

## Social media alters Traditional Parenting Paradigm

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**ABSTRACT:** *While the laissez-faire parents are quite comfortable in handing over smart phones to their kids, letting them dive into gadgets and indeed help them in exploring the online universe, the paranoid guardians mollycoddle their children and keep their teens away from the online world. Globalization, Privatization and technological advancements are fast changing the traditional parenting paradigm in India. Computers, internet, smart phones and social networking sites have reduced the engagement time between parents and children and affected its quality adversely. Sleek Smart phones fuelled by 4G internet connections seem to have transformed everyone into android robots dancing to the tunes of technology. A new challenge before the generation that grew up playing outdoor cricket or kabaddi, sans computers and android sets is to parent gadget friendly tech savvy smart kids.*

*While on the one hand, twenty first century Indians struggle to strike balance between rearing children and work, they on the other face multiple challenges at every level, which is more so when they try to multitask with an iPad in their hands. Since parents are themselves into e mails, SNS and phone calls, social media not only prevents them from active parenting, but also keeps them on edge all the time as they incessantly endeavor to police their children. The multiple threats to the vulnerable age group of adolescents and teenagers like stranger danger, bullying, excessive time drainage, depression etc, explains the fear of parents clearly. This research work based on secondary data explains various aspects of parenting and social media. It explains the dilemma of parents and enumerates novel challenges posed by social networking sites before us like- to protect the young ones from cyber crimes, to keep away from the temptation of watching children 24x7, to intrude into teen's privacy and also to engage with them more in real world than in virtual.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Social Media, Parenting, Cyber crimes, Adolescents, Changing Paradigm*

### INTRODUCTION

A SNS is a “nonymous”, or user known, online website where users create and update profiles in order to communicate personal information to others (Hum et al., 2011, p.1829). The four important characteristics of SNS which make them different from other communication styles are that they are persistent, replicable, searchable and scalable. The information shared on SNS will be saved long term, individuals can be easily found by name and identifying characteristics, news and information can be shared and copied easily, and the material on the sites is not bound to specific domains-SNS can reach people all over the world (Parker & Boyd, 2010)

Growing internet and mobile penetration in India have created a virtual alternate world of computers and social networking sites. People are networking more on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Instagram etc than in real lives. The online and offline worlds have become fully intertwined in their activities and social interactions, and adolescents continuously and quickly switch between online and offline modes of communications. Van Kokswijk (2007, 40) captures this development in the concept of “interreality,” which he defines as a “mix of the virtual and physical realities into a hybrid total experience.” Teenagers and adolescents have their own world on SNS, with their specific jargons and lingo, connecting with their age groups, where parents aren't wanted. It is also worth noting that adolescents and teenagers are experimental with their romantic and sexual endeavors at this age and social networking sites facilitate such interactions .

Exchange of sensual pictures, revealing video chats on Skype and other video chat forums also expose them to risks of blackmail and harassing. Microsoft researcher Danah Boyd, says, "Teens want a space of their own." While Social Networking sites help parents to get information on parenting issues or social and emotional support for child rearing (Pew Research Centre Survey, September 2014), SNS have brought in the necessity for serious contemplation over traditional Indian parenting model. Social Networking Sites are eventually becoming the favorite stop for many as they are spending endless hours over computer and phone screens crushing candies, chatting, and texting or uploading pictures and videos.

While adults realize the serious health implications of long hours on SNS on physical, emotional and social self, the vulnerable age group of teenagers and adolescents do not bother about the consequences. New information and communication technologies have opened up several avenues of learning and exposure to the world, but it is rather unfortunate to note that internet usage of majority of Indian youngsters is to get copy paste material for their assignments or to post pictures, update status, or comment on friends' activities on social networking sites.

### **Negative Impact of Social Networking Sites on Adolescents:-**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the ever growing penetration of digital media technologies into homes has altered the childhood (Livingstone, 2002, p. 1). Besides the fact that social networking sites can be customized to one's needs and likings, they are indeed inexpensive, user friendly, have instant feedback facility, and help connect worldwide. While such characteristics of social networking mediums might give teenagers sufficient rationale to network and connect over virtual mediums, there are several grounds suggesting the need for a check on online networking activities, especially for the vulnerable age group of adolescents and teenagers.

In the wake of SNS proliferation, children are playing more on screens than in grounds. Such deskbound lifestyle and physical inactivity due to computer addiction is causing health problems like obesity, diabetes, heart problems, excessive stress on eye etc. Several studies show that high consumption of soft drinks and fast foods are directly related to increased exposure to electronic mediums. As playgrounds and parks shrink into screens today, children fail to master the art of real life companionship, compatibility and team work. Children over engaged on online forums, at subsequent stages of life, fail to be resilient in real life situations, and have problems understanding emotions of people around them. Youngsters with low confidence level put up edited pictures of exaggerated self and engage more over online than in real world. Psychologists (Mehdizadeh, 2010) also suggest that amount of self-promotional content on Facebook and self-esteem of youngsters is inversely proportional to each other.

