

Virtual Peer Pressure

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ABSTRACT

The life these days is running too fast, the men have been replaced by machines, human feelings are now being showcased on internet one of the major replacement of such human replacement in social media, wherein the users make their profiles, friends and chat and share their feelings across. The current study is based on the peer pressure an individual is facing these days due to social media and the consequences for the same. The data has been collected from various reliable published sources like data from National Crime Bureau and other authentic newspapers and websites. It is found that the impact of social media has increased to such an extent that youths are getting into depression and some have even committed suicide over these social media issues. The paper is concluded with some suggestions to the youths as well as the parents on how this pressure can be handled.

Keywords: Social media, Peer pressure, Suicides, Depression, Facebook.

INTRODUCTION:

Peer pressure is the direct or indirect influence on people by peers, friends or the colleagues. The peer pressure can be either positive or negative for an individual. Same thing or the same behaviour can be positive motivator for one and negatively motivating the other in the same or in different context. Various studies have been done in the past relating to the effects of the peer pressure on an individual specially the adolescents and children, as peer pressure can affect individual from any age, gender or ethnicities. It is the change in the attitude, behavior and values of an individual due to the influencing group or individual. The peer pressure has moved from face to face interaction to digital interaction, known as the social media including Facebook, twitter, Instagram and so on. The exposure of an individual towards inappropriate behavior and fake news build a peer pressure on any individual. The individuals face a pressure of being available 24* 7 or being perfect¹. Peers play a very important role in the life of a child or specially an adolescent and their influence begins from an early age only. Some of the peer pressure can be positive encouraging music, interest in games etc and at the same time, it can be a negative peer pressure too like smoking, drugs, alcohol or using abusive language etc. The children these days feel the peer pressure because they want to fit in it as they have a fear of being left out or losing the fun element in the group. They care more about what their friends think of them and are more likely to go with the crowd for the fear of being rejected (Brown et al., 1986)². The peer pressure is not only about the habits, the students are also facing this at the same time the pressure of doing certain things that they wouldn't engage in if they were on their own. Peer pressure is a tunnel which everyone goes through but its impact varies from person to person or from one situation to another. But heightened importance of peer influence is a hallmark of adolescent psychosocial functioning (Brown, 2004)³. Adolescents is the most influenced category in peer pressure as in this age, the friends and peer are the most important part in their lives. The study of homophily, (the human tendency of affiliating with like minded friends) have shown that the adolescents and peer pressure are comparatively higher than any other age group. The adolescence is a age when the family takes a backseat and most of the time is spent with friends. As per the recent survey done, it is found that the peer exposure during a risk taking task doubled the amount of risky behavior among middle adolescents increased it by 50%

among college students and no impact on adults (Gardner and Steinberg, 2005)⁴. Most of the studies have shown the conformity to peer pressure in early and middle adolescence is higher as compared to preadolescence and later years (Berndt, 1979⁵; Brown, 1990⁶; Krosnick and Judd, 1982⁷; Steinberg and Silverberg, 1986⁸), the effect may vary but effects are significant.

Types of peer pressure:

Various types of peer pressures have been identified, some are:

Verbal/ spoken peer pressure: It is the influence of the peers verbally on the other, by word of mouth a person can be positively or negatively motivated to do a particular task. Sometimes, teenagers asks a friend to leave the studies and try taking a drink together. The peer pressure in this case is quite clear as the child usually quits the work and starts being a part of group so that the friends shouldn't start teasing him and he might feel left out or losing his friends or being bullied by this.

Unspoken peer pressure: An unspoken or non communicated provoking also takes place when a person gets influenced by the lifestyle of the individual. Herein the pressure is not built up due to the verbal communication rather a silent pressure is built in by getting influenced with the lifestyle and independence enjoyed by other person. Eg: a person may feel that drinking at a younger age leaves a good impression on others, just by looking at the other individuals in the friend circle.

Negative peer pressure: Even if it's a spoken or a unspoken peer pressure, the impact of this can be very negative too. At certain points of time, a person is prone to develop wrong habits like drugs, smoking, drinking or using abusive language due to the influence of the peer pressure. A girl hailing from Jammu and Kashmir, India was found hanging from her fan and the reason behind this extreme step was that she couldn't gather the courage to go to her college after reading the obscene remarks over her facebook posts⁹.

