

Do You Have A Mirror on Your Desktop? Self Glorification and Exhibitionism in Facebook

Communication & Journalism
Research
3 (1&2) p 9-17
©The Author(s) 2014
Reprints and Permissions:
masscomhod@uoc.ac.in
ISSN 2348 – 5663

Anusuah

Research Scholar, Dept. of Communication, M.S. University, Tirunelveli, Tamilnadu, India

Dr. Balasubramaniya Raja

Reader, Dept. of Communication, M.S. University, Tirunelveli, Tamilnadu, India

Abstract

The recent statistics from Facebook says it has 10 billion monthly active users. Compared to other social networking sites, Facebook users find the site quite user friendly. It is really very hard to find college students who don't have accounts in social networking sites; especially Facebook. They keep in touch with their friends, express or share what they have in mind through these social networking sites. Active 'Facebooking' is determined by frequent photographs and text updates by the users. This study focuses on how the frequent usage of Facebook induces the users to follow the so called "virtual pop culture" i.e. mobility and exhibitionism. At present the popular culture among Facebook users is to get more likes and comments. The excessive number of likes gives them an opportunity to think of themselves as popular personalities. Using in-depth interview method the data were collected from college students in Tirunelveli who change their profile picture often on Facebook (N=20). The reasons for frequent change of profile pictures and updating personal pictures in public space were discussed in this paper.

Keywords

Facebook, self-glorification, exhibitionism, social media

Introduction

Everyone has a great feel of being appreciated, envied and popular. The practice of seeking attention by projecting the virtues of the self-cam in vogue, actually, with the advent of social networking sites; and it gained incredible popularity in no time. Facebook provided everyone with the golden opportunity of being

celebrities in their friends (both known and unknown) circles ranging from hundreds to thousands. It is at this point that how one projects oneself became a matter of relevance. In short, Facebook started to work as a medicine to those who desperately wanted to make themselves known to the world without much ado.

Social networking involves use of an online platform or website that enables people to communicate, usually for a social purpose, through a variety of services, most of which are web-based and offer opportunities for people to interact over the internet, e.g. via e-mail and 'instant messaging' (Rajat Raizada, et al. 2009).

The social networking activity started out as a hobby for some computer literate people and now it has become a social norm and a way of life for people from all over the world (Boyd, 2007). Besides establishing important social relationships, social networking members can share their interests with other like-minded members by joining groups and forums (Neelamalar, 2009).

Facebook

Facebook and other social networking tools is increasingly the object of scholarly research. Scholars in many fields have begun to investigate the impact of social-networking sites, investigating how such sites may play into issues of identity, privacy, social capital, youth culture, and education.

Facebook is one of the most popular websites in the world with over 600 million users (Ahmad, 2011). Those who use Facebook enjoy many benefits such as finding their old and new friends' building networks among acquaintances.

According Facebook user statistics, 1.15 billion active users were registered at the end of March 2013. Facebook was founded in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg with his college roommates and fellow Harvard University students Eduardo Saverin, Andrew McCollum, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughesa.

It is particularly popular among students (Hargittai, 2008; Jones & Fox, 2009). Some college students use Facebook to seek and receive social support when they feel upset (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009; Wright, et.al, 2007). Toma and Hancock's (2011) recent experiments found when individuals are feeling distressed, they turn to Facebook to feel better. It supports various features that enhance communications, allows individual to share personal information, photographs and videos, send messages to friends, and join groups of friends/causes, among others (Vimala Balakrishnan 2013).

Williams et al (2008) in a review of online social networking profiles by adolescents states that Social networking profiles involve individuals creating and maintaining personal Internet sites allowing authors and other users to post content, thus creating a personal network.

Larsen (2009), based on the empirical data, says that both genders seek the acknowledgement they get from having their looks commented on, but the girls are more preoccupied with what kind of comments they get and whom they come from. In general, it is very important that the comments come from friends and people they know, rather than strangers. This indicates that photo comments are not just about having ones outer looks valued and acknowledged (identity construction), but also about practicing and maintaining friendships.

