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SOCIAL MEDIA: KEY ISSUES AND NEW CHALLENGES - A STUDY OF NALGONDA DISTRICT

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Abstract: *The term social has various definitions. More prominently it refers to a characteristic of living beings related to their interaction. It always refers to the interaction of one sort of living beings with other living beings for their combined co-existence, irrespective of whether the interaction is intentional or unintentional (Prashant K Mathur, 2012:1). From the other end, media refers to be the main means of mass communication (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/media>). Collectively these words bring out a new word called social media. Social media has been defined in diverged ways by various social scientists. The befitting definition that best suits the current topic is:*

Internet-based software and interfaces that allow individuals to interact with one another, exchanging details about their lives such as biographical data, professional information, personal photos and up-to-the-minute thoughts (<http://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/social-media.asp>).

In the contemporary world, the social media has not only established its place in the field of mass communication, but also posed threat equally to the conventional mass media. This paper examines the key issues and new challenges of the social media with the help of a filed study in Nalgonda district of Andhra Pradesh, in detail.

Keywords: *Social media, new media, Facebook, Twitter, mass communication, ICT, ubiquity, interactivity, Andhra Pradesh, Nalgonda.*

Introduction

The mass media used for the purpose of social interaction is called social media. More aptly, social media can be defined as:

“Activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and content creation...microblogs, and more.”
(Charles Wankel, 2010: 242).

For any media to be interactive, it needs to co-exist with some sort of communication techniques, for which social media is not an exception. In order to twirl communication into an interactive dialogue, the social media turns to be one of the most successful applications of Satmass Media (Suman K Kasturi, 2013:183) (a word coined by Dr. Suman K Kasturi to indicate the mass media that work in conjunction with the satellite communications). As of now, there is no single renowned definition of social media. However, of the many definitions that exist, it can be said that social media is the set of web-based broadcast technologies that enable the democratization of content, giving people the ability to emerge from consumers of content to publishers. With the ability to achieve massive scalability in real time, the social media technologies allow people to connect with each other to produce or re-produce value through online conversation and collaboration (Peter R Scott & J. Mike Jacka, 2011: 5).

In the beginning days, social media was limited to fundamental tools and websites used mainly by professors of technology and computer geeks. Over a period of time, social media changed into a behemoth that is changing the way how people connect and converse with corporations, governments, traditional media, and each other. The monopoly of the message held by the traditional media lost its reins with the advent of social media due to the domineering facts of social media over the traditional media. In case of the traditional media, the communication was merely monologue or, at the most a restricted two-way tête-à-tête. Without using any interactive means, through the traditional media, the individuals used to share information or ideas about an organization. Such a communication was established mainly through one-to-one communication – either in person or on the phone; either through the mail or via e-mail.

With the progression of time from mid to late 90s, slowly the conventional and traditional media started getting replaced by the social media. Various forms of social media like Internet forums, personal websites, advanced bulletin board systems and online chat ensured that the individual’s voice reached to the mass audience. Many organizations still housed in monologue mode but started reckoning the need to adapt the new media in general and social media, specifically.

As the time passed, today, social media has rapidly turned to be the way of how people communicate with each other. Over the past one decade, it has transformed the way people and organizations communicate. This has become a reality with the ubiquitous spreading of broadband internet in every nook and corner of the societies. The multimedia compatibility of the social media like easy uploading of audio-video content, text and images, another dimension of immediate global access has been added to the social media, thereby causing a great threat to the prevailing traditional and conventional media. Social media paved a way for every individual to become a publisher of his ideas and views. The social media not only brought advantages, but also equal number of threats along with its inception.

Objectives of the Study

This study is intended to get acquaintance on the following with the help of a field study of Nalgonda district in Andhra Pradesh:

- To discuss the significances of social media;
- To discuss the key features of social media;
- To discuss the major roles played by social media;
- To discuss the key challenges posed by social media;
- To seek the opinion of audience of social media on various aspects.

Significance of the Study

The last two decades have witnessed a rapid transformation of traditional media into new media that encompasses digital, computerized, and networked information and communication technologies. Every segment of society desires its virtual presence on the social media platform. There exists a need to know why social media has grabbed such a great focus, as it has been causing an intensified threat to the other conventional media.

