Acceptable and Unacceptable Behaviour on Social Networking Sites: A Study of the Behavioural Norms of Youth on Facebook

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Abstract: SNS offer many benefits, especially for the youth who are striving to establish their identity as young adults. The youth are the most active users of SNS but are also the biggest perpetrators of behaviour that would not be tolerated offline. Although differences between these two environments have been identified, the link between the underlying behavioural norms and what is regarded as acceptable and unacceptable behaviour online has not been comprehensively explored – even less so how that behaviour is determined. Given the gap in the knowledge and the prevalence of use by the youth, the objectives of this research were to determine: (1) what behaviour is regarded as acceptable/unacceptable on SNS, (2) how that is determined, and (3) whether there are differences between online behavioural norms and those that apply to offline behaviour. Guided by social cognitive theory, qualitative interviews were conducted with 16 youth aged 18-20 years who had Facebook accounts.

Findings indicate there is greater clarity on what is unacceptable behaviour than what is acceptable. Personal behavioural norms appear to guide determination of unacceptable behaviour whereas the lead of others' indicates acceptable behaviour. Acceptable behaviour appears to be more audience dependent than unacceptable behaviour, and there sre strong indications of herding behaviour with regard to determination of acceptable norms.

The lack of clarity regarding acceptable online behavioural norms is distinctly different from the offline environment. The "protection" that the computer screen provides also contributes to the differences between offline and online behaviour. The distinction between types of friends that exists offline is emphasized online because users usually have one Facebook page that serves all audiences as opposed to encountering different groups separately as is the case offline. Online there is also the obligation to befriend people one normally would avoid offline.

Keywords/Phrases: Social networking sites; behavioural norms; youth; herding behaviour; mimetic theory; Facebook

1. Introduction

Social networking sites (SNS) offer many benefits, especially for the youth who are striving to establish their identity as young adults. Youth are the most active users of SNS, especially Facebook (McLaughlin & Vitak 2011), but also exhibit behaviours that would not be tolerated offline (Ahn, 2011). Although differences between these two environments have been identified, the link between the underlying behavioural norms, and what is regarded as acceptable and unacceptable behaviour online has not been comprehensively explored – even less so from the perspective of the youth.

Given the gap in the knowledge, and in answer to calls for further research into the role of social media and the youth (Ahn 2011; Steinfeld, Ellison & Lampe, 2008), the objectives of this research were to determine: (1) what behaviour on SNS (Facebook) is regarded by the youth as acceptable or unacceptable, (2) how that is determined, and (3) whether there are differences between online behavioural norms and those that apply to offline behaviour.

The following sections document the literature background to the study, the research method and findings, a discussion of the findings, and a conclusion.

2. Literature review

Boyd and Ellison (2007) define SNS as a web-based service that allows 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 display of one's friends differentiates SNS from other online media (boyd & Ellison 2007) and with Facebook, for instance, both the user and their friends can contribute to the

site (Steinfield et al. 2008). Facebook also offers the facility of creating different pages for different audiences.

Most people use SNS to contact new people; keep in touch with friends, and for general socializing (Brandtzaeg & Heim 2009). Social networking can increase social capacity by increasing the number of friends and depth of the relationships (Granovetter 1973).Implicit is the desire to build and maintain social capital - those benefits that come from strong relationships. This is particularly the case among the youth for whom SNS provide a place where they can develop their personal identity (Ahn 2011), and that is free from adult surveillance (Livingstone 2008). It is often seen as a place where they can develop their social identity reflexively and also develop confidence in that identity (Giddens, 1991) The feedback one receives from the SNS network determines how that identity develops (Ahn, 2011). SNS are furthermore seen as a place to experiment and take risks – the balance between opportunity and risk being viewed as self-actualization (Giddens, 1991), although what might be seen as opportunity-rich by young adults, might be perceived as risky by adults (Livingstone 2008).

SNS participation can thus have a significantly positive effect on self-esteem and psychological wellbeing (Valkenburg et al. 2006) but it can also result in detrimental behaviours such as bullying, especially amongst teenagers who are particularly sensitive to the opinions of their peers (Ahn, 2011). Additionally, apparent double standards regarding acceptable male and female behaviour seem to reinforce concerns about stereotyping (Bugeja in Walther, Van der heide & Kim, 2008).

