FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This study on the arrival of new media and social implications with particular reference to youth was undertaken when diffusion of home computers and mobile phones was bringing a rapid change in the world we live in. The new media like internet and mobile phones are powerful tools for working and learning with a rich source of content and wider access to information. Today new media offers a culture of information, pleasure and relative autonomy, all of which are of particular appeal to youth. This has implications not only for young people themselves but also for their relationships within the family and between generations. The advent of globalization offers for many young people, the sphere of experience that is global and local. Youth are often among the first to take advantage of this change. Hence, in this regard, an attempt was made to study the usage of new media among the youth for academic entertainment and communication purposes.

The study was confined to two arts and science colleges namely Lady Doak College and American College, which were among the oldest academic institutions founded in Madurai city. The two colleges were selected, using cluster-sampling method. Students with net connectivity and a personal mobile were chosen as samples for the study. The total numbers of samples chosen from both the colleges together were 121 males and 271 females.
The demographics for the analysis were respondent’s discipline of study, gender, educational, income and occupational background of the family, time spent using new media, purpose of use and the experience encountered and lastly its influence on personal and social relationship.

The findings of the study revealed that management students’ possession of internet connectivity among the male students in the initial years is lower than the final years, that is senior students have been wired at home more than the juniors and hence senior students could be classified as early adopters to technology when compared to juniors.

Observation made among female respondents showed that possession of net connectivity is higher among respondents in the initial year of study when compared with students in the final year. The percentage of early adopters is less when compared to late adopters, In the Science discipline also the possession of internet connectivity is more in the final years among both male and female students when compared to initial years. The rationale for this could be endorsed to science student’s sibling’s professional educational background and their parent’s occupational position. Another observation that could be made is net connectivity is more among female respondents when compared to male respondents.
Arts students’ possession of internet being still infancy could be due to the fact that their subject calls for reading books more for reference and assignment work when compared to the other two streams in the usage of net connectivity. Higher net connectivity among management students could be attributed to their families’ business background and between female respondents business and professional background of their parents, has made the possession of net viable at home.

Religious background of the respondents shows that female respondents in the science disciplines belonging to Hindu and Christian community possess net connectivity more when compared with other religious communities while among the male respondents possession to net connectivity is more among Islam and Hindu religion. Hindu boys in the management discipline possess net access more when compared with other religious communities. Thus male respondents from Hindu and female respondents from Christian faith are more in the possession of net connectivity when compared to other religious communities. Religious classification of respondents highlights the fact that there exist gender differences in the possession of net connectivity and this could be attributed to their economic background as discussed in table one.

Out of the total male population of 1945, possession of internet connection at home is only among 6.23 percent and similarly among the total 4620 female population,
possession of internet is only among 5.86 percent. This clearly shows that only less than 10 percent of the total population is in the possession of internet connection at home. Internet usage may be popular among arts and science college students from the exterior but when possession is considered for nevertheless a wide gap exists between those who possess and those who are not in possession of internet access. Since it could be that in India, students still depend on their parents for education and purchase of computer and have an internet connection secured is a family decision depending on the socio economic status of the family. However, with the modern society increasingly turning digital, those who have Internet access have rapid access to all kinds of information, and this could create another divide between the haves and have-nots i.e. the knowledge divide apart from class divide.

Possession of net connectivity is more among females in the forward and most backward communities. Females outnumber males in possession of net connectivity in these communities. The professional background of the forward communities and the business background of the most backward and backward communities could be attributed to the increased possession of internet. Female respondents from all these communities have been provided with net connectivity in comparison to males. However, between the SC and ST community’s possession of net connectivity is more among male respondents when compared female. It could be that in the SC and ST community male adult requests and need may be considered when compared with female respondents. This is because education itself may be secondary for many in SC and ST communities
due to their lower socio economic status. Hence, possession of net connectivity being an additional expenditure is considered with less concern by families, paving way to gender differences.

It is observed that respondents’ having net connectivity at home for less than one year shows that male respondents are spending more time in the internet when compared to female respondents and the reverse is seen in the category of those possessing internet for more than three years. It is also found that female respondents are early adopters to net connectivity when compared to males.

