

# International Journal of Research

A BLIND PEER REVIEWED BIANNUAL JOURNAL



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# International Journal of Research

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**DR. M. Z. FAROOQUI**  
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## Virtual Crisis: Interpersonal relations and new social media

\* Samya Shinde

### Abstract

*A large part of social interaction is taking place online with Computer mediated technology becoming the most common form of communication today replacing face to face communication. The usage of social networking sites amongst youngsters is on a rise today with the advances in technology. Tablets, smartphones, laptops are ubiquitous by their presence. Technology today offers myriad ways to communicate effectively with the advent of Skype, webcams, Facebook, twitter, WhatsApp etc. As a hub for communication, entertainment and information, social networking sites have grown in popularity. The usage of social networking sites has tremendous influence on the youngsters especially on their interpersonal relations. Emoticons, as new mode of communication, have largely replaced face to face communication today and are equivalent of nonverbal cues. They have worked well with both old and young alike, although their usage is more among the younger generation whose constant companions are the smart phones and tablets. The present paper is based on the research conducted on 242 undergraduate college going students in the age group of 17-20 years to ascertain the usage pattern of social networking sites, their purpose of using it, the use of emoticons and the effect on interpersonal relations. For the purpose of study questionnaire was administered and focused group discussions were held to know the impact of social networking sites on interpersonal relations at the personal level with regards to identity formation and social level – with regards to their relations with family and peers.*

**Keywords:** social media, computer mediated technology, identity, emoticons

### Introduction

**“The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said”: Peter Drucker**

The study of social media is a new area of scholarship in social sciences and humanities. A large part of social interaction is taking place online with Computer mediated technology becoming the most common form of communication today replacing face to face communication. The expression new media has been in vogue since 1960 and encompasses an expanding and diversifying set of applied communication technology.

They have become more widespread leading to a new vocabulary especially among the youth today. With the spread of mobiles and smart phones the use of emoticons and social networking sites has become an everyday practice fast replacing text messages as well.<sup>1</sup> These apps are centers of social interaction with both positive and negative consequences leading to friendship and social support as well as feelings of rejection, drama and misunderstanding. However one needs to ascertain the impact of social networking sites on interpersonal relations and whether replacement of face to face communication with nonverbal emoticons has improved personal interaction or not among today's generation. The present paper also focuses on social media and creation of identity using Goffman's dramaturgical approach.

Face to face communication involves gestures, nonverbal cues, tones to convey feelings which are all absent when one communicates via the computer mediated technology. One

finds today that sentences have been cut short due to text messages restriction making communication cost effective as well as use of emoticons that are being used to convey emotions rather than properly constructed sentences. The paper addresses how interpersonal communication has been affected by social networking sites.

### Methodology and research questions

For the purpose of research survey of relationship between interpersonal communication and social networking sites was carried out among the undergraduate college students in the age group of 17-20 years. A total of 242 students were distributed the questionnaire. Focused group discussion was also conducted with the students to elicit response on impact of social networking sites at personal and social levels. They were asked questions on the computer mediated technology/technologies they use; the frequency of the use, the time spent and the impact it has on their interaction with others. The research was primarily carried out to ascertain the way the use of social networking sites have altered behavior if any and social media and identity.

Byod and Ellison ( 2007) define social networking sites “as web based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within the bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view

1. ComScore, a leader in measuring the digital world estimates that in India 1 in 4 minutes online are spent on social networking sites (2012). Google ranked as the top destination reaching 95% of the online population, while Social networking sites ranked as the top online activity accounting for 25.2 % of all online minutes.

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and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.”

Emoticons refer to symbolic representations of feelings and emotions using facial expressions through keyboard characters. The origin of emoticons is disputed, but studies conducted suggest that they have been in vogue since 1980's (Derks, Bos and Grumbkow 2007 cited in Park et al 2013). Like the non-verbal cues they help in the interpretation of the meaning, attitude and level of emotions not easily interpreted by language (Lo 2008, Gajadhar and Green 2005 cited in ibid). Online and mobile communication however lacks the tools that face to face communication allows though it may be non-verbal (such as gestures, facial expressions and body language) face to face interaction. Thompson and Foulger (1996 cited in Walther et al 2001) 'referred to emoticons as "pictographs" and described their use in Computer Mediated Communication "to express emotion or as surrogates for nonverbal communication", "suggestive of facial expression . . . a paralinguistic component to a message"

Previous research on emoticons reveals that text messages with emoticons are better understood rather than those without it (ibid).

It has also been found that excess use of emoticons can lead to misunderstandings as well as behavioral problems in the future for growing children who find it difficult to communicate when confronted face to face. According to Australian research ( 2014) published in the journal Social Neuroscience, Dr. Owens Churches from Flinders University in Adelaide found that emoticons language is changing and shaping the brain.

