

Diversification of Social Networks of Adolescents – offline and online

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Diversification of social ties

Communication Technologies impact:

Social connections became more

Diverse:

To give variety to

To extend into disparate fields

To spread out

More and Different

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*Naama(18, J, G) “Ahh...not really... you know using the Internet today is not like “WOW! I chatted today!!!!” It's a regular, normal daily experience, like **brushing your teeth** every morning.*

- Communication technologies are integrated in individuals' everyday life.
- Internet provides a new space for expansion and diversification of adolescents' social ties.
- Maintenance of intimate and non-intimate ties
- Formation of intimate and non-intimate social relationships.

Diversification of Social Networks of Adolescents – offline and online

- Internet access can bridge existing social inequalities by providing access to skills, information and resources that are needed in an information society.
- Internet can reduce gaps in social inequalities by providing access to social ties that previously were not open to adolescents.
- Diversification of social ties will be more pronounced for groups that are more segregated.

Adolescence and social ties

- A period in life characterized by rapid developmental changes.
- Less interaction with their parents
- Peers act as emotional confidants, provide advice and guidance, serve as models of behavior and attitudes.
- Studies on adolescent friendships have relied on the proximity-similarity hypothesis .
- Two step process: proximity provides opportunities for social interaction and similarity is the result of sharing social status and activities.

Diversification of Social Networks of Adolescents – offline and online

- Past studies on adolescents' social ties focused on one context of social interaction: School.
- Communication technologies call for the study of different and new contexts.
- We need to compare different contexts of relationship formation (neighborhood, school, and online) for social similarity/dis-similarity
- Quality of social relationships that were created in the neighborhood, at school, and online.

Study goals

1. To explore the extent that adolescents' social networks are becoming more heterogeneous and less bounded to place of residence.
2. To compare the quality of ties created online with ties created offline. The assumption is that weak ties are more conducive to social opportunities.
3. In the current research the relationship between the social context of acquaintance (school, neighborhood, and online) and the structure and quality of friendships among adolescents was studied.

Methods

The study:

Surveys: two surveys of a representative sample of the adolescent population of Israel in 2001 and 2004.

A qualitative study including in depth interviews with 40 adolescents in 2004.

Use of communication technologies among adolescents in Israel

Israel is divided according to national lines Israeli Jews (79 percent of the population), and Israeli Arabs (18 percent).

The division is reflected in access to ICT's

Data for families with adolescent children shows that 86 percent of Jewish and 62 percent of Arab households report computer ownership.

Cell phones, 89 percent of the Jewish households and 61 percent of the Israeli Arab population report ownership.

Internet Access in Israel

In 2001 only 35 percent of the adolescent population had access to the Internet by 2004 access was available to 65 percent.

As to purpose, the overwhelming majority of adolescent Internet users reported mainly social purposes.

The percentage of households with adolescents reporting an internet connection is 72 percent for the Jewish population but only 45 percent for Israeli Arabs.

RESULTS

| | 2001 | 2004 |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| Internet Access | 36.3% | 66.7 |
| Percentage from Neighborhood | 29.8% | 28% |
| Percentage from School | 59.9% | 60% |
| Percentage from Internet | 11.7% | 12% |

Who is making online friends? Adolescents' in homogeneous networks

| 2001 | 2004 |
|---|--|
| Younger adolescents | Age not significant |
| Arab Israelis | Arab Israelis |
| The higher the number of local friends | The higher the number of local friends |
| The higher the percentage of friends of similar gender category | The higher the percentage of friends of similar category |
| SES not related | SES not related |
| Amount of Daily Internet use of social purposes | Amount of Daily Internet use of social purposes |

Results for Similarity of ties

| | 2001 | | | 2004 | | |
|--------------------------------|--|--------------|--------|---|--------------|--------|
| | School | Neighborhood | online | School | Neighborhood | Online |
| Proportion same age | 89.5 | 80.4 | 75% | 90.2 | 80.1 | 77% |
| Proportion same gender | 94.2% | 92.3% | 73.5 | 92.0 | 88.2 | 69% |
| Proportion same residence | 88.7 | 94.1% | 76.2 | 93.2 | 93.7 | 74.8 |
| Factors that reduce similarity | Age, online friendships, duration of relationship(+) | | | Age, online friendships, duration of relationship | | |

Results for Strength of Ties

| | 2001 | | 2004 | |
|------------------------------------|---|-----------------|---|-----------------|
| Strength of ties | 14.06 (2.11) | 12.45 (3.45) | 14.01 (1.76) | 12.08 (2.58) |
| Factors affecting strength of ties | Age, Female, frequency of use, friendship duration, propinquity, (online) content and activity multiplexity | | Female, propinquity, duration of use, friendship duration, (online) content and activity multiplexity | |

In Depth Interviews (20 Arab and 20 Jewish Israeli Adolescents)

Privacy.

Nuhas(14, C,B) I met one of my friends through the net. She is a girl and lives in my village and she is also Christian. She studies at my school and I see her every day, but I don't speak with her there...it's embarrassing...it's not acceptable...but chatting is different because only she and I know we chat..."

Maha, (13, Muslim,G):

"I met a boy through the net. A friend of my friend gave to him my email address and he added me to the list. We chat ... Instant messenger is cheaper and my parents allow me to use the computer as much as I want. With the messenger I have privacy; nobody knows who I'm chatting with. With the cell phone I don't have privacy, my sisters and my parents ask me all the time who's on the phone."

Managing Distance

Nitza (18, J,G):

Communication is not a problem with friends who live nearby. I have a choice between a land line and cell phone. But with friends that live far away (another city or temporarily in another country) electronic mail helps us to remain connected. When friends go on vacation overseas we use electronic mail much more.

Faisal,16, M, B):

"I started talking with a girl from another city. She is a Muslim like me. I got the email from a friend; We chat by computer and once or twice we talk over the phone.. We never met face to face.

Siham (18, M, G):

*Yes I met on the net a male from another village. He said that my email address got onto his buddy list **by mistake...and** we started chatting. Our relationship is limited to I.M. We have been good friends a year already ...*

Virtuality and Reality

Liron,(16, J, B)

"I like to play a game through the internet. There is an entire group that plays...we start knowing each other by placing messages in the game bulletin board. ... We arrange meetings during the holidays because there is no school and it is easy to travel to another city. At the last meeting I met eight members. We became like friends.

What does it mean to be like friends?

"Is like schoolmates. We meet and do the same things that I do with my friends at school..."

Faisal (16, A, B):

I started talking with a girl from another city. She is a Muslim like me. I got the email from a friend; they are family and chat from time to time. We chat by computer and once or twice we talk over the phone. She is a year younger than me. We never met face to face.

Rushdi (17,M,G):

*I met new people on the Internet from other schools and towns....You know – a friend brings a friend, so friends started adding me to the buddy list....
(Interviewer's probe: Did you ever go out with one of them?) No, never. We chat about school, about fights with siblings, problems with friends....but we did not met.*

Discussion

1. Online relationship formation is more likely among social groups that are embedded in homogenous social ties.
2. Online relationship formation provides an opportunity for *diversification* of social networks.
3. Culture is still relevant. More western groups online ties become integrated in their offline ties. Less western groups search for ways of integrating culture and social ties.

- **Online ties are still weak ties providing opportunities of social capital accumulation.**
- Online ties can bring individuals from different locations, social statuses to share resources.
- Culture matters, and communication technologies can not overcome certain social divisions. In the case of Israel national divisions.

Thank you

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