

AN EFFECTIVE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO CONTINUE READING HABITS AMONG THE SENIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 CRISES IN INDIA: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore how social media affects the continuation of reading habits among senior secondary school students in India during the COVID-19 crisis. According to a review of the literature, there are around 622 million Internet users in Indian households, and it is predicted that this number would rise to 900 million by 2025. There aren't as many gaps in rural internet connectivity as there are in urban areas. Between 2019 and 2021, the percentage of school children in rural areas who own a smartphone climbed steadily from 36 to 61 percent. When it comes to social media accounts among school pupils, the majority of students access them through their parents' devices. Social media has a good impact on students' reading habits, but it also has a negative impact in terms of distractions during study time. Adolescents in high school are heavily reliant on social media. The entire research project is theory-based and extremely useful for other research projects.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media is defined as an interactive form of electronic communication that allows users to generate and share material in a variety of formats, including text, photos, audio, and video. This type of communication requires platforms such as social networking and microblogging websites, where users can construct online groups and communities to share their thoughts, information, personal messages, etc. It is a web-based application developed on web 2.0's concept and technological foundations. Web 2.0 is defined as websites that prioritize user-generated content, flexibility of use, peer interaction and compatibility for end users. Instead of humans, computers generate fresh information in web3.0. The issue today is not a lack of information, but rather an abundance of it. This problem can be solved by sorting all such data and categorizing it properly. Web3.0 is more concerned with the tools and strategies that may be used to make information consumption more efficient and effective (Shelley Walsh, 2021), (Nations, 2021), (Wikimedia, 2022).

2. GENESIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

ARPANET, which was launched in 1967 to facilitate the flow of non-government/business ideas and communication, later evolved into INTERNET. Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) were created in the late 1970s and were the first type of social networking site that allowed users to log on and engage with one another, much like we do now, though at a considerably faster speed. UseNet, one of the earliest computer network communications systems, was founded in 1979, nearly a decade before the World Wide Web. These newsgroups were created as discussion forums for users to share user-generated content and served as a valuable source of consumer information. Message forums transferred to the web when the World Wide Web (WWW) was added to the internet in the 1990s, later becoming internet forums with the ability to accommodate multiple individuals simultaneously.

Geocities, created in 1994, was one of the first social networking sites, followed by classmates.com in 1995 and SixDegrees.com in 1997. Yahoo! Geocities is a free web hosting service that allows users to develop and launch websites based on their own preferences and concepts. Classmates.com allowed people to join their high school or college and search the network for other people who shared their interests, but users couldn't build profiles or add friends until years later.

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SixDegrees.com allowed users to establish profiles, list their Friends, and browse with the Friends lists that started in 1998. Ryze.com, which was created in 2001 to assist people utilize their business networks, was the start of the next wave of SNSs. In 2002, Friendster was developed as a social companion to Ryze. It was created in order to compete with Match.com, a popular online dating service. In addition, many more SNSs were created from 2003 onward, inspiring social software analyst Clay Shirky (2003) to develop the acronym YASNS: "Yet Another Social Networking Service." LinkedIn, Visible Path, and Xing are professional sites that cater to business people. As the popularity of social media and user-generated content expanded, websites devoted to media sharing began to incorporate SNS features and become SNSs themselves. Flickr (picture sharing), Last.FM (music listening habits), and YouTube (video sharing) are some of the examples.

Another elaboration of social media can be described as web-based sites that allow users to engage with one another. Some of the examples of social media are Facebook, YouTube, Whatsapp, SMS, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc. The name "Social Media" is formed by combining the words "social" and "media." The "Social" element refers to people interacting with one another by sharing and receiving information or having a conversation. The term "media" refers to a medium that enables communication, such as the internet, whereas radio, television, newspapers, and other forms of traditional media were formerly employed. Hence, social media can be characterized as an internet-based communication tool that allows people to share and receive information with one another. Social media, on the other hand, is a fairly broader term. Some people compare it to social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, while others consider blogs to be social media. Blogs are a type of social media that is one of the oldest forms. User accounts, comments sections, and blog networks, among other features, have made blogs interactive, and so they fall under the genre of social media, such as tumblr, wordpress, and Blogger, and many more. Traditional media such as television, radio, and newspapers are a part of social media but not entirely for a variety of reasons. Social media allows users to engage with one another, whereas traditional media just delivers information to its users, alerting them to the latest news and information that may be of value to them, but does not allow its users to participate or offer suggestions in any way. Social media consists of a variety of networks for people with a wide range of interests.

Social networking is a cost-effective and efficient technique to reach a larger audience and have a deeper impact upon its users. With the advent of social media customers and businesses have become well connected with each other. Over time, various types of social media platforms have changed, becoming more sophisticated in terms of technology, more effective in terms of customer influence, and more efficient in terms of reaching customers at the optimal moment (Boyd & Ellison, n.d.), (Sajithra K and Patil, 2013).

