

Leisure, Social Networking And Mass Media: The Evolving Confluence

* *Dr. Satya S.*

UNDERSTANDING LEISURE FROM VARIOUS VIEWPOINTS

The meaning of the term *Leisure* is as versatile as the activities that are undertaken during leisure. Leisure comprises of social, recreational and entertainment activities. Anne & French (2001) specified that freedom of choice, and enjoyability are critical to an 'Activity' to be considered leisure. Tinsley et al (1993) pointed out that four characteristics are necessary for a leisure experience to occur, and they are that the activity should be (1) Chosen freely. (2) It should be intrinsically satisfying. (3) The activity must be optimally arousing. (4) The activity requires a sense of commitment. Hanks and Kalfs (2000) opinionated that leisure time is all the time a person does not devote to ensuring their future welfare in a broad sense.

Dumazedier (1968) describes leisure as (1) Freedom from institutional obligations that are prescribed by the basic form of social organization. (2) **Disinterestedness:** Freedom from a primary obligation. Leisure is not motivated by gain. (3) **Diversion:** It is an activity for search of satisfaction - a state that is sought as an end in itself. (4) **Leisure and Personality:** Leisure answers individual needs as distinguished from primary obligations imposed by society. When trying to identify what leisure is and what leisure is not, the nebulous nature of leisure gets evident and this is discussed in the work. The boundaries between leisure, mandatory and maintenance activities are increasingly interwoven.

Activity by nature is complex : (1) The nature of a single activity has multi-attributes, for example, gardening can be done as a leisure activity, and it could also add credit to the person by boasting of the best garden in the locality. (2) There exists a sequential interleaving of activity fragments. (3) The simultaneous conduct of multiple activities (multi-tasking). Classification of leisure activities were attempted in many studies, and the simplest one is based on the nature of the activity. Overs et al (1977) classified leisure activity under sports, nature, arts & music, organization, education, entertainment, culture, volunteer, games, crafts and collecting. It should be noted that Over's study, since it was conducted in 1977, did not include ICT.

Anne & French (2001) offer a simple tripartite classification of leisure namely: achievement leisure (playing sports, hobbies, creative & performance arts), social leisure (activities for being in the company of others) and time out leisure (listening to music, watching TV, contemplation). From the point of view of social networking as leisure, this tripartite classification does not hold significance as it merges achievement, social leisure and time out leisure. Through ICT (Information Communication Technology), a person can be in the company of friends and extended networks of friends by being indoor and based on the goals of networking, it can achieve personal goals too. For instance, if a person wants to advocate for liberation of Tibet and feels that his life achievement is fulfilled by getting the attention of the world on this issue, the ICT platform surely makes the difference. Anne & French are more generic in classifying leisure activities, whereas Over's classified leisure is based on activities performed. Based on Anne & French's classification of Social Leisure, that is any activity initiated to be in the company with others is dominant amongst youth and the way it is carried out is more in the virtual space, going beyond the geographic boundaries and time zones, focusing on common issues and interests that drive individuals.

There are studies viewing leisure as structured and unstructured activity. Shannon (2006) studied the role of structured and unstructured leisure in the adolescent's life. His study was compiled after interviewing 10 male & 10 female students of Grade 12. Adolescents receive a wide range of messages from their parents about the role that leisure has in one's life. The four leisure themes that emerged through this study are (1) Leisure as restorative. (2) Different leisure activities having different levels of importance. (3) Leisure has a means to an end. (4) Leisure can be a mean to an end.

Elke Zeijl et al (2000) explored the role of parents and peers in the leisure activities of young adolescents. Their study investigated the degree to which pre - adolescents and adolescents associate with peers in their leisure times. The study was conducted with 927 juveniles from the age of 10 to 15 through a questionnaire. A leisure kid typology was

* *Professor, Acharya Institute of Technology, Soladevanahalli, Hesaraghatta Main Road, Bangalore -560090.*

E-mail: ss.manuscript@gmail.com

constructed using Principle Component Analysis for categorical data. Results showed that 10-12 year old kids from the higher social classes were family kids. 14-15 year old boys, especially from higher social class focused on peer groups, whereas girls of the same age preferred dyadic friendship. Pre-adolescent boys and girls who participated in organized leisure activities spend considerable time with the peer group. Children and teens from families with higher status spend more time with peers than juveniles from families with lower social status. The study concluded that for Dutch juveniles, the transition into secondary education, which takes place at the age of 12 years, goes together with increased contact with peers, and decreasing contact with parents. Through social networking, peers are accessible 24X7 and parents are overlooked.

