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Narcotization of Social Movements on Youth with Reference To #metoo

Abstract

Paul Felix Lazarfeld and Robert K. Merton, introduced a term called ‘Narcotizing Dysfunction’, in an article ‘Mass communication, popular taste, and organized action’ in the year 1948. It mentions how the overflow of information available replaces passive activism to knowledge gain, which is later replaced by virtual zone of action. This theory was proposed much before the invention of the internet. Today, social media is highly preferred to promote social issues. Hence this theory seems to be highly applicable in the present period with the ‘like’ and ‘comment’ behaviour observable online. This provides little to no commitment to the action taken against any issue or social concern promoted online. This study is conducted to find out the prevalence of narcotising effect and its dysfunction among youth in Chennai.

This is done by conducting a purposive survey on 50 people aged between 15 to 30 years, to understand their knowledge on #metoo campaign that gained popularity among social media users in India in 2018 and to analyse the effect of narcotization it has had on them.

Keywords: #metoo movement, Narcotizing Dysfunction, Youth, Social Media

Introduction

Digitalization has almost paved its way into the republic of India. With a population of 133.92 crores, according to a report provided by World Bank as on 2017, 29.5% of the entire population are internet users. Out of this, 326 million people are social media users, according to statistics of 2018 December. For centuries, connecting with people across long distances has been a concern. A rapid change was observed in the technology in the 20th century and networking has never been the same. Since a couple of decades, people have stayed well connected with their friends and relatives around the globe using social networking sites. The creation of these dates back to history, in 1940s. This was the period when super computers were created. Scientists then tried their way into connecting these computers with each other, creating a network. It further led to the creation of the first recognized social networking site in 1997, Six Degrees. Soon this led to further more inventions until 2006, when Facebook and Twitter came, and ever since Facebook has never ceased to be top used social networking site. Today, the number of social media sites has gone much higher, with different working and connecting systems in each. Social media serves many purposes like sharing profiles, photographs, connecting to users worldwide, sharing messages, forming groups online, sharing stories, opinions, business, social campaigns and much more.

Simon Mainwaring, a social media specialist who authored *We First: How Brands and Consumers Use Social Media to Renew Capitalism and Build A Better World*, said that, Social media is to considered as service to the society and not any type of exploitation of technology. Well, this is true in the current period. People are often seen coming along to form groups online to promote various social cause. Due to its availability to every person from the comfort of his or her house, there is an overload of information from unreliable sources. Like other forms of media, social media is also proven to be addictive. In general, it has the potential to narcotize people with the amount of information it has. Media of any type, is indeed termed as an element similar to a drug that has the potential to narcotize people. This way there are chances that they could get desensitized to repeated stimuli. American – Austrian sociologist Paul Felix Lazarsfeld proposed a theory called Narcotizing dysfunction, in 1948, much before the discovery of the internet. It conveys that when people receive too much information or repeated information about anything, they tend to become apathetic towards it. This way they replace action with information. They also leap into a virtual world of action. This may or may not be true when applied to the current era. Social movements are expected to bring about a positive change in a society. Here, active action matters. If the campaign is conducted online, the chance of it involving active action is unpredictable.

#metoo is an online social campaign that intends to support women who have been victims of sexual harassment in any way or on any scale. The phrase was first used by an American social activist in 2006. The movement came into light in October 2017 with a hash tag being circulated online popularized by Alyssa Milano, an American Actress. She asked people worldwide to support each other on cases of sexual assault to make people aware of the magnitude of the issue. India also saw the viral campaign online around in the middle of

2018. Many celebrities took it on a serious note. South Indian singer and dubbing artist Chinmayi Sripaada still continues to promote this cause online.

Aim

This research aims to understand social media's narcotising effect on youth with regards to #metoo movement.

Objective

- To check the prevalence of narcotization and its dysfunction among youth
- To understand the reach of the campaign among youth on social media
- To interpret people's opinion on the survival of the campaign

Limitations

This study is completely focused on people's opinion and their understanding. The survey is limited to 50 members only.

Review of literature

The use of social media by youth has been consistent over a couple of years. The social media sites have benefits like culture development, building self-identity, developing social communication among people belonging to different geographical locationsⁱ (Sam Gounder, 2017). When mentioning about the advantages of social media in the current era, its ability to build communities and its use as a tool to promote noble cause is always on the list. Since platforms like LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook have gained a lot of popularity, these become one of the most viable communication choice for anybody who wished to post any sort of content. It serves a good platform and a quick way to help anybody who is in needⁱⁱ (Waseem Akram, 2018).