**Findings and discussion**

**How frequently do you use Social Network sites per day?**

a) Less than an hour	57
b) 1-3 hours	40
c) 4-7 hours	29
d) 8-12 hours	23
Total	242

**How frequently do you use social network sites per week?**

Less than an hour	17
1-3 hours	45
4-7 hours	64
8-12 hours	40
More than 12 hours	76
Total	242

It was found that 52% spend more than 8 hours per week on social networking sites with 31 % spending 12 or more hours per day. It means that during this time they are not exercising, reading, hanging out with friends, communicating with family or spending qualitative time with friends and family. Such a lifestyle makes them easily distracted and develops difficulties in establishing interpersonal relationships with parents, siblings and other family members. They reduce face to face contact and become addicted in a virtual world of relationships. Instant gratification of needs become their goal. Chatting with friends , browsing profiles on social networking sites has become a compulsive habit to visit own profile several

times in a day for checking friends' update, changing status and commenting on others photos and videos.

Social media has become an important tool of self-expression and presentation. We want to project ourselves as living the best irrespective of the reality we keep on posting the real, created or edited pictures of ourselves. The desire of self-gratification is leading to peer pressures. The desire of posting and checking comments after every moment is making youth addictive.

**Which social networking site do you prefer the most?**

Facebook	73
Twitter	7
Whats App	137
Viber	2
Others	23

Though respondents use a variety of portals, among the most used social portals the most popular are WhatsApp and Facebook. Facebook and Whats App currently are now at the forefront of social networking websites due to their easy-to-use interface and the continuous innovation of their features and layout.

Although McLuhan died before the advent of social media, his analysis is applicable to social media. McLuhan in 1966 famously said medium is the message. He wrote that various mediums have distinct impact on the consumers of media. The social media today are cool mediums where the information or data level is low but participation is high. Twitter is a sparse medium that does not allow the user to post a message exceeding 140 characters. The data level is low but participation is high.

**For what purpose do you use social networking sites?**

Keeping in touch with family	61
Keeping in touch with friends	92
To meet new people	12
For fun and entertainment	46
Because everyone uses it	3
Time pass	28
Total	242

People use social networking sites because it gives them an opportunity to express their views, a feel of independency and self-esteem. Emoticons are used to communicate most effectively and frequently with friends and close cousins whereas used rarely with parents. Along with changes in quality of communication, it is also affecting the kind of language we use in our informal and formal written communication. Those who mentioned the use of emoticons with parents expressed words not easily communicable with parents such as showing dissent or their love interest. Respondents texted a variety of emoticons out of which the top three used are smileys, wink and heart. While texting most of the respondents mentioned the use of using emoticons for expressing the emotions of anger, love, affection and frustration.

**Has the usage of social networking sites changed your interpersonal relations with family?**

Agree	130
Disagree	112
Total	242



Technology has impact on family relations. Focused group discussions revealed that technology has taken control over the family. Youngsters spend more time on social networking sites than with the family. They have changed the way families communicate. Dr Jefferey Mcquillen, assistant professor of speech communication at Texas University warns that advent of technology has made the world smaller in terms of interaction, but wider in terms of face- to face relationships and virtual interaction as substitute for face to face interaction can be disastrous for family life.

In the era of social media, relationships in many families have changed. Social media affects these relationships in a number of unexpected ways. Individuals have become completely isolated from the world revolving around them. Communication heavily relies upon internet. Many expressed that though they are active on social media they feel socially isolated as they know more people, but find themselves alone when in crisis 'without a shoulder to cry on', as one respondent states. From an optimistic perspective social networks provide valuable opportunity for communication. They are able to keep in touch with their loved ones through social media services. Sharing pictures online, discussing issues have all become possible through social networking.

**What is the reaction of your parents to the use of social networking sites?**

They are fine with it	92
They are critical of it	60
They are fine with it if used in moderation	90
Total	242

**Has the usage of social networking sites changed your interpersonal relations with friends?**

Agree	132
Disagree	110
Total	242

55% respondents feel that usage of social networking sites have changes relations with friends. It tends to cause more misunderstandings between friends when the message can be misunderstood. Sometimes social media is used to intentionally hurt friends creating insecurities. Social networking sites can also damage relationships with friends and spouse by creating feelings of jealousy and rejection.

**What is the level of the degree of trustworthiness of the people you meet on social networking sites?**

Very trustworthy	23
Moderately trustworthy	49
Slightly trustworthy	108
Not at all trustworthy	62
Total	242

**For the purpose of communication do you use smileys and expressions or do you express emotions verbally (in terms of frequency of use):-**

Smileys	112
Verbally	13
Sentences	4
Combination of both	54
Total	242

The respondents for the purpose of communication used emoticons more than expressing emotions verbally and felt

they were able to express so in much better way rather than expressing themselves in sentences. A small percentage also mentioned that they felt comfortable using combination of both smileys and expressing themselves verbally as well as expressing emotions in sentences while texting.

