Exploring Identity in the Digital Age : Social Media on Self-Perception and Interpersonal Relationships

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Abstract

In the modern world it is characterized by technological advances in the use of the digital platform, use of social media transfigure how a person perceives him or herself as well as other people. This study attempts to reveal the effects of social media on self-esteem and inter-personal relationship of 47 samples of Kathmandu Ward no. 15. Employing quantitative questionnaires and qualitative interviews, the study aims at exploring how social networks impact the participants' self-concept and interactions with relatives, friends, and other people. These as well, portray a dual effect by showing not only benefit but also harm. Media programs present means of communication, expression, and connection and at the same time, present platforms of anxiety, shallowness, and indiscernibility of self. The incapacitating impacts of Social Media are summarized with guidelines for addressing potential inconvenient repercussions while promoting the positive usage of Social Media as instruments for boosting one's self-esteem and fortifying relational connection.

Keywords

Social media, Self-perception, Interpersonal relationships, Digital identity, Social consequences.

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1. Introduction

The arrival of social media sites has brought about many challenges affecting self-identity processes and interactions with other people. Sites which include Facebook, Instagram, and twitter enable one to display the best part of themselves hence auto shaping the self-esteem and identity (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). Such dynamics forms the framework of this research study in which the use of social media as evident in Kathmandu Ward no. 15 impacts self-esteem and relations.

Friends' profiles have control over themselves and share pleasant, sometimes even idealized, images of themselves, which has the double effect on the Self. More positive feedback can be received via the use of such platforms; however, according to Gonzales and Hancock (2011), the adverse impacts that stem from comparison with others' apparently happier lives are also experienced. This duality is supported by Valkenburg, Peter, and Schouten (2006) who further argue that social media improve the self-concept clarity while, at the same time fragmenting the self-concept since the individual has to present multiple selves due to presentation pressure.

Furthermore, it can be noted that the nature of such dynamics is best defined by the social comparison theory. According to Festinger (1954), people always engage in self-estimations with other people; this scenario is worse when facilitated by social media (Chou & Edge, 2012). Such relative comparison often culminates in either low self-esteem or lack of self-esteem among the targeted population, which include adolescents and young adults (Oberst, Wegmann, Stodt, Brand & Chamarro, 2017).

Turkle (2011) elaborates on how social media interfaces alter human relations by isolating individuals even when they are connected; this aspect is referred to as being 'alone together'. This trend implies that, most of the social relations on Social media are not as personal, or sincere as live. In the same year, Hampton, Sessions,

and Her revealed that though social media allows for the development of weak ties, and therefore social capital, an individual's close, intimate relationships are undermined.

The theory of media multiplicity by Haythornthwaite (2005) could add more information to this, by stating that the closeness of a certain relation is evident by the number of media channels that are utilized in a relation. Nonetheless, the nature of such interactions is problematic, research says that use of technology can negatively impact depth of relationships (Kross et al., 2013).

Thus, one may examine the effects of the social media in the context of the cultural setting of Kathmandu too. This paper seeks to research on how the Nepalese society with compact and united family and social structure is changing with the help of youth going fully digital. Another study by Dahal (2018) and Thapa (2020) reveal that social media is gradually transforming social culture and interaction in the society primarily among youths within the urban echelon.

It signifies that it is on par with the global trends which show the clash between the traditional and modern world which is expanding in the digital frontier and establishing new forms of socio-cultural communication (Castells, 2011). Thus, it is important to grasp how these dynamics work in respect to the given community of Kathmandu for the better understanding of the wider significance of the social media in the formation of identities and relations in a traditional but in the same time introducing more and more liberal and technological society.

In the modern society which is greatly dominated by technological developments and extensive use of virtual applications, the use of social media constitutes a substantial factor that impacts interpersonal sensations and interactions. Thus, the social activities in the contemporary world involve the use of sites like Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, as the primary means of self-identification and communication (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). Reflection of the given works, this paper aims at analyzing the social media's influences to self-esteem and relationships of a certain sample of people from Kathmandu Ward No. 15.

It can be understood that the topic of identity in the age of the Internet is ambiguous and contains many layers. Social media creates a kind of real identity that people present online which is different

from the real-life persona which causes a split personality. While positive outcomes stem from social cues of an online interaction and the reception clients receive, negative self-appraisals arise from an endless comparison to the seemingly happier lifestyles of others in an online environment (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). Valkenburg, Peter, and Schouten (2006) similarly stress this dialethic aspect: On the one hand, social media can provoke self-clarification, on the other - the weakening of the self-concept.

