CHAPTER VI
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION
As most of the Muslims who participated in this study were very young, the results and conclusions of this study can be interpreted also as “youth culture” among Muslims of Mysore city. Above all, young members of the Muslim community were the main group of Internet users. Young Muslims were more educated comparing with their parents, more inclined to the modern world.

Muslim community of Mysore had a naïve “digital ecosystem”; a considerable percentage of Muslims in Mysore did not uses the Internet; although, the condition ameliorated due to the proliferation of mobile Internet, and smart phones, but still the Internet usage was more common among those Muslims who had better economic background and/or those who were more educated. Accordingly, deep “digital divide” was observable in this community. It is also noticeable that comparing with Muslim men, Muslim women have less chance to the Internet.

Major barriers of Internet usage among Muslims of Mysore were financial inability to afford the costs of access to the Internet which are disproportionately higher than what was affordable for many of poor Muslim families, illiteracy or low literacy which made it difficult for many of them to use the Internet, digital illiteracy or the lack of familiarity of using digital technologies that hampered effective use the Internet, negative evaluations about the Internet by some Muslims who amplified the negative impacts of the Internet and accordingly avoided Internet usage and the lack of any motivation to use the Internet.

But at the other hand, there were several social and psychological factors that motivated them to use the Internet as well; the most notable motivations were to benefit from advantages of using the Internet as a powerful communication technology including variety of communication tools and services, communication speed, vast geographic extension of Internet-based communication and the economic benefits of using the Internet as an alternative communication tool; to improve “social empowerment” through increased level of “social engagement” and more opportunity for “social interaction”, particularly for Muslim women; to enjoy more freedom on “online space”, to be
“modern” and “up-to-date” and curiosity to know about the Internet as well as curiosity to know about what “others” do on the Internet.

In terms of Internet infrastructures, there was not a considerable lack of technological infrastructures that could hamper Internet penetration growth. The diversity of Internet connection types and the average speed were encouraging enough to allow Muslim community of Mysore to improve their online presence. Generally, there were three main types of Internet connections in Mysore including broadband connections, CDMA dongles and mobile Internet connections – including 2G and 3G.

Mobile Internet connections were the most popular type of Internet connection among Muslims of Mysore followed by broadband connections and CDMA dongles. The average monthly charge of accessing to the Internet ranged between Rs.600 to Rs.1000; a few of the samples said that they pay less or more than this average range to have access to the Internet access. Smart phones were the most popular device to connect to the Internet follow by laptop PC, desktop PC and tablet PC; most of the samples did say that their access to the Internet was not limited to any place and they had access to the Internet everywhere (the dominance of mobile phones can explain this). Other Muslims although said that their homes, offices, school or college, and cyber café were the main places where they connect to the Internet.

Despite all the differences of the ways through which Muslims of Mysore used the Internet, four major themes of Internet usage were recognized among them including using the Internet as an online communication medium, using the Internet for online entertainment purposes, using the Internet for learning and education, and using the Internet for doing economic activities particularly online shopping; however there were rare cases of online business among the studied samples.

Size and composition of online communication circle was investigated; online communication circle was important because it portrayed the online connections of Muslims on the Internet and showed knowing how these connections were integrated with their offline connections was an important clue to show how online and offline lives of the participants were intermingled on a hybrid “social space”.
The size of online communication circle also shows their “online sociability“ and the magnitude of online communication. It was observable that as the size of online communication circle increased, the participants needed more communication skills and time to manage their expanding online ties. It is important that “potential size” and “actual size” of online communication circles were very different.

It was observable that having more online friends was a source of social credit; most of the participants wanted more friends on their Facebook profiles that explain why they usually added many people who did not know at all. But the “actual size” of online communication circles points to those people with whom they really communicate on the Internet; number of these users were considerably smaller. Muslim participants in this study potentially had 800-1200 online friends in average (based on the size of their friend lists on Facebook), while they actually communicated with only 100 to 250 people on the Internet.

