

The power of social media clout - a change and a challenge: an empirical study

Dr. Stephen D'Silva,

Director , Jannalal Bajaj Institute of Management Studies,

Department , University of Mumbai

Dr. Bernadette D'Silva,

Director, Smt. K.G. Mittal Institute of Management & Research

Miss Roshni Bhuptani,

Lecturer, Smt. K.G. Mittal Institute of Management & Research

Abstract

With the growing importance of internet in day to day urban life, social media has gained rapid acceptance in the minds of youth. They have been recognized as a strong electronic medium in building social capital. Though, primarily social media has been perceived as a tool for networking and developing new contacts, today it has emerged as one of the most important components in marketing of products, brands and social causes. Considering the large number of people accessing these websites, most of the companies ensure to have their presence felt on social media websites to attract large number of potential customers. The basic objective of this paper is to understand the usage pattern of social media among youth in the city of Mumbai. The study also explores the preference of the youngsters regarding various social media websites and it also studies the impact of social media marketing tools on political and environmental aspects in the society. Results from the paper showed that social media do have positive impact not only on corporate brands and social issues, but also plays an important role in creating awareness among the masses towards the society and economy as whole.

Key words

social media, youth, brands, marketing, companies, usage, awareness etc.

Introduction

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), Social media is the combination of various Internet based applications that are constructed with different ideology and advanced technology so as to enable the user to create and exchange information generated with help of these applications. In simple words, social media is fine culmination of technology with humane touch on it. On other hand social networking sites like Facebook, Orkut, and Twitter

etc can be identified as a common platform in sharing and exchanging media contents to large number of people. These sites have achieved tremendous popularity on basis of their regular usage by general public across the globe. In the world of Globalization, social media marketing has formed integral part of the companies' promotional strategy. This is due to the increasing number of people accessing these websites. Social media is more preferable both from marketers and customer's point of view. The most probable reason is its low cost investment. Customers are not required to go to any shop for getting the information on any product or brand. Just a One click can provide them with adequate information regarding that particular product or brand. Thus it saves time and money of the consumer. All the customer needs is to join that particular networking site that is absolutely free of cost. Similarly even companies can save lot of money by marketing their products through social media which is quite cheaper, affordable, accessible and convenient than traditional marketing techniques. It is true that Social media do have its own limitations and disadvantages, but if used in a strategic manner it can reap you with enormous benefits, thereby reducing the costs of your product and adding better value to the product which will attract maximum customers.

Literature Review:

Murdough (2009) have positively agreed on the potential of social media but like any other marketing tool it is difficult to gauge the kind of impact that it lays on the masses. According to Winterberg (2010), social media websites like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter come with unbelievable techniques to communicate with family, colleagues and friends. Benson, Filippaios, & Morgan (2010) have studied the usage of social networks in career development of students and also building the relationship with their employers and have concluded on some better understanding of motivations as an effective application of these networks on businesses. Backer (2010) have investigated the usage pattern in adoption of new technologies like Facebook and Smart phones on students and found that such applications create a sense of motivation and responsibility as well as it enriches their learning experiences. Donna and Fodor (2010) have found out that instead of using companies' investment for calculation of returns on investment, managers must assess consumer motivations for using social media and measure customer's investments in calculation of ROI. Sara Tye (2010) have analysed the impact of advances in technology and how it transformed the traditional business procedures in communicating to their target audience. Chan & Prendergast (2007) have perceived Materialism and social comparison as important issues, amongst adolescents and found that Social comparison with friends and with media figures were both positive predictors of materialism.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Objective:

The basic objective of the paper is to understand the usage pattern of social media among youth in the city of Mumbai. It also aims at assessing the influence of social media on the consumer buying behaviour. The study also explores the preference of the youngsters regarding various social media web sites and it also studies the impact of social media marketing tools on political and environmental aspects in the society

Data Collection:

Both Primary and Secondary data was used for purpose of research. Primary data was used to understand the usage pattern of youngsters for social networking sites whereas Secondary data was used to understand the influence of social media on the society.

