

User Perception and Use of Social Networking Sites by Sikkim University Students

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Abstract

The advent of Social Networking sites and its resources have revolutionized the communication and social relation world. A significant transition can be seen in the academic communities approach and way they seek information and establish the social relation activities. The purpose of the study was to investigate the user perception and use of Social Networking sites by the Sikkim University students. It has been observed in the study that majority parts of the students expressed the use of their internet for Social Networking sites and its resources and were enthusiastic in improving their skills in the use of Social Networking sites. Facebook was the most popular site compared to other Social Networking sites. Though the students indicated that lack of security and privacy were the main concerns of Social Networking sites, majority of them used real names and photos in their profiles.

Keywords: Web 2.0, Social Networking Sites, Internet, Sikkim University

1 Introduction

The age of Networked Information, internet is the largest worldwide source of information, and powerful communication media and educational tool. It has made a tremendous impact on the academic activities, communication and social relation between Information Seekers. The Development of the web, communication and social relation system has adopted the new technology. So many Social Networking sites have been in the development of web version 2.0. The term web 2.0 was coined by O'Reilly Media in 2004 and refers to web application, which provides online collaboration, participation, social networking, interaction and user granted content sharing Social Networking sites are profile-based websites that allow users to maintain social relationships by viewing, visiting and sharing their lists of social

connections with other members. Social Networking sites are online discussion forums, chat rooms, community based personal websites and other social space accessible to users for exchange of personal contact communication, as for example Facebook, Orkut, Twitter and My space.

Social Networking sites provide a wide variety of resources and services such as messaging, blogging, videos and audios, saving photo etc. Particularly students and youngsters are the avid users of these sites. Through the Social Networking sites students can touch with their Teachers, Friends and Institutions and allow them to connect with discussion forum by the use of Social Networking sites. Students can create and share their identities and profiles that may include personal information pictures, blog entries and videos. Also students can share information, exchange files and seek comments, advice, suggestion and ideas instantly. The Social Networking sites are platforms for



students and they can connect with the long lost classmates, batch mates and family members. Security and privacy are the topmost concerns of Social Networking sites.

The present study is an attempt to understand the user perception and use of Social Networking sites by the Sikkim University students. Sikkim University is established on 7 July 2007 with the motto of development of higher education and research activities in Sikkim and North East states.

2. Review of Literature

There have been a number of research studies on the user perception and use of Social Networking sites in the developed and developing countries. Some of these studies measure usefulness; some have focused accessibility, while others have combined all these. A review of literature reveals that the students or youngsters are the most frequent users of Social Networking sites. They use the Social Networking sites for development of the friendship and connection with long lost classmates for academic purpose. Pempek, Yermola jayvee and Calvert (2009) studied college students' Social Networking experiences on Facebook. Results of the study revealed that students used Facebook approximately 30 minutes throughout the day as part of their daily routine. Students communicated on Facebook using many styles. Shaheen (2008) investigated the use of social networks and political activism by the students of three universities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi during the political crises and the emergency imposed by the Government of Pakistan on 3rd November 2007.

Park(2010) studied the use of Social Networking sites by undergraduates, graduate and faculty members at Vnsei university in Seoul, South Korea. The analysis indicated that the three groups

of users demonstrated distinct patterns of use of Social Networking sites although the undergraduates used the profile service more than the community service, graduates used the community service more than profile service. Mikami, et.al (2010) examined online communication on Social Networking sites in a longitudinal sample of 92 youths. The study found that youths at age group of 13-14 years based on gender, ethnicity and parental income were using Social Networking sites more than the age group of 20-23 years. Subramanian et.al conducted a study to assess the use of online and offline Social Networking sites among the college students of a large urban university in Los- Angeles. The study revealed that the students often used Social Networking sites to connect and reconnect with their friends and family members.

Keenan and Shiri(2009) conducted an exploratory study on how Social Networking sites encourage sociability. For Social Networking site (Facebook, Orkut, Twitter and Blog) were examined from a user's perspective. They found that the Social Networking sites use a number of different approaches to encourage sociability among the users. Facebook promotes privacy representing real world networks in a web environment. Twitter and Blog focus on more specific aspects of community and technology, respectively. Pfeil, Arjan and Zaphirls(2009) investigated age differences and similarities in the use of the Social Networking sites, myspace. They found that youngsters have larger networks and friends compared to older users of my space. Majority of youngster users friends were in their own age range, whilst older people's network of friends tends to had a more diverse age distribution. Thelwall(2009) investigated the characteristic of social network comments and

found that the comments were typically short. In general, the use of Social Networking sites have been studied and discussed at different levels.

