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SOCIAL MEDIA AND CHANGING COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

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Abstract: Given the pace we are encountering new media as a democratic means of communication, the prospect of NICTs being most indispensable part of our lives is not really far away. In this perspective, paper attempts to study the changing communication patterns of 21st century tech savvy generation. It has been argued that new media has brought sea changes in intrapersonal, interpersonal, group and mass communication processes and content. Once upon a time traditional media was setting agenda of public discourse is looking forward to new media for breaking news. In the absence of a proper content regulatory authority new media is diminishing the gate keeping function in media thus making it more participatory yet less authentic in terms of content. In the virtual world, youth is living a virtual life rather than virtuous life. The paper explores how new media is redefining social roles that are more vulnerable to dissolution as interpersonal communication is taking place on public platforms. In the crowd of hundreds and thousands of friends of social media, youths find themselves alienated in the real world. Author concludes that in the age of over communication a new kind of social order is being developed that is strengthening public and mass communication but weakening interpersonal communication.

Keywords: Social media, communication patterns, Vanity Fair, netizens, alienation

Introduction

What's app! Follow me on twitter! Check my status on facebook page! These are the buzz words of today's generation. In the age of Information and communication Technologies whosoever is unaware of these terms is considered illiterate or outdated. Once obsessed with capital intensive mass media technologies development planners as well as advertisers are finding new means and tools to reach out their tech savvy target audience. Educators are engrossed in new means to use the updated technology in their class rooms. In an age when there are one billion users inter connected through facebook this is one of the most powerful participatory medium of

communication. In this scenario whosoever is educated and is having means to use this simple technology can't ignore it.

Social media is emerging as a most vital tool of different kinds of communication which is equipped with the ability to share information, mould opinion, connecting individuals and communities and tool of active participation. Social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks (Ahlqvist, & Halonen, 2008). Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that are built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan, & Haenlein, 2010). Furthermore, social media is available on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content. It introduces substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities and individuals (Kietzmann, & Hermkens, 2011).

In India, the number of people actively using Social Media is about 66 million but it is growing faster with the availability of cheaper broadband connection and internet enabled handsets at very low prices. Social media is transforming the contours of social interaction. Emotions like love, friendship, family bonding, intimacy and language and are finding various platforms and forms of expression.

No other media has become so popular in such a short period of time as social media. Credit of this tremendous success goes to user friendly features of Social Media. According to Nielsen, internet users continue to spend more time with social media sites than any other type of site. At the same time, the total time spent on social media in the U.S. across PC and mobile devices increased by 37 percent to 121 billion minutes in July 2012 as compared to 88 billion minutes in July 2011(State of media report, 2012). It has been observed that Facebook is now the primary method for communication by college students in the U.S (Harris, 2008). According to Nielsen, global consumers spend more than six hours on social networking sites. "Social Media Revolution" produced by *Socialnomics* author Erik Qualman contains numerous statistics on social media including the fact that 93% of businesses use it for marketing and that if Facebook were a country it would be the third largest (Youtube 2011). Several colleges and universities such as Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Columbia and Stanford among others have even introduced classes on best social media practices, preparing students for potential careers as digital strategists.

Various functions performed by different techniques and tools used by media are social networking, web publishing, virtual reality, creating virtual relationships, Interpersonal and community interaction, sharing of text, sounds and AVs, Gaming etc. With the advent of Web 3.0 technology more features and sophisticated tools are being added.

Reasons of the growth of use of Social Media in India

No other technology has seen such an unprecedented growth, the telecommunication has seen. Now, the question arises, why the India, which is considered to be developing economy, is experiencing the tremendous growth in this sector? The reason lies in the following factors:

- 1. Booming economy The economy of India is the tenth-largest in the world by nominal GDP and the third-largest by purchasing power parity (PPP) (Wikipedia, 2013). The country is one of the G-20 major economies and a member of BRICS. On a per-capita-income basis, India ranked 141st by nominal GDP and 130th by GDP (PPP) in 2012, according to the IMF (Wikipedia, 2013). India is the 19th-largest exporter and the 10th-largest importer in the world. The economy slowed to around 5.0% for the 2012–13 fiscal year compared with 6.2% in the previous fiscal (Wikipedia, 2013). These facts support the fact that Indian middle and lower class is capable of spending on consumer goods more and more at present.
- 2. Rapid expansion in country's middle class With one of the fastest growing economies in the world, clocked at a growth rate of 8.3% in 2010, India is fast on its way to becoming a large and globally

important consumer economy. The Indian middle class was estimated to be 250 million people in 2007, by McKinsey & Company (Wikipedia, 2013). It will reach 600 million by 2030. According to Deutsche Research the estimates are nearly 300 million people for all Middle Class (Wikipedia, 2013). If current trends continue, Indian per capita purchasing power parity will significantly increase from 4.7 to 6.1 percent of the world share by 2015 (Wikipedia, 2013).

