

Perceptions of Adolescents on Usage of Social Network Sites for Identity Development

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a transitional period of growth and change including the development of mature forms of thought, emotion and behaviour. Identity construction is a unique time in every adolescent's life. Social networking sites are dominant web presences that greatly influence the formation of adolescent's identity through digital communication and interaction. The present study focuses on role of social networking site in the formation of identity development of professional and non-professional degree students. Majority of boys studying in professional (P) and non-professional (NP) course perceive that they use SNS (Social Network Sites) tools in creating their identity to a greater extent than girls who perceive their usage is average. Majority of adolescents have positive perception on SNS. Professional students perceived high importance of SNS in their identity development. Girls perceived that effect of SNS on their identity is high than boys. Boys use SNS tools more than girls in creating their identity irrespective of group of study.

Key words: Social Network Sites (SNS), Perceptions, Identity Development, Adolescents

INTRODUCTION

Identity development involves an adolescent's active search for their role, contemplation of personal strengths and weaknesses, and the ability to make meaning of their context and experiences. SNS offer adolescents new opportunities as well as new challenges to express to the world who one is. Social networking sites are dominant web presences that greatly influence the formation of individual identity through digital communication and interaction. Some forms

include blogs, micro blogging, podcasting, social media releases, social networks, wikis and virtual worlds. "Despite its diversity and vast applications, the key to social media is the interaction. Social media is an umbrella term that defines the various activities that integrate technology, social interaction and content creation. There are both positive and negative perceptions on using social network sites. Whitty *et al.*³ reported positive and negative effects of usage of SNS's.

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The positive effects of using SNS's include developing long-lasting friendships and fall in love online and the negative effects include criminal behavior such as cyber-bullying and cyber-stalking. The usage of social networking is advantageous and disadvantageous too. Hence the present study was taken up with the objective of determining whether social networking sites are providing platform for adolescents to create their identity and to find out gender and group of study (professional and non-professional) differences in the usage of SNS.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study was conducted to know the perceptions on usage of social network sites and identity development of professional and Non-professional studying adolescents of Hyderabad and Secunderabad cities.

Selection of sample

Twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad from Telangana state was purposively chosen as the locale of the study. Purposive sampling procedure was used to select sample for the present study. Sample comprised of 200 adolescents with equal number of boys and girls. Keeping in point of view adolescents were selected between the age group of 18-20 years and those studying graduation from professional and non-professional colleges.

A detailed schedule for studying the role of social network sites in creating the identity of adolescents was developed for the present study which included 20 questions divided into 2 sections to understand the perceptions and the tools they use to create their identity in social network sites. The developed schedule was pretested and revised before using for the main study.

Statistical analysis:-

Statistical analysis of collected data was carried out after consolidation and computation into frequencies and percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The table 1 depicts the perceptions of the adolescent boys and girls (Professional and Non-Professional) on usage of social network sites. The results were categorized as low, average and high. The results of the study shown that 48 per cent of professional girls perceived that they use SNS tools more

whereas 50 per cent of them use SNS tools average in creating their identity and 66 per cent of boys perceived it high for creating their identity using SNS tools. According to Lloyd (1) Identity development involves an adolescent's active search for their role, contemplation of personal strengths and weaknesses, and the ability to make meaning of their context and experiences. SNS offer adolescents new opportunities as well as new challenges to express to the world who one is. In one-on-one communications within SNS e.g., "Facebook messages", adolescents can express their likes and dislikes as well as their worldviews and get immediate feedback. With SNS, adolescents express their views and the recipients of this information include both known as well as unknown targets.

2/3rd of non-professional girls had average perception about the use of SNS tools to create their identity while 76 per cent of boys perceived that they highly used SNS tools in creating their identity. From the results it can be concluded that boys use SNS tools more than girls in creating their identity irrespective of group of study.

It was interesting to note from the study that majority of professional course students (girls 74%, boys 60%) perceived that the usage of SNS tools to create identity average. It was surprising to note that even majority of non-professional students (60% girls and 56% boys) perceive the same way that usage of SNS to create their Identity should be average but boys use SNS more for identity development.

