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The Role Of Social Networking Sites In Promoting Environmental Awareness Among The Youth In Shillong

Miss Phindashisha Malngiang ¹, Dr. Jacinta Ivory Rapthap ²

Research Scholar, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya.

Assistant Professor, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya.

Abstract

With the advent of the science and technology in this modern era, the social networking sites has emerged as the easiest and cheapest tool of communication among individuals worldwide. Its immense growth to disseminate information, ideas, facts, knowledge and opinions around the world have made connectivity and communication much easier. This research aims to extensively examine the purpose of social networking sites in promoting environmental consciousness among the youngsters, considering various dimensions and implications. This research provides a deeper understanding of how these platforms of social networks such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and so on determines the changing mindset of the youth towards the development and sustainability of the surrounding and the environment they reside in. The research was descriptive in nature and Simple random sampling technique was used to ascertain the representative of the study. For the purpose of data collection, interviews and structured close-ended questionnaires was used. The study found that social networking sites plays a significant role in disseminating environmental awareness and shares updates on environmental problems and real-time environmental alerts. Further, the study also provides educational contents to tackle environmental problems and eventually helping the respondents to change their mindset and behavior to bring positive changes and betterment to the environment as a whole.

Keywords: Social networking sites, environmental awareness, environmental issues, environmental sustainability.

1. Introduction

With the rapid emergence of globalism and information access, social networking sites platforms emerged as the most essential tool of communication and connection around the world and it is widely used by different organizations and institutions to spread information, ideas, opinions, facts, knowledge and awareness in relating to their own particular field. Social networking sites being the easiest and cheapest tool of communication paves way for people around the globe to disseminate, gather and receive information effectively and efficiently at their best convenient time. Social networking sites platforms has gone past over individual use and unfolded chances for divergent groups and corporation to furnish information, to fascinate like-minded individuals and bring forth a better decision making. As social networking sites platforms has developed such an important connection device within traditions, workplace, investigators, and specialist from diversity directions have been examining ways to influence social networks for connection and interaction, marketing, managements and analysis activities. Its importance to disseminate and spread awareness about the well-being of the environment and its surrounding is on another level and much needed.

Nowadays, social networking sites “services are more frequently utilised for environmental awareness among people to engage in public dialogue almost instantaneously. Social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc., share news, information, and articles and are thus, most resourceful for concerned “netizens” to keep abreast of the environmental issues. The social networking sites has also created spaces for convergence of traditional media with new media to produce an eclectic and multifaceted resource for people to gain indigenous knowledge about environmentalism” (Kambu, M and Pali, T, 2023). Environment being the most fundamental part for all organisms, is the principal asset to be look after at the utmost and earliest means. Humankind is relying on the environment for its necessities and thus depend on it for fresh surroundings, water, raw materials, flora and fauna and so on. It is the environment around us which complete our needs and refill natural resources that helps human race to survive on this planet. Due to expeditious industrialization and with the explosion of enormous population, there is considerable constraint on the surroundings. In this way, we are exceeding the pressure of our environment. This increasing pressure on environment creates many serious environment problems. Forest has been cut for the land use purpose to make houses, industries, factories; industries pollute land, air and water; natural habitats and forest of animals are being destroyed and many species are surfacing destruction today. Building our environment safe and protecting one self, it is high chance for us to take further step in controlling and preserving it. “All this is possible only if we make people more and more aware of our environment and describing them about the environmental effects on their life and what are the consequences that they are going to face if they harm, pollute and destroy it today” (Tilwankar et al ,2019). The difficulty, which we are dealing today, is because of absence of environmental consciousness among the human race and lack of understanding for sustaining life. This can be resolve only if environmental sensitivity and concern amongst the humankind could be uplift. The benefit of eco awareness is its benefaction to general support for governance measures in environment protection and legislation.

Environmental consciousness can be uplift with the learning and instructional programs to youths and people residing around the world to paves way for the betterment and development of environmental sustainability.