Persons Correlation (r) value calculated between possession of net connectivity for less than one year and usage per day is 0.98 and for those in the group of above three years is 0.94. This could be because initially they are in the exploring stage and hence more usage. Similarly those in the category of above three years may be in the experienced stage and hence more usage. However, for those in the category of one to three years R-value is found to be 0.46. It could be that they may be aware of certain operations and skills and their curiosity may not be as high as those in the explorative or advanced stage of improving digital skills.

Access to net connectivity is more in families where siblings are pursuing professional course when compared arts and science disciplines. Sibling’s education in arts and science discipline has not been a driving force to be net connected at home and
net connectivity is minimal when sibling’s education level is just school completed. Siblings professional education could be an influencing factor for being net connected in the present-day family environment.

Birth order of the respondents shows that 43.80 percent of the male and 4.64 percent of females who are last born in the family, have internet connection at home when compared with the first born and the reason could be due to the prevalence of sibling’s use of internet at home and also be due to parents yielding to the request of the last born to be wired. Today it is also a status symbol in the family to be a part of the information highway. To be wired in families is becoming a necessity from being a luxury in the earlier times and this change in attitude would have enabled many last born to be net connected when compared to others in the order of birth.

Income variation as a factor for limiting accesses to net connectivity at home has been enhanced. Even in the lower income groups, possession of net connectivity is becoming common, reducing the digital divide. The need for net connectivity is being felt necessary even in these families for the sake of children’s education. Hence, net connectivity associated with upper class and prestigious occupation has resulted in a change with diffusion of technology percolating among families whose occupations are less prestigious like crafts men, skilled and unskilled workers.
The social background of a person’s determines his/her degree of 'digital socialisation'. The characteristics of the parents – their average education level, the experience they have gained at work and the family income however help to explain the degree to which the household possesses the pc infrastructure which is evidently so important for young people.

Residential categorization of net access at home shows that 76.9 percent of the male and 84.9 percent of the female respondents are from urban areas while 23.1 and 15.1 percent claiming residence from rural areas. This difference in possession clearly states that net connectivity is an urban phenomenon. The higher percentage of the possession of net connectivity in the urban areas could be attributed to the higher educational and income status of the urban areas when compared with that of rural areas.

Knowledge of both advanced and basic courses in information technology is more among male respondents in the management discipline and among female respondents; it is more in the science discipline. Awareness of advanced or basic courses known is more among male respondents from the management discipline compared to female respondents. Male respondents from management discipline and female respondents from management and science discipline are ahead in acquiring and improving their knowledge in digital skills when compared to students from arts background.
Respondents, having internet access for less than one-year shows that male respondents are spending more time on the internet when compared to female respondents and the reverse is seen in the category of those possessing internet for more than three years. Among, female respondents early adopters use internet longer when compared to males since they are of the opinion that internet enables them to get a lot of information confining to their homes. Also for most of the female students socializing outside their homes with peer group is restricted which has resulted in gaining familiarity with computer and the internet resulting in them spending more time.

Privacy can be a factor in increasing the time spent on the internet. At the same time, it can also make the youngsters go into isolation, breaking their relationship with reality and attaching more to virtuality. On one hand, privacy can enhance concentrated learning; on the other hand, it can detract youth from forming and maintaining relationships.

With regard to downloading from the internet for academic purpose, it is found that 78 percent of the male respondents in the management discipline, 74 percent in the science discipline download books and articles from the internet while it is only 28 percent for students in the arts discipline. Among female respondents, it is 79 percent in the arts discipline, 81 percent in the science discipline and 65.21 percent among management students. Pictures occupy the second choice in the materials downloaded for class assignments. The Lab protocols are the least that is downloaded since the
respondents seem to be still familiar with noting down in class rather than browsing the digital media for this reason. Downloading for course related work is a new practice being established both by male and female respondents.

