

CRITICAL INSPECTION OF USEFULNESS OF NEW MEDIA

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Abstract: *Internet usage is on the rise, and with it the increasing proliferation of social media. As computer mediated communication enters a new phase of digitalisation and integration, increasingly the urge to be connected is becoming more of an incessant craving. Empirical evidence suggests the new generation to be particularly prone to that habit. There is a fear that utility of the internet may soon be overshadowed by the amusement and entertainment part it provides. But is the user aware of the problem. In this paper, we look deeply into that problem.*

Keywords: *Social media, internet, validation, new media, staying connected, facebook, twitter, apps.*

Internet usage in India is on the rise. According to latest governmental data, around 25 crore Indian is now accessing the net and the figure is only likely to go up in the coming times. Internet has been a potent tool to spread awareness among the masses. To bring about radical changes in the way people perceive communication. Shunning the interlocutors in the middle, it has proved to be an effective source of communication between the source and the respondent. In that aspect, India has taken on the footprints followed by other developing nations, not only computer, but even mobile phones have taken a very potent role in this communication revolution. The 4th estate of the democracy i.e the media have got a new partner an able ally or folly as one sees it in the new media sources.

New media as the term is broadly used in context of the social networking sites. As the technology age is fast bringing about myriad changes in society, the social interactions are also evolving at rapid phase. What was perceived to be a medium of light entertainment just a few years back, has suddenly completely occupied our mind space according to many critics. It just seems for many they can't subscribe to the notion of logging off, it's just one continuous flow of computer mediated communication. The question is whether there is a case of information overload and how much is the threshold of possible human capacity after which the law of diminishing returns creeps in.

The topic under consideration is new media and whether it's over emphasising on entertainment, enjoyment over actual utility. In a way are the slaves becoming masters. Are people getting addicted to the new age medium in an unprecedented way is a matter of important concern. But for that we should be clear of the definitions of utility and enjoyment.

Utility is defined as tangible property in economics. In Marshallian economics, utility is taken to be a backbone of how much a person is getting satisfaction from a product. A typical demand curve shows marginal utility decreasing with supply increase. But often with social media a reverse trend has been seen especially in the younger population. An all-encompassing, insatiable urge to be listened and heard is seen at all times. It is more

than a cry for help in some times. So in this paper we analyse the probable causes of this and how internet addiction is leading to a systematic decay in general productivity.

Now a thing which is often underestimated in this addiction part is how internet is not anymore being glued to a computer or laptop for that matter. With increasing tariffs and low margins the mobile companies are very aggressively pushing for data consumption. Very recently all the companies slashed their rates around 80 to 90 percent on 2g internet. Even attractive discounts are offered on 3 g. 4g though yet to roll out across the country hopes to change the paradigm of mobile technology with streaming movies and TV programmes almost in real time. Thus it means basically an effort to hook consumers round the clock. The concept of second screen has come in very handy in recent times. Let's discuss and highlight

this concept in a bit detail. Second screen in essence at one go, a person is accessing two screens. While it in first go may look a bit incredulous in reality it's becoming quite a feature now. It is quite a common phenomenon during live cricket matches or similar thing of mass public interest. People see it in their TV or stream their content on internet and straight forward put their live feedback in the social Medias. It's kind of a social gratification, the quelling of incessant thirst of being heard. During IPL, we often saw the tweet count with certain hash tags. There was a concept of twitter team battles where one held their allegiance in their sleeves or in their fingertips as a matter of fact. Many a time these brands and channels have also gone into partnerships with social networking sites like twitter and facebook. The integration of the digital space means increase of footmarks for all, hence a win win situation. While the exact monetisation process seems to be always a matter of hush hush policy, the move is essentially to get the viewers ore engrossed and garnering greater eyeballs in the increasing competitive space. The audience or the urban middle-upper middle classes seems to have lapped up the idea to a great detail. Especially the interactivity works quite handy in case of a cognitive dissonance. When a person is really riled up about anything or in a state of great anger or anguish the social media acts as a great vent to pent up feelings. In an increasingly encapsulated world, it gives a sort of existence to the faceless. In this way it's a great validation.

Literature review:

The explosive growth of the Internet over the past decade has almost certainly changed the profile of the "computer addict" (Brenner, 1997; Young, 1996b). With its convenient communication options and the World Wide Web, the Internet provides remote access to other people and abundant information in all areas of interest. It is an environment that could be a Review of the Research on Internet Addiction 365 is abused by virtually anyone, regardless of their interest in technology and science (Griffiths, 1998). Although there is no standardized definition of Internet addiction, there is acknowledgement among researchers that this phenomenon does exist. As Griffiths (1998) notes, excessive use of internet may not be problematic in all cases, but it can certainly have bad effects in some cases. He mentioned internet addiction as a subset of technological addiction.

