Impact of Social Networking Sites (SNSs): Are Youth affected by its usage?

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Abstract The popularity of online social networking sites (SNS) is constantly growing. New social networking practices are being used in areas such as knowledge sharing, development of ideas, creative production, communication etc. especially by adolescents and young adults. These groups can be called the IGENERATION as majority of their daily activities including staying connected, doing project work/assignments as well as information gathering about the happening around them, they use internet as opposed to the older generations who used resources like newspaper, library or television to stay update.

The purpose of the study was to examine the usage pattern of social networking sites among the youth of today's generation. Descriptive research design was used in order to understand the usage pattern of SNS amongst youth and its impact on their performance and psychological well being. Survey was conducted using a self-made questionnaire to study the 'usage pattern of social networking sites amongst the youth and its impact on their performance and psychological well-being' in Dehradun, capital of Uttarakhand. Stratified random sampling technique was used for the study. The sample includes different age groups, gender, and regional background.

Results indicated that the students have access to internet, 73% are members of any one of the social networking sites, Facebook being very popular followed by Google +.Majority of the students used social networking sites mainly for social purposes rather than for educational purposes. It was also reported that SNSs did not affect performance and study habits though it affected language to a certain extent.

Keywords: Adolescents, Young adult, Social networking sites, IGENERATION, Facebook, Google +

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1. INTRODUCTION

The increase in the use of Social networking sites (SNS) has become an international phenomenon due to its popularity over the last decade especially amongst adolescents who are the most prolific users of these sites. MySpace, Facebook, Twitter are some of the most popular social networking sites in vogue, especially with the new generation often denoted as 'IGENERATION'. Some items they may choose to include are: pictures, favorite books and movies, birthdays, relationship status, and location (Tufekci, 2008). These websites are focused on building online communities having shared interests (Sharma and Wadhwani, 2011). In 2009, over 27% of young adults used a social networking site every day (Lenhart, et al., 2010). This is because social media sites empower users to take an active role in their own socialization process and in constructing their own self-identity (Urista et al., 2009).

Social Network is a 'social space' for people who want to expose themselves amongst others and stay connected with each other. These sites are 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 (Boyd & Ellison 2007). Individuals may choose to send private messages, chat, do instant messaging, 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. There are sites that are business related such as LinkedIn or social in nature like Facebook. Members can join user-generated content sites through self-registration or an existing offline connection. However, a valid e-mail address is required in both cases (Murchu et al. 2004; Gangadharbatla, 2008).

Recent trends show that the usage of social media has increased. One of the most well-known social media sites is Facebook. This site currently boasts over 901 million monthly active users, and more than 125 billion friend connections at the end (Key Facts, 2012). Individuals who exhibited higher levels of extroversion were more likely to belong to more Facebook groups; however, this personality trait was not associated with having a larger number of friends (Ross et al., 2009). Smock et al. (2011) applied the uses and gratification approach to analyze why individuals use Facebook in general, as well as why they use certain functions on the website. The researchers found that users who update their status are motivated chiefly by a desire for expressive information sharing, whereas individuals who post comments do so for relaxing entertainment, companionship, and social interaction. This gratification theory assumes that students take active part in integrating media in their lives and are responsible for choosing it to meet their specific need. Another theory known as 'Signaling

theory' is a framework used to understand how individuals disclose information on their SNS profiles; it further examines how one's self-presentation in SNS develops identity and trust with others (Donath, 2007; Ahn, 2011)

Studies have also reported that social media websites influences individuals' self-perception. This is because they receive social support from other users which helps to maintain existing relationships; this has been found to improve quality of life in college students (Lui & LaRose, 2008). Obtaining comments from other users on pictures and wall posting improves images that individuals have on themselves. It is a way of receiving attention from a broad spectrum of people in an indirect way. A timely response elicits gratification and good feeling of self and satisfaction of personal and interpersonal desires (Urista et al., 2009). This self-disclosure provided the framework for a theoretical model that high disclosure generates relationship intimacy (Jiang et al., 2011). It is further reported that students learn in new ways of using social media and educators should embrace these new platforms (Jenkins, 2006). According to a survey carried out in a school in London on the issue of technology and its effect on sleeping habits of teenagers, it was found that 37% of those questioned had been left sleep-deprived as a result of social networking and 75% didn't like the idea of phones being kept close by while they slept. Similarly, a study was conducted in USA on the High School students on excessive texting and social networking. The result revealed the risk of teens engaging in dangerous unhealthy behavior including smoking, drinking and drug use. Thus this online domain has long been theorized to be a transformative context for youth's social development (McKenna & Bargh, 2000).

