Impact of Social Networking Sites on the Mauritian Youth: A Study of Their Life Styles and Its Effectiveness in Nation Building

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Abstract:

Online Social Networking sites have achieved a phenomenal growth over the last decade attracting much attention from researchers. Most of the major social media are predominated by the youth, exploiting it for one purpose or the other. A sample of 300 was collected from Secondary and Tertiary Institutes of Mauritius highlighting usage, purpose, time spent, impact and influence, level of trust and the future role of social media, this explorative study examines the impact of social networking sites on the lifestyles of Mauritian youth and its effectiveness in nation building.

Introduction

Social Networking Sites (SNS's) have become imperative to the lives of youth today. They are a compulsive and addictive behavior to our modern adolescence. Facebook, whatsApp, twitter, Orkut, LinkedIn and other networking sites have not only given them a platform to interact, discuss and remain in touch with their loved ones who live at places across the globe but also to voice their opinions on social issues. It has created nothing less than a revolution across the world. The recent *Vire Mam* for general election recently held in Mauritius, *Jan Lokpal Bill Movement* led by Anna Hajare and his team, and *Nirbhaya Gang Rape Case Movement* in Delhi are uprising examples of Social Networking Sites where youths created mass awareness across the society. They not only participated to create a movement but also voiced out their opinions through the various social networking sites mobilizing people to sign online petitions, sending them across to the respective authorities. It was an eye opening example for any country and government to understand the power of Social networking sites. The Social Networking Sites have not only made a significant change in their personal and social lives, but also played a crucial role in breaking boundaries, crossing nations and enabling them to communicate and share their views on issues like violation of human rights, girl's education, adverse effects of global warming, wrong deeds of political leaders, crime against women, corruption etc.

On one hand where social networking sites empower the youth and enable them to grow up their social circle in term of their own acquaintances, on the other hand it also raises many questions about their life styles, safety, privacy and legal issues. In this project I would like to highlight the impact of these networking sites on the life styles of Mauritian youths. It is not only because this a very subjective issue to make opinion about their thought but also about the change in their sociological and psychological behaviors.

Social Networking Sites in Mauritius

Social media in Mauritius is run by young and educated youths. According to Analysis in 2012, Social Media in Mauritius saw a tremendous growth in the rise of the number of users and their participations spent their time on Social Networking Sites. While Telecom Regulatory Authority of Mauritius has written their report that there has been rapid rise in the number of internet users in Mauritius. The number of users has reached 700 thousand in 2012. Broadband too has seen a significant growth in 2012 with 400 thousand users (57%) are

educated young people. Mauritian migrate to Australia, Canada, and European countries for education and jobs and most of them are constant touch with family and friends which led to the rise in usage of social networks and increased even more, as Foreign companies set up offices in Mauritius employing thousands of people here, Mauritian using more technology products like mobiles, laptops, other computing devices like PCs, tablets and finally the voyeuristic appeal with open networks drove the usage further. Most popular social networking site in Mauritius is Facebook as around 58% is dominated by male and mostly the young students and professionals in the age group of 14-24 are dominating the social media usage followed by the 25-35 age group. They spend hours every month on the various social networking sites and actively engage with friends and others. Most of the users are using social media to stay in touch with friends, track and update their activities, social gaming, follow groups and communities, discuss social, and entertainment topics and also look for information about brands, products and also provide their feedback.

Literature Review

Social media depends on web based technologies to create a platform through which individuals and communities share, discuss, and modify user generated content. The impacts include substantial changes to communication between organizations, communities and individuals. Social networking is defined as "the use of dedicated websites and applications to communicate with other users or to find people with similar interests to one's own" (Oxford Dictionary, 2011). Maria-Webster dictionary the definition of social media is "forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content". Another definition includes web and mobile-based technology that encourages users to interact with each other for creating and exchanging user generated content. A recent study found that college students use Facebook, a popular social networking site, to sustain their social assets [1]. They use Facebook to stay linked with people with whom they used to be more closely involved, e.g., former classmates.

A related study investigated whether college students use Facebook for 'social searching 'or 'social browsing' [2]. Social searching occurs when a Facebook user looks up particular individuals he or she already knows or has become aware of via an offline connection in order to learn more about them. Social browsing, on the other hand, occurs when users try to find

strangers online whom they would like to meet offline. Overwhelmingly, college students are using Facebook for social searching [3, 4].

