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## **SOCIAL NETWORKING ADDICTION: ARE THE YOUTH OF INDIA AND UNITED STATES ADDICTED?**

### **Abstract:**

Social Networking is the mainstay that aided the survival of internet during the turbulent times of E-commerce. Internet users stayed glued to social networking websites especially Facebook, which started advertising to them and hence they started buying. The extent of its growth makes it an interesting and unexplored area of research. The advantages it provides are immense and hence it has penetrated into our daily lives, but theres a flip side to it – excessive usage per day; inferiority complex creeping in, when the happening lives of friends and family are portrayed on Facebook, feeling lonely has been cited as a reason leading to the increased use of SN websites, causing more loneliness as the end product; addiction arising out of pleasure, etc. This paper aims to study the Facebook usage pattern of a sample of students from United States and India, and gauge the pattern and relate the same as symptoms of addiction.

### **Keywords:**

Facebook, FAD, Social Media ,Social Network/Social Networking, Addiction, Usage, Facebook

**JEL Classification:** M30, I00

## I. Introduction

This paper has been intended to study the Facebook usage (FB) in the context of two countries (India and the United States of America) in two different continents (Western Asia and North America). The authors believed that comparing the behaviours of users from two countries will shed some lights on this important subject and spur further research. This research is in two parts, namely, the impact analysis of SNS in general and a more focused impact analysis on Facebook. The second part will be represented in this paper.

The pervasiveness of the social networking (SN) into mainstream culture and its integration into every life of people in all nations of the world has made it an active research. Man is a social animal. The need to connect has been an inherent need and with the changing times, the need became conspicuous. Social Networking is best explained as the use of dedicated websites and applications to interact with other users, or to find people with similar interests to one's own. There are various aspects of Social Networking, most of them have their own significance but each requires an extensive level of research. In this particular paper, we have focused on the relationship aspect of it. Social networking meant meeting and interacting with friends and family, in person but our research will be focusing on the social networks occurring on the Internet. Although, this research utilises some aspects of social network analysis, relating to the behavioural analysis of social network users, the bulk of the analysis is on the usage of SN websites. We investigate the manner in which users access SN sites, the impact analysis will include an examination of the addictive nature of the SN sites.

This paper is organised as follows: first, we will discuss the current research on SNS with focus on Facebook Addiction Disorder (FAD). Second, we would address the methodology used in this research along with the research questions. Third, the results and findings will be presented. We would discuss impact analysis on the basis on addiction. Lastly, we would be followed by concluding remarks and scope for further research.

## II. Review of Literature

Social networking sites, social networking application and social networking service are used interchangeably in the literature. Although, social networking is used in many other contexts, it is becoming increasingly synonymous with building relationships via the World Wide Web. Following the argument presented in the article by Boyd and Ellison (2008), we would prefer the use the term "social network" rather than social networking, which they claimed connotes "looking to meet new people or initiating relationship." According to them, many large SNSs users do not necessarily engage in "networking." They define SNSs as web-based services that allow individual to construct personal profiles for public or semi-public consumption; articulate "friends" to share connections with; and surf information of other notable users within the confines of the systems.

In this section, the review of studies related to social networking, FAD and various aspects related to it, have been considered. The review of empirical studies has been undertaken to observe which areas have been explored and which need further investigation, in order to formulate the objectives and undertake productive research. The review has also been undertaken to earmark the problem areas related to social networking. Besides, these studies would provide an insight into the various efforts directed towards better understanding of the complexities of the social networking.

The recent report by Ofcom, an independent regulator and competition authority for the United Kingdom communication industries described their qualitative and quantitative analysis research to gauge social networking sites in the wider media literacy, online and communication contexts; to profile peoples' use and understanding of networking sites; and to understand the associated privacy and safety concerns of social networking sites (Ofcom, 2008). According to Ofcom, social networking sites are most popular with teenagers and young adults just over one fifth (22%) of adult internet users aged 16+ and almost half (49%) of children aged 8-17 internet users. It was also reported that some under-13s are by-passing the age restrictions on social networking site with 27% of 8-11 year olds who are aware of social networking sites say that they have a profile on a site. The same report indicated that the average adult social networker has profiles on 1.6 sites, and most users check their profile at least every other day.

