



Social capital in the digital era and its sociological analysis of online and offline youth networks

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Abstract

The present study examines the sociological impact of online and offline social networks among youth in the contemporary digital era. The rapid growth of social media platforms and digital communication technologies has significantly transformed the patterns of interaction, communication, and social relationships among young individuals. The study aims to analyze the influence of online social networks on youth behaviour and communication, examine the role of offline social interactions in personality and social development, and compare the effects of both forms of social networking. The research is descriptive and analytical in nature and is based on both primary and secondary data. Data were collected from 230 youth respondents through structured questionnaires and informal interviews. The findings reveal that online social networks provide communication opportunities, educational support, social awareness, and career benefits; however, excessive use may lead to addiction, stress, social isolation, and reduced face-to-face interaction. The study concludes that balanced participation in both online and offline social networks is essential for the healthy social and emotional development of youth.

Keywords: Youth, social networks, online interaction, offline interaction, sociology, social media, social capital, digital society

Introduction

Background of the Study

The advancement of information and communication technology has transformed human interaction and social relationships across the world. In recent years, social networking has become an essential component of daily life, particularly among youth. The emergence of digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, X (Twitter), and LinkedIn has significantly influenced the ways young people communicate, share information, build relationships, and express their identities. Alongside these online interactions, traditional offline social networks including family, friends, educational institutions, peer groups, and community organizations continue to play an important role in shaping youth behaviour and personality.

Youth are considered one of the most dynamic and influential segments of society. Their social interactions greatly affect cultural development, social participation, educational progress, and economic activities. The digital revolution has expanded opportunities for communication and connectivity, enabling young individuals to establish relationships beyond geographical boundaries. However, this rapid shift from traditional face-to-face communication to virtual interaction has raised several sociological concerns related to social isolation, emotional well-being, weakening of interpersonal relationships, cyber dependency, and changing cultural values.

Social networks, whether online or offline, serve as mechanisms for socialization, social support, exchange of ideas, and formation of social identity. Offline social interactions generally provide emotional attachment, trust, moral values, and stronger interpersonal relationships, while online social networks provide wider connectivity, instant communication, access to information, and opportunities for self-expression. The coexistence of these two forms of

social interaction has created a new social environment that significantly influences the lifestyle, attitudes, communication patterns, and social behaviour of youth.

In this context, the present study seeks to conduct a sociological analysis of the impact of online and offline social networks among youth. The study aims to examine how these social networks shape social relationships, behavioural patterns, communication styles, emotional health, educational performance, and overall social participation in contemporary society.

JEL Classification Code

1. **D83:** Search, Learning; Information and Knowledge, Communication, Belief
2. **J13:** Fertility, Family Planning, Child Care, Children, Youth
3. **Z13:** Economic Sociology, Economic Anthropology, Social and Economic Stratification
4. **L86:** Information and Internet Services, Computer Software
5. **I31:** General Welfare, Well-Being

Concept of Social Networks

A social network refers to a system of social relationships and interactions among individuals, groups, or organizations. It represents the structure through which people communicate, share information, provide support, and maintain social connections. Social networks may exist in both physical and virtual forms and are considered an important aspect of social organization and social capital. Traditionally, social networks were based on direct face-to-face interactions involving family, friends, relatives, neighbours, colleagues, and community members. These offline networks were fundamental in shaping social identity, values, norms, and cultural practices. However, with the development of digital communication

technologies, online social networks have emerged as virtual communities where individuals interact through internet-based platforms.

Online social networks allow users to create profiles, share content, communicate instantly, and participate in various social activities. These platforms facilitate interaction beyond geographical and cultural boundaries. Social networking sites have become influential tools for communication, education, entertainment, business, political participation, and social activism. From a sociological perspective, social networks are important because they influence social behaviour, social integration, identity formation, social participation, and the development of interpersonal relationships. They also contribute to the creation of social capital by connecting individuals and communities through shared interests, values, and communication.

Online and Offline Social Interaction

Social interaction is the process through which individuals communicate and establish relationships with one another. It is an essential element of social life and plays a significant role in personality development and socialization. Social interaction can be categorized into online and offline interaction.

Offline social interaction refers to face-to-face communication and direct personal relationships that occur within families, educational institutions, workplaces, neighbourhoods, and social communities. These interactions involve physical presence, emotional bonding, non-verbal communication, trust, and mutual understanding. Offline interactions are traditionally considered more personal and emotionally meaningful.

