

Social Media Use and Impact on Interpersonal Communication

Yerika Jimenez¹(✉) and Patricia Morreale²

¹ Department of Computer and Information Science and Engineering,
University of Florida, 412 Newwell Drive, Gainesville, FL 32611, USA
jimenyer@ufl.edu

² Department of Computer Science, Kean University, 1000 Morris Ave, Union,
NJ 07083, USA
pmorreal@kean.edu

Abstract. This research paper presents the findings of a research project that investigated how young adult interpersonal communications have changed since using social media. Specifically, the research focused on determining if using social media had a beneficial or an adverse effect on the development of interaction and communication skills of young adults. Results from interviews reveal a negative impact in young adult communications and social skills. In this paper young adult preferences in social media are also explored, to answer the question: Does social media usage affect the development of interaction and communication skills for young adults and set a basis for future adult communication behaviors?

Keywords: Social media · Social interaction · Interpersonal communications · Young adults

1 Introduction

Human interaction has changed drastically in the last 20 years, not only due to the introduction of the Internet, but also from social media and online communities. These social media options and communities have grown from being simply used to communicate on a private network into a strong culture that almost all individuals are using to communicate with others all over the world. We will concentrate on the impact that social media has on human communication and interaction among young adults, primarily college students. In today's society, powerful social media platforms such as Myspace, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram (IG), and Pinterest have been the result of an evolution that is changing how humans communicate with each other. The big question we asked ourselves was how much has social media really impacted the way that humans communicate and interact with each other, and if so, how significant is the change of interpersonal interaction among young adults in the United States today?

The motivation behind this research has been personal experience with interaction and communication with friends and family; it had become difficult, sometimes even rare, to have a one-on-one conversation with them, without having them glancing at or interacting with their phone. Has social interaction changed since the introduction of

advanced technology and primarily social media? In correlation with the research data collected in this study, it was concluded that many participants' personal communication has decreased due social media influence encouraging them to have online conversations, as opposed to face-to-face, in-person conversations.

2 Related Work

The question of how social media affects social and human interaction in our society is being actively researched and studied. A literature review highlights the positive and negative aspects of social media interaction, as researchers battle to understand the current and future effects of social media interaction. A study done by Keith Oatley, an emeritus professor of cognitive psychology at the University of Toronto, suggests that the brain may interpret digital interaction in the same manner as in-person interaction, while others maintain that differences are growing between how we perceive one another online as opposed to in reality [1]. This means that young adults can interpret online communication as being real one-on-one communication because the brain will process that information as a reality. Another study revealed that online interaction helps with the ability to relate to others, tolerate differing viewpoints, and express thoughts and feeling in a healthy way [2, 3]. Moreover a study executed by the National Institutes of Health found that youths with strong, positive face-to-face relationships may be those most frequently using social media as an additional venue to interact with their peers [4].

In contrast, research reveals that individuals with many friends may appear to be focusing too much on Facebook, making friends out of desperation rather than popularity, spending a great deal of time on their computer ostensibly trying to make connections in a computer-mediated environment where they feel more comfortable rather than in face-to-face social interaction [5]. Moreover, a study among college freshman revealed that social media prevents people from being social and networking in person [6].

3 Experimental Design

This research study was divided into two parts during the academic year 2013–2014. Part one, conducted during fall semester 2013, had the purpose of understanding how and why young adults use their mobile devices, as well as how the students describe and identify with their mobile devices. This was done by distributing an online survey to several Kean University student communities: various majors, fraternity and sorority groups, sports groups, etc. The data revealed that users primarily used their mobile devices for social media and entertainment purposes. The surveyed individuals indicated that they mainly accessed mobile apps like Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, and Instagram, to communicate, interact, and share many parts of their daily life with their friends and peers.

Based on the data collected during part one, a different approach and purpose was used for part two, with the goal being to understand how social media activities shape the communication skills of individuals and reflects their attitudes, attention, interests,

and activities. Additionally, research included how young adult communication needs change through the use of different social media platforms, and if a pattern can be predicted from the users' behavior on the social media platforms. Part two of this research was conducted by having 30 one-on-one interviews with young adults who are college students. During this interview key questions were asked in order to understand if there is a significant amount of interpersonal interaction between users and their peers. Interpersonal interaction is a communication process that involves the exchange of information, feelings and meaning by means of verbal or non-verbal messages. For the purposes of this paper, only the data collected during spring 2014 is presented.