Positive peer pressure: The virtual peer pressure has not only been negative in every situation, a positive influence of the same can not be ignored be ignored herewith. The posts on facebook and twitter has been found to be encouraging the youths to start with some game or study hard to get good marks or better marks so posted by some friends on social media. This competitive spirit has also been instigated by the social media.

Adult peer pressure: The peer pressure have been found not only amongst the adolescents but even the youth in adults or professionals. Though their minds are not as easily changeable as a teenager but still they are found to shift their habits like drinking or smoking in order to relieve stress. At times, they are also found to be corrupt as they see their seniors taking bribe.

Virtual world: With the change in the current era, the new technology has drifted the humans from each other and the reason so clearly visible is the non human factorial forces, known as internet. A man has found a better option of being in touch with the rest of the world through the social network, facebook, twitter, instagram and many more. Facebook is a site wherein after making an account, anyone can stay connected with their friends and family by adding them in their friends' list and updating them by posting pictures and videos and the viewer has the option of liking or disliking it or sharing it further after adding one's comments. Twitter and instagram gives the option to the account holder to post their photos and videos and get views over it.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

There has been many researches done previously over this topic in different contexts, some have focused on the increase in the usage of social media while some have stressed upon the consequences of the usage of the same. Technological changes including continuous access to the personal profiles of others through Facebook have increased self comparison and thus the peer pressure amongst the teens (Sheldon, Abad, & Hinsch, 2011; Strano, 2008; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). Social interaction through internet has far reaching effects for users of all ages (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011; Brown et al., 1986; Feaster, 2010; Miller, Lansford, Costanzo, Malone, Golonka, & Killea-Jones, 2009; Zhao et. al., 2008). In another research, the transmission of peer pressure through Facebook was examined and the behavioural changes so found in users through their personal profiles based on their perceptions was also studied. The findings supported the ability of perceived peer pressure in generating behavioural changes in individuals and a peer pressure was found with alterations in the profile pictures (Strano, 2008). Sheldon et. al. (2011) found that studied that the frequent use of social media is a major contributor to overall psychological health. Their study reported that the Facebook users felt disconnected to life when they were restricted to use Facebook for 48 hours. (Elphinston & Noller, 2011; Gershon, 2011; Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; Joinson, 2008; Junco, 2012; Kim & Lee, 2011) studied the various personality traits of Facebook users , potential behavioral changes and frequency of updating information and other such information so impacted on social media. (Kim & Lee, 2011; Paradise & Sullivan, 2012; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Ryan & Xenos, 2011; Sheldon et al., 2011; Strano, 2008) studied the implications of

direct/ indirect peer pressure in decision making processes and frequency of use of social media. Research was also conducted to study the desire for romantic relationship and the its relationship with demographic who are largely active

on social media (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011; Lenhart et al., 2010; Malik & Mahmood, 2012; O'Keefe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). Teenagers were found to be more susceptible to perceived peer pressure as they are always trying to develop an acceptable projected image amongst their peers (Connolly et al., 2004; Mikami, 2010; Santor et al., 2000; Suizzo, 2000). In another research, it was found that the Facebook acts as a constant access to the life of friends and they feel the presence of face to face contact with others (Elphinston & Noller, 2011; Feaster, 2010; Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; Joinson, 2008; Junco, 2012; Kirkpatrick, 2010; Kujath, 2011; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Need of Research:

Keeping in view the importance and growing trend towards the virtual reality, the researcher has emphasized to enquire about the impact of the virtual peer pressure on individuals. The peer pressure has always been found through personal contact but the extent of peer pressure so created through the virtual world knows no boundaries and so the need to study the same has arisen.

