Facebook use and conflicts among young married couples

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Abstract

Facebook usage has become one of the inevitable patterns of communication in everyday life. It provides a place for people to interact with others, friends, family or online friends. Researches revealed that excessive use of Facebook can harm relationships. Disclosure can bring intimacy among Facebook friends as it can also lead to emotional breakdowns between married couples. From the related literature it is hypothesized that prolonged use of Facebook, increased partner monitoring has a strong association with decreased trust and increased conflicts, loneliness among the partners. This research paper concentrates on the conflicts arise due to online disclosure among Facebook using married couples. The methodology adopted for this study is in-depth interview. The interview questions included basic patterns of Facebook usage, establishing trust among them, having a lot number of mutual friends, things they disclose among their mutual friends, other acquaintances and partner monitoring through Facebook profile, posts and other modes of disclosure. The questions also included the conflicts faced by the couples due to disclosure of intimate, personal information, pictures etc details in Facebook. The participants were also asked to do a self evaluation of their Facebook usage before and after marriage life. Convenience sampling is employed, involving 21 couples as participants of this study, these couples were from various demographic and socio-economic groups and majorly both were working. Each couple was interviewed individually using personal and non-personal interview method.

I. Introduction

Online social networking sites had become very popular during the recent years. The usage of SNS like Facebook Twitter had gained worldwide attraction regardless of culture, race, ethnicity, economic, demographic factors etc. Smartphone usage and various other gadgets like Tablets, Smart watches have made SNS usage anywhere, anytime to everywhere, every time. Various studies had been done on the usage pattern of Social Networking Sites, the Psychological factors like introvert, extrovert behavior found among the users, sociological factors like Life satisfaction, Self esteem, shyness etc. These studies resulted in bringing out a new kind of communication, the problems & positives faced by the users. These social networking sites play an important part in Interpersonal communication. It has a major role in maintaining relationships and friendships today. The mode of communication using SNS has some interesting facts then Face-to-Face communication. According to Jiang & Hancock (2011) Social Networking Sites provide direct as well as private interpersonal communication such as texting, instant messaging, emoticons and Video chat. According to PEW research conducted in 2014 majority of the Indians prefer to use internet to connect with their family, friends and acquaintances. Smartphone had increased Social networking usage among Asians (PEW report, 2015).
II. Facebook and Marital/Romantic Relationships

Studies had proved engaging in online communication has greater association with loneliness, desire for affection. Facebook plays an important role in initiating and maintaining relationships (Dainton M., 2013). Recently, several studies had been done on Facebook usage and Romantic relationships. These studies resulted providing implications of Facebook usage and increased or decreased romantic life, Facebook related jealousy among partners, monitoring partners activity through Facebook (Emery L F, et.al, 2014; Hand MM, Thomas D, Buboltz WC, et.al, 2013; Marshal TC, et.al, 2013). Facebook status, posts and pictures are public representation of the self and they provide opportunity to represent their better self (Laura R. Saslow, Amy Muise, et.al, 2012). When it comes to couple online engagement, people use Facebook as a self-representation strategy to appear happy (Wilson, Gosling & Graham, 2012). Some studies argue that people who are less satisfied in their relationship tend to share more number of dyadic pictures in Facebook (Ovies, Grubber, Keltner, Stamper & Boyce, 2009; Back et.al, 2010). It allows public communication (posts, pictures etc) between partners which is useful in relationship maintenance (Tong ST, Walther JB, 2011; Jiang LC, Hancock JT, 2013).

Cherrie et.al (2015) in their study discussed the role SNS play in maintaining romantic relationships, especially partners who were living far away from each other i.e Long distance romantic relationships (LDRR) use SNS relatively more to maintain their romantic life than partners living together i.e Geographically close romantic relationships (GCRR).

Russell B. Clayton et.al (2013) conducted an online survey among Facebook users and found out that the high level of Facebook usage predicted negative relationship outcomes and these relationships are mediated by Facebook related conflicts. Information gathering through Facebook posts, updates, profile pictures, pictures, videos either directly or indirectly been measured by the partner to estimate and understand the depth of the relationship (Muise A, et.al, 2009). The interactions of partner with others or their previous partners/romantic partners may kindle jealousy and bring conflict in present relationship (Muise A, et.al, 2009).

From the collected literature it is been understood that married couple with relatively high Facebook usage, experiences conflicts and negative relationship outcomes. The studies analyzed for reviewed literature consists of participants from socially developed countries. The same result cannot be idealized in a traditional, conservative, socially developing country like India. This study focuses on the conflicts faced by Metropolitan based young Indian married couple.
III. Method

The methodology adopted for this study is In-depth interview. Convenience sampling method was used to select the sample. The author posted a request in her Facebook page describing the research and the willing participants (as couple) were requested to participate in the study. They were contacted through Facebook messenger. Due to time and economic constraints the Non-personal in-depth interview was followed. The questions were asked in English and Tamil. The responses included texts, emoticons and pictures.

The interview questions included basic patterns of Facebook usage (hours of Facebook usage per day), establishing trust among partners through Facebook posts, pictures etc. Questions were asked regarding mutual friends in Facebook between the partners, information they share about their partner with their mutual friends, partner surveillance through Facebook.

The questions also included the conflicts faced by the couples due to disclosure of intimate, personal information, pictures etc in Facebook.

IV. Participants

Participants were 21 young married couples (N=42) residing in metropolitan city of south India (Chennai, Cochin, Bengaluru and Mysore) ages 21-40 (Men M= 34.9; Women M= 32.15), married between 0-3 years. Facebook usage of these couples average from 2-4 hours per day. Out of these 21 couples 2 married their Facebook friend. 13 couples were living in separate cities due to their work; they meet their partners during weekends and holidays. Out of 21 men 17 were professionals from IT, Medicine, Engineering, Finance background with upper middle class economic status. Out of 21 Women 15 were Professionals. 3 couples were from different states following different mother tongue.