Sample Size:

Primary research was done through distribution of structured questionnaires amongst 120 respondents in the city

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of Mumbai. The questionnaire also included dichotomous as well as multiple choice questions. The period of research was from (Nov - Dec 2010)

Sample Composition:

The sample size comprises of 120 respondents out of which 65% are males and 35% are females. Nearly 53% of respondents are graduates and 46% are post graduates. Only one percent of the respondents have not completed their graduation. Again, Majority of respondents are not engaged in any kind of job and are pursuing higher studies. This is because most of respondents interviewed were teenagers in age group of 20 -25 years.

Research Design:

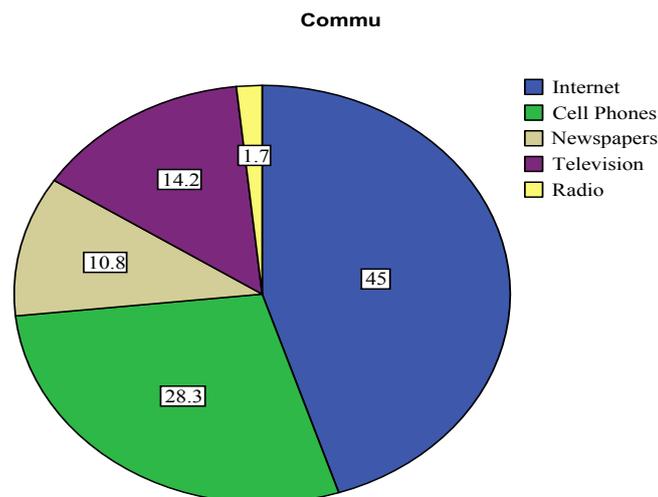
The data was analysed by using statistical packages like SPSS 16. Different statistical tests like Frequency Analysis, etc were performed on the data collected for the purpose of understanding impact on different groups in Indian society.

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

1. Which mode of Communication do you prefer?

Table (1): Mode of Communication

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Internet	54	45.0	45.0	45.0
	Cell Phones	34	28.3	28.3	73.3
	Newspapers	13	10.8	10.8	84.2
	Television	17	14.2	14.2	98.3
	Radio	2	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total		120	100.0	100.0



Data Interpretation:

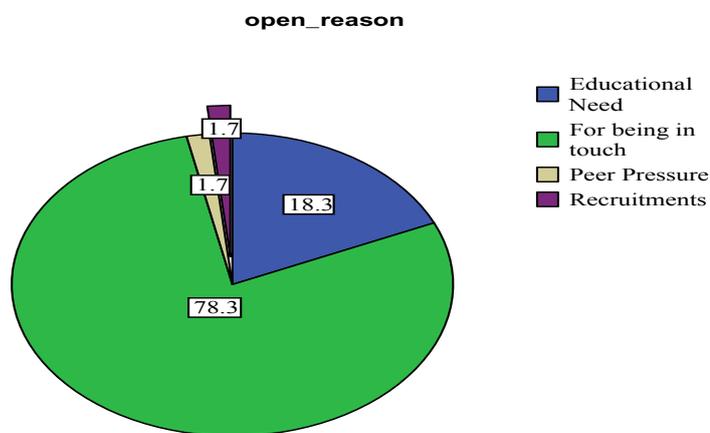
From the above analysis it is found that, there is high penetration of internet usage in urban areas. This means that people try to get maximum information through broadband connections. The frequency table also indicates that even cell phones are increasingly used as a preferred mode of communication. But people living in urban areas

use maximum internet services as it gives comprehensive and sometimes even pictorial information.

