

Use of Academic Social Networking Sites by Academic Community at National Institute of Fashion Technology Centers in India: A Study

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ABSTRACT

Academic social networking sites (ASNS) are trending in academics and play a significant role in disseminating knowledge. The study aims to explore the usage of ASNS by the faculty members and researchers of NIFT Centers across India. An online questionnaire method used to collect the primary data from 17 NIFT Centers. According to the results of the data analysis, the majority of respondents were aware of and utilised academic social networking sites (ASNS) in NIFT Centers. Google Scholar achieved the highest level of awareness and usage (34.98 %), followed by ResearchGate (27.09 %), LinkedIn (18.23 %), and Academia.edu (17.24 %). The findings indicate that faculty members and researchers use ASNS primarily to access freely available millions of research papers, slightly less for communicating in a new way with researchers, and very rarely for increasing citations of research papers. Finally, the results reveal a positive attitude towards using famous academic social networking sites. NIFT should organise workshops and seminars on ASNS platforms to raise awareness and visibility of their research.

Keywords: Academic social networking sites; Google scholar; Academia.edu; ResearchGate; LinkedIn; Use and awareness; NIFT centers

1. INTRODUCTION

Sharing research information using formal and informal channels has always been essential in daily scholarly activities. The access and management of research information have also changed rapidly in the last two decades due to improvements in information communication and web technology platforms. Nowadays, Internet has changed human lives and opened endless possibilities for scholarly communication. The Internet offers access to a considerable amount of information resources worldwide. People are interconnected through different social media networking sites via the Internet.

Boyd¹ defined Social networking sites as “web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system”. The first social networking site (SixDegrees) was founded in 1997, based on the evidence that everyone is connected. As a closed virtual community for Harvard students, the most popular modern social network site (i.e., Facebook) was founded in 2004. Facebook has an almost 1.6 billion user base presently.

Subsequently, Academic social networking sites (ASNS) are widespread in academics for scholarly communication activities. Several online platforms have attempted to bring the benefits of online presence to an academic audience. ASNS may be classified into two categories using this description and

applying it to online services intended towards academics were created primarily to facilitate profile creation and connection like Academia.edu and ResearchGate and those designed mainly to facilitate the posting and sharing of academic content like Mendeley. Academia.edu and ResearchGate are two platforms where find scholarly research and review articles. Both sites were established in 2008 and initially appreciated moderate growth, with each network exceeding a million registered members. Mendeley, a renowned bibliographic tool with social networking features, also emerged with 2 million members at the same time. Since 2012, growth has accelerated, and Academia.edu currently encourages people to join over 64 million users, while ResearchGate claims to have over 15 million members². These platforms are at the highest regarding numbers and universal presence.

1.1 National Institute of Fashion Technology

National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) imparts fashion education and provides trained human resources to the fashion industry. Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, established the NIFT in 1986. Early professors included notable progressive scholars from the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, USA, who brought in a broad spectrum of aesthetic and intellectual approaches. NIFT has expanded its wings across the country. NIFT, with its 17 professionally established campuses, provides a structure to allow prospective students from all over the country to attain their full potential via the academic programmes provided. Since its inception, the institute has provided a solid base in fashion education in design, management, and technology. The institute’s faculty

has emerged into a network of top educators, entrepreneurs, creative thinkers, and researchers. Academics all over the world recognise the degrees awarded by this institute. Thus, the researchers and faculty members affiliated with NIFT must be familiar with and use academic social networking sites. Are the faculty and research scholars of NIFT Centers familiar with academic social networking sites? Do they use academic social networking sites? Why do scholars use academic social networking sites? Many such questions need to be answered. This study investigated the usage of these ASNS sites for academic purposes whose professional careers are dependent on their ability to produce and publish research. Hence, this study was conducted at NIFT Centers across India consisting of faculty members and research scholars engaged in teaching and research activities³.

2. POPULAR ACADEMIC SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

Following are the popular academic social networks available for research communication.

2.1 ResearchGate

ResearchGate was founded in 2008 and is the largest and most well-known network for researchers, allowing them to connect with collaborators, expand their scientific network, and communicate utilizing various scientific applications. Any researcher from any discipline may create a profile and share their published and unpublished work, working papers, and research datasets worldwide⁴. ResearchGate is a powerful tool for scholarly communication, more interactive and easier to navigate.

2.2 Academia.edu

In academics, academia.edu is the largest social networking platform. It is an excellent platform for disseminating academic research and meeting researchers from different parts of the world. Academia.edu provides four basic features sharing articles, viewing statistics, following other researchers in the field and interacting with other researchers. Richard Price⁵ founded Academia.edu in the year 2008. Over 173 million registered users and 29 million papers are uploaded.

