

Editorial

Decoding Web Groups



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What did come first then, the chicken or the egg? The vast universe of the sunny yolk had to be cracked open for the chick to be born, grow up, mate and lay an egg. But who put that first chicken in the haystack? Would you say our Digital Natives group and the members within are a Kafkaesque chicken-and-egg waiting for their moment of evolutionary truth?

A group's presence is crystallized long before it's given a name, right from that creative moment when the idea to form a group came into play. Of course, the moment of big bang is quite hazy. The blank, white space of the cyber walls wait for proclamation from the newly hatched members to validate its existence; that moment when we all say, "We are part of this group", or when you click, "join" and your membership is "confirmed" – that's when the group takes its first breath.

Again, what came first, the empty-walled group with only a name to go by and unseen ideologies keeping it awake, or the group members, who are bursting with the knowledge of what they are, where they come from, what they want this group to be. The group, so long as it is a conscious, Kafkaesque chicken, doesn't even have that much to go on. It only knows that it has to nurture the egg and wait for it to hatch. Does the chicken know the color, dimensions, size or thoughts of the egg and chick within? No, nothing!

So, by definition, a group's outline is pre-defined even before members join it. Once the members join, they define that outline further, sort of like darkening a pencil line on paper with a charcoal marker. What happens as the days go by? Does the group stick to the outlines of its ideals or do the members slowly change its shape and definition? Don't we slowly erase the boundaries of definition and redefine the group for what 'we are', rather than for what 'it' (the group) stood for? In this metamorphosis, members also change, exhibit new traits and behavior and continue molding the group in unforeseen ways. The group in effect can never be a static entity and cannot be effectively quantified or defined at any one point in time.

The Chicken is the Egg

Do members make a group or is it the other way around?
An oval egg helps me reason.

If posts are representations of a person – their voice, so to speak – what does it say about group behaviour online when we ignore or remain neutral to status updates?

In a fit of frenzy, when I was feeling particularly stir-crazy, I deleted the more than 100 posts I had up on a Facebook group I am part of. A hundred-odd status updates, news and information links, poetry, polls, video, and photo uploads that were specific to the interests and theme of the group – digital native culture. The hardest part was the fact that of the 70-plus members, not a one noticed this 'transgression'. The most surprising fact is that I didn't get all hyper-emotional for losing vital bits of what I had invested in the group for more than a year. So, what gives?

Well, it wasn't all mayhem. I was particularly interested in finding out if, firstly, would anyone notice the missing posts; secondly, would anyone 'miss' the deletions on an emotional note; thirdly, would it concern anyone enough that posts that were Liked, Commented and Gushed over were no longer available to the group as an archive; fourth, did anyone think that I unfairly deleted posts that was partly, group property, considering so many of them commented and expressed considered opinions on them; and lastly, what are the qualities that we attribute to posts – are they merely information bytes, or do people use them as reference to understand the person behind the posts?

The last point is crucial to delve into considering that group members on Facebook hardly meet each other, especially if the original way they came together was virtual and not an offline-meet up-turned-cyber-hangout. So, the way we interact within a group is, apart from one-on-one or one-to-many group chats is primarily through the dozen postings. The posts become a guide to form impressions on group members: someone who simply Likes several hundred posts over the year but never responds through comments would be considered a lurker or a introvert, neutral or talk-shy person. At other times, posters can be classified as information sharers, information consumers, opinion makers, persuaders or other personality-types within groups. There is much to make sense of from those posts!

In a group, an overt response to your post or links is the only way to ascertain if you have been heard. Posts serve an informational as well as emotive, neutral or non-descript functional values. Being seen as 'data' rather than a person's voice makes it difficult to formulate a framework within which we make sense of the way we "treat" persons and their online contribution.

Coming back to the original sleuthing goals, if no one missed the deletions and hardly anyone noticed that certain important news links or Infographics are gone forever, what does that say about the 'value' we ascribe to people as well as the collective

presence of a group? That's just like posting a Facebook update, 'I am feeling miserable after my dog died', for example and no one decides to respond to it. And is it really about a calculative action: do I, should I comment or Like beneath an update, do I skip it over, do I scroll to more interesting news; do we deliberate over it so consciously?