1.1 SNS behaviour

SNS users perform two main tasks online: managing their self-identity and managing their relationships. Because SNS provide the opportunity to self present, users' postings reflect how they would like to be perceived (Ahn 2011). However, although users can control their initial selection of friends, they often feel obliged to accept subsequent friendship invitations from people they don't know (McLaughlin & Vitak 2008). This impacts their ability to fully control postings on their page. Some postings appear intended to embarrass, yet users often don't remove postings they don't like (Steinfield et al. 2008). These reactions can be explained by the expectancy violation theory (Burgoon 1978) whereby negative violations by close friends are confronted but those by acquaintances are tolerated (McLaughlin & Vitak 2011). This point also illustrates the multiple audience nature of SNS (McLaughlin & Vitak 2011).

Because many of the non-verbal cues that would guide interpersonal interaction offline are not available online (Walther et al. 2008), other cues are used. In posting certain information, the user consciously leaves cues/signals about themselves (Walther et al. 2008). Sometimes this extends to exaggeration – which has come to be expected (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006). Unconscious cues provided by the user, such as choice of friends and network size, are regarded as good indicators of what they are like (Walther et al. 2008; Foulger, Ewbank, Kay, Popp & Carter, 2009). However, cues provided by others, are most influential. Warranting theory suggests that we judge people based on cues left by others. Others' descriptions are regarded as more objective and truthful than information posted by the user of themselves (Walther & Parks in Walther et al. 2008).

Although the motivation to join a SNS is positive – nurturing established relationships and building new ones - there is certain online activity that can be perceived as negative behaviour. However, behaviour such as online harassment and bullying is a manifestation of existing social, psychological and emotional predispositions of the individual. The technology is only the enabler (Ahn 2011). This also leads one to the question of the role and importance of social norms.

1.2 Norms of SNS behaviour

Social norms are the "customs, traditions, standards, rules, values, fashions and all other criteria of conduct which are standardized as a consequence of the contact of individuals" (Sherif in McLaughlin, 2011). There are different types of norms but those that are applicable on SNS are implicit norms (Burnett & Bonnici 2003), in other words, they are not formally documented and agreed by the community. In light of this implicit nature, individuals learn the applicable SNS behavioural norms through observation and interpretation of what they see. Social cognitive theory posits that we acquire these norms through observation and imitation (Bandura 1989). This occurs against the background of the norms that apply in real life (Ahn 2011). However, the way in which we interpret what we have observed is critical in determining what we shall and shall not imitate. Apart from the overall norms of

the society, the norms of the individual's different reference groups play an important role. During adolescence, for instance, peer influence is particularly strong, much stronger than that of the family (Guyer, McClure-Tone, Shiffrin, Pine & Nelson, 2009).

Because of the speed of SNS development, a set of explicit social norms guiding SNS behaviour has not yet emerged although some have been identified: be considerate of other members; don't publish over-emotional status reports. There also appears to be a norm of passivity among acquaintances and tolerance of "unacceptable" behaviour (McLaughlin & Vitak 2011).

Several differences between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour online (SNS) and offline have emerged. "Friends" offline usually refer to those one knows well. In SNS "friends" include close friends as well as acquaintances, and often people one doesn't even like. The number of SNS friends is consequently far greater than offline (Tong, Van der Heide, Langwell & Walther, 2008). There are differences in perceptions of privacy and property issues between the online and offline environments. The technology is seen as placing a distance between the actor and the "victim" whose rights might be infringed. The nature of the consequences for online behaviour is indirect, and there is often a lack of obvious consequences (Foulger et al. 2009). In addition, while the user can manipulate their SNS profile because of the time availability (Walther et al. 2008), offline encounters often require immediate response.

