Chapter 2

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES:
THEIR ROLE IN CONTEMPORARY
INDIA
2.1 Introduction

In terms of social development, Information Society reproduces the historical continuity from nomadic to agrarian societies, to the industrial society and then to the Information Society. The extensive progress in electronic technology in last few years, has seen the world to shrink and the statement, ‘it’s a small world’ is ever more accurate. The emerging trends in each historical phase of social development sets a new foundation for future changes in society. Technology has the potential to transform society and the fact that, post modern society rests on nodes and networks of connection cannot be undermined. Network society is a form of society which is based on microelectronics based structure. Even though this structure of society is local, but most of the human experience is global. Majority of developed and developing countries have seen the emergence of Network society after the advent of Globalization. It has given rise to Social Media which enables netizens to communicate openly from all over the globe with no constraints of time and space. This prompts social units (individuals or organizations) to instantly connect and interact anytime and anywhere, which relies on a support base offered
by the Information Technology. The rapid rise of Social networking sites is the most prominent feature of the Network Society. This chapter examines the concept of ‘Network Society’ and the role of Social Networking Sites in the contemporary Indian society.

2.2 The Network Society

Manuel Castells (1996) used the concept of ‘Network society’ first of all in sociology in the late 20th century. In his view, a new social structure which is based on microelectronics and is ensured by information and communication technology is called as Network Society.

While Industrial Society was dependent on modes of transport and communication, the Network Society is dependent on modes of digital communication. Castells argues that network society has grown at a much progressive rate than the previous societies of the industrial age. Castells mentions that it is not the force of technology that brings changes in society, but rather the emerging changes in social needs that interact and lead to the development of technology. According to him, network society is characterized by the following:
• Nodes can interact anytime and anywhere because of the technical support;

• Material resources are managed by information power grid;

• Communication is not dependent upon time or space because nodes are mobile and move around the Network. This is known as “space of flows.” (Glass, 2005; Castells, 2004);

• Power is embedded in networks that spread out horizontally;

• Information is the key factor of the Network Society; and

• There is a juxtaposition between Individualism and Communalism – individuals exist in the Network which increases the sociability as individuals.

The power of Network Society is embedded in technology which results in Informationalism, which subsumes industrialism and forms the material basis of society. In this way society is still capitalistic but information is its foundation. The Network Society is influenced by two major phenomenon-Technology and Globalization. Internet and mobile phones are important nodes of networking in network society. They have made social networking easily accessible to one and all. Even though the internet was first
discovered in 1969 but gained mass popularity only in the last
decade, because of various reasons such as: Regulatory changes
i.e. fast bandwidth in telecommunications, growth of personal
computers and user-friendly programs which make easy to upload
and access a large volume of content online. As a result, the rapid
growth of social demand for the networking has forced experts to
develop technology at a very fast rate. The number of Internet users
grew from 40 million in 1995 to about 2.7 billion in 2013. In 2013
rates of penetration have reached 39% of the world population.

The local and global domains are connected through internet. Today, global cities have connections that do influence its
structure and bring changes in specific regions and aspects. In
network society, it is quite visible that an attempt is made to
annihilate time in our everyday life; less time and more work is the
dominant principle. The means of technology accelerates multiliving
and multitasking. While Castells (2009) talks about ‘Timeless
Time’, Scott Lash and John Urry (1994) talk about ‘Glacial
Time’. According to Castells, “Timeless time and glacial time embody
the fundamental struggle taking place in the network society
between the taming of the technological forces unleashed by
human ingenuity and our collective submission to the automation that escaped the control of its creators”. Social structures are seen in space and time dimensions. Communication networks eliminate space and time in society. Cairncross (2011) calls this as “death of distance”. Glacial time has lost its relevance with the emergence of Timeless time. Castells talks about some important consequences of the emergence of the Network Society:

- The decisive role of science and technology to bring changes in various aspects of society.
- With the development of the network economy, the labor market has changed as well. The new network economy requires a highly flexible independent, and efficient workforce.
- The Internal Organizational structure of the companies has changed radically due to introduction of network structure.

As a result, a new type of horizontal and vertical communication network has developed with Internet Diary (the Blog), Video diary (the Vlog), and own radio broadcast (the Podcast) as its essential components. These contents are easily accessible to anyone at anytime. Not only this the growth of the Network Society affects all aspect of society including media. Previous dependence on static electronic devices result in
technology being divided between computers, telecommunications, and
the broadcast media. In the system, known as ‘Old Media’ the flow of
information went from a minority of creators to a majority of passive
consumers. But now due to low cost, technology is widely available,
easy to use and allows for mobility. This results in technology being
diffused throughout all realms of human activity and media being
produced at anytime, anywhere, and by anyone. Another key change is
the ability of individual nodes to easily spread throughout the network.