This brings us to the question: Are all posts given the same value? Perhaps, some of you might already ask to change the interrogative context to, 'Should all the posts be given the same value' for which the answer would be an obvious no. Think about this, while conversing in a physically present group on a physical plane, you make an announcement or talk about the most mundane of things, knowing that you have the surety, guarantee, of being heard. After all, your voice can't be shut out. It's a different matter to gauge whether your group is paying attention to your speech or if they are tuning you out. However, you are guaranteed feedback, either through verbal or a facial cue, or via body language. If the importance we assign to posts is set at an arbitrary level, no one is guaranteed any measurable response and the Message Board of Facebook, Twitter or any other social media site just becomes another graffiti wall, no response required, it's all over in the process itself.

Ok, so the sum-total of all my energies and efforts to curate interesting links for the group and start an inspiration thread on a post-Singularity dystopian future didn't so much as register a blip on the attention radar of the members when it all (the posts) vanished overnight. I waited, tapped fingernails on keyboard, prayed to the cyber-goddess shakti to salvage my vanity, and eventually the impatient hyper-enthusiast in me leaked the 'secret' to a couple of group members. The reaction? They ended up seeing my riotous deletions as a "lol, fun" activity rather than a "subversive experiment in chronicling the value of our textual detritus" that I intended it to be. So much for Rainbow's Gravity.

Well, I have erased all traces of my past. I have erased the back story that made references to what gave me a kick and what saddened me. I bet, I bet you a good deal of the gold pot at the end of the rainbow that not many of you would remember a quarter of all I said, debated, disliked or perhaps stayed non-committal about. If you don't have proof of the text that gave evidence of my existence (as a member of your group), what are you going to rely on to talk to me today, tomorrow? Are your impressions of me good enough and well-formed, or did you earmark my words – links and posts – to be looked up later on?

I feel it's not human to look at our communications online as merely information-archives streaming our individual walls for consumption. But I also wonder, will it really matter to those who come after me?

CONTRIBUTORS



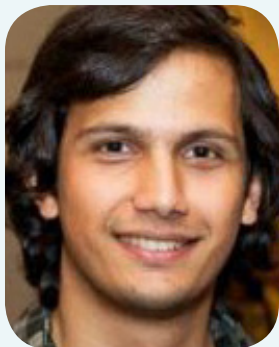
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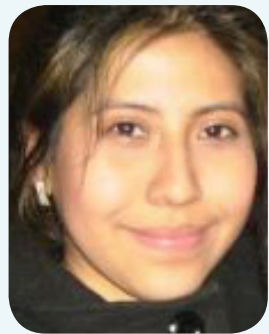
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History Sheet

UK's first ever online flash mob

Relive UK's first ever online flash mob
Let the hoppers loose. Experience the fun. All over again.

What happened?
The UK's first ever online flash mob saw hundreds of colored hoppers invade one of the biggest sites on the Internet.

Flash mobs normally take place in the real world, when a large group of people suddenly converge in a public place and perform an unusual activity for a short while - normally to the surprise and confusion of passers-by - before disappearing as suddenly as they appeared.

The first flash mobs were started in New York in 2003 as a social experiment, but their popularity boomed. Famous events have included a silent disco at London Underground stations, where participants were encouraged to dance wildly to their own personal music player, and a mass pillow fight which took place in 25 cities around the world simultaneously.

The online flash mob which caught Yahoo's users by surprise saw thousands of individually designed coloured space hoppers bounce across

Satio™ and Aino™ sparked the hopper invasion. We recorded it. Catch it again. Right now.

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The UK's first ever online flash mob saw hundreds of colored hoppers invade one of the biggest sites on the Internet. Flash mobs normally take place in the real world, when a large group of people suddenly converge in a public place and perform an unusual activity for a short while - normally to the surprise and confusion of passers-by - before disappearing as suddenly

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ously. The online flash mob which caught Yahoo's users by surprise saw thousands of individually designed coloured space hoppers bounce across the screen for 40 seconds at exactly 3 pm, before vanishing.