In one of the first academic studies of privacy and Social Networking Sites, gross and acquits and analyzed Carnegie Mellon University Facebook profile and examined how individuals disclose information and protect privacy on face book, finding that most users share personal information open and few modify their default privacy setting for increased protection [5]. According to a report published by office of communications, UK (Ofcom), (2008), social networkers differ in their attitude to social networking sites and in their behavior while using them. Qualitative research indicates that sites users and tend to fall into several distinct group based on their behavior and attitude. [6]

Alpha Socializers- people who used sites in intense shorts to flirt, meet new people, and are entertained.

Attention Seekers- people who craved attention and comments from others, often by posting photos and customizing their profile.

Followers - peoples who joined sites to keep up what their peers were doing.

Functional- people who tended to be single minded in using sites for a particular purpose. [7]

Social media have evolved to include tools and practices that were not conceived of only a few years ago. Social media combines the three levels of communication. The first level is visible, and can be defined as obvious patterns and behaviors, along with technology, buildings and artifacts. The second level is less visible and involves cultural communication; that is, how people communicate both verbally and nonverbally. At the third level it is made up of the 'ideas, basic assumptions, values and beliefs held by a society' and is almost invisible. If communication can be divided into three realms of words, material things and behavior then social media provide an interesting and complex challenge, as they bridge the three levels of culture and communication. For many people, well-known social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter typify social media. The sites have become enormously popular across demographics of race, age and gender, and have hundreds of millions of users.

Social media, primarily social networking sites as we know today has evolved brilliantly. What started from a small endeavor to stay in contact has resulted through its evolution into a huge network of sites that serve the purpose of connecting millions of individuals, groups and communities providing them a platform to discuss, share and spread their ideas. The history of social media is a fascinating one. One cannot have a complete understanding of it without dwelling on the aspect of its origin. As early as in 1978, Jef Raskin at Apple Computer Inc., Ward Christensen and Randy Suess, two members of the Chicago Area Computer Hobbyists Exchange, and employees of IBM were working to make history i.e. the birth of world's first social network. It all started with former IBM employee Christensen's simple concept.

Christensen and Suess developed a virtual system named Dubbed CBBS (Computerized Bulletin Board System), where users could post public messages similar to an office notice board. It was capable of using user's own MODEM file transfer protocol. CBBS was created to inform the group members about meetings and important announcements without placing dozen of phone calls. As more members started joining the talk and sharing information through individual postings, the early makings of a small virtual community began to emerge. There has been a sharp rise in the number and types of social networking sites available and the variety of services that they offer. This chapter reviews some of the popular social networking sites like Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, Hi5, MySpace, Ning, Xing, Friendster, Tumblr, Classmates, Vine, Meetup, Ask.fm, WhatsApp, Viber, WeChat.

Social networking sites provide a platform to people to interact using the internet. Social media diminishes geography, economizes time, demolishes hierarchy and erases identity. It is the fastest way of communication. One can also share photos, videos and audios by just a click. It provides a vehicle for visual communications cutting across borders and is a good measure of expressing love and affection like parents communicating with children abroad or siblings settled across the globe.

Social media is also used as a source of recreation. Many people derive a sense of pleasure from the use of social media. Social networking sites are mostly blue in color, and this has a psychological reasoning behind it. The color blue is said to have a calming effect on the human brain. Hence, many users also derive a sense of enjoyment by spending time on such sites. It provides a medium through which one is constantly connected with friends and family

instilling a sense of security and belonging. Facebook, one of the most popular social networking sites, also known as the Social Capital of the internet offers the same advantages. One can look for the people they know and can 'friend' them by just a click. It offers features such as the news feed which keeps the user updated about the movement of their 'friends'. One can update his status, upload photos, join groups and also play games on Facebook. The new and much hyped social networking sites are a frontier that is rich with opportunities, threats and risks. It is majorly a platform to perform various tasks like instant messaging profoundly known as email, downloading songs, posting pictures. With the positive impacts come the negatives too, thus one must constantly keep a tab of what one is posting online. Social Media has in the recent years gained a lot of importance, people use it to socialize, gather information almost for 30 years (Carton, S. (2009)).

