

Impacts of Social Media on Youth's Sexual and Social Behaviors

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Abstract—This research examines social & sexual impact of youth social media behavior using an ethno methodology approach. Several theories are employed in this research including the theory of sociology of media, social interaction and the concept of sexuality. Results indicate that despite the promise of enhanced socialization, communication, and education, however, many adolescents' experience of social media use has been negative on balance, i.e. from lowering self-esteem to creating new social norms that encourage increasingly risky behavior, SNS use, the sexual and social wellness of adolescents. This study showed a potential association between frequent social media use and increased likelihood of sexual activity among youth. The implications of this research are this study is expected to contribute information and enrich the repertoire of social science especially sociology also for the development of research on youth, media and sexuality.

Keywords: youth, social media, sexuality

I. INTRODUCTION

Mobile technologies, internet and social media have become social phenomenon especially among young adults aged 18 to 29 or also known as the Millennial generation. The use of social networking sites among teenagers and young adults has risen significantly since 2006. They are found to be more engaged in many social relation activities such as sending daily messages to friends, bulletins, group messages and private messages on these sites.

Social networking sites (SNS) are a relatively new phenomenon and increasingly popular among adolescents. These are websites that permit social interaction among users and allow users to create online profiles that may (or may not) represent the user's real-life identity. Users personalize profile pages with images, audio, and text, and can designate 'friends' and other relationships. These websites are attractive to adolescents because they allow for individualized self promotion as well as inclusion into a group that may not be attainable in physical reality. During a time when it is as important to be unique as it is to fit in, SNSs allow adolescents to manufacture an image they want the world to see.

Romo, et.al. stated that social media (SM) and online communities are integral parts of adolescent lives. It is estimated that more than 90% of adolescents nationally have access to and report using the internet on a daily basis, and more than half report going online several times per day. Similarly, social networking sites (SNSs) and mobile apps, which are Web sites that permit social interaction and allow for selfexpression or promotion through online profiles, are used by more than 70% adolescents to communicate with their friends and meet new people. Being part of these online communities allows adolescents and young adults to engage in normative developmental behaviors by interacting with peer groups. However, sometimes these sites are used by adolescents to share sexually explicit images, videos, or posts. A national survey reported that 20% of adolescents have sent or posted to a SNS seminude or nude pictures of themselves. This behavior might often translate into risky social and sexual behavior. Studies that have conducted content analysis of online SNS profiles of older (ages 18-21 years) and younger (ages 11-18 years) adolescents in the United States show that older adolescents frequently display references to sexual behavior, which might increase the chances of meeting sexual partners via the internet. Similarly, younger adolescents who displayed sexual references were more sexually interested[1].

Young et.al explain that adolescent social life is enacted online as well as in person. Nearly all (92%) of teens go online daily. A survey of 909 youth ages 8 to 17 showed that nearly half of them said that they used Facebook, with two-thirds of 13- to 17-year-olds reporting they had Facebook profiles, and 70% indicate using multiple social media sites, primarily Instagram and Snapchat. Social media sites are seen by adolescents as a crucial tool for social interaction. An adolescent without a social media profile "might as well not exist"[2].

In 2015, 92% of teens aged 13 to 17 years reported going online daily, 24% were online "almost constantly," and 71% used more than one social networking site. Without protection under the law for the consequences of teens' online activities, the responsibility of monitoring largely falls to parents. Parents

appear to be doing some monitoring of their teens' online behavior, but frequent and consistent monitoring does not appear to be the norm. A Pew Research Center survey of parents of teens found that although 60% reported they had "ever" checked their teen's social media profiles, only 35% knew the password to one or more of their teen's social media accounts, and 39% had ever used parental controls for their teen's online activities[3].

The results of the study indicate that, on daily basis, socializing via various social media sites is the most popular online activities among majority of the students across schools (88%). This result is similar to other reports that young adults socialize and interact with one another via social media very frequently compared to adults beyond 25 year old. This activity is followed by information searching activities (65%), reading (28%) and sharing information (23%). The least popular online activity across schools is online shopping (12%).

II. RESEARCH METHODS

Ethno methodology is the study of how individuals create and understand everyday life, i.e. the method of achieving everyday life. Ethno methodology is based on the idea that daily activities and social interactions that are routine, and general, may be done through various forms of expertise. According to Bogdan and Biklen, the notion of ethno methodology refers not to a model or technique of collecting data when a person is conducting a study, but rather gives direction on what problem will be studied[4].

Garfinkel defines ethno methodology as an investigation of indexical expressions and other practical actions as a unified completion of the day-to-day organized practices. Garfinkel describes the goal of ethno methodology is as the objective reality of social facts and the fundamental phenomenon of sociology because it is every product of the local society that is created and organized in an eclectic, continuous, practical, always, only, surely and holistically, endless and avoiding, exceed or delay. Garfinkel gave rise to ethno methodology as a form of his dissonance to conventional sociological approaches always equipped with assumptions, theories, propositions, and categories that made the researcher not free in understanding social reality according to the circumstances in which the social reality took place. Garfinkel himself defines ethno methodology as an investigation of the indexical expressions and other practical actions as the ongoing unity of completion of the organized daily practices of life [5].

