Research in Social Sciences
ISSN: 2641-5305
Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 69-77
2018
DOI: 10.53935/2641-5305.v1i2.10

Facebook as a Culture: A Sociological Study

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ABSTRACT: *The small 'f' letter has become the new cultural symbol. The blue world of Zuckerberg has become the postmodern cultural manifestation. Today, Facebook has become the largest virtual networking space with more than 2.23 billion monthly active users. The game of like, comment and share has become the contemporary way of life. The present paper aims to comprehend how Facebook is reconstructing new acculturation and socialization among the youth generation. This advanced cyberculture is reinforcing the most recent sociological concepts like the 'Net-Generation', 'Millennium Generation' 'Digital Natives' etc. The main purpose of the study is to illustrate how the culture of the Facebook is constructing a new pattern of identity, a changing trend of interaction and a new preference about interpersonal relations among the students of the University of Dhaka. The researcher tends to analyze the nature of Online Vs Offline pattern of the youth life. This research also tries to analyze whether Facebook itself is a culture or a subculture or a cultural extension. As a major methodological technique, the researcher uses a quantitative method approach for data collection and analysis. The study reveals that Facebook is encouraging community feelings by facilitating individualism. People are judging another individual through the screen of the Facebook newsfeed. There is evidence of growing night culture, the popularity of English and Bangla mixed writings, Edited picture and edited name to create a new image among students. An awareness building program should be taken by the concerned authority on the positive side and negative side of Facebook use for helping the users.*

Key words: *Culture, Facebook, Youth, Social networking sites, Learning, Bangladesh.*

1. Introduction

In *The New Yorker* (July 5, 1993), Peter Steiner's popular cartoon about two dogs sitting in front of a desktop computer captioned- "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog" (Solo-anaeto & Jacobs, 2015). This example clearly fits with the most contemporary culture of Facebook. The most recent concept of 'Generation F' or 'Generation Facebook' connotes how this 'social!' networking site is creating a virtual acculturation especially among the youth (Mao & Qian, 2015); (Sarker et al., 2019). According to Lin et al. (2016), the main appeal of Facebook lies within the motto- "You only see friends there". In 2015, the 'Face with Tears of Joy' emoji as a pictograph became the Oxford dictionaries 'Word of the Year' because it was the most used emoji mostly on Facebook in 2015 (Solo-anaeto & Jacobs, 2015). This is how every aspect of Facebook is becoming intermingled with our daily lives (Anderson et al., 2012). A great body of research has

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been conducted on the usage of social networking site among the youths, social media and mobilization of the youth, impact of internet among the youths (Nasrin et al., 2019; Sarker et al., 2019).

Facebook emphasizes on 5 core values, such as: focusing on the impact, moving fast, being bold, being open and building social values (Sarker & Jie, 2017). Culture works on the same way. The learning, sharing, impact of symbols, integrated and dynamic characteristics of culture are strongly present in the idea of Facebook (Rahman et al., 2018); (Khan, Sarker, Huda, Nurullah, & Zaman, 2018). This study interconnects two concepts- the idea of Facebook and the idea of culture. Simply, culture is the way of life which builds the notion (Sarker & Jie, 2017; Sarker et al., 2017); (N. I. Sarker et al., 2018). Facebook is also becoming the way of life especially among the youths. In the age of *Liquid Modernity* (2000), Zygmunt Bauman shows the transformation to a hardware-oriented modernity to a software-oriented postmodernity (Beilharz & Bauman, 2001). Facebook is that networking software which dominates the postmodern essence of living (Sarker et al., 2018; Sarker et al., 2018). We can easily decide who should be our friend and who should not (Shiau, et al., 2018). The present research focuses on the 'degree of the virtualization' in the way of life by Facebook among the students of the University of Dhaka. It highlights impact of the Facebook culture to construct a new digital socialization among youths. The core theme of the study is how a culture of image is developing among them.

This study is trying to emphasize on the cultural rather than the technical aspects of the Facebook. It focuses on to what extent the Facebook is constructing the virtual idea of self, digital way of interaction and flexibility in the interpersonal relationships among the students of the University of Dhaka. To understand the cultural influence of Facebook among the youths, the researcher articulates some analytical variables such as the accessibility and the using pattern of the Facebook among the students, information about their Facebook profiles, communication with friends and peer groups etc. Therefore, this study intends to explore what extent the Facebook is establishing a culture among the youths at the University of Dhaka?

