

Impact of the Internet on Relationships: Perception of Male and Female Students of Pakistan

Zarqa S. Ali

Department of Film, Television, Media Studies
University of Auckland
New Zealand

Abstract

This study finds out the perception of male and female students regarding the role of the Internet in changing their relationships with the opposite sex, family members and anonymous people. When it was a matter of collective perception, students agreed that the Internet played a role in changing relationships with the opposite sex, family members and anonymous people; however, they offered no opinion about the role of the Internet in increasing romantic relationships. Pakistan is a conservative society, which may compel students to keep their opinion reserved regarding romantic relationships. The results of the study revealed that the Internet has brought family members closer to each other, enhancing the unity among them and strengthening the family ties which have increased the sense of responsibility among youth. The perception of males and females was not significantly different. However, the perception of users and non-users of the Internet was different. The non-users disagreed that the Internet had a role in changing relationships, while users indicated their agreement on its role in bringing change to youngsters' relationships.

Key Words: the Internet, Relationships, Gender, Family, Pakistani students

1. Introduction

Pakistani society is conventional where freedom of relationship between opposite sex is not appreciated. The young girls are not allowed to have a meeting with any of associates or male class mates because it is not acceptable by the society. The attraction between opposite sex is natural but is not tolerated by the culture. To ask this question to the respondents from developed countries may be less worth but in Pakistani culture it is a big question to ask from the youth who always cherish to enjoy the freedom to interact with others. Majority of the Pakistani girls are not confident to communicate with others but have no courage to talk to boys openly before others as a girl having communication with boys is branded as not a strong character and this always hinders girls to intermingle with boys. The culture in Pakistani universities is quite changed now and the reason may be the use of the Internet; so, this needs to be researched. For the last decade, the role of the Internet in youngsters' life has been steadily increasing its importance, especially for males as they have been found to be more inclined to use Internet for the social liberties that they may not enjoy much in Pakistan. Internet is predominantly used for communication purposes and helps to maintain existing relationships and it is fairly common to communicate with strangers online. (Gross 2004; Lenhart et al. 2005).

In this way, Internet provides a context and channel for people to meet with strangers for the first time, initiate meaningful and satisfying conversations, and build stable, long term relationships, similar to face-to-face interactions (Walther and Burgoon 1992). Many people use Internet regularly to meet someone special or to maintain personal relationships (Parks & Floyd, 1996; Ryan, 1995; Stafford, Kline, & Dimmick, 1999). Online relationships are regarded as normal experiences by some researchers like (Bonebrake 2002). Email and the Web have enhanced users' relationships with their family and friends and thus challenged the notion that the Internet contribute to isolations (PEW Internet and American Life Project, 2001). Change has become a dominant feature of Pakistani culture may be as a result of the usage of the Internet. Internet has played a role in developing human relations, transforming beliefs and values of Pakistani youth. It is hard to accurately predict the similar effects of the Internet on all of its users; some researchers have suggested that the Internet would prove to be a constant source of worry for parents who view the Internet as being responsible for changing attitudes and behaviour of their children. Such parents presume that the Internet will ruin their children's emotional, psychological and social life, and consequently, their involvement in the community may come to a halt (Kraut et al. 1998). The Internet has reduced face-to-face interpersonal communication as time spent on the Internet comes from time that used to be spent with friends, family and socializing outside the home (Nie and Erbring 2000; Turkle 1988); while other scholars believe that "Generation X" (those born in the age of the Internet) is more advanced than its predecessors and is actually the ambassador of change.