The rise in online crimes in India like cyber bullying, account hacking, stalking, data theft, cyber extortion, online child pornography, harassing etc and failure of cyber laws in place stresses on the need of parental guidance over online networking activity of children and adolescents. D S Rawat, Secretary General, ASSOCHAM, while releasing a study on "Cyber and Network Security Framework" said, "What is causing even more concern is that the origin of these crimes is widely based abroad in countries including China, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Algeria among others". Going by the 2013 report of National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), the majority of cyber crimes took place in the states with highly urbanized cities with Maharashtra topping the chart. This also suggests a relation between internet penetration and rise in the number of cyber crimes.

### **Parenting gets difficult in the world of SNS:-**

Understanding the ways in which technology impacts and influences child's learning, growth and overall development is critical for the wellbeing of one's family. As a guardian, one is constantly concerned of the safety and security of one's children trying to protect them from cyber crimes. The parent-teen relationship often gets complicated due to parental restrictions on time and kind of SNS use leading to intergenerational conflicts. Parenting teens' technology use, often referred to as "techno parenting" has evolved as a challenge before parents as striking a balance between exercising authority and intruding into child's privacy is easier said than done. In India, there are some parents who are quite authoritative and monitor each and every online move of their children, some periodically inquire about it, while some are completely unaware of the

online world and hence do not bother asking children about their cyber ventures. In India, especially in the semi urban and rural areas, while parents are still struggling to learn about smart phone apps or networking on online social forums, techno parenting is a big challenge owing to parent's little knowledge of cyber crimes and technology. The fact that kids know technology more than parents also reflects a change in conventional generational dynamics of our country.

Teenagers and adolescents seem perpetually to be on edge texting every now and then. They update their status if they are out of a shower, or are sick, have topped an exam or fell down the stairs. Such changes in the socializing patterns of children, demands change in the traditional parenting model. It is an everyday battle at houses of many when parents keep pestering children to keep their phones away while studying and dining or when they unsuccessfully try sneaking into the call or chat history of their teens and were caught doing so. While majority of youngsters multitask doing home assignments while chatting, playing video games, texting and also having their favorite show on over television, parents struggle applying combination of strategies with a trial and error approach, to rein in technology use of their children.

Yardi and Bruckman in their paper, "Social and technical challenges in Parenting Teens' Social Media use", suggest that "...First, parents should be somewhat blind to what their children are doing with technology because it is personal and mobile. Second, Children's technology use is a distributed problem and requires collaboration among their broader community-teachers, coaches, extended family, and school administrators..."

## **CONCLUSION**

Given the changes in lifestyle brought about by SNS and smart phones, media pedagogy is the need of the hour. Belonging to a very vulnerable age group, adolescents and teenagers easily fall prey to the cons of online networking. Teachings should be imparted through interactive and interesting workshops designed differently for primary and secondary class curriculum, explaining the importance of self censored SNS use. Moreover parents should be counseled to be neither very authoritative nor very liberal. They should be explained the importance of personal space of their children and motivated to realize that youngsters will eventually have to survive and stay in this ubiquitous online media world.

Since the repercussions of negligent and reckless networking over social forums may be grave, leaving parents and adolescents to grapple with its aftereffects for long period of time, the impact of technology on health should be taken up and covered extensively by mainstream media houses as well. Also Policy makers need to develop policies to ensure online safety and security of children and adolescents. Developing age rating systems on video gaming like PEGI (Pan European Game Information) and conducting awareness programmes for parents on such rating systems will also help in filtering out violent, pornographic and unsuitable content from the games played by kids online. While several aspects of child rearing like bedtime, eating habits, social etiquettes, studying methods etc have candid do's and don'ts, techno parenting being a new dimension of our lives, needs special attention. Instead of watching kids surreptitiously and waiting eagerly for them to commit mistake and impart a teachable lesson to them, they can be well informed about they being under scanner, which would not only motivate responsible behavior but also inculcate habit of informed choice making. The tightrope has to be walked by all parents, but the state has a role to play as well, in the case of parental failure or where public or societal interests require intervention (Scott 2000; Buss 2004). One needs to understand that adolescent autonomy is necessary for the young to evolve as independent and responsible adults. Part of this maturing process involves youths conducting risk-taking and experimental behavior, including online sexual exploration that as such is perfectly healthy even though it may sometimes involve particular vulnerabilities or harm (Kohnstamm, 2009). Given the surge in cyber crimes, careful technological guidance to teenagers is the need of the hour.

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