

# The Impact of Social Networking on Society with special emphasis on Adolescents in India

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses the growing impact of social media on society with special emphasis on adolescents with its positive and negative repercussions. Although, social media is a place for the people no matter how old they are, to share their views, happiness, discuss their issues and obviously get opinions from every corner of the world. Before knowing the impact of social media, people should know how to use social media as it allows people to share or exchange information, ideas, images, videos and even communicate with each other through networking. Further, I would like to cover all features of social media with special focus on entertainment, education, and change in behaviour, extremist disruptive activities, cyber bullying etc. I have tried to explain how social media affects adolescents in a broader way.

**Keywords:** Social media; Entertainment; Education; Societal implications; Adolescents; Antisocial behaviour; Emulation and Aggression.

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## 1. HIGHLIGHTS

Comprehensive understanding of a particular subject is the ultimate power that we need. We all know that social media plays authoritative role in our lives. By just being online on social media, we get the authorization of all information including the unrestrained content. In present times, it is indubitable that social media plays crucial role with its impact on our society, our financial system and our overall observation of the world. Social media is an innovative medium that brings people to share their ideas, connect with peers, communicate and assemble for a cause, search for an idea and offer guidance as it has completely detached communication barrier and created decentralized communication channel and open the door for all to have a voice and participate in a democratic fashion including people in repressive countries. This media channel accommodates a wide variety of spontaneous, formal, informal, scholarly and unscholarly writings to flourish. It enables common interest groups such as students to work in a collaborative project outside of their institution. It fosters creativity and collaboration with a wide range of commentators on a number of issues such as education, economy, politics, race, health, relationships etc.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Irrespective of abundance of studies, the detailed consequences of media usage and exposure to media contents remain empirically challenged (Pantic, 2014). In recent years, the rising number of scholars have contemplated and researched the pros and cons of online social media, i.e. whether using social networking sites and technologies leave positive or negative outcomes. The literature suggests that the past efforts have raised more questions than provided concrete answers. A recent systematic review of the association between online communication and adolescent's psychological well-being in fact points to 'a wealth of contradictory evidence suggesting both 'harmful and beneficial aspects' of Internet-based social media (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, (2014).

As per the Pew Research Centre Report, 2010 that created a lot of stir in the social media usage in American habitats, 93% of the US adolescents aged between 12-17 years use social networking sites on a regular/daily basis. This continuous surge in the online media has prompted the American Psychological Association to include "Internet use Disorder" in the appendix of the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (Kuss, Griffiths & Binder, 2013). A different kind

of depression on Facebook has become a legitimate medical concern now a day's especially for the adolescents. Ironically, social media's influence is revolving us into one of the most antisocial generations. We prefer texting to phone, conversations, online chat to a face-to-face meeting or video conferencing and many more.

Now – a day's, social media helps people to connect with rest of the world within the shortest possible time at a very low cost. In earlier times, children's used to play in the open grounds, read books, comics, listen to radio and TV was a luxury at that time. But with the popularity of TV in 1980's it became a popular medium of household medium of audio-visual entertainment due to its eye-catching potentialities. With the advent of internet in 1990s there was a complete transformation in the living standards. Everything is dependent on the internet from our daily requirements to socializing, sharing everything etc.

### 3. BACKGROUND

Although, the focus here is primarily on the harmful effects of social media, it is essential to be familiar with some positive aspects of social media usage as well. Social media proposes the capability to form associations of compatible people to work together in coordination. Social networking sites help adolescents do considerably better in academics, primarily by connecting with each other on projects, assignments and joint group projects outside the institution. For example, so many social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat allows students to gather outside the institution to exchange, share ideas about their projects. Some institutions utilize using blogs as teaching pedagogy that has advantage of highlighting proficiency in a particular language both written, expression and creativeness.

But contrary, there are so many negative aspects associated with social media usage especially among adolescents. As explained earlier, while forming groups, sometimes they may come in contact with deceptive people having fake profiles that might harass them in later stages of their association. While completing their projects there are some youngsters who don't work but want to be benefited without even trying or working in a group.

Social media is also an outstanding marketing device used to spread information faster than any other traditional news channel or any other forms of media. Everyday examples of social media sharing are seen and received on our smartphones, Facebook pages, Instagram, Snapchat etc. reporting the missing persons' photos, abuse, harassment we see on social media sites. Most recent examples of rapid social media sharing occurred is the Boston marathon bombing. After the event, when the FBI released photos of the two suspects, these images immediately went viral on Twitter, Facebook. Social media was used to form groups in which people posted photos and information pertaining to the case. This phenomenon is called crowdsourcing or crowd sleuthing and eventually the whole country was on the watch; there was nowhere the perpetrators could hide.

