

Impact of Facebook on People and Society

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Abstract

Objective: Social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook are affecting our daily lives. In this paper, we researched on how Facebook impacts people and society with reference to India. **Methods:** We developed a questionnaire and conducted an offline survey on people of different profiles and ages using Stratified sampling technique. Also, we studied news reports on Internet about people who used Facebook in a certain manner to express their ideas or to voice their anguish. **Findings:** The combined study showed how Facebook can affect the individuals at psychological level, social bodies at administration level and thus help in moulding their behaviors. Earlier, one researcher analyzed on how Facebook can affect and help in development of relationships. Another paper researched on its role in students' academic performance. One more paper studied about the role of Facebook in social sciences. **Applications/Improvements:** The methodology can be applied effectively to understand how SNS are changing the way people communicate and administrative policies are being formed because of its increasing role in government machinery.

Keywords: Emotional Impact of Facebook, Psychological behavior, SNS, Social Impact of Facebook, Social Behavior

1. Introduction

The association of people with computers and information technology has progressed to a greater extent in the past decade. There are numerous applications of computers and mobile devices. One such application is WWW (World Wide Web), which has changed the way businesses operate and people think, perceive and communicate. If you ask someone about WWW and Internet, they will perhaps mention Google, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram and so on. Most of people spend a good deal of their time of Internet surfing on Social Networking Sites (SNS). SNS have enabled the people to meet and communicate with their families and friends online, regardless of their physical location. These sites are becoming an imperative part of our lives and it seems that they will be for a long time in future as well.

There are many popular SNS like WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram etc. In this paper, we have chosen Facebook to study the social and psychological behaviour of its users. Facebook is a popular website dedicated to online social networking. Facebook initially was

known as Facemash¹. Its headquarters is in Menlo Park, California. The website was launched on February 4, 2004, by³ with his Harvard College roommates. It gradually rose to most popular social networking website. On December 31, 2014, it had 1,390 million active users² which rose to 1,550 million users on December 31, 2015³. This continuously growing user base of Facebook motivated us to study its role in moulding the social fabric of our tech-savvy society.

2. Previous Work

There are millions of Facebook users around the globe. The profiles of users are unique in terms of age, occupation, location and family backgrounds. Many researchers have applied different methodologies to understand why people use Facebook and their usage behaviors. In ⁴ conducted a survey for her research⁴ to know how Facebook can affect long-term relationships. According to social penetration theory given by Altman and Taylor⁵, there are four stages of development of a relationship, which were discussed in her thesis:-

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- Orientation of interaction
- Exploratory affective exchange
- Affective stage
- Stable stage

According to their theory, a relationship gradually develops from a formal communication into an intimate one.

In another research, In⁶ discussed about behavioral difficulties⁶ found in high school students due to prolonged use of SNS resulting into social bullying and low academic grades. However, SNS can be used in other way also. There are many academic groups on Facebook created by individuals, schools, and universities etc., which are helping the students to learn the concepts of different subjects in an interactive manner. Thus, SNS can be used by students to improve their grades.

In⁷ did a literature review to analyze the influence of Facebook on different social sciences to understand psychological and sociological processes which affect the people and societies while using SNS.

In⁸ emphasized on using features available in Facebook to the advantage of enhancing the teaching-learning process and improving the students' performance.

All these previous works provided a backdrop to our study of psychological and social influence of Facebook in the context of Indian environment.

3. Methodology

To understand the role and reach of Facebook, we conducted an offline survey using Stratified sampling technique. We distributed a questionnaire consisting of 20 questions of multiple choice types to 100 persons of different profiles and age groups. Samples were collected from 53 female and 47 male respondents. People were asked questions related to the role Facebook can play in personal and social areas of their lives. The tables mention the characteristics of our samples. Table 1 shows the various age groups of our samples. Table 2 shows the occupation/profile of our samples for this research.

Table 1. Age group of samples

Age Group	No. of Respondents
18-21	21
22-25	19
26-30	25
31-35	24
>35	11

Table 2. Profiles of samples for the research

Occupation	No. of Respondents
School Student	12
College Student	17
College/University Teacher	36
Industry Professionals	9
Office Clerks	5
School Teacher	12
Housewife	6
Others	3

Here, we divided our samples into five age groups. The first age group is of school students and under-graduate college students. The second group is of post-graduate college students as well as freshly inducted employees. The other 3 age groups belong to people from different occupations, i.e. teachers, professionals and others with different maturity levels.

4. Impact of Facebook

We analyzed the responses of people to our questionnaire from three perspectives:-

- The psychological aspects of social behavior exhibited by our respondents,
- The emotional influence while selecting a particular response to a question.
- The social and political expectations of people from Facebook due to the wide reach and appeal it carries.

The responses were indications of peoples' beliefs and their specific behavior on SNS.

4.1 Psychological impact

First, we will discuss the role of Facebook in emotional and psychological framework of people. Not more than 20% respondents claimed they are not very active on SNS and created their profile on Facebook only to show their online presence. However, the rest of respondents were using Facebook for different reasons. In response to the question, "Why you use Facebook?" the highest no. of respondents claimed they use it to stay in touch with their family and/or friends.