2.3 Mendeley

Mendeley is a free reference management software and social network for academics. It helps to collaborate with other researchers online, import papers from similar software, identify related documents based on what you are reading, and access your documents from any location. Researchers can create an online account on the Mendeley platform and store bibliographic information and full-text papers in PDF or other formats, which can subsequently be retrieved. Mendeley was established in 2007, and the website went live in August 2007. The Elsevier Publishing Company purchased Mendeley in the year 2013.

2.4 LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the most widely used social media platform. It connects business people and professionals from all around

the world, regardless of their field. The purpose of the link is to exchange information, offer products and services, find work, and build a business to business relationships. Although LinkedIn is mainly free to use, premium packages provide additional features. LinkedIn has almost 147 million users. The average LinkedIn user is between the ages of 25 and 54 years. Europe and North America account for 66 per cent of LinkedIn members.

2.5 Google Scholar

According to Nature Survey (2014)⁶, Google Scholar is the most well-known and frequently used ASN site. Google Scholar⁷ is a searching tool for scholarly information such as research papers, books, preprints, abstracts, and judgments of courts from different publishers, professional associations, institutional repositories, and websites. Google Scholar profile provides connections to publications on various commercials, open access, and personal websites.

2.6 Penprofile

Penprofile⁸ launched in 2015 as an academic social networking service. It offers a wide range of productivity and networking functions to everyone. Penprofile is a platform that combines social interaction with generative knowledge exchange and human resource development. Individual and organisational profiles may create using penprofile's robust inbuilt capabilities. It's a platform that facilitates blogging, article sharing, and group creation for peer evaluation of research and academic news, such as a call for papers.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

During the last ten years, scholars have undertaken several studies on academic social networking sites. There have been some relevant studies are being discussed and reviewed here:

Madhusudhan⁹ found that most respondents were aware of social networking sites and have utilised them for pleasant communication for six months. Many researchers use these sites every day for an hour as a collaborative platform for academic interaction and a source of knowledge with the support of their peers.

Al-Aufi and Fulton¹⁰ discussed in their study that faculty members at COMSATS Institute of Information Technology, Islamabad, Pakistan, are commonly used by academics, faculty members and information providers for sharing research work and communicating with one another across disciplines.

Sheikh¹¹ attempted to analyse how the faculty at COMSATS Institute of Information Technology, Islamabad, Pakistan are aware of ASNS in the study. The results show that CIIT faculty members were well aware of Academic SNSs. The main objective of using Academic SNSs was to have discussions, engage with experts, publish their research findings, and stay up to date on the latest research trends.

Nigam and Singh¹² reported that most faculty members of State universities of Uttarakhand were using SNSs and sharing information. The research also suggested that Wi-Fi be provided at all institutions so that faculty members can utilise it in their academic pursuits during their working hours on

campus. This will lead to more extensive use of social media for academic achievement

Bhardwaj¹³ discovered that the performance of four prominent ASNS, specifically ResearchGate, Academia.edu, Mendeley, and Zotero, is not up to the mark, and none of the sites ranked as “Excellent.” Session filters, output features, privacy settings and text display, and search and browsing fields are all missing from the sites. These sites have limited bibliographic and general characteristics.

In his study, Manco¹⁴ explored how early-career social scientists and PhD social science students in Brazil use social networking sites for science communication. In the study, different social networking sites provide a complex ecosystem where different agents interact, negotiate, and provide connectivity from within each other. Affordances theory enabled an understanding of how researchers use the various platforms and of the many motivations behind their use of social networking sites.

Chugh¹⁵, *et al.* found that research was on the fast-developing phenomena of social media. This study focused on a social media user who has received less attention - higher education teachers, or academics. Because there is a small but increasing body of research on academic use of social media, it's time to assess what is out there. Hence, this review study explore to identify the service, advantages, and challenges/barriers of social media for academics.

In his study, Hailu¹⁶ explored that over the last few years, academic social networks have grown in popularity. It now plays a significant role in academics. ASNS acts similarly to social networking sites, but they are committed to research and academic intellectual and quality through better-linking research organisations and their research output. Nowadays, ASNS are the most significant channels in the current information and education sectors.

In the study, Manson¹⁷ found 1771 researchers from eight institutions in Japan adopted and used Academia.edu and ResearchGate, the two most prominent ASNS in the world today. The results show that most connections initiated by Nagasaki researchers are with other researchers in Japan, while link from others is almost equally domestic and international.

