

Impact of Internet on Social Connections in Family System: A Survey Study of Residents in Lahore

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Abstract

This study explores the "Impact of internet on the social capital and relations" through survey using questionnaire as a tool of data collection. Finding of the study revealed that 40% respondents reported that it results in less emotional bonding among real life relations because people concentrate more on virtual ties. 40% respondents said that due to internet usage their reliance on electronic medium increases. 73% respondents agree that they use the internet to know new people, as it helps the users to increase their online social capital. Among respondents 59% people agree that they use the internet to renew online contacts with old friends. Whereas only 25% respondents strongly agree they use the internet to intensify online contacts with their relatives. It targeted 440 respondents and got response from 400 (200 male, 200 female) having demographic characteristics like, age, gender, education and income of respondents. For age the researcher has selected youth (20-25 y) and middle aged (30-40 y) sample is selected, for status, students and professionals/teachers sample is selected, for gender, the researcher has selected female and male, and for income, low, middle and high income sample has been selected and lastly for education, both IT educated and Non- IT educated sample has been selected. The key variables of hypothesis were "Impact of internet on relations with social capital, Impact of internet on the face to face communication, Impact of internet on virtual ties". For this study, impact of internet has been operationalized into several dependent and independent variables.

Keywords: Impact of internet; Social capital; Virtual connectivity; Virtual socialization

Introduction

According to DJ Pall, "communication is a process, by which people exchange ideas, feelings, facts or impressions on ways that everyone gains a common understanding of the message" The communication field is continuously growing due to the advent of new technologies. Now people enjoy different means of communication and contact. If we look back on the technology inclination of past decade then we can straightforwardly analyze, how rapidly internet has altered the features of communication.

Due to advent of new technologies, now people are able to enjoy the benefits and outcomes of high technology media, this improved technology media is much faster in comparison to the older traditional media. This new mass media technology includes a broad range i.e. mobile phones, i-pods, internet and computers. According to Rya Fulk; Williams and Rice, internet has considerably influenced the communication style of people with each other. As Chesebro and Bonsall predicted that Internet is changing how, if, and when people communicate to each other in all societal systems. The Internet is slowly but surely changing individual communication. Due to internet, now we have many new channels of communication which include different social Networking Sites, instant messaging, email, blogging, Viber, Whats app, Internet TV and many more mass communication channels which are speedily flourishing today.

According to Boyd and Ellison now people can see rapid increases in the presence and utility of SNS's. These networking sites allow individuals to establish a public or semi-public profile in a bounded

system. In addition these SNS also allow the users to share a list of other networking users with whom they have a connection. These SNS makes it possible to view and transfer the connections' list within the system.

The use of modern media is rapidly increasing in urban areas day by day. People are seriously reliant on the new media tools and technologies to satisfy their needs. Internet is most frequently used to send and receive e-mails. Internet enables the users to connect and communicate with their friends, family, classmates and colleagues, and furthermore with unfamiliar people, via Instant Messaging, e-mail, or social network websites. The Internet is in fact the latest mode of communication and socialization and it is reducing face-to-face or telephone contact. On the other hand Internet is widening the gap among individuals by isolating them and reducing the time spent participating in social activities. According to Attewell, Battle, Paul and Suazo-Garcia [1], young people having a personal computer at home spend a lesser amount of time to participate in games or other outdoor playing activities. Besides, virtual sociability cannot be considered equivalent to traditional sociability: face-to-face interactions and contacts are generally more rich and affluent than online and virtual contacts which are maintained by social networking sites, e-mails, chat or instant messaging.

Internet usage greatly affects the increasing or decreasing sociability that is important for establishing and maintaining the social capital. Internet usage might alter the nature and kind of the individual's social capital. Internet usage can facilitate the raise of individual's virtual ties and social capital. As Granovetter [2] predicted that it is feasible to discriminate among the two types of online social doings. Primarily, the Internet might give the chance in order to sustain or strengthen already accessible social relations with family and friends. Secondly,

the Internet might also be used to create and retain or continue relations with contacts or to build new ties with virtual connections. In contrast, computer-dependent communication might be used to fortify virtual relations, but it also develops weak interpersonal and face to face communication [3].

