

## GENDER ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE PATTERNS AMONG THE YOUTH IN LAKHIPUR TOWN OF CACHAR DISTRICT

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### ABSTRACT

The tremendous growth of social media has displayed the talent, skill, ideas and creation of the youth. Social media have both advantages and disadvantages for the youth. They enhance the learning ability of the students, the productivity of employees and the formation of social capital of the society. Unlike computer, the smartphone has engaged more number of the urban youth on social networking sites. The creative contents of social media such as write-ups, photography and so on are sources of inspiration for the netizens. This paper attempts to find out the use patterns of social media among the youth in Lakhipur town of Cachar district located in Assam. The primary data were collected from the sampled youth selected using the stratified random sampling technique. The study depicts that WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter have dominated the social media platforms. Moreover, the learning materials available on YouTube provide supplement to the youth in academics. Moral restrictions prevail in educational and work environment; hence, the youth find it convenient to use social media at home. The main purposes of using social media among the youth include to stay connected with far-off friends, upload photos and videos, send and receive messages supported by multimedia, give views on updates of online friends and other users, meet new people, build profile, connect with family members and relatives, and search news. It is concluded that social media are the extension of traditional face-to-face interaction that have provided immense opportunities to the youth.

Key words: Internet, social media, use patterns, gender, youth

## INTRODUCTION

The society consists of individuals and groups who rely on each other in some way or the other through the network of social relationships. It has witnessed ups and downs of civilizations throughout the ages. The process of globalisation has brought innovative changes and challenges for the masses of the society. One such domain without which the individuals cannot survive in the present information society that emerged due to the process of globalisation is the communication media. The integration of old communication technologies with new communication technologies has drastically altered the scenario of the society (Neelamalar & Chitra 2009). Internet emerged as an initiative of Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) of the United States Department of Defence in 1958 to fulfill the demands of defence and science and technology. There is a growing impetus for Web 2.0 Internet-enabled services like social media which have contributed towards the expansion of social connections among individuals beyond physical proximity. They can connect with related ones at any point of time through social media sites. The 'Jio wave', launched by the Reliance Communications Limited in 2015, increased the number of Internet and social media users at an exponential rate. India is placed among other countries in the world with over 250 million user base of social media. However, there prevails digital divide and gender disparity in using social media as majority of the urban youth are social media users whereas males are frequent users of social media than females. Social media help youth participate in a range of activities such as social networking, blogging, instant messaging, uploading and sharing their own creations, and collaborating with people in various ways (Vossen & Hagemann 2007). The domain of social media has emerged as one of the major fields of enquiry in the academic research of social sciences. Consequently, many empirical studies have been conducted in this field. A study conducted on the effects of social networking sites examined the role of frequent use of social networking sites on a sample of 536 Nigerian students drawn from three higher learning institutions in Mubi, Adamawa state, Nigeria; namely, the Federal Polytechnic, Adamawa State University and College of Health Technology. Of the sample, 56% of students were male and 44% were female. Majority of them

(46%) belonged to the age group of 22-25 years, followed by the age groups of 26-40 years (30%) and 18-20 years (20%). The study revealed that most of them (97%) were aware of the social networking sites they used; Facebook was most used by the students (95%), followed by 2go (81%), YouTube (28%), Twitter (21%), MySpace (8%) and Skynet (2%); 52% of them used the social media for about 2-4 hours per day, followed by one hour (39%); 51% of respondents used the social networking sites to remain in touch with friends, followed by to pass time (28%) and to solve social problems (16%) and 74% to do academic assignments (Camilia, Ibrahim & Dalhatu 2013: 39-46). A study explored the extent of use, benefits and skills acquired by the learners of the uses of social networking technologies in higher education in a sample of 124 students drawn from five institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe; namely, Harare Institute of Technology, Harare Polytechnic, Midlands State University/TRUST Academy, University of Zimbabwe and Women's University in Africa. Of the students 72.8% were male and 27.2% were female. 66.4% belonged to 21-25 years of age group, followed by the age group of 26-30 years (15.2%). It informed that most (79.2%) of the students used laptops for Internet connection, followed by smart phone (70.4%), desktop (56.8%) and cell phones (40%); 64.8% accessed to Internet from computer labs on campus; 87.2% accessed to Internet once a day; 96.8% had social networking profile; most learners used Facebook (93.6%) and MySpace (83.2%), followed by LinkedIn (43.2%) and Twitter (41.6%); 31% used social networking sites for social activities; 67.8% spent less than 10 hours per week on social activities; 76.6% were in favour of use of the sites in higher education; 54.8% used the sites in doing group projects or assignments and 87.9% opposed any ban on the sites in universities (Zanamwe, Rupere & Kufandirimbwa 2013: 8-18). Social media influencing the varying mentality of the youths has been overlooked as a burning issue in today's Indian scenario. An exploratory study was conducted on 100 youths of Delhi-NCR region between the age group of 18-30 years mostly through email or send link of the structured questionnaire on various social sites to know the level of awareness on social issues and how far social networking sites awakened today's youth in expressing their views on current and burning issues like corruption, human rights, girl's education, etc. It was revealed from the

