

"Yin-Yang" of Using Social Networking Sites: Perspective of University Youth

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The study sought to explore the perspective of youth regarding positive and negative effects of social networking on their personal and social life. The sample included 12 men and 12 women: undergraduate students who were studying in various universities of Lahore, with an age range of 20 to 25 years. We collected data through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion, and content analysis was used to analyze the data. The results of this study showed that social networking had both positive and negative effects on the personal, academic, and social life of the youth. Positive impact of social networking sites involved constructive identity, improved confidence, decreased tension, increased socialization, and better understanding among friends and improved relationships with relatives. On the other hand the excessive use of these sites appeared to limit the contribution of youth in their families, and caused physical isolation. Social networking also appeared to have bad effects on their physical health, caused academic procrastination and diminished academic activities. Diverse impact of social networking across genders, and its misuses were also discussed.

Keywords: social networking, content analysis, positive and negative effects, physical isolation

Social networking sites (SNS) have changed the ways of individuals or groups interactions with other people across the world. Indeed, the young people subscribe to this notion that *socializing* includes an online component. Half of the adults and three-quarters of teenagers in the United States are active SNS users (Hampton, Goulet, Marlow, & Rainie, 2012). Today, the word *Social Networking* implies electronic interactions based on computers and smart devices rather than face-to-face interactions (Tropper, 2007). Popular social networking platforms include *Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Instagram, and Skype* etc., through which people connect with friends, family-members, relatives, classmates, clients and with people who share same interests. Social networking is focused around the idea of persona and it is also communicated through our online profiles like, who I am, my photos, my interests, and my friends. SNS present various new ways for the public to communicate by using internet on their cell phones or personal computers (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Approximately 1.5 billion people have their profiles in SNS across the world (Shirase, 2012). People can interact with each other and share their opinions, activities, hobbies, interests and actions with each other on regular basis. Social networking has brought many controversies in the field of social psychology in conjunction with bringing friends and family closer, making connections with new people, and isolating them from the world around.

The usage of SNS has generally been discussed in three areas (viz., audiences and users, adoption and domestication, and dissemination and network effects) since its advent.

Technology research in the past ignored the role of the user as an important variable in studying technology and media. Influenced by early mass communication theories, such as the *hypodermic needle model*, media users were studied as mass audience (Wimmer & Dominick, 1994). This theory suggests that mass media can leave

same messages to audience and can produce a homogenous, universal impact on them. As the scientific research into communication strengthened, it became obvious to researchers that although audiences share some universal characteristics, each member of society is unique. The People's Choice study in 1944 (Kellner, 1995) explored the effect of mass media on voters' choices, and reported that media was not the sole gate way to receive information but the opinion leaders also played a major role as a secondary interpersonal source of communication. This led to the development of the two-step flow theory, which emphasizes that media messages move in two separate stages: from the media to the audience, and from the opinion leaders amongst the audience to other people in the audience. The emergence of new approaches in studying audiences in the 80s and the 90s challenged traditional mass communication theories. Different schools of thought shifted attention to the power of audiences to resist media manipulation and interpret their own meanings (Kellner, 1995). As audiences began to be identified as being dynamic, participative and interactive; research in audience studies widened in scope and spread into new areas for example, participation: with the focus on user-generated content and interactivity, globalization: highlighting contextual diversity, domestication: integrating audience studies with consumption studies, and youth culture: as the pioneers of new media (Boyd, 2004). The shift in terminology is also striking. New media research is now focused more on the user as opposed to the audience (Livingstone, 2007). As SNS evolved around the usage of their members, understanding their role, how they are using SNS as source of communication and what they make of them is an important aspect for understanding the impact of these new technologies. In the context of SNS, there are numerous studies, which are investigating the role of the user for example, Hargittai (2007) explored differences between people who use SNS and not. Studying a diverse sample of 18-19 year old students at the University of Illinois (Chicago), the study concluded that SNS (e.g., Facebook, My Space, Xanga and Friendster) user's existing offline networks influenced which site they used.