- 3. Inexpensive technology According to AC Nielson's *The Social Media Report 2012* assesses that, "More people are using smart phones and tablets to access social mediaWith more connectivity, consumers have more freedom to use social media wherever and whenever they want."
- 4. Telecom expansion Telephony introduced in India in 1882. The total number of telephones in the country stands at 960.9 million, while the overall tele-density has increased to 79.28% as of May 31, 2012 and the total numbers of mobile phone subscribers have reached 929.37 million as of May 2012 (Wikipedia, 2013). The mobile tele-density has increased to 76.68% in May 2012. In the wireless segment, 8.35 million subscribers were added in May 2012 (Wikipedia, 2013). The wire line segment subscriber base stood at 31.53 million(Wikipedia, 2013). Indian telecom operators added a staggering 227.27 million wireless subscribers in the 12 months between Mar 2010 and Mar 2011 (Wikipedia, 2013). According to Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) report, the number of active social media user base in India is 32.5 million (82% of active mobile internet base) (IAMAI, 2012).
- 5. Internet expansion The report, 'Internet in Rural India', prepared by IAMAI and the Indian Market Research Bureau, states rural India has 38 million claimed internet users and 31 million active internet users (Business Standard, 2013). Active users are those who access internet at least once a month, while claimed users are those who have used internet at least once in their lifetime.

Impact on various communication levels

When telegram was invented, the importance of pigeon-courier started undermining. The same way when television arrived in communication foray, radio went the back stage. History of communication demonstrates that whenever any new medium arrives on the communication stage it affects the communication patterns of society.

Intrapersonal communication

Social media has become an important tool of self expression and self presentation. Whatever we think important we are communicating it to others. Be it birthday party, marriage ceremony, outings, dinners and even shopping. This expression to build image in the eyes of other is leading to narcissism. We want to project as we are living the best life irrespective of reality we keep on posting the real, created or edited pictures of ourselves and surroundings. The desire of self gratification is leading to peer pressure. The desire of posting and checking comments after every moment is making youth addict towards the social media. The presence and affordability of smart phones is catalysing this phenomenon of addiction. When someone finds that others are so happy on 'face book' he/she finds his life miserable as the kind of happiness other are portraying is not possible in every body's life. The depiction of fake happiness reminds of 16th century 'vanity fair' of UK public life. This 'Vanity Fair' is leading to a life which is full of envy and jealous and at times fake pride as well.

Besides this, various researches support the fact that too much use of internet to seek the information leads to decrease in creativity, concentration span and originality of thought. Nicholas Carr's *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* "While internet improves our cognitive ability to skim and scan, it diminishes our intellectual capacity to concentrate and contemplate. Internet gradually makes us incapable of long form reading and long hours of intellectual focus."

Interpersonal communication

Social media was created for social interaction and it is serving its purpose fully. It has enabled the communication, faster, cheaper and anytime anywhere. This very feature which seems to be useful is becoming a problem in interpersonal communication. People are virtually connected all the time with updated status on social media sites. But due to over obsession of update in virtual world is leading to 'not communication' in real world. Most of the time netizens are so much engrossed in their virtual communication they hardly find time to talk to those near and dear one who are present in their physical surroundings. In the world of over-communication we are moving away from the real world and living a virtual world of fake identities and intimacies. Those who are not really using them due to lack of knowledge, access or disinterest find themselves alienated.

Not only it is affecting the quantity and quality of communication but it is also affecting the kind of language we are using in our informal and formal written communication. Like on Twitter one can post messages in limited number of characters, netizens have innovated a variety of acronyms. This is affecting the language of present generation in various ways. Students have started using these acronyms in their examination answer sheets and many of them have forgotten the actual words for those.

Group communication

Once upon a time there used to be hardly 15-20 friends of a person with whom he used to interact regularly, but with the development of social media the number of friends whose update one can have is running into hundreds. Something that was shared amongst friends in inner circle, the very information gets disclosed instantly. Earlier relationships were maintained in secrecy and break ups were having silent tone. With changing times people have started committing on facebook and that commitment is broken on facebook itself. Earlier these all were matter of embarrassment and people used to hide such instances. Now people announce them on face book with fanfare. Now the concept of Interpersonal communication is fading as people have created many groups on face book. Anything and everything is communicated amongst all the group members.

