

Skyrocketing Popularity of Facebook: A New Milestone in the Journey of Social Media

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become an integral part of our day to day life. The influence of social networking sites and messaging apps can be noticed in each sphere of life. Among the social networking sites, today Facebook rules the roost. Its popularity is soaring high globally. From little kids to octogenarian adults, school going students to working professionals and businessmen to politicians, people of all age groups and classes love this social site. Research says that Facebook is the most visited site among all social networks. Although there are a number of factors that attract people towards this popular social platform, but speed has emerged as the most liked feature of Facebook. Along with speed, gaming, privacy and ease of navigation are other important features that people like in this social platform. Thanks to these features, Facebook is scripting new chapters of success with each passing day. In this research paper a serious effort has been made to understand the revolutionary changes in the virtual world and its impact on human life. At the same time, the key factors behind soaring popularity and exponential growth of Facebook and the challenges before the social media giant have also been analyzed.

KEYWORDS: Social media, Virtual world, Digitally connected globe, Internet revolution, Popularity, Data breach, Hate speech, Fake news, Speed, Artificial intelligence, Covid pandemic, Constant upgradation, Networking, Technological Innovation

INTRODUCTION

Social Media as we see today, is a unique gift of aspirational mankind's technological innovations, for which human race has been striving hard since the inception of the civilization. This media has revolutionized the world of communication. Immediacy, wide reach, two way communication and cost effectiveness are the characteristic features of this media. On account of these features social media has become the favourite of billions of users across the globe. And Facebook, with nearly 3 billion monthly active users is inarguably the largest and the most popular social platform in the world. It is changing the way hundreds of millions of people relate to one another and share information.

Facebook was launched by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 while he was a college student. At that time neither had he imagined about the great success of his idea nor was he aware of the hardships of Business life. He had to face lots of problems in initial days. The other big problem that came his way, was how to attract investors and bring money to the company. Another problem that Mark faced in 2005 and 2006 was the allegation that Facebook sells the users' information in order to make money. Privacy groups lodged complaints against the privacy policy of the website. In his defence, Zuckerberg said "We do not allow the applications to share personal information, plus, the advertisers can't have access to it. But if application runners share it with the advertisers, we disable their functioning on our website, we shut them down. We make sure that people have control over their privacy and it will become the most fundamental thing on the internet". In other words, the journey of Facebook was not smooth. This social platform witnessed many ups and downs. But ultimately it overcame the challenges and today it has become the undisputed leader among the social networking sites.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: SURVEY & CONTENT ANALYSIS

ERA OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The internet revolution of 1990's transformed the world and its connectivity in letter and spirit from a few loosely connected people to a digitally connected globe. People today spend more time on their Laptops, palmtops, smart phones and computers and other electronic gadgets to read newspapers, e-books, e-journals, book travel ticket, listen to music, watch videos and movies, search any kind of information, buy any product through online shopping, share pictures and videos and interact with friends, family, business or government organizations via popular social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube, LinkedIn and others. All they need is an internet connection and a computer. This media provides a very good platform to individuals, businesses organizations, government as well as civil society to interact in this information age. Today Social networking sites are so powerful that they can topple government regimes, boost political campaigns and play a key role in electoral politics. In short, the all powerful social media is having a deep impact on all spheres of life. This media has become a distinct source of information for the networked people, whom it provides enhanced ability to undertake any collective action. Today life without social media has become unimaginable.. Government agencies strategically chalk out their plan to present themselves on social media to reach out to masses. That's why nowadays Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have become the most common outlets for government social media endeavors. All the government departments have their social media page; and twitter is mostly used by government departments to communicate with citizens. More importantly, the use of social media by the Indian Ministers and their respective ministries has become institutionalized. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also very much active on this media. In a vast country like India, PM Modi uses his digital net as wide as possible in order to reach all demographics.

