

## **Social and Political Impacts of Social Media: A Sociological Study of the Students of Banaras Hindu University**

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### **Abstract**

*New developments in the technological world have made the internet an innovative way for individuals and families to communicate. Social media networks have created a phenomenon on the internet that has gained popularity over the last decade. This study was designed to explain the social and political impacts of social media on youth. The population of the study was students of Banaras Hindu University. A sample of hundred students from two faculties of BHU was selected by following two stage sampling method. The investigators constructed a questionnaire to gather relevant information from the students. This work was undertaken on the lines of a descriptive survey. The findings indicated that almost all the students were having account(s) on social networking platforms. Facebook was found to be the most popular social networking site. The youth population felt themselves more confident, outgoing, and popular and also had a better concept about them by using SNS. Social media was playing an important role in changing their views regarding political discourses and the students accepted that social media can bring change in society.*

**Keywords:** Social Media, SNS, Social and Political Impact, Students, BHU.

### **Introduction**

The Internet is sprouting at a rapid pace. According to internetworldstats.com the number of Internet users has grown by more than 30 million from 1995 until 2014. Users are relying on social media now more than ever. Internet has evolved as the most popular apparatus in the hands of teens and young adults since the very creation of social media networks. Social media usage is particularly high among young adults and college students because students embrace new media quickly (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). Most of the students make use of social media through social networking sites to create a personal profile, they post what they feel, what they are doing, where they have checked in, they upload pictures to share with friends, they send messages and stay connected with friends, family and the world as well. Social media are also used to develop a professional network to establish and strengthen relationships in the business world. Social media are

modern interactive communication channels through which people connect to one another, share ideas, experiences, pictures, messages and information of common interest. What distinguishes the social media from the conventional means of communication is their interactive nature which allows the audience to participate in it from any part of the world they reside. In this information age social media sites seem to be growing in popularity rapidly, especially among young adults (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). McQuail (2010) differentiates the social media from the traditional mass media when he noted that traditional mass communication was essentially one-directional, while the new forms of communication are essentially interactive. This interactive aura of the new media confers an unprecedented popularity on them. The benefits of social networking sites points to some potential opportunities to extend and improve conceptualization of ‘cyber citizenship’ in policy and practice. The discussion of the benefits of social networking sites illuminates the ways in which the online and offline worlds are mutually constituted. Manjunatha, (2013) conducted his study to check the influence of social networking sites on interpersonal relationship of college students. His study belonged to Bangalore and Mysore. He found that the uses of SNS had effect on interpersonal relationship of college students, particularly with their members of family, friends and teachers. He found that due to the availability of SNS the communication between college students and their members of family, between college, college students and their friends had increased. College students’ use of social media is happening in rapidly growing amounts as new technology becomes available. Computer-mediated communication allows young adults to interact over social media with family and friends. Few studies have been conducted to examine how using social media and other computer-mediated communication affects communication skills.

Boyd and Ellison (2008) defined social network sites as public web-based services that allow users to develop a personal profile, identify other users (“friends”) with whom they have a connection, read and react to postings made by other users on the site, and send and receive messages either privately or publicly. Individuals may choose to send private messages, write on other user’s walls, organize social activities, and keep informed about other user’s daily activities. However, users can limit themselves on what information they would like to share publicly with others. Some items they may choose to include are: pictures, favorite books and movies, birthday, relationship status, and location. Baym, Zhang, and Lin (2004) studied social interactions of college students across all media. Their results indicated that 64% still prefer face-to-face interaction, 18.4% prefer the telephone, and only 16.1% prefer the internet for making social contacts. The internet interactions reported

showed that e-mail was by far the most dominant form of contact, followed by chat and instant-messaging (Baym et al., 2004). Of the 51 participants in the study, 49 reported conducting their social life contacts through at least two, and often three, methods on any given day (Baym et al., 2004). Similarly, one study reported that over 27% of young adults used a social networking site every day in 2009 (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). Social network sites help fulfill communication needs and wants. It is a convenient method of communication and provides the ability to stay connected with friends and family, but on the users own rate and time (Urista, Dong, & Day, 2009). Users can manage their interactions within their own schedule by choosing when they want to read and respond. The internet communication is a solitary activity usually done alone. However, it is efficient because it is a one-to-many method of communication that allows users to quickly spread information.