Social networking sites which enable the people to develop their personal networking have been growing manifolds in recent years. Social Networking Sites provide a new method of communicating employing computers as a collaborative tool to accelerate group formation and escalate the scope and influence of the group (Kane, Fichman, Gallaugher, & Glaser, 2009; Pfeil, Arjan, & Zaphiris, 2009; Ross et al., 2009). New developments in technology have made internet accessible to a wider population. People all over the world are now sustaining relationships with others through various social networking sites like Facebook, twitter, MySpace etc. Social Networking Sites have infiltrated lives of many with amazing rapidity to become an important platform in computer related communication. These social media sites let those who are on it make profiles of themselves where they can add pictures, statuses and other personal information and share it with people via various applications and groups on the internet. In this information age, these Social Networking Sites are largely growing making young adults its main targets. Many of these young adults use social media networks to communicate with family, friends, and even strangers. Social media sites have created new and non-personal ways for people to interact with others and young adults have taken advantage of this technological trend. Social media affects college student's communication with others and their own self-concept.

Another study was conducted to analyse which Social Network Sites was trending among the avid users. Among the largely growing Social Networking Sites, Facebook seemed to top the list with maximum users. Facebook statistics indicate that its global members have rapidly

increased from 150 million to about 350 million between January and December 2009 (Eldon, 2009). Facebook is used primarily by students to maintain relationships with individuals they are acquainted with who live near and far (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). Facebook makes it simpler to communicate with multiple people at one time. Social media may also make it easier for users to monitor activities of people they have not seen in a while as well as reconnecting with new and old friends (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010).

Overview of the Research Objectives

An important burning issue for our society today is the upcoming impact of social networking sites on our youth. A research study for the purpose has been conducted on youths with a view to understand the impact on their lifestyles and also to know the level of consciousness on the community issues like human rights, sexual assaults, women harassment, gender discrimination, environment concerns, political concerns, nation development etc. For these purpose a study was conducted on 300 young people mostly through personal interaction to collect questionnaire for the same mainly from secondary and tertiary institutions of Mauritius.

- To study the awareness level of usage of different social networking sites.
- To study the purposes for which the Social Networking Sites are used.
- To find out level of trust over the information received from social networking sites.
- To determine the likely impact and influence on the life styles of Mauritian youth.
- To study the type of social issues discussed over social networking sites.
- To understand the effectiveness of Social Networking Sites for social development and nation building.

Research Methodology

The present research gives an impending approach to the awareness level and the purposes of the Social Networking Sites of the Mauritian youth. It also analyses the impact of the networking sites on their lifestyles and how effective they have been on the various social movements like the recent general elections, creating brand identity of leaders and other socio-economic issues like gender discrimination, unemployment, environment concerns etc. Further, it also   identifies the effectiveness of social media for nation development in the times ahead. A questionnaire was administered to collect data for the same and it was analyzed using tools like tables, pie-charts, bar graphs.

The Questionnaire

Keeping in mind the objectives of the study a structured questionnaire was designed. The questionnaire has 23 questions altogether divided into three sections. The sections relate to**:**

Section I: Personal Information of the respondents

Section II: Types of Social Network Sites and Usage

Section III: Impact and Influence of Social Networking Sites

Section I: Personal Information

Section I relates to collecting demographic details of the respondents pertaining to gender, age, educational qualification, category and income.

Section II: Types of Social Network Sites and Usage

This section seeks to obtain responses relating to whether the respondents had accounts on the networking sites, which Social Network Sites were more favored, time spent on them, purposes for which they use and the information about themselves that is provided over these sites.

Section III: Impact and Influence of Social Network Sites

Section III contained eleven questions in all and the responses were rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree**.** This section obtained responses for impact and influence on the lifestyles, level of trust, social issues discussed and the future role of social media

Sample

A non-probability convenience sampling was used to collect responses from a total of 300 people mainly from secondary and tertiary institutes of Mauritius. No bias was involved in sampling. Those who could be conveniently approached, were willing to be interacted and are active members of the social networking sites were part of our sample. The summarized demographic details of the sample are presented below in the table:

Table: Demographic characteristics of the sample

| Demographic characteristics		Mauritius(N= 300)	
		No.	%
Gender	Males	168	56 %
	Female	132	44 %
Age	Below 20 yrs.	79	26 %
	20 – 30 yrs.	167	56 %
	30 – 40 yrs.	44	15 %
	Above 40 yrs.	10	3 %
Edu. Qualification	Post-Graduation	45	15 %
	Graduation	125	42 %
	Others	130	43 %
Category	Student	200	67%
	Working	55	18 %
	Non- Working	45	15 %
Income	None	125	42 %
	10000-30000	155	52 %
	30000-50000	20	6 %

Demographic Analysis

A total of 300 respondents constitute our sample size. The respondents represent a heterogeneous combination of gender, age, qualification and income. A brief description of the same is as follows:

Table: Gender Classification

| Gender	Respondents (300)	
	No.	%
Males	168	56 %
Females	132	44 %

The above table shows that of the total respondents 56 % are males and 44 % females. The representation can fairly be assumed to be reasonably equal.

