

The Use of Social Networking Sites Among Teenagers: A Study of Face- book Use in Dhaka City

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Despite the plethora of research on teenagers and the use of social networking sites, little is known about this issue in the Bangladesh teenagers. This study is an attempt to understand some of the issues involved in Bangladesh teenagers and use of Facebook. One hundred subjects aged 12 to 18 years residing in Dhaka city were interviewed on their use of Facebook and its impact on daily life. This study examines some of the issues surrounding Bangladesh teens use of Facebook. Quantitative and qualitative data through surveys were used in both Bangla medium schools and English medium schools in the Dhaka area. An analysis of the interviews yields the Bangladesh teenagers thoughts on the social networking site Facebook and the positive and negative aspects of its use in their own words. First, Facebook is used to waste time in a city where there is little recreation for young people; second, Facebook is used as an opportunity to communicate with friends both near and far; and third, Facebook has a darker side for some teenagers who create false identities, seek opportunities for long distance romance, and view pornography. The responses from Bangladesh teenagers add nuance to our understanding of how this social networking site has become a part of the societal structure, for good or ill. This study is part of a growing body of research on non-Western views on social networking sites and its effects on the youth and society. In using a largely untapped source of Bangladeshi teenagers in Dhaka, this project will contribute to future research on similar topics. Technology is not a good or a bad thing. With proper usage and supervision from adults, teenagers can take advantage of many great learning opportunities on the internet. However, if children are left unsupervised on the Internet, it can result in Internet addiction, Facebook depression, cyberbullying, and unwanted predators taking advantage of unsuspecting teenagers.

Technological forms of social networking on the Internet such as Facebook are becoming increasingly a popular past-time of teenagers and young adults. Facebook was created in 2004 as a college networking site with limited access to universities in the United States and those who held a university email server. In 2007, Facebook was opened to the general public and was reported to have more than 21 million registered members generating 1.6 billion page views each day (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). The site is tightly integrated into the daily media practices of its users. The typical user spends about 20 minutes a day on the site, and two-thirds of users log in at least once a day. Facebook helps strangers connect with others based on shared personal interests, political and economic views, or recreational activities. Some sites accommodate distinct viewers, while others attract people based on similarities, such as common languages or shared racial, sexual, religious, or nationality-based identities. The ultimate aim of social networking sites is to encourage new ways to communicate and share information.

The importance of Facebook is increasing for communicative purposes among adults, but teenagers are the most frequent users. Globally, teenagers and college students are spending long hours on social networking sites such as Facebook. This has resulted in a significant drop in regular healthy social interaction as well as affecting work, school, and home life. In Bangladesh, all people are not able to access the Internet on a regular basis. Usually higher and upper middle classes have access to the Internet. In Dhaka, parents are increasingly busy with jobs outside the home. They have less time to spend with their children. The ability to play out of doors is virtually non-existent for children. Most of these urban children spend their time indoors and much of it is alone time watching television or using internet with very limited physical activity.

Passing time is a popular activity on Facebook as young people can play games, chat, and network. Facebook is only one social networking site and is one of the more popular worldwide. Increased internet among children results in less physical, psychological, and emotional outlets for stimulation necessary for development. The misuse of Facebook by teenagers has become one of society's most insidious menaces. It is not only harmful to a teenager but also adversely affects the family unit and society as a whole. When a teenager spends too much time on the Internet and misuses the time, their behavior patterns can be adversely altered as they spend less time on studies and household responsibilities and become overcome with the desire to be online. There are many who forsake sleep, meals, and time with family and friends to be connected online. Facebook as a time passing activity among teenagers has been on a rapid incline in Dhaka.

Methods

This study used sample surveying of teenagers aged 12 to 18 years of age. The study was conducted in the Dhaka Metropolitan area. Five Bangla Medium Schools and Five English Medium Schools were purposively selected for this study (i.e., Bir Shreshtha Noor Mohammad Rifles Public School and College, Cambrian College, Dhaka College, Institute of Social Work and Research and Viqarunnisa Noon School, College for Bangla Medium Institutions, British Columbia School, East West International School, Green Gems International School, Green Gems International School, Mastermind School). For the purposes of this study, a teenager was identified as both male and female persons between the ages of 12 to 18 years who may use or misuse Facebook.