V. Themes evolved from the interview.

From the detailed descriptions of the participants and observations from the author, the interview is been transcribed to English. Several themes were evolved from the primary analysis. The following were the most relevant themes supporting the study.

A. Surveillance

People use Facebook to seek information about their partner through profile information, interests, posts they uploaded, posts they liked, comments etc. Participants answered that when they login into Facebook, they visit their partners’ Facebook page to read their post updates (texts, pictures, video links etc), comments for those posts, emoticons etc. Female partners answered that they visit their partner’s Facebook page to check on their present activity updates. Partners those who are living away from their
spouse/partner check their current online activity through Messenger (online/offline), Whatsapp (Last seen/Online/Offline).

*I usually see his Facebook to check whether he is in office or having lunch with his colleagues. He has the habit of sharing every moment in Facebook and Instagram. So it’s quite easy for me to keep an eye on him. I don’t think it’s wrong.* (33, Female, Long distance Married Partner)

Partners who are living together answered that they do visit their partners’ profile. The couple who were into arranged marital relationship expressed that they show keen interest in checking their partner’s profile to get to know about them, posts that had been updated before their marital relationship, pictures and profile pictures. They also check the number of opposite gender users in their partners’ friends list.

**B. Relationship maintenance**

Female partners answered that they add new friends of similar likes and interests, acquaintances from workplace, meetings and Professional bodies in Facebook. Male partners find Facebook as a tool to communicate and self represent them, maintaining contacts with old and new friends. When it comes to partners’ mutual relationship maintenance through Facebook, the initial part of Facebook activity is updating their Relationship status in Facebook profile information. They tag their partner’s Facebook profile ID in Dyadic pictures, Profile pictures, sharing relationship relevant information through texts, pictures and emoticons. Exhibiting the strength and depth of their relationship in Facebook makes them to feel comfortable about the relationship among friends and family. The quality time spent by the partners with their family had been decreased due to increased Facebook usage. Couples who participated in this study agreed that they spent less time with their partner such as Face-to-Face conversation; rather they share more time in Facebook with their partner.

*We used to go out for movies, malls together. But I always felt that we never spent time together without Facebook, Whatsapp and other apps. Posting our pictures responding to the comments posted in our pictures eats up our quality time.* (31, Male, Geographically close Married Partner)

**C. Trust**

The level of trust between partners decides the depth and longevity of a relationship. Constant partner surveillance increases arguments among married partners. Participants answered that they feel annoyed and intimidated when their partner bring in an argument regarding their Facebook activity. Surveying past posts and constant monitoring leads to depression and decreasing trust among partners. Recently Facebook has introduced an option which shows your past posts posted on the same date in previous years. This enables the user to check his past posts and share it again. Partners check their spouse’s Facebook past posts and they agreed that they feel jealous of the previous relationships, the pictures/posts
exhibiting intimacy with opposite gender. They reflect hatred feel in their posts as texts, pictures and emoticons. Few participants (Men-3, Women-7) agreed that they had blocked their partners’ Facebook page for at least few days, when they felt annoyed by the past posts. The argument also extends interpersonally. When they have face-to-face conversation they bring it up, leading to temporary break-ups in relationship. Partners also lose trust when their spouse constantly uses Facebook. Constant and prolonged use of Facebook brings negative impact in married life.

*My spouse used to fight with me regarding the pictures I post in Facebook. I post more pictures of me than text updates. After fights, he usually tags me in his posts which deliberately express our relationship flaw. In such times I feel humiliated before our friends and acquaintances* (27, Female, Long Distance Married Partner)

**D. Conflicts**

Male and Female partners had similarities and differences in opinion. The following bulletins were the activities carried out by their spouse which highly irritates the partner.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Posting pictures as Public post</td>
<td>• Posting pictures</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Having many Online friends</td>
<td>• Sharing day-to-day experiences in public posts</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Disclosing personal information to online friends.</td>
<td>• Spending increasing amount of time in Facebook</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Checking the comments from opposite gender friends.</td>
<td>• Checking past posts.</td>
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Partners experience lack of interpersonal communication due to prolonged Facebook and other Social networking site activity, which is followed by difficulties in relationship like lack of trust, mutual understanding, further they get frustrated which ends up in depression.

**VI. Discussions**

This study focused on the conflicts among married couple and the relationship difficulties they face. Increased online interaction has been associated with loneliness and lack of interpersonal communication. The participants showed relatively high Facebook 2-4 hours per day. Engaging in Facebook interaction decreases face-to-face communication among married partners. They also showed positive and negative exhibition of their day to day life in Facebook which decreases quality in relationship.
Lack of daily physical togetherness, it was predicted that among married couple those who living in long distance would have relatively higher levels of Facebook use intensity (Ellison B, et.al, 2007).

Studies have demonstrated that people involved in romantic relationships use Facebook to access information and to monitor their partner, and that, they rely on this information to gauge their partner’s involvement and loyalty. Long distance married partner access Facebook relatively more than geographically close married partners because they have fewer opportunities to observe their partners face to face. (Muise A, et.al 2009). In this study most of the participants follow long distance married relationship due to their professions. The participants show keen interest in checking their partners profile information to know their day to day activity in past posts.

VII. Conclusion

To conclude, the Facebook users are likely to be jealous about their partner’s Facebook activity. Facebook related jealousy inducing events can lead to negative experiences like lack of trust, frustration and depression. Altogether, the studies indicate how people exhibit their relationships through Facebook which affects other’s perceptions between married couple. The increasing Facebook usage has affected how one interacts with other and how we communicate with one’s romantic partners.

References


