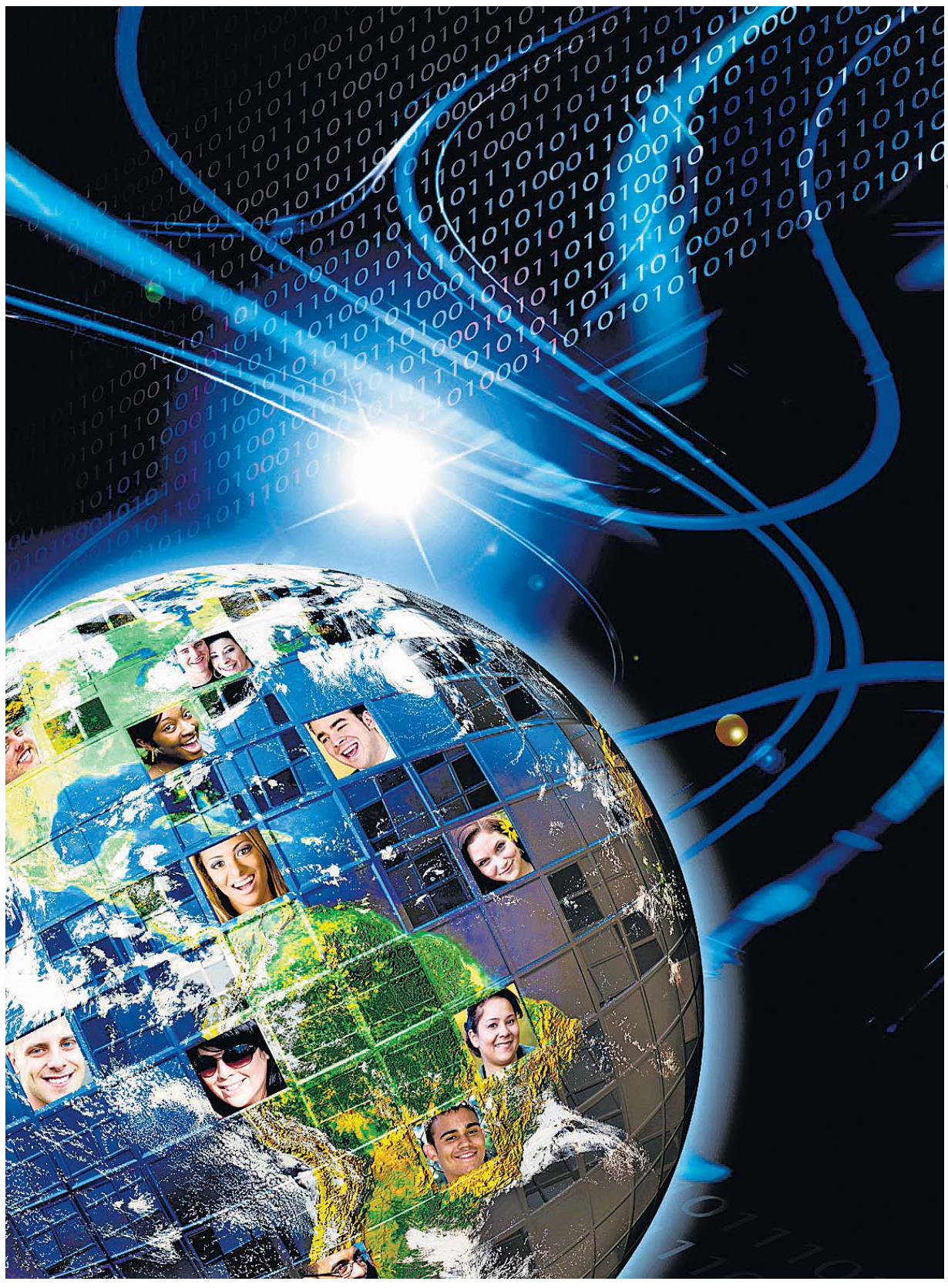
Network for growth

USE IT WELL The popularity of social media among the youth is growing by the day. **V Pradeep Kumar** guides you on how to utilise it to further your educational and professional goals

The popularity of social media like Facebook, Orkut, Twitter, Google Plus, MySpace etc. has reached a new high, with the 13-21 age group, becoming the fastest growing tribe of net users. While indulging in these social media offers gratification and delight, the behaviour and obsession of the youth to social media, is truly a harbinger of the future.

Indeed, research firm Gartner & Comscore expect 20 per cent of net users to shift to social networking from email, over the next three years. According to Experion, an Information Services Co, visits to networking sites was 12.97 per cent whereas emails were 8.1 per cent last New Year's Day. Greetings for birthdays, anniversaries, festivals and special occasions — a traditional forte of emails, are changing rapidly to social media. No wonder then that the findings by an IT major indicates that one third of college students think that the Internet is a basic amenity like air, water, food and shelter.



