BLURRING THE LINE BETWEEN PERSONAL AND PUBLIC DOMAINS IN MEDIATED COMMUNICATION
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Abstract: *The paper delves into the intricacies of communication via social media platforms. The manner in which mediation on social media has come to influence norms of interpersonal communication is discussed in detail. How the relationships and their parameters have come to get transformed in the modern age of social media is explored. Moreover, the ethical concerns that problematize the domain of communication on social media are explicated in relation to interpersonal dynamics on social media. The paper also explores the issue of privacy that comes across to be a paradoxical thing on the platform of mediation. As such, the ethical parameters that govern interpersonal communication on the present day have come to be more complicated to the degree of not being comprehensible to the common people in general. Apart from this, the social ill of cyber-bullying is also explored in the course of the paper as it further complicates interpersonal dynamics leaving a lasting impression on the minds of people who are victimized. The ethics of communication thereby seem to have changed drastically in the age of social media and internet mediated communication.*

Introduction

In the age of technological advancement across the globe, the internet has opened up the greatest avenues of communication by doing away with the problems of geographical barriers and difference of communities. Now, the internet and social media have paved the way for ease of communication. Online dating has recently emerged as an immensely popular fad due to the fast-paced nature of life in twenty-first century America. Courtship and traditional means of finding a romantic partner such as within the workplace have been complicated by laws and shifting social and cultural mores. Online dating involves a person creating an online profile and initiating or waiting for another party to initiate contact vis-a-vis a service that advertises potential mates and their interests, appearance, education, and persona. Such internet and smart phone services are among the most frequently used, and they also represent one of the internet's largest revenue generators. Many observers view online dating versus real-world dating in a dyadic fashion, which is a reductive way of analyzing virtual consumption patterns.

It is important to examine and assess how meeting an individual and communicating online starkly differs from offline interaction in order to ascertain how the development of romantic relationships is has been blunted by the internet. Extant research and personal accounts reveal the overlapping processes that facilitate relationships from transitioning from the virtual world to the real world and how both virtual and offline environments interact in order to cultivate meaningful romantic attachments. Even though the internet retains a transformative function that has caused a paradigm shift in courtship and dating rituals and adapted to modern contingencies, it devalues traditional sexual morals by imbibing economic value in relationships. It also needs to be understood that communication on social media has come to complicate the notion of privacy among the users. A close introspection of the matter would surely make one realize the various things related to the virtual domain of communication. Privacy can very well be explicated to be a paradoxical concept when it comes to the context of social media platforms. While thousands of people from across the globe use social media platforms for connecting with others, there are certain issues like cyber-bullying that need to be taken into consideration as well. Indeed, cyber-bullying is one of the burning issues that need to be addressed as it has the potential to impact many people negatively. However, it needs to be reckoned that one of the most important factors that seem to get problematized in the complexities of mediated communication is the governing ethics in

interpersonal communication. One needs to take into consideration how the individual is affected by the intricacies related to using social media since the lack of perception about the ethical standards of communication on the mediating platform comes to affect key factors of interpersonal communication on such websites.

Mediated Communication for Interpersonal Ties

It needs to be reckoned that the new generation is treadingtoward some seriously uncharted territory, as while they hesitant to label their relationships, theygo on to participate in certain deviations of relationships. Indeed, the consumption of dating websites such as Tinder, Ok Cupid!, Plenty of Fish, and Match.com has called into question the very nature of dating culture in the context of modernity. While there are a handful of drawbacks in online dating due to the superficial nature of self-marketing for love, advocates point to some benefits the virtual world of dating offers that traditional courtship does not. Consumerism specialists have looked for reasons why millions of people between the ages of sixteen and sixty four have in exponential numbers turned to internet dating sites rather than participating in traditional courtship rituals. Interestingly, however, there has been a dearth of information on why there has been such a proliferation of Internet dating sites, which represent a unique case of consumer behavior and marketing strategy. People who use dating sites are indeed both consumers as well as the commodity. However, there is no looking back indeed, as social media platforms have come to occupy the entire domain of communication in all the corners of the world.

While once it was believed that aiming to find interpersonal relationships on the social media platforms was simply a form of advertising oneself awkwardly due to social ineptitude, the practice is now much more common. Those who engage in online dating lack the physical presence and proximity, physical appearance, and social context that are present. As a result, they contend that the internet and dating applications facilitate romantic compatibility because of the lack of physical presence and attraction at the outset. Interacting online rather in person forces people to interact without the traditionally necessary components, which often cultivates uncertainty in both parties. Developing symbols and nonverbal cues thus helps build rapport as a substitute for the absence of body language and corporeality. Many individuals today, especially those in their late teens and early twenties, articulate suspicion towards online dating because it eschews traditional romance.

