A Mirror On Your Desktop - Facebook And Exhibitionism

[1]Anusuah.R & Dr. Balasubramaniya Raja[2]

[1]Research scholar, Department of Communication, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli.
[2]Associate Professor, Department of Communication, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli.

Abstract

The recent statistics from Facebook says that it has 1 billion monthly active users. Facebook users find it quite user friendly when compared with other social networking sites. It is very hard to find a college student who doesn't have a Facebook or a Twitter account. They keep in touch with their friends, express or share what they have in mind through these social networking sites. Photographs and text updates are the major components of Facebook updated by most of the users. This study focuses on how the frequent usage of Facebook induces the users to follow the so called "virtual pop culture" i.e. mobility and exhibitionism. At present the popular culture among Facebook users is to get more likes and comments, the excessive number of likes brings them an opportunity to feel as one of the popular personality.

Using in-depth interviews method the data were collected from college students in Tirunelveli who change their profile picture often of Facebook (N=20). The reasons for frequent change of profile pictures and updating personal pictures in public space were discussed in this paper.

Introduction

Everyone has a great feel of being appreciated, envied and being popular. The practice of seeking attention by projecting the virtues of the self came in vogue, actually, with the advent of social networking sites; and it gained incredible popularity in no time. Facebook provides everyone with golden opportunity of being celebrities among their friends (both known and unknown) circles ranging from hundreds to thousands. It is at this point that how one projects oneself became a matter of too much relevance. In precise, Facebook started to work as medicine to umpteen's who desperately wanted to make themselves known to the world without much ado.

Social networking involves use of an online platform or website that enables people to communicate, usually for a social purpose, through a variety of services, most of which are web-based and offer opportunities for people to interact over the internet, e.g. via e-mail and 'instant messaging'. As this is a relatively new phenomenon and there is no common international regulatory body, it is difficult to find an official or universally agreed definition. Social networking sites are defined as web-based services that allow individuals to: Construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, Articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and View and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site. (Rajat Raizada, et al 2009).

The SNS activity started as an hobby for some computer literate people and now it has become a social norm and a half way of life for people from all over the world (Boyd, 2007). Besides establishing important social relationships, social networking members can share their interests with other likeminded members by joining groups and forums (Neelamalar, 2009)

Facebook

Facebook and other social networking tools are increasingly the object of scholarly research. Scholars in many fields have begun to study the impact of social-networking sites, investigating how such sites may play into issues of identity, privacy, social capital, youth culture and education.

Facebook is one of the most popular websites in the world with over 600 million users (Ahmad, 2011). Those who use Facebook enjoy many benefits. According Facebook user statistics, 1.15 billion active users were registered at the end of march 2013. Facebook was founded in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg with his college roommates and fellow Harvard University students Eduardo Saverin, Andrew McCollum, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughesa.

It is particularly popular among students (Hargittai, 2008; Jones &Fox, 2009). Some college students use Facebook to seek and receive social support when they feel upset (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009; Wright, Craig, Cunningham, & Igiel, 2007). Toma and Hancock's (2011) recent experiments found when individuals are feeling distressed, they turn to Facebook to feel better. It supports various features that enhance communications, allows individual to share personal information, photographs and videos, send messages to friends, join groups of friends/causes, among others (Vimala Balakrishnan 2013).

Williams et al (2008) in a review of online social networking profiles by adolescents states that Social networking profiles involve individuals creating and maintaining personal Internet sites allowing authors and other users to post content, thus creating a personal network, finding old and new friends. Apart from finding old friends and creating new network, the most important uses of Facebook tended to be related to the 'social searching' and surveillance functions (Adam.N, 2008).

Boyd (2007) says gender appears to influence participation in social network sites. Younger boys are more likely to participate than younger girls (46% vs. 44%) but older girls are far more likely to participate than older boys (70% vs. 57%). The older boys are twice as likely to use the sites to flirt and slightly more likely to use the sites to meet new

people than girls of their age. Older girls are far more likely to use these sites to communicate with friends they see in person than younger people or boys of their age.

Larsen (2009), based on the empirical data, says that both genders seek the acknowledgement they get from having their looks commented on, but the girls are more preoccupied with what kind of comments they get and whom they come from. In general, it is very important that the comments come from friends and people they know, rather than strangers. This indicates that photo comments are not just about having ones outer looks valued and acknowledged (identity construction), but also about practicing and maintaining friendships.

Exhibitionism and Facebook

Exhibitionism was first described as a disorder in a scientific journal in 1877 by a French physician and psychiatrist Charles Lasègue. He dealt exhibitionism with sexual gratification such as exposing body in a public place. And later it was also described as the act of deliberately behaving to seek attention. Exhibitionism, in adherence to the lately derived meaning, can be seen at its best on Facebook. People update their photographs and comments every second; their happiness is incomplete until they update it on Facebook; they cannot convince themselves that they are feeling low until they share their tragedy on Facebook, their achievements are not achievements until they receive some "likes"; their journeys are not journeys until they update their current location in their profiles.