Generally speaking, online communication circles of Muslims who participated in this study were more in-group oriented; their preference was to communicate with individuals and/or groups of people who belonged to the Muslim community of Mysore. They mostly looked at the Internet as a complementary “communication tool” to re-construct their real world social relationships on the Internet rather than creating new online interactions. They usually communicated with their relatives, family members, friends and classmates. Younger participants were more friend-oriented while their parents were more oriented to communicate with their family members.

It was observable that as they gradually expanded their online social interactions through time, they needed to learn how to manage their online ties more effectively. They always began their online communications by re-constructing their real world relationships on the Internet, but gradually they exceeded this boundary and looked for completely new friends based on common interest.

The religious identity played an important role on the composition of online communication circles particularly among elder Muslims; many of them were so keen to communicate with other Muslims outside their own community particularly with
Muslims in Pakistan as well and Muslims in Arabic countries with whom they had deep religious sympathy.

The Internet offers a variety of online communications tools which allowed them to communicate either with other individuals (person-to-person) or with groups of people. In this study four main groups of these online communication tools were investigated to portrait how Muslims of Mysore use each of these tools to communicate on the Internet. These four online communication tools were email services, social networking platforms, instant messaging services, and voice and video chat services.

Most of “experienced” participants who had longer history of online communication confessed that email was not as important as before and they had gradually shifted to the new environment such as Facebook. But it was observable that email was still an important tool on their online communication toolbox. Almost all of the participants had at least one email address (which worked as their online postal address).

A great majority of them said that they regularly check their “email inbox” as an important daily habit. Sending and receiving emails were generally common for formal online communications, while informal messages were increasingly sent through social networking and/or instant messaging environments. It was also noticeable that, for the older participant who had not been adapted to the new environments of social networking and/or instant messaging, email still was the dominant online ecosystem and the main form of online communication.

Social networking platforms were very popular online communication environment among Muslims of Mysore. A great majority of them used different social networking platforms in everyday basis. Social networking was highly attractive online experience; it could be rarely seen anyone who had experienced social networking and left the environment.

Facebook was very popular and the dominant social networking platform among Muslims of Mysore. Great majority of the participants actively used Facebook. For many
of them, Facebook was the pathway to the Internet as they had begun using the Internet only to use Facebook. In fact, using the Internet for many of them thoroughly meant using Facebook. Beside Facebook there were some other social networking platforms. But none of these social networking platforms had the popularity of Facebook.

Instant messaging services which could provide both synchronous and asynchronous online communication, quick, instantaneous and omnipresent environment also were very popular. A combination of the smart phones with mobile Internet connections, instant messaging services – particularly WhatsApp – and Facebook mobile application created a considerable part of everyday lives of people. A considerable share of their time was spent in this digital ecosystem.

As time passed the boundaries between social networking and instant messaging was becoming shallower and not easily recognizable. As the results, participants were engaged on very fast and instantaneous communication dynamism; they were connected to a large number of friends, anytime, anywhere and made a kind of alacrity on them. Young participant were very fast, very skillful and very creative on using the Internet. They knew that as they had superior online skills comparing with their parents, the Internet was their realm. It offered them sense of freedom, independence and more opportunities exceeding social boundaries and social control.

Usually, instant messaging was a text-based communication; although along with text files, images, videos and clickable hyperlinks were sent as well. Voice and video chatting were other types of online communication among the studied samples which had relatively less popularity comparing with “texting”. Although as more and more of participants had shifted to mobile ecosystem, voice chat was used as an alternative for phone calls.

In most of online communication environments (e.g. social networking platforms or instant messaging services) to use any kind of online communication facility, participants had to provide a group of information through subscription process. After the subscription process was done, they had “personal space” known as profile. Through time, “profiles” usually were become the repository of online activities of participants.
Configuration of the profiles were very important for most of the participants. The configuration of the profiles in many cases could regulate online interactions of Internet participants.

Most of participants regularly visited others’ profiles and it was always the case that they evaluated and judged about others’ profiles. They also compared themselves with the others. Reciprocally, most of them knew that their profiles would be the subject of others' evaluation and judgment as well. Therefore they always were worried about the configuration of their profile.

