

Digital Interactions: A Study on 'Facebook' as an Interface between Children and Parents

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Abstract

Technology is the need of the hour. Progress and development cannot be achieved without moving with the times and adopting the latest technologies. New technologies have enabled the individuals to interact on different platforms at the same time.

The new forms of interactions, socialization and expression are the order of the day, the new media technologies or the digital media have democratized and globalized the information and have lead to a digitized shifts in all spheres of our lives. The whole new digitized environment has been created for questioning and exploring atmosphere which also have facilitated new ideas, thoughts and creative expressions to be exhibited. The digizens recognize, validate, share, create and extend their ideas, views, and perceptions caring little about their defined values, cultures and behaviors. The socially agreed upon behavioral boundaries are changing fast. The social networking sites are creeping and eroding deep into our relationships, our cultures and ourselves. They have given rise to digitized relationships and digital interactions. There is a shift in relationships. We have gone from personal to public. Even the personal relations are finding expressions through digitized public spaces. True, we have moved on from private to public; individualized to universalized; from one to one to one to all. From recipient to provider technology is the root cause for expressions. We have walked ahead from 'sit back and listen' culture to and express, exchange and do culture'. This has given rise to different levels of creative and expressive as well as interactive planes between parents and children as well. It has changed the dimensions of personal relations. The 'reveal all' and 'hide nothing' expressions are resulting in proving the digital interactions as connectors as well as dividers. The willingness to negotiate differences, the ability to integrate diverse viewpoints into a coherent whole as well as the potential to achieve unique qualities that are brought in fore by the technologies' new forms of interactions are either thickening or thinning the interfaces between children and parents. There is a certain shift of paradigm. How far the cultural ethos are upheld and respected, what are the changing dimensions in parent and children's relations will be explored by this study on

'Facebook'. It is clear that as long as the underlying threads which keep the fabric of culture and respect for relationships alive, the technology will play a positive role and help the societies, cultures and relationships to grow and evolve, till then the digital ingression will not be an unwelcome phenomena.

Keywords: Digital media, Social networking, Cultural shift, Facebook, Interaction, Communication

1. Introduction

'Man is a Social Animal'. (Aristotle). Now he is socializing digitally and can be found socializing on social networking sites: Facebook, Myspace, Orkut... The meanings of socialization have changed and so are our personal relations. Today, if you ask the teenagers or anybody to remain in touch and try to give them your email, the instant reaction is: Are you on Facebook? No. Orkut? If no again, do you Tweet or Buzz? If your answer is that you are not a bird or a bee, then, probably you are outdated or obsolete or not well connected. Digital means have given a whole new meaning to interactions.

Technology is the need of the hour. Technology has and will always be used to sculpt and create our modern society. Technology is a huge contributor to the well being of human kind. Progress and development cannot be achieved without moving with the times and adopting the latest technologies. Try to imagine how hard it would be to make it through the day without the simplest of technologies. Technology has surely proven itself to be very beneficial, if not necessary. Homo sapiens have made rapid strides in the field of technology from Stone Age to information age. Hitherto underdeveloped societies have undergone a transition from industrial revolution, economic revolution and finally settling down to Information revolution.

Media Technology and Society offers a comprehensive account of the history of communication technologies, from the Telegraph to the Internet. Winston argues that the development of new media, from the telephone to computers to satellite is the product of a constant play-off between social necessity and suppression. Winston's fascinating account challenges the concept of a "revolution" in communications technology by highlighting the long histories of such developments. The fax was introduced in 1847. The idea of television was patented in 1884. Digitalization was demonstrated in 1938. Even the concept of the "web" dates back to 1945. Winston examines why some prototypes are abandoned, why many "inventions" are created simultaneously by innovators unaware of each other's existence, and shows how new industries develop around these inventions, providing media products for a mass audience.

The digital technologies a society uses in its communication exert a powerful influence on the shape, values, meaning and order of the culture. In understanding a culture, one needs to give attention to the different forms of communication within the culture and how they relate to each other.