Source of Data:

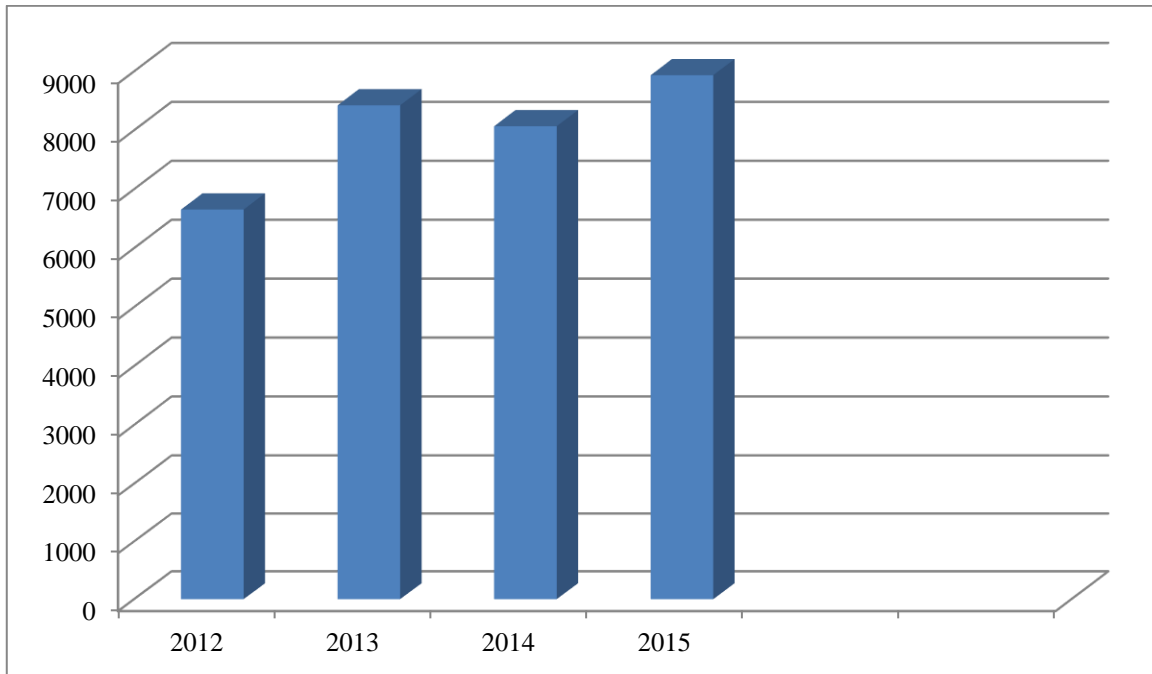
In any kind of research, data is categorized as primary data or the secondary data, but for a research to be more authentic and descriptive, the researcher has chosen the secondary data so forth available through newspapers, journals and other news updates so available. The primary data so used initially did not prove beneficial as the respondents were found to be hesitant in sharing such information.

Scope of the data:

The research is extended

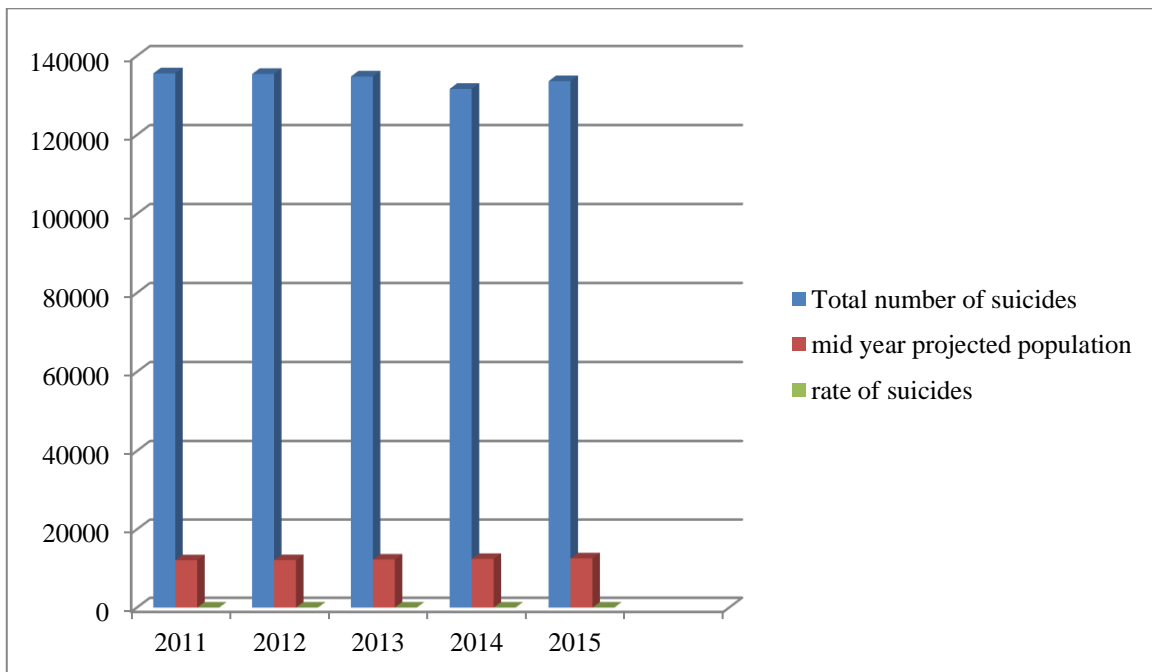
DISCUSSION:

