Values in a Virtual Society: Social Networking and Value Based Education

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Abstract

Social relationships, social interactions scaffold the integrated growth of human beings. Man, acme of God's creation owes its existence to the various ethical, cultural and moral values which are enshrined in society. In this era of globalization and IT Revolution, the whole tapestry of human relations is designed in new forms and new designs. Social relationships are being interpreted in terms of Social networking services which are considered to be the most prominent type of virtual societies. They are either a website or a software platform that focuses on creating and maintaining relationships. Face book, Twitter and My space are all virtual communities.

Underlining the need of social interactions for human beings, the present paper attempts to address certain issues regarding the influence of social networking on contemporary social milieu. How the change in social milieu has catalyzed a change in value system and social order? How far the click of a mouse in a virtual society can replace the rhythmic throbs of a living society? Why are the sense of peace, harmony and sense of fraternity vanishing? Why are we becoming so self centred, narrow and value less. Can education be blamed for all the maladies prevailed? Is education of today objectively value based for all practical purposes, aspirations and expectations? Are these virtual societies threatening the human values which help in maintaining a better world order? Addressing these pertinent issues the present paper underscores the need of Value Based Education to move these virtual societies towards a virtuously virtual society.

Keywords: Virtual, Value Based Education, Networking

Introduction

"No man is an island, entire of itself;
Everyman is piece of a continent, a part of the main."

John Donne.

Indubitably, a human being is incomplete in isolation. It is society, which vivifies the integrated growth of human personality. A society gives rise to a family system and organization relationships which form the heart of any social group. It is society which provides a platform to the individuals belonging to different ethnic groups to come together. Their interactions give rise to strong social bonds that result in long-lasting relationships. And these relationships give rise to social interactions between people of a society.

One of the primary purposes of society is the formation of an organized group of individuals, who can support each other in various ways. The support given by society can be of the physical, emotional, financial or medical form. The members of a society need to be concerned about each other. The basic purpose of society is to be part of a collective movement and move together in life. Being a part of society is about taking everyone along; it is about taking unanimous decisions for the achievement of a common goal. Social inequality, racial discrimination, economic disparity, poverty and overpopulation are some of the major concerns of society today. As an organized social group, it is our duty to heed these concerns and work towards the betterment of society.

Thus, society gives us a framework to work together. It provides us with a platform to take collective efforts towards improving social conditions. Most importantly, a society serves a strong support system in our life. A society is characterized by social networks. They form an integral part of society. Social networks are defined as the maps of relationships between people. Social relationships, social experiences and social interactions connote association, cooperation, mutual dependence and belonging. Social experience shapes interactions between the body and the mind to produce citizens with a strong moral compass.

Social Milieu and Moral Values:Shifting Paradigms

Every individual is widely conscious to his/her surroundings. A lot of internal and external transformations and interchanges in the social milieu exercise pressure on the mindset of the individual. The ever-changing social scenario and its emerging trends create a new world order and values. The values are liable to synchronize with the changes. The human mind is considered to be a 'tabula rasa' upon which the experiences of the environment are inscribed. The mind is initially empty and passive, determined by factors from the physical and social environment. This concept is inspired by theory of associations and its principles: stimulus-response, reinforcement, punishment, etc. Locke, Watson, Thorndike, and Skinner are the most relevant representatives of this theory. From the cognitive point of view it is assumed that concepts and structures are a reflection of all that is outside the individual in the physical and social world. The individual's development is brought about through direct instruction or through the imitation of adult models with emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge, abilities and skills. The acquisition of moral behavior is governed by the same general principles of learning. For this theory the origin of morality is not the individual, but society.

The societal approach of Durkheim understands morality as a matter of accommodation of the individual to societal values through processes of adaptation and internalization. Society is prior to the individual, chronologically and morally. It is the source of all the values that are reflected in the individual. According to this approach, moral behaviour is governed by rules. An individual will be moral or immoral to the degree that one accepts and follows the rules established by society. From this perspective, the individual must be educated for discipline and adhesion to the community. When these two aspects are strongly instilled, individuals are able to live in society because they are morally prepared to obey and enforce the rules. Morality is not a system of customs, but a system of obligations. Thus, it is necessary to develop in man a sense of discipline and deference for authority. Rules are equally prescribed to all, and those who enforce them are to be obeyed and respected. As Durkheim states: "We are moral beings only to the degree that we are social beings" (Annibal, 223).. According to Durkheimian concept, the true motivations for morality are directed toward the satisfaction of group interests.