Need and Importance of the Study

The increasing use of digital technology and social networking platforms among youth has created significant changes in social behaviour and communication patterns. Understanding these changes has become essential for sociologists, educators, policymakers, parents, and researchers.

This study is important because it examines both positive and negative impacts of online and offline social networks on youth. The study helps in understanding how social networking influences relationships, emotional well-being, social participation, cultural values, educational performance, and personality development.

Statement of the Problem

The rapid expansion of online social networking platforms has transformed the social life of youth. While these platforms provide opportunities for communication, learning, and social participation, they also create challenges related to mental health, interpersonal relationships, social isolation, and cultural changes.

At the same time, traditional offline social networks are experiencing changes due to increasing dependence on digital communication. The balance between online and offline interactions among youth has become a matter of sociological concern.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the concept and nature of online and offline social networks among youth.

2. To examine the influence of online social networks on youth behaviour and communication.
3. To analyse the role of offline social interactions in personality and social development.
4. To compare online and offline social relationships among youth.
5. To identify the positive and negative impacts of social networking on youth.

Hypotheses of the Study

1. **H1:** There is a significant relationship between the use of online social networks and the communication behaviour of youth.
2. **H2:** Offline social interactions have a significant positive impact on the personality and social development of youth.

Review of Literature

1. Theoretical Perspectives on Social Networks

Social network theory is an important sociological framework that explains how individuals and groups are connected through social relationships and interactions. A social network consists of individuals, groups, or organizations linked through various forms of social relationships such as friendship, communication, cooperation, and emotional support. Sociologists believe that social networks influence social behaviour, identity formation, cultural values, and access to resources and opportunities.

The concept of social networks gained importance with the development of modern sociology and communication studies. According to social network theory, relationships among individuals shape patterns of communication, trust, influence, and social participation. Networks may be formal or informal, strong or weak, and online or offline in nature.

In the digital era, online social networks have emerged as virtual communities where individuals communicate through internet-based platforms. These networks enable rapid communication, information sharing, and global interaction. Sociologists argue that online social networks have transformed the nature of social relationships by reducing geographical limitations and creating new forms of social interaction.

2. Sociological Theories Related to Youth and Communication

Youth communication and social interaction have been widely studied through various sociological theories. These theories explain how communication patterns influence personality, socialization, identity formation, and social behaviour among young individuals.

3. Previous Studies on Online Social Networks

Several researchers have examined the influence of online social networks on youth behaviour, communication patterns, and social relationships.

- Boyd and Ellison (2007) [10, 11] defined social networking sites as web-based services that allow individuals to create profiles, interact with others, and form online communities. Their study highlighted the growing importance of digital communication in social interaction.
- Turkle (2011) [9] observed that excessive use of digital communication technologies may reduce face-to-face

interaction and emotional attachment among youth. She argued that online communication often creates superficial relationships and social isolation despite increased connectivity.

- Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calvert (2009) [13] found that college students spend a significant amount of time on social networking platforms mainly for communication, entertainment, and maintaining friendships. Their research showed that online networking affects daily social activities and communication habits.
- Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) [11] emphasized that social networking platforms contribute to the development of social capital by strengthening social connections and facilitating information sharing among youth.
- Kuss and Griffiths (2011) [12] identified negative effects of excessive social media use, including addiction, anxiety, reduced academic performance, and emotional stress among young individuals.

4. Previous Studies on Offline Social Relationships

Offline social relationships have traditionally been considered the foundation of socialization and personality development. Various sociological studies emphasize the importance of family, peer groups, educational institutions, and community participation in shaping youth behaviour.

- Coleman (1988) [3] introduced the concept of social capital and explained how family relationships, trust, and community networks positively influence educational achievement and youth development.
- Putnam (2000) [8] argued that declining face-to-face interaction and community participation weaken social trust and civic engagement. His study highlighted the importance of interpersonal relationships in building social cohesion.

5. Comparative Studies on Online and Offline Networks

Comparative studies on online and offline social networks examine differences in communication patterns, emotional attachment, relationship quality, and social participation among youth.

- Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) [14] argued that online communication complements offline relationships by helping youth maintain friendships and social connections. However, they also noted that excessive online engagement may reduce direct interpersonal communication.
- Valkenburg and Peter (2009) [15] found that online interaction can positively influence friendship quality and social support when used in moderation. However, overdependence on virtual communication may lead to loneliness and social withdrawal.