Despite differences between the online and offline environments having been identified, the link between the underlying behavioural norms, and what is regarded as acceptable and unacceptable behaviour online has not been comprehensively explored – even less so how that behaviour is determined. This research thus set out to address that gap by embarking on an exploration of what behaviour is regarded as acceptable/unacceptable on SNS, how that is determined, and whether there are differences between online and offline behavioural norms. Because the youth are the most prominent users of SNS, the study was approached from the perspective of the youth.

2. Theoretical lens

Given the significance of reference group influence, an appropriate theoretical lens through which to approach this research, and which has been adopted in various studies of group online behaviour, is that of herding behaviour bias (Dholakia & Soltysinski, 2001; Dholakia, Basuroy and Soltysinski, 2002).

Herding behaviour describes the behaviour of humans that appears to replicate the behaviour of herd of animals. Banerjee (1992) described how, even though an individual decision maker might possess their own private information, the decisions made by previous decision makers will outweigh that of the individual decision maker, particularly if a sufficient number of other decision makers has made a similar decision. The individual plus other decision makers thus all gravitate towards a common decision.

There are two levels of explanation of such behaviour. The first is that the herding behaviour is a manifestation of a type of heuristic, or short cut to decision making (Bikhchandi, Hirschleifer & Welch, 1992). Banerjee (1992) indicated that, in times of uncertainty, or when confronted with complex decisions and it was difficult to evaluate the options, then the decision maker relies on indicators such as the behaviour of preceding others. This is known as an informational cascade, particularly when there is a disregard for other personal information (Bikhchandi et al.,1992; Bikhchandi, Hirschleifer & Welch, 1998). There is also the perception that "consensus implies correctness" (Maheswaran & Chaiken, 1991). However, it is acknowledged that when decision making strategies are selected, there is a compromise between making the best decision and the amount of effort required to do so (Dholakia & Soltysinski, 2001).

The second explanation is deeper and that is that the behaviour stems from a desire to belong or to be like others. Mimetic theory indicates that we strive to be like someone we admire and our behaviour thus imitates theirs (Garrels, 2011). We also covet what they possess, and aspire to that to which they aspire. We thus either seek to acquire the object of desire or something similar, or try to succeed in attaining similar aspirational goals. In extreme cases, the "idol" becomes regarded as the competitor, to be vanquished in the pursuit of the desired object or aspiration.

A number of researchers in IS have explored herding behaviour and its effects. Duan, Gu and Whinston (2009) studied the impact of the public rankings of online software downloads on the download rates. They attributed the peaks and troughs to informational cascades. However, the concept of "herding behaviour bias" has been most prominently studied in the area of online auctions (Dholakia & Soltysinski, 2001; Dholakia et al., 2002; Gilkeson & Reynolds, 2003; Hooper, Huff & McDonald, 2007).

Gilkeson and Reynolds (2003) found that even when bidders had their own private information, they were still influenced by the action of others. Dholakia and Soltysinski (2001) found that bidders would overlook certain, possibly more valuable, listings in favour of listings that attracted more bidders. Bidders thus gravitated towards the desirable object, coveting what others were perceived to covet. Dholakia and Soltysinski (2001) also found that the "sunk cost" of having made the initial bid commitment, led to further commitment to that bidding process by the bidder. This relates to the conformity preserving processes of the "sunk cost effect" (Arkes & Hutzel, 2000) which indicates an increased commitment to a decision made. Hooper et al. (2007) found similar evidence of herding behaviour and mimetic rivalry between bidders.

As indicated, the outcome of such herding behaviour is not always advantageous but rather a compromise. For instance, Kennedy (2002) found that television presenters who sought to perform like one another, led to a disappointing profits. This sub-optimal outcome has been referred to by (Dholakia & Soltysinski, 2001) as the "winner's curse".

3. Research methodology

Guided by the herding behavioural perspective, and as this research was exploratory, an interpretative approach was adopted (Burrell & Morgan 1979). Qualitative interviews were conducted with 16 youth, aged 18-20 years, and who had a Facebook account. This age group was chosen because they typically go through a number of social changes at that age – often dependent on leaving school. Facebook is the most popular SNS worldwide, and youth are the most active Facebook users (McLaughlin & Vitak, 2011). Stratified convenience sampling was used to ensure equal representation of males and females. The group included students, who all worked part-time, and full-time workforce employees. The interview transcripts were coded according to themes and analysed (Byrne 2001). These themes, including sub-themes, focussed on motivation to join Facebook; categories of audiences; acceptable and unacceptable behaviour; ways of determining acceptable behaviour; and differences between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

4. Findings

The findings are reported according to the main areas explored.