The EDUCAUSE Center for Analysis and Research (ECAR) in its Research Study on Social Networking Sites supported the findings by Ofcom as indicated above (ECAR 2008). According to ECAR, the extent of social networking sites use has increased dramatically with considerably 95.1% of users aged 18 and 19 years using social networking as opposed to 37% users aged 30 and older. Other findings of ECAR included: Facebook has the most users with 89.3%; majority of the users (55.8%) spend 5 hours or less on social networking sites and 26.9% between 6 and 10 hours; half of the users utilise social networking sites to communicate with classmates about course-related topics; fewer than one-third of users are very concerned or extremely concerned about the misuse of their information, security problems, cyberbullying or cyberstalking, or leaving a history that could cause them problems.

The study "Facebook Addiction: Factors Influencing an Individuals Addiction", by Erica Sherman (2011) suggests that though internet addiction has been studied but social networking addiction has not been researched. The study investigates how factors such as personality, gender, procrastination, boredom and ones values may affect amount of time they spend on Facebook. It further concludes that they are either overly possessive about the usage thereof or not. The research conducted was a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques, using scholarly articles that focused on personality types and Internet addiction. Based on the results from the qualitative study, quantitative survey instrument was devised, which includes likert-style statements that test personality type, values, boredom and procrastination.

The article titled, "3 Reasons You Should Quit Social Media in 2013" discusses the UK study which proves that over 50% of social media users evaluated their participation in Social Networking websites as having a negative effect on their lives. Comparing themselves to others (family, friends, peers) was a blow to their self esteem. And stalking by ex or his/her husband/wife is considered worse.

Psychologist Dr. Michael Fenichel describes FAD as a situation in which Facebook usage "overtakes" daily activities like waking up, getting dressed, using telephone or email checking. According to Joanna Lipari, a clinical psychologist at University of California, LA, discusses some signs of Facebook addiction as:

- i) Losing sleep over FB. Staying logged in throughout the night and eventually getting too tired for the next day;

- ii) As a bench mark spending one hour or more on FB is too much;
- iii) Being obsessed with exes who reconnect on FB;
- iv) Ignoring work for FB;
- v) The thought of getting off FB leaving the user in cold sweat;

Eleanor Shaw (2013) in the article "Status update : Facebook Addiction Disorder", opines that the user is suffering from FAD, a disease referred to by psychologists, if he/she has more online friends than real life friendships. Also, if the user checks the FB more than 5 times a day (spending hours updating the status) or if checking the Facebook account is the first thing that he/she does in the morning.

The study, "Facebook a more powerful addiction than alcohol, cigarettes"(2012) reveals that the pull of checking one's Facebook page can be more powerful than addiction to alcohol or cigarettes. As in 2012, scientists claim that 350 million people suffer from this condition.

The reason cited by FB addicts have been:

- i) The urge of human interaction and the ease of it through FB;
- ii) Getting a message on FB is exciting since it feels like someone is interested in "me".

To check this urge to be on FB page, a web application can be used, which shuts off the computer after the user has spent a pre-determined amount of time. (NEwsChannel9WSYR, 2012, "Study:Facebook a more powerful addiction than alcohol, cigarettes")

A medical study titled , "Microstructure Abnormalities in Adolescents with Internet Addiction Disorder" by Kai Yuan, Wei Qin, Guihong Wang, Xuejuan Yang, Peng Liu, Jixin Liu, Jinbo Sun, Karen M. von Deneen, Jie Tian reveals that long-term internet addiction would result in brain structural alterations, which probably contributed to chronic dysfunction in subjects with IAD. The study sheds further light on the potential brain effects of IAD. The areas that were affected in the people who were diagnosed with IAD are thought to govern emotional processing, executive thinking skills and attention, and cognitive control. What's more, the brain changes found in this study are thought to be similar to those involved in other kinds of addictions like alcohol and drugs.