Communication patterns as they are being formed by digital media are not the only determinative factors but they are crucial because they form the web of the culture, the complex networks of connections and relationships that enable every other cultural activity to take place. Different media while making use of different kinds of information create different patterns that address and develop different patterns of relationships and perceptions. In some cases new ways of communicating simply replace the old. In other cases, the new overlays the old or integrates with it to create a new media-mix, with the old continuing but in a new way.

Demassification of the human civilization, which the digital media both reflects and intensifies, brings with it an enormous jump in the amount of information we all exchange with each other. And it is this increase that explains why we have become an Information society.

Embarking on a journey through the information age, technological devices such as the television, mobile phones, and personal computers have come and established themselves and made a place in our everyday life. Digital technology has definitely influenced interpersonal communication in many ways, not only at the work places but also in our homes and in our relationships. While teenagers are creating their own websites and blogs, moms and dads are still watching serials on Star, Colors and Sony channels and news channels viz NDTV, Times Now and Aajtak etc., a quite a revolution is taking place around us through web 2.0 or 3.0 interacting with one another on social networking sites viz. Yahoo, Google, Twitter, Youtube, Hi5, Linked in, Facebook etc. Social networking is growing at a robust rate. Approximately 2 lakh words are being communicated per second through the medium of new media.

Facebook was created in 2004 by a Harvard student as a way for college students to communicate with each other. Two years later, it was opened to everyone above 13 yrs with an email address. Facebook has 500 million active users today. Average user has 130 friends. People spend 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook. There are over 900 objects that people interact with

(pages, groups, communities etc.), 30 million pieces of content is shared each month. 200 million active users are using Facebook through the mobile devices.

Technologies either facilitate or prevent communication. With this generation of youth dividing their time between doing assignments, downloading and listening to music, talking on msn and checking email, with the television in the background, family members arguing in the next room. Any one experience is splinted, even in our own homes.

The metamorphosis between family habits and the technology itself is surely one that will need to be monitored and studied over the coming years as radical changes in both technologies and families continue to take place.

This has reduced the communication between parents and their children. Due to the lack of time spend together the bond has got digitalised. Television has been in our lives for quite some time now, it has got replaced by the other digital mediums. Internet is one of them. A recent study shows "Internet users watched about 4.6 hours of television less per week than non-users".

With the invention of Internet, the world has effectively become a global village as perceived by Marshall McLuhan. People from remote corners of the world are able to easily converse with each other quickly and easily through the means of cyberspace. Email established itself as a fast, free and convenient method to send messages, replacing traditional mail in the process, which in turn has got replaced by Facebook or other social networking sites. The Internet has indeed made the life of the people interesting and time consuming. Everything in today's time can be done through Internet. Internet has transformed/digitalized human life completely.

The transformation of society is consistent with the state of affairs projected by the noted author Alvin Toffler. *"A information bomb is exploding in our midst, showering us with a shrapnel of images and drastically changing the way each of us perceives and acts upon our private world. In shifting from a second wave (less technology sound period) to the third wave info-space, we are transforming our own psyche"*.

Digital technologies have continued to make significant inroads into the inner workings of society, more so for the youth. "As new technology becomes increasingly embedded in everyday niches, it is common for youth to interact with dozens of digital devices throughout a typical day, and many spend hour-upon-hour learning about and manipulating computer devices such as laptop computers, handheld computers, game consoles, cell phones, pagers, and audio players".

Most traditional communication mediums including telephone, music, film, and television are being reshaped or redefined by the digital media/Internet. Even print media like newspaper, books and other published material have to adapt to digital mediums.

This medium has enabled or accelerated new forms of human interactions through instant messaging, Internet forums, and social networking sites. They allow users to display and communicate with others at one forum instantly. Social

networking websites also initiate friendships between known as well as strangers.

Elements of these features were present in the past mediums as well but offered only a limited space and length. All of us are aware of these sites. If we want to look for people we know, these sites will be the easiest place for us to look for them. The more popular the website is, the better the chances are for us in finding them. These websites help us interact with people from different places and planes.

Parents keep tab on the networking behaviour of their children and that is why colloquial term used is helicopter parents. (Foster w Cline, M.D. and Jim Fay in their 1990 book: *Parenting with Love and Logic: Teaching Children Responsibility*. They are so named because they keep hovering over their networking children. In Scandinavia this phenomenon is known as curling parenthood. It is also called over-parenting. Also termed as lawnmower parents or Black hawk parents.