Source: <http://hopperinvasion.admedia.yahoo.com/uk/watch>

Opinion

Digital Project Management: Better Than Offline Monitoring?

Brendon O'Brien examines the viability of remote working and managing groups online in an age where every process seems to be digitally connected

Digital technologies have officially taken over every aspect of human interaction and communication. Families use video conferencing technology to speak to their relatives overseas. Schools use internet resources to share information, give assignments and even grade papers. And now, businesses use programs to share files out-of-office, speak to employees across different departments or branches, and even let employees do some tasks remotely from their homes. Very soon, perhaps in the next decade, the idea of having to go to your office building would seem ridiculous!

Digital technologies have modified the definition of workplace and teams. Nowadays, it's not uncommon to see several teams working on one project across different time zones and physical spaces, share and edit documents and files together using innovative web-based applications such as Google Docs for instance, and use cloud-backup programs that allow more than one person to access the same file easily. Project management websites like freedcamp allow group leaders to give tasks and share milestones without convening a boardroom meeting with dozens of tea-breaks, unnecessary stationery distributed and the boss talking down to specific members about who's not getting the job done.

Even with all this technology geared toward creating a seamless work environment, basic questions still remain: is digital project management here to stay, and is it more effective in getting work done compared to traditional, face-to-face monitoring at a workplace? Let me discuss the pros and cons. The first issue with online work is that it makes the basic assumption that all workers are "tech-enabled", meaning everyone has the same capacities to grasp digital technologies and make use of office-related digital tools. In order for every person to have the same access to necessary information, participate in group processes in a timely manner and file correspondence according to per deadlines, all members need to have: 1) access to Internet at home 2) the same hardware 3) spend the same number of hours working online as per their team members.

If the group is required to be constantly participating in the process of the project or relay new information as it is received, then the group is expected to have the same broadband speed or plug-in Internet connections with same bandwidth. Can this be guaranteed? If members are required to travel for client meetings, then they need to have Internet-enabled mobile phones and laptops to send or receive critical files, data or communicate information in real time. Not everyone, however, has these facilities ready at their disposal. Companies do provide net connection to those who work from home, however, as we know, there are several technical difficulties in accessing faster broadband connections across different geographic regions. This might mean that the group, or its leader, will have to decide how to gather those resources for the benefit of the group, and hope that it is properly utilized.

This leads me to problem number two. Giving employees the freedom to work at their own pace or in their own space means that they can be easily distracted by the things that usually take up a person's time when they are not in office or on the field doing work. In a 9 to 5 business environment, family and friends usually restrict calling employees and workers know that they cannot take unusually long coffee or lunch breaks or go out to complete their chores! This is actually what happens when you do work from home: many of us get caught up or distracted with paying the bills, calling our friends or answering the door as we don't restrict the work zone at home. All this translates into an erratic work pattern and delayed project timelines.

Often, groups that are managed online for the purpose of finishing a project suffer from a lack of leadership, even when a leader is assigned. The problem is seldom that the leader is incompetent or lazy, but rather that his sphere of influence is restricted to voice chats or video conferencing. The force of someone's personality, their emotions or body language gets diluted when the medium is a 'screen'. The good thing about a manager 'in the real world' is that he has the opportunity to get in your face and speak to you one-on-one. He can observe your willingness and ability to work, read your body language to tell if you're enthusiastic to get the job done, and look into your eyes when he's telling you what you're doing wrong and make sure you understand how to correct it. This can also be a problem for the other members of a team, who could very well be working their tails off but will not be able to get that recognition because the work takes place in a space where only the end results matter and are seen, and not the process itself, which remain hidden.