3. PROS AND CONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has been fairly popular in recent years due to its user-friendly features. People can communicate with one other using social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and many others, overcoming physical and time obstacles. It is very popular among teenagers and is an excellent educational tool. Social media may help students learn about a variety of topics. Furthermore, social media has made it feasible to broadcast live lectures from anywhere in the world. In comparison to traditional forms of mass media, social media has a far broader audience and spreads news much more quickly. Many individuals use social media to keep them updated with current events and topics all across the world. It provides a terrific platform for young artists to showcase their talent for free while also providing them with great chances through employment. Entrepreneurs profit as well, because social media has become a hotspot for promoting their products and brands, as well as connecting them with customers. Social media if not monitored properly can lead to grave consequences especially in the case of children and students. It invades privacy of users as over sharing on social media is targeted by predators and hackers. It leads to cyber bullying; hence its monitoring is of utmost importance. People often get addicted to social media that ultimately hampers their academic performance as most of the time is wasted on social media instead of focusing upon education and learning. Fake news can be spread very easily by the use of social media that can fill

hatred in the minds of common man and can accelerate communal rifts. In the end it can be concluded that social media can act as a boon to the society if a balance is created between academic performance, physical activities and social media. Excess of everything is harmful and is applicable in case of social media. A right balance should be therefore maintained to live a peaceful and satisfying life and derive benefit out of the use of technology (Toppr, 2022).

4. READING HABITS AMONG THE SCHOOL STUDENTS

It is true that books are our best friends, and the habit of reading gives us more information, wisdom, innovative ideas, and experience that can be employed prudently when the situation calls for it. As a result, the more knowledge learned, the greater the visibility and the person will be better ready to face any obstacle. Knowledge is a necessary component in any industry, including work, belongings, money, and even health care. It is an intangible asset that is unaffected by loss or theft. Learning new technical skills, languages, and presenting projects/papers all need extensive reading. When we read/speak with fluency, proper style, and tone, it raises our morale and creates a positive picture of the speaker in the eyes of the audience and judges. Our writing skills also depend upon our reading habits and acquiring knowledge which can produce fruitful results in future. Furthermore, depending on the subject and topic of the book, reading a good book can provide enormous inner calm, tranquility and always guide us towards the right path in our life.

The practice of reading helps us to improve our minds by presenting us with a wealth of information that allows us to better understand the world around us. It stimulates our minds and boosts our creativity and imaginative thinking. Reading improves our vocabulary and communication skills, as well as our ability to write. Reading a good book helps us relax and de-stress while also stimulating our brain muscles, keeping them healthy and active. It gives a great deal of pleasure when reading a good book such as an autobiography, novel, or factual book and many more. Reading habits help people build analytical skills and reproduce new ideas and concepts, which excite and develop brain cells. Last but not the least; it helps to alleviate boredom and monotony in everyday life. A good book that informs, enlightens and guides us in the correct route in life is our best companion. (Nishad, 2018).

5. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, schools all across the world were closed. Around the world, 1.2 billion youngsters are not in school. Remote learning became a savior for the education system throughout this pandemic. Digital technology paves the way by enabling both teachers and students to access specialized study material (beyond textbooks) in a variety of formats, overcoming time and location barriers, and thereby embracing a new digital learning environment. Similarly, rather than simply covering the curriculum, virtual laboratories allow students to create, conduct, and learn from experiments. The old traditional techniques of teaching (classroom and blackboard teaching) and learning have been altered by technology. Students participate in class via various educational initiatives such as online classrooms, webinars, digital exams, and so on, using platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom, Teams, and many more. Many online platforms, like BYJU, Tencent Classroom, Lark, Alibaba's remote learning solution, and others, are providing free access to their services throughout the pandemic.

On the contrary, both pupils and teachers encountered numerous obstacles at the same time. Due to budgetary constraints, students do not have the resources to attend online programmes and are battling to obtain the essential equipment. Teachers, on the other hand, are working hard to become conversant with the usage of ICT in order to handle new equipment and digital teaching methodologies. Parents who are illiterate face numerous challenges in assisting their children with their education via the internet. Due to the COVID-19 shutdown, which has deprived many kids of proper food and nourishment, the government of India's midday meal scheme, which aimed to draw large numbers of pupils to school, has come to an end. In this situation, students not only lose their academic learning, but also their family members. Most kids in such circumstances were obliged to drop out of school in order to assist their families financially since there was no other option. Almost everyone has suffered from social isolation, which has a negative impact on mental health. During this dreadful condition

that existed around the world, depression rates climbed along with a rise in suicidal instances. Due to a shortage of financial resources, low-budget organizations and schools were compelled to close. It is just for the students' safety at home, so that they do not become infected with this potentially fatal illness. (Suresh, 2021), (Schleicher, 2020), (Emma Dorn, Bryan Hancock, Jimmy Sarakatsannis, 2021), (Li, Cathy and Lalani, 2020).

6. TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA/ SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM/FORUM

Some of the most prominent types of social media are:

- (i) **Social Networking Sites:** People use social networking services like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter to interact with friends and followers, join communities and groups, and exchange ideas and information ranging from blog entries to infographics and beyond.
- (ii) **Image Sharing Sites:** In comparison to music and text, visual content has a larger and deeper influence on individuals; hence visual assets have now become a primary priority. As a result, new forms of social media based solely on visuals, such as Instagram and visual messaging apps like Snapchat, have arisen.
- (iii) **Video Sharing Sites:** More people share and talk about videos than any other format. Video portals like YouTube and Vimeo, like image-based social sites, are garnering massive audiences.
- (iv) **Social Blogging:** Despite the different sorts of social media platforms available, blogging still has a lot of influence. Medium, Tumblr, Quora, and other social blogging services use written content to engage their audiences and participants.
- (v) **Messaging Apps:** WhatsApp, Messenger, Wechat, etc are some of the messaging apps with various advanced capabilities such as calling, creating groups, broadcasting messages to multiple users, transfer of money, etc (InVideo, 2022), (Wong, 2021), (Barnhart, 2017), (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021).