### **Need and Significance of the Study**

Social media has given us great ways to protect and build our digital reputations. Today we have the ease of searching conversations, the ability to set alerts to help us monitor our names, the constant availability of learning opportunities and more ways to communicate and interact with others. Importance of social media was understood firstly in 2008 presidential election USA, when Barack Obama used Social Media as a tool for campaigning. The debate has started worldwide about social media as it was going to influence social, political, cultural and economic features of society. Social media played a crucial role in Arab Spring 2011. It was the first collective movement in Middle East started due to social media in 21st century. The factors of social media affecting public opinion and international support, rapid dissemination of news, widespread messaging, and the ability of the individual to spread information globally are relatively new phenomena during revolutions. Social media has become a part of everyone's life, it influences people's daily life and how they interact with each other.

This field of study is important because sociability is an underlying theme in using forms of social media. Since this social media phenomenon is continuing to grow at a fast pace, it is important to understand the effects it has on personal communication. A study like this shall help to ascertain whether Students use of the media could be regulated or not. This is obviously because the disposition of people of a given community could shape the media in existence there, just like a cerebral media scholar; Anim (2007) aptly notes that societies greatly influence the operations and functions of the media that operate within those societies. The manner in which the social media were used and the role they play in the recent uprising

which rocked the middle- East popularly referred to as “Arab Spring” could be deciphered as credence to the above academic observations.

This study was an attempt to understand the different impacts being caused by social media particularly social networking sites. Furthermore, as a novel phenomenon, it is necessary to examine how students use the new means of communication. This is because student’s contribution as youths can make or transform any nation. The outcomes can be helpful to identify the political and social role played by social media in influencing the views of students.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To identify the pattern of use of Social Media by the students.
2. To identify the social impact caused by the use of Social Media on students.
3. To identify the change in political views of students caused by using Social Media.
4. To estimate the future potential of social media.

### **Population**

The aim of this study was to see the social and political impact of social media on the youth; hence the students of post-graduation of Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi studying in the session 2014-15, constituted as population for this study.

### **Sample**

For the sampling of respondents two stages were followed. In the very first stage purposive sampling method was adopted for the selection of faculties i.e. faculty of science and faculty of social sciences of BHU. Further at second stage randomly 100 students were selected, in which 50 students (25 male and 25 female) were from faculty of science and 50 students (25 male and 25 female) were from faculty of social sciences.

### **Procedure of the Study**

The study was carried out following the descriptive survey method of research. The researchers had developed a questionnaire to collect the relevant data regarding the course of study. Questionnaire was given to fifty male and fifty female students from faculty of science and faculty of social sciences. Proper instructions regarding the questionnaire were well given before allowing them to fill up the information. They were ensured that information

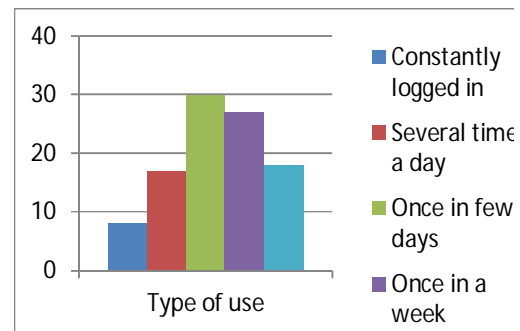
given by them will be kept confidential so that they could tick on the most suitable option which they prefer. Data were analysed with the help of suitable statistical techniques.

**Analysis and Interpretation of Data**

After the statistical analysis, tabulation and presentation of data some interpretations were made. As per the findings regarding first objective, it was found that 100% of the respondents were using facebook which makes this SNS most popular. 64% of them were using whatsapp which was found to be the second most liked social networking platform, 47% students were having their profiles on twitter. 34% respondents were having their profiles on google+ too. It was also found that maximum 30% students logged in to their social networking accounts once in a few days, only 8% students remained constantly logged in, 17% of them visited their profiles several times in a day, 27% used their social media accounts once in a week while 18% of them occasionally logged in to their social media handles (Table1 & Figure1).