Both male and female respondents indicated that, in order of preference the most common groups people they did not they interacted with on Facebook were friends, family, work associates, acquaintances, and even particularly like.
> "People I've accepted but don't like to talk to" (M)

We term the latter two groups "acquaintances" and "non-friends" depending on the extent of dislike. These were people who were work associates, or people who had been referred by friends, family members or work associates. They were "accepted" or tolerated for the sake of that relationship and the desire not to cause offense by not accepting that invitation.

The motivation to participate in Facebook was mainly to keep in touch with friends and family. For this age group, many of their friends had moved away after school, or they had moved to another city for employment reasons. Other strong motivations were to build relationships with new friends; and also to build more collegial relationships with work associates. Apart from family members who covered a range of ages, all the other groups with whom the respondents interacted were in more or less the same age as themselves.

4.1 Acceptable behaviour on Facebook

Respondents all took a while to consider their responses to this topic.

They all seemed clear on acceptable behaviour with regard to family and work associates. In interacting with family, most respondents regarded polite and respectful behaviour as acceptable. A more conservative approach was favoured by all – mainly to avoid embarrassment or shame.

> "I'd say when it comes to family, you'd want to keep things pretty tame" (M)

A similar approach was applied to work associates. Respondents wished to keep things on a professional level and ensure that their reputation was not compromised.

However, there were distinctions between the sort of behaviour deemed acceptable for close friends and those who were acquaintances or non-friends. In interacting with friends, the most commonly accepted behaviour was similar to what was acceptable offline. Female perceptions were that this included not posting rude or offensive material on each other's walls. Many males (44%) indicated that anything was acceptable when interacting with friends on Facebook.

> "Well, with my friends anything is acceptable really …. There are no barriers when it comes to my mates. We're all pretty open with everything" (M)

Yet this standard did not seem to apply similarly to acquaintances.

> " … with online friends that I haven't actually met [offline] … I would probably be a bit more lenient if I didn't actually know them personally" (F)

In terms of interaction with non-friends, the general response was to only post a minimal amount of personal information on one's profile.

4.2 Unacceptable behaviour on Facebook

Respondents identified unacceptable behaviour much more easily than acceptable behaviour.

With regard to friends, nearly 90% of respondents indicated that they did not expect to see information that was too personal.

> "I don't think it's acceptable when you put personal problems and stuff up on Facebook … and announce it to the whole world" (M)

With family, coarse language was unacceptable or posting explicit messages on one's profile. Respondents also felt that it was unacceptable to discuss relationships on Facebook, either with family or allowing family members to see them.

> "You wouldn't go on hard out about relationships and stuff … about girlfriends … I don't want my family to see that stuff" (M)

The same sort of behaviour was considered unacceptable in terms of what was communicated to work associates. The general feeling was to avoid becoming too friendly with these associates because it might compromise the professional relationship. In terms of interacting with acquaintances or non-friends, posting any personal information, particularly problems and private information was unacceptable.

4.3 Determining acceptable and unacceptable behaviour on Facebook

When it came to determining what was and what was not acceptable behaviour on Facebook, a recurring theme amongst respondents was to observe others' behaviour and then copy what they perceived as acceptable.

> "Well, seeing what they do on Facebook … the stuff they write, the type of pictures they put up … I kind of copy from their examples" (F)

Another, less frequently employed way of deciding what behaviour was acceptable, was through trial and error.

> "I just tried behaving the same as I would normally, then I would go by the responses I got from people …. With positive responses I realised those types of things were acceptable" (M)

Some respondents (about 30%) indicated that what was acceptable offline applied online. However, all respondents used the same guidelines for what was unacceptable offline, online.

> "I go by what I consider to be unacceptable in real life" (F)

Personal beliefs and values seemed to guide many of the respondents.