Leisure is an “*Activity*” - with the change in technology, leisure activities have changed over the years. Recent trends around the world clearly demonstrate that there is a paradigm shift in the leisure activity. Traditional leisure activities like gardening and hiking are replaced by socializing with friends on the net. Opinions on social networking as an activity of leisure can be debated for or against in the current scenario, but the emerging trend can never be ignored by researchers.

SOCIAL NETWORKING EMERGING AS A POPULAR LEISURE ACTIVITY

There is overwhelming evidence that the Internet is becoming an integral part of leisure habits amongst all demographics around the world. The profile of leisure activity is changing completely in the modern context, with the advent of Information Communication Technology (ICT). A study by Mokhtarian, Salomon & Handy (2004) identified that information communication technology affects leisure activities and travel in four different ways, and they are (1) The replacement of traditional activity with an information communication technology counterpart. (2) The generation of new ICT activities. (3) ICT enabled reallocation of time to other activities. (4) ICT as a facilitator of leisure activities. There are 13 dimensions of leisure activities that are especially relevant to the issue of ICT impact, and they are (1) Location (in) dependent. (2) Mobility based V/S stationary. (3) Time (in) dependence. (4) Planning horizon. (5) Temporal structure and fragmentation. (6) Possible multitasking. (7) Solitary V/S Social activity. (8) Active v/s passive participation. (9) Physical v/s mental. (10) Equipment / media (in) dependence. (11) Informal v/s formal arrangements required. (12) Motivation. (13) Cost.

Yet another study on kids trailed the changes in leisure activities in America. Bonnie, Miller Rubin, Mc Clatchy (2010) recorded a trend amongst the kids of present days. The study revealed that kids are spending more time using their phone to play video games, watch TV and listen to music than actually using them to communicate with others. It was found that African Americans and Hispanics watched You Tube for nearly six hours a day as compared with their white counterparts, who watched You Tube for nearly 3.5 hours a day. It is reiterating that across age groups, ICT is getting stronger, replacing physical space with virtual space.

Networking through ICT has many issues, and this was the topic of the study for Godwin Doborah D. (2002). A longitudinal study was conducted to find out the impact of information communication technology on leisure. Some of the issues related to ICT are : intrudence in privacy and stalking to name the most prevalent. A seven-year longitudinal study, involving 10,000 young people randomly selected from many areas of Scotland were the respondents of the study. The same group was re-interviewed three times in 87, 89 and 91, aiming to analyze adolescent's individual development over time. The study explored 1) Awareness of the distribution/ access to internet service in homes. 2) To document the importance of social networking in lives. How, when and where and with whom they networked. 3) To examine teen's leisure time and how they integrated social networking into their entertainment preference and 4) Learn about opinions and concerns about social networking, especially about stalking, privacy and prudent usage of time.

ICT is a worldwide phenomenon, and sociological changes have resulted in increased utilization. Social aspects like technology, Government deregulations and work hours prevalent in a country influence the usage of ICT. Xiangdong Yin (2006) analyzed leisure habits in China. He explained that China began its new work system with the 5-day workweek and 2 day weekend in 1995. People think they can improve their quality of life with more leisure time. As leisure consumption is increasing, it is observed that there is a wider variety of leisure options available in the market. It is clearly observed that leisure is becoming more individualistic in nature with the progression in time. Report from Chinese Internet network Information center reveals that there are 46 million internet users in China, and the youth spend their leisure time on the net.