2. What can be probable reason behind opening an internet account on social media website?

Table (2): Reason for opening the account

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Educational Need	22	18.3	18.3	18.3
	For being in touch	94	78.3	78.3	96.7
	Peer Pressure	2	1.7	1.7	98.3
	Recruitments	2	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	



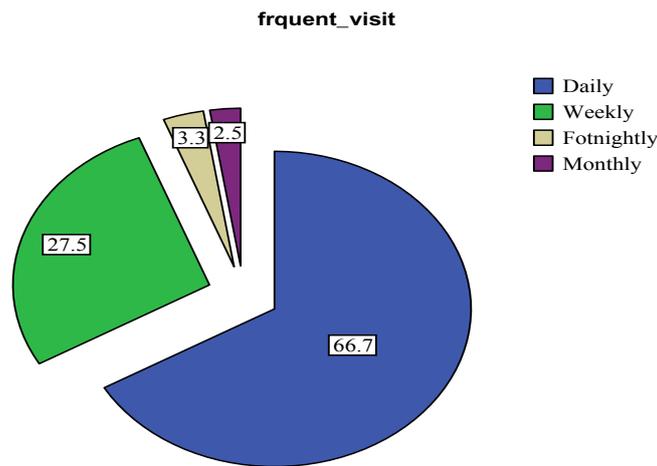
Data Interpretation:

It is clear that people living urban areas prefer to use internet as source for getting maximum information. The above analysis explores the reasons behind joining social networking sites. It has been found that nearly 78.3% of respondents have joined this websites to stay in touch with their family, friends and other peer groups. Very few respondents have stated that due to academic requirements could be the probable factor behind joining these sites. Nearly 1.7% of respondents have joined these sites for purpose of recruitments. Hence it can be said that social media sites is major tool to maintain and develop contacts for the people.

3. How frequently do you visit social media websites?

Table (3): Frequency of Visits

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Daily	80	66.7	66.7	66.7
	Weekly	33	27.5	27.5	94.2
	Fortnightly	4	3.3	3.3	97.5
	Monthly	3	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	



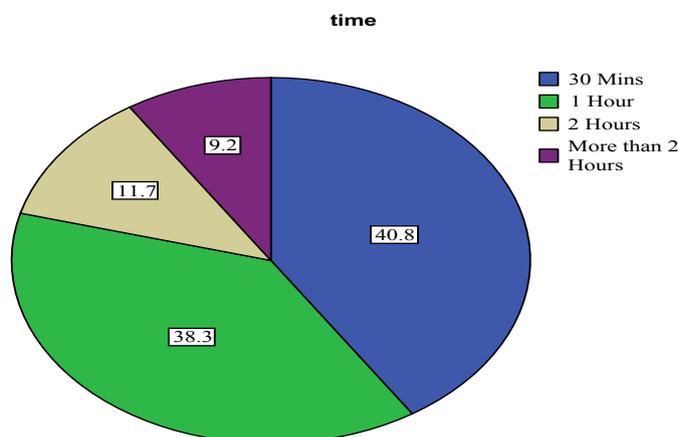
Data Interpretation:

The above analysis states that nearly 67% of respondents frequently visit these social media sites on daily basis. Nearly 27.5% of people would visit these sites at least once in a week. This means that there is rapid usage of internet on daily basis. It has been found that majority of people prefer to use internet to stay in touch with other. People living in urban areas have easy access to internet services therefore they can visit these sites on daily basis. Other reasons could be that these websites does not consume more time of the respondents and can quickly approach or contact the person through these social media websites on internet.

4. How long do you surf on these websites?

Table (4): Time

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	30 minutes	49	40.8	40.8	40.8
	1 Hour	46	38.3	38.3	79.2
	2 Hours	14	11.7	11.7	90.8
	More than 2 Hours	11	9.2	9.2	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	



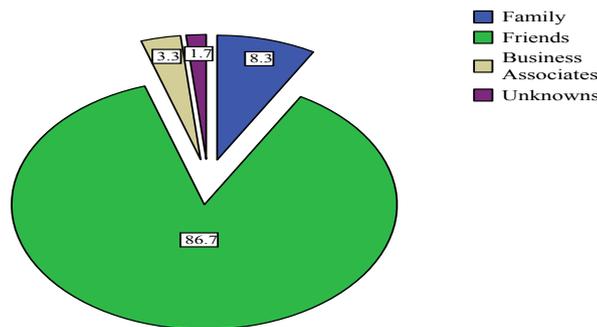
Data Interpretation:

The above analysis states that nearly 41% of respondents surf these websites for nearly half an hour. 38% of respondents stay on these websites for nearly one hour whereas approximately 12% of the respondents surf these websites for nearly two hours. There are very few people i.e. nearly 10% of the respondents consume more than two hours on such websites. This means that people do take some time from their busy schedules to visit these websites on regular basis and also surf them for at least 30 minutes to fulfil their respective requirements for being part of these social media websites.