Nonetheless, although forging a non-verbal rapport with another individual prior to physical contact is beneficial, there is no denying that dating apps including Tinder are overtly superficial, as matches are formed by looks first, thereby pushing interests and personal achievements into the background. While online dating was once stigmatized as

self-marketing and a narcissistic enterprise one engaged in because they were socially inept, now dating has become one click away with someone who an individual finds physically attractive. Tinder is emblematic of the glib online dating culture that has emerged, and the mass appeal of such an application underscores how much laudable old-school romantic ideals have transformed in the modern day. As such, bachelors and bachelorettes in the modern-day convey old-school attitudes regarding the stigmatized nature of online dating due to the shallowness of matching up with someone a person have never met and can only judge based on appearances.

One has to understand the fact that to find success in online dating, one requires presenting him and her in a "desirable" manner which means that the person has to advertise and commoditize oneself. Profiles and how one explicates their description of themselves and their interests, personality, physical characteristics, and activities are critical. This stands in opposition to the shallowness and commodification involved in online dating and hooking up. In online dating, the profile itself is like a salesman making a pitch towards consumers who might be interested in purchasing a product. Dating sites thus mirror the rest of western consumer culture on the internet, which grants users instant satisfaction and pleasure. Dating site members emerge as goods or commodities that are self-marketing themselves in the hope of attracting and pleasing the consumer. Thus, this practice jeopardizes the traditional notion of relationships.

Beyond the shallowness of online dating, certain apps and websites facilitate the ability of an individual to reinvent themselves and lie to potential suitors, thereby conveying power dimensions latent in virtual dating culture. While online dating has emerged as a favored mechanism for the initiation of romantic relationships, media reports and scholarly research indicate that it is a ripe arena for diffuse deception both small and large. The popular MTV television show showcases how desperate some people are to become someone they are not due to insecurities and/or other underlying problems that compel them to make up new persona using fake information and fake photographs to win the affection of another person. The economic approach to dating is one of the less obvious vagaries that defines contemporary dating culture and extends beyond mere deception. Producing a show that imbues currency in the deception and lies within a relationship merely highlights how romance and love has become an economic enterprise, a fundamental notion that has been rendered a remnant of an ancient and pre-modern past. Moreover, this economic interpretation of the show further underscores the tenuous nature of "love" in relation to superficiality. Goldman questions how someone could love another person they had never met yet establish a deep emotional connection one minute and then immediately feel hatred towards that individual. This observation evinces how commoditized relationships have become in the modern day as a result of

the phenomenon of online dating and the deception and superficiality it foments when individuals seek to engineer a romantic connection with another.

Forging intimate and romantic relationships with others a fundamental human drive that has significant ramifications on one's well-being and overall satisfaction and happiness they feel. As a result, people have vested a great deal of their time and money in order to situate themselves in the best context or position for possible romantic encounters. Within the context of the last few years, online dating has emerged as the primary modicum through which the engineering of romantic encounters takes place. Extant research and personal testimony reveals that, despite the prevailing belief that advertisers spew regarding finding one's soul mate through online dating based on scientific research and the advice of relationship experts. Rather, online dating has become a business, which websites including e-Harmony and Match.com reveal. Exploiting and glib and superficial tastes combined with the platform for deception enable these businesses to thrive and to continue to commoditize romance and courtship. As such, while online dating has become increasingly popular and time-consuming, it represents a paradigm-shift in modern relationships and portends the demise of genuine intimacy of romantic courtship within the traditional sense. Mediated communication comes across to be one of the potential contenders for bringing people together- something that points to the immense influence of social media in the lives of people in the present era. However, one needs to introspect about the privacy concerns related to social media in this context, as huge amount of personal data is shared on the platform for the purpose of communication.

Issues Related to Privacy of Communication

While the users of social media might feel that they are given the options of customizing the privacy settings of the data that they share on the social networking platforms, in reality all the data that is shared on the platform becomes totally shared. The data that is stored (including personal data) on social media is, firstly, prone to privacy breach. There have been many instances in the past when the data shared on social networking sites have been hacked. As such, privacy breach is one of the main issues of the modern day technology that the world is witnessing. Users have to be very careful while using social networking sites and they need to stay away from potential threats to security that may be present in form of malware, malicious links, key-logger, and so on. Although the social networking websites claim to have a sophisticated security system, they are often breached. They have been many instances of security breach in leading social media websites like Orkut and Facebook. In most of the instances, the hacked accounts could not be recovered by the original users. This scenario can very well be described to be an instance of identity theft of the original user. The social media websites do come up with

newer security measures with time, but that has not been able to totally curb the negative impact of hacking and security breach on such platforms, while the common people have to pay the price of the occurrences.

