
Attitudes of Research Scholars on the Use of Social Networking Sites

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Abstract

The goal of the present survey is to assess the research scholars' attitudes on the use of SNSs and to study the impact of SNSs on their research work. The social networking sites are becoming popular in the academic set up thereby posing many challenges for professionals in rendering the services. It also signifies the use of SNSs in their research and academic environment. The present paper provides a bird's eye view on the attitudes of research scholars on the social networking sites. A thorough review of literature is also presented. In addition to theoretical aspects, the survey identifies the problems faced by the research scholars.

Keywords

Facebook, Google+, Karnatak University; Research Scholars; Social Media; Social Networking Sites.

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INTRODUCTION

The buzz words of the present generation are - check my status on Facebook, follow me on Twitter, What's up on What's App etc. The Social Networking Sites (here after SNSs) are one of the participatory mediums of communication. At the beginning of the twenty first century the studies were focused on the theoretical aspects of internet, i.e. use of internet, use of search engines and use of web based services etc. (Ruleman, 2012). The social media is now a widespread and well accepted by the people of all ages (Bala, 2014). According to Suraweere et al. (2011), "social networking refers to a process of relationship building among a group of people who have a common interest." Human beings have always lived in communities because they are social animals that believe so much in interpersonal relationship (Danah and Ellision, 2007). SNSs have gained tremendous popularity in all walks of life, be it an entertainment, communication, trade, academic and many others. Unlike traditional environment, SNSs provide and create a new and virtual platform for the students to communicate with their peers for effective communication (Dickson and Holley, 2010; and Singh and Gill, 2015). Because of SNSs online communication has become so easy, say Bhatt and Amit Kumar, 2014). The statistics on social network users in India (since 2012) show that if there were 63.1 million users in 2012, it was 86.7 million in 2013 and 120.5 million in 2015 and expected 197 users in 2017 and 224.2 million users during 2018 (Statistical Portal, 2015). The various SNSs tools like Twitter, Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn, Academia etc. are becoming common among the people of all ages, especially college students. Due to its high use, the library professionals are advocating these SNSs to reach out to the students' community by rendering services, thereby taking libraries to the doorsteps of the users (Farkas, 2007; Mathews, 2006 and 2007; Milstein, (2009). Librarians have started to question and explore how these SNSs can be adopted and used in libraries.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

During the last two decades there have been number of major developments in the web especially among SNSs (Scale, 2008). In recent years, more and more users have begun to the SNSs (Hsiao, 2011) and are gaining popularity among the tech savvy users thereby changing their life style and reaching the unreached person (Vasilakaki and Garoufallou, 2014). The SNSs help the scientists to communicate

their research findings expeditiously (Eperen and Marincola, 2011). Ruleman (2012) discusses the faculty and students' usage of SNSs tools. The outcomes of the survey indicate that both faculty and students are frequent and high users of SNSs. Mahajan et al. (2013) study reveals the use of SNSs by the research scholars of Panjab University (PJ), Chandigarh and Kurukshetra University (KU), Kurukshetra in India. The Facebook was the most popular accessed SNSs both in PU (83 per cent) and KU (77 per cent). A similar result was also observed in the study conducted by Kumar (2012). The study indicates that the students are using SNSs not only for entertainment, keeping in touch with their peers but also for academic purpose. The Facebook is highly used SNS by the university students and spending considerable amount of time on exchange of ideas, social interactions and connections etc. (Baro *et al.*, 2014). A study conducted by Singh and Gill (2015) reveals that SNSs were mostly used for entertainment and communication.

In a study conducted by Mohamed and Sumitha (2011) a majority of students (75.4 per cent) used SNSs for friendly communication. Hamade (2013) assesses the awareness and use of SNSs in Kuwait. The results reveal that Twitter and Facebook are the most preferred SNSs by the students. The author also emphasizes the need for orientation programmes to train the students on the advantages of SNSs. Bhatt and Amit Kumar (2014) explore that students have accounts with the most popular sites Facebook (98.5 per cent), Twitter (80.6 per cent) and Google+ (79.1 per cent). A good number (67.9 per cent) of students use SNSs to communicate with their classmates. The users make use of SNSs to stay in touch with the researchers in the similar field of activity and to disseminate their research findings (Nandez and Borrego, 2013). Madhusudhan's (2012) study reveals that Facebook and ResearchGate are the most used SNSs for academic purposes. There are a few studies which reflect on the use of individual SNS and their impact on study, research and various other activities. Social media can be utilized even in recruitment process, says Carrillat *et al.* (2014) in their investigation. Loving and Ochoa (2011) examine the use of Facebook as a solution for teaching-learning process at University of Florida. Moqbel *et al.* (2013) investigate the use of SNSs by the employees of the organization on job performance and satisfaction. Tella *et al.* (2013) in their article examined through a descriptive survey, the use and benefits of SNSs to the academic librarians and their libraries. The study reveals that Facebook and Twitter are the most

frequently used ones by academic libraries. Dickson and Holley (2010) in their paper discusses that if privacy issues of the students are dealt properly then SNSs can be used effectively without any fear.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The prime objective of this paper is to study the research scholars' attitudes on SNSs. Specifically, the present study uses the following research questions to elicit the opinion from the researchers:

1. What Social Networking Sites are used by the research scholars?
2. What academic SNSs are used by the research scholars?
3. How often do the research scholars use SNSs?
4. For what purposes do research scholars use SNSs?
5. What are the problems the research scholars face in using SNSs?