Another approach reflects the contribution of the social constructionists who argue that development of technology should

be analyzed in terms of how it is socially and culturally used and adopted by different social groups (Hartmann, Berker, Punie, & Ward, 2006). This approach emerged as 'The Social Construction of Technological Systems' known also as SCOT (Social Construction of Technology) and out of Science and Technology Studies. SCOT theorists argue that human action shapes the way technology develops, not vice versa of it. The argument is based on the idea that technologies are embedded in social contexts and hence, you cannot understand how they evolve unless you explore how the people using the technology are also shaping it. In the context of SNS, the tensions between users and creators of the site have been explored by Boyd (2004) using an ethnographic approach. She believes that usage is not entirely determined by the architecture, but is also influenced by the social norms and values of the users. Users structure the technology to present their identity, so as to be able to use it in a personally meaningful way (Boyd, 2004).

Studies on the adoption and dissemination of technologies have also contributed to the understanding of innovative technology's impact on society and the economy. Most of these studies have been conducted using the 'diffusion of innovations' framework, initially proposed by (Rogers, 1995). Until the mid-1980s, the *diffusionism* was the most popular theory in diffusion of innovation studies. This discipline focused on presenting and describing the process of diffusion, that is, the adoption of innovations at micro-level, and the spread of innovations within a social system at a macro-level. Much of the diffusion literature highlights the role of innovation itself in the diffusion process. Throughout the diffusion process, the innovation under consideration changes and improves, which in turn makes it more attractive to the marginal adopter. This enables the marginal adopter to penetrate new market segments, leading to further improvements and positive feedback effects, for example, learning by using, and learning by producing (Arthur, 1988). In the case of SNS, we expect both effects to be present. The value of Facebook, for instance, quite obviously increases as more users sign-up, through direct network effects. This also attracts application providers to develop complementary products and services, improving the functionality of Facebook, increasing its attractiveness further, in a virtuous circle.

Research has established that the perceived usefulness of SNS positively influences the adoption and spread of this technology by users (Hsieh, Hsieh, & Feng, 2011). There are many motivational reasons (e.g., to contact new people, to keep in touch with friends/family, and general socialization) for using SNS (Brandtzaeg & Heim, 2009). For example, Facebook is mostly used to make social interactions and chatting with their friends (Madge, Meek, Wellen, & Hooley, 2009). The advent of social networking has encouraged an average person to share his likes and dislikes openly with the world (Kalamdani, 2009). Although several surveys emphasize that the youth usually use these sites to pass their time (Haroon, 2013); however, researches also indicate that participation in social networking leave favorable psychological effects that include improved health, access to valuable information, and other prized resources (Burke, Kraut, & Marlow, 2011). Even individuals who suffer from social anxiety and low self-esteem gain a lot from using SNS. Jacobsen and Forste (2011) found that online social communication skills and self-esteem are positively correlated. Facebook keeps students in touch with their institutional activities and helps them to adjust in university (Madge, Meek, Wellen & Hooley, 2009). This site motivates them to make so many relationships and the quality of feedback received on their profiles matters a lot for example, positive feedback on the profiles

improves their social self-esteem and well-being, while negative feedback decreases the self-esteem and well-being of adolescence (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006).

Internet is significant for the students to communicate with each other and also for getting more information (Malik, 2009; Safdar, 2008). Social networking also holds knowledge payback for example, Web 2.0 technologies (e.g., SNS, Blogs, Wikis, Folksonomies, Video, Sharing Sites, Hosted Services, Web Applications, and Mashups) provide students numerous opportunities for informal interaction and engagement beyond both the classroom walls and the physical environment. Web 2.0 sites allow users to do more than just retrieve information, and encourage the user to rely more on their browser for user interface, application software and file storage facilities. These technologies have opened the new ways for developing vast online learning procedures and also increase interrelations, indulgence and feedback between students, their friends, and also teachers (Harrison & Thomas, 2009). The greater number of students account positive effects of internet use than the negative ones (Suhail & Burgees, 2006). Shaheen (2008) concluded that internet use at the time of political crises encourages democracy and freedom of expression among the students by providing them a platform to criticize the political leaders, give suggestions, and share their opinions. It also promotes a sense of awareness about their rights. Risk taking behavior of the people who use these social networking applications is greater than the people who do not use the sites (Shaheen, 2008).