“Environmental awareness today is a pressing need of the society to make the people realize of environmental hazards and to initiate actions, starting from the individual level. Social networking sites acts as a means in creating consciousness and awareness about the ramifications of environmental problems such as Global Warming, Land degradation, air pollution, deforestation, landslides, loss of biodiversity and so on” (Okuah, O et al, 2019). Environmental consciousness and education hence, becomes unchallenging by using social networking sites platforms. Many socially responsible individuals make public numerous environmental problems to rekindle among the individuals the perception of commitment towards conservation and safeguarding nature. “Pages, websites, groups are created on social networking sites platforms to spread information and awareness related to environmental issues. Social networking sites can inspire environmental activism through positive messages such as quotations, stories underlying environmentally - responsible behaviours, and pictures of nature among others” (Cox, 2010).

Soundarapandian and Thamodharan (2017), implies that “contribution of social networking sites platforms particularly in raising environmental awareness in the target group among the youth is important because it produce greater environmental influence on growth of world population and standards for high lifestyle of our communities”. “Users post and share real time photos and videos on a variety of environmental issues such as air, water, noise, soil, solid waste pollution, forest fires, chemical or oil spills in waterways, illegal dumping, plastic menace, affected plants or animals. This simple, yet effective action can result in prompt awareness of an environmental incident and timely response from various agencies responsible for the environment” (Mallick and Bajpai, 2019).

By exploring the above-mentioned aspects of the importance of social networking sites platforms and its updates, information, facts, news and opinions it provides, it is hence very essential to understand and know to how much extent that these social networking sites play a major role in providing environmental awareness among its users. To clearly understand how people and youth are responsible about the surrounding and environment they reside in and to know whether there are changes in their behaviour after exposing to educational contents about environment and its preservation, therefore, this study aims to extensively examine the involvement of social networking sites for promoting environmental perception among the youngsters, considering various dimensions and implications. Finding out whether the usage of social networking sites imparts knowledge about various environmental issues around them, and secondly, whether social networking sites provides adequate information on how to tackle and initiate problems arising regarding the environmental problems.

2. Review of Related Literature

Various authors and researchers in previous studies agree that social networking sites have drastically influenced environmental awareness and how these social network platforms make a greater change in people's views and opinions towards the betterment of the environment.

Iqbal et al (2023), Bhardwaj and Sharma (2023) and Misra (2021) in their studies reflected that social networking sites play a major role in creating environmental awareness among the youth. They indicated that social networking sites promote environmental consciousness among people living in the community. Further, these platforms provide insightful information in influencing public opinion and distributing environmental information. "Environmental awareness is a kind of strategic communication that encourages environmental consciousness, informs the public about the devastating effects of human progress, and aids in their understanding of sustainable development" (Iqbal et al, 2023).

Various studies Santh (2018), Scholtz et al. (2016), Rahim et al. (2012), and Arlt et al. (2011) revealed that environmental awareness through social networking sites among the youth is important because through environmental consciousness and insights can create greater environmental influence on growth of sustainable environment as a whole. "Users have an instant, cost free and unlimited access to a great number of environmental documentaries that will help them gather a greater insight about the environment and its preservation" (Arlt et al, 2011).

Hajri and Daife (2024), Sinha and Padhy (2022), Tilwankar et al. (2019), Soundarapandian and Thamodaran (2017) in their studies depicted about "social networking sites creating awareness about environmental degradation namely deforestation, climate change, global warming, water pollution, air pollution, soil pollution, over population, loss of biodiversity, so on". These studies reflected that the optimal and vital ways to handle the circumstances are to instruct individuals and alerting them about environmental problems. Studies found that social networking sites platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram etc. are used by the environment concern people to share pictures, videos and messages relating to environmental issues and problems to depict the reality concerns about it and making people residing around aware of the ongoing issues about the environment (Tilwankar et al, 2019).

