SNSs: Connected yet Disconnected

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ABSTRACT
Most of us use some form of social media every day – and whether it’s for personal communication, self-promotion or marketing, we use it conscientiously. Humans are creatures of habit, but they’re impatient. This trait alone is the reasons why social networks thrive. People want the news fast and they want to talk about it now. Technological advancements have made it easier for people to express themselves and relay news through social media platforms. We all live in a plugged-in world where communication is a child’s play. But one of the biggest casualties of this connected world is connected to SNSs yet disconnected in real life. We simply don’t have the patience to talk to anyone anymore or even listen to others. We live in a self absorbed world. We love talking, arguing, and debating in our own heads. The Indian social media scene represents a fast-emerging and influential domain of information exchange involving nearly 60% of the 83 million Internet users in the country. This paper presents the dichotomy of the times we live in – connected to SNSs yet disconnected in real life.

Keywords: Social Networking Site (SNS), Social media, Social isolation.

I. INTRODUCTION
Social media is media for social interaction. Social media is broad and it covers a range of websites. There are basically six kinds of social media i.e. social networks, blogs, wikis, podcasts, forum, content communities and micro blogging. Social media are relatively newer forms of media, which allow its users to be more interactive with the content, as well as use technologies (both mobile and web-based) to create an interactive platform where individuals and communities share, co-create, and modify user-generated content (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). During the past decade, it has become far more interactive. Some important aspects of social media are presence, sharing, conversations, groups, reputation, relationships, and most importantly, identity (Kietzmenn et al., 2011).

Abbreviated as SNS a social networking site is the phrase used to describe any site that enables users to create public profiles within that Web site. Buss and Strauss (2009) have defined SNSs as virtual communities which mainly focus on user relationships; the members of these communities create profile pages of themselves which have information about one self, their backgrounds and any vital information that may lead one to recognize another in these virtual communities. Popular examples include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and MySpace SNSs help people to feel socially connected and part of a community, even though they may be sitting home alone at their computer or with their mobile phones. Participants connect with other people they know through school, work, or an organization; they also meet complete strangers from all over the world (Coyle & Vaughn, 2008).

In a new survey conducted in September 2014, the Pew Research Center finds that Facebook remains by far the most popular social media site. Social media is now pervasive in our world with existing social networks expanding SNSs have changed the way people interact. In many ways, SNS has led to positive changes in the way people communicate and share information; however, it has a dark side, as well. Social networking can sometimes result in negative outcomes, some with long-term consequences. Proponents of social media cheer on the benefits and possible advances to society, while dissenters worry the dangers and wasted time far outweigh any benefit.

II. UNDERSTANDING SNSs

While the kinds of SNSs are many and their implementations seemingly boundless, they all share a common set of characteristics that meet the rules of social media. Herewith, then, are the five C’s of SNSs:
• **Conversation.** No longer is the communication one-way, broadcast or somehow sent to a passive audience. SNSs are at least a two-way conversation, and often a multidimensional conversation. SNSs engage everyone involved.

• **Contribution.** SNSs encourage contributions and reactions from anyone who is interested. ‘Encourage’ is the key here; SNS solicits an interaction, positive and negative, by making it easy to contribute.

• **Collaboration.** SNSs promote an exchange of information between you and your audience, and among audience members, by inviting participation. Creating a quick and simple collaborative platform requires that information be organized and easily distributed.

• **Connection.** Accessing information on the Internet only takes a click. SNSs thrive on connections, within Web vehicles and through links to other sites, resources, people, and automatic feeds. People can even create their own personalized site of connections.

• **Community.** The fundamental characteristic of SNSs is the creation of community: a fellowship and relationship with others who share common attitudes, interests, and goals (such as friendship, professionalism, politics, and photography). Communities form quickly and communicate effectively. Communities build goodwill from personalized site of connections.

III. WAYS SNSS ARE CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS

By any definition social networking is an act of engagement. Groups of people with common interests, or like-minds, associate together on social networking sites and build relationships through community.

With social networking, communication is two-way. Depending on the topic, subject matter or atmosphere, people congregate to join others with similar experiences and backgrounds. Conversations are at the core of social networking and through them relationships are developed. Because social networking is direct communication between us and the people that we choose connect with, conversations are richer, more purposeful and more personal. Network exponentially grows as we meet and get introduced to others.