"I guess it's just kind of my upbringing and my personal beliefs and morals. I wouldn't want someone to do something to me which I wouldn't do to them" (M)

4.4 Experiences and consequences

In order to uncover any further indications of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, respondents' experiences on Facebook were explored.

All respondents were able to identify positive experiences, the most common of which were being able to catch up with old friends, getting to know people better, and meeting new people.

"I started a group on Facebook, about baking. I like baking. We've got over 350 members, and that was just me. I just wanted to start a group which just shared baking photos and experiences with people." (F)

Negative experiences, related by most respondents (60%), were associated with security, privacy, and undesirable postings.

"Well, people hacking into my account and leaving comments and stuff – that gets a bit annoying" (M).

Another negative experience was receiving "friend" requests from random people. There was also the concern regarding the sort of information which such people could access. One respondent indicated how random people stalked them through the use of a Facebook account.

As a result of the negative experiences, the most common change in behaviour was a change in privacy settings.

"I've changed my profile to fully private so only people that I know can see it, just because I feel safer that way. I don't want random people looking at it" (F)

Others noted that they were careful about what they published on their profiles.

"I'm far more conscious of what I publish … well I know that anything that goes online stays online, even if you delete it" (M)

A few respondents changed the way they behaved, bearing future employers in mind.

Interestingly, these responses did not relate to discussions on (un)acceptable behaviour or the online/offline differences. Those were more from the first person perspective – what they should (not) do - whereas these responses focused on what others had done to them and how they had reacted.

4.5 Differences between online (Facebook) and offline behaviour

All except three respondents were of the opinion that there were differences between the way people behaved offline and on Facebook. Most respondents noted that in a face-to-face environment people were not able to talk freely. The ability to talk to someone without having to see their facial expressions and determine the consequences of what was being said, meant that people had the freedom to say what they wanted without hesitation – and this included discussing their personal problems and issues.

"Just because you're behind the computer screen, you've got that safety net. You're not actually talking to them so if you feel uncomfortable with the conversation, you can just disconnect and disappear, and never see them again. But if you're face-to-face, you can't escape that easily. You've also got that social decorum to follow and things like that" (F)

Because of the opportunity to avoid face-to-face interaction, people appeared to not be too concerned about the immediate consequences of what they said online. This gave people greater freedom to express themselves honestly.

"If you've been avoiding saying something, you could say it online not necessarily publicly and it could be easier that way" (M).

The respondents recognised that people who were shy and conservative were more open online. Their level of comfort increased greatly when interacting online.

Despite the strong indications of what behaviour was unacceptable on Facebook, contradictions seem possible due to the noted freedom that the computer screen provides.

5. Discussion

All respondents indicated that their Facebook activities had a positive influence on their lives. By using Facebook, they were able to keep in touch with friends and family (Brandtzaeg & Heim, 2009), communicate with others more often (Ahn, 2011, Walther et al., 2008) and build stronger relationships (Granovetter, 1973).

It was noticeable that although respondents had definite views as to what sort of Facebook behaviour was unacceptable, they were not as clear on what was acceptable and many tried to establish guidelines for themselves by first observing then copying the actions of others (Burke et al, 2009), or by trial and error. This split in certainty might be ascribable to the fact that many of the codes of conduct that govern our everyday lives, such as religious codes and legal systems, are couched in terms of what is not allowed rather than in terms of what is allowed. With regard to what behaviour was unacceptable, it seems that respondents followed their own counsel (Ahn, 2001) and the probability is high that they drew on these codes and systems for guidance. With regard to what behaviour was acceptable, there is strong evidence of herding behaviour (Dholakia & Soltysinski, 2001). This took two forms. On the one hand, some respondents indicated that their main focus was to communicate so they sought the most expedient way of finding out how to do so in an acceptable fashion. That was to watch and copy. This is reflective of the heuristic motivation suggested by Dholakia et al. (2002). The second form was to emulate admired others (Garrels, 2011) This was prevalent among both males and females with the males indicating a desire to be like friends they admired because they had "succeeded". The stereotypical behaviour was also reflective of not only being like a group but also trying to emulate the nonchalant, attitude of many stars of the screen. This is a typical example of mimetic behaviour (Garrels, 2011).