Also a regular problem is communication between all members of the team, which can very easily turn hostile. In every group there are people who find a harder time to get along and work together than everyone else. Usually, because of subtle social pressures to keep the peace, even two team members who cannot get along will decide to just suck it up and work around each other. In the digital space, however, where there is no one to hold you back or speak to you before you say or do something you might regret, words can be more easily taken out of context or read too much into. This can lead to lack of cohesiveness within the group, and even create animosity between members. Since there isn't a project manager sitting right across the floor or in the next cabin or cubicle, problems tend to simmer or stretch out, or worse, team members continue working without solving the issue.

In sum, a group that is digitally managed does seem to have a lot of shortcomings. There are several advantages at the same time, such as being able to share information quickly and easily, promote an open and transparent working environment where all data is shared and available, tracking of a

project's timeline becomes easier, and finally, it allows for greater levels of multi-tasking. However, unless they are met with some level of on-shore 'in-office' monitoring, it is not likely to yield great results. While innovative and advantageous, online project management has a long way to go before being accepted as norm across industry, NGO and government sectors.

Poet's Hangout



Herd Mentality

Its twelve midnight
My eyes are glued to the monitor,
Alert fingers type furiously,
I'm conversing with friends across the world.

The chat is on Facebook,
While the other window monitors my mail,
A third zips through my RSS feeds,
My head is like the flying Twitter Whale.

I have been to MySpace,
Networked on LinkedIn,
And most recently on board Google Plus
I signed up for my communication needs.

I doze off,
Wake up,
Make a cup of coffee and asked myself
Why am I watching my fingers dance?
What do I get from all this mayhem?

Realization struck;
Virtual Talk has changed my lifestyle
Most of my friends are digital,
Most of my work floating in space,
It was the way of the world,
I am just one among the herd.

It's time I get back to my body
Time to walk away from the 'herd mentality'
I head back to sites that I can control,
Perhaps, my friends will follow me?

Paidamoyo Muzulu

INTERACTION^{net}

HOW DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS ARE INTERACTING ONLINE

WHO USES THE SOCIAL WEB?

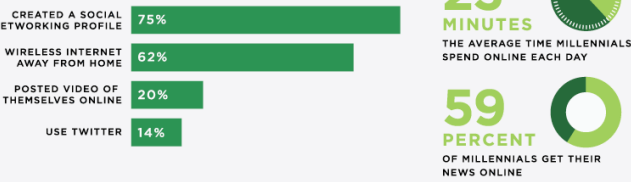
MOST ONLINE INTERACTION TAKES PLACE ON THE SOCIAL WEB (FACEBOOK, TWITTER, ETC.). HERE'S THE AGE DISTRIBUTION ACROSS THE SOCIAL WEB:



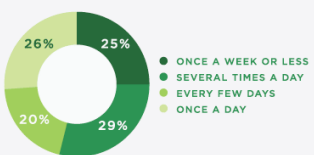
MILLENNIALS: THE FUTURE OF THE INTERNET

MILLENNIALS, BORN BETWEEN 1978 AND 1994 (CURRENTLY AGES 16-32), WERE THE FIRST GENERATION TO BE "RAISED" ON THE INTERNET AND REPRESENT A SUBSTANTIAL PORTION OF INTERNET USERS. THE MILLENNIAL AGE COHORT IS EXPECTED TO BE AS LARGE, IF NOT LARGER THAN THE BABY BOOMER GENERATION.

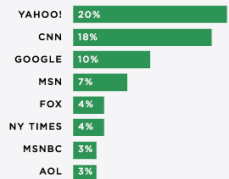
HOW ARE MILLENNIALS USING THE INTERNET?



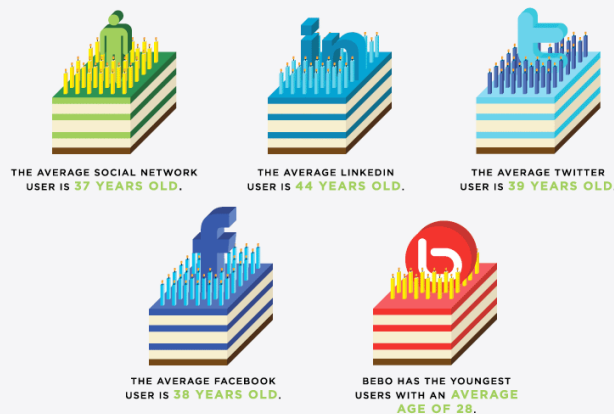
HOW OFTEN DO MILLENNIALS VISIT SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES?



