

THE USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES (SNS) BY THE POST-GRADUATE STUDENTS

Dr Manzoor Hussain

Assistant Professor
Department of Sociology
University of Kashmir, Srinagar
E-mail: dr.manzoor_hussain@yahoo.co.in

Dr Fayaz Ahmad Loan

Documentation Officer
Centre of Central Asian Studies
University of Kashmir, Srinagar
E-mail: fayazlib@yahoo.co.in

Gousia Yaseen

Research Scholar
Department of Sociology
University of Kashmir, Srinagar

Abstract

Purpose of the study – The study aims to understand the use of social networking sites by the post-graduate students, Departments of Sociology and Social Work, University of Kashmir.

Research Design – The Department of Sociology and Department of Social Work, University of Kashmir were selected as a universe of the study. Later, the survey method of research was applied to conduct the study and questionnaire was used as a data collection tool. In order to obtain the accurate results, 50 percent of the post-graduate students were selected through the systematic random sampling method.

Findings – The students at large have started to widely make use of social networking sites; however, few students have shown reservations due to lack of interest, lack of time, lack of facility and privacy concerns. Students who use SNSs spend 1.43 hours as an average on social networking sites per day and mostly use social networking sites to gain knowledge, to be in touch with family and friends; to share information and promote social, religious, political and environmental awareness; and few for passing time. The social networking sites used by the students are Facebook, Google+, YouTube and Twitter respectively.

Research limitations/implications – This study was conducted in a single academic institution; therefore, findings may not be applicable and reasonable to be generalized on all academic institutions.

Implications – This paper provides valuable insight into the usage of SNSs by a very important client group and disciplines *i.e.* Post-graduate students of sociology and social work.

Originality/value – The study is original in nature as the data was collected directly from the Post-graduate Students of Sociology, University of Kashmir, Jammu and Kashmir to examine and investigate their usage of SNSs.

Keywords Social Media, Social Networking Sites, Sociology, Social work

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Social networking sites (SNSs) like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and MySpace, have become essential and popular communication and information sharing tools for internet users all over the world. These web sites have attracted a large number of users worldwide than ever before, resulting in the social media revolution. The wave of this revolution has created a trend to have a user profile on these sites. A social network site is a web-based service that allows individuals to present a profile within an organized framework, create a list of other users with whom they share a connection, navigate their own list of connections, and view those made by others within the system. Social networking sites are profile based websites that allow users to maintain social relationships by viewing, visiting, and sharing their lists of social connections with other members¹. Singh and Gill² define a social networking site (SNS) “as a web-based service that allows individuals to become part of a specific group and establish profiles within a closed system, manage connections with other users and share activities, ideas, interests and events”. In a similar way, Kaplan and Haenlein³ state that social networking sites “enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other.” These sites allow people with common interests to create their communities online for exchanging and sharing ideas, data, information, knowledge and even wisdom through voice, text, images, videos and what not. These sites are used to build personal blogs, personal websites, discussions forums, chat rooms and other social spaces in virtual environment accessible to users for communication and exchange of information. These sites indeed have changed the nature of interaction and collaboration among individuals and organizations⁴.

The journey of social networking started with Six.Degrees.com in 1997, followed by others such as LiveJournal, Friendster, LinkedIn, MySpace, Flickr, YouTube, and Facebook⁵. Now, there are special categories of SNSs dealing with different fields of life like business (LinkedIn), education (Classmates), research (ResearchGate), writers (MyCreativeCommunity), books (Shelfari), travel (TravBuddy), religious (MyChurch) and many more. Even there are content specific SNS also like Flickr (photo sharing), Twitter (text sharing), Last.FM (music listening habits) and YouTube (video sharing). People, now use social networking sites to connect with others in many ways, including dating, meeting others with common interests and sharing information.