Yet despite the recent technological advances in social communication, and the fact that social bonding is a crucial psychological aspect of being human, there are certain individuals for whom social networking produces real-life anxiety (Stein & Stein, 2008). In addition to social anxiety, due to the over use of SNS, people are facing depression and other psychological disorders as well (Haroon, 2013). Several studies have shown that social networking, Facebook in particular can have harmful effects on our wellbeing. Researchers from the University of Michigan found that the more people used Facebook, the more negativity they experienced concerning their day-to-day activities, and over the time reported higher levels of dissatisfaction with their life in general (Norton, 2014).

These SNS make the life of a person a digital document (Shirase, 2012), and affects personal relationship with family members and also partners. Excessive internet use is strongly associated with isolation and is weakly associated with poor balance between users' work and holidays. The people who use internet frequently have their own deviant values and to little extent they have lack of emotional and social skills (Engelberg & Sjöberg, 2004). It is also affecting our social behavior and relationships. Spending most of the time on SNS changes the interaction pattern by reducing face to face interaction. Numerous surveys highlight that the excessive use of SNS by the youth results in deteriorated bonding with their family members, and leads the individuals to be alone (Haroon, 2013). People mostly use the language that they use on these SNS in their routine and academic life. The major concern is to focus on the over-use of these sites and its bad effects on our social ties. It also affects languages and writing skills of excessive users. Excessive use of SNS leads towards poor academic performance (Ng & Wiemer-Hasting, 2005).

It appears that somehow, along the way, the privileges of social networking have been abused both in terms of its meaning as well as its victims. In the year 2014, British charity Child Line found the rate of cyberbullying to be getting higher, with children reporting

4,507 cases of cyberbullying in 2012-13 compared to 2,410 in 2011-12 (Norton, 2014). By the excessive use of SNS privacy of the person is so much affected because of the over sharing of personal experiences and has diverse effects on their lives. Research on internet addiction has exposed that users can become addicted to it. Addiction to the internet allocates some of the negative aspects of substance addiction and it leads towards poor academic performance, and also relationship problems with their friends and family members (Ng & Wiemer-Hastings, 2005).

Few documented studies have revealed that men and women use SNS differently and it has diverse impact on their lives for example, women are more conscious to disclose their personal information on these sites than the men (Fogel & Nehmad, 2009).

The aim of the present study was to investigate the perspective of university students about the impact of social networking on their personal, academic, and social life, since it is evident through the literature that SNS have become the indispensable part of youth and they spend most of their time on these sites.

Research Question

How the excessive use of SNS affects personal, academic, and social life of young adults?

Method

Sample

The sample included 12 men and 12 women: university undergraduate students of age ranged between 20 and 25 years ($M = 21.5$, $SD = 2.86$). They belonged to diverse socioeconomic statuses. As no standard criteria of regular internet users were available, so the students who claimed that they were regular SNS users were included in the study after taking their consent. They had been using any SNS (e.g., Skype, Facebook, and Twitter) for at least six months and minimum for 4 hours daily.

Measures

A semi-structured interview schedule was designed to collect the data. Some of the questions of the interview and focus group discussion were: What are your preferred networking sites? How did you start using social networking? What are your peak timings, duration of social network usage and primary functions you perform on social networking?

Procedure

Data for the study were collected from the students of various public/private sector universities of Lahore (e.g., GC University, The University of Punjab, University of Management and Technology, University of Central Punjab) via snow ball sampling technique. Once we approached some regular users of SNS, we requested them to guide us to contact the students whom they knew were using SNS on regular basis. After the approval of the research project from the Board of Studies of the department of Psychology, GC University Lahore, requests via mobile phone or internet to participate in the study were sent to university students who were identified as the regular users of social networking sites. The participants were either approached separately or they were engaged

in focus group on the bases of their consent and availability. Focus group was conducted with nine men and five women who were willing and managed to gather on a specified date and time. Semi-structured interviews of the remaining three men and seven women were conducted individually, because they were either not comfortable to share their information in a group or could not manage their time to participate in the focus group. Duration of focus group was one and a half to two hours and each interview lasted from 30 to 45 minutes. All the interviews were transcribed, summarized, and analyzed for initial codes and themes.