Our data shows that 14% persons use Facebook to socialize. For some people Facebook is a good platform to make new friends and build relationships. Such people use it to socialize with unknown or less known persons. Many of such people prefer to build friendship with opposite sex.

Interestingly, 11% people mentioned that they use Facebook to get rid of boredom or just to pass their idle time [Figure 1].

45% people mentioned they check for updates either before going to bed or immediately after they wake up in the morning. 55% of respondents have a good friend list on Facebook having 100 or more contacts on their friends list. The people who are actively using their Facebook account, they usually have a friend list of 200 or more people. They update their status at least 2 times in a day and/or check for updates 10 times or more in a single day. Around 14% respondents admitted that they check their Facebook account 10 or more times in a day.

On the other side, in response to the questions related to the time spend on Facebook and online activity, more than 50% of responses by people, who have a big friend list, showed that these people use their account in less to moderate manner. This can be said that the size of friend list is not a measure of active use of Facebook since people tend to accept the friend request of persons who are their colleague or acquaintance only. The psychological response to a friend request is either to “oblige” the person or not to let the other person think of you as “arrogant”. [Figure 2]

The answers provided by our respondents to another question indicate that most of people share posts which can boost one’s motivation and spread positivity, the posts relevant to the society at large, and also the posts which are lighter in nature and fall under the category of fun stuff. “Motivational posts” was also the option selected by 60% people in response to a question related to the types of posts liked by them. These responses show that many people use Facebook to assure themselves they are part of society and possibly they seek motivation to get rid of the negativity in their minds. [Figure 3]

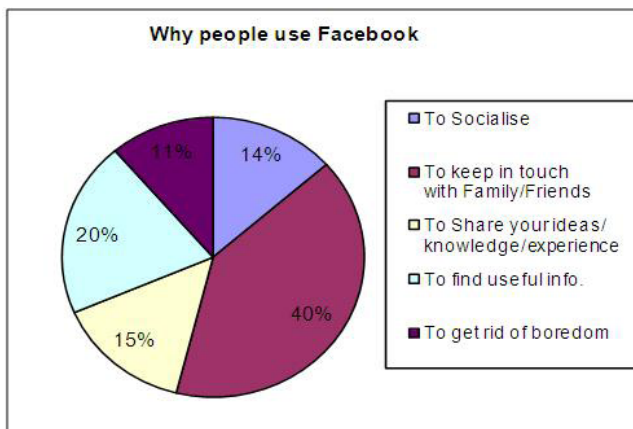


Figure 1. A Pie-chart showing why people use Facebook.

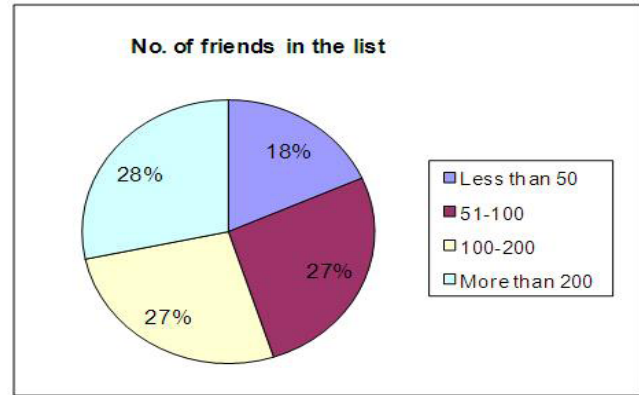


Figure 2. A Pie-chart showing no. of friends in peoples’ profiles.

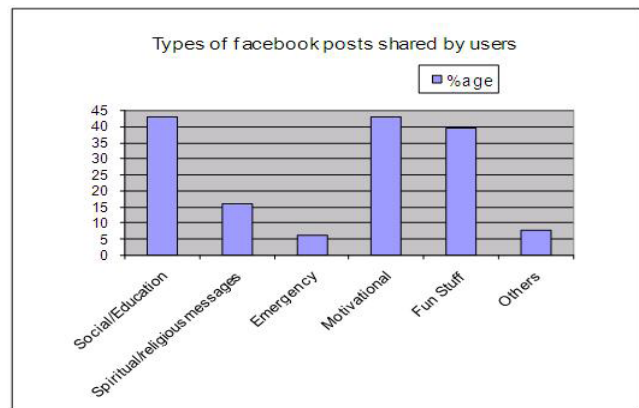


Figure 3. Column Chart showing types of posts shared by people.

In response to question on the types of Facebook posts people like, around 20% respondents say that they check and like personal updates posted by their Facebook contacts. Some of the examples of personal updates are photographs/videos of their recent trip to an exotic location, success in their careers, “selfie” etc. The immediate psychological response when one sees photographs of an abroad trip posted by someone or when one reads about the astounding success of one of his/her friends is envy and/or the feeling of being “left out”. It might negatively impact one’s self-esteem. To overcome these negative feelings, these people try to project themselves online in a positive light. One practice followed by the people, especially who are under the age of 25, is to post a “selfie” every other day and counting the number of likes. When one sees the perfectly clicked and professionally edited “selfie” of his/her friend, the psychological reaction is one tends to compare his/her appearance with the photograph of friend. Some people take “selfie”, which could be perhaps

better than his/her friend's, and post on their profile. The urge to post "selfie" is referred to as "narcissism"⁹ by psychologists. This behavioral trait is more common among young users of SNS.