Online communication also facilitates some broadening of everyday network, sustaining connections with friends from abroad or distant relatives. According to Pornsakulvanich et al. (2008), users pleading for face-to-face communication also use online communication to share their feelings to develop closer online partnership for the sake of self-fulfilment. These scholars have strongly suggested that the Internet might enhance the scope of knowledge and relationships, broaden the canvas of social and political engagements and ties among youngsters (Bimber 1997; Jones 1995). However, some advocate that the Internet build improvised relationships, create isolation among members of the families, and increase the distance between users and the outside world (Stoll 1995). Parks and Floyd (1996) argue that two different versions of online relationships were presented by these two schools of thoughts. "One version is of relationships lost, while the other is of relationships liberated and found" (Parks and Floyd 1996). The social circle of youngsters has increased greatly by communicating through the Internet (Brignall and Valeyb 2005). The Internet users feel themselves a part of the global village by connecting themselves through new media. Universities played role in enhancing the diffusion of the Internet by realising the value and the potential use of the Internet for "online information searching and online communication" (Goldfarb 2006). Some studies stated improvement in relationships with friends (Freeman-Longo 2000; Lenhart et al. 2001b). However, online communication has both positive and negative aspects. (Valkenburg and Peter 2011) indicated that users take advantage of online anonymity, synchronicity and accessibility for their self-presentation and self-disclosure.

Youngsters' exhibition of self-unity and self-esteem help in their identity formation and psychosocial development. It enhances intimacy through online relationship formation and friendship. However, many chances of serious risks of cyber bullying and unwanted sexual solicitation during online communication cannot be ruled out. There has been voluminous discussion about the implications of the Internet for relationships. However, the research on the role of the Internet in changing relationships deserves to be replicated with other samples of the Internet users. The study will focus on Pakistani students. Since in many developing countries, the youth of today is the first generation which has experience of the Internet. It is transforming youngsters' responses, behaviours and lifestyles and many scholars proclaim that the Internet will even act as a catalyst for a broader change in their lives. The Internet is the most modern means of interpersonal communication, and has directly influenced relationships with family, friends and other. Some studies in the past have been conducted on the use of the Internet and its effect on relationship and friendship. The adoption of the Internet by youth is greater than their parents and they know more about the Internet than their parents do.

The Internet helped improving their relationships with their friends. The ease of communication over the Internet helps them keep in touch with a large group of people. (Lenhart et al. 2001a). "The use of the Internet is not restricted to one user in the family as the enthusiasm of the child who uses Internet heavily, influences other members of the family to get involved in the Internet use" (Kraut et al. 1996). Even the family decision making has been influenced by the Internet use (Belcha et al. 2005). Online relationships are outpacing the face-to-face relationships at home among the families (Kraut et al. 1996; Sleek 1998; Stoll 1995; Turkle 1988). Such theoretical approach elaborates that the use of the Internet expands, rather than displaces. It enhances the chances to contact peers that play a role in boosting self-esteem and well-being (Morgan and Cotten 2003; Valkenburg and Peter 2009). The Internet clearly has become a part of family life for many and has affected family relationships. Gonyea (2005), conducted an exploration of family time expenditure and investment related to computer use. There were changing patterns of family time with the ownership of computers particularly depending on gender and also the types and nature of displaced family time. The researchers also investigated joint and solitary activities at home with reference to computer and found that male and female use of computers differed in duration.

The study revealed that male spent more time in solitary activities than female. The Internet not only offered new ways of sending and receiving messages but also provided access to engage the users in common activities, sharing one's thoughts and feelings, or discussing ideas with one others (Lee et al. 2003). The Internet users find online forums and message boards a place to meet people like themselves and receive personal assistance (Robbins 2001). Robbins discussed the underrepresentation of young girls in the use of the Internet in social connectivity. Eight girls aged 12-14 years were interviewed; the personal websites of six were examined along with a review of postings on a message board for young girls. The data revealed different ways of developing social relations, personalized learning, and peer and parental support in confidence building. The researcher argued that emotional support of peer in the use of the Internet among girls was significant.

Robbins (2001) claimed that the Internet as an information and communication technology brought innovative breakthrough in the relationships and connectivity of girls. The socio-cultural exposure and sharing experiences of the girls made them collaborative in socializing. The online social interaction has multiple implications affecting human beings. (Selfhout et al. 2009) in their study explored that use of the Internet for communication predicted less depression among the youngsters who have low friendship quality and played a role in the well-being of the users. The Internet reduces personal influences and this impersonal communication is sometimes advantageous in facilitating communication that avoids normal interpersonal discourse (Walter 1996). Heavy Internet use as a proxy for social interaction was investigated by (Ofosu 2001). He conducted a comparison between Internet-dependent and non-Internet-dependent university students regarding their perception about social support focusing on the factors like self-esteem, shyness, loneliness, gender and level of dissociation.