study that all but one respondent had easy Internet access; Facebook (33%) was the most popular website of all the other social networking sites, followed by YouTube (19%), LinkedIn (15%), Orkut (14%) and Twitter (11%); where males preferred spending more than 30 minutes per session females tried to restrict themselves between 10-30 minutes; almost 90% of the youth in the age group of 20-40 years thought that social networking sites were a tool for mass mobilisation and rapid information dissemination through Internet; the corruption was the most popular issue discussed over the social networking sites followed by human rights and gender inequality. Though women were spending less time on these sites mainly for 10-30 minutes, yet they were more sensitive towards these social issues (Jain, Gupta & Anand 2012: 36-43). The review of literature reveals that there is the need to study the growing importance of social media in the urban setting of a peripheral region in North-East India. Hence, the paper attempts to find out the use patterns of social media among the youth in Lakhipur town of Cachar district of Barak Valley in south Assam.

## THE UNIVERSE

Lakhipur town is situated at 24°8' N latitudes and 93°02' E longitudes in Cachar district of Assam. The area of Lakhipur town is 1.66 sq km. There are 2,011 households in Lakhipur town. The total population of the town is 10,277, out of which there are 5,168 (50.29%) males and 5,109 (49.71%) females. The population of the town has increased by 4.8% during 2001-2011. The child population of the town is 1,118 (10.88%). By caste distribution, 9,962 (96.93%) belong to General Castes, 301 (2.93%) belong to Scheduled Castes and 14 (0.14%) belong to Scheduled Tribes in Lakhipur town. The sex ratio is 989 females per '000 males and the literacy rate is 90.97% in the town (Govt. of India 2011).

## THE METHODOLOGY

The study is based on the social network theory which depicts how digitally interconnected people maintain social relationship in the network-based society. Lakhipur town constituted the universe and the youth from diverse socio-cultural background were units of

analysis of the study. According to the voter list of the selected ward in Lakhipur town in 2017, the total number of youth was 318 (151 males and 167 females). Considering the large size of the universe and units of the study, 3% of the youth was selected to represent the strata. The primary data were collected from a sample of 10 youth (5 males and 5 females) from the age group of 19-35 years selected applying stratified random sampling technique. The questionnaire was administered to collect data from the sampled youth in 2018.

#### THE RESPONDENTS

Of the total youth, three fifths (60%) belong to the age group of 26-35 years and two fifths (40%) are from 19-25 years of age group. A half of the youth (50%) belong to the General Castes, subsequently followed by Scheduled Castes (SCs) (40%) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) (10%). All of the youth follow Hinduism. Four fifths (80%) belong to the Bengali linguistic community and the rest (20%) speak Hindi. Two fifths (40%) are graduate in Arts/ Science/Commerce disciplines, over one fourth (30%) read upto H.S. School and levels of education of one tenth (10%), each, of the youth are primary school, H.S.L.C. (matriculate) and post graduation. The occupation of a half of the youth (50%) is service, subsequently followed by self-employed (30%) and housewife (20% of females). The type of family of a half (50%), each, of the youth have nuclear and joint family. The monthly income of family members of near about three fifths of the youth (57.69%) ranges from Rs 10,001/- to Rs 20,000/-, subsequently followed by upto Rs 10,000/- (30.77%) and Rs 20,001/- to Rs 30,000/- (11.54%).

#### THE GENDER ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE PATTERNS

The use patterns of social media among the youth indicate the year of social media used first time, type of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) used for accessing to social media sites, social media sites used most, place of comfort to use social media sites, time spent on social media use in 24 hours, purpose of using social media, family members using social media and reaction of the youth on inability to log into social media sites due to poor Internet connectivity. The use patterns of social media are found among 10 respondents in

Lakhipur town which are analysed taking into account their categories of gender as a social factor. This section discusses these patterns of social media use.