The findings of the study revealed that more than 3/4th of both professional and non-professional respondents (78 % girls and 82% boys of professional) and (90% girls and 88% boys of non-professional) perceived that SNS has positive impact on identity development, because SNS gives an opportunity to express themselves in more creative way and boosts up the confidence through features like likes, positive comments and appreciation they receive.

Ellison *et al.*² conducted study to examine the closeness to friends more thoroughly, reported that those who use Facebook intensely (i.e., actively engage in Facebook activities frequently and feel emotionally connected to the use of Facebook) perceived greater bonding social capital, or

strong social ties and closeness to others who can provide emotional support.

The study reveals that the majority of respondents not only have high positive perceptions about SNS but equal negative perceptions also. The finding from the above table indicate that majority of professional students (82% girls and 82% boys) had negative perceptions on SNS in creating their identity. The same holds true with non-professional students for both girls (86%) and boys (78%). The respondents had negative perceptions because it is easy to create fake identities and cyber bullying can easily occur. Further logging in SNS may become addiction which may affect mental, physical and academic activities of adolescents. Whitty *et al.*³ reported positive and negative effects of usage of SNS's. When people are interacting with others online it was non-face-to-face, was perceived as an anonymous environment and was non-threatening. The positive effects of using SNS's include developing long-lasting friendships and fall in love online and the negative effects include criminal behavior such as cyber-bullying and cyber-stalking. Rosen⁶ studied the impact of social networks on adolescents within the family through a survey of 1000 households and concluded that the excessive use for social networking sites causes mental disorders and aggressive tendencies, especially among adolescents.

Results of study reveals that majority of girls (72% professional and 52% nonprofessional) perceived that adolescents should give average preference for using SNS to identity development. But boys (66% professional and 50% non-professional) perceived that high preference can be given for SNS in creating their identity. Thelwall⁴ found that males tend to make new relationship in social network environments more than females do.

The finding of the study revealed that professional girls (54%) perceived importance of SNS in identity development as low. Whereas more than half of professional boys had average perceptions on importance of SNS. It was interesting to note that non-professional respondents (54% girls & 70% boys) perceived that the importance of SNS in identity development should be average. Finding of Barker⁵ study indicated

that adolescent girls generally use SNS's to communicate with peers and to reinforce pre-existing relationships, while boys more often use the platforms to meet new people and make new friends. Boys are also more likely to identify with groups on social network sites that differ from their offline peers.

It is surprising to know from the study that even though average importance and preference is given to SNS in identity development majority of students (60% girls and 48% boys in professional courses, 60 per cent girls and 50 per cent boys of non-professional courses) perceive that their time of usage of SNS is high.

Majority of the girls (62%) of professional course perceive that effect of usage of SNS is high on the identity formation whereas majority of the boys perceive this effect as average. Non-professional course students, 74 per cent girls perceive the effect of SNS on identity development as high while 50 per cent of boys perceive that effect is average.

Gender Differences in perception of identity development using SNS:

The gender difference (Table 2) on usage of SNS in identity formation is given in above table. Gender difference is found in using SNS tools for creating identity, where boys use more of SNS tools in creating identity. Even gender difference is found significant in perception of creating identity using SNS. According to the Pew research centre⁸, nearly twice as many men (63%) as women (37%) use LinkedIn, but all the other social networking platforms have significantly more female users than male users. Boys are more likely than girls to report posting fake information to their online profiles. Boys have high perceptions about creating identity using SNS than girls.

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There is no significant gender difference in positive and negative perceptions about SNS. The perception of both genders on

preference and time of usage of SNS is found to be same. Saxena⁷ found the major gender differences in the usage of type of SNS. Facebook is more used by females whereas males use more of Twitter and LinkedIn. Females interact more with family, friends, colleagues and people staying far away whereas males speak more with relatives and strangers. Gender difference is also found in the major activities done using SNSs. Males are seen engaged into activities like sharing pictures and information, instant messaging and keeping in touch with friends/family and relatives while females are more engaged in reading comments posted on SNSs. Males preferred visiting SNSs, multimedia, education whereas females preferred using more of emails and sites related to food and healthcare.

