

Pattern of Friends and Family Communication through Social Media among the HSC Level Students: A Study on a Selected Government College in Rajshahi City

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Abstract: This quantitative study explores the pattern of higher secondary level students' social media communication with their friends and family members. It was conducted on the students of New Govt. Degree College, Rajshahi. Using convenience sampling method, a total number of 61 students were selected from Science, Humanities and Business Studies groups of sessions 2018-19 and 2019-20. Primary data collected through a structured questionnaire. The findings of this study show that Facebook and Messenger are the most popular social media sites among the respondents. A significant number of the respondents maintain more than 1000 online friends and a good number of them are engaged in more than 5 online groups. Almost all of them have more virtual friends than real life friends. In selecting virtual friends, as perceived most of the respondents, male students are more active than the female ones. This virtual friendship is mainly built with classmates, people familiar in real life and people who are shown in social media as having mutual friends. Friendships are initiated mainly by accepting others' friend requests and by sending friend requests to others. As for the communication, most of the respondents give priority to virtual friends over parents, other family members and relatives. The findings suggest that the respondents' pattern of communication with friends and family members is changing drastically and the communication preference is given to virtual world, not to the real world.

Key words: Patterns, Friend and Family (FnF), Communication, Social media, HSC students

1. Introduction

Social media is an online based informal but very much popular platform for people of all strata around the world. It facilitates the interaction between groups or individuals of virtual communities through which they produce, share and exchange their ideas, feelings, personal information, images, videos and the like over the internet. In Bangladesh, different age groups from illiterate to literate, housewives to workers, and urban people to rural ones use social media for various purposes. People aged **18 to 24** are the largest user group of Facebook, a social networking site, in Bangladesh (NapoleonCat, 2019). Part of Higher Secondary level students belong to this group as this level in Bangladesh normally begins when a student is aged sixteen years and a half and ends when s/he is roughly nineteen.

Along with bringing new opportunities, the rapid expansion of the internet, Wi-Fi facilities and social media sites has also brought new concerns to the students, their teachers and guardians. It is said that the use of internet at home has a strong negative impact on time spent with friends and family as well as time spent on social activities (Nie&Hillygus, 2002). That means it can affect the quality of a person's relationship with their family members and friends. Its extensive use can also make the user withdraw herself/himself from the society s/he lives in, and consequently diminish their social ties and increase their social isolation (Quaglio& Millar, 2020). Considering these facts, Bala (2014) claims that social media is creating a new kind of social order[;] it is strengthening social network but weakening inter-personal relations. He also finds that whenever any new medium arrives on the communication stage it affects the communication patterns of society (Bala, 2014). As students are a part of the society, their communication pattern is supposed to be affected with the arrival of social media. Because the more time the students, the future of a nation, spend on social media, the less time they spend with their families and real life friends, which can make them lonely and depressed (Sanders et al., 2000). So, to keep the students free from loneliness and depression through strengthening ties with friends and family members, it is necessary to know whether and to what extent social media has affected their communication pattern. In other words, it is necessary to investigate what social media sites the students use, how many friends they have, how they select their virtual friends, what strategy they follow for selecting their online friends, what sexual identity of the virtual friends they prefer, how many groups they maintain and who they are mostly connected with. Therefore, the present study seeks to explore the higher secondary level students' pattern of maintaining communication with friends and family members through the use of social media.

2. Research Methodology

Quantitative approach is followed by applying a questionnaire survey in this study. This approach was followed because the queries of the objective of this study were possible to materialize by using a structured questionnaire.

The participants in this study were the higher secondary level students of New Govt. Degree College, Rajshahi. This college was selected purposively because it has the highest number of HSC level students in Rajshahi Division (Sohopathi, 2020). The reason of choosing HSC level students is that students' intermediate life is very crucial time for self-development as well as for career development. This period is also the gateway to higher education in Bangladesh.

