INTRODUCTION
THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING MEDIA – ‘FACEBOOK’ ON THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP IN THE FAMILIAL ENVIRONMENT

INTRODUCTION

Our lives today can be defined by the term ‘hustle and bustle’. In the wake of our increasingly nuclear existences from one another, multiple answers to solve this ‘communication gap’ while keeping up with the frantic pace of our lives, provided by technological advances, such as email, SMS, Skype, etc. and by social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. are now intrinsic to our daily existence. Across India, there is a growing debate in homes, schools, colleges, workplaces and all other forums of discussion, about whether all these (necessary) distractions affecting our ability for coherent thought. Research, however, suggests that our brains are rewiring themselves: our inborn survival mechanism is kicking into gear.

1.1 Social Media – Boon or Bane?

1. New media has changed the face of communications and now virtually dominates every aspect of human activity. The assimilation of such technologies has a major impact on social interaction between individuals. It is also apparent from available literature that these new media technologies play a vital role in Indian family relationships too. Widespread usage of the Internet among children has a negative influence on the quality of their relationship with their parents. Norman H. Nie, D. Sunshine Hillygus, Lutz Erbring (2008). Indeed, technology and social networking are now the major factors in shaping of a child’s attitude, beliefs, values and lifestyle.
Schwartz, J. (2004, January) recommends that the Internet can assist as a tool to eliminate interpersonal hurdles within families that encounter hindrances in direct communication, for it is observed that youths are more open to share their glitches in an online environment, because: (i) it negates the need for eye contact, lessening the possibility of awkwardness; (ii) due to the asynchronous nature of communication, the user has time to compose his or her thoughts and comments; and (iii) it removes non-verbal cues that may complicate communication. Thus, the Internet has become an alternative medium for children to communicate with, in a language and space than they are more accustomed to.

In opposition to this argument, Baroness Greenfield (2012) has said that a decline in human contact means that children struggle to formulate basic social skill and emotion reactions. She has evaluated the “unhealthy” habit to social networking sites of some handlers, who resort to gradually foul outpourings under the “sanitized and often anonymous guise of the web”. Also, her survey conducted among secondary school English teachers revealed that the majority thought their pupils’ attention spans were shorter than before. Greenfield also quotes that more than half of 13-17 year-olds now spend more than 30 hours a week using video games, computers, e-readers, mobile phones and other screen-based technology.

Evolvement of next-gen media in India

In the last five years, India has seen drastic changes in the presence and use of social networking websites (Social networking sites), which are "web-based services that allow individuals to: (i) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system; (ii) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection; and (iii) view and
traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system”, Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2008).

Social networking media create a central location for users to communicate with friends, network with professionals and find others who share common interests. The “cues filtered out approach” Culnan, M.J.; & Markus, M.L. (1987) argues that social networking media can facilitate a positive development of relationships by omitting the physical and social cues that are found in face-to-face interaction. While communicating online, people sense less self-conscious and are more copious with their expressions. Thus, it creates an air of comfort where people are willing to share their most intimate thoughts and feelings.

**Indian youth’s appetite for Social Media:**

The Indian scenario of Internet usage shows that India has the fastest Internet traffic growth globally. It is expected that the country will have 348 million users by 2017, a study by networking giant Cisco says. According to Cisco's Visuals Networking Index (VNI) forecast (2012-17), Internet traffic in India will reach 2.5 exabytes per month in 2017, up from 393 petabytes per month in 2012 (one exabyte equals 1 million terabytes). Globally, internet users will swell to 3.6 billion by 2017, which will be more than 48 per cent of the world's projected population of 7.6 billion. In 2012, worldwide internet users stood at 2.3 billion against a population of 7.2 billion.

Social networking has revolutionized the way we communicate and interact, and its reach extends into the smallest of Indian towns. According to a report by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (as reported in The Hindu, March 19, 2013), there are around
111 million internet users in India, 89 million active internet users and 66 million social media users. Of the 66 million social media users, 34 percent belong to the top eight metro cities and are classified as active urban social media users; 42 percent belong to small cities; and 24 percent are from small towns (with a population of less than 2 lakh).