People have more news outlets than ever before, which means they are free to seek out large amounts of it or ignore it completely. There is consistently weak association between online news consumption and online civic participation. The abundance of content on internet has reduced to little to no interest in news online.ⁱⁱⁱ (Ksiazek, 2010). Majority of people using social media , do not take part in the online events^{iv} (Selmani, 2014). Participants who engage with political campaigns on the internet, work towards making the collective goal, by this they feel as an active part of the community^v (Salter, 2017).

New terminologies like ‘clicktivism’ and ‘slacktivism’ is very evident on new media. What has to be an action taken in attempt to bring a change in the society is now used just to feel good, called feel good activism. There is information diet online^{vi} (Sakir Esitti, 2016). There is often confusion among the users where they think being informed is equal to taking an action. Narcotizing dysfunction may be danger of information^{vii} (Nick Lee, 2016). A research shows that liking on social media sites has become the new tool to share contents. It cannot be denied that this place can help in better presentation of self, but as long as it is not overdone^{viii} (Marie Ozanne, 2017).

Users on social media are allowed to create and circulate counterdiscourses. This further helps them to create oppositional interpretations of their identities and needs. This is indeed considered as a positive point in online political activism^{ix} (David .M .Dozier, 2015). Studies have shown that social media in a way promoted rape culture but also provided space for women’s voice. This space provides them the chance to link themselves with people who have faced similar experiences. This would provide them with support from people who are able to relate to what they have gone through, or even going through at present. The outcome of this is a relief in the mind of the victims, which is referred to as a feel good thing. This is in a way, one of the purpose of such activities on social media^x (Sophie Sills, 2016).

Research gap

Research has been conducted on the narcotizing effect of social media before but none have been done on the narcotisation of any social movement in particular. Also, #metoo has been researched before but not to find out its narcotising effect on youth on social networking sites.

Research Design

This is a quantitative research. It aims to observe social media's narcotizing effect on youth. Self-designed questionnaire was used for data collection. Purposive sampling was used. Sample space was 50 which included respondents from Chennai, aged between 15 and 30. It includes both male and female participants. A structured questionnaire has been used to collect data from respondents. Data collected through structured questionnaire was tabulated and analysed using spreadsheet which was further converted into pie charts and bar graph for graphical representation.

Data analysis and interpretations

The study was done using self-designed structured questionnaire with definite, concrete and pre-ordinate questions to elicit a more detailed response. Sampling is convenience sampling. It contains 20 questions to analyze the respondent's understanding on #metoo campaign and to know their opinions on how the issue affected them.

1. Gender of the respondents.

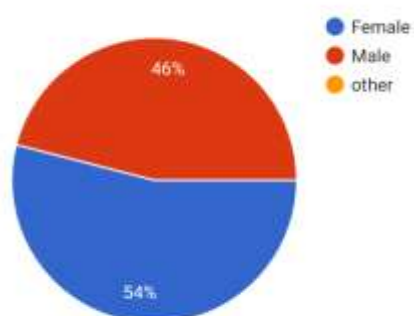


Figure 1: gender of the respondents.

The pie chart provided in figure 1 is graphical representation of the number of male and female participants. Out of the received 50 responses, 46% i.e; 23 are male while 54% i.e; 27 are female.

2. Age group of the respondents.

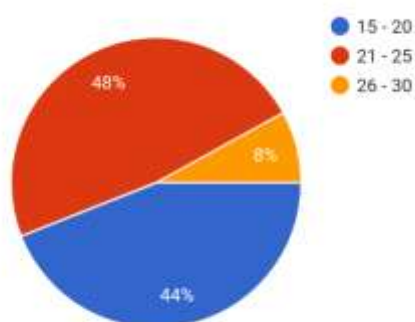


Figure 2: Age categories of the respondents.

This study is directed specifically towards the youth in the city aging from 15 to 30. As per the data represented in the pie chart, 44% respondents age between 15 to 20, which accounts for 22 numbers, 48% belong to the category of 21 to 25, which is 24 respondents and 8% i.e; 4 people belong to the category of 26 to 30.