A study by University of Chicago Booth School of Business states the desire to frequently check your social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, among other social networking sites, can lead to a stronger addiction than those who are addicted to alcohol or cigarettes.

The study was done by giving 205 adults, ages 18-85, Blackberries and sending them tweets seven times over 14 hours a day for seven days. The study quotes that "Texting and checking Facebook and Twitter come in just below sex and sleep on impossible to resist urges,

Ellison, N.B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C in their study “The Benefits of FB “friends”:Social Capital and college students use of online social network sites” provide the scale items to judge the addiction of Social networks, viz.,

- i. Facebook is a part of my everyday activity
- ii. I am proud to tell people, I am on Facebook
- iii. FB has become a part of my daily routine.
- iv. I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto FB for a while.
- v. I feel I am a part of FB community.
- vi. I would be sorry if FB shut down.
- vii. Approximately how many FB friends do you have?
- viii. In the past week, on average, how much time Per Day have you spent actively using FB?

Foremski Tom in his article, “Facebook ‘Likes’ can reveal your sexuality, ethnicity, politics and your parent’s divorce”, discusses the study which included researchers from Cambridge’s Psychometric Centre and Microsoft Research Cambridge Researchers. The researchers analyzed a dataset of over 58,000 US Facebook users and developed a model that could predict whether a man was homosexual 88% of the time, and 75% of the time for women; ethnic origin (95%), gender (93%), religion (82%), political affiliation (85%), if they use addictive substances (75%) and relationship status (67%).

Also, Frank Agyemang, in his article, “Infected with Facebook Addiction Disorder?”, refers to a study by Cambridge University suggests that contrary to the belief, it aids in people to be more sociable giving people more choice as to how and with whom they conduct their relationship.

Haisha Lisa in her article “Is your Facebook Addiction a sign of loneliness?”, discusses a unique aspect of Facebook Addiction which differentiates it from the other types of addictions. Unlike addiction to drugs, alcoholism, and sex, where the guilt is a major factor, the Facebook addict feels that they have reasons to be addicted, since they claim to be doing business. Some are self employed professionals looking for clients, some are job seekers trying to network for a new job, and some are corporate employees trying to extending their company’s message. Their time on Facebook is actually escapism disguised as working. Also, most of the people are addicted to their past-reconnecting with their friends, old classmates, former lovers, etc.

In another research on social network, Yang and Tang (2003) focused on students’ performance in an online course offered at the National Cheng-Chi University in Taiwan. They found that social networks that serve advising roles have positive impact on students’ performance and that networks that are adversarial have negative impact.

The review of the available literature reveals that studies have included various aspects of Social Networking Addiction (with special reference to Facebook) including-its symptoms; positives of Usage, also its negatives; implications and impact of Social Networking Addiction. The studies listed here, also included are the professional opinions of the

psychiatrists and psychologists regarding the influx of SN cases especially FAD cases.

### **III Research Methodology**

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The research study will investigate the daily usage of Facebook and how people interact with social networking sites on a daily basis. The focus will be on how often people use this tool to converse with or keep current with their friend's social or personal lives. The significance of the study is to examine the impact of Facebook on its users, its addictive parameters. Research questions include:

1. To theoretically arrive at the symptoms of Facebook Addiction Disorder.
2. To compare usage of Facebook based on the symptoms, in Western Asia (India), North America (United States).

The research design that will be used in this study is based on the mixed research model. This model is chosen in order to achieve full potential, including benefits of mixed methodology and to provide a comprehensive investigation of the research questions. These benefits include:

- 1) allows qualitative approach to complement the results of the quantitative approach and vice-versa,
- 2) maximises the advantages of quantitative and qualitative methodologies and minimises the demerits,
- 3) applies both objective and subjective points of view,
- 4) allows researchers to choose explanations that best produce desired outcomes,
- 5) researchers' values play a large role in the interpretation of results and
- 6) mixed model is pragmatic and more realistic and serves as the middle ground for the positivist and constructivist theories (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). These benefits of mixed model are of great importance to this study. The open-ended questions are intended to complement the closed-ended questions and vice-versa to help produce stronger analyses and desired outcomes.