It needs to be understood that in the virtual domain of communication, the private and the public spheres that are totally different in the physical domain of existence are completely transformed in practice. In the domain of social media and social networking websites, the private and the public space come to overlap one another to complicate the notion of privacy. While a user might feel that there are options on a social networking site to share selected data with certain groups of people, in reality the user is giving out personal or sensitive data on the public domain of communication. It needs to be understood that every social media website has its own database. Here all the data that is shared or put up by the user are stored. Now, one can well understand that every personal data that the social media profile of a person is updated with gets stored in the platform's database (Mainier & Louch, 2010).

This goes on to complicate the notion of autonomy of the individual in matters of privacy. The social media websites provide the wrong impression to the user that the data shared by him or her has optimum security with well-knit privacy measures. However, the information is getting public in the real sense of the word. It is highly imperative that people who use social networking websites for the purpose of communication come to realize that they need to be very careful while sharing any data on the social media platform. There might have been a huge debate on privacy and its importance in the physical domain of human existence, but in the virtual world, the entire notion of privacy gets changed. Now, having a social media profile has become quite a common matter in the present day. Very less number of people might give this matter a thorough thinking so as to realize the intricacies of the issues related to privacy on the medium of communication (Barnes, 2006).

Privacy can, thus, be taken to be a paradoxical thing in the realm of social media. While the user gets the feeling of empowerment in matters of utmost privacy, the real scenario is very different. This complication related to the notion of privacy on social media influences the identity and self of the person. Problems to privacy can lead to personal crisis that might take a toll on the individual. Issues of hacking and data breach can be cited as an example. Recently, the security of the photo-sharing application, Snapchat, was breached. Now, this is just one example of how things might go wrong in the virtual domain. Hence, it is needed on the part of the people to have awareness of the possible threats and complications of privacy that are existent on the social networking websites. Communication and its ways have seen a sea of change in the recent past with the virtual domain driving inter-personal interaction all over the world. The concept of privacy with

respect to the internet has to be transformed to make way for the understanding of the threats that the users become prone to when they use social networking websites. With the cyber laws being quite poorly developed in many countries of the world, the problem of privacy becomes all the more vital to be addressed with immediacy and utmost importance. Most of the people of the society are not even aware of the different types of cyber-crimes that ought to be reported to the authorities. As such, the situation becomes extremely complicated indeed. Moreover, the absence of any universally accepted cyber law that transcends the laws of a sovereign nation state by binding the entire human society together enhances the vulnerability of the victims, while the accountability of cross-border offenders gets seriously thwarted.

Cyber-bullying on Social Media

Apart from the issue of privacy, one should also take a note of the occurrence of cyber-bullying that is a serious cybercrime having the potential of harming the psyche and reputation of the victim. There needs to be heightened awareness about the importance of curbing instances of cyber-bullying so as to make the domain of social media a proper place for communication and socialization. It has to be reckoned that although many social media platforms have rules of not allowing non-adults use the platform for socialization, these rules are often undermined by the young minds. Young people are the ones who use internet the most in the present times, and they access social media platforms from various devices including their smartphones as well as computers, making them spend a bulk amount of their time on the virtual domain of existence. Thus, it would be correct to opine that social media has come to be a major part of the social lives of youngsters of the modern day society. However, just like any other social situation, a person can be vulnerable to bullying on social media platforms as well. Now, cyber-bullying is just like any other type of bullying, but is occurs on the internet (Breguet, 2007).

A person can be bullied on the social media platform by his or her classmates, acquaintances or even unknown users. There are various ways in which a person can be bullied on social media platforms. A victim might receive threatening messages, or the victim might also be tricked into revealing some embarrassing or personal information that would lead to blackmailing or sharing in public. Moreover, a person might be victimized with identity theft with someone else opening a profile by his or her name and doing things that are unwelcome. The victim might also be made fun of in the public domain of social media- something that can impact the social image of the victim to a large extent. As such, it would be right to opine that there are a number of ways of carrying out cyber-bullying on social media platforms that can prove to be very harmful

for the victims just like that are harmed and threated in case of face-to-face bullying in any social ambiance. (*ncpc.org*, n.d.)