**Family relationship vs. Virtual relationship**

The intervention of social networking into the familial environment has changed the concept and meaning of ‘family time’ Gustavo S Mesch, Ilan Talmud (2006). By ‘enhancing different patterns of social interaction, access to information and allocation of time’ Alladi Venkatesh & Nicholas P Vitalari, (1992), the new media has enriched individuals’ prospects within the family.

Social networks have become ‘extended families’ and are considered an ‘intrinsic part of Contemporary life’ Church, Kate., Jenny Weight, Marsha Berry, and Hugh MacDonald.(2010.). Mesch (2006) says, “The introduction of new technologies such as internet into the household can potentially change the quality of family relationships” (p 119). Technology has completely taken over many family activities and led to “a basis for future social behaviour” A.Venkatesh and N P Vitalari (1992). The Cartoon Network’s New Gen report shows that 58% of children use computers and 27% use the Internet, primarily to play/download games and to socialize. According to Mesch (2006), the usage of new technology in the familial environment “has made the boundary between work time and family time more permeable than ever (p 124)”. The traditional method of spending time together and interactions on personal/social issues after returning from work/school have been drastically affected.
It is a challenge to research social media using either the Computer–Mediated Communication Theory (CMC) or the Mass Communication Theory.

**Facebook offers something to everyone:**

![Facebook features](image)

**Courtesy: Life story & me, Saturday, June 25, 2011**

“Different people have different reasons for compulsive Facebook use. But I think it comes down to the fact that there’s a continuous dribble — there’s always something new — so every time you go, something has changed; somebody has updated their status; someone has sent you a request; someone has posted an item,” Daniel. P, Journalist, The Times of India.

Founded in 2004, Facebook was initially designed to connect college students by allowing them to set up a personal profile that included items such as pictures, lists of likes and interests, and contact information. The use of a search tool enabled members to seek out other members and make a ‘friend request’. Once a request was accepted, members had access to the each other’s profiles and could send messages, both publicly and privately. The use of a search tool enabled members to seek out other members and make a ‘friend request’. Once a request was accepted, members had access to the each other’s profiles and could send messages, both publicly and privately. They developed the culture
and general patterns of the site. In 2006, Facebook brought about a major change in member policy: membership was opened to all individuals not just those enrolled in college (Source: Homepage of Facebook.com, 2012), while keeping its functionality essentially the same.

Since membership was opened to all individuals, the result has been a massive influx of older individuals, although the 15 and older-group is currently the fastest growing demographic on Facebook. Due to its ever-increasing popularity among both young adults and older patrons alike, Facebook was much opted for researches. Similar to its shifting demographic, Facebook has adapted privacy options over time. Currently, users can restrict FB account settings to ensure their privacy, such as who can view their listing in a search, what information is available to strangers, how much of their name is revealed in the search, and whether or not others can request their friendship online. Specifically related to their profile page, Facebook members can adjust which users have access to content such as pictures, wall posts (messages listed on users’ profiles that are initially set to be visible to Facebook friends), personal notes, and contact information. Users can also remove or alter content that they have created, or content that another user has created on their page. Many individuals take advantage of the ability to toggle content as private or public; when using a social networking media profile.

A major aspect of managing privacy on Facebook is how users deal with the aforementioned ‘friend requests’. If a user receives a request and wishes to make a connection, they accept the request. Facebook friends are granted access to each other’s profile content. Facebook, however, gives users the option of adjusting privacy and content settings for their profile page on a per-user basis. For example, if a child accepts
a friend, he has the full control on what they can see in his profile.

**Mobile internet – A revolution for Social media:**

The usage of mobile internet for social media is relatively high in India. Among the 39.7 million mobile internet users, 82 per cent use it to access social media, so much so that it is considered the main internet activity done on a mobile phone. According to an AT Kearney report, called ‘The Mobile Economy 2013’, initially, most internet users in India were sporadic users as they had access to a fixed, often shared, internet-connected device. But today, smartphones have caused rapid growth in the number of internet users and also enabled personal, anytime internet access. According to the report, globally, smartphone users use their phones for over 2 hours per day, of which, a mere 12 minutes is spent on voice calls; the rest is spent on the Internet, social media, gaming, videos etc. In February 2011, the company Cisco presented an analytical report on the perspectives of the development of mobile networks in India. According to their estimates, the volume of traffic in 2015 will be 26 times what it is at present (and the speed, the number of mobiles, PCs, etc. will also increase), mainly because people will source information about nearby restaurants, cafes, lounges, shops and other establishments, or catch up with the latest news via their smartphones.

