

Uses and gratifications of selected social network services: Study of Lahore youth

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Abstract

The Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have drastically transformed the contemporary societies. Social Networking Services (SNS) have overcome time and space distance and increased opportunities of individuals' interactions. This study explores the impact of on students' behavior in Lahore. Utilized survey design where a self-administered questionnaire is the instrument to find out the factors of these sites that had impact on respondents. Through purposive sampling 206 students are selected from two universities of Lahore. Data is analyzed in the backdrop of uses and gratifications theory to determine 'most popular social networking site', 'time consumed on these sites', 'instrumental use or active use' and 'ritualized use or passive use'. The descriptive statistics including percentage and mean is applied. The mean for ritualized or passive use of four items is 84% whereas for instrumental it is only 31%. The other significant statistics related to items include 63% use of Facebook, 61% use of the SNSs for more than two hours, 11% use for serious political debate and 94% use for making fun of political personalities, 91% use for sharing and liking the celebrity photos. This study also highlights future considerations for research in this domain.

Key Words: *Uses and gratifications; Social Networking Sites (SNSs), Instrumental media; Ritualized use of media.*

Introduction

The emergence of new technologies over the past few decades has multiplied chances for audience activity. Audience can now pick and choose, and have power to mould the communication content. In an era of convergence, the paradigm of technology has shifted manifold. The audience is becoming active towards using media and setting

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priorities and participating as citizen journalists which has opened new horizons for researchers to explore and measure the pros and cons of audience participation.

More than half a billion individuals are using SNS today, which has the potential to disclose personally identifiable information such as names, date of birth, email address, cell numbers, home contact numbers on their profiles where some users also relate their political and religious outlooks (Arshad, 2010). Majority of SNS users is youth (Bode, Vraga, Borah & Shah, 2013) who can use SNS to construct a public or semi-public profile within an encircled system; articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection; scrutinize and go over their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Boyd and Ellison, 2007b, p.2).

The greater media involvement has been linked to media orientation towards using media channels (Heran 1989, Perse 1998 & Rubin 1994) where uses and gratifications literature on audience activity identified two saturated media orientations involved intentionally and selectively using media for goal-directed motives such as information seeking, behavior guidance, or arousal and by contrast a ritualized orientation involved using media primarily for diversionary motives such as use that occurred out of habit or for passing time (Metzger & Falanagin, 1998: p339). Ferguson & Perse (2000) argued entertainment as a motive for web use which serves as a source of ritualized distraction while Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) found a more active orientation towards the internet (as cited in Metzger & Flanagan, 1998: p.340).

The SNS are used by the students for socialization in the mediated environment, giving them opportunities of sharing their daily learning experiences and consecrating on a number of guises

(Liccardi et al, 2007). These endow with effortlessness of tie, utility and sharing. An individual can post news, informative matter, videos and images where these features mesmerize students for communication (Cain, 2009).

Boyd and Ellison (2007a) maintain that in the late 1990s SNS born with Web 2.0, brought applications of blogging, posting with the site 'six degree', with the E-messaging facility. A significant majority of popular SNSs today according to Arshad (2010) were introduced after 2003 like Facebook, Twitter, Orkut, MySpace, Hi5, Flickr (p.16) but in September 2005 it allotted, professionals of corporate sectors and higher study students and later in 2006 allowed all and sundry (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Online Social Networking Sites (OSNSs) or can be referred as Social Network Services or Web-based Social Networks are the terms used interchangeably (Aloufi, 2012, p. 2). These sites are the digital format for social networks which allow users to create profiles and share information, experiences, and media with a list of users like family members, friends, colleagues (Aloufi, 2012:1). According to Aloufi (2012) most of these sites have similar functionalities such as private messaging, commenting on a friend's profile, uploading photos or videos, and discussion groups (p.1).

The Social Network Services as categorized by Thelwall (2009) for three objectives: First '*socializing*' where all activities center on social communication between members like on Facebook, Myspace, Hi5 and Cyworld; second '*networking*' means the activities center on non-social communication like in LinkedIn for business links and third '*social navigation*', browsing takes place to get information like YouTube,

CiteUlike and dig (pp. 19-73).

The SNS have considerable influence to gratify an unfathomable necessity that is the desire to explore and chitchat (Donath, 2007 & Tufekci, 2008). Agarwal and Mital(2009) identified three aspects: first the '*widening of perspective*' like understanding business environment and career planning; second the '*sharing of opinions*' like seeking help from people, making plans with friends and contacts and third '*personal socialization*' like staying in touch with friends, family or strangers or managing new friends. The motivations of students to go abroad for job and higher education can be addressed through SNS which can help them to materialize their dream as a high percentage of SNS users belong to the developed nations like U.S. Australia, England and Germany. Li and Bernoff (2008) say that a variety of businesses in order to flourish launch various SNSs applications, incorporating them into corporatization to boost marketing and organizational gain.