Chebbi, Koong& Liu (n.d.) have stated that, people who are addicted to internet can develop many types of disorder and one of the disorders that are common for the modern day is Internet Addiction Disorder (IDA). Individuals who are suffering from IDA can exhibit symptoms such as drawbacks and face consequences that are similar to individual who are addicted to alcohol, gambling, shopping or other compulsive behaviours. The two major treatments available to help people in this disorder are: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET). Young (1998), had identified seven reasons for the IDA such as marital discontent, work related stress, financial problems, insecurity, anxiety, struggle in life, and limited social life (as cited as Chebbi, Koong& Liu, n.d.).

There are many studies about internet usage and internet addiction. Two researchers, Egger and Rautenberg have worked out a questionnaire to assess usage, feeling and experiences of internet use. When this questionnaire was posted, it and attracted 454 responses and 10% of them were identified as addicted. While the other survey: Internet Usage Survey with 32-item true-false questionnaire had been posted by Brenner and received 563 responses. Besides that, Petrie and Gunn had conducted another online study with 27 questions about the participants' internet use, attitudes, and beliefs and yielded 455 valid responses. The result has shown that 46.1% of them classifying themselves as addicted to the internet. Another two assessments are also completed by respondents which are Beck's Depression Inventory and Eysenck's Introversion/ Extroversion Scale. In these both assessment, it is found that the high

internet usage and both depression and introversion indicating that those who consider themselves addicted to the internet were more likely to be depressed and introverted. Internet Addiction Test (IAT) was posted by Young with 20-item. This is the latest version for Young and more systematically (Widyanto&McMurrin, 2004).

Young have selected eight out of ten criteria that she felt that can applied most readily to internet use:

1. Preoccupation of the internet.
2. A need for increase time spent online to achieve the same amount of satisfaction.
3. Repeated efforts to curtail internet use.
4. Feel irritability, depression, or mood liability when internet use is limited.
5. Staying online longer than anticipated.
6. Putting job or relationship in jeopardy to use internet.
7. Lying to others about how much time is spent online.
8. Using the internet as a means of regulating mood.

Individuals fulfil five of the eight criteria would be considered as internet dependence .

While most papers so far has given importance to the notion of internet addiction and it's correlation with different demographics, age group etc this paper tries to denote what people think about how well they use their time in internet and to find out if even the conscious users are prone to addiction or so on.

What is asked from the users about their expectations from users about how they mean to use it and finally their actual usage pattern is tracked. It is to see whether often people access internet with a different set of expectation and intention ending up with something different. This is particularly relevant in syndrome of modern inverting realities'. The adolescents are often being given access to internet from a very early age has been red flagged as a very worrying syndrome for quite some times. As sociologists have very rightly pointed out, often there seems to be a peer pressure that forces these tween and teenagers to act sometimes out of their age. While what defines as age is also a vastly debatable issue with value systems fast changing and eroding in accordance to the new technology proliferation. So here computer mediated communication has taken a completely different turn with the consumers also becoming producers. So a chain is being formed where each feeds on each other. While the line between right and the wrong, ethics and unethical is a matter up for debate what is legal and illegal has a lot more clarity to it. The cases of young people getting addicted to pornography, drugs, terror-induced activities are all well known and documented and often to disastrous outcomes. Internet feeds on anonymity, which essentially gives an easy gate pass for manipulative people to do mayhem. Also in essence people on the process of earning validation tend to lower their guards leading to horrible impact.

The entire thing has taken a much serious turn with social media interactions often being pointed to be a root cause of increased violence against woman. Shows like M.T.V webbed are showing how the media can be detrimental to safety of common people especially woman. So in a sense internet which started off as a boon, as a tool for empowerment had taken away much perverse that it originally intended to be. So much so, there is now a reverse curb on internet in many places. Very recently there was a proposal in the IIT'S to disconnect the LAN connection between 2 A.M to 6A.M as it was found to be extremely detrimental to productivity of the bright old minds. According to the authorities of the elite institution, students are prone to interacting in social media and it's tertiary activities very much late into the night. Although the proposal was finally not carried out, but it did raised some very serious questions and the probable and possible concerns on the way forward. Many I.T firms have also banned social networking sites within their campuses for the same thing. Even gmail is blocked in some places and the sole way of communicating is the intra net which is constantly monitored by the authorities. Hence an attitude of policing has crept in to curb of this increasing growing fad. In a sense it is upsetting but in a way a sort of obvious corollary to the entire systematic failure.

Survey:

Coming to the survey, people were divided into broadly three categories. They are of working professionals, students and those living in houses (senior students and housewives mainly though not exclusively). The question which was put forward to them was how much they used internet and what according to them was the optimal ratio of entertainment to productive work should be. While there has been argument that in many cases the two may get merged or interrelated especially to those who work in social media but grossly the demarcation between the two was well recognized by the respondents. The people were surveyed mainly from the middle and upper middle class of the social strata.

