

5.3 Significance of SNS in academics/research

It can be clearly seen from the figure- 5.3 that 265 out of total 326 students use such sites for other than academic purposes. Only 39 (11.96%) students utilize SNSs for

finding study material, 15 (4.60%) students use them for preparing for jobs and 7 (2.14%) students use SNSs for searching researchers.

Figure- 5.3: Significance of SNS in academics/research



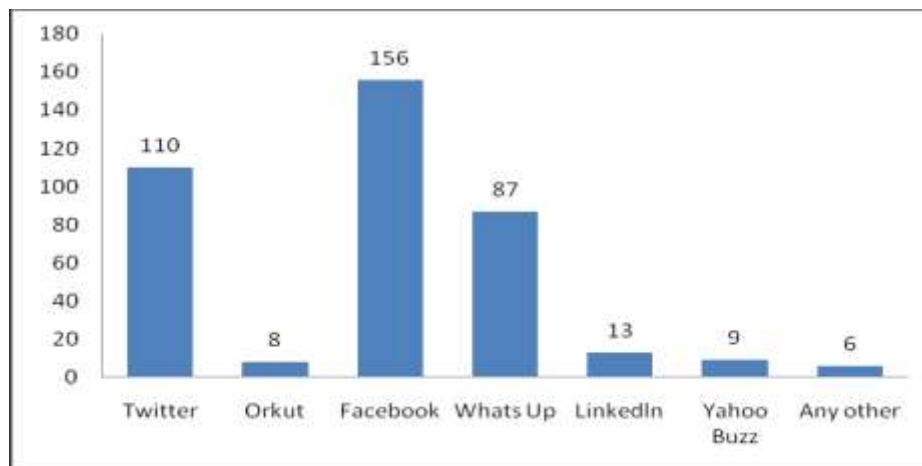
Source: Researcher's Compilation

5.4 Preferences of SNS

Figure- 5.4 states it very clearly that most of the students have preferred Facebook (47.85%), followed by Twitter (33.74%). Very few students are using Orkut (2.45%), Yahoo Buzz (2.76%), and LinkedIn

(3.98%). Students are shifting to Whats Up (26.68%) from Twitter and Facebook. Students revealed that they were facing privacy problems from family and relatives on Twitter and facebook so they have shifted to Whatsup.

Figure- 5.4: Preferences of SNS



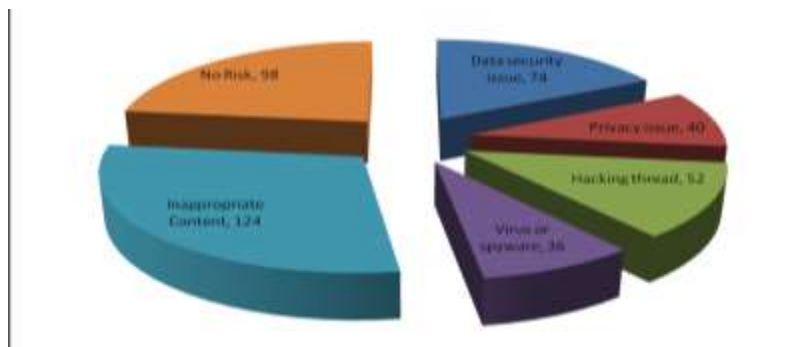
Source: Researcher's Compilation

5.5 Risks and problems faced due to SNS

According to figure- 5.5, inappropriate contents has topped the list as 124 (38.03%) students are stating the problem of inappropriate contents followed by data security issue, stated by 74 (22.69%)

students. 36 (11.04%) students stated Virus or Spyware as risk, 40 (12.26%) students stated privacy issue on stake and 52 (15.95%) students are afraid of hacking threats. 30% students stated that no risk/problem has been faced by them due to the usage of SNS.

Figure- 5.5: Risks and problems faced due to SNS



Source: Researcher's Compilation

5.6 Relationship between risks faced and usage/knowledge of SNS

To find out the relationship between the risk faced by the students while using SNS and usage of SNS, correlation analysis has been

Table 1: Correlation among risk faced and knowledge of SNS

	Correlation Coefficient	Sig (p-value)
Pearson Correlation	-0.699	0.000
Spearman Rho	-0.726	0.000

used. Table 1 clearly shows that risk faced by using SNS and the knowledge of SNS are highly negatively correlated which states that the less you use these sites, the more your risk increases and vice-versa.

5.7 Relationship between usage and information sharing

Table 2 shows the result of regression analysis to check the relationship between usage of SNS and information sharing on such sites. It clearly shows that there is a positive and significant relationship between the usage of SNS and information sharing i.e., students using more SNS shares more information than others.

Table 2: Results of Regression- Relationship between Usage and Information sharing

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	2.249	1.294		1.737	.013
Usage	0.321	.195	-1.313	-.621	.002

Note: Dependent Variable is Information Sharing

6. CONCLUSION

The following conclusions can be drawn from the research findings:

- 1) Majority of respondents are aware of SNS. More than half of the respondents use SNS more than once a day.
- 2) Most of the user spends time Socialize with friends followed by updating information.
- 3) Facebook and Twitter are most preferred SNS among respondents.
- 4) Although there are many resources and services provided by SNS but still risk of data security and inappropriate content is present in the mind of respondents.

7. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite its valuable findings and implications, this study contains some limitations as discussed below:

- 1) Due to time constraints, the research could not be made extensively. The study is limited to the students of Panjab University only. Study could have been expanded to include students of other universities as well. Therefore, researchers should be cautious while generalizing the findings of SNS to the students of other universities.
- 2) A more typical diary research approach may have provided a broader measure about SNS. Such a method is not used in study because it was difficult to approach students asking minute-by-minute measure about the use of SNS.

Future studies can be conducted taking larger sample size. Also, a study can be conducted by involving more than one university campus for cross-cultural and cross-marketplace comparison.

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