7. OBJECTIVES

- i. To determine the number of total populations, have the Internet connectivity;
- ii. To determine the number of school students who have social media accounts;
- iii. To examine the role of social media and its impact on school students' reading habits during COVID-19;
- iv. To quantify the increase of Smartphone ownership during COVID-19;
- v. To explore the educational sector's response to the COVID-19 challenges;

8. METHODOLOGY

The recent pandemic has wreaked havoc around the globe, including India. The entire educational system has crumbled, but advances in technology and tools have restored some balance to the system. Some questions have been established to explore how tools and technology assist school students in teaching learning research. To obtain the answers to these questions, a systematic inquiry was conducted using exploratory approaches to find the answers. Research Papers, Government and Private Reports, Blogs, Websites, Wikimedia, and other publications are among the documents being studied to justify the questions. Some essential data was extracted from the reports and graphs were created to improve the study's visibility. For the citations and references, APA 6th standard has been utilized throughout the study.

9. DISCUSSION

9.1 India's Population with the Internet Connectivity

In today's digital era, the internet plays a vital part in practically every aspect of our lives. The internet has become a phenomenon in recent years, everything now relies on it starting from small to big tasks. It's difficult to envision a world without Google, Amazon, Apple, or Facebook. The internet is a fantastic tool for students to learn and get academic knowledge in a matter of seconds, most of which

is free to read or download. Students gain a better comprehension of their topic as information is easily accessible via the internet. Information is spread faster and more easily through the internet with real time updates and services. Multimedia materials over the internet are very supportive to students by providing visual explanations with the use of different technological tools. Students can avail various scholarship schemes very quickly through the use of the internet and can get themselves registered directly. Distance education is made possible with the use of the internet and in today's pandemic situation of COVID-19 which has brought the whole world on its knees, the internet has provided us with other alternative solutions to continue education through online mode and thus safeguarding the lives of students and continuing their academics. The internet has opened up numerous economic opportunities, notably in the education industry.

9.2 E-publishing

Since the Universe of Knowledge is constantly developing and increasing, libraries and information centers must adapt to the changing scenario of the digital age. From static text to graphic, hypertext, audio, video, and now interactive multimedia, the mode of presentation is evolving. To deal with the availability of literature, the difficulties in retrieving information owing to its dispersion, rising prices, and shrinking library budgets, E-Publishing and E-Delivery of documents were born. E-publishing is a publishing process in which manuscripts are presented in electronic formats, edited, printed, and distributed to readers through the use of computer technology and internet connectivity. When compared to print forms, e-publishing is always more current with visuals and saves library personnel time and effort in handling them, rendering them superfluous. Its storage and access is also significantly easier and reduces expenditure upon converting texts later into digital forms. Readers can access pertinent material without physically visiting the library by using the internet and remote access to the library's subscribing journals and databases from any location and at any time. Furthermore, going paperless with e-publishing is both cost effective and environmentally friendly (Neosperience Team, 2021), (Impoff, 2019), (Fiber, 2022).

9.3 Library on Web

A library website serves as a web portal or interface for patrons to access information online about the library's products and services. It provides users with a virtual door, such as the Library OPAC, which is an online public access catalog that displays the library's collection and resources while also allowing remote access to the library's e-resources and databases. In addition, library tutorials assist users in selecting appropriate electronic resources. Remote users can submit questions to the virtual reference services via email and messaging. Library blogs, on the other hand, advertise new resources or services given by the library to its patrons and are a wonderful way of communicating with users and gathering input for future growth. All these services require the basic need of internet connectivity to function appropriately.

9.4 Digital India

Digital India is a government of India effort aimed at making government services more accessible to individuals through enhanced online infrastructure and enhanced internet access. In 2015, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology launched a campaign with a goal to make the country digitally empowered in the sphere of technology. Under the Digital India Project, various projects are undertaken like Accessible India Campaign or Sugamya Bharat Abhiyaan for persons with disabilities giving them equal opportunities and services, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme for girl child education, adoption of UPI BHIM App for encouraging digital transaction, E-Granthalaya i.e. an integrated library management software developed by NIC for automation of library activities and is UNICODE compliant, Digital AIIMS project providing unique digital identification to every patient of AIIMS giving them digital identity, eBIZ services offered by Infosys Technology to improve business environment in India and avoid delays by use of online portal, E-Pathshala developed by NCERT that disseminates all e-resources through websites and mobile app, Himmat app is an initiation of Delhi Police for safety of womens, etc. The Digital India project's goal is to turn our country into a technology driven society with a knowledge - based economy (IT & India), 2022).

