PATTERNS OF YOUTHS' COMMUNICATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA IN WESTERN ETHIOPIA

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Abstract

Online communication has become a centerpiece in the social life of youths. They outnumber adults in their use of communication technologies, especially through social networking sites. This study focuses on the patterns of youths' communication on social media in Western Ethiopia. The objectives of this research paper is to assess the types of social media that Ethiopian youths prefer to use; the timings that the Ethiopian youths prefer to access the social media; and the size of contacts (friends and groups) the Ethiopian youths have on their social networks. There are three target population of this study from where the sample is drawn: teen cyber café visitors, cell phone using older youths and laptop using professional youths. For the first target population, systematic random sampling is used whereas for the second and third snowball sampling is applied. The sample size (n=264) comprises of questionnaire (n=252) supplemented by interview from key respondents (n=12). The data is collected and analyzed keeping in view the age and gender dynamics and the result is presented. The findings conclude that the youths of Ethiopia are stupendously engaged in online social media use. They are leapfrogging into online communication landscape through different tools of social media and reshaping the society.

Key words: Social media, social networks, online communication, youths, Western Ethiopia.

1. INTRODUCTION

"Social networks" are online communities that give opportunities to connect with, or provide resources to, clients, colleagues, family, and friends who share common interests. There are many different types of social network sites, many of which are free, and they range from general to those tailored for a specific demographic or interest area. The term "social media" refers to the wide range of internet-based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content and join online communities. Social media use

web-based and mobile technologies on smart-phones, computers, tablets or laptops to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals, communities and organizations can share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content or pre-made content posted online (Mayfield, 2008; Hussain, 2014). They are computer-mediated online tools that allow people, companies and other organisations to create, share or exchange information, career interests, ideas and pictures, videos in virtual communities and networks. They are the set of internet based tools which share the information in the form of text, photo, audio, video, animation and graphics. Social media is a big world. The number of users of social media is bigger than some of the most populous countries in the world. Facebook has 1.55 billion monthly active users. If Facebook was a country it will outrank China, India and will be the most populated country in the world (Hussain 2014). Although it is very difficult to make a list of all the social media platforms as this technology keeps on changing day by day, yet the prominent social media are --- social networks, blog, microblog, social bookmarking sites, wikis, video sharing sites, social news sites, online rating sites, podcasts, forums/message boards, geo-location, and many other platforms (Boyd and Ellison 2007). Social networking site is one of the types of social media. Social media is broader term than social networking site. Social networking site allows its user to share the information, opinion, form groups and interact with them. These social networks allow you to connect with other people of similar interests and background. It is one of the most famous and most used social media platforms. Usually the social networks consist of various profiles and various ways to interact with other users. On these sites, one can form online communities and frequently share information through posts, links, photos, video and other multimedia. The most popular examples are Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, LinkedIn etc. (Mayfield, 2008; Hussain, 2014). Social networks exert an ever-tighter grip on our everyday lives, and the ways that we communicate and keep ourselves informed. The most striking features of the social media phenomenon have been the extraordinary speed and scale of their adoption across the world. The statistics portal Statista projects a figure of 33 million UK Facebook users by 2018, more than half the entire population. In July 2015, Twitter claimed it had reached 15 million active users in the UK, around one person in four. Instagram claims 14 million active monthly users in the UK. (Baker, 2016).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term "social media" emerged in the late 1990s when it began to be used as an all-encompassing description for emerging digital technologies. Social media, which are most often accessed through the Internet, are defined as, "forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other contents ." As a functional definition, social media refers to the interaction of people and also to creating, sharing, exchanging and commenting contents in virtual communities and networks (Toivonen, 2007). Mayfield (2008) defines social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content." Social media is ubiquitously accessible, and enabled by scalable communication techniques. Social media are said to be tools generated from Web 2.0, as they facilitate the large scale "peer sharing" that defines this second generation of internet. Social media is a "death of distance" which has reduced the physical barriers and has strengthened the relationships. It has shortened the distance between the people all over the world (Flew, 2002). The society has been globalized and people on virtual communities are sharing their pleasantries, sorrows, love, knowledge, plans, gossips, commerce, discussions and so many other activities online (Rheingold, 2000). Social media has produced a huge increase in the volume of communication, the speed of communication and the opportunity of interactive communication. It has become associated with converged, computerized, networked, interactive and compressible technologies and information (Jenkins, 2006). Social media is a shift to "computer-mediated communication which is considered as one of the indicators of the developmental contours of a nation (Castells, 1996).

