

# IS CYBERSPACE A BOON OR A SOURCE OF INSECURITY IN THE PRESENT WORLD: AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AND THE YOUTH

**Esha Bhattacharya Chatterjee,**

*Ph.D Research Scholar*

*Department of Sociology, Jadavpur University  
Kolkata, India*

## ABSTRACT

*One of the major changes which has taken place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the onset, and consequent, popularity of the ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies). Of all the ICTs, the Internet has been highly influential in the everyday life of the people, especially the youth, because this virtual world has opened up a vast new arena for them. The Social Networking Sites (SNSs), which comprise of one of the major elements of cyberspace, has been pivotal in shaping the life of the youth in many ways. In recent times, the SNSs not only enable people to maintain regular contacts but has, in fact, strengthened the existing bonds which otherwise would have weakened in this fast pace of today's life. However there is another darker side to it too which often goes unnoticed by the users. The uncertainty of identity of people in this cyberspace, apprehension of theft of personal information by stalkers or 'hackers' or its misuse, has generated a feeling of 'insecurity' or 'risk' in the minds of youth. This paper attempts to look at, and provide sociological explanations to, this 'jams-faced' nature of cyberspace by highlighting how the SNSs act as a boon and simultaneously is generating feelings of lack of trust and 'insecurity' in the minds of today's youth of India.*

**Key Words:** *Cyber Space, Social Networking Sites, Risk Society, Online self, Reflexivity*

## INTRODUCTION

***“Internet technology and renewable energies are beginning to merge to create a new infrastructure for a Third Industrial Revolution (TIR) that will change the way power is distributed in the 21st century.”- (Rifkin: 2011)***

The above quotation is relevant to almost everyone residing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is primarily because our new era is influenced greatly by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). These ICTs have created an impact on the lives of all age groups, from the infants to the aged. However, there is one group that is most affected by ICTs- it is the *youth*. As a matter of fact, the youth has always been under the microscope and of external concern to the

adults, social researchers as well as the state. Various kinds of fears and anxieties have constantly shaped the 'youth question' and influenced 'what is to be done about the youth'. In the present society, digital media and online communication have become pervasive in the lives of youth. Apart from the old forms of media like television, the 'new' forms like: the Internet and modern gadgets like cellular phones are fixtures of the youth culture today.

Notwithstanding the enormous diversity in terms of living environments, an unprecedented as well as unifying media culture has developed that challenges and often surpasses the traditional forms of socialization like: family and school. This complex cultural situation, where the youth in the contemporary era is trying to find direction in their lives or simply to survive, to improve their living conditions and to develop their identities, has been given various names. Some call it the '*The information Society*' or '*The Information Age*'. Apart from this, labels or terms like: '*post-industrial*', '*virtual society*' and '*cyber society*' are also used. The idea behind using all such terms is that ICTs are now playing a very significant and central role in the lives of the youth as well of the society at large, across the world.

By the early 1990s, a "*Third Industrial Revolution*" (Rifkin: 2011) was making its way, which transformed and affected not only the realm of social relations but also ushered the way for a "*distributed capitalism*" and "lateral power". The pioneer in this field, Jeremy Rifkin, pointed out that the outreach of this new revolution- it would alter the "*traditional, hierarchical organization of economic and political power and give way to lateral power organized nodally across society.*" (Rifkin: 2011). It was becoming evident that the future was not just confined to the personal computers (PCs), but rather to a global system of interconnected computers-called the *Internet*. Now, the Internet has taken over almost every sphere of our lives. In fact, 'cyberspace' now represents the new medium of communication, which is fast outmoding or so as to say, replacing the more traditional methods of communication. For instance, now-a-days, we often send e-mails instead of paper letters or leave electronic messages on bulletin boards rather than pinning slips of card to wooden notice boards and with time we are able to read texts online in e-journals rather than on good old-fashioned wood pulp.