One main facet of SNSs is its emphasis on creating and maintaining relationships. The entire content one creates, all the following one builds, each of these is designed to create and foster more intimate relationships with people, in some cases, people one might not have met any other way. SNSs are changing our interpersonal psychology and thereby interpersonal relations. This has important implications for personal and professional lives, which is based on strong interpersonal relationships.

SNSs are changing relationships in several important ways.

- Connect with More People
- Contagion Effect
- Comparing Oneself with Others
- Isolation

**Connect with More People**

SNS is allowing us to connect with more people more rapidly. As we look at the first trend, we note that SNSs enable us to connect with many more people, from all walks of life, than we might normally meet in a normal work-week.

We can connect with the CEO of a Fortune 500 company on LinkedIn. The business case for developing such a broad social network is found in the work of Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, who studied how people have historically gained social currency which he called it social capital. One way they did this was by having large networks that were loosely organized and not particularly intimate. This finding has been supported in many industries, which demonstrates that those who attain top leadership positions tend to have broad social networks.

With this increase in number of connections and frequency of contact, people have access to many more ideas and resources than ever before. One can crowd source the best information to solve particular business issues. Research shows that, generally speaking, more opinions create a better result. It is easier to extend one’s sphere of influence and enlarge it to include people you’d like to meet, or would like to know better. This means that influence will beget more influence. If you’re connecting with clients and customers through SNSs, you want to be aware of how various changes in our interpersonal psychology might directly impact your client relationships. On another level, too, it’s important to be aware of how SNS participation may be impacting, as this will have implications for the decisions one makes and the choices we adopt for business.

**Contagion Effect**

It makes us more susceptible to a sort of SNS contagion effect, which means one may possibly start adopting behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs from those within the social network. The major downside of social media relationships is that we’re potentially subject to emotional contagion effects, as illustrated in research by John Cacioppo, a researcher at the University of Chicago. His studies show that loneliness is transmitted via social networks. Cacioppo’s findings suggest that if a direct connection of yours is lonely, you are 52% more likely to...
be lonely. If the connection is a friend of a friend, 25% more lonely.

While this research looked at offline social networks, it may have some implications for online social networking as well. If someone in the online social network is angry, lonely, or hostile, and takes it out on you, you’re more likely to ‘transmit’ this mood yourself. This means that even though you may never have met this person or interacted with them in real life, their “bad behavior” can still influence yours. As you become increasingly networked and involved with each other, it’s going to be more crucial to monitor your own influences and reactions. We might be more prone to social media moodiness, depending on whom we’re spending time with and paying attention to within our social networks. It is also seen that sometimes normal courtesy and politeness— aspects one would utilize in face-to-face interactions—are sometimes reduced or missing altogether in the online space.

**Comparing Oneself with Others**

SNSs facilitate comparing ourselves with others, which may have positive or negative effects. Our social media relationships can be that successes feel diminished and failures amplified. With the inrush of so much information about how other people are living their lives, or conducting their businesses, it’s easy to feel that we can’t compete. Individuals might also feel some pressure to demonstrate a certain persona, as they know that people are always watching. It can feel like they have traded a real-life rat race for an online one.

**Isolation: Connected yet Disconnected**

While on the surface it appears social networking brings people together across the Internet, in a larger sense it may create social isolation, according to a BBC News report. As people spend increasing amount of time on social networks, they experience less face-to-face interaction. Scientists have evaluated social isolation in many studies, and have determined that it can lead to a host of mental, psychological, emotional and physical problems including depression, anxiety, somatic complaints and many others. In fact, a University of Illinois at Chicago School of Medicine animal study showed social isolation impaired brain hormones, which is the likely reason socially isolated people experience tremendous levels of stress, aggression, anxiety and other mental issues.

In a remarkable TED talk, MIT Professor Sherry Turkle presents a disturbing case stating that social media and technology which are great hopes for connection are actually causing us to disconnect. In The Atlantic, Stephen March expanded this theme in “Is Facebook Making Us Lonely? ” where his conclusion is “We are more connected, yet we feel less connected.”