3. How many hours are spent on social media.

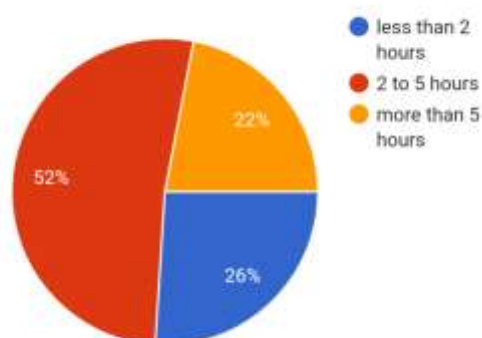


Figure 3: distribution of hours spent of social media

More than half of the respondents acknowledged that they use social networking sites for 2 to 5 hours per day, which is 26 out of 50. 22% people have acknowledged to be using social media sites for more than 5 hours on a daily basis, which is 11 respondents. Finally, 26% people i.e; 13 use social media for less than 2 hours per day. Which means , on an average ,50% people of the total use social networking for 2 to 5 hours per day.

4. Awareness of #metoo campaign among the respondents.

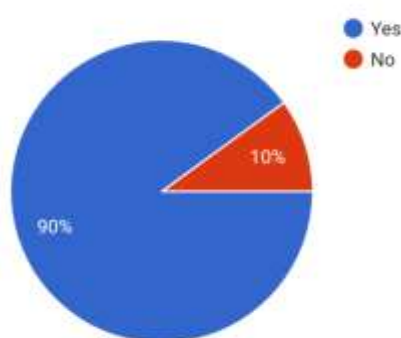


Figure 4: depicts the awareness of the campaign

90% of respondents, i.e; 45 out of the total are aware of the #metoo campaign that went viral online. Only 10%, which is 5 respondents are unaware of the same.

This denotes that the campaign was successful in circulating the message online and had an impressive reach among the public.

- The source that provided news about the campaign to the respondents.

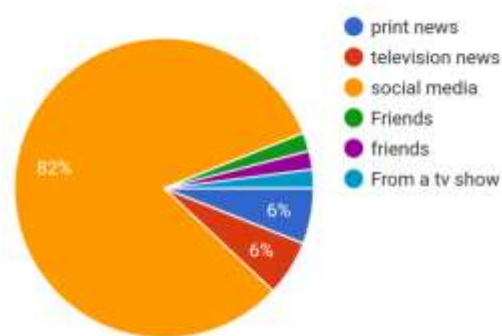


Figure 5: respondent's source of information

The campaign was started on Twitter, and later passed on to various other social networking sites. When asked about the source from where the respondents received their information from, 82% people accepted to have sourced it from social media, which is 41 respondents. 6%, i.e; 3 out of 50, got aware of the campaign from television news and another 6% people from print news. The rest 4% includes the people who got the news from friends, television shows, and the ones who are not aware of the campaign on the whole.

- The number of times they come across a post or tweet regarding the campaign.

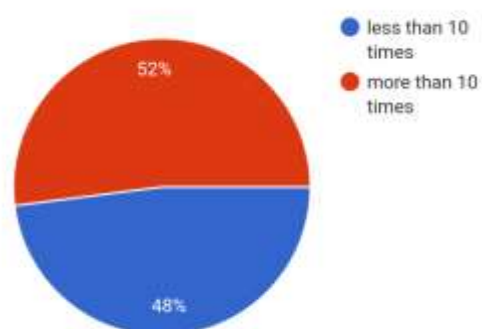


Figure 6: No. of times there's a post about the issue

From the above pie chart it can be observed that 52% of the total respondents feel that there is a post or tweet popping up in their social media feed for more than 10 times in a week, which is quiet a considerable amount. The rest 48% believe that there's less that 10 posts per week in their feed, which could range anywhere from 1 to 9. From the data it is understood that the campaign is still prevailing on social networking sites.

7. The social media sites that the respondents think propelled the campaign quiet strongly.

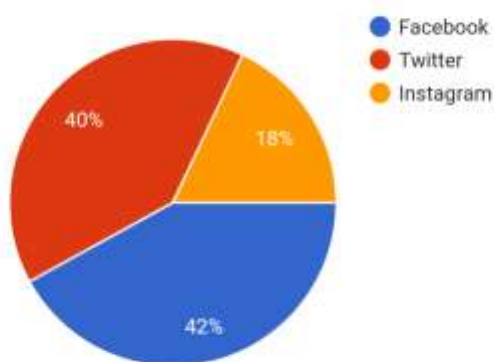


Figure 7: social media sites that propelled the campaign

In 2017, American actress started the campaign on Twitter. Ever since, the campaign has managed to survive within the twitter network till date. 40% people, i.e; 20 respondents think that Twitter propelled the campaign. While, a majority of 42% i.e; 21 respondents feel that Facebook played a major role. The least, 18% , i.e; 9 respondents feel instagram has propelled the campaign.