In this context, the popularity of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) is also equally significant and must be talked about. These are mediums which have come as a boon in today's fast moving world. They help people to connect to each other, reinforce old relations, maintain them and even foster new ones. However, there is a flip side to it too. On one hand, the cyberspace is actively fostering new forms of spatial (or electronic) relationships that either enhance or supplement the existing face-to-face interactions and relations. On the other hand, this is not to gainsay that it is also creating various kinds of anxieties and insecurities in the minds of the youth. This is to say, since individuals are unaware of the identity of one another in the virtual world, they face "*risk*" of falling into 'traps' by cyber fraudsters or stalkers and hence remain alert regarding the information they share. It is in this light, that the paper has been written with the objective to shed light on the dual or 'janus-faced' nature of the cyberspace, specifically

speaking the SNSs. I shall talk about how the benefits of SNSs, as perceived by the youth of today, and the ways in which they are negotiating with the security measures and privacy policies adopted by some of the popularly visited Social Networking Sites among the youth like: *Facebook (its Messengers), Google Plus and Instagram*; the problems and fears they face regarding 'insecurity' in the virtual world. In this paper I have attempted to understand and thus highlight the nature and reasons of insecurities and 'risk' that youths face while interaction the cyberspace. These aspects shall be discussed and analysed in the context of sociological concepts.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPTS OF CYBERSPACE AND SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES (SNSs)**

The term 'cyberspace' is, now, an oft used one in the present age of Internet or Information Society. But the point which we tend to miss is the meaning of this term. The concept of 'cyberspace' was introduced in English language by Canadian science fiction writer William Gibson, in 1982, in his novelette "Burning Chrome" and later popularized in his book "Neuromancer" (1984). According to him, "*Cyberspace is a consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts ... A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system*" (Bryant: 2001). Now-a-days, the term is widely used to refer to the network which most people use, known as the Internet. Interestingly, it is not just the computer that is 'creating this cyberspace'. Rather, in the words of David Clark "*it is the interconnection which creates cyberspace*"- an interconnection which affects the layers in it. There are four aspects of this concept which can help us to understand its meaning, significance and extent. Firstly, cyberspace describes the flow of digital data through the network of interconnected computers- it is at once not "real", because it is not possible to locate it spatially as tangible object. Secondly, cyberspace is the site of computer-mediated communication (CMC), in which online relationships and alternative forms of online identity were enacted, raising important questions about the social psychology of internet use, forms of life and interaction, and the relationship between the "real" and the virtual. Thirdly, cyberspace is not just a communication tool but a social destination, and is culturally significant in its own right. Fourthly, cyberspace can be seen as providing new opportunities to reshape society and culture through "hidden" identities, or it can be seen as borderless communication and culture. (Clark: ) Thus, in common parlance, the word cyberspace is understood as a space which is created by the electronic medium of communication, specifically Internet, where millions of people arrive for myriad purposes- for communication with either known or unknown faces, undertaking economic transactions, looking for information on a particular field, doing essential activities pertaining to everyday life like: shopping, paying bills and so on.

Social Networking Sites (SNSs) consume a major proportion in cyberspace today. These are defined as those sites which allow individuals to “(1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site” (Boyd and Ellison: 2007). Although there are various technical features in SNSs, yet they mainly rely on visible profiles, which show an articulated list of ‘friends’, who are also users of the system. SNSs have implemented a wide variety of technical features and their backbone consists of visible profiles that display an articulated list of “Friends” who are also users of the system. Profiles are unique pages where one can “type oneself into being” (Sundén, 2003). After joining an SNS, an individual is asked to fill out forms containing a series of questions. The profile is generated using the answers to these questions, which typically include descriptors such as age, location, interests, and an “about me” section. Most sites also encourage users to upload a profile picture. Some sites allow users to enhance their profiles by adding multimedia content or modifying their profile's look and feel.