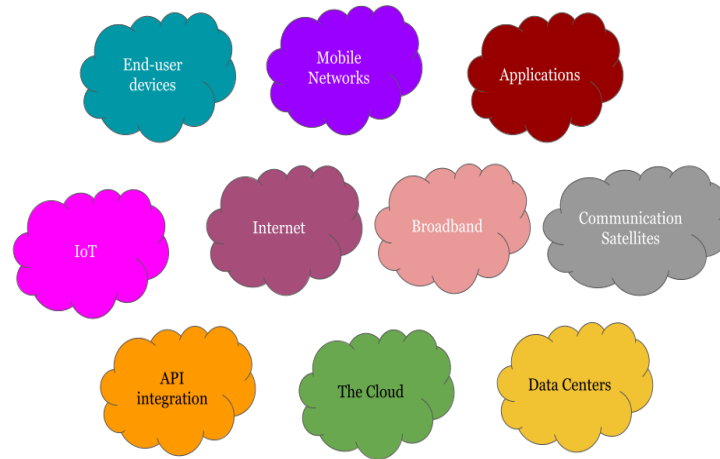


Fig: 1 Digital Component

9.4.1 Basic Infrastructure required for Digital Project

Basic Infrastructure is a combination of both physical and virtual technologies required to start a digital project. It includes internet, broadband, mobile network, communication satellites, data centers, end-user devices, the Internet of Things (IoT), applications, and the cloud for information storage, retrieval, and easy access of information. The Internet is a global network of servers and data centers, sometimes known as cyberspace that provides end users with numerous types and forms of information via websites. Internet access is provided by Internet service providers (ISPs), who maintain a physical network of cables, servers, and data centers. Broadband is essential in order to connect customers to the internet at a fast speed. It is a physical link between a device (like laptops, desktops, tablets, mobile phones, etc) and a server, and it is used to connect to the internet via a router (often referred to as Wi-Fi). IoT is also seen as a crucial infrastructure for the continuation of digital programmes. IoT refers to all devices that can connect to the internet and gather and share data via sensors, such as Alexa, Google Assistant, smart laptops, smart watches, smartphones, and other devices that make our lives easier. In addition to this, the cloud is a network of servers that uses the internet to store huge files, personal data, and images. It works by providing on-demand computer services over the internet in exchange for a fee based on storage capacity. Cloud computing saves files over the internet rather than on local storage devices for example google drive, dropbox, icloud, etc. Apps are also an important infrastructure, referred to as software programmes that allow end users to conduct a variety of tasks on devices with internet connection, whereas an API (Application Program Interface) allows applications or parts of them to communicate with one another (Designing Buildings, 2021).

9.5 Dramatic growth of Internet Connectivity in India

Internet connectivity has been fast increasing in India as a result of the country's digital promotion, with the goal of providing a link between the centres and states for hassle-free services. The data has been taken from the Kantar report (Kantar is a global leader in data, analytics, and consulting)

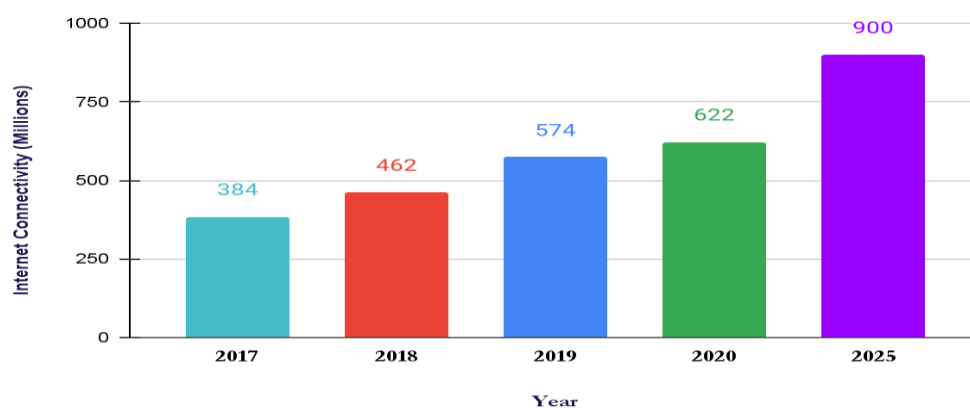


Fig 1: Growth of Internet connectivity in India

Figure 1 depicts the constant and significant growth of internet connectivity in India. In 2017, 384 million internet users were recorded, followed by 462 million in 2018, 574 million connections in 2019, and 622 million in 2020. This demonstrates that India's internet connection has improved at a rapid rate. This report also predicts that by 2025, more than 900 million people will have access to the internet. This indicates that the majority of the population in this country will be digitized in the near future. (Kantar, 2021). COVID-19, which struck India at the end of 2019, has had an immediate impact on our educational and economic systems. When a complete lockdown was imposed across the country at the start of 2020, schools and colleges, as well as the workplace, were completely shut down. To cope with the issue, people were urged to work from home and keep social distance as a preventive step to minimize COVID-19 transmission. Technology has aided our educational system in adopting new ways and strategies to continue education among high school and college students, with the internet playing a significant role in this. Hence a vast increase in internet connection is seen during the year 2019 and 2020.

9.5.1 Growth of Internet Connectivity Rural and Urban Area

The Kantar research was also used to analyse internet connectivity in rural and urban areas, and it was discovered that there was a significant disparity in 2017, 2018, but that gap has narrowed in 2019, 2020.