The bullying carried out on the social media platforms show their effects in the physical domain of existence and personal lives of the victims. One of the primary results of cyber-bullying is the psychological trauma or depression that the victim succumbs to in course of time. A victim can suffer from low self-esteem, and he or she can even lose interest in studies, or even go onto depression. In extreme cases where the victim is in a very bad state of mind, he or she can even commit suicide. There have been several such cases where the victims could not cope with the bullying and finally killed themselves out of shame or mental agony (Brown, 2014). As such, it is not hard to understand how enormous effect social media and cyber-bullying can have in one's life in the present times where communication and socialization is largely based on the internet and social media platforms of various kinds.

No doubt, the females and the children are the ones most vulnerable to cyber-bullying in the age of communication over social media platforms. In fact, cyber-bullying is something that can occur all through the day, and make a person feel extremely harassed and lonely. Moreover, images and messages can be posted on social media anonymously or by using a pseudonym, while the posts can reach a very wide audience within a very small amount of time. Thus, tracing the source too becomes an issue at times. Apart from this problem, deleting the harassing messages or inappropriate images or texts can become extremely challenging after they have been posted on social media platforms. (Campbell, 2005). The fact that a victim is harassed, made fun of, or insulted on the social media platform in the presence of innumerable people adds to the woes of the victim, and makes him or her feel all the more vulnerable and helpless.

The victims mostly are unsure about whom to approach for help under such circumstances, and are left in depression in many instances. Moreover, it needs to be reckoned that cyber-bullying is a very complicated issue for the comprehension of adults who are not too familiar with the usage of the social media platforms in comparison to the young minds of the society (Kwan & Skoric, 2013). Hence, creating awareness among people regarding the matter becomes very much important in the present times as the omniscience of social media cannot be denied in any way. The parents have to be highly cautious for signs of depression and anxiety among children as cyber-bullying might very well be the triggering factor behind the mental state of the youngsters. There have been many cases where the young minds have succumbed to depression and threats. There have been instances where people have committed suicides being too much bothered by the bullying or threat they were subjected to on social media platforms. Often, elders fail to understand the emotional impact of cyber-bullying on the young

minds that are in their developmental phase. While many websites have the rule that non-adults cannot use the platform, in practice things are quite different with youngsters below the accepted age of adulthood crowding the social media platform for communication purposes.

For the purpose of eradicating the enormous threat posed by cyber-bullying and to ensure the safety and well-being of the young generation, the authorities of the countries around the globe should show extreme commitment. There is need for setting up of very strong cyber laws that can implement strict disciplinary action against the people involved in bullying someone. Moreover, since the entire world is connected via social media, there should be cooperation among nation states in cases of cross-border bullying. Apart from this, raising the awareness among the people of the society is another very important thing to achieve. It is only through proper knowledge about cyber-bullying and the ways to combat the same that this new social menace can be thwarted before it comes to harm the future generations. The social media platforms too need to have stringent regulations and monitoring systems to curb cyber-bullying of any sort, and thereby ensure a proper virtual environment for the users. Moreover, the nation states too have to take the responsibility of implementing the cyber laws with utmost efficiency so as to ensure the safety of the common people. Awareness campaigns regarding the existing cyber laws would also be extremely helpful for the purpose of letting the common people know about the offenses that are punishable by law so that they can be careful about reporting any criminal activities to the competent authorities to initiate proper investigation and subsequent legal action.

Conclusion

Hence, it would be correct to conclude by saying that the massive growth in science and technology has opened new avenues for communication on social media. But, one has to understand the negative impact that might threaten minds on social media. It is the duty and moral responsibility of the social media companies, governments as well as the adult citizens to make sure that social media platforms are not used for objectionable purposes. The use of social media for dating and thereby paving the path for interpersonal relationships shows the omniscience of the medium of communication and its inevitability in the future. People rely on social media platforms for such major aspects of their personal lives. The various spheres of a person's identity get overlapped in the parallel domain of existence. Thus, social media problematizes the issue of ethics in communication as a person meshes the spheres of communication and facet of identity on the platform of mediated communication. While this is the scenario of mediated communication, privacy has truly become a paradoxical concept in the present times with the need of understanding of the social networking sites. The transformation in the nature

of interpersonal communication needs to be acknowledged so as to make the way for further constructive developments to set the ethical parameters that would regulate the communication on social media platforms in the present era. People have to be capable of gauging the amount of data that can be safely shared on the virtual platform. Social media is a tool for communication and socialization, and no unlawful activity must be tolerated on such platforms. Cyber-bullying is a social menace that should be uprooted with utmost immediacy with the cooperation of all the stake-holders. It is only through ensuring a proper social environment that social media platforms can pave the way for a better ambiance communication in the virtual domain. Hence, it is high-time to consider the ethics of communication on the social media platforms that can be reckoned to be the future of interpersonal communication in the era of internet.

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