Methodology

In this research study, survey method has been used to collect the data that is quantitative in nature. All the available literature has been reviewed for the acquaintance of knowledge on subject matter to verify the nature, significance, characteristics, and roles played by the social media, apart from the key challenges imposed by this form of media. Opinions of a total of 54 participants from all three geographic levels (urban, rural and semi-urban) in Nalgonda district of Andhra Pradesh has been taken into consideration for arriving at a conclusion. An equal representation of men and women aged below 35 years has been considered for the study.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation in this study is the lack of information about non-users of social media. To expand the knowledge of the digital divide at a given geographic level, it is very much essential to know more about the “have-nots” i.e. about the people, who are not the audience of social media. Therefore, this study might be followed up by collecting the data from a sample of non-users as the respondents, within the same geographic region considered for the study (Nalgonda) and in the same socio-economic context.

Significances of Social Media

Social media has become very significant because of the two most important and precise characteristics of social media. They are: ubiquity and interactivity.

Ubiquity: Ubiquity is the sense that new media technologies affect everyone in the societies they are employed, even if everyone in the society may not be the audience of such a media (Leah A. Lievrouw & Sonia Livingstone, 2006:6).

The clear inspection of the existing things reveal that in this day and age, an increasing environment of social phenomena, ubiquitous data, and computational process can be observed in many domains and contexts, including social media, mobile computing, and online social networking. Such systems in which social, ubiquitous, and computerized processes are interdependent and tightly interwoven can be characterized as distributed social-computational systems i.e. integrated systems of people, sensors and computers. Typically, the proportion of such systems can be considered to be growing, which means they are influenced by a combination of social phenomena, algorithmic computation and ubiquitous data. In such systems, potentially internal system properties emerge through social adoption and usage. For example, Jin Yang and Jyotika Ramprasad observed:

“Researchers have identified various factors that may exert influence on social capital. Social scientists assert that generational deficiencies are mainly responsible for the disappearance of social capital in America. Other variables they identified include movement of women into the labor force, mobility, family structure, work related time constraints, the growing number of retirees, corporate-sponsored volunteering and the rising home heterogeneity. While there are all relevant perspectives to account for reduced social capital, examining the influence of mass media on social capital is especially important given the ubiquitous nature of mass media and individual’s reliance on mass media in daily life.” (Jin Yang & Jyotika Ramprasad, 2007:17)

Interactivity

The second significant issue that distinguishes new media from traditional mass media channels and content is the persistent sagacity of interactivity associated with new media channels, that is, the selectivity and reach that media technologies offer users in their choices of information sources and interaction with other people (Leah A. Lievrouw & Sonia Livingstone, 2006:7). For the establishment of any relationship, interaction is essential and the interactive nature of social media makes it an important variable of social capital study.

The division of mass media has had several important outcomes for public relations. First, with the fragmentation of mass audiences, the influence and significance of conventional advertising had diminished, thereby increasing the cost effectiveness of public relations, which has experienced a major growth as the new media environment has surfaced. Second, users of new media tend to be active rather than passive participants in the communication process. They are more likely to already have knowledge, opinions, and objectives that influence how they react to messages. They also have goals and intentions in mind when they use these media. Third, the knowledge and skills necessary to use new media are different from the knowledge and skills required to use traditional media (Sandra C. Duhe, 2007:99).

For quite some time, the term social media has been used to describe emerging new technologies that are important public relations. While the term was initially used to describe the interactive nature of blogging, it is felt that social media or new media can be broadly applied to all interactive technologies.

The key features such as immediacy, responsiveness and social presence of interaction which have been possible with new media channels constitute a qualitatively and substantively different experience than what would otherwise has been possible through traditional mass media. Despite the fact that there are many debates which continue about the scenery and quality of mediated communication, especially in contrast with face-to-face exchange of dialogue as the presumed *ideal* mode of interpersonal communication, mediated interactivity nonetheless has long been exhilarated as the ultimate difference between new media and mass media.

Key Characteristics of Social Media

- **Free web space:** The social media websites provide the users or the so called audience with free web space to upload their personalized content.
- **Unique web address:** The audiences are provided with a personalized unique web address to have a unique identity, which makes them to share their content in real time. It remains intact till the time they maintain their online account.
- **Possibility of building profiles:** With the possibility of building personalized profiles, the social media enables an individual to have access to the likeminded people to interact with each other. It is also possible to conceal the profile from pirates and making it accessible to only a desired group of people.
- **Virtual connections with friends and relatives:** Social media websites turns to be the platform for virtual meetings. People, who are miles away from each other, can get in touch virtually with each other through such website enabled chat engines. The websites even make it possible to share valuable files, photos and multimedia content with each other.
- **Real time content upload facility:** Through social media, it is possible for the audience to have a chance to upload their personalized content or other files as the services are open round the clock 24x7 for all 365 days in a year.
- **Feedback:** With the online social networks, feedback, the key element in the communication process becomes vital. Feedback is immediate like in face to face communication through new media or social media communication, provided the responder is also online, at the time when the sender initiates the dialogue.
- **Time stamp:** Each and every post in the social media has a time stamp indicating if the post is either fresh or stale. Depending on the freshness of the post, the responder may either choose to respond or not to respond.