The Internet dependents showed more perceived social support than non-Internet dependents. This revealed that the Internet dependents felt more inclined to use the Internet to search for the social support that they were lacking in their conventional face to face relationships with their family and friends. Ofosu (2001) noted that among females, fewer the Internet- dependents and more non-Internet dependents were found, while among male participants the situation was reversed. The majority of the participants asserted that their Internet-based social interactions were worse and less meaningful than their real life interactions however ten percent reported that their on-line interactions were better and more meaningful than their real life social interactions. Almost eighty five percent participants expressed that they preferred their off-line interactions to their Internet-based interactions. The researcher claimed that there was a strong association between Internet-dependence and dissociation. The respondents' lack of social support from friends and family in the real life was the factor of their dependence on the Internet where they expected perceived social support for compensation of the missing social support in their real life. Internet-dependents exhibited more shyness and were more conscious of self-esteem than non-Internet dependents. Internet dependents expressed significantly more social loneliness than family or romantic loneliness as compared to non-Internet dependents. The male participants were more intended to be Internet –dependent than female participants. The loneliness was categorically studied by (Hu 2007), who investigated the social use of the Internet and loneliness from both sides - social psychology and computer related communication.

The respondents reported higher level of mood loneliness among those with trait loneliness and chatted online than those who conversed face to face. The respondents gave more positive evaluation to face to face conversation than computer mediated chatting and also claimed that people emphasized social interaction either through time spent in computer mediated chatting or face to face communication and contended that the Internet use had influenced users' psychological wellbeing. The findings of the study showed that mood loneliness in face-to-face communication and computer mediated communication were marginally significantly different. For online users, the Internet communication is considered a means of keeping in touch with friends, a way to avoid face-to-face contact, a way of transmitting information, or a place to meet and talk with others. The Internet gives them a sense of freedom and control but the users can clearly distinguish between real life and virtual experiences (Markham 1998). Social identity, social interaction and relationship may be different on the Internet than in real life. Youth is developing online relationship at a fast pace due to greater anonymity, reduced importance of physical appearance and physical distance as “gating features” to relationship development, and one's control over the time and pace of interaction. It is generally considered that interacting online with unknown people is risky for youth. The findings of (Wolak et al. 2008) suggest that many youth interact online with unknown people with little risk. It is rule-breaking behavior, depression and social problems that may manifest during online interaction with unknown people. How the Internet affect social ties of Pakistani users remains to be explored.

2. Methodology

In a traditional society like Pakistan, where open and free mixing of boys and girls is not appreciated, their open friendship is considered a social taboo. The open opportunities to contact and communicate with opposite gender through the Internet have played some role in developing a friend. Despite the fact that CMC has become a common tool of communication in industrialized countries but there is a scarcity of research about how people use the Internet as a relational communication channel in different developing countries where this is a new medium of communication. The present study addresses the questions regarding the Internet and its impact on relationships. The first question concerns the perception of the Pakistani students about the role of the Internet in bringing change in relationships. The second question focuses to compare the perception of males and females about change brought by the Internet in youngsters' relationships.

The third question addresses the effect of period of usage of the Internet on the perception of the students about the relational role of the Internet.