Sample survey was used as the study method. Survey studies are usually used to find the fact by collecting the data directly from population or sample. It is the most commonly used descriptive method in educational researches. The researcher collects the data to describe the nature of existing condition or look forward the standards against existing condition or determine the relationships that exists between specific events. Most of the time a survey study intends to understand and explain the phenomena in a natural setting or provide information to government or other organizations or compare different demographic groups or see the cause and effect relationship to make predictions. To this end, it requires responses directly from respondents of large population in general. The type of information required decides the coverage of geographical area for data collection and whether it is an extensive or intensive one.

Through non-probability sampling from the chosen schools, 100 respondents were selected. By non-probability sampling from the selected five schools and five colleges, 100 units were selected. The units were equally distributed, that means the ratio of male and female students as well as school and college students were 1:1 and from every institution 10 students were selected. The respondents were equally distributed by gender and schools interviews were scheduled with respondents so that the researcher could question the participants as well as observe the student. Face to face interviews helped the researcher to clarify and discover information through participant observation and interac-

tion. The collection of data from the study was edited. Then it was classified according to its characteristics. Various statistical methods were used to analyze the data such as mean, median, standard deviation, and correlation. Microsoft Word and Excel were used for analysis in the study.

Findings

Facebook is currently being used by millions of people across the globe. This social networking site provides its users with the activities of their contacts, but also can be a poison for relationships. As revealed in a recent study, it is increasing jealousy and tensions between their supporters. According to the study of Muise (2009), Facebook may lead to serious situations of jealousy with a continuous flow of information about what they do, who are friends, and what photos appear online. This also may result in a disregard for human privacy and rights of what will or will not be posted about an individual.

The teenage years are a time when a person is developing emotionally. The individual is shifting from child to adulthood. The behavior patterns of teenagers change quickly because of the complex and rapid physical and mental changes. During this time frame, teenagers begin to expect and demand more privacy and freedom from their guardians, however, they are not yet emotionally mature enough to understand adulthood and the responsibilities that go along with it. Further, teenagers are generally very much influenced by their peer groups. Because of the rapid growth in technology (e.g., cell phones, laptops, netbooks, wireless Internet, and more), urban teenagers have more access to and enjoy spending their free time online. Males are more prone to interest in online gaming and chatting, where females are more likely to enjoy posting pictures, chatting, and social networking on Facebook. In their quest for building relationships, higher personal status with peers, and recreation, these urban teenagers are often misguided and become more prone to misuse of online technology. Some patterns of Facebook misuse by teenagers are:

Spending long hours online, in particular with social networking sites

Facebook is very important for 27 percent of the teenagers surveyed and important for 25 percent of the teenagers surveyed. Over half of the respondents in this study indicated Facebook as an important part of their life. The remaining 48 percent indicated Facebook was somewhat important or not very important. This may be a result of having lack of access to internet on a regular basis. A common issue in the developing world, particularly for low-income families.

Twenty-seven percent of the teenagers indicated they are online more than 10 hours per week, while 23 percent of the respondents are online 8 to 10 hours a week and 26 percent are online 5 to 7 hours per week. Half of the respondents are online and using Facebook on a fairly regular basis. It would appear that majority of the teenagers surveyed are spending a great deal of time on Facebook. The hours actually reported are probably significantly less than what they do spend online as it is easy to lose track of the time when an individual is checking out other people's profiles, updating his or her own profile, chatting and playing games.

The respondents were asked to indicate the times of the day they are most likely to be on their Facebook account. Forty-six percent of the teenagers in the study indicated the time they were most likely online was between 10 p.m. to 12 a.m. The question comes to mind why this would be a peak time for most teenagers. Many would perhaps have completed homework at this time and finished dinner. However, it is also a critical time period for young people to be sleeping. Another 12 percent of the respondents indicated that, they were online from 12 a.m. to 2 a.m. which is past the time that most household members would be sleeping.

Further, this is only reported time spent on one site (Facebook), it does not take in to account the actual amount of time that a teenager spends online looking at other sites. As many reported, they also are frequent users of various other internet sites such as Google, YouTube, Yahoo Messenger, MSN, or other entertainment and social networking sites. The amount of time actually spent online is far greater than one could speculate. The time amount may be grossly underreported as the users lose track of the time they are spending online, particularly those who would have regular access to a personal computer and Internet from home where they are not actually paying by the hour for time used in cyber-café's or school labs. The respondents who report going on Facebook for shorter amount of time such as two to four hours a week or less than one hour per week are more likely unable to access the Internet as they do not have a personal computer and internet access. It would be a more likely accurate count of their time spent if they are paying by the hour to go online through a cyber-café.