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was designed to collect the primary data from the research scholars. The experts in the profession went through the questionnaire for its validation and the research scholars of various departments to demonstrate its appropriateness. A questionnaire was distributed to a total of 12 science departments. The study is limited to the science departments only, since the research productivity of the Karnatak University at Dharwad is very high in science subjects compared with that of other streams (Hadagali, 2014). The questionnaires were distributed to a total of 227 regular research scholars, out of which 180 duly filled in questionnaires were received back. The response rate is 79.29 per cent. The data collected then were gathered and MS-Excel and Predictive Analytics Software (PASW), erstwhile SPSS were used to get frequencies and percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Department wise distribution of questionnaires

The present study considers all the twelve science departments of the Karnatak University, Dharwad (available at www.kud.ac.in website). A total of 227 questionnaires were distributed to all the regular research scholars of science departments. Among the science departments, the department of Chemistry has the highest regular research scholars i.e. 60 at the Karnatak University, Dharwad, followed by 30 each

from Mathematics and Physics. There are only two regular scholars in the department of Applied Genetics, since this department was established in the year 2004 and only one research guide is available at present. Other details are presented in Table I.

Table 1: Department wise distribution of questionnaires

Sl. No.	Name of Department	Actual research scholars & questionnaires distributed	Questionnaires received
1	Applied Genetics	2	1
2	Biochemistry	8	8
3	Biotechnology & Microbiology	19	15
4	Botany	24	17
5	Chemistry	60	48
6	Computer Science	5	5
7	Geography	12	11
8	Geology	12	2
9	Mathematics	30	23
10	Physics	30	27
11	Statistics	8	8
12	Zoology	17	15
	Total	227	180

Course of study

The regular research scholars include Project Fellows. In some of the departments the research scholars are working as project fellows funded from various funding agencies such as Department of Science and Technology, the Technology Information Forecasting and Assessment Council (TIFAC) etc. M.Phil. (Master of Philosophy), Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy) and Post-Doctoral fellows. Out of 180 respondents, 172 (95.55 per cent) are working for their Ph.D., followed by 6 (3.33 per cent) working as Project Fellows for various projects undertaken by the faculty members and there is only one person working for M.Phil and Post-Doctoral respectively.

Awareness of SNSs

The respondents were asked a question on the awareness of the SNSs. The study indicates that all the regular research scholars under study were aware

of the SNSs, i.e. 100 per cent. The data is presented in table II.

Table 2: Awareness of SNSs

Sl. No.	Awareness	No. of research scholars	Percentage (%)
1	Yes	180	100
2	No	0	0
	Total	180	100

Commonly used SNSs

A question was raised to the research scholars on the use of access tools of the SNSs. A surprising result was found that among the different access tools Google+ was the most heavily used access tool with 91.11 per cent. Even though the access to these SNSs is banned in Karnatak University still quite a good number of research scholars are using other SNSs frequently. 76.11 per cent research scholars are using Facebook, followed by Youtube with 70.00 per cent. A study conducted by Garoufallou and Charitopoulou (2011) reveal that the most frequently used tool was Facebook. A similar result was also found in the study conducted by Singh and Gill (2015); Tella *et al.* (2013). In the study conducted by Mohamed and Sumitha (2011) Orkut with 75.4 per cent was the most popular SNS, followed by Facebook with only 38.8 per cent. The result was somewhat different in Hamade's (2013) study i.e. Twitter with 89 per cent was the most preferred SNSs among the students. The same result was also observed in Kumar's (2012) study (with 89 per cent Twitter was the most popular and widely used SNS by the students. However, only few SNSs, like Facebook and Twitter seems to be the most commonly used SNSs in most of the libraries (Palmer, 2014).