8. Distribution of respondents following accounts of celebrity victims.

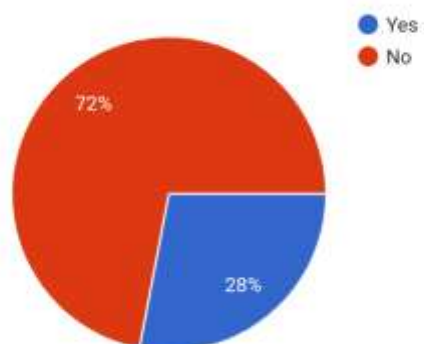


Figure 8: representation of people following celebrity victims

The above graphical representation shows that majority of people who know about the campaign do not follow any of the celebrity victims on any social media networking sites. 72% people do not follow, while 28% i.e; 14 people follow the celebrity victims online. Since most of the celebrity victims have been sharing their incidents on their page, it is less likely for the people to know their side of story without following them, apart from what is given in television or print news. This could form a biased opinion on the issue.

9. People's opinion on whether the campaign has the potential to reduce victim shaming.

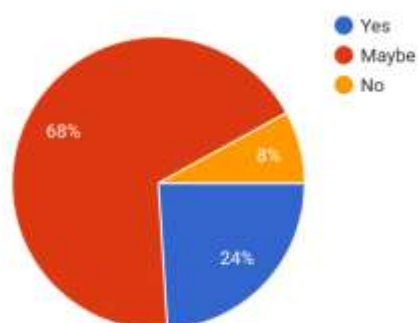


Figure 9: campaign's potential to reduce victim shaming.

When asked to the respondents if they feel that the #metoo campaign had the potential to reduce victim shaming which is an unfortunate behavior in the society, a majority of people were unsure of it. 68% responses told that they were unsure if it would reduce victim shaming, or increase it. 24% people strongly voted a yes, that it could reduce victim shaming. 8% voted no, stating that it would not reduce the victim shaming. The campaign even after 2 years of circulation has not given the people an evident change to be able to analyze its potential and purpose.

10. Is social media the right platform to promote such a campaign?

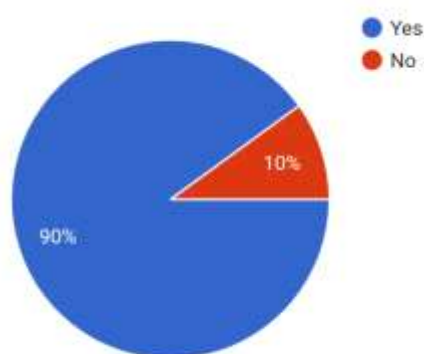


Figure 10: people's opinion on the right platform

90% of the respondents feel that social media is the right platform to promote a campaign like #metoo in the age of digitalization and more and more active members online. Whereas, 10% believe that social media is not the right platform to promote it.

11. Involvement from the respondent's side in the campaign.

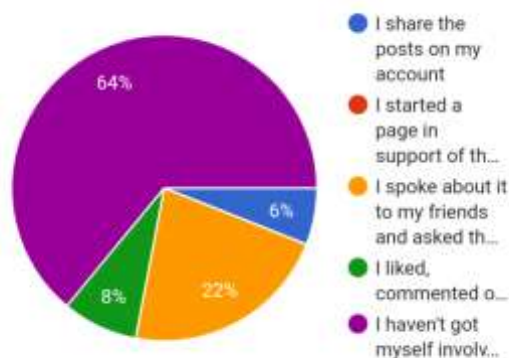


Figure 11: participation from the respondents in the campaign

The above pie chart conveys that, 64% respondents, i.e; 32 people told that they haven't participated in the campaign in any way. 22% respondents, i.e; 11 people told that they shared about the campaign to their friends and family and asked them to support the cause as well. 8% respondents, i.e; 4 people told that they comment or click like on the posts. 6% that is 3 respondents share the posts regarding the campaign on their page. It can be interpreted from this that, though the campaign has impressive reach, it has not received enough participants online.

