Author: 09spAAS258JN

Title: Use of The Internet

About the Author:

Keywords: Internet, Muslims, Immigrants, Social Networks, Facebook, privacy

Abstract: For my ethnographic research I wish to study the integration of modern technology into the lives of Muslim and Arab youth on campus. I want to find out if these groups use internet sites such as facebook, myspace and various other websites to network. If they do use these sites, do they use these tools to find others with similar beliefs and cultures? Do these sites build on cultural values or challenge them? Do they use these sites to inform fellow students about upcoming social events such as upcoming speakers, political rallies, organizational meetings, or even just parties? What do their parents or older generations think of using the internet to build relationships? Do their parents fear that they will lose their Arab or Muslim identity and become too "Americanized"? I also want to explore what becoming Americanized means for these groups. To find these things out I could interview Muslim or Arab students around campus, it is also possible that I could contact students by using these social networks.

Question: Do Muslim students use the internet for the same things that I do? Does being a Muslims student change how facebook is used?

Discuss (Final Paper):

The Internet: Wolf in Sheep's Clothing?

For my research I conducted four interviews with female students from the University of Illinois campus, trying to get a glimpse in to how they utilize the internet in their daily lives. Faqirah is a second generation Indian Muslim who grew up in Lake Village, a small suburb outside of Chicago. Ramziyah was born in Pakistan but moved to Champaign when her father came to the University of Illinois to attend grad school. Rafia was born in the United States to a Saudi father and a Pakistani mother and grew up in the suburbs of Chicago. Rafia, Ramziyah, and Faqirah are each Muslim with their own levels of devotion. The forth student interviewed is Daya, who was born in India and is Hindi. Although she is not Muslim, her experience as a second generation

immigrant growing up in a secular United States has many similarities to the other girls.

Students are becoming more and more reliant on the internet and the many services that are available. The internet is the preferred choice to find out about weather and world news. Research can now be completed entirely from a computer with internet access, especially at a University where access to thousands of scholarly articles and journals is available for free to students. If you don't mind circumventing copyright laws, then you can find almost any movie or album for free, thanks to the ease of peer to peer networks. The internet even allows us to pay bills, order clothes, check our bank account and complete taxes. One of the newest trends on the internet is the concept of social networks, a place where you can make digital friends or keep in touch with old "real" friends. There are literally thousands of social networks on the internet today and each of them offers unique services and target markets. Facebook is the largest of all the social networks today, with over 145 million users worldwide. All of the girls interviewed had a facebook profile, with the exception of Rafia who recently deactivated her account.

One group of sites that are gaining popularity, or at least exposure, are dating sites such as match.com or eharmony. For Muslims there are matrimonial sites where you can find other Muslims looking for marriage. None of the women interviewed thought that they would ever "resort" to using one of these sites. Faqirah says "The women who use those sites are like 35 and their parents are getting desperate."

As far as staying in contact with extended family overseas, email is a more popular choice than facebook. Overseas phone calls can be very expensive so email is the best way to keep up with family. Each of the interviewees said that they have emailed cousins or aunts overseas. Internet cafés seems to be what all the cousins overseas use for the internet due to slow internet in homes or roaming power outages in residential areas. Daya says that her cousins feel like the internet cafes are their "window to the world." Perhaps that statement shows me that in other countries the best way to keep up with world news or stay in touch with family is through the internet, and since they don't have the uber fast lightspeed internet from Comcast, the use of

the internet is much appreciated.

Ramziyah holds a position of leadership in the campus Muslim Students Association (MSA). She says that since nearly every incoming freshman uses facebook, it is used as a major recruiting tool, and they send out messages and event invitations to all students who identify as Muslim at the beginning of the fall semester. Once a student has joined the email list for the MSA, they will receive twice weekly emails about social events that the MSA is hosting. Rafia confirmed that when she was a freshman that she did get recruited by the MSA over facebook, and although she is not an active member, appreciated the events especially during Ramadan. Interestingly enough the clubs that Rafia was active in she found out about from a good old fashion flier taped up in a hallway.

With something as widespread throughout the world as the internet there is bound to be some evil out there. Hackers can try and steal your identity from your bank accounts. Stalkers and pedophiles can become dangerous predators to unsuspecting victims, a TV show called *To Catch a Predator* has spawned off these tragic true stories. However, it seems that the youth today believe that their almost 24/7 use of the internet will not expose them, at least if they take the right precautions. It seems more of us are more afraid that our parents will find our facebook than that a creepy stalker is going to kidnap us using information obtained on the internet.

"My parents don't really know what facebook is, my mom can barely use a computer at all." –Faqirah

To the surprise and sometimes horror of kids these days, some the parents of our generation are beginning to figure out what a computer is and are even becoming hip to the social networking trend. Ramziyah's father is a prominent figure at the University and was encouraged to create a facebook account as a new and exciting way to keep in touch with students. Although her father has requested to be facebook friends, Ramziyah has not yet accepted this invitation, even though they are close in real life. "I don't know if I am going to click 'confirm' or 'deny.' It's not that I'm hiding anything from him, I just don't want him to misinterpret something on my profile." Ramziyah is not the only one with these concerns, in fact no one that I interviewed allowed their

parents full access to their page. Facebook offers a unique feature that allows you to limit the content that certain friends see, giving them a glimpse of your "limited profile." Daya allows her mother and aunts to be friends with her, but they have only limited access. Although Faqirah's parents don't use facebook, many of her cousins and extended family does, again family means limited profile.

