

Facebook and twitter
have opened doors to
allow for easier
communication
research...

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Abstract

The aim of this research paper is to analyze the social networking phenomenon and its impact on interpersonal communication. A thorough examination of the topic suggests that social media has become the primary medium of communication for the past few decades which may be a key factor for the significant amount of attention they receive. Social media today, especially social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, have become more than a means of exchanging written messages. Such sites are used extensively to share photographs, videos, organize and coordinate events, corporate marketing and networking. The study found that users mainly use social networking sites to stay in touch with family and friends. The sites are also used to make new friends, with interactions often being limited to the virtual world. But many sociology scholars have emphasized the negative impact of social networks like Twitter and Facebook on relationships and society; they hold the opinion that the quality of relationships has deteriorated and the bond has become weak. It has also been suggested that social networking sites render users incapable of maintaining successful real life relationships as they become accustomed to enacting fake virtual personalities. This study found that, although social media addiction and the negative impacts of social networking are limited to extreme cases. For a majority of users, social media is an effective and easy means of communication that helps them maintain bonds with family and friends.

Facebook and Twitter have opened doors to allow for easier communication

Introduction

Social media networks have gained a significant amount of popularity in recent times, thanks to their ability to facilitate communication. Twitter and Facebook are the most important social media websites that have opened up new and hitherto unexplored avenues in the field of networking and innovation. They have revolutionized the arena of communication and have become a major social symbol of the modern era of technology.

The definition of the word “ friend” in recent times has changed exponentially due to the effect of Facebook, even though the conception of people regarding the word may not have undergone such a great change. When two persons become “ friends” on Facebook, it does not automatically imply that they share the intimacy and closeness that they have with most of the offline friends. However, there are Facebook and Twitter members who are engaged in what is commonly referred to “ friend-collecting behavior”. This means that they befriend people whom they do not know personally in order to expand their online network strength. The trend seems to be popular mostly among the adolescent groups. This might be considered a strategy of impression management since the user is likely to believe that a greater number of Facebook or Twitter friends and followers will increase their level of popularity .

Considering the widespread and global use of social networking sites and the increasing reliance of users on them as a means of communication, it is important to understand the impact that social media has on the actual

social relationships that people, adolescents in particular, have. Does social media take the focus away from real-life relationships and bonds in favor of superficial virtual ' friends'? This paper puts forth the thesis that social media and technology have made communications easier, specifically social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, thereby allowing users to stay in touch with family and friends across the globe.

Literature Review

Even though the watered down definition of the term " friend" in relation to the social media networks like Twitter and Facebook has earned a lot of criticism, there are scholars who have explored how the formation of these networks influences interpersonal relationships between people and has the potential to restructure the manner in which they judge their relationships. A person can have thousands of Facebook friends with whom there is no regular contact. But the thought of knowing the tangible existence of the network serves as a source of comfort. Even people who are no more than distant acquaintances but Facebook " friends" can fulfill major functions . Facebook users do not consider these connections to be pointless not their maintenance stressful; for them, these are comforting presences in the background. A dormant network consists of a group of people with whom users are not obligated to interact in an explicit manner but they find solace in simply knowing about the existence of the relationships. These networks prove to be beneficial since when required, a person can tap easily into this dormant network instead of their offline extended group. Facebook seems to keep various lines of communication open as both people are able to view

each others' profile and continue their respective lives without communicating in a direct fashion. This may prove beneficial for sustaining past friendships or tenuous friendships and prevent their fading away which is rather common as we face various changes in life .

Impression management is a major component of interpersonal communication and some new media formats, including Twitter and Facebook, permit the use of extra tools for presenting people from others. Social networks, in a lot of ways, are self-presentation platforms. Compared to web pages, blogs and smartphones, the environment on a social media site promotes self-disclosure in a focused manner and allows others with access to the profile to view other " friends". This combination of various groups of people may pose challenges for the purpose of self-presentation. People have different individuals from professional, personal and academic contexts in their Facebook network and the increasing diversity of their social media sites poses new challenges as they attempt to engage in impression management.

Most of the research on Facebook is concentrated on the alliances which are less intimate and maintained solely through the medium of social networks. Since a large number of people maintain offline contact with their family and close friends, Facebook serves more as a supplement to the issue of interpersonal communication. As a large part of the Facebook " friend" networks of people are made up mainly of people with whom they have minimal face-to-face contact in their regular lives, Facebook and even Twitter to some extent offers an alternative space for interactions that can fit quite easily into the hectic schedule or interest area of a person. In order to

remain connected through Facebook, both people do not need to look at the other's profile page at the same time. They can catch up on the activities of their " friend" by scrolling through their timeline for the past couple of weeks instead of checking in on a daily basis.