The Facebook Mobile version is an additional success story in its journey to revolutionize social networking. This has enabled the user to immediately share his thoughts and connect with friends on the go. For many people, networking via mobile is not just an impulse activity anymore, it is categorized as an important service which is used every day and everywhere: at home, at work or while traveling- it’s a part of life. (Source: Home page of Facebook.com)
Family Concept battles with Social Media invasion:

Family may seem like a simple concept, but there is no simple definition of family. In basic terms, a family is a group of individuals who share a legal or genetic bond, but a family means much more; even the simple idea of genetic bonds is more complicated than it seems. The family is a group of people that ‘live together in a permanent arrangement separated from the rest of the world by the walls of the family dwelling’ Cheal, David J (2002:4). As per Lalor, Kevin, Áine de Róiste and Maurice Devlin. (2009), a young being needs the family as it is their “most important source of security, love, belonging and identity” (p. 76). But the concept “nuclear family” which is a closed circle with a husband; a wife; and one or more kids; and the home were often measured as one for “practical purpose.” Cheal (2002:4)

In India, ‘family’ is an all-encompassing term that includes cousins, who are considered siblings, biological aunts and uncles, who are akin to parents; even and strangers are referred to as ‘auntie’ and ‘uncle’.

According to Nalinaksha Mutsuddi (Blogger), India and many other Asian countries -- extending up to Japan -- share traditional definitions of the parent-child relationship. It is parents’ responsibility to rear their children in the best possible manner. Every member of the family is to care for every other. Elders are to be held in high esteem and looked after well. A sense of belongingness pervades across the entire family. At no point of time is any member to be subjected to discrimination, negligence or disrespect. Traditionally, every family was a close-knit unit comprising of toddlers, young men or women and elders. The elderly were virtually free of worry, mainly engaged in playing with grandkids, in spiritual pursuit and in maintaining cordial social links.
But, directly and indirectly, global trends invade and change all traditional definitions, and the social networking ‘explosion’, aided by advancing technology, is no exception to this rule. The result: the irrevocable change in the traditional cordiality of the parent-child relationship. While the duty of the parents remains the same- rearing children in the best possible way- the difference now is that children prefer to be left alone, with no semblance of traditional togetherness/paying no heed to the traditional definition of the ‘parental bond’, preferring instead to forge ahead with relationships made by social networking.

Now, families own more than one computer, with machines spread beyond the den, and on wireless connections become increasingly popular, making the home itself a hub of instant messaging. Although it might seem lazy or silly to send electronic messages instead of getting out of a chair and walking to the next room, some psychologists say that the role of the technology within families can be remarkably positive. They are of the belief that in many cases, the use of social networking tools within the family is helping to break down interpersonal barriers that often prevent open communication.

"Conversation between parents and teenagers could be highly emotional and not necessarily productive," says Elisheva F. Gross (2006). When young people are online, however, "it's their turf," she goes on to say. "It may be a way for parents to communicate in a language and in a space that their children are more comfortable with."

Teenagers already use online communications to take on difficult topics with one another, says Katelyn McKenna, Adam Joinson, Tom Postmes (2007). A preliminary result from a study conducted by her last year suggests that "they are able to talk with one another about issues that bother them more readily online, than when they are talking face to face."
Both, instant messages and e-mail messages can help smooth things over after a fight, according to Nora Gross, a 17-year-old from Manhattan, who says that electronic communication has helped strengthen her relationship with her father. "I can remember a few times when we've had little blowups and sent apology letters over e-mail," she says. "We're both writers, so I guess it's easier for us to put our feelings into words through text."