12. Effect of respondent's participation.

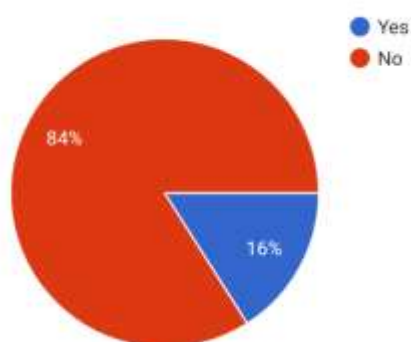


Figure 12: Pie chart representing respondent's opinion

When asked about their perspective on whether they have made any difference to the campaign with their participation, a majority of 84% respondents, i.e; 42 people

conveyed that they have not made any difference to it. Whereas, 16%, i.e; 8 people told that according to them they have made a difference to the issue, though it is not clear how.

13. The campaign is a ‘feel good thing’ according to promoters of the campaign.

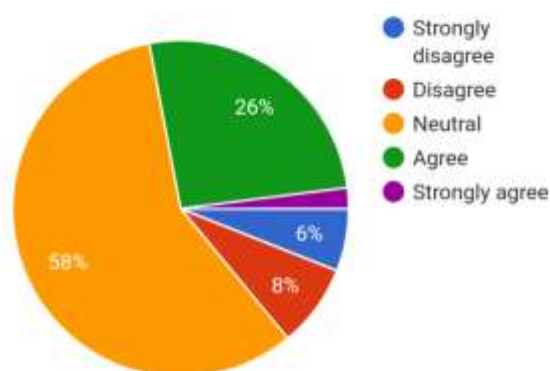


Figure 13: respondent's opinion

The promoters of the campaign called this a ‘feel good thing’ for the victims, but 6% respondents strongly disagreed to this claim. 8% people disagreed the same. A majority of 58% people, i.e; 28 didn't have any particular opinion about the same. 26% agreed that it serves the purpose and very few strongly agreed. From this, it can be understood that not many have a clear idea about the claimed importance of the campaign.

14. Social media campaign's potential to provide mental support to the victims.

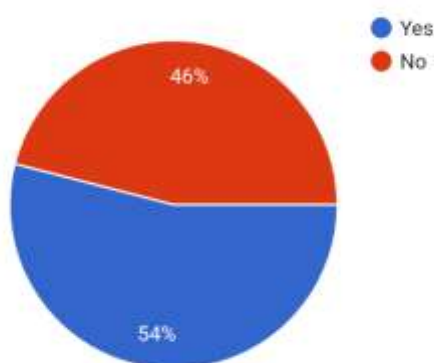


Figure 14: campaign's potential to provide mental Support to victims.

Out of the 50 responses, 54% respondents feel that the social media campaign can provide victims of sexual harassment mental support, while, almost equal share, i.e; 46% feel that it cannot do the job.

15. Effect on respondent's reactivity level

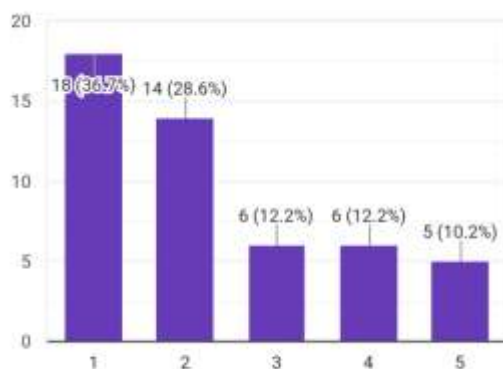


Figure 15: Bar graph

The graph above shows a five scale analysis of how many feel that the repeated and prolonged occurrence of news has made them less reactive to the issue. 36.7% respondents strongly agreed to being affected, 28.6% people agreed, 12.2% feel neutral, 12.2% disagreed to being affected, and 10.2% strongly disagreed to it. A total of 32 respondents out of 50 agreed to being affected in a negative way, which is a proof of narcotization.

16. Chance of the campaign getting dissolved due to information on social media from multiple sources.

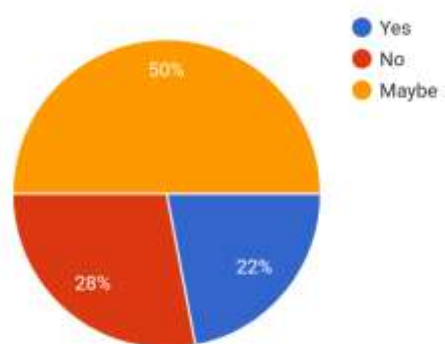


Figure 16: Opinion of the respondents.