Mondal & Kar¹⁸ conducted the study to evaluate the samples of 140 Calcutta University researchers asked to participate in the survey. According to this survey, male researchers at the University of Calcutta are more motivated to use ResearchGate than female researchers. It discovered that using ResearchGate to improve academics' ability to keep up with current advancements in my field of research is most advantageous to University of Calcutta researchers.

Kipruto¹⁹, *et al.* revealed that most postgraduate students in Kenyan institutions utilise Social Networking Sites (SNS) to communicate intellectual knowledge. The findings show that doctoral students use social media to exchange research ideas, class experiences, and updates on deadlines for completing class projects and group discussions.

These literature reviews reveal that similar studies have been published on the awareness and use of the Academic Social Networking Sites (ASNS) covering different educational

institutions. However, no such research has been published on the National Institute of Fashion Technology.

4. OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

- To identify the most used Academic Social Networking Site (ASNS).
- To find out the awareness of ASNS among faculty members and researchers.
- To identify the preferences of ASNS as reliable sources of information.
- To discover the usefulness of ASNS in teaching and learning.
- To seek the opinions and role of ASNS for academics.

5. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The stratified sampling method is adopted to collect primary data to maintain homogeneity in the responses. Minimum ten respondents were expected from each NIFT Centers in this study. The student population of NIFT Centers are not covered in this study.

6. METHODOLOGY

The study was exploratory and designed to establish the presence of academic social networking sites in NIFT Centers. A survey was conducted of all 17 NIFT Centers across India. The study adopted a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. An online questionnaire was used to collect the primary data from the respondents. The survey was designed in such a way that a single respondent was not allowed to give more than one response. The survey was carried out from October 2021 to December 2021. In the given period, a link to the online questionnaire was sent to all the 594 faculty members and 56 research scholars of 17 NIFT Centers located in India. The respondents were from different age groups, designations and gender. The questionnaire consists of demographic profile, individual characteristics, participation in academic activities through ASNS and opinion on ASNS as an educational tool. A total of 175 responses from faculty members and 26 responses from researchers were received. The collected data was processed and analysed using MS Excel and every effort has ensured the representativeness.

7. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

7.1 Profile of the Respondents

Data analysis of the questionnaire summarised the basic information shared by the respondents in Table 2.

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents. Most of the respondents were from the 35 years and above age group, which means the senior faculty members and researchers are more likely to adopt technology, including ASNS. Male respondents are more than females in this study, as most scholars of the male category. It shows that 175(86 %) belong to faculty members as a majority in this category, followed by Research scholars 26(13 %).

Table 1. Profile of the respondents (n=203)

Profile of the respondents		n	%
Category	Faculty members	175	86.21
	Research scholars	26	12.81
	Not answered	2	0.99
	Total	203	100
Gender	Male	108	53.20
	Female	94	46.31
	Not answered	1	0.49
	Total	203	100
Age	Less than 30 years	21	10.35
	30-35 years	58	28.57
	35 years and above	124	61.08
	Total	203	100

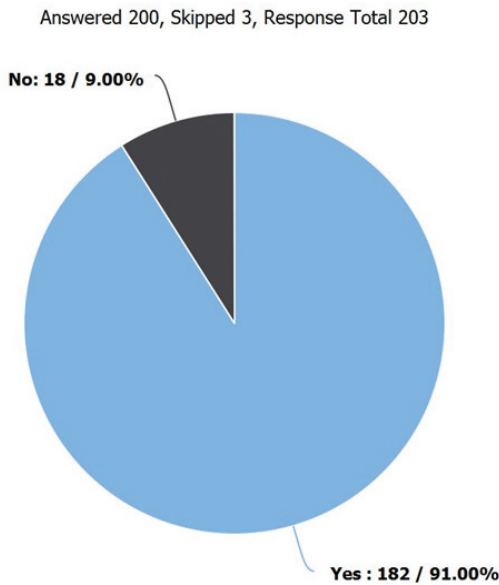


Figure 1. Awareness and use of ASNS.

7.2 Awareness and Use of ASNS

The second cluster began with whether respondents used ASNS as a reliable and authentic source of research information. Fig. 1 shows the awareness among the respondents. It is demonstrated that 182 (91 %) respondents were aware of the ASNS, whereas 18 (9 %) respondents answered ‘No’ and are

Table 2. Professional use of ASNS (n=203)

Purpose	n	%
Get free access to millions of research papers	91	45.50
Find new research idea	60	30.00
Discussion in a new way with researchers	31	15.50
Share my research publications	11	5.50
Increase citations to my research papers	07	3.50
Not answered	03	1.4
Total	203	100

not using ANSs for academic and research purposes. These sources should be considered the authority of NIFT to invite and support their academic to use the ASNS.