Therefore, a great deal of concern arises among parents, teachers as well as the society as the use of technology may affect students' development. For instance, it may have a positive impact by the informative use of internet where both students and teachers can use it as a tool to disseminate knowledge while recreational usage may have a drastic impact. (Shah et al, 2001; Oskouei, 2010)

Various researches have been carried out across the globe on the effects of technology on young minds. However, very little research work has been undertaken to understand its influences on adolescents' engagement with this technology with reference to developing countries like India. It is also imperative to understand the adoption of SNS and the factors that lead to the adoption of SNS in the daily activities of youngsters. Therefore, the present study was carried out with the following objectives:

1. To determine the type of social networks students mostly prefer.
2. To examine the importance of social networks among students.
3. To study the impact of social networks on the performance and their psychological well being.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research questions were framed to determine the usage pattern of social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter etc. and its impact on the psychological well being and performance of students.

Research Question # 1: Which is the most preferred social networking site amongst the youth?

Research Question # 2: What is the purpose and to what extent does the youth prefer using social networking sites?

Research Question # 3: How do students spend their spare time on different activities including SNS?

Research Question # 4: What factors associated with social networking sites affect the performance and psychological well being of students?

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research design was used in order to understand the usage pattern of SNS and its impact on their performance and psychological well being. The population of the study consisted of students studying in secondary, higher secondary and undergraduate classes of Garhwal region belonging to age group between 13 years and 25 years.
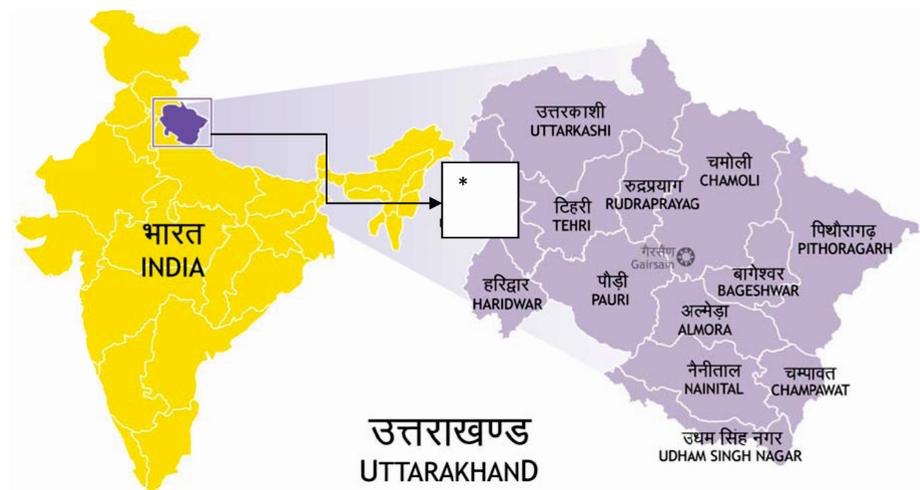
* [   ]   **Indicates study area**

*Source-www.**maps**ofindia.com**/maps/uttaranchal/***

Map showing the location of study area

14

Survey was conducted using a self-made questionnaire to study the 'usage pattern of social networking sites amongst the youth and its impact on their performance and psychological well-being' in Dehradun, capital of Uttarakand (map). Dehradun is considered to be an educational hub for secondary and higher secondary education in North India. Lately, it is developing into a preferred destination for higher and technical education also.

The questionnaire consisted of items on accessibility to internet, being members on social networking sites, preference of SNS, usage pattern and actions taken on these sites, factors associated with SNSs that affect performance and psychological well-beings of youngsters. For data collection, 2 Government schools, 2 Public Schools and 2 Universities were randomly selected.

Stratified random sampling technique was used for the study. The sample includes different age groups, gender and regional background. A total of 700 respondents comprised the sample. However, 15 incomplete questionnaires were rejected. Further those who declared themselves as non-users were rejected for data analysis on research questions 1-4. In other words, only members of social networking sites i.e. having account in atleast one social networking site comprised the study group. Thus for research questions 1-4, 500 respondents comprised the sample.