Chen and Madni (2023), Sherman et al (2021), Dongarwar (2020) and Severo et al (2019) in their studies reflected about the importance about how educational contents relating to environment sustainability through social networks platforms paved a greater method to change mindsets of the people to think logically and creatively to bring positive changes and betterment to the environment and to sustain their way of living. Studies found that validated knowledge can inspire users to shift their viewpoint towards surroundings and sustainability matter. Studies also indicated that "user's green buying habits and purchase intentions are being reshaped by social networking sites posts and videos, which is helping to advance the development of a sustainable environment. Moreover, social networking sites platforms encourage users to use eco-friendly products, to lessen plastics use, to limit usage of disposable products, to increase usage

of reuse products and to follow the reuse, recycle and restore method in a mere and urgent way” (Chen and Madni, 2023).

3. Theoretical Frameworks

Altin et al. (2014) and Mei et al. (2016), highlighted that “environmental awareness is aligned with the individual’s convictions regarding environmental causes, their positioning through actions and attitudes, and the way in which they demonstrate this behaviour in favour of the environment, by participating actively in environmental issues. It is through social networks that individual members of these digital platforms can access and share networks, while fostering discussions and creating various forms of content”.

Several theories are used in the study to explain how social networking sites creates environmental awareness among the youth and how through this awareness the youth are becoming alert and passive to change the environment and maintain it to a better extent. This study is anchored on the Grounded Theory, Social Network Theory,

3.1 Grounded Theory

Okuah et al (2019) in their study stated that Grounded Theory proposed by Strauss and Glaser in 1967, reflects how “grounded theory attempts to unravel the meaning of people’s interactions, social actions and experiences. The theory emphasises how social networking sites allows its users to communicate using voice, instant messages, chat, videoconference and blogs and its services allow users to be contacted and connected with one another”. Further, the theory also explained how social networking sites can be “used to foster environmental behaviour, to provide news, sign petitions and to create more awareness and motivations. Social networking sites influencers can be used to potentially steer people towards being environmentally conscious and therefore they can use their influence to help create a positive impact in their communities” (Okuah et al, 2019).

3.2 Self- Determination Theory of Motivation

Self- determination theory of motivation was developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in 1985 which implies about motivation that suggests individuals focudes by a need to grow and obtain accomplishment. The theory looks up to describe how being self- determined effect motivation and however, most people feel more motivated to take action when they think that what they perform will have a positive effect on the outcome. Further, it explained that users of social networking sites tend to follow and take actions willingly to bring a change in the environment and they are intrinsically motivated to post images and videos relating to environment to create awareness and information among users in order to bring a change and betterment to the surrounding and their environment as a whole.

3.3 Social Learning Theory of Bandura

Social Learning Theory was developed by Albert Bandura in 1977, emphasizes the role of observation, imitation and modelling in learning behaviours. It suggests that people acquire new behaviours and knowledge by observing others within a social context, especially when those behaviours are seen to lead to positive outcomes or rewards. In this context, the theory reflected that influencers on social networking sites can posts blogs, videos and images about the importance of eco-friendly products such as reducing plastic use, encouraging of buying used goods, to used electricity and water wisely, etc. This will eventually motivate the users to replicate such behaviours and get inspire to use more recycle and eco-friendly products.

4. Research Methods

Descriptive research design is used for the purpose of the study. The sample of the research comprises 120 youth who are active users of social networking sites ages between 18 to 35 years belonging to the Municipality Board of Shillong, Meghalaya. Simple random sampling technique is used for the purpose of the research to randomly select youth who are active users of social networking sites. Data of collection was carried by the researcher through interviews and structured questionnaires were distributed to the respondents questioning them about environmental awareness through social networking sites, how educational contents through social networking sites helps the respondents to tackle environmental problems and issues and lastly whether they involve in activities after learning from social networking sites about the betterment of the environment. Statistical techniques such as Percentage, Frequency and descriptive statistics like Mean and Standard Deviation are used in the research for the analysis and interpretation of data.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 5.1: Demographic Profile of the respondents

