

How Social Networking is acting as an Agent of Change

Tanay Sukumar

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The topic, a heavily clichéd one, is normally put up by middle-aged people still trying to come to terms with their fascination by the compactness that social networking brings to the world. Social networking is now as significant a part of life, as any other life process. And, nothing about the phenomenon is actually strange. A society has always been a—and the—way of life. So, what is the USP that an online society brings? The question is, why it still intrigues masses, even when it is universally acknowledged that the internet is ready to change the way humanity interacts, in the most unexpected of ways, in the years to come.

Obviously, the interest lies in the magical definition it provides to a society. For starters, it may be a pastime that helps find new friends. Social networks can find you friends for life, a spouse for marriage, a new set of customers for business, a bundle of fans of your skills to take you to glory. Moving beyond such social effects, which are largely limited to one's personal life and workplace, there are certain other impacts, which actually alter the civilisation as a whole, for its good.

If not a more literate society, online societies have given us a more aware youth. Take the daily news for instance. A conventional form of society would need a person to follow the news to know about a story creating waves. Today, a person may not follow the news, but surely follows his Facebook news feed. Here, he is *made* to know about such a news story, for he is bound to wonder why everyone is talking about the same topic.

The news is just an example—a mere subset of a far bigger effect an online life brings. It is the *sharing of opinions* with a community, which makes social networking what it is. A person, who would not rather write/speak a tirade on his views on life, society, governance and other niceties, is encouraged to showcase those same opinions on an online platform, when he sees everyone doing so. If not as an article, then as a brief status-update! **A rebel by heart discovers his speech thus; a yesterday's "nobody" gets liked, retweeted, and gets confidence.** An online forum gives a new definition to freedom of speech. In another part of history, putting forward opinions was the job of the intelligentsia, and following them the duty of the commoner. Today, social networking provides this opportunity to anyone and everyone with an opinion.

In my view, the broader effect of the online simulations of societies as an agent of change is majorly due to its revolutionary platform, that helps an otherwise off-line (pun intended) society to wake up, build and share opinions, think, argue, stay aware about a variety of things in life. The place which ignited the fight to bring Hosni Mubarak down, a phenomenon that can get a whole country behind Anna Hazare, something that can leave behind television media in impact, is surely a remarkable agent of change.

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES ARE REVOLUTIONISING THE LIVES OF TODAY'S YOUTH. HOWEVER, ARE THESE SITES ACTING AS AGENTS OF CHANGE OR OFFERING YOUNGSTERS AN ESCAPE ROUTE FROM REALITY?

With the advancements in technology, social networking is gradually becoming a way of life for many. It is the latest means to communicate as we eat, sleep and live in the virtual space today. No longer restricted to merely expanding one's social network, more and more people are using it to start mass movements and generate people support — *Team CEB*.

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SOCIAL networking has become a significant part of our lives, like any other life process. The interest lies in the magical definition it provides to society. For starters, it can find you friends for life, a partner for marriage, a new set of customers for business as well as fans who appreciate your skills.

But, moving beyond its conventional definition, which is largely limited to one's personal life and workplace, social networking is also impacting and altering society in a whole new way. If not a more literate society, online societies are surely giving rise to a more 'aware' youth population.

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Living in cyberspace

Photos: Camelt Chandra, Graphic: 79/10/12/azant



REALITY BYTES (clockwise from top-left) Rushika Arp, Akshay Jain, Kanika Mehra and Tanay Sukumar

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SOCIAL networking as a phenomenon was virulent even in its embryonic stage. It gave a fresh dimension to both networking and socialising. Gone are the days when people used to bump into like-minded people at the neighbourhood bookstore, coffee house or art gallery. Social circuits have now metamorphosed into their virtual counterparts.

For any little interest you may harbour, be it rocket science or pre-medieval Brnolet art, the existence of a Facebook group is as certain as your existence in the first place. Also, social networking has revolutionised the face of distant learning as we know it.

With teachers and scholars from overseas universities reaching out to global students with options of 'skype-teaching' and virtual classrooms, quality education is now a click away. Indisputably, social media has proved its prowess as a swift, well-encompassing avenue for information broadcasting. When recently an educational conference was held in New York City, the members updated the minutes of the meeting on a leading social networking site to amass quick public opinion.

This is the power of social networking as it is changing the way we have defined education and the entire notion of classroom learning. While e-learning is promising to be the next big thing in education, e-commerce has also been garnering much speculation.

With virtual platforms boosting business, there has been an unprecedented phenomenon of markets going e-baynetic. Social networking has become a marketing ground for small scale enterprises, with young dynamic entrepreneurs going in for a promotional page on the social site rather than a roadside billboard. Thus, people today have found new ways to display their skills and subject expertise with the growth of social networking. It is the way ahead.

contd on page 3