Sixty-one students were selected as sample respondents using convenience sampling method. The sample was taken from the first year (session: 2019-2020) and the second year (session: 2018-2019) of Intermediate classes of the aforesaid college. From the first year, 11 from Humanities, 10 from Science and 10 from Business Studies groups and from the second year 10 from each of the three groups were selected conveniently. Necessary data were collected from the primary source through a structured questionnaire having eight close ended

questions. The survey was conducted during February to March, 2020, immediately before the call of lockdown by the government due to Covid-19 outbreak. Initially the sample size was determined as 92 using Andrew Fisher's formula where the size of the known Population was 2400, Confidence Level was 95% and Confidence Interval was 10%. The questionnaire survey was interrupted by Covid-19 outbreak. Before the interruption responses from 61 students could be collected. Collected primary data were verified, reviewed, and scrutinized thoroughly and edited manually to remove inconsistencies. Then the data were analyzed using SPSS version 23.

3. Results and Discussion

The results of the survey data are category-wise presented in frequency table with percentage. Critical remarks on the major findings follow the table concerned.

3.1 Accounts with Different Social Media Sites

Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, Messenger, Imo, WhatsApp, Skype and the other are some of the social networking sites that are used by Bangladeshi users. These sites ask for opening accounts with them to be their users. The result of the query for the sites with which the intermediate-level students of Bangladesh maintain accounts is presented in the Table 1.

Table 1: Accounts with different social media sites

Name of the social network	Responses	
	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	61	26.0
YouTube	38	16.2
Twitter	4	1.7
Snapchat	6	2.6
Instagram	7	3.0
Google+	4	1.7
Messenger	59	25.0
Imo	33	14.0
WhatsApp	22	9.4
Skype	1	0.4
Total	235	100.0

Source: Survey data, 2020

Note: The respondents had the scope to choose multiple options. While responding, a total of 61 students selected a total of 235 options.

Table 1 shows that the sites that are most popular among the respondents are Facebook and Messenger. It is to be noted that Messenger is also a part of Facebook. Our finding gets support from a statistics related website named NapoleonCat (2019) that states that Facebook with its 42620000 users in Bangladesh (November, 2020) is the single most important social media site used by the people of Bangladesh. Quite naturally the respondents of this study are part of the number stated above. But why Facebook/Messenger, and no other sites, is

so popular among the respondents? The reasons are stated by Sheldon (2008) who indicates that most of the students use Facebook for maintaining relationship; for searching information; for listening music and watching videos and for keeping in touch with others.

3.2 Number of Friends in Social Media

Number of friends in social media is an important factor for the social media users. The more the number of friends is, the more the fun is. Therefore, making the friend list long is one of the primary mandates of the social media users nowadays. Table 2 gives the range of the number of friends the respondents have.

Table 2: Number of friends in social media

Number of friends	Frequency	Percentage
Fewer than 200	9	14.76
201-400	13	21.31
401-600	11	18.03
601-800	8	13.11
801-1000	4	06.56
More than 1000	16	26.23
Total	61	100.0

Source: Survey data, 2020

Table 2 shows that more than 26% of the respondents have more than 1000 online friends in social media. Increased number of friends in social media gives the users a feeling of popularity among others. It appears that making the friend list big has turned out as an ugly competition among the students. A research by Al-Jubayer (2013) states that teenagers having 500 to 1000 friends or more do not personally know their virtual friends and 42% of the respondents of that study feel pleasure in having unknown persons in their friend list. According to Brand (2017), human beings have the capacity for only a limited number of friends because they have neither enough time nor enough emotional space in their hearts to continue friendship simultaneously with unlimited number of people.

3.3 Virtual Friends vs. Real Friends in Social Media

Virtual friendship means the type of friendship that exists on the internet, and seldom or never is combined with real life interaction. On the other hand, real life friendship is the friendship that involves substantial real life interaction. Virtual friends or real friends – who are more useful and efficient? The argument is as old as the initiation of social media. The answer is not always so straight forward but the response given by the students is alarming (See Table 3).