Ellison et.al(2007) identified relationships between undergraduates' use of Facebook and three types of social capital. The study revealed that Facebook enhance social capital formation more through week ties than through story ties and may psychologically help students increase their life satisfaction and self-esteem Harigettai (2008)found that students gender, race ethnicity and parental educational back ground have significant relationships with the adoption of Social Networking sites.

However, there seems to be simple research that assesses the user perception and use of Social Networking sites by the Sikkim University students in developing countries like India.

3. Objectives

The study was conducted with the following specific objectives:

- ❖ To study the use of Social Networking sites by the university students and students of affiliated colleges to Sikkim University,
- ❖ To identify the different purpose for using Social Networking sites
- ❖ To assess the source of information about Social Networking sites
- ❖ To study the opinion about Social Networking Sites
- ❖ To assess the problem faced using Social Networking Sites

4. Research Methodology

To study the purpose and objective of the Social Networking Sites, quantitative research

methodology along with comprehensive literature review was adopted. Structured questionnaires were distributed among 175 students for data collection .A total of 166 filled in questionnaires were received back , overall response rate was 94.85% .Data was analyzed and inferences were made based on standard statistical methods.

5. Data Analysis

5.1 The Social Networking sites is new platform of communication in the electronic age. It is a special form of communication between persons or group of persons or organizations and especially very popular among students community. The results of a awareness response of Social Networking sites among the students is as follows in the Table –1 . The Analysis showed that a majority (57.83%) of the students were aware of Facebook and Orkut (14.45%) .A very few students were aware of this (1.80%) , Ming (1.80 %) and Classmate.com(1.20%)

Social Networking Sites	No of respondent (N=166)
Facebook	96 (57.83%)
Orkut	24 (14.4 %)
Twitter	12 (7.3%)
Blog	9 (5.41%)
My Space	8 (4.8%)
Bebo	5 (3.01%)
YouTube	4 (2.40%)
Hi5	3 (1.80%)
Nirg	3 (1.80%)
Classmate.com	2 (1.20%)

Table 1: Awareness of Social Networking

Table I revealed that a major part of the students were aware of two Social Networking sites Facebook and Orkut. Facebook is most popular among the students compared to Orkut and Twitter. Facebook is not only popular in Indian students but also popular in developed countries like United State and United Kingdom.

5.2 Source of Information about Social Networking Sites

Many sources are available for getting the information about Social Networking Sites. The important Source of information about Social Networking Sites is friends, Internet Newspapers & Magazines and Seminar & Conference. Table - 2 shows that a major part of Students got the information about Social Networking sites through the friends(64.46%) and few Students got information through the seminar & conference (4.82%). Students join in these Sites because their friends invite and compel them to become the members of these sites

Source	No. of Respondents
Friend	72(43.37%)
Internet	41(24.71%)
Teachers	26(15.66%)
News Papers & Magazines	10(6.02%)
Books	9(5.42%)
Seminar & conference	8 (4.82%)

Table 2: Source of Information about Social Networking Sites

5.3 Social Networking Sites used by Students

There are number of Social Networking sites are being used by the students' community. Some

important Social Networking sites used by students are given in Table No.-3 Table-3 shows the major part of the (56.63%) of the students use the Facebook and few students (1.20%) use the classmate.com.

Social Networking Sites	No of Respondents (N=168)
Facebook	94 56.63 %
Orkut	22 13.26 %
Blog	9 5.42 %
Myspace	9 5.42 %
Twitter	11 6.64 %
Youtube	5 3.01 %
Hi5	4 2.40 %
Bebo	6 3.62 %
Ning	4 2.40 %
Classmate.com	2 1.20 %

Table 3: Use of Social Networking sites

The Students are very much aware of the friendly communication and academic applications of Social Networking sites like Facebook and Orkut. Facebook and Orkut are the most used Social Networking sites.

5.4 Purpose of Social Networking Sites Use

Table -4 shows the different purpose for which the respondents used the Social Networking sites. Table -4 showed that 13.25% of the respondents used Social Networking sites to obtain friendly communication, 59.04 % Used for academic communication and very few students 3.62% used for job searching.

Purpose	No of respondents (N=166)
Academic Purpose	98 (59.04 %)
Discussion for Innovative Ideas	10(6.03%)
Job searching	6(3.62 %)
Friendly communication	22(13.25 %)
Gossiping /Chatting	12(7.22 %)
Making friendship	18(10.84 %)

Table 4: Purpose of Social Networking Sites

However, a major part of the students used Social Networking sites for academic purpose and also they used it as a way to connect and reconnect with friends and relatives.

5.5 Frequency of Time Spent on Social Networking Sites.

The variation of the time spent in use of Social Networking sites by the students was also studied. Some of the students visited these sites once in a day and a very few students visited these sites once a month. Table -5 shows that a good number of students (62.65 %) visited the Social Networking sites every day and very less percentage(9.64 %) students visited these sites one time a month.