Internet allows its users to enhance or maintain their online social capital by increasing various online group actions and activities. Many researches have checked the effect of Internet consumption on social capital [4-6]. Heavy users of Internet are more vulnerable target and are likely to be separated from usual social relations because the Internet holds a key place in their lives [7-10].

Modern media affects social capital and interpersonal communication behavior of individuals. According to Moody [11], due to heavy usage of modern media, we see reduction and displacement of social activities for the reason that the individuals like to spend much time online and they are not able to take part in face to face social activities. In addition another effect is the displacement of "strong ties". Due to this reason virtual connections are of a lesser quality in comparison to face to face interactions and relations. When people are busy and indulged in a large number of virtual contacts, these may reduce the stronger face to face interaction and ties [12].

This study is conducted to analyze the effect of internet on social capital and interpersonal behavior of people. According to the approach of Kraut and his colleagues too much internet usage was coupled with depressing impacts on individuals i.e. diminishing and reducing social circle and raising melancholy and isolation. Additionally, many quantitative researches reported that lonesomeness was coupled with amplified Internet usage [12-16].

The term social capital includes the relationships, institutions and norms that help in shaping the worth and size of a society's social connections. Social capital is the glue that holds all these institutions together. Internet has the power to affect the building and continuation of social capital. In particular, the researcher wants to recognize that investing online in social capital is a replacement to conventional investments in social capital: (face-to-face contacts and volunteer activities). Internet use can change the type of individual's social capital by enabling increase of virtual social capital and weakening the face to face relations and communication. The transform in social capital at personal level can direct to different changes in social capital at the country level, with economic and social cost.

The notion of social capital was initially shaped by sociologists and now it has been extended to other social sciences, especially economics. Basically it is a community feature. Every community or group is differentiated by a level of social capital that seems to be associated with the degree of shared trust among community members.

This study was designed to discover the effects of internet usage on social capital, considering these effects on people possessing dissimilar demographics like (male: female, youth: middle-aged, educated: uneducated, low income: high income) living in the area of Lahore, have internet access. This research was significant as there was a widespread anxiety in our society that internet has great impact on our interpersonal communication and real life relations. The amount of these effects increases in case of heavy users. Unluckily, less attention had been given to this sensitive issue in the past in Lahore, Pakistan. This study will help the parents, educators and technology creators to analyze the potential risks and rewards of this growing media.

However, where such Socializing utilities have their benefits, there are crucial harms and risks attached to their usage. These sites have somewhat casted a spell on the youth who cannot elope from the charisma and attraction of these attractive social interaction tools. SNSs have a strong influence on the youth and with more and more users joining it every day, this seemingly influence rate is also growing like an obsession. Because of their charismatic appeal, it is necessary to study the reasons behind the observed behavior and attitude of users/ consumers of these sites.

Objectives of the Study

- To evaluate the internet impact on the interpersonal communication and social capital.
- To evaluate the internet on virtual ties with social capital.
- To evaluate the internet usage patterns among different demographic variables:
- male: female, simply educated : IT educated , young : middle aged, high income : low income)

Literature Review

Social capital is a major aspect of efficient and strong democracies [17]. A brief review of the literature on this subject explains that researchers have defined this concept in terms of trust, life satisfaction, social networks, and civic engagement and a variety of other concepts [17]. The main idea of social capital is straightforward: It is the resources which are available to people through their social interactions [17,18]. Individuals with a varied and large network of associates are considered to have more social capital than individuals with less varied and small networks. However people frequently gather social capital as a result of their daily interactions with family, coworkers, friends and strangers, it is also possible to make mindful reserves in social interaction. People report that their main reason to use internet and to spend time on the social networking sites is to keep in touch with their old friends and to strengthen virtual ties with their friends, relatives and colleagues. By using SNSs, individuals try to increase and maintain their online social networks [19]. Investment in social networks enables the individuals to increase and develop standards of trust, which are essential for successful participation in collective activities. In short, trust assists working with other individuals on common issues [17].