**Parent and Child ‘a.k.a’ Friends!**

One of the most significant and intimate relationships among humans is that between parents and their child. The parent-child bond is unique, both in its biological foundation, and in its psychological meaning. The child is surrounded by his/her family, which provides a framework within which the child may find roots, continuity and a sense of belonging. The loving and accepting parents provide a healthy atmosphere for the child to develop his capabilities into proper channels and exercise his/her potential to the maximum. Trust is another construct that is essential to examine in the parent/child relationship. Many studies have demonstrated that parent-child trust is significantly affected by the privacy and disclosure practices of both parents and children. Judith G. Smetana, Aaron Metzger, Denise C. Gettman, and Nicole Campione-Barr,(2006).

Harini (15yrs, an active Facebook user): You know what… As a teenager, I find that if you post things on Facebook not fit for anyone to see…. something is wrong. I’m friends with my parents, but they don’t really use their accounts – becomes too much for them. I’m friends with all my cousins and siblings, too. This throws light on the fact that the Facebook culture adopted by young adults may potentially be at odds with the culture of their respective families, as established by parent-child relationships.
The ‘existing relationship’ between parent and child refers to the state of intimacy between the pair before the introduction of Facebook into their relationship, and is an important factor that must be taken into consideration when examining the potential of Facebook as a tool to further enhance intimacy in the parent-child relationship. In cases where parent-child relationships are already very intimate, the effects of Facebook in fostering a closer relationship is less pronounced. Children who have a positive relationship with their parents in real life are more likely to embrace their parents on Facebook and extend the relationship into the online environment, Kobayashi, E. (2007).

But there are some sour grapes as well:

Adversely, certain young adults may perceive parental Facebook friend requests as an invasion of privacy. Anita L. Vangelisti (2004) conducted four studies to examine the effect of parental invasion of privacy in parent-child relationships. The studies were carried out before the Internet gained widespread use, but still reflect the dynamics of privacy at work in the parent-child relationship. In study one, young adults identified the specific methods perceived as intrusions of privacy used by parents (e.g., open children’s mail, listen to telephone conversations, ask personal questions). The defensive actions taken by young adults as a result of perceived parental privacy invasions were also detailed (e.g., locking bedroom door, confronting parents, hiding personal belongings). Overall, invasions of privacy had a negative impact on children’s perceptions of relational quality and parental trust.
Theoretical framework:

Having set the stage for this research proposes to investigate the following research questions by employing Uses and Gratification Theory (U&G). Blumler, J. G., & Katz, E. (Eds.) (1974) Uses and Gratification theory suggests that media users play an active role in choosing and using media. Users take an active part in the communication process and are goal-oriented in their usage of media. The theory says that a media user seeks out a media source that best fulfills his need, assuming that the user has alternate choices to satisfy this need. In earlier researches, the U&G was applied to understand the traditional media Katz, Elihu, Haas, Hadassah and Gurevitch, Michael(1973), primarily like newspapers and television, Kippax, S., & Murray, J. P. (1980), although a few recent studies have also applied this to new media, Leung,L (2001).

Hypothesis:

The research focuses on the Uses and Gratifications theoretical framework to understand the quality of the relationship between parent and child after the influence of social networking on the following set of Hypothesis:

H1. The Social networking media has not affected the traditional pattern of interaction between Parent-Children

H2. Facebook in certain cases has enhanced the relationship between Parent-children

H3. Facebook will soon become an alternative communication for face to face communication among the family environment.

H4. Facebook mutually helps to understand and convey the personal information among family members.
H5. Children often prefer to accept their family members as friends

H6. Most of the children spend more time in front of a technological device accessing social networking media

H7. Social networking media especially Facebook enables Parents to gain confidence in children

H8. Children use Facebook to satisfy 2 primary needs: a) The need to belong and b) the need for self-presentation

**Research Questions:**

This study focuses more on the influence of social networking media, especially Facebook, for its rapid penetration into Indian society, which has been receiving considerable attention Tufekci, Z (2007). The study employs a ‘Triangulation’ research method consisting of surveys and interviews, to prove the following Research Questions

RQ1: To what extent does social networking media, especially Facebook, influence the children in the parent-children relationship?

RQ2: How does the pervasive nature of technology affect the self and the parent-child relationship in the familial environment?

RQ3: Why is Facebook the most preferred social networking tool among children/youth?

RQ4: Has the quality of time spent with family members changed after the intervention of social networking media?