## DICHOTOMY OF TRUST AND SECURITY IN CYBERSPACE (SNSs)

There are certain forms of risks and insecurities that the youth face in the cyberspace, which have been discussed below:

- (a) *Violation of privacy*: Daniel Solve defines *privacy* as being a personal bubble that allows freedom and protects individuals from the “intrusiveness of others”; and that a society without privacy protection would be marked by suffocation and it might not be a place where individuals would intend to live (Frazer and Dutta: 2009). As we know that the various online sites are constructed for users to share information, hence by disclosing information into these public arenas, people risk bursting out their personal bubble and violating their privacy. The cyberspace, especially online sites (SNSs) has often been criticized for privacy violation. Authors argue that users are not innocent bystanders, but rather active participants in privacy violations against one another. From the moment the users begin to create their identity-image, through to when they rapidly multiply their audience by accepting strangers as “friends”; they are setting up themselves for context collisions, which they experience as ‘privacy violation’ and hence *risk*. In fact, privacy leaks in SNS are often due to the actions of others. The friend lists in these sites end up in including acquaintances, each of which are less likely to know the user’s privacy expectations, thereby increasing their risk of a privacy leak.
- (b) *The dichotomy of trust*: Many of us worry about our identities being stolen by Internet hackers which are shared on various sites. Since the explosion of SNSs and other such sites, virtual reality has given a new meaning to the term “*facelift*”. Millions of online

social networkers have become expert in self-fabrication, distortion, misrepresentation and outright imposture. For example: shy introverts become sociable extroverts or weaklings can become buffs and so on. Various authors term this as identity *disaggregation*. The construction and maintenance of multiple identities on Internet is rapidly becoming norm and many youth are getting involved in it. Thus identities in the cyberspace are multifaceted, splintered, concocted, fluid and sometimes deceptive.

- (c) Another way by which Internet and social networks erodes the concept of trust and introduces risk is by the scams. The scammers have mainly targeted personal information that is contained in profiles. Once they manage to distort the users profile, sending and receiving of spam mails become common. Hence, victims often end up loosing money or some personal or sensitive information. (Fraser and Dutta: 2002; 61-64 )

David Sancho in his article "*Security guides to social networks*" writes about how users create fake profiles in various networking sites and how this creates insecurity amongst the minds of the other users. For instance he talks about instances of security flaws on *Facebook* that allowed anybody to access the "basic information" data of any user, no matter what their security settings were. This attack was released by casual users after *Facebook* ignored the users' warnings for a few days. No great knowledge was needed in this case to exploit a security weakness. Following such and other examples he also talks about certain precautions that can be taken to safeguard oneself in cyberspace. *Firstly*, one should only publish information that he/she is perfectly comfortable with, depending on what he/she wants to accomplish. *Secondly*, he/she should add only those people whom they trust, to his/her contact list. They should in this case, avoid clicking on unexpected links coming from unknown others and never fully trust any of those contacts.

## METHODOLOGY

A mixed approach methodology has been used in this study. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques have been incorporated to gather, analyze and interpret the data. The sample size was 30 youths in the age group of 18-28. Narratives as well as structured questionnaires have been used to substantiate the data in order to understand their views regarding insecurities and how they negotiate with it while interaction in the cyberspace. Since cyberspace is a broad arena and there are numerous Social Networking Sites, I have focused on three most popularly used and visited sites by the youth: Facebook, Instagram and Google Plus.

## FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Before moving on to the analysis and discussion of the study, let us have a look at the findings starting with the profile of the respondents, in terms of their sex, age and occupation.

**A. Sex Profile**

My study included both males and females. Their distribution is shown in the following Table 1:

Sex of the Respondent	Number of Respondents	Percentage
MALE	16	53.3%
FEMALE	14	46.6%
	Total= 30	

Table I

**A. Age Profile**

The age group of the youth chosen is 15-29 (according to National Youth Policy in India, 2014). The age-distribution is shown by the following table (Table II):

Age-Group	Number of Respondents	Percentage
15-18	6	20%
19-22	11	36.7%
23-26	9	30%
27-30	4	13.3%
	Total= 30	

Table II

**B. Occupational Profile**

My respondents belonged to three main categories: students, working professionals and home makers. Their distribution is shown in Table III:

Occupational Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage
STUDENT	16	53.3%
PROFESSIONALS	12	40%
HOMEMAKER	2	6.6%

Table III

**C. Frequency of Access in the SNSs**

The SNSs have become an essential part of our everyday life and this is what the youth of our society also feels. In the present times marked by rapid change and fluidity, the youth log into Facebook and Instagram everyday at a very frequent rate. About 70% visit every two or

three hours daily to see the latest updates and check out events happening around them. However, I found that around 28% of them log in about four to five a day and only about 2% visit about just twice or thrice a day. This is because either they are extremely busy with their job pressure which act a deterrent to spend more time in the virtual world, or they have realized their excess indulgence in not doing some 'constructive work' and hence found no use in spending so much time among their 'virtual circle of friends'.