Accessible research on the relationships between SNSs and people's interpersonal communication, well-being, trust and participation is limited especially with reference to Pakistani society. The case for literature on general Internet use and social capital is not same. In fact, research is sufficient to accommodate opposing paradigms, which may clarify our discussion on the total effects of SNS usage on social capital. Putnam's [17] "time displacement hypothesis," states that heavy television viewers and Internet users have lesser face-to-face interactions. Different researches established that online communications positively help the individuals' in building social trust and motivating them for participation in community life [20]. According to Shah, and Holbert the scholarly clash between cyber pessimists and optimists still continues, although it is obvious that the positive and negative impacts of the Internet on social capital are subjected to the intellectuals conceptualization of the medium and the way people use this medium [10]. According to Williams, "time displacement hypothesis" pays no attention towards the differences between traditional mass media and new interactive media. People do

not communicate with each other while watching TV. Whereas, while sending or receiving e-mail, during chatting and using SNSs, people are engaged in interpersonal communication. Researchers associate the Internet usage as time spent with the technology while ignoring the diversified audiences, intentions and experiences that this medium allows. They tend to find the negative impacts on the production of social capital at individual level. Whereas, some researchers understanding the various uses of the Internet tend to find a positive relation behind the intentions for Internet use and social capital. Generally it is assumed that new media usage patterns related to the community building and information acquisition play a positive role at individual-level production of social capital. Whereas new media usage patterns in case of entertainment affect the production of social capital in a negative manner. In fact technology does not affect one's social capital, rather the different ways of using the technology affect one's social capital. That's why researcher's claim that online activities can reduce and increase social capital. According to Resnick, when we are spending time on the Internet that we will otherwise use to engage in face-to-face communication, social capital will lessen. Expanding this justification to SNSs, we can say that their impact on social capital is subjected to the uses and gratifications required by users. On the basis of Putnam's [17] concepts of weak-tie social capital versus strong-tie social capital, Williams illustrated that the type of relationships within social networks can build diverse types of social capital. In another study *The Mobile-izing Japanese: Connecting to the Internet by PC and Webphone in Yamanashiyata*, Boase, Wellman and Ikeda [21] examined the social characteristics and the social relationships of the users of Internet-connected by web phones and personal computers. According to the data collected on the quantity of email exchanged and the extent of those exchanges, they concluded that web phones, like other mobile phones, are especially important for maintaining strong ties that is, close friends and family [22-25].

Donath and Boyd hypothesized that online social networks cannot increase a person's number of strong ties. Instead, it contributes in increasing a person's weak ties. This proposal was tested by Ellison, Lampe and Steinfield using survey technique data from a small sample of undergraduate students in the U.S. They found that usage of SNSs had a strong connection with solidifying and maintaining accessible offline relationships, as opposed to meet new people. The strongest association, however, was among Facebook usage and maintaining social capital. Though the existing literature explains a relation between Facebook usage and individual level construction of social capital. The uses and gratifications approach gives a valuable framework to draw these inferences. According to McQuail the most apparent reason for Internet users to join a SNS is the need for integration and social relations. In another research I have a life online, Ahsan discussed that people like to move towards online social life more than trying to exercise socializing skills in real world. According to the report of Daily Dawn the increased usage of internet is reducing the time spent for other activities. People like to create new online contacts rather than making new contacts in real world. In another research *Networking Community: The Internet in Everyday Life*, Barry Wellman, Jeffrey Boase [7] discussed that how the internet has influenced different aspects of communication and society. This research report was about 20,075 adults responses: 17,711 Americans (88 percent) and 2,364 Canadians (12 percent) in Toronto-based NetLab. They concluded that due to the impact of internet on society, society is shifting from groups to individual networking. This change is not only taking place at the personal level but also at the group level. It is the shift from tightly-bounded and intensely-knit groups to sparsely-

knit and loosely-bounded networks. Kaitlin in another research *Social media change social relationships*, concludes that Internet facilitates people to connect and share information with each other. In addition it also helps in building new relations, due to which our social interactions are affected in different ways as we adapt to our increasingly technological world. It was concluded as a result of a survey report in United States that internet especially social networking sites are changing our social relationships.