7.3 Use of ASNS for Academic Purpose

The respondents who have a profile on ASNS platforms asked about the professional purpose of using these sites. Table 2. Indicates that respondents are using ASNS for different purposes. According to the data collected, 91 (45.5 %) respondents use ASNS to generate free access to millions of research publications, and 60 (30 %) use ASNS to find new research ideas. Similarly, 31 (15 %) respondents said they would discuss research differently with researchers, very few 11 (5 %) said they would share research articles on academic social networks.

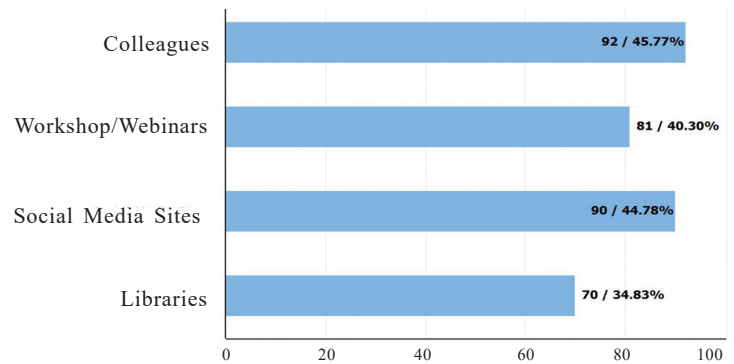


Figure 2. Sources of information on ASNS.

7.4 Sources of Information on Academic Social Networks

Figure 2 shows the source of information on Academic Social Networks. According to the collected data, 92 (45.77 %) of respondents are aware of Academic Social Networks through their colleagues, and 90 (44%) of respondents found information about ASNS through social media sites.

7.5 Preferred Academic Social Network

Figure 3 demonstrated that Google Scholar was the first choice for the NIFT faculty and research scholars. Google Scholar is the most widely used ASNS, with 71 (34.98 %) respondents at NIFT Centers. It was followed by ResearchGate 55 (27.09 %), Linked in 37 (18.23 %), Academia.edu 35(17.24 %), and Mendeley 5 (2.46%)

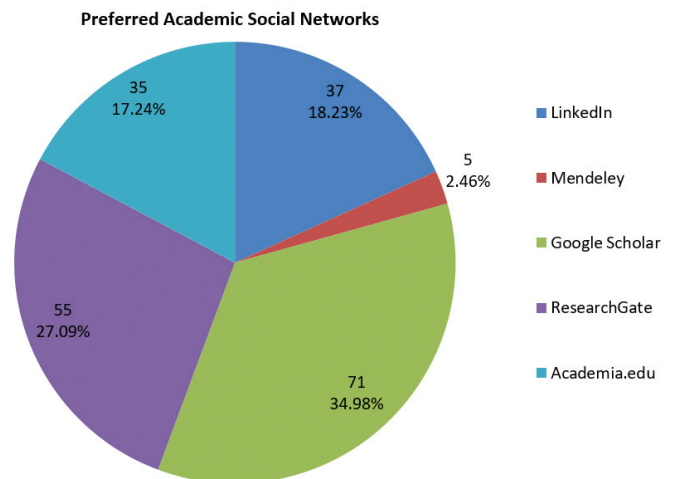


Figure 3. Most frequently used ASNS site at NIFT centers.

%) and Mendeley 5 (2.46 %), respectively. Nobody is using Penprofile ASNS for academic profiling purposes. That indicates that ASNS became an essential part of the intellectual life at NIFT Centers

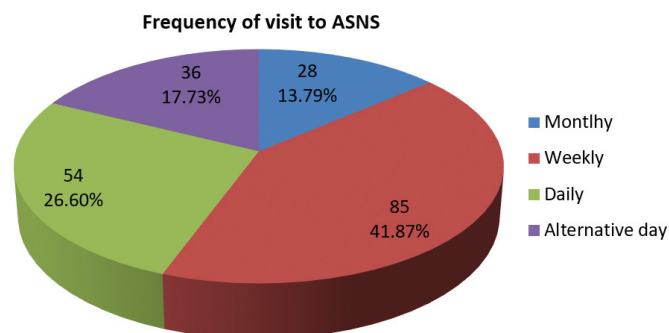


Figure 4. Frequency of visits to ASNS.

