The mobile internet in the wild and every day: Digital leisure in the slums of urban India

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Abstract
The wild and the everyday point at once to twinned aspects of life and, in this article, to a technological imaginary drawing upon the use of the mobile internet in urban slums of India. The article responds to the rather untethered way, from the point of view of state regulation, in which the telecom market in India has devolved to include poor populations, stoking a repertoire of unconventional daily use of the internet by youth living in slums. This article serves to locate the 'wild and everyday' as a specific sociocultural space in relation to use of mobile Facebook among young populations invisible to mainstream research on internet and culture. While development, as conventionally understood, is not focused on purposive outcomes of digital leisure practice (romance, play, entertainment), we argue that online engagements such as these are powerful precursors to ecologies of learning, reconstituting our understandings of global and mobile internet practice.

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While development, as commonly understood, is not focused on purposive outcomes of informal learning, we argue that engagements such as these are a powerful precursor to developing technology literacies, skills and ecologies of learning (Rangaswamy and Cutrell, 2013). To examine the accretion of digital literacies through leisure practices in the everyday we leverage evidence embedded in the social life of things, the mundane use of technology as an extremely immersive and schooling experience. The search for and enjoyment of leisure-driven content inform the 'stuff' of digital technologies, shaping relationships between people, digital media and informal learning. It is indeed astounding to find relatively high updating of digital technologies by user populations least likely to afford and access them in the slums of urban India. With a focus on Facebook via mobile use among the youth – mostly young adult and male – in the slums of Hyderabad and Chennai, the themes we explore to frame this article will be a departure from research approaches studying 'perpetually connected' (Katz and Aakhus, 2002) spaces and persons in the domain of new media youth practices (boyd, 2008; Ito et al., 2009). It is interesting to note Goggin's (2009) study of the iPhone, which underscores the active role consumers' play in orchestrating a specific culture of the mobile phone use. Like the iPhone users, slum youth in our study remake their humble phones as an 'instance of consuming culture', but in ways that draw meaning from their specific social contexts.

Social network sites (SNSs) are designed to enable new communication channels, architecting novel ways of becoming acquainted with people and managing flows of interpersonal relationships. With more than a billion users, is Facebook all about a new relationship between society and technology? As digital multi-media permeate the globe, and as more people are spurred to go online, we are seeing the steady narrowing of literacy gaps between the digital rich and poor, especially among users who have the infrastructural support to forge 'perpetual contact' and those who lack such support, to access, use and persist with digital media. Facebook in India, the third largest global market with over 90 million users, is steadily engaging populations at the lower end of the economic spectrum, allowing a hitherto unavailable trans-hierarchical class/caste social experience. The ways that these constrained users are being acculturated into Facebook and into the global community are subtle, layered and culturally coded. While our young informants, by joining Facebook, seem to have been introduced simultaneously to the internet and its many affordances, they reported learning English, typing with a keyboard, developing sociable personalities and acquiring general knowledge via Facebook-mediated interactions. More

powerful themes of idealizations of social qualities – such as romantic relationships, persona building, communication/ netiquette patterns – emerged as we looked more deeply into both the manifest online behaviours and the ethnographic offline contexts of social media use. This work serves as an opportunity to resituate notions of digital labour and prosumption that are, for the most part, driven by western concerns and values. Our insights strongly suggest an aspirational appropriation of Facebook beyond the more grounded and local social affordances, a small example being friending young women of a higher class and from international locations. Not only are social media making people familiar with these aspirations, they are also offering a new materiality to view and articulate a global aesthetic and life chances in unaccustomed, sometimes revolutionary ways. Our approach to everyday Facebook use in urban South Indian slums explores conceptual reformulations about one's social location, the subversion of these in friending patterns, in the extending of potential romantic opportunities and the experiencing of aspirational mobility. Much of our interest lies in the ways Facebook is becoming a critical virtual setting in contesting and overshadowing handed-down versions of conventional notions of personhood, social esteem, markers of social location, communities of friendship and heterosexual love.