Along with Castells, Jan Van Dijk (2006) talks about ‘Network
Society’ or ‘Modern Society’ which has some important features:

- Science, rationality and reflexivity forms the base for network
  society.

- Information Production characterizes the economy.

- Knowledge and Higher education (i.e. Knowledge society) forms
  the base of dynamic labour market.

- Media and Information products dominate the culture in network
  society.

(J.V. Dijk)

Networking system is as old as the evolution of life. Following are the
various types of networks which exist in society:
### Types of Networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Networks</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical Networks</td>
<td>Natural system of higher complexity: Ecosystems, river networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organic Networks</td>
<td>Organism: nervous system, blood circulation, strings of DNA in cells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuronal Networks</td>
<td>Mental systems: Neuronal connections, mental maps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Networks</td>
<td>Social systems with concrete ties in abstract relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Networks</td>
<td>Technical systems: roads, distribution, networks, telecommunication and computer networks etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Networks</td>
<td>Media systems connecting senders and receivers and filled with symbols and information.</td>
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(Given by J.V. Dijk in The Network Society) **Diagram 2.1**
The contemporary society is based on Social networks, Technical networks and Media networks. Social Media gives impetus to online interactions while technology provides the technical expertise needed for maintenance of social networking. These networks and the desire of humans to interact globally and virtually has given rise to social networking sites. It becomes important to understand the concept, origin and functioning of social networking sites to look at their impact on contemporary society.

2.3 Social Networking Sites

The idea of “Social Networking” has existed for several decades as a way for people to communicate in society and build relationships with each other. The Web-based services which allow individuals to construct a semi-public or public profile in a bounded system is termed as social networking site. As quoted by Boyd and Ellison (2007)\textsuperscript{10}, they are “Web based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system”. Social Networking Sites are popular because they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks. This results in connection
between individuals who are far off and unknown. During the decade of 1990, when new online communication technologies were introduced to the public in forms such as email and chat rooms, many authors such as Dr. Norman Nie(2001)\textsuperscript{11} of Stanford University, predicted that these forms of technology would adversely affect adolescents social life and reduce their sense of association. However, communication has been facilitated by social networking sites because members of these sites form groups and communities to share their opinions among themselves through opinion polls, discussion forums etc.

2.3(a) Development of Social Networking Sites

Singlegress.com was the first social networking site launched in 1997, which not only allowed users to create profiles and list their friends but also surf the friends. A new phase of social networking sites began when Ryze.com was created in 2001 to help people to leverage their business and commercial networks. Friendster came in 2002 as a social complement to Ryze. It could not work for long because it encountered technical and social difficulties which frustrated its users. From 2003 onwards many new social networking sites came up. Facebook was launched in 2005 which includes school students, professionals inside corporate networks and now eventually everyone as its users. Unlike other social networking sites, Facebook provide option to users to make
their profile public or private. As present there is no reliable data on number of people using social networking sites, although research indicates that their popularity is growing worldwide.

Social networking sites have given rise to Virtual Communities. These communities are quite distinct from the old. A diverse and widespread virtual society in cyberspace has created the tradition of the virtual communities. Taylor and Licklider (1968)\(^\text{12}\) saw the potential of electronic community networks. In their views virtual community has geographically distant actors grouped in micro clusters and are not based on common location but on common interest. Rheingold (1993)\(^\text{13}\) explains the concept of virtual community as, “Virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace”. The important features of a virtual community are shared resources, common values, and reciprocal behaviour. Moreover, technology has made virtual communities possible and has brought enormous intellectual, social, and commercial changes. In addition it provides political leverage to ordinary citizens at a relatively low cost. Virtual Communities, in present day society, are not limited by the space-time constraints. People engage with others irrespective of geographic distance and time as
compared to traditional communities which did not guarantee communication at such a fast pace. The traditional community was often exclusive, inflexible, isolated, unchanging, and homogeneous while a modern community is one that is primary devoted to democratic problem solving needs. According to this conception, these communities are groups of people who achieve particular goals. Licklider and Taylor wrote in 1968 an essay that was about computing future. They say that life would be happier for the digital natives because the people with whom one interacts will be selected more by commonality of interests than by proximity. It will make communication more effective and productive as well as enjoyable. Moreover, cyberspace provides a new form of public space. People tend to forget their actions and activities which has multiple trajectories i.e. effect in more than one sphere of life and sometimes contradictory ones. As philosopher Alfred Schutz (1967)\textsuperscript{14} mentions that people live in “multiple realities”. Netizens have developed two identities, one in real life and another in virtual world. Even though the internet brings people together, it also provides the means to remain anonymous in communication. Carey (1993)\textsuperscript{15} points that “everything that rises must
diverge”. Critics lament it as a technology which has reduced face-to-face interaction as it requires undivided attention and is addictive.