Privacy has become the most concerned factor in social networking sites. It seems as though every facet of one's life can be documented online, preserved for Internet eternity in any media form or another (Marina Kurokawa).

The most active users were found to be young, female and single. They spend more time than other users updating their status, and use the photos they post to shape the impressions that they want others to see them (Susan, 2013). They want me to know what they're eating, wearing, feeling and thinking in each moment. They are actually exhibitionists. So while there is a little voyeurism, there is a lot of exhibitionism on Facebook. (Shane Hipps, 2010).

Goffman believed that all participants in social interactions engage in certain practices to avoid being embarrassed or embarrassing others. This led to Goffman's dramaturgical analysis. He saw a connection between the kinds of acts that people put on in their daily life and theatrical performances.

Calvert (2000) argues that Facebook cultivate mediated voyeurism "The consumption of revealing images of and information about others' apparently real and unguarded lives, often yet not always for purposes of entertainment, but frequently at the expense of privacy and discourse, through the means of mass media and Internet"

Method
Sample

The methodology espoused in this study was Qualitative. In depth interview method was used to collect the data**.** After a periodical monitoring for four weeks, the samples (N=20) were carefully scrutinized and selected on the basis of frequent usage (every day access) of Facebook, updating more than one status update per day includes pictures and text updates, recurrent change of profile picture (more than two photos in a week). All the samples were frequent users of Facebook. The sample constitutes of equal proportion of male and female. Age

Procedure

The samples were interviewed through the messenger/chat on Facebook. They were asked 15-20 questions regarding usage frequency, updating text status updates and photo updates and profile pictures.

Results and Discussions

Popularity is one of the social phenomena that every human being craves for. It's a general notion that to be a popular personality on Facebook one must have at least 1000 friends, which was unanimously accepted by the respondents. When the number of friends in the list increases the status updates can reach many. The respondents answered that the number of followers can also make us popular. Facebook popularity is measured by the number of likes an individual is receiving for their updates.

The maximum number of friends a user can add is 5000. When they reach the limit, the new members who add them will come under followers list. These followers can also like comment and share the user's updates.

I have reached the limit of friends (5000) a few months before. Most of them are completely unknown and I hardly remember their names. (An 26 year old male respondent).

"I started to comment on the popular personalities' updates and I got much more likes and friend requests than earlier" (an 18 year old Facebook user). These personalities are the writers, politicians, political supporters, film actors, etc. Fame is associated with two circumstances that can lead to greater levels of self-focused attention, famous people are more likely to be aware that other people are aware of them, famous people are different from the majority of others who are less distinguished or less famous (Mark S,. 1997).

While categorizing the feelings of the respondents when they receive more likes or vice versa, all the respondents said they feel more enthusiastic while receiving many numbers of the likes. Respondents answered that they obviously feel angry and annoyed when their updates receive a lesser number of likes. When they get less no. of likes, they concentrate on the next update to get more no. of likes.

They said when they update social issues related posts they get increased number of likes, which persuades them to continue to post social issues. *"I show interest on social issues and I got very welcoming when I post positive updates supporting social issues like Koodankulam, Sri Lankan Tamils and Tamil Fishermen problems. I like to be called as an activist rather a student"* (a 20 year college student). There are so many social and political activists in Facebook trying to get attention from others. Apart from print and electronic media Facebook played a major role in the students'' hunger strike and protests against alleged war crimes in Sri Lanka. The respondents agreed that the users who actively participated and posted updates on protest got so much attention, which made them to show interest in the protest.

The content of the photographs posted by the respondents were their own pictures, pictures with their friends, family, Spouse/partner and their own edited/photoshop pictures. Photo editing software options were used to enrich their beauty, smartness, crop and add special effects.

"I use edited pictures because I do concern my privacy and also I must inform my friends that it's me" (a 23 year old female respondent and an IT employee). According to Susan K. Women on Facebook try to create a good impression through profile pictures, rather than posting their actual image they try doing some editing work and enhance their beauty.

There wasn't a great difference between the usage pattern of Facebook among male and female. 76% of the male respondents and 68% of the female respondents spent more than 3 hours on Facebook in a day. The content of the photographs posted by the respondents were their own pictures, pictures with their friends and the edited/Photoshop pictures.

The frequency of changing profile pictures is more than two pictures in a month. The respondents answered the frequent change of profile picture and photo updates makes them feel more connected with their friends. The majority of the respondents said they would rather upload profile pictures which expose their richness, beauty, smartness etc. (e.g. Eating dinner at a big restaurant).

"I don't have a car or even a two wheeler but I pose photos standing near a car or sports bike and upload to my Facebook. I admire myself in a sports bike. I don't think it's wrong to say I own a car which I doesn't own in reality" (a 23 year old respondent)

Rogers observed that many people experience a discrepancy between the real self and the ideal self. The real self contains a person's true or real qualities and the actual tendency. The ideal self is what they wish to be, look or act like. Here the self glorification emerges when the ideal self suppresses the real self. They show or pretend themselves as their idealized persons. Those idealized persons are the people in their Facebook friends list with too many numbers of friends, followers, likes and comments.