The qualitative approach of this research study will utilise content analysis based on open-ended questions of the survey questionnaire. Content analysis is chosen for this research because it is well suited to the study of the methodical and description of the content of recorded human communication. Babbie (2002) defines content analysis as "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages."

Judgment sampling was used to study 151 Under-graduate students from Delhi University and 120 from Fayetteville State University, Fayetteville, North Carolina, USA. The questionnaire was sent to 1000 respondents but as a limitation, only 151 and 120 respondents respectively filled it up. The quantitative portion of this research study will involve a cross-sectional approach for data collection. This data analysis will utilise statistical package provided by Google Docs. The percentage of the total agreement has

been taken by adding the strongly agree and agree percentages, and same for disagreement level. The simplicity of the method, combined with the qualitative discussions, would give us the real crux of the comparison. To keep it simple, the agreement level of the two set of respondents is compared and conclusions drawn accordingly. For this study, we will be using Google Forms' spreadsheet that keeps the responses.

## IV. Findings and Analysis

The purview of the paper is to study the various aspects of Social Networking wrt Facebook , affecting the respondents from the United States (U would be prefixed with the code) and India(I, would be prefixed). The Coding for various aspects is

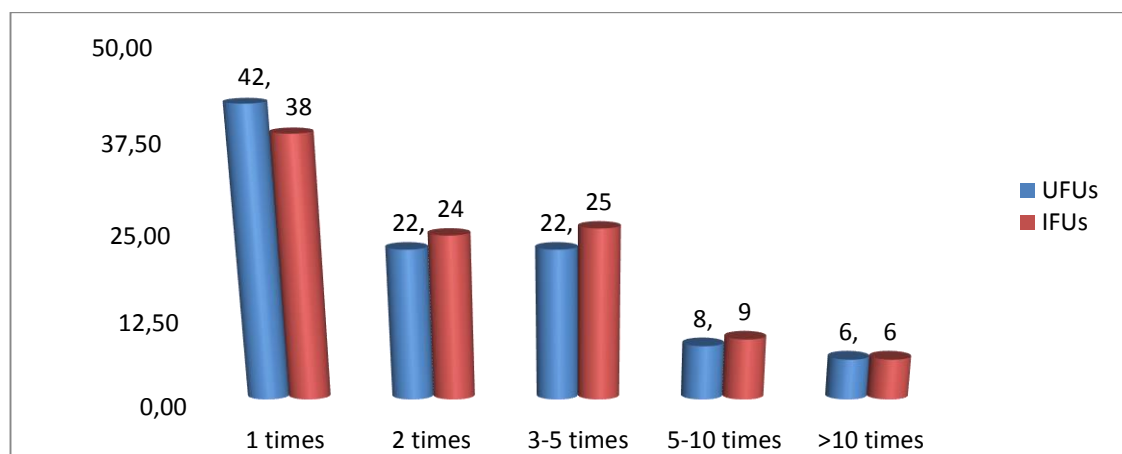
1. FUs Facebook Usage
2. FTM First thing in the morning
3. LTN Last thing at Night
- 4 A FbF Facebook Friends
- 4 B RLF Real life Friends

### Symptom I

Facebook Usage (FbUs)

One of the most important symptoms of Social Networking Addiction is the amount of time spent online and the number of times the social networking website, in this case, Facebook is accessed. Psychologists suggest that if more than 3-4 times a day, the chances of being affected are high.

**Fig 1: Number of times FB is accessed by respondents from US and India**



The two set of respondents, I(Indian) and U(United States of America), are analysed and compared.

IFbUs- 38% of users access FB at least once a day

UFbUs- 42% of respondents from US log in to Facebook at least once.

Both set of users fall in the category of accessing it at least once a day. Around 35-40% are accessing it more than 3 times a day, a symptom of FAD.

All this is good news for Facebook, since their users can be targeted for the personalised ads at least once a day.