Nevertheless, the virtual mediums of communication that rely on technology have brought a revolution in the contemporary society. The internet is the most significant ‘Computer Mediated Technology’ (CMC). However, many aspects of life have been transformed with the advent of new type of communication. It is evident that the networking sites have brought many changes in the society both at the micro as well as macro levels. Therefore, it becomes crucial to analyze the impact of social networking sites on society.

2.3(b) Social Networking Sites and Society

The present character of society is in transition because of the emergence of Social networking sites. These sites have brought enormous changes in interaction and social patterns. The identity information included in public profiles enables interaction between people which is not possible otherwise. Interaction is viewed as a distinct unit of analysis by Goffman (1959)\textsuperscript{16}. It occurs when individuals are in proximity. According to Goffman, individuals need to be in ‘face to face’ situation for interaction which further depend on situational expectations. Hence, role taking is important in every situation which
involves communication. There are varied roles to play and society is the stage where we enact these roles. Thus ‘social interaction is a type of performance’ according to Goffman. However, virtual world provides opportunities to the actors to interact in abstraction. Due to significant rise in their popularity it has attracted considerable scholarly attention in recent years. Youth engage in various social activities through social networking sites and it is a crucial part of the process of development of their self-identity. Social networking sites have many features such as messaging, scraping, photo and video sharing. An important distinction between social networking sites and other communication technologies is the articulated social network. Most of the major networking sites have such forums in which members can go to discuss social issues. All this reflects that computer conferencing systems have become a stage for ‘actors’ to act out and communicate in several ways. The Indian society too is slowly and steadily heading towards Network Societal structure due to the impact of Globalisation. Therefore, it becomes imperative to critically examine the role of Social Networking Sites in Contemporary Indian Society.

2.4 Impact of Social Networking Sites on Indian Society

Social networking sites have integrated into the daily routine of millions of Indian users. The post independence generation holds India’s present
and future in its hands. The decisions made and the patterns set by this generation will affect the future. The challenge before Indian society is to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. In words of Edward Shils (1981), ‘tradition is anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present’. The Hindu culture, prescribe roles which are inherited, clear and attainable. Role performance, which depends on virtue or vice lead to the wheel of life called Nirvana. Social Mobility relates to progress on the wheel. A modern way of life involves scientific way of doing things via rational principles. It involves the rejection of inherited role and performing new ones. It is democratic, secular, and aristocratic. Modern science and technology, modern democratic government and modern culture have made their impact on Indian society. An entire social system is changing and Indian society which was a closed one; in which young people had no opportunity to meet others or to take decisions, has now changed to an open society. In this system, social interaction outside the family is both desirable and necessary. Indians are becoming more social and interactive virtually. Although not everybody has access to the Internet and computers in Indian society, the fact that, it is spreading very fast cannot be undermined.
The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) pegged the number of Internet subscribers in India at 164.81 million as of March 31, 2013, with seven out of eight accessing the Internet from their mobile phones\(^\text{18}\). The fact is that social media is more democratic than electronic or print media, because of its interactive nature. The leader in measuring the digital world has released its report, “2013 India Digital Future in Focus” in August, 2013 which states that India is third largest Internet population in the world, overtaking Japan but still behind US and China. The social networking growth in India is led by Facebook\(^\text{19}\). A new report released by ComScore in October 2013 says that, in Asia Pacific region, India is now the second largest online population with 11.4% of the 644 million Internet users in Asia Pacific in 2013, as compared to 9.3% share of the 604 million Internet users in 2012.\(^\text{20}\)

Some demographic facts in the report are:

1) 75% of the Indian population is under the age of 35, when compared with other nations. Breaking it down further, 36% are between the age group of 15-24 years, 39% are between 25-34 years, 16% are between 35-44 years, 6% are between 45-55 years and 3% are between 55-64 years.
2) Indian Internet population comprises of 34% females. Besides this, they also spend less time online than males. They spent about 10.8 hours per visit, whereas men spent about 12.7 hours. In addition, females falling in the age group of 35-44 years are the heaviest internet users while amongst male, 25-34 years old are the heaviest internet users.