Foregrounding frames of reference

Revisiting ICTs as artifacts of development

The ICT for development (ICTD) community tends to privilege what are and what are not desired/legitimate developmental impacts of technology. New media practices in emerging economies that are substantively oriented towards leisure – play, entertainment and pleasure – are duly relegated as irrelevant to development project interests. However, some of us in the ICTD domain view development as the enhancement of livelihoods/ quality of life, reflected in improved life indices, where the adoption of technology can meaningfully enrich social life (Arora and Rangaswamy, 2013, 2014; Ganesh, 2010; Kavoori and Arceneaux, 2006; Mitra and Rana, 2002). In this article, we move away from a narrow focus on ICTs as objects of development; instead, we support the idea of these tools as social artifacts of the 21st century that are often deeply entrenched in leisure, as is made evident through its everyday usage in the global South. It is essential to complicate the linear understanding of socioeconomic progress, development benefits and beneficiaries, particularly the normative understanding of 'users' in emerging economies as unique and utilitarian beings in this digital age. This article argues that repositioning these users within the larger rubric of social mediatization facilitates a bi-directional flow of scholarship between the fields of New Media Studies and ICTD. This fluidity enables ICTD scholars to contribute to contemporary and critical preoccupations within internet studies regarding online surveillance and privacy, virtual economies and free labour, and cyber-activism, to name a few, and, in turn, provide a rich diversity and representation of participatory practice that extends digital understandings beyond the western frame of reference.

Digital empowerment can mean a variety of things in different contexts. To begin with a globally accredited definition, the World Bank continues to understand

empowerment as: 'the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process are actions which both build individual and collective assets' (World Bank, n.d.). This simply translates to empowerment as a decision-making power to own, use and allocate available socioeconomic resources. Initiatives, motivated by individual or social impulses, illustrate how individuals can choose to act to seize an economic or social opportunity at a given time. We are not advocating an either/or approach to choice, as it is demonstrated that these new participatory platforms can fulfil multiple agendas and are capitalized accordingly. So we see nurses in emerging economies using texting to remind people to take their anti-retrovirals as well as to make private phone calls to their loved ones; we see farmers checking for updated crop prices online while also using the digital platform to fulfil sexual desires (Ganesh, 2010). In a place like the urban slum, formal schooling is no longer the lone gatekeeper of learning and organic collaborative environments become important to infusing access and building digital literacies. A case in point is the new digital literacies created by children in the slum to mediate play with novel computer applications (Mitra and Rana, 2002). Several of the authors' own research studies have dwelt on very specific cultural productions of technology localizations in India which involved a spectrum of leisure practices: the multi-purpose, peri-urban cyber café, the mobile retail and repurpose store, the urban slum mobile internet hub, and the rural community information centres are a few such examples validating this avenue of research (Arora, 2010a, 2010b; Rangaswamy, 2009; Rangaswamy and Nair, 2010). Many of these socio-technical instantiations occur as, what we believe is a forging of local competence. If competence is defined as having sufficient knowledge or skills to act effectively in a given context, everyday ICTs bracket and hone that competence to tackle practical and real-world experiences of technology. For example, rather than using the internet to search for educational material, low-income youth in Kenya search for music and movie teasers (Wyche, 2013); a mobile store in a Mumbai slum can make more money from downloading audio-visual content than selling SIM cards (Rangaswamy and Nair, 2010); a shared internet centre in small-town Ecuador supports itself transferring ringtones to mobile phones (Salvador et al., 2005); cybercafés in rural Himalayas survive primarily because of the use of Orkut by the local teens (Arora, 2010a). These are hardly developmental from a conservative ICTD perspective, but are, nevertheless, critical spaces offering entry, experimentation and ultimately immersive use.

The social life of ICTD

ICTs are social artifacts before they are baptized as tools for development. Using the titular idea in Appadurai's seminal work, *The Social Life of Things* (1988), we examine the influence of technology in the formations of cultural extensions of technology use. Over the past decade, as technologies migrate and re-home in the global South, they come to be contextually imagined, accepted, modified and operated (Rangaswamy and Sambasivan, 2011). Such trajectories of technology use have little ideological space to evolve and be recognized as legitimate processes through the lens of development. An emerging class of literature has presented accounts of technology usage in the South wherein leisure practice is interwoven and intricately embedded: for example, in