6. Research Gap

The review of literature reveals that numerous studies have been conducted on online social networking, youth communication, social media usage, and interpersonal relationships. Many researchers have focused separately on either online social networks or offline social relationships. However, limited studies provide a comprehensive sociological comparison between online and offline social networks among youth. Existing research often emphasizes

psychological or technological dimensions rather than sociological aspects such as social behaviour, identity formation, cultural values, social participation, and interpersonal relationships. Therefore, the present study aims to fill this research gap by conducting a sociological analysis of the impact of online and offline social networks among youth and by comparing their influence on social relationships and youth development.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

The present study is based on a descriptive and analytical research design. The descriptive approach helps in understanding the existing patterns of online and offline social networking among youth, while the analytical approach assists in examining their sociological impact on communication, behaviour, personality, and social relationships. The study aims to systematically analyse the role of social networks in shaping youth interaction in contemporary society.

2. Nature of the Study

The study is sociological and empirical in nature. It focuses on examining the social behaviour, communication patterns, interpersonal relationships, and social participation of youth in both online and offline environments. The research is exploratory as well as analytical because it investigates emerging patterns of digital communication and compares them with traditional social interactions.

3. Sources of Data

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data will be collected directly from youth respondents through questionnaires and personal interaction. Secondary data will be obtained from books, journals, research articles, newspapers, reports, websites, and previous studies related to social networks, youth communication, and sociology.

4. Sampling Technique

For the purpose of the study, a convenient sampling technique will be used to select respondents. This method is suitable because it allows easy access to youth participants who actively engage in online and offline social interactions. Respondents will be selected from educational institutions and social groups.

5. Sample Size

The study will be conducted on a sample of 230 youth respondents. The selected respondents will represent different educational and social backgrounds to ensure diversity in opinions and experiences related to social networking and communication patterns.

6. Tools and Techniques of Data Collection

Data for the study will be collected mainly through structured questionnaires and informal interviews. Observation methods may also be used to understand social interaction patterns among youth. The questionnaire method is considered appropriate for collecting information regarding social media usage, communication habits, interpersonal relationships, and social behaviour.

7. Questionnaire/Schedule Design

The questionnaire for the study will consist of both close-ended and open-ended questions. The questions will be

designed to gather information regarding demographic profile, online social networking habits, offline social interactions, communication patterns, behavioural changes, emotional well-being, and social participation of youth. Simple and clear language will be used to ensure accurate responses from participants.

8. Methods of Data Analysis

The collected data will be classified, tabulated, and analysed using simple statistical tools such as percentages, averages, tables, and charts. Analytical interpretation will be carried out to identify patterns, relationships, and sociological impacts of online and offline social networks among youth.

9. Ethical Considerations

The study will maintain ethical standards throughout the research process. Participation of respondents will be voluntary, and their personal information will remain confidential. Respondents will be informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent will be obtained before collecting data. The study will ensure honesty, objectivity, and respect for the privacy and opinions of participants.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

1. Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of data collected from 230 youth respondents regarding the impact of online and offline social networks. The data has been collected through structured questionnaires and informal interaction. The analysis is based on the objectives and hypotheses of the study. Simple statistical tools such as percentages and tabulation have been used for interpretation.

2. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Gender-wise Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Male	128	55.65%
Female	102	44.35%
Total	230	100%

Source: Questionnaire

Interpretation: The table reveals that out of 230 respondents, 128 respondents (55.65%) are male and 102 respondents (44.35%) are female. The data indicates that male respondents slightly outnumber female respondents in the study. However, participation from both genders is adequately represented, ensuring balanced sociological analysis and interpretation of youth social networking behaviour.

Table 2: Age-wise Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Number of Respondents	Percentage
18–20 Years	84	36.52%
21–23 Years	96	41.74%
24–26 Years	50	21.74%
Total	230	100%

Source: Questionnaire

Interpretation: The table indicates that the majority of respondents (41.74%) belong to the age group of 21–23 years, followed by 36.52% in the 18–20 years category.

Respondents aged 24–26 years constitute 21.74% of the sample. The findings show that young adults are highly active participants in social networking activities.