The freedom of expression in Facebook has got a lot of users. They feel happy to share each and everything. But they don't worry about that anything written on the site can be viewed by others, and this can often cause conflict (DeSouza & Dick, 2008).

The presentation of elf in everyday life by Erving Goffman was the first book to treat face-to-face interaction as a subject of sociological study. Goffman treated it as a kind of report in which he frames out the theatrical performance that applies to face-to-face interactions. Goffman also believed that all participants in social interactions engage in certain practices to avoid being embarrassed or embarrassing others. This led to Goffman's dramaturgical analysis. Goffman saw a connection between the kinds of acts that people put on in their daily life and theatrical performances.

Exhibitionism and Facebook

Exhibitionism was first described as a disorder in 1877 by a French physician and psychiatrist Charles Lasègue. He related exhibitionism with sexual gratification such as exposing body parts in a public place. And later it was also described as the act of deliberately behaving to seek attention. Exhibitionism, in adherence to the lately derived meaning, can be seen at its best on Facebook. People update their photographs and feelings every now and then; their happiness is incomplete unless and until they update it on Facebook; they cannot convince themselves that they are feeling low until they share their tragedy on Facebook; their achievements are not achievements unless it receives a few virtual 'likes'; their journeys are not journeys until they update their current location in their profiles; and what not! The term 'privacy' has become a concept of the gone days.

The most active users were found to be young, female, and single. They spend more time than other users updating their status, and use the photos they post to shape the impressions that they want others to have of them. (Susan, 2013). They want me to know what they're eating, wearing, feeling and thinking in each moment. They are actually exhibitionists. So while there is a little voyeurism, there is a lot of exhibitionism on Facebook. (Shane Hipps, 2010). The democratization of public or semi-public exhibitionism has thrown traditional concerns about "personal privacy" out the window (Al Giordano).

Privacy has become the most concerned factor in social networking sites. It seems as though every facet of one's life can be documented online, preserved for Internet eternity in any media form or another (Marina Kurokawa).

Facebook and its components

Main components of Facebook are the following:

Newsfeed

News Feed is the center column of any Facebook home page, which is a constantly updating list of stories from people and Pages that we follow on Facebook. News feed stories include status updates, photos, videos, links, app activity and likes. An update appears repeatedly whenever it is being liked, commented or shared.

Notifications

Notifications are the quick information on our status updates, photos, videos, links, app activity, likes, comments, our close friends' activities, tag and activity log information.

Like

The Like button is the quickest way for people to share content with their friends. A single click on the Like button will 'like' pieces of content on the web and share them on Facebook. When we click *Like* on a Facebook Page, in an advertisement, or on content of Facebook, we are making a connection. A story about our like will appear on our Timeline and may also appear in others' News Feed.

Comments

The Comments box lets people comment on content on our site using their Facebook profile and shows this activity to their friends in the news feed. It also contains built-in moderation tools and special social relevance ranking.

Profile picture

The profile picture is one of the major features which enables the user to upload their own picture or whichever. The user can choose who can see their picture. The options are "Public" view, "Friends", "Only Me" and custom setting which offers the user to share their pictures for selective friends. This is now located in the bottom left corner of Cover Photo. It has less prominence now because of the introduction of the Cover Photo. Typically a head shot, inset at the bottom left our Timeline cover. A smaller version also is shown throughout the network beside our status updates, comments and activity notices in the news feeds and tickers of our friends.

Cover photo

Cover Photos take up between 1/2 and 1/3 of the screen (depending on size) when we visit a Page or Profile with Timeline. It's the first thing which attracts any user who visits our profile. This extra large banner or horizontal image strips across the top of our page. It can be a photo or other graphical image. Its purpose is to welcome visitors and make a visual statement about us. Our Timeline cover image is public by default and can be viewed by everyone. To repeat, the visibility of a cover photo cannot be limited--Facebook requires that it be public, so choose this image with care.

Friends

The "Friends" button allows to access list of Facebook friends from our Timeline. The Friends menu also lets us manage who was connected with, how much we see from each of them in your news feed.

