Agency Reformation (Individualism) in the New Media Family Situation

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ABSTRACT

This study of new media user-practitioners' among Delhi-NCR university students is based on new media engendered functionalities and dysfunctional ties. This research was conducted on 300 students and the information was collected through using convenience sampling by administering a schedule by the researcher. The study involved assessing the volume and nature of indulgence of the participant-students' with the new media enabled smart devices and the different internet platforms offered by them. The goal was to gauge the indications of autonomy and individualism in the new media practitioners with regard to parents and household. The results revealed certain tendencies based on privacy orientation and communication inclinations/volume of the respondents in the household. Some of the privacy parameters are positively associated with heavy media usage in varying degrees.

Key Words: New Media, Consumption patterns, individualism, autonomy, family, etc.

INTRODUCTION

Littlejohn & Foss (2006) have endorsed the views of Mcluhan and Harre, regarding the social impact of media technology on family and individuals. They regarded agency as a promising term for actor or communicator in the wake of new media peculiarities that transcended across regions. The authors found updated area of research where agency and structure are interacting. Meanwhile, the social context varies, where social impact can be seen, are the sites to access its implications. Scholars found communication as affected by the sense of self, message of others, conversation, relationship, the group and social and cultural milieu, all in social context and communication context. In the present research, almost all these aspects are attempted to know the communication patterns, treating these as frames of communication in the new media era.

Jonathan Donner et al. (2008), while focusing on Indian middle class families and where the authors saw a 'new topic' emerging and that was about mobile phone and its use. The questions among families were when to purchase, whether or not to purchase, how to use it, or not to use it. They also observed that conversations among family members have been traditional. But the mediating communication technology came to affect the family dynamics, which reformed the negotiations in the relationship, all in changed circumstances of social and economic life.

In the framework of this research, the new media practitioners/individuals are dubbed as 'agency', who have characteristics fitted dynamically with their social context, i.e. family, and who have internet embedded lifestyle in their everyday lives. Social subjects and systems are continuously reproducing and to some extent, reforming each other. Their interactions are not in terms of abstract principles, but in concrete contexts and practices (Giddens, 1984:17). Before Giddens, Dave Alan (1978:379) had noted that "Here, then, is the problematic around which the entire history of sociological analysis could be written; the problematic of human agency."

New Media is primarily an entertainment-driven individual medium. Julia T Wood (2009) also attempted to understand new media from the angle of uses and gratification theory and mentions users have nearly infinite choices for pleasure, information, conversation, collaboration and the like, which spirals into the cycle of more use and more gratification.

The media consumption analysis helped the researcher to ascertain and assess their consumption and their tastes for items they consume and use, in order to understand their lifestyle and life-world, as the agency absorbs it and gets a new character imbued with traits like individualism, and reluctance for communication within family. This problematic was ascertained from the observation and experience of the researcher and also from the relevant literature. For relevant analysis

(indulgence), the users have been classified on the basis of their total daily average usage duration of new media gadgets, as 'light users' (up to one hour daily), 'medium users' (1-3 hours daily), and 'heavy users' (more than 3 hours daily). The emphasis on 'heavy and light users' for the analysis of the findings is indicative of the fact that the real concurrence or association of two phenomena is best reflected at the extreme ends.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This study seeks to understand the characteristics of the new media practitioner-students (dubbed as agency) in terms of individualism and autonomy and the resulting situations of the NCR families and parents, in whose relation the new media agency located in respondents/actors operates and the traits of individualism and autonomy are unleashed. The study involved assessing the volume and nature of indulgence of the participant-students' with the new media enabled smart devices and the different internet platforms offered by them. The goal was to gauge the indications of autonomy and individualism in the new media practitioners with regard to parents and household.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is an exploratory study based on the survey of 300 new media user/practitioner students of the national capital region (Delhi-NCR) universities (eight). Questions were asked to seek information regarding the daily consumption volume of new media, types of new media gadgets owned, platforms being accessed, content being consumed and so on. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected from the respondents, under mixed method approach to research.

The unit of the study is the student, who owns a smartphone. Convenience sampling was deployed 'to find the research subjects quickly and easily seeking information whatsoever available' (Judith M, et al., 2005:75)[1]. The exploratory study focuses on new media practitioner students of National Capital Region (NCR) universities as agency (ego) in relation to the social context, i.e. their families (alter), to identify the emerging new patterns of communication and he traits that the agency has acquired through new media remediation. This exploratory study seeks to explore the 'reformed' tone and traits of the agency, accumulated through new media usage.