5. With whom do you communicate frequently on social media websites?

Table (5): Whom to communicate

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Family	10	8.3	8.3	8.3
Friends	104	86.7	86.7	95.0
Business Associates	4	3.3	3.3	98.3
Unknowns	2	1.7	1.7	100.0
Total	120	100.0	100.0	



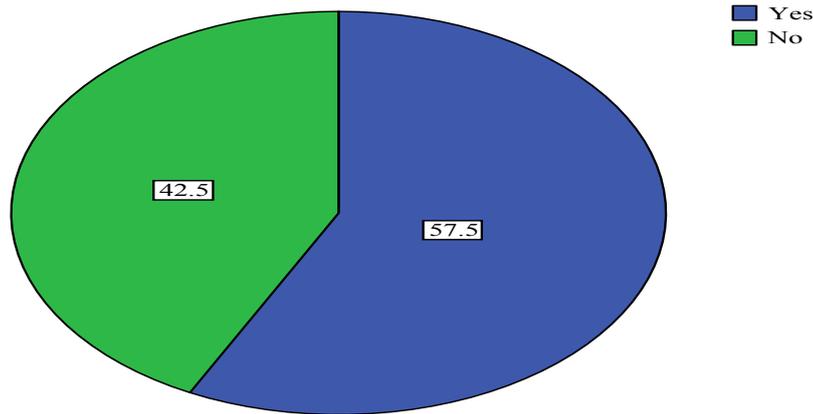
Data Interpretation:

The above analysis states that approx. 87% of respondents are in contact with these social media websites to stay in touch with their friends and peer group. Nearly 8% is in touch with their family who are staying away from them. Very few respondents maintain contacts with Business Associates on these social media websites. Even there are respondents who surf these websites to maintain contacts with new and unknown people. Thus basically social media websites are medium to stay connected with their friends only

6. Are social media websites helpful in providing you the brand information?

Table (6): Brand Information

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	69	57.5	57.5	57.5
No	51	42.5	42.5	100.0
Total	120	100.0	100.0	



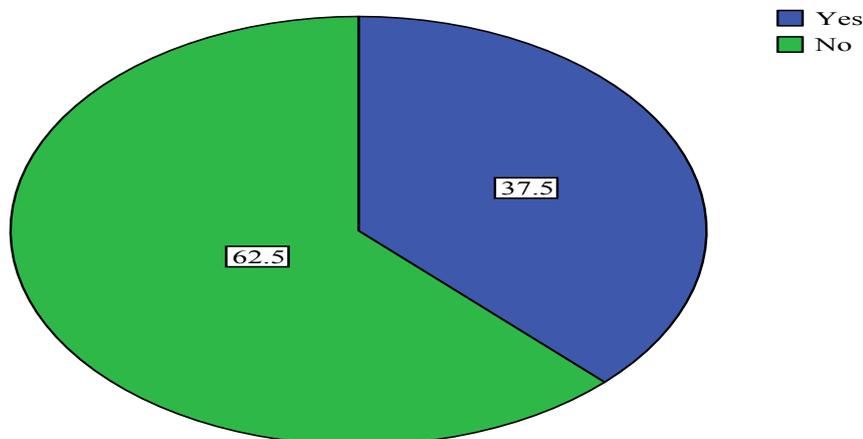
Data Interpretation:

The above analysis states that nearly 58% of respondents agree that social media websites are helpful in providing information regarding various brands. Companies have started understanding the importance of these websites for marketing their products. In order to make their presence felt among consumer, they have started using these websites as marketing tool for their products and brands. Thus these websites give lot of information regarding various corporate brands, thereby creating brand awareness among the customers. Nearly 43% of respondents did not agree that social media websites are helpful in providing information regarding various brands. The probable reason could be that social media marketing is still at infancy stage in India. Not all brands and products can afford to use social media for promoting their products. Hence it can happen that many respondents may not get the necessary information about their product.