The presuppositions of the researchers, that the university students in Pakistan do not use Social Network Services for useful purposes but for useless activities. The escalation rate of Internet consumers is second highest in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) where Pakistan's increase velocity 16.8%, as compared to 28.3% in Maldives,13.6% in Bhutan, 12.1% in Sri Lanka and 7.3 % in India (as cited in Merchant, 2014).

In an article in Daily Times, a survey revealed that there were 30 million Internet users in Pakistan and SNSs use increased by 50% in 2013 since last survey in 2011, fly-by-night 8 million monthly users is last couple of weeks (as cited in Saleem, Malik, Ali &Hanan, n.d). So given the altering drift with increased Pakistani youth using SNSs, it is imperative to explore how much this excessive use is influencing the

behavior pattern of educated youth. The study examines the instrumental and ritualized use of SNS like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn among youth of Lahore. The youth is using these online SNS on mobile phones because these services are cheaper than mobile phone messages and calls and university students are virtually privileged to have an access to internet at university, at home or on cell phone/smart phone.

The study explores the extent to which Facebook is more popular than Twitter and LinkedIn among students in Lahore. Usage patterns of SNS are also explored to determine the instrumental use or ritualized use of SNS in addition to the time consumed on SNSs.

Literature Review

The Social Networking Sites can be used/gratified for various objectives/motives by all age groups like educational, social and political. They may lead to social isolation of children and parents, can enhance self efficacy of students and can give opportunity for political participation. The social and psychological gratifications are classified into five majors by Katz, Gurevitch and Has (1973) after listing thirty five needs from literature of the social and psychological functions of the mass media which are: social integrative, personal integrative, integrative, affective and cognitive (as cited in Sheikh, Dhaha, Igale, 2013).

Uses and Gratifications (U&G) perspective to investigate the undergraduate students' use of Facebook and its gratifications obtained is adopted by Foregger (2008) and the US students demonstrated various motives like passing time, sexual attraction, utility and upkeep, connection, channel use, networking, social comparison, accumulation and to establish old ties.

Social Impact

Saleem, Malik, Ali and Hanan (n.d) researched whether too much use of Social Network Services creates isolation amongst the youth from their strong relationships like peers and family by enhancing their circle with strangers. They conducted the investigation with a sample of 306 Pakistani youth and concluded the strong correlation between time spent on SNSs and isolation and the heavier users of SNSs had a tendency to be more isolated. SNS was used more for interaction with strong ties rather than weak ties (p.41).

Educational

Ellison, Steinfield & Lamp (2007) found that students used SNS roughly 30 minutes per day. Balsamo asserted that SNSs have the potential to diminish social segregation and amplify student's self-efficacy.

For Political Participation

The researchers had considered the motivations of users consuming time on SNS from a U&G purpose like satisfying social interaction, entertainment and information needs and few had thought the political implications (Papacharissi& Rubin, 2000; Ferguson &Perse, 2000 as cited in Bode et al, 2013).

Neuman (1991) argued that instrumental use of new media may direct to a boost in civic participation because the diversity and abundance of information available via new ICTs could invigorate the audience and even if only a few people are to take advantage of the vast information resources available through the new media, the consequences of this in terms of political engagement would be great (as cited in Metzger and Flanagin, 1998: p.349). The relationship between students' motives and civic and political participation where as informational uses are more correlated to civic and political action as

to recreational users are found (Park, Kee & Valenzuela, 2009).

According to Shah, et al (2007) the communication mediation model suggests that media consumption suggests a variety of uses like online news consumption, television watching, newspaper or magazine reading supported a few style of communication which leads to increase in political participation. SNS also facilitates anti-war political activism like during the 2003 Iraq war, views of internet users differed from the mainstream media (Hwand et al as cited in Bode et al., 2013).

The Uses and Gratifications is one of the most cited communication theories for analyzing new media technologies (Ebersole, 2000). The theory is mainly concerned to identify how people use media to gratify their needs so the audience is considered proactive. Individuals use media for what they want to read and see where a variety of media compete to satisfy each individual's needs. According to Severin & Tankard (2001) U&G approach focuses on the goal of the receiver and not the goal of communicator.

U&G approach according to Katz, Blummer and Gurevitch (1974) dates back to the empirical studies on mass media research in 1940s including Lasersfeld-Stanton anthologies of 1942, 1944 and 1949 that focused on quizzes, soap operas, radio music, children and comics and functioning of newspaper reading. The concept of Uses and Gratifications appeared in an article written by Katz in 1959 in rejoinder to Berelson who thought that communication research seemed to be dead but Kats said that filed could survive if the interest converted from persuasion-oriented to people need-oriented. The study applies U&G in the same perspective.