Psychiatrists have been witnessing a high rate of depression syndrome and suicide rate due to the influence of social media, the youngsters in the age group of 15-29 years have been a major cause for the same. The youths have become more susceptible to an obsessive behaviour of staying online 24x7 and posting their selfies and pictures. This kind of behavior warrants attention and is creating an addiction amongst the youth¹⁰. There has been alarming cases wherein youths, specially teenagers have been found ot be occupied with the social media for 8-10 hours posting pictures and liking and sharing with their friends. Also, sexual promiscuity and drug abuse is found to be higher amongst youth social media addicts¹⁰. According to the data, one student commits suicide every one hour (National Crime Records Bureau). As per the data, between 2011- 2016, 49,249 students in India committed suicides. Statistics from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) show that 6,654 students committed suicide in 2012; 8,423 in 2013; 8,068 in 2014; and 8,934 in 2015.



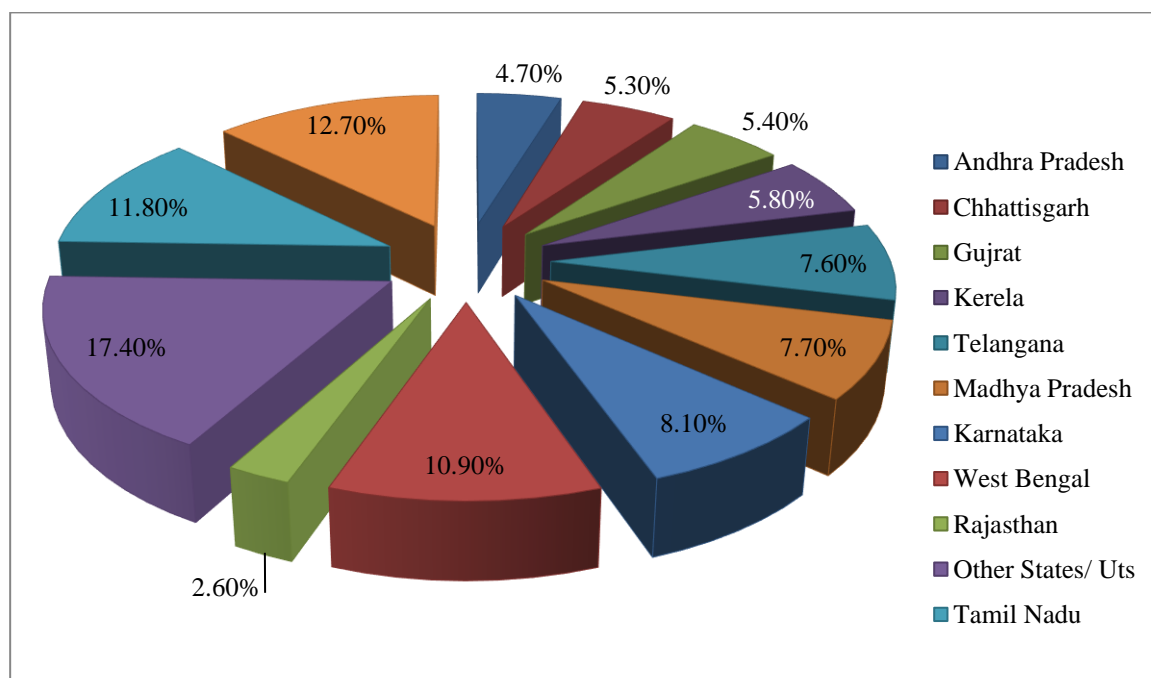
The national crime bureau states that the total number of suicides have already increased manifolds since 2012, wherein it was at 6654, it rose to 8423 in 2013, 8068 in 2014 and 8934 in 2015. Though there have been many reasons so recorded behind these suicides but many have been there due to peer pressure or social peer pressure. Desires to feel socially accepted, viewing the relationship status of others on Facebook could initiate internal feelings or perceptions of pressure to be involved in a romantic relationship based on the status' of the user's friends (Feaster, 2010; Morrison and Bies, 1991; Strano, 2008; Waters and Ackerman, 2011). Available research has indicated that adult participants will alter their behaviors and change their profile pictures based on peer pressure from their virtual friends.