Government's social media provides a good platform to citizens to express their views and get instant feedbacks. The citizens' involvement in the governance process influences the perception of citizens about the government .Some prominent areas where the use of social media has proved to be very important; are as follows

--- Crisis Communication

--- Health care and dealing with health hazards like COVID 19

--- Education

--- Disaster management operations

--- Handling terrorists in sensitive areas like J&K and North East

--- Tackling world's biggest challenges like human rights violations & climate change

--- Civic engagement and

--- Maintaining transparency in the system

Social media have transformed the political scenario worldwide and its effect has entirely changed campaigning in elections. Social media channels provide political parties a mechanism to directly connect with people across the country at a reduced cost and with immediacy, which was not possible through traditional media.

This media has also proved to be a boon for Non-Governmental Organizations. It helps in raising funds and creating awareness about social cause and charitable events. According to nonprofitsource.com, over 80% of millennials and 49% of Gen X-ers donate through online forums. Most millennials tend to be inspired by social media.

Moreover, today this media has become an integral part of journalism & mass communication. It has transformed journalism in totality. The way journalists gather news and present their stories, has changed altogether. The way of consuming news and the way of creating news, both have changed. In this era of social media. The traditional one-way communication has turned into two-way conversations. Interactive dialogue and social interactions are exclusive features of this media, which provide a platform to journalists to have real conversations with their audience, viewers or readers. One more noticeable change that has taken place in journalism & mass communication after the advent of social media, is that online debates have become new normal, where everyone can express himself without any hesitation or restriction.

Social media has brought a noticeable change among all sections of society and its influence is so powerful that in this information age, life without social media seems impossible..

POPULARITY OF FACEBOOK

Founded in 2004 at Harvard university by Mark Zuckerberg and his four fellow students, Facebook went to public in 2006, bringing revolutionary changes in the virtual world. As of now, with nearly three billion active monthly users, Facebook is the most popular and user friendly mode of communication in the world. This popular social networking site has a number of features. One can text, comment and like posts of others by just a click of the mouse or simply a finger touch. So it is very easy to use. In fact, all of Facebook's features are easy, that make it the most favourite social site for people of all demographics.

Constant upgrading is Facebook's another feature that lures users. Facebook's user interface has changed repeatedly over the years. It has added a news feed, timeline and cover photo and the list goes on.

Besides, Facebook is addictive and that's because it has some really engaging features. The popular social giant offers a number of services like news feed, messaging/chat, voice and video calls, and the features of like, follow, subscribe marketplace and much more. Facebook's messenger platform has become very popular.

Moreover, Facebook tries to eliminate anonymity on the web, which in turns makes the popular social site appear safe and more inviting to people from around the world.

In 2008 this social giant launched an extension of its platform called Facebook Connect, which made it easier for users to take their online identity with them across the web.

The research says that around 95% people retain information more easily in a video, while only 10% retain it if written in text. This is the reason why YouTube is on the forefront today; The same reason applies to the exponential growth of Facebook as well.

The findings of a research published by the Tech Report in 2018 highlighted the popularity of Facebook by pointing out that 92% NGOs around the world use it to connect with their supporters; whereas 72% NGOs create their profile on Twitter and 39% use Instagram. With around 3 billion monthly active users, Facebook has become very important for NGOs.

So, in true sense of the term this social platform serves multiple purposes and this is the most prominent reason for its worldwide popularity. Needless to say that this popular social platform is changing the way hundreds of millions of people relate to one another and share information.

In India also Facebook is the most popular social networking site. As per the data of December 31, 2022, the monthly users of Facebook in the country increased to 2.96 billion.

This wide reach and popularity of Facebook also lures unsocial elements to use it for their vested interests. According to a study in 2017, Facebook plays a vital role in circulating fake news. A number of fake news were shared on Facebook in the national election in the UK (regarding the nation’s withdrawal from the EU) and in the US presidential election 2016. It’s an established fact that these fake news influenced the election results.

The misuse of Facebook also came to light during Covid pandemic. The social media giant told its millions of users that the online posts they watched about covid pandemic, contained misinformation; and announced plans to contain it. The situation became so grave that the Chief executive of the company Mark Elliot Zuckerberg came with a clarification on his Facebook page.