Respondents browse different websites for a lot of specific information for academic purpose. The question - answer websites are frequented more by male and female respondents since it reduces their dependency on others for clarification of doubts. Higher education and career-based websites are also frequented next to question answer websites. Awareness of higher education, career, and new field of study are now obtained digitally at the click of a button, making them information rich to develop a suitable career plan. At the surface level internet is a source of information and a tool for communication but the latent function according to Merton could be related here where it acts as a medium for education and career counseling.

Usage of internet for academic work shows that among management discipline, 44 percent each use it for assignments and exam reference. Similarly, 44 percent of male students from science use it more for class work and 50 percent for exam reference. Among Arts discipline, 40.52 percent of male respondents use it for class related work and 35.71 percent for exam related reference. Also Arts students’ usage of internet for assignments is less when compared to management students and science students. It could be that management and science student’s dependency on the new media was growing more compared to humanities students who still depend on print media. The
female respondents from management studies use it more for assignment and class work, than for exam reference and project work. The science students use it more for exam reference and assignment and the arts students use it more for class work and exam reference. Using internet for project work is not very common among both male and female respondents.

Overall, 61.1 percent of the male respondents and 82.3 percent of the female respondents have the experience of doing web related assignments, browsing for lot of information which itself can be a learning experience through looking for lot of related information. In this category, females outnumber males. Web based assignments enhance searching skills, reading skills and web evaluating skills. Web based assignments thus improve and build up digital skills among the youth so as to make them more competitive for the future. The traditional evaluation of written assignments is slowly being replaced by web based assignments, making it more interesting for the students.

There is a change in the perusal of information for academic resources from print media to digital source. This increasing trend in the usage of digital source for academic work, calls for libraries in arts and science discipline to be made virtual to meet the growing needs of the students.

Regarding the use of library resources, it is observed that both male and female respondents depending only on library resources has reduced considerably. Only less than
five percent of the student’s library for academic resources. Student’s dependency for academic resources on is now broadened from library to digital media.

Academic downloading is slowly becoming a practice both among male and female respondents. This could be due to the availability of internet at home that enables them to improve their class preparation, thereby making them to work with gravity.

In the use of internet for doubt elucidation, it is found that 66.9 percent of the males contact teachers directly followed by friends consisting of 64.45 percent, whereas 75.64 percent of the female respondents contact teachers followed by siblings. Male respondents approach teachers and friends, while female respondents approach teachers and their siblings in terms of academic doubt clarification directly. In the use of internet for doubt elucidation 37.19 of males use email to contact friends followed by sibling and academic experts comprising 26.44 percent each. Email contact of teachers is less but mobile phone contact of teachers is more among both males and females. Both male and female respondents use mobile phones more to be in touch with peer group to seek any academic explanation or clarification and not email Digital media however has opened a new avenue for students to talk to academic experts everywhere, enhancing their scope of communication in fulfilling their academic thirst for gaining knowledge. This indicates that digital technology enables in increasing students’ level of interaction thereby increasing their level of learning.
Female access to internet technology is establish to be early when compared to mobile technology while male access to mobile phone is earlier when compared to internet technology. The chi-square analysis also shows that the calculated value for internet accesses and gender is 13.7 and mobile phones and gender is 19.4 which is above the table value at 0.5 level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between new media accesses and gender is rejected and the alternate hypothesis that there is significant relationship between the two is accepted.

Majority of the respondents spend below 300 rupees a month for talking. This could be an additional expenditure for the family in terms of maintaining a personal mobile phone for their grown-up children. Male respondents are cautious in their spending with regard to downloading when compared to female respondents. However, male respondents seek more gratification through variety even though downloading is an added expenditure to the respondents.

Email is the main online function for both male and female respondents in using internet for communication. Among male respondents next to email in social communication, respondents are involved in chatting, networking and sending instant messages, While among the female respondents, it is instant messages and networking followed by chatting. More than 73.80 percent of females and 61.15 percent of males are involved in playing games in the internet. Females outnumber males in playing games through internet. Shopping as an online activity is gaining popularity among both male
and female respondents. However, female respondents are involved in shopping more than male respondents. Information function of internet includes web browsing, news and blogs and herein females respondents outnumber males in seeking information which includes browsing, looking for news and creating blogs. However, internet being used for education stands high both for male and female respondents.