So why are youth who have hundreds of friends on their facebook page keeping family members quarantined behind a limited profile view? I asked them if they think that they are living a double life, a digital one on the internet, and one where you actually need to eat and shower. The overwhelming answer was no, the person that appeared on their facebook page was the same one sitting across the table from me. Moreover they are not ashamed of who they are, even if they are not the most pious. Faqirah says that the reasons for keeping her extended family on the fringe was that reputation was very important in the Muslim community and that if a cousin in India saw pictures of her in western clothes, or with her boyfriend that her father would be disgraced by his family. She wants to stay "inconspicuous" and avoid gossip which could be a result of a misinterpreted picture. Ramziyah does not want her dad to be able to read her wall because, "What if I skip class and my friend says something about that on my wall, I just don't want him to know." Daya, who is the only one who drinks alcohol, believes that when it comes to family and facebook, "ignorance is bliss" or that her family would not want to see some of the pictures that she has on her profile. Daya also expressed that it was important to keep professional contacts on a limited profile because she is looking for a job and does not want to employers to get the wrong idea about the kind of person she is.

I find it interesting that the students believe that family members or potential co-workers will be quick to pass judgment about their character based on wall posts or pictures, but the hundreds of peers won't do the same. As I learned these fears are not entirely unfounded. Ramziyah's family was contacted by the family of Mohammed, an acquaintance of hers, and they were in the beginning stages of marriage talks. About a week before the talks began, Mohammed's little sister sent a friend request to Ramziyah on facebook and she accepted. Only after the talks began did Ramziyah realize that the sister "may have been a spy or

something, looking for faults." Rafia also has first hand experience in what can happen when a family members has unlimited access to your profile. Her parents are divorced and she and her older sister live with her mother. Towards the beginning of her freshman year her father, who doesn't call much, gave Rafia a call from his homeland of Saudi Arabia. He was irate after he was shown by her cousin the pictures that Rafia had posted on her facebook profile; they havn't spoken since. Rafia did not really care that her father was angry and left the pictures up, but after her older, and much more religious, sister kept calling her and telling her to take these pictures down she finally decided to scrap her whole account. I told her about the possibility of putting her sister on a limited profile list so she wouldn't be able to see the pictures but she said, "I don't see the need to hide behind a limited profile, it's who I am, but I don't want to keep making my family mad at me. I also found that it was beginning to waste my time and hinder my school work so I just decided to deactivate it."

Maybe the identity that the girls are portraying is not really that different than how they act in real life. It is true that in real life they might not wear clothes that their family approves of (Rafia), or drink alcohol (Daya), skip class (Ramziyah), or have a boyfriend(Faqirah). These situations undoubtedly have occurred throughout history in all social groups. What a student tells their family over the phone is one thing, what is really going on is another. With the advent of facebook, parents can have the ability to monitor their kids while they are away at college, if the kids let them. The same reason you don't want to let your mom go with you to the movies with your friends is the same reason that many people are hesitant to give their parents full facebook access. If Rafia lived thirty years ago and wore revealing clothing, her father would still be angry. The only reason he found out is because of the internet and the illusion of anonymity.

As a white Christian male, I did not think coming into this project that I would find that much in common with foreign Muslim women, but that turned out not to be true. Like the girls that I interviewed, I am very hesitant to show my profile on facebook to my parents. My parents know that I drink alcohol, and since I am twenty one, they do not have a problem with that. That being said, if they saw a picture of me passed out face first on a couch with lude marker drawings all over me that my nice friends drew,

they would definitely stop paying my tuition and probably try to send me rehab. In that same light I would never want a potential employer to see that picture and think I am irresponsible and unfit for a task requiring thought. My friends who posted the picture were there and probably remember the good or at least wild times that led up to that moment and not think I am a raging alcoholic, at least that's my assumption. In reality I untag myself from every picture which I even have a beer in my hand and try to keep a presentable profile. Still I find myself worried that someone, like my friend's mom or a company that I interviewed with, is snooping on my profile, will see something incriminating and tell my parents which would result in my life becoming that of a street beggar.

The world we live in today has become infinitesimally smaller with the advent of the internet. The internet has an impact on almost every facet of our daily lives, even in countries where it is not as widely available as in the United States. Without the internet you would not be reading this paper, but I would have finished it hours earlier. The internet allows me to read scholarly journals on any topic ever, but I have no idea how to navigate the library stacks. People would only know their distant cousins from twice yearly phone calls or a couple of expensive trips during their life, but Rafia might still talk to her father. Are we willing to trade our anonymity for instant information and global communication? It seems that we are.