The respondents were asked if Facebook has affected their ability to complete homework. The majority have responded (79%) that their use of Facebook does not affect their ability to complete homework. Twenty-one percent of the teenagers surveyed said that it has affected their schoolwork. There is no doubt that television, interactive video games, and the Internet can be sources of education as well as entertainment for teenagers. Too much screen time, however, can have unhealthy side effects. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that parents should monitor and limit the time children spend playing games, watching television, and being on the Internet. They recommend children under the age of two should not have any "screen time" while children over two years old should have no more than one to two hours a day of "quality programs." They also recommend that children should be given a wide variety of free-time activities such as reading, playing with friends, and sports, which can all play a vital part in helping them develop a healthy body and mind (Gavin, 2011). Gavin (2011) further recommends the following to parents concerning online use for children: Parents should become computer literate by learning how to block objectionable material. Families should keep computers in a common area where children's use can be monitored. Parents should share an email account with younger children to monitor incoming messages. Teach children about Internet safety and have rules regarding internet use. Bookmark preferred and favorite sites. This ensures that children will have easy access and be less likely to make a typo that could lead to inappropriate content. Additionally, parents should spend time online together with their children to teach appropriate online behavior.

Sixty-six percent of the respondents in this research reported their parents had knowledge of their Facebook use while thirty-four percent of the teenagers indicated their parents did not have knowledge about the amount of time they spent on Facebook. The concern is parents do not know what their children are doing or who they are talking to online. A study conducted by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (Teenage Research Unlimited, 2006) found that:

Seventy-one percent of teenagers 13-17 reported receiving messages online from someone they don't know. When teenagers receive messages online from someone they don't know, forty percent reported that they will usually reply and chat with that person but only eighteen percent said they will tell a parent or adult about it. Forty-five percent of teenagers 13-17 have been asked for personal information by someone they do not know. Thirty percent of teenagers surveyed have considered meeting someone that they have only talked to online and fourteen percent have actually had such an encounter. One in four youths aged 10-17 has been exposed to sexually explicit pictures online without seeking or expecting them. One in five youths between the ages of 10 and 17 has received unwanted sexual solicitations online. Less than ten percent of sexual solicitations and only three percent of unwanted exposure episodes were reported to authorities such as a law-enforcement agency, an Internet Service Provider or a hotline. One in seventeen youths aged 10-17 has been threatened or harassed online. Only about half of the children who were threatened or harassed reported the incident to their parents.

Sixty-two percent of the respondents said that, they spend time chatting on Facebook. At a lower second, were those playing games on Facebook at just over 19 percent of the respondents. Online games require a higher internet speed and many of the subjects do not have this. Close to 10 percent of the respondents indicated that, they just browse or look online or update their profile page.

The respondents were asked if they preferred being on Facebook or if they would rather watch television. About half of the respondents indicated they would rather be on Facebook than watch television while the other half indicated they would rather watch television than be on Facebook. The majority of the teenagers surveyed did not give preference to Facebook over their homework. About 22 percent teenagers who responded to this survey indicated they prefer Facebook to doing homework. However, 78 percent of the teenagers said they would do homework first.

The participants were asked if they ever give up sleep time to be on Facebook. The majority of teenagers in this study, at 73 percent said that, they would not forego sleep to be online. However, 27 percent of the teenagers in this study said that they did forego sleep to spend time on Facebook. The problem here is greater than one would suspect as psychologists are now warning that teenagers around the world are sleep deprived. The normal amount of sleep for a teenager to properly develop is nine hours a night. However, the majority of teenagers are not getting this much sleep per night. Whether they are online, talking on the phone, texting, or studying, the norm for teenagers appears to be getting by on less and less sleep.

Sleep-deprived high school students who doze off in class are not just risking the wrath of their teachers. They are also three times more likely to be depressed than their alert classmates who get enough sleep. A study by Siddique (2010) has found most teenagers average six hours a sleep per night. Sleep deprivation and depression go hand in hand among teenagers. Siddique states, "Instead of giving them medications, I'd rather give them a chance to sleep better, and more."

Uncontrolled and unsupervised online "relationships" and online romance

Twenty-one percent of respondents indicated the number of online friends between 300 to 1000 while nine percent of the respondents claim over 1000 to 5000 online friends. It is highly likely that teenagers that claim to have 500 to 1000 friends or more do not actually personally know the persons they claim as Facebook friends. Competing for popularity is common among young people online and having more friends is a way of showing ones popularity. Respondents that indicate they have around 50 friends on Facebook, which was at seven percent of those surveyed, are likely to know the persons to whom they have selected as friends. It is estimated by this study that 76 percent of those surveyed may actually be acquiring friends on Facebook as a competition or an opportunity to show how popular they are on the social networking site. Seventy-seven respondents claimed to know between 50 to 75 persons who were their online friends.