Activity on Facebook requires cognisance of its multi-audience nature (McLaughlin & Vitak, 2001). Awareness of (un)acceptability of content for different audiences came through very strongly in the distinctions that respondents made between audiences. The need to accommodate changes within themselves according to their different life stages was also evident in the respondents' awareness of the need to be more cautious of what they put online and of the chances that future employers might see the content (Ahn, 2011).

When discussing acceptable behaviour per se, the male respondents appeared to be tolerant of all sorts of behaviour, especially for close friends whereas females tended to require respectful behaviour which did not hurt or embarrass people. This could be interpreted as reinforcing the gender-specific stereotyping, which is a version of herding or imitation of admired role models (Garrels, 2011). However, when discussing negative experiences, a number of males indicated their annoyance at having their online privacy breached (Walther et al., 2008). Some also noted that they had Facebook "friends" whom they didn't like. The tolerant attitude exhibited initially might not be so but rather young males feeling the need to act stereotypically (Bujega in Walther et al., 2008). This raises the interesting question of whether herding behaviour has a stronger influence at certain times and in certain conditions then at other times and in other conditions. There is also the aspect of compromise in choice alluded to by Dholakia and Soltysinski (2001), and Kennedy (2002).

Another insight gained was that while discussions of (un)acceptable behaviour focused on the first person, the user, the respondents did not include the experiences they had had as a third person so that breaching another's privacy, was not mentioned as unacceptable behaviour per se but was rather implied. The following lists of acceptable and unacceptable Facebook behaviour emerged, whether explicitly or implicitly:

Acceptable behaviour

- Respectful, polite postings – audience dependent
- Anything – audience dependent and irrespective of who had posted; possibly gender dependent
- Tolerance of other's postings – depending on who had posted
- Professional – audience dependent

Unacceptable behaviour

- Rude or offensive postings (McLaughlin & Vitak, 2001)

- Embarrassing postings (McLaughlin & Vitak, 2001)

- Coarse language

- Too much, too intimate, and too detailed personal information (McLaughlin & Vitak, 2001)

- Unprofessional content – audience dependent

- Breaching others' privacy

- Randomly requesting friendship

- Pestering a friends' friends

- Stalking

Indications of the extent of acceptability of certain behaviours depending on the audience, further emphasize the multi-audience nature of Facebook. Although multiple audiences exist for an individual offline so that herding may take place to a greater or lesser extent with each group, the groups are usually encountered separately. However, an individual usually has one Facebook page that serves all audiences together. This is despite the fact that separate pages can be set up on Facebook for different audiences. Nevertheless, even if separate pages are established, the lack of control over "friends" and their friends has the potential to minimise the effect of differentiation of postings. Online there also appears to be the obligation to befriend people one would normally avoid offline. This is possibly because of the overt (recorded) nature of rejections/avoidances, and implications for the original relationship. Seen alternatively, this could be viewed as the manifestations of a greater/lesser desire to herd (Dholakia & Soltysinski, 2001), The implication of a herding bias or elements of mimesis, which exert either a greater or lesser influence on the way in which users behave online with regard to different groups, further supports the question of whether, and under which conditions/situations such influence waxes and wanes.

The lack of clarity regarding acceptable behavioural norms is distinctly different from offline. The protection that the computer screen affords the user also appears to have contributed to the difference between what is and what is not acceptable in the online and offline environments. The freedom to "say" things without fear of seeing, and being influenced by, the reaction in the other's expression, plus having the ability to withdraw immediately if the situation became too uncomfortable is the advantage of the online environment (Walther & Parks, 2002). Plus, the time differential allows the user to couch the message in the most suitable manner without having to respond immediately as is often the case offline. This might be regarded as the tyranny of the face-to-face encounter and whereas some might regard the SNS environment as being anarchistic and even cruel, an alternative approach is to view it as one which is more honest and open and free from the constraints of the face-to-face facade which many of us adopt offline. An aspect worth considering, though, is the potential carelessness with which hurtful statements could be made behind the protection of the screen. Another aspect is that respondents felt that not knowing someone offline almost made them less real and therefore more distant and less likely to affect them. Consequently, behaviour which might otherwise have been regarded as unacceptable was tolerated. These scenarios also indicate a decrease in the extent of the herding bias, and that the computer screen could be seen as shield against others' influence and the need to herd with them.