Survey Distribution and collection

In the first stage, the questionnaires were sent to researchers, colleagues or other concerned persons in all the selected public sector universities. A survey package containing a paper version of the questionnaire and a cover letter was sent to the selected universities for all the sample of the study. The total numbers of sent-out questionnaires were 1000. The turnout of the filled questionnaires was 825 that means the questionnaire received were 82.5 percent. Researcher herself or individuals appointed by the researcher administered the questionnaires. Individuals to administer the questionnaire were appointed because it was not possible for the researcher to visit all the universities in seven cities due to distance involved between cities and time factors. Cities where individuals other than the researcher administered the questionnaire were Bahawalpur, Multan, Sargodha, Gujarat and Rawalpindi. In the universities of Lahore and Faisalabad, researcher herself administered the questionnaire. Individuals appointed to administer the questionnaire were selected on the basis of their qualification and research experience. Selected individuals were volunteers, having at least a Master’s degree and had already conducted at least one research study. Nonetheless, they were briefed by the researcher about how to administer the questionnaire. The permission was taken for the class teachers to administer the survey in the class rooms. Questionnaires were distributed to the participants. Written as well as verbal instructions were passed on to the participants and after clarifying queries (if any) participants were asked to mark their responses. The questionnaires had been filled by both male and female students. It took 5-10 minutes to fill the questionnaire. Cronbach’s Alpha of the scale was .868

What is the perception of university students about the role of the Internet in bringing change in youngsters’ life?

To answer this research question, the collective perception of the both male and female students about the role of the Internet in bringing change in youngsters’ life was examined. This change was explored in the areas of relationships

- Ho₁ There is no significant difference between the perception of male and female students about the role of the Internet in bringing change in relationships with opposite sex, family and anonymous people.
- Ho₂ There is no significant difference in the perception of the students with varying period of the Internet usage about its role in bringing change in relationships with opposite sex, family and anonymous people.

3. Results and Discussion

University students’ opinion was solicited to explore their perception about the role of the Internet in bringing change in relationships with opposite sex, members of family and anonymous people as a result of enhanced communication. A portion of questionnaire comprising 11 statements was specified in order to measure their perception about the role of the Internet in changing relationships.

Table 3.1: Mean Response Values and Standard Deviation of Students’ Perception about Change in Relationships with Opposite Sex, Family Member and Anonymous People due to the Internet

Statements	an	Std. Deviation
Make people meet and interact with others having similar interests	1	1.24
Improve ability to form new relationships	5	1.29
Reduced shyness to talk to opposite sex	0	1.27
Increase family unity and strength	7	1.31
Increase personal responsibility towards family	7	1.30
Increase communication with opposite sex	5	1.27
Improve friendship with opposite sex	4	1.29
Enhance the ability to understand opposite sex	4	1.19
Increase relationships with unknown people	1	1.27
Increase romantic relationships	0	1.26

Table 3.1 presents the mean response values for each of the statements (ranges from 3 to 3.41) and standard deviation examining students' perception about change in relationships with opposite sex, family members and anonymous people. Mean response value of the statement "Make people meet and interact with others having similar interests" is 3.41, which is the highest mean value in the scale of "Internet and Relationships". The result of Pew 2001 also speaks of youngsters' online meeting with the strangers on line. This shows that youth of the developing countries is equally using the Internet as it is being used by the youth from developed countries. So, the Internet is an equal opportunities provider (Lenhart et al. 2001b). However, most young people see little point in talking to strangers on the Internet, regarding unknown online contacts as 'dodgy' (Livingstone and Bober 2003). The lowest mean response value in this scale is about the statement "Internet increase romantic relationships" that is 3 (the value of MRV 3 indicates that students had no opinion on this statement). However, the respondents from other countries were freely expressing their opinion about their romantic relationships. (Lenhart et al. 2001). However, they did agree that the Internet had increased communication and friendship with opposite sex.

They were also of the opinion that the shyness to talk to opposite sex was reduced and they are more open to talk to opposite sex due to the use of the Internet. The study of Mckanne (2002) revealed that shy people like to interact online as 'gating features' like physical appearance and other apparent symptoms of shyness like blushing, which restrict shy people to develop social relationships, are not obvious in their online interaction. Henderson (2002) says that online interaction also provides ample time to shy people to think about their responses. As far as the relationships with family members was concerned, the Internet had brought family closer to each other that had enhanced the unity and strengthened the family ties that had increased the sense of responsibility among youth. It may help them in decision making on the basis of their ready contact for instant advice and sharing of information. The Internet use was positively correlated to contact the family and friends (Amichai-Hamburger and Hayat 2011).

