Social Media Are Affecting Face-to-face Communication

Jijian Chen

Oakland University, Rochester, MI

Abstract

It is a world of technology. We are living in a digital era. The most essential and indispensable technology we use every day is Internet. With the widespread advent of personal computers and portable smartphones, we are creating a virtual society in which we connect with people online through social media. Nowadays, people use more new modern social media to interact with friends instead of traditional face-to-face communication. Social media bonds people closely regardless of time and distance. When people are become more dependent on social media communication, they are gradually losing the competence to interact face-to-face.

Social Media are Affecting Face-to-face Communication

The dramatic development of technology over the past decades has changed the world and our lifestyles. One common technological innovation in the modern world is transport. We started to take flights and drive cars to travel instead of riding chariots or wheeled vehicles. More significantly, technology also changes the way we communicate with people: The email message is replacing the traditional handwritten correspondence in business and personal interaction; People gradually use more and more widespread portable cell phones for communication; Internet-based social networking sites, like Facebook and Instagram, allow people to communicate with friends and families by sharing personal stories and online videos. The most prevailing business-oriented social networking service can provide us with job searches and recruitment, and expand our professional networking. Conclusively, we are connecting with people more dimensionally in a social media world. However, we are gradually losing face-to-face communication because of using too much technology.

**Literature Review**

Although technology expands communication, it is also a cause for concern. Social media takes up too much time online. There are 2.03 billion active social media users around world, representing the “global penetration” of 28 percent. More impressively, young people spend more than two hours a day on social media, and use 39,757 years just on the Facebook overall per day (Sethi, 2015). Thus, when people become more and more obsessed about online entertainment and communication, we allocate relatively less time to hang out with friends to explore nature or go shopping, play sports in a recreation center, or get together with friends around tables to share life (Nisen, 2014). This indicates that people use more social media to interact with each other instead of traditional face-to-face communication in a digital world. Actually, everyone is dependent on social media these days right from young children to adults. It is hard to resist social media and the opportunity it offers to virtually connect a number of people across the globe. But the issue arises when people become addicted to social media. We spend less, or even no, quality time with each other in real life. Teenagers who spend more time online have less desire to have communication in a physical life (Shim, 2007). This unwillingness to have face-to-face communication causes people to gradually lose face-to-face communication.

Lack of face-to-face communication prompts people’s absence of representing their verbal expressions and using proper body language. Oral communication is a way to deliver information through verbal language which people organize and express by spoken voice messages. Verbal communication is applicable to a wide range of situations from formal presentations to daily casual conversations. Without practicing enough face-to-face communication, people are inclined to choose wrong words or long sentences conveying their opinions and thoughts. It is essential to master oral communication because it can help us maintain our relationships with friends, especially fostering efficiency with workers (Mikoluk, 2013). Body language, as a non-verbal communication including gestures, body posture, eye contact, and facial expressions, is the setting of a face-to-face interaction. From the hand wave, we can interpret a massage “help” or “goodbye”; we can feel the happiness from smile on a person’s face; lowered heads may mean they are shy or ashamed. Making eye contact is necessary for not only showing us that a person is paying attention, but also getting and exchanging information through the “window of soul.” For instance, when people look up during a speech or presentation, they may be recalling their prepared words (“Eyes body language”, n.d). Research also shows us people with face-to-face dialogue represent a higher quality of communication than “back-to-back” communication (Arnal, 2009). Categorically, a good face-to-face communication skill is indispensable, so we should emphasize the importance of face-to-face interactions and spend time with people in real world.

Hence, whether people are dating someone, interviewing someone, or just meeting someone for the first time, face-to-face communications have a special quality. We can catch the subtle tone in voice, feel emotion from their expression as it changes from happy to sad, and use eye contact to see nonverbal signals. However, texting, phone calls, social networking with our cell phones and computers occupy so much of our interactions in a physical world. Especially for teenagers, they like walking around streets with default mode music. That means much less chance of conversation with the people who populate their real lives (Glaser, 2007).

Nowadays, millions of people around the world are carrying their smartphones for personal contacts and satisfaction. Research shows that 56% of American people have smartphones, and 30% of teenagers have smartphones (Abayneh, 2013). Smartphones dominate so much market because they offer limitless news, social networking, games, entertainment, e-mail, life applications and business. Captured by accessible irresistible information, a large number of people would like to spend their leisure time and share stories and events on cell phones at the cost of meeting with friends. Furthermore, instant contact applications furnish people with more direct and convenient communications by messages, phone calls, and Facetime that can help people express their thoughts and information in an immediate and reliable way. A survey states that 39% of teens use their phones to connect with friends. Some people even would rather make a phone than talk face-to-face (Abayneh, 2013). Moreover, when people with cell phones meet, they tend to be distracted by cell phones. They may check their cell phones to see whether there are social messages or notifications, updates. It is also clear that people like to take pictures and upload them online to let others know and share their happiness. People sometimes can sometimes easily end communications with friends by unexpected calls. But on the other hand, we can’t deny that we can make a decision quickly to hang out when we make contact and see if it is proper time. The large amount of online information can inspire us as well to connect more and have longer conversations to discuss and comment on more topics.