4. Data Analysis and Results

Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data. Out of 685 respondents, 224 were males and 276 were females. 56% of the respondents were in the age group of 14-19 years whereas 44% were between 20-25 years old.

Figure 2 shows the response of students who have access to internet. From the data collected, 51% of students have access to internet at home, 42 % at school/college and 7% student access internet either at Cybercafe or at their friend's place. Majority of respondents reported accessing the internet on their mobiles (54%), followed by desktop or laptops (42%), and 4% reported using notebook or notepad for accessing the internet (Fig. 3).

Figure 4 shows that 73% are members (having account in any social networking sites) and 27 % are not members of SNS. Out of the respondents who were using SNS, 23% reported that they were members of three or more such sites whereas 60% reported that they accessed only one social site.
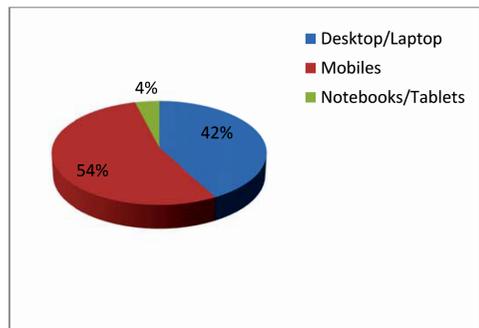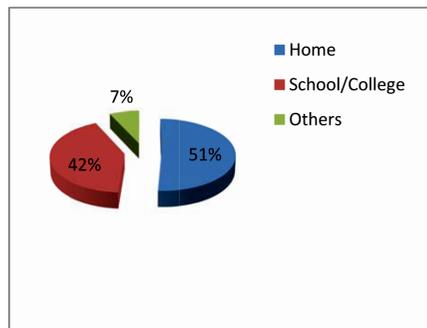
In order to analyze Research Question # 1, respondents were asked to state their preference of social networking sites on a 5 point rating scale. Out of 500 respondents, Facebook (86%) is the most predominant social networking site used by the youth, followed by Google + (71%), Twitter (27%), LinkedIn (11.4%), Instagram (8.6%) and Livejournal (6.4%) and MySpace (3.6%) as shown in Figure 5.
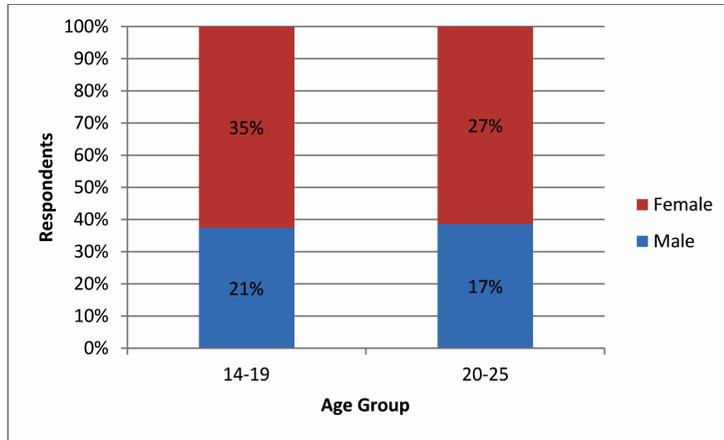
N=685

Figure 1: Age and Gender.

## Access to Internet & Tools Used

N=685

Figure 2: Place of Access.   **Figure 3:** Tools used.

