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TITLE OF PAPER

Mobile Internet in the Wild and Every day: Case Studies from the Slums of Urban India

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INTRODUCTION

The wild and the everyday point at once to twinned aspects of life and, in this paper, to a technological imaginary drawing upon the use of the mobile internet in urban slums of India. The paper 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 paper serves to locate the ‘wild and everyday’ as a specific sociocultural space in relation to use of the internet and social media technologies among populations invisible to mainstream research on mobile society and culture.

While development, as is 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 (Author 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’s indeed astounding to find relative affluence in the uptake 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 & male, in the slums of Hyderabad and Chennai, the themes we explore to frame this paper will be a departure from research approaches studying ‘perpetually connected’ (Katz & Aakhus 2002) spaces and persons in the domain of new media youth practices (Ito et al 2009, boyd 2008).

Social Network Sites (SNS) are purposed to enable new communication channels, architect novel ways of acquainting 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 permeates 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 them to access, use and persist with digital media. Facebook in India, the third largest global market with over 90 million users, is steadily immersing populations at the lower 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 dwelled deeper into both the manifest on-line behaviors and the ethnographic off-line contexts intermediating social media use. This work serves as an opportunity to re-situate notions of digital labor 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 is social media familiarizing these aspirations, but 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 is exploring reformulations of material and conceptual ideas 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, occupation and heterosexual love.

FOREGROUNDING FRAMES OF REFERENCE

It is purported that ‘Information and communication technologies (ICT) can enable solutions towards human progress when applied with a broad understanding and a multidisciplinary approach” (Brewer et al, 2005). Despite the broad and liberal definition, the ICT for development community (ICTD) tends to privilege what are and what are not
desired/legitimate developmental impacts of technology. New media practice in emerging economies that are substantively oriented towards leisure - play, entertainment and pleasure, are duly relegated as anecdotal. However, some of us in the ICTD domain view development as enhancement of livelyhoods/quality of life reflected in improved life indices and adopt familiar ways to identify technology driven processes implicating progress (Ganesh, 2010; Mitra, 2005; Kavoori, Chadha & Arceneaux, 2006). In this paper, we move away from a narrow focus of 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 made evident through its everyday usage in the global South. It is essential to complicate the linear understanding of socio-economic progress, development benefits and beneficiaries, particularly the normative understanding of ‘users’ in emerging economies as unique and utilitarian beings in this digital age. By repositioning these users within the larger rubric of social mediatization, the authors argue that this facilitates a bi-directional flow of scholarship between New Media Studies and ICTD fields. This fluidity enables ICTD scholars to contribute to contemporary and critical preoccupations within internet studies regarding online surveillance and privacy, virtual economies and free labor, 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. To the authors, benefits encompass both experiential and purposive elements of ICT adoption; and beneficiaries are a range of users in resource constrained environments generating rich organic usages that are not overtly developmental from a conventional sense of the term.
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….” The UNICEF Women’s Equality and Empowerment Framework identifies awareness and social perceptions about inequality as directly related to the capacity of self-alleviating the structural impacts of inequality. This simply translates to empowerment as a decision-making power to own, use and allocate available socio-economic 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 fulfill multiple agendas and are capitalized accordingly. So we see nurses in emerging economies use SMS to remind people to take their anti-retrovirals as well as make private phone calls to their loved ones; we see farmers check for updated crop prices online while also using the digital platform to fulfill sexual desires (Ganesh, 2010). Combining the UNICEF approach to digital empowerment with literature on collective action and social capital might build a new integrated analytical framework to capture the interactive relationship between individual capabilities and social structures that include the inherent need for leisure.

For example, in a place like the urban slum, formal schooling is no longer the lone gatekeepers 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 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 centers are a few such examples validating this avenue of research. Many of these socio-technical instantiations occur, what we believe, as 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 (Author 2010); a shared internet centre in small town Ecuador supports itself transferring ringtones to mobile phones (Salvador et al 2005). These are hardly developmental from a conservative ICTD perspective but are critical spaces offering entry, experimentation and ultimately immersions of 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 (Author 2011). Such trajectories of technology use have little ideological space to evolve and be recognized as legitimate processes through the lens of
An emerging class of literature has presented accounts of technology usage in the south wherein leisure practice is interwoven and intricately embedded; in middleclass homes in Asia (Bell 2006, Donner et al 2008), technology ecologies of micro-entrepreneurs in South Africa (Donner 2009), Bluetooth enabled sharing of digital content among the Bangalore street entrepreneurs (Smyth et al 2010), digital browsing in cybercafés in rural Himalayas (Author 2010), sexuality and the internet in emerging markets (Ganesh 2010), and digital learning through play (Mitra 2002; 2003). For ICTs to 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 the radio, the television to the computer in our day and age (Arcangeli 2003; Bryce 2001; Fischer 1994; MacLean 1968). Its popular knowledge that India rolled out satellite TV and colour broadcast in 1982 to coincide with the roll out of an ambitious national adult literacy programme. Much of the ethnographic work amongst populations in low-income, digitally unstable, and diversely literate environments is about getting closer to the processes of cultural production of global technologies. The more global, the more universal and standardized is technology, in contrast to contexts of use that show ways of discovering, localizing and making technology ‘one’s own’ through more social than utilitarian means. Local translations define the relationships between the broad understanding of technology, deemed for 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.
In its emerging Web 2.0 form, ICT can no longer be conceived as assemblages of hardware, software, and user consumption. Viewed instead as ‘architectures of participation’, ICT becomes an opportunity for generating, mediating and moderating a particular paradigm of social life (Thompson 2008). In suggesting a relationship between new architectures of participation and enhanced well-being, we are drawing attention to a ground-up technology-enhanced activity representing a new, possibly Web 2.0 form of liberation from a place and time of constraint. In its ability to generate an alternative social-digital infrastructure and network-enabled social life, Web 2.0 poses an implicit challenge to existing forms of socio-economically motivated cultural constraints expanding the social universe of life-chances, digital literacies and skills. Development 2.0 as theory examine ways in which the provision of user generated platforms of social and economic exchange can work to create new and revolutionary interactional opportunities in terms of communication and media entitlements for the digital-poor in the world. Does this imply the transformational potential of Web 2.0 models will not disturb broader structural inequalities within which these models play out?