The present study explains that students showed their agreement to the statements that the Internet had provided opportunity of meeting and interaction to its users with opposite sex, family members and anonymous people who came across during the use of the Internet. The respondents kept their opinion reserved regarding the role of the Internet in increasing romantic relationships. The reason may be that Pakistani society is not liberal that may force the youth not to give opinion when the matter is to express their opinion about romantic relationships. It may keep the students reluctant to express their opinion in this regard. Where in a study of developed country, the results revealed that men were more open to romantic relationships (Golub et al. 2007). Another study conducted by (Parks and Roberts 1998) in United States found that the most commonly reported types of relationships were simple friendship, close friendships and romances. The majority of relationships formed were with members of opposite sex. The results of Doctoral dissertation of (Robbins 2001) revealed that girls recognised the Internet as a way to reach out to friends and to others with similar interests. The Internet has enabled them to locate other people having similar interests.

The question of just how online environments or online methods of communication enhance social engagement and help to build social capital has been the focus of a range of recent studies. Those who better express their true self over the Internet were more likely than others to form online relationships and converted these friendships to face-to-face basis and these relations remained intact (McKenna et al. 2002b), the Internet is neither a utopia, liberating people to form a global egalitarian community nor a dystopia-producing armies of disembodied, lonely individuals. Like any form of communication, it is as helpful as harmful depends upon its users (Katz and Rice 2002). The relative anonymity experienced on the Internet and the psychological support strengthen communication efficiency, participation, relational behaviour and decision making (Woolger 2002). These all studies pointed out the apparent capacity of the Internet to enable or enhance social connection. (McKenna et al. 2002b) posits a view that the anonymity inherent in the Internet promotes connectedness on the part of individuals who for whatever reason might otherwise have problems with starting face-face relationships. The Internet permits people to communicate and express themselves in the real world in ways they might be incapable of, (Katz and Aakhus 2002). It enhances their level of social connection and their feelings of confidence. Similarly Internet activities indicate that fun seeking, sociability, and information seeking were significantly related to the emotional and informational dimension of social support (Leung & Lee 2005, p. 174).

Difference in Perception of Male and Female Students

Gender is a strong predictor of the Internet use (Kraut et al. 1996). In order to examine the difference in perception of male and female students about the role of the Internet in bringing change in youngsters' life, an independent sample t-test at the 0.05 significance level was employed to analyse the hypotheses dealing with this question. If participant in the study are randomly assigned to the group, or if the variables being studied is a subject

Internet and Relationships with Respect to Gender

To compare male and female students' perception towards the role of the Internet in bringing change in relationships with opposite sex, family members and anonymous people, an independent sample t-test was employed.

Table 3.2: An Independent Sample t-test for Male and Female Students' Perception about Change in Relationships with Opposite Sex, Family Members and Anonymous People due to the Internet

Gender	N	Mean	Mean difference	t	Sig.
Male	427	3.233	.0169	.298	.766
Female	431	3.216			

Summary of the independent sample t-test, as shown in Table 3.2, reveals that t-value for mean difference was not statistically significant. Hence, the null hypothesis stating that male and female students' perception had no significant difference about the role of the Internet in bringing change in relationships with opposite sex, family and anonymous people was accepted due to p value >0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that both male and female students' perception about the role of the Internet in bringing change in relationships with opposite sex, family members and anonymous people was similar. This result is similar to the study of (Golub et al. 2007) that also found that there were no significant difference between men and women as far as their online relationships are concerned. The results of the (Wang et al. 2010) study showed that both male and female respondents were more willing to initiate friendship with opposite sex those who have their online profile along with photo. It has been found that females prefer the use of the Internet for relationshipbuilding. However, the study of (Hupfer and Detlor 2007) showed that users, who like to develop connection with others, took greater advantage of the Internet to enhance their social connection. In this case, biological sex lagged behind other-orientation.