We asked our samples one question about their reaction if they get the less number of likes for their Facebook posts than they expected. Below is the data of answers we received:-

- ❖ 55% of respondents said they would prefer to analyze the quality of their post.
- ❖ Interestingly, 20% claimed that they would rather do "tit for tat" for others' posts.
- ❖ 16% said they will post less in future.
- ❖ Rest of 9% said they will feel sad or disappointed.

These responses give an insight into the psychology of persons living in different environments, having different age. For example, most of respondents who selected "tit for tat" option were under the age of 25.

4.2 Social & Political Impact

Facebook is not only popular among individuals, but is also used by organizations to make the people aware of their services. Businesses use it as a good platform to promote their products and services. In 2012, the beauty pageant Miss Sri Lanka Online¹⁰ was organized using Facebook only. Similarly many online events and/or event invitations are being given using Facebook.

Government agencies are now using Facebook to reach citizens to know their concerns as well as to make people aware of various social-economic schemes launched by the government. For example, Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship under Indian Government launched a scheme called "Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana" (PMKVY) in July 2015. To reach a wider range of people, the ministry has created their official website as well as profile on SNS, including Facebook. Similarly, every government department has their official page on Facebook to let the citizen know about different policies and decisions taken by the authorities concerned. One another example is the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP)¹¹, which aims at providing government services in fast and cost-effective manner.

In answer to a question asked in our survey, more than 75% Facebook users agree that it can impact the political structure of a country and make the governance more responsible. Only 6% respondents were against this notion; rest of people preferred to be undecided [Figure 4].

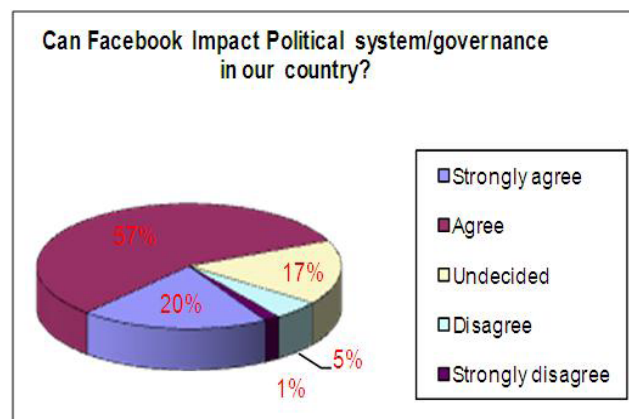


Figure 4. A Pie-chart of survey responses.

In Lok Sabha elections of 2014, almost every political party used the power of Facebook to reach the eligible voters and convey their message to them. Facebook played an important role in shaping the destiny of Indian political system. CNN referred to these elections as "India's first Social Media Elections"¹².

On the other side, Facebook has been used by individuals to express their anguish and dissatisfaction over many social and political issues. Here, we quote some famous news items related to Facebook:-

- ❖ A professor of Jadavpur University was arrested in April 2012 for posting a cartoon ridiculing the Chief Minister of West Bengal using Facebook¹³.
- ❖ Aseem Trivedi, a Free speech campaigner from Mumbai, was arrested in September 2012 for mocking Indian Parliament on his Facebook page¹³.
- ❖ In November 2012, two girls from Mumbai were arrested for questioning the shutdown of the city for funeral of Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray¹³.
- ❖ In August 2014, a political party worker was arrested for posting comments about the Prime Minister of India on his Facebook page¹³.

All these incidents had a strong social and political impact across the country as all these were related to the misuse of Section 66A of IT Act of Indian Constitution. The Supreme Court of India finally declared Section 66A of Information Technology Act as unconstitutional¹⁴ and struck it down on 24 March 2015, under which all the above mentioned arrests were made. This verdict showed the influence of SNS on the political as well as the judicial structure of a country.

5. Conclusion

Based on our study, we can safely conclude that SNS are shaping numerous aspects of our society; be it personal social or political. On personal aspect, it has enabled people to stay in contact with their family, friends, colleagues etc. It lets one's contacts know about what is happening in the lives of people they know. It has also bridged the geographical divide between people and helped them to bond strongly. Many people, especially young ones, are using this platform to fulfill the emotional backlog of their lives by trying to find the emotional support they need. It can be said that though it definitely is a good platform to connect with our friends and loved ones, SNS can never replace the warmth of relation and bonding shared between persons living together or connecting by other means except of SNS.

On the social front, it is affecting the way government bodies and other social agencies respond to masses at large. The effective use of Facebook has resulted in increased transparency in administrative functions and higher responsibility towards the citizen. Many countries have been forced to change their law and order related functions as citizens are using Facebook to highlight the wrongdoings by responsible agencies. Thus, we can conclude that it can play a bigger role in future also in shaping the administrative policies of these bodies.

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