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## 8. Life through the Prism of the Social Media

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### Abstract

The Social media is a boon for us. No matter what the outcome of debates may be, the fact is that it has a tacit influence over us as individuals and communities. There are different media for different needs, whether it be personal, social or professional. There is an ever-growing number of people who are using the social media, needless to say that most of them are the youth. The future of our country has to be adept with the latest technology to make a mark for themselves in the world. This paper is an attempt to understand the impact of social media on society and what the youth perceive with reference to the same. A questionnaire was passed on to the youth in the age group of 18 – 21 through convenient sampling.

**Key Words:** Social Media, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Youth

### Literature Review

We are in times of a digital revolution. Technological advancements have brought us into a revolutionary era wherein one has easy access to data via the internet (Poore, 2013). Social networking platforms have become prominent and quite a few people have formed communities and share plenty of information through this medium (Srinivas, 2014). The media has many positive influences on people wherein distances have been reduced, relationships are built, people take part in activities, solve problems, bridge gaps, etc. (Mishra, 2012). It is through the social media that discussions can be carried on and social evils can be done away with. Even corrupt practices can be checked (Shrivastava, 2015).

The social media helps in transcending boundaries and helps in increasing acceptability among individuals (Qualman, 2009). Not just that, even social development can take place because of this media. One only needs a basic smart phone (Schroeder, 2018). People become more aware of their rights leading to reducing of inequality in society. However, the question of the digital divide could still keep us on the same plane of extensive inequality (Dijk, 2006).

What is alarming is that communication has become faceless and emotionless leading to loss of cognitive abilities (Miller et al, 2016). Individual identities are created giving a visibility on the public sphere, thereby also leading to a collective identity. The digital space is crossed

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(Sinnan, 2017). This visibility on the public domain could invade into our privacy, making us known to the unknown (Claypoole, 2014).

On the one hand, family values are eroding, on the other, it leads to a bonding due to the crossing of barriers of time and space (Venkatraman, 2017). There are the lower socio-economic and lower-middle classes who put restrictions on their women folk when it comes to using social media (Schroeder, 2018).

Professionally, sites like LinkedIn have been a booster to those who want to create a professional image of themselves and develop professional linkages (Russell, 2011). This is a branding for oneself whereby one makes a marketable package and presents it to the world like a commodity which is liked and becomes an object of desire (Deckers & Lacy, 2011). Even trainers have found it to be a boon because they can have conversations and discussions beyond the timings of their workshops, thereby capitalizing on the availability of this media (Bozarth, 2010).

Democracy too has been strengthened by the social media. Politicians and political parties are making use of this media to help propagate themselves and become more visible, especially among the youth who are the maximum users. With the onset of the 2019 General Elections it is all the more an active beehive (Saeed, 2009).

### **Method**

This paper has been prepared with the help of primary and secondary data. A questionnaire was passed on to 101 respondents who are studying in college and are in the age group of 18 – 21 through convenient sampling. The secondary data has been obtained from books and journals.

### **Introduction**

Today almost everyone has a cell phone with him / her. Not being in possession of a smart phone makes one feel like fish out of water. Even though there is no need, one feels that he / she must be connected, leading to a compulsive behavior of checking the phone repeatedly for messages or posts. Technological advancements that mankind has gone through has brought us into a revolutionary era which is characterized by the internet, new modes of communication, easy access to data, etc. This is indeed the digital revolution. Mark Pinsky used the term 'digital native' in 2001. It is a digitized world and one cannot ignore the fact that we are moving speedily in that direction. Students are so adept to the digital environments that they think differently and process information too differently from the earlier generations (Poore, 2013).

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Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram, etc. are social networking platforms that have gained prominence over the years. Today, a large number of people have formed various communities or are sharing loads of information via this medium. One is instantly connected and gets to know what is happening in any part of the world just as it has occurred. According to Jan H. Kietzmann, social media has the following building blocks – identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and, groups. All these parameters help in creating a complete social media presence. (Srinivas, 2014).

The positive influences that the media has on people are: (a) it reduces distances between human beings. Not only is the world made a smaller place, also, relationships are built. (b) Human beings can take part in activities taking part in other parts of the world. (c) It helps develop positive opinions, cater to emergencies, tackle problems, etc. (d) It can bridge the gap between different cultures (Mishra, 2012).

Social media is global in nature. One of the most important benefits is that it helps people stay connected with the family, relatives and friends who are separated by vast distances. (Qualman, 2009). It can also help people get involved by passing on knowledge, skills, etc. Distance has been reduced and time has been shortened for work and even for entertainment. It appears as though space and time are not important any more in a network society (Dijk, 2006). Many debates can be carried on thereby bringing advancement in society. Social evils can be done away with by having extensive discussions and mass awakening towards such events. It is through this that corrupt practices can be checked (Shrivastava, 2015). Some major events gain more prominence due to the presence of social media.