Number of suicides per population till 2015:



Source: The Registrar General of India, National Crime Records Bureau

STATE WISE STATISTICS OF SUICIDES IN INDIA:



It has been evidently found that the highest rate of suicides is found in other States/ U.T s (17.40%) and Maharashtra (12.70%) followed by Tamil Nadu (11.80%) and West Bengal (10.90%) and Karnataka at 8.10%. Telangana and Madhya Pradesh are found almost at same level, 7.60% and 7.70% respectively. The least suicide rate is found in Rajasthan (2.60%) followed by Andhra Pradesh (4.70%). Kerela (5.80%), Gujrat (5.40%) and Chhattisgarh (5.30%) have almost the same level of suicides. According to World Health Organisation, approximately 1.53 million people will die from suicides in the year 2020.

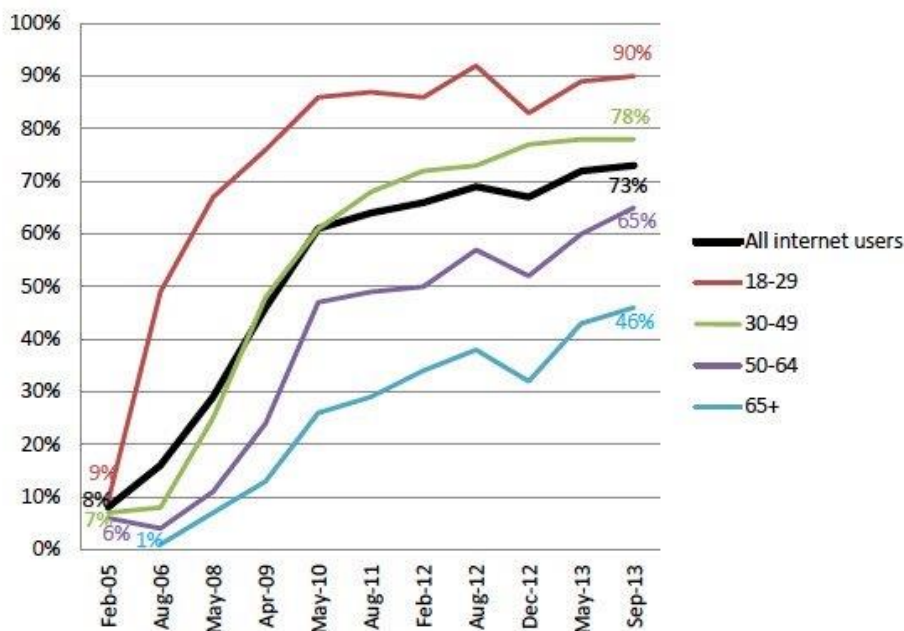
In case of internet related suicidal crimes, the rise of suicide pact is really high. Suicide pact is an agreement between two or more people to die at a particular time and often using the same lethal means. In case of cyber suicide pacts these are the agreements formed between complete strangers through online chats or virtual bulletin boards. The first documented suicide pact was found in Japan in 2000 but now the virtual suicide has increased from 34 suicides in 2003 to 91 in 2005. At the same time, Korea has become the country having the highest suicide rates (24.7/100 000 in 2005), and evidences states that almost one third of suicides are due to cyber suicides¹¹. Cyber bullying and social media lives depicting a “perfect” lives is taking a toll on the teens’ mental health. According to a survey, it was found;

- That the teenagers using electronic devices including smartphones for five hours daily doubled from 8% in 2009 to 19% in 2015. These teenagers are more likely to have suicidal thoughts than those who were reported one hour of daily use.
- In 2015, 36 percent of the teenagers were reportedly found to be desperately sad or hopeless, or thinking about, planning or attempting suicide, up from 32 percent in 2009. For girls, the rates were higher — 45 percent in 2015 as compared to 40 percent in 2009.
- In 2009, 58 percent of girls upto XII th class used social media every day or nearly every day; by 2015, 87 percent used social media every day or nearly every day. They were 14 percent more likely to be depressed than those who used social media less frequently.

