Impact of Social Media: Pros & Cons

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Abstract: *The present paper highlights the Impact of Social Media and its Pros & Cons. Social media, with all its benefits and the potential for more, is definitely a boon to our world. However misuse or irresponsible usage can have negative effects on individuals and society, especially the young impressionable minds. The expansion of the global reach of social media platforms   has raised important questions about digital freedom and free expression. Further,   it   hopefully,   would   lead   to   the integration of the technology with the "Cell phone" and would bring "the others" to the information superhighway platform of social media.*

Key words: ***Social Media,*** *Pen Friendship, new doors, dynamics*

1. Introduction

A few decades ago, strangers would explore friendship and exchange messages by snail mail within and outside their countries and wait eagerly, patiently and hopefully for a response. It looks a long time to know each other as postal mail exchanges took days and weeks. The source of long distance "Pen Friendship" was paper and ink. Handwritten letters carried much sentimental value and added thrill. Technology has changed all that.

The networked population of the world has grown from a "low million" in the 1990s to a 'low billion' in the first decade of 21st century. It is a remarkable pace of adoption of a new technology by the society at large.   From business to politics, common man to celebrities, activities to government – all of them look at social-media as essential. There is almost a scramble to get on to the platform of social media to communicate, reach out and even to bring about the change that one considers desirable from

his perspective. Indeed, the number of people using social media platform in the world is growing exponentially and it is transforming the way people relate to each other.

Social media has been defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that .... Allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content".   "Further more, social media depends on mobile and web based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss and modify user-generated content.   It introduces substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations and communities and individuals." Social media may be simply defined as highly interactive mobile and web-based platforms through which individual share, discuss, and modify user generated content as part of a collaborative process of content creation. This can include social networking platforms, blogs and micro blogs, content communities,

collaborative content creation projects and even virtual gaming communities.

Democratization:

In fact, social media is fast emerging as a powerful and unparalleled tool to share information, shape opinions, connect people across domains and cultures, bringing about participation, and above all to communicate as never before. Social media can become a very effective policy tool for Governments if they learn to leverage it in the best possible manner. Governments across the world need to communicate more effectively, engage citizens, garner feedback on policies and programs in real time, and demonstrate a commitment to a more participative governance model. In all these areas social media platforms can offer the right interfaces and tools. Further, as internet penetration increases manifold and it becomes more localized, social media will enable more and more people to get connected.

This world that exists only in cyber space is called Face book. Face book's larger than life, presence in digital media, which is itself defined as "the creative convergence of digital arts, science, technology and business for human expression, communication, social interaction and education", is a phenomenon. That is being emulated and initiated the world over. It is springing new forms of human interaction, a phenomenon described as social media net working.

Asia currently accounts for almost 45 percent of internet users the world over and India contributed under `12 percent of this number in the middle of 2012. India is the second largest nation in the world next to USA in consuming the social media. Indians spend an average of approximately 30 minutes every day on social media. Of these numbers, the maximum users are youth (84 percent) and college going students (82 percent). It is interesting to interpolate this data with the country's 2011 census statistics. India has more than 50 percent of its population below the age of 25 and more than 65 percent below the age of 35. It is expected that, in 2020, the average age of an Indian will be 29 years. The census indicated 74 percent literacy among the entire population with the male literacy rate at 82 percent. With cheaper mobile devices becoming more easily available, it can be safely assumed that internet usage – and consequently social media networking- will show quantum leaps in the next few years in India.

One of the main divers of social networking and the growth of social media is mobile telephony. A.C. Nielsen's the Social Media Report 2012 assesses that "More people are using smart phones and tablets to access social media... with more connectivity, consumers have more freedom to use social media wherever and whenever they want". According to the Internet and Mobile Association of India report, the number of social media users in urban India reached 62 million by December, 2012. Nearly three out of four (74 percent) of all active internet users in urban India use the social media. On 12th April, 2012 Economic Times quoted a Deloitte study stating that the "next wave of telecom growth will emerge from rural India and operators will increasingly use the voice platform as well as localized content to ensure relevance and widespread adoption in rural areas."

Social media has emerged as a vital tool of communication and has created new ways of mobilizing public

opinion and encouraging participation in political and civic activities – ranging from joining online petition and social groups, posting short messages on Twitter, expressing supports through blogs and uploading videos on youtube. The recent 'wiki leaks' disclosure online of US foreign policy clearly demonstrates the disruption caused by social media, which is now forcing the mainstream news media to turn to political blogs and citizen users for materials. Such disruption has enabled citizens to discuss and share political information with friends and networked citizens and critically monitor the actions of governments and corporate interests. This has also posed a profound challenge to the state about how to regulate social media and face user-generated challenges.

A report by the Internet and Mobile association of India shows that as of June 2012, there were 137 million claimed Internet users: 99 million in urban cities and 38 million in rural villages. Of these 137 million Internet users, 111 million are active Internet users, i.e., they use the Internet at least once a month. In terms of percentage, only about 11.4% of India's population uses Internet, which might not be considered significant.