Forty-two percent of the respondents stated they would be comfortable or have already made friends with unknown persons on Facebook. This would either be accepting a friend request from an unknown person or asking an unknown person to become a friend. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents said that they would not or do not make friends on the internet with unknown persons. The idea of making new friends online is not really much different than making friends face to face. The problem is not that online friendships has become a common phenomenon globally, the issue is teenagers do not have the necessary skills of being selective in making friendships. Many of the respondents are "online friend collectors" or someone who likes to have many friends to indicate how popular they are to others. The respondents were also asked the reasons for making friends with persons online that they do not actually know. Sixty-seven percent of the

respondents indicated they made friends online simply to acquire more friends. About twenty-four percent of the respondents were either looking for opportunities for online dating or simply chatting with new people. The growing trend of online dating has become increasingly a part of the new technologically driven society. About twenty-six percent of the respondents said they did so just for the fun of it or to bother and disturb others. The idea of disturbing others online is more alarming as this is indicative of cyber-bullying, a growing phenomenon online.

According to the National Crime Prevention Council (2010), being a victim of cyber-bullying can be a common and painful experience. Some youth who cyber-bully pretend they are other people online to trick others, spread lies and rumors about victims, trick people into revealing personal information, send or forward mean text messages, or post pictures of victims without their consent. Youth who are cyber-bullied report feeling angry, hurt, embarrassed, or scared. According to the National Crime Prevention Council (2010), these emotions can cause victims to react in ways such as seeking revenge on the bully; avoiding friends and activities; and cyber-bullying back. Some teens feel threatened because they may not know the person who is cyber-bullying them. Although cyber-bullies may think they are anonymous, they can be found. The National Crime Prevention Council recommends teenagers that are cyber-bullied and need help should save all communication with the cyber-bully and talk to an adult they can trust to stop the problem.

The teenagers were asked in this study if they ever had an online relationship, referring to dating someone that they did not personally know but considered as a love relationship. About 81 percent of the respondents stated that they never engaged in an online relationship. However, 19 percent of the teenagers indicated they had been in a relationship online. The sample was asked if they had physically met with the person to whom they were having an online relationship. Almost 58 percent of the respondents indicated that, they had met the person whom they were having an online relationship, while 42 percent of the teenagers indicated that, they had not met the person they were involved with online. Distance would certainly play a factor in whether or not the teenagers met their online partner. There is a growing number of social networking and dating websites on the internet. Facebook is only one such site and growing numbers of sites are being developed even in Bangladesh for people to meet. Since there are so many services available, it is clear that people are really interested in establishing relationships, meeting new persons, and seeking romance online. However, romance started online simply does not last (Bambling, 2008). The teenagers in this study were asked if they felt they had deep physical relationships with people they developed an online relationship with. Six percent of the respondents indicated they had a deep physical relationship with someone that was also an online partner. Adolescence is a time of development for intimacy and understanding relationships. During this stage of development it is customary for adolescents to want to have romantic relationships. They will develop new feelings, which may include bewilderment, confusion, and increased vulnerability. This ambiguity could lead to negative consequences, such as entering in to violent or abusive relationships.

False identities

Respondents were asked how they felt about persons who make false identities online. A false identity would be one in which the person on the profile is not the actual person, but a fictitious name and information, even including fictitious photos. It could be a male impersonating a female or vice versa. It could be someone older posing as a teenager, or it could be someone just creating a false identity to spy on friends profiles without the friend knowing the true identity of the individual. Further, false identities may be used to hack in to another person's account and pose as that individual, a crime in many countries. About 49 percent of the respondents indicated that they either did not mind the

activity or they had no opinion one way or another while 51 percent of the respondents indicated it bothered them that some people have false identities. Facebook has been proactive on trying to stop false identities online. Users can report the false identity to Facebook and have the account blocked or removed. It is more common than many people realize and Facebook users are becoming more sophisticated on identifying and reporting the problem.

The respondents for this study were asked if they had more than one Facebook account, or where holding an account with a pseudonym. Seventy-eight percent indicated they do not have more than one Facebook account while 22 percent claimed to have a pseudonym account. This could be related to access to a computer and Internet as managing multiple accounts would take more time to manage. It would be most likely that teenagers who have the luxury of a laptop or personal computer with Internet access in the home would hold more than one account, while teenagers who would have to rely on computers in cyber-café's, schools, or friends would have less time to spend online.