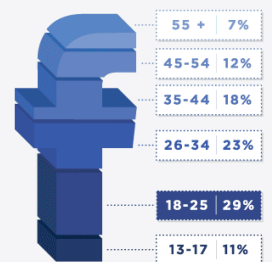
OF THE MILLENNIALS THAT GET THEIR NEWS ONLINE, HERE ARE THE CHANNELS THEY USE:



AVERAGE AGE OF USERS PER SITE



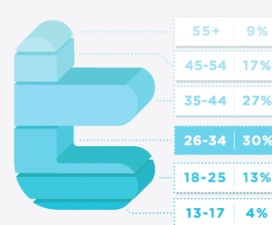
FACEBOOK USER BREAKDOWN BY AGE



AGE-BASED BEHAVIOR ON FACEBOOK

- TEENS HAVE TWICE AS MANY FRIENDS THAN USERS AGED 30-40.
- TEENS MAKE ALMOST 3X AS MANY WALL POSTS AS USERS AGED 40-50.
- USERS IN THEIR EARLY 20'S LIST THE MOST ACTIVITIES IN THEIR PROFILE OF ANY AGE GROUP.
- YOUNGER PEOPLE EXPRESS MORE NEGATIVE EMOTIONS, AND SWEAR MORE, THAN OLDER USERS. THEY USE MORE PERSONAL PRONOUNS AND POSSESSIVES ("I," "MY," ETC.) AND TALK MORE ABOUT SCHOOL.
- OLDER PEOPLE WRITE LONGER UPDATES, USE MORE PREPOSITIONS AND ARTICLES, AND TALK MORE ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE, INCLUDING THEIR FAMILIES.
- USERS AGED 27 AND 28 HAVE THE MOST UPLOADED PHOTOS, WITH AN AVERAGE OF 510.
- USERS IN THEIR 40'S UPLOAD ABOUT AS MANY PHOTOS AS THOSE IN THEIR 20'S, BUT ARE TAGGED IN PHOTOS 28% LESS.