2. Review of Literature

The whole phenomenon of communication and social networking emanates from the Gordon's theory of grapevine communications. The grapevine arises from social interactions; it is dynamic, and varied as people are. It is the expression of their natural motivation to communicate. It is the exercise of their freedom of speech and is a natural, normal activity. The grapevine is flexible and personal and can spread information faster than the formal communication channels. The grapevine is also capable of penetrating even the tightest security because it cuts across organizational lines and deals directly with people we know.

The new media has entrapped the total interaction phenomena. One side it is freedom of expression and on the other the invasion into privacy. Critics may describe it as 'Narcissism, attention deficit disorder and stalking', (Vijay Nagaswami, The Hindu, July 11, 2010)

The diversity of perspectives represented through new media /digital media enriches the literature, providing an abundant repertoire of tools for examining these phenomena, but it is at times also an obstacle to understanding. Few works are commonly cited across the field, and most are known only within the confines of their discipline. The absence of a common set of organizing theoretical principles can make it difficult to find connections between these disparate works beyond their common subject matter. The scholarly community would benefit from a broader view of the field.

- According to Don Tapscott, author of *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation*, N-Genres embrace interactivity in terms of media consumption, prefer to play participatory role rather than an observatory one, and value self-driven, N-Genres are accustomed to digital technologies, having grown up with them, and it's suggested the generation gap – a difference in cultural norms – has been replaced by a generation lap – a cohort of kids superseding the knowledge and capabilities of their parents. At an estimated age of between 0 and 20 years old, some N-Genres will never know the world pre-Internet and

accept technology as commonplace. N-Genres possess a digital literacy that confounds.

- According to Obliger and Obliger, N-Genres are hopeful and determined, like public activism and the latest technology and dislike negativity and anything slow. 'For the Net Gen, the Internet is like oxygen; they can't imagine being able to live without it.' Their attitudes, aptitudes and learning styles reflect their exposure to information technology.
- Coined by Castells, as 'network society', in the mid 1990s, the network society describes the reinvention of social organisation through the development of information technologies. Closely linked to the globalisation paradigm, the network society centres around information technology and its ability to impact economic and political transactions. Proceeding the age of tangible goods, the network society trades in intangibles. For the N-Gen, an information rich society means an 'informed population, capable of self-expression and political and cultural participation through new technologies
- Interpersonal communication has been a growing issue as more and more people have turned to social networking as a means of communication. "Benniger (1987) describes how mass media has gradually replaced interpersonal communication as a socializing force. Further, social networking sites have become popular sites for youth culture to explore themselves, relationships, and share cultural artifacts "A Many teens and social networking users may be harming their interpersonal communication by using sites such as Facebook and Myspace
- New media technologies are increasingly becoming more than just a simple way to pass the time. In fact, some academics suggest that technology is at the very cultural heart of the current generation of young people. "For the new culture, a trip into virtual reality is far more significant than remembering Proust, (Kelly, 1998). Technology, such as the internet and mobile provide young people with unlimited access to opportunity. It has revolutionized the way we communicate and interact with each other. "Technology generates opportunities: new things to explain; new ways of expression; new media of communications; and creates new forms of destruction.
- Digital media/ICTs make it possible to offer on-demand access to current information. Allowing an individual to access relevant information quickly and easily when she is most receptive to it may facilitate information absorption. Second, it allows multiple, overlapping associations between materials. For example, placing links on a Web site to related material can help contextualize new information. Third, it allows the creation of a flexible information environment, in which an individual may tailor how he encounters content so that the experience best suits his learning style (Jones and Berger 1995). For example, content may be provided in a range of modalities, including text, images, audio, and video, and with a variety of levels of interactivity, from static documents and reports to dynamic user-controllable models.