With regard to the comparative use of SNSs, it was found most users (about 85%) were accessing Facebook at greater rate than Instagram and Google Plus (G+). This was because of the user friendly nature of the former over the latter.

#### **D. Awareness and feeling of security measures in the sites**

All the respondents are aware of the security or privacy settings in the social networking sites which they use. Everyone use those settings to keep their information safe and protected. But availing these measures was not enough to satisfy their anxiety or sense of 'risk' regarding theft of information or photographs and being misused. Thus, most of the respondents believed that security measures or privacy policies are not adequate to safeguard the personal or private information that they share in SNSs, especially the ones used popularly like: Facebook and Instagram. However, some believed that they were more or less safe. Others differed because they could not say much. They were uncertain of the guarantee ensured by the SNSs. Their responses, with regard to their perceived sense of 'security' or 'insecurity', has been graphically presented in figure 1 below:

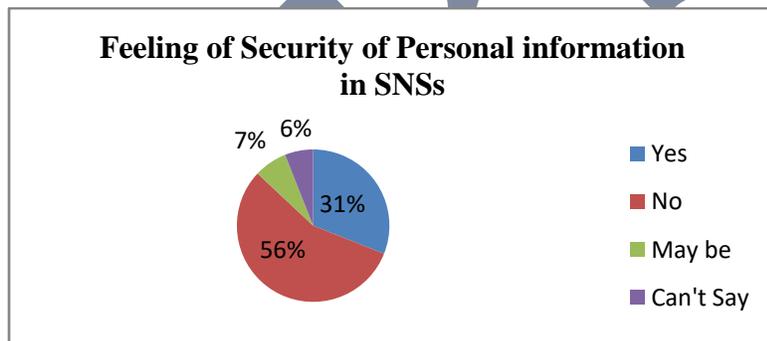


Fig 1

#### **E. Personal experience of security breach in SNSs**

Social networking sites are widely accessed by the youth of today and surprisingly, my study yielded, that quite a few of them have experienced unfavourable situations while interaction in cyberspace. However, there were some who personally were victims of hacking of or abuse of personal information; while there were some who did not face it personally but have

seen close people around them falling prey to ill intentions of ‘unknown faces’ in the virtual world. These included: creation of fake profiles, hacking of password and sending sexual requests to ‘known people’ in these networking sites, posting unwanted ‘indecent photographs’, misuse of personal information shared and so on. The personal experience of people of security breach, in terms of their number and percentage, is shown in Table IV below:

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	13	43.3%
No	17	56.6%
	Total= 30	

Table IV

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Following the above section on findings, I come to the analysis and discussion which deals with the qualitative responses of people and the sociological analysis of the same. I have divided this section into certain sub-sections to make it more comprehensible.

### Purpose of joining Social Networking Sites

Everyone joined sites like *Facebook*, *Instagram* or *G-talk* for a primary purpose- *communication*. The various activities that members indulge are:

- (a) Catching up old friends and known people, with whom they are no longer in touch. Communication and interaction in SNSs help in maintaining ‘regular’ contact with them.
- (b) Keeping in touch with friends and relatives on a daily basis.
- (c) sharing and remembering special days and moments
- (d) updating or sharing events of daily lives with others,
- (e) Disseminating or sharing one’s own thoughts and expressions, photographs and hobbies. In fact, many individuals share their own writings. These writings are a manifestation of their thoughts and expressions and feelings. Hence, these networking sites have become a medium of sharing and expressing thoughts of oneself as well as of others.
- (f) Glancing at the photos of their near and dear ones and commenting
- (g) playing online games, during their free times
- (h) Access to news and information from online news pages regarding business, politics, sports, entertainment, leisure and so on, from all over the world.