Table 3: Use of SNSs

Sl. No.	Access tools	No. of research scholars (n=180)	Percentage (%)
1	Google+	164	91.11
2	Facebook	137	76.11
3	YouTube	126	70.00
4	LinkedIn	117	65.00
5	Wikis	93	51.67
6	Twitter	86	47.78
7	Blogs	40	22.22
8	MySpace	21	11.67
9	Instagram	15	8.33

10	Flickr	10	5.56
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Period of using SNSs

The table IV indicates the time period for which the research scholars are using the SNSs. The study reveals that 70.00 per cent research scholars are connected with SNSs more for than 2 years, followed by 22.22 per cent from the time period of 1 to 2 years. Thus, the result indicates that the SNSs have gained popularity among the research scholars from the past 2 years. Singh and Gill’s (2015) study reveals that 27.7 per cent respondents were connected with SNSs for the time period of 1 to 2 years.

Table 4: Period of using SNSs

Sl. No.	Time period	No. of research scholars	Percentage (%)
1	Less than a Month	0	0
2	1-6 Months	3	1.67
3	7 Months to a Year	11	6.11
4	1-2 Years	40	22.22
5	More than 2 Years	126	70.00
	Total	180	100.00

Preference of using SNSs

The advantages and uses of SNSs are many, hence people prefer these SNSs for social interaction, entertainment, companionship, communication etc. A question was raised to the research scholars on the major preference of using the SNSs. 92.78 per cent research scholars were using SNSs for social interaction with their peers, followed by communication with 90.00 per cent. A similar result was observed in Bhatt and Amit Kumar’s (2014) study that 78.8 per cent students use the SNSs for communication and Mohamed and Sumitha’s (2011) study indicates that a majority (75.4 per cent) of the students use the SNSs mainly for friendly communication. Singh and Gill’s (2015) study reveals that the SNSs were mostly used for entertainment and communication.

Use of academic SNSs

Apart from the general SNSs there are numerous academic SNSs which help research scholars stay in

touch with the academic community in their respective field of specialization. A question was asked on the use of academic SNSs and the data is presented in table V. The survey found that the ResearchGate with 71.11 per cent, Academia with 65.00 per cent, Slideshare with 60.00 per cent have commonly used the academic SNSs by the research scholars. While the responses on the use of Epernicus, My Science Work, SciMeet, SciBlog, Ologeez, SciSpace and ResearchID are least used in the academic SNSs. Hence, the study concludes that the ResearchGate (71.11 per cent) has more stakeholders in terms of usage by the research scholars, followed by Academia (65.00 per cent). A study by Nandez and Borrego (2013) reveals that most of the research scholars use Academic (an academic SNS) for various reasons. Madhusudhan’s (2012) study indicates that most of the respondents preferred the academic SNS, ResearchGate (53.75 per cent) followed by Academia (51.25 per cent).

Table 5.: Use of academic SNSs

Sl. No.	Academic SNSs	No. of research scholars (n=180)	Percentage (%)
1	Research Gate	128	71.11
2	Academia	117	65.00
3	Slideshare	108	60.00
4	Epernicus	73	40.56
5	My Science work	38	21.11
6	SciMeet	34	18.89
7	SciBlog	29	16.11
8	Ologeez	27	15.00
9	SciSpace	21	11.67
10	ResearchID	7	3.89

Purpose of using SNSs

SNSs are used for various reasons like communication, discussions, to share photos, files, videos etc. It is observed that majority of the respondents, i.e. 93.33 per cent were using SNSs to share education, jobs, and research related information with their friends, followed by the interacting professionals in their field of specialization (table-VI) and 86.67 per cent to stay in touch with their friends. Bhatt and Amith Kumar’s (2014) study explores that majority (94 per cent) of students use SNSs for communication. Madhusudhan’s (2012) study reveals that research

scholars use SNSs for academic purpose. But Singh and Gill's (2015) study reveals that respondents use SNSs for entertainment and communication with their family members and friends. Whereas, Nandez and Borrego's (2013) study indicates that the respondents (67.2 per cent) use SNSs to get in touch with other fellow researchers.

Table 6: Purpose of using Social Networking Sites

Sl. No.	Purpose of using SNSs	No. of research scholars (n=180)	Percentage (%)
1	Share education, jobs and research related information with friends	168	93.33
2	Professional interactions	159	88.33
3	Stay in touch with friends	156	86.67
4	Finding useful information on conferences / seminars / workshops	152	84.44
5	Participate in discussions	142	78.89
6	Share photos, files, music, videos	126	70.00
7	Share social and political related information with friends	118	65.56

Problems faced while accessing SNSs

The research scholars were asked to indicate the problems faced while accessing the SNSs. The table VII represents the data provided by the research scholars. Of the ten choices given the most common problems cited by the research scholars were access denied by the university (72.78 per cent), followed by common internet problem (66.11 per cent) and lack of orientation programmes (65 per cent). The Karnatak University has banned access to SNSs within the campus. The authors conducted an informal interview to elicit the reason how the research scholars use other SNSs. The study reveals that they were using Internet from their mobiles (paid Internet plans). Whereas, other problems such as no wi-fi connection, low bandwidth, limited access to computers, no privacy ensured are some of the other problems faced by the research scholars. Fear of

misusing personal information was the major problem faced by the respondents (Mohamed and Sumitha 2011; Bhatt and Amit Kumar, 2014; Singh and Gill, 2015; and Dickson and Holley, 2010).

