IS SOCIAL NETWORKING REALLY IMPORTANT?

'The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.' – George Bernard Shaw.

Social networking or social media might sound slightly grammatically different, yet they are synonymous to us in common parlance. It is the collectively recognized online communication platforms, channels, websites and applications which are intended to allow people to communicate or share ideas, thoughts, marketing, pictures, videos, music, gaming, movies and education as well.

The most attractive feature of social networking is the scope of these sharing activities getting executed easily and efficiently among a vast multitude of people within a matter of seconds. Such a phenomenon would sound like a fantasy even twenty years ago. Adding all the attributes of social networking with man's undying urge to communicate with other fellow human beings or at least express themselves explains its popularity and by observing its momentum of growth and development, it can safely be stated that social networking is going to flourish further with lightning speed and would die along with mankind itself.

The social networking has its background in the form of letter dating back to 500 B.C. Then, after a long time came the telegraph in the late 18th Century and telephone in the late 19th Century. Invention of these two devices was considered to be some kind of landmark in the history of communication. With the advent of internet in the 1970s, emails and Internet relay chats came into the picture and gradually gained momentum for popularity which is intact till date. In the early 2000s, various sites like Six Degrees, My Space, Blogging sites, Orkut and various other emailing sites arrived. Thus, the modern era of social networking was established. With the arrival of Youtube, twitter and facebook the landscape changed completely. Presently, there are so many varieties of Social Networking Sites, that, it is neither possible to name them all nor use them all.

Coming to the question whether social networking is really important, it is imperative that we should weigh and consider everything at disposal instead of taking anything for granted.

The social networking is that sensational instrument which allows people to get instantly connected, redefine old lost relations and friendships, create new relations which might transform into a lifelong togetherness. More than often, it is used as a platform to share information, views, ideas and feelings. It is even seen that an introvert personality expresses himself or herself beautifully here to everyone's amazement. This so called platform gives the freedom to manifest himself or herself without any inhibitions or apprehensions. It provides a very suitable space to raise awareness on various subjects and issues among a huge number of people as connectivity has become really easier, faster and cheaper. With the availability of so much information, social networking can be regarded for bringing transparency into various matters. In this era, the ease with which an issue gets reported and highlighted has eventually changed the concept of 'news'. We get information about an incident within a matter of seconds after its occurrence if we remain connected with the social networking. This social networking has enabled the celebrities, renowned personalities to connect with the general public inspiring them and helping them occasionally. This instrument has redefined the customer grievance redressal procedure. Consumers and customers can easily connect with the service providers and complain about or drop in some suggestions or simply share some feedback which enables the companies to ameliorate their quality of product or service or help other consumers in making a choice. In case of dissatisfaction, a consumer can at least vent it out and on the other hand, a service provider can build a solid relationship with their customers by providing prompt service or making amendments. There are now growing practices among the police administrations as well to install communication with the public via social media where, anyone can inform the police about an incident over the 'facebook' or 'whatsapp' or 'twitter'. Therefore, informing the police becomes easier and the onus lies on the police after the information exchange over the social media, thereby the safety of the common public is also covered. The concept of shopping and marketing has also changed drastically with the advent of social media. The online shopping is making everything under the sun available to the common man. This is not only saving time and energy but also creating employment and boosting the economy of this country.

