

# Are There Threats of Social networks among Youths? Western Ethiopia in Context

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**Abstract-** Social networks continue to play a central role in the lives of Ethiopian youths. The safety of these online spaces and the risky behaviors in which youth engage is of utmost importance. There are youths who face risks and are harmed online. Indeed, some youths are more at risk than others. Those youths who have psychosocial issues; family and school problems, are far more likely to be under threat than the average youth using the internet. This study explores the risks and threats of youths on social networks through assessing their attitudes towards risks; prominent threats; and risk aversion strategies. The objective of this research is to analyze the age and gender dynamics of youths regarding risks and threats through social networks. There are three target population of this study from where the sample is drawn: teen cyber café visitors, cell phone using older youths and laptop using professional youths. For the first target population, systematic random sampling is used whereas for the second and third snowball sampling is applied. The sample size comprises (n=252) questionnaires; and the data is collected and analyzed keeping in view the age and gender dynamics and the result is presented. The findings pertaining to risks and threats on social networks reveal that most of the Ethiopian youths take social networks as a fun and little bit risky. Majority of youths waste their time due to over consumption of social networks. Ethiopian teens bully their counterparts more than the elder youths whereas, females bully online more than males. Mostly youths receive texts as a dominant form of cyberbullying and most of the youths bully bi-annually. To avert the probable threats, maximum youths either block or ignore the strangers on social networks.

**Index Terms-** Social networks, threats, online communication, youths, Ethiopia.

## INTRODUCTION

Online communication has become a centerpiece in the social life of youths. They outnumber adults in their use of communication technologies, such as social networking sites. “Social networks” are online communities that give opportunities to connect with, or provide resources to, clients, colleagues, family, and friends who share common interests. There are many different types of social network sites, many of which are free, and they range from general to those tailored for a specific demographic or interest area. Examples include Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Skype etc. In each social network, a profile is created that describes a person or organization, and then people are invited to join as “friends.” (boyd and Ellison, 2007; Hussain, 2014). The three most visited social networking websites among Ethiopian youths are: Facebook, YouTube and Skype. Facebook is the top most popular (above 95%) social networking site. In frequency, most of the Ethiopian youths (above 40 per cent) use social networks ‘once in a few days’. Time-wise, maximum youths (above 45 per cent) use Social networks 30-60 minutes per session, whereas contact-wise, most of them have more than 300 friends in their profile (Hussain, 2014). The increase in social media has been so rapid and their presence in youths’ everyday life is now so pervasive that, for them, social media is the primary way they interact socially, and a large part of this generation's social and emotional development is occurring while on the Internet and on cell phones. Because of their limited capacity for self-regulation and susceptibility to peer pressure, youths are at risk as they navigate and experiment with social media (McBride, 2011). The massive popularity of online communication among youths has elicited reactions. Concerns have been voiced that adolescents develop shallow relationships with online strangers or may become victims of online solicitation (Valkenberg & Peter, 2010). The objective of this paper is to analyze the age and gender dynamics of youths regarding risks and threats through social networks.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The main risks and threats for youths online today are associated with at least five factors: the predominant use of online communication (whether it is anonymous); the communication partner (friend or stranger); the type of use (compulsive or non-compulsive); the timeline of data collection (i.e., the effects were more negative in the early stages of the Internet); and motivation to use a particular technology (e.g., for communication or entertainment). Valkenberg and Peter (2010) expound anonymity (freedom to hide identity), synchronicity (freedom to edit) and accessibility to intimacy as the important threat on social networks.

Furthermore, according to boyd and Marwick (2009) there are three issues that dominate as online threat: sexual solicitation, harassment, and exposure to inappropriate content. Online solicitation is harassing or teasing communications that are not designed to seduce youth into offline sexual encounter. One in seven minors in a national United States sample is sexually solicited online. Peers and young adults—not older adults—account for 90% of solicitations in which approximate age is known. Many; 69% of solicitations involve no attempt at offline contact and youth typically ignore or deflect the experience without distress (Wolak, Kimberly & David, 2007). Harassment or bullying is an aggressive, intentional act or behaviour that is carried out by a group or an individual repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend himself or herself (Olweus, 1999). Cyber-bullying is “an overt, intentional act of aggression towards another person online” (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008) or a “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices” (Hinduja & Patchin 2008). Hinduja and Patchin (2009) found that 82% of victims in their United States. sample knew their perpetrator (and that 41% of all perpetrators were friends or former friends). Exposure to inappropriate content is pornography and other problematic content. Encounters with pornography are not universal and rates of exposure are heavily debated. Wolak et al (2007) found that 42% of youth in a United States. sample reported unwanted or wanted exposure or both; of these, 66% reported only unwanted exposure, and only 9% of those indicated being “very or extremely upset.” Furthermore, rates of unwanted exposure were higher among youth who were older, suffered from depression, and reported being harassed or solicited online or victimized offline.

