

The role of Membership and Participation in Admissible Virtual Social Networks on Cultural Convergence (Case study: the Young Members of FACE NAMA in Qom)

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Abstract

The appearance of different social media has been very influential in individuals' life. The most common social networks are virtual social networks which have been fascinated by many users because of a lot of similarities with human society, and communications and interactions which are formed in it. This study investigates the role of membership and participation in virtual social network on cultural convergence. Manuel Castells and Giddens's theories are applied as theoretical framework. This study is a survey study which was conducted through by distributing the questionnaires among FACENAMA virtual social network in Qom city. The sampling method was simple random and the sample size included group of 400 members. This study investigates the role of participation and membership in virtual social network on cultural convergence based on Sharing personal experiences, expressing opinions about up to date social issues, trivializing the genders of the members, virtual social networks, avoiding ethnocentrism, inattention to spatial and local position. The results show that there is a significant relationship between participation and membership in virtual social network and cultural convergence. The implications to both research and practice are provided in this paper.

Keywords: Personal experiences, Social networks, Cultural convergence, Participation, membership.

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1. Introduction

Today's social network is predominately free to join which makes it extremely popular. Social networks are simply networks of social interactions and personal relationships. Think about your group of friends and how you got to know them. Maybe you met them in elementary school, or maybe you met them through a hobby or through your church. Either way, you were exposed to social networks: meeting other individuals in a social situation, while developing strong personal bonds over time. One of the biggest challenges to virtual world concludes its roles on social-cultural life of people. Talking about modern communicative technologies and the resulting changes in daily life isn't a new issue. Perhaps nowadays, what information and mass media introduce in different social and political grounds is one of the most precious issues in human societies (Niazi et al., 2011,p.4).

Modern communicative-informative technologies has made the probability of the society's appearance and a network in which people and societies have appeared in new frameworks, has changed our attitudes towards ourselves, others and even the world (Castles, 2001, p.20) as well as changing the dominating rules on human interactions and communications (Olson, 1998,p.5).

The most important achievements of the third millennium has mad communication meaningful and has changed social interactions, accordingly it has developed virtual networks based on that change in these interactions.

Internet transfers millions of messages which affect the users' values, attitudes and cultural identities and the cultural and political system of the society in minor and major levels (Niazi, et al. 2011:4).

The social networks in this space which are recently available in intelligent cellphones in addition to personal computers have the ability of transferring certain social traits. This study investigates the effect of virtual networks' membership and participation on cultural convergence and shows the appearance of these networks and their development in similar cultural features in different points independently. Many social sciences' theorists and scientists think that the convergence of communicative technology with capitalism structural revision in recent decade and our entrance to a new era are unavoidable. Daniel Bell call it "meta-industrial society" Imanuel Castles calls it "network society" and some call it "informative society" (Navabakhsh, 2007, p.147).

Accordingly, the creation of virtual social networks in interpersonal communication, the users' approach towards them and changing it to a kind of communication, removes the limitations.

This communication provides the ground for solving one of the most important problems in the complementary path of social order, i.e. the possibility of structural attachment between the actors higher than spatial, temporal and cultural limitations. When there is the possibility of actors' access to each other, the sender and the receiver will be attached together in structural view (Shoots Isheh, 2012, p.424).

The virtual space provides the opportunity of creating new communities of users with an indirect relationship. Social internet networks have become popular among the youths. These social networks in addition of being an environment in which people find new friends or inform their old friends of the current changes of their life provide conditions for exchanging the ideas in which the youth can share their ideas and opinions. The ability of making communication with other countries leads to the more popularity of these social networks. Nowadays, social networks' websites have changed into the most applicable internet services after the big portals such as "Yahoo", "MSN", and searching motors such as "Google".