This study sought to test pattern of Facebook behaviors Facebook users are likely to be engaging in negative behaviors such as exhibitionism. The quality of the interpersonal interactions people experience on Facebook will be reduced, some research suggests that people are evaluated not just by their own profiles, but by the comments others make on their profiles (Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong, 2008).

Conclusion

Facebook was started to establish a relationship and find new friends. But it became a platform to exhibit their day to day happenings. People tend to spend more time than other users updating their status, and draw on the photos they post to shape the impressions in order to look more popular, cool, and attractive. The temperament of exhibitionism is growing enormously through Facebook and other Social networking sites. The individual gets a peer pressure to stabilize the status among their friends.

Sidney Jourard the Canadian Psychologist says self disclosure is a healthy component of a mentally normal person. Happiness or sorrow it gets better when it's shared, but the person whom we share things should be trustworthy. Less mentally healthy people tend to be unable or unwilling to engage in the kind of self-disclosure and sharing that would enable them to truly know themselves. It can also be seen as the person who share their details, to everyone has more possibilities to get into privacy issues as well as their life gets criticized publicly.

Online social networking tools may be of particular utility for individuals who otherwise have difficulties forming and maintaining both strong and weak ties, but it ends individuals with low psychological well-being due to few ties to offline friends and neighbors (Bargh & McKenna, 2004).

These technologies are designed for users to continually investigate digital traces left by the people they connect through social media. The users must be aware of what to share and with whom, as the addiction to Facebook can kill our valuable time and the things we exhibit may bring privacy issues.

If Facebook is to be a place where people go to repair their damaged ego (Toma & Hancock, 2011) and seek social support (Wright et al., 2007) it is vitally important to discover the potentially negative communication one might find on Facebook and the kinds of people likely to engage in them. Ideally, people will engage in pro-social Facebooking rather than anti-social Facebooking. Facebook users tend to value personal information more than practical information, however, indicating that Facebook is valued less for utilitarian purposes and more for social purposes (Bumgarner, 2007).

These social networking sites act as a one way mirror where the user is on the reflector side, happily admiring his/her image while anyone can be on the opposite side observing more than the user does.

Bibliography

Ahmad, A. (2011). Social network sites and its popularity. International Journal of Research and Reviews in Computer Science, 2, 522–526.

Bargh, J., & McKenna, K. (2004). The Internet and social life. Annual Review of Psychology, 55(1), 573–590.

Boyd, d. (2006). Friends, Friendsters, and Top 8: Writing Community into Being on Social Network Sites [Electronic Version]. First Monday, 11 (12). http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue11_12/boyd/

Brett A. Bumgarner (2007). You have been poked: Exploring the uses and gratifications of Facebook among emerging adults. First Monday, Volume 12 Number 11 - 5 November 2007 http://www.firstmonday.dk/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2026/1897

DANAH, Boyd Danah, Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Learning Youth, Identity, and Digital Media Volume (ed. David Buckingham). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press (2007), http://www.danah.org/papers/WhyYouthHeart.pdf.

Goffman, E. (1959) The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

LARSEN, Malene Charlotte Larsen, Girls are more preoccupied with photo comments than boys. April 29, 2009. http://malenel.wordpress.com/category/youth/

LENHART, Amanda Lenhart, Adults and social network websites, 2009. http://www.pewinternet.org/˜/media//Files/Reports/2009/PIP

Marwick, Alice E. (2012). The Public Domain: Surveillance in Everyday Life. Surveillance & Society 9(4): 378-393. http://www.surveillance-and-society.org | ISSN: 1477-7487

Munar, Ana María (2010). "Digital Exhibitionism: The Age of Exposure", Culture Unbound, Volume 2, 2010: 401–422

Park, N., Kee, K. F., & Valenzuela, S. (2009). *Being immersed in social networking environment: Facebook groups, uses and gratifications, and social outcomes*. Cyberpsychology & Behavior, 12, 729–733.

Toma, C. L., & Hancock, J. (2011). Affirming the self online: Motives and benefits of Facebook use. Boston, MA: Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association.

Walther, J. B., Van Der Heide, B., Kim, S. Y., Westerman, D., & Tong, S. T. (2008). *The role of friends' appearance and behavior on evaluations of individuals on Facebook: Are we known by the company we keep?* Human Communication Research, 34, 28–49.

Wilson, Kathryn and Fornasier, Stephanie and White, Katherine M. (2010). Psychological predictors of young adults': use of social networking sites. Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 13(2). pp. 173-177.

Wright, K. B., Craig, E. A., Cunningham, C. B., & Igiel, M. (2007). Emotional support and perceived stress among college students using Facebook.com: An exploration of the relationship between source perceptions and emotional support. Chicago, IL: Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association.