Also, when discussed informally with some of the respondents, a very interesting observation has been made. The respondents shared that since they access FB more through app on their smart phones, it has become impossible to trace and share the number of times they access FB. The accessing of websites, could be tracked and kept a note of but they just know that they access FB, how many times they were not very sure.

Now, coming to the addiction part, around 40% of respondents from both sets are accessing it for more than 3 times a day. Urge to get hooked on to it, time and again is high, and hence a symptom leading to the same.

The other aspect is also very interesting, it can mean a lot of good things for FB, which has seen an increase of 200% in its ad revenue from its mobile application, so since the respondents from both the nations are accessing it at least once a day, the future only seems promising.

The analysis reveals that the "Buy" button on Facebook will be able to lead to impulse buying as being hoped by the social networking giant since "impulsive behaviour" has been the highlight of Facebook usage, with people being caught up in their lies while disclosing the truth on FB or vice versa.

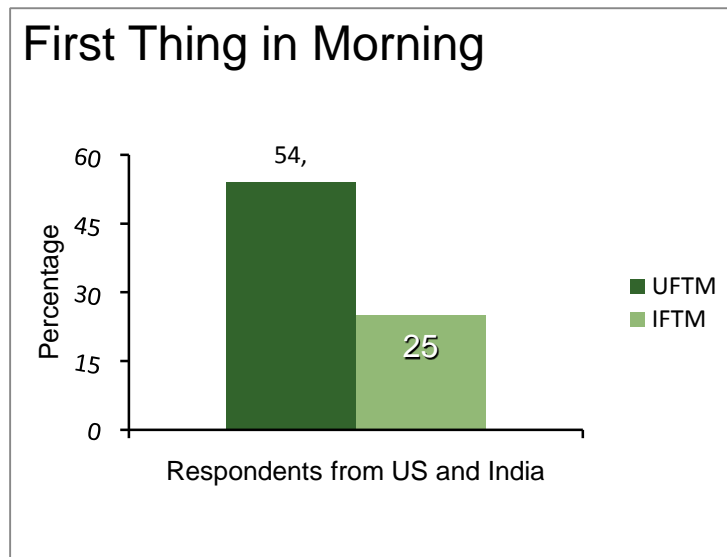
## **Symptom 2**

FTM First thing in the morning

The basic reason for the inclusion of this symptom is that something of immense importance or something that you slept over would a respondent do the first thing in the morning. Hence, in case the respondents access their Facebook accounts first thing in the morning, it emphasises the paramount importance of SN sites to them.



**Fig 2: Accessing Facebook first thing in the Morning (FTM)  
Respondents from US and India**



The analysis reveals an interesting aspect that only 25 percent of Indian respondents access Facebook FTM as compared to more than half (54%) of the respondents from US. This symptom is more pronounced in US respondents as compared to Indian respondents.