Literature Review

Social media, including social networking sites, has been a field of study among social scientists especially media professionals, sociologists and information scientist since its inception. Numerous studies have been conducted on social networking sites all over the world due to the exponential use of social networking sites globally in recent years. According to Alexa, Alexa and Stoica⁶, social networking sites have become the most

heavily used websites, and they are ranked as one of the top sites visited globally. These sites have become an integral part of the daily personal, social and business lives of many people. Social networking has made it simple to develop relationships that transcend age, race, culture and geographical differences⁷. According to Boyd and Ellison⁸, the primary purpose of these sites was to connect people based on common language or shared racial, sexual, religious or nationality-based identities, shared interests, political views and activities. The sites assist in the development of relationships that transcend racial, cultural, social, political and geographical barriers. As of July 2011, Facebook surpassed 750 million users, LinkedIn had over 100 million members, Twitter provided over 177 million tweets per day and YouTube reached three billion views per day⁹. Tortorella¹⁰ also reports that there are nearly 700 million active Facebook users, over 100 million LinkedIn members, 5 billion+ images on Flickr, 24 million pages on Wikipedia, 300 million Twitter users posting over 7,000 tweets per second, over 2.9 billion hours on YouTube watching per month. According to Statista¹¹, Facebook was the first social network to surpass 1 billion registered accounts and currently sits at 1.59 billion monthly active users. Eighth-ranked photo-sharing app Instagram had over 400 million monthly active accounts. Meanwhile, blogging service Tumblr had more than 555 million active blog users on their site. Social networking has become a part and parcel of netizens all over the world. The growth rate of users and active users of these sites accelerates at a very fast pace across geographical, political, racial and religious boundaries.

Perryman¹² states “Social networking is everywhere today and is being used by people of all ages and for the widest variety of purposes”. Social networking tools are commonly used by individuals of all ages, but are used especially by young people and college students¹³. Na’ndez and Borrego¹⁴ also reveal that the demographic profile of social networking sites users varies, with junior and younger researchers more likely to be frequent users of social networking sites. Subrahmanyam¹⁵ conducted a study to assess the use of online social networking sites among the college students of a large urban university in Los Angeles. The study reveals that the students often used social networking sites to connect and reconnect with their friends and family members. Hargittai¹⁶ also conducted a study on usage habits of social networking sites by college students. The findings of the study reveal that a majority of the college students are active users of the social networking sites accessing these sites seven times or more in a week, followed by semi-active users accessing them less than seven times a week. Bicen & Cavus¹⁷ study the social networking sites usage habits of undergraduate students. The study reflects that most under-graduate students use Facebook for more than four hours a day. Chatting, sending messages and sharing links are common activities on Facebook. The researchers proposed that by integrating Facebook into teaching and education, a significant impact on students’ lives in the university could be made. Haneefa and Sumitha¹⁸ conducted a study with the purpose to investigate the perception and use of social networking sites by the students of Calicut University, Kerala. The study shows that a majority of the students were aware and make use of social networking sites. The results reveal that 75.4 percent of the students used social networking sites for friendly communication, 36.6 percent for academic communication, 29.1 percent for discussing social issues, (11.2 percent) for promoting their work and 8.9 percent to publish their writings. Bhardwaj¹⁹ conducted a study on the use of social networking sites by library and information science professionals in higher education institutions in India. The results reveal that 71.9% respondents are members of more than 10 groups; whereas 17.7% are

members of 11 to 50 groups; 15 (7.8%) more than 50 groups and 5 (2.6%) are not members of any group on SNS. Further, the study shows that the majority of respondents (94%) preferred Facebook followed by 115 (60%) LinkedIn, 84 (44%) Orkut, 78 (40%) Twitter, 72 (37%) YouTube and 27 (14%) Flickr whereas Xing (1%) and Myspace (4%) are the least preferred SNS. Above studies reveal that social networking sites are heavily used by a large population of the globe. Youngsters, especially students, are the avid users of the social networking sites and use these sites for a variety of purposes. However, no study has been conducted on the students of a particular branch of knowledge. Therefore, it becomes inevitable to assess the use of social networking sites by the scholars of a particular field. The present study is a step forward in this direction. The current study focuses on the use of social networking sites of post-graduate students of the Departments of Sociology and Social Work, University of Kashmir.