Leisure activities have been a topic of interest for many researchers and leisure activities change with geography,

demography, and cultural description of the audience. A study by Choi Sook Hee (2009) studied leisure activities of Korean Employees. The study was conducted with 1431 respondents. 38.7 percent were salaried workers, and 57 percent were men. The study revealed that Korean employees spend their leisure time on 8 passive activities at home and 10 activities, which are out-of-home. Passive leisure activities include 1) Watching TV, DVDs, Home videos. 2) Reading books. 3) Playing cards or board games. 4) Listening to music. 5) Handicraft. 6) The Internet/computer. 7) Napping. and 8) Having a conversation with family friends and relatives over the phone. Active leisure activities include 1) Going to Movies. 2) Shopping. 3) Participating in Cultural Events (concerts, performances and exhibitions). 4) Spending time with relatives. 5) Meeting friends. 6) Working out (playing Sports, muscular exercise, walking). 7) Watching sports games. 8) Drinking. 9) Singing at karaoke facilities, and 10) Visiting saunas, hot springs or public baths. 88 % Korean employees watch TV, 74 % use the internet/computer almost every day, and 52 % of the non-working people use the internet/computer every day. It is interesting to note that ICT as a leisure medium prevails in 74 per cent of the Korean employees.

Leisure habits have an immense influence on identity development of individuals. Because free time and leisure activities consume a considerable amount of adolescent's daily time, it seems likely that leisure participation may have some effects on the identity development process (Siks Zentmihayli M. and Lanon R. 1984). There is considerable evidence that social networking is becoming the modern-day leisure activity across the world. Social networking as an activity is getting popular amongst various demographics, making the forum a powerful mass media platform.

SOCIAL NETWORKING : AN EMERGING MASS MEDIA PLATFORM

Social networking is becoming one of the most focused mass communication tools. It seems that no other mass communication media can address a narrowly focused segment as effectively as the social-networking sites, with next to no costs involved in the creation, dissemination and consumption of data. The social networking sites seem good for a marketer as the advertising costs of popular media like the television, magazines and newspapers are sky rocketing. Social networking sites seem to be an effective alternative, if not a replacement, to the conventional newspaper and television.

Social network sites are used to spread social messages, they act as platforms to get like minded people together across the world to garner solidarity and support for a cause. In fact, social networking sites have been put to such versatile use that it acted more effectively than mass media in an instance where people were gathered to form a task force to help flood victims. Narayana Madhavan (2008) points out that networking sites, which usually associates youngsters congregating online for fun and friendship, took to a social cause when a networking group was launched to rally relief for victims in remote Bihar. A quickly formed network was used where 11 volunteers, in matter of hours, raised awareness and coordinated to approach Red Cross to form a Bihar flood relief group site. It had the reach of a mass media, plus the personal touch since all the members were connected initially through personal friendship. The lead-time of production of news and consumption, as in the case of a newspaper, was absent in social networking. Like in the Television media, the delivery of news and consumption is simultaneous, but with a change. The news in conventional media is created by a specialist, namely the reporter, and in social networking, it is created by the members of the group. Since the group is homogenous and the members act as a strong referral, the reaction to the news is immediate.

Waters, Burnett, Lamm, Lucas (2009) through their study established how the social networking sites allow organizations to create profiles and become active members. Organizations have started incorporating strategies into their PR programming, which includes disseminating a message through social networking. Earlier, this was done purely through newspapers and magazines. Non-profit organizations are taking advantage of social networking sites, and there are 275 non- profit organization profiles on Facebook. Solely having a profile will not in itself increase awareness or trigger an influx of participation. Careful planning and research will greatly benefit non-profit organizations, as they attempt to develop social networking with their stakeholders.

A US based research presented by Dr. Ruben showed that 540 hospitals in the country had accounts with social media sites like Facebook. The others were linked to You Tube and independent blogs. Adolescent Medicine Clinic switched from a classic phone in system to incorporate social media sites as well provided staff with new internet access and saved up to \$ 5000 a month through call costs (Anonymous, 2010).

The versatility of social networking is evident as it aids sales. Magazines on business and computer explain how the process is executed, *"The sales pitch is made through a webinar. This presentation is viewed by the client on the*

computer, mobile bi-proof phone, Blackberry or printouts. The download files also have audio narrations, jpeg images and slides. The webinar is led by an expert on helping sales professionals capitalize on social networking sites. So, everything a sales executive needs to know is taught on how to use social networking sites to close more sales.” (Business Wire, 2010).