The sites which were taken to be as part of the social media were Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, Tumblr, Skype, Instagram, Pinterest. Also use of various chat apps such as Snapchat, wechat, whatsapp and vimeo etc were also taken under account as part of the leisure and entertainment section. So in a sense not only was their internet consumption tracks their whole digital footprint was accounted for as all contributes the addiction type situation as indicated in researches. The people who were asked were mostly asked before the experiment took place about internet addiction and similar questions. Most were sort of sure they were not addicted to the net per se and more of an “enthusiast” provided they were interested in the internet space at all. In a sense it was a case of self-discovery for many of the respondents who manually noted down their internet usage for 7 days and recorded it back. Most were themselves taken aback by the amount of time they devoted to social media consciously or unconsciously. In a sense it was a realisation of the ever changing societal fabric. With joint families breaking down, families are getting increasingly nuclear in sizes hence significantly cutting down on the interaction part. Hence social media is an easy to go recuse for those people. In case of young people, what were overwhelmingly found is the almost breaking down of the community system that has made them more of a slave to the social media. The parks are increasingly becoming scarce, thus making virtual games the new reality of life.

The method of self-evaluation was taken rather than the other popular methods like taking an internet addiction test because often the websites or the apps a person visits is a true test of his usage rather than the hour spent. In a sense it's a break from the popular notion of using merely the consumption of internet as a cause of malice and looks to go deeper into it.

Results:

Let us share the results of the survey done in a relatively small scale. The number of respondents is 50. They were initially asked about their internet using patterns and a form was filled up by them to say approximately how much they use internet and the nature of their surfing. That is if they were surfing for couple of hours per day, it was asked to fill up how much was it for office or study work/ information purpose and how much for social media and other allied works. All these people were given a sheet to log their own usage for 7 days. In a sense it was a self-assessment of sort to see whether they were they consistent with the assertion done by them prior to the experiment. It was seen that around 80 p.c of the respondents reported over usage from their self pre-set limits. For only 20 percent it was due to “utility” work, for rest it was mainly the usage of social media. Among the social Medias, facebook and chatting app whatsapp were the most used with 53.6 percent time devoted between these two applications. This trend was seen to be most acute among the young users. People whose profile had them still studying were found to be heavy users of social media. Out of 20 surveyed, 18 reported excess usage of internet from their own estimates. The trend is no less worrying for other two demographics as well with uniformly chatting apps and social networks ruling roost. On the question of whether internet was turning out to be bane or boon for them, 72 percent said that it was still a boon. 38 percent was concerned about possible overuse of internet and said about trying to cut down on their usage.

Inference:

When people were asked about what they think is the possible cause of them crossing their self-imposed barrier, an often mentioned tacit acknowledgement was of addiction. Especially during the weekends, young people find it extremely difficult to pass time especially in absence of any spouse or companion. Often social networks are their place for solace, a fact which was broadly agreed on by the people interviewed. Boredom as a possible

cause of internet over usage was also mentioned by most. It was observed that most people don't think internet over-usage or being glued to the social media is not a big problem for them. In a sense, social media as a possible utility abuser is still not a dominant theme in the public mind. Whether they are living in a state of denial or it is not really a matter of much larger question, is an unanswered question.

Limitations:

The survey could have been much more comprehensive with a larger user base of people who could have probably given a more diverse perspective of the question asked. Especially, the survey lacked due to its logistic scope the opportunity to ask people coming from the towns and b and c centres. Internet in India is vastly increasing and the maximum of it is in the rural and semi-urban belt. It's not only a case of validation for them, but also aspiration for many of the left out people. Hence for many of these people being glued to the social networks in itself maybe a utility, a window to the aspirational society, a sort of fillip to work hard to reach that goal. Hence the core idea of this survey with proper fund and time needs to be done in a much larger scale to gauge the public perception. Also while the method of self-assessment was taken in this survey, a more prudent would have been an experiment under controlled atmosphere where an app or device could track the user's net usage. As often in self reporting, there is a scope of under reporting which can't be accounted for in this case.

Conclusion:

In essence, what is seen is there is a growing dependency on internet and technology as a whole in day to day life. While some of it is due to a large amount of digitisation of technology as a whole, it is also due to a compulsive obsession to being connected to be in the midst of news. The media as a whole and the social media space has also suitably tapped into the tendency by smooth less integration of the real and virtual space. So even when somebody is not in any certain social media the feeling of being left out forces the person to get involved. In a sense, it is a viscous circle and it's quite unlikely the syndrome as some would like to call it will cease to exist in any foreseeable future. In a sense, like with all syndrome or addiction, a self-censoring is required to strike the right balance between the right and the wrong, the essential and the left over. Off course internet addiction centres are not a thing of the future but are rather realities of the present. But for those who are not really in that level of despondency, a serious introspection is needed as the survey suggest. The internet which serves us in so many myriad and wonderful ways should not become counter effective and hurt us. A lesson sooner we imbibe, the better.

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