Time	No . of Respondents (N= 166)
Every day	104 62.65 %
Thrice in a week	44 26.50 %
Twice in a week	64 38.55 %
Once a Week	28 16.86 %
Once a month	16 9.64 %

Table 5: Frequency of Time Spent on Social Networking Sites

5.6 Facilities of Social Networking Sites

The analysis revealed that students sent scraps(36.14%) and make new friends (42.77) using Social Networking sites. A good number of the students posted photographs (6.64%), few students responded that they used Social Networking sites to post comments (4.82%).

Facilities	No. of Respondent (N=166)
Sending Scraps	640(36.14)
Making New Friends	71 (42.77)
Posting photographs	16 (99.640)
Finding old friends	11 (6.63)
Posting comments	8 (4.82)

Table 6: Facilities of Social Networking sites

5.7 Names and Photographs used in Social Networking Sites

Uses of Social Networking sites can be done for biographical information, symbolic images and false name in their profiles.

Name and Photo used	No. of Respondents (N=166)
Real	109 (65.66%)
False	57 (34.34%)

Table 7: Names and Photos used in Social Networking Sites

Table 7 showed that majority (65.66%) of the students used their real names and photos in their profile. The students may be very much aware of the security and privacy concerns of Social

Networking sites. The information is accessible to anyone with an internet connection. Students need to be very careful about the personal information they reveal through their profiles and walls. Social Networking sites are public domains and any information posted in these sites can remain long after it has been removed.

5.8 Reasons for not using Real Names and Photos in Social Networking Sites

Some students were not using real names and photos in Social Networking sites. The analysis revealed that (34.34%) students are not using real name and photo due to fear of security & privacy, misuse of personal information and unwillingness.

Reasons.	No. of Respondents (N=57)
Security and Privacy	24
Misusing personal information	3
Unwillingness to disclose the identity	9
Others	11

Table 8: Reasons for not using Real Names and Photos in Social Networking Sites

Students can protect their identity by using false names and symbolic images in Social Networking sites like Face book provides security and privacy than Blog and Orkut.

5.9 Gender Variation use of Social Networking Sites

The Social Networking sites provide a lot of opportunities and facilities. Facebook provides the security and privacy. The analysis revealed that

female students (68.67) were more attracted than male students towards Social Networking Sites.

Gender	No. of Respondents (N=166)	
Male	52	31.33%
Female	114	68.67%

Table 9: Gender Variation in use of Social Networking Sites

5.10 Opinion about Social Networking Sites

Students were asked to indicate their opinion about Social Networking sites. The results were as follows

Opinions	No. of Respondents	
Easy for contacting	29	(17.47%)
Old and new friends	102	(61.45%)
Useful for academic		
Communication	21	(12.65%)
Helpful for easy communication		
Others	14	(8.43%)

Table 10: Opinions about Social Networking Sites

Table 10 showed the majority (61.45%) of the students opined that Social Networking sites are useful for academic communication and the second major part of the students (17.47%) used the Social Networking sites for easy way of contacting old and new friends. A few (8.43%) students have the opinion that it is useful in some other way.

5.11 Problems in use Social Networking Sites

Table 11 indicated problems faced by them in using the Social Networking sites. So many students (34.34%) indicated security and privacy, fear of

misusing personal information (27.10%) and lack of time as the concerns while using Social Networking sites.

Problems	No. of Respondent N = 166	
Security and privacy	57	34.34%
Lack of time	24	14.46%
Misusing personal information	45	27.10%
Internet facility	9	5.43%
Others	31	18.67%

Table 11: Problems Faced using Social Networking Sites

6. Conclusion

The study showed that a many students were aware of Social Networking sites for good purpose. However, a good number of students use these sites for academic purpose also. We can say that Social Networking sites can be used as interactive platform for academic and other communications. Face book is the most used Social Networking site by the Sikkim University Students.

Although there were many resources and services available through these sites, there were also many concerns. Security and privacy were the top most concerns while using these sites. However, a major part of the students still used their real names, photos and biographical information in their profiles.

Social Networking sites need to improve the security and privacy. They should establish policies and strategies for the proper and safe use of personal information posted on their bites. Students may share copyright materials such as videos, music,

photo and other documents. Social Networking sites should protect the misuse of copyright materials.

Students should not disclose personal information to strangers. They should work in accordance with strict and safe computing practices. They can protect their privacy by putting up fake biographical information and images, making the profile private and for friends only. They can also use Social Networking sites that provide better privacy and facilities to present highly customizable personal information. Training and awareness programmes should be given to educate students about the applications, benefits and risks associated with Social Networking sites.

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