Research Design

Scope and purpose of the Study

The scope of the present study is limited to the post-graduate students of the Departments of Sociology and Social Work, University of Kashmir. The University of Kashmir is the oldest higher educational institution in Jammu and Kashmir, India established with the objective of imparting higher education and conducting research in all areas of knowledge, including arts and humanities, business and commerce, education and legal studies, general sciences and social sciences, applied sciences and technology. The study aims to understand the use of social networking sites by the post-graduate students of the Departments of Sociology and Social Work, University of Kashmir.

Research Methodology

The intake capacity for the two year post-graduate programme in the Department of Sociology is 66 and in the Department of Social Work is 40 students per year. The total students studying in these departments were 212 (*i.e.* first year 66 + final year 66=112 in Sociology; first year 40 + final year 40= 80). In order to obtain the most accurate results, 50% (112) of the students have been selected through systematic random sampling method. Later, the survey method of research was applied to conduct the study and questionnaire was used as a data collection tool.

Department	No. of Students	Sample Size (50%)	Response Rate
Sociology	132	66	62 (93.94%)
Social Work	80	40	38 (95.00%)
Total	212	106	100 (94.47%)

Table 1: Population and selection of sample

Among the selected sample, 41% were male students and 59% female whereas 64% were rural and 36% urban students.

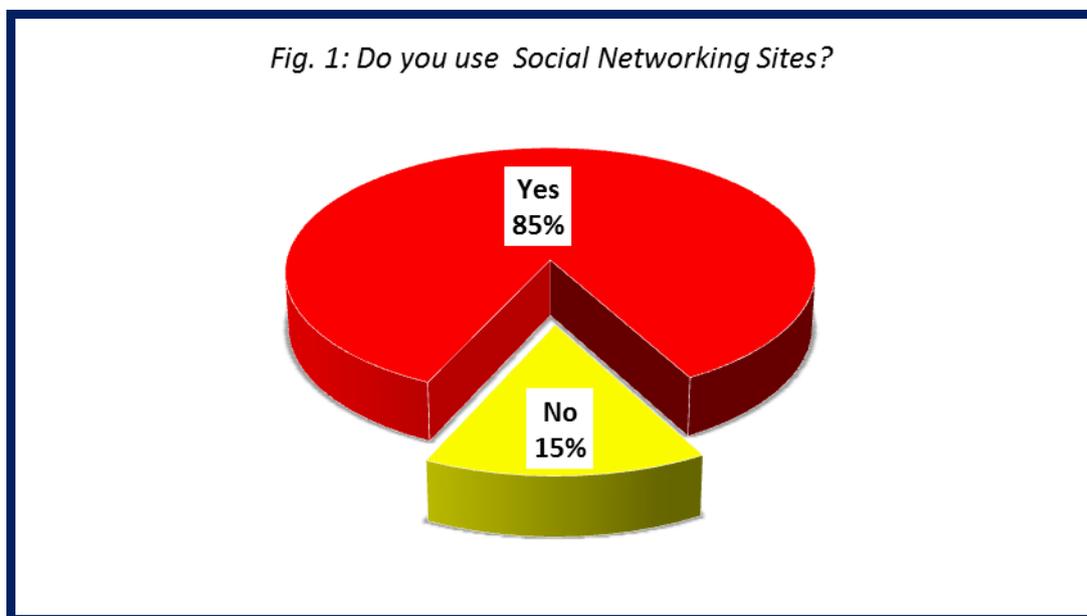
Sex	Percentage	Residence	Percentage
Male	41	Rural	64
Female	59	Urban	36
Total	100	Total	100

Table 2: Stratification of the selected sample

Research limitations/implications – This study was conducted in a single academic institution, namely University of Kashmir, Srinagar. Therefore, findings, conclusions and recommendations may not be applicable and reasonable to be generalized on all academic institutions.