It seems that the social networks in the internet become more important in the future. These networks are getting more popular day to day. In social networks, people are not alone anymore for finding their like-minded fellows. It is obvious that in the real world, the interested people never find their favorite issues such broadly. This reason and the similar reasons have changed the social network services to the one of the most important foundations of internet during the last year. It is for several years that the concept of social networks has propagated broadly among the Iranian users by the presence of overcut and it advanced so immediately that made Iran stand in the third position in overcut after Brazil and America.

At present, the existence of different applications such as We chat, Chaton, WhatsApp, Tango, Kakao talk ... in the intelligent cellphones, these networks have developed broadly.

In these networks because of the users' membership and lack of limitations of the real world, it seems that common features are created among the members and the groups who may be very far from each other in culture and place and get them to a convergence in behavioral and cultural perspective. The purpose of this study is paying attention to this view that linking to active and present virtual social networks in Iran and continuous activity in them make similar cultural features or a kind of cultural convergence in the members, in spite of temporal and spatial distance.

2. Review of Literature

Navabakhsh, Zadshampour and Hashemnejad (2007) in an article named "Investigating the effects of internet and cellphone in changing the youths' identity aged 15-29 years old in a city in Mazandaran" concluded that the space and time limitations have been removed by improving the modern informative and communicative technologies, so the individuals are not dependent to their local place, they are able to remove geographical borders and communicate with a bigger world.

Zand Lashani (2011) in a study named "The impact of communicative-informative technologies on the governmental employees' lifestyle in Dorood province" concluded that applying informative technologies is less among females than males and is more among the singles than the married and there is a direct effect between recreation and applying communicative technologies on consuming patterns and body's management.

Niazi and Karkonan Nasrabadi (2011) in *The Society and Internet* state that internet create new interactive frameworks in making interpersonal communication which provide new opportunities for the users to present their personalities, in spite of their internal limitations.

In the study conducted by Farahmnad (2008) and named "Girls and the Use of Internet" concluded that endangering the girls' identity, electronic addiction, acculturation through internet, engaging in virtual loves, and sexual abuse make sever threats for female users.

In a study named "The application of virtual social networks in globalization era" Rahmazadeh (2010) concludes that the aim of many scholars deconstructing artificial borders and the sever existence of natural borders. In their view, the artificial borders which include national and ethnic linings and governments' autonomy era are created after the nations then they fail and natural borders will be replaced. Natural borders are not the subordinate of the land and are created by like-minded groups who have common interests which create modern and overlapping societies in addition to of being distributed round the world. Hezarjeribi and Akbaritabar (2013) in an article named "A study about the effects of virtual social networks on the youths' lifestyle and leisure time" states that the changes and evolutions in the technology and its global application and the appearance of information technology and communication, make changes in the way of spending time in individuals with different ages. From among these individuals, the youth and teenagers are the first group who welcomed to these new technologies with open arms.

In a research conducted by Chu and Snider in 2013 named “Applying virtual social networks for selecting Canadian youth for participation in medical researches” they concluded that advertising through Facebook is a cheaper method in comparison with other similar approaches for attracting the responders to participate in the research which makes possible selecting the studied sample from among a wide range of people.

In an article named “The students’ self-declaration in Facebook, has been assessed personal variances and self-controlling” which were conducted by Chen and Marcos (2012). The results showed that presenting information by people is different in virtual and real space. Both of the personal and cultural variances are important and influential.

Garoosk, et al., (2011) in a study named “My dear professor, what should I write in Facebook wall? A case study about academic applications from Facebook” suggested that Facebook is excessively paid attention by the youth and other people and it has a broad range of members of different ages (higher than 13 years old) and has changed into an important part of the university students’ life.

Castells in explaining the importance of internet says that, it is the skeleton of the global electronic communication, since gradually it links the networks to each other. The history of developing internet and attaching other communicative networks to this network helps the understanding of technical, organizational and cultural traits of this network. So, it opens the way for assessing its social effects. In fact, this is a unique combination of military strategies, major scientific cooperation and anti-cultural innovations (Castells, 2001,p. 402).