## METHODS AND MATERIALS

This research has been accomplished through quantitative research design. The study was conducted in Nekemte town of Oromia region in Ethiopia. It is situated at the elevation of 2088 m above sea level, and located at a latitude and longitude of 9°5'N 36°33'E. It is at the center of the road network for South Western Ethiopia. The town is fairly developed having about 15 cybercafés, 300 EVDO connections and 700 CDMA users through which social networks is used on the internet (Ethiopian Telecommunication, 2012). There are three target population of this study from where sample is drawn. They are teen cyber café visitors, cell phone using older youths and laptop using professional youths. The participants of this research are social networks users falling under teen and youth category. An individual who had used social networks through internet at least once in the last one month is the participant of this research. The participants are the desktop user teens from five cyber cafes; cell phone user youths from five universities; and laptop using professional youths of different organizations of the town. The tool used for quantitative data is self-administered questionnaire. In order to get desired response, the close ended type items were included in the questionnaire. A pilot study of 20 cases has been done to draw Cronbach Alpha and add value to the questionnaire. The sample size of this study is 252, which is statistically derived for questionnaire survey using the assumptions of desired precision 5 % and confidence level 95 %. The sample includes both male (n=126) and female (n=126) youths. In addition, age-wise it also includes teens (n=111) and older youths (n=141) youths. As there are three target population of this study from where sample is drawn, for the first target population (teen cyber café visitors) systematic random sampling is applied. For the second (cell phone using older youths); and third (laptop using professional youths) target group snowball sampling is applied. The survey sample includes teen desktop users in 5 different cyber cafes of town; cell phone using older youths in 5 different universities of the town, and laptop (EVDO/CDMA) using professional youths of the town. The questionnaire is translated into English. After the data is gathered through questionnaire, it is analysed through SPSS in terms of frequency and percentage.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Profile of the respondent

The respondent profile of this study consists of 126 (50%) male and 126 (50%) female. Age break up constitutes 111 (44%) teens and 141 (56%) older youths. In education, the respondents include 31% preparatory students, 28%

less than first degree, 23% first degree and 11% second degree. Occupation-wise, 149 (60%) respondents are students, 26 (10%) are skilled workers, 10 (4%) are clerks/salesmen 3% are self-employed professionals and small traders followed by unemployed people, businessmen, junior officers and senior officers.

**Table 1: Respondent profile**

S. No.	VARIABLES	RESPONDENTS (Base=252)
<b>GENDER</b>		
1.	Male	50 (126)
2.	Female	50 (126)
<b>AGE</b>		
1.	Teens	44.0 (111)
2.	Older youths	56.0 (141)
<b>EDUCATION</b>		
1.	5-9 years of school	7.1 (18)
2.	10-12 class	31.0 (78)
3.	Less than First Degree	27.8 (70)
4.	First/Second Degree (General)	23.0 (58)
5.	First/Second Degree (Professional)	11.1 (28)
<b>OCCUPATION</b>		
1.	Unskilled Worker	-
2.	Skilled Worker	10.3 (26)
3.	Small traders	2.8 (7)
4.	Shop Owners	-
5.	Business with employing non	0.4 (1)
6.	Business with employing 1-9	1.2 (3)
7.	Business with employing 10 & above	-
8.	Self-employed professionals	3.2 (8)
9.	Clerical/Salesman	4.0 (10)
10.	Supervisor Level	15.9 (40)
11.	Jr.Officer/Executive	0.8 (2)
12.	Sr.Officer/Sr. Executive	0.8 (2)
13.	Student	59.1 (149)
14.	House-wife	-
15.	Unemployed	1.5 (4)