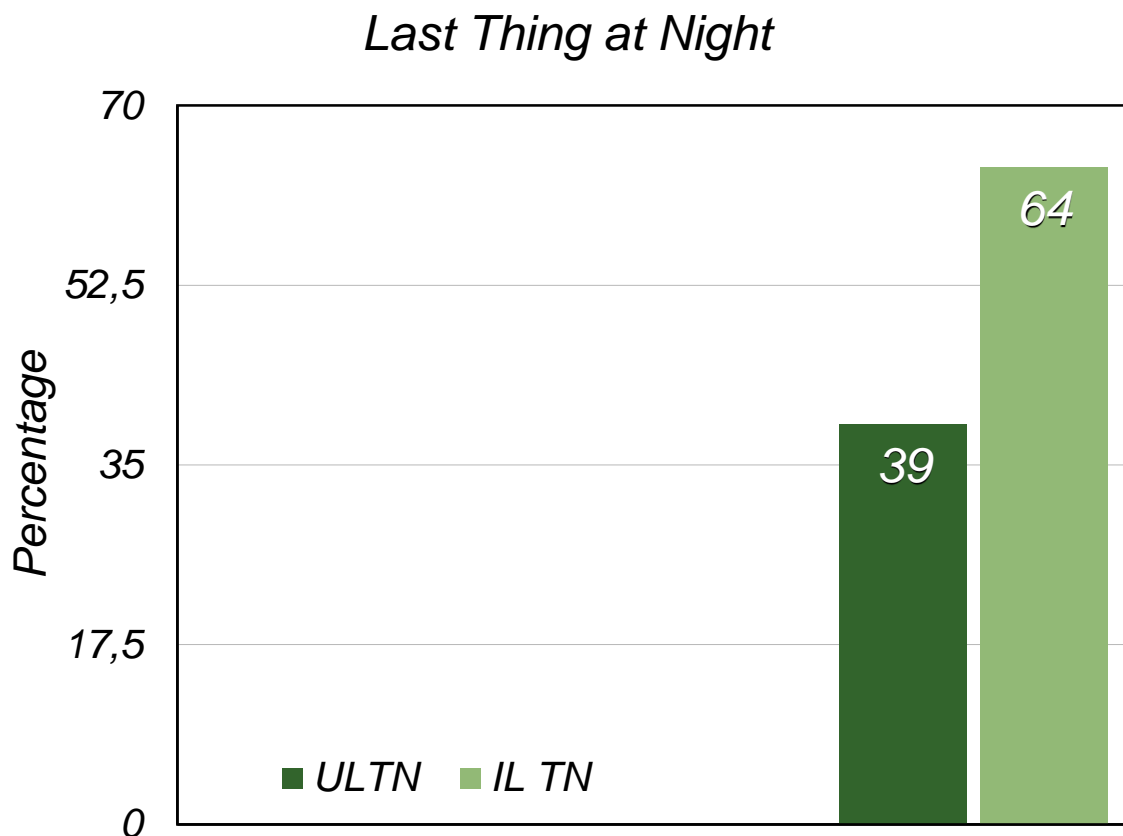
When discussed, the respondents from the US reveal that they get all the course related updates and all from their friends updates on the groups, so it is mandatory for them to access it early in the morning in order to plan their day. Whereas the students from India reveal that they are more on FB to socialise and less to share the important information, hence they use it less to access it early in the morning.

### Symptom 3

LTN Last Thing at night

This symptom is extremely important not only to establish whether the addiction exists or it doesn't but also to infer that it is not healthy. The scriptures of many religions and also the psychological health groups emphasise that the last thing we do before sleeping off determines to an extent how well we sleep at night, which in turn affects our mental health.

**Fig 3: Accessing Facebook last thing at night (LTN) respondents from US and India**



The practice of logging into the social networking websites last thing before going to sleep is prevalent in both set of respondents, a large percentage indulging in it. If compared more respondents from the India (64%) as compared to US respondents(39%) are in the habit of checking their Facebook accounts before going to sleep.

Again the informal discussions with some of the respondents reveal that the respondents from India use FB more as a mode of recreation and to unwind at the end of the day unlike respondents from US who use it to plan their day(FTM).

Also, this is further supported in India, by a study (2015) which concludes that digital intimacy, it would seem, has even diluted the physical connection between sexually active partners. Dr. Prakash Kothari, the nation's leading sexologist based in India, shares that

there has been a sudden surge in young couples, especially working professionals, who come to me for consultations after facing weak sexual desire owing to social media addiction that gobbles up night hours.

The psychological interpretation for the same cant be good. Religion tells you to chant before going off to sleep, psychiatrists tell you to either read good books or think of all the good things you did in the day. Basic reason is to make the mind calm before going to sleep. In today’s busy life, getting a good night sleep is the only respite our brain gets, since we are all in a stage of being constantly “On”. Logging on to Facebook before going to sleep means sleeping with the images of friends/family having fun, partying, holidaying, etc. The race on Facebook is more to do with who is happiest in the marriage, whose weekends are the most happening ones, who has the cutest pet, who is going to the best restaurants or exotic places. None of which can have calming affect on the mind of the user.