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 have emphasized transformations in notions of community, identity, and the nature of human interactions (Castells, 2000; Miller & Slater, 2000; Wellman & 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 (formally seen as passive consumers) both create and consume their own media content (Ritzer
& Jurgenson, 2010 in Horst & Wallis 2011). Some of the examples intersecting the domains of technologies for self and ICT for development are also intersections of instrumental consumption with leisure oriented appropriations. Referred 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.

Another powerful lens originating from the discourse around technologies of self are its two pronged impacts of empowerment and subjugation. Practices of self are ways in which the subject actively constitutes himself (Foucault 1988) and by extension, alludes to a suite of technologies that permit individuals to instrumentalise a self towards a better state of being (Bakardjieva & Gaden 2012). The internet offers a platform of resources for the active and reflexive shaping of the self, a central feature characterizing the era of the Web 2.0 and the everyday of the local-global dialectic, and the other dialectic between technology platforms and users practices inscribing a second life. Networks, as Castells argued, constitute the production infrastructure of contemporary western societies where technical convergence paves the way towards a closer intertwining of practices of the self with economic production. The labor of self on self, paradoxically, becomes part of the “free labor,” “pleasurably embraced” and often “shamelessly exploited,” (Terranova 2004 in Bakardjieva & Gaden 2012). Free labor is free in the sense that it is willingly exerted as an outburst of creative energy and self-actualization but its technical enabler will structure and shape the kinds of interactions that constitute user interactions. 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 & 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 to the dictates of the site’s cultural taste.

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 remarks, in his study of Mobile phones and mobility in the context of a bustling religico-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 constituting a dynamic site for the development of human social and material relations.

*The Culture of Aspiration as prelude to Development*

The idea of aspiration told by Appadurai (2004) as the capacity to aspire is also a tool kit to understand 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 author’s idea of production of locality
and the idea of imagination as social practice not just defined by reproductive logics (aka
Bourdieu’s rules & 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.

Another kind of antipodean disposition of culture versus development is a kind of
‘pastness’ as habit, custom, heritage, tradition and development as future and hope. This
opposition, according to Appadurai (2004) is an ‘artifact of our definitions’ and has a crippling
effect on a mutually beneficial dialogue between anthropologists and developmentalists.
Definitionally, there is a need to view culture as action based on strategy and calculation
endowing a practical dimension that can be researched as everyday praxis. This also means
that culture is not a throttled effect of heritage but a piece of life alive to the impacts of social
change. This brings a slice of ‘practice’ urging the study of what constitutes culture, as
‘collective horizons for collective aspiration’ in ICTD research.

Here, poverty is not only a condition but is 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, the poor 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). 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 (Author 2010). The complex relationship of the poor and the marginalized to the cultural regimes within which they function is clearer still when we consider a specific cultural capacity, the capacity to aspire. As approaches to cultural processes, these frequently remain obscure and prove costly for the poor especially in regard to development policy and think-tank. 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 underlines the role that participatory digital architectures of today can play in enabling these myriad voices of expression and aspiration.