KEY CONCEPTS

New Media
The new media communication technologies use computers and telecommunication as mediums for information dissemination to a scattered and heterogeneous audience defying space, time and distance. Different tools of new media have emerged, like the internet, mobile phones, videoconferencing, e-mail, chat apps, online newspapers, magazines and many others. The term digital media, is often used interchangeably with the new media, since new media runs on digital technology.

New Media Consumption
M. Lister (2003/2016)[2] defined consumption as thus: 'Consumption is browsing, surfing, watching videos, and we may consume so much as we are 'immersed'.' Of course, now, chatting, video calling and posting can be added now as the popular activities on the new media platforms. The consumption includes both the volume and frequency of usage. The researcher utilized these while presenting the position of new media practitioners as producer and consumer simultaneously.

Individualism
Individualism is grounded in the belief that individuals are separate beings with personal differences that make him unique (Triandis, 1995). Such individuals have the tendency to describe himself/herself as a person first, as opposed to a member of a group. It is called independent view of the self. Larger focus is placed on internal processes and desires including goals, values, needs, desires, preferences, rights and identity. These guide and motivate an individual's behavior and thoughts irrespective of conformity to one's group. Therefore, individuals behave in accordance with their attitude as opposed to the norms and mentality of their group.

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[1]Judith, Espinosa, Valencia, DeAnza, Jensen, Michael, White, Mary, (2005). Regional Transportation's Consensus Building Between Local and Tribal Governments in New Mexico: A Case Study. Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board, 1924, pp 75.
[2]2 Lister M. et al. 'New Media: a critical introduction', NY: Routledge, 2003.

DATA INTREPRETATION & ANALYSIS

Individualism and Autonomy

An important dimension of the rise of digital networks is the rise of individualism and the decline of communities, which are traditionally defined in terms of space, work, family, and ascription, etc. (Castells, 2012). The autonomy, which facilitates individualism, has been bred by internet, a dominant platform utilized by the new media. The below tables access the level of and factors responsible for this acquired individualism (if any).

Extent of use of the new media gadgets

Ascertaining the level of preoccupation of the respondents with new media is crucial to gauge their level of indulgence. More indulgent users are likely to devote less time to other activities, including conversing with the family members. While the lack of appropriate communication motivation or lifestyle and personality of family members are important factors affecting communication, but the use of new media may amplify the opportunities and motivation of the respondents to evade conversations. Therefore, the amount of time spent on new media devices has a direct bearing on the volume and quality of communication with the family members. The below table assess the total daily average usage of gadgets by the respondents.

Table 1.1: Total Daily Average Usage Duration of New Media Gadgets by the Respondents

Duration	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Up to one hour	25	8.3	8.3	8.3
1- 2 hours	102	34.0	34.0	42.3
2-3 hours	43	14.4	14.4	56.7
More than 3 hours	130	43.3	43.3	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Nearly 43% of the respondents use digital gadgets for more than 3 hours per day, apart from telephonic conversations. 145 (48%) respondents use smartphone for 1-3 hours. Also, around two third respondents (173) use digital gadgets for at least two hours a day. For the matter of classification, up to one hour daily users are 'Light Users', 1-3 hours are 'Medium Users' and more than 3 hours are 'Heavy Users'. The significant number of 'Heavy Users' indicate high level of indulgence of the respondents.

Participation in collective family exercise like TV-viewing

TV viewing is more of a cultural practice. Morley (1992: 138) sought to reject the individual centred approach altogether and decided that *"the basic unit of consumption of television [should] be the family/household rather than the individual viewer."* New media, on the other hand, is an individualized medium, with little scope for 'collective' viewing. Hence the below table depicts respondents' indulgence in watching TV with family members, which also gives an idea whether the respondents are inclined towards the notion of 'family time' and face to face interaction, necessitated by this collective exercise. Further, table no. 2.2 shows the variation of new media usage volume with TV viewing habit.