Key Roles Played by Social Media

Of the many roles executed by the social media, the following are the most prominent and key roles played by the social media. Social media has wide-ranging functions that turned imperative in a person's day to day life. Life without social media is beyond imagination and turns to be very crucial.

- **Communicate:** Nevertheless social media is of most recent origin, it turned to be one of the most effective communication tools in the history of communication. The entire organizations can turn to be a single social community which is more aptly known as town square. With the more interactive technology involved in this form of communication, the feel through this way of communication is rather very lively and gives a feel of face to face communication. It has an added advantage of the ability of very easily monitoring change initiatives. Social media is not only the media of extroverts, but also of introverts. They have the freedom of communicating at an ease without directly facing the responder, unlike in face to face communication or the so called interpersonal communication.
- **Collaborate:** Collaboration is off the charts. Today, it's very common that almost all Netizens get themselves involved in social media chats, blogging and hangouts of google talk etc. One person initiates

the communication by his posts with or without the support of multimedia content and it is circulated among a closed or open group of Netizens. People keep on adding the comments to the post which further processes the communication. The comments can be considered as the feedback to make the conversation a dynamic one. The entire process turns to be innovative and collaborative.

- **Educate:** The third major role played by the social media is educating the masses. The entire organization of community is made a global class room on the social media platform. Virtual classes around the world are made possible through social media. People in nooks and corners of the world can attend an online lecture delivered by a resourceful person from a remote location. Even the audience can pose their doubts and get them clarified. Such a facility is more similar to that of a live class room environment. This type of education has an added advantage. Simultaneously, the entire thing can be recorded, to revise at a later stage. The world's best resources can be made available to all the desired people with the involvement of technology in social media.
- **Engage:** Every employee of the organization can be made equally responsible by engaging them in some or other way. Such a process not only brings up their morals high, but also paves them a way to feel as part of the team and to come out with more innovative ideas, to improve the overall performance of the organization, at any given time. It happens so because, when people are engaged, they feel respected and valued. As a result, they ponder the most, deliver extra, and even work with a heightened strength. The ultimate result is the great productivity from the employees; it happens because of the happiness of the employees.
- **Monitor:** Monitoring is another crucial function of the social media. It gives a clear picture of the situation in the real time. For example google analytics gives the clear picture of the number of visitors at any given time. Such type of monitoring facilities not only makes the team leaders to have virtual access to the situation, but also enables them to change the strategy in accordance to the situation. Setbacks are easier to spot, and losses can be cut, adjustments can be made, or reinforcements can be sent in. Social media functions in a similar vein just like the central nervous system of human body and paves the leaders a way to respond, accordingly.
- **Maximize:** Social media usage makes the employees more excited and extracts more from the employees in any given organization, as the social media tools have the capability of letting the people to work with an ease, thereby achieving the maximum for the organization.
- **Entertain:** Social media is the new media that offers the audience a great entertainment. It enables the user to get all sorts of multimedia content, thereby dispelling all the limitations which otherwise are possessed by each of the traditional media. It has all good qualities of each and every conventional media embedded in it and more advanced features added to it.

Key Challenges Posed by Social Media:

Despite the fact that social media play the vital roles such as communication, collaboration, education etc, it poses few major challenges too. The following are the most prominent challenges posed by the social media.

- **Privacy:** The primary challenge posed by the social media is the privacy. Many people restrain themselves from taking part in a dialogue with a fear of losing their privacy.

- **Access for those with disabilities:** Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of the US provides guidelines for making federal websites accessible to people with disabilities, including the visually and hearing impaired. A brief on this act is appended below:

In 1998 the US Congress amended the Rehabilitation Act to require Federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities. Section 508 was enacted to eliminate barriers in information technology, to make available new opportunities for people with disabilities, and to encourage development of technologies that will help achieve these goals.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Section_508_Amendment_to_the_Rehabilitation_Act_of_1973)

This section provides guidelines for making federal websites accessible to people with disabilities, including the visually and hearing impaired. There is a need for the formulation and implementation of such guidelines to remove the barriers for differently abled people. Such an issue should be taken up for the better implementation, both in letter and spirit.