7. Do you actually make purchase decisions of the products from social media websites?

Table (7): Actual buying decision

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	45	37.5	37.5	37.5
Valid No	75	62.5	62.5	100.0
Total	120	100.0	100.0	



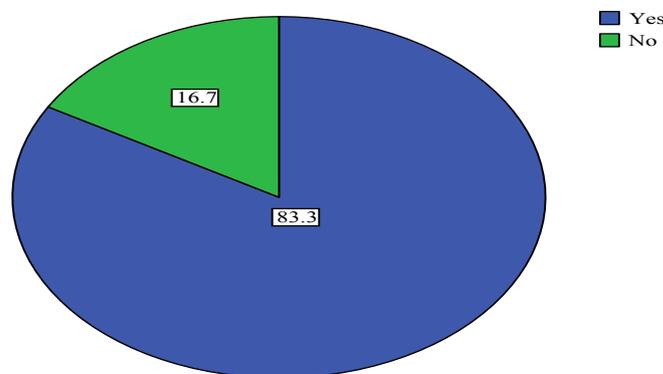
Data Interpretation:

It is true that social media websites are helpful in providing information regarding various brands and are successful in creating brand awareness among the customers. Hence nearly 38% of respondents do make purchase decision of the product after surfing these websites. Hence social media advertising has become effective marketing tool for the people living in urban areas. But still majority of people do not make buying decisions by surfing these websites. Hence companies are required to develop effective promotional tools on these websites so that more and more people get attracted towards their brands and can ultimately lead to buying decision for them.

8. Is Accessing internet affordable to you?

Table (8): Affordable Usage

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	100	83.3	83.3	83.3
No	20	16.7	16.7	100.0
Total	120	100.0	100.0	



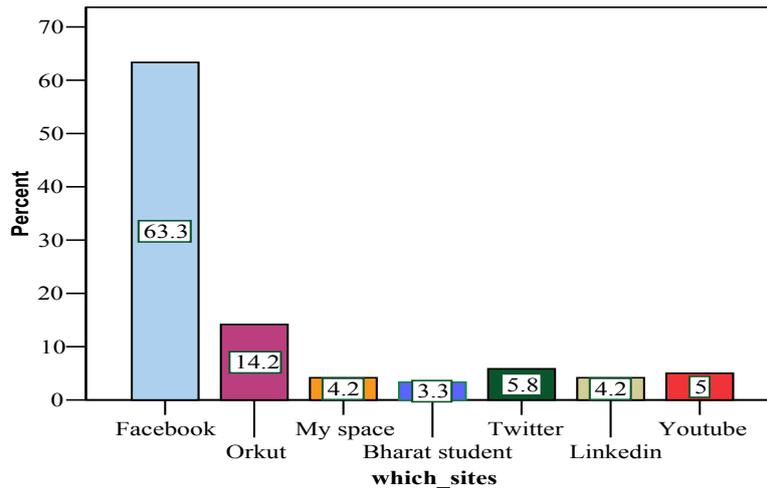
Data Interpretation:

Cost is one of the major factors in selecting a particular mode of communication. Joining a social media website is absolutely free of cost for the respondents to stay in touch with their friends or to get any kind of necessary information. Hence this technology appeals to masses in general. The above analysis states that nearly 83% of respondents agree that social media websites are very affordable in providing them required information and is also regarded as most convenient option to stay connected with the friends and the society.

9. Which websites do you frequently visit?

Table (9): Preferred Websites

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Facebook	76	63.3	63.3	63.3
Orkut	17	14.2	14.2	77.5
My space	5	4.2	4.2	81.7
Bharat student	4	3.3	3.3	85.0
Twitter	7	5.8	5.8	90.8
LinkedIn	5	4.2	4.2	95.0
Youtube	6	5.0	5.0	100.0
Total	120	100.0	100.0	



Data Interpretation:

The above analysis clearly interprets that Facebook is the most popular social media website preferred by the respondent, followed by Orkut (14.2%), Twitter (5.8%), YouTube (5.0%) and My Space & LinkedIn (4.2%) each. Websites like Orkut or twitter are use only perceived as a networking tool whereas LinkedIn is used mostly by professionals and YouTube is primarily used for downloading videos. One of the major reason behind the popularity of Facebook is not only it is effective tool in connecting the people but the website itself is designed in such a manner it also incorporates various networking software and applications as well as it effectively promotes various brands and products companies that conveniently makes the user of these website to get an idea about those products. Such kinds of features are commonly not found in other social media websites. Thus Facebook stands unique when compared to other websites and hence highly preferred by respondents, companies and customers.