One of the major efforts of their online activities was to find better contents to “improve” their profiles and to attract more attention, more appreciation, and better evaluation. Through time, and through a process of trial and error, participants gradually could recognize the tastes of their online friends and could learn how to get better attention and more appreciation. Many of them tried to “construct” their images; their profiles were obsessively engineered installations of their selected life events and contents; they gradually developed a kind of personal media strategy.

Social networking platforms and instant messaging services were interactive ecosystems. Participants shared content through their profiles and expressed their feelings, thoughts, daily activities and those contents which they had found interesting. They shared their personal photos, links, and videos. Few of them wrote notes to update their status and allowing their friends to know about them moods.

In these interactive online ecosystems feedbacks were very important because they were the basis of online socialization and acculturation. There were several types of feedback mechanisms, but two types of feedback mechanisms were more common than the others including pushing “like button” (which provided quantitative feedbacks) and “commenting” (which provided qualitative feedbacks)”. These two types of feedbacks were working based on dichotomous logic of punishment and award. It is very much like the process of human evolution. Those treats which are not favorable in the environment (in this case online environment) gradually extinct and those treats which can adapt to the environment intensify and evolve through time.
Rewards (positive feedbacks) are given to those treats (in this context, it can be online contents) which are favored, and punishments (negative feedbacks) to those which are not favorable. Participants always look for rewards (logically) and as the result they try to provide more favorable contents. Through time, this process “shapes” the online habit of Internet users. They “learn” how to “survive” in this environment; the meaning of survive in online context can be more successful and effective online communication, more appreciation and social credits.

Public conversations were also common among the participants. Public conversations were usually in written in forms of commenting. Usually those patricians who were engaged with particular topic were contributing on public conversations as well. To be effectively successful in public conversations, participants needed to have some expertly or at least some familiarity about a particular topic (about which the public conversation was shaped) as well as online communication skills including technical skills as well as enough familiarity with online communication etiquettes. Online communication etiquettes were not necessary skills only for successful contribution on public conversations.

Participants needed to know about a group of norms and online customs, lingual rules and skills about how to protect their online privacy and security. There was not any kind of systematic education for these skills and they learnt these skills only through trial and error process. It was obviously observable that younger participants were always faster and more successful to learn these skills.

English and Urdu were the most common languages with which Muslims of Mysore communicated on the Internet. However in writing Urdu they still used English alphabets. Knowing how to effectively use abbreviations and graphic symbols also were very crucial to be successful on the fast pace of online communication.

Effective online communication needed enough skills of protecting privacy. Some participants accidentally posted sensitive information due to lack of enough skill to work with privacy and security settings (for example they accidentally posted personal
response to many people while they wanted to send that privately and only for an individual friend).

Defining the boundaries between online “entertainments” versus “non-entertainment” was not easy. Most of the participants were engaged on social online entertainment. Such social entertainments could be playing online game, watching and sharing online video or listening and sharing online music. For all of these activities there were some sort of social attributes. For most of the users, having more “fun” was usually coincided with having more social engagement.

An important theme among the studied samples was that they were highly indented to social games. Many of these online games were synchronized with social networking platforms and on many cases participants invited their friends to join an online game. Online games were popular entertainment activity mainly among young Muslims.

Images were the dominant form of online content among the studied samples; they usually preferred images to texts. Such as any other types of contents, images also were exchanged. A great majority of online images were shared and re-shared on huge scale. Personal and family photos were the most prominent contents on online daily traffic of the participants. Smartphones played very important role as phones cameras were omnipresent, and easy to use.

It was very common trend to show off particular possessions such as cars or motorcycles. Many of them tend to show their houses and their lifestyles. They tend to keep connected with the flow of information traffic and nothing was easier than taking personal photos (usually with smartphones) and sharing that with the others on an ongoing “visual conversation”

Another major area of online entertainment among the participants was listening to online music either streaming online music or downloading music. Listening to online music always was complemented by social networking. A great majority of the studied samples had online music applications on their mobile phones which made online music
24 hours activity. By far the most popular genre of music was Indian pop music. Very few participants regularly listen to any online radio and podcasts. Many of the participants did not know about these online services.