Pakistan girls are not allowed to move freely so the visual anonymity of the communicators and the lack of co-presence of the communication may add to the interaction possibilities, and for some this is the 'magic' of on-line relationships (Lea and Spears 1995). As the users are not in their personal appearance, it gives them better opportunities to share various aspects of themselves that they do not feel comfortable to disclose in ordinary face-to-face interaction (McKenna and Bargh 2000). Being a member of Pakistani culture, I believe it is very true to the Pakistani youth, the anonymity, limited value of physical appearance and physical distance as "gating features" (McKenna and Bargh 2000) in developing relationships convinced Pakistani youth to extend their relationships online. Since Pakistani girls are not very much free in establishing relationships with unknown and with the opposite sex, they might consider it safer to develop online relationships. (McKenna et al. 2002a) discovered that online relationships sustained for some years provided they were developed on expressing true self over the Internet. Male had more positive attitude towards online relationships and spent more time than female users. In cross cultural study of British and Chinese students, (Li and Kirkup 2007) also found males of both the countries were more likely to use email or chat rooms than use of the females of both the countries.

The positive effects of computers on individuals and society is equally believed by both the male and female students (Shashaani and Khalili 2001). Engaging students at Kuwait University in a study "Internet and Youth Subculture in Kuwait", it was found that the use of the Internet of youth was developing new kinds of communication across gender lines, which was affecting conventional social rituals and norms of the Kuwaiti society and bringing fresh autonomy for the youth in leading their lives. The results of (Hupfer and Detlor 2007) study related to differences in gender in the usage of the Internet proposed enhanced level of interest among females in applications of relationship-building implications when compared to males,

which is contrary to the present study. Papastergiou and Solomonidou (2005) studied differences in gender in the usage of the Internet among students of Greek high school. The data analysis revealed that there were insignificant differences of gender, which were reported regarding Internet activities of students, like chat, communication via e-mail or video-conferencing. These are the activities that are heavily used to build relationships. The usage of the Internet for socialisation was also found in a study conducted by Lee and Zhu, (2002). Though, girls disclose lesser numbers of their online friends as compared to boys, yet girls have demonstrated more intimacy for their online friends (Desjarlais and Willoughby 2010). Women's online posting (Colley and Maltby 2008) revealed that women developed new friends, renewed contacts with old friends or family members. Some women even admitted that they found their partner or spouse due to online interaction. These studies revealed that effect of online interaction was similar the lives of both men and women in making online relationships. In order to examine the difference in perception of students with varying period of the Internet usage about the role of the Internet in bringing change in youngsters' life, one way ANOVA was employed at 0.05 significance level.

Internet with respect to varying period of usage

To explore the relationship between the period of usage of the Internet and the change in perception among students about its role in youngsters' life, a univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied. There were seven groups ranging from 'non-users' to 'more than four year users of the Internet' – non-users, six-month users, one-year users, two-year users, three-year users, four-year users, more-than-four-year users - that were studied. When one way ANOVA was applied to consider results of this analysis, if very clear and significant result appeared for various periods of time, Post Hoc analysis would be also performed which would reveal that there were significant differences between six month users, one year users, two years users, three years users, four years users and more than four years users.

Internet and Relationship with Respect to Period of Usage

To explore the effect of period of usage ranging from 'non-usage' to 'more than four years' on the students' perception about the Internet's role in bringing change in relationships between opposite sex, family members and anonymous people, univariate analysis of variance was applied on the scale dealing with "Internet and Relationships".

Table 3.3: Analysis of Variance for change in relationships Based on the Internet' Usage Period

	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	6	9.851	15.285	.000
Within Groups	774	.644		

* $p < 0.05$.

Summary of univariate analysis of variance presented in Table 3.3 shows that the value of F was found to be significant at 0.05 level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis stating that there was no significant difference in the perception of the students with varying period of the Internet usage about its role in bringing change in relationship between opposite sex, family and anonymous people has been rejected. (Odacı and Kalkan 2010) in their study argued that heavy Internet users have established greater dating (romantic) relationships on the Internet as compared to other students. However, (Zhao 2006) found that the Internet users have higher contact with family and friends than to non-users. The present study also finds a difference in perception between users and non-users about impact of the Internet on relationship. However, it reveals that at least one group of students with respect to period of usage had different perception from others. To identify the significantly different groups, post hoc analysis was run. Table 3.4 summarizes the results of post hoc analysis.