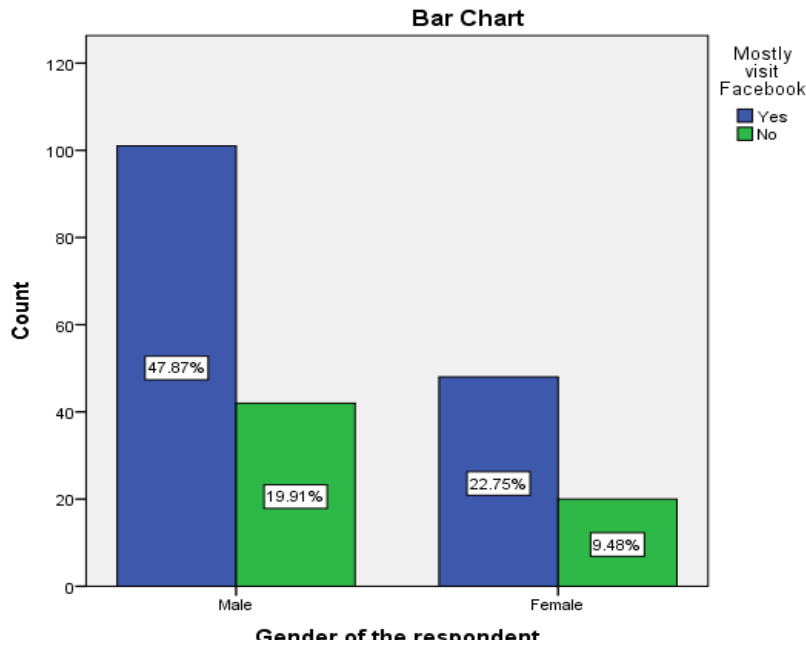
All these examples establish the fact that due to its popularity Facebook is also misused at a large scale.

SURVEY & DATA ANALYSIS

A sample survey was conducted in Delhi NCR to have a deep understanding of Facebook’s continuously increasing popularity. Three hundred respondents of different demographics were targeted. Out of them two hundred and fifteen respondents of various age groups, genders, educational qualifications and income brackets took part in this survey. The data collected from this survey revealed many interesting facts. Let us have a look at the findings of this sample survey.

Facebook visit on gender basis

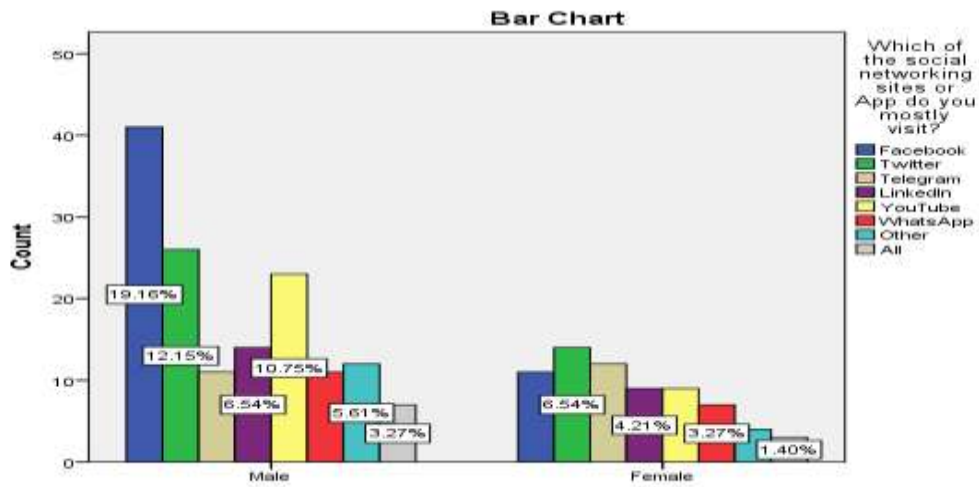
Visiting Facebook on gender basis Cross tabulation				
Count				
		Mostly visit Facebook		Total
		Yes	No	
Gender of the respondent	Male	101	42	143
	Female	48	20	68
Total		149	62	211



In the above table and chart, the respondents involved in the research study have been analyzed for visiting Facebook on the ground of gender. It is clear from the analysis of the data that out of the total 211 respondents involved in the study, the number of men who visit Facebook site is 101, whereas number of men who don't visit Facebook is 42. Among the female respondents, the number of those who visit Facebook is 48, whereas the number of those who don't visit this site is 20. In conclusion, it is clear that the percentage of women and men who agree to visit Facebook is higher than those women and men who don't visit this popular social platform..