Mobile phone today acts as tool to do different functions from the click of a button, reducing time and labour. Male respondents use it more for retrieving news and sports score, maintaining appointments and use it as an organizer to schedule work at home and in college. Female respondents use it more for, maintaining appointments, shopping, and purchase of e tickets and gathering news and lastly to participate in contests. Mobile phones are the number one choice for arranging to meet with friends, having quick conversations or contacting a friend when bored. Thus, it acts as time filler that reduces boredom and acts as a powerful tool for self-organization. The gratification theory of Katz can be related to the findings of the use of mobile phones. In the primary use of mobile for communication, the male respondents want to be connected with family is more when compared to girls and this could be related to the process gratification while among female respondents the need to be connected is equal among family and friends. In the entertainment part, listening to music through mobile by male and playing games through mobile could related with process gratification and lastly in the use of mobile for information, maintaining schedule in order to systematize oneself could be related to content gratification derived in the use of mobile technology.
Downloading songs for entertainment is more popular among both male and female respondents 81.81 percent of male respondent and 67.62 percent of the female respondents download music from the internet. Male respondent’s choice of downloading for entertainment apart from music is games and you tubes. Female respondents also download in the same order as males. However, their percentage of download is less when compared to male respondents. Entertainment through digital media is centered on listening to music and playing games making it more personal in nature, increasing man to machine interaction.

Regarding virtual games played, it is found that 61.151 percent of the male respondents and 73.80 percent of the female respondents play games. Female respondents play games more than males and here again for more than 60 percent of the respondents there is no restriction from parents in playing games. Virtual games are a new phenomenon among youth, enabling a new experience and tangible rewards and these rewards could be a gratification. Male respondent’s involvements in games are more than female respondent’s. Virtual games that appeal both male and female respondents are adventurous games, which involve a lot of strategy to plan, think ahead and to decide. The observations demonstrated a range of consequences of game playing, which could be looked upon as perspective interchange, role sharing, self-organization, and strategic discourse and impression management.
Digital media provide new opportunities for people to maintain contact across distance. In addition, there is clear evidence that digital media are also important in maintaining contact with local ties. Keith Hampton and Barry Wellman have called this phenomenon “globalization.” This new phenomenon is found to be applied by the students in this study to expand their horizons, at the same time to use ICT to maintain local ties.

Social networking is gaining momentum among college students, which could be related to building social network. According to Putnam’s theory, networking enables in building social capital, forming a wider community from the existing. In addition, Putnam’s social capital dimensions that is bridging and bonding can related to respondents social networking. Networking with unknown persons could be related with ‘bridging’ an outward-looking network with different kinds of people, which may help in respondents moving ahead for their future. Networking with known persons on the other hand could be related with ‘bonding’ an inward-looking network, bringing together similar kinds of people thereby forming homogenous groups. Thus by connecting persons and other social ‘sites’ with distinct traits, networking bridges across roles, status differences, material and symbolic interests, space, norms, and even worldviews. Thus it plays a pivotal role in developing social relations with a wider network and at the same time creates an self identity.
The study shows that online chatting with known persons has lead to misunderstanding. Among the male respondents, while it is more among unknown persons for female respondents. The major risks attached to chatting are, losing one’s privacy and prone to be exposed to obscenity. Virtual environment promotes wider connectivity and enables in building social capital at the cost of losing one’s privacy and exposure to vulgarity, which need to be addressed seriously.