Data Analysis

Social Networking Sites



As reflected in the figure (1), 85 percent of students use the social networking sites whereas only 15 percent do not use them at all. The students (15%) who don't use SNSs mention many reasons for the same; 40 percent of them aren't interested in joining social networking sites, (33.33%) don't have time to use them, (26.67%) have privacy concerns (26.67%) don't have facilities and 20% thinks that it is a useless exercise (Table 3).

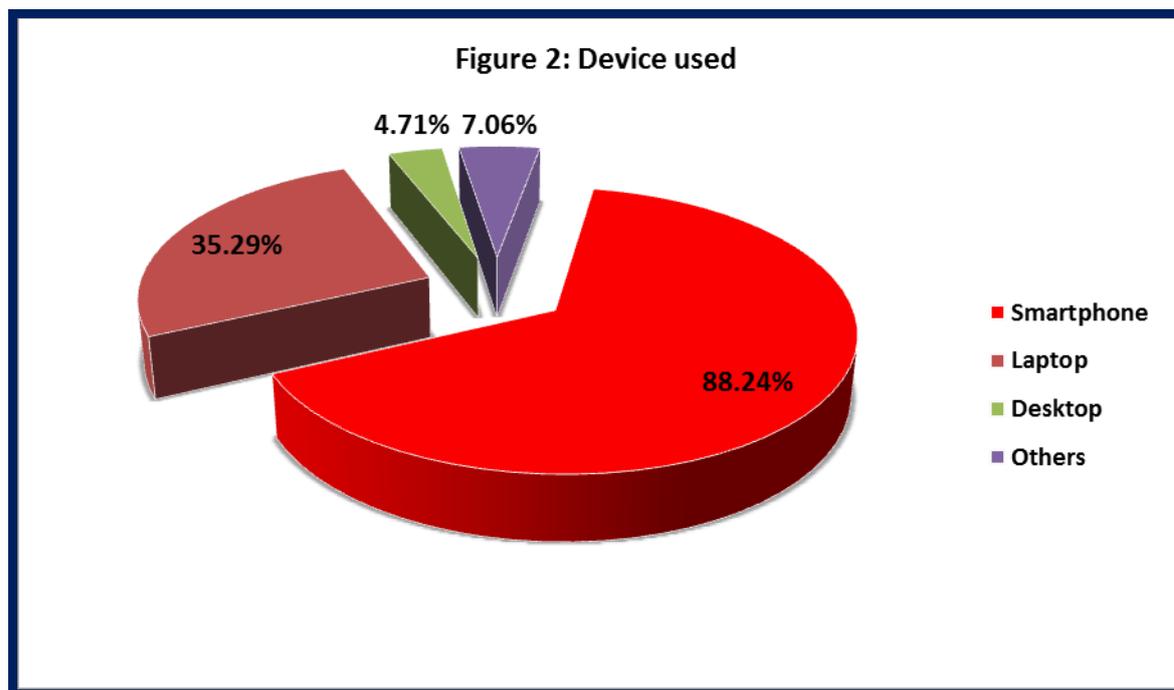
S. No.	Reasons	Number	Percentage
1.	I am not interested in joining social networking	06	40.00
2.	I don't have time to use SNSs	05	33.33

3.	It exposes the privacy	04	26.67
4.	I don't have facilities (Internet, Computer, Laptop and Smartphone) to use them	04	26.67
5.	It is a useless exercise	03	20.00
6.	I Joined once, but I didn't enjoy it	01	06.67
7.	It is expensive	01	06.67
8.	Any other reason	02	13.33

Table 3: Reasons for not Using Social Networking Sites (n=15)

Device used

Smartphones are used by the majority of the students (88.24%) to access social networking sites followed by laptops (35.29 percent) (figure 2).



Accuracy of Profile Information

More than 90% of the students provide accurate information for religion, qualification, marital status and designation whereas more than 70% provide accurate information for the name and date of birth on social networking sites. Besides 67% of the students provide the right information about their address, whereas 63.53% don't have their real

image as their profile picture, 32.95% provide an inaccurate residential address, 23.53% conceal their original date of birth and 22.35% don't disclose their original name. The mean of the data shows that as an average 79.41% of the users provide accurate information on social networking sites as compared to 20.59% of the users who don't right information (Table 4).