3) When compared to other nations, Indian internet users prefer to spend more time on Social Networking Sites. Time spent on services (Emails, Instant Messaging etc.) by Indian internet users is 23%, on social networking sites is 25% and on entertainment is 11%.

4) Among various social networking sites, Facebook continues to be number one social network with a reach of 86%. Surprisingly, 59.6 million Indian users access Facebook, which is followed by Linkedin and Twitter.

(Comscore, 2013)

It is quite evident from the above facts and figures that the educated youth of Indian Society is as materialistic as their western counterparts. Owing to changes in values and beliefs a distinction is made between a ‘found identity’ and a ‘made identity’. In the past era, people changed their names or appearance if they want to hide their
found identity. But now, due to technological spurge, a new identity can be created virtually. In India people are encircled in the found identity of caste, creed, religion, gotra etc, but virtual space now provides an opportunity to frame a made Identity in which they can mould their identity. This extraordinary and revolutionary drift has brought changes in values of younger generation who believe more in change and independence. Social networking sites have become popular for discussing social issues. Social awareness through social networking sites has brought more maturity, unity and thoughtfulness in Indian society. It is necessary to examine social change in Indian society due to the emergence of social media.

2.4(a) Social Change through Social Networking Sites

India is in a transitional phase of development with the spread of Cyber Culture, Technology and Social Networking Sites. A new global culture i.e. a Consumer culture, with a panorama of goods and services, transnational fashions and cosmopolitan personal relationships has emerged. People redefine culture itself as a source of both individual and social identities, as computer networks circulate ideas, information and images throughout the world. Bill Gates (1995) As more and more citizens gain access to broadband technologies in Indian society, an increasing number seeks social connectivity through the net. Social
networking sites enable families and friends to converse in a way as if they are in the same place. The public has re-conceptualize the notion of a community after the introduction of social networking sites. These sites serve as platforms for political-social organization and are not simply used for personal interests. They are not simple sources of entertainment but are vital tools of communication and collaboration. Social networking sites indeed provides a visible stage in new ways and means that street protests and rallies cannot provide speakers and protestors. For instance, the significant role of social media in Gang Rape case in Delhi, the capital of India in December 2012 cannot be undermined. Facebook reached out to millions to join the movement against culprits. It was a huge platform for the Indian citizens to vent their outrage against the heinous crime. An online petition platform change.org received more than 65,000 signatures for an appeal seeking the intervention of President Pranab Mukherjee and Chief Justice of India Altamas Kabir on the issue. A lot of web pages related to social issues like rape, murder, girls education, female foeticide, corruption etc. are created on various social networking sites. One such page is created by name ‘India against Corruption’ which has earned a widespread popularity. The chief minister of Gujarat Narendra Modi effectively used the social media to connect with netizens. Youth, who certainly are more attuned to digital culture are attracted by his political gimmicks. His
proactive presence on social media helped him to win the assembly election. Anna Hazare, effectively used the social media to mobilize the youth and other segments of society, in his agitation on the Jan Lokpal Bill. His effective use of social media not only made it more global, but also garnered huge support in his campaign. Finally, in December 2013 Lokpal bill was enacted and the role of social media cannot be undermined in this historic event. It is also important to make a note of famous ‘Aarushi Murder Case’ in which role of social media cannot be underestimated. The case was discussed on blogs and various social networking sites through which justice was demanded by netizens. It indicates that social networking sites are forces of integration for all the regions of the country including various castes, groups, cultures and minority groups. In addition to common people, many bureaucrats, politicians and social activists are making their mark on social media. Social networking sites have brought changes in the thinking of Indian population who relied only on traditional media for awareness.

Even corporate organizations have integrated social media with internal communication to create a collaborative work environment. Social media-savvy organizations in India conduct campaigns on a regular basis where social media is the leading component. Companies use social media to frame strategies for new markets, address
consumer grievances and communicate directly with target groups. However, the darker side of social networking sites has emerged in the form of Cyber crimes. Cyber crimes have become prominent on Social Networking Sites because of the simple fact that people reveal a lot about themselves on these sites.