middle-class homes in Asia (Bell, 2006; Donner and Tellez, 2008); in the technology ecologies of micro-entrepreneurs in South Africa (Donner, 2009); in Bluetooth-enabled sharing of digital content among the Bangalore street entrepreneurs (Smyth et al., 2010); in digital browsing in cybercafés in rural Himalayas (Arora, 2010b); in sexuality and the internet in emerging markets (Ganesh, 2010); and in digital learning through play (Mitra, 2003; Mitra and Rana, 2002). Before ICTs become tools of utility, they often undergo a process of sustained exploration through leisure avenues. We see this pattern recurring with every new technology of the time, from radio and television to the computer in our day and age (Arcangeli, 2003; Bryce, 2001; Fischer, 1994; MacLean, 1968). Much of the ethnographic work among populations in low-income, digitally unstable environments where people have diverse levels of literacy is their cultural production using new media technologies. Local translations define the relationships between the broad understanding of technology, deemed to have a specific use, and the practices occurring around them in a specific social ecology. Therefore, development practitioners need to confront the mutuality of the global and local influence on competence, literacy and skill building, and also reveal mediating relationships between accessing and adopting technology.

The impact of internet-based technologies of the self in early studies of virtual communities, in the arrival of the Web 2.0 and networked forms of communication and information through digital social media, has emphasized transformations in notions of community, identity and the nature of human interactions (Castells, 2000; Miller and Slater, 2000; Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002; Turkle, 1995). Many of the changes arising within a new media ecology can be captured through the concept of 'prosumption'. Defined as the collapse or convergence of production and consumption, prosumption highlights how users (formerly seen as passive consumers) both create and consume their own media content (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010, in Horst and Wallis, 2011). Some of the examples intersecting the domains of technologies for the self and ICTD are also intersections of instrumental consumption with leisure-oriented appropriations. Referred to as 'smart consumption' (Alhassan, 2004), or the strategic use of mobile phones through practices such as flashing and text messaging (Sey, 2010), these are practices designed to optimize means for pursuing a rich repertoire of mobile communication channels.

Practices of self are ways in which the subject actively constitutes herself (Foucault, 1988) and, by extension, alludes to a suite of technologies that permit individuals to instrumentalize the self towards a better state of being (Bakardjieva and Gaden, 2012). The internet serves as a platform for the active and reflexive shaping of the self, a central feature of Web 2.0, and the everyday of the local–global dialectic, and between technology platforms and users' practices inscribing a parallel life. A study of MySpace profiles, for example, documents the function of this site as a stage for the performance of taste (Liu, 2007 in Bakardjieva and Gaden, 2012). This is an activity in which the self is being expressed in terms of the semiotic systems of popular culture, such as music, film, television, clothing and so forth. The user interface of MySpace invokes directly the symbols of this culture and users write themselves into MySpace by mapping themselves according to the dictates of the site's cultural taste. Newer forms of publishing, such as YouTube, are ways to narrate and communicate experiences as consumers and, with incremental use and user-created practices, values associated with specific user communities of the platform begin to emerge. In a study of YouTube, Burgess and Green (2009) indicate the

workings of a platform as a cultural system, a virtual affordance of a continuum of cultural participation. In a sense, YouTube is a technology of performance and user-driven activity that creates and sustains the popularity and visibility of content creators (or authors). Like all media, YouTube makes sense only when people make use of it in everyday life (Burgess and Green).

In our research we are seeing a simultaneous interplay of affordances and constraints exerted by technologies of self, at once cutting-edge and ominous for users at the margins of participation. How is Facebook in the Indian slums configuring the youth understanding of globalization, diasporas, communication ecologies, self-identity, heterosexual romance, in short their habitus? As Doron (2012) remarks in his study of mobile phones and mobility in the context of a bustling religious-cultural urban space in India, by creating 'stuff' (Miller, 2010) we simultaneously create ourselves in varied and contradictory ways. These can produce liberating or oppressive effects, depending on the cultural and historical contexts, but constitute a dynamic site for the development of human social and material relation.

The culture of aspiration as prelude to development

The idea of aspiration, seen by Appadurai (2004) as the capacity to aspire, is also a tool kit for understanding the relationship between culture, poverty and development. For the most part, Appadurai argues, it is in the realm of culture that ideas of the future, as much as those about the past, are embedded and nurtured. Thus, in strengthening the capacity to aspire, conceived as a cultural capacity, especially among the poor, the future-oriented logic of development could find a natural ally, and the poor could find the resources required to contest and alter the conditions of their own poverty. This argument runs against the ICTD grain of many 'deep-seated images' of the opposition of culture to economy. But it offers a new foundation on which research can base answers to two basic questions: why is culture a capacity worth building and strengthening, and what are the concrete ways in which it can be strengthened? This nuanced approach to aspiration is also tied to the Appadurai's idea of production of locality, and the idea of imagination as social practice, not just defined by reproductive logics (aka Bourdieu's rules and regularities) but as collective/social visions or desires. To produce is to inhabit and sustain a space, a relation involving large amounts of labour, attention and effort.