Hypothesis

The hypotheses designed by the researcher for the study were as follows:

- H1: Usage of internet may positively correlate to virtual connectivity with the society.
- H2: Usage of internet may positive correlated with virtual socialization.

Theoretical Frame work

The present study comes under the effect approach of mass media. It discusses those theories that are based on "what people do with media" and how new technology is replacing the old ways of communication. The research emphasizes on the lasting effects of media. Therefore, this study applies 'Uses and gratification theory' in terms of media usage and its impact on the social capital. 'Time displacement theory' describes that how time spent with new technology reduces the time for other activities.

Methodology

In present research, researcher has used the survey technique to gather the quantitative data from a large representative, but assorted population. The survey method has helped researcher in collecting information directly from the individuals that are using the internet and internet is affecting their social capital in any way. The effects on the social capital and interpersonal communication of individuals have hence sorted out through the information given on a quantitative scale. The present research was conducted in September 2012 to July 2013. This data was gathered in January 2012 and February 2012. This time period was selected because in universities this is peak time when all semesters are running.

The total population for this research study consists of youth aged 20 to 25 years and middle aged 30 to 40 years, who have access to internet and residing in Lahore. It was not possible for the researcher to reach the total population; therefore, the researcher has applied stratified random sampling technique for data collection. The sample size consists of 400 respondents (200 male and 200 female) from Lahore Garrison University, Punjab University, Beacon house National University. The rationale behind this selection is the variety among the participants studying in these universities and the researcher was able to study the impact of internet on the social capital of male and female, high income and low income, youth and middle aged people in both IT educated and non-IT educated people.

In this research, questionnaire has been used as a tool for data collection. For data analysis Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS Version 13.0) has been used, MS Word and Excel were used for designing tables, graphs, charts and writing the script of thesis. In this study the relationship between internet usage and its impact on the social capital was evaluated by regression test. The regression test is

used in those research studies where the obtained data consists of counts or frequencies. This test is frequently used for categorical data. The present research is also categorical in nature so the researcher has analyzed data by applying regression test [26-35].

Procedure for Testing Hypothesis

Steps for testing Hypothesis

Null hypothesis H0 (no association between variables)

Alternative hypothesis H1 (association between variables)

Significance level $\alpha=0.05$

$$t = \frac{r\sqrt{n-2}}{\sqrt{1-r^2}}$$

Test statistics

Degrees of freedom $v=n-2$

$$t_{(\frac{\alpha}{2},v)}$$

Critical value

Critical region $t > t_{(\frac{\alpha}{2},v)}$

Decision Rule Reject H0 if $t_{(\text{calculated value})} > t_{(\text{table value})}$

Data Analysis and Findings

Hypothesis-I: Usage of internet will be positively correlated to virtual socialization

The below tables present results of multiple regression, where the presumed predictors, namely, Internet increased my online social circle, internet increased my community involvement, Socialize with new friends, Internet brought me closer to my family and friends were regressed against the criterion variable that for how many hours you use internet daily.

	Sum Squares	of Df	Mean Square		
Regression	646.8	4	161.701		
Residual	31.55	395	0.08		
Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
Internet brought me closer to friends and family	0.734	0.033	0.679	21.979	0
Socialize with new friends	1.217	0.033	.1.060	36.513	0
Internet increased my community involvement	-0.98	0.028	-0.769	-34.5	0
Internet increased my online social circle	0.419	0.058	0.275	7.276	0
Multiple R: 0.976					
R Square: 0.953					
Standard Error: 0.283					
F Value: 2.024 p: 0.000					

Table 1: Multiple regression analysis of Usage of internet will be positive correlated to virtual socialization.