Public communication

Indian TV channels started election campaigns on TV recently. But Narender Modi became the first leader who effectively connected with its youth voters on Internet. He gave love chat on Google plus that attracted youth and middle class net users. Not only is he an active user of social networking sites he knows the capability of new media and how to use in its favour while moulding the opinion of masses.

Now when there is an interface between new and traditional media, politicians have started understanding the importance of being present on new media. All the major political parties and leaders have their facebook pages and they keep on posting their messages on Twitter. Arvind Kezriwal's entry on Indian political front is a pertinent example of the power of this media in political arena.

Mass communication

In comparison to the age of mass communication which is more than four centuries old social media is in infancy. Despite the fact, it is influencing traditional mass media in every aspect – programmed formats, content, treatment and language. Most of the big newspapers, TV channels and radio channels monitor the content of popular social networking sites Facebook and Twitter to get the latest update of happening around the world. The 24X7 update of the information on various news sites is giving immense competition to traditional media. Despite the rise in competition, new media and traditional media are shaking hands in reaching the masses and reinforcing the communication messages in the interest of target audience.

Earlier journalists were dependent on the discretion of editors for the space and time they were getting in newspapers and TV channels, now new media is giving them more space in terms of blogs. A few of them are leaving their jobs and are sticking to blogging where not only they are getting more readers and audience but they are earning advertising revenue sans interference of management.

Traditional media has always been accused of not giving space to its readers and audience but now anyone who knows how to use internet can give voice to its thoughts. Even the voice of marginalised sections like eunuchs, gays, lesbians etc are not only finding platforms of expression but also finding supporters on different websites.

Media has always been considered as watchdog of society. New media is acting as "watchdog of watchdogs" in the sense when something controversial does not find space in traditional media, someone from the general public highlights on social media sites or micro blogs and mass media has to cover the issue. The buzz created on social media sites sets the agenda for traditional media.

Traditional media has always suffered the wrath of higher authorities. In India there have been many landmark court cases that have change the history of freedom and speech and expression. Govt of various countries like India, China and Iran have faced criticism for controlling the social media yet the kind of freedom social media is enjoying mass media can never has such privilege that is still dependent on state for licensing and other facilities.

Audience research cell of the media used to collect data from opinion polls and surveys etc in 20th century, now mass media gets ready made latest data from social networking sites that can be instantly used and used from different perspectives.

The hard core readers of paper editions of newspapers used to say that in 21^{st} century people will stop subscribing newspapers as news is available free of cost on different sites. But the data has broken the myth as the number of titles of publications is increasing everywhere and their circulation figures are going north.

Future of Social media

Despite a billion users are registered on social networking sites yet as per its social media is still an infant. Once a popular networking site 'Orkut' it has lost its identity in virtual world. Same may happen to other sites as well. Facebook is considered more a social burden than a loved networking site by young users. A recent study by Pew research Centre on teen agers has found that facebook was losing its crucial demographic, which long fuelled to its success. According to *Huffington Post*, teens are increasingly abandoning facebook and turning to Instagram, Twitter, MySpace where they tend to have more privacy. Teens consider that site has become overrun by parents and leads to unnecessary 'social drama' (Hindustan Times, 2013).

With tremendous use of new media to seek information readers are prone to post unauthentic information on serious academic issues. It is very difficult for users to rely on the information. As teenagers use their maximum time on online communication readers are using online information for their studies and there is a big question mark on their understanding of critical issues.

British-American entrepreneur and author Andrew Keen criticizes social media in his book *The Cult of the Amateur*, writing, "Out of this anarchy, it suddenly became clear that what was governing the infinite monkeys is now putting away on the Internet was the law of digital Darwinism, the survival of the loudest and most opinionated. Under these rules, the only way to intellectually prevail is by infinite filibustering" (Keen, 2007).

Conclusion

A big source of information, education, communication and of course entertainment social media is going to be next big challenge for the different aspects of our social and personal lives. Social media is creating a new kind of social order it is strengthening social network but weakening inter-personal relations. User-generated content will lead to more plagiarism i.e. new challenge for IPR, a new form of addiction for younger generation (difficult to rehabilitate), an age of over communication (24 hrs messaging and chat) and alienation on the other hand (leading to psychological disorder). Degradation of ethics in various sectors may prove a cultural shock for the generation of 20th century. Mass media's dependency on new media may lead to new media's supremacy, leading to more representation and more participation in public sphere.

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