- Mobilizing structures refer to the mechanisms that enable individuals to organize and engage in collective action, including social structures and tactical repertoires (McCarthy1996). Social structures encompass both formal configurations, such as social movement organizations or churches, and informal configurations, such as friendship and activist networks. Tactical repertoires describe the forms of protest and collective action that activists are familiar with and able to utilize. Thus, supporters are more likely to mobilize around an issue if there is an existing organizational infrastructure and familiar forms of protests.
 - Opportunity structures refer to conditions in the environment that favor social movement activity, and include factors such as the relative accessibility of the political system, the stable or fragmented alignments among elites, the presences of elite allies, and the state's capacity and propensity for repression (McAdam 1996). For example, civil rights mobilization efforts in the 1950s and 1960s were successful in part because of the Protest in an information society differing attitudes between elites in the North and those in the South toward the rights of African Americans (McAdam 1982).
 - Survey data collected in 2000 suggests that Internet users are more tolerant and open minded than non-users (Robinson et al. 2004). Another survey conducted in the U.S. during the 2004 presidential election suggests that online news users are not utilizing the control afforded by these technologies to filter out viewpoint-challenging information (Horrigan et al. 2004).
 - ICTs are also producing changes in repertoires of contention, allowing activists to engage in new forms of contentious activity and to adapt existing modes of contention to Protest in an information society an online environment. Comparable transformations have occurred before. For example, the availability and mobility of print enabled by the printing press helped move protest from transient local direct action to more flexible and sustained national contention (Garner 1999).
 - "R. Kelly Garrett"quoted that, In 2008, David Randall and Victoria Richards did research on "Facebook can ruin your life. And so can MySpace, Bebo..." In the judicial backwater of a New Jersey federal court, a case is being heard that nominally affects two families but should also make millions of Britons think twice about something they do every day: put highly personal information on Facebook, MySpace or Bebo. An American insurance company, in defending its refusal to pay out a claim, is seeking to call in evidence personal online postings, including the contents of any MySpace or Facebook pages the litigants may have, to see if their eating disorders might have "emotional causes". And the case is far from a lone one. Suddenly, those saucy pictures and intimate confessions on social networking sites can be taken down and used in evidence against you in ways never dreamed of.
 - A special issue of the Journal for Computer-Mediated Communications was dedicated to studies of social network sites. Included in this issue is an introduction to social network sites (Boyd & Ellison 2007).
 - A 2008 book published by Forrester Research, Inc. titled *Groundswell* builds on a 2006 Forrester Report about social computing and used the term "groundswell" to refer to "a spontaneous movement of people using online tools to connect, take charge of their own experience, and get what they need-information, support, ideas, products, and bargaining power-from each other."
 - In 2010, Telstra did research on "New research reveals impact of social networking on school studies". More than half of Australian parents with children using online social networking services like Facebook and Twitter say the services are distracting them from their studies* according to the latest Cyber-safety Research Report commissioned by Telstra.

"Computers are a fantastic educational tool, and in 2010 are almost impossible to do without at just about at any level of study. However it is important they are used to enhance rather than distract students from their school studies, especially in those vital secondary years."
 - Social networking, the interactions or the relations on these sites may facilitate only superficial relationships may be criticized as virtual, However "sociologists differentiate between strong ties and weak ties and have concluded that weak ties too are an integral component of social well being"(Vijay Nagaswami)
- The strategy for aligning these writings into a coherent literature is to adopt a theoretical framework in which existing and new work can be located. This conceptual scaffolding would help to recognize connections between apparently dissimilar works, and to identify fruitful areas for future study. This paper advances one such framework and provides an overview of the major ideas represented in the literature.
- ### 3. Methodology
- The methodology adopted for the topic is descriptive as well as exploratory .The study is based on the observations made on the reactions of the parents in relation to the teenagers' usage of the social networking sites especially Facebook. I have made use of evaluative observational variables. The various questions that were observed are:
1. Is technology responsible for bringing cultural and social changes in society?
 2. Has social media globalised the whole culture?
 3. Has Digitalization affected personal relationships?
 4. Has Facebook changed the relationship between parents and children?
 5. What prompted parents to have Facebook account?
 6. Have Parents been successful in establishing contacts with their children on Facebook?
 7. Do children resist to having parents' accounts and adding them as friends?
 8. Even after having an account, are there difficulties in understanding the language?
 9. Do children raise privacy questions?
 10. Has Internet reduced the activities of playing outdoors and interacting with friends in real form?