Ethno methodology is intended to examine the rules of daily social interaction based on common sense. What is meant by the world of common sense is something that is usually taken for granted, underlying assumptions and shared meanings. The essence of ethno methodology is to express the world of common sense from everyday life. The work of ethno methodology studies how the people as a supporter of the prevailing order use the properties of the order so that for the

citizens there can be apparently organized organizational features.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Social Impact

Cookingham & Ryan explained that in this digital age, popularity is measured by how many 'friends' or 'likes' are collected on a SNS. Social media encourage adolescents to compete for attention in order to increase their 'likes' and enhance their self-worth. If a 'post' or a 'pic' doesn't garner enough comments, the adolescent is encouraged to 'share' it to make it more newsworthy. Bolder and more daring behavior is rewarded when the audience applauds the actions of the performer and the cycle perpetuates. These seemingly innocuous online behaviors can be quite damaging themselves, and they are easily translated into a risky offline reality[6].

1. Cyberbullying

Young et.al. describe that by demonstrating power over others within their networks on public social media sites, aggressors may gain access to social or sexual resources by attracting the attention of bystanders or impressing potential romantic partners. In this view, aggression among adolescents online or offline persists because it works to "boost the social prospects of aggressors and marginalize victims". In interviews, cyberbullying is positioned by adolescents themselves as a way to gain social benefits or social capital, defined as a means "to shore up bonds of friendship and status in both the online and the offline field"[2].

Patton, et.al. explain that the first major category of social media-involved youth violence is cyber-bullying, or electronic bullying. Cyber-bullying is generally defined as a type of bullying involving the use of online or computer-mediated communication, such as Twitter, Facebook, instant messaging, or text messaging. Examples of cyber-bullying include sending insulting or threatening messages, spreading rumors, disclosing personal information, displaying embarrassing pictures, or excluding others during online communications. Although there appears to be a significant conceptual overlap between face-to-face bullying and cyber-bullying, cyber-bullying differs from traditional bullying in that humiliating text or visual materials sent to social media can be permanent and available to the public. Moreover, whereas face-to-face bullying is generally characterized by physical dominance, a physical advantage is not necessary in cyber-bullying; perpetrators can instead dominate a victim through knowledge of social media usage, anonymity, and the victim's limited possibilities of defense and few options of escape[7].

Furthermore, Patton, et. al. show that little is currently known as to whether certain types of cyberbullying are more common than other forms. One study, which looked at cyber-victimization over a period of one year, found that the type of cyber-bullying most frequently reported by victims was rude or nasty comments (32%), followed by rumor spreading (13%), and then by threatening or aggressive comments (14%). One

study, which included 1,684 participants between the ages of 11 and 16 years from four public middle schools located in a Southern state, utilized the Revised Peer Experiences Questionnaire (RPEQ), a nine-item self-report measure that assesses overt and relational victimization within the previous 30 days. Four self-report items were added to each of the RPEQ victimization scales. The items were: “(1) A student sent me a text message or instant message that was mean or that threatened me; (2) A student posted a comment on my Web space wall that was mean or that threatened me; (3) A student sent me an e-mail that was mean or that threatened me; and (4) A student created a Web page about me that had mean or embarrassing information and/or photos. The study found that 14% (n = 239) of the students in the sample indicated that they had been victims of cyber-bullying at least one time in the past 30 days. On the other hand, an earlier study was conducted by reporting that as many as 72% of youth had experienced cyber-bullying within the past year. Collectively, however, these studies highlight the fact that cyber-bullying occurs frequently among youth[7].

Cookingham & Ryan explain that individual conduct can damage self-esteem, so too can the actions of an online adversary or ‘cyberbully.’ This era's equivalent of a schoolyard bully, a cyberbully is someone who deliberately uses social media to perpetuate false, humiliating, or malevolent information about another individual. Similar to traditional offline bullying, studies have shown cyberbullying can lead to depression, anxiety, severe isolation, and poor self-esteem for the bullied individual. Cyberbullying can be even more pervasive, however, because SNSs provide a forum any time of the day or night for anyone and everyone to see. Perhaps not surprisingly, it has also been shown that individuals who participate in cyberbullying are more likely to participate in offline bullying[6].

2. Gangs

Patton, et.al. state gangs engage in a number of online activities including but not limited to posting videos, watching videos, announcing activities, inciting dares, making fun of a recent homicide or victimization, displaying weapons, and discussing and displaying illegal and other substances. It is found that current and former gang members predominately engaged in posting videos (55%) and watching gang-related videos on YouTube (58%)[7].