TWITTER USER BREAKDOWN BY AGE

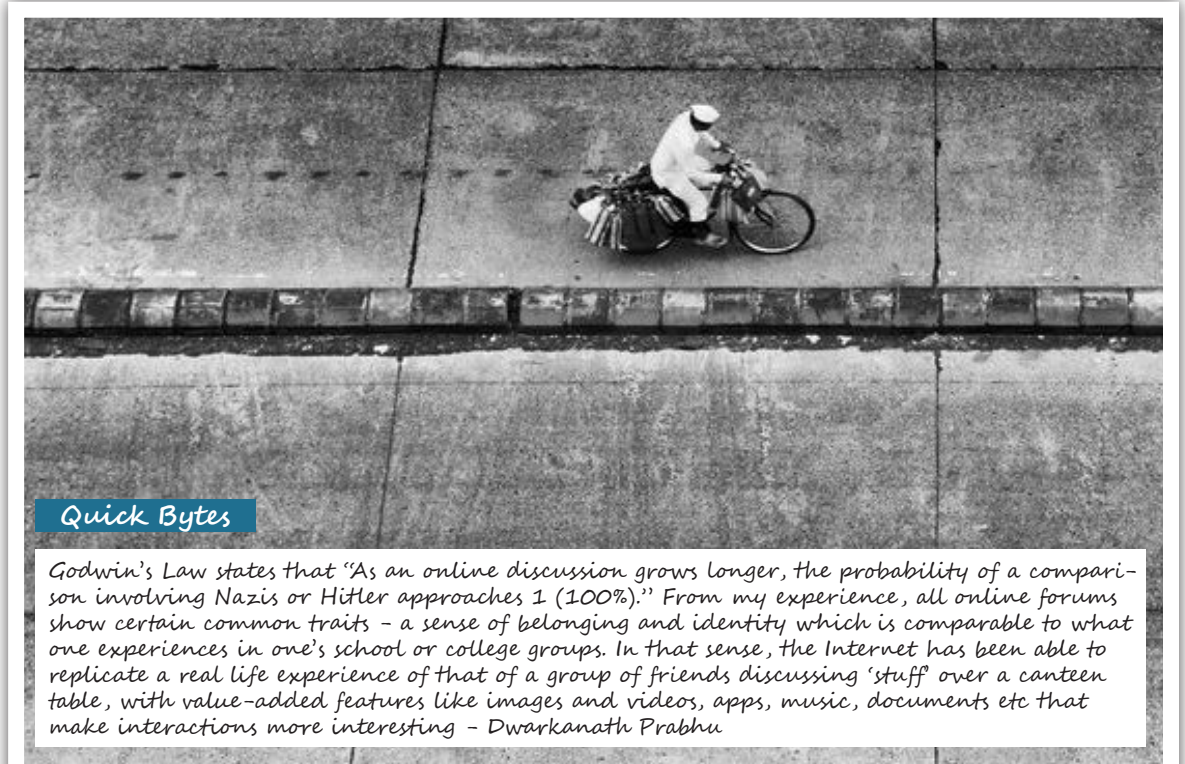
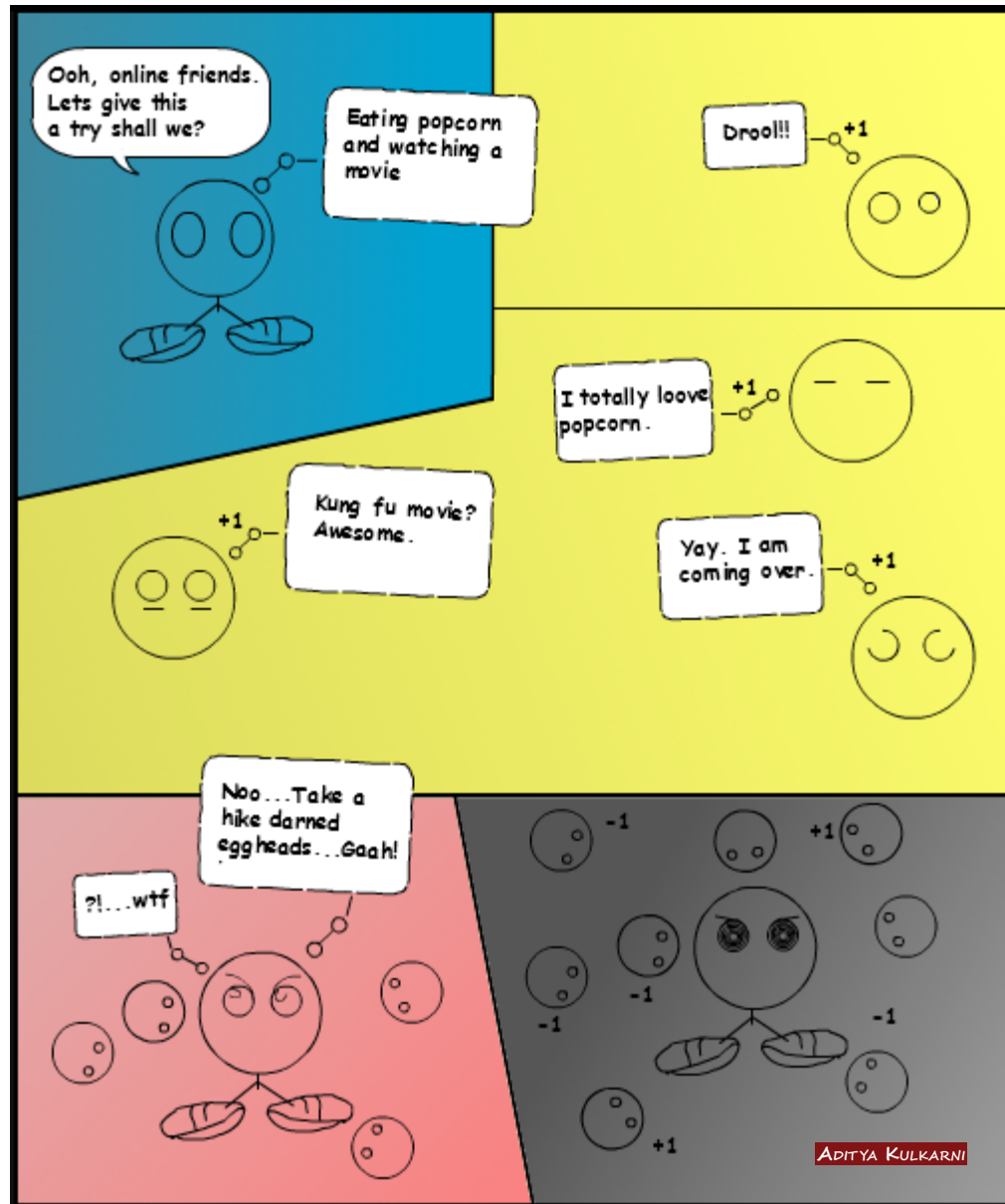


