The New Media Usage, Parental Authority and Family Communication of the New Media Practitioner Agency

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Abstract

This study aims to characterize the 'new media practitioner student agency' in universities located in the NCR region, as shaped by the pervasive use of mobile and internet technologies. It further seeks to examine the resultant communication patterns within their families. A total of 300 students were surveyed using a structured schedule designed to elicit both qualitative and quantitative responses. The data largely supports a 'soft determinism' stance, which better encapsulates the nuanced agency wherein lifestyle choices and reflexive self-awareness simultaneously drive and are shaped by media use. The study concludes that, although direct causal relationships are elusive, there exists a broad correlation between the evolution of the agency influenced by new media practices, and the shifting contours of familial communication.

Keywords: Digital Media, Technology, New Media Practitioners, Family, Communication, Agency.

Introduction

New media technology has undeniably streamlined both personal and professional domains, offering seemingly limitless possibilities in daily life. The scope of "everyday life" includes familial relationships, routines, cultural practices, and spaces that individuals utilize to interpret their world. It is the site where meanings and practices surrounding new media are negotiated. As Lister et al. (2003) suggest, new media can transform the spatio-temporal dynamics, limitations, and power structures inherent in daily life. Although smartphones have revolutionized areas such as entertainment, work, and communication, they have also introduced several dysfunctions: destabilization of parent-child relationships, widening generational gaps, and an erosion of traditional social values (Sumati & Gambhir, 2014).

The concept of 'agency' has gained traction in both social sciences and communication studies. It emphasizes the role of the actor, or agent, in shaping behaviors and outcomes in social interactions. Agency is defined as the degree of intentional action attributed to the self. It becomes evident whenever individuals deliberate or act.

This research examines how new media practitioner students in the NCR region influence and are influenced by familial communication structures. Drawing from Parsons' (1937) actor model, the study regards these students as agents capable of generating meaningful communication within the family context. Giddens' (1984) structuration theory places agency as a central tenet of human existence, echoed by scholars such as Waters (1994), Craib (1992), Jenkins (2008), Bandura (2006), and Harre (1984), all of whom emphasize the transformative capacity of human agency.

This investigation focuses on the interactional patterns between student agents and their familial structures. The data aims to outline a composite picture of student agency, shaped by both traditional and digital modes of socialization. These dual channels operate concurrently and inform behavior and communication strategies.

Research Method

This exploratory study is based on a self-administered survey of 300 university students in Delhi NCR who are identified as new media users or practitioners. The survey instrument collected data on the socio-psychological attributes of these amateur users to understand their lifestyle patterns and reflexive self-image in both real and digital domains. A complementary set of questions explored family communication patterns, particularly in the context of prolonged smartphone usage. The theoretical lens includes works on

agency-structure dynamics by Giddens, McLuhan, and Williams, among others. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study gathered both qualitative and quantitative data for comprehensive analysis.

Objective of the Study

To explore the relationship between new media consumption, parental authority, and family communication patterns among new media practitioner-students, in the context of their media-induced agency.

Key Terms

The Agency

The term 'agency' is often used interchangeably with actor, action, or agent. While some scholars like Latour (1993) extend the concept to include non-human entities such as machines and diseases, this study focuses exclusively on human agency. Human agency reflects a 'mental script' and a 'reflexive self,' both shaped by life experiences in the real and digital worlds.

Anthony Giddens (1984), a prominent British social theorist, asserts that society is both the product and the outcome of human actions. Contrary to structuralist traditions, Giddens posits that structure and agency are mutually constitutive. Agency, for him, encompasses the ability to act with intention and to influence one's social environment. He emphasizes that while individuals can act purposefully, social structures often exist beyond their control, leading to unintended consequences.

The Family Context

Families, particularly in the NCR region, represent a cultural amalgam: they absorb modern influences through urbanization and media exposure, yet retain elements of traditional Indian familial structures. Predominantly shaped by Hindu values, these families emphasize hierarchy, customs, and responsibilities. However, democratization, nuclearization, and rising individualism are altering the family environment. The infusion of new media technologies has introduced elements of Westernization, impacting communication within families through the agency redefined by new media use.

New Media

New media, emerging from the 'second media age' (Post 1980s), is characterized by its reliance on internet and virtual technologies. The term is often used interchangeably with digital media and is intrinsically linked to technological advancement. Freedman (2006) highlights its defining attributes: interactivity, non-linearity, virtuality, digitality, space-time compression, asynchronicity, and convergence.

New Media Consumption, Parental Authority and Communication Patterns

Data were gathered from 300 university students in the NCR region and classified accordingly. The subsequent analysis is presented below.