### Nature of Interaction with others in SNSs

Most of the individuals (75% of all) did not prefer neither accepting strangers as ‘friends’ nor being ‘friends’ in networking sites like: *Facebook*, *Google Plus* or *Instagram*. Hence, most did not have unknown people as friends in these sites. This is primarily because, they were uncertain

of their identity and felt that sharing their personal photographs and information with such people could invite problems like: misuse of data or being trapped with a 'wrong person'. Hence, they prefer keeping a safe distance from these strangers. However there are people, about 25% of the respondents, who do accept unknown faces as 'friends'. The reasons provided by them are myriad. Some, though only a few in this category (about 10%), do so to make new friends as it gives them the opportunity to know new people, thus giving them 'thrill'. However, in such attitudes an age difference was noted. Those who accepted strangers as 'friends' for their reasons, were mainly in the age-group of 15-20; while, those who belonged to the age of above 24, never entertained and intended to make new friends in this virtual space, rather they preferred meeting new people face to face. Others accept 'new friends' because of their personal reasons like: increasing number of views and thus disseminate their personally created pages catering to various needs like: photography, cooking, travelling and so on.

### **Security of personal information in the cyberspace**

Regarding uploading and sharing of personal information, updates and photographs in SNSs, most of my respondents (about 90% of all) have said that they do upload and share personal information very frequently, probably every two or three days, but keep them locked using the 'Privacy Settings' options. Amongst them, there are quite a few (60% of all) who selected some few friends with whom they want to share all their pictures or information. In such cases, especially in Facebook, they use the "custom" of the privacy settings in Facebook and hide the pictures from those friends 'who are not close' (yet have been included in the "friend list") and thus "restrict" or limit the photos and other things a close knit of few ones. In case of *Instagram* and *Google Plus* also, most prefer to keep their accounts 'private' so that only their close circle of known people can see the images that they share. However, 10% of respondents share personal photographs seldom in SNSs, either they are not so keen to share their photographs with everyone in the virtual space; or, they feel insecure in doing so.

A common expression that was noted among all the respondents was a persistent feeling of anxiety or fear of theft of personal information or images by hackers or stalkers for ill purposes. Most of the respondents reported that irrespective of the online social networking site that they are accessing, they always suffer from this unexplainable fear or insecurity. Surprisingly, they reported that this increases day by day in the minds of the users of SNSs because of frequent incidents, reported in the news, of victims of 'morphed pictures' or misuse of personal information in various ways. In this regard, some my respondents shared their personal experiences as to how their accounts were hacked in sites like; *Facebook* and *Instagram* and inappropriate photographs and requests were sent to her close circle of people which actually did tarnish their self images for quite sometime. Some were even sending requests to 'follow', forcefully in *Instagram*, commented on personal photographs and updates which outraged their modesty. In *Google plus*, such instances of security breach was comparatively less, they reported. From this, a marked contradiction in the mind set of the users can be noted. On one

hand, the users of these sites share their life events with others in the virtual space, while they are also constantly aware of the consequences thus suffering from anxiety.

### **Interpretation and theoretical understanding**

From the above sections, certain sociological comments and analysis can be made.

- A basic consensus, noted, among all the respondents is that all believe, social networking sites today stand as an essential part of our everyday life. They are an important medium for maintaining contact and sustaining relationships in the present era. Since people often have to stay far away from one another for official purposes or other such reasons, these sites help them to stay in touch with their near and dear ones. Such connections were unthinkable few years earlier. This leads to the conclusion that the SNSs have tremendously served as a boon for people to remain connected with their family and close ones overcoming the hurdles of time and space. From this, it can be said that cyberspace plays a positive function in our society by bringing in integration and cohesion. They help individuals and families to stay in touch with one another, irrespective of their location, thus making life easier. It also reinforces old bonds, even fosters new ones, and makes them stronger due to their 'regular contact' in the virtual world.
- The modern world we live in today, in the words of Anthony Giddens, is indeed a juggernaut, a "*runaway engine of power*" (Ritzer: 1988). The impact of Internet technology has been such that it has transformed human interaction and interrelationships. The cyber space, a major part of which constitutes social networking sites, has effectively broken down barriers of time and space. As a result, relationships with the ones who are physically absent and increasingly distant have become possible. Moreover, with the help of online communication, social relations from the local contexts of interaction are now 'lifted out' and they are restructured across indefinite spans of time and space. Therefore, life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is "*disembedded*" (Ritzer: 1988). However it is not just the diminishing significance of time and space, rather individual identities and life is also highly fluid today. The cyber space, and its users, is "reflexive". New users join and give it a new shape, add new dimensions. The individuals in it take on different 'images' in different situations and hence is extremely fluid. Therefore, we find that the self, here 'online self', is continuously reformed and distorted in varying contexts. Also, our accounts in social networking sites are loaded with personal information, photographs depicting various moments of our lives. Passwords and 'privacy settings' are not reliable to guarantee 'privacy' of our information, because technical knowledge will help to get access to it. Everytime we log in to these sites, we are situating ourselves in this vast virtual world where we are unaware of each other's physicalities. What is known to us is only an 'image' and that helps us to identify others. It is this phenomenon of the modern world that is posing a problem for the individuals,