**Table 1 & Figure 1: showing types of usage of social media**

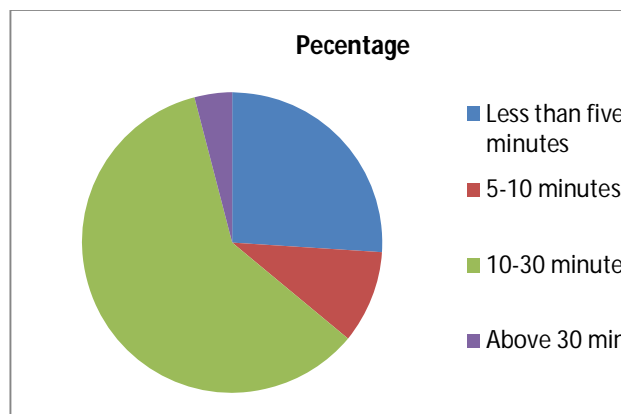
Type of use	Faculty of Science		Faculty of Social Sciences		Total %
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Constantly logged in	2	1	3	2	8
Several times a day	3	7	2	5	17
Once in few days	8	6	7	9	30
Once a week	7	7	8	5	27
Occasionally	5	4	5	4	18



60% students accepted that they usually spent ten to thirty minutes while visiting their social media accounts, 26% of them gave less than five minutes, 10% students spent five to ten minutes whereas only 4% of them accepted that they spent more than thirty minutes time during visiting their social media handles (Table 2 & Figure 2).

**Table 2 & Figure 2: Showing duration of using social networking sites**

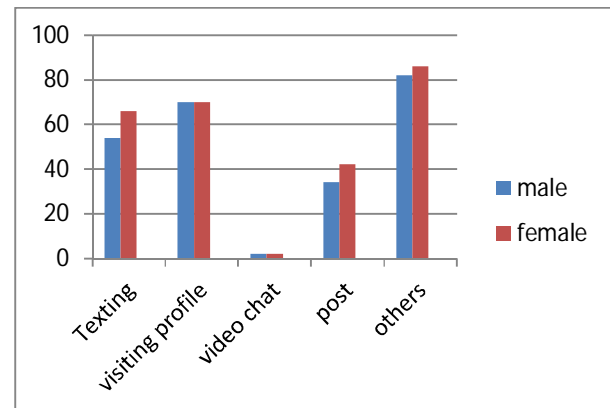
Duration	Faculty of Science		Faculty of Social Sciences		Total %
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Less than five minutes	6	7	5	8	26
5-10 minutes	16	17	15	12	10
10-30 minutes	2	1	4	3	60
Above 30 minutes	1	0	1	2	4



54% males and 66% females used SNSs for texting, 70% males and 70% females liked to visit profiles, 34% male students and 42% female students preferred to post something, 2% of both of them used it for video chats and 82% males and 86% females liked to do other activities on their social media accounts (Table 3 & Graph 3). It was seen that there were small differences among the activities of male and female students in the patterns of using social media.

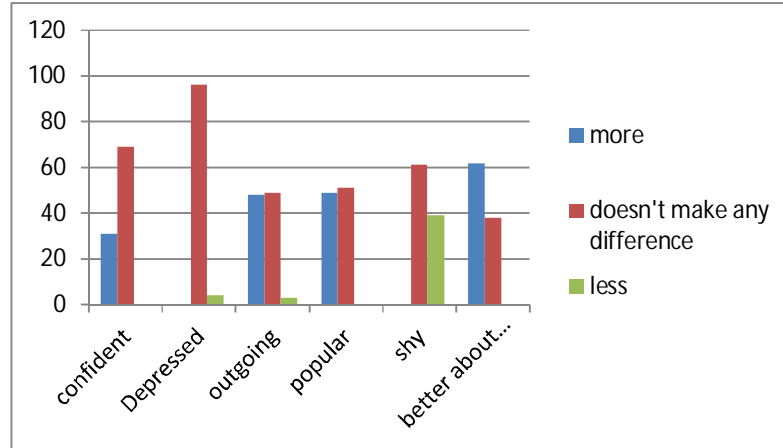
**Table 3 & Graph 3: Showing activities on social networking sites by male and female students**