Gender Split
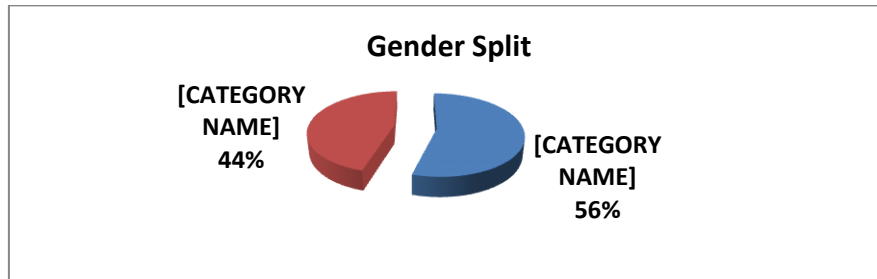
Table: Age classification

Age	Respondents (300)	
	No.	**%**
Below 20 years (teenagers)	79	26 %
20-30 Years (youth)	167	56 %
30-40 Years (young adults)	44	15 %
Above 40 Years (adults)	10	3 %

The table depicts the age classification. The youth represented in the age bracket of 20-30 years is the highest at 56 % and of the total 97 % is represented by the young generation.


Age split
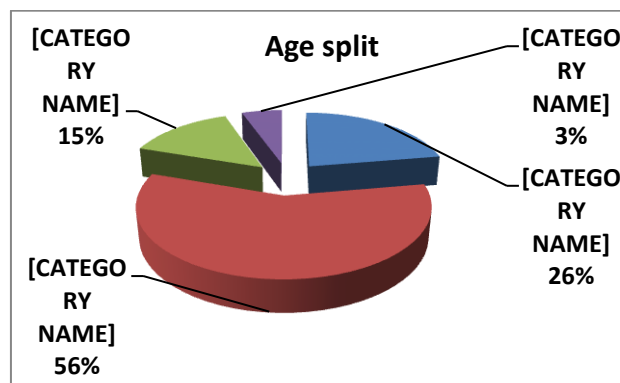
Summary of the Demographic Analysis

An insight into the demographic details of the respondents reveals a high concentration of males (56 %) to females (44 %). 97 % of the total is below 40 years. The concentration of graduates is high. 67 % represented the student category and 18 % working class. In all 58 % of our youth respondents are earning.

Table: Membership of Social Networking Sites

Member of Social Networking Sites	Respondents (300)	
	No.	%
Yes	292	97 %
No	8	3 %

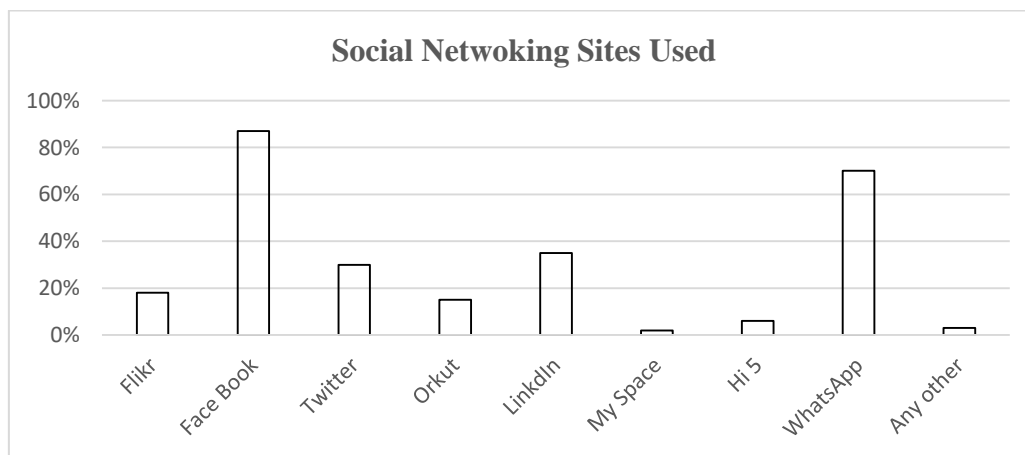|	Respondents (300)	
	Yes	No
Males	164	4
Females	128	4
Total	**292**	**8**
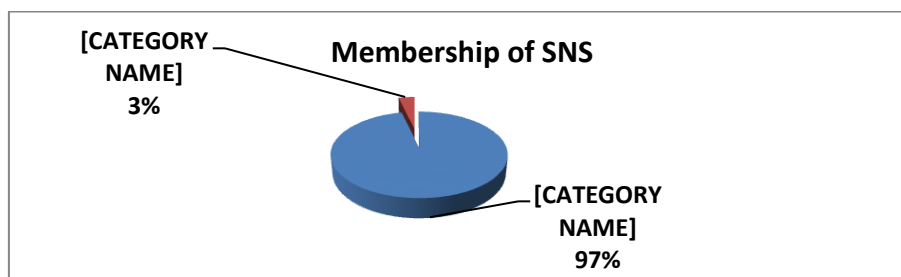
From the pie diagram above a remarkable 97% of our sample was member of one or more social networking sites which clearly makes a strong statement "being a member in one or more social networking sites is a status quo" among Mauritian youth. Among them 54 % were males and 43 % females. Those who were not member of any Social Networking Sites, the reasons identified were do not have regular computer access, do not have time and not interested.