The study is an exploratory in nature as it is used when the researcher has less knowledge about the subject and wants to explore the things, whereas descriptive research uses highly statistical tests to validate the hypotheses. Survey methods utilized to explore the research questions. The self-administered questionnaire is employed as a research instrument for the collection of data. The population of the study fall in the age group of 22-30 in two universities of Lahore districts namely University of the Punjab and Minhaj University. Primarily, a pretest of the questionnaire is administered to a sample of 19 students to explore the reliability and validity. After making the required changes as a result of the pre-testing, a questionnaire is constructed having 11 with 10 dichotomous questions.

Using purposive sampling procedure the questionnaire is distributed amongst 206 respondents who are University students and can access SNS while preparing their assignments at home or in libraries as there is no restriction on using SNS. In a focus group conducted at Minhaj University Lahore with a strength of 15 students, it is found that majority of users preferred using SNSs and especially Facebook in particular for an average of two hours a day. This scale is also established to enhance the response rate from the respondents, as it is observed that students without watching responses ticked the options in the Likert scale, so the Likert scale is not preferred. The activity is done during class hours after lecture and responses are penned down.

Respondents are asked about four items including entertainment or kill time; discussion about entertaining program; making fun of political personalities and posting famous celebrity

photos and these four variables collectively constituted the ritualized gratifications from selected social networking sites or in short the passive use. The item talking about political satire shows is to see the percentage of active students who are coming from offline media of television to participate on online social networking sites.

The categories of instrumental and ritualized use are mutually exclusive as they fall into the major category of uses and gratifications. The four variables considered are: the most popular social networking site, time consumed, instrumental use; and ritualized use. Where the latter two's percentages and mean were compared for analysis using percentage and mean.

Most popular social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and Linked in are studied in this research. Similarly, the respondents are asked about the time duration they consumed on SNSs. Descriptive statistics is applied for analyzing data. The scale of yes/no questions is used to measure responses. Whereas, for instrumental and ritualized use of SNS, the mean of four items is calculated to explore the active or passive usage.

Results

Table 1: Use of Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn among students in Lahore.

Name of SNS	Percentage(%)
Facebook	63%
Twitter	24%
LinkedIn	9%
Other	4%

The variable considered here is 'the most popular online social networking site.' Among two hundred and six students, 63% were found to use Facebook, 24% used Twitter, 9% used LinkedIn and 4% other online social networking sites.

Table 2: Time consumed on Social Networking Sites

Time Consumption	Percentage (%)
Less than two hours	38%
More than two hours	62%

*Among 206 students 38% happened to use the online social networking sites for less than two hours and 62% happened to use them for more than two hours.

Table 3: Use of Social Networking Sites for instrumental purposes

Purpose	Percentage%
1. Information/education	56%
2. Serious political debate	11%
3. Raising voice for vulnerable or Charity	26%
4. Talking about Political Satire Shows	29%

*Among 206 respondents, 56% used online social networking

sites for information/education, 11% only considered them for serious political debate, 26% used them for raising voice for vulnerable or for charity and 29% came from offline news media to discuss political issues.

Table 4: Use of Social Networking Sites for ritualized purposes

Purpose	Percentage%
1. Entertainment/Kill Time	73%
2. Discussion about entertaining Content	79%
3. Making fun of political personalities	94%
4. Posting famous celebrity photos	91%

*Among 206 students 73 % also used social networking sites for entertainment/killing time, 79% used them for discussion about entertaining content like posting, liking, sharing, 94% used it for making fun of political personalities or non-serious talking, whereas 91% used it for posting photos of famous celebrity photos.

Discussion and Analysis

Social Network Services are growing in popularity. All respondents of happened to use SNS. The study found that Facebook is the most popular SNS with the penetration of 63% and agreed with the research of Singh & Kumar (2013). The similar findings are suggested in Malaysia among Somalian students (Ruslan & Dhaha, 2012). Facebook has become a huge platform and its potential for political/civic participation and engagement is undeniable because of its popularity among youth and university students (Valentine, 2011, Abdullah, Said

& Ibrahim, 2011). Facebook has interconnected continents and has formed global citizenship where skepticism can be eradicated if used wisely and this wisdom can be aided by the communication scholars' community, teachers and media.

Investigation about the time being consumed for SNS revealed that only 38% respondents consumed less than two hours for using SNSs and high percentage (62%) used them for more than two hours which contradicts Ellison, Steinfield and Lamp (2007) who suggest that the students use SNSs approximately 30 minutes throughout the day as part of their daily routine. Few studies are seen with longitudinal design to study the habits of using SNS. The contradiction between this study and the previous study leads to social scientists to design longitudinal studies to compare the results at different points in time and among the same respondents. This also requires qualitative studies to see the impact of these technologies in individualist and collective cultures.