Table 2.1 : Frequency of Watching TV with Family by the Respondents

Frequency of TV viewing	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Daily	126	42.0	42.0	42.0
Frequently	55	18.3	18.3	60.3
Occasionally	36	12.0	12.0	72.3
Rarely	51	17.0	17.0	89.3
Never	32	10.7	10.7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Nearly 60% of the respondents (181) watch TV with their family either daily or frequently. However, it is not difficult for a person to watch television and go online at the same time, especially given that the pace of TV allows the users to simultaneously indulge in, for example surfing of internet. The amount of interactivity and involvement needed for the internet depends upon the platform being used. So there could be a fair bit of overlap between TV viewing and new media use here. Interestingly, 28% of the respondents (83) would rarely or never watch TV with the family, as the data above

indicates. This could be construed as either reluctance to submit to collective family involvement or that the smartphone serves as a preferred alternative to Television.

Table no 2.2 : Total Daily Average Usage of Gadgets by the Respondents * Frequency of Watching TV with Family by the Respondents

Daily New Media Usage Volume	Frequency of Watching TV with Family by the Respondents					Total
	Daily	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	
Less than 1 hour	16	3	1	4	1	25
1- 2 hours	47	16	9	18	12	102
2-3 hours	19	6	9	6	3	43
More than 3 hours	44	30	17	23	16	130
Total	126	55	36	51	32	300

As evident from the above table, respondents' inclination for watching TV with the family decreases as the use of new media increases. 64% (16) of the light users prefer to watch TV daily with their families; while 46% (47) of the medium users (Daily Average Use 1-2 hours), 44% (19) of the medium users (DAU 2-3 hours) and 34% (44) of the heavy users prefer to watch TV daily with the family. It could be inferred that individual indulgence with smartphones could substitute for collective entertainment with family. The collective TV-viewing decreases as the new media usage increases. The seclusion is obvious since digital media provides for single person viewing, especially smartphones.

New media usage's variation with the volume of communication with parents
The below table depicts the daily average use of gadgets by the respondents in juxtaposition with the volume of communication between the respondents and their parents. The preoccupation of the respondents with the new media could be time consuming and that could undercut the volume of communication with the family members. The communication or lack thereof, with the parents, can seriously alter the family dynamics and relationships. Given below is relevant data to that effect.

Table 3.1: Total Daily Average Usage of Gadgets by the Respondents * Have Respondents' Communication with Parents gone down since they started using Smartphone

Total Daily Average Usage of New Media	Have Respondents' Communication with Parents gone down since they started using Smartphone		Total
	Yes, communication has gone down	No, communication hasn't gone down	
Less than 1 hour	11	14	25
1- 2 hours	36	66	102
2-3 hours	19	24	43
More than 3 hours	57	73	130
Total	123	177	300

44% (11) of the light users (Total 25) believe that their communication with the parents has gone down since they started using smartphone. Equally, 44% (57) heavy users (Total 130) also believe so. Similarly, 44% (19) of the respondents whose daily average usage is 2-3 hours (Total 43) believe their communication has gone down. Although majority of respondents across categories don't believe their communication has gone down, but the differences are not big. Therefore, the amount of time spent on new media devices might or might not have some bearing on the volume and quality of communication with the family members. At least this is what this data shows.

Inclination towards living separate from family
The below table indicates the inclination of the respondents towards living separate from their family. This inclination indicates desire for autonomy, freedom, as also a strand of individualism.

Table 4.1: Distribution of Respondents Wanting to Live Separate from Family?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	72	24.0	24.0	24.0
No	189	63.0	63.0	87.0
Can't Say	39	13.0	13.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

One fourth of the respondents (72) would prefer to stay separately from their family, as against 63% (189) respondents who would like to stay with their families. This indicates that a vast majority of respondents want to stay with their families, which reiterates that the agency is largely still traditional and subscribe to parental influence, despite the individualistic temper of new media.

Reasons for preferring to live separate from family
The below table assesses the reasons for living separate from their family, if they were given a chance. The reasons are important because they give an insight into the factors that motivate them to retreat into individual and self-'protected' space.

Table 5.1: Reason for Respondents to Prefer Living Separate from Family

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
They argue too much	3	1.0	1.0	1.0
They interfere too much	9	3.0	3.0	4.0
Want to be independent	33	11.0	11.0	15.0
Want complete freedom to access smartphone/laptop	18	6.0	6.0	21.0
Any other reason	1	.3	.3	21.3
They interfere too much+ Want to be Independent	1	.3	.3	21.7
Want complete freedom to access smartphone/laptop+ Want to be independent	6	2.0	2.0	23.7
They interfere too much+ Want to be Independent+They argue too much	1	.3	.3	24.0
N.A.	228	76.0	76.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Out of those who prefer to stay separate from their families (72), 45% (33) believe that this is so exclusively because they want to be independent. Overall 57% (41) respondents reported this reason amongst others. 25% (18) reported that they want complete freedom to access smartphone/laptop only.