6. Conclusion and implications

The research has explored two issues: (1) what behaviour is regarded by the youth as acceptable or unacceptable in SNS (Facebook), (2) how respective behavioural develop, and (3) whether there are differences between online behavioural norms and those that apply to offline behaviour. The research adopted a herding behaviour lens as the theoretical underpinning of the study.

There was greater clarity on what was unacceptable behaviour than what was acceptable. Personal behavioural norms appeared to guide determination of unacceptable behaviour whereas the lead of others indicated acceptable behaviour. Acceptable behaviour appears to be more audience dependent than unacceptable behaviour. Different audiences become more or less relevant over time and certain audiences may be added at different periods of time. Even though there is the facility on Facebook to create audience-specific pages, most users use a single page for all their "friends". This indicates a need for the youth to be alerted to the multiple audiences and that present postings for one audience might become available to other audiences at any future time. There was also the hint at different behavioural norms might apply to the user themselves as opposed to a third party.

The "protection" that the computer screen provides, has considerable influence on the differences between offline and online behaviour. This can be regarded as liberating and advantageous, but can also have negative consequences. Furthermore, the distinction between types of friends and audiences that does exist offline is emphasized online because users usually have one Facebook page that serves all audiences. Even if differentiations are made between audiences, the lack of control over the network reach can override those distinctions. Other, more targeted SNS like LinkedIn with its professional contact focus, might not require such audience category caution.

In all these findings, there was strong evidence of herding behaviour, whether driven more by mimesis and the desire to be like others, or as a type of heuristic. At different times, in different conditions, and with regard to different audiences, the herding influence appeared stronger or weaker. There was also evidence of compromise with regard to perceptions of acceptable behaviour.

The findings have yielded insights for academics and users, parents, educators and businessmen alike. For academics, a number of questions have arisen that need further exploration:
- How strong is the herding behaviour bias in SNS with regard to:
  - Different reference groups,
  - Over time, and in
  - Different situations
- Do different SNS behavioural norms apply for ourselves and for others?

The research findings also carry implications for Facebook users, parents, educators, policy makers, managers, and marketers. Users need to be aware of what they can and what they cannot control on Facebook; clear on what they regard as acceptable and unacceptable behaviour; and that what might seem appropriate for one audience group might not be so for another group, nor that what might seem appropriate for one stage of their lives might not seem so at a later stage. This is more easily said than done and it becomes more of a challenge when the entry age for Facebook is 13 and the teens are a period when peer pressure is very strong.

Although many SNS like Facebook provide guidance to users on appropriate use of the SNS, much of the responsibility lies with the parents, primarily, educators and policy makers to inculcate socially acceptable behavioural norms into the youth. Care should be taken to address all sides of an argument such as the freedom which the screen does provide and whether it's better to maintain the face-to-face "facade" or to view the online channel as an opportunity for greater honesty and openness. Great benefit has been derived from Facebook and SNS and behaviours that result in these benefits should be facilitated. Where there is ambiguity regarding acceptable behaviour, guidance is needed. The use of suitable role models who can be emulated has worked well in similar situations.

Managers have a particularly important role to play. The youth are their young/future employees, who represent the organization to the world. In addition to what is placed on official organization Facebook pages, managers can be quite clear on what sort of behaviour is acceptable and what is not. Preventative action in terms of clearly stated policies could prevent considerable embarrassment later. Leading by an example which others could follow is another positive way of ensuring acceptable behaviour.

Marketers could also use these Facebook insights in the way in which they pitch promotional messages. Facebook provides a rich source of ethnographic data that would be hard to collect in another way.

Generally, the benefits derived from Facebook activity seem to far outweigh any disadvantages. Differences between Facebook and offline behavioural norms require acknowledgement and guidance in negotiating, and acceptable behavioural norms need to be firmly established.

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