Third and fourth factors being considered are for the quality of time spent on these SNS that is split into instrumental and ritualized use. Technologies can control impulses, and users can use these technologies without noticing that technologies are using them because of the unknown requests, side bar advertising on pages, liking, posting, sharing and numerous notifications. Among 206 respondents, 56% used SNSs for information/education, 11% only considered them for serious political debate, 26% used them for raising voice for vulnerable or for charity and 29% came from offline news media to discuss political issues (instrumental use). 73 % used SNSs for entertainment/killing time, 79% used them for discussion about entertaining content like posting, liking, sharing, 94% used it for making fun of political personalities or non-serious talking, whereas

91% used it for posting photos of famous celebrities (ritualized use). It is found that 56% used SNS for seeking information and education which agreed with Greenhow and Robelia (2009), Madge et al (2009) and Selwyn (2009) point of view that SNSs best served educational goal and objectives by connecting students through such informal methods as they allowed students through the process of collaborative sense making. They also agreed with Liccardiey al (2007) who reviewed that the students were socially connected with each other for sharing their daily learning experiences and do conversation on a variety of topics. The study revealed that only 11% used SNS for serious political debate. This is an issue because the students who have access to the technology are the privileged ones and have access to them at home, in corridors, at canteens and libraries. This easy access should be utilized to the maximization of benefits. The 26% of respondents used it for charity and raising voice for vulnerable, which is good sign that students feeling the responsibility and want to do something for themselves without involving in politics. This suggests that the politics of emotions and the aggressive environment for politics is leading the students to stay away from politics. The 29% of respondents talked about the political satire shows broadcasted on cable and satellite television channels of Pakistan. This is healthy as students are coming from the traditional media to new media. It also indicates that traditional media are agenda setters for new media users so the agenda setting theory is very much alive. It is explored that 73% of the respondents used SNS for killing time and this finding agreed with Putnam(2000) that time spent on SNSs could displace the formation of social capital and discourage youth from participation.

The study suggests that the 79% of respondents used SNSs for discussing entertaining content which is in agreement with Kumar and

Kumar (2013) who maintains that the main purpose of using SNSs is entertainment by 92.66%. It is also explored that the 94% used SNS for making fun of the political figures and 91% used for sharing and liking the photos of their favorite celebrities. The mean for ritualized use is 84% which is encouraging that 31% used for instrumental purposes but the university youth is an educated sphere and this percentage is less. It is also observed that the educated youth in Lahore is not politically active on social networking sites and 11% used it for serious political debate as compared to the 94% which used it for making fun of political figures. Civic engagement is also discouraging which is only 26%. However the mean for four variables investigated under the instrumental category is 31% which is less as compared to the mean of ritualized use. Shah et al (2005) argued that online media usage complements traditional media in influencing political discussions and expression and these variables in turn increase behavioral outcomes such as civic participation. However the findings of this study do not endorse Shah's finding as it is noted that the satellite cable channels are popular among youth and lead them to talk about the political satire shows (29%) and celebrities (91%) which suggests their inclination towards entertaining media. The 73% used it for killing time so they are becoming addict.

The study chalks out that the inclination of students towards entertaining use of SNS and time spent for this purpose is alarming and controlling their impulses for using SNS hence making them addict. Serious political participation is lacking. These may affect their studies. This passive use of social networking should be checked by arranging workshops, lectures, seminars and conferences at educational institutes in Lahore for better instrumental use of SNSs. The print and

electronic media should also write features, columns, editorials and broadcast programs during prime time hours on private and government channels to give awareness about the effective use of Information and Communication Technologies.

U.S congress proposed legislation to ban SNS in libraries and for students (Boyd & Ellison, 2007) but this is not the right option and the vitality of ICTs can make a real difference for achieving better grades and collaborative research because SNSs are becoming the interest areas of libraries, documentation centers for implementing new services in libraries and informing their clientele in short time period (Kumar and Kumar, 2013).

Facebook allows the students in the past at the campus to network with each other (Facebook, 2012) as the notion behind establishing it was to share and connect with people with more comfortable ways of controlling over the content they share (Zuckerberg, 2014). This SNS has become the most popular among college students in US. (Foregger, 2008) therefore, the need of the hour is to throw light on the vital potential of this utility and facility in Pakistan.

The political usage of SNS should encourage students for their serious contribution in politics as research has already suggested that both online and offline forms of communication mattered for encouraging participation (Bode, Vraga, borah & Shah, 2013).

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