Gender difference is found in using SNS tools for creating identity, where boys use more of SNS tools in creating identity. Even gender difference is found significant in perception of creating identity using SNS. Boys have high perceptions about creating identity using SNS than girls. There is no significant gender difference in positive and negative perceptions about SNS. The perception of both genders on preference and time of usage of SNS is found to be same. However significant difference on importance of SNS in identity development is found, where boys perceive high importance of SNS in identity formation. Significant difference was found between genders on effect of SNS on identity development, where girls perceive the effect of SNS on identity development than boys.

Table 1: Details about Perceptions on using SNS for Identity Development

S.No.	Perceptions of adolescents about usage of SNS for identity development	P.Adolescents (n=100)				NP.Adolescents (n=100)				Total				
		Girls (n=50)		Boys (n=50)		Girls (n=50)		Boys (n=50)		P.Adolescents n=100		NP.Adolescents n=100		
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
1	I use these tools in SNS to create my own identity (status updates, Changing pictures..etc)													
	Low	1	1	2	4	4	8	0	0	6	6	4	4	
	Average	25	50	15	30	32	64	12	24	59	59	44	44	
	High	24	48	33	66	14	28	38	76	85	85	52	52	
2	Adolescents perception about creation of identity using SNS													
	Low	5	10	5	10	11	22	4	8	10	10	15	15	
	Average	37	74	30	60	30	60	28	56	67	67	58	58	
	High	8	16	15	30	9	18	18	36	23	23	27	27	
3	Positive perceptions about SNS													
	Low	1	2	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	1	1	1	
	Average	10	20	9	18	4	8	6	12	19	19	10	10	
	High	39	78	41	82	45	90	44	88	80	80	89	89	
4	Negative perception about SNS													
	Low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	Average	9	18	9	18	7	14	11	22	27	27	18	18	
	High	41	82	41	82	43	86	39	78	82	82	82	82	
5	Preference of using SNS for identity development													
	Low	1	2	0	0	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	
	Average	36	72	17	34	26	52	24	48	53	53	50	50	
	High	13	26	33	66	13	26	25	50	46	46	38	38	
6	Importance of SNS in identity development													
	Low	27	54	3	6	5	10	2	4	30	30	7	7	
	Average	18	36	31	62	27	54	35	70	49	49	62	62	
	High	5	10	16	32	18	36	13	26	21	21	31	31	
7	Time of usage of SNS													
	Low	1	2	2	4	1	2	1	2	3	3	2	2	
	Average	19	38	24	48	19	38	24	48	43	43	43	43	
	High	30	60	24	48	30	60	25	50	54	54	55	55	
8	Effects of usage of SNS on their identity formation													
	Low	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	4	2	2	3	3	
	Average	18	36	34	68	12	24	25	50	52	52	37	37	
	High	31	62	15	30	37	74	23	46	46	46	60	60	

Table 2: Gender differences in Usage of SNS for Identity Development

S.No	Dimensions	Girls		Boys		z- test
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1	Using SNS to create identity	2.38	0.579	2.71	0.498	0.002615*
2	Adolescents perception about creation of identity using	2	0.568	2.23	0.6171	0.006687*
3	Positive perceptions about SNS	2.82	0.4353	2.85	0.357	0.5954
4	Negative perception about SNS	2.83	0.3756	2.8	0.4	0.587067
5	Preference for using SNS for identity development	2.34	0.5141	2.57	0.514879	0.001917
6	Importance of SNS in identity development	1.89	0.719	2.21	0.5733	0.000135*
7	Time of usage of SNS	2.58	0.5325	2.47	0.55968	0.1567
8	Effects of usage on identity development	2.68	0.5075	2.45	0.5545	0.002649*

CONCLUSION

Majority of boys studying in professional and non- professional course perceive that they use SNS tools in creating their identity to a greater extent than girls who perceive their usage is average. Majority of adolescents have positive perception on SNS and they also exhibited negative perception on SNS. It can be concluded that they are aware of both advantages and disadvantages of using SNS. Professional students perceived high importance of SNS in their identity development. Girls perceived that effect of SNS on their identity is high than boys. Boys perceived high use of SNS tools in creating their identity.

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