**Symptom 4**

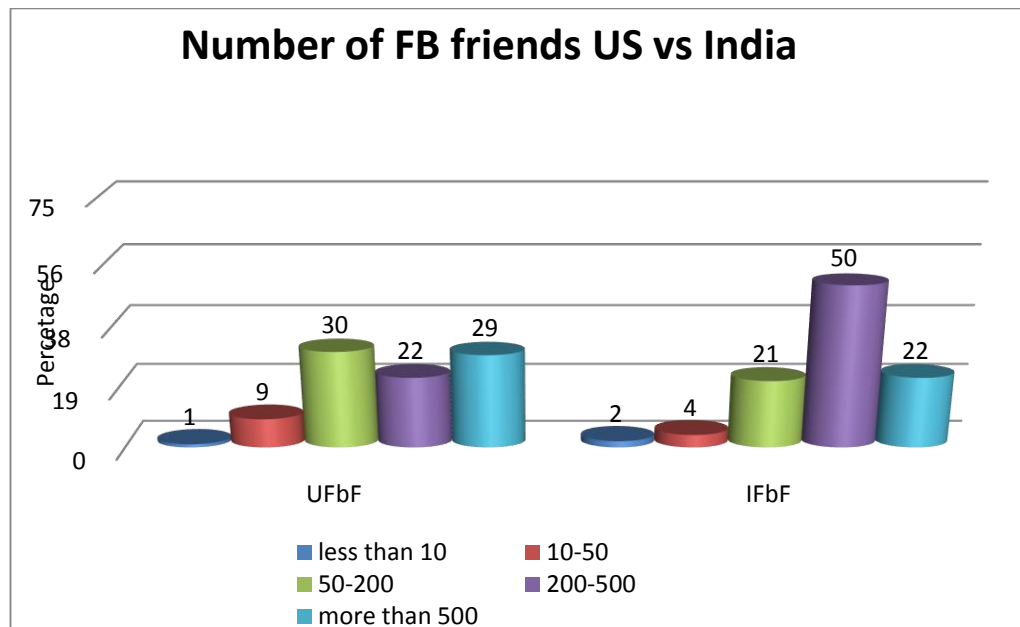
4 A FbF Facebook Friends

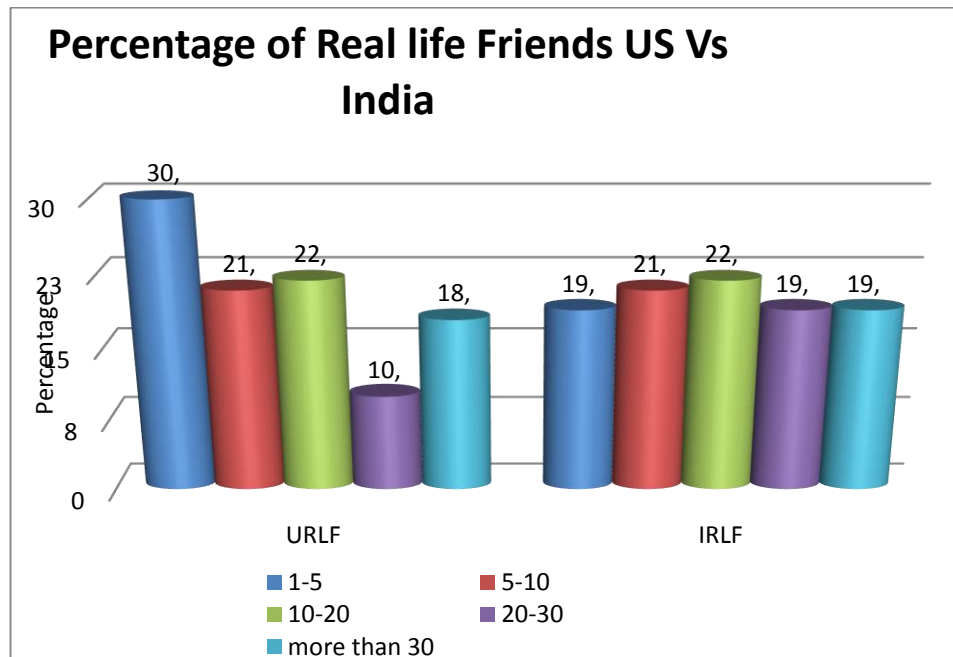
4 B RLF Real life Friends

4 A Number of FB friends

This parameter is important to study since it has been observed that more the number of online friends, more is the likelihood of staying hooked on longer, whether as a participant or a lurker.