Category	Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage
Real Name	66	77.65	19	22.35
Real Picture	31	36.47	54	63.53
Real D.O.B	65	76.47	20	23.53
Right Address	57	67.05	28	32.95
Right Qualification	83	97.65	02	02.35
Right Designation	77	90.59	08	9.41
True Religion	83	97.65	02	02.35
True Marital Status	78	91.76	7	8.24
Mean	67.50	79.41	17.50	20.59

Table 4: Accuracy of Profile Information (n=85)

Number of friends

On social networking sites, 60% of the students have less than 1-100 friends, 18.82% have 101-200 friends and 8.24% have 201-300 friends. In total, 87.6% have up to 300 friends, whereas only 12.94% have more than 300 friends in whom 9.41% have 500 plus friends (Table 5).

S. No.	Number of Friends	Number	Percentage
1.	1-100	51	60
2.	101-200	16	18.82
3.	201-300	7	8.24
4.	301-400	1	1.18
5.	401-500	2	2.35
6.	More than 500	8	9.41

Table 5: Total No. of friends on the Social Networking Sites (n=85)

Friends personally known

On an average almost 52.74% of the friends on social networking sites are personally known to the students whereas 47.36% of the friends aren't personally known to them. These may be friends of friends or even strangers with some common interests. (Table 6)

S. No.	Friends personally known	Number (f)	Mid-points (x)	(x.f)
1.	Up to 15%	12	7.5	90
2.	15-30%	10	22.5	225
3.	30-45%	10	37.5	375
4.	45-60%	15	52.5	787.5
5.	60-75%	16	67.5	1080
6.	Above 75%	22	87.5	1925
Mean		$\sum(x.f)/n$	4482.5/85	52.74

Table 6: Percentage of friends on SNS personally known (n=85)

Time Spend

About half (48.23 percent) of the students spend 1-2 hours per day on social networking sites whereas 24.70 percent spend less than 1 hour and 15.29 percent spend 2-3 hours on social networking sites per day. A few students (11.74 percent) spend above 3 hours on social networking sites in a day. However, students spend 1.43 hours as an average on social networking sites per day, which is equivalent to 21.74 days in a year (Table 7).

S. No.	Time spend daily	Number (f)	Mid-points (x)	(x.f)
1.	Less than 1 hour	21 (24.70%)	0.5	10.5
2.	1-2 hrs	41 (48.23%)	1.5	61.5
3.	2-3 hrs	13 (15.29%)	2.5	32.5
4.	3-4 hrs	06 (7.05%)	3.5	21
5.	4-5 hrs	01 (1.17%)	4.5	4.5
6.	More than 5 hrs	03 (3.52%)	5.5	16.5
Mean		$\sum(x.f)/n$	146.5/85	1.43 hours

Table 7: Time spend (n=85)

Purpose of use

The majority of the students (82.35 percent) use social networking sites to gain knowledge, 60 percent to be in touch with family and friends, 58.82 percent to share information. A good number of students (31.76 percent) use social networking sites to promote social, religious, political and environmental awareness and for passing the time (28.24 percent) (Table 8).

.S. No.	Purpose	Number	Percentage
1.	To gain knowledge	70	82.35
2.	To be in touch with family and friends	51	60
3.	To share information	50	58.82
4.	To promote social, religious, political and environmental awareness	27	31.76
5.	To pass time	24	28.24
6.	To share videos/ pictures/ music	16	18.82
7.	To make new friends	14	16.47
8.	To make professional and business contacts	7	8.24
9.	Any other reason/s	5	5.88

Table 8: Purpose of use (n=85)

Services used

Facebook (77.65%) is used by the majority of the students followed by Google+ (69.41%), YouTube (51.76%), Twitter (32.94%), The other SNSs used by the less than 10% of the students are LinkedIn, MySpace, Flickr, Orkut, Friendster, Bebo, Hi-5 and Instagram (Table 9).

