

Book Review: From Likes to Lives: Unravelling the Impact of Social Networking Sites on Youth

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The book “From Likes to Lives: Unravelling the Impact of Social Networking Sites on Youth” is authored by two eminent media researchers and academicians, Prof. (Dr.) Ramesh Kumar Sharma and Prof. (Dr.) Durgesh Tripathi. The book is a culmination of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), Ministry of Education, Government of India sponsored project titled ‘Impact of Social Networking Sites on the Youth- A comparative analysis of youth in metro and remote areas.’ The book provides an overview of the comprehensive study undertaken by the researchers among youth in Delhi and Varanasi regarding their social media usage, its impacts, potential for positive utilization, and perceptible threats that the techno-social networks pose. The book is divided into six chapters with each of them providing a strong foundation and theoretical precepts to understand the multifaceted nature of social networking sites. The book concerns itself with both the individual behavior and collective experiences of the youth in important areas of inquiry such as civic engagement and evolving forms of democratic participation, political communication, e-governance, and digital education. The book's strength lies in providing a comprehensive comparative analysis of the media consumption patterns of the youth in Delhi and Varanasi in the rapidly evolving mediascape of the country.

The book is an important resource for researchers, academicians, students, and research scholars who are interested in deciphering the impact of social networks and how these networks shape the identities and the realities of the Gen Z in the country. The book is relevant to a myriad of subjects and disciplines including media studies, digital media, journalism, education, sociology, anthropology, culture studies, psychology, political sciences, and population studies among others. The book provides a holistic framework for youth studies which can be replicated in other research with similar research objectives. To aid the readers and researchers, the book provides an exhaustive section of references and key concepts of terms and Index at the end of the book. Such exhaustive sections for references and a list of key terminology reflects the academic integrity and research authenticity of the study conducted.

The book provides an Introduction which provides a broad overview of each chapter along with the preface that sets the tone of the book. Chapter 1 of the book titled “Navigating the Digital Sphere: Youth and Social Networking” gives an outline of the rapid growth of digitization in India which has been corroborated by the latest statistics. The chapter presents the peculiar case of India where both the print and the digital media are showing thriving growth rates simultaneously. It is a unique case as most parts of the world are showcasing a significant decline in print media with the proliferation of emerging media, especially social networking sites. The chapter also provides an overview of the socioeconomic demographics of the country including its mediascape. It brings forth the details regarding the media consumption patterns of

the vast population of India with the latest data from credible institutions and publications like Reportal (Digital 2023), Digital India Report (2023), and Statistica (2023). The chapter traces the historical and theoretical foundations of the important concept of 'socialization to emphasize that socialization is not a new or unique social phenomenon. The socialization process has existed since the times when humans began to live a settled life yet, socialization through social networking sites is bringing a paradigm shift in the way we communicate, network, and create communities of our shared interests. The chapter also delves into the varied definitions of youth along with contemporary discourses. The chapter discusses the narratives related to digital youth and how social networks impact their minds, identities, and experiences of reality. The chapter lays down the strong theoretical foundations for the study reflecting on the key concepts focused on ICT and Youth.

Chapter two titled "Exploring the World of Social Networking Sites" traces the history of social networking sites including the inclusion of the concepts of networks, networking, and social networks that existed in the offline world from time immemorial. It creates a sequential trail of offline networking to online networking in the Web 2.0 scenario. It provides a framework for understanding social networking sites through an enumeration of the common features of popular social networks. It elaborates on the role of social networking sites in the public sphere with a focus on their participatory nature that may have implications for democracies through examples of the websites/apps of Facebook, X (Formerly Twitter), YouTube, Pinterest, Google, and LinkedIn. The book explains the role of social media in democratic processes through the case of Delhi Elections in 2019 and corroborates it with the reports and studies from the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI). It also enumerates the various types of social networking sites and provides clear distinctions between them including the professional networking sites, short messaging applications, photo and video sharing sites. The chapter describes the advantages and disadvantages of social media along with their physical, psychological, and social aspects.