It is found that the maximum use of social media sites is being done by the youths in the age group of 18-29 years (90%), 78% users are in the age group of 30-49 years and 65% users are in the age group of 50-64 years and only 46% users are more than 65 years in age. The growing addiction towards social media has increased manifolds and it has become the new era, now a days. The people are more prone and addicted to use internet and the social media than anything else, the addiction to update their “status” or the best moments of their lives have indeed become one of the essential part of the lives of the people from any background and any age group.

Social networking site use by age group, 2005-2013

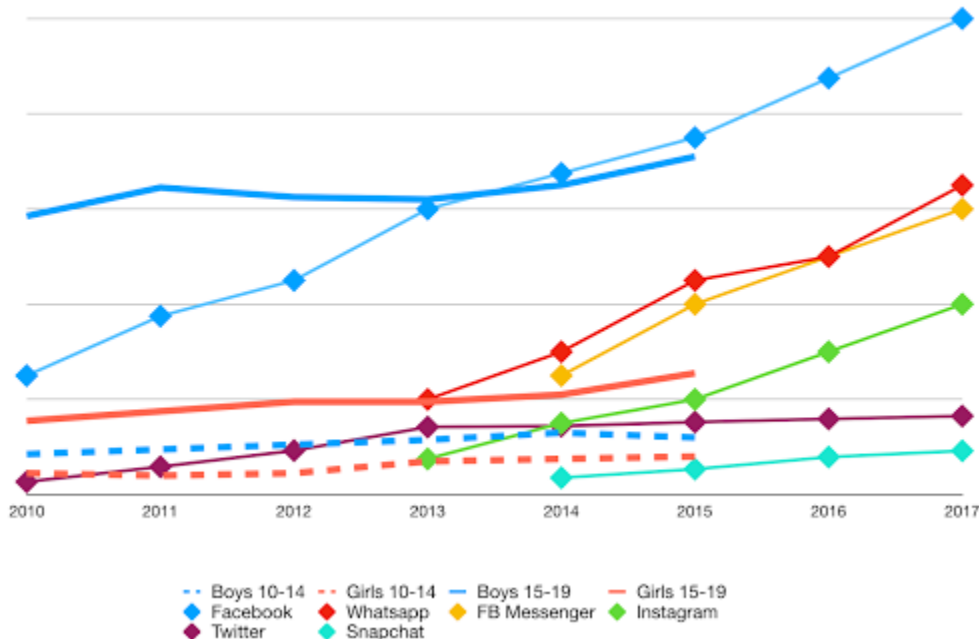
% of internet users in each age group who use social networking sites, over time



Source: Latest data from Pew Research Center's Internet Project Library Survey, July 18 – September 30, 2013. N=5,112 internet users ages 18+. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. The margin of error for results based on internet users is +/- 1.6 percentage points.