Table 3: Whether the number of virtual friends is more than that of real friends

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	56	91.8
No	5	8.2
Total	61	100.0

Source: Survey data, 2020

Table 3 reveals that about 92% of the respondents have more virtual friends than real friends. This study proves that actual friends of the students of HSC level have decreased after the advent of social media usage. The respondents remain busy with their virtual friends avoiding their real friends. Students’ desire for making virtual friends instead of real ones is also supported by a research article that says that more than half of the respondents have more virtual friends than real ones, and a majority of them think that making more and more virtual friends is the reason for decreasing the number of real friends (Rahman, 2018). It is found in another study that the average user of Facebook in Europe has 139 friends, and it is not uncommon to have two or even three hundred online friends. (Froding& Peterson,2012).

3.4 Whether Males Have More Virtual Friends than Females or Vice Versa

Gender discrimination in having friends in Facebook and other social media sites is also a matter of concern to the students (See Table 4).

Table 4: Perceptions of the respondents about number of males’ virtual friends than females

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	54	88.5
No	7	11.5
Total	61	100.0

Source: Survey data, 2020

Table 4 exposes that a majority (88.5%) of the respondents believe that male students have more virtual friends than the female students. In Bangladesh male students send friend request more than female students and they also accept friend requests more without checking whether those requests are fake. But female students feel scared in making such friendship with unknown persons. Instead of making such friendship they are, as a study by Sultana &Ratul (2018) claims, more inclined towards browsing internet for commercial transaction, shopping or ordering products, acquiring products information, surfing products pages on Facebook etc. In another study it is found that boys are more likely than girls to make online friends or virtual friends; 61% of boys compared to 52% of girls have done so (Lenhart, 2015).

3.5 Criteria of Selecting Friends in Social Media

Social media websites apply different policies to facilitate the increase of friendship among the users. Table 5 shows the basis on which virtual friends are selected and added to the friend list by a particular user from among millions of other users.

Table 5: Basis of selecting friends in social media

Criteria of selecting friends	Responses	
	Frequency	Percentage
Gender/Sex	6	3.4
Familiar	60	34.3
Mutual friend	46	26.3
Person and place	9	5.1
Classmates	46	26.3
Known in online	8	4.6
Total	175	100.0

Source: Survey data, 2020

Note: The respondents had the scope to choose multiple options. While responding, a total of 61 students selected a total of 175 options.

Table 5 reveals that almost all the respondents (98.4%) make friendship with people who are already familiar with them outside the virtual world. Three fourths of the respondents (75.4%) select their friends on the basis of mutual friends. Similar number of the respondents (75.4%) selects friends from among their classmates. The finding of our study is quite different from that of Sarker (2018) who states that 42% of the respondents include only those persons as friends who are suggested by the social media sites and male students try to make friends with opposite sex indiscriminately. That means, the social media sites play a great role in increasing the number of friends in the friend list.

3.6 Strategies for Selecting Friends in Social Media

There are two ways to make friends in Facebook, firstly, adding someone as a friend on the condition of the other one's acceptance; the other one is to respond or confirm to someone's friend request. The strategy varies person to person, situation to situation (See Table 6).

Table 6: Key strategies in choosing friend

Strategies	Responses	
	Frequency	Percentage
Send more and more friend request	18	29.51
Accept more and more others friend requests	23	37.71
Both	16	26.22
None of that	4	6.56
Total	61	100.0

Source: Survey data, 2020

Table 6 shows that about three-tenths (29.51%) of the respondents send more and more friend requests; more than one third of them (37.71%) accept others' friend request and more than one fourth of them apply both strategies for making friendship in social media. Only one sixth of the respondents apply none of those strategies. It is found that students rarely ignore or removed the friend request

and they also check the number of mutual friends at the time of confirming friend request.

3.7 Number of Social Media Groups Maintained by the Respondents

There are many social media groups created on the basis of the users’ common interest. These groups may be based on the profession, friend circle, batch, gender, interest in travelling, exam preparation, love for sports, music, movie etc. (See Table 7).