### **Year of Social Media used First Time**

The advent of social media in the life of the youth selected from Lakhipur town happened in the year 2010. This decade shows an exponential growth of social media users which depends upon the accessibility of ICTs. The youth were beginners in using social media who started their journey as social media users in 2010, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 which are depicted in the following table:

Table 1  
Year of Social Media Used First Time among the Youth by Gender

Year of Social Media Used First Time	No. of Youths (%)		Total (%)
	Male (%)	Female (%)	
2010	2 (40)	--	2 (20)
2012	1 (20)	--	1 (10)
2014	1 (20)	1 (20)	2 (20)
2015	--	1 (20)	1 (10)
2016	1 (20)	2 (40)	3 (30)
2017	--	1 (20)	1 (10)
Total (%)	5 (100)	5 (100)	10 (100)

The table shows that over one fourth of the youth (30%) begun to use social media for the first time in 2016, subsequently followed by the years 2010, 2014, 2012, 2015 and 2017. By gender, two fifths (40%), each, of males and females became social media users in 2010 and 2016 respectively. Males grasped the technological features of Internet at an early stage whereas females became active users at later stage.

### **Types of ICT Used for Accessing to Social Media Sites**

The Internet-enabled applications and services allow the youth to assemble, retrieve and manage data. Thus, social media are the converged applications of Internet which can be

accessed by the youth through desktop computer, laptop computer, notebook PC and smartphone. These are shown in the following table:

Table 2  
ICT Used for Accessing to Social Media Sites by the Youth by Gender

ICT Used for Accessing to Social Media Sites	No. of Youths (%)		Total (%) N=10
	Male (%) N=5	Female (%) N=5	
Desktop computer	2 (40)	3 (60)	5 (50)
Laptop computer	3 (60)	2 (40)	5 (50)
Notebook PC	1 (20)	--	1 (10)
Smartphone	5 (100)	5 (100)	10 (100)

The table depicts that all of the youth use smartphone to access to social media, half (50%), each, of the youth use social media through desktop and laptop computer, and the rest (10%) possess notebook computer which is used by them to access to social media sites. More males (60%) than females (40%) use laptop for accessing to social networking sites whereas more females (60%) than males (40%) visit social networking sites through desktop computer. Now-a-days, smartphone has replaced other computing devices due to its portability.

### Social Media Sites Used Most

Many social media platforms have attracted the youth. The common social media sites used by the youth include Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, Google+ and LinkedIn. The table highlights the distribution of the youth into social media sites often used by them:

Table 3  
Social Media Sites Used Most by the Youth by Gender

Social Media Sites Used Most	No. of Youths (%)		Total (%) N=10
	Male (%) N=5	Female (%) N=5	
Facebook	5 (100)	4 (80)	9 (90)
WhatsApp	5 (100)	5 (100)	10 (100)
Twitter	3 (60)	1 (20)	4 (40)
YouTube	3 (60)	2 (40)	5 (50)
Google+	3 (60)	--	3 (30)
LinkedIn	3 (60)	--	3 (30)



The table reveals that all of the youth use WhatsApp, most of the youth (90%) use Facebook, a half (50%) are users of YouTube, two fifths (40%) use Twitter and over one fourth (30%), each, are users of Google+ and LinkedIn. This pattern is similar across the two genders. Thus, WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube are widely used social media sites among the youth because they provide messaging services through stand-alone apps on the smartphone.

### **Place of Comfort to Use Social Media Sites**

The place of comfort to use social media sites denotes the comfort zone where there is the absence of restriction in using social media. The comfort zone can be home, neighbour's house, work place and outside of home. The following table shows the distribution of the youth into the place of comfort for using social *networking sites*:

Table 4  
Places of Comfort to Use Social Media Sites among the Youth by Gender

Place of Comfort to Use Social Media Sites	No. of Youths (%)		Total (%) N=10
	Male (%) N=5	Female (%) N=5	
Home	4 (80)	5 (100)	9 (90)
Neighbour's house	1 (20)	--	1 (10)
Work place	4 (80)	1 (20)	5 (50)
Outside of home	1 (20)	--	1 (10)

The table depicts that most of the youth (90%) feel comfortable in using social media at home, a half (50%) use them at work place and one tenth (10%), each, use these sites at neighbour's house and outside of home. By gender, males usually use social media at home and workplace for keeping in touch with family members and relatives residing outside, and colleagues and acquaintances. However, females maintain social relationships with bosom buddies, kins and family members on social media platforms. The working females maintain social ties with co-workers on social networking sites.