Usage Of Social Media For The Benefit Of Society

Table (10): Social media & Political Awareness

Political Groups on Internet Websites	Number of Members	Aims & Objective f the Group
Bharat Uday Mission (Yahoo Groups)	4864	Bharat Uday Mission is committed to community and national service and its major aim is to strive for peace, prosperity and harmony, and for India. It also aims to eradicate the rotten social and political system completely.
True e-Governance (Yahoo Groups)	4802	True e-Governance focuses on Transparency, Integrity, gender equity, women empowerment, Processes, Security, Accountability, empowerment of rural masses and Accessibility
Indian Politics (Orkut Communities)	13,083	A community for discussing in depth matters related to both India and politics and are free to post their comments on it
Discourse analysis and racism (Orkut Communities)	1,282	This community is to discuss the influence of language in different countries with regard to topics like ethnic minorities, multicultural society, racism and discrimination.

Sources: facebook.com, yahoogroups.com, Orkut communities etc

Impact of social media on politics

There are many social media websites that has started various groups addressing different political issues. These groups are highly popular since it creates a sense of national integrity and unity amongst the masses. These groups have specific purpose and members in these groups try to educate the society regarding various political issues and developments in country. These groups discuss about the recent political changes that are present in the economy and try to recommend on the same. Their comments and recommendations can be easily accessed through these social media websites. These groups help the people to share their views and opinions on particular political issue and give comment on the same. Suggestions from the group members sometimes become very critical and their impact becomes so strong that it can even led to political revolution in the country. Everybody is recognizing the tremendous influence of this powerful medium and thus active participation of masses will facilitate two way communications between people and the Government. It has been found that more and more & more politicians actively use social media as a part of their public relations strategy so as to be in maximum vicinity with the masses. Through social media, the common can easily interact with prominent personalities, for example Rahul Gandhi on Facebook, and it gives the feeling to the masses that they are within the reach of the common man. There is no need for the people to take special appointments or wait for them at their offices in order to have a talk with them. It becomes easy for the politicians to understand the grievances and issues of the masses and can accordingly take necessary steps to solve their issues. It also increases their popularity and helps in creating positive image for them in the society.

Table (11): Social media & Conservation of Environment

Political Groups on Internet Websites	Number of Members	Aims & Objective f the Group
Stop Global Warming (Facebook Groups)	3,701,000	With more than 2,000,000 members worldwide, the Alliance is a unique non-profit, non-partisan organization that is committed to educating the global community about the urgency of implementing comprehensive solutions to the climate crisis.
Greenpeace International (Facebook Groups)	294,291	Greenpeace Fund, Inc.'s mission is to halt environmental destruction and to promote solutions for future generations though public education, grassroots lobbying and grants to other environmental organizations.
Care2.com	14,859,494	It aims at covering a broader area than just sustainability and environmental issues; Care2 also has a good sized section focusing upon Green Living.
Do the right Thing	2455 active people and 542 active companies,	It is Social networking site that allows people to share information about how socially and environmentally responsible businesses are.

Sources: facebook.com, yahoogroups.com, Orkut communities etc

Impact of social media on environment

In technologically fostered climate, social media can be considered as a potential mechanism to enhance engagement with the natural world, rather than an enemy with which nature must compete. Social media with its unique characteristics in appealing masses as a whole can really bring end to various environmental problems. It is quite possible that there are many people across the globes that are either ignorant or unaware about the dangers of not protecting the environment around them. Through social media, education and awareness could be spread regarding global warming or on energy depletion issues. For example through the unique features of Facebook

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can be of great help in educating people about environment and issues related to it. For these, various energy conservatism campaigns and causes have been started on Facebook through which one can easily join the group and spread awareness about it to rest of the world.