Table: Social Networking sites used

Name of the Social Networking Sites used	Respondents	
	No.	**%**
Flickr	52	18 %
Face Book	254	87 %
Twitter	88	30 %
Orkut	44	15 %
LinkedIn	102	35 %
My Space	6	2 %
Hi 5	18	6 %
WhatsApp	204	70 %
Any other	9	3 %

There was an overlapping pattern in the membership of social networking sites where 87 % of the respondents use Face Book and 70 % WhatsApp, others included Blogspot.com, Wayn, Hi5, Style FM, Ning, Netlog, Friendster, eBuddy and VampireFreaks. Facebook and WhatsApp were identified as the most popular among the Mauritian youth. The results for the same are graphically displayed in the bar chart


Table: Time spent on the Social Networking Sites

Number of Hrs. (in a week)	Respondents (292)	
	No.	%
0 – 5 Hrs	6	2 %
6 – 10 Hrs	93	31 %
11 – 20 Hrs	99	33 %
21 – 30 Hrs	75	25 %
31 – 40 Hrs	27	9 %
More than 40 hrs	-	-

Time spent by 60% respondents on the Social Networking Sites are more than 11hrs. Further the table below shows the time spent by males and females separately.

Number of Hrs. (in a week)	Respondents (300))	
	Males	Females
0 – 5 Hrs	0	6
6 – 10 Hrs	29	64
11 – 20 Hrs	64	35
21 – 30 Hrs	47	25
31 – 40 Hrs	20	10
More than 40 Hrs	-	-
Total	160	140

The above table depicts the time spent by males and females on the Social Networking Sites. 46 % females spent 6-10hrs where as 46% male spent 11-20hrs on Social Networking Sites, 42% male spent 20-40hrs where as 25% female spent 20-40hrs on Social Networking Sites, Male youth spends more hours on the Social Networking Sites.

No. of Hours Spent (weekly)
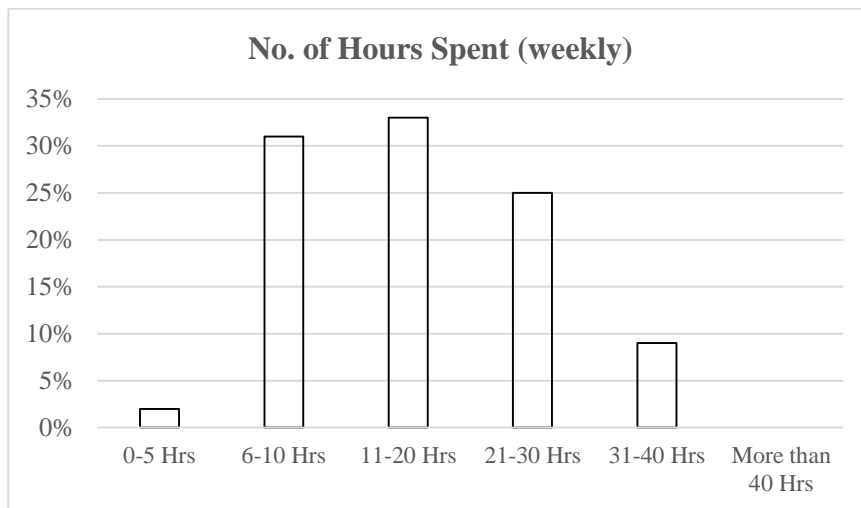
Summary of Frequency Analysis