In an era of social media, thousands of social websites are designed and developed in order to group unfamiliar people with their interests and preferences. They support and foster our modern social interaction. Facebook is one of the most influential social networking services launched to socialize with classmates, family, and friends online. This innovation in technology has connected us online more than ever before: Nearly 60 percent of Americans now have a Facebook account (Nisen, 2014). American Facebook members devote an average of 40 minutes per day as much time as we spend on household chores or personal grooming (Bosker, 2014). The more time people maintain their relationships online, the less chance people can have face-to-face communication. It holds that people are willing to interact with each other through Facebook since we have access to numerous topics. We can choose what we like and show our anecdotes with online friends no matter what time and place. Compared to face-to-face communication, interacting with friends online seems like a more absorbing way to gain happiness and friendship. When people have Facebook user accounts, they can edit user profiles to display their preferences and life. People don’t have to spend hours to know what they are. Instead, we can just use a few minutes to go through what their past life looks like. But, compared to talk online, on a face-to-face communication, people will reflect their same memorable feeling or stories immediately, and laugh, cry, cream spontaneously. More significantly, people are more likely to develop an intimate relationship in a physical situation (Yun, 2013).

The benefits of this new modern and interactive social media communication are distinct and significant, but nonetheless lack face-to-face communication. It increases the frequency of communication by utilizing the traditional offline forms of contact. People can interact with friends by smartphones, regardless of the physical distance that may otherwise prevent them from doing so (Masket, 2014). Therefore, people should learn how to use social media effectively and acceptably. People can balance their online communication and face-to-face interactions well by following these suggestions. The primary way is to set a strict schedule. We should consider what we want and how we can use it more wisely and effectively. People should realize the benefits and importance of face-to-face communication and invest and enjoy the time to communicate with others. Then, we will tend to make this kind of communication rather than spend a lot of time online. Next, we should set our time when we can use Internet. It is difficult to control the use of Internet. Hence, we can require ourselves to do some extra assignments, like reading books, before we want to use social media. Yet the biggest key is keeping this schedule all the time (Bilton, 2014). Second, if we don’t have a cell phone or computer, we can’t use it at all. So, we can keep electronic devices away or turn off cell phones when we have a cnversation with others.

**Method**

The purpose of my primary research was to investigate the relation between how much time students spend on social media and face-to-face communication each week. This study surveyed 24 students of Oakland University in Rochester, MI. The survey was conducted online by asking 8 multiple-choice questions. The students were randomly chosen from the Kresge Library and the Oakland Center at Oakland University.

**Results**

There were 24 participants including 14 males and 10 females in this survey. 8 students out of them had part-time jobs when reviewing the results from the survey. Every student in this survey had computers and smartphones. More significantly, 23 students had Facebook or LinkedIn accounts and checked them every day. When students answered the question “What kind of communication do you like best?” all the students from this survey chose the face-to-face communication. Students liked to interact with real faces rather than screens of computers and smartphones. In this survey, students who had part-time jobs, two students spent more than 20 hours, four students pay 10-20 hours, and one student used less than 10 hours each week on social media, while over 90 percentage of students consumed more than 20 hours. Students also said they liked to browse popular websites and watch videos and share attractive news or video clips with friends. Students’ answers for how much time they spent on face-to-face communication, about 20 students spent 10-20 hours of face-to-face communication. As for 17 students who spent more than 20 hours each week online just two students spent more 20 hours of face-to-face communication. There is also another fact revealing that students were involved in Internet. Just 5 students liked traditional classroom lectures at all, and most of them preferred to take a mixture of online classes and traditional classes.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

From the result of the survey, we can see students are involved in social media through accessible computers and cellphones. Social media software in those devices relate our life to online society. Students still prefer to face-to-face communication compared to talking online. Just as my secondary research suggested, people want to talk online because they have many stories to share, regardless of time and distance. For the students who have part-time jobs, they spend less time online compared to students who don’t have one. I think social media occupies them less time because they have less leisure time to entertain themselves online.

One reliable result showed us that students spent more time online tending to allocate time on face-to-face communication: 17 students who spent more than 20 hours each week online, just two students spend more than 20 hours on face-to-face communication.

We can conclude that students spend much time online and decrease the time they spend on face-to-face communication. It proves my secondary research that technology are affecting face-to-face communication. However, because this survey was conducted among a limited place and small amount of students, it can’t accurately describe whole students’ opinions. We need more students to investigate to further my research opinion.

References

Abayneh, R.G. (2013, December 13). Impacts of smartphones on young people. *Academic.edu*. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/

Arnal, LH., Morillon, B., Kell, CA., Giraud, AL. (2009, October 28).Dual neural routing of visual facilitation in speech processing. The Journal of Neuroscience, *29*(43): 13445-13453. doi: 10.1523/JNEUROSCI.3194-09.2009

Bilton, N. (2014, July 16). Three tips to find a social media balance. *The New York Times*. http://www.nytimes.com/

Bosker, B. (2014, July 23). Facebook now takes up about as much of our time as grooming or chores. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/

Eyes body language (n.d.). *Changing minds*. Retrieved from: http://changingminds.org/

Glaser, M. (2007, October 22). How cell phones are killing face-to-face interactions. *PBS*. Retrieved from http://www.pbs.org/

Nisen, N. (2013, October 21). These charts show what we’re not doing because we’re online all the time. *Business Insider*. Retrieved from http://www.businessinsider.com/

Masket, S. (2014, January 12). Don’t fear the network: The Internet is changing the way we communicate for the better. *Pacific Standard*. Retrieved from http://www.psmag.com/

Sethi, L. (2014, January 12). Social media addiction: 39,757 years of our time is collectively spend on Facebook in a day. *Dazeinfo*. Retrieved from http://dazeinfo.com/

Shim, Y.S. (Spring 2007). The impacts of the Internet on teenagers’ face-to-face communication. *Global Media Journal*. *6*(10): 1550-7525. Retrieved from http://lass.purduecal.edu/cca/gmj/sp07/graduate/gmj-sp07-grad-shim.htm

Yun, K. (2013, March 20). On the same wavelength: Face-to-face communication increases interpersonal neural synchronization. *The Journal of Neuroscience*, *33*(12): 5081-5082. doi: 10.1523/JNEUROSCI.0063-13.2013