Chapter 4
Social Interaction Process
Analysis of Bengalis’ on Orkut®

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ABSTRACT
This study investigates what interlocutors do when they exchange messages on the social network site (SNS) Orkut® and how they do it. In so doing, the study examines the interplay of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) acts, interaction processes, and frequency of message exchange in text-based dyadic interactions of diasporic Bengalis on Orkut®. A total of 48 dyadic interactions were analyzed. The subjects were observed to have produced mostly bona-fide positive socioemotional content, primarily through ‘greet’ and ‘claim’. It was also noticed that dyads who exchange utterances more than global average, produce more task-oriented content than those who exchange utterances less than global average. Task communication is achieved primarily through ‘inquire’ and ‘inform’. ‘Bona-fide positive socioemotional’ content is argued to be providing users’ socio-emotional needs, while ‘task’ communication helps them accumulate social capital. The findings contribute to CMC, pragmatics, and social psychology. It further helps common people understand the benefits of interaction on SNSs.

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INTRODUCTION
Human to human interaction through the shared use of Inter-supported Communication (CMC; Herr- ring, 2004). CMC has long been adopted for both instrumental and social interactions in organizational contexts (Steinfield & Steinfeld, 1986). However, only recently attention is being diverted to computer-mediated social communication (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Cliff, 2007; Honeycutt & Herring, 2009; Peña & Hancock, 2006). In fact, with the exponential growth of popularity of social network sites (SNSs), such as Facebook®, MySpace®, and Orkut®, more research is required to understand different aspects of users’ behaviors. On SNSs, users create profiles, articulate their social networks, and establish or maintain con-
Social Interaction Process Analysis of Bengalis' on Orkut®

Connections with others primarily through text-based communication (boyd & Ellison, 2007).

In recent years, our social mobility has gone up for various reasons. Both forced and voluntary migrations affect immigrant population socioemotionally (Jacobsen, 2002). CMC, however, plays an important role in creating and strengthening a sense of community among immigrants of the same linguistic and/or ethnic origin (Hiller & Franz, 2004). The internet in general, and SNSs in particular, offer migrants a new resource for the formation of social capital (Boase, et al., 2006; Ellison et al., 2007; Hiller & Franz, 2004). Social capital is broadly defined as the resources gathered through relationships among people (Coleman, 1988). However, very few studies have actually examined how immigrants benefit from using SNSs. It seems that inadequate empirical findings of users’ behavior on SNSs and popular mass media’s anecdotal reports on the bad aspects of these sites are some of the causes for some individuals’ and institutions’ unfavorable attitudes towards SNSs. Although text-based CMC offers a potentially rich source of insight into human behavior, to date, I am not aware of any studies that have substantiated their findings by systematically analyzing actual content of the interaction that goes on these sites among immigrants.

This study addresses the fundamental question: What is it that interlocutors are doing (or intending to do) when they exchange messages on Orkut®? In answering the question, the study proposes a new analytical method to analyze multi-dimensional aspects of communication. Drawing from pragmatics and conversation analysis, the new method investigates the interplay of CMC acts, interaction processes, and frequency of message exchanges in naturally-occurring text-based dyadic interactions of diasporic Bengalis in a small university town in the Midwestern USA. This method will be useful for researchers trying to understand the meaning of text-based CMC across languages and CMC modes since the method was developed using empirical data. Additionally, the findings of the study help us understand how conversations on the social network site, Orkut®, bring members of the immigrant community closer together to create a network which consequently provides social capital and socioemotional support to the members. Thus, the study helps us understand the benefits of conversations on SNSs in general.

ORKUT®

Orkut® is one of the most popular SNSs, with 67,000,000 members as of December, 2007 (Claburn, 2007). It is run by Google and was developed by a Turkish software engineer, Orkut Büykökten, in January 2004 (AskWiki, 2006). Although it originated in the U.S., Orkut® is popular primarily among Brazilians (53.99%) and Indians (16.91%) (Orkut®, 2008). It is a convergence of various media applications: profiles that users personalize to express their interests and tastes, ‘friending’ via links, communities, scrapbooks (public/semi-public, asynchronous), email (private, asynchronous), chat (private, synchronous), photo uploads, videos, etc. The friend network lets users link to their friends and traverse the resulting network of profiles. Orkut®’s scrapbook is particularly interesting as a mode of computer-mediated communication, in that senders’ texts only appear on receivers’ scrapbooks, such that the two halves of an exchange are located in different scrapbooks (see figure 1). Further, scraps are arranged in the order they are posted, with no option for sorting by the user. Consequently, between two related scraps from any user, there may be other unrelated scraps from other users; thus the coherence of exchanges is often disrupted. The coherence may also be disrupted due to temporal gap between initiation and responses of messages between dyads. Despite this, the ‘scrapbook’ appears to be the most commonly-used mode of interpersonal communication on Orkut®.