Analysis and Results

The content analysis technique was used to analyze the data. Content analysis is the method in social sciences in which we study the content of communication. It is a qualitative research design in which we draw inferences from the data and these inferences are drawn after summarizing the data. We start from making codes, and

Table 1
Percentages of Male and Female Students on Preferred Network, Timings, and Functions of Using SNS.

Categories	Themes	Men	Women
Preferred Network	Facebook	80%	100%
	Skype	20%	10%
Peak Timings	8:00p.m-12:00 a.m	30%	20%
	10:00 p.m-12:00 a.m	70%	80%
Daily Duration	4-8 hours	30%	60%
	6-8 hours	70%	40%
Functions	Posts	80%	40%
	Chatting	80%	40%
	Sharing (music, games/pics)	20%	80%
	Add status	20%	80%
	Comments	80%	80%
	Bullying/Games	20%	40%

Table 2
Percentages of Male and Female Students on Motivating Factors of Using SNS.

Themes	Men	Women
Exploration	40%	20%
To make friends	40%	0%
To interact with friends abroad	80%	40%
Entertainment	60%	40%
To bring good image of Pakistan	20%	0%
Leisure time activity	60%	60%
To seek information	20%	40%
To stay in contact with friends	80%	100%
To share daily/class activities	20%	80%
Substitute of telephone	20%	20%

it leads to themes and categories. In this research we used 'Bottom-up' content analysis technique in which categories are based on the content provided by the participants. Initial themes were extracted from all the transcribed interviews and they were listed down separately for male and female participants. Then themes were clustered under meaningful categories. Later frequencies and percentages of themes were calculated.

Both male and female students mostly preferred Facebook because it gathered all their friends at the same place and they could contact them easily. According to them Facebook itself is a very big facility to interact with friends and to know the views of others. Both male and female students started using Facebook because of

Table 3
Percentages of Male and Female Students on Positive Effects of SNS

Categories	Themes	Men	Themes	Women
Social understanding	Increases socialization	80%	Increases socialization	50%
	Improved relations	60%	Improved relations	100%
	Diverse personalities	80%	Diverse personalities	70%
	Various cultures	20%	Connect friends	60%
	Reduced distances	60%	Reduced distances	80%
	Events/opportunities	70%	Emotional support	90%
	Repair the image of Islam and Pakistan	40%	Repair the image of Islam and Pakistan	0%
	Self-awareness	60%	Self-awareness	60%
	Release tension	40%	Release tension	80%
	Boost up confidence	80%	Boost up confidence	40%
Identity	Improves self-image	40%	Improves self-image	20%
			Heightened competition	70%
	Business	30%		
	Academic discussion	40%	Academic Discussion	55%
	Seminars/workshops	25%	Seminars/workshops	30%
Economic/academic growth			Information through different pages	40%
			Share food recipes	50%

their friends. Peak timings for majority of male students is till midnight, whereas, female students appear to use Internet between 10:00 p.m-12:00 a.m. Boys mostly perform functions like posting, chatting, commenting, and harassing (to misuse the shared information, and disclosing secrets) others, but the females are usually involved in positive commenting, adding status, and sharing food recipes videos and games with friends.

The basic purpose for both male and female students who were using Facebook was to stay in contact with their friends and keep on connecting with the people of other countries. They used Facebook in order to avail their leisure time and to get relaxed deeming it as another world. According to some male participants, they use Facebook in order to explore the world and it enhances their knowledge. Some of the men and women also reported internet as a substitute of telephone. Some of the male participants proclaimed that they were trying to produce good image of their country through Facebook friends from other nations and religions.