Variables	Values	N	Percentage
Age	18-23 yrs	38	31.7%
	24-29 yrs	43	35.8%
	30-35 yrs	39	32.5%
Sex	Male	61	50.8%
	Female	59	49.2%
	Others	0	0%
Community	General	12	10.0%
	Scheduled tribe	95	79.2%
	Scheduled caste	4	3.3%
	Other Backward Classes	9	7.5%
Educational qualifications	Primary	0	0%
	Middle school	4	3.3%
	High school	31	25.8%
	Post High school	12	10.0%
	Diploma		
	Graduate	37	30.8%
	Post Graduate and above	24	20.0%
	Others (Certificate course, Diploma etc)	12	10.0%
Occupational Status	Employed	27	22.5%
	Self-employed	48	40.0%
	Unemployed	14	11.7%
Religious Background	Student	31	25.8%
	Christian	85	70.8%
	Hindu	17	14.2%
	Islam	8	6.7%
	Indigenous Khasi religion	10	8.3%
	Any other (specify)	0	0%

Table 5.1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents. It reflected that majority of the respondents (35.8%) belongs to the age group of 24-29 years, and majority of them (50.8%) were male respondents. Most of the respondents (79.2%) belongs to scheduled tribe community, and also majority of them (30.8%) have graduated from college. The table also presented that majority of the respondents (40.0%) are indulge in self- and majority of them (70.8%) belongs to Christian religion.

Table 5.2: Social networking sites Usage

Variables	Values	N	Percentage
Social networking sites platform used most frequently	WhatsApp	63	52.5%
	Facebook	29	24.2%
	Instagram	28	23.3%
	Any other (specify)	0	0%
Type of device that mostly use for social networking sites	Smartphones	100	83.3%
	Laptops	20	16.7%
	Computers	0	0%
	Others	0	0%
Hours spend on social networking sites each day	less than 2 hrs	18	15.0%
	2 hrs-4 hrs	22	18.3%
	4 hrs-6 hrs	52	43.3%
	6 hrs or more	28	23.3%
Years spend on social networking sites	Less than 3 yrs	2	1.7%
	3 to 6 yrs	50	41.7%
	6 to 9 yrs	6	5.0%
	9 yrs or more	62	51.7%
Frequency of checking on social networking sites	Every 5 mins-15 mins	62	51.7%
	Every 15 mins-30 mins	39	32.5%
	Every 30 mins-45 mins	12	10.0%
	Every 45 mins or more	7	5.8%

Table 5.2 represents the social networking sites usage by the respondents. The table depicted that majority of the respondents (52.5%) mostly used WhatsApp frequently and most (83.3%) of them used smartphones to access social networking sites. Further, it indicated that majority of the respondents (43.3%) spend 4-6 hours daily on social networking sites and most of them (51.7%) have used social networking sites for 9 years or more. The table also reflected that majority of the respondents (51.7%) checks on social networking sites for every 5 minutes- 15 minutes. From the table, it is clearly reflected that majority of the respondents have used social networking sites for a longer period of time and they spent a lot of hours to browse social networking sites each day.

Table 5.3: Social networking sites shares environmental updates relating to:

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Climate Change	120	4.11	.877
Global Warming	120	4.27	.719
Air Pollution	120	4.38	.651
Water Pollution	120	4.34	.667
Loss of Biodiversity	120	4.33	.637
Deforestation	120	4.83	4.668
Waste Management	120	4.36	.765
Plastic Pollution	120	4.51	.622
Soil Degradation	120	4.36	.754
Over Population	120	4.41	.655
Over usage of non-renewable resources like fossil fuels, minerals, water and so on	120	4.34	.692

Note: Strongly Agree=5, Agree=4, Neutral=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1

Table 5.3 represents social networking sites plays a significant role in building environmental consciousness through sharing eco-updates. Most respondents admit that social networking shares updates on climate change and majority of them strongly agree that social networking sites shares updates on global warming, air pollution, water pollution, loss of biodiversity, deforestation, waste pollution, plastic pollution, soil degradation, over population and over usage of non-renewable resources like fossil fuels, minerals, water and so on. From the table, it is clearly reflected that social networking sites thus plays a major role in providing environmental awareness to the youth as whole.