Here, poverty is not only a condition but is also how people view themselves as poor and as a group in society, including the awareness of being poor, in the language that society offers to articulate this condition. Hence, poor people certainly have understandings of themselves and the world which are expressed in and through a cultural space: in the everyday 'habitus' of lived experience and in the rituals of public engagement of society. These cultural resources may not be easy to identify, and:

> may be differently articulated by men and women, the poorest and the merely poor, the employed and the unemployed, the disabled and the able-bodied, the more politically conscious and the less mobilized…. But it is never hard to identify threads and themes in the worldviews of the poor. These are strikingly concrete and local in expression but also impressively general in their reach … (Appadurai, 2004: 65)

A case in point is the study of activities in cybercafés in rural Himalayas, where users produced visual mashups of themselves with Bollywood stars and self-portrayals as superheroes (Arora, 2010). The complex relationship of poor and marginalized people to the cultural regimes within which they function is clearer still when we consider a specific cultural capacity, the capacity to aspire. Aspirations certainly have something to do with wants, preferences, choices and calculations. And because these factors have been assigned to the discipline of economics, to the domain of the market and to the level of the individual actor (all approximate characterizations), they have been largely invisible in the study of culture. Thereby, our call to look at digital leisure as a legitimate lens for understanding technology use among marginal populations in the global South underlines the role that participatory digital architectures of today can play in enabling these myriad voices of expression and aspiration.

The slum as a socio-geographic lens

The primary focus of the article is the evolution of social media, particularly Facebook, to adapt specific socio-technical practices and technological characteristics for contextual usages, in this case the urban slum. Facebook, in the context of use among residents of a slum community, pioneers social networking practices beyond the neighbourhood, face-to-face and community-based networks. Urban shanty towns or slums in India are essentially resource-poor and digitally stressed communication ecologies. Some of the questions we wanted to answer were as follows: How do computing technologies, especially the mobile internet, find their way into these communities? Who are the people driving these technologies? How is technology being received by the community?

The multi-dimensional aspects of internet and social media use cannot be discussed in isolation from the slum locality, and the context, habitats and modes of technology penetration. Both slums in our study are located in metro-core areas. Public transportation and proximity to major commercial venues, burgeoning city expressways, malls, and multiplex theatres are not very far from the reaches of the slum quarter. The slum quarter is an evolving assortment of small habitats, spatial layouts and commercial enterprises. Businesses within this domain comprise small-scale industries like metal workshops and auto spare parts garages, furniture stores, photo studios, fast-food joints, and shops selling small goods such as mobile phones, groceries, appliances, garments or jewellery. A typical home is a 100–200 square feet, and many do not have attached bathrooms or private bedrooms. Constraints of space and resources force the compartmentalization of homes based on activities and functionality – kitchen area, television area, mattress area, storage area, and a washing/water storage area – all housed in a single room, or spread between two or three connected smaller rooms (Sambasivan et al., 2009). Doors are usually kept open and every home typically has a constant influx of visitors – relatives, neighbouring children and adults stopping by. Informal spaces are usually gender segregated: the males huddling in front of mobile phone shops or cheap fast-food joints or simply on street corners. Women usually congregate around water pumps during hours of water supply, when they go out to clean dishes, wash clothes and bathe kids while performing domestic chores. Young women usually do not hang out but interact more

purposively in public spaces. We will revisit the importance of gendered spaces in slum quarters in our discussion section.

Public spaces serve as information hot-spots and, despite the strong face-to-face and word-of-mouth channels, mobile phones occupy pride of place in maintaining, expanding and regenerating socio-business ties and networks. Privacy comes with a premium and public spaces are those that ironically afford private moments. It is on the street corners, outside shop fronts and in cybercafés that digital leisure is forged and enacted. The proximity to resources at large of the city, the all-too-visible aura of technology-driven cityscapes in the form of IT parks, public hoardings, premium malls, fuels the hunger for cosmopolitan experiences which finds immediacy through the digital realm. The urban slum is then a dynamic site of diverse experiences operating in the shadow of India's new global economy, a constant flow of marketed ICT products and consumptive aspirations. This article is more than just a vignette about an urban slum in a certain place; it is situated in our account of the rise of the affordability of ICTs, exploring in some depth the nature of the multiple and complex relationship between the virtual and physical self, and the challenges/opportunities these offer in the form of leisurely yet serious engagements with and within digital life.