Followers

The followers are the 'non-friends' who can see, like, comment and share our updates if we allow. A Facebook user can only have 5000 friends, when the limit exceeds they can only have followers.

Methodology

The methodology espoused in this study was Qualitative.

Sample

In depth interview method was used to collect the data. After a periodical monitoring for four weeks, the samples (N=20) were carefully scrutinized and selected on the basis of frequent usage (every day access) of Facebook, updating more than one status update per day, recurrent change of profile picture (more than two photos in a week). All the samples were frequent users of Facebook. The age group of the respondents is 18 to 30 years.

Procedure

The samples were interviewed personally and also through the messenger/chat on Facebook. They were asked 20-25 questions regarding usage frequency, updating text status updates and photo updates and profile pictures.

Results and discussions

Popularity is one of the social phenomenons that every human being craves for. It's a general notion that to be a popular personality on Facebook one must have at least

1000 friends, which was unanimously accepted by the respondents. When the number of friends in your list increases, your status updates can reach many. The respondents answered that the number of followers can also make us popular. Facebook popularity is measured by the number of likes an individual is receiving for his/her updates.

Privacy has become the most concerned factor in social networking sites. It seems as though every facet of one's life can be documented online, preserved for Internet eternity in any media form or another (Marina Kurokawa).

“To be noticed, to be wanted, to be loved, to walk into a place and have others care about what you're doing, even what you had for lunch that day: that's what people want, in my opinion,” (Kaysar Ridha)

“I started to comment on the popular personalities' updates and I got much more likes and friend requests than earlier” (Facebook user, 18yrs). These personalities are the writers, politicians, Political supporters, Film actors, etc. Fame is associated with two circumstances that can lead to greater levels of self-focused attention, famous people are more likely to be aware that other people are aware of them; famous people are different from the majority of others who are less distinguished or less famous (Mark S., 1997).

While categorizing the feelings of the respondents when they receive more likes or vice versa, almost all the respondents said they feel more enthusiastic while receiving many numbers of the likes. All the respondents answered that they obviously feel annoyed when their updates receive a lesser number of likes. When they get less no. of likes, they concentrate on the next update to get more likes. The respondents said when they update social issues related posts they get increased number of likes, which persuades them to continue to post social issues related posts.

“I show interest on social issues and I got very welcoming when I post positive updates supporting social issues like Koodangulam, Sri Lankan Tamils and Tamil Fishermen problems. I like to be called as an activist rather a student” (College student, 20yrs). There are so many social and political activists in Facebook trying to get attention from others. Apart from print and electronic media Facebook played a major role in the students' hunger strike and protests against alleged war crimes in Sri Lanka. The respondents agreed that the users who actively participated and posted updates on protests got so much attention, which made them to show interest in the protest.

The content of the photographs posted by the respondents were their own pictures, pictures with their friends, family, spouse/partner and their own edited/Photoshop pictures. These photo editing software options were used to enrich their beauty, add special effects etc.

“I use edited pictures because I do concern my privacy and also I must inform my friends that it’s me” (A female IT employee, 23yrs). According to Susan K., women on Facebook try to create a good impression through profile pictures, rather than posting their actual image they try doing some editing work and enhance their beauty.

The frequency of changing profile pictures is two and more than two pictures in a month. The respondents answered the frequent change of profile picture and photo updates makes them feel more connected and updated among their friends. The majority of the respondents said they would rather upload profile pictures which expose their richness, beauty, smartness etc. (e.g. having dinner from a big restaurant).

“I don’t have a car or even a two wheeler but I pose photos standing near a car or sports bike and upload to my Facebook. I admire myself in a car. I don’t think it’s wrong to say I own a car which I don’t own in reality” (A male respondent, 23yrs).

Rogers observed that many people experience a discrepancy between the real self and the ideal self. The real self contains a person’s true or real qualities and the actual tendency. The ideal self is what they wish to be, look or act like. Here the self glorification emerges when the ideal self suppresses the real self. They show or pretend themselves as their idealized persons. Those idealized persons are the people in their Facebook friends list with so many friends, followers, likes and comments.