One of the most popular social media sites, Facebook, has 1.4 billion users around the world, nearly a fifth of the world's population, thus helping us to better understand, learn and share information instantaneously making the world look like a small village. According to a statistical portal, the figures show that primary ranking of the leading countries in the world is done according to the number of Facebook users as of January 2018. Due to this placement, around 130 million users from Brazil were listed on the social networking site. But the shocking placement shows India being placed on the topmost position with 250 million users, with United States ranked second ranked with 230 million users. Therefore, Facebook is the most admired and popular social networking medium worldwide, with a widespread usage dissemination of 22.9 percent. ([www.statista.com/statistics](http://www.statista.com/statistics)).

As per the report by UNICEF, 2017, states that there are 302 million internet subscribers in India of which 94% are mobile internet users and 6% wired internet, with the subscriber base of 400 million internet users, 28 million users are school-going children (IAMAI, 2015).

From the above reports it is clear that if we observe carefully don't we really need a strong regulation as the figures still show shocking rise of internet users that too children and adolescents.

Further, the author wants to share few shocking incidences that are reported in leading newspapers in India after children spending more that 8-10 hours per day on the internet, the kind of content they are watching, are they really getting influenced with the kind of content they are watching and want to imitate such happenings in real life. The children in India are increasingly accessing the media whether it is internet, TV etc. which has become a more saturated with sexual content and especially children are engaged in sexual activity at early stage.

#### 4. PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

In this section, I will cover several supporting ideas showing how social media, specifically, Facebook/YouTube can lead to psychological problems. It's clear that social media has negative personal impacts; enabling young people to over analyze and criticize themselves as well as their problems. The special effects of sexual content shown in music videos and films have received moderate attention from researchers all over the world, although studies show that there are hypothetical basis to believe that social media plays a key role in the socialization of sexual knowledge, attitudes and behaviour (Roberts, 1982).

##### Facebook Depression

There are numerous researchers who proposed a new phenomenon called 'Facebook depression', that is defined as a depression when individuals spend a unnecessary amounts of time on social media sites, such as Facebook and then start displaying typical indications of depression. The vital component of our social life is to seek acceptance and stay connected with our peers. On the other hand, the amount of time that the online world requires is constant engagement by generating a factor of self-awareness that may trigger depression in some people. The adolescent's users who discuss their problems with friends on social platforms, messenger's etc. experience higher levels of anxiety, nervousness than those who donot indulge in these acts. As with offline depression, people who suffer from Facebook depression are at risk for social isolation and sometimes turn to risky Internet sites and blogs for 'help' that may promote substance abuse, unsafe sexual practices, violent and aggressive and self-destructive behaviours."

The study conducted by psychologist Dr. Mark Becker of Michigan State University, found a 70% increase in self-reported depressive symptoms among the group using social media and a 42% increase in social anxiety. Clearly excessive social media usage leaves one prone to be at a higher risk of Depression, anxiety, and ultimately stress. The findings say that adolescents who are engaged in social media like gaming, texting, cell phones, Instagram, Snapchat etc., are more likely to have depression and anxiety.

Another Harvard Business study conducted on 5,208 citizens says that more you use Facebook, the more depressed you feel by clicking and liking others' posts and by seeing other's enjoying in other corners of the world, people feel depressed. This is because of the reason that real world social networks are positively associated with the over-all well being. The use of social media may detract children from personal associations, reduction in decreased focused and meaningful activities thereby enhancing inactiveness in behavioural actions by encouraging more screen time. This increase in surfing time leads to internet addiction and destroys one's self-esteem through unfavorable social comparisons such as body image and mood. Adolescent's who spent quality time on Facebook are reportedly in a more depressing and negative mood than those who spent time on the controlled mediums. Human behaviour is directly associated with self-comparison and because most people have the tendency to exhibit the most positive and entertaining features of their lives on social media especially Facebook. It is due to the possible fact for a human beings considering that their own life compare negatively to what they see presented by others.

According to ASSOCHAM survey 2016 in India, a massive 73 percent of children in the age group of 8 to 13 years are using social networking sites like Facebook. The survey was conducted in tier-I and tier-II cities like Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, Kolkata, Ahmadabad, Hyderabad, Pune, Lucknow and Dehradun.