2. Review of the Literature

Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (1964) is a notable work to understand Marshall McLuhan's famous quote- "The medium is the message." Don Tapscott in his *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation (1998)* argued that in the West, the teenage cultural consumption is mainly the media artifacts such as the internet, social networking sites, video games, mp3 player, computers etc. Young people have created their own bedroom culture with a media-oriented environment which reinforces to grow different values, attitudes and behavior in them. The Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) approach emphasizes on the fact that the technology is a social product which is constructed by the social actors (Llorens & Capdeferro, 2013). It means that the technology itself is not good or bad, but rather good or bad is performed by an individual through technological means (Anderson et al., 2012).

Schwarz and Shani (2016) reported that teenagers are seriously addicted to pornography which is against the mainstreaming Islamic culture of the society. The new technologies are creating a new space where the men and women can interact with one another in such conservative society where such communication outside marital relation is very limited (Al-Rawi, 2017). *The Crime Against Children Research Center (2011)* at the university of New Hampshire interviewed 1501 young people on their study of cybercrime and concluded that 19% of the participants have experienced sexual solicitation via internet. Ryan et al. (2011) structured the core components of the N-Gen (Net Generation). These are: Independence, Investigation, Immediacy, Innovation, Openness, Inclusion, Free expression.

Błachnio et al. (2018) proposed that the virtual space is articulated in the broader socio-cultural, socio-economic and imaginary constructions. The digital world also forces us to reach beyond the dual aspect of technological determinism and social constructionism and creates a whole new social space. In *Children and the Internet: Great Expectation, Challenging Realities* (2009), Sonia Livingstone pointed the conflicts between the online and offline culture (Warlaumont, 2010). She believed that the virtual world is a culture itself (Llorens & Capdeferro, 2013). The internet and the social networking sites are the space of freedom, fluidity and flexibility (Khan, Khan, et al., 2018). The online relationships are becoming more intimate than the offline relationships. In Bangladesh, Zahid (2007) found that the respondents of his study spend little time on internet for the academic purpose.

Hong and Na (2018) found that the culture of internet creates a reconciliation of both the western and the indigenous culture. The Bengali youths have a western perception with a very own Bengali practice (Sarker, 2017). The emergence of consumer culture facilitates this type of cultural identity. It is not the internet but the

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commodification of the culture which creates a blended lifestyle among the youth (Sarker, 2016; Sultana et al., 2017). Internet is a powerful mechanism of this capitalist practice. Warlaumont (2010) showed how the media is alternating our social relations, communications, behaviors and attitude by accelerating new structural transformation in the society. It is creating a community with new identities, As Lee et al. (2017) argued that the cyberspace is creating pretense and alienation which is the substitute of the real world.

3. Theoretical Framework

In *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (1964)*, Marshall McLuhan asserts that the technology of the media is an extension of society. It allows us to reach through time and space. He categorized media with the metaphor of 'hot' and 'cool'. The hot media creates the audience as passive components. Animations and video games are the 'cooler' versions of media because they construct the bridge between imagination and reality- a virtual reality. Based on the idea of McLuhan, French Sociologist Jean Baudrillard coined a term called 'hyperreality' in his groundbreaking study *Simulacra and Simulation* (Baudrillard, 1988). Hyperreality is the representation of symbols without authentic or real origin. The state of hyperreality is creating confusion by altering reality with the fabricated representations (Baudrillard, 1988). The idea of hyperreality can't be understood fully without the concepts of 'Simulacra' and 'Simulation'. In *Faith in Fakes*, Umberto Eco defined Simulacra as "The authentic fake". On the other hand, Baudrillard (1988) conceptualized Simulation as "A real without origin or reality". The process of simulacra and simulation constructs a hyperreality into four phases:

a) The first phase is concerned with the faithful representation of the real. Baudrillard defines this phase as "the sacramental order".

b) In the second phase there is a distortion or the unfaithful reflection of the reality. According to Baudrillard, it "masks and denatures" the authenticity of the real.

c) The third level covers or hides the absence of the reality. In this level, signs or images 'pretends' to be the original. Baudrillard highlights this level as the "order of sorcery".

d) The last stage has no connection with the reality at all. In this stage, signs or images represent other signs or images. It is the phase of pure simulation which constitutes the state of hyperreality.

Baudrillard (1988) exemplified his theory of hyperreality with the concept Disneyland. The 'imaginary world' of Disneyland tries to manipulate the actual reality of the physical world. There is no reality, but it is real. He conveyed this state neither real nor unreal- a condition of hyperreality. Facebook is doing the same thing by establishing an image with has no connection with the reality. The symbolic reactions of Like, Love, Haha, Wow, Sad and Angry reactions are replacing the actual emotions behind these signs. The face-to-face responses are being altered by texts and stickers. Edited pictures are becoming the real identities.