AGE-BASED BEHAVIOR ON TWITTER

- 85% OF USERS 18-24 FOLLOW FRIENDS.
- MORE USERS AGED 18-24 FOLLOW CELEBRITIES (54%) THAN FOLLOW FAMILY MEMBERS (29%).
- TEENS DON'T USE TWITTER AS MUCH AS ADULTS BECAUSE THE SERVICE IS MORE ABOUT CONNECTING TO CONTACTS AND BRANDS THAN INTERACTING WITH FRIENDS.
- SINCE MORE ADULTS ALREADY USE TWITTER, MORE ADULTS ARE INCLINED TO TRY IT OUT, SO IT REMAINS PRIMARILY AN ADULT NETWORK.

SOURCES: DIGITAL VITALITY, ANZACNEWS.COM, REPAI, ATROPTON.COM, SHOP.HUBSPOT.COM, PUBLIX.COM, HUBSPOT.COM, MARKETINGMAGAZINE.COM

Community102
Advanced Moderation For Online Communities
www.community102.com



DID YOU KNOW?

Evolutionary theory suggests that humans evolved into a species that is best equipped for survival when it functions in groups.

The study of groups in a psychological manner was first founded by Kurt Lewin (1943), which consisted of explaining the way small groups and individuals act and react to different circumstances; he called this group dynamics.

The group's cohesion (sticking together) depends on the extent that the individuals in the group want to accomplish the group's common goals and group identity.

Editor Recommends:

Cyber Selves:

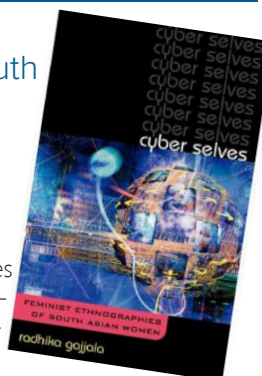
Feminist Ethnographies of South Asian Women

Radhika Gajjala

<http://amzn.to/nf68oy>

Review:

In her book, Radhika Gajjala examines online community formations and subjectivities that are produced at the intersection of technologies and globalization. She describes the process of designing and building cyberfeminist webs for South Asian women's communities, the generation of feminist cyber(auto)ethnographies, and offers a third-world critique of cyberfeminism. She ultimately views virtual communities as imbedded in real life communities and contexts, with human costs. The online discussions are visible, textual records of the discourses that circulate within real life communities. Her methodology involves a form of 'cyberethnography,' which explores the dialogic and disruptive possibilities of the virtual medium and of hypertext. Gajjala's work addresses the political, economic, and cultural ramifications of the Internet communication explosion. This book will be a valuable reference for those with an interest in cultural studies, feminist studies, and new technologies.