3. Usage Pattern of Online Social Networks

Table 3: Most Frequently Used Social Networking Platforms

Social Media Platform	Number of Respondents	Percentage
WhatsApp	72	31.30%
Instagram	84	36.52%
Facebook	28	12.17%
Snapchat	24	10.43%
LinkedIn/Others	22	9.58%
Total	230	100%

Source: Questionnaire

Interpretation: The table shows that Instagram is the most frequently used social networking platform among respondents with 36.52%, followed by WhatsApp with 31.30%. Facebook, Snapchat, and LinkedIn/Others have comparatively lower usage. The findings indicate that youth prefer instant and visually interactive communication platforms for social interaction and connectivity.

Table 4: Average Daily Time Spent on Social Media

Time Spent	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Less than 1 Hour	32	13.91%
1–3 Hours	94	40.87%
3–5 Hours	68	29.57%
More than 5 Hours	36	15.65%
Total	230	100%

Source: Questionnaire

Interpretation: The table indicates that the majority of respondents (40.87%) spend 1–3 hours daily on social media platforms, followed by 29.57% who spend 3–5 hours. About 15.65% spend more than 5 hours, while only 13.91% spend less than 1 hour. The findings reveal that social media occupies a significant portion of youth’s daily routine and communication activities.

4. Influence of Online Social Networks on Youth Behaviour and Communication

Table 5: Impact of Online Social Networks on Communication Behaviour

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	88	38.26%
Agree	96	41.74%
Neutral	24	10.43%
Disagree	14	6.09%
Strongly Disagree	8	3.48%
Total	230	100%

Source: Questionnaire

Interpretation: The table reveals that a majority of respondents believe online social networks significantly influence communication behaviour. About 41.74% respondents agreed and 38.26% strongly agreed with the statement. Only a small proportion expressed disagreement. The findings indicate that online social networking platforms have become an important medium of communication, interaction, and information exchange among youth in modern society.

5. Role of Offline Social Interaction in Personality Development

Table 6: Importance of Offline Social Interaction

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	102	44.35%
Agree	88	38.26%
Neutral	18	7.83%
Disagree	14	6.09%
Strongly Disagree	8	3.48%
Total	230	100%

Source: Questionnaire

Interpretation: The table shows that most respondents consider offline social interaction important for personality and social development. About 44.35% strongly agreed and 38.26% agreed with the statement. Only a limited number of respondents expressed disagreement. The findings indicate that face-to-face communication, family relations, and peer interactions continue to play a significant role in youth socialization and emotional bonding.

6. Comparison between Online and Offline Social Relationships

Table 7: Preferred Mode of Social Interaction

Mode of Interaction	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Online Interaction	74	32.17%
Offline Interaction	116	50.43%
Both Equally	40	17.40%
Total	230	100%

Source: Questionnaire

Interpretation: The table indicates that 50.43% of respondents prefer offline social interaction, while 32.17% prefer online interaction. Additionally, 17.40% respondents consider both modes equally important. The findings reveal that despite the increasing influence of digital communication, youth still value face-to-face interaction for emotional connection, trust, and meaningful social relationships in everyday life.

7. Positive Impacts of Social Networking

Table 8: Positive Effects of Social Networking among Youth

Positive Impact	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Better Communication	72	31.30%
Educational Support	54	23.48%
Career Opportunities	38	16.52%
Social Awareness	42	18.26%
Entertainment	24	10.44%
Total	230	100%

Source: Questionnaire

Interpretation: The table reveals that better communication is the major positive effect of social networking among youth, reported by 31.30% respondents. Educational support and social awareness are also significant benefits. Career opportunities and entertainment received comparatively lower responses. The findings indicate that social networking platforms play an important role in improving communication, learning, awareness, and social connectivity among youth.

8. Negative Impacts of Social Networking

Table 9: Negative Effects of Social Networking among Youth

Negative Impact	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Addiction	74	32.17%
Social Isolation	48	20.87%
Mental Stress	42	18.26%
Reduced Face-to-Face Interaction	52	22.61%
Cyberbullying	14	6.09%
Total	230	100%

Source: Questionnaire

Interpretation: The table shows that addiction is the major negative effect of social networking among youth, reported by 32.17% respondents. Reduced face-to-face interaction and social isolation are also significant concerns. Mental stress and cyberbullying were identified by comparatively fewer respondents. The findings indicate that excessive use of social networking platforms may negatively affect interpersonal relationships, mental well-being, and social behaviour among youth.

9. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1 (H1)

H1: There is a significant relationship between the use of online social networks and the communication behaviour of youth.