**Do you prefer social networking sites to face to face relationship?**

Yes	155
No	87
Total	242

**Are social networking sites an alternative to face to face interaction?**

Yes	139
No	103
Total	242

**Why do you use emoticons:-**

Reason	Number of respondents
Speedy exchanges	71
Personal space	29
Feel uncomfortable to express in words	50
Avoid long conversations	85
To save oneself from embarrassment	7
Total	242

Respondents feel the need to use emoticons for speedy exchanges and to save time avoiding long conversations. It provides them with personal space for communication. Respondents feel that certain emotions are difficult to communicate verbally as they cause discomfort such as offering condolences or rejecting something/someone which is more uncomfortable to express in words. At such times words create a crippling anxiety that can be replaced by emoticons. Youngsters chose to talk through networking site because of their emotional invisibility, their fear of people seeing and judging them, they prefer using the electronic means to communicate. This means that reality has been taken over by social media which has detrimental effect on the youngsters. They create different online images for different portals thus getting disconnected with their own identity.

**Do you think emoticons are replacing human emotions?**

Yes	76
No	160
Can't say	106
Total	242

New media has brought about sea changes in communication at intra personal and interpersonal level. Emotions like love, friendship, family bonding, intimacy and language and are finding various platforms and forms of expression. Approximately 49% of the respondents felt that smileys are replacing human emotions but since they live in a techno savvy environment it is not only irresistible to be a part of the network but also necessary if one has to build networks, however they did not rule out that there are dangers associated with excessive use of emoticons.

Though respondents expressed positively to the use of emoticons they also expressed anxiety in its use. As a poor substitute for face to face communication it is turning today's generation into socially awkward creatures. The lack of verbal



communication makes people less expressive and may cause behavioural problems in the future making the real world seem unrealistic. Use of emoticons can also lead to misunderstanding and miscommunication leading to wrong interpretations.

### Identity and social media

Focused group discussions with the respondents revealed that social media plays an important role in the way identity is created. The virtual avatar determined who they are at that moment. Identity can be defined as a construct that includes the way we think about ourselves and our role in larger social environments and is enacted through social interactions with others and our relationships with them. Interaction online through social network sites, blogs, chat rooms, identity processes are complicated because many identities are masked and can be misrepresented. Individuals can adopt multiple online images. In these and other online contexts, identity is essentially typed into being (Sunden 2003).

Social media allows one to mask their real self identities and power to create someone who does not mirror who they are in reality. Dobson (2002) suggests that self-identity is a 'global understanding someone has of themselves (and) is composed of relatively permanent self-assessments.' Popularity of online networks has created an avatar or second self with people floating multiple identities. Having an online 'self' or avatar enables people's identities to be 'entirely generated by what can be typed or posted in images and text.' (Jones & Holmes 2011). Goffman's analysis of social behavior and interaction may be useful for understanding digital phenomena. The symbolic interactionism perspective focuses attention on pattern of communication suggesting that social interactions create individuals and society. Social interaction is mediated by symbols such as language that enables individuals to interpret each other's meaning and actions. Digital space is an area where identities can be made and remade. We reconstruct our identities and this reconstruction is our cultural work in progress (Turkle 1995).

Goffman's work on presentation and self in everyday life mentions about the front stage and back stage. Front stage is similar to an actor performing on stage in front of the audience, whereas back stage refers to the place where the individual relaxes stepping out of character and representing the real self. In everyday situations we enact performances trying to impress the audience. This aspect of impression management is not deceptive or manipulative, but is a natural aspect of societal relationships that help in smooth interactions in everyday life.

The depth and richness of interaction that Goffman mentioned may not be apparent in digital interaction but his Dramaturgical approach can be applied here as we create multiple identities and play various performances on different platforms and spaces on the web. Using his analogy of theatre we present ourselves on the web engaging in impression management online. Electronic interaction presents many expressive resources that establishes and maintains multiple identities.

Social media offer new opportunities for sharing self-presentational content, or "branding" oneself online. One such form is through micro-celebrity, defined as "the commitment

to deploying and maintaining one's online identity as if it were a branded good, with the expectation that others do the same" (Senft 2012) or "an emerging online practice that involves creating a persona, sharing personal information about oneself with others, performing intimate connections to create the illusion of friendship or closeness, acknowledging an audience and viewing them as fans, and using strategic reveal of information to increase or maintain this audience" (Marwick 2010).

### Conclusion

Researches point out to the fact that too much use of internet to seek information leads to decrease in creativity, concentration span and originality of thought. Social media interaction is making people lose touch with reality. Obsession of update in virtual world is leading to no communication in real world. Hooked on to the media they hardly get time to interact with near and dear ones present in the physical surroundings. In a study conducted in US it was found that 10-11 years old spent about 5 hours a day on their smart phones barely interacting with anyone around that lead to their stunted growth. It is important to remember that humans are social beings and important skills are required in order to understand the real world that the virtual world is unable to provide.

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