Table (12): Social media & Other Social Causes

Political Groups on Internet Websites	Number of Members	Aims & Objective f the Group
Save the Indian Tiger (Facebook Groups)	739,470	Save the Indian tiger mission is to protect the endangered species of tigers and to stop their poaching for purpose of trade.
Stop Female Infanticide... Save The Girl Child (Facebook Groups)	346,567	Stop Female Infanticide... Save The Girl Child aim is to spread awareness and educating the masses about the issue. This is probably the best way to deal with this social evil as even though there are laws that prohibit this practice, preventing the practice is possible only when the attitude of the society is altered. Therefore, Join this movement, spread a word and become an active member of this cause.
Janshakti: Power of People (Yahoo Groups)	1158	It provides powerful platform for members and public to protect themselves against exploitation and injustice. It periodically conducts seminars and events and intervenes in matters of public interest and victimisation cases.
Wildlife Action Group (Yahoo Groups)	2028	This group aims at protection and preservation of wildlife and their environment by taking appropriate action against the offenders.

Sources: facebook.com, yahogroups.com, Orkut communities etc

Impact of Social Media on Society

Social media marketing has been a boon in disguise for social cause marketing. Media websites like Facebook or Twitter or whether its Yahoo Groups or Orkut Communities, everyone in its own way have created huge impact on large number of people in supporting these social causes. Social media has really done a good work in making people aware about various atrocities that are done on females, children and old age people all around the world. Due to this many large and small nonprofit organisations are joining these social media causes to stop these enormous pain inflicted on these underprivileged groups. For example Facebook applications connect crores of people with common interests in humanitarian efforts. These applications can be used to access all types of social causes which include relief efforts, environmental causes, political causes, etc. For example, The Save the Indian Tiger cause has really created lot of awareness with regards to Tiger trade and its poaching for manufacturing of elicit Tiger wine. This cause has generated lot of donations by its effective exhibits on social media website. Thus these websites can really make a lot of difference in elimination of suffering and exploitation not only to the human beings but also to entire ecosystem as a whole.

Conclusions:

It is true that Social media has become an important part of our lifestyle. Results from the analysis reveal that maximum people prefer internet as an effective mode of communication for interaction. The basic purpose for many people joining the social media websites is only to stay in touch with family and friends. This is because theses websites are relatively cheaper and convenient to get connected with your colleagues and relatives. These websites gives the user the opportunity of expressing their views and opinions freely with each other on website.

People do not have to wait for the response since exchange of thoughts take place simultaneously through the common platform. These websites have become so integral part of common man's life that it compels the person to regularly visit the website for approximately half an hour in a day. These websites also creates lot of difference from the corporate perspective. Companies increasingly use these media tools for marketing and promotion of their brands and products. Each marketer wants to make their presence feel to customer on this media websites so that it will create brand awareness among the people and ultimately influence their buying decision.

Social media effective not only reap benefits in changing the lifestyle of the people but it has a tremendous influence on society as whole. It is not only companies who use social media has a marketing tool but is alarmingly used by politicians all around the world in developing the strategies for winning elections or bursting out with new issues in the country. But if this tool is used in a proper manner it can be of great help to country and economy as whole. Politicians can effectively use this strategy to keep themselves regarding various problems and issues that are prevalent in the country. It can help them in easy accessibility common people thereby resolving their issues. Social media is also useful in creating awareness regarding various environmental problems like global warming etc to awaken the people from their ignorance and negligence towards these problems. Moreover these websites also tremendously help the underprivileged groups by staring up various causes and campaigns on their websites. Through these campaigns, many people who do not have time to do anything for the society can join such causes and can really make a great difference for such people. It is true that social media has tremendous potential in changing the world but it is still at a very premature stage across the globe especially in developing countries like India. This is because India as a country does not have adequate broadband penetration in all regions especially the rural areas. Illiteracy and Poverty is another factor that stops this development. But the combined efforts of people, government and society can definitely bring India under the shadow of Generation Y.

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