New Media Consumption

The below table assess the total daily average usage of gadgets by the respondents.

Table 1: Daily Average Usage Duration of New Media Gadgets by the Respondents

	Duration	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Upto one hour	25	8.3	8.3	8.3
	1- 2 hours	102	34.0	34.0	42.3
	2-3 hours	43	14.4	14.4	56.7
	More than 3 hours	130	43.3	43.3	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Source: Investigator's own survey

The data reveal that 43% of respondents engage with digital gadgets for more than three hours daily, while another 48% use them between one and three hours. Based on this, users were categorized into 'Light Users' (up to three hours) and 'Heavy Users' (over three hours). The

prevalence of heavy users indicates deep immersion in digital environments. Jenkins (2006, 2007) describes this as 'super saturation'—a state of information overload that reduces users' engagement in real-world activities, including familial conversations.

Acknowledgement of Parental Authority

It is pertinent to examine whom the respondents perceive as the most influential figures in their lives. Traditionally, parents are regarded as primary role players—a notion deeply embedded in classical texts, popular cinema, and literary narratives. This perception is further reinforced by cultural discourses that emphasize filial duty and gratitude toward parents, who are often portrayed as making profound sacrifices for the well-being of their children.

Table 2: Biggest Contributor in the Lives of the Respondents

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	God	26	8.7	8.7	8.7
	Your own Self	87	29.0	29.0	37.7
	Technology	26	8.7	8.7	46.3
	Parents	155	51.7	51.7	98.0
	Others	6	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Source: Investigator's own survey

More than half of the respondents believe that parents play the biggest role in their lives, reflecting a continued, albeit moderated, acceptance of parental authority.. So, although the agency is conscious and owns a free will to act, it is constrained by the structure in some manner. A significant minority (29%) prioritize their own agency. The minimal emphasis on religious or spiritual figures (8.7%) suggests a pragmatic and self-oriented worldview among respondents.

Preference for non-parents over Parents, in day-to-day Conversations

The table below is intended to determine with whom the respondents feel most inclined to engage in routine, everyday conversations. This data also serves as an indicator of the general level of trust and emotional comfort the respondents associate with various interlocutors, using parents as the principal frame of reference.

Table 3: Preference of the Respondents with regard to Day-to-day Conversations

	Preference	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Parents	90	30.0	30.0	30.0
	Friends	134	44.7	44.7	74.7
	Brother/Sisters	37	12.3	12.3	87.0
	Relatives	1	.3	.3	87.3
	Don't discuss with anybody	38	12.7	12.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Source: Investigator's own survey

A notable 44.7% of respondents prefer speaking with friends, while only 30% engage primarily with their parents. This divergence may reflect a generational mismatch, discomfort with hierarchical authority, or a quest for emotional intimacy outside familial structures.

Reduced Communication with Parents

The table seeks to determine whether respondents perceive a decline in their communication with parents since they began using smartphones. Parents constitute a vital component of the communication process in their children's lives, and the maintenance of familial ties and shared time is a foundational value for sustaining functional relationships. However, when this dimension is challenged by factors such as media displacement, it can significantly impact interpersonal communication within the household.

Table 4: Respondents' Communication with Parents since they started using Smartphone

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes, communication has gone down	123	41.0	41.0	41.0
	No, communication hasn't gone down	177	59.0	59.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Source: Investigator's own survey

While 59% of students do not report a decline in communication, 41% acknowledge reduced interaction with parents. This aligns with prior research indicating that digital media may displace traditional family interactions (Viola GjylbeGaj & Hussain Bedi, 2019). According to findings from a research report by the Cologne Institute for Economic Research, "Mobile phones have changed the ways in which we maintain our relationships with family, spouses, and close friends. The multiple communication features […] available at our fingertips make us less responsive to the immediate environment"—in this context, the family.

Friction in Communication with Parents

The table below aims to evaluate the respondents' reactions and behavioral tendencies when confronted by their parents regarding 'excessive' smartphone use. In relation to the impact of smartphones on adolescents, Deborah Brauser (2013) asserts that excessive smartphone use significantly heightens the risk of severe psychopathological issues. Muhammad Sarwar and Tariq Rahim Soomro (2013) highlight several adverse outcomes, including disrespectful behavior, privacy violations, cultural dissonance, and distractions in both workplace and educational settings. Similarly, Cris Rowan (2013) links the overuse of smartphones to a rise in physical, psychological, and behavioral disorders.

Table 5: Respondents' Arguments with Parents when Complained about 'Excessive Smartphone Use'?