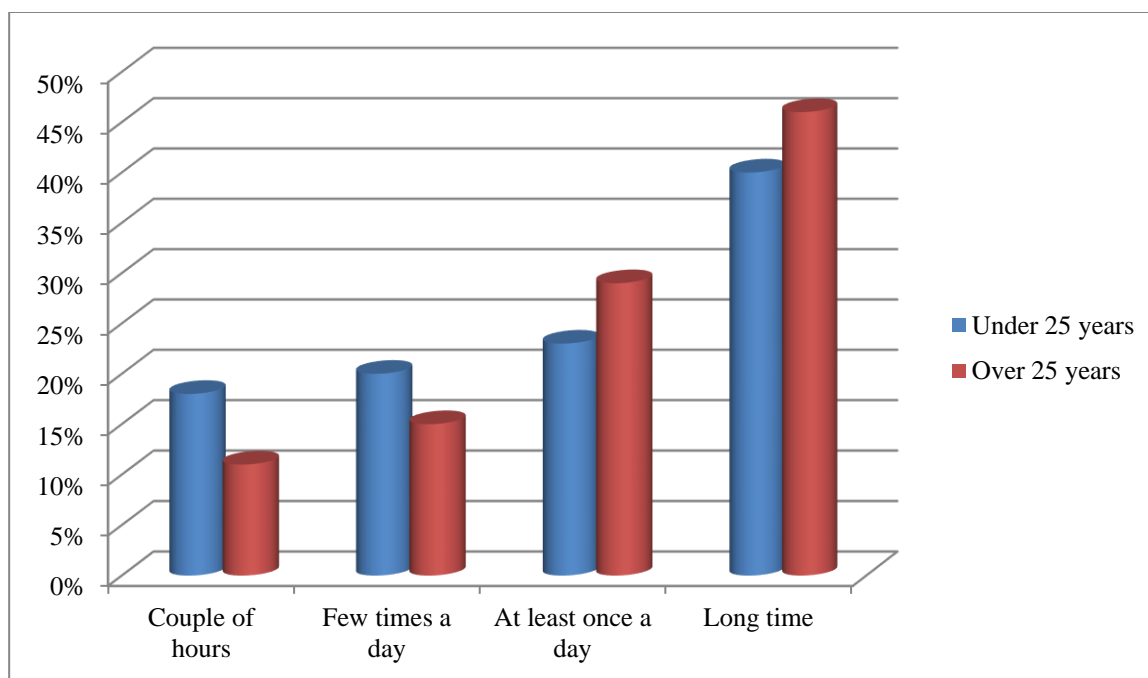
The chart below clearly states that the impact of facebook has been highest and has been highest in boys in the age group of 10-14 years. The second highest impact is found in case of whatsapp users followed by Facebook messenger and Instagram. Twitter and snapchat are the least used or least influencing of all the social media means so available with the youths in this era.

Suicide Rates for Children and Social Media Growth



The data evidently shows that the users who are under the age of 25 years use more of social media sites. Only 11% of users over the age of 25 years use social media sites couple of hours in a day whereas 18% under the

age of 25 years use social media for couple of hours in a day. 20% of users under the age of 25 years use it few times a day as compared to 15% who are over the age of 25 years. The users using social media at least once a day are higher in case of users over the age of 25 years (29%) as compared to the ones who are under the age of 25 years (23%). At the same time, the uses over the age of 25 years i.e. upto 46% use social media for long time as compared to 40% users under the age of 25 years. So, it is quite evident that the craze for social media is higher in case of users of less than 25 years of age as compared to more than 25 years of age.



The potential negative impact of social media on young people is receiving increasing attention and contagion, sharing information about suicide methods and encouragement towards suicidal behavior.

SUGGESTIONS TO CONTROL PEER PRESSURE:

There is a dire need to make the youths understand that there are some positive benefits attached with the social media apart from sense of community and support from friends. It can act as a platform for sharing information giving promising results. Facebook recently launched “proactive detection” which is capable of detecting through scanning of all posts for pattern of suicidal thoughts and when necessary send mental health resources to the user or their friends, or contact local first-responders. It has been found that browsing Instagram is associated with increased depression whereas talking to each other increases life satisfaction. There is a need to make the youth aware that they need to focus more on some productive activities rather than these social media means. The parents need to keep a keen eye on the behavioural changes so found in their kids and they need to involve them more into family affairs and responsibilities. The life has become too hectic and more of a show off business is there which needs to be balanced by making the youths realize the value of life and that these “likes”, “posts” or snapchat is of no importance and they need to come out of their virtual life and interact more with the peer group. Any person updating their “happy times” on facebook or any other social media doesnot depict the true life in most of the cases. The role of family, specially the parents is of utmost importance in such cases. Proper counseling needs to be done in case a youth is found with some suspecting behavioural changes or is found to be too much addicted to such social means.

CONCLUSION:

There are always two sides of a coin, use of social media has both advantages and disadvantages at the same time. It all depends upon in what manner a person makes use of it. Such social media sites can act as a very big help to exchange views, knowledge and ideas from across the world and have interactions world across and can act as a source of negative knowledge at the same time. A person has to be more aware and wise enough to choose the mean for the same.

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