**Fig 4 A Number of FB friends online US and Indian Respondents**



**Fig 4 B Number of RL friends online US and Indian Respondents**

The number of “Friends” on Facebook has very interesting interpretation. Friend request/ “friends” being a misnomer for people who range from acquaintances, colleagues, strangers, immediate and distant family members (very minimal percentage are actually ‘friends’). When compared the symptom reveals that Indian respondents have large number of friends, with 50% claiming to have more than 200 but less than 500 friends as compared to only 22% from US. More the number of Facebook friends, more is the tendency towards addiction, especially when the real life friends (Fig 5.) are only 19% with more than 30 friends from both the categories. Real life friends mean people we know and interact with in our life. With 80% of respondents from both the sets, managing with less than 30 friends have more than 50-500 online friends. The logic defies the same.

The term “friends” is a psychological trigger. We are very careful in calling people “friends” in our daily routine but on Facebook, we take it as a norm of accepting “friend requests” from 100s of people. People who are friends, colleagues, colleagues of friends and thereby (in case privacy settings are not set), we are sharing our personal lives with all. Some of the “friends” even have their profile pictures as those of some celebrities. Can those people be trusted with your personal information?

## V. Conclusion

The comparative analysis of the respondents from the United States of America and India has been made and it reveals that Social Networking (SN) through Facebook being a global phenomena, the behaviour of the two set of respondents is similar, though more profound in some areas and lesser in the other.

- Majority of both the group of respondents access FB more than 3 times a day (which isn't encouraging). The symptom recognised by many psychologists as an indicator of moving towards FAD.
- FTM and LTN, both are important to determine the addictiveness of the respondents. The respondents from US portray more pronounced usage, with 54% of them accessing it FTM as compared to 25% of their counterparts in India. The role is reversed with LTN, where Indian respondents (64%) access it before going to bed and 39% from US are accessing it. One way or the other, both set of respondents seem to be bordering the addiction pattern, which is in no way comforting. The qualitative interpretation is that the respondents from US use it more to share important information amongst the closed groups and hence use it to plan their day by accessing it more as a first thing in the morning as compared to their counterparts in India, who prefer it as a mode of entertainment and hence use it to unwind before going off to sleep.
- The shallowness of online friendships, when the word "friends" has acquired a new meaning. The race to have 100s of friends is very high in respondents in India and hence a pseudo life, since the number of real offline friends is very less.
- It does not seem like a very positive scenario. Cyber-bullying, Pseudo self image, Body Dysmorphic syndrome are some of the psychological manifestations of excessive social networking.

It can be concluded that FB has become an integral part of respondents' life. It justifies being a global phenomena since the opinion/usage pattern all fall within the same range. The gen-next seems to be bordering on the symptoms of FB Addiction (using it for more than an hour or probably more, accessing it more than 3 times a day, first thing in the morning, last thing at night), having a lot of online and less offline friends. The respondents from US seem to be using it more for professional purpose as opposed to Indian users, who are using it for entertainment.

Our responsibility is to make the users aware that FAD exists, its symptoms, problems associated, and ways of de-addiction, they might in all probability stay clear of it or get de-addicted.

## VI. Need for further research

The research in the field is imperative and it mainly advocates against the raucous use of an important tool of networking. The social networking websites like FB are a boon when used judiciously. Also, the sample size should be increased as per the availability of funds and time.

Innumerable stories of people growing in their career through LinkedIn, missing people being found with the aid of Facebook posts, and a never ending list. But when looked at for its flip side, it's the mental health caused by excessive use, cyber bullying, terrorism, narcissism, and many more crop up. The use of any good thing is justified but when it becomes an addiction or serious symptoms start showing, it's time to think and start creating awareness and providing solutions.

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