Table 5.4: Social networking sites provides Real-Time Environmental Alerts such as:

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Earthquakes	120	4.35	.752
Landslides	120	4.35	.741
Tsunamis	120	4.44	.719
Cyclones	120	4.38	.791
Floods	120	4.43	.670
Extreme weather	120	4.36	.719
Air quality alerts	120	4.23	.857
Tornadoes	120	4.22	.822
Wild fires	120	4.34	.728
Droughts	120	4.34	.680
Heat waves	120	4.40	.627
Mudslides	120	4.33	.702

Table 5.4 represents social networking sites provides Real-Time Environmental Alerts among the youth through social networks platforms. The table indicated that most of the respondents strongly agree that social networking sites provides Real-Time Environments Alerts on various disasters and calamities such as earthquakes, landslides, tsunamis, cyclones, floods, extreme weather, air quality alerts, tornadoes, wildfires, droughts, heat waves and mudslides.

Table 5.5: Social networking sites shares educational content to tackle environmental problems:

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
It shares videos on how to reduce, reuse and recycle things	120	4.24	.733
Motivates to conserve water	120	4.27	.807
Encourages to use energy-efficient light bulb	120	4.25	.759
Encourages to use eco-friendly products	120	4.36	.671
Motivates to use product wisely and only when needed	120	4.36	.683
It highlights the importance of carrying self-carry bags	120	4.84	4.662
It motivates users not to waste food	120	4.37	.755
It highlights the importance of planting of trees	120	4.40	.653
It educates users about conservation of natural resources	120	4.87	4.654
It encourages to replace disposal items with reusable items	120	4.79	4.676
It educates users to walk more to reduce fuel energy	120	4.38	.688
It educates users to avoid single-use plastics	120	4.42	.602
It highlights users to reduce usage of electricity at home	120	4.47	.579
It encourages to buy used goods	120	4.49	.518

Table 5.5 represents social networking sites shares educational content to tackle environmental problems among the youth. The table indicated that majority of the respondents strongly agree that social networking sites shares videos on how to reduce, reuse and recycle things; motivates to conserve water; encourages to use energy-efficient light bulb; encourages to use eco-friendly products; motivates to use product wisely and only when needed; it highlights the importance of carrying self-carry bags; motivates users not to waste food; it highlights the importance of planting of trees; educates users about conservation of natural resources; it encourages to replace disposal items with reusable items; educates users to walk more to reduce fuel energy; educates users to avoid single-use plastics; it highlights users to reduce usage of electricity at home and lastly it encourages to buy used goods. From the table it clearly reflected that social networking sites thus shares and educates the youth about how to maintain and sustain their environment in a more effective and efficient way.

Table 5.6: Activities involving by the respondents after learning from social networking sites about environment sustainability

Activities Involving	N	Percent	Percent of Cases
Participating cleaning drive in the society	114	9.7%	95.0%
Planting of trees	109	9.2%	90.8%
Planting of flowers	99	8.4%	82.5%
Cleaning of Rivers/Waters	86	7.3%	71.7%
Maintaining dustbins arranging by the Municipal/Authorities	79	6.7%	65.8%
Reducing plastics use	91	7.7%	75.8%
Using water only when needed	101	8.6%	84.2%
Using electricity only when needed	97	8.2%	80.8%
Purchasing eco-friendly products	96	8.1%	80.0%
Prefer to walk more	95	8.1%	79.2%
Carrying self-carry bags	105	8.9%	87.5%
Buying thrifts clothes, products or items	107	9.1%	89.2%
Total	1179	100.0%	982.5%

Table 5.6 represents the activities involving by the respondents after learning from social networking sites about environment sustainability. The table reflected that majority of the respondents (95%) Participating cleaning drive in the society; 90.8% participated in planting of trees; 82.5% participated in planting of flowers; 71.7% participated in cleaning of Rivers/Waters; 65.8% participated in maintaining dustbins arranging by the Municipal/Authorities; 75.8% participated in reducing plastics use; 84.2% used water only when needed; 80.8% used electricity only when needed; 80% purchasing eco-friendly products; 79.2% prefer to walk more; 87.5% participated in carrying self-carry bags and 89.2% participated in buying thrifts clothes, products or items. Thus, from the table it is clearly seen that social networking sites do transform the mindset and behaviour of the youth in maintaining and preserving the surrounding and environment as a whole.