The usage of social networking sites for sales can replace the dynamics of selling. It would make the whole process cumbersome free. There would be no travel, hence saving costs, time and geographic boundaries. The impact created by direct face to face sales pitch can be achieved through the virtual media. Social networking enables ways of reaching people, which can be lucrative. Scholarship and non-profit programs use Twitter and Facebook to let online users know about scholarship programs. Honeywell spokesperson says because they were genuinely trying to let people know about their scholarship programs, they used Facebook and Twitter (Chris Miller, 2009). The versatility of the social networking sites seems as resourceful as the user. Social workers have tried to connect the youth through social networking and spread the message for which they stand for. Wendy Stogner uses her social networking site to create awareness on dating violence, drugs use and texting among teens (Amy Bounds Mc Clatchy, 2010).

David Scott and Fern K. Willits (1998) conducted a study to see if leisure habits change in a person over a period of time, and tracked a set of people from their adolescence to adulthood. It is very interesting to note that leisure habits of a person developed in high school continue even when a person turns 50, and there is not much of change in the leisure habits with the progression of time and age. Data from a long-term panel study of a cohort of persons from rural Pennsylvania was collected to keep track of their leisure activities over the period of time. It was revealed that leisure activities of these people engaged in as high school sophomores were predictive of their participation in similar activities even when they were in their early fifties. Going by this study, social networking is going to exponentially increase in its reach, making it the most popular, focused, cost effective, participative and result oriented media ever. Social Activities, which constitute a large component of adolescent free time, might be expected to be beneficial because they may facilitate the social relatedness aspects of identity formation. Top 3 social-networking platforms are Facebook with 350, 000,000 members, followed by MySpace with 130,000,000 and Bebo in the third place with 40,000,000 members. No newspaper readership or television viewership can sustain this mass reach year after year in the case of newspaper or program after program in case of television. The next important aspect is the reach of social networking across boundaries. If this media is not leveraged by the existing mass media companies, it would result in myopia.

Suzy Bauch Leilanihan (2006) reiterated that the Site MySpace enjoyed 367 % year after year growth, blogger 80 %, MSN Spaces 286%. The study on the top 5 brands of social network shows that considerable time is being spent on Social Networking Sites (SNS), and it will only show an increasing trend in the future. The popularity of the mass media is measured by readership or viewership and the time spent on reading or viewing. In terms of the time spent on social networking sites, Yahoo as a brand takes the lead with Yahoo unique audience being 1, 05,444 with time per person spent on the site being 3 hrs 10 minutes. MSN with 92,786 audience and 1 hour and 38 minutes is the second, Google with 92,120 audience spending close to 52 minutes stands third, Microsoft stands fourth with 95,777 audience spending 45 minutes and AOL with 70,433 though in terms of numbers are small, the audience spends a whopping 6 hours and 11 minutes per person.

In a survey conducted by the Nelsen in 2009, the five largest sectors under online are Search, General Interest Portals and Communities, Software Manufacturing, Member Community, and E-mail. As far as a percentage point leaps on active reach is concerned, search domain has increased by 1.9 %, general interest portals and communities by 1.9 %, software manufacturing by 1.4 %, member community by 5.4% and e-mail by 2.7%. Clearly, member communities are growing more rapidly than the other sectors under online services. The study reports that in the last 6 months of 2008, Facebook tripled its audience to over 2.4 million unique visitors. There is an increase in popularity and time people spend on social networking. The total amount spent online globally increased by 18 percent. In the same time, the amount spent on member community sites rose by 63% and 566 % increase on Facebook, that is an increase from 3.1 billion minutes to 20.5 billion minutes. Looking at the definition of mass media, it is clear that the definition needs a revisit instantly. Mass media is defined as a medium of communication as newspaper, radio or television that is designed to reach the mass of the people (Merriam Webster). Dictionary.com defines mass media as those means of communication that reach and influence a large number of people, especially newspapers, popular magazines, radios and television.

Mass media denotes a section of the media specifically designed to reach a large audience. The term was coined in

1920 with the advent of national wide radio networks, mass circulation newspapers and magazines (Wikipedia.org). Oxford dictionary is more generic in its definition and explains mass media as a means of communication to large numbers of people.

With the change and improvement in technology, ICT based social networking, which facilitates and promotes mass communication platform should not be overlooked in the definitions. Social networking is not de-limited by geographic boundaries, timeframes, or language. The participation is voluntary, and the news in this media is sought after. Specific and focused lines of interest, congruence of peers, and depth of expertise makes networking having an edge over the proficiency and knowledge sharing of conventional media. The goal of a conventional media, at the most, could be to dish out news live and transmit it as objective as possible. Continuity of news (follow up news) can never be guaranteed as the newspaper or the television will have to catch up with the volatile macro-level scenario, where priorities or center stage focus changes all the time. Because the members of the networking group are brought together for a common cause, say they want freedom for Tibet, irrespective of the change in focal point in the world scenario on news and issues, the networking team is going to keep "*Freedom to Tibet*" at the center stage all the time and every time.