If we consider other changes effected by emergence of social media into our lives, we will find that the biggest problem we have created for ourselves is by violating the delicate barrier between our personal and private lives. This is a mistake that is committed by people of all age groups, from kids to even the elderly people as well. The opportunity to share everything with the entire world has led people to be least concerned about their private issues. People tend to casually publicize their entire life in order to satisfy their craving for more attention. The outcome of such a blunder can be of various forms as misuse of the private information, pictures, etc. are very rampant and they can be used to create devastating impact. Till date, we have witnessed everything from harassment to cyber bullying, from cruel banter to suicides, from murders to intimidation and black mail, from honey trapping to terrorist recruitment, from theft to hacking, from riots to impeachment and resignation. The most popular social networking sites like 'Facebook', 'Twitter', 'Whatsapp', 'Instagram' are all account based which have certain criteria to be fulfilled by the account holders. Then there are some kind of reporting systems as well where offensive and objectionable posts can be reported against and taken action against. However, these so called safety measures are as good as absent. Often, it is seen that mishaps and misfortunes strikes well before any preventive measure can be taken. There is almost nothing left to happen which has no connection with these social networking sites. From love affairs to marriages, from estrangements to divorces, from reunions to enmity everything has happened and will continue to happen in future. With the invasion of the social media into our lives, we are doing things so that we can show off or tell others about it. Whenever we are indulging in leisurely surfing into the social media, we are bombarded with countless information which creates short attention spans thereby curtailing our capabilities to pay attention or make deeper calculations with our judgment. As a result, we often hastily accept fake news and disseminate it with responsibility. How many times have we seen that an unimportant or insignificant issue snowballs into a massive structure leading to some groundbreaking or devastating effect? Likewise, an important issue also gets overlooked due to lack of attention or interest or momentum or exposure. We get attracted towards all kinds of provocative headlines and superficial hearsay. People often respond to an issue impatiently and spontaneously often based on incomplete information. Sometimes, a popular voice and view is agreed to unwillingly as people find it hard to go against it fearing criticism, therefore the freedom of expression gets strangled.We have experienced that we might create a lot of relations over the social network within a considerably short period of time span, but eventually those relations hardly matter to us as they lack warmth and touch. By spending excessive time over the social network we develop an addiction for it. On the event of being ignored or brutally made fun of, depression engulfs us and the outcome is well known to us. To add further, valuable time which could be used to do something productive is also dwindled away to useless surfing.

Social media is not a monster that is all set to grab us, but mishandling and inappropriate uses might turn it against us. No one can claim to be impeccable in using the social media. Every individual user has his or her pattern and reasons for using it. Over the period of time, the reasons and pattern of usage change though. The most important thing is to realise the mistakes committed while using the social media. We often get carried away or get sentimental or emotional on some issues or matters and given the opportunity for expression, it is not that difficult to get engaged in debate, dispute or even legal complexities. Exploring the people all over the world's overall social networking habits and pattern, it is safe to say that the usage of social networking sites is related to trust, tolerance, intelligence, discretion, social support, community and political engagement as well.

If the current situation is studied, we will observe that the increased usage of social media has blurred the lines between the information that is available over the social media and the information that is to be found from the practical world. There is a development of the unhealthy habit of copying and imitation from the information found on the internet or social media, which is leading to diminished creativity or ability to innovate or free individual thinking. Instantaneous solutions and answers are available all over, weakening the individual analytical power. We are growing a habit of making decisions based on the information available and we get confused as various sources of information provide multiple versions of a particular issue. This overload of information paralyzes our thinking capabilities and thus we cannot act with conviction.

In India, with the growth of her population, social media users are also going to multiply every day. Even kids and not so literate people are also using social network which means that everyone can be on the same platform, irrespective of the rich, the poor, the literate, the illiterate, the grown-ups and the young ones. The amazing fact is that the rural India is not lagging behind that much in comparison with the urban India. The

corners of India where electricity has not reached are already illuminated by smartphones, which means electricity and other necessities are not far away. There are approximately thirty crore smartphone users in India currently. That means, any issue which needs to be made aware of, will reach these people at the earliest.

The social network has provided India with a lot of positivity. A country so big with such huge population and diversity does need a single common platform or media which can be accessed by everyone to express themselves. If we consider that India is a country of one hundred and thirty crores of minds, then India has inestimable talent and prospect. Many creative minds had taken to social media to manifest their talents and so many have got recognition. Sad thing is that, every good thing also comes with some avenues which lead to misuse and malpractices as well. The disheartening fact that pricks the Nation and its administration is the lack of appropriate implementation of cyber security laws which can curb malpractices or at least suitably punish the miscreants or the guilty. The fact is that India is yet to be properly equipped to restrict all kinds of malpractices like hacking, piracy and cyber security threats. But the heartening reality is that India intends to bring some order into this chaotic world of social media which has united with our real world forever and now, we really cannot do without it. Hence, social network is of paramount importance to us. Therefore, it is our duty to use it discreetly and shape it in such a manner that our future generation might not get endangered.