S. No.	Social Networking Sites	Number	Percentage
1.	Facebook	66	77.65
2.	Google+	59	69.41

3.	YouTube	44	51.76
4.	Twitter	28	32.94
5.	LinkedIn	6	07.05
6.	Any other/s	30	35.29

Table 9: Mostly Used Social Networking Sites (n=85)

Membership in Groups

The majority of the students (61.17%) are members of 1-5 groups followed by 17.64 percent of students who are members of 6-10 groups. A good number of students (14.11 percent) aren't members of any group (Table 10).

S. No.	Membership in groups	Number	Percentage
1.	None	12	14.11
2.	1-5	52	61.17
3.	6-10	15	17.64
4.	11-15	3	3.52
5.	15-20	1	1.17
6.	More than 20	2	2.35

Table 10: Membership in social networking sites communities/ groups (n=85)

Discussion

The students at large have started to widely make use of social networking sites; however, few students have shown reservations. Few don't show interest, few others don't have time, few have privacy concerns while few don't have the facility and others think that it isn't beneficial to use social networking sites. The privacy is one of the obstacles in social networking highlighted by many scholars all over the world. Every social network provides its users with a profile page that can include a photo, name, basic information, interests and many other things including user's connections and social networks. Internet users retrieve this information from social networking sites while searching through search engines like Google or even social networking sites like Facebook. Social networking sites have become people's search engine. However, most social networks have technological facilities to restrict users in sharing their personal information with the

public. Facebook and MySpace let users hide their pages from the public so that only their selected friends can view their information. It has overcome the problem of privacy to great extent. The hindrances like lack of interest in joining SNS and lack of their usability can be successfully tackled through user awareness programmes, workshops, short term training courses, manuals, etc. The need is to aware students about the social, academic and other benefits of social networking thoroughly. This study also confirmed that lack of time is one of the biggest barriers faced by the non-users. The students need to use their time judiciously as per the timetable and spend some time on social networking to reap its benefits. Lack of facility like laptops, desktops etc. to access social networking sites is another issue of students and smartphones have solved this problem to a large extent as almost 90% of the students use smartphones to access social networking sites.

The Facebook is really a Facebook or a “Fakebook” is a major mystery because as 63.53 percent don't have their real image as their profile picture, 32.95% provide an inaccurate residential address, 23.53% conceal their original date of birth and 22.35% don't disclose their original name. As an average almost 80% of the students provide accurate information on social networking sites as compared to 20% of the users who don't right information. The study depicts that even the educated conceal their real identity on Facebook which is a matter of great concern. Haneefa and Sumitha²⁰ reveal that almost the same percentage of students used false names and fake photos due to fear of security, privacy and misuse of personnel information. This issue can also be addressed through a user identification mechanism applied by professional social networking sites like LinkedIn and ResearchGate. A talk on social and moral ethics available on the homepage of the social networking sites can also reduce their misuse and misinformation.

The friendship trends show that 87.06% of students have up to 300 friends, whereas only 12.94% have more than 300 friends. On an average almost 52.74% of the friends on social networking sites are personally known to students, whereas 47.36% of the friends aren't personally known to them. This ratio depicts that students are open for friendships for all people including their physical friends, friends of friends or even strangers with some common interests. The study proves that social networking sites are helpful for connecting people with common interests across physical boundaries.

Time analysis reveals that students spend 1.43 hours as an average on social networking sites per day, which is equivalent to 21.74 days in a year. However, few students (11.74 percent) spend above 3 hours on social networking sites in a day in which 3.52 percent spend more than 5 hours. The findings show that students are the avid users of social networking sites and spend time judiciously on the social networking sites to reap their benefits. Social networking sites have a wide variety of uses and students use these sites for various purposes. The majority of the students use social networking sites to gain knowledge, to be in touch with family and friends; to share information and promote social, religious, political and environmental awareness and few for passing the time. The top most used social networking sites worldwide are commonly used by the student community as well. Prominent social networking sites used by the students are Facebook, Google Plus, YouTube and Twitter. Majority of the students are members of online social groups as well. Findings are supported by Haneefa and Sumitha²¹ who pinpoint that social networking sites enable students to get in touch with their friends, faculty members, and

institutions and allow them to connect with more friends; create and share their identities and profiles that may include personal information, pictures, blog entries, videos and music clips; and join groups and communicate with other persons as well. It is a good sign that students use social networking sites for constructive purposes. However, students need to be made aware about the dark side of social networking like viewing pornographic material and indulging in nuisance interactions. The social ethics need to be followed in online environment as well.