The space that is provided by social media networks can even help to decrease some amount of stress felt in regards to maintenance of relations or staying in touch by facilitating contact in a more convenient way. The expectations of regular contact with Facebook friends present in the extended networks of individuals happen to be minimal. A frequent comment on an image or status update or even the click of a mouse on the " Like" button serves to maintain those relationships. Social media networking services happen to be a part of modern life that are able to improve connections in a world that has become divided by the influence of capitalism, the isolation of suburban sprawl as well as the disengagement of television.

Some critics are concerned that social networks are making us lonely; they hold the opinion that the advancement of technology has helped create the ultimate alienation technology. But there is no evidence to support the claim of displacement of offline conversations with online conversations. In fact, people who use social media tend to be a great deal more social while offline. They seem to have benefitted from social sites to maintain relations with people they could not keep in touch with otherwise. Social media is improving the connectivity between humans since people are able to converse in ways that were not possible at one time. Many surveys show that families believe social media to be beneficial to their family life - they

are able to keep in touch at a frequent rate .

The younger generations tend to use the Internet as a common tool for communication. Facebook has witnessed unprecedented growth since its inception in the year 2004. Till the year 2011, the social network boasts of 500 million active users. Owing to the incredible growth rates of Facebook and the levels of usage among young adults, it is necessary to understand the potential of this social networking medium. The use of Facebook is responsible for affecting other kinds of communication along with development and maintenance of relationships.

There are plenty of research opportunities in the field of social networking including the analysis of the effect of Facebook on interpersonal friendships. Through the determination of the impact of usage of the social network site, it is possible to help young adults use the page as well as other emerging kinds of interpersonal communication in an effective manner. Facebook usage can be defined as possessing an active Facebook page and account. Interpersonal friendships can be defined as relationships of the non-romantic nature. CMC or Computer mediated communication can be referred to the type of communication that is possible through a technological medium . Most people use Facebook since their peers are members of the website. Therefore, it is a necessity to maintain their social lives. People, especially teenagers, are motivated to go online since they have friends who do the same. The internet has now become an additional place where it is possible for people to go and manage their offline relationships. Interactions that take place on the internet are not hampered by geographical location but face-to-face communication needs physical proximity.

Maintenance of relationships and information-seeking are common motivators for people to join Facebook and other social media sites.

Facebook permits its users to gather information regarding their Facebook friends via the information they have shared on their user profiles and wall posts. Researchers have indicated that a primary Facebook use is to strengthen the bonds in society in existence and maintain friendships of the long distance variety. Facebook can help students take care of their present connections with friends from back home and high school. As these relationships are often prone to physical separation, forming an online connection can help students adjust.

Self-disclosure, an essential portion of relationship development, is one of the most important motivating factors for joining Facebook. It promotes trust and information-sharing. Instant messaging enables adolescent users to disclose issues they do not usually feel comfortable discussing in a face-to-face setting. Instant messaging provides an outlet to share personal issues with friends and colleagues if the users lacked their own physical space to discuss these issues and did not feel very comfortable if a guardian or parent was in close proximity to their face-to-face discussion. This process allowed users to reinforce their existing friendships . Facebook users exhibit some specific traits of personality. Introverts have been found to have a higher chance than extroverts to use the overall internet but extroverts seem to log in more hours on social networking websites. The self-esteem of a person can either decrease or rise based on the tone of feedback received on the virtual profile of the person .

In spite of the advancements made in the field of technology, the social

networks are unable to replicate human conversation in a precise manner. Many features of the traditional formation of relationships are missing from social networking web pages like the verbal and visual cues and the face-to-face communication that accompanies interactions of the non-digital sort. When an individual posts a comment on the profile page of a friend, it is possible that the context might be lost on the targeted audience along with the casual observer. Moreover, misinterpretations of meaning might result in complications in relationships.

The large amount of communication carried out online, especially among users of a lower age group, can have a significant impact on the way users establishment and handle relationships, both offline and online. If the number of online friends of a person becomes more important than the relationship quality, social ties may be weakened. The line dividing more conventional offline relationships and digital relationships in recent times has started to blur owing to the contribution of the social networking web pages. While relationships forged online usually contain weaker ties compared to traditional relationships offline, the evolution of social networking technology can lead to strong, solely online relationships .