Findings and discussion

Reclaiming Facebook as leisure and labour

Our research fields in both Chennai and Hyderabad are less than 5 sq. km space of human habitat inside the city limits. The Chennai slum on the southern coast, Urur, is mainly residential and adjoins a posh neighbourhood; it is home to 3000 households and has a population of 10,000. Much of Urur slum youth have the privilege of living in the margins, absorbing without participating in the public culture of a posh Chennai neighbourhood. The authors were introduced to some of the youth in the Chennai slum by a young taxi driver they had known for a while. As research progressed some of our participants and research informants led us to many of their peers and to gain access into their neighbourhood in order to understand Facebook practices among their young men and teenagers. Hafeezpet, in the outskirts of one of the major IT parks of Hyderabad, is inhabited by a multi-religious population comprising low-income classes and a slum quarter. Slit by a highway, it comprises a mix of households, small commercial establishments, survival economies in the form of small shops, cottage industries, servicing stores and a self-employed human labour force offering diverse economic services. Much of our research entry in Hafeezpet came from the owners of mobile phone shops dotting both sides of the highway. One of them, a 19-year-old mobile phone dealer and repair-wallah (repair man) transitioned to become a primary participant in our research foray. Our study, being ethnographic in nature, aims to engage deeply with a small sample of users. Hence, from a focused and deep engagement with a set of users, our findings are indicative of broad trends and patterns of behaviour. We employed a variety of qualitative methods, including open-ended interviews, observations of community life and semi-structured baseline surveys, all aimed at achieving a 'thick description' of contexts of technology use. We chose both our field sites, Hafeezpet and Urur, for two reasons:

first, they were typical of the unauthorized and informal urban settlement we refer to as slums; second, due to their proximity to the vast public infrastructures that are afforded by global Indian cities like Chennai and Hyderabad.

We adopted two techniques to understand social networking behaviours on Facebook: (1) face-to-face in-depth interviews with 23 Facebook users in three urban slum communities and (2) qualitative profile building of the same users by an extensive study of their Facebook pages. We conceived and executed our research from March to November 2012 in three socio-geographic communities, two in Hyderabad and one in Chennai. Our focus was on charting pivotal elements of Facebook use, such as the beginning and the amplification of the use of Facebook, and the unfolding and maturation of skills to press the site to service a specific set of behaviours. All except two participants are male, between 17 and 21 years of age, from low economic backgrounds, with a family income in the range of US$ 1700–2500 (a monthly income $140–70). Their educational background varied from school drop outs to college-going, with some of them working for an average monthly income ranging from US$ 100–200. Average monthly spending on the mobile internet is around US$ 1–3 per person. We investigated the social contexts of our subjects, concentrating on their motivations for joining Facebook and the paths that led them to the social media site. We further focused on their articulations of behaviours exclusive to Facebook, their friending patterns, what they post and how they share and exchange information, photos and messages. We paid careful attention to their phones, the way Facebook was accessed via applications and clients downloaded specifically for this purpose, their friend lists (making note of the social profiles of their friends) and exchanges that were public on their pages. Next, we made a gallery of all the images that appeared on their pages with an intention of analyzing aspects of persona building and representations they signify. From profiling our participants, both on and offline, we gathered (a) their social locations, (b) what they post and (c) for whom (their sense of audience).

Our research informants accessed social media sites on their modest feature phones and customized them with proliferating technology platforms and applications specifically developed for low-cost digital environments. In developed contexts, Facebook has become an increasingly important tool for people engaging in a range of communication behaviours, meeting information needs and building social capital. Our set of user profiles is no different, but their Facebook activity is forged as a path to overcoming constraints of the everyday and has specific consequences for their personal and social expectations of networking on Facebook. Facebook, as technology mediating social interactions, offered an incredibly powerful channel to overcome the duress of locality and sociality of youth living in the marginalized urban edges of India.