According to a study of 30 gang members ages 16–20 in a large city in Israel, the degree to which gang members are engaged in social media activities may be impacted by their technical proficiency. The study qualitatively assessed computer skills by asking participants to report on their completion of a basic computer course. Computer skills were grouped into three groups. Low-level computer skills included sending e-mails, using Facebook, and playing games. Mid-level skill included the ability to download movies and music. An individual with high technical skill indicated a broader knowledge of software and, in some case, hacking. Gang

members with low-level computer skills might engage in general Internet searching activities but were more likely to prefer face-to-face interactions. Gang members who possessed more advanced computer skills, however, were more likely to engage in cyber-crimes such as hacking, at times associated with a desire for social respect and or revenge against another gang or someone in the same gang[7].

3. Social media, urban gang violence and criminality

According to Patton, et.al., the ways urban gangs use social media to facilitate violence and crime, examples of violence and crime on social media include but are not limited to: selling drugs; downloading illegal music and videos; harassing or threatening someone online; attacking someone on the street because of something said online; and posting videos of violence and threats online. While gang members use social media in ways that are similar to the broader youth population (e.g., talking to girls, sharing videos and music, etc.) social media is also used to promote gang activity. For example, gang members in their qualitative sample reported that they used social media to brag about violence, make threats, and display gang symbols. The researchers also found that almost one-quarter of the participants reported gang-related cyber-victimization on social media sites. In a more recent study of 585 current and former gang members and violent offenders interviewed about their use of the Internet and gang involvement in five metropolitan areas, found that 45% of the participants engaged in at least one form of online offending, which includes selling drugs or stolen property, harassing and threatening people, and uploading violent videos. The study also found that only 11% of their sample reported that their gang organized online and only 8% of the sample suggested that their gang recruited online[7].

4. Cyber-suicide

Cyber-suicide is a self-directed form of youth violence. Definitions of cyber-suicide vary but generally refer to individuals using the internet to communicate suicidal ideation. Patton, et.al. found that adolescent suicide statements on MySpace, reviewed 1038 MySpace posts that were collected from publicly available profiles. Profiles were downloaded using a search algorithm which downloaded over 40,000 profiled. Final comments were included/excluded based on the following criteria: “had a public profile; did not self-identify as a musician, comedian or movie maker; had received less than 4000 comments. Findings from this study revealed that youth communicated suicidal thoughts in direct response to negative experiences with personal relationships, substances use, a complicated mental health status which may include thoughts of various methods of suicide[7].

B. Sexual Risk

Sexting, defined as “the sending of sexually explicit content such as sexual messages or images” has recently come to a national spotlight, particularly with respect to its reputational and legal ramifications. A national survey reported

that 40% of surveyed adolescents had sent sexually suggestive text messages or online posts and a recent longitudinal study reported a temporal association between engaging in sexting and subsequent sexual activity. Romo, et.al findings that frequent SM use increases their odds of sexual activity, as does sexting. Although frequent SM use is not associated with certain risky sexual behaviors (more lifetime and recent sexual partners), sexting does carry this risk. This study further adds to the understanding of parental influence on SM behavior and results suggest that parental monitoring of SM decreases the risk of sexting, especially among Latina adolescents[1].

Sexting, a more direct form of sexual expression, was found to be less prevalent among Hispanic participants in early adolescence, compared with in middle and late adolescence. Similar to previous studies, this might be reflective of less sexual experience with younger age and suggests that although early adolescents are using SM modalities widely, they are not using sexting as an avenue to exchange sexual material. In this study, even when controlling for age as a function of sexual experience, those who sexted had higher odds of engaging in oral, vaginal, and anal sex. Sexting was also found to be associated with risky sexual behaviors such as having more lifetime and recent sexual partners in our sample.

A reassuring finding, however, was that even after adjusting for age, all SM use (SNSs, apps, and sexting) among female participants was found to be associated with use of regular forms of hormonal contraception, and emergency contraception. This suggests that although frequent SNS and app use, and ever sexting is associated with sexual activity and risk behaviors, Hispanic adolescents and young adults are taking precautionary measures to prevent unplanned or unwanted pregnancies. Unfortunately, frequent SM use and sexting were not associated with LARC use, most likely because of the low numbers of LARC users in our sample. This suggests a potential role for SM to aid in the promotion of more effective methods of contraception among adolescents and young adults especially because a significant amount of health promotion activities on Facebook and Twitter.

Regarding male participants, frequent SM user or sexters, however, had higher odds of being unsure of their partner's contraceptive use, suggesting that these male participants might be less engaged with pregnancy prevention than those who are not frequent SM users or sexters. Research on Hispanic youth sexuality suggests that although Hispanic girls desire pregnancy prevention, their agency to negotiate contraception and condom use is often challenged by their male partners as questioning their sexual knowledge or fidelity. Male participants are more likely to sext than female participants suggesting that special attention should also be given to educating male participants regarding safe sex and SM use [1].

IV. CONCLUSION

Social media have become an integral part of today's culture and have helped define the latest generation of youth. Despite the promise of enhanced socialization, communication, and education, however, many adolescents' experience of social media use has been negative on balance; i.e. from lowering self-esteem to creating newsocial norms that encourage increasingly risky behavior, SNS use, the sexual and social wellness of adolescents. This study showed a potential association between frequent social media use and increased likelihood of sexual activity among youth.

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