In the recent assembly elections in Gujarat, the State Chief Minister Narendra Modi effectively used the social media to connect with online citizens. Besides being active on Twitter and Face book, Modi also went for a live chat on 'Google plus' with netizens. By going online for Live Chat, he became the First Indian Politician to do so. Through his social media campaign, he was able to capture the first time voters, the youth, who certainly are more attuned to digital culture. At the same time, the middle classes are also quite active on social media.

Similarly, It is well known that Anna Hazare in his agitation over the issue of Jan Lokpal Bill, effectively used the social media to mobilize the youth and the middle classes. The effective use of social media not only brought the issue into cyber space and made it more global, but also garnered huge support for the anti-corruption campaign. The general perception that people use the social media largely for entertainment does not hold true in this case. At the same time, using social media for entertainment doesn't stop one to use it for political activities.

The coming of social media has certainly had a democratizing effect on the functioning of news papers and news channels. The earlier monopoly of newspapers and news channels over providing news and breaking stories has been dismantled with the coming and spread of social media. Newspapers and News Channels are now operating under the fear of losing their credibility to the social media. It is now difficult for traditional news media to hide a story from the public because of the fear that such stories might get published in a blog or get circulated on social networks. This pressure of the social media has certainly democratized the existing public sphere and enhanced the accountability of public officials. The recent exposure in India of many scandals has become possible because of the social media. Once the issue was exposed on the social media, public pressure started building on traditional media to take up the issue. The exposure of the 2G Scam is one such case where the social media played a leading role.

In a recent study conducted by the IRIS knowledge Foundation and the Internet and Mobile Association of India, claimed that results in over 150 parliamentary constituencies in the coming general election could be decided by "Face Book Users, making them the newest vote bank with the power to shape Indian Politics." All political parties now have their presence on social media, and maintain their party website detailing the activities and programmes of the parties. Majority of politicians have their Twitter account or Face book pages. We have seen that during major events such a budget sessions or parliamentary debates, politicians break the news by posting message on Twitter. Social media literacy is fast becoming a sign of forward looking and development oriented leaders, ready to take up the new challenges in a globalised India. Realizing the importance of Social Media, the Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Sigh opened his Twitter account last year to provide up-to date information as well as to present the achievements of his government to the people.

Changing Power Structures:

The transition of the media landscape from the state owned, state controlled media to the development of an independent, though commercial profit oriented media, had transformed many societies. The pluralism of voices contributed to the development of democracy that responded to atleast the voices of the rich and the powerful.

The challenge faced by politicians and business persons is now creating a new employment niche of new media "experts" powered by a net book and dongle. The propaganda machinery is quite often manned by twenty somethings. The press officers have a difficult task cut out for them.

During the Nehru era, keeping track of a few national dailies mostly English ones – was enough. By the time Indhira Gandhi came to power, the vernacular press was quite attention worthy. But when there are voices from a few million households that cannot be disregarded without political disaster, democracy becomes firmly embedded in the society.

Positive Aspects:

The overall benefits, positive effects or the wide scope of usage of the social media are limitless. It has become quite evident, and proved beyond doubt, that the social media is a very powerful tool that, if used in the correct manner, can bring about tremendous changes in any facet of life and be beneficial to mankind in multiple ways. Individuals are using the social media in their own different ways to interact and connect with people, get in touch with old-friends, share media files, documents, personal views, opinions, comments and even personal photos on social networking sites with likeminded people or communities or groups.

Making the accessibility to social media even easier today's smart phones are integrated with the most popular networking sites and also offer popular free apps that can be downloaded easily to chat, message, upload photos and videos that can be shared instantly online with friends or contacts, making it much more easier to stay connected and updated on the latest happenings. Also, since most smart phones are economically priced, it is easily affordable for a large segment of population.

Today, school and college students can use the social media to their advantage in many different ways. In fact, due to the advancement in technology,it has become important for each and every student to know how to use the technology effectively and be well versed with all aspects of it since more and more employers are beginning to check the social media background of a potential employee. Thus, knowledge and proper utilization of the social media gives the student an edge over others in the market. They can use the social networking sites to connect with people from their study or workgroup and interact with peers or teachers directly. By using the Internet for academic purposes, students learn much more than they can in a class room, and their ability to access, analyze, retain and share information improves dramatically.

Perhaps the biggest positive impact of the social media has been in its ability to mobilize and get support from the masses towards various social causes all over the world. Indian social activist, Anna Hazare used the social media effectively to organize and gather support from the masses to protest against corruption and to get the government to pass an anti-corruption Bill in the parliament. Thus the true potential and the power of the social media to bring about political changes and revolutions came to light.

To make social media more meaningful and purposeful particularly for rural women, relevant information and tools need to be provided to address women's needs and demands. The group functional block represents the extent to which users can form communities and sub-communities. The more 'social' a network becomes, the bigger the group of friends, followers and contacts.

To achieve these objectives, a clear understanding of how social media can be best suited as a tool for people's economic empowerment should be developed so that creative solutions can be developed that could enable to promote and facilitate the use of social media to the benefit of the people.