Table 7: Problems faced while accessing SNSs

Sl. No.	Problems	No. of research scholars (n=180)	Percentage (%)
1	Access denied by the university	131	72.78
2	Internet Problem	119	66.11
3	Lack of Orientation Programmes	117	65.00
4	No Wi-Fi connection	89	49.44
5	Low bandwidth	70	38.89
6	Limited access to computers	42	23.33
7	No privacy ensured	41	22.78
8	Mobile data card problems	17	9.44
9	USB modem (Dongle) problems	7	3.89
10	Other problems	2	1.11

Impact of SNSs on research work

The research scholars were asked to mention their opinion on whether there was an impact of SNSs on their research work. The Figure III clearly indicates that the impact of SNS was very visible among the research scholars. Out of 180 respondents, 118 (65.55 per cent) respondents have agreed and 49 (27.22 per cent) respondents said that they strongly agreed about the statement that there was an impact of SNSs on their research work. Some of the research scholars are of the opinion that their academic career has improved in all respect after using SNSs. A similar result was also observed in Hamade's (2013) study that SNSs help the students to maintain better relationship. The outcome of the study has indicated that there is a positive impact of SNSs on their study.

Suggestions

- It is evident from the study that the access denied by the university for SNSs is the major problem the research scholars are facing. More than 72.78 per cent respondents attributed to it. On the other hand, the authorities report that some of the

students and research scholars are misusing access to SNSs such as Facebook, Orkut, you tube etc. Therefore, the reason to ban these SNSs. Hence, it is recommended to the authorities that the ban for access to SNSs may be lifted so that the research scholars can rigorously and effective use these SNSs for their research work.

- It is high time for the Karnatak University to have Facebook account of its library to provide various services, since the research scholars are using Facebook as the second preferred SNSs access tool even though the access is banned. With the help of SNSs especially Facebook, ResearchGate, Academia the library can provide various services to its users. Thus fulfilling the laws of library science as devised by Dr. S.R. Ranganathan (Ranganathan, 1931).
- The research scholars face problems with the Wi-Fi connection. 49.44 per cent research scholars said that there was no adequate Wi-Fi connection to all the science departments. There is a separate IT section in the Karnatak University to look into the matter of Internet related problems and Wi-Fi connection. It has established Wi-Fi facilities to all the major buildings like library, green library, administrative building, finance section, examination section and other departments. Though some of the departments have Wi-Fi facility but the range is limited. As a result they are getting weak signals. Therefore, it is recommended to the higher authorities that adequate Wi-Fi facilities should be extended to all the departments to help research scholars for their future endeavours.
- The data reveals that 65.00 per cent research scholars were facing problems with regard to lack of orientation programmes. So far, the central library fails to organize orientation / training programmes frequently on how to use e-resources in general and SNSs in particular. Hence, it is requested to the authorities that regular orientation programmes be conducted exclusively for the research scholars. Because the productivity (in terms of publications) of science research scholars is high compared with other stream research scholars and other universities as well (Hadagali, 2014).

CONCLUSION

SNSs provide a new forum for reaching users community (Hadagali and Kenchakkanavar, 2015)

and have become one of the largest plat forms all over the world for sharing and keeping abreast with real time information (Bhatt and Amit Kumar, 2014). The present survey accomplishes the use of SNSs by the research community in an academic institution. The findings have indicated that all the research scholars are aware of the SNSs and Google+ was the most heavily accessed SNS access tool followed by Facebook and YouTube. A number of research scholars are connected with the SNSs for more than two years. The majority of respondents used SNSs for social interaction with their peers. Apart from the general SNSs there are numerous academic SNSs which help research scholars stay in touch with their friends or professionals in their field of specialization. The ResearchGate and Academia are the most commonly used academic SNSs. Most of the research scholars used SNSs to share education, job and research related information with their peers, followed by interacting with professionals in their respective fields. The most common problems cited by the research scholars were access denied by the university, followed by common internet problems, lack of orientation programmes etc.

The study reveals that the research scholars face problems while accessing the SNSs. It is essential to educate the students by organizing training and orientation programmes for the effective utilization of SNSs. The study also reveals that the Karnatak University has banned access to the SNSs due to misuse by the students and research scholars. Since very few students and research scholars are misusing, it is suggested to the authorities that the action should be initiated on such students instead of imposing ban on the SNSs. A comparative study of various universities should also be conducted. It would be interesting to further discuss on setting up of guidelines for SNSs on how to deal with privacy issues of their users.

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