11. What are the ill effects of addiction of these sites?

The study is supported by the data collected through the Questionnaire.

Sample size: Parents - 50
 Mothers - 25
 Fathers - 25
 Children (Teenagers) - 50
 Male - 25
 Female - 25

Tool of data collection: Questionnaire

Data Analysis

Face book is most popular site and the largest networking site. It has entered into every aspect of our life so deeply that it is difficult to get rid of it. Today not to have a Facebook account is not to exist. It also overshadows every other modern means of communication for staying in touch. Face book has become the medium. One can no longer throw it off as a medium used by young people. It has to an extent affected the relationships between the families. It has made the parents the helicopter parents who like to hover around their children when they are on Facebook. Also, it is the young children's association with the Facebook which has led to the creation of accounts of parents on Facebook, especially the mothers with an idea that they can have the chances of peeping into the accounts of their children to keep tab on the digital interactions of teenagers with diverse audience from diverse backgrounds.

Whereas for some other parents it offers an opportunity to interact with them and solve various problems and remain in touch with this digital medium in this digitalized world. Indeed, Face book is acting like an interface between parents and children. Social media is acting as connector as well as divider in relationships. Our relationships are now more likely determined by the speed of our broadband connection.

The various questions in mind were observed from parents' and also from children's point or view for evaluation.

- It was observed that most of the parents had strong belief that technology has a lot of impact on young generation and is responsible for bringing cultural shifts.
- Most of them believed that though it has globalised the whole culture but it has given rise to a new indigenised culture in youngsters. Some others believed that they were very much influenced by various English serials.
- The teenagers did not believe that they imitate the western culture or ideas but it was observed that while talking to their friends, siblings or parents they made use of same expressions, language etc.
- Coming down to whether digitalization has affected personal relations, it was observed that the rise of digital technology and the rise of cell phone, the helicopter parents often blame it as the world's longest umbilical cord. It is like a parenting tool. As one parent reacted "it is a good way to have some contact in your child's life" when asked others said, "it is sensible".
- They believed that it has changed the relationships or equations with parents. In the digital era of helicopter

parenting more and more parents and kids are meeting up and clashing on Facebook, and other networking sites.

- It was observed that most of the parents had started the Facebook account after the children; whereas the younger age group helped their parents to have/start the account, the elder age group did not help.
- More mothers than fathers started accounts.
- It was observed that for the teenagers it has become a lifeline.
- Most of the parents were of the view that Facebook is a hindrance in their relationships and it also comes in their way of out door activities.
- The ill effects of the Facebook were also highlighted viz: Fatigue, insomnia, odd sleeping and getting up hours, obesity, weak eyesight etc.
- Parents believed there was no set time period in which communications occur. Boundaries have also been broken interpersonally. If a teenager has a problem or concern be it health, political, economical, personal, or otherwise there are numerous avenues that are now available to youth like Internet, email, or over the phone that can be trialled for a resolution to the issue.

The observations were made mainly from the point of view of parents. The results of the data collected through the questionnaire are tabulated and inference is as below:

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Children

Gender	Number of Respondents
Male	25
Female	25
Total	50
Age	13-17
Education	8 th -12 th

Table 2: Internet usage by Children

Frequency	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Every day	36	72
Twice a week	10	20
Once a week	4	08

Table 3: Internet sites most surfed by the Children

Sites	No of respondents	Percentage
Facebook	50	100
Orkut	29	58
Twitter	12	24
MySpace	10	20
Youtube	45	90
Google	50	100
Yahoo	30	60
Gmail	24	48
Songs.pk and other downloading sites	25	50
Gaming	20	40

Table 4: Time spent on social networking sites (hour per day)

Time	No. Of respondents	Percentage
0-01	20	40
01-02	22	44
02-03	05	10
03-04	02	04
04-more	01	02

Table 5: Usage of Facebook by Children

Place	No.of Respondents	Percentage
Home	38	76
Cafe	01	02
Friends house	08	16
Mobile	03	06

Table 6: Purpose of using Facebook

Purpose	No. of respondents	Percentage
Connecting and sharing information	26	52
Photo Sharing	10	20
Chatting	12	24
Educational	02	04