Table 7: Number of social media groups involved

Number of groups	Frequency	Percentage
1-5	34	55.74
6-10	10	16.39
11-15	9	14.75
15+	8	13.12
Total	61	100

Source: Survey data, 2020

Members of a particular social media site can join different virtual groups based on their common interests, hobbies, musical taste and romantic relationship. Table 7 shows that about 56% of the respondents are involved in 1-5 groups; and the rest are involved in more than 5 groups. Most of the respondents are involved in SSC or HSC batch-wise or educational-institute wise groups. Bala (2014) states that the concept of interpersonal communication is fading as people have created many groups on Facebook; earlier a person used to have hardly 15-20 friends with whom s/he interacted regularly, but with the development of social media the number of friends whose update one can have is running into hundreds. With the increase of the quantity of friends, the quality of friendship has decreased drastically.

3.8 Communication Patterns through Social Media

Social media provides the students with a convenient and faster way to communicate with their family and friends. Besides, through social media respondents can communicate with relatives, strangers, foreigners, known persons and online mutual friends and so on. To what degree they maintain the communication with different persons is presented in Table 8.

Table 8 reveals that almost all the respondents (98.36%) communicate with their friends through social media; about 56% of the respondents communicate with their relatives, more than 44% with their family members; and almost 51% with their parents. An insignificant number of the respondents communicate with unknown persons in the country or with unknown foreigners. This finding suggests that students are communicating less with their parents and family members but becoming busy with their virtual friends.

Table 8: People with whom the respondents are mostly connected through social media

Person type	Responses	
	Frequency	Percentage
Parents	31	20
Other family members	27	17.42
Friends	60	38.71
Relatives	34	21.94
Unknown person in the country	1	0.64
Foreign unknown person	2	1.29
Others	0	0
Total	155	100

Source: Survey data, 2020

Note: The respondents had the scope to choose multiple options. While responding, the 61 respondents selected a total of 155 options.

Similar finding is given by Singh & Laxmi (2015) who show that 17% of the respondents keep contact with schoolmates, 18% with relatives, 29% with college-life friends, 21% with colleagues and 15% with unknown person. It is found in another study that 36% respondents communicate with friends through SNSs; 28% respondents seek new friends; 8% respondents contacts acquaintances; 3% of the respondents get in touch with the old friends; 1% respondents communicate with family members (Brandtzaeg et al., 2010). The percentage given in both studies are relatively low because the respondents did not have the option to select more than a single answer.

4. Conclusion

The findings show that Facebook and Messenger are the most popular social networking sites among the respondents. They also show that a considerable number of the respondents have more than 1000 online friends; and they have more virtual friends than real-life friends; male students have more virtual friends than the female students, and male students send more and more friend requests as a strategy for increasing the number of online friends. It is also found that most of the respondents make friendship with their familiar persons, class mates and the friends of their social media friends. Very few of the respondents communicate with unknown persons. With whom the respondents mostly communicate through social media are their virtual friends who may or may not be their real-life friends. These virtual friends get preference over parents, other family members and relatives.

The findings suggest that change has already taken place in the communication pattern of the respondents. The students are not confined to the concept of having limited number of real-life friends, rather they are increasing the number of their virtual friends, not for developing friendship but for getting popularity. The finding related to the persons with whom the respondents communicate suggests

that the so-called virtual ties are increasing while ties with the family and the society are decreasing. This finding is presumably cautionary for the guardians because it has the potential of creating loneliness and depression among the respondents, and thus affects disapprovingly the career of the students and the future of the nation.

This study is an academic endeavor to bring out the pattern of students' use of social media. The sample size of this study is too little to generalize the findings. Yet they can provide the teachers and guardians with some insights needed to deal with the students concerned. Similar study with a representative sample size can be conducted in future so that the findings can be generalized. Researches can also be conducted on the impacts of social media on Bangladeshi students' academic and socio-psychological issues.

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