On the other hand, greater number of cases will be recorded where social networking websites facilitate relationships that have ended in stagnation instead of being maintained and strengthened even further due to the multiple options of interaction and communication these sites permit. The superficiality connected with online relationships on Facebook may have a considerable effect on the quality of offline relationships since a large number of users are likely to form greater social friend networks but with

weak connections between the relationships.

Facebook and Twitter tends to offer users a helpful method for handling a great number of weak ties. While the maintenance of strong relationships normally needs great commitment of time and energy, weak ties can be managed only through the associations between “ friends” on Facebook. Facebook provides users with the chance to remain up-to-date on their weak ties in their lives by simply viewing the details found in the profiles of those friends and by connecting through various actions like private messages, pokes, comments on pictures and wall postings. By providing numerous interaction methods, Facebook can save considerable time of the users, thereby enabling them to form and maintain a large social network, but one that is made up of weak connections between users .

Twitter, unlike Facebook, is a microblogging tool. The website allows an individual to improve his social presence in an online course via a mechanism for social interactions. The site is well-established and boasts of a large and expanding base of participants and it is easily accessible. People can share their resources and ideas within a limit of 140 characters, ask and answer questions, solve practical problems, among others. Most people participating in Twitter engage in daily conversations, gossip, sharing of URLs and resources and reporting news. The community members of Twitter can post their contributions through the Twitter website, their email, mobile phone and instant messaging service. This has made twitter an extremely powerful and convenient micro sharing environment that is controlled by the community. Depending on the people followed by an individual, Twitter can be used effectively for social and professional networking since it is able to

connect people with similar interests. All the communication takes place in real-time and so the exchange of information happens to be immediate. Twitter can improve the potential of social presence. The site is a great option to check in with members of family, friends or colleagues who are using it. People can learn about the feelings of their acquaintances, issues faced by them in their day to day life, their occupation and the state of their families. This enables Twitter to have a more intimate aspect compared to other forms of social networking, though they possess their own merits. Twitter can facilitate a feeling of recognition and belonging among various individuals. It has a large role to play in the connectedness of certain people. Even people, who are not in the habit of posting a large number of tweets, keep track of the conversations going on in Twitter. This helped foster stronger connections and enabled them to learn more about different people in the course of time. Twitter can also provide some good resources. Students who have become involved with the Twitter community have also reported the impact on the teaching and cognitive presence .

It is necessary to understand the concept of social capital, both offline and online. The term broadly indicates the resources collected through relationships among different people. Social capital is treated as a flexible term with different definitions in various fields, treated both as the effect and the cause. Wacquant and Bourdieu have placed the definition of social capital are “ the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual recognition and acquaintance. These relationships offer resources that differ not just in function but even

form, depending on the nature of the relationships .

Social capital has connections to different positive social outcomes like improved public health, lower rates of crime as well as effective economic markets. According to numerous social capital measures, this much-needed resource has been falling for the past years. With the decline of social capital, a community is likely to experience greater social disorder, lesser civil activity participation and more distrust among members of the community. If social capital increases, it results in commitment to a community as well as the capacity to mobilize collective actions apart from the other benefits. Social capital can be used even for negative purposes but it is usually see as a positive impact of interaction among the various participants of a social network .

Self-disclosure in online social networks like Twitter and Facebook results in the positive relationship between social connectedness and online communication. Compared to face-to-face communication, online communication leads to greater positively in interactions, in improved liking of online acquaintances and in greater scope of interaction. These processes can all qualify as alternative explanations for the positive connection between the use of the internet and the connectedness of the social media. Self disclosure in face-to-face interactions is usually effective for the formation of close friendships during the time the communication partner happens to be supportive and responsive.

Conclusion

Social networking sites have their pros and cons. While adolescents, and even adults, today are more reliant on technology to communicate, it does not imply that using technology such as social networking sites degrades the importance of real life relationships. A majority of social network users have been found to use the sites in order to stay in touch with friends and family members who live in different geographical areas, even in different countries and continents. At the same time, these sites are being used to form online friendships with people the users may never have met or will meet in person. The positive impact of Facebook and Twitter on existing friends can be explained by improved online self-disclosure. But the same liberating mechanisms for online communication that leads to positive outcomes may have negative consequences for adolescents. However, the positive impact that social networking sites have had to ease communication is noteworthy.

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