4 Data Collection

Through interviews, accurate results of the interaction of young adults with social media were collected. These interviews involved 30 one-on-one conversations with Kean University students. Having one-on-one interviews with participants allowed for individual results, first responses from the participant, without permitting responses being skewed or influenced by other participants, such as might occur in group interviews. It also allows users to give truthful answers, in contrast to an online or paper survey, as they might have second thoughts about an answer and change it. The one-on-one interviews consisted of ten open-ended questions, which were aimed to answer, and ultimately determine, how social media interaction involuntarily influences, positively or negatively, an individual's attitude, attention, interests, and social/personal activities. The largest motive behind the questions was to determine how individual communication skills, formally and informally, have changed from interacting with various social media platforms. The interviews, along with being recorded on paper, were also video and audio-recorded. The average time for each interview was between two to ten minutes. These interviews were held in quiet labs and during off-times, so that the responses could be given and recorded clearly and without distraction (Fig. 1). A total of 19 females and 11 males participated, with ages ranging from 19 to 28 years old.

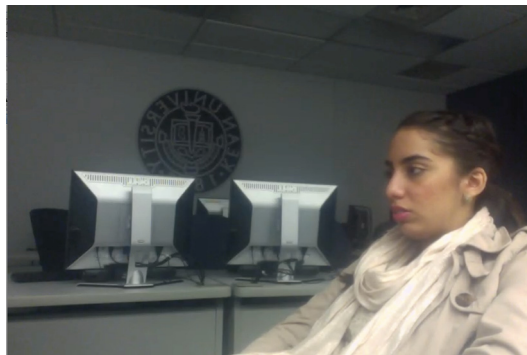


Fig. 1. Female participant during one-on-one interview

After conducting the interviews and analyzing the data collected, it was determined that the age when participants, both male and female, first began to use social media ranged between 9 to 17 years. It was found that, generally, males began to use social media around the age of 13, whereas females started around the age of 12. The average age for males starting to use social media is about 12.909 with a standard deviation of 2.343. For females, the average age is 12.263 with a standard deviation of 1.627. From this, we can determine that males generally begin to use social media around the age of 13, whereas females begin around the age of 12.

After determining the average age of when participants started using social media, it was necessary to find which social media platforms they had as a basis; meaning which social media platform they first used. MySpace was the first social media used by twenty-three participants, followed by Facebook with three users, and Mi Gente by only one user, with two participants not using social media at all. It was interesting to find that all of the participants who started using Myspace migrated to Facebook. The reasoning provided was that “everyone [they knew] started to use Facebook.” According to the participants, Facebook was “more interactive” and was “extremely easy to use.” The participants also stated that Myspace was becoming suitable for a younger user base, and it got boring because they needed to keep changing their profile backgrounds and modifying their top friends, which caused rifts or “popularity issues” between friends. After finding out which platform they started from, it was also essential to find out which platform they currently use. However, one platform that seemed to be used by all participants to keep up-to-date with their friends and acquaintances was Instagram, a picture and video-based social media platform. Another surprising finding was that many users did not use Pinterest at all, or had not even heard of the platform. After determining which social media platforms the users migrated to, it was essential to identify what caused the users to move from one platform to another. What are the merits of a certain platform that caused the users to migrate to it, and what are the drawbacks of another platform that caused users to migrate from it or simply not use it all?

4.1 Social Interaction Changes

For some participants social interaction had a chance for a positive outcome, while others viewed it in a more negative aspect. The participants were asked if their social interactions have changed since they were first exposed to social media (Table 1). One participant stated that “it is easier to just look at a social media page to see how friends and family are doing rather than have a one-on-one interaction.” As for people’s attitudes, they would rather comment or “like” a picture than stop and have a quick conversation. On the other hand, another participant felt that social media helped them when talking and expressing opinions on topics that they generally would not have discussed in person. Moreover, the participants are aware of the actions and thing that they are doing but continue to do it because they feel comfortable and did not desire to have one-on-one interactions with people.

