

## Preface

Adolescent use of social online media such as blogs, chat rooms and text messaging has dramatically increased over the past decade largely due to the accessibility of such technology. For example, a recent report by Pew foundation (Pewinternet.org, 2007) indicated that approximately 64% of adolescents ages 12 to 17 engaged in at least some type of online social networking, up from 57% of online teens in 2004; however, about 47% of teens reported posting photos where others can see them and 89% of those who posted photos said that people comment on the images at least “some of the time.” Posting personally identifiable information on the Internet is a general public concern and the news media indicates that online social communication may pose more threats than benefits to adolescents (Isakson, 2007; NBC Dateline, 2006; PBS Frontline, 2008). Echoing the growing concerns of the media, academia has been exploring the issues related to this emerging social phenomenon. So far, research on online teen social communication has been in separate directions, ranging from identifying adolescent cognitive development characteristics (Greenfield, 2004; Greenfield & Subrahmanyam, 2003), to personality and individual differences (Amichai-Hamburger, Wainapel, & Fox, 2002; Anolli, Villani, & Riva, 2005; McKenna & Bargh, 2000), to social communication (Dietz-Uhler & Bishop-Clark, 2005; Eastin, 2005), and to media characteristics (Hrastinski & Keller, 2007). There has been a failure to provide a coherent and well organized compendium of adolescent online communication research until now.

We believe that the key to a better understanding of adolescent online communication behavior is first to develop a unified theoretical framework on this topic (Zheng, Burrow-Sanchez, Donnelly, Call, & Drew, 2010). A unified theoretical framework of adolescent online social communication research will provide more guidance to the public in understanding teen online social communication behavior as well as generating new research in this area. This edited volume is significant in that it presents, for the first time, a systematic approach to the study of adolescent online social communication undergirded by a unified theoretical framework.

### **THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIS BOOK**

This edited volume addresses the pressing need to establish a unified theoretical framework for adolescent online social communication research which has been lacking until now. More specifically, this volume serves to (a) identify the role and function of the Internet in adolescent social communication behavior, (b) bring together top researchers in the field who discuss the dynamic relationships among such things as adolescent social-psychological needs, personality, and social norms in online communication, and (c) bridge the theories with practices in adolescent online social communication by offering practical guidance to the public on this issue. In order to meet these objectives, we have taken an interdisciplinary approach that has drawn on the knowledge and research of educators across the globe with an emphasis

on diverse aspects of adolescent online social communication such as social and cognitive development, communication characteristics and mode of communication. This volume, thus, moves beyond traditional disciplinary and geographical boundaries and provides important and useful information to researchers, educators and practitioners on adolescent online social communication.

## THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

The foci of this edited volume are to (a) understand the theoretical aspects of adolescent online social communication, (b) identify the mechanism that supports and regulates adolescent online social communication, and finally (c) provide important evidence on successful development and implementation of adolescent online social environment. Of fourteen excellent contributing chapters, three distinct themes have emerged. They include *emerging conceptual and theoretical perspectives*; *current legal perspectives and future legal needs*; and *recent research findings, educational perspectives, and practical application*. A discussion of the themes and relevant sections follows.

**Section 1** presents a theoretical perspective on adolescent online social communication. It explores various issues from theoretical framework for adolescent online communication research to adolescent online social relationship, to online behavior such as Internet addiction, to adolescent developmental needs, and finally to a theoretical perspective on adolescent sexual identity development in the Internet.

In **Chapter 1**, Robert Z. Zheng, Jason J. Burrow-Sanchez, Megan E. Call, and Clifford J. Drew, of University of Utah, and Stephanie Donnelly, of University of Miami, explore a conceptual framework for research on teen online communication. It brings attention to the influences of related elements such as social and individual factors on adolescent needs and behaviors in online communication. The authors proposed that adolescent online behaviors are linked to their needs pertaining to developmental, social-psychological, and cognitive demands. While adolescent needs are influenced by the social and individual factors, such influences also impose indirect impact on adolescent online behaviors. This framework provides a comprehensive picture of teen online communication in terms of the components involved in such communication.

In **Chapter 2**, Gustavo S. Mesch, of the University of Haifa in Israel, discussed the motivations for the use of each social application and the impact of the use on the type, size and quality of social ties that are maintained and created. Drawing from multiple perspectives in adolescent online communication including social relationships and worldview of the young generation as well as the multiple venues of social communication such as the use of electronic mail, open forums, chat rooms, Instant Messenger and social networking sites, the author delved deep into the issue pertaining to the impact of these new media on adolescent social activities in an online environment. The author concluded that the communication environment has become more and more complex, further research should be conducted to understand the use of different social applications, the structure and content of social communication and the behavioral and psychological association with those applications and content.

In **Chapter 3**, Laura Widyanto and Mark Griffiths, Nottingham Trent University of UK, provided an extended discussion on the pathological and addictive nature of the Internet. The authors reviewed the history and concept of Internet addiction and the research on Internet addiction. They made several important conclusions about the current research in adolescent Internet addiction. Finally, the authors proposed directions for future research by identifying key areas related to adolescent Internet addiction.

**Chapter 4** raises an important issue related to the formation of online relationships in the dual contexts of adolescent cognitive and psycho-social development and characteristics of Internet communication technologies. Susan M. Miller, Kent State University; Kenneth L. Miller, Youngstown State University,

and Christine Allison, Kent State University, reviewed the literature on how teens use the Internet to support existing, offline relationships. Their discussion was then extended to online communication where adolescents' online behaviors were distinguished by their psychological and personal traits. The authors concluded that forming online relationships may rest with the teen's awareness of how to present him or herself given the unique cue-free Internet environment.

