

# USAGE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES: AN ANALYSIS ON SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

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**Abstract:** Use of Social networking sites is a case of relational technology occupying in peoples everyday life. More and more people are using social networking sites, eventually leading to change in social dynamics. Its adoption and dependency being taken as an independent variable, the analysis takes place on other dependent variables of social and psychological aspects, playing around the uses and gratification theory. Its users being termed as prosumers; creating, consuming and processing contents swims through many factors accounting for their dependency in social media in everyday life. The aspects of interpersonal relationship, social networking, individual-interest group belongingness, instant information gratification, escapism, identity play and individual personality are dependent variables on which the analysis takes place.

**Key words :** relational technology, uses and gratification theory, identity play

## Introduction

Communication is a social activity. By sending messages, exchanging ideas, relationships are developed, nurtured and the whole being of the society is maintained. It is the essence of living. It is a term encompassing every human experience, effort, and social manifestations. The journey of communication technology revolution has come a long way since the invention of Gutenberg's printing press. Dissemination of information and news on a mass scale brought forth the idea of media. Print media, electronic media came along on the journey. Invention of internet gave an onslaught on the entire communication scenario. The speed, the ubiquity, the democratic nature of the web gave a jolt on the face of the media. With time, economy of technology too changed. It became an easily accessible commodity. The real change in the mediascape came with the emergence of social networking sites. Media no longer became the prerogative of the media houses. People on the way became a part of production and dissemination of news and information. Not only in the case of news, the whole structure of communication, and networking with people too changed drastically. The sprawling lawn of social networking sites

gave people to experience communication in a multidimensional way, equipped to trigger a magic multiplier shot.

Social networking sites turned out to be an address in cyberspace where people can flock, gather, exchange data, views, disseminate ideas. It is a techno-product that can create an alternative life driven by radical human relationships and socio-psychological politics. It is a fringe technology where you assemble, maintain your product as you require. Membership is viral, mimetic, diffusive and infectious. Blogs, micro blogs, video/image/file sharing platforms and wikis are the basis of social networking sites. Popular SNSs are Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, and Foursquare. SNS (social networking sites) became a need of needs. Communication as a human need got redefined in a new way. The phenomenon of communication made an onslaught on cyber culture. The ever burgeoning number of its users is its testimony. SNSs are networks connecting human consciousness with clusters of data churning out of the users almost every moment. Growing number of people is touched by this cyber subculture. People use it for many purposes. Human being as a social animal is

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always in need for communication and connection with other fellow beings. This is one reason why people use SNS. It is a fringe technology where you are just transported into a world of myriad of other fellows. As these relationships are technologically aided, there is a transaction of self with others in many modes. These things happen on account of inherent virtual nature. Identity is transacted. People are finding escapism in it, playing around it. S Duck & D T. McMahan (2012) says that identity is partly a characteristic (something you possess), partly a performance (something you do), and partly a construction of the society. The way you express yourself and the ways you respond to other people in your social context transact part of your identity. Your identity is partly constructed through the interactions with other people. In many instances, identity is molded by situation, person or the communication and this is especially phenomenal in case of social media, where the virtual identity is the statutory innate other self.

Again, the odd phrase 'doing an identity' is getting a stark place than 'having an identity' especially in social media platform. In the culture of social media networking, identity projection, relationship co- habitation and the synthesis of social behavior are evident. Users' Profile organization, uploading / sharing photos, status updates, and joining membership of a group or raising a group and commenting on friend's post manifest many areas of individuality and the way of self-gratification socially, psychologically and finally the synthesis of one's social behavior.

### **Technology and Social networking**

Human Communication and networking with people has come a long way. With the passage of time, communication and relationships are increasingly relying on technology and media. The concept of relational technologies is applied when relationships are maintained and established through devices like cell phones, internet, iPods, and similar devices. These gadgets or the technology is increasingly becoming a fundamental commodity in our

everyday life. Relational technology facilitates fulfillment of objectives of cultural membership of any kind. Perceiving and using technology consistent with these groups assists in developing particular identities. Some groups view the cell phone less as a device to contact others and more as a means of displaying social status and membership (J. Katz, 2006). The relationship between technology and human communication have drawn many criticism from various angles, either it is fulfilling or too technical in imbibing human values.

No doubt, technology has influenced a great deal in adapting and accomplishing relational needs. Marshal Mc Luhan's epic statement 'medium is the message' gets through this technological era. Message communicated with a certain technology creates a particular vibe in relationship equation, timeliness, appropriateness of the situation. Relational technology largely depends on the technology habits of people in that particular social network. Its adoption falls on relatively same timing with other group members. Relational technology helps in redefining the depth, significance, professionalism, and social bonding.