Social interactions via text message seem to serve as more of an instant personal contact, without having to worry about one’s personal appearance and actual interaction. Texting is a relatively safe environment with the advantage of both synchronous and asynchronous communication medium. It has the relative speed of face-to-face communication, at the same time gives users the distance and opportunity to compose their thoughts. The social impact could be strained relations in the family among parents creating anxiety, at the same time it give independence to youth to interact and develop closeness with friends, friends of opposite sex and cousins. The manifest function of SMS is communication, but the latent function could be socialization between opposite sex without the control of parents. In the Indian families, free interaction between opposite sex is restricted but the mobile phone through SMS mode has broken this code and gives more freedom for youth, which can be utilized positively or negatively based on the attitude of the youth.
Both male and female respondents consider talking to parents while texting to friends. Male respondent’s text to female respondents more while female respondent’s texting to female friends is more when compared to male friends. Female respondents exchange lot of communication and are being present in many instances with their friends virtually; sharing personal moment’s. It is a state of being present but absent. Social interactions via text messages seem to serve as more of an instant personal contact, without having to worry about one’s personal appearance and actual interaction. Texting is relatively safe with the advantage of both synchronous and asynchronous communication mediums. It has the relative speed of face-to-face communication, but gives users the distance and opportunity to compose their thoughts.

The frequent SMS communication messages significantly improve the social proximity between the communicators. Multimedia service communication (MMS) provides more natural interface for social interaction. The use of videos and images help the users to visualize specific details of a situation, an event or an object. This provides a realistic sense of what a particular experience is. At the same time it could be also observed that as proposed text based interaction is found to have less social presence or media richness than multimedia service mail as they lack nonverbal cues compared with other media as proposed by media richness theory of (Daft & Lengel 1986). Therefore, it is clear that text messaging through a mobile device provides lower level of richness and social presence than communicating through mobile phone.
Missed calls are generally given more as information for reaching a particular destination by both male and female respondents. 31.3 percent of male and 44.15 percent of female respondents use mobile phone for this purpose. Next, it is used as reminder call to family, friends for any prior plan prepared. 26.7 percent of the males, and 22.8 percent of females use mobile for reminding family and peer members on their routine schedule. However, 21 percent of male and 18.5 percent of female use it because it is a cheap mode of exchanging information.

Only less than fifty percentage of respondents said that they change their mobile phones frequently in a year. Frequent change of mobile phones is not a common occurrence among respondents. Majority of the respondents have stated that they cannot visualize the absence of cell phones in their daily lives, shows their attachment to cell phones. The reason for this dependency is the multiple use of mobile in the lives of the youth.

Experiences of the respondents while using mobile at home shows that 63.63 percent of the male respondents experience financial constrain whereas among female respondents it is less than 20 percent only. Also 55.37 percent of the male respondents are of the opinion that their studies get affected during the exam time because of the use of mobile phone and 47.93 percent said their studies in general get affected because of talking or messaging through mobile. Male respondents are aware that cell phone is a problem affecting their studies. Male respondents experience financial constrain when
compared to female respondents, since they are habituated to being out with friends yielding to peer pressure in spending money for self and their friends resulting in expenses apart from using money for the maintenance of mobile phone. Female respondents on the other hand are interrupted through constant calls from the family to know their whereabouts and lack of privacy to talk freely while being at home. Female respondents opine that mobile phone increases parental surveillance, which is not approved of the them since they consider it as an interruption in their day-to-day affair.

The interpersonal difficulty experienced by both male and female respondents is annoyance from their peer group when their calls and messages are not answered immediately. Receiving messages excessively at the same time leads to a lot of distraction and exasperation when text messages are not answered immediately. Other problems experienced by the respondent’s messages are vague and receiving of too many messages from their peer group. However interpersonal problems experienced from the opposite sex show that 68.59 percent of the male respondents faced frequent disturbance through SMS, 61.15 percent faced conflicting situations because of wrong perceptive of understanding the text messages sent and 53.37 percent faced misunderstanding from friends for not answering the calls made to them the from opposite sex friends. Nearly 69.74 percent of the female respondents on the other hand experienced misunderstanding from male friends for not answering calls received while 61.62 percent received calls, which were mostly superfluous talk, and less than 50 percent of the respondents
experienced frequent message disturbance and wrong understanding of messages received thereby leading to interpersonal conflicts with peer group.

