

Ethical Implication of Virtual Social Networking in Adolescent Netizens

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Abstract—Social networking is the practice of expanding ones social contacts. Online Social Networking is facilitated by social sites hence have been described as an interactive mechanism on the internet. The high interactive stance of the social networking sites has made Virtual Networking a vital part and parcel of social life particularly of adolescent netizens across the globe. In spite of several merits one serious criticism often leveled against the Virtual Social Networking is that it is contributing to the decay of morality due to unethical behavior both at the end of users and administrators of social sites. Researchers have written widely on the role of social media in moral erosion. For it, they considered more commercial orientation of social sites and their less ethical orientation. In their pursuit, ethical implication of Virtual Social Networking in adolescent netizens has been forgotten, in particular. In this article, an attempt has been made in this direction.

Keywords: Ethical implication, Virtual Social Networking, adolescent netizens.

Introduction

Ethical Implication

Generally implication refers to a consequence of an action or proposed action. Ethical implication refers to bearing of an action on moral judgment and decision making (www.quora.com).

Virtual Social Networking

Social network is a social structure made up of individuals or organizations called “nodes”, which are tied or connected by one or more specific types of interdependency, such as friendship, kinship, common interest, financial exchange, dislike, sexual relationships or relationships of beliefs, knowledge or prestige (Asemah and Edegoh, 2012). Virtual Social Networking means expanding ones onsite social contacts.

Virtual Social Networking Sites

Virtual Social Networking Sites are web based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with

whom they share a connection and view as well as traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Adolescent Netizens

Adolescent netizens are the adolescents who are using internet, especially habitual or keen ones.

Discussion

Morals are rules and conventions about what people should do in their interactions with other people (Santrock, 1996). Cognition is the higher mental process which involves understanding of information, processing of information, making of judgments and decisions on the basis of such information and communicating them to others (Feldman, 1990). Moral cognition refers to how people make moral judgments and decisions (Knobe, 2005). Shaping of moral cognition means exerting influence on making moral judgments and decisions. Shaping is the function of learning.

There is public cry of moral turpitude everywhere. Morals seem across the road. Morality word seems a distant dream. There are various causal factors of moral distortion like growth of industrialization, lust for power, indiscipline, selfishness, materialistic attitude, social disorganization, bad character, violence, corruption, injustice, modernization, lack of feeling of loyalty, lack of code and conduct, advancement of science and technology, et cetera (B. S. Jamwal, 2017).

On line social networking is a recent development made possible by the internet. It has become very popular across the globe mainly with young people. This is mostly because it affords users the opportunity to interact with one another *in multimedia format* (B. S. Jamwal, 2017).

Social Networking Sites are the web based networking platforms which are primarily meant for bringing people of different social background together in a forum and enable them to interact regardless of location and time

(www.techopedia.com). Social Networking Sites enable the youth to socialize with their friends even when they are unable to gather in unmediated situations (Boyd, 2008). For it, social networking sites allow creation of public profiles. Profiles are unique pages where one can “type oneself into being” (Sunden, 2003). What makes social sites unique is not that they allow individuals to meet strangers, but rather they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks. This can result in connections between individuals that would not otherwise be made (C. Haythornthwaite, 2005).

In 1997, SixDegrees.com, the first recognizable social site launched. SixDegrees.com promoted itself as a tool to help people connect with and send messages to others (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Since its advent, online social networking platforms have expanded exponentially with the biggest names in social media today being Facebook, Orkut, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Google+, Whatsapp and Snapchat. These have become everyday places to hangout for their users for news, education, employment, entertainment, communication, et cetera. Among them, the most famous www.facebook.com started in 2004 as a mean to connect students at Harvard University. Now the website is having more than 200 million active users who upload 850 million photos collectively and 8 million videos to this website every month (facebook.com). Moreover, according to Kaiser Family Foundation 71% of 15 to 17 year old internet users participate in chat rooms. With the rise of Online Social Networking, the ethical dilemmas are growing in number including violation of privacy, misrepresentation, bullying, victimization and creepiness (Ameer Ahmed Khan, 2015).

The unprecedented development of online social networks raises a series of questions regarding the user’s ethical behavior and also the moral responsibility of the social network sites administrators (Mircea Turculeț, 2014).

Adolescent netizens spent their most of time on social sites, which is a matter of great concern. The reason put forward for it is that social sites permit creation and distribution of contents without taking due cognizance of their ethical appropriateness and inappropriateness. Facility of relatively unrestricted social communication makes adolescent netizens more vulnerable to ethical dilemmas. Various researches show that there is impact of positive or negative scenes or pictures or contents on the mind of children especially during adolescent formative years hence on their behavior. Positive contents propagate the positivity and negative scenes propagate negativity, they hold. As such, frequent exposure to ethically inappropriate contents created and distributed on social sites and particularly communicated in sexual relationship based chat rooms due to absence of punishers or negative reinforcements is responsible for their internalization hence shaping of cognition. This fact is supported by the theories of learning.

Adolescent netizens unethical behavior has bearing of contents which they come across on social sites. This argument is

supported by theories of powerful media effects and cultivation theory developed by Gerbner. Regular exposure to culturally alien contents published and distributed on such platforms is believed to have a cumulative effect upon moral cognition and behavior, with a particularly influential role upon impressionable adolescents during their formative years as they transition to adulthood. Consequently social values are getting eroded, moral values have become fragmented and the society is facing an unprecedented cultural evasion. Our society today is taking on new values which are at loggerheads with the time tested and religiously accepted principles of our society. A large part of the responsibility for which must be borne by the administrators of social sites who forget about their moral responsibility of surveillance and scanning of contents being published and distributed by users on their sites as well as due to their full commercial orientation and less ethical orientation.

Conclusion

On one hand, interactive interface of social networking sites and lack of cultural supervision in onsite forums empower highly vulnerable adolescent netizens across globe as culturally inappropriate information publishers and distributors on social sites in the form of texts, cartographic, audios and videos by using highly accessible and scalable web based publishing and distributing technologies, being motivated by their instincts. On the other hand, simultaneously, virtual social networking have also turned them into real time information consumers published and distributed across global village by other adolescent netizens as well as by social site administrators on behalf of sponsors due to zero regard for geographical boundaries on such platforms. Persistent unethical communication and consumption of ethically inappropriate contents conveyed on social networking sites during formative years as adolescent netizens transition to adulthood have cumulative negative implication upon moral cognition hence upon moral behavior of impressionable adolescents. Reporting of increase in strength of adolescent netizen moral disorganization has become order of the day. Therefore, it is inferred that persistent and excessive hangouts on online social sites abounding in and vulnerable to unethical practices has bearing in shaping moral cognition hence moral behavior of adolescent netizens. The objective of this article is to provide knowledge and understanding pertaining to the implication of virtual social networking on the moral cognition hence on moral behavior of adolescent netizens. Writers tried to justify the underlying objective. Pursuits in this direction do not end here. There are still large extant relevant research opportunities which need to be explored. The writers are hopeful that this article will catch the attention of social sites administrators to help generally in overcoming and particularly in reducing the menace of increasing moral erosion in adolescent netizens.

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