Another study by the author from 2015-2017 conducted in four cities of India i.e Ahmedabad, Mumbai. Lucknow and Delhi states that out of 790 adolescent's who were part of the study, 80% adolescents are influenced by the unrestrained content, want to see it again but very few admitted that they donot want to imitate such actions. WHY??? I tell you the reason because due to societal inhibitions in India adolescent don't feel comfortable admitting the fact because of the still prevailing conservative mores.

##### Social Media and Anxiety after watching videos

Social media is also a source of depression and anxiety as it also serves as a source of stress for young people especially after watching YouTube. The anxiety formed from continuously trying to project an impractical and unattainable perception of precision within social network is the way, social media causes depression/ anxiety in adolescents as they always want to explore newer forms of entertainment. They are also searching of the perfect companion, career, follow their idol on everyday basis etc.

Another consequence of social media that leads to anxiety is the experience of false intimacy. Mostly, as social media encourages highlights of all the enjoyment, thrill and achievement the adolescents seem to enjoy but tell very minute details about where and how they are struggling in their life on a deeper level. So, the adolescents who make their own videos and upload in *YouTube*, *Musically*, *Snapchat* try to appear more fun filled, entertaining portraying perfectly happy and trendy because that's what they see others doing and want to imitate the same. As a result, they reflect how they want to be perceived, rather than showing a genuine image of who they really are.

As per the Psychological view "the ambiguity of online communications has made many impossible things in the real world, possible in the virtual one." This is because of the reason that the mind has a authoritative way of controlling intricate narratives about reality. When they see the images of their beloved ones, they have better tolerance rather than suffering from any pain. Therefore, one can understand the strong connection that can be formed from thousands of miles away through the exchange of frequent sentiments and assurance of lifelong love with no more than a photograph in hand.

### **Adolescent's involvement in criminal activities on Social Media**

The emotional problems explained in the previous sections, the major part is the adolescent's indulgence in criminal activities through the use of social media. With the increased consumption of social media, malevolent and negligent people take advantage of the liberty of social media platforms to deceive, lie, attack, fraud and hurt others in a number of ways.

Due to the exploitation of social networking sites many criminals have taken benefit of social media platforms to hide their individuality and commit several crimes such as cyber bullying and cyber stalking, cyber terrorism, human trafficking, drug dealing, Phishing etc... In the following paragraphs, I will explain few points such as cyber bullying, criminal and terrorist activities, the frequent illegal activities.

### **Social Media and Cyber Bullying**

In the last couple of decades, Cyber bullying has become the major problem among adolescents as it permits the sufferers or the victims to share images in the public domain in front of their peers and insult them publicly. Cyber Bullying is defined as an aggressive act that takes place in the digital media devices such as mobile phones, laptops, ipads, by sending SMS, MMS, gaming and other online application by a group or an individual repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself. With the help of this application, we can send, share and post all the harmful, destructive, fake, shameful content. With the use of Internet and mobile phones, a new form of bullying has emerged often called 'cyber bullying'. During cyber-bullying, violent behavior and aggression takes place via electronic method by using Internet particularly through social media.

Those people who are engaged in cyber bullying have some special skills by hiding their individuality posing as someone else through false identities to frighten their victims by blackmailing, sending unrestrained content. A pilot study done on parents of adolescents states those more than three out of ten parents in India say their teenage kids are the victim of cyber bullying while only 50% of the parents are aware of the issue online in India. The reason again most of the adolescents' hide such problems from the parents and discuss only in extreme cases and try to solve it among the peer groups. If we compare these finding with the rest of the world, the findings are quite surprising, which revealed that the incidences of cyber bullying in India are higher than that of western nations including the US (15% of children), UK (11% of children) and France (5% of children). Prior to this survey, there has been little evidence to suggest cyber bullying is a major issue in the country. This is in contrast to the United States, where the phenomenon has been linked to several teen suicides.

The laws in India on the problem and victimization of cyber bullying are always silent. There are numerous increasing occurrences over the years that have attained an alarming situation. India is placed on the third position in terms of cyber bullying cases across the globe. The Information Technology Act, 2000 along with its amendment of 2008 has not touched upon communication related threats and offences on the cyber space. One of the advantages of internet and computers is effortless communication and connectivity.