Watching videos also was very popular. Youtube was the major video-based social network which gradually was an alternative role for TVs. Comparing with photosharing there were fewer tendencies to share personal videos among Muslims of Mysore. They regularly watched videos but very few of them produced and shared any kind of personal video. Downloading videos also were very popular. Short videos were mainly shared on social networking platforms as well as instant messaging services. Watching pornography videos was popular among young male participants. Many of these pornography videos were exchanged between them through private messaging channels such as instant messaging services. One of the main concerns of Muslim parents regarding the Internet usage of their children was popularity of pornography contents.

Exchanging quotes and jokes were also very popular online entertainments. Some of these quotes were being shared on social networking platforms (mostly Facebook) while most of them were shared on instant messaging services (mainly on Whatsapp).

A great portion of online traffic of instant messaging services was quotes. Many of these quotes were Islamic quotes usually from Prophet Mohammed or any other Islamic figures. Along with Islamic quotes, sentences from other pundits and/or scientists or any other public figures also were very popular. Such as photo sharing, sharing quotes also was an easy way to be engaged on public conversations. Along with quotes, jokes also were popular form of text-based content. However sending jokes was not as popular as sending quotes. An important attribute of online text was that it had to be short text, because participants usually did not like to spend long time on reading long texts and rather preferred to read short texts, see images and watch videos instead.

Online learning in many cases were accompanied with playing and social engagement. The dominant trend (mostly among young Muslims) was that they learnt new things from their friends on social networking platforms, or through watching videos and even playing online games. In other words, instead of older sources of information
such as read a whole text book, young Muslims were always looked for new information sources on the Internet to learn something.

An important source of online learning among the participants was searching for quick answers or sandwiches of information. They constantly posed new questions and usually tried to find short answers for their questions through “Google search”. Through time they improved better skill of how to pose more relevant questions and how to search and fine more relevant contents. Amelioration of “search engines” also helped them to find more appropriate information. The dominant and most popular “search engine” was Google. Mobile Internet was very important because they could search almost every time and everywhere. They carry their smart phones with them which worked as an answering machine on their pockets.

Using the Internet to do homework was very important way through which many of the studied samples in this study used the Internet. It was because of the fact that a great majority of the samples in this study were young Muslims and most of them were students. Therefore an important area of Internet usage among them was using the Internet as a tool to do homework. They had developed many creative ways to use the Internet to do or improve their homework. A most common way was searching information on different websites, finding the proper sites, “copy and pasting”, and rephrase online contents. Another ways of using the Internet in doing homework were using mobile applications, web based application, watching video tutorials and downloading online contents such as PDF books and articles.

Another important theme in the online learning and education among the studied sample was their preference to learn by visual contents. Watching video tutorials to learn something new also was very popular. They usually used Youtube to search a key term. In many cases this process was done on mobile phones.

Along with doing homework, there were plenty of other things that they learnt through the Internet. But it is necessary to note that only few of the studied samples continually and systematically used the Internet for learning things more than their formal education frameworks.
Most notably was their interest to learnt about Islam. In the case of learning about Islam, some Muslims worried that all the available sources of information about Islam on the Internet are not trustworthy. Finally, another source of online learning was learning through MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) which were not very popular among the studied samples in this research. Only a few of them knew about MOOCs and very few continually attended a MOOC to learn something new.

Many of the participants were regularly engaged with online shopping. The process of online shopping for them always began with searching for goods. They searched to find stuff they were looking for, no matter it was a cloth or a technology gadget. They searched different sources. These searches included searches for prices (and compare prices) to find the best price, search for reviews (to compare goods), search for offers to enjoy better price. When they found the good/s, the next step was ordering and payment. In many cases the process had another aspect which was consumer service.

Such as other major online activities, online shopping also was majorly dominated by social features. Popularity of mobile ecosystems was the motivation for most of the online shopping retailers to develop their mobile applications. These online shopping centers constantly communicated with their “audiences” and engaged them on a social shopping.