The nature of these dynamics can be explained using the theory of social comparison. Festinger stated that people evaluate their abilities often in relation to the other people. This is made worse by social media through which people are always presented with selected aesthetics from their friends. Chou and Edge (2012) explain that relative comparisons lower self-esteem and produce adverse effects on individuals especially the youths. In support of this view, Oberst, et al. (2017) said that social media plays a major role in affecting self-esteem and mental health.

Furthermore, social media has deep meaning for interpersonal communication. According to Turkle (2011), the patients were all together but alone simultaneously, this is true because they were connected through their iPads and iPhones but were lonely in person. Backing this notion, Hampton, Sessions, and Her (2011) evidence how, despite the contribution of social media to the formation of weak ties and social capital, it is destructive to the close and intimate relationships. According to Haythornthwaite (2005) media multiplicity theory, closeness of a relationship is defined by the amount of media that are employed to reach the other party.

However, Kross et al. (2013) state that the quality of such interactions is poor and characterized by lower richness, which translates into infrequent and less substantive communication. One has to consider how identity and relations are affected by social media can be discussed within cultural frame of the country, namely, Kathmandu. In this regard, the Nepalese society that consists of closely-knit and bonded family systems is chin contemporary changes owing to the digital era especially young generation living in cities (Dahal, 2018; Thapa, 2020). These are allegations that depict a growing contradiction between the cultural ethos of the societies and the new culture synonymous with new technologies, as espoused by Castells (2011). These dynamics may help in understanding the

issues related to the use of social media in respectively traditional yet rapidly developed society such as Kathmandu and the impact on identity and social bonds.

2. Statement of the Problem

However, it is found that though there are paramount researches on the effect of social media globally, researches specific to the cultural impact of social media are few. The research topic for this study is therefore on the impact of social media on self-esteem and social relation among the residents of Kathmandu Ward No. 15. The first is to examine how the phenomenon in question affects the self-system and socially shared processes within a collectivistic and digitally emerging context. Using both questionnaires and interviews as the research tools and outcomes of this experiment, this work aims at presenting the reader with the doubled-edged outcome of social networking services - the fact that they can serve as helpful tools yet pose a great threat to people's perceptions of themselves and the others. It also results in a fairly specific analysis of the sociocultural consequences of social media in Nepalese community. Though this type of research is fundamental in identifying the general impact of social media, the following study aims at focusing more on the effects of social media on the aspect of self-esteem and inter-personal relationships among the people of Kathmandu Ward no. 15. However, the present paper focuses only on the localized studies as the effects of social media in different cultures cannot be fully understood through global research alone.

3. Research Questions

An attempt has been made in this paper to find out the answers of the following two questions:

1. How does social media usage affect self-perception among residents of the study area?
2. What are the consequences of social media on interpersonal relationships among these residents?

4. Objectives

Two-fold objectives of this paper are as under:

1. To explore the impact of social media on self-perception among the residents of the study area.

2. To examine the effects of social media on interpersonal relationships within this community.

5. Significance of the Study

Analyzing the present study's findings on social media usage and its effects on body image and interpersonal relationships in Kathmandu can be valuable for policymakers, educators, and social workers to develop and implement preventive measures to counter adverse ositive social media usage. It also helps to the further understanding of the sociological perspectives on digital identities and relations in the South Asian context.

6. Limitations of the Study

Thus, the present research shares the common limitations characteristic of studies conducted on a limited sample size and in a specific region, that is, Kathmandu, Nepal. However, cross-sectional studies, as the current research is, give a 'point-in-time' view rather than longitudinal outcomes of social media's impacts.

7. Research Design

This study therefore uses survey questionnaires alongside interviews in satisfying the objective of the research. Taking into account the findings for this study a total sample size of 47 respondents used the purposive sampling technique. This way the survey collects demographic information and assesses how often the participants use the social networks as well as evaluates the parameters of self-esteem and relationship satisfaction. The interviews help to get the qualitative data regarding the respondents' attitudes and subjectively felt changes in the result of active use of social networks.

8. Results and Discussion

Major results of this study have been presented in the following tables:

Table-1 : Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	22	46.8
Female	25	53.2

Age Group		
18-25	15	31.9
26-35	18	38.3
36-45	10	21.3
46 and above	4	8.5
Educational Level		
High School	12	25.5
Bachelor's Degree	20	42.6
Master's Degree	10	21.3
Doctorate	5	10.6

Source : Field Study, 2024.

The above demographic analysis indicated that a little more than half of respondents (53.2%) were female. The predominant age group, nearly four out of every ten (38.3%) was of 26-35 years, followed by little less than one-third (31.9%) respondents between 18-25 years. In terms of education, nearly four out of every ten (42.6%) of the respondents had a Bachelor's degree, almost one-fourth (25.5%) had completed high school, nearly one-fifth (21.3%) completed Master's degree and remaining almost one-tenth (10.6%) had Doctorate degree.