2.4(b) Cyber crime through Social Networking Sites

Social Networking Sites are used for harassing, threatening or intrusive communication. It has changed its form from traditional obscene, telephone calls to ‘Cyber-stalking’ where persistent messages are sent to an unwilling recipient. Cyber criminals target social networking sites to draw out personal details supplied by users. Personal information posted on the sites such as name, data of birth, address, job details, email and phone numbers, all make its users vulnerable to cyber criminals. A vicious virus Koobface- ‘Koob’ being book in reverse affected thousands of Facebook and Twitter users in 2008 by hacking the accounts of social networking users. Another danger emanating from social networking site is the popular quizzes, horoscopes and games which are freely downloaded but may contain link to viral sites. Messages appear to come from friends on various occasions of diwali, holi etc, when in fact they are linked directly to sites that persuade victim to reveal personal information. Not only this, traditional
bullying in school is now replaced by cyber bullying on social networking sites. Cyber victims suffer more because of the hidden identities of cyber bullies. Apart from availability of Internet at home, it is easily accessible on mobile phones at a very cheaper price. One cannot keep an eye on what children are into on social networking sites.

“The only thing we can rely on is our cultural values we have passed on to them. We just try to be friendly with our wards without peeping much into their personal lives as this may break their trust on us. But as a parent I fear of the perils of social networking sites,” said Dr Dinesh Kapil, a pediatrician.\textsuperscript{23} Experts say child guidance is more important than child monitoring in case of social networking. In addition, public concern has increased manifold over the danger that sexual predators pose online. Other crimes done through Social networking sites are cyber defamation and cyber fraud. The secure feeling of being anonymous on social networking site encourages a person to commit crime online that a normal person would not commit in the real world. It is evident that social networking sites are not only attractive and popular among common man but is also the target of cyber criminals.

2.5 Conclusion

The technological advancement has given rise to network structure of society. Social networking sites are an important element of network
society. It has changed the way people think about interactions. Identity formation has become very important in globalised era because people have become social media savvy. Netizens engage in variety of activities on social networking sites. Just a few decades ago it was tough to connect with people except through face-to-face interaction. The rise of social networking sites connect people in new ways and enable them to empathize with each other online. Moreover, the growth of social networking sites in Indian society show a significant change in the social and personal behaviour of adolescents. Even though these sites help adolescents to publicize their personal information, it also encourage them to overstate various aspects of their lives. However, these positive aspects are not without associated risks such as identity theft and cyber blackmailing. Other adverse effects on adolescents are mood swings, attention deficits at school and addiction. Moreover, these sites serve as a platform for the adolescents to engage in some deviant acts. People can hide their real identities on social networking sites and can play with emotions and feelings. They display their best on these social networking sites creating a false sense of perfection. Social networking sites have also given rise to cyber crime. The crime has become easy, anonymous and effective on social networking sites. Emergence of cyber crime in network society has become a concern for researchers and thinkers all over the world. It is essential to analyze various studies
and works undertaken in this area. It is also necessary to find out what these studies lack as cyber crime is a dynamic issue and needs constant observation. The following chapter critically reviews various published works on cyber crime, social networking sites and effect on adolescents as a result of excessive use of these sites.

**Notes and References**

1. The expression “Network Society” first appeared in sociology in the late 20th Century. The concept became better known through the work of Manuel Castells (Castells, 1996, Castells-Cardoso, 2006). According to Castells (born in Spain) who has researched in France and the United States, network society has a new social structure and process which is ensured by information and communication technologies based on microelectronics. In a network society, it is with the help of computer networks that information is created, processed and transmitted, building on the knowledge accumulated in the network hubs. See Castells, Manual (2006), *The Network Society from Knowledge to Policy*, Pg 8 The Johns Hopkins University Press, Washington, DC.


4 Key ICT indicators for developed and developing countries and the world (totals and penetration rates). International Telecommunications Unions (ITU), Geneva, 27 February 2013


7 Glacial time is sequential and constituted by elements of past, present and future but it is desynchronized from mechanical structuring of chronometric clock time. As Lash and Urry express it “glacial notion of time is one in which the relations between humans and nature is long term and evolutionary. It backs out of immediate history and forwards into a wholly unspecifiable future” (1994;241). Timeless Time - The relationship to time is defined by the use of information and communication technologies in a relentless effort to annihilate time by negating sequencing by compressing time (as in split-second global financial transactions or the generalized practice of multitasking, squeezing more activity into a given time).


18 India is now world’s third largest Internet user after U.S., China; The Hindu; Aug 24, 2013

19 2013 India Digital future in focus; comScore, August 22, 2013
The found identity is one which is created by circumstances such as who are parents, ethnic background, religion, sex, schooling, profession and all the external factors that people use to describe someone. On the other hand, the made identity is one which is created. It is how one wish to see himself or herself in front of others.