In this community of young adults, social norms seem to accommodate friending strangers, who make up the vast majority of their Facebook friends. Many hoped to make offline friends out of online acquaintances. This may be related to the tendency to friend strangers who are local or regional. Similarly, some searched for new friends based on familiar names or were happy to friend request any Indian person. Certainly others mentioned an interest in making friends with people far away, as a teenage boy put it 'I will look for and friend certain names … like Jack or John for instance …' For our young informants, Facebook engagements are gateways to unimaginable opportunities:

composing second selves, making friendships and forging diasporic interactions. More importantly, underlying all these online activities is the urge to seek interactions with people from an elevated social status to fulfil aspirations of social mobility. Such interactions may range from associating via Facebook with film stars, sports personalities and fashionistas to body builders, beautiful educated women, non-resident citizens, ethnic diasporas and people of authority. These are articulated in the manner and pattern of Facebook friending, which formed a good part of our study. Looking for romantic opportunities plays a big role in Facebook activity and is dominated by heterosexual dating possibilities aligned with possibilities of upward class mobility via friending women from higher social segments (Arora and Rangaswamy, 2015). Facebook pages display behaviours as engagements for better material affordances in the form of socially elevating friendships and heterosexual relations. These behaviours were grounded in specific practices that our informants described as parameters by which they evaluated strangers for a friend request. This evaluation process is a fertile site for examining a user's life-world of values, social norms and romantic expectations from Facebook to fit into these. Searching profile pictures(especially for girls whose profiles tend to be private), photos that are browsable in a Facebook user profile, overall impressions in terms of the profile's socioeconomic class and perceived authenticity were cited as factors in deciding the imagined potential for a friend request. Once this was sent, some of them, confessed to feelings of vulnerability about the status the request will be subjected to (this emotional response indexes a sense that a friend request carries [at least some] of the anxiety of 'making the first move' in offline situations). Moving beyond exploring romantic possibilities, star-struck users fill their timelines with pictures, quotes, moments from the lives of celebrities, simultaneously endowing them with their intimate gaze. Timelines thus transform into a repository of audio-visual attestations of celebratory fandom and testaments to one's association with elevated statures. In the absence of infrastructural bandwidth for perpetual digital connectivity and storage, Facebook stands in as an enduring interface for the persistent gaze and affinity with beloved personalities, objects and moments in the life of our user subjects. They, of course, keep their own Facebook profile laid bare for evaluation from their potential friends and declare these pages as a embodying their 'complete' identity. For future research, it would be interesting to investigate in what sense their profiles do capture their 'complete' identities.

Thus user aspirations for Facebook varied widely. They ran the gamut from exploring, making and learning from friends, both near and far-flung across the globe. These young men seemingly play down the importance of Facebook in their lives, as one of them said, 'FB is just for entertainment, just like cinema and at max to find out few things, but not for entire life.' Even if informants play down their emotional involvement with Facebook and claim that it is not very compelling, they equally let it slip that they 'cannot live without Facebook'. This attitude reorients to an idea of entertainment, not as frivolous but as important leisure time in what may otherwise be a demanding routine.

Offline social realities are reflected in the online Facebook interactions, but manifested differently in different users. These socially marginal youth live under highly structured socialization possibilities with young women and their low socioeconomic status affects their heterosexual comportment and dating choices. In some users' experience of Facebook, these social structures reproduced themselves: they socialized online

mostly with young men, were unable to change their settings to reflect a romantic relationship, stated that people with darker skin were less likely to use a photo of themselves as a profile picture, or felt intensely uncomfortable with pornographic profile pictures certain women friends (usually fake profiles of women) choose to display on their pages It is not unusual for these young men to have hardly spoken with girls in their life. For example, one of our 20-year-old informants said:

> In the 10th and 12th [grade] I never used to talk to girls … even now I don't, but before I used to bow my head down and not answer any questions. After a year of Facebook chatting, I can look at them and speak with them and at least answer their questions before walking off…

He speaks very candidly about the difference between online and offline social affordances:

> On FB, one can talk freely without having any fear.… That girl asks me 'Come on FB.' She cannot ask me like that to come outside, na…. She also uses [informal vocabulary]. She may not talk outside at all.… It is easier to talk with a girl [friend] on Facebook than in person.… Face to face, we cannot really talk anything. If it is FB, we can talk more …