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	30	10.0	10.0	10.0
	Sometimes	144	48.0	48.0	58.0
	Never	126	42.0	42.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Source: Investigator's own survey

Nearly 58% of respondents admit to arguing with their parents about smartphone use, suggesting a tension between individual autonomy and structural expectations. Scholars such as Rowan (2013) and Sarwar & Soomro (2013) link smartphone overuse to behavioral, psychological, and social dysfunctions.

Discussion

1. The data collected and analyzed to ascertain the nature of the new media agency emerging from heightened media engagement is discussed first. This agency operates at the intersection of new media technology, cultural conditioning, and social context—specifically, the family. The consequences of new media usage are experienced within families through the agent—the student—who serves as a conduit for such media interaction. These effects are embedded in social dynamics that significantly influence family communication. Unlike conventional media, which lacks interactivity, personalization, and privacy, new media introduces a novel paradigm. This novelty, often referred to as part of the 'second age media,' renders it far more influential in shaping cultural and social relations.

2. Media technology appears to shape user context and lifestyle, aligning with McLuhan's proposition that "the medium is the message." This is reflected in the empirical data, where the lifestyle and behavioral tendencies of student agents embody this assertion. As McLuhan further articulated, "the new technologies of the electronic age can alter the entire way people use their five senses, the way they react to things, and therefore, their entire lives and the entire society" (Wolfe, 1965). The evidence in this study confirms the embeddedness of technological logic in the formation of modern social practices among the youth.

3. The usage pattern of digital gadgets (see Table 1) reveals that a substantial number of students (130 out of 300) exhibit a high level of engagement with new media, indicating deep immersion. Jenkins (2006) refers to this condition as "super saturation," characterized by an incessant influx of information that overwhelms the user—what he terms a "media torrent." This hyper-engagement leads to an erosion of time and attention for other significant life domains, including interpersonal family communication. Consequently, such agents become less invested in real-world or familial relationships, instead gravitating towards digital spaces for gratification and identity formation.

4. Table 2 suggests that, despite media immersion, the student agency largely retains a family-centric orientation, possibly due to ingrained cultural and sustenance values. Over half of the respondents (52%, or 155 students) perceive parents as having the most significant influence in their lives. This affirms the role of parents as 'significant others' in the psychosocial development of these agents. Conversely, the relatively low attribution to God (only 8.7%) indicates a shift toward pragmatic and materialist worldviews, signaling a generational transition in belief systems.

5. As youth, these agents show a marked preference for informal, day-to-day conversations with peers rather than with parents. Although most respondents acknowledge the importance of parents (as indicated in Table 2), spontaneous communicative interactions are more frequently directed toward friends. Table 3 shows that 44.7% of the respondents prefer speaking with friends, while only 30% choose to converse with their parents. This implies that agents find greater ease and emotional safety in non-familial relationships, possibly to escape the perceived burden of structural authority. Factors such as parental availability, communication style (e.g., conversation versus conformity orientation), and the emotional climate at home likely mediate these preferences.

6. The volume of communication between student agents and their parents appears to have diminished, as evidenced in Table 4. About 41% of respondents acknowledged a decline in their communication with parents since they began using smartphones. While not a definitive causation, this correlation suggests that new media may disrupt traditional communication patterns. The reduction in interaction also serves as an indicator of diminished intimacy and bonding within familial structures, raising concerns about the long-term implications of digital displacement in core relational spaces.

7. The tension between agency and structure remains a fundamental theoretical concern. Giddens (1984) argues that while

individual actions stem from intentional choices, they are often constrained by structural forces that lie beyond personal control—leading to unintended consequences. This theoretical friction is borne out in the data, particularly Table 5, where nearly half of the respondents (144) admit to engaging in arguments with their parents over perceived overuse of smartphones. This points to an agency that is not only aware of its autonomy but also assertive and, at times, resistant to structural constraints. The agency here demonstrates a form of reflexivity that is conscious, defensive, and self-validating.

Conclusions

The new media practitioner agency exhibits variation in its degree of indulgence with digital media. Consequently, the characteristics of this agency—and by extension, the dynamics of its communication within the family—are also subject to corresponding variations, influenced by an array of contextual factors. The agency examined in this study is identified predominantly as a moderate to heavy user of new media, generally compliant with traditional authority structures, yet deeply enmeshed in compulsive patterns of media engagement. According to the agency's own acknowledgment, family communication has declined in 40% of the cases, primarily due to smartphone use. Additionally, the agency demonstrates a greater inclination toward engaging with peers rather than parents for interpersonal interactions. Ultimately, this agency is frequently engaged in disputes with parents over perceived excessive use of smartphones, reflecting an ongoing tension between digital autonomy and familial expectations.

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