In order to analyze Research Question # 2, respondents were asked to state the average time spent on various activities on day to day basis. For this purpose, the researcher distributed the time slabs into five categories i.e. from over 5 hours to none on activities generally adolescents and young adults like to spend their time on.
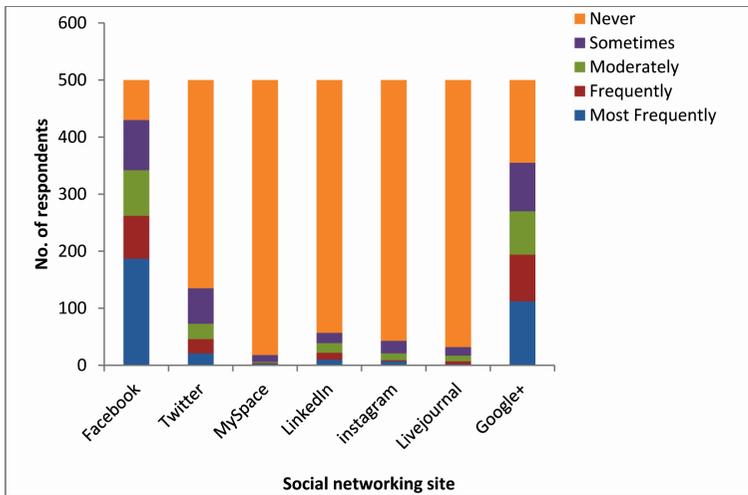
The maximum usage of social networking sites is for finding information and news (30%) and keeping in touch with family and friends (30.4%). Socializing and entertainment accounted for 17% and 22.5% respectively. Playing games (8%), getting opinion (8.5%), being part of online communities
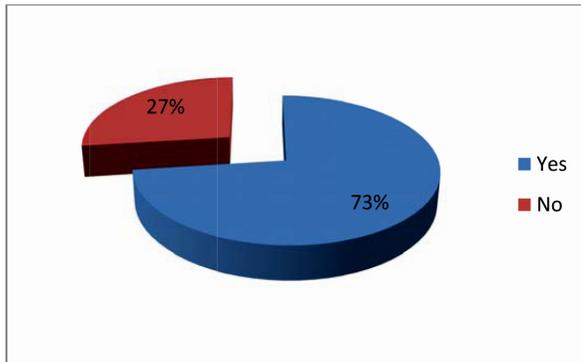
N=685

Figure 4: Members of SNS.

N=500

Figure 5: Popularity of SNS.

(8%) and online shopping (6%) were the least reasons for the respondents who were most frequent users of SNS (Fig. 6).

Further, keeping in touch with friends and family members was the most predominant purpose for the frequent users of SNS with 27% of them logging on these sites. However, online shopping was the least of their priorities with only 10.5% of frequent users. Amongst the moderate users of SNS, entertainment was the maximum with 28% respondents and online communities minimum with 12.4%. For the casual users, playing games and getting opinion (28% each) was the main purpose (Fig. 6).
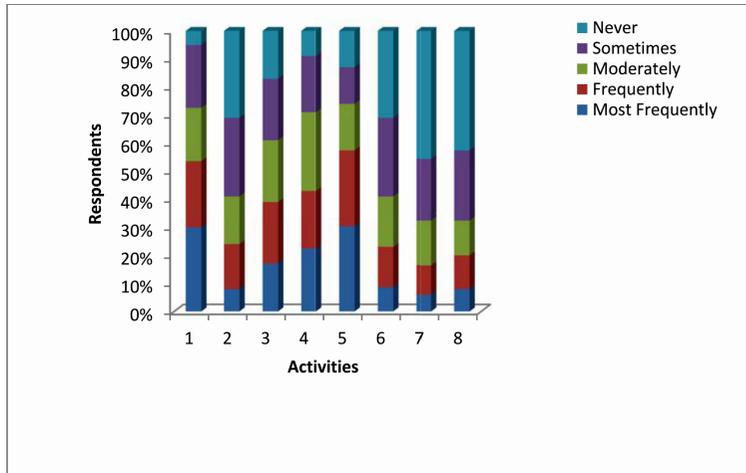
1. Find some information & news 2. Playing computer games 3.Socialize 4.Entertainment 5. Keeping in touch with family and friends 6. Get opinion 7. To get better deals on online shopping. 8 Being part of the online communities

N= 500

**Figure 6:** Purpose and Frequency in the Usage of SNS.

5. TIME SPENT ON DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES

In order to analyze Research Question # 3, respondents were asked to state the time spent on different activities out of their spare time.

It was observed that 56% of the respondents spend less than 1 hour per day on SNS, 30 % spend 1-3 hours, 10% spend 3-5 hours and only 5% spend over 5 hours on SNS. Apart from spending time on SNS, the researcher asked the respondents to list out other activities on which they spend their spare time. It was found that majority of respondents spend more than 5 hours with their family (33%), 3-5 hours on assignments and projects (21%), 1-3 hours watching television (35%), less than an hour for reading (51%), playing indoor games (50%) and on phone with friends (49%) as shown in Figure 7.