Note: The number in parenthesis is frequency of responses

**B. Attitude towards threat**

The EU Kids Online project (2009) provides a matrix model for thinking about risks to young people online. Whilst far from comprehensive, it provides a useful frame for considering young people’s exposure to, and participation in, risk factors and risk behaviours through their online social networking activity. They are underlined as illegal content, pedophiles, grooming, strangers, extreme or sexual violence, other harmful or offensive content, racist/hate material activities, advertising/commercial persuasion, biased/misinformation, exploitation of personal information, cyber-bullying, stalking, harassment, gambling, financial scams, suicide, anorexia, invasions/abuse of privacy, and illegal activities like hacking and downloading. Therefore, online social networks opens up the possibility of young people for many risks (Hussain, 2014).

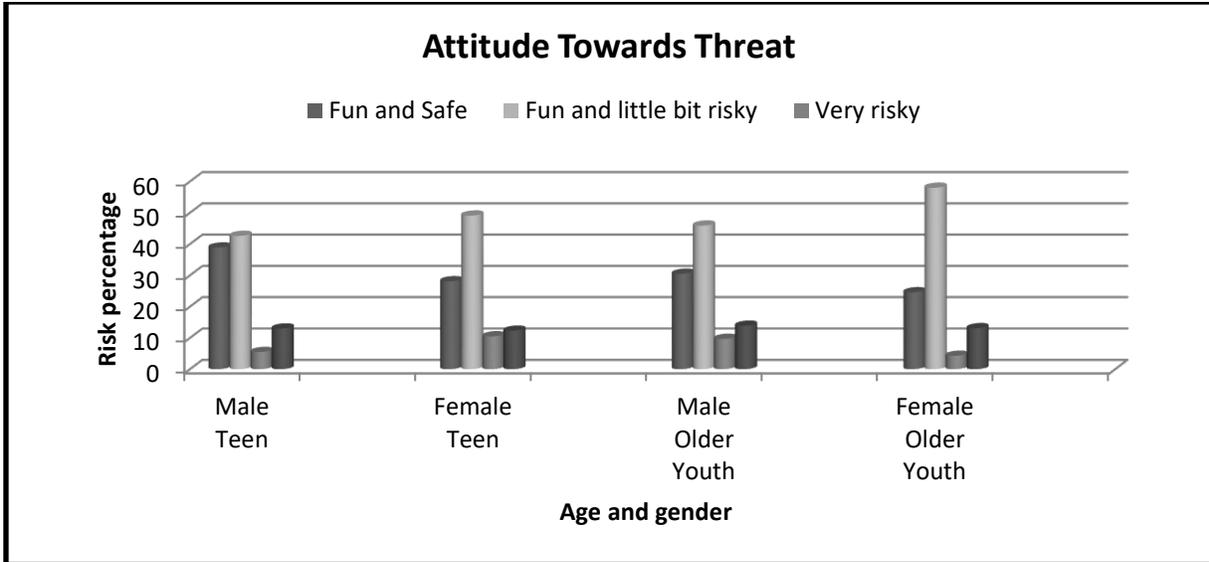


Fig 1: Attitudes towards risk on social networks by age and gender

The figure demonstrates that when asked about the youths risk perception on social media, majority of the male youths (45%) take social media, as a fun and little bit risky whereas 34% regarded social media as a fun and safe. 14% of male youths take it carelessly and only 8% consider social media as very risky. Likewise, majority of the female youths (54%) take social media, as a fun and little bit risky whereas 26% regarded social media as a fun and safe. 13% of male youths take it carelessly and only 7% consider social media as very risky. Age-wise data of risk perception on social media shows that majority of the teens (46%) take social media, as a fun and little bit risky whereas 33% regarded social media as a fun and safe. 13% of male youths take it carelessly and only 8% consider social media as very risky.

**C. Prominent risks and threats**

Risks factors are those conditions of situations that are empirically related to particular out comes. The social networks introduce new opportunities for Ethiopian youths to get access to problematic content, including pornographic and violent content as well as that which depicts or encourages self-harm (Hussain, 2014).