Bryant Paul and Lelia Samson, of Indiana University, presented in **Chapter 5** a new perspective on adolescent online social communication and relationship formation by considering the potential role of the Internet in the process of adolescent sexual identity construction. The authors asserted that the Internet is likely to play a critical role in individuals' sexual self-identity development in the millennial age. The authors then reviewed the specific role Internet communication technologies have come to play in the process of adolescent sexual socialization and argued that future research addressing the role of the Internet in the process of adolescent sexual socialization and identity development must consider both the specific structure of the adolescent brain and the unique nature of the Internet as a source of information and an opportunity for social networking.

**Section 2** presents an important aspect in the research on adolescent online social communication. That is, the legal perspectives and the legal needs related to current and future practice and research. This section consists of two chapters contributed by authors who have considerable practical experiences and who have conducted substantial research on this issue.

**Chapter 6** offers a discussion on the legal aspects related to adolescents and social networking sites such as Second Life. Larry L. Burriss, of Middle Tennessee State University, identified aspects on what is protected and what is not in the ever-expanding CyberVillage in relation to speech, expressions, and other cyber related behavior. Given the current legal climate, the author proposed that it is critical that schools develop written policies regarding the role of the school in education for civility, free speech, disruption, threats and proper computer use, and how computer use relates to these areas.

In **Chapter 7**, Zhong Yan, of State University of New York at Albany, reviewed The Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA; 2000) as well as other existing regulations in protecting children on the Internet, followed by an empirical study showing the evidence that CIPA is associated with a decrease in high school students' Internet use at school but does not appear to have a beneficial effect on their knowledge of Internet safety or opportunities for Internet safety education. Recommendations were made regarding assessing the real impact of CIPA as well other Internet safety regulations on young Internet users.

**Section 3** consists of seven chapters covering a wide range of topics from effects of motives for Internet use, to adolescent fear in online environment, to risk factors affecting adolescent online social communication, and so forth. The researchers discussed various issues through unique lenses which revealed with considerable depth and breadth the causality and relationship of adolescent online social communication.

In **Chapter 8**, Louis Leung, of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, focused on the ways in which individuals use the Internet for social communication and support. In particular, how personality traits, such as perception of *aleness* and *age identity gratifications*, together with *motives for Internet use* impact Internet habits and behavior. The author investigated how differences in the above constructs among adolescents and children influence their online social behavior such as use of instant messaging, online games, and participating in forums.

In **Chapter 9**, Myron Orleans, of California State University at Fullerton, focused on the interactions between the social networks of young adolescents and their computer usage. Particular attention was devoted to determining whether heavy computer use tended to isolate adolescent users. The findings challenged the common attributions of prevalent danger, that heavy youthful computer users would experience social isolation. The author concluded that the interpersonal lives and computer activities of

early adolescents reciprocally reinforced patterns of behavior that lowered the likelihood of risk behaviors to a significantly greater degree than did direct parental involvement.

Taking a different perspective Megan E. Call and Jason J. Burrow-Sanchez, of University of Utah, identified in **Chapter 10** risk factors involved in adolescent online social communication. The authors claimed that although the Internet is a beneficial tool for youth, some children and adolescents are at risk for being victimized online. They further pointed out that media reports portraying online predators and their victims can be inaccurate or misleading. Therefore, it is important that mental health professionals and parents receive accurate information about online victimization in order to protect youth from harm. The chapter provides research-based information on adolescent Internet use and the risk factors associated with online victimization. Further, recommendations for increasing protective factors are provided as a means to keep youth safe while using the Internet.

**Chapter 11** explores Millennials' participation in the public good, investigating whether they use social networking for social responsibility. Sharmila Pixy Ferris, of William Paterson University, described social networking, as new media uniquely a part of Millennials' wired and connected lifestyles, has the potential to "transform citizenship." Using a Webnography approach, the author investigated Millennials' social networking and social responsibility. Findings go against conventional wisdom as the author found that Millennials use social networking to take social and political action, engage in social entrepreneurship, and conduct charitable solicitation and donation.

In **Chapter 12**, Ikuko Aoyama and Tony L. Talbert, of Baylor University, investigated cyberbullying among adolescents, teens, and young adults who either perpetrate and/or are the recipients of harassing and threatening behaviors through the use of technologies such as emails, Internet communities and social networking Web sites, chat rooms, and cell phones. This chapter presents the characteristics and theoretical frameworks that define and contextualize cyberbullying including the international prevalence and related statistics, backgrounds and profiles of perpetrators, and adults' roles. It also provides educators and parents with prevention and intervention strategies to address cyberbullying among youth.

Maja Pivec, of University of Applied Sciences in Austria, and Paul Pivec, of Deakin University in Australia, took a unique perspective by examining the relationship between electronic games and adolescent online social communication. **Chapter 13** discusses the role of media and students. The authors claimed that while it is agreed that technology such as electronic games provide a wealth of opportunities for digital generation learners, there is not enough evidence to show that the digital generation learns any differently than previous generations, or children who have never been exposed to computing of any kind. Finally, the authors concluded that the creative mind can be captivated in both traditional and digital teaching environments.

Finally, **Chapter 14** describes how information and communication technologies (ICT) are shaping the societies in which adolescents of the future will live. Muhammet Demirbilek, of the University of Wisconsin, and Berna Mutlu, of the University of Florida, elaborated on the functionalities of chat rooms for social communication and relationship formation. The chapter offers a detailed discussion on issues related to chat rooms as a two-way real time communication tool frequently used by adolescents. Emphases were made on the effects of chat rooms on adolescents' second language development.

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