Thompson introduces internet as a tool for information circulation and cultural transition. In one hand, he pays attention to its technological aspects and divides the internet to three aspects of cultural transitions: 1. Transition of technical intermediation 2. Transition of organizational components 3. A certain type of spatial and temporal distance in transition and in the other hands, by considering these three components, we compare internet with other mass media (Niazi et al. ,2011,p.66). He thinks of internet as a ground for face to face interaction, intermediary and interference like (ibid).

In Anthony Giddens’ view, communication evolution and developing information technology are the symptoms of globalization, they are deeply dependent to globalization processes and governments and big commercial and industrial companies help the development of this process. These agents provide the primary sources for the primary steps of developing the internet (Giddens, 1998, p. 40).

A phenomenon is called globalization during which social relationships are strengthened. A relationship which links distant spatial conditions so tightly which leads to the effect of a local event on occurring other events which are very far from it (ibid, 1998, p. 77).

David Riesman divides social history regarding the human role in making the values of the self and his relationship with others, in his view there are three periods overcoming the history which everyone has its own special period.

He divides the history of human civilization to three steps or periods regarding the communication aspect: 1. the sovereignty of traditions on human thoughts and behaviors “the period of tradition leadership human”, 2. the sovereignty of human “the period of self-leadership human” 3. The powerful sovereignty of mass media and human alienation “the period of another human leadership”.

Fredrick Jameson, the postmodern thinker, looks towards the reality of capitalism world with an economic and Marxian's view; he divides the capitalist world into three groups: business capital which accompanies with steam engine and semi-exclusive capitalism which is defined by steam and combustion power and multi-nationalism capitalism which is linked to nuclear energy and electronic machines. In Jameson's view, the identity of thought formation are the produced concepts by symbolic reproduction machines including cameras and camcorders, computers, videos, cinemas, internet and other postmodern issues. These media make agitated and inconsecutive minds instead of alienated minds and create self-inconstancy. Under such condition, human being doesn't have the ability to think and get himself free from this condition (Turner, 2002, 27-28).

Also, the framework of this study is based on Anthony Giddens and Imanol Castles which are briefly explained here. Anthony Giddens believes that globalization is in fact the comprehension of modernism internal characteristics and modernity which are published by developing communicative tools and disability of the borders and national sovereignty in the control of international media around the world. Gradually, all of the people around the world select a common culture (resulting from modernism). He explains this view in a book called *Globalization, Reforms Our Life* as such “globalization reorders all of the societies, however the results are not predictable sometimes, it is advancing despite of the obstacles which it faces with and it is considered as the contradiction of tradition and modernity”.

Giddens defines globalization in sociology book as such “developing social and economic relationships around the world in present condition, different aspects of human life are influenced by the organizations and social networks which are located a

thousand miles farther from their place. One of the main aspects of globalization study, is the appearance of a global system, it means that in some aspects we should consider the world as a unique social order (Rahmanzadeh, 2010, p.7).

Mass media direct us to the conditions which we have never had the possibility of direct communication with them. So, the traditional connection between social events, occasions and natural inhabitants are decreasing gradually, and in contrast some situations and events are created by figures and prepared social experience (Giddens, 2003, pp. 124 -125).

Manuel Castells in the famous book named "*The Information Age*" writes that informative city needs informative citizens. He believes that revising capitalism along with modern technologies lead to the social change and consequently the city's change. This change replaces the bipolar city for the traditional city. The great evolutions which occur in human society lead the citizen to a direction in which he is able to get the skill of living in such society. Here, the concept of electronic city is revealed, which is a city in which the citizens' communications are possible by informatively communicative technologies. So, the modern communicative technologies lead to "information society".

During the recent decades, the great changes in informative and communicative technologies made fundamental changes in the construction of global structure. This evolution is called "informative revolution and communication".