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**Time Spent Daily on Social Media Use**

The daily time span of using social media denotes how much time they spend on social media sites. They include less than 30 minutes, 30 minutes – 1 hr, 1.30 – 2.00 hrs, 2.00 – 2.30 hrs, more than 2.30 hrs and always online. None of the youth is found using social media for 1 hr – 1.30 hrs in Lakhipur town. These are depicted in the following table:

Table 5  
Daily Time Span of Social Media Use among the Youth by Gender

Daily Time Span of Social Media Use	No. of Youths (%)		Total (%)
	Male (%)	Female (%)	
Less than 30 minutes	--	3 (60)	3 (30)
30 minutes – 1 hr	1 (20)	2 (40)	3 (30)
1.30 – 2 hrs	1 (20)	--	1 (10)
2.00 – 2.30 hrs	1 (20)	--	1 (10)
More than 2.30 hrs	1 (20)	--	1 (10)
Always online	1 (20)	--	1 (10)
Total (%)	5 (100)	5 (100)	10 (100)

The table reveals that over one fourth (30%), each, of the youth use social media for less than 30 minutes and 30 minutes – 1 hr and one tenth (10%), each, of the youth spend 1.30 – 2 hrs, 2.00 – 2.30 hrs, more than 2.30 hrs of time everyday on social media sites. By gender, males spend more time on social media sites than females.

**Purposes of Using Social Media**

The youth use social media for various reasons such as building profile, linking up with family members, keeping in touch with friends, uploading photos and videos, downloading photos and videos shared by others, posting updates about life events, sending messages, discussing social issues on the profile, discussing social issues with specific online groups, communities and/on pages, giving opinion on posts of friends and other people, reconnecting with friends and people of the past contacts, meeting new friends and people, educational purpose, advertising expertise, getting information on trending topics, easy interaction,

cheapness of the media, passing of time, keeping up with events of the friends' life, collecting information about celebrities and business purpose. The distribution of the youth into purposes of using social media is presented in the following table:

Table 6  
Purposes of Using Social Media among the Youth by Gender

Purpose of Using Social Media	No. of Youths (%)		Total (%) N=10
	Male (%) N=5	Female (%) N=5	
Building profile	3 (60)	--	3 (30)
Linking up with family members	1 (20)	2 (40)	3 (30)
Keeping in touch with friends	3 (60)	3 (60)	6 (60)
Uploading photos and videos	3 (60)	3 (60)	6 (60)
Downloading photos and videos shared by others	--	1 (20)	1 (10)
Posting updates about life events	--	1 (20)	1 (10)
Sending messages	2 (40)	2 (40)	4 (40)
Discussing social issues on one's profile	--	2 (40)	2 (20)
Discussing social issues with specific online groups, communities and/on pages	1 (20)	1 (20)	2 (20)
Giving opinion on posts of friends and other people	3 (60)	1 (20)	4 (40)
Reconnecting with friends and people of the past contacts	--	1 (20)	1 (10)
Meeting new friends and people	4 (80)	--	4 (40)
Educational purpose	--	1 (20)	1 (10)
Advertising expertise	2 (40)	1 (20)	3 (30)
Getting information on trending topics	2 (40)	1 (20)	3 (30)
Easy interaction	--	1 (20)	1 (10)
Cheapness of the media	1 (20)	--	1 (10)
Passing of time	2 (40)	2 (40)	4 (40)
Keeping up with events of the friends' life	--	1 (20)	1 (10)
Collecting information about celebrities	1 (20)	--	1 (10)
Business purpose	1 (20)	--	1 (10)

The main purposes of using social media among three fifths (60%), each, of the youth are keeping in touch with friends, and uploading photos and videos; two fifths (40%), each, use social media for sending messages, giving opinion on posts of friends and other people, meeting new friends and people, and passing of time; over one fourth (30%), each, use social media platform for building profile, linking up with family members, advertising expertise, getting information on trending topics; and discussing social issues on one's profile and discussing social issues with specific online groups, communities and/on pages are main reasons among one fifth (20%), each, of the youth. However, majority of males (80%) use social media for meeting

new friends and people whereas three fifths (60%), each, of females visit social media sites for keeping in touch with friends and uploading photos and videos.