Research Question # 4 required analysis of factors associated with SNS which affect the performance and psychological well being of students. Results indicated that 65% still prefer classroom learning, 23% prefer studying through internet while 12% were not sure. When asked how they complete their assignments, it was observed that 50% used internet/ SNS, 25 % took help from friends, 10% used library and 15% got help from their tutors. When respondents were asked to give their opinion on whether teachers have more information than social networking sites, it was reported that 78% still believe that teachers are institutions of knowledge; however, they might refer to
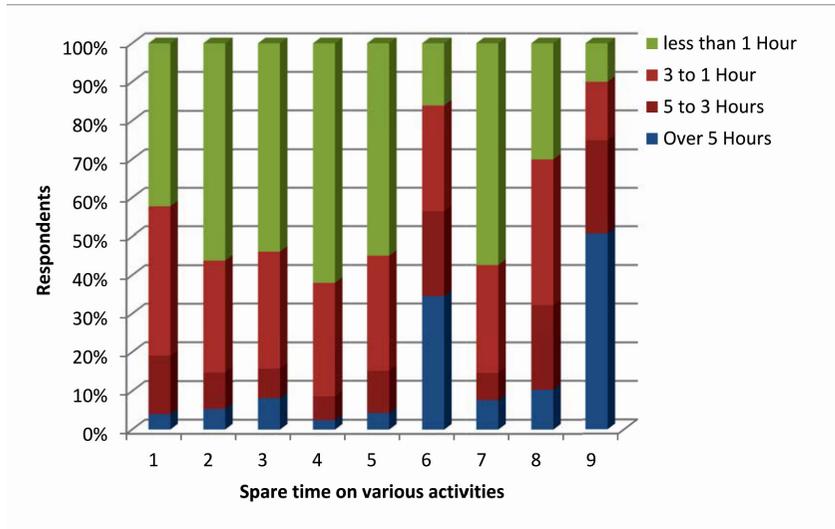
1. Watching television 2.Playing computer games3.Playing outdoor games 4.Playing indoor games 5.Reading Spending time with family 6.Phone with friends 7.Assignments and projects 8.Using social networking sites

N= 500

Figure 7: Spare time spent on various activities.

internet/SNS for further information. It was also observed that students seek help of their friends on SNS to complete their projects.

Majority believed that SNS do not affect their performance (89%). This is reinforced by 78% respondents reporting that SNS does not affect their study habits. This may be because the sample constituted of students. They realize that this is the most crucial time for their career development. However, they do not believe that social media helps in getting admissions (Yes-22%, No-35% & Can't say 43%) or seeking employment (Yes-19% No-58% , Can't Say-23%).

It was also observed that surfing on social networking sites affects language. 49% use short forms, 37% use slangs and 14% only write complete sentences while messaging. Results also indicated that 78% sleep with their mobiles by their bedside, 24% wake up at false sound of mobile messages and 27% perform text messaging while studying. Lastly, it was found that 47% have virtual friends, 40% still believe in having real friends while 13% say that their real friends are virtual friends. They also believe that social networking have made them popular (72%) as they are prompt in wishing birthdays or helping their friends with homework.

DISCUSSION

Technology has advanced at a very fast pace, especially during the last decade. Its revolution has taken the world by storm and use of internet has become an integral part in the life of its populace, especially the youth of today. This is amply illustrated in this study, where 100% of the sample chosen said that they are internet savvy. By accessing the internet, young people can connect to sources of new experiences that were unimaginable a few years ago (Buckingham, 2003; Edwards & Usher, 2008; Leander et. al., 2010). They find time, place and tools to access internet whenever they want. It may be the desktop/laptop at home, school, cybercafé or friend's place and also on their mobile/tablets while travelling. The purpose of accessing internet ranged from rendering abreast of happening to maintaining contact with friends/ relatives at distant place, preparing projects, accessing e-library etc. However, for young people in medium and low income countries, opportunities for internet access are more unevenly distributed which was indicated in the study as students residing in rural areas were still deprived of this advantage than their urban counterparts.