96 % of the youth have an account over Social Networking Sites. Facebook is the most popular followed by WhatsApp. Males spend more hours than their Female counterparts (almost about 3 hours per day). In terms of the reasons/ purposes of Social Networking Sites, a sizable majority 84 % use it for chatting and networking. 56 % of the time spent is on enhancing education and knowledge. An important revelation emerged in the context of online shopping and expressing opinions over issues of social and political concerns wherein both are gaining momentum over the social sites.

Descriptive Analysis

Table: Impact and influence of SNS on the lifestyles of Mauritian Youth

S. No.	Statements	Respondents (N = 300)	
		No.	**%**
	Being part of SNS is important and significant	288	96%
2.	Profiles & updates reflect status & personality	174	58%
3.	Social Network Sites Influences lifestyles		
a.	Personal growth/ development	108	36%

b.	Professional growth	96	32%
c.	Relationships	153	51%
d.	Education & Knowledge	156	52%
e.	Health & Fitness	36	12%

The above table describes the score of the youth on the impact and influence of Social Networking Sites on their lifestyles. For the youth of Mauritius being part of Social Networking Sites today is important (96%) as also the updates are a reflection of their status and personality (58%). The dimensions of lifestyles respondents for education and knowledge (52%), relationships (51%) to be the most influenced, high ranging between agree to strongly agree which indicates the fact that for the Mauritian youth today.
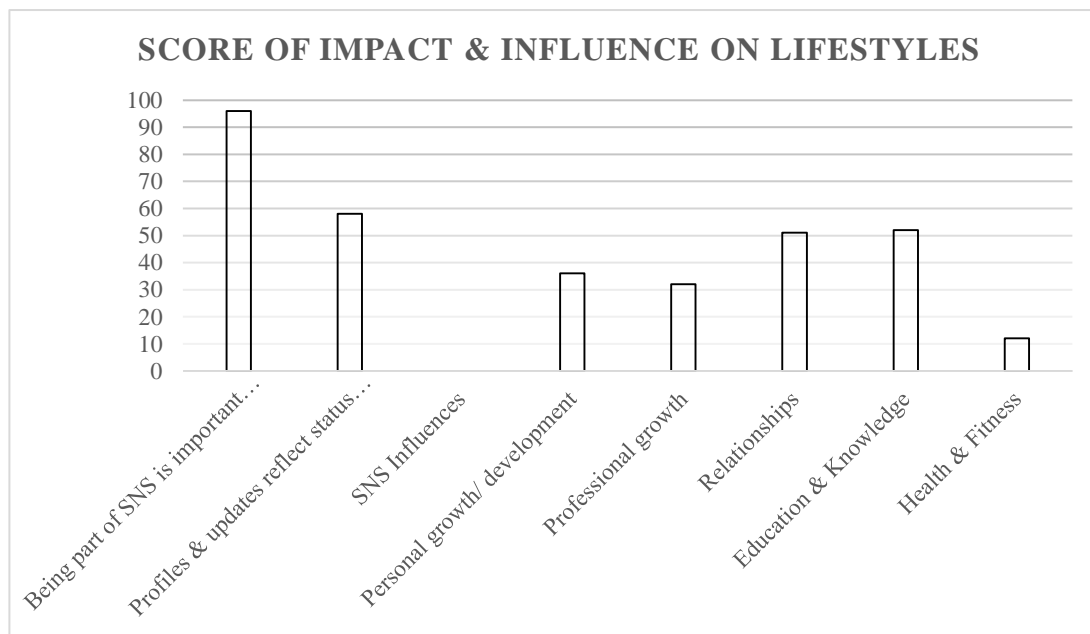
Table: Level of Trust on the Social Networking Sites

S. No.	Statements	Respondents (N = 300)	
		No.	%
	Privacy of my information is protected on the Social Networking Sites		64%