Jenkins (1999) suggests that the digital world is creating new opportunities for adolescents to grapple with social norms, explore interests, and develop technical skills and experiment with new forms of self-expression. These activities have captured their attention because they provide avenues for extending social worlds, self-directed learning and independence. A curiosity and mystique around teens and their behavior has long been a cultural obsession (Mayfield 2008). This demographic lot (youths) wields tremendous influence on their peers, their parents and the culture at large. This age group embraces new things quickly and dramatically. They are digital natives, super communicators and multi-taskers as and when they consume social media. They

love it and most of the time they are busy in texting, networking, gaming and other online genre preferences (Ito et al. 2008).

Social media in Ethiopia is a newly born baby. Very little or no studies have been carried out on the issue of fast developing social media and its impact on youths. The main aim of this study is to illuminate this under-researched topic in Ethiopian context. The opportunities to youths in terms of social media consumption are rapidly developing, there is a dire need to find out the impact of social media on youths lifestyle. The outcome of this study would be very useful as it is an issue of concern for parents, elders, teachers and policy makers of the country. This paper focuses on the following research questions: What types of social media and social networks do the Ethiopian youths prefer to use? What are the timings do the Ethiopian youths prefer to access the social media? What is the size of contacts (friends and groups) do the Ethiopian youths have on their social networks?

3. METHODOLOGY

This research has been accomplished through quantitative research design. The study was conducted in Nekemte town of Oromia region in Ethiopia. It is situated at the elevation of 2088 m above sea level, and located at a latitude and longitude of 9°5′N 36°33′E. It is at the center of the road network for South Western Ethiopia. The town is fairly developed having about 15 cybercafés, 300 EVDO connections and 700 CDMA users through which social networks is used on the internet (Ethiopian Telecommunication, 2012). There are three target population of this study from where sample is drawn. They are teen cyber café visitors, cell phone using older youths and laptop using professional youths. The participants of this research are social networks users falling under teen and youth category. An individual who had used social networks through internet at least once in the last one month is the participant of this research. The participants are the desktop user teens from five cyber cafes; cell phone user youths from five universities; and laptop using professional youths of different organizations of the town. The t o o l u s e d for quantitative data is self-administered questionnaire. In order to get desired response, the close ended type items were included in the questionnaire. A pilot study of 20 cases has been done to draw Cronbach Alpha and add value to the questionnaire. The sample size of this study is 252, which is statistically derived for questionnaire survey using the assumptions of desired precision 5 % and confidence level 95 %. The sample includes both male (n=126) and female (n=126) youths. In addition, age-wise it also includes teens (n=111) and older youths (n=141) youths. As

there are three target population of this study from where sample is drawn, for the first target population (teen cyber café visitors) systematic random sampling is applied. For the second (cell phone using older youths); and third (laptop using professional youths) target group snowball sampling is applied. The survey sample includes teen desktop users in 5 different cyber cafes of town; cell phone using older youths in 5 different universities of the town, and laptop (EVDO/CDMA) using professional youths of the town. The questionnaire is translated into English. After the data is gathered through questionnaire, it is analysed through SPSS in terms of frequency and percentage.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Respondent Profile

Table 1: Respondent profile

VARIABLES	NUMBER (Base=252)	PERCENTAGE
GENDER		
1. Male	126	50
2. Female	126	50
AGE		
1. Teens	111	44.0
2. Older youths	141	55.9
EDUCATION		
1. 5-9 years of school	18	7.1
2. 10-12 class	78	30.9
3. Less than First Degree	70	27.7
4. First/Second Degree (General)	58	23.0
5. First/Second Degree (Professional)	28	11.1
OCCUPATION		
1. Unskilled Worker / Agricultural Labor	00	00
2. Skilled Worker	26	10.3
3. Small traders	07	2.7
4. Shop Owners	00	00
5. Business with employing non/Marginal Farmer	01	0.3
6. Business with employing 1-9 /Small Farmer	03	1.1
7. Business with employing 10 & above/Medium Farmers	00	00
8. Self-employed Professionals	08	3.1
9. Clerical/Salesman	10	3.9
10. Supervisor Level	40	15.8
11.Jr.Officer/Executive/Large Farmer1	02	0.7
12. Sr.Officer/Sr. Executive/Large Farmer2	02	0.7
13. Student	149	59.1
14. House-wife	00	00
15. Unemployed	04	1.5

(Survey data)

The respondent profile of this study consists of 126 (50%) male and 126 (50%) female. Age break up constitutes 111 (44%) teens and 141 (56%) older youths. In education, the respondents include 31% preparatory students, 28% less than first degree, 23% first degree and 11% second degree. Occupation-wise, 149 (60%) respondents are students, 26 (10%) are skilled workers, 10 (4%) are clerks/salesmen 3% are self-employed professionals and small traders followed by unemployed people, businessmen, junior officers and senior officers.