Recommendations for further research

The results of this study examine many aspects related to the usage of SNSs by students; however, there are several areas that need to be addressed in future research. Further studies are needed to examine additional issues of SNSs such as legal, ethical and intellectual aspects. Additionally, future studies can be conducted on academic use of SNSs in educational institutions.

References

1. Boyd, D. and Ellison, N.B. Social network sites: definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 2007, **13**(1), 210-230. <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/boyd.ellison.html> (accessed 15 December, 2015)
2. Singh, K.P. and Gill, M.S. Use of social networking sites by the research scholars: a study of Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. *Library Herald*, 2011, **49**(3), 229-241.
3. Kaplan, A.M. and Haenlein, M. Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 2010, **53**(1), 59-68.
4. Veletsianos, G. and Kimmons, R. Scholars and faculty members' lived experiences in online social networks. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 2013, **16**(1), 43-50.
5. Aharony, N. Facebook use in libraries: an exploratory analysis. *Aslib Proceedings: New Information Perspectives*, (2012) **64**(4), 358-372
6. Alexa, E., Alexa, M. and Stoica, C. The use of online marketing and social media in higher education institutions in Romania. *Journal of Marketing Research & Case Studies*, 2012, article ID 721221. DOI: 10.5171/2012.721221. Retrieved from: <http://www.ibimapublishing.com/journals/JMRCs/2012/721221/721221.pdf> (accessed 12 January, 2016)
7. Graham, J.M., Faix, A. and Hartman, L. Crashing the Facebook party: one library's experiences in the students' domain. *Library Review*, 2009, **58**(3), 228-36.
8. Boyd, D. and Ellison, N.B. *op. cit.* 1
9. Chen, B. and Bryer, T. Investigating instructional strategies for using social media in formal and informal learning. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 2012, **13**(1), 87-100
10. Tortorella, D. *Library marketing and promotion via social media*. 2012. <http://infopeople.org/training/library-marketing-and-promotion-social-media> (accessed March 9, 2016)

11. Statista. *Leading social networks worldwide as of April 2016, ranked by number of active users (in millions)*. 2016. <http://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/> (accessed March 9, 2016)
12. Perryman, B.E. *Use of social networking as an instructional aide in higher education*. PhD dissertation, 2011, OK State University, Stillwater, OK.
13. Bhardwaj, R. K. Use of Social Networking Sites by LIS Professionals in Higher Education Institutions in India: A Study. *The Reference Librarian*, 2014, **55**(1), 74-88, DOI: 10.1080/02763877.2014.855604 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02763877.2014.855604> (accessed 15 January 2016)
14. Na'ndez, G. and Borrego, A. Use of social networks for academic purposes: a case study. *The Electronic Library*, 2012, **31**(6), 781-791.
15. Subrahmanyam, K., Reich, S. M., Waechter, N., & Espinoza, G. Online and offline social networks: Use of social networking sites by emerging adults. *J. App. Dev. Psych.*, 2008, **29**(6), 420-33.
16. Hargittai, E.. Whose space? Differences among users and non-users of social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 2008, **13** (1), 276-97
17. Bicen, H., & Cavus, N. Social network sites usage habits of undergraduate students: case study of Facebook. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2011, **28**(0), 943-947.
18. Haneefa, M. K. and Sumitha E. Perception and Use of Social Networking Sites by the Students of Calicut University, *DESIDOC Journal of Library & Information Technology*, 2011, **31**(4), 295-301
19. Bhardwaj, R. K. *op. cit* 13
20. Haneefa, M. K. and Sumitha E., *op. cit.* 18
21. *Ibid*