According to Abraham Maslow, social needs come after the physiological, safety and security needs. It is here that humans feel the need to be accepted and interact with others in society. Social media steps in where individuals interact with each other transcending boundaries. There is a very high level of acceptability when it comes to the social media (Qualman, 2009).

It is believed that social development in India can take place due to technology that does not need large-scale infrastructure. For e.g. social media would need the most basic tool of a smart phone (Schroeder, 2018). Moving on from one thought process to another, changing the outlook of oneself towards issues, making opinions on what was once thought to belong only to the elite, etc. has led to development in the Indian society.

One of the benefits of a society with intense social media activity is that it can reduce inequality in society. People become more aware of their rights. There is also the question of the

digital divide. Is it narrowing down or become broader? (Dijk, 2006). In India, there are still several people who do not have access to computers or the internet. They are bereft of the ready availability of information and also the connectivity that it provides in social mobility. So, are we really equal?

One of the debates that is going is that whether social media is really social. This is because it has made people more individualistic and they remain busy with their own media rather than make time even for their own family members (Poore, 2013). Because of new technology, we have also lost some of our authentic humanity. Communication has become faceless, emotionless (with more emoticons), gestureless, etc. We are also losing our cognitive abilities like long attention spans (Miller et al, 2016). The younger generation is glued to social media for longer periods of time, not realizing that eventually their social life has become eroded. Such are more susceptible to depression.

Social media creates a public identity for an individual, thereby giving him / her a visibility in the public sphere. Creation of a Display Profile is the first among a series of visibility creation. Though the disadvantages far outweigh the advantages, it nevertheless brings a person onto the public sphere, which didn't exist a few years ago. An individual identity that is created automatically leads to the formation of a collective identity. There were times when people belonged politically or geographically to a particular community, which gave them a distinct sense of collective identity. This can be distinguished by the individual identity that social media creates. It also creates a collective identity that crosses the barrier of space (Sinnan, 2017). Virtual realities are more in vogue than ever before.

One cannot expect total privacy when one uses the social media. Much of the data that we place on the public domain makes us visible. Though there is a possibility of filtering information, much of what we post is seen by others around us, even though we may not know them and we could be stalked! (Claypoole, 2014). Several frauds and crimes have taken place which still haven't been solved.

Another advantage of the social media is that it helps people display emotions whether they are true or not. People find this medium very helpful in expressing themselves. Groups are formed and chatting, sharing, conferencing, etc. go on which helps people connect continuously (Miller et al, 2016). Some people simply put up posts due to peer pressure or they would be castigated for not being in sync with the group.

Family values are eroding in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, it is the social media that is helping families bond together like never before, that can help in reinforcing relationships bound.

A young working mother can send a video recording of her speaking to her children via Whatsapp and thereby fill the gap of her absence at home. On the other hand, members of the family who are in different parts of the world can communicate with each other instantly by creating a group of their own, and remain connected continuously, disregarding the fact that they are far apart from one another (Venkatraman, 2017).

These days people spend most of their time either in collecting information or socializing. The media is used for getting actively involved and engaged in various activities. There is mutuality in this engagement which is no more a one-way media. It is multi-directional and creates cross-networks. No one can afford to be non-informed in such a scenario. The flip side to this is that often there is a passiveness in a person's behavior on social media. This applies to those who are members of groups and watch what is happening there but don't contribute anything specifically (Schroeder, 2018). Of course, sometimes it is more a boon than a bane to remain silent.

The social media also sees restrictions being imposed, especially among the lower socio-economic and lower-middle classes. There is complete restriction over female members of the family on using the social media. Even time-limits are set when a girl / woman can use social media. Even space becomes a constraint, wherein girls are allowed to use social media within the four walls of their homes. Some women also have an intentional strict surveillance on their profiles (Schroeder, 2018).

On the professional front, LinkedIn is a very powerful social networking site used to enhance professional and business relationships. It provides business opportunities on a domain that is widely accessed. One can create a professional profile that can look very appealing. Personal details are neatly and professionally packaged, and members who would want to befriend such a person because of certain commonalities may send a friend request (Russell, 2011). This helps in building professional communities and more work is generated.

The Social Media has been a big boon for trainers. It is a medium wherein participants at a workshop can carry on their conversations and discussions beyond the timings of their workshops. It truly takes the learning process beyond the confines of the classroom. This is such a tool where a trainer can meet his / her learner wherever he / she is. Facebook and LinkedIn are good examples of media that can help in such discussions (Bozarth, 2010).