### **Family Members Using Social Media**

The young generation maintains social relationship and connects with the people through social media platform. The family members of the youth such as brother, sister, husband, brother-in-law and sister-in-law are among other social media users in the family. The following table shows the distribution of the youth into the relationship of family members with the youth:

Table 7  
Family Members Using Social Media among the Youth by Gender

Family Member Using Social Media	No. of Youths (%)		Total (%) N=10
	Male (%) N=5	Female (%) N=5	
Brother	3 (60)	1 (20)	4 (40)
Sister	2 (40)	--	2 (20)
Husband	--	4 (80)	4 (40)
Brother-in-law	--	2 (40)	2 (20)
Sister-in-law	3 (60)	1 (20)	4 (40)

The table demonstrates that two fifths (40%), each, of the youth's brother, husband (of females) and sister-in-law in the family are social media users whereas sister (of males) and brother-in-law (of females) of one fifth (20%), each, of the youth have built profiles on social networking sites to communicate with the acquainted individuals.

### **Youth's Reaction on Inability to Log into Social Media Sites due to Poor Internet Connectivity**

The feelings of the youth when they are unable to log into social media sites due to poor Internet connectivity can be grouped into three categories; namely, feeling as being out of touch, disappointed and does not matter. The table presents the distribution of the youth into their feelings emerged as a result of lack of Internet connection:

Table 8  
Reaction on Inability to Log into Social Media Sites due to Poor Internet Connectivity among the Youth by Gender

Reaction on Inability to Log into Social Media Sites due to Poor Internet Connectivity	No. of Youths (%)		Total (%)
	Male (%)	Female (%)	
Out of touch	3 (60)	2 (40)	5 (50)
Disappointed	1 (20)	1 (20)	2 (20)
Does not matter	1 (20)	2 (40)	3 (30)
Total (%)	5 (100)	5 (100)	10 (100)

The table reveals that half of the total youth (50%) feel out of touch when they cannot access to social media accounts at the time of slow Internet connection, for over one fourth of them (30%) it does not matter whether they can access to social media sites or not and one fifth (20%) feel disappointed in facing poor Internet connectivity. By and large, similar pattern has emerged from the categories of gender.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion on major findings of the study is illustrated here:

1. Social media help the youth communicate and socialise with fellows, co-workers and people across different segments of the society. The advent of Internet marked the beginning of expanding social networks of the youth in the virtual world. In the last decade, i.e., 2010 onwards there was an exponential growth in the number of male and female social media users residing in Lakhipur town.
2. The mobile phone was used to make voice calls and send short messages ten years back. Now-a-days, smartphone is a small computer that has overtaken all necessary functions of desktop and laptop computer. It comes with stand-alone apps which do not require logging in social media accounts of the youth all the time. Hence, it is mostly preferred by them.
3. Of varieties of messaging services of social networking websites, WhatsApp and Facebook are widely used by the youth. WhatsApp is a stand-alone app available on the

smartphone. It is a chatting platform for the youth which does not require logging in unlike Facebook. Moreover, Facebook also requires better Internet connectivity to load pages and messages. At present, both WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger are integrated with each other.

4. Social media are the continuation of offline and face-to-face social interaction among the youth. They manage time for conversation on social media at home where they can develop creative ideas for educational attainment or have a conversation on pending works and find ways to complete them regardless of time and space. Majority of them spend one hour or more in a day on social networking sites.
5. Sociologically, social media play a significant role in establishing the connection among individuals and groups in the society through exchange of behaviour. The youth construct profiles on social media sites to stay connected with peers, relatives and family members who are near to and far away from them through instant messaging, share images and videos, meet new people and go through the news on web pages and links on social media platforms. The young family members in the family of the youth also use social media for these purposes. Social media platforms have also shaped the symbolic interaction of the youth.

## CONCLUSION

**The society has transformed into an information society characterised by the excessive proliferation of social media. Now-a-days, the process of communication among the people is maintained online, thereby restructuring and strengthening social relationships via social media. The top five social media platforms among the youth in the contemporary information society include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Instagram. They are blooming and unfolding their captivating attributes to the youth.** Social media provide opportunities to the youth which are not confined within a physical space. Social media promote writing contents in one's mother tongue, thereby encouraging the linguistic diversity within the

society. Thus, the bonding and bridging behaviour of the youth through social media lead to the development of social capital in the society.

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