New media usage and inclination of living separate from family
It would be worthwhile to examine the level of new media usage alongside the inclination of the respondents to live separate from the family. The parental control or monitoring may have an influence upon the heavy users, in a way that they could seek alternative situation where such controls don't exist. The below table presents it as thus:

Table 6.1: Total Daily Average Usage of Gadgets by the Respondents * If Given a Chance, would Respondents like to Live Separate from Family?

Total Daily Average Usage of New Media	If Given a Chance, would Respondents like to Live Separate from Family?			Total
	Yes	No	Can't Say	
Less than 1 hour	10	12	3	25
1- 2 hours	13	75	14	102
2-3 hours	10	28	5	43
More than 3 hours	39	74	17	130
Total	72	189	39	300

Majority of the respondents across almost all the types of users prefer to live with the family. 48% of the light users (12), 73% of the medium users (DAU 1-2 hours) 65% of the medium users (28) and 57% of heavy users (74), would prefer to live with their families. The heavy use of new media doesn't seem to have clear concurrence with respondents' inclination to life separate from their families.

Occupation of separate room in the household
New media is a highly individualized and private medium. Separate room gives the respondents ample opportunity to get involved in their smartphones/laptops, without any constraints from the family, especially parents. So, it is an enabling factor in new media indulgence. Table 7.1 shows the distribution of respondents regarding occupation of a separate room for themselves in the house.

Table7.1: Occupation of Separate Room by the Respondents at Home

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Owns a separate room	178	59.3	59.3	59.3
No separate room	122	40.7	40.7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Around 60% (178) of the respondents own a separate room in the household. Rest of them share their room with either parents or siblings. While separate room could also be a function of type of family, where joint family naturally has more family members and hence less rooms available to be allotted on individual basis. It also depends upon the size of the house and hence household income.

Preference for separate/shared room
As discussed, owning a separate room provides the respondents unfettered new media access. Separate room also minimizes the avenues and possibilities of conversation or engagements with other family members, primarily parents. So preference of a separate room is pretty indicative of the disposition of the agency on the parameters of individualism and privacy. Table 8.1 displays respondents' preference for separate room.

Table 8.1: Preference for Separate and Shared Room (If given a choice)

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Separate room	166	55.3	55.3	55.3
Shared room with parents	44	14.7	14.7	70.0
Shared room with brother/sisters	79	26.3	26.3	96.3
Shared room with other members	11	3.7	3.7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

If given a choice, more than half of the respondents (166) would choose to live in a separate room in the household. Nearly one-fourth of them (44) would choose to share room with their siblings. Only 14% (44) respondents prefer a shared room with their parents. Lesser preference for parents indicates less comfort level of respondents. Higher preference for siblings

is understandable, as a) there is little or no generation gap, so there is a great deal of concurrence in preferences; b) siblings don't command the same level of authority.

Variation of new media use with the preference for separate room
It is also worthwhile to analyze the cross trends of total daily average usage of gadgets by the respondents and their preference for separate and shared room. The new media is an individualized, personal medium and its usage isn't contingent upon shared time and space. Owning a separate room provides the agency unfettered new media access, with little chances of 'outside disturbance'. Separate room also minimizes the avenues and possibilities of conversation or engagements with other family members, primarily parents. Preference for a separate room indicates an inclination towards privacy and confinement, which may increase with consumption.

Table 9.1: Total Daily Average Usage of Gadgets by the Respondents * Preference for Separate and Shared Room (If given a choice)

Total Daily Average Usage of New Media	Preference for Separate and Shared Room (If given a choice)				Total
	Separate room	Shared room with parents	Shared room with brother/sisters	Shared room with other members	
Less than 1 hour	6	8	8	3	25
1- 2 hours	51	16	31	4	102
2-3 hours	23	5	14	1	43
More than 3 hours	86	15	26	3	130
Total	166	44	79	11	300

24% (6) of the respondents, who are light users (25), prefer to own a separate room in the household. The number of respondents preferring separate rooms increase as we move towards medium and heavy users, with 50% (51) for 1-2 hours daily usage, 53% (23) for 2-3 hours, and 66% (86) for the usage upward of 3 hours daily. There is a visible concurrence between the new media usage and the tendency of individualism and autonomy by preferring separate room. As the data suggests, the heavy use of new media coincides with the increasing preference for a separate room, which allows them to exercise their autonomy with regard to consuming the new media commodities.