Table 3.4: Summary of Post Hoc analysis for change in relationships

	No use	Six Months	One year	Two years	Three years	Four years	More than four years
No use	-	.7413*	.8189*	.9436*	.8867*	1.0244*	.9547*
Six Months	-	-	-	.2023*	-	.2831*	.2133*

Table 3.4 reveals that the perception of students of six groups, out of seven, who had been using the Internet ranging from 'six months' to 'more than four years' were significantly different from the seventh group of 'non users of Internet'.

Moreover, those who were using the Internet for two years and more had significantly different perception than those who were novice users i.e. using the Internet for six months or one year. It may infer from this finding that the use of the Internet brings change in the perception of the university students about the role of the Internet in effecting the relationships depending on the period of use of the Internet. It was also evident from mean response values of these seven groups which were 2.38, 3.12, 3.20, 3.33, 3.27, 3.40, and 3.38 respectively that describe non-users were disagreed whereas users were agreed on this aspect of the Internet. However, the study of (Chou and Hsiao 2000) also revealed that both the heavy users that had the addiction of the Internet and those who spent less time on the Internet had indicated that the Internet had positive impacts on their relationships with friends and class mates.

4. Conclusion

Some researchers have argued that the Internet socially isolates people and cuts off genuine social relationships. Online relationships are considered shallow and impersonal. "The face book users often claim having several hundred or more friends whereas in real terms the number of face book friends does not reflect the quality of relationships" (Amichai-Hamburger and Hayat 2009). Theorists who subscribe to "the social presence theory" argue that online relationships are more impersonal and less intimate than face-to-face relationships. The social presence theory (Rice & Love, 1987) contends that "social presence" is the feeling that one has that other person is involved in a communication process. According to this theory, as social presence declines communication becomes more impersonal. In the case of Pakistan, as girls are not allowed to talk to the opposite sex so this impersonal communication is playing a role to trigger the communication with others and thus developing contacts with even unknown people because youth has less social and cultural fear of having contacts with unknowns and of people of opposite sex. Where youth have not tacit approval of the society openly and freely mixing of boys and girls, the Internet has opened the door of opportunities to avail. The access of the Internet has increased in the metropolitan cities, at least for students it has become easier to find reasons to get computer. As the use of computer has increased in Pakistani Universities and parents have to give permission to the children to get computer increasing use of the Internet.

The Internet provides an exceptional environment to experience and learn about relationship that make the users to feel empowered (Whitty 2008). Such can be the matter of Pakistani women. However, trust, honesty and commitment are just as important in online relationships as in traditional relationships (Whitty & Gavin, 2001). Both male and female students of Pakistani universities agreed that the Internet increased communication with the opposite sex which has improved their confidence and feel more comfortable to talk to the opposite sex, and it has enhanced understanding and friendship between opposite sexes. No opinion was given by both male and female students regarding the role of the Internet in increasing romantic relationships. Students were in agreement that the Internet increased family unity and strength and made them more responsible. It also improved the feeling of safety and security in a family. To some extent, they agreed that the Internet played a role in developing new relationships even with unknown people. Among all the statements regarding the change brought by the Internet in relationships, the respondents showed highest agreement with the role of the Internet making people meet and interact with others having similar interests.

The perception of male and female students regarding the role of the Internet in bringing change in relationships with opposite sex, family members and anonymous people was not significantly different, which means that both male and female students had similar perception and agreed that the Internet brought change in relationships. The gender gap between men and women in the use of the Internet and email is going to be diminished and it may have the equal impact on the perception of both male and female users as the use of the Internet affects relationships. The role of the Internet in bringing change in the perception of the university students affecting the relationships with opposite sex, family members and anonymous people, depended on the period of the usage of the Internet as the perception of users and non-users were different. Moreover, those who had been using the Internet for two years and more, had significantly different perception than those who had been novice users i.e. using the Internet for six months and one year. The non-users disagreed that the Internet brought change in relationships while users showed their agreement on the role of the Internet in bringing change in youngsters' life.

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