who are traversing the cyber space almost everyday and at every time, by generating a feeling of insecurity or fear of the ‘unknown’ or what we call the lack of “trust”. According to Giddens, trust is the *“confidence in the reliability of a person or system, regarding a given set of outcomes or events, where that confidence expresses a faith in the probity or love of another, or in the correctness of abstract principles (technical knowledge)”* (Giddens: 1990). Simply speaking, trust is like a ‘protective cocoon’ which guards the self in its dealings with everyday reality. Trust, as a concept, can be understood in relation to absence in time and space. In the present days, trust at an individual level is decreasing and one of the reasons is the lack of information and this is being caused by technology. If the activities or physicalities of people would be visible and thought processes would be apparent then there would not arise the feeling of lack of trust.

- The *“disembedded”* character of modern life raises various issues. While the disembedding mechanisms have provided us with security in various areas they have also created a distinctive “risk profile”. The modern age where we are living today is marked by a *“risk culture”* (Giddens: 1991). Technically speaking, risk society is a kind of society that systematically produces, defines and distributes *“techo-scientifically produced risks”* (Beck: 1992). Thus, the risk society is not a revolutionary society but rather it is a *“catastrophic society”* (Beck: 1992). Ulrich Beck, the propounder of the concept goes on to argue that, in the present era, science and technology is increasingly merging and creating risks, both environmental as well social. Internet, especially social networking sites, enable the youth to become free from structural constraints of real or everyday life can reflexively create and portray various selves in the cyberspace. In this ‘world’, newly formed relationships and social networks are chosen individually and are becoming reflexive, which means that they are to be established, maintained and constantly renewed by individuals. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, relationships are no longer dependent upon physical proximity. In other words, *“the reflexive conduct of life, the planning of one’s own biography and social relations, gives rise to new inequality, the inequality of dealing with insecurity and reflexivity”* (Ritzer: 1988). Thus, the virtual world acts as a camouflage to their everyday lives. This is creating an imminent sense of anxiety and fear of the unknown or ‘stranger’ in the minds and psychology of the individual.

From all the above, we arrive at a common question that- if they know it then why are people still insisting on divulging personal information? This is because, people have social reasons to participate in such sites and these social motivations explain why users value them notwithstanding its well-known privacy risks and why they systematically underestimate those risks. As a matter of fact, the strong motivating forces that drive people to Internet are the social factors of identity, relationship and community. As each

of these factors has shown- there are deep-seated social urges that go to the very core of human desires. The price they pay for this is to risk their privacy, yet this seems a small price that many users are willing to pay. The paradox of the cyberspace is that the same mechanisms that help it to create new social contexts also help it juxtapose on them. It offers social differentiation but delivers convergence-which users experience as violation of privacy and creating risks in their minds. Thus feelings of insecurity develop among the users of the Internet (Frazer and Dutta: 2009).