6. Findings and Discussion of the Results

1. The study found that majority of the respondents belongs to 24-29 years of age, and most of them were male respondents. Most of the respondents belongs to scheduled tribe community, and majority of them have graduated from college. Further, it reflected that majority of the respondents are indulge in self-employed and also majority of these respondents belongs to Christian religion.

2. The study reflected that majority of the respondent mostly used WhatsApp frequently and most of them used smartphones to access social networking sites. Further, it indicated that majority of the respondents spend 4-6 hours daily on social networking sites and most of them have used social networking sites for 9 years or more. Also it reflected that majority of the respondents checks on social networking sites for every 5 minutes-15 minutes.
3. The study reflected that majority of the respondents strongly agree that social networking sites creates environmental awareness and shares environmental updates on climate change, global warming, air pollution, water pollution, loss of biodiversity, deforestation, waste pollution, plastic pollution and so on. This is supported by similar studies Saneh (2018), Scholtz et al. (2016), Rahim et al. (2012), Arlt et al. (2011) revealed that environmental awareness through social networking sites among the youth is important because though environmental consciousness and insights can create considerable ecological factors on widening of sustainable environment as a whole
4. The study revealed that majority of the respondents strongly agree that social networking sites provides Real-Time Environments Alerts on various disasters and calamities such as earthquakes, landslides, tsunamis, cyclones, etc. This is further explained by further studies Hajri and Daife (2024), Sinha and Padhy (2022), Tilwankar et al (2019), Soundarapandian and Thamodaran (2017) reflected that social networking sites platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram etc. are used by the environment concern people to share pictures, videos and messages relating to environmental issues and problems to depicts the reality concerns about it and making people residing around aware of the ongoing issues about the environment.
5. It revealed majority of the respondents strongly agree that social networking sites shares educational contents on how to reduce, reuse and recycle things; motivates to conserve water; encourages to use energy-efficient light bulb and so on. This is supported by similar studies Chen and Madni (2023), Sherman et al (2021), Dongarwar (2020) and Severo et al (2019) reflected about the importance about how educational contents relating to environment sustainability through social networks platforms paved better process to change mindsets of the people to think logically and creatively to bring positive changes and betterment to the environment and to sustain their way of living.
6. The study reflected that majority of the respondents participating cleaning drive in the society, participating in planting of trees, participating in cleaning of Rivers/Waters, participating in reducing plastics use, etc. Chen and Madni (2023) also reflected that social networking sites platforms encourages users to used eco-friendly products, to lessen plastics use, to limit usage of disposable products, to increase usage of reuse products and to follow the reuse, recycle and restore method in a mere and urgent way.

7. Limitation

The principal limitation of the research is that number of participants of the study is limited. There is a need for more studies involving more samples to clearly understand the opinions and views of social networking sites users about environmental awareness.

8. Suggestion

1. It is suggested that youth using social networking sites should focus about the posts on environment and also disseminates information about it to others as well.
2. Government and policy makers should introduce more educational programs on social networking sites about how to tackle environmental issues and problems.

9. Conclusion

Environmental awareness is very much needed and crucial in today's world as there is no much time left to make this world a better place to live on. As days and years pass by, we have vividly witnessed with our own vision that environmental degradation is to a great extent whereby if not taking seriously to protect and preserve it, in no time living beings will severely suffer from it. As we are all aware that social networking sites being the most progressively online platforms which disseminates and spread awareness, information, facts, updates, news and so on, and at the same it is mostly used by all people around all ages around the world, henceforth, through uploading posts, pictures, videos, texts and links on these social networking sites platforms about various educational issues, news and happenings around can eventually create a major awareness to other users to a great extent. The sites and apps of these social networks provide opportunities to connect with other users around the globe having similar interests about to preserve and maintain the environment as whole.

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