There is no denying the fact that moral values and social environment are interdependent terms.The pertinent question before us is that the emerging trends in the social engineering are not coherent. Many of them contradict each other. Our past experiences and understanding which has scaffold the growth of values are relegated back by the unscrupulous people among us. They desire to achieve what they do not deserve for. It is more pathetic that our youth are ignorant of their own role and responsibility. However they aspire for their rights to be complied. The definition of relationships, dependence, sense of neighborhood and belongingness are being deliberately sidelined. In this age of digital connectedness, Virtual communities are coming in to existence.These virtual communities all encourage interaction, sometimes focusing around a particular interest, or sometimes just to communicate. They allow users to interact over a shared passion, whether it is through message boards, chat rooms, social networking sites, or virtual worlds. There is a dire need for an individual to seek adjustment with intermittent growing pace of culture, acculturation and enculturation of thoughts, views and behaviours. Simultaneously, we see that values for which mankind stands, are getting a lateral shift in its concept and meaning.

Social Networking as a Nucleus of Universal Brotherhood

The social networking websites are more like the virtual meeting places where people can discuss on different topics, share information, and exchange files and pictures with their friends. There are some people who use these sites as a platform to meet long lost friend and batch mates. Some people also use these websites to promote their blogs and services. The recent sociological concept of Social Network Analysis (SNA) defines social relationships in terms of Network Theory consisting of 'nodes' and 'ties'. Nodes are the individual actors within the networks, and ties are the relationships between the actors. There can be many kinds of ties between the nodes. Research in a number of academic fields has shown that social networks operate on many levels, from families up to the level of nations, and play a critical role in determining the way problems are solved, organizations are run, and the degree to which individuals succeed in achieving their goals. People have used the idea of "Social Network" loosely for over a century to connote complex sets of relationships between members of social systems at all scales, from interpersonal to international. In 1954, J. A. Barnes started using the term systematically to denote patterns of ties.

Now a days, the social networking sites have become extremely popular among the youth as well as the professional people. Keeping in mind, the growing popularity of these sites and the effect it has and the benefits that it brings along, it can be easily predicted that its popularity is sure to grow much more. Some of the sites such as Friendster and My Space are the two most popular sites that aim to build special niche for people who share common interests and passions. Whereas social networking sites such as Twitter and Linked In are more professionally related and help the business men promote their businesses. By joining different communities, now people can easily know about the latest news related to that community. One can easily get the experts advice on any challenge one may face related to their topic of interest. And the best part of this is that the advice is free. One doesn't need to pay a single paisa for it. Experts are always ready to give their advice and share information with you. These are just some of the several positive things that have contributed to make social networking really popular among people and spread smiles. It has made world a small pace and everyone can stay connected. Virtual communities are used for a variety of social and

professional groups. It does not necessarily mean that there is a strong bond among the members, although Howard Rheingold mentions that virtual communities are formed "when people carry on public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships"

Social Networking Sites: Building a Virtual Society

Virtual communities resemble real life communities in the sense that they both provide support, information, friendship and acceptance between strangers. We have every astounding achievement of communication that has ever been invented at our disposal and yet, wading through this deluge of digital communications, most of us have yet to find any real meaning in life. The medium of the internet, it appears, cannot yet encode and transmit the essence of the human spirit; nor love, compassion, empathy or consciousness. In this age of great digital connectedness, we increasingly find ourselves clinging to illusions of intimacy surrounded by the great faceless, nameless masses from which no commonality can be extracted.