Chapter three titled "Social Networking Sites and Their Importance: An Overview of the Literature" provides a comprehensive analysis of the existing body of literature on social networking sites. It has sections that explain the interconnections between social networking sites with emotions and addictions in the digital age. Additionally it relates to the disinformation and hate campaigns, receding attention among youth due to their social media engagement and potential for collaborative academic excellence. It has deeply concerned itself with how social networks are changing social interactions and provides studies that substantiate those claims. It discusses studies that claim that Twitter (Now X) has become a medium for class discussions and emphasizes that education is thereby becoming student-centric due to the micro-blogging site. Whereas other studies thrust upon how photographic communities on social media aid in the skill upgradation. It also demonstrates how online discussions have enhanced a sense of ownership, commonality, and camaraderie among youth. The chapter also elucidates on the various theories related to the press and democracy that include normative theories of the press such as Authoritarian Theory, Free Press theory, Social Responsibility Theory, and Soviet Media theory. It also draws upon the Democratic Participant theory to discuss the role of digital media and their relevance in contemporary times. It also entails a discussion of the Diffusion of Innovation Theory in the context of Indian Elections especially about the mass mobilization

through the tools of Web 2.0. The chapter traces the evolution of digital engagement and citizen participation from the Jasmine Revolution of Tunisia in 2010 to the recent Black Rights Matter movement (2020) in the USA. The chapter examines the rise of social media as an alternative forum for challenging the existing power structures including the corporate media and the strategic challenges for the narrative hegemony and media control. The chapter also discusses the potential of social media to be leveraged for instigating violence and averting the democratic processes as explained through the prism of a case study of the London riots. The chapter also traces the journey of digital politics from electronic brochures to the electronic headquarters somewhat indicating the idea of connective parties. However, the chapter concludes with the thrust that social networking sites are emerging as a reservoir for political energy that posits a newer challenge for media, politics, democracies, and public life.

Chapter four titled ‘Methodological Approaches to Investigating the Impact of Social Networking Sites on Youth’ begins with the acknowledgment of conducting interdisciplinary research and bridging the differences within the different disciplines. It also asserts that there are blurring lines between the different disciplines to assess the ‘impact’ of a particular technology or emerging social phenomenon. The chapter elaborates on the research questions laid down by the researcher. The research questions for the study conducted deal with the

- Reach and access of social networking sites among youth in both urban and rural settings,
- The purpose of using such portals especially in young audience in metro and non metro areas
- The behavioral impact of social media on youth
- Social Networking Sites as an agent of political change and,
- The role of social media in e-governance and enhancing transparency in governance and administration.

The study utilized a survey method to understand and analyze the purpose of using social media. The chapter elaborates on both the locations chosen for studying the youth patterns and preferences i.e. Delhi and Varanasi and describes its socio-political context by explaining their history, demographics, socioeconomic status, sex ratio, and literacy levels to provide a comprehensive overview. The study uses Stratified Random Sampling with 800 participants and utilized SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for data analysis.

Chapter five titled ‘Social Networking Sites & Youth: A Quantitative Approach’ throws light on the findings of the study undertaken through the survey method. It elaborates on the reach and access of social networking sites in both Delhi and Varanasi and their popularity among the age cohort. It also helps to determine the light and heavy users of social networking sites and the purpose of using such websites. The chapter also provides a comparison between social networking sites and other mediums of digital engagement. It provides holistic statistics on social networking sites and their utilization by youth for varied purposes like social causes or activism, education and employment, and engagement with social and political issues. It also tries to understand the usage of social media in enhancing engagement with e-governance and ensuring the accountability and transparency of the existing

governance structures. Overall, it assesses the impact and behavioral changes in the youth who are active on social networking sites.

Chapter six titled ‘Social Networking Sites & Youth: Debates & Discussions’ reflects upon the findings of the study and delves into contemporary ideas, trends, and concepts and also suggests ideas for further research. It discusses the changing dynamics of the digital divide in India and enhanced reach and access to digital media. It also asserts that the role of social networking sites is further exacerbated in the COVID-19 pandemic. The reduced cost of smartphones and internet packages has facilitated access and the rolling out of 5G plans at affordable rates is contributing towards fast-paced internet in both urban and rural areas in India. The chapter differentiates between the traits and preferences of Millennials and Gen Z in India. It also provides crucial details and statistics related to the popularity of social networking sites pertaining to the Indian context. It also provides key findings on social media usage in terms of hours spent on these portals by the youth. The study has been undertaken in a crucial area of research i.e. youth studies which is often a neglected but important concern of any nation as they are often referred to as a demographic dividend. The chapter also delves into how social networking sites are acting as agents of social change and an alternative platform for causes of concern, especially climate change and global warming. Social Networking sites provide an accessible platform for the youth to create sensitization for environmental causes and advocacy. The study also reveals critical findings related to social networking sites and their usage for educational purposes including attaining new information and skill development. It also provides significant findings on how digital media is emerging as a platform for behavior changes which may have both positive and negative connotations for the youth and larger society.

Book Details:

- Title: From Likes to Lives: Unravelling the Impact of Social Networking Sites on Youth
- ISBN: 9781913936396
- No of Pages: 136 Pages, B/W Illustrations
- Published by: HP Hamilton Limited, United Kingdom
- Publication date & year: February 14, 2024