According to the participants, significant positive effects of Facebook/Skype were: increased social circle of the students and improved their relations, especially with their friends and relatives. It has abridged the gap among them. According to both males and female students, pages of different organizations and academic leaders are source of awareness, they avail educational opportunities through the news of workshops, seminars and courses on educational pages, and resolve their academic issues through blogs and networking sites. Male students proclaim that SNS make them familiar with diverse cultures, and they use internet to repair the image of Pakistan and Islam associated with terrorism. It is a source of reducing tension for both male and female students, and the emotional support from friends increases a sense of security, and boosts up confidence of female participants. Most of male participants reported that Facebook improved their self-confidence, and according to female participants, it increased the sense of competition due to the achievement status of people on Facebook. Male participants favoured the social networking for economic gains, as they find business friends and give promotion of their products on Facebook, while some of female students took a stance that they used social media for catharsis of their social issues and grievance with friends and foes. Both male and female participants reported that their self-image improved via social networking as they feel elevated when receive positive comments on their posts and pictures. Many of students (both male and female) asserted that they become aware of many of their qualities when Facebook friends appreciate and give positive comments on their posts like, collection of poetry, suggestions, and pictures etc.

Negative impact of social networking seems more obvious on male than on female participants (e.g., reduced family interaction, displeasure of parents, physical isolation, and reduced outdoor activities. As for as personal life concerns, mainstream of male participants realizes the negative impact on their personal life as compared to female participants like, negligence of social responsibilities, social and academic procrastination, regrets, misuse (using fake id, exploiting girls). According to most male and female participants, the use of Facebook has affected their health, in particular; weaker eyesight, low concentration, disturbed eating and sleep patterns. According to female students, they developed inferiority complex due to the display of life style and wealth of their friends and acquaintances on the Facebook. Majority of male students described Facebook use as an addiction. According to both male and female students, it increases curiosity of what their friends are planning, doing and discussing on Facebook, and they feel

restless and agitated when they are away from Facebook. It has become an essential part of their life. In general, male users feel restless, and female users feel bored when they are not using Facebook.

Table 4
Percentages of Male and Female Students on Negative Effects of SNS

Categories	Themes Men		Themes Women	
Social life	Reduced family interaction	100%	Reduced family interaction	60%
	Displeasure of parents	40%	Displeasure of mother	20%
	Physical isolation	60%	Physical isolation	20%
	Reduces outdoor activities	80%	Reduces outdoor activities	10%
Personal life	Negligence	80%	Negligence	40%
	Procrastination	70%	Procrastination	30%
	Regrets	40%	Regrets	60%
	Abuse	80%	Tarnish reputation	10%
	Academic performance	80%	Academic performance	40%
Health	Eyesight/Headache	40%	Eyesight	80%
	Eating patterns	40%	Eating patterns	40%
	Sleep	80%	Sleep	30%
	Lack of concentration	40%	Develop complexes	20%
	Absent mindedness	20%	Laziness/exercise	20%
	Addiction	90%	Addiction	50%

Discussion

The SNS have revolutionized in the ways of social interaction. Results of the present study show that Social Networking has become a significant part of the lives of Pakistani youth. The most usable and preferred networking site among the university students is Facebook. They prefer Facebook to keep in contact with their friends, class fellows and relatives and it helps to perk up their relations with them. Facebook is a platform for all friends to discuss various issues. The results of this study also show that the use of Facebook has increased the social circle of students since they interact with large numbers of students on Facebook. This boosts-up their socialization and helps them to adjust well in the university.

The majority of female students use SNS to gain social and emotional support when they feel bad, and they believed that they became relaxed and found solution to their problems. SNS emerged as a source of entertainment. Both male and female users reported that the shared poetry, jokes, songs and pictures made them fresh and happy. Due to interaction with different people on the Facebook, they have developed a sense to understand different personalities, and various cultures that broadened their vision and changed their perception of people of different regions and religions. It helps them to explore the world. Majority of male users

proclaimed that they presented soft image of Pakistan and Islam on Facebook, thus SNS is being used by male students as a weapon for the restoration of the positive image of Pakistan and Islam, seeing that terrorism is associated with Islam and Pakistan all over the world. Both male and female users added that they used Facebook in order to avail their leisure time and overcome boredom.

Results are in line with Haroon (2013) that people use SNS in order to make new connections, maintain their relationships, and to pass their leisure time. One of the salient functions of social networks is connecting users with other users. Numerous studies have supported how social media stimulates sharing and relationship-building among their users (e.g., Forest & Wood, 2012). According to the participants of our study, Facebook keeps them well aware of university activities. Previous researches also support the role of Facebook to glue people in the university together and help to fine-tune them in the university (Madge et al., 2009).