SNS or Apps mostly visited by Respondents

Which of the SNS or App do you mostly visit? Cross-tabulation										
Count										
		Which of the social networking sites or App do you mostly visit?								Total
		Facebook	Twitter	Telegram	LinkedIn	YouTube	WhatsApp	Other	All	
Gender of the respondent	Male	41	26	11	14	23	11	12	7	145
	Female	11	14	12	9	9	7	4	3	69
Total		52	40	23	23	32	18	16	10	214



In the above bar chart and cross tabulation, the respondents’ preference for social networking sites or apps have been analyzed on the ground of their gender. Analysis of the above chart and tabulation says, the valid count of respondents goes to 214. Out of these 214 respondents, 145 respondents are male whereas 69 respondents are female.

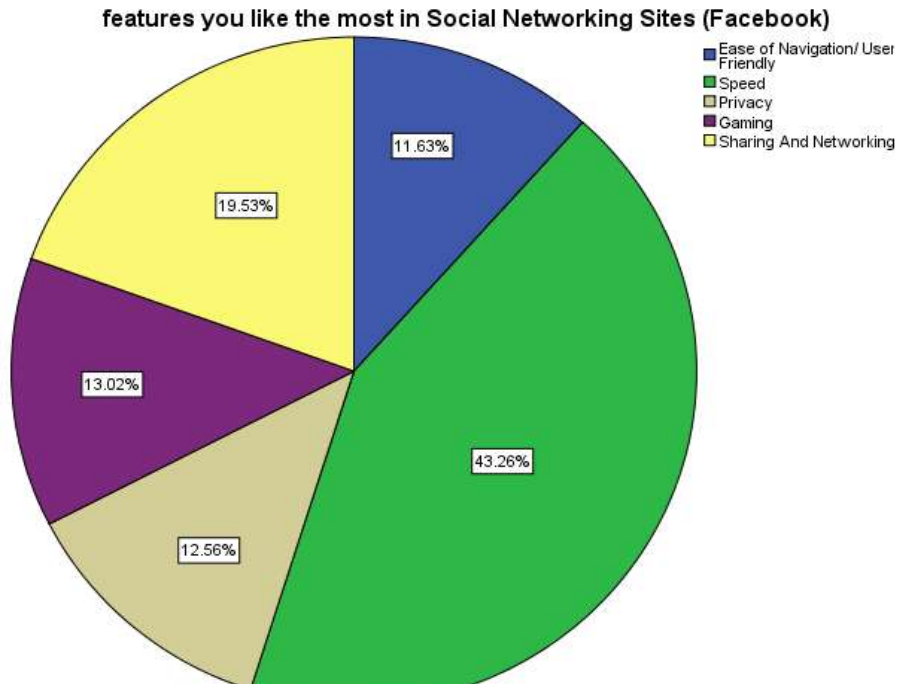
Out of 145 male respondents, 41 respondents mostly use Facebook, 26 of them use twitter, 23 respondents prefer YouTube on top priority. 14 respondents use LinkedIn, 11 use telegram, 11 goes for Whatsapp whereas there are also 12 male respondents who use other apps or sites. Lastly, there are 7 male respondents who use all apps.

Out of 69 female respondents, 11 respondents use Facebook, 14 use twitter, 12 respondents like to use telegram on top priority. Number of female respondents on LinkedIn and YouTube is 9 each. 7 female respondents use whatsapp whereas 4 opt for other apps or sites. The remaining 3 respondents are those exceptional individuals who use all the apps.