It could be thus highlighted from this study that student’s access at home and use of ICT depend on their socioeconomic position within the society. Differential access is usually called the digital divide, in reference to the gap between technology haves and have-nots. The exposure of youth, to new media technologies depends heavily on social locations—including gender, caste, class, and place of residence in this highly stratified society. The findings of the study, brings out the fact that diffusion of internet access in students homes are not widespread, but the digital divide gap is however being reduced since access to internet has pervaded into the middle and lower class families which is driven by status, ambitions and aspirations of a better future for its young through access to technology and technology skills.

Management students among males and science students among females have net access more and are familiar with digital operations more when compared to humanities disciplines. Diffusion of home computers and mobile phone is a recent phenomenon, slowly gaining access into the family environment. The advent of the internet and the ensuing social transformation has reconfigured the world we live in, specifically, the ways in which we connect with others. The internet revolutionized the way youth look at the planet and the future. Through the internet, youth are able to do research by the available search engines resulting to earlier submission of their reports, assignments and
other college requirements. Most of all, it gives them the opportunity to interact with other youth and discuss significant issues making them mature and real choice makers.

Today, college students using a computer and internet require specific skills, which go beyond machines, which only require the push of a button. However, what makes them radically different is that they are very powerful tools for working and learning and that they require a certain capacity for memory and abstract thought, which is the basis of learning skills.

Examining the internet as a communication technology for education highlights it as rich source of content, providing greater selectivity to access information. It is clear, however, that engagement with digital technologies is transforming learning, socializing and communication among youth who are able to access and use them. The new digital media now play a central role in youth’s friendships. Youth use new media primarily to maintain existing friendships rather than start new ones. Mobile voice and text communication, instant messaging, email, and social networking on websites like MySpace and Facebook provide youth myriad ways to connect with their friends. Some of these communications take place in a public setting, like MySpace and Facebook while like text messaging, email, and instant messaging (IM) are more private in nature. For these youth, activities like content generation, collaboration and sharing are important aspects of daily life. Many of these activities are ‘friendship-driven’, serving to maintain relationships with people already known offline. In either context, the casual,
frequent use of new media contributes significantly to the development of both technological and social skills. The internet's email and chat room functions allow users to act as equal partners in the communication process. The internet has created new forums of social interaction and social relations through social networking yielding to virtual community isolating from the real community. Socialization is no longer limited to traditional agents such as family, religion and school. Youth they are now agents of their own socialization. They create and form part of online social communities and networks involving other youths with whom they have varied or shared interests, values, and worldviews. This is enhancing greater intercultural communication and dialogue, and consequently, narrowing gaps of understanding.

The mobile phone on the other hand, is changing the way in which interaction occurs, which makes it sociologically relevant. Cell phones make youth available anywhere, and anytime, which changes the way that individuals are choosing to interact in social settings with other individuals. With the development of cellular phones, youth are able to remain in close and instantaneous contact with members of their social network regardless of where they are in the globe. In this new environment, face-to-face interaction is only one of the many contact options individuals can choose for social interaction. Face-to-face relationships used to be the context within which all other forms of contact (e.g., postal and telephone contacts) were embedded. Typically, people came to know each other in face-to-face situations first and used mail and the telephone afterward to help maintain the relationships. Now, this trajectory of acquaintanceship
development is entirely reversed. In such cases, face-to-face interaction is the outcome rather than the basis of mediated communication.

The instantaneous, constant, and simultaneous nature of their new media communications increase opportunities for self-disclosure, with potential positive effects on levels of intimacy yielding to close relationships. Moreover, the public nature of friendships, and group membership complicates the way these peer interactions are experienced. By declaring publicly ones friendships, youth place undue emphasis on social status and overlook the importance of personal compatibility. In attempting to define clearly and publicly the boundaries of their group affiliations, youth may be the victims of the new forms of bullying made possible by new media technologies. However, there is less direct human contact in these new technologies, causing social isolation for youth and similarly their impact on family relations is a concern in the modern society.

**Recommendations**

The infrastructure facilities in libraries of arts and science colleges have to be improved to make libraries a real virtual learning and information centers, which would benefit more students in the use of digital communications, since the possession of net access at home is only in the beginning phase among arts and science students.