Result

The responses collected from respondents indicate that the majority agree that online social networking significantly affects communication patterns and social behaviour. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 2 (H2)

H2: Offline social interactions have a significant positive impact on the personality and social development of youth.

Result

The findings show that most respondents consider offline social interactions important for emotional bonding, personality development, and social values. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted.

Findings, Suggestions, and Conclusion

1. Major Findings of the Study

The present study analysed the impact of online and offline social networks among youth from a sociological perspective. Based on the data analysis and interpretation, the following major findings have been identified:

1. The majority of youth actively use online social networking platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Snapchat for communication, entertainment, and social interaction.
2. Online social networks significantly influence the communication behaviour and interaction patterns of youth. Most respondents reported that digital platforms have become an essential part of their daily social life.
3. Youth spend a considerable amount of time on social media platforms, indicating a high level of dependency on online communication systems.
4. Offline social interactions through family, friends, peer groups, and educational institutions continue to play an

important role in emotional support, personality development, and social values.

5. Most respondents prefer offline social relationships for trust, emotional bonding, and meaningful communication despite the increasing popularity of online networking.
6. Online social networking provides several positive benefits such as educational support, social awareness, career opportunities, information sharing, and connectivity.
7. Excessive use of online social networks may lead to negative effects including addiction, mental stress, reduced face-to-face interaction, social isolation, and communication gaps.
8. The comparative analysis indicates that both online and offline social networks have significant influence on youth behaviour and social development.
9. The study confirmed that balanced participation in both online and offline social interactions contributes positively to youth development and social adjustment.
10. The hypotheses of the study were accepted, indicating a significant relationship between online social networking and youth communication behaviour, as well as the positive role of offline interaction in personality and social development.

2. Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions and recommendations are proposed:

1. Youth should maintain a balanced use of online and offline social networks to ensure healthy social and emotional development.
2. Educational institutions should organize awareness programs on responsible use of social media and digital communication.
3. Parents and teachers should encourage face-to-face communication and participation in social and cultural activities among youth.
4. Counselling and guidance programs should be introduced to address issues related to social media addiction, cyberbullying, and mental stress.
5. Youth should be motivated to use social networking platforms for educational purposes, skill development, and career advancement rather than excessive entertainment.
6. Community-based activities, sports, seminars, and group discussions should be promoted to strengthen offline social relationships and social participation.
7. Government and educational authorities should develop digital literacy programs to educate youth regarding ethical and safe use of online platforms.
8. Social networking companies should strengthen privacy protection measures and mechanisms to prevent cybercrime and misuse of digital platforms.
9. Further sociological and interdisciplinary research should be conducted to study emerging patterns of youth communication and social networking in the digital era.

3. Policy Implications

The findings of the study have important implications for educational institutions, policymakers, families, and society.

1. Educational policies should include digital literacy and responsible social media usage as part of youth education programs.

2. Institutions should develop counselling and mental health support systems for students affected by excessive social media usage and online stress.
3. Government agencies should frame policies for cyber safety, online privacy protection, and prevention of cyberbullying among youth.
4. Policies should encourage youth participation in cultural, social, and community activities to strengthen offline social interaction and social cohesion.
5. Awareness campaigns should be conducted to promote balanced and healthy communication habits among young individuals.
6. Social media regulations and ethical guidelines should be strengthened to ensure safer digital environments for youth.
7. Public policies should focus on integrating technology with social well-being to achieve sustainable youth development in the digital society.

Conclusion

The present study examined the sociological impact of online and offline social networks among youth. The study revealed that social networking has become an inseparable part of modern youth life and significantly influences communication behaviour, interpersonal relationships, social participation, and personality development. Online social networks provide opportunities for communication, information sharing, education, career development, and global connectivity. However, excessive dependence on digital interaction may create challenges such as addiction, stress, social isolation, and weakening of face-to-face relationships.

At the same time, offline social interactions continue to remain essential for emotional bonding, trust, social values, personality development, and social integration. Family relationships, peer groups, educational institutions, and community participation play a vital role in maintaining social stability and emotional well-being among youth.

The study concludes that both online and offline social networks have their own significance in contemporary society. A balanced and responsible approach toward the use of social networking platforms is necessary for the healthy social and psychological development of youth. Therefore, efforts should be made by families, educational institutions, policymakers, and society to promote positive and meaningful social interaction in both digital and physical environments.

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