Emoticons are becoming emotions. Facebook is the best example of how a 'hyperreal culture' or 'culture of images' is developing among the youths. This virtual space as a cultural artifact gives the youth a sense of belonging. Digital spaces such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, YouTube, Instagram owned by the giant business organizations aim to reshape the consumption pattern of the youth (Lin et al., 2016). Internet is actually blurring the link between the products that are essential for living and products for which the essentiality is constructed by their images. Social networking sites such as Facebook are working like an eraser to erase the line between the reality and the image. As a result, 'Image is better than the real' culture is becoming the dominant ideology of postmodernism.

4. Research Methodology

In the study, the independent variable is the culture of Facebook and the dependent variable is the students of the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. So, the quantitative approach is the main mechanism for the methodology of this research. This research is trying to illustrate the impact of Facebook on the behavior, attitude, preference and overall pattern of the students. Therefore, a survey method is used for the collection of data.

4.1. Sampling Procedure

For this cross-sectional study, 200 students as a sampling frame were selected. For this research, at first 10 residential halls from the 23 halls the University of Dhaka were randomly selected. From these 10 halls (8

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boys hall and 2 girls hall), 10 rooms were selected using a simple random sampling technique. 2 respondents with valid Facebook account from each room were randomly sampled for the interview. So, 20 students from each hall were interviewed.

4.2. Tools for Collecting Data

For the data collection, self-completion questionnaire was constructed. The pattern of the questionnaire is both structured and semi-structured. It contained mostly closed-ended and few open-ended questions. It was prepared in both English and Bengali Version for the proper understanding of all the respondents.

4.3. Procedure for Analyzing Data

The collected closed-ended data were entered and analyzed using SPSS statistics 20.0 software. The closed-ended questions are coded according to their variables in the Variable View sheet of the SPSS. Descriptive analysis has been done to interpret the results.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1. Time Spending on Facebook

Most of the respondents spend 3-5 hours on Facebook. This shows a type of addiction towards Facebook among the respondents (Figure 1).

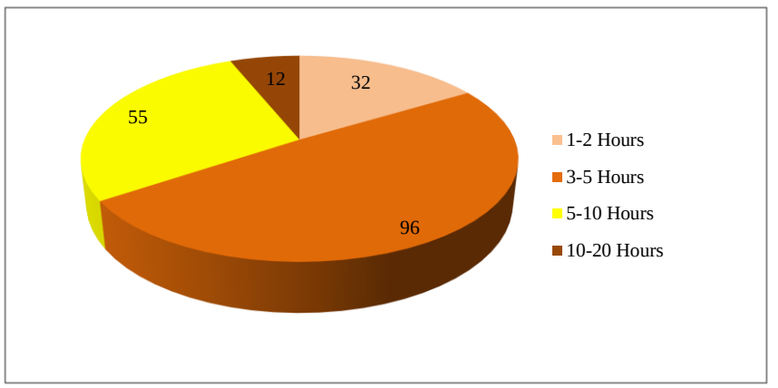


Figure-1.Distribution of students according spending time on Facebook

5.2. Particular Spending Time on Facebook

Interestingly, a great number of respondents use Facebook at the time of night and midnight. Generally, it is the free time for the students. This shows an emergence of 'night culture' among the students (Table 1).

Table-1. Particular spending time on Facebook

Particular time on Facebook	Frequency	Percentage
Morning	16	8.0%
Noon	15	7.5%
Afternoon	11	5.5%
Evening	48	24%
Night	57	28.5%
Midnight	53	26.5%
Total	200	100%

5.3. Pattern of the Profile Picture

Some respondents don't use their own profile picture on the Facebook profile. Among girls there is a tendency to upload pictures of dolls as their profile pictures (Table 2).

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Table-2. Pattern of the Profile Picture

Pattern of the profile picture	Frequency	Percentage
Own Picture	143	71.5%
Picture of Dolls	34	17%
Picture of Celebrities	5	2.5%
Others	18	9%
Total	200	100%

5.4. Reasons for not Uploading Own Profile Picture

Most of the female respondents don't upload their own profile pictures to avoid too many friend requests. Many of the respondents don't upload own profile picture because they thing that they have bad looks (Figure 2).