- The above discussions lead us to concept and idea about ‘online self’ and the way it acts as a source of insecurity in the minds of its users. Interactions in networking sites denote an interesting feature. Meaning and the form of interaction are symbiotically ‘wed’ in the process of communication. In this process, a sense of self is constructed, maintained and transformed. Hence, any investigation of ‘self’ necessitates the examination of both meaning and form and this is particularly the case for online self, because it is contextually based within the structure of computer-mediated interaction. Although online selves emerge with the same processes by which any self emerges, alterations in the means by which people interact will subtly, yet powerfully, transform the boundaries and nature of self, social world and the self-social world relationships. In “*No sense of place*”, Joshua Meyrowitz argues that the electronic media alters the significance of time, space and physical barriers to human interaction and by the dislocation of significance of time, space and physical barriers to human interaction, online environments are transformed into new social situations that are simultaneously a medium and environment in and of itself (Douglass and Waskul: 1997). From this process, emerge a unique form of social interaction situated in cyberspace and this form of interaction transforms once distinct social spheres into new social environments with new patterns of social action, feeling and belief.
- Technological transformation has resulted in radical shifts in our exposure and relationships with others, and significantly altered everyday experiences of self and social world. As a result, there is a state of “social saturation” in which technologies make it possible to sustain relationships with an ever-expanding range of diverse other persons. Waskul and Douglass in their article “*Cyberself: The Emergence of Self in Online Chat*” argue that the technologies of social saturation are a means of social interaction that entail an ever-increasing possibility of developing a “*populated self*”, or the acquisition of multiple potentials for being. They further argue that the electronic media presents contrasting and conflicting images “*in a juxtaposed manner that blurs the modern sensibility that has traditionally kept them apart*”. The electronic media allows us to view the public activities privately and vice-versa, develop intimate relationships, perceive real events through an unreal medium and perceive unreal events as if they are ‘real’. This contradictory nature reveals a *hyperreal*<sup>1</sup> dimension of electronic communication.

## CONCLUSION

The fast moving world of today has made it difficult for regular face-to-face interaction with everyone. We often loose contact with people over a period of time. The Internet, or the cyberspace, has eased the life of many. Here the SNSs have come as a boon which have reinforced old relationships and simultaneously helped in forging new ones as well. However, this technology has another side to it too which is often overlooked by the users. Online interaction entails various elements. 'Dislocation' and 'disembodiment' are marked features of online interaction. They allow the emergence of several variable elements. Firstly, the dislocated nature of online self makes it highly fluid. This multiple and simultaneous form of interaction is reflected in the fluidity of online chat associations. Secondly, online interaction is a potentially anonymous form of interaction. Often participants, can and do, modify their online self to meet the 'demand' of the situation. Thus, variable identities of an individual are possible in the cyberspace. This uncertainty of the 'other' generates feelings of risk and insecurity in the minds of the youth. Although the youth spend a lot of time in the virtual world, they experience feelings of insecurity or lack of trust with regard to stalkers or fraudsters or theft of personal data.

In the conclusion, it is essential to talk about some of the steps that can be used or taken in SNSs to avoid becoming one of the victims of online hackers or stalkers.

1. **Being Skeptical**- The point of interaction in SNSs is to find people who share our interests and establish a network of friends, but we shouldn't let down our defenses too easily. Friends, in the virtual world, must be chosen with caution.
2. **Being Diligent**- Knowing that the potential exists for scam artists or sexual predators to be lurking about, it is essential to keep an eye on our profile and being diligent about who we allow to connect with our profile.
3. **Reporting Suspicious Behavior**- If there is a reason to believe that someone is a sexual predator or scam artist, then it should be immediately reported to the site.
4. **Monitoring**- keeping passwords under check and changing them from time to time. Monitoring the privacy settings of one's profile is also essential to avoid infiltration of any kind. Moreover, keeping an eye on the activities or posts of fellow friends because that can give an idea about the habits, outlook and attitudes of others. Also, monitoring activities of children in facebook is essential in present times as they are often easy victims of online abuse in many forms. (Bradley: 2015)

There are various dimensions of the Internet technology to be looked into. On one hand, it is this technological advancement that has made various activities of life and knowing about each other in the cyberspace by just a click of the mouse; yet on the other hand it cannot be

overruled that it is the same technology that has created 'fear' and 'apprehension' and has also brought about misfortune on its user.

## NOTES

Hyperreal<sup>1</sup>- a concept formulated by post-modern theorist Jean Baudrillard. It refers to a reality which is created or simulated from models, or derived from references to models.

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