Table-2 : Social Media Usage and Self-Perception

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	Percentage (%)
Social media improves my self-esteem	10	15	8	9	5	47	100
I often compare myself to others on social media	12	18	7	6	4	47	100
Social media makes me feel inadequate	9	14	10	8	6	47	100

Source : Field Study, 2024.

The data showed that a little more than half of respondents (53.2%) either agreed or strongly agreed that social media improves

their self-esteem. However, a little less than two-third (63.8%) often compared themselves to others on social media, and a little less than half (48.9%) felt that social media made them feel inadequate.

Table-3 : Impact of Social Media on Family Relationships

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	Percentage (%)
Social media enhances my connection with family	8	13	10	9	7	47	100
Social media causes conflicts in my family	5	10	12	13	7	47	100
I spend less time with family due to social media	7	15	10	8	7	47	100

Source : Field Study, 2024.

The results indicated mixed effects of social media on family relationships. While less than half (44.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that social media enhances their connection with family, more than one-third (38.3%) felt that it causes conflicts. Additionally, again less than half (46.8%) acknowledged spending less time with family due to social media.

Table-4 : Impact of Social Media on Friendships

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	Percentage (%)
Social media strengthens my friendships	11	17	8	6	5	47	100
Social media leads to superficial friendships	10	16	9	7	5	47	100
I prefer online interactions over face-to-face	9	14	10	8	6	47	100

Source : Field Study, 2024.

Data contained in the above table clearly showed that nearly six out of every ten (59.6%) of the selected respondents felt that social media strengthens their friendships. Conversely, more than half

(55.3%) agreed that social media leads to superficial friendships, and a little less than half (48.9%) preferred online interactions over face-to-face ones.

Table-5 : Overall Impact of Social Media

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	Percentage (%)
Social media has a positive impact on my life	10	15	12	6	4	47	100
The negative effects of social media outweigh the positives	9	16	11	7	4	47	100
I am mindful of my social media usage	12	18	8	5	4	47	100

Source : Field Study, 2024.

The overall perception of social media revealed that more than half (53.2%) of respondents felt it had a positive impact on their lives, while the same proportion (53.2%) among them also agreed that the negative effects outweigh the positives. A significant little less than one-third (63.8%) stated that they are mindful of their social media usage.

9. Discussion

The result implies that even though social media leads to increased self-esteem, the end result is comparison and self-condemnation. This duality finds support in previous research claiming that social media may boost self-esteem as well as enhance numerous doubts. In the area of family functioning, the effect was less clear-cut. While a vast number of the respondents noted feeling closer to their families because of technology, several noted interference and lack of quality time with family. This is an implication, therefore, that though social media plays the role of connecting people and enhancing communication, it has an unpleasant way of intruding face to face and interpersonal relations thus contributing to family conflicts.

A multilateral effect on friendships was evident that according to the results. Thus, while social media was perceived regarding it as an environment to fortify friendships, it was at the same time regarded

as an arena of ''shallow'' connections. This division suggests that social media can enable people to stay plugged in to each other's lives while simultaneously eroding the quality of these mechanisms. As it can be seen from the preceding analysis, social media in general was felt to have positive as well as negative effects. Thus, the high level of mindfulness as to the usefulness of social media usage reflected in respondents' answers evades the negative implications of misuse but rather indicates a more or less reasonable approach to the incorporation of social media into one's life. In general, the study shows that though social media is beneficial in the aspect of such factors as connectedness and identity, it is associated with costs that have implications on psychological health and interpersonal relations. The awareness of respondents about their frequency of social media use showed a high level, thus suggesting that there is increasing recognition of such consequences.

10. Conclusion

Thus, this study contributes to an understanding of the impacts of social media regarding self-esteem and social relationships within Kathmandu Ward No. 15. The results highlight a dual impact : it is used effectively for communication and self-identity at the same time as it elicits social comparison in the process and superficial relationships. These results highlight the applicability of moderate use and precaution of the detriment social media poses.

It is useful for a localized presentation of the phenomenon, which would give an insight into how social networks are used in a certain cultural setting. The following conclusions may prove useful for policymakers and educators who want to manage the concept of social media and its negative impact.

Thus, further research should extend the range of investigations to cover longitudinal studies and samples comprising significantly more people that are represented by a diverse mixed population. Further, prevention strategies targeting the enhancement of information competencies might be useful in supporting people in coping with the challenges of social networking sites.

In conclusion, social media is still growing and thus, its effects on the social self and personality still relevant and important to study. Thus, people who are able to be conscious about communication in application, will be able to fill it a positive impact on their life and the life of other people, and do not get negative effects of it.

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