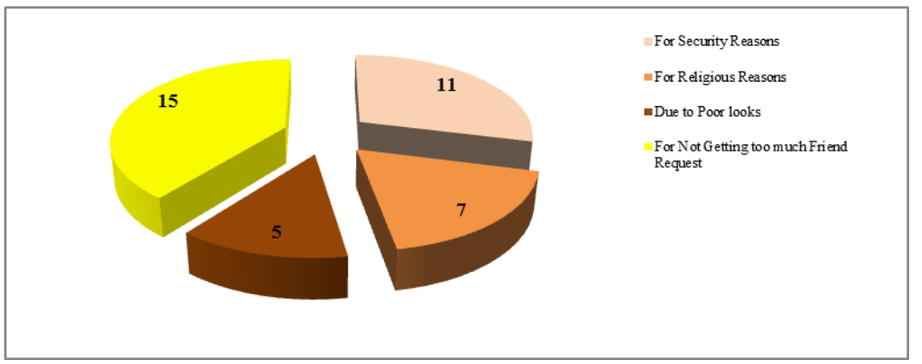


Figure-2. Distribution of students according to reasons for not uploading own profile picture

5.5. Uploading Edited Picture

Uploading edited picture has become a trend. Most of the respondents like to upload edited pictures. This marks a representation of a distorted reality (Table 3).

Table-3. Pattern of uploading edited picture

Uploading edited picture	Frequency	Percentage
Every time	31	15.5%
Often	47	23.5%
Sometimes	73	36.5%
Never	49	24.5%
Total	200	100%

5.6. Reason for Uploading Edited Picture

Most of the respondents are not satisfied with their real looks. So, they upload the edited version of their pictures. Many of them upload it to get more likes and comments. This reflects a growth of virtual happiness (Figure 3).

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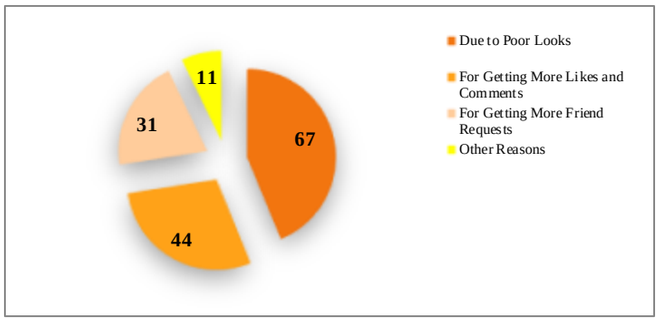


Figure-3. Distribution of students according to reasons for uploading edited profile

5.7. Profile Name of the Respondents

Many of the respondents prefer stylized names or half names on their Facebook profile. Stylized names are creating new identities preferred as 'cool' on Facebook (Table 4).

Table-4. Pattern of uploading edited picture

Pattern of Profile Name	Frequency	Percentage
Full Name	68	34%
Half Name	55	27.5%
Own Stylized Name	42	21%
Not Own Name at all	30	15%
Others	5	2.5%
Total	200	100

5.8. Language Preference at the Time of Chatting

Bangla in English Font or the *Banglish* style of writing is the most popular typing style on Facebook (Figure 4).

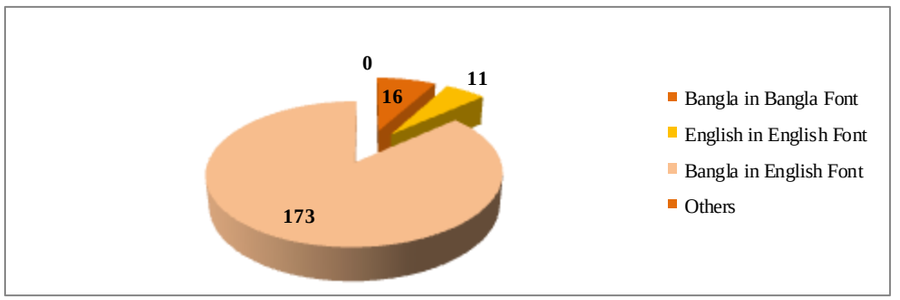


Figure-4. Distribution of students according to language preference at the time of chatting

5.9. Language Preference at the Time of Uploading Status

Many respondents like to upload status on the Bangla Font. Many of them do it in the *Banglish* style (Table 5).

Table-5. Pattern of language preference at the time of uploading status

Language Preference at the Time of Uploading Status	Frequency	Percentage
Bangla in Bangla Font	99	49.5%
English in English Font	11	5.5%
Bangla in English Font	90	45%
Others	0	0%
Total	200	100

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5.10. Relationship with Unknown Person

Surprisingly, 102 of the respondents have a very close friend on Facebook without knowing him/her in real life. This reflects a bond of networking via Facebook (Figure 5).