Facebook presents a low-stakes environment to socialize with new people. Our users took the opportunity to befriend and chat with new girls. Even the few who already had a girlfriend found this freedom compelling. One of them admitted 'that even after having found a steady girlfriend I am looking around for more girls as a backup …'

The humble feature mobiles these youth own afford the ability to do practically anything on Facebook. Accessing Facebook via mobiles is characterized by an economy of time and attention. Everything costs money to access, and, even in an unlimited data plan, there is also a time cost to consuming Facebook's image-heavy mediascape. Users have to labour to persist and tease out affordances from the mobile in order to press Facebook into servicing their unbounded desire to find rapport with new friends. This interface allows the user to see the most relevant information in sufficient detail (e.g. how many comments have already been posted on a girl's photo), but it does not let you see all information side-by-side, as you would on a desktop computer. The mise-en-scène of a Facebook profile dissuades our users from being anything but passive. On a phone, it is as though the user has blinders on, viewing the site in discrete portions, consuming the information ecology byte by byte. Thus enormous dexterity is needed in order to consume a site piecemeal and steadily build an integrated experience out of discrete ones of whatever the preoccupation is – whether romantic, diasporic or otherwise. This results in an altogether different immersive sense of involvement and participation on Facebook.

Several apps and clients are customized on to the mobile screens of users. Some of the core ones are anti-virus programmes, Core Play for media files, 3G TV, which links to streaming media (much of which is porn) and, more importantly, Nimbuzz, a messenger for voice and text chats with friends over data. Nimbuzz users can chat directly from their screen names to Facebook chat and the user stays within Nimbuzz, but s/he is plugged into the FB API and can pull in friends from different platforms simultaneously. Using Nimbuzz, especially with short-term unlimited data plans, can represent huge cost

savings for the volume of voice and chat messages. The 'favourites' feature allows people to chat more easily with whoever they've added to this list. Facebook does not allow the creation of a friends list but replaces it with alerts of friends who are online. In our opinion, the Nimbuzz favourites list could encourage our young users to re-chat girls they might have wanted to be better friends with and speculatively add to the friends list. It is a software/structural feature that encourages relationships to be strengthened over time instead of chatting with whichever random stranger happens to be online. These practices get repeatedly fine-tuned and honed to optimize the internet as the preferred channel of communication. It also points to a shift towards using the internet for voice interaction and chat, bypassing the plethora of attractive talk time and SMS plans, particularly designed to develop and maintain far-flung and potentially long-term friending relationships.

Kulbeer's diaspora: cultivating a garden

Building Facebook profiles is an intensely engaging and passionate project in the lives of our research subjects. It is like 'cultivating a garden' as Kulbeer states. He is a 16-year-old Sikh boy who lives in a slum in Hyderabad with his father, a truck driver, his mother and younger brother. Kulbeer is in high school and discovered the 'mobile internet' when a friend's friend in a city college talked about a deal of 5 Indian rupees (4 cent) for a day's internet and unlimited download. He soon stumbled upon a plethora of deals from around 12 telecom national and multinational service providers in his slum. He has a Nokia 5300, bought from the money he earned working in a pharmacy during the summer, and loaded the internet on it. '*Mental Kartha Hai*' or 'blowing my mind' is what he said after a few weeks of his micro pre-paid internet, usually bought from a careful study of the day-plans floating around the numerous mobile stores in the vicinity. His neighbourhood buddies and their buddies, similarly aficionados of the internet, get together in the evenings to discuss and customize internet plans, deals, phone features, specifications, websites offering free downloads of music and videos. Life was happy until Facebook came along and disrupted their contentment! Now, Kulbeer and his friends had something in their palms that could connect them outside of their neighbourhood, their city, region and country, especially to young women unknown to them and their family and community! A time of enchanted exploration followed, searching out ways to optimize the phone and the internet within small means. The desire to befriend forbidden women of higher status and class overwhelmed all other explorations on Facebook. Kulbeer initiated his Facebook profile with a photo of a sleeping ginger puppy that soon gave way to a mug shot of his face. He was initially hesitant to plunge into the romantic opportunities that the site offered but did so abetted by his friends, who were far ahead in matters of chatting, exploring heterosexual dating opportunities and tagging him in several photos of romantic nature.