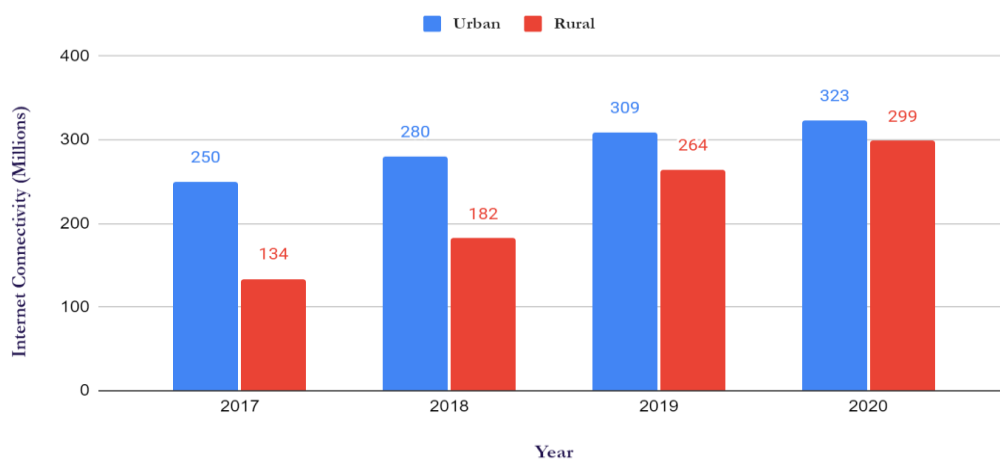


Fig 2: Growth of internet connectivity in rural and urban areas.

Figure 2 reveals growth of internet connectivity in rural and urban areas in India. A maximum of 323 million internet users were reported in urban areas and 299 million internet users in rural areas in 2020, followed by 309 million users in rural areas and 264 million users in 2019. However, a total of 280 million internet connections were reported in urban and 182 in rural areas in 2018, followed by 250 million internet connections in urban and 134 million users in rural regions in 2017. These graphs exemplify that the growth of internet connectivity between urban and rural areas were almost at a similar pace and prove to be a good sign of progress in both rural and urban areas of the country. This shows that people were adjusting and adopting new tools and techniques to fulfill basic needs of their lives with the help of the internet which acted as a boon in this grave situation when this pandemic had struck our nation (Kantar, 2021).

9.6 Social Media accounts among the School Students in India:

Between July and December 2020, the research team of Mumbai-based NGO Rambhau Mhalgi Prabodhini carried out a study project for NCPCR. A total of 5811 people took part in the event, including 3491 school-aged children, 1,534 parents, and 786 teachers. A total of 60 selected schools from six different states participated in the poll. States from East, West, North, South, and North East India are included in the study.

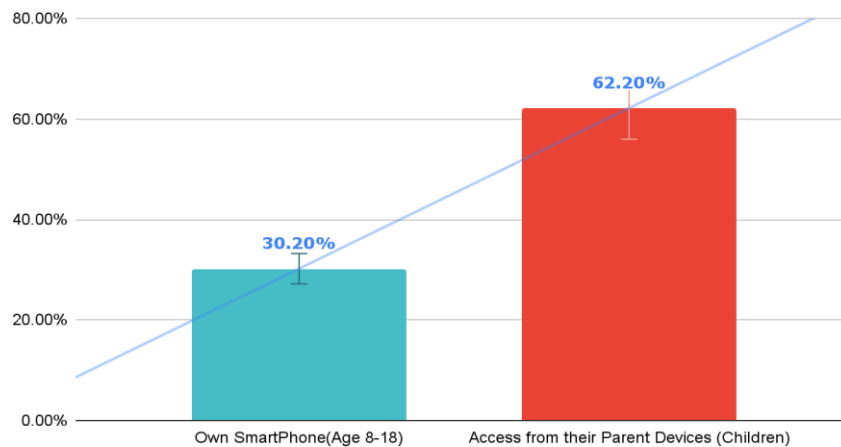


Fig 3: Social Media Account

According to the report, 42.9 percent of respondents had a social media account. Students in the age bracket of 8 to 18 years old own 30.2 percent of smartphones. It was surprising that 66.6% Students accessed social media accounts through their parents' smartphones. During the epidemic, 94.8 percent of students used social media for online learning, according to the report. According to the research, students believe that the epidemic has harmed their education, and that online learning isn't good enough (Pandit, 2021).

9.7 A review on role of social media and its impact on school students reading habits during COVID-19

The recent pandemic COVID-19 has brought a preventive measure involving social distancing and staying at home after complete lockdown was imposed across the different nations of the whole world to combat this horrible contagious disease. Reading habits among the students during COVID-19 was evolving and challenging due to non-availability or lack of resources and thus increased use of smartphones is done for reading purposes. However some of the students face difficulty in handling the technology and digital devices and its appropriate use. Lack of motivation is seen among students due to the fear element associated with the epidemic's fatality rate that leads to psychological anxiety and depression among students. Heavy usage of social media is done by students during this period to get themselves abreast with the latest updates regarding the spread of COVID-19 and its precautionary measures that can be undertaken by every person to protect themselves. Another big reason for increased usage of social media is entertainment to reduce boredom and monotony in life. It is accessed mainly using smartphones for browsing different social media sites like facebook, twitter, instagram, YouTube, whatsapp, etc. A positive impact of social media is revealed on reading habits among students however distractions during study time is noted as its adverse effect. Google classroom, google meet, zooms and team's app are excessively used by students to continue their academic activity. The use of social media enhances student socializing and aids them in their studies by allowing them to look for and use more relevant material available over social media. Students are losing the social element that they feel by physically traveling to their schools, thus social media technology provides a collaborative and interactive learning environment that engages students in reading and other academic pursuits.

Reading time is uplifted among students as compared to normal routine from 1-2 to 3-4 hours per day in addition to the normal online session/classes taken by them. Screen time has also alleviated for students due to online mode of teaching and learning and later on completion of their projects and tasks assigned by their teachers. During the COVID-19 school closure, reading was the most popular leisure activity, and print format was favored above digital ones. There are several intrinsic constraints of digital reading that prohibit pupils from adopting new habits of reading in digital form, such as eye strain, the necessity for continuous power supply with good internet access, and tedious navigability, etc.