Discussion

*Reclaiming Facebook as Leisure and Labor*

We adopted two techniques to understand social networking behaviors 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 specific set of behaviors. All except two are male, between 17-21 years of age, from low-economic backgrounds with a family income in the range of 1700-2500 $US (a monthly income 140-170 $US). Their educational background varied from school drop outs to college going with some of them working for an average monthly income ranging from 100-200 $US. An average monthly spending on the mobile internet is around 1 to 3 $US per person. We investigated the social contexts of our subjects concentrating on the motivations to join Facebook and the paths that led them to the social media site. We further focused on their articulations of behaviors 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 to analyze 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 behaviors,
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 and who make up a vast majority of their Facebook friends. Many hoped to make offline friends with online acquaintances. This may be related to the tendency to friend strangers that 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 teenaged 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 on-line activities is the urge to seek aspirationally endowing interactions with people from an elevated social status. The latter may range from associating via Facebook with film stars, sports personalities, and fashionistas to body builders, beautiful educated women, non-resident citizens, ethnic diaspora 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 play a big role in Facebook activity and are dominated by heterosexual dating possibilities aligned with possibilities of upward class mobility via friending women of higher
social segments. Facebook pages display behaviors as engagements for better material affordances in the form of socially elevating friendship and heterosexual relations. These behaviors 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 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 off-line 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 does it capture their ‘complete’ identities.
Thus user aspirations for Facebook varied widely. They ran the gamut from exploring, making and learning from friends 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 off their emotional involvement with Facebook-and claim that it is not very compelling they equally let it slip by that they “cannot live without Facebook.” This attitude re-orientates to an idea of entertainment not as frivolous but as important leisure time in what may be an otherwise 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 the low socioeconomic status affect 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 women profiles) 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 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 labor to persist and tease out affordances from the mobile in order to press Facebook into servicing their unbounded desire to rapport with new friends. This interface allows the user to see 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 to be anything but passive. On a phone, it is as though the user has blinders on, viewing the site in discreet portions, consuming the information ecology byte by byte. Thus enormous dexterity is needed in order to consume the site piecemeal and steadily build an integrated experience out of discreet ones of whatever is the preoccupation, whether romantic, diasporic or otherwise. This
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 a huge cost savings for the volume of voice and chat messages. The ‘favorites’ feature allows people to more easily chat whoever they’ve added to this list. Facebook does not allow the creation of a friends list but replaces with alerts of friends who are online. In our opinion, the Nimbuzz favorites 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 whichever random stranger happens to be online. These practices get repeatedly fine-tuned and honed to optimize internet as the channel of preferential communication. It also points to a shift towards using the internet as voice and chat, bypassing the plethora of attractive talk time and SMS plans, particularly serviced 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, a 16 year old Sikh boy states, living in a slum in Hyderabad with his father, a truck driver, mother and younger brother. Kulbeer is in high school and had discovered the ‘mobile internet’ when a friend’s friend in a city college talked about this 5 Indian rupees (4 cent) for a day’s internet and unlimited download. He soon stumbled upon a plethora of deals from 12 odd telecom national and multinational service providers in his slum. He has a Nokia 5300, brought from the money he earned working in a Pharmacy during the summer and loaded 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 deal of the day plans floating around the numerous mobile stores in the vicinity. His neighborhood buddies and their buddies, similar aficionados of the internet, get together in the evenings to discuss and customize internet plans, deals, phone features, specifications, web sites offering free downloads of music and videos. Life was happy until Facebook came along and disrupted their contentment! Now, Kulbeer and friends had something in their palms that could connect them outside of their neighborhood, their city, region and country, especially young women unknown to them and their family and community! A time of enchanted exploration followed, searching ways to optimize the phone and the internet within small means. The desire to befriend forbidden women of higher status and class overwhelmed other explorations of 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 romantic opportunities that the site offered, 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 Kubeer’s pages on Facebook over a period of 12 months yielded an interesting schema of ‘cultivating a garden’. Kulbeer had been making over his timeline! His site as of last week had a repository of photos extolling his ethnic Sikh identity, a sequence of historical junctures in Sikh history, most of them acclamationg a history of heroism, overcoming physical and socio-cultural subjugation, a string of current global news about the Sikh diasporic community and most interestingly, a deluge of Sikh men in various states of physical fitness and show of brawn, bringing a closure to a historical tableaux of Sikh valor and fortitude. He continues to be tagged in his friend’s photos sometimes in the Telugu text in contrast to and merrily accompanying his own photos visible on his pages and newsfeeds.

Kubeer’s Facebook behavior 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 labor for a serious tailoring of identity and enjoyment, however dispersed and manipulative be the sources of influence crafting his Facebook profile. 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*
Localization of Facebook is not simply forging a technical system to match affordable access but a socio-cultural 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), into a world inhabited by places and personalities inaccessible without these ‘technologies of self’. The consequence of perceiving Facebook as a romantic gateway rests as much on its ability to influence and shape offline personas and their self-perception. Our user subjects perceive Facebook as an aspirationally romantic gateway and a vesting of affordance that constantly evades their every day. 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 therefore is at once dichotomously local/global, rooted/diasporic and momentous/mundane.

As Miller (2012) points out drinking coke in Trinidad is not to ‘import the symbolic meaning of that drink’ but ‘foreground the primacy of local constructions of meaning’. It seems Facebook was so apt for Trinidad, as a ‘Trini’ Fasbook, amalgamating the culture of Bacchanal, romance and gossip. When our informants say that they discovered their own habitus via Facebook it seemingly allude to the latent even undiscovered, facets of neighborhood, its nooks and crannies and more importantly facets of kinship and friendship. It also seems there is deeper stuff going on with Facebook allegedly vesting magical properties to the everyday. When Flowking (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 did not exclude the possibility of his experience of ‘heterosexual romance’ an act of personal maturation and the imbuing of a romantic personality. That the girls friended and chatted up by Flowking 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 behaviors rendering the social networking site central to the lives of these youth to 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 paper 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 every day 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 leisurely use and developmental use is artificial, and by and large, a facile one.

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