Online social networking platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Google +, instant messaging, video conferencing, Wikis, Live journal, MySpace, web meetings are all a part of relational technology. Social networking in today's world can never be effective without these online networking sites. When everybody else is wired into online world, the real human relationship gets rooted in online to some extent. Human relationship gets expanded in online world too. Tim O'Reilly, the founder of the publishing house O'Reilly (2005) Media puts the term social media under the umbrella of "web 2.0", the main characteristics of web 2.0 being radical decentralization, radical trust, participation instead of publishing, users as contributors, rich user experience, the long tail, the web as platform, control of one's own data, remixing data, collective intelligence, attitudes, better software by more users, play and

undetermined user behavior. Castells (2009) employs the terms “web 2.0 and 3.0”, which he defines as “the cluster of technologies, devices, and applications that support the proliferation of social spaces on the Internet”. The idea of social spaces on the internet is one mode of human's interaction with their physical environment. And technology is the retrofit to their natural endowment. Technology aids into the dimension of social networking. Social media tools feature “the elements of profile, contacts and interaction with those contacts,” “blur the distinction between personal communication and the broadcast model of messages sent to nobody in particular” (Meikleand Young 2012). There lies the essence of social media: a media for a social group produced, controlled and consumed by its group members. That is a unique media technology coming to common man's hand for networking his social circle.

Thus, social media with all the varied applications, human relationships get inked on a unique platform. Publishing, decentralizing idea, democratic view of the situation instills a unique worldview of contexts. So does technology play its part in the domain of power relations in networking with people. The novelty, the technology capital and its application renders value exploitation and takes control over our relationship with others.

### **Social Media system Dependency and its uses and gratification**

Individual's dependency on media comes from many factors. Be it the regular mainstream media or social media; factors like the inherent nature of media, the need for information, the dynamics of human relationship and relationship between the government and people are accounted here. It is the media system (Riley and Riley, 1959; Wright, 1975; Gouldner, 1976; Alexander, 1981; Kellner, 1981) that controls information resources, and it is the media system that has relations with other social systems that shape the dynamics and the content of individual's dependency on disseminated media

messages. And again S. J. Ball-Rokeach (1985) define media-system dependency as a relationship in which the capacity of individuals to attain their goals is contingent upon the information resources of the media system—those resources being the capacities to (a) create and gather, (b) process and (c) disseminate information. Coming to social networking sites the nature of the media: the producer–consumer dichotomy, the multiplicity of news feed, development of fan culture becomes one reason why this media is unique. It has dwindled the interface between the producer and consumer.

Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs (1943) highlights the third level need: the social need: friendship, belongingness to a group, love and intimacy. SNS is one gateway to satisfy Maslow's third level of hierarchy of needs. SNS having streams of news about friends, information about the group a person belongs to, the news feeds from many institutes all give a world of what we want to live in. Regarding regular media dependency, S. J. Ball Rokeach (1985) says that possible range of individual dependency on media system is determined more by structural dependency, the pattern of interdependent relations between the media and other social systems than by the personal and social psychological characteristics of the individual. However, as regards the SNS, it is rather the latter factors mentioned above viz. the personal and social psychological characteristics that determines his dependency on the SNS.

Unlike regular media system, SM (social Media) does not derive its legitimacy from the political and economic system. SM defies the structural media dependencies. It is not under the prerogative of a particular media house. On the other hand, every citizen in SM can do a realistic appraisal of the system of the society and government. Political parties, voluntary organizations and interest groups develop dependency relations with SM. They project their dogmas, interest groups mobilize people, and voluntary organizations reach out their ideas and

standpoints. SNSs being a democratic media; it fulfills the multiplicity of views and information of any social issue. Its democratic nature exhibits free and fair information.

When it comes to individual's need to be a part of SM, Individual can be taken as an analytic unit of an audience having a multitude of goals for his social needs, information, and entertainment. Ball Rokeach (1985) enumerates the typology of Individuals' media System Dependencies 1) Understanding, a) social b) self; 2) Orientation, a) action, b) interaction; 3) Play, a) social, b) solitary. He pointed out the significance of social environment in media dependency. He defines social environment as a general term intended to encompass all environs that may bear upon individual's understanding, orientation, or play goals whether they be international, national, community, or interpersonal. An individual's dependency on social media largely depends on the above factors plus playfulness of his identity for self gratification in the virtual community.

Individual's social media dependency encompasses all the above elements even though personal networking stands too compelling. Social media also being a platform of all regular media, people depend on it to have a view of the crisped news capsules of various media at one screen at the touch of the fingertip rather than taking the nuances of flipping the print counterparts. Friends' post and interpersonal network provide information services in which second opinion and reinterpretation happens. Prompt or regular Interest groups in important times or normal times: emergencies, crisis, and disasters fill up the gap between individual's strife to fulfill personal goals as well professional goals. It can act like a game changer, mover of ideas or a crowd puller.