Cursory review of literature revealed that social media exhibits a positive impact upon reading habits among school students as lockdown and lack of resources along with financial barriers has encouraged its use. However, some of the literature also proves the negative impact of social media upon reading habits among school students due to various factors like distractions, addiction and its increased use for other purposes like entertainment, gaming, chatting, etc. It is recommended that strategies should be adopted by the school authorities in this regard to attract the learners towards social media and facilitate online learning, guiding them about rich and reliable study material sources available on social media that can be accessed with ease and simplicity. In addition to this, it is further suggested that certain orientation and awareness programmes along with meetings, seminars and workshops must be arranged by school authorities at regular intervals to guide its students about positive and right efficacious use of social media for learning purposes and authentic sources that should be explored by them to benefit academically. The habit of spending quality reading time in secondary school should be fostered because there is a great risk of losing this habit owing to distractions linked with technological advancements especially during COVID-19 crises. Furthermore, a student's reading skill has a significant impact on academic success. Parental guidance is also of utmost importance in ensuring that their wards are paying sufficient attention towards studying and making judicious use of social media in the right direction (Saikia, 2019), (CareerRide.Com, 2016), (MuthyalaiiahChetty & Kishore, 2017), (Oge, 2019), (Dynamic, 2022), (Nnaji et al., 2020b), (Packialakshmi et al., 2021a), (Nnaji et al., 2020a), (Rohidas et al., 2021), (News, 2020), (Rafiq et al., 2019), (Sun et al., 2021), (Packialakshmi et al., 2021b), (Conversation, 2020),

9.8 Smartphone uses among the School Students

In rural areas, schoolchildren who own a smartphone have increased steadily from 36 to 61 percent during the last two years starting from 2019 to 2021. This points to a narrowing of the digital divide between rural and urban areas, as well as improved educational outcomes. In India, children are taught online using digital devices such as smartphones at home during pandemic crises. It is learned from the COVID-19 epidemic that we must embrace technology whether we like it or not. We must rely on technology to keep the education system functioning, making smartphones and computers mandatory for students so that education is not disrupted by external challenges. Smartphones like every other device have their own pros and cons. Children get addicted to its use and even though their health is hampered as a result of its long excessive use. In light of the dire scenario that has evolved as a result of COVID-19, it is the last remaining option for teachers and students to support education. The National Education Policy (NEP) aims to prepare the ground for significant changes in the country's school and higher education sectors. Universal education from preschool to secondary school, with a 100% gross enrolment ratio in school by 2030, to reintegrate two million out-of-school children into the mainstream through universal access and the expansion of the open schooling system. In terms of literacy, the poll found that the country is still 4% short of achieving 100% literacy at the elementary level, and that female literacy remains below the national average (T. N. I. Express, 2021), (Mohanty, 2021), (T. I. Express, 2021), (ASER, 2021).

9.9 Educational sector response to the COVID-19 Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted practically every sector in the world, particularly the educational system. In India, over 32 crore students ceased attending school or college, and all educational activities were discontinued. COVID-19 has taught us that change is inevitable. The education sector is still battling to stay afloat in the face of the crisis, employing a variety of techniques and relying heavily on digital technologies to do so. The Indian government has taken several initiatives to ensure that education continues in a seamless manner. In India not every kid has access to digital technologies and devices, the situation is dire as both teachers and students are unprepared for online education. Parents also have to strive hard to ensure their ward's education. India's educational industry is still grappling on how to employ digital resources to cope with the abrupt shift from traditional to online educational settings. Educators have used technology to provide online lectures via live video conferencing utilizing apps such as *Zoom, Teams, Google Meet, Facebook,*

YouTube, and Skype and many more. The WhatsApp group of children, instructors, parents, and guardians allows them to communicate effectively and discuss any obstacles they may face.

However, for students to continue learning, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has created many provisions, including:

- i. **Online portals and educational channels** via Direct to Home TV, Radios and Podcasts for students to continue learning that are available 24x7 free of cost. For youngsters in distant places without access to the internet, radio broadcasting is used. NCERT produces high-quality audio/radio programmes that make excellent use of media such as music, sound effects, and well-respected publications to help students gain a deeper understanding. These radio programmes, which are broadcast in a variety of languages including Hindi, English, Sanskrit, and Urdu, provide enrichment, information, and education. DIKSHA, ePathshala, and 12 Gyan Vani FM Radio stations, as well as the Jio Saavn mobile app, broadcast these programmes on a regular basis. For better reach, some 800 programmes have been shared with All India Radio (AIR). 12 PMeVidya DTH TV Channels began broadcasting school education programming on September 1, 2020. KVS instructors created around 600 podcasts in various disciplines for grades 6 to 9, which are available on Google Drive to CBSE and the Ministry of Education.
- ii. **Diksha (Digital Infrastructure for knowledge sharing)**, provides a wide range of educational resources for students and teachers in multiple languages with various interactive modules including e-books, audio, videos, etc. The content can be accessed using QR Code given on the textbooks and its App can be downloaded using IOS or Google play store. More than 250 experts who teach in different languages contributed to the content of Diksha. Offline use is possible with the app. It offers over 80,000 e-Books in several languages created by CBSE and NCERT for classes 1 to 12. DIKSHA also promotes teachers' professional development by providing 18 NISHTHA teacher training modules for primary teachers. TARA (Technology aided responses and answers) is a Chatbot that helps with navigation, user experience, and e-content access. Vidyadaan, a nationwide e-content contribution initiative that supports DIKSHA platform by various educational entities, corporate sectors, and individual specialists, was started in April 2020.
- iii. **E-Pathshala and National repository of open educational resources (NROER)** site created by CBSE and NCERT includes nearly 17,500 e-learning content for students, teachers and parents based on the curriculum, including video, worksheets, textbooks, and assessment. During the COVID-19 crises, e-textbooks were also consolidated on DIKSHA to provide users with a consistent experience through single platforms. The e-pathshala web portal and mobile app can be used to access NCERT e-textbooks. More than 600 digital books, including 377 e-textbooks for grades 1-12 and 3,500 multimedia content from NCERT, are freely accessible in numerous languages.
- iv. **Online educational platforms like SWAYAM, SWAYAM PRABHA** are also available covering both school and higher education in all subjects and areas that proved to be a boon to the society. Swayam Prabha has launched 32 DTH TV channels that broadcast educational content 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is available for free with the use of a DD Free Dish Set Top Box and Antenna. It covers arts, science, commerce, social science, humanities, engineering, technology, law, medicine, and agriculture for secondary school and higher education. On the SWAYAM portal, online MOOC courses related to NIOS (open schooling grades 9 to 12) are available. In order to provide continuing learning, NIOS has begun broadcasting a daily 8-hour live programme (4 hours each) on PM eVidya channels for classes 10 and 12. Yoga, music, and painting sessions were also broadcast live on the SWAYAM PRABHA channel.
- v. **OLABS:** During the pandemic school closure, online virtual labs were established to encourage practical aspects of course learning. It is based on the premise that lab experiments can be taught anywhere and anytime through the Internet in a cost-effective manner.

- vi. **E-Content for visually and hearing-impaired students:** One DTH channel dedicated to hearing challenged pupils is operating, with a one-hour sign language programme broadcast on the PM eVidya channel for school students. Study materials in the Digitally Accessible Information System (**DAISY**) and sign language have been produced for visually and hearing-impaired students, and are both accessible on the NIOS website/YouTube.
- vii. During such a critical juncture of COVID-19, there is a rapid and unpredictable increase in online activity by teachers and schools, which can lead to cyberbullying and cybersafety issues, particularly for young pupils. As a result, CBSE has created a student-friendly manual on cyber safety.
- viii. In addition, during the COVID-19 outbreak, the Ministry launched an effort called '**MANO DARPAN**,' which provides psychological help to teachers, students, and parents for emotional and mental well-being providing toll-free helpline numbers, interactive online chat platform, webinars, AV resources and short films, etc.
- ix. The Ministry of Education established **Art Integrated Learning (AIL)** to reduce stress concerns among its students connected to school course curriculum in order to make teaching-learning more enjoyable, competency-based and increase art and music skills among them.

This online way of learning has boosted students' digital literacy by allowing them to use electronic media such as SMS, e-mails, and various social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and many more to share information with a global audience. This global crisis has taught students proper time management along with self-learning techniques and strategies (Babbar & Gupta, 2021), (The World Bank Group, 2022), (Rajhans et al., 2020), (Choudhary, 2020), (Jena, 2020), (Ministry of Education, 2020).

10. FINDINGS

- i. The study indicates that India's internet connectivity has grown at a fast pace with a maximum of 622 million internet users in 2020, followed by 574 million internet connections in 2019, 462 million in 2018 and 384 million users in 2017 showing a steady increase in internet connectivity across India. The report predicts that more than 900 million persons in India will be having internet access by 2025.
- ii. The study exemplifies that a maximum of 323 million internet users were reported in urban areas and 299 million internet users in rural areas in 2020 in India. This proves the growth of internet connectivity between urban and rural regions was at a similar rate. This indicates that people in rural areas are also evolving and getting acquainted with the latest digital technology to accomplish the very basic need of their life with the use of the internet during such a crucial time of pandemic in India.
- iii. According to the literature review statistics, 30.2 percent of school students aged 8 to 18 own a smartphone and, as a result, a social media account. However, it was surprising to learn that 66.6 percent of students used their parents' smartphones to access social media accounts.
- iv. It is evident from the study that social media have a strong influential impact upon reading habits among school students due to lack of educational resources and financial barriers which has encouraged its increased use during the lockdown period of COVID-19.
- v. It is a good sign that social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and many more are increasingly used by school students to share and receive information with international communities. Most of the time it is accessed using smartphones while Google Classroom, Google Meet, Zoom and Teams App are enormously used by both teachers and students to continue their teaching learning process.
- vi. However, some of the research shows a negative impact of social media upon reading habits among school students due to various factors like distractions, addiction, lack of knowledge on relevant

sources, eyestrain and many others. It has exerted a negative impact on student's mental health and created panic among by spreading the fatality rate of this dreadful disease.