Social networking interactions can never replace the real-world bonding between friends. Real-world friends build commonality and trust based on shared personal experiences like hiking trips, shopping experiences, playing outdoor games, dance parties. These mutual histories form true friendships based on common experiences that reinforce an important foundation for any lasting friendship. Such experiences are utterly lacking in the online world. Hurling photos, movie links and clever chat quips into the vast void of the internet is no replacement for private, shared events witnessed and remembered with real life friends. This is why the internet while it appears to be connecting us, is actually driving us apart. We are friends online but strangers in the street. We live in boxed houses, year after year, never even knowing the names of those souls who live right next door. The people who physically live closest to us are, in reality, our greatest strangers. We don't know their interests, their favourite bands or recipes, or their intimate secrets. Those details are more readily shared online, usually in an attempt to replicate the feelings of intimacy and bonding where no such bonding is realistically possible. Many of the most prolific internet users are ironically more alone today than ever before in the history of human life on our planet -- alone in an age of great connectedness, where words can leap across the planet at the speed of light, where we can broadcast video from our desktop, or pod cast audio from our cars, or communicate with millions through the tapping of our fingers on plastic keyboards. Google has spidered over eight billion web pages, and indexed each one, and displayed them as results in hundreds of billions of user searches, and yet not once has Google transmitted love or friendship or understanding. It is outside the specification of digital information. The fact that this experience was noteworthy for all of us is, in itself, a disturbing commentary on the state of internet social interaction today. We think we know our virtual friends, but we really don't. We don't know each other until we meet in person, and even then, our experiences of each other are often filtered through the thick haze of preconceptions acquired from virtual contact on internet.

Virtual Society: A Threat to Human Values

Social networking of course helps in a lot of ways but the users have to really careful to stay secure and safe. Few people seem to realize or care about the dangers social networking sites bring to our lives. Our online habits are changing rapidly from a closed, private behaviour towards an open and sharing culture. While this brings us lots of good, it seems to me we are still ignorant of its possible dangers.

Security is one of the topmost concerns of social networking sites that we currently use. This is mainly because the social networking sites allow one to display one's personal information such as name, location, and email address. There are some people who are always in search of a fake identity. If they get all the information about you on internet, they may use your identity for different type of illegal activities, which may cause you problems in future. It is always advisable to don't provide your entire identity information online phishing can be used on anyone.

Cyber bullying and Social Media Harassment perhaps the most saddening, are the peer-to-peer dangers that take place through social media. The non-confrontational feature of social media makes people to say things that would otherwise be frowned upon. Cyber bullying advances when a group becomes a whole network of adolescents who target and single out a peer, post cruel comments on the targeted adolescent's profile page. It almost becomes a sort of frenzied trend within the adolescent network, picking up more and more bullies who make a game out of harassment. This unfortunate social networking danger has even caused suicides in some young adolescents.

There are youth who have thousand friends on Face book and My Space. It sounds impressive at first: thousands of friends? But alas! None of them are real flesh-and-blood people whom they ever chatted with face to face. They do not know their real names and wouldn't even recognize them if they pass them on a real street, not a virtual world street. In effect, a youth who has thousands friends is completely alone in the real world. The more active people are in online social Networking, the more isolated they become in the real world.

These people, in a very real way, become domesticated. In exactly the same way that a domesticated dog cannot survive in the wild, domesticated humans cannot survive outside the manicured mazes of concrete cities and fibre optic data pipelines. They almost become a new race of people 'Homo netizens', with soft fingers and skin unable to wield simple tools; with pale skin unable to bear sunlight; with a complete inability to recognize and name a single food crop growing in a farmer's field. These 'Homo netizens' have ventured into their own imaginary worlds and created fictitious iendships, fictitious personalities and even fictitious, thriving economies.

Value Based Education: Moving the Virtual towards Virtuous Way of Life

There is no denying the fact that the social networking sites has a tremendous potential for transmitting knowledge, for aggregating the wisdom of many and for bridging the cultures of the world. But if the internet is used as a replacement for real human interaction it becomes a hindrance to human progress. An entire generation becomes lost in the virtuality of fictitious spaces and make-believe friendships. Connection with the real world is lost, and netizens, glued to their virtual worlds, eventually find themselves utterly incapable of existing outside their fabricated, artificially-illuminated worlds.

To connect these netizens to the real life, Education can play a great role. It is true that society plays an important role in inculcating the life values in human beings. As Hogan believes that moral behavior is determined by five factors:

Socialization

Becoming aware as a child of society's and parents' rules of conduct for being good.

Moral Judgment

Learning to think reasonably about our own ethics and deliberately deciding on our own moral standards.

Moral Feelings

The internalization of our moral beliefs to the degree that we feel shame and guilt when we fail to do what we "should."

Empathy

The awareness of other people's situation, feelings, and needs so that one is compelled to help those in need.