Contrarian View

Right to Lurk - Prabhas Pokharel

Ibreak silence today, and come out of the woodwork, but I had every "right" not to.

In an age of increasing digital participation, silent participation must be considered participation, and left be. Not everyone needs to comment, vote, whatever else. Some may just read/watch/listen, and perhaps, appreciate. It is okay if no thumb is clicked up, no quick reply sent back. No blog written.

O designers of engagement, let us, sometimes, enjoy the noise of our computer fans as the bits whizz by. A click here and a scroll there, and pitter patter of rainfall rather than keyboard.

<http://digitalnatives.in/prabhas/blogs/right-lurk>

Almost One-fifth of Youngsters Cyberbullied

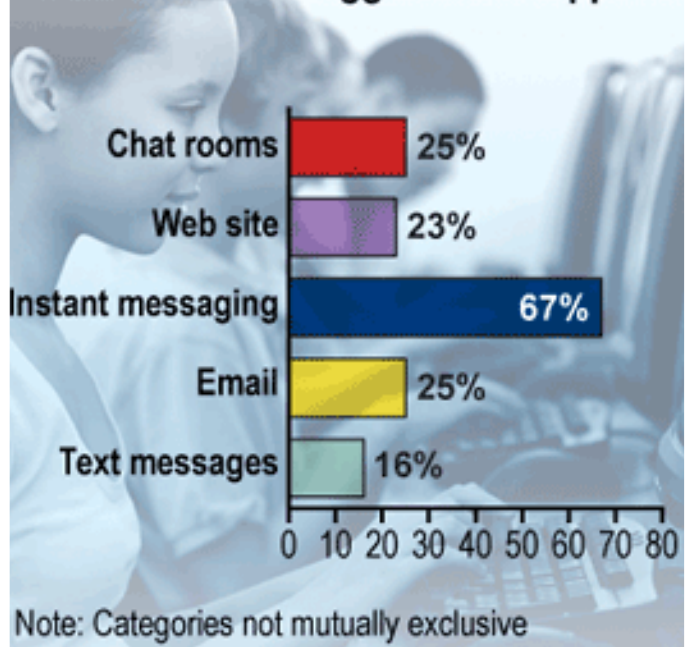
Internet and phone bullying causes loss of confidence and damages mental health, study shows. Nearly one in five UK youngsters have been the victim of cyberbullying, with girls affected more than boys, research suggests.

Many victims said the experience had damaged their confidence, mental health and even school attendance.

The study, by academics at Anglia Ruskin University, questioned almost 500 young people aged between 11 and 19.

Source: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/aug/01/cyber-bullying-victims>

Where Electronic Aggression Happens:



Distribution of cyberbullying venues used by young people in the US, according to the Centers for Disease Control



V for Vendetta (2006)

Directed by James McTeigue

Based on the graphic novel by Alan Moore, V for Vendetta takes place in an alternate vision of Britain in which a corrupt and abusive totalitarian government has risen to complete power. During a threatening run in with the secret police, an unassuming young woman named Evey (Natalie Portman) is rescued by a vigilante named V (Hugo Weaving) -- a caped figure both articulate and skilled in combat. V embodies the principles of rebellion from an authoritarian state, donning a mask of vilified would-be terrorist of British history Guy Fawkes and leading a revolution sparked by assassination and destruction. Evey becomes his unlikely ally, newly aware of the cruelty of her own society and her role in it.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0434409/>

Next Issue: Analog Relics in Digital Age
Arcade games still set your pulses on fire? Secretly hoarding your Atari game controllers? Why do we write emails like we do letters on paper? Remember the good old days of floppy discs and wrist watches? Our next issue will explore all these nostalgic analog dinosaurs! To volunteer as the Guest Editor / Writer, please get in touch with Nilofar:

nilofar.ansh@gmail.com

Deadline for submission: November 10