Activities on SNS	Faculty of Science		Faculty of Social Sciences		Total %
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Texting	15	16	14	17	63
Visiting profile	19	17	16	18	70
Use of video chat	1	0	0	1	2
Post	9	11	8	10	38
Others	20	22	21	23	86



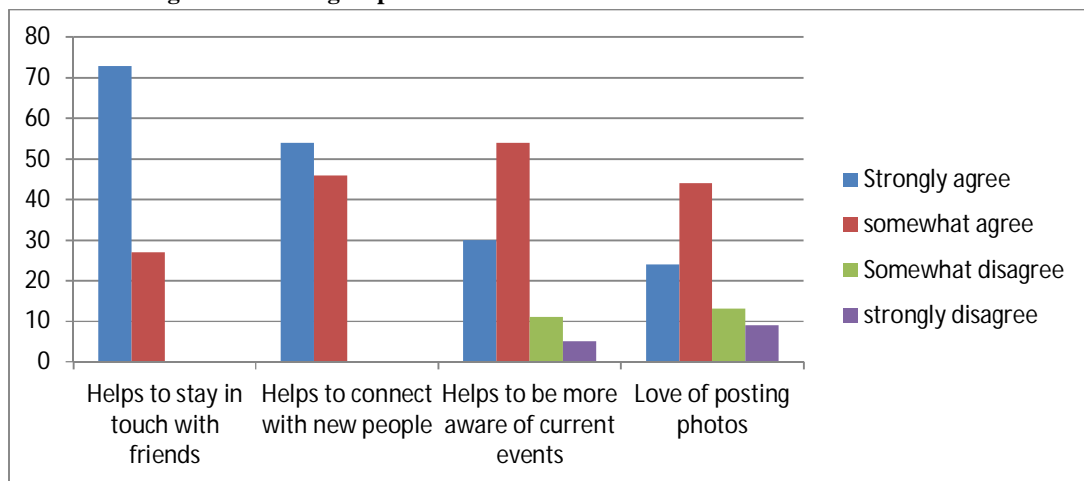
The use of social networking sites did not depict any kind of negative impacts on social and emotional well-being of the youth population (Figure 4). 31% of students felt more confident by using social media while for 69% of them it did not make any difference. 48% of them felt themselves more outgoing, very few i.e. 3% felt themselves less outgoing whereas 49% were of the view that it did not make any difference. 54% of them opined that they had become more popular while for 46% it did not make any difference. 39% students felt that they found themselves less shy in their expressions whereas for 61% it did not make any difference. Very few of the respondents i.e. 4% found that it could lessen depression while almost all i.e. 96% students found that it did not have any effect on depression. 62% of the students accepted that they felt better about themselves while 38% students did not find it significant regarding this.

