

Chapter 18

Impact of Social Networking on College Students: A Comparative Study in India and the Netherlands

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ABSTRACT

In today's world where Internet has experienced tremendous growth, social networking sites have become highly significant in peoples' lives. This comparative study between India and the Netherlands will concentrate on youngsters more precisely college going students in Chennai and Maastricht. The research explores how college students create identity for themselves in the virtual world and how they relate to others online. It will analyze the cultural differences from the youth perspective in both the countries and discuss whether social networking sites isolate youngsters from the society or help them to build relationships; the participation in these sites is also explored. Survey technique, interview, and online observation were the research methods used. Findings show that Indian students spend more time in these sites than Dutch students and Dutch students participate more actively than Indian students. It was also found that virtual interaction taking place in these sites is just a supplement to real life interaction.

INTRODUCTION

We are living in a world primarily characterized by objects in motion. Appadurai (2001) states that, "These objects include ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, technologies and techniques" (p. 5). Media has always played a crucial role in the stepping up of globalization

and Internet can be considered as a breakthrough in the globalization era. The Internet has provided an opportunity to build a global communication base that would link people around the world together. It allows groups of computers to interact simultaneously. This technical consideration signifies that the Internet can support and mediate new forms of communication, thus bettering the social relationship between individuals.

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Miller and Slater (2000) argue that most discussions of the Internet have accentuated both the abolition of distance and a following detaching of relationships from particular place. In their research they showed this conclusion to be deceptive. They state that, “the Internet media are very capable of bringing dispersed things into immediate, virtually face-to-face, contact: prices and commodities, families, music, cultures, religious and ethnic diasporas” (Miller & Slater, 2000, p. 1). They found that in Trinidad, online relationships were treated similarly to offline relationships and therefore they emphasize that Internet is not a virtual or a disembodied world set off from the real but connected to the everyday lives of the people. This theory is tested by comparing the role of Internet in the students’ lives in India and the Netherlands as they also emphasize that Internet may be different in different places.

With Web 2.0 technologies, the Internet has become a communication platform on which virtual communities are formed and it provides scope for interactivity, collaborative learning, social networking and participation (Flew, 2007). So, there are tremendous advancements taking place and most importantly youngsters form the majority of the consumers.

In order to examine the Internet in a more precise and measurable way, this study focuses on social networking sites. Social networking sites (SNSs) are now among the fastest growing Internet resources. The chances for the young people to form and maintain relationships on the Internet have increased in the last few years. SNSs have become the choice for the youngsters, who reach out to others on the web, receiving and distributing information on a real-time basis. Today almost each and every youngsters has a profile and is part of the virtual world. There are different types of SNSs depending on the relationships they focus. In this study only generic friend SNSs like Facebook are concentrated.

The key point to examine is not only what is happening on these sites but also why it is

happening since human beings relate to people both in the virtual world as well as real world. Nowadays, young people seek to have more interactive communication and have become producers of content rather than consumers. This paper primarily focuses on college going students in both the countries since youth or young people cannot be defined to a specific age group. The effectiveness of virtual communities and the impact the SNSs have created among young people in the two countries, India, a country in South Asia and Netherlands, a North European country are examined in this article. Media consumption habits and preferences show a discrepancy significantly across the countries, where one is a developing and the other is a developed country.

It is assumed that the consumption of social media where Internet plays a vital role generally ascends with socio-economic status. Hence a significant need to figure out how far the change has influenced both the countries makes it essential to survey and explore as to why youngsters prefer and interact with the social media. The objectives of the study are as follows: To find out how social networking websites help in building relationships among the college going students; To study the level of participation of the young people while at these sites; To analyse whether these sites are isolating youngsters from society or vice versa; and to find out whether there are differences between India and Dutch students in these respects.

The current situation of the engagement of the students from India and the Netherlands in social networking sites will be discussed to provide a base for speculations on the future potential. And yet in the world of swiftly developing and up-and-coming technologies, the current circumstance does not hang around for a long period to be studied entirely. So this article will make some speculations for future research but every assumption will be based on the current status. The aim of this study is to map the current status of college going students’ exposure, access, use

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