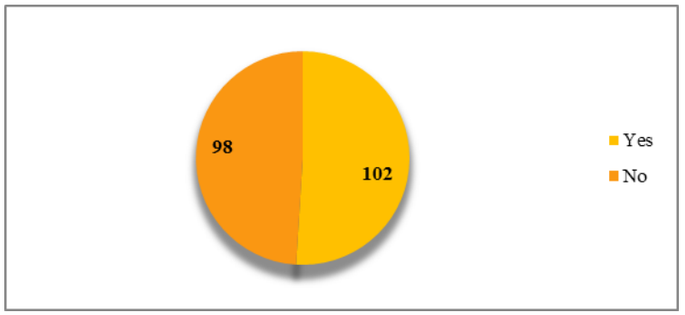


Figure-5. Distribution of students according to relationship with unknown person

5.11. First Meeting with Girlfriend/Boyfriend

First meeting with boyfriend or girlfriend also becoming mediated by Facebook and other social networking sites. Yet, a large number of respondents have a real-life experience of meeting in real life.

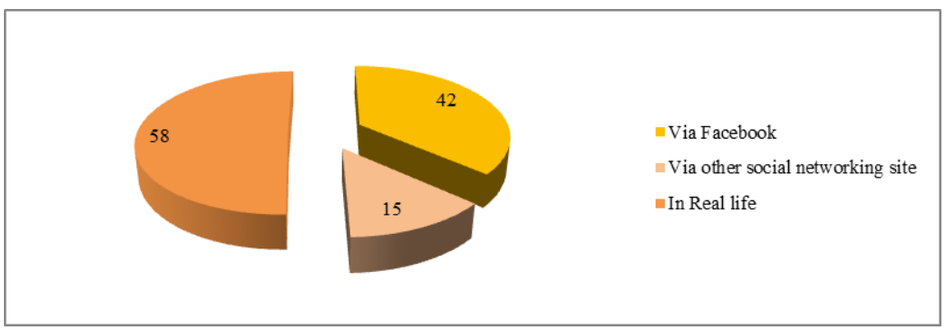


Figure-5. Distribution of students according to relationship with unknown person

5.12. Romantic Relationship in Facebook

Some of the students have engaged in romantic relation with someone who they don't know in real life- A virtual experience of love. About 31% of the respondents experienced sex chats on Facebook. Facebook is creating a new dimension in sexuality also (Table 6).

Table-5. Pattern of romantic relationship in Facebook

Pattern of relationship	Response	Frequency	Percentage
A Romantic Relation on Facebook without knowing him/her in Real Life	Yes	43	21.5%
	No	157	78.5%
Experience of Sex Chat on Facebook	Yes	31	15.5%
	No	169	84.5%

6. Conclusion

Facebook is obviously a product of the consumer culture. It is a postmodern capitalist practice for the commodification of culture. This cultural symbol is beyond the material and non-material cultural approach. This can be called as a hyper-non-material culture which creates a hyper organic solidarity in the age of post-modernism. The outcomes of the study comprehend the facts that Facebook is an *extended cultural setting* which is creating a new pseudo identity, an imaginary feeling of community and a delusive sense of solidarity with its vast networking. Above all, it is establishing a virtual image which is not actually related with the reality. Although this cultural impact is not too much evident at some points, but many aspects of

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virtualization is significant in their way of living. There is an evidence of growing night culture, a popularity of English and Bangla mixed writings, Edited picture and edited name to create a new image among the respondents of the study. Facebook is encouraging community feelings by facilitating individualism. People are judging another individual through the screen of the Facebook newsfeed. Facebook represents the ethos of the post-modern culture. It symbolizes a notion of *Hyperculture* - a super modern notion of digitally connected society. (Bertman,1998). Social Solidarity is replacing by the expansion of virtual or digital solidarity. So, the idea of 'Social' is becoming contradictory day by day. Facebook as something between material and non-material approach of culture is not building a space for 'Friends' but an 'Image of Friendship'- a new cultural commodity.

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Research in Social Sciences
Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 69-77
2018
DOI: 10.53935/2641-5305.v1i2.10
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Email: sajalcsc@gmail.com
Funding: *This study received no specific financial support.*
Article History:
Received: 4 October 2018
Revised: 23 October 2018
Accepted: 26 November 2018
Published: 20 December 2018