**Figure 4: Showing Perceived Effect of Social Networking on Social and Emotional Well-Being**

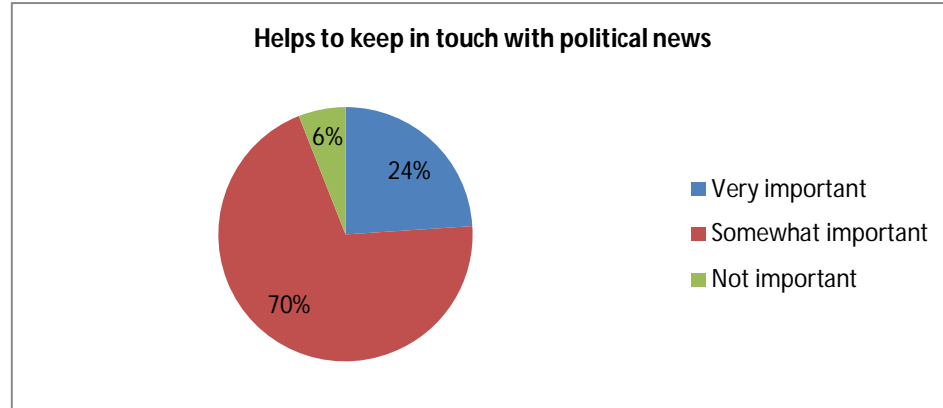


73% students were found strongly agree that social networking sites helped to stay in touch with friends and family while 27% of them were somewhat agree at this point. 54% of them were strongly agree while 46% were somewhat agree that it helped to connect with new people as well. 54% of them were somewhat agreed while 30% were strongly agreed that SNSs helped them to be more aware regarding current events whereas 11% of them showed somewhat disagreement and 5% were strongly disagree on this point. A mixed type of response was reported on the matter of people’s love towards posting and sharing their photos (Figure 5).

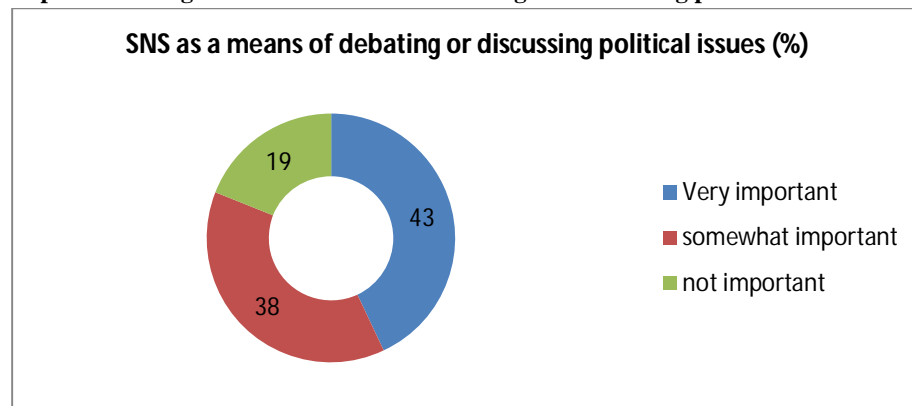
**Figure 5: Showing Impact of social media on social life of users**



As per the third objective, related with political impact of social media; it was found that SNSs helped to keep in touch with the news regarding political volatility. 70% of the respondents found it somewhat important and according to 24% of them SNSs were very important to be aware of the political stuff whereas 6% did not find it so important (Figure 6).

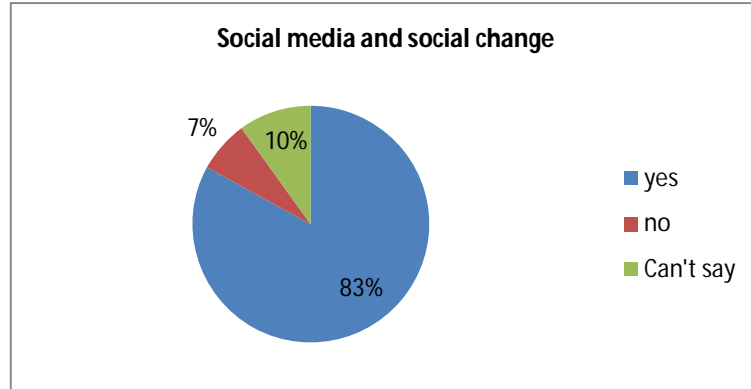
**Figure 6: Showing use of social networking sites to update the users about political news**

The analysis also showed that people who were using social media, considered it as an important platform for discussing and debating political issues (Graph 7). 48% of the students considered it very important, 38% considered it somewhat important and very few opined it being not so important. After discussing, debating and sharing one another's view on social media 79% of students agreed that it changed their opinions.

**Graph 7: Showing use of social media in debating and discussing political issues**

Apart from that, maximum number of students had the view that social media essentially has the potential to bring changes in the society (Figure 8). 83% of them were agree on this point, 10% were not so sure about it and only 7% students disagreed over the point that it can be a possible way to cause social changes in near future.