Negative Aspects:

However, as every coin has two sides, so also there are two dies to the use of social media, the good and the bad. Where there are so many positive aspects to the social media, there are bound to be negative aspects as well. Probably the most worrying aspect to the social media is the fact that it cannot be controlled and therefore it goes without saying that its consequences can also be dangerous and uncontrollable for all those who use it recklessly and in an irresponsible manner. It is said that, "unless you take control of social media, you risk social media, taking control of you".

The very nature of social media, providing the prospect of enhanced social interaction, presents an opportunity for the user to speak up and be heard without being interrupted, thereby making social media seem interesting and addictive at the same time. This is what lures people into embracing the social networking with a vigour. However, the continued activity on social media has its own pitfalls, which many not be evident, and we as a society need to be wary of the impact these can have on individuals in particular and society in general.

The obsession to stay updated, coupled with lack of time has resulted in many people using these networking sites to look for faster ways of conveying their message. So it is common now to find sentences filled with an array of acronyms and emotions. Micro blogging

sites like Twitter have restricted number of characters that can be posted in the status, as a result of which, people have to come up with innovative ways to express themselves using as few words as possible. Now a general trend that is observed is the way people just cannot seem to express their thoughts or expressions in the form of complete sentences. Thus affecting the language skills in various people, especially children.

Frequent networking on sites like Face book could also generate negative feelings like inadequacy, envy, jealousy or even aggressive behaviour due to constant comparison with their own colleagues or friends who always "appear" to be better off. Face book is flooded with photos of people looking very happy with life, partying with their long lost friends or families, traveling to exotic destinations, or simply showing off their riches in the form of pictures of their flashy cars, stylish homes or yachets, etc. Women, who are slim and know they look good, post pictures of themselves in stunning outfits. All these facts are bound to have some kind of psychological impact on others who feel that they are "lesser" or inadequate in some manner or the other. These comparisons can make our successes feel diminished and our failures amplified.

Constant networking can cause distractions, especially for children and college going students who find it difficult to pay attention to their academics and therefore end up getting lower grades. Also spending long hours in front of the computer or with electronic devices can cause serious health problems, strain the eyes and also causes the person to get lethargic. Keeping awake late nights can lead to sleep deprivation and physical stress and fatigue. This also results in a

lack of concentration or ability to focus and or prioritize important issues in their daily life. Some people may not properly think before they upload photos taken at a wild party or at private social gatherings, but it may turn out to be embrassing for another person. The same can be said for videos and or mms recorded on mobile devices that could be misused by anyone for the wrong reasons. Needless to say, such actions could have disastrous consequences. Recently, there were news reports of nude photos of the Royal Couple (Prince Williams and Kate Middleton). They were uploaded on Face book, Twitter and other sites on the Internet. This is only an example of how this media can be misused by others.

Safety Considerations:

A serious drawback to these kind of free communication channels that are open to one and all comes in the form of Cyber bullying. Unfortunately, this is becoming a common trend among teenagers on social networking sites. Calling names, ridiculing, making fun of people and using abusive language has become common place. This form of cyber bullying can have dangerous consequences, if left unchecked, as has been proven many times where young children have committed suicide on account of such incidents.

Most networking sites do not really protect an individuals privacy. A simple example is that of photos being posted on such sites without taking permission from all the people concerned. Some people may feel that it's Okay!, since its being done just for fun or to get a few laughs. In the year 2010, a twenty two year old guy named Messy Mya was shot dead around 8PM as he was returning from his girl friend's baby shower. Messy May was a New Orleans

youtube sensation shown for being humorous while ridiculing random people in the New Orleans area. Insult was added to injury when an onlooker posted the picture of his body on Twitter raising a huge uproar and controversy.

Conclusion:

Social media, with all its benefits and the potential for more, is definitely a boon to our world. However misuse or irresponsible usage can have negative effects on individuals and society, especially the young impressionable minds. We need to guard against the negative impact of the social media, which ought to be used in the correct manner for creative or productive purposes, so that it is progressive to mankind and society at large, rather than regressive.

The key point here is that social media offers all the three pillars of self-motivation autonomy, mastery and purpose, and can take a learner from being extrinsically motivated to being instrinsically motivated to learn and perform.

The expansion of the global reach of social media platforms such as Twitter and Face book has raised important questions about digital freedom and free expression. Opinion and ideas in this social networking system generally target government, government officials and politicians. These provoke extreme reactions. Sometimes, user contents either show communal hatred, disharmony in society, criticism of the government, or disaffection towards government.

It is only since late 20th century, with Internet becoming easily accessible and cost effective and mobile telephony becoming ubiquitous that delivery of learning experiences is undergoing innovation.

It hopefully, would lead to the integration of the technology with the "Cell phone" and would bring "the others" to the information superhighway platform of social media. The ITU reports that there are 771 million mobile phone users in India, which is almost 65 percent of Indian population and it is growing at a faster rate. This is a bigger hope.

Social media means different things to different people. It can be used for hobby or as a serious and effective business tool. Behind every organizational success story in this media is a lot of patient planning and a sharp focus on getting things right – putting all the right elements in the right way in the right place at the right time. Like any other technology or facility, social media technology or facility too becomes good or bad depending on how it is used.

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