**Table 2: Risks and threats by age and gender**

Risks and Threats	AGE AND GENDER			
	Male Teens (Base=54)	Female Teens (Base=57)	Male Older Youths (Base=72)	Female Older Youths (Base=69)
	Percentage	Percentage	Percentage	Percentage
Pornography/hate speeches	35.1 (19)	35.0 (20)	48.6 (35)	40.5 (28)
Cyber-bullying	31.4 (17)	47.3 (27)	41.6 (30)	46.3 (32)
Meeting stranger	37.0 (20)	22.8 (13)	30.5 (22)	43.4 (30)
Wastage of time	44.4 (24)	22.8 (13)	45.8 (33)	52.1 (36)
Social exclusion	14.8 (8)	26.3 (15)	23.6 (17)	28.9 (20)
Personal information	12.9 (7)	26.3 (15)	23.6 (17)	33.3 (23)
Sexual predation	18.5 (10)	19.2 (11)	26.3 (19)	24.6 (17)
Frauds	18.5 (10)	12.2 (7)	20.8 (15)	28.9 (23)
Unwanted attention	18.5 (10)	19.2 (11)	23.6 (17)	24.6 (17)
Hacking and identity theft	18.5 (10)	15.7 (9)	30.5 (22)	26.0 (18)
Invasion of privacy	18.5 (10)	24.5 (14)	31.9 (23)	28.9 (20)
Haven't thought about it	12.9 (7)	12.2 (7)	5.5 (4)	10.0 (7)

Note: The number in parenthesis is frequency of responses

The table 2 clarifies that for male youths the top five risks on social media are wastage of time (45%), exposure to porn, hate speeches (43%), harassment or bullying (37%), meeting strangers (33%), and privacy issues (26%). For female youths the top five risks on social media are harassment or bullying (47%), wastage of time (39%), exposure to porn, hate speeches (38%), meeting strangers (34%) and personal information (30%). Age-wise for teens the top five risks on social media are harassment or bullying (40%), exposure to porn, hate speeches (35%), wastage of time (33%), meeting strangers (28%) and privacy issues (22%). For older youths the top five risks on social media are wastage of time (49%), exposure to porn, hate speeches (45%), harassment or bullying (44%), meeting strangers (37%) and privacy issues (30%).

**D. Risk and aversion strategies**

Web filters and blocking content is the most frequently used mechanism to promote safety and risk. But, the most used mechanism for ensuring young people’s safety online (blocking and filters) is least trusted as effective. Interventions through training is most trusted as effective but least frequently used. Actively supervising young people’s internet use is the one which is widely used and most credible method (Davies & Cranston, 2008).