Conclusion

Facebook was started to establish a relationship and find new friends, acquaintances. But it became a platform to exhibit their day to day happenings. Sharing our thoughts and feelings with other people and getting their feedback are great ways to increase our self-understanding. (Jourard, S. M.). Active users tend to spend more time than other users updating their status, and drawing attention to the photos they post to shape the impressions in order to look more popular, cool, and attractive. The temperament of exhibitionism is growing enormously through Facebook and other Social networking sites. When they get more likes they feel as they get more appreciated, and they try to establish the ideal self hiding their real self. The individual gets a peer pressure to stabilize the status among their friends. The users must be aware of what to share and with whom, as the addiction to Facebook can kill our valuable time and the things we exhibit may bring privacy issues. The Facebook users try to repair their exaggerated sense of self-importance (Toma & Hancock, 2011) and seek social support (Wright et al., 2007) it is vitally important to discover the potentially negative communication one might find on Facebook and the kinds of people likely to engage in them. Ideally, people will engage in pro-social Facebooking rather than anti-social Facebooking.

References

- Ahmad, A. (2011). Social network sites and its popularity. *International Journal of Research and Reviews in Computer Science*, 2, 522–526.
- Benedict, C. (2006). The Fame Motive. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/22/health/psychology/22fame.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&
- Boyd, D. (2006). Friends, Friendsters, and Top 8: Writing Community into Being on Social Network Sites [Electronic Version]. *First Monday*, 11 (12). Retrieved from http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue11_12/boyd/
- Boyd, D. (2007). Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life. *MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Learning Youth, Identity, and Digital Media Volume* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Retrieved from <http://www.danah.org/papers/WhyYouthHeart.pdf>.
- Boyd, D. and Ellison, N. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1),1-11. Retrieved from <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/boyd.ellison.html>
- Erik Groset. (2012). *Funny Status Updates for Facebook: Get More Likes*. Advantage, South Carolina. ISBN 978-159932-326-8
- Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- LARSEN, Malene Charlotte Larsen, (2009) Girls are more preoccupied with photo comments than boys. April 29,. <http://malenel.wordpress.com/category/youth/>
- LENHART, Amanda Lenhart, (2009) Adults and social network websites,. http://www.pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2009/PIP_Adult_social_networking_data_memo_FINAL.pdf
- Mark Schaller. (1997). The Psychological Consequences of Fame: Three Tests of the Self-Consciousness Hypothesis. *Journal of Personality* 65:2. Duke University Press.
- Michael B., Frank G., Edwin J. (1994) *Human Communication*, New Delhi, Sage.
- Neelamalar.M and Chitra.P (2009). New media and society: A Study on the impact of social networking sites on Indian youth. *Estudos em Comunicac*, 6, 125-145.
- Park, N., Kee, K. F., & Valenzuela, S. (2009). Being immersed in social networking environment: Facebook groups, uses and gratifications, and social outcomes. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, 12, 729–733.

- Park, N., Kee, K. F., & Valenzuela, S. (2009). Being immersed in social networking environment: Facebook groups, uses and gratifications, and social outcomes. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, 12, 729–733
- Rogers, C.R (1970) on becoming a person: a therapist's view of Psychotherapy. Boston:Houghton Mifflin.
- Susan Krauss Whitbourne (2013). *The High Cost of Facebook Exhibitionism*. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201304/the-high-cost-facebook-exhibitionism>
- Toma, C. L., & Hancock, J. (2011). Affirming the self online: Motives and benefits of Facebook use. Boston, MA: Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association.
- Walther, J. B., Van Der Heide, B., Kim, S. Y., Westerman, D., & Tong, S. T. (2008). The role of friends' appearance and behavior on evaluations of individuals on Facebook: Are we known by the company we keep? *Human Communication Research*, 34, 28–49.
- Wright, K. B., Craig, E. A., Cunningham, C. B., & Igiel, M. (2007). Emotional support and perceived stress among college students using Facebook.com: An exploration of the relationship between source perceptions and emotional support. Chicago.