A revolution which brought about "information society"; the revolution of information and communication appeared from the convergence of two changing process "information" and "communication". Computer is the technologic symbol of information but telephone and television is the symbol of communication. These two independent processes are attached together by the appearance of "network".

The evolution was created by combining and converging the capabilities of information and communication and it was called ICT revolution. Internet is the most important production of this convergence. More importantly information phenomena and technologies are combined so tightly that no boarder can be defined between them (Hezarjeribi, et al. 2012: 4).

3. The Research Hypotheses

1) It seems that there is a relationship between participation and presence in virtual social networks and sharing the life experiences.

2) It seems that there is a relationship between participation and presence in virtual social networks and commenting about the daily social issues.

- 3) It seems that there is a relationship between participation and presence in virtual social networks and avoiding ethnicity.
- 4) It seems that there is a relationship between participation and presence in virtual social networks and inattention to local situation and geographical place.
- 5) It seems that there is a relationship between participation and presence in virtual social networks and inattention to people's gender.

4. Methodology

The present research is taken from a research which is conducted by a survey study. The research population includes the members of virtual social network inside the country and from among the frequent virtual social network and the users of FACENAMA. The sample's size was measured 363 by Cochran's formula. The sampling method is simple random. The data are analyzed by SPSS software in descriptive and illative statistical levels.

4.1. Descriptive Findings

Regarding the descriptive results, the gender frequency of the responders is 52% in females (208 samples) and 48% in males (192 samples). The frequency of the responders' marital states is 63.3% in single samples (253 samples) and 36.8% in the married ones (147 samples). The highest frequency of responders in education is 55.5% (222 samples) in bachelors and the least frequency is related to the Ph.D. students (8%). The highest frequency of responders in respect to the age is allocated to the ages from 26 years old to 30 years old (that is 45.3% equal to 181 samples) and the lowest frequency is allocated to the ages of 15-20 and higher than 30 years old (that is 6% equal to 24 samples). The collected data shows that most of the respondents (79.5%) share their life experiences with others high or very high, 16.8% of the samples do it low and very low and only 3.8% of the responders don't do it, most of the responders (83.5%) comment about the daily issues high and very high, 15.8% do it low and very low and only 8% (3%) don't do it. More than half of the responders (52.6%) had ethnocentric ideas in a low and very low level and less than the one fifth of the responders (16.3%) appear ethnocentric ideas in high and very higher levels in virtual networks and 31.3% of the responders were not ethnocentric. More than half of the responders (52.8%) paid attention to the local position of the members low and very low and almost one fifth of the responders (16.3%) paid high and very high attention to this fact and the rest of the responders (24.5%) didn't pay attention to this fact at all.

More than half of the responders (61%) think that the importance of the members' gender is low or very low, (33.5%) think that it is high and very high and only 5.5% of the responders stated that this is not important for them. The rate of the responders' presence (701%) in virtual social networks is high and very high, 26.3% were average and only 12.8% of them were low and very low. Regarding the illative statistics, the investigation of cultural convergence among females and males shows that there is a significant difference between the females and males' convergence who are members of virtual social networks and the female convergence (62.96%) is more than males (38.27%). There is a significant difference in the convergence of the single and married members in virtual social networks and the single convergence (60.57) is higher than the married ones (34.83%). There is also a significant difference in cultural convergence based on the level of education. There is a significant difference in cultural convergence of the people with different ages and regarding the results of the study. In the first hypothesis there was a significant relationship between the presence in virtual social networks and sharing the life experiences. So, this hypothesis is confirmed.

Table 1. Correlation coefficient of sharing life experiences and participation in virtual social network

Sharing life experiences	Participation in virtual social networks			
.647	1.000	Correlation coefficient	Participation in virtual social networks	Spearman's RHO
.000	.	Sig (2-tailed)		
400	400	N		
1.000	.647	Correlation coefficient	Sharing life experiences	
.	.000	Sig (2-tailed)		
400	400	N		

The second hypothesis is about investigating the relationship between participation in virtual social network and commenting about daily issues; the obtained results show that there is a significant relationship between these two variances. So the research hypothesis is confirmed.