- **Commercial advertising on social media:** Advertising on social media should follow the formalities of censor; and porn content in advertisements should be avoided on the websites, intended for the very purpose of social networking. If such restrictions are not imposed, strictly, it may ruin the minds of youth, thereby indirectly increasing the crime rate. This is one of the vital challenges posed by the social media in the contemporary web world.
- **Terms of agreements:** Most of the social media sites allow the audience to create an account, after accepting terms of agreement, which are often vague. The terms of agreement can be interpreted in multiple ways. They pose a threat, indirectly. Most of the social networking websites get an agreement accepted by the users that their information can be used by the owners of the social media. It indirectly causes invasion of privacy. Such a challenge is one of the crucial confront posed by the social media.
- **Security Concerns:** Social media sites pose an equal threat to the security of personal information and other concerned data. Hacking of the websites is the most common feature; with hacking there is an imminent threat to the audience of social media. This turns to be another key challenge posed by the social media.
- **Deception:** The identity of the individual who joins the social networking sites may either original or fake. The veracity of his/her identity is not known to the fellow user. In the recent past, many cases of deception around the world have been registered. Social media turns to be an easy way of deceiving people using the technology.

Findings

This study and its embedded data analysis find that the social media has a tremendous upshot on the masses of all three geographic levels; and on both male and female participants. The results of this study are appended below:

- Table 1 gives the clear picture of the opinion of all the 54 respondents on the ubiquitous nature of the social media.

Geographic Level	Boys			Girls		
	High	Moderate	Low	High	Moderate	Low
	In percentage			In percentage		
Urban	77.77	11.11	11.11	88.88	11.11	0
Semi-Urban	88.88	11.11	0	66.66	22.22	11.11
Rural	66.66	22.22	11.11	55.55	33.33	11.11

Table 1 Opinion of the respondents on ubiquitous nature of Social Media

- Table 2 gives the clear picture of the opinion of all the 54 respondents on the interactive nature of the social media.

Geographic Level	Boys			Girls		
	High	Moderate	Low	High	Moderate	Low
	In percentage			In percentage		
Urban	88.88	11.11	0	77.77	11.11	11.11
Semi-Urban	77.77	11.11	11.11	88.88	0	11.11
Rural	77.77	11.11	11.11	88.88	11.11	0

Table 2 Opinion of the respondents on the Interactive nature of Social Media

- Clearly examining the above data, it is evident that with an average acceptance level of 77.77%, boys from all three regions feel that the social media is highly ubiquitous in nature. Through the collected data, it is also evident that girls from all three geographic levels accept the fact that social media is highly ubiquitous with an approval rate of 70.36%. Fig1 gives the graphical representation of the approval levels of highly ubiquitous nature of social media by both boys and girls.

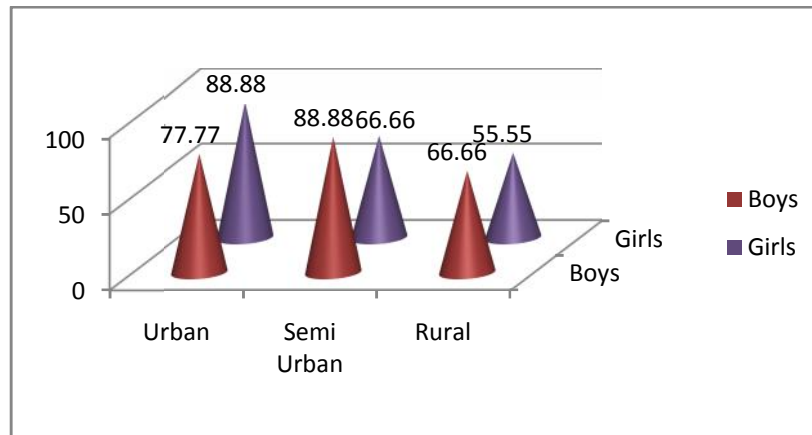


Fig.1 Approval levels of highly ubiquitous nature of social media

- In a similar vein, as far as the interactive nature of the social media is concerned, 81.5% males, representing all three geographic areas of Nalgonda district opined that social media is highly interactive. From the other end, 85.2% girls from all three geographic areas of Nalgonda district opined that social media is highly interactive. A detailed pictorial representation of the approval levels of highly interactive nature of social media is given in Fig 2.