Confidence and Knowledge

Knowing the steps involved in helping others and believing that one is responsible for and capable of helping.(220)

Socialization which helps in moral development can never be virtual one or the one which connects one to the world of netizens.The problem is that none of these things are real. One moment without electricity and their entire universe collapses into nothingness. One cut of the fiber optic line and those thousands of virtual friends vanish in an instant, to be replaced only by the bitter loneliness of an empty room.

So value based education as a separate subject matter should be introduced in curriculum to help students build moral habits which are required to comprehend moral norms and ideals that help us to lead a desirable life. The objectives of the Value Based Education for these netizens can be divided in to four categories:

The formation of Moral Habits and Good Manners

It involves mastering basic good habits and social etiquettes through continuous modelling, inculcation, and training. This curriculum strand involves learning such specified moral habits or etiquettes as how to greet the elders, how to talk to the elders, how to use public goods, how to keep close friendship, how to do one's duty, how to reflect on one's daily life, how to help others, how to cooperate with others and so forth.

The Comprehension of Moral Norms and Ideals

It is related to transmission of great moral traditions. This curriculum strand attempts to instill a strong commitment to the moral order through persuasive presentation of moral norms, and to develop students' comprehension of the need for a normative structure in society. Therefore, it requires students to learn universal moral norms or ideals so that they develop the ability to tell right from wrong.

The Development of Moral Judgment and Decision-Making

It refers to students' ability to solve moral conflicts occurring in daily life situations on the basis of discrete moral considerations and morally justifiable methods. This curriculum strand involves students in practical experiences, so that they can make conscious and deliberate decisions based on their moral autonomy.

Building Autonomous Moral Character

It refers to having a solid moral disposition or a strong moral willingness to do the good by dint of internalization of moral principles, ideals, and self-actualization.

This curriculum strand requires students to develop autonomous voices or lenses on moral issues on the basis of strong moral principles and moral ideals. It requires them to have a strong self-strength to overcome various harmful temptations and moral laziness. However, in order to enhance the effectiveness of moral education as a separate subject matter, there are still several tasks that need to be successfully fulfilled. First of all, as Lickona comments, "Value based Education must seek better integration of moral knowledge, feelings, and actions"(99). Second, moral education in schools must be implemented in a closer relationship with home and community. Parents and communities are vital supporters for moral education of the youth .Third, for the success of Value based education,, it is necessary to change the highly competitive atmosphere of educational institutions so that it becomes a moral, democratic community based on cooperation and mutual understanding. Fourthly, various teacher education programs must be implemented. Especially, special programs for unlicensed moral education teachers must be enlarged so that they can acquire necessary information and experience in moral education. Furthermore, at least in pre- service education, community service activities and group dynamics must become important parts of the required curriculum for prospective moral education teachers. Fifthly, it is necessary to build a closer relationship between teacher educators in the university and teachers in schools. Effective integrating theory and practice is a crucial factor for the success of the Concept of Value Based Education.

Conclusion

Towards the end, I would like to say that there is nothing wrong with a little online networking if it is pursued within the frame of having a real life, with real friends in the real world. Facebook, My Space, Twitter and online gaming can be experienced responsibly by those who are able to maintain balance. The danger emerges when people allow

their lives to become immersed in these virtual realities at the expense of abandoning their existence in the real world. Moving into imaginary worlds can be a wonderfully entertaining and educational experience. But we should not forget to come back to the real world. So social media does not have to be completely avoided. Social media is a new method of social interaction in this age of information, and to ignore it would only isolate oneself from social communication, and the plenty of useful or enjoyable aspects of social networking. The point here is to be on guard, be vigilant, and be aware of the ways in which social media can be dangerous. Value Based Education is indispensable to make the netizens realize the value of virtues of love and compassion to enjoy ecstatic happiness. Overall, it enables pupils to examine the kind of life that is worth living and to consider what kind of life they want for themselves. To quote Dr. Deirdre Mullan,

"Having a degree should not give people power. Real power is being able to make the choice between good or evil, life and death, ….Education is too often viewed as the exit route to a better lifestyle rather than the beginning of a journey, which will take a lifetime.Today values have become words mired in controversy, embraced and reviled that we scarcely know how to use them, without turning them into slogans"

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