Table 2. Correlation coefficient of commenting about daily issues and participation in virtual social network

Commenting about daily issues	Participation in virtual social networks			
.666	1.000	Correlation coefficient	Participation in virtual social networks	Spearman's RHO
.000	.	Sig (2-tailed)		
400	400	N		
1.000	.666	Correlation coefficient	Commenting about daily issues	
.	.000	Sig (2-tailed)		
400	400	N		

Investigating the relationship between participation in virtual social networks and avoiding ethnocentrism is considered as the third research hypothesis which was confirmed regarding the results and shows a significant relationship.

Table 3. Correlation coefficient of avoiding ethnocentrism and participation in virtual social network

Avoiding ethnocentrism	Participation in virtual social networks			
.617	1.000	Correlation coefficient	Participation in virtual social networks	Spearman's RHO
.000	.	Sig (2-tailed)		
400	400	N		
1.000	.617	Correlation coefficient	Avoiding ethnocentrism	
.	.000	Sig (2-tailed)		
400	400	N		

The fourth hypothesis is about investigating the relationship between participation in virtual social network and inattention to the members' local situation and then the research hypothesis is confirmed.

Table 4. Correlation coefficient of inattention to local position and participation in virtual social network

Inattention to local position	Participation in virtual social networks			
.671	1.000	Correlation coefficient	Participation in virtual social networks	Spearman's RHO
.000	.	Sig (2-tailed)		
400	400	N		
1.000	.671	Correlation coefficient	Inattention to local position	
.	.000	Sig (2-tailed)		
400	400	N		

And the fifth hypothesis investigated the relationship between participation in virtual social networks and inattention to the members' gender and the results showed a significant relationship with an average level and confirms the research hypothesis.

Table 5. Correlation coefficient of inattention to local position and Participation in virtual social network

Inattention to the members' gender	Participation in virtual social networks			
.577	1.000	Correlation coefficient	Participation in virtual social networks	Spearman's RHO
.000	.	Sig (2-tailed)		
400	400	N		
1.000	.577	Correlation coefficient	Inattention to the members' gender	
.	.000	Sig (2-tailed)		
400	400	N		

Regarding the results of the present study and confirming the research hypotheses, there is a significant relationship between the participation in virtual social network and cultural convergence with an average level which confirms the research hypothesis.

Table 6. Correlation coefficient of cultural convergence and participation in virtual social network

Cultural convergence	Participation in virtual social networks			
.685	1.000	Correlation coefficient	Participation in virtual social networks	Spearman's RHO
.000	.	Sig (2-tailed)		
400	400	N		
1.000	.685	Correlation coefficient	Cultural convergence	
.	.000	Sig (2-tailed)		
400	400	N		

Moreover, the investigation of determining the rate of changes in the cultural convergence variance, regarding the variance of participation in virtual social networks and its prediction, shows significant relationships between these variances and the rate of the changes is predicted 66.9%.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.684^a	.669	.669	2.794

a.

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	93908.3	1	66908	12414	.000
	Residual	6106.81	398	10.806		
	Total	100015	399			

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Natural borders are not the subordinate of the land and are created by like-minded groups who have common interests which create modern and overlapping societies in addition to being distributed round the world (Rahmanzadeh, 2010, p. 22).

Developing modern technologies in the recent decades leads to appearing different electronic and computer programs and these changes facilitate more the human life.

Accordingly, it can be concluded that the positive potential and the useful application which affected different aspects of human life brings about creativity and facility however this developing global network has another aspect too.

One of the positive sequences which can be referred to here is communication facilitation and acceleration and information exchange and one of the negative sequences is endangering the individuals' privacy, isolation and weakening the family foundation and the reason is lack of precise recognition of the members from each other. Social networks are in fact playing a crucial role in shaping not only our daily routine but also in worldwide assets.

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