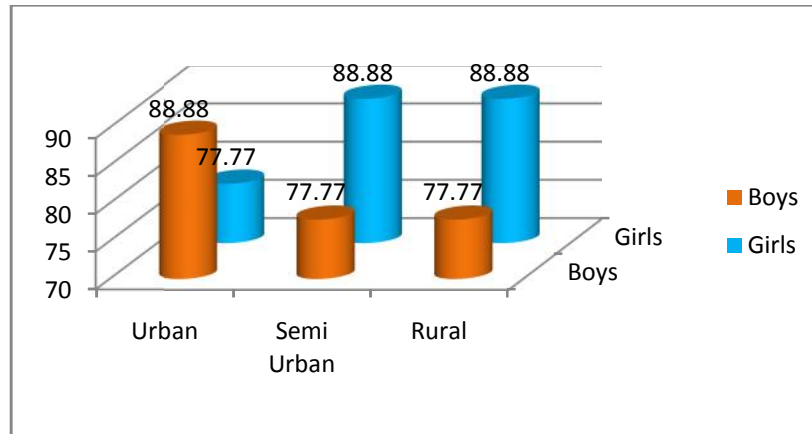


Fig.2 Approval levels of highly interactive nature of social media

- Answering a question regarding what made them to think that social media is ubiquitous, while most of the male members from all three geographic levels said that the social media has virtually occupied every field, the female participants told that social media is ubiquitous, because, even the conventional media content can be embedded in the social media network with its multimedia applications.
- Irrespective of the geographic area and their sex, all the respondents are of the opinion that the life without social media cannot be thought of, due to its high interactivity.
- 94.4% respondents opined that social media provides sufficient free web space for uploading their personal content.
- Similarly, 98.1% participants felt that social media gives them a unique identity on the World Wide Web (WWW), apart from enabling them to build personal profiles.
- All the participants agreed that social media enabled them to connect with friends and relatives, staying at distant places. They are also in agreement with the fact that uploading of the content in real time has become possible with the social media.
- 92.6% people agreed that social media enables free flow of opinions. The respondents are of the opinion that they restrict themselves from posting adverse comments though the platform gives them a chance of posting comments at their will, because of the imposed restrictions by the government of India through Section 66A and Section 69 of IT Act, 2000.
- Only 81.5% people see the stamping of time on the posts as an added advantage; and they are of the opinion that in order to overcome the fact of being stale due to stamping, the post can be reposted to make it a fresh post.

- The graphical representation of various characteristics of social media is given Fig.3