- Note:**
- Internet brought me closer to friends and family (Internet helps users to keep in touch with family and friends virtually through SNS)
- Socialize with new friends (Internet helps the users to socialize with new friends through SNS)
- Internet increased my community involvement (Internet increases involvement in online community activities)
- Internet increased my online social circle (Inter increases virtual contact and connections with friends, family, new people, colleagues etc.)

It is evident from the Table 1 that the value of Multiple R is 0.976 which indicates that there is positive significant and very strong relation between criterion variable (for how many hours you use internet daily) and all the independent variables collectively. The value of R square is 0.953, we can infer that the model is explaining 95% of the variance in the criterion variable. The computed values of F(2.0243) and Sig.(.000) of the ANOVA suggests that the regression model is fit and overall statistically significant.

As evident from the table that there was a significant relationship between the criterion variable “for how many hours you use internet daily” and the predictors i.e. internet brought me closer to family and friends (b=0.679 and p=0.000); socialize with new friends (b=1.060 and p=0.001); internet increased my community involvement (b=-0.769 and p=0.000) and internet increased my online social circle (b=0.275 and p=0.000). Thus H1 (Usage of internet will be positive correlated to virtual socialization) was supported.

A comparison of beta scores indicate that relationship between exposure to internet (criterion variable) and internet increased my online social circle (predictor variable) (beta=0.275) was stronger than other predictor variables. Whereas there was a negative relation between exposure to internet (criterion variable) and predictor variable (internet increased my community involvement).

The results infer internet helps in increasing our online social capital and virtually socialize with new people as it helps people to maintain with family and friends. It also helps to intensify old contacts, create new contacts and renew online contacts. Internet helps in increasing community involvement as it allows to share content among the virtual

social capital and to participate in discussions etc. It is easier and cheaper means of communication that's why people can easily maintain their online social capital. According to time displacement hypothesis due to excessive use of technology people hardly find time to meet their friends in daily routine. In such situation internet is the best source to maintain online social capital. It strengthens virtual social capital by increasing the online community involvement.

Hypothesis-II: Usage of internet will be positive correlated with virtual connectivity with society

The below table presents results of multiple regression, where the presumed predictors namely, to make new friends, it is easier to communicate with others, to keep in touch with friends, Staying connected with family, easier to connect with others, content sharing were regressed against the criterion variable that for how many hours you use internet daily.

	Sum Squares	of df	Mean Square		
Regression	676.707	6	112.785		
Residual	1.653	393	0.004		
Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
To make new friends	1.169	0.006	0.851	190.332	0
Easier to communicate	1.77	0.025	0.202	70.642	0
Easier to connect	1.652	0.011	0.883	145.542	0
Keep intouch with friends	0.915	0.013	0.3	69.882	0
To connect with family	0.417	0.01	0.23	43.352	0
Content sharing	-1.412	0.01	-0.948	-139.237	0
Multiple R : 0.999					
R Square: 0.998					
Standard Error: 0.065					
F Value: 2.6824					
p: 0.000					

Table 2: Multiple regression of usage of internet will be positive correlated with virtual connectivity with society.

- **Note:**
- It is easier to communicate with others (Internet is very easy and cheap means of communication)
- To keep in touch with friends (Internet helps users to connect with friends online)
- To connect with family (It helps people to keep in touch with family members through SNS)
- Content sharing (It allows users to share content like pictures etc.)
- To make new friends (It helps users to interact with new people, colleagues, old class fellows etc.)

- Easier to connect (It helps users to keep in contact with social capital using SNS and instant messaging etc.)

It is evident from the Table 2 that the value of Multiple R is 0.999 which indicates that there is positive significant and very strong relation between criterion variable (exposure to internet) and all the independent variables collectively. The value of R square is 0.998, we can infer that the model is explaining 99% of the variance in the criterion variable. The computed values of F(2.6824) and Sig.(.000) of the ANOVA suggests that the regression model is fit and overall statistically significant (Figure 1).