My survey further stated that parental awareness regarding cyber bullying is associated with the behaviour, the teenager's really can't consider on what actually happened, it is in fact probably due to the proportion of adolescents being cyberbullied as the parents are really not aware about the extent of the cases or the adolescents being bullied on the Internet. These psychological problems leave adolescents with deep mental and emotional disorders and have even lead to suicidal tendencies. There is a lot of pressure for adolescents to deal with among the peers and family expectations and

some really feel difficulty dealing with past traumas they have experienced. Sometimes parents and adolescents struggle between the adolescents wanting their independence and simultaneously in need of parental guidance that result in conflicting behavioural issues. As we read in the newspapers about many stories about adolescents engaged in rigorous and irritating behaviour that prompts suicides or inflicts lasting physical or emotional disorders.

There are several debates on the suicidal tendencies, deaths and emotional problems among adolescents due to the side effect of social media. Cyber bullying victimization has presently been associated with an increased risk of suicidal tendencies and increased risk of mental disorders. These findings stress the importance of programs aimed at reducing bullying behavior, especially because of early-onset mental health problems may pose a risk for the development of psychiatric disorders in adulthood. The link between online bullying and suicide, especially among young people, has come to the attention of the authorities. Exchanging hostile messages on the Internet is now treated as a crime. Some are requesting to end the anonymity in cyberspace, and others want offenders to be punished in court. Several nations have now passed laws against cyber bullying in order to protect bully victims.

### **Social Media, Terrorism and radicalization of adolescents leading to violent extremisms**

The Internet especially the social media proposes major potential for sustaining the implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda of 2030 by advancement of all human rights, including the right to information, freedom of expression and privacy. Majorly the use of Internet and its interrelated effects might lead to violations of these rights.

As per the UNESCO report 2017, well-known scholars and researchers from all over the world from the fields of humanities and the social sciences, technology, education, psychology and sociology have been exploring the dynamics of digital social networking over the past 10 years. They examined the link between the growing extent of social media and the role of individual, opinionated, cultural, sacred and sadistic radicalization of youth in divisions.

Internet is progressing to be a dynamic element for brutal radicalization that facilitates the propagation of fanatic principles in low cost, speedy, sub urbanized and internationally associated networks. These extremist/fanatic organizations as a powerful tool are trying to spread the feeling of hatred by provoking youngsters, by recruiting them in spreading violence on these social networking sites. Moreover, extremists use internet to propagate the ideologies, motives and grievances. They are now deeply extended all over the Internet and utilize cyberspace in different manners, from online recruitment to the dissemination of violent content.

Another dangerous aspect of social media is the rapid adoption of this medium by terrorists groups. In the last couple of decades, incidents of Islamic terrorism have occurred on a global scale not only in Muslim-majority countries but also in Europe, Russia, and the United States. Terrorism has been using social media for their benefit for gathering information, for recruiting members, for fund raising, and for propaganda schemes. According to a research report by Gabriel Weimann in Haifa University Israel, states that there is a strong relationship between terrorism and social media since the early days of commencement of Internet all around the world and it has been published in a report entitled "New Terrorism and New Media." According to the report, terrorists started using the Internet almost 18-20 years ago. There were only no more than a dozen extremists groups who were online in 1998. Ever since then, scrutinizing the use of the Internet and the use of online platforms by extremists/fanatic groups has escalated from 12 to over 10,000 terrorist websites. This trend was called "Lone Wolf" – the fastest growing kind of terrorism. After 9/11, many terrorist groups, such as the Jihadist movements moved to cyberspace. These extremists organization are engaged in cyber movement (jihad) that has started with 1980s promotion of the use of "Electronic Technologies" till today to embrace social media as new freedom movement organization.

According to Weismann's report, most of the extremists groups are using social-media sites to broaden their territory, raise funds by misguiding people as well as recruiting and training new members. Social media helps in interconnecting terrorists within the groups thereby allowing them to get new workforce. Precisely, these extremists also know the category of people who are accessing social media. Usually, the perfect target groups for these extremist organizations are the young people that are vulnerable/ susceptible and ready to experiment new things in life. The new recruits are emotionally very weak and hear about radicalization and recruitment. Due to the growing use of media content especially social media the recruitment of new members has become easier. This social media movement is helping extremist's organization go through the practical training in which there is somebody who trains, guides, and launches them and finally they are ready to lead the movement called *jihad*.

Social Media can also be used as a cyber terrorism tool where the perpetrators disseminate false or compromising information using the Internet. The growing role of cyberspace in society has opened up new threats as well as new opportunities. A growing number of individuals and groups are looking to use cyberspace to steal, compromise and destroy critical data and the national security machinery.

Social media is increasingly becoming a tool for individual criminals and terrorist groups. Unfortunately, Internet has enabled aspiring extremists to commit offences based on a brief that law enforcement struggles to operate in the online world. It allows criminals to target countries from other jurisdictions across the world. Cyber criminals can operate from any corner of the world.