RQ1: What types of social media and social networks do the Ethiopian youths prefer to use?
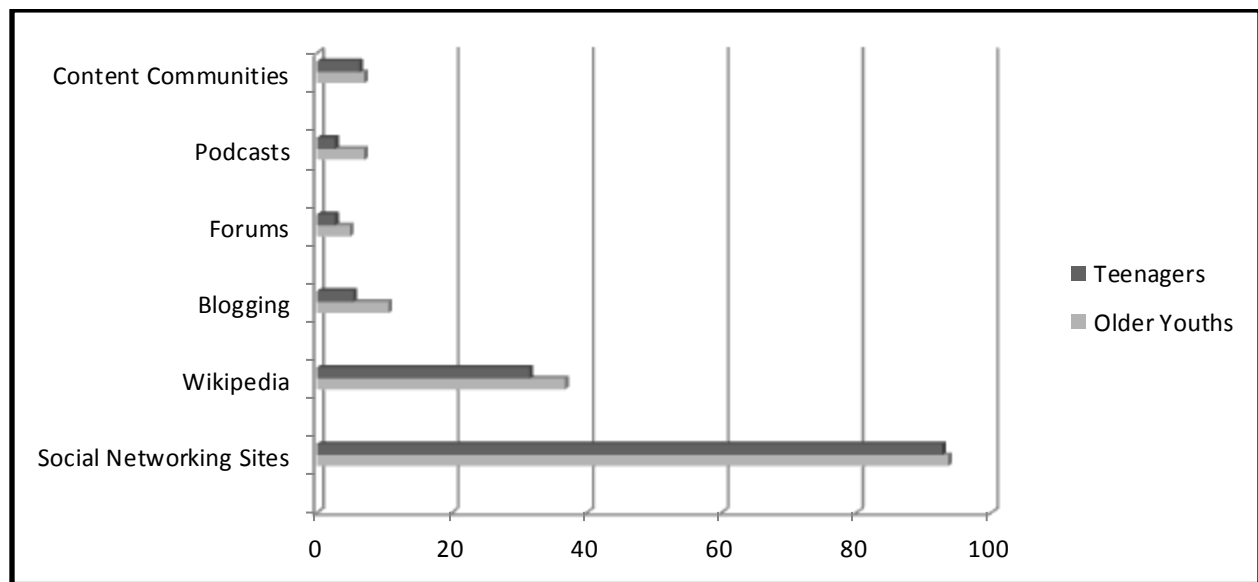
4.2 Types of social media

Figure 1: Types of social media

The data related to kinds of social media reveals that Ethiopian teens mostly use social networking sites (91.2%) followed by Wikipedia (38.5%) content communities (6.3%), blogging (5.4%), forums and podcasts (2.7%). Among older youths, 93.6% respondents use blogging, 7% use podcast and content communities, and 4.9% use forums.

4.3 Popular social networking sites

Table 2

Responses	Male Teens (Base=54)	female Teens (Base=57)	Male youths (Base=72)	Female youths (Base=69)
Facebook	48 (88.8%)	57 (100%)	65 (90.2%)	66 (95.6%)
WhatsApp	18 (33.3%)	23 (40.3%)	28 (38.8%)	26 (37.6%)
YouTube	16 (29.6%)	19 (33.3%)	24 (33.3%)	17 (24.6%)
Skype	13 (24.1%)	18 (31.6%)	18 (25%)	15 (21.8%)
Google +	10 (18.5%)	8 (14%)	20 (27.7%)	10 (14.4%)
LinkedIn	8 (14.8%)	2 (3.5%)	23 (31.9%)	9 (13%)
Twitter	5 (9.2%)	5 (8.7%)	11 (15.2%)	12 (17.3%)

Source: Survey data

While various social networks have dominated the in Ethiopia, Facebook is currently the most popular among respondents by almost any standards. The above table depicts that the top five popular social networks among the youths are: Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Skype, and Google +.

RQ2: What are the timings do the Ethiopian youths prefer to access the social media?

4.4 Preferred timings

Table 3

Responses	Male Teens (Base=54)	female Teens (Base=57)	Male youths (Base=72)	Female youths (Base=69)
Morning	19 (35.1%)	18 (26%)	17 (23.6%)	18 (26%)
Afternoon	28 (51.8%)	31 (34.7%)	39 (54.1%)	24 (34.7%)
Evening	32 (59.2%)	29 (72.4%)	53 (73.6%)	50 (72.4%)

Late night	10 (18.5%)	14 (28.9%)	10 (13.8%)	20 (28.9%)

Source: Survey data

The age-wise data shows almost the same trend among teens and older youths. For teens also evening (55%) is most preferred time to stay on social media and late night is least favored (22%) by them. The second most preferred session is afternoon (53%) followed by morning. The old youths also reflects the same tendency to stay on social media. Their most preferred timing is evening (73%) followed by afternoon (45%), morning (25%) and late night (21%).