Students who have a pseudonym account gave the following reasons: Seventy-three percent said in order to verify the activities of a boy or girl friend. This may be the most common issue for Bangladesh teenagers because dating is an increased phenomenon and yet most of it is done in secret, or without parental knowledge of the teen dating. The teen years are very trying times for developing intimate relationships. As a result, there can be a great deal of uncertainty about relationships with persons of the opposite sex. The second most popular reason was to have another account for playing games. The games on Facebook entice users with opportunities to play with other friends, offering gifts and expanding the gaming possibilities. Without other friends to send the person "gifts," it is difficult to increase the ever demanding needs of the game as the person reaches higher and higher levels. Teens that may not have a lot of friends playing their particular games will create a pseudonym account in order to be-friend it and send themselves more "game gifts." Fifty percent of the respondents said they had a pseudonym account in order to disturb other people. This was alarming as the ideas of disturbing others or making "fun" can be very harmful to other teenagers who may feel harassed or intimidated by a person who is seemingly unknown to them. Fourteen percent said that it was "to deal with different types of users." This can also be related to cyber-bullying, spying, or stalking another person online. While teenagers may think this is all for fun, the truth is that these types of activities can be very damaging and harmful to other teenagers.

According to a study by Surahmanyam and the colleagues (2008), creating fake identities deters from real life social situations because it allows for individuals to create any image of themselves with little or no repercussions. Even though the Internet may be a catalyst for communication amongst teenagers and may even increase social competence of socially anxious or introverted teenagers, it also can encourage fake identities and a false image of real life situations. These socially anxious teenagers may have a tendency to resort to computer communication as a substitute for real life interactions, which is damaging for proper social development. Issues of the growing use of false identities online are definitely alarming. Parents should be made aware of the problems that could occur when teenagers make friends on Facebook with unknown persons. However, in this study, the teenagers that reported making false identities on Facebook did so for other reasons. The first reason was to check on a boy or girl friend to monitor their activities on Facebook, to see if they were talking with or creating relationships with other boys or girls. The second reason was gamers who wanted to have more than one profile so they could send gifts to themselves from the game sites. Although the intents of some of the teenagers in creating false identities was not malicious, these persons may easily fall prey to another false profiler who has more malicious intentions.

The respondents were asked if they felt comfortable sharing information about themselves such as information, videos, or photos on the social networking site, Facebook.

Fifty-nine percent of the teenagers reported that they felt comfortable releasing information and photos, videos, and more about themselves online while 41 percent said they did not. Facebook in response to privacy concerns for many young users has made it possible to adjust the settings from fully open information to anyone that goes online to restricting access to information about an individual online to friends only and even to restrict certain information to certain people. Although many teenagers globally are less concerned about privacy issues online, most rarely thinking about possible dangers of sharing public information.

Reasons teenagers use Facebook

The respondents in this study were asked the reasons why they prefer to be online. Twenty-eight percent indicated that they want to use the Internet for educational purposes. However, Facebook is a social networking site and cannot truly be constituted as “educational.” Just over 21 percent of the respondents reported that they were online for dating purposes, which indicates that online dating for Bangladesh teenagers has become a more popular phenomenon than perhaps most families would like to admit. Almost 18 percent of the respondents indicated they wanted to be online to communicate with relatives not living in the same household. Tragically, just over 14 percent of the teenagers reported that their family just did not have any time to spend with them, so that they preferred to go online, while just over 7 percent of the teenagers said their parents were boring. About 80 percent of the respondents indicated that they use Facebook regularly because they have a lot of friends online. Many of the respondents used Facebook as an opportunity to chat with their friends. Profile pages are very important to teenagers as 50 percent would look regularly for the responses from other people or friends from items they had posted, while 47 percent liked to review other people or friends profiles for updates and information.

There are now numerous games on Facebook, which attracts many teenagers. Games such as Farmville, Millionaire City, Army Attack, Mafia Wars, Zombie Lane, and Sims Social. Teenagers can play along with their friends, providing gifts to one and others game site as well as helping each other to accomplish to the next level in a game site. Thirty-three percent of respondents reported that they were regular game players on Facebook. Fifteen percent of the respondents indicated they liked to view “soft” pornographic material on Facebook. The interpretation of pornography may be different based on the respondent who answered the question. There is margin for error that some respondents may not wish to report this type of use on Facebook. It should be noted that Facebook does have a policy against pornographic materials on its site and has the ability for Facebook users to report abuse or pornographic materials to the webmaster for removal. In general, Facebook is fairly quick at responding to complaints by users. Most likely due to the bad press given to MySpace.com for the liberal allowances of pornography, which turned many of its users away from the site. Looking at pornographic sites on Facebook is actually common among teenagers.