7.6 Frequency of Visits to ASNS

The NIFT faculty members and research scholars asked the frequency of visiting the ASNS. The data presented in Fig. 4. Illustrates differences in the frequency of visits of ASNS. The largest group of respondents, 85 (41 %), used ASNS on a weekly basis, 54 (26 %) answered that they used ASNS daily, and 36 (17 %) used them on an alternate day. Only 28 (13 %) respondents indicated that they used ASNS once a month.

7.7 Rating the Importance of ASNS in Teaching and Research

Figure 5 indicates the majority of the respondents rated the significance of ASNS in teaching and research, which was placed on a 1 to 10 rating scale. The rating shows that 169 (85.36 %) respondents rated more than 7 points for the importance of ANS in teaching and research. It is reported that ASNS are very important in teaching, learning and research. At NIFT is to encourage and support the use of ASNS to increase its visibility and representation in ranking among similar academic institutions.

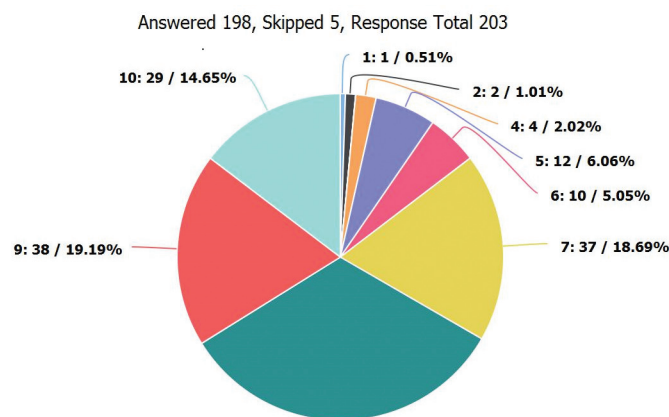


Figure 5. Rating the importance of ASNS in teaching and research.

7.8 Usefulness of ASNS in Teaching and Research

Annexure I, illustrate the distribution of responses as a total significance of academic social networks for their teaching and research. The respondents received a set of

questions to specify their level of agreement on a Likert scale. The summary shows 187 (92.1 %) respondents said that ASNS are extremely important to find new research ideas; likewise, 161 (79.3 %) respondents use ASNS to solve the academic issue and collaborative learning. Similarly, 130 (64. %) sharing research, some 116 (57.1 %) respondents use ASNS to organise and store data online.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Academic social networking sites are trending in academic institutions with more efficient and effective ways to communicate and collaborate. It is found that faculty and research scholars spend a significant amount of time utilizing ASNS daily.

The case study analysed the profiles of users of academic social networking sites. The result shows that users are mainly senior faculty members keen to use ASNS for teaching and research purposes. The majority of the users are found in the male category, while most researchers are more likely to adopt the technology. They use these networks mainly to find new research ideas and get free access to millions of research papers. It is found from the study that the most widely used academic social network was discovered to be Google Scholar, with 71 respondents using it and 55 using ResearchGate. The majority of respondents are male 108 (53 %) who use ASNS, whereas female 94 (46 %) respondents are not using ASNS intensively.

Higher educational institutions like NIFT need to develop appropriate policies and strategies to use these ASNS to support education and learning in the classroom. It is proposed that NIFT Centers should organise workshops and seminars on Academic Social Networking sites to raise awareness among female scholars and junior faculty members. NIFT academic staff should use ASNS for sharing their research; sharing research data will increase the citation count and research productivity. Institutes like NIFT need to develop suitable policies on using these ASNS to support education and learning. The ASNS would be a good place for researchers to share their work and find resources, collaborate, and learn.

An investigation of academic social networking sites has never been conducted at NIFT Centers before. This study discovered that academic social networks have both promise and drawbacks in boosting teaching, learning and research.

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Annexure I
The usefulness of ASNS in teaching and research

Level of the agreement to the following statements	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always	Somewhat important (%)	Extremely important (%)
	1	2	3	4	5	1+2	3+4+5
I use ASNS to solve my academic issue.	8	30	84	62	15	38 (18.7)	161 (79.3)
I use ASNS for collaborative learning.	4	31	83	68	10	35 (17.2)	161 (79.3)
I use ASNS to share my research.	17	49	70	47	13	66 (32.5)	130 (64.0)
I use ASNS to find new research ideas.	3	7	70	90	27	10 (4.9)	187 (92.1)
I use ASNS to organize and store my data online.	44	37	63	45	8	81 (39.9)	116 (57.1)
I use ASNS to develop a network of researchers in my research field.	13	36	71	61	17	49 (24.1)	149 (73.4)