Advantages of social media

Living in the Information Age, social media is a requirement for the youth due to several perceptible benefits:

- Encourages and facilitates networking with friends and relatives
- Enables de-stressings and balancing academics and personal life
- Helps find long lost friends, cousins and schoolmates
- Aids sharing of knowledge, disseminating information and gaining accessibility
- Helps build a community around people or a cause. Such communities have proven to be a powerful and persuasive force to reckon with
- Helps save time, by aiding in quickly organising events, sharing opinion, getting feedback etc.

Avoiding pitfalls

While recognising the immense advantages, understand the dangers too.

- Don't use social media in Wi-Fi enabled classrooms, as the distraction complicates the learning process
- Don't add strangers to your network, unless a trustworthy friend introduces you or a background check is performed
- Don't click links indiscreetly as there have been instances of viral links. Change passwords frequently
- Don't express personal emotions, opening your inner self to the world. Be careful in posting comments. While placing pictures, be aware they can be misused
- Don't take revenge by posting nasty comments on the walls of friends and teachers, as eventually this can only show you in a poor light. Further, institutions can get access to your postings and initiate action, if there is a violation of the code of conduct
- Don't let the peer pressure of being in touch, expressing an opinion, participating in surveys, eat too much into your time
- Don't get intimate online. Do understand the harsh realities and potential dangers of online relationships

Be safe than sorry

Review your profile as it appears to others outside your network. Alternatively, check your profile through a Google search and change privacy settings, appropriately. Your postings must conform to social norms and codes of public conduct. Never write something online that you will regret later.

It's your prerogative to have personal information such as mobile, address, email id, pictures etc on networking sites. Yet, personal information on networking sites, can work either way.

USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO KICK-START YOUR CAREER. GET HEAD-HUNTED WITH A PROFESSIONAL PROFILE. MAKE YOUR PROFILE IMPRESSIVE WITH A FEW RECOMMENDATIONS GIVING AN OUTSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE OF YOUR PERSONALITY

Boost academic and career interests

Considering the trends and potential, social media have moved ahead proactively to offer applications, redefining the concept of networking. As a student, use this media to promote your academic and career interests.

eLearning: Join academic groups such as Harvard Business Review in LinkedIn to understand the latest trends and insights. Such groups are a great resource for eLearning as you can get your questions answered by professors and industry experts. Similarly, check Twitter for resources on eLearning or subscribe to eLearning tweets through Google Reader.

Get news: Read articles, share experiences and discover new things. For example, join popular newspaper groups and get to know what your peers, group members are reading.

Develop a hobby: Join groups on photography, music, or an NGO to pursue an interest.

Know your campus: If you are planning your higher studies in India or abroad, join the relevant groups to understand campus life. Additionally, these groups can get you key information, inaccessible otherwise.

Network with professionals: Get into appropriate networks of LinkedIn. For instance, to become an entrepreneur, join a group on business opportunities to know projects and collaborations.

Join an industry group: Join industry groups of your interest like Information Technology, adding significantly to your knowledge and networking domain.

Develop soft skills: Get interview and grooming tips on social media. Learn language and communication skills, developing a smart personality.

Research employers: Social media can help conduct research on your potential employer. Check your alumni for employees and source information.

Get head-hunted

Importantly, use social media to kick-start your career. Get head-hunted with a professional profile. Make your profile impressive with a few recommendations giving an outsider's perspective of your personality. LinkedIn, Twitter, Marketplace applications in Facebook for jobs, are great as a career resource or even for part-time jobs. Set up email alerts for new jobs posted.

Enable an easy online search of your profile, using key words like aggressive, dynamic, career-oriented etc. and place a hyperlink. This makes you visible to employers and anyone looking for you.

Be aware that employers can also use your social media profile to do a background check on your behaviour, attitude and social compatibility.

Build high social capital

Social media has revolutionised communication bringing everyone across the world close and accessible, by influencing the way we think and act. Do remember that networking is not hunting. It's not the numbers in your network that's important; it's the people behind those numbers that matter.

Social media is all about people; use this tool to cultivate strategic relationships. When used in moderation, it builds a high 'social capital' giving you a sense of high-esteem, satisfaction and well-being. However, the key word is 'moderation' as research in the US has shown that heavy users have a lower grade than moderate users.

Trustees of posterity

As a former British prime minister, Benjamin Disraeli said, "The youth of a nation are the trustees of posterity". Social media helps you understand yourself, communities around you and our cultural diversity. As a communication tool, social media has abundant educational, business and social applications; use it to build a successful career and life.

William A Ward, the inspirational writer once said, "The recipe of success is to study while others are sleeping, work while others are loafing, prepare while others are playing, and dream while others are wishing". (The author is a management and career consultant.)

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