About 23 percent of the respondents indicated that they used Facebook for other reasons, such as to communicate with family and friends, share photos and information, make new friends or develop stronger connections with friends, and share information about themselves through updates on their own profiles. Facebook is a social networking site intended for just such purposes. In this regard, there are unintended purposes such as connecting with unknown people, looking at or creating pornography, creating sites or pages that contain hatred, prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping, or being cruel to other people through “cyber-bullying.” These are some of the consequences of such a large social networking site with millions of users that have different attitudes, beliefs, values, and agendas.

The Role of Parents and Facebook

Thirty-eight percent of the respondents indicated their parents allow them to go on Facebook, but the activities are watched or monitored to some extent. About 33 percent of the respondents indicated that they are free to go on Facebook without their parents monitoring the activities. Fourteen percent of the respondents indicated that their parents did not have any knowledge about Facebook, which indicates there is no monitoring. About seven percent of the respondents indicated their parents had no time available to monitor their online activities. In more than half (54%) of the teenagers in this study were using Facebook without parental supervision. Eight percent of the respondents indicated their parents are strongly against Facebook, hence time spent on the site is not known to the parents.

The respondents were also asked if they ever lied to their parents about Facebook usage. About thirty-three percent of the teenagers in the study indicated they have lied to their parents about their use of Facebook while sixty-seven percent said they have not lied to their parents. According to Barker (2011), the Internet makes information accessible in ways previous generations never imagined. Social networking has all but replaced the telephone as teenagers' preferred means to communicate. Further, online videos are putting television programmers on alert in the quest for further attention. The Internet is also a place where anyone can say anything, where knowing the difference between fact and fiction is harder than most teens or adults realize. Lack of experience on how to use technology and Internet should not stop parents from being responsible and monitoring their children's activities. Parents who are not technologically savvy already have a social media expert in the home. Parents need to ask their children to show the social networking ropes. If a parent does not have an account, they can ask their teenager to help them set one up.

In this study, 42 percent of the respondents indicated their family does not use Facebook, so that the parents were not online. Twenty-nine percent of respondents indicated that they wanted to have their own privacy and did not ask their family to be friends on Facebook. Close to 17 percent of the respondents said that their family was against the use of Facebook, so that the use of the site was not shared with parents. Over 12 percent of the teenagers said that they did not really have a reason for not having family members as friends on their Facebook profile.

Discussion

While there are certainly concerns about the growth of technology and Internet use among teenagers in Bangladesh and around the world, technology should not be necessarily negative. The fact is that technology has become an integral part of the modern teenager. Parents should become more conscious and aware as well as responsible for monitoring online usage of their children. They should recognize that technology is now a normal part of many teenagers' lives.

Results from the most extensive study (Ito, 2008) on teens and their use of digital media suggest that youth are developing important social and technical skills online, often in ways their parents do not understand or value. Ito (2008) indicated that:

It might surprise parents to learn that it is not a waste of time for their teens to hang out online. There are myths about kids spending time online – that it is dangerous or making them lazy. But we found that spending time online is essential for young people to pick up the social and technical skills they need to be competent citizens in the digital age.

Over three years, this study (Ito, 2008) interviewed over 800 young people and their parents, both one-on-one and in focus groups, spent over 5000 hours observing teenagers on sites such as MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, and other networked communities, and

conducted diary studies to document how, and to what end, young people engage with digital media. This study identified two distinctive categories of teen engagement with digital media: friendship-driven and interest-driven. While friendship-driven participation centered on “hanging out” with existing friends, interest-driven participation involved accessing online information and communities that may not be present in the local peer group.

Undoubtedly, the digital age is here to stay. It will only continue to grow and expand and the younger generations will become more and more technologically sophisticated. Technology is not a good or a bad thing. With proper usage and supervision from adults, teenagers can take advantage of many great learning opportunities on the Internet. If parents leave children unsupervised on the internet, it can result in Internet addiction, Facebook depression, cyber-bullying, and unwanted predators taking advantage of unsuspecting teenagers.

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