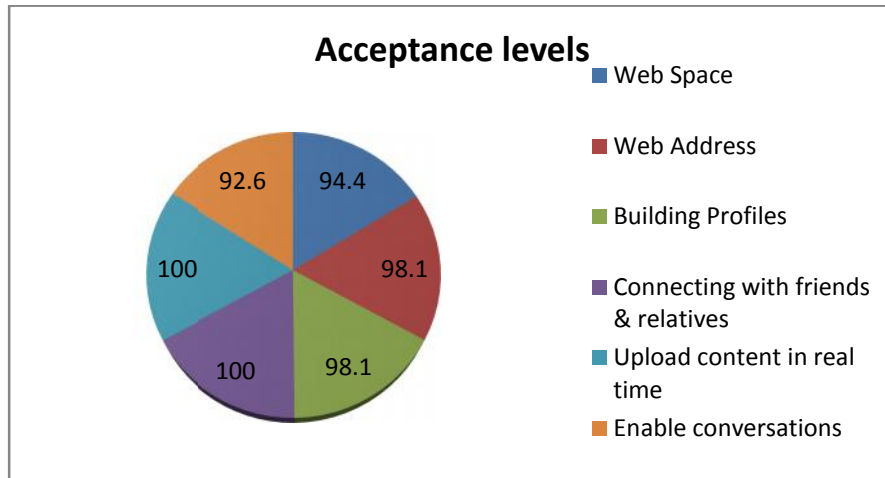


Fig.3 Acceptance levels of various characteristics of social media

- Almost all the respondents agreed that social media plays all the major roles mentioned in this paper viz. communicative role, collaborative role, role of education, role of engagement, role of monitoring, role of maximising and role of enjoying.
- When questioned regarding the increased levels of addiction of the Netizens due to Facebook, Twitter and few other social networking sites, most of the respondents opined that it is in the beginning only, the Netizens spend more time on the virtual meet platforms and said there is no truth in telling that the Netizens are becoming addicted.
- Almost all the respondents agreed that the social media platform, which started at the fringes, are now increasingly getting embedded in mainstream culture and inspiring actions and reactions in our physical world.
- In a similar vein, all the respondents agreed that social media is fast emerging as a powerful and unparalleled tool to share information, shape opinions, connect people across domains and cultures, bring participation, and above all to communicate as never before. Social media can become a very effective policy tool for Governments, if they learn to leverage it in the best possible manner.
- Most of the respondents see the victory of Anna Hazare in getting the Lokpal bill passed in the parliament of India as the valuable contribution added by the social media audience through their wide support on the social media platform. They even see the victory of Arvind Kejriwal in becoming the Chief Minister of Delhi is more related to the contribution of the audience of social media.
- A mixed response has been received from the respondents regarding trolling. Few people opined that inflammatory or objectionable material on the Internet is definitely circulated but felt that the material is informal and not to be taken as a negative aspect. Few others opined that trolling is very high on the social media unlike in any form of conventional media and they see it as a negative aspect of social media. The final category of respondents feel that it's up to the individual whether to respond or not to such inflammatory or objectionable material and they see compare it with that of movies certified 'A', which

grab the attention of the people who are prone to it. Whatsoever the case, but, the respondents agree that trolling is high on the social media platform.

- Based on the answers received from the respondents regarding their interest levels on the social media, it is estimated that majority of the social media users depend on social media for entertainment rather than for political activities or any other activities.
- All the respondents are not in agreement with the democratic nature of the social media. Most of the respondents quoted the example of the arrest of the two girls: Shaheen Dhada and Renu Shrinivas, who were arrested over their Facebook post questioning the shutdown in the Mumbai city for Shiv Sena patriarch Bal Thackeray's funeral. Only a few respondents feel that social media is more democratic for anyone with access to the Internet can raise an issue in the public arena.

Recommendations and Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations and suggestions are made:

- Article 19 (1) of the Constitution of Republic of India guarantees freedom of the speech and expression to all the citizens of India; from the other side, Section 66 (A) and Section 69 of Information Technology Act 2000 imposes certain restrictions on the Netizens. There is a need to review these contradicting acts in Indian context, in accordance to the contemporary requirements of the social media.
- Most of the respondents opined that social media is very interactive. In India, various sectors didn't have their presence on the social media. It is very astonishing that the world famous ISRO entered the Facebook officially on December 18, 2013. All sectors need to get themselves promoted on the social media, which is the need of the hour.
- Due to the setbacks of social media in the form of key challenges, the free space provided by the owners of the social media websites is not being utilised by many with a fear of not having secrecy. This may be well addressed by the social media owners so as to enable more audience of this media.
- Social media has immense potential to mould the people's decision. The areas which need the attention of most of the people may better utilise the social media platforms to obtain the palpable response. For example, reduction of carbon foot printing may be achieved by promoting it in the social media environment, instead of circulating the pamphlets and brochures that itself violates the very purpose.
- As far as storage of data is concerned, social media poses potential dangers to the individuals in various forms like identity theft, sexual predators, stalking, unintentional fame, employment, apart from various threats for institutions. All these issues need to be addressed by the social media owners for ensuring a better work environment.
- Privacy, the crucial factor needs to be addressed by the service providers with utmost dedication and on top priority. Once this crucial issue gets properly addressed, the most important challenge posed by the new media can be overcome.

Conclusion:

The last two decades have witnessed a rapid transformation of traditional media into new media that includes computerized, digital, and networked information and communication technologies. Today, an increasing entertainment of social phenomena, ubiquitous data and computational process can be observed in many domains and context, including social media. There is a palpable shift from conventional media to new media. This shift has raised many concerns and discussions around the pros and cons of the new media, and other related issues.

From one end, the respondents are of the opinion that they cannot even imagine a world without new media; and from the other end, there are many challenges posed by the new media. At this juncture, the only option left with is, the addressing of these challenges posed by the new media in a desired way, so that the maximum can be obtained out of the social media. Both service providers and the concerned competitive authorities at appropriate level should look into this matter, so as to provide a better new media environment to the audience.

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