- vii. The study reveals that social media is extensively used for other purposes specially to reduce boredom and monotony for entertainment, gaming, chatting and many other reasons by school students.
- viii. The study depicts a constructive role played by educational sectors in dealing with the challenges faced by them during COVID-19. The Ministry of HRD, Government of India has taken numerous initiatives in this regard to ensure that education is continued in an unblemished manner. For students to continue their education for free, it includes online portals, instructional channels via Direct to Home TV, radios, and podcasts. Moreover, during this period, various integrated e-content resources such as DIKSHA, E-Pathshala, National repository of open educational resources (NROER), OLABS, and e-content for visually and hearing-impaired students in DAISY form are made available to school students. A lot of online educational platforms, such as SWAYAM and SWAYAM PRABHA, are broadcast 24 hours a day, seven days a week on 32 DTH TV channels, covering all subject areas.
- ix. The study also expresses the efforts made by Ministry to deal with psychosocial well-being of students, teachers and parents to reduce stress level and depression among them by launching a psychological support in the form of 'MANODARPAN' and 'Art Integrated Learning (AIL)' to make teaching-learning more creative and delightful.
- x. The study proves that school students are well equipped in the use of technology and social media during this contagious pandemic situation and have learned from this global crisis about right efficacious use of time and self-learning towards education.

11. CONCLUSION

Social media has played an important role in the industrial sector since its inception, as proven by a survey of literature. The educational sector, on the other hand, is not far behind in adopting the social media culture. According to Digital India project data, India has 448.0 active social media users as of January 2021. As a result, it is now possible to readily reach individuals via social media rather than traditional media. As of now, social media has become an integral aspect of all academic institutions. It would be incomprehensible if every academic institution did not have a social media page. During these pandemics, social media becomes quite popular and educational institutions such as schools, colleges, and universities use it to connect their students to provide e-content. It does, however, have both positive and negative features, although the positive perspective may obscure the negative parts. According to the findings of the above analysis, school students have benefited from using social media to continue their studies during this pandemic. To access social media profiles, it's required a Smartphone and Internet access. The Digital India project is a fantastic initiative by the Indian government to virtually connect communities with the rest of the country. Today, internet connectivity in rural and urban households is about identical. As a result of this technical breakthrough, the country's school education system has been less affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools used WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook etc. to stay in touch with their students and encourage them to keep up their reading habits. Therefore, it can be stated that social media has a beneficial impact on teaching and learning among students in the country, and that it should be formed as an alternative mode of education to eradicate the country's illiteracy poverty.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

Educational sectors should take the appropriate steps to plan, emphasize, and ensure that all students/learners return to school including:

- i. All suitable actions are implemented to reopen schools safely.
- ii. All students return to school and receive the customized services they require to satisfy their learning, health, psychological well-being, and other requirements.

- iii. All students receive considerable support from school educators and teachers to bridge the learning gap and foster a blended way of learning that includes both traditional and digital instruction, preparing them for future digital instruction.
- iv. All teachers are prepared and supported to manage learning losses among their students as a result of the epidemic, as well as to integrate digital technology into their classrooms.
- v. It is recommended that school officials organize orientation and awareness programmes including meetings, seminars, and workshops at regular intervals to advise their students on how to use social media for learning purposes in a positive and productive manner.
- vi. It is the role of educational sectors to inform students about trustworthy sources that can help them further their academic goals.
- vii. Secondary schools should also ensure that their students develop reading habits by spending quality reading time in order to prevent the danger of losing this habit owing to different temptations linked with social media and technological improvements.
- viii. In such a critical scenario as COVID-19, parental guidance is critical to guarantee that students devote the necessary attention to studying and using social media responsibly.

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ANNEXURE

S.No	Social Media	Year	Name of Inventor(s)Founders
1	Six Degrees	1997	Andrew Weinreich
2	Cyworld	1999	Dong-Hyung Lee
3	Mixi	1999	Kenji Kasahara
4	QQ	1999	Shenzhen Tencent
5	Blogger	1999	Pyra Labs
6	LiveJournal	1999	Brad Fitzpatrick
7	Lunar Storm	2000	Rickard Eriksson
8	Ryze	2001	Adrian Scott
9	Friendster	2002	Jonathan Abrams
10	LinkedIn	2003	Reid Hoffman, Allen Blue, Konstantin Guericke, EricLy, Jean-Luc Vaillant
11	Photobucket	2003	Alex Welch, Darren Crystal
12	Tribe.net	2003	Paul Martino, Mark Pincus, and Valerie Syme.
13	Delicious	2003	Joshua Schachter and Peter Gadjokov
14	Myspace	2003	Chris DeWolfe, Tom Anderson, Jon Hart
15	Facebook	2004	Mark Zuckerberg
16	Orkut	2004	Orkut Buyukkokten
17	Hyves	2004	Raymond Spanjar and Floris Rost Van Tonningen
18	Hi5	2004	RamuYalamanchani
19	Bebo	2005	Michel and XochiBirch
20	YouTube	2005	Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed karim
21	Twitter	2006	Jack Dorsey, Noah Glass, BizStone, Evan Williams
22	Spotify	2006	Daniel EK, Martin Lorentzon
23	SlideShare	2006	Rashmi Sinha
24	Tumblr	2007	David Karp
25	BizSugar	2007	John Holsen
26	WhatsApp	2009	Brian Acton and Jan Koum
27	Pinterest	2010	Ben Silbermann, Evan Sharp and Paul Sciarra
28	Instagram	2010	Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger
29	Viber	2010	Talmon Marco and Igor Magazinnik
30	Periscope	2014	Joe Bernstein and KayvonBeykpour
31	Minds	2015	Bill Ottman, john Ottman, Mark Harding
32	Gab.ai	2016	Andrew Torba
33	Mastodon	2016	Eugen Rochko

Source: (Dhingra & Mudgal, 2019), (Boyd & Ellison, n.d.)