Concluding the analysis, we can say that 52 respondents out of 214 (including both male and female) use Facebook which is the maximum number of respondents on a particular site or an app.

Features liked the most in SNS (Facebook)

features you like the most in SNS (Facebook)		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Ease of Navigation/ User Friendly	25	11.6	11.6	11.6
	Speed	93	43.3	43.3	54.9
	Privacy	27	12.6	12.6	67.4
	Gaming	28	13.0	13.0	80.5
	Sharing And Networking	42	19.5	19.5	100.0
	Total	215	100.0	100.0	



In the above chart and cross tabulation, the respondents involved in the study have been analyzed on the ground of the features of the Facebook they like the most. Analysis of both the chart and tabulation says that out of 215 valid respondents, 93 respondents are those who like speed the most, which is 43.3 % of total respondents. 42 respondents like sharing and networking which is 19.5% of total respondents. Gaming feature of Facebook has been liked by 28 respondents which is 13.0% of total respondents. 27 respondents like privacy the most which is 12.6% of total respondents. Lastly, 25 respondents mostly liked the ease of navigation/user friendly feature of Facebook which is 11.6% of total respondents.

Concluding analysis states that 93 respondents like the feature of speed on top in Facebook, which is the largest number among total respondents.

The analysis of data collected from this sample survey clearly establishes that the percentage of male and female respondents, who regularly visit Facebook is higher than those who don't visit this popular site. The research data also establish the fact that Facebook is the most preferred Social Networking Site for both male and female respondents and speed has emerged as the most important feature of the Social Networking Site – 'Facebook'.

CHALLENGES BEFORE SOCIAL MEDIA GIANT

The journey of Facebook has many ups and downs. Since it's birth in 2004 it has been facing various challenges. Breach of privacy, Data leak, hate speech, fake news and fake accounts are prominent among them. Cambridge Analytica data breach is a major blot on the shining face of the popular social platform. As per a stunning revelation, Cambridge Analytica had harvested personal data of millions of people from their Facebook accounts without their consent and used the information for political motives. It was an alarming incident, which forced people to think that Facebook is destabilizing democracy and using its platform to manipulate political decisions.

Fake news and hate speeches are major challenges before the social giant. People with ill intentions often use Facebook platforms to circulate fake news and hate speeches. Thanks to the characteristic features of social media, any information circulated on it spreads with high speed. Many times it causes social disturbance and creates unrest. The society pays heavily for the misdeeds of mischief makers. These unfortunate incidents put a question mark on the credibility of Facebook.

Since Facebook is spread across the globe, taking regulatory measures and maintaining checks and balances becomes an uphill task for the social networking site. Although Facebook takes the help of Artificial Intelligence to tackle the problem, but the massive technological challenge of understanding videos, images and texts from different languages and then contextualizing and forming meaning behind those posts in real time is a big task for the social media giant. However, in such situations human moderators become useful. But even for them it's not an easy job. Besides, fake accounts on this site are another headache, which are often used to circulate objectionable contents and hate speeches.

CONCLUSION

Findings of this research make it clear that there are a number of factors behind the skyrocketing popularity of the social media giant Facebook and 'speed' is on top of them. It is noteworthy that 'speed' is a double edged weapon. On the one hand it can make one's fortune overnight, turn a street beggar into a star in few moments, can prove to be a boon for humanity in pain and distress and on the other, it can prove to be a big spoiler as well. With lightening speed fake news or hate speeches could travel to any corner of the globe within seconds. The society might bear its consequences in the form of communal tension, violence and devastation. Sometimes people with vested interests take undue advantage of this characteristic feature of social platforms and circulate objectionable contents serving their agenda. After making mischief, such elements easily disappear in the thin air, but the social media platform bears the brunt of their misdeed and loses its credibility. So it would be prudent for Facebook to take speed in the larger perspective and make future strategy keeping in mind the pros and cons of this unique feature of social media. Moreover, Facebook will have to take strict regulatory measures to check complaints of breach of privacy, data leak, circulation of hate speech & fake news and keep a vigilant eye on fake accounts.

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