Table 7: Profile of Facebook Friends

Profile	No of respondents	Percentage
Friends in reality	35	70
Virtual friends	08	16
Parents	05	10
Relations	02	04

Table 8: Facebook as an Interface

No. of respondents	Yes	No	I don't know
Help in Maintaining/improving relations	20	20	10
Invasion into Privacy	40	08	02
Fear of befriending by friends if parents were friends	10	35	05
Have hidden accounts	12	38	0
Have aversion to Facebook	06	34	0
Feel it is waste of time	01	49	0

Inferences

- As per the findings 72% children use Facebook every day. 20% twice a week and only 8% once a week.
- Most surfed Internet sites were Facebook, Google Youtube, and yahoo

As far as number of hours spent is concerned, most of the respondents i.e. 44% used Facebook for 1 to 2 hours, 40 % for upto one hour.

- Next table shows as to where do they surf the Internet and the highest %, that is 76%, says it surfs the Internet from house. 8% surf the Internet from friends house, 03% from cafe and 01% use mobiles.
- About 52% of children's purpose for using Internet was for connecting and sharing information, 24 % for chatting, 20% for photo sharing and only 04 % for educational purposes.
- 70% of children share and connect with their real friends only. 16% are virtual friends, 10% have added their parents in their profiles, 2% are other relations.

According to Table 8: On the question whether Facebook helps in maintaining or improving relations 40% said it may, 40% it may not and 20 % did not react.

80% teenagers felt that adding their parents hinders their personal space.

75% parents do not like their children using Internet late night. 59% of parents say that they guide their children to be safe on Internet. 11% of them can't make up their mind about it.

Very few, only 12 respondents had hidden accounts. 6 teenagers had developed aversion to Facebook. Only one thought that it was waste of time.

According to study it is mothers who have more Facebook accounts than fathers. Most of the teenagers surprisingly did not want their mothers on the Facebook.

It was found that in some households there was a rule that children who want to have Facebook account have to be friends with their parents. 60% Parents banned texting after 10pm. Twenty percent of parents admitted they had told their children to unfriend someone. The survey also found that 12% of parents have banned their kids from using social media as punishment.

Parents admitted that "it can be awkward at times" when they follow their children's Facebook updates, but think that it's probably worth it to keep tabs on them. Of course, savvy teens can easily exclude their parents from seeing potentially incriminating updates using Facebook's advanced privacy features.

So to friend or not to friend is the big question facing many parents dealing with teenagers on Facebook.

Conclusion

One of the key issues that have arisen from the Facebook as an interface between Children and parents is that there is a growing

dependency on digital technologies among the teenagers. Arguments have arisen over the addiction towards new technologies especially the Internet and the various online communities it provides, particularly online chat and online gaming.

The teenagers are definitely more active on social networking than parents having an account though it definitely offers parents a chance to peep into their network. It is important also that use of such networking tools is monitored especially among children. Though most of the teenagers don't want contacts with their parents on networking sites, they want to live more freely and liberated. They also may have different personality on social networking sites. They may have multiple personalities too. These fake identities is a mischievous phenomenon. Through grapevine effect it spreads to others, which adds negatively to socio-psychological behaviour of the human beings. The challenge however, which the parents face is, how to keep children off these sites and networking webs.

The numbers of Facebook users is on the rise. This proves that e-world /digital world is taking its toll over the real world as far as the numbers is concerned. As Social networking values are vanishing, it is believed that user fatigue is soon going to set in. These sites will have to offer new and varied platforms with diverse content packaging.

The onus lies on parents to make the teenagers understand, how these sites should be used judiciously. We should post relevant information only and not very personal ones, so that, in future we do not regret it. Also, the information posted should be authentic, so that it becomes a source of awareness and not sensation.

However, in Indian context being on Facebook isn't going to magically change your relationship with your child. Neither the real is going to be taken over by virtual.

Limitations

- Few people were keen to fill the questionnaires.
- Time limitation

Suggestions

The study opens up the scope for various topics for research viz.:

- The identity issues in digital interactions.
- The privacy issues.
- Socio-psychological changes in the behaviour of various groups using digital media.
- Using Facebook for marketing, advertising and PR etc.
- Using Facebook for political communication etc.

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