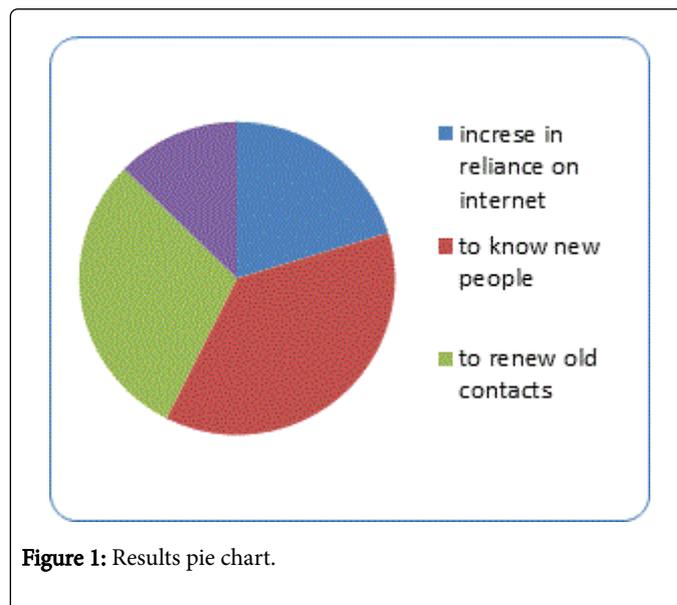


Figure 1: Results pie chart.

As evident from the table that there was a significant relationship between the criterion variable “exposure to internet” and the predictors i.e. To make new friends (b=0.851 and p=0.000); it is easier to communicate with others (b=0.202 and p=0.000); to keep in touch with friends (b=0.300 and p=0.000); Staying connected with family (b=0.230 and p=0.000); easier to connect with others (b=0.883 and p=0.000); content sharin (b=-0.984 and p=0.000). Thus H2 (Usage of internet will be positive correlated with virtual socialization.) was supported.

The results infer that internet has impact on connectivity with society and real world relations. It helps in bringing the people closer to their family and friends and helps in increasing no of friends through social networking sites. It strengthens virtual ties with social capital. Internet usage leads to virtual connectivity with social capital and society.

Conclusion

According to the results of H1 and H2 it is clear that internet has very strong impact on the social capital. Internet usage helps in expanding virtual social capital it helps in increasing online contacts, and result in strengthening virtual ties. According to the results only 40% respondents reported that it results in less emotional bonding among real life relations because people concentrate more on virtual ties. 40% respondents said that due to internet usage their reliance on electronic medium increases. 73% respondents agree that they use the internet to get to know new people, as it helps the users to increase their online social capital. Among respondents 59% people agree that

they use the internet to renew online contacts with old friends. Whereas only 25% respondents strongly agree they use the internet to intensify online contacts with their relatives. It is evident from the Table 1 that the value of R square is 0.953, we can infer that the model is explaining 95% of the variance in the criterion variable. It is evident from the Table 2 that the value of R square is 0.998, we can infer that the model is explaining 99% of the variance in the criterion variable. After all, Internet is a technology and tool at people's end. People necessitate using it frequently at work or for interpersonal communication. The results infer that internet itself is not a problem, problem occurs when people use it in a wrong way. Internet could turn into a socially isolating tool if people utilize it to avoid face to face contact with social capital and to escape from the real world real world relations and activities.

However, our results show that geographic mobility, age, income, education levels, status and especially gender have influence on online investments in social capital and face to face communication. Meeting new people online seems to be pretty specific to young generations. as a result, young people might have social capital composed of more weak ties [2]. These results show the critical role played by the Internet in the construction of social capital, even though the relations between strong-tie and weak-tie investments or between online and face-to-face investments are very multifaceted and require further study. More investigation is required on how online investments in individual social capital affect the whole society. In other words, as social capital is greatly composed of virtual social capital, does the whole society become less or more reactive and innovative, and more or less cooperative and cohesive.

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