RQ3: What is the size of contacts (friends and groups) do the Ethiopian youths have on their social networks?
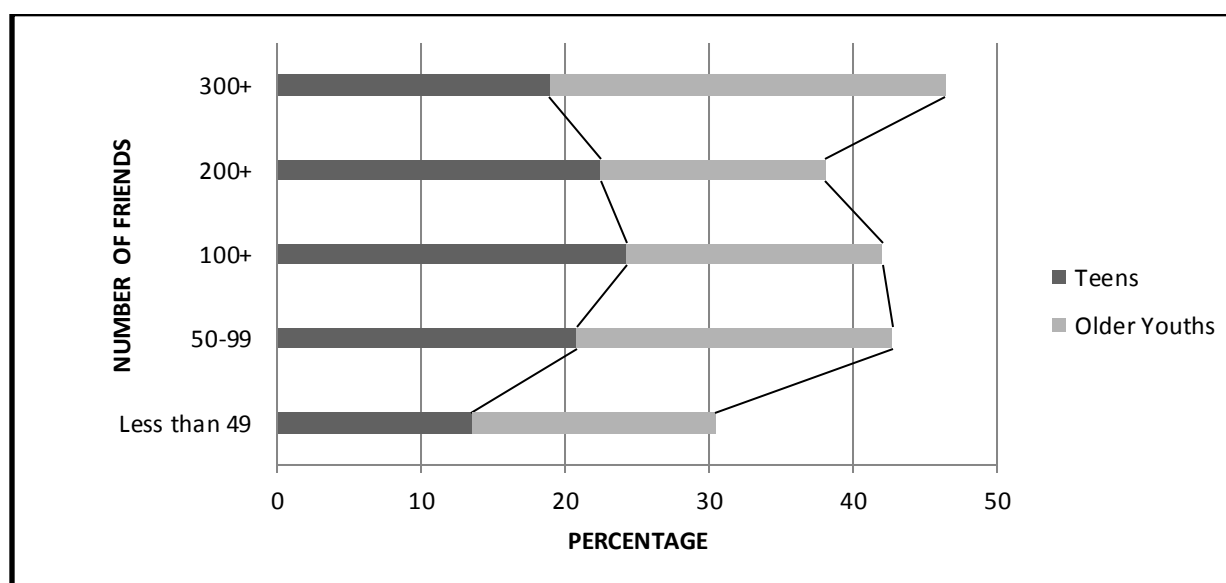
4.5 Number of friends

Figure 2: Numbers of friends on social networks

The age-wise statistics portray maximum (one fourth) teens have 100+ friends on social media followed by 200+ friends (23%), 50-99 friends (21%) , 300+ (19%), and less than 49 friends (14%).

4.6 Number of group/community

Responses	Male Teens (Base=54)	female Teens (Base=57)	Male youths (Base=72)	Female youths (Base=69)
None	16 (29.6%)	15 (26.3%)	29 (40.3%)	17 (24.6%)
Up to 10	24 (44.4%)	26 (45.6%)	26 (36.1%)	33 (47.8%)
11-50	13 (24%)	10 (17.5%)	15 (20.8%)	12 (17.3%)
51+	1 (1.8%)	6 (10.6%)	2 (2.7%)	7 (10.1%)

The age analysis clearly indicates that 28% teenagers have no community membership on social media while 45% have only up to 10 membership of community whereas only 6% respondents have 51+ community memberships. Among older youths also, 42% respondents have community membership up to 10 while 33% were having no community membership. Only 19% were having community membership ranging from 11-50 whereas negligible respondents (6.4%) have 51+ community memberships.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Social networking sites and Wikipedia are the two most popular social media among all categories of youths i.e. males, females, teens and older youths. Facebook, Google + and You Tube are the three most popular social media platforms among males, females, teens and older youths. Twitter is most popular among males (24.6%) whereas it is highly ignored by females (8.7%) and teenagers (9%). Except teenagers majority of older youths, male youths and female youths have more than 300 friends on their profiles. Majority of people in all four categories, teens, males, females and older youths are connected with less than 10 communities (groups). Mostly the youths of all categories (males, females, teens and older youths) prefer to stay on social media in the evening session and late night is the least preferred timing for them. Afternoon and morning sessions are second and third preferred timing of youths who use social media.

Social media for the last three decades has been reshaping the entire existence and behavior of youth's communication. One can find that adults should focus on understanding what teens and youths do with the media. It is important to understand what youths do with media in order to make sense of the effects. Youths use social media for gaining information with multiple sources. They develop social connection and extend their peer based expression of interest. By establishing self-directed learning, teens enjoy leisure and entertainment. It is their domain of freedom from where they frequently share their creations; opt for illegal downloading and cyber bullying. These important aspects call for further research in order to deeply investigate the real opportunities and challenges of social media.

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