**Figure 8: Showing Change in view after discussion regarding the political posts on social media.**

### Discussion of the Results

The study was conducted on the students to outline the social and political impacts that were caused by using social media. Findings of the study suggested that almost all the students had their profile on facebook and they were active users of this popular social networking site. This finding concurred with the study by Lenhart et al. (2010) which found that Facebook is the most popular form of social media. Second most liked social media platform was whatsapp, followed by a large number of them using twitter and Google+ as well. Since the emergence of smartphone era whatsapp is expanding its user base exponentially. Most of the students constituting sample for the present study were likely to log in to their social media profiles once in a few days (except whatsapp), some students did this once a week and a small number of them remained logged in constantly. Most of the students spent ten to thirty minutes visiting their social media platform at a time; this finding was supported by Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calvert (2009) showed that students spend an average of 28 minutes a day on Facebook and was contradictory to the finding that average college student spends eight hours a day online (Kuh, 2001) as cited in Jasmine et al. (2016); which also provided evidence that college students have concerns about their internet usage and balancing social life, their studies and extracurricular activities. Small gender differences were also reported in the online networking activities of students. Female students were found keener regarding texting and posting status updates than their counterparts while male students were found interested in other activities supporting the findings of Kolek & Saunders (2008) Park, Kee, & Valenzuela (2009) as cited in Lee (2012). Sheldon (2008) found that overall women were more likely to use social media for maintaining relationships with family and friends, passing time, and entertainment, but men were more likely to use social media to meet new people. College women were also more likely than men to use the internet

for relational communication, such as contacts with friends, family, and romantic partners (Baym, Zhang, Kunkel, Ledbetter, & Mei-Chen, 2007). Some students reported that using social media had enhanced their level of confidence and almost half of them felt themselves more outgoing. Most of the students were finding them more popular and started to have better feelings about themselves. A large number of respondents were agreeing over the fact that social media platforms had helped them to stay updated about the current events. They were better able to communicate with others and were proficiently expressing themselves. As per the political considerations; social media was found to be a great way of updating themselves regarding political flux for most of the students and they used these platforms to discuss and to debate on political issues as well. A large proportion of the respondents had the opinion that social media has not only provided them a platform to express, discuss or debate their political views but also it helped them to modify, update and change their previous outlooks. These findings supported previously undertaken works which reported that students are using Facebook and other channels to develop their identities, beliefs and stances on various issues such as politics, religion, economy as well as to pioneer and develop intimate relationships (Konetes and McKeague, 2011); also, Gross (2004) noted that students use social networking sites not only for leisure and personal socialization but also as a platform for more meaningful and serious deliberations, and students are using social networking for making friends, sharing links, online learning, finding jobs to accomplish their economic, educational, political and social being, as cited in Eke et al.(2014).

### **Implications and Suggestions**

In this era of globalization and cyber citizenship if anyone does not currently have an account with any social networking site, it is like that person is missing out on the increased communication on offer. This piece of work can be supportive in pertinent utilization of this rapidly growing apparatus of communication, expression and knowledge processing i.e. social media in academia. It can be helpful in chalking out most popular social media platforms which can be further exploited to act as a way of sharing and discussing academic discourses. Unacademy, Insights, Quora, NPTEL, Coursera and many channels on youtube are some of the best examples of it. Social networking is becoming a vital part of everyday business, providing endless potential which can be of benefit to students in their academic performance and daily life activities in a variety of ways (Eke Miss et al, 2014). Social media can also be used as a mode of spreading basic literacy regarding various religions, cultures, languages and ethnicity. That is not all; there are also some dangers associated with it for

instance people have begun to interact more via social media, they have started lacking interpersonal communication, the threats of cybercrimes are also tied with it. Social media platforms need to be rationally utilized.

This work can be further expanded by conducting it upon a larger population to see the relationship among age, gender, place of dwelling and exposure to internet facilities. More comprehensive studies should be conducted and replicated at district, state, country and international level including large number of users.

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