Social media do not produce a content of its own and goes far away from the theory of media-system dependency. Its inhabitants, the prosumers set their own agenda of fulfilling individual needs. They keep this media as an

essential link between individual and their social environs interpersonal network or multi personal network or personal network of networks when keeping individual as foci of communication discourse, an individual executes his agenda setting hypothesis (Shaw and McCombs, 1977: Gandy, 1982) as a dependency model. There is a set of personal agenda that makes people dependent on the social media revolving around the vice-versa producer- consumer cycle of social media fodder with the effects of its consumption and production ranging from micro level determinants such as personal goals to the larger macro level determinants such as concerning environment or affairs of the community or the state.

Joshua Meyrowitz's (1993) idea of the media that they are not simply channels for conveying information between two or more environments, but rather shapers of social environments themselves hold true. The information bred in the social media creates a totally unique social environment for that particular individual. The SM does not set any agenda, rather its inhabitants play on it their personal agendas of their lives on different contexts. SM defies the information monopoly system unlike the regular media. Harold Innis had also elaborated in his medium theory that a medium that is in short supply or that requires a special encoding or decoding shall have more potential to support the interest of elite classes because they have more time and resources to exploit it. On the other hand, a medium that is easily accessible to the average person is more likely to help democratize a culture. This statement made long before the invention of social media still prevails exactly when it applies to social media. Social media and its democratic nature cannot be overemphasized. When people want a multidimensional view of a particular social issue, SM speaks loud "Medium is the message". A multitude of opinion, a multidimensional view, a pluralist approach to digest an issue overwhelms the medium,

“Medium is the message” rules here giving no space to rewrite the story, the ultimate verdict being given by the society of the medium.

Another case of dependency of media when applied to SM is that of Harold Innis theory of the “bias” of communications (1951). It stated that different media favoured different ways of organizing political power, whether centralized or decentralized, extended in time or space, and so on was no doubt too crude to account for the complexities of the historical relations between communication and power. He emphasized the fact that communication media as such are important for the organization of power, quite apart from the question of the content of the messages they carry. This theory has proved right if we look at the incidence of Arab Spring. Common man's revolution through facebook and subsequent overthrow of dictatorship regimes in Arab countries: Tunisia, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Egypt. How political power has been wielded through the social media tests the testimony of Innis theory of bias of communication. The characteristic of social media particularly facebook in case of Arab Spring shows the power of social media in mobilizing people, spreading social dogmas and organizing agitations. It has the power to create a hub where leaderless organized groups can wield ultimate social force of the state.

### **Social cognitive theory and other personality traits: its variance in SNS usage**

Usage of SNS is increasing day by day. The time people spent on it differs from person-to-person. Some researchers have focused on the relationship between Facebook use and various aspects of personality (Amichai-Hamburger, 2002; Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Mehdizadeh, 201; Sheldon, 2008). According to Amichai-Hamburger (2002), this kind of research is crucial as "personality is a highly relevant factor in determining behaviour on the Internet" (p. 6). The majority of research in this area has been based on broad models of personality. The Five-Factor

Model, otherwise known as the Big Five (Goldberg, 1990), is arguably the most commonly used model for this purpose (Ehrenberg, Juckes, White, & Walsh, 2008; Landers & Lounsbury, 2006; Swickert, Hittner, Harris, & Herring, 2002; Tuten & Bosnjak, 2001). The Big Five is based on the theory that an individual's personality can be evaluated by determining how they rank on five bipolar factors: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience (McCrae & John, 1992). Keeping these factors as a framework, various entities are analysed. It is observed that individuals high in openness to experience tend to be creative, original, and curious, while individuals low in this factor tend to be down to earth, conventional, and have a narrow range of interests (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The importance of each of the Big Five personality factors has been independently validated by a number of researchers, and empirical testing across various methods and cultures has shown this model to be widely replicable (see McCrae and John, 1992).

For example, extraverted individuals generally have more Facebook Friends (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010), and belong to more Facebook Groups (Ross et al., 2009), than introverted individuals. Furthermore, individuals who are high in neuroticism are more likely than emotionally stable individuals to prefer using the Wall (Ross et al., 2009). As Ross et al. (2009) explain, a possible reason for the latter result is that the Wall offers people with neurotic tendencies the opportunity to take their time formulating messages and responses.