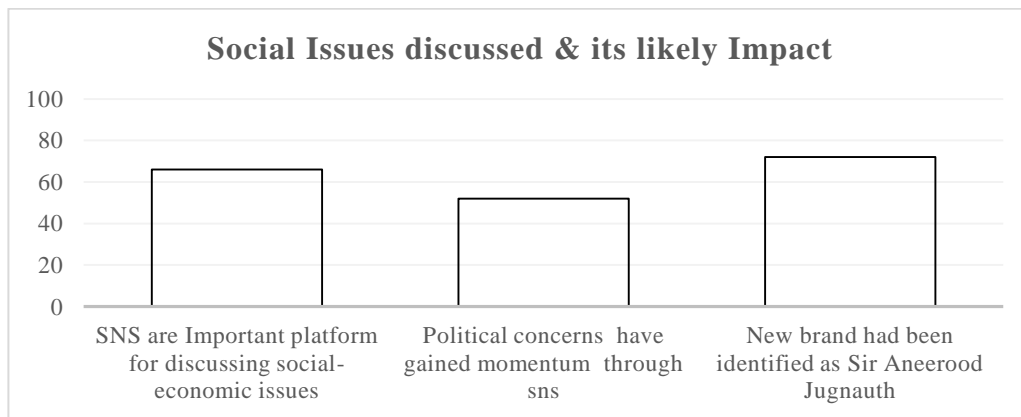| 2.	Trust on Social Networking Sites that they will not misuse personal details	198	68%
3.	Information collected from social Networking Sites is true	144	48%

The above table depicts the descriptive scores of the level of trust and privacy from the respondents of Mauritius. Privacy is one of the most controversial concerns over the internet and as we become more social on the internet our privacy becomes vulnerable. Amongst the dimensions identified, 'personal data will not be misused' was rated the highest and 'information on Social Networking Sites is true rated low.

Table: Social issues discussed and its likely impact

S. No.	Statements	Respondents (N = 300)	
		No.	%
	SNS are Important platform for discussing social-economic issues	198	66%
2.	Political concerns have gained momentum through Social Networking Sites.	156	52%
3.	New brand had been identified as Sir Anerood Jugnauth in the recent General elections	216	72%

As it can be inferred from the table above on the social issues discussed, they have gained momentum in the recent past. This is indicative of the fact that the youth today agrees that social issues, political concerns, and opinions on elections are widely being discussed on the Social Networking Sites and believe that it help in building brand identities to the representatives.

Social Issues discussed & its likely Impact

(Bar chart showing three categories)

- SNS are Important platform for discussing social-economic issues: ~66
- Political concerns have gained momentum through sns: ~52
- New brand had been identified as Sir Aneerood Jugnauth: ~72

(Y-axis: 0 to 100)

Summary of Demographic Analysis

The results of the above descriptive analysis are summarized as under: Being part of Social Networking Sites is important for the youth today as they reflect the status and lifestyles. They identify education and knowledge followed by personal growth and development to be the most influenced. This could be attributed the fact that majority of our respondents (about 60 %) were students. For the level of trust on the sites, youth seemed to be more open in giving and sharing information on Social Networking Sites. Though they are not much sure of the privacy of their personal details and the authenticity of the information obtained through the Social Networking Sites.

There is a general consensus among the Mauritius youth that Social Networking Sites are important platforms for discussing issues, more upfront for socio-economic issues whereas youth are also concerns for recent politics of Mauritius and most of them are agreed on new political identity created by Sir Aniroodh Jugnauth through social media.There is no denying to the fact that social media is fast emerging and gaining a significant role for the society, in terms of creating greater awareness and their role in national development. Youth today believe that the groups/ communities on the Social Networking Sites will create better and greater awareness and also have an important role in the nation development. My hypothesis 'Youth participation is significant in social development and nation building'

Findings

Age, Gender and Income were identified as distinguishing demographic criterions influencing lifestyles of Mauritian youth through Social Networking Sites. More peculiar is the sharing and

disclosing profiles and updates seemed to be more casual and open for Mauritian youth and also the impact on the relationships as found to be of much concern.Another highlighting point was about the concern of privacy wherein the respondents expressed more confidence and more apprehensiveness to the trust and privacy concerns over social Networking Sites.

The 'future role of social media' across the country is an indication that socio-economic issues, political concerns are gaining momentum and are being constructively used to build new brand identities. There is no denying to the fast emerging role of social media for knowledge, understanding and nation development. It has grown from 'going viral' to creating 'meaningful engagements.'

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