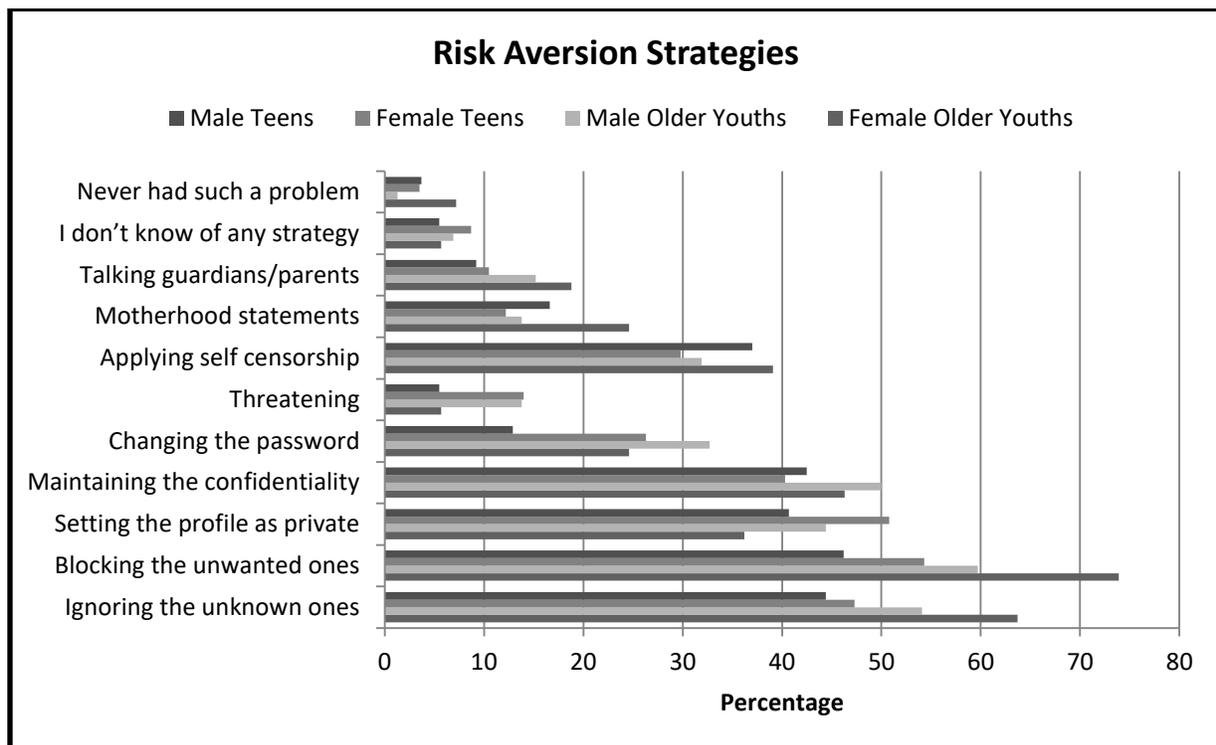


Fig 2: Risk aversion strategies by age and gender

The figure 2 demonstrates that to avoid risk on social networks, for male youths top five risk aversion strategies are blocking the unwanted contacts (54%) followed by ignoring the strangers (50%), maintaining confidentiality (47%), setting the profile as private (43%) and applying self- censorship (34%). The five risk avoiding strategies of female youths are blocking the unwanted contacts (65%) followed by ignoring the strangers (56%), maintaining confidentiality (45%), setting the profile as private (43%) and applying self-censorship (44%). The five risk avoiding strategies of teenagers are blocking the unwanted contacts (50%) followed by ignoring the strangers (46%), setting the profile as private (46%), maintaining confidentiality (41%), and applying self-censorship (33%). The five risk avoiding strategies of older youths are blocking the unwanted contacts (67%) followed by ignoring the strangers (59%), maintaining confidentiality (48%), setting the profile as private (40%) and applying self-censorship (35%).

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

In sum, the Ethiopian youths are very insensitive in relation to social networks threats. Majority of youths take social networks as a fun and little bit risky followed by fun and safe. Very few people think that social networks are very risky. Moreover, the top five risks associated with social networks expressed by Ethiopian youths are: wastage of time, cyber-bullying, pornography, meeting strangers, and invasion to privacy. Further, to avoid risk on social

networks Ethiopian youths use the five most popular strategies; and they are: blocking the unwanted contacts, ignoring the strangers, maintaining confidentiality, setting the profile as “private” and applying self-censorship. Eventually, the findings pertaining to risks and threats on social networks reveal that most of the Ethiopian youths take social networks as a fun and little bit risky. Majority of youths waste their time due to over consumption of social networks. Maximum youths either block or ignore the strangers on social networks to avert the probable threats. Ethiopian teens bully their counterparts more than the elder youths whereas, females bully online more than males. Mostly youths receive texts as a dominant form of cyberbullying and most of the youths bully bi-annually. Researches consistently highlight a connection between the practices of seeking access and being exposed to social networks, suggesting that an effective intervention needs to account for the motivations that youths have when they seek access. Blocking access certainly has its place, but if we fail to address those who are seeking access, we will not curtail the most problematic outcomes. The more we create channels of communication between youths and responsible adults and empower youth to play an active role in any intervention, the more successful we will be in combating the risks and threats we face. Youths should think and rethink about privacy before posting anything on social networks as it does not exist in the web world. The studies expose that majority of teens and females add everyone in their network which leads them to online harassment. The elders should aware youths about the ramifications of posting inappropriate material. Youths need to know that once they post something, it cannot be taken back and can follow them. General privacy concerns and identity disclosure concerns are of greater importance to female youths than male youths. While signing up for opening a profile on social networks youths should be advised to stay safe related to the disclosure of important information like home address, phone number, and other privacy concerns. In addition, sometimes guardians need to check privacy settings and online profiles for the better safety and security. Finally, the time spent on computer is important to notice as it leads to social networks depression of the youths.

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