On the contrary, the study also entails negative impact of Social Networking due to its continuous use and misuse. Social Networking came into view to limit the relationships of youth with family members because they spend most of their time on Facebook, which appeared to bring displeasure of their parents. Decline in bonding of social media users with family was also held up by Haroon (2013). Both male and female users reported that the use of Facebook lead towards the physical isolation that resulted in reduced outdoor activities. Male participants also reported that Social Networking lead them toward the deviation from moral values. The male students reported to become disobedient, careless, harass and play with the feelings of girls by using fake IDs. Engelberg and Sjöberg (2004) found that the internet users associated their isolation to excessive use of internet that leads to their own deviant values. According to a 2010 CBS News report, Cyber-bullying has spread commonly among youth, with 42% reporting that they have been victims (Jung & Media, 2014). Results of this study also illustrate that the frequent use of Facebook affects the studies of the students, since they are spending most of their time on Facebook, give lesser time to their studies, and procrastinate their academic assignments. Previous researches also show that excessive use of SNS leads towards poor academic performance, and also results in relationship problems with friends and family (Ng & Wiemer-Hasting, 2005). Both male and female participants acknowledged Facebook as a time consuming activity, since they neglect their studies, ignore social responsibilities and household chores while they are using Facebook. Previous research elucidates that people mostly use Facebook to make new social interactions and chatting with their friends rather than actual work (Madge et al., 2009).

The results of both male and female users demonstrated that the use of Facebook generated several health related concerns like headache, weak eyesight, low concentration level, unhealthy dietary habits, and other complications. Due to interaction with several people at a time social relations become more complicated that cause anxiety and depression for example, if there was mutual rivalry among friends of the SNS user, the person was incapable to decide whom to leave. Similar phenomenon was observed by Stein and Stein (2008). The female users reported that sometime they interact with people who are immoral which results in tarnishing their social image. Haroon (2013) also asserts that there is a primary risk of interaction with dangerous people, which can disturb the personal and social well-being of the individuals. Male users explicated that they shared everything with their friends without any

fear and hesitation. Whereas, female users reported to be more concerned about their private life and shared less information about themselves than the male users. These themes are in line with the work of Fogel and Nehmad (2009) that women are more conscious to disclose their personal information on SNS than the men.

Facebook use was experienced as an addiction by the participants of the study. Majority of the male students reported that they became restless, agitated, and intolerant; whereas, life seemed tedious to female users when they were away from Facebook. They reported to feel as if they had lost something important when they were away from Facebook. Some of the participants believed that their life was incomplete without Facebook. Previous literature also reveals that it becomes habitual for the individuals to check their profiles even during their work hours, which takes them towards anxiety and addiction (Shirase, 2012).

Conclusion

Social networking has become an indispensable part of the life of university students. Despite the reality that Social Networking boosts-up confidence, improves self-image, helps in adjustment and develops social skill, it has negative impact on the studies, health, personal identity and family relations of users; it creates physical isolation, anxiety, and depression among many participants. Other negative effects included spread of misinformation, a platform for cyber-bullying, and online details that increase risks of identity theft. Some of the male students misuse the SNS for harming others, while female were involved in productive activities like, sharing food recipes, academic discussion, and fashion trends. Despite the fact that students realize the negative impact of using SNS, they continue to utilize it, because they assume what they are gaining outweighs the harm it causes. Social Networking was clearly revealed to have positive and negative effects on the youth. The decision is up to them how to use these sites.

Limitations

The study included sample only from universities in Lahore. The sample may be taken from different cities Pakistan. The sample included only university students, future studies may include college students and people from workplace. Data were collected via semi-structured interview and focus group discussion; structured survey questionnaires may also be added in future studies to assess the social and psychological impact of SNS using mixed method studies. The study focuses on overall effects of SNS. Effects of each networking site can be studied individually.

Implications

This study explored empirical perspective of young adults on how their lives are being affected by the excessive use of social network, and implies exploration of the dynamics of young adults for using SNS. The study can help to understand how we can use SNS to resolve many of our interpersonal and social issues. We can conduct different seminars in order to develop awareness among people regarding positive and negative impacts of Social Networking.

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