Findings indicate that Facebook (86%) and Google + (71%) were the two most popular social sites accessed by the respondents. Earlier studies have also stated the popularity of Facebook It was reported that Facebook is the most popular social site with almost 800 million monthly active users in 2011 which soar up to 901 million in 2012 (Lenhart et al., 2010; Facebook, 2011, Key Facts, 2012). In the present study, it was observed that Linkedin and Livejournal were not very popular among the respondents which may be because the sample did not comprise of professionals amongst whom the aforesaid sites are commonly used. Facebook was widely used for entertainment, exchanging updates about self, family and friends and staying connected with them (Sheldon, 2008; Baym et al., 2007 & Urista et al., 2009) whilst Google+ was mainly used to access information and keeping oneself update.

Although the popularity of SNS has grown, it appears that it is used basically for social purposes (Ahmed & Qazi, 2011a, Nemetz et al., 2012) rather than for educational purposes (Akyildiz & Argan, 2010; Smith & Caruso, 2010). Findings of the study also reported that only 23% have shown their positive attitude towards online learning while 65% respondents preferred classroom teaching and 12% were indecisive about it. In other words, students still prefer face to face communication rather than virtual learning (Baym et al., 2004).

Majority of SNS users admitted spending atleast an hour everyday (56%). The usage is 1-3 hours for one third users. However, some are so addicted that they have reported using SNS for over 5 hours daily. The finding is in conformity with those of Sheldon (2008) and Quan-Haase and Young (2010)

who have reported that majority of college students visited social networking sites several times a day.

Majority of the respondents i.e. 79% opined that SNSs does not adversely affect their study habits and 89% respondents stated that it did not affect their performance. They also use SNSs for their academic assignment (Onyeka et al., 2013). This is also validated by the fact that Dehradun being an educational hub forces the youth to compete with their peer to get good grades and placements. However, it cannot be denied that addiction to these sites have a negative impact on the psychological wellbeing of the youth as they are stressed at all times even while sleeping and wake up between their sleep to check messages/ updates frequently. The language used by them is also adversely affected due to usage of slangs and short forms. This leads to less proficiency in English as students tend to write and edit more when they text messages (Mehmood & Taswir, 2013). Similar result was reported in the present study where 49% of the respondents used short forms and 37% use slangs to communicate.

Thus it is inferred from the findings of the study that the impact of social sites can be positive as well as negative. Staying connected with family and friends and gathering information for assignments and projects are the positive aspects. However, the cause of concern arises when youth are addicted and spend most of the time online, logged into social sites. By having more virtual friends leads them to a false belief that they are becoming more popular which in turn boosts their ego and self-esteem (Pempek et al., 2009, Sponcil & Gitimu, 2013).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The present study reveals that Facebook and Google + are the most preferred social networking sites amongst the adolescents and young adult. The IGENERATION kids have the inherent capability for adapting to the latest technology and are in their comfort zone while using it to their best advantage. Findings of the study reported that the purpose for which SNSs are used the maximum is for communication and to update oneself of the latest happenings going on around the world while entertainment and socializing is a close second option. Thus SNSs are being used for social benefits while it is still to be utilized for educational purposes.

Results also indicated that outdoor games have taken a backseat in this age of technological advancement and the youth today prefer to stay indoor watching television, playing computer/video games or working on their assignments. They even prefer to relax by logging into social networking sites and browsing through them. However, spending time with family and friends is a positive aspect which has emerged from this study. The study

Rai, G

further concludes that the performance and study habits are not affected to an extent which may be detrimental for their future; though it does affect the psychological well being of the youth.

Hence, the study is useful to the parents, teachers, educators in particular and society in general to understand the behavior of the youth of today. Secondary and higher education should adopt social networking technique into the curriculum. Teachers, students and administrators should explore the use of online social networking sites in education. They can incorporate a range of communication tools such as mobile connectivity, blogs, video-sharing etc. into subjects which was used traditionally. They can bring SNSs in the classroom through various learning styles, thus creating teacher-student and student-student interaction. They can upload academic contents for the use of students. Parents and school can monitor the time spent by children on these sites by blocking the websites for a certain period of time. Care should also be taken to prevent from unethical practices by providing security and privacy of personal information. This will help the society to guide the youth to make the best use of the technology while ensuring that the youth are aware of the damages being caused due to its addiction.

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