The results of the studies by Buffardi & Campbell (2008) and Mehdizadeh (2010) indicate that people with high levels of narcissism engage in frequent use of Facebook. According to those researchers, this trend is attributable to the fact that Facebook encourages users to engage in self-promoting and superficial behaviours, such as posting photos and writing status updates (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Mehdizadeh, 2010). As Buffardi and Campbell

(2008) point out, the prevalence of narcissistic individuals on Facebook may lead to a rise in narcissistic behaviour among users in general, as such behaviour may begin to be viewed as acceptable.

In regards to shyness, the results of the study by Orr et al.(2009) demonstrated that shy people spend significantly more time using Facebook than non-shy people. Similarly, Sheldon (2008) found that people who are socially anxious like to use Facebook to combat loneliness. These outcomes may stem from the fact that shy and socially anxious people tend to feel more comfortable maintaining social relationships in online settings than they do in face-to-face interactions (Ebeling-Witte, Frank, & Lester, 2007). If this is the case, Facebook use may lead to beneficial outcomes for these particular people, such as increased social capital (Steinfeld et al., 2008). However, as neither Sheldon (2008) nor Orr et al. (2009) examined exactly how shy and socially unstable people were spending their time on Facebook, the validation is far less the truth.

### **Interplay of virtual identity in SNSs**

Identity interplay in internet has been a subject of interest for many researchers. MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons), Chat Rooms, and Bulletin Boards (Rheingold, 1995; Surratt, 1998; Turkle, 1995) has been the areas where people play their identity anonymously on internet. Identity plays a key role in virtual communities (JS Donath, 2003). There are no physical cues which are manifested in virtual conversations. Identity manifestations as told by S Duck & D T. McMahan (2012) happens in many ways : psychic / reflective self, symbolic self, performative self, practical self, accountable self and improvisational performance. Since there are no physical settings on the interaction ground, the idea of doing identity in online environment can be manifold. This was an important finding, for it indicated that the online world was not monolithic, and online self-presentations varied according to the nature of the settings (S Zhao, S Grasmuck, JMartin, 2008). The emergent online

anonymous environment also provides an outlet for the expression of one's "hidden selves" (Suler, 2002) and the exploration of various non-conventional identities (Rosenmann & Safir, 2006). Communication mediated by technology and propelled by text and sometimes with sound and an environment completely devoid of physical cues provides a good ground where different selves of same person can sprout. The combination of disembodiment and anonymity creates a technologically mediated environment in which a new mode of identity production emerges (Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002; McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002). There is the tendency for people to play-act at being someone else or to put on different online persona that differ from their "real life" identities (Stone, 1996; Turkle, 1995).

It is seen that the characteristics of SNS are usually woven around many of offline friends, acquaintances, neighbours and colleagues. These offline based online relationship is called "anchored relationships"(Zhao, 2006). An anchored relationship is thus a "nonymous" (i.e., the opposite of "anonymous")

Relationship. The nonymous online world, however, emerges as a third type of environment where people may tend to express what has been called the "hoped-for possible selves" (Yurchisin et al., 2005). Hoped-for possible selves are a subcomponent of the possible selves that differs from the suppressed or hidden "true self" on the one hand and the unrealistic or fantasized "ideal self" (Higgins, 1987) on the other. Many people cannot deliver certain socially desirable identities in real world, these Hoped-for possible selves are played on and established in SNS in many cases. That is the specialty of virtual platform.

While the nonymity of the environment does seem to make people more "realistic and honest" (Ellison et al., 2006) in their self-presentation, the reduction of "gating obstacles" in the online setting enables the users to "stretch the truth a bit" (Yurchisin et al., 2005) in their

efforts to project a self that is more socially desirable, better than their "real" offline identity.

S Zhao, S Grasmuck, J Martin(2008) on their study says that Facebook users sought to make certain implicit identity claims by showing off their list of friends, hobbies, interests, list of books movies they have watched or other likes. Their cultural selves are exhibited in the list of likes they show. As for the people having multiple profiles, they exercise their multiplicity of their identity for different purposes in different contexts. However it is found that managing multiple profiles is an added burden and sophisticated access control mechanisms are difficult to navigate and often ignored by users (J Morris, D Micco, D R.Milen, 2007).

### Conclusion

Technology has come a long way in the journey of revolution of communication. Coming

of social networking sites has dawned a new way of socialization and networking of people. Technology enabled communication and a whole new door of virtual world has given a new vista to explore human psychology and status of man as a social being. People are becoming more dependent on social media on a number of factors like personal gratification for social membership, driving out loneliness, professional development and gathering of day-to-day information. Social cognition theory especially the 'five-factor model' has profoundly justified the usage habit of social networking sites as per different personality traits. Besides these findings, another spectacular sight is the gap of human behaviour when they act online and offline. Different patterns of identity exhibitionism in the state of nonymous or partly nonymous and anonymity have been found to exist.

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