Today, one must brand oneself by creating a strategy to promote oneself in a professional manner. One creates an awareness of oneself and becomes visible on the public domain in a proper marketable package. This promotion creates opportunities that set the ball rolling for

business establishments and good linkages. Self-promotion becomes important so that one can connect with others and further one's career prospects and help one have a sound professional standing (Deckers & Lacy, 2011).

In the political arena, democracy can only be strengthened by social media. Right to freedom of speech and expression is found in Article 19 of the Fundamental Rights. Attempts to curb social media are an indication of how important a medium it is to influence the people. Democracy has become mature due to developments in the media. Today, no political party can imagine contesting elections without tapping on the social media. The 2014 elections were fully based on social media. The coming elections too will see the same. With a major chunk of the voting population being the youth, it is social media that will influence the voting patterns because of its wide presence (Saeed, 2009).

### Analysis

To understand the impact of social media on society, a survey was conducted online through convenient sampling among students in the age group of 18 to 21. There were 101 respondents of whom 57.4% are female and 42.6% are male. Ninety-nine % use social media and only 1% does not use it. 34.7% use social media in the range of 0 – 2 hours, 35.6% use it for 2 to 4 hours, 18.8 % use it for 4 to 6 hours, and 10.9% use it for 6 to 8 hours.

66.3% use WhatsApp the most, 25.7% use Instagram, 6.9% use Facebook, and 1% uses Twitter the most. To the question 'Which social media, do you feel, will have more impact on the Indian youth?' 37.6% felt that it would be Instagram, 28.7% felt WhatsApp, 26.7% felt Facebook, 5% felt that it was Twitter, and 2% felt that it was LinkedIn.

When asked the question 'If social changes can be brought about in India via the social media, then by what percentage do you feel will these changes come about?' 12.9% felt that it would be in the range of 0 – 25%, 45.5% felt that it would be 26 – 50%, 32.7% felt that it would be 51 – 75%, and 8.9% felt that it would be in the range of 76 – 100%. The question 'If youth are being made aware of their rights through social media, then what percentage of youth will become aware of their rights?' got interesting answers: 7.9% felt that it would be in the range of 0 – 25%, 28.7% felt that it would be 26 – 50%, 47.5% felt that it would be 51 – 75%, and 15.8% felt that it would be in the range of 76 – 100%.

When they were asked how many WhatsApp groups they have, 68.3% said that they have 0 – 10, 23.8% have 11 – 20, 5.9% have 21 – 30, none have 31 – 40, and 2% have 41 – 50. Reply to the question how many friends they have on WhatsApp, it is observed that 55.4%

  
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have between 1 – 100, 14.9% have between 101 – 200, 13.9% have between 201 - 300, 7.9% have between 201 – 400, 4% have between 401 – 500, and 4% have above 501 friends.

They were asked the question as to how many friends they have on Facebook and the responses were interesting. 39.6% have 1 – 100, 10.9% have between 101 – 200, 6.9% have between 201 – 300, 5% have between 301 – 400, 2% have between 401 – 500, and 39.6% have more than 501 friends. When asked whether they would seek help from the social media to make an important decision in life, 16.8% replied in the affirmative, 40.6% replied in the negative, and 16.8% replied that they may do so.

Interestingly, when they were asked whether their life has change for good after using social media, 30.7% replied saying 'Yes', 23.8% replied saying 'No' and 45.5% replied saying 'Maybe'. The respondents were asked whether the social media would influence their choices for voting in the 2019 General Elections. 34.7% stated 'Yes', 35.6% stated 'No', and 29.7% stated 'Maybe'.

### Conclusion

It is very evident that maximum number of youth in this category use social media. Around 70% of them use it from 0 – 4 hours, WhatsApp being the most used app. Most feel that social changes can be brought about through Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook. 87% felt that social changes can be brought about in the range of 26 – 75%.

75% felt that youth are becoming aware of their rights from 26 – 75%. About 91% of the respondents have up to 20 WhatsApp groups, 55% have up to 100 friends on WhatsApp, 40% have around 100 friends on Facebook and the same number have more than 501 friends. Around 40% would not take help from social media for making important decisions in life, 30% felt that their life has changed for good after using social media, and 35% felt that their voting choices could be influenced by social media in the 2019 elections, and 36% felt that it would not.

The social media has more advantages than disadvantages. It can be used very effectively to bring about changes in our Indian society over a wide range of issues from individual to family to society. One cannot turn a blind eye to its existence or even its usefulness as it is here to stay with an ever-increasing influence on society. Channelizing, thus, is important.

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