The above pie chart conveys that 22% respondents, i.e; 11 people feel that the campaign could get dissolved due to plenty on reliable and unreliable sources online. Almost an equal share of people, 28%, feel that the campaign will survive this situation. Whereas, majority of people, 50%, are unsure of the same.

17. Information load of #metoo

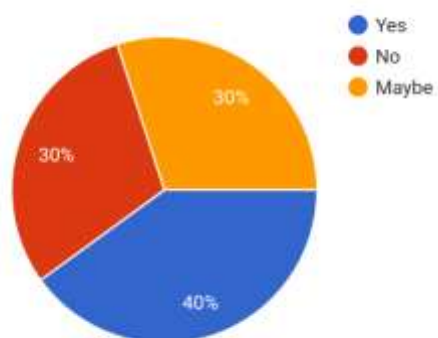
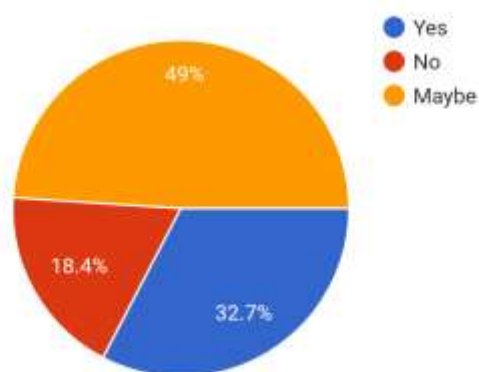


Figure 17: opinion of the respondents.

According to the data above, 40% of the responses show that there are chances of the campaign to get dissolved due to the load of information available online per day. 30 % responses showed that the campaign could successfully function while another 30% suggested that there is an either or chance of it getting dissolved.

18. Will the campaign meet its purpose.



Majority of people, 49% are not sure if the #metoo campaign will meet its purposes. 32.7% people are sure that the campaign could be a success, and 18.4% respondents feel that the campaign will not succeed. This evidently shows that nearly half of the respondents are unable to come to an opinion whether this campaign would succeed or not.

Conclusion

Social media is a widely used media platform in the current period. On an average, a person spends around two to five hours on social media in a day. Everybody using various social media platform has the access to post and upload any content of their choice as long as it does not violate the community guidelines. Thus, it has both advantages and disadvantages to it. There is high level of participation from the public on social networking sites, which is why social media is often seen promoting various campaigns online. Due to its high networking capacity, it helps in providing better reach all across the globe. One such campaign is the viral #metoo campaign which gained popularity in India in 2018. The campaign had a wide reach and was successful in making the public aware of its existence. Though, study shows that it has almost failed to provide the public with its details. Public feels that social media is the right platform to promote such a campaign but it is unclear if it

is helping in meeting its purpose. It is clear that the rapid flow of information on social media is slowing down the process of reaching its goal and the same reason is why people feel narcotized online. Paul Lazarsfeld's theory on Narcotizing dysfunction is applicable in this particular case as the people have responded saying the repeated occurrence of the data on social media regarding this case has made its audience less reactive to the situation. This has indeed resulted in them doing things like liking and commenting posts, which make minimum to no difference to the issue. This is the virtual space of action that was mentioned in the theory of narcotizing dysfunction, proposed in the year 1948. This theory may or may not be applicable in a couple of years, which will be a good sign towards a better future because a positive change requires true activism and not slacktivism.

ⁱhttps://www.researchgate.net/publication/322538324_Impact_of_Social_Networking_on_Indian_Youth-A_Survey

ⁱⁱhttps://www.researchgate.net/publication/323903323_A_Study_on_Positive_and_Negative_Effects_of_Social_Media_on_Society

ⁱⁱⁱhttps://www.researchgate.net/publication/233303605_Newsseekers_and_Avoiders_Exploring_Patterns_of_Total_News_Consumption_Across_Media_and_the_Relationship_to_Civic_Participation

^{iv}https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267568366_Behavior_Analysis_of_users_on_Facebook

^v <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/9781118783764.wbieme0021>

^{vi} https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301685342_Narcotizing_Effect_of_Social_Media

^{vii} <https://medium.com/@nicklee3/narcotizing-dysfunction-the-danger-of-information-d832fd4869c0>

^{viii} <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2056305117706785>

^{ix} https://www.researchgate.net/publication/285216201_Demographics_and_Internet_behaviors_as_predictors_of_active_publics

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