Further, in order to ascertain a relation between extremist activities and social media, we need to review the different profiles where new people could be grouped into. The first groups of people that easily join radical groups are isolated people. The second category of people includes people with emotional problems such as depression and the last reason why some join terrorist groups is because these radical groups make them feel important.

### **The Relationship between Social Media and Criminal Activities**

After examining the effects of social media on adolescent behaviour in the previous sections, it is obvious to observe that there is a connection between extremist activities and consequently the emotional problems caused by social media in the lives of adolescents. As discussed researchers found that there is an indication of depressive symptoms followed by psychosocial disorders associated with violent/aggressive protests and terrorism. There is also correlation between depression and radicalization.

Depression and emotional unsteadiness is one of the major psychological problems exposed by many people. For example, the forcible conversion of young people to other religion is radicalization after battling depression in their present state of mind. It recommends that in search for ways to discourage adolescents from the path of extremism, they must be undergoing some mentally depressive state being in the association of peers who motivate them to adopt such path.

Another research by Kamaldeep Bhui of the Wolfsan Institute of Preventative Medicine supports the association of social networking with modifiable risk and protective factors that lead to violent protest among adolescents.

Isolation is also an additional menace supporting extremism. Some researchers have extensively demonstrated about the strongest condemnation of violent acts associated with more social contacts. Social networks endorse confrontation by offering a range of cultural distinctiveness and better prospect. But, these findings are in both compound and preliminary stage yet they present a strong argument for future problem of radicalization as a behavioural issue. Another category that makes terrorism prominent is the fact that these groups are offering an opportunity for youngsters to feel commanding, powerful and lead the movements. They're making cynical, estranged radicals experience like they're doing something really significant, meaningful with their lives. One thing that these extremist movements have completed far more efficiently is that they have an expertise in this fantasy world.

Another excellent example that supports the relation between social media, psychological problem behaviors' and criminal activities where all the youngsters are radicalized and recruited through social media. The leave some traces such as their online footprints on twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Because of their continuous exposure to extremist views through social media, one can easily deduce that the emotional status includes some of the symptoms such as isolation, disillusion, depression and instability and thus they become easily influenced and radicalized through the online content of social media.

In sum up, the psychological issues such as depression, isolation and unstable personality discussed above makes it easier for extremists to obtain new recruits. From the previous sections, one can figure out that social media is one of the many sources of emotional issues. Hence, social media can simply be considered not only a medium used by terrorist groups but also as the feasible stride in helping radicalize prospective workforce among extremist organizations .

## **5. CONCLUSION**

To summarize the above discussion, in spite of the positive advantages due to the onset of social media it helps in speedy information sharing, allows people to generate false individualities and superficial associations, causes melancholy and is a crucial device used by criminals and extremists. It is obvious that there exist a correlation between social media and its

impact on the behavioural change among adolescents. As a result, messages can reach from one target group to another in stipulated time. Nowadays, youths especially adolescents are in constant exposure with internet and different kinds of social media. They want to live in digital world and acquire digital literacy called as “Net Generation” to which the adults are just the neutralized part. The adolescents are socializing in a confined, fused virtual space, getting to learn so many innovative approaches thereby creating a new language of communication and are eager in adapting multicultural values. (Tappscott, 1998). The major distinctiveness of this “Next-Generation” culture are: self-determination, expressiveness and intellectual openness, inclusion, strong and liberated expression of views, originality and authentication in thought, preoccupation with maturity and sensitivity.

Lastly, as social media is comparatively a new development and the studies done on the influence of social media so far are also reasonably new, I believe as though the benefits of social media are highlighted quite often as compared to its negative features. This socializing trend needs transformation and hopefully my study stimulates it by notify future researchers who are supporting both sides (Positive and negative aspects) of the argument. Even though, change is the law of nature and very much inevitable and required for the betterment of the society. In this study, I have tried to explore all the aspects both from national and international perspective but it is portraying lot of stable breakdown of societal organization and the destruction of our conventional value systems unless we take the responsibility to make sure that our perception of social media and its impacts are continuously assessed with the day to day incidents in the world.

In this Study, I have explored the harms posed by this uncensored and unmonitored new medium of communication which exposes us all to a gradual breakdown of social cohesion and the destruction of our traditional value systems, unless we take responsibility to ensure that our understanding of social media and its impacts are constantly evaluated with what's happening in the world.

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