Respondents' discomfiture with conversations regarding household matters
Researchers have specifically linked habitual and unregulated media use with negative effects. Lee and Perry's study (2004) showed links between habitual use of instant messaging and negative symptoms associated with preoccupation, such as decreased time spent in completing desired tasks, difficulty fulfilling college and household work responsibilities, and spending less time with family/friends. The below table assesses the comfort level of the respondents with regard to household matters and responsibilities.

Table 10.1: Respondents feel uncomfortable when Parents talk about Household Matters?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	72	24.0	24.0	24.0
No	228	76.0	76.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

3/4th of the respondents (228) don't feel uncomfortable when parents talk about household matters, while the rest feel uncomfortable. It shows that the agency is largely not averse to involvement in household affairs.

DISCUSSION

This pursuit of privacy reminds the process of atomisation of man, as indicated by authors like Yuval Harari (2018:128), who notes that the adolescent children in US and UK vie to own separate rooms in the household at an early age (as early as 12) and the parents were not supposed to enter their room without knocking on the door.

Around 60% (178) of the respondents own a separate room in the household. Rest of them share their room with either parents or siblings. If given a choice, more than half of the respondents (166) would choose to live in a separate room in the household. Only 14% respondents prefer a shared room with their parents. The high preference of separate room is indicative of the need of privacy. Around 24% (6) of the respondents, who are light users, prefer to own a separate room in the household. The number of such respondents increase as we move towards medium to heavy users, with 50% (51) for 1-2 hours daily usage, 53% (23) for 2-3 hours, and 66% (86) for the usage upward of 3 hours daily.

In the nuclear families, due to reduced size, preference for privacy and individualism are the ascending tendencies which are visible and have changed environment of family interaction. Giving a research input to the study of modern time family in Gujrat (India), AM Shah (1998) highlighted the subordinate phenomenon of joint family disintegrating, which was not the case in 1950s. However, the rise of nuclear families have facilitated the provision of separate rooms, which safeguards this private space, and in the process skirting family/public gazes, while having a private time on smartphone. It also rules out immediate restrictions and conflicts with the parents.

The most dominant aspect of the digital/new media is that it led to the 'privatization' and 'individualization' of media use, which could mean the users vying for private spaces for themselves in the households. While TV used to be the anchor of the living spaces, which provided for family gatherings and socialization, computers which arrived subsequently, provided for more secluded spaces in the households (Morrison & Krugman, 2001).

The leisure time, which had traditionally been spent in collective exercises like TV viewing, family conversations and playing games, seem to find less favour among the respondents and is now preferred to be spent in individual gratifications through new media. As also indicated by the data, 28% (83) of the respondents would rarely or never watch TV with the family. From the data, it could be inferred that individual indulgence with smartphones could substitute for collective entertainment with family. The collective TV-viewing decreases as the new media usage increases.

The amount of time spent on new media devices might or might not have some bearing on the volume and quality of communication with the family members. At least this is what this data shows.

CONCLUSIONS

The new media practitioner agency has a rather individualistic orientation when it comes to indulgence in collective common interest activities like watching TV, which is practiced by far less respondents than those who like to engage with their smartphone/laptop in their spare time, amongst other leisure activities. Also, respondents who engage only with their digital gadgets during leisure time, is twice the number of respondents who prefer spending time with the family instead. This implies a shift towards 'the reconstruction of social relationships, on the basis of individual interests, values, and projects', which in turn has engendered the culture of autonomy and individualism, which are at cross-purposes with the value of collectivism, on which family institutions thrive.

As per (Morrison & Krugman, 2001), the most dominant aspect of the digital/new media is that it led to the 'privatization' and 'individualization' of media use. It led to more individualized adolescents who got less oriented towards family (Jennings & Wartella, 2004).

Smartphone seems to have altered the contours of 'private space'. Privacy and its protection are valued by the respondents. Majority of respondents prefer to have a separate room for themselves in the household; and the number of such respondents increase as one moves from medium to heavy users. So, seemingly there seems to be a positive association between the volume of new media consumption and the implicit demand of privacy by the practitioner students. This concurrence implicates the new media's 'reforming' power over agency.

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