While the above studies show actual correlations between social networking and negative consequences, others argue that many other negative consequences may exist that have not yet been studied. Some of the harmful effects people suggest social networking has that have not yet yielded conclusive study results include:

- Encouraging poor grammar, usage, and spelling
- Allowing the spread of misinformation that may be perceived as fact even in light of evidence to the contrary
- Creating a culture in which a single mistake such as a racy picture or poorly thought-out comment can cause irreparable harm to your reputation
- Decreasing productivity as workers habitually check social networking sites while they should be working
- Providing information that increases the risk of identity theft.
- Creating a platform for cyber bullying

**IV. CONNECTED YET DISCONNECTED**

Glance around any public place be it a restaurant or a movie theatre and you’ll be hard-pressed to find people who don’t have their heads down using their cell phones to text, Tweet, or update their Facebook statuses—all while sharing a meal or watching a film Social media’s effect on our ability to interact and communicate is visible throughout all areas of society, so what does this mean for interpersonal relationship?

Individuals can use SNSs in several different ways including accessing information, debating, socializing, or for entertainment (Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009). Hence, the usage of such sites differs from person to person, and dissimilar patterns of usage might have different social implications (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2011).

What was considered private is now open to a wide community. SNSs become the source of change in different fields, supplemented traditional social interactions and even discussion of common interests; they have revolutionized people’s interaction, communication, and even the way of thinking (Abdelraheenm, 2013).

SNSs have changed the way we communicate with each other. Two key concerns surfaced regarding the role SNS now plays in people’s interpersonal relationships. On one hand it allows us to communicate with people from across the globe like never before. This ability makes us more connected in that sense. SNS sites allow us to communicate on a daily basis with those people who we normally wouldn’t communicate with. It opens up our social circle in that way. What we do lose though is the personal human interaction. We are becoming isolated in that way. We aren’t dealing with people so much anymore. We are now dealing more with machines. Our interactions on SNS tend to be weak ties—that is, we don’t feel as
personally connected to the people at the other end of our communication as we do when we’re face-to-face. While we’re communicating more, we may not necessarily be building relationships as strongly. Another concern lies in technology addiction, when individuals spend more time on SNSs than interacting with the people around them, to the detriment of those face-to-face relationships. It may be the parent checking his or her e-mail during a family dinner or the young college student updating Twitter while on a first date. For these people, they likely feel such a strong sense of identity online that they have some difficulty separating their virtual actions from their real ones.

The problem is that, though they have a fun-filled life online, their real life is often full of problems, to which they don’t think they have any solutions. Though they are connected virtually, they more or less live a disconnected life in real life.

V. CONCLUSION

All enjoy being a part of SNSs and understand that it can connect with others too. But individuals are struggling with a sense of disconnection. Individuals need to unplug by employing a “transition ritual”. We need to establish rituals of “turning off” the laptops, pads, and smart phones. Keeping it on is futile. An example is while walking in the door you place the phone in a bowl or basket for a set period of time, perhaps two hrs or even until the next morning. Or while dinner game commit to keeping the phone in your room so you can really “be there”. It is more difficult than one expects it to be to accomplish this simple change. Leave room for the surprise and wonder and contentment with being “in relationships”. Cultivate a real-life network of contacts as well.

Individuals need to monitor emotions and reactions. When aggravated, angry or distressed, and you don’t know why, back away from the computer. Go for a walk, or connect with someone in your offline life. This help can give you a perspective on your emotions and reactions.

Individuals need to treat the virtual world only as an extension of the real world. By ignoring the real world they are losing out on the most precious years of life. When one looks back one needs beautiful memories, which can only be created in the real world. So create those memories with real people. A balance between online and offline life needs to be maintained. Connecting with people face to face, not just by email, phone, or social sites is the need of the hour.

According to Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), the number of SNS users in Urban India reached 66 million by June 2013 and by mid-2015 expected to cross 80 million users. SNS likely will continue to become increasingly integrated into the normal human experience like most of the communication technologies that preceded it. They will continue to increase the volume of the human communication process, and it is inherent on the individual to use social networking constructively.

REFERENCES