Since the purpose of the networking is highly focused, it can bring about results or actions as people in the group are active participants generating, sharing and wanting to see results through their social networking. The outcome of integrated marketing communication is measured in terms of the positive response to the campaign. There is a process involved in designing, scripting this message through news agency or advertising agency to create a positive response. In social networking, the affinity to the cause drives the campaign. For a networking group, dissemination of news is just a partial goal, and finding remedies to the cause they are working towards will complete their agenda.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORKING

Terri Willard (2009) has done an in-depth study on sustaining development through social network sites. The study reiterates that social networks operate under an autonomous business model, in which the social network members serve dual roles as both the suppliers and the consumers of content. The study titled '*Social Networking and Governance for Sustainable Development*' aimed at seeing how social networking is used by people in sustaining development and to explore if social networking changes the way decisions are made about sustainability, and to investigate the opportunities to strengthen the ability of online social networkers to improve governance processes for sustainable development.

Social networks operate under an autonomous business model, in which a social network's members serve dual roles as both the suppliers and the consumers of content. Organizations and individuals have pursued sustainable development within mainstream social networking sites.

Two approaches, namely personal and professional routes enable sustainable development. By linking together individuals, groups, events and pages, SNS enables individuals to learn about new ideas and social movements as their friends and colleagues become involved in them. SNS empowers viral marketing of ideas, events, and organizations by enabling rapid sharing of information received from one contact to all others. It is within these large networking that "*Social contagion*" is possible, leading to changes in behavior and action (Christakis NA, 2008).

Mainstream social network sites are primarily "*personal*" in terms of the type of information users share with each other (family, events, hobbies, music, current events) whereas, professional SNS have also been developed to facilitate improved sharing of business-related connections and knowledge. Sustainable development-oriented groups on mainstream SNS can be large, since they require little ongoing maintenance or attention. 19,000 members of Facebook are "*go green*" group and 21,000 members of Orkut are "*save the environment*" community. The most popular sustainable development themed applications in Facebook have been (Lil) Green Patch and (Lil) Blue Cover with 7.9 million monthly active users. Through these applications, users send free virtual gifts to populate friend's gardens and coves. For every 10 gifts, the user sends- images of flowers, birds, characters- the corporate sponsors donate funds to protect rainforests. Only through this initiative, 96 million square feet have been saved so far through nature conservancy.

The other approaches to sustainable development are by striving to change users' knowledge, attitude and behavior. "*The Stop Global Warming Game*" has close to 63,500 monthly active users, who are engaged in a slow-paced simulation game of initiating low carbon projects around the world. Business oriented SNS like LinkedIn, an

interconnected network of experienced professionals from around the world, represents 170 industries and 200 countries. Sustainable development professionals have established a number of groups like Green - 28,800 members, energy and utilities networks - 13,200 members, and sustainability professionals - 6000 members.

With the advent of social network analysis tools, researchers have begun to model how social networks impact political regime change, recruitment of individuals into social movements, and how networking may build a commitment to collective action on a variety of issues.

CONCLUSION

Leisure habits are changing with the change in time and improvement in technology. With the advent of social networking through the World Wide Web, the earlier typologies of leisure activity is undergoing a rapid change. The social networking sites are an active supplement to the traditional mass media platform. Social networking is not only cost effective, but is also changing the way news is created. Apart from being extremely cost effective, social networking is growing rapidly, surpassing the conventional growth of traditional mass media. Because the networking groups are focused and share common causes, the depth and follow-up in this media prove effective. Results are the decisive factor in a SNS, whereas reporting is the main forte of any mass media. SNS is emerging as a mass media to reckon with. Through a case compiled by Terri Willard (2009), it is evident that Sustainable Development is a process that can be put in place by people in the SNS. In short, the revolution of the yesterdays, which was propagated through public speaking, and personal charisma, can be done through SNS and its members in the virtual space.

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