The participants were also asked to explain how social media changed their communication and interactions during the years of using social media (Table 2). The data shows that participants interact less in person because they are relating more via

Table 1. Social interaction change

Has your social interaction changed since your first exposure to social media?
Participant x: "I have been interacting more on social media to see how my friends and family are doing. It easier to see their status and pictures than actually call them or have a face-to-face conversation". "Personally I think that people's attitudes have changed because when people see you around school they act like they do not know you. But online they like all your pictures and comment."
Participant x1: "It made me more open with people – I feel comfortable sharing information and discussing topics that I wouldn't have mentioned in person. "
Participant x2: "Using social media makes it easy to start a conversation. However, most of the time you will never have the same conversation because people are scared of actually saying something face to face. Online, you do not have to deal with the stress of seeing that other person's gestures or body language."
Participant x3: "I text 24/7 and I ignore people around me while I am texting. Sometimes I cannot control myself"

Table 2. Communication and interaction changed

How has your communication changed since social media?
Participant x: I interact less, because I can simply see that everyone is doing good by looking at their online pictures and status.
Participant x1: It made me more cautious – afraid to put my personal information up.
Participant x2: My communication is the same. However, people have changed a lot. The internet creates their popularity, but they walk around and act like they now know you but they cannot say hi and act like they do not know you. If people don't not learn how to separate the two (reality vs. social media) then there will not be any more one-to-one interaction between people
Participant x3: Yes, I look at their pictures and I try to understand them just by their pictures-without speaking to them. In other words, I judging by looking

online pictures and status. For other participants, it made them more cautious and even afraid of putting any personal information online because it might cause problems or rifts in their life. On the contrary, some participants stated that their communication and interaction is the same; however, they were able to see how it had changed for the people that are around them. A participant stated that "internet/social media is a power tool that allows people to be whatever they want and in a way it creates popularity, but once again they walk around acting like they do not know you and 'like' your pictures the next day."

5 Discussion

The data illustrated in this paper shows how much the introduction and usage of social media has impacted the interaction and communication of young adults. The future of interaction and communication was also presented as a possibility, if the current trend continues with young adults and social media or online communities. This raises the notion of possibly not having any social, in-person interaction and having all communication or interaction online and virtually with all family and friends.

6 Conclusion

Referring back to the question asked during the introduction: how much has social media impacted the way we communicate and interact with each other? After reviewing all the findings, seeing the relationship individuals have with their mobile phones, and comparing social media platforms, it is clear that many young adults have an emotional attachment with their mobile device and want interaction that is quick and to the point, with minimal “in-person” contact. Many young adults prefer to use their mobile device to send a text message or interact via social media. This is due to their comfort level being higher while posting via social media applications, as opposed to in-person interaction. To successfully and accurately answer the question: yes, social media has had a very positive and negative effect on the way we communicate and interact with each other. However, how effective is this method of “virtual” communication and interaction in the real world?

References

1. Paul, A.: Your Brain on Fiction. *The New York Times*, 17 March 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/18/opinion/sunday/the-neuroscience-of-your-brain-on-fiction.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0. Accessed 26 April 2014
2. Burleson, B.R.: The experience and effects of emotional support: what the study of cultural and gender differences can tell us about close relationships, emotion, and interpersonal communication. *Pers. Relat.* **10**, 1–23 (2003)
3. Hinduja, S., Patchin, J.: Personal information of adolescents on the internet: a quantitative content analysis of myspace. *J. Adolesc.* **31**, 125–146 (2007)
4. Hare, A.L., Mikami, A., Szwedo, Y., Allen, D., Evans, M.: Adolescent peer relationships and behavior problems predict young adults’ communication on social networking websites. *Dev. Psychol.* **46**, 46–56 (2010)
5. Orr, R.R., Simmering, M., Orr, E., Sisic, M., Ross, C.: The influence of shyness on the use of facebook in an undergraduate sample. *Cyber Psychol. Behav.* **12**, 337–340 (2007)
6. Tong, S.T., Van Der Heide, B., Langwell, L., Walther, J.B.: Too much of a good thing? The relationship between number of friends and interpersonal impressions on facebook. *J. Comput. Mediated Commun.* **13**, 531–549 (2008)