Observing and mining Kulbeer's pages on Facebook over a period of 12 months yielded an interesting schema of 'cultivating a garden'. His site had a repository of photos extolling his ethnic Sikh identity, a sequence of junctures in Sikh history, most of them exemplifying a history of heroism, and the overcoming of physical and sociocultural subjugation, a string of current global news about the Sikh diasporic community

and, most interestingly, a deluge of physically fit Sikh men displaying their brawn, bringing a closure to the historical tableaux of Sikh valour and fortitude.

Kulbeer's Facebook behaviour is a testimony to a mosaic of activities that tie his identity to several layers of personhood drawn from his sense of locality, region, religion and the diaspora. Both personal volition and an allowance for the preferences of friends are braided by a Sikh teenager living in South India and tenuously associating with the Sikh global diaspora. Kulbeer's Facebook is a measure of his labour in seriously tailoring his identity for his own enjoyment, however dispersed and manipulative the sources of influence crafting his Facebook profile might be. It also points to a constant pruning of and engagement with technology for perpetual connections, communication and externalizations of self-identity.

Conclusion

Leisure geographies of digital media

Kulbeer's garden, bearing diasporic content on his Facebook timeline, is a presentation of self in online networked environments in a complex of SNSs that combine a variety of audiences 'into a single crowd of spectators' observing the same performance, but from a variety of vantage points (Papacharissi, 2010). Kulbeer's audience encompasses a range of friends and strangers, exotic foreign women and the diaspora from his own Sikh community. Kulbeer is essentially engaging in 'multiple mini performances' to produce his presentation of self, in a space that only Facebook can provide, in a form that is accessible, affordable and sustainable.

Localization of Facebook is not simply about forging a technical system to allow affordable access but is a sociocultural phenomenon resulting from interpreting contexts of use. What slum youth perceive to be Facebook is durably connected to the management of what the SNS offers in relation to what is made available to them in lived contexts. For our informants in the slums of Chennai and Hyderabad, Facebook was not just an object, experience or technology of leisure. It was a gateway, enabled by a socio-technical habitus and 'the elective mobilization of the distant' (Giddens, 1991) into a world inhabited by places and personalities inaccessible without these 'technologies of self'. The perception of Facebook as a romantic gateway rests on its ability to influence and shape offline personas and their self-perception. Our user subjects perceive Facebook as an aspirationally romantic gateway which provides an affordance that constantly eludes them in their everyday life. Facebook-enabled romance is also a presence mediated heavily through popular cinema, attached to the screen personalities of its matinee idols, translating to heterosexual pairing. A Facebook persona is therefore at once dichotomously local/global, rooted/ diasporic and momentous/mundane.

In other words, as Miller (2012) points out, 'drinking coke' in Trinidad unavoidably includes both the symbolic meaning (US imperialism) and local constructions of the meaning of consuming this foreign drink in a local context. It seems Facebook was so apt for Trinidad, as a 'Trini' Facebook emerged, amalgamating the culture of Bacchanal, romance and gossip. When our informants say that they discovered their own habitus via Facebook it seemingly alludes to the latent, even undiscovered, facets of neighbourhood,

its nooks and crannies and, more importantly, facets of kinship and friendship. It also seems there is a deeper enactment going on, with Facebook allegedly vesting magical properties in the everyday. When a 20-year-old college student from the Chennai slum said he is able to friend girls on Facebook and hold a conversation, it surely does not exclude the possibility of his experience of 'heterosexual romance' as an act of personal maturation and the imbuing of a romantic personality. That the girls friended and chatted up by this college student on Facebook belong to an elevated social category provides a whole new edge to subverting entrenched social conventions in the context of the slum's social geography. Conceptually, Facebook provides an expressive space for varied notions of self while also triggering new behaviours rendering the social networking site central to the lives of these youth so they can acquire agency over their representations. If Facebook is a composition of 'technologies of self' it suggests a digital entitlement of knowledge, skills and a worldview.

The goal of this article is to highlight the centrality of leisure spaces as an active producer of cultures of digital literacies. While development, as we understand it, is not focused on purposive outcomes of informal learning, engagements such as these are a powerful precursor to developing technology literacies, skills and ecologies of learning. To explore everyday ICTs for entertainment, pleasure and play, we touch upon (1) how mundane repetitive everyday use of technology holds tremendous potential for immersive adoption; (2) how the everyday is dominated by the search for and enjoyment of leisure-driven content; and (3) how this separation of leisure use and developmental use is an artificial and, by and large, a facile one.

Funding

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