STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM: ANALYSIS OF TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE. A CASE STUDY OF STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT: *Cell phones play an essential role in communication throughout the world. The study was conducted to investigate the different dimensions of technological change in mobile phones and its influences on students. For this purpose the data was collected from 100 students of PMAS Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi, selected using convenience sampling. Data collection tool included semi structured questionnaires. The study shows that structural change in mobile phones greatly influenced its function among students. The major technological change, i.e. internet access on their mobile phones affects their lifestyles, personalities and learning patterns. Data shows that 68% of the students use internet on their phones only for Facebook while a mere 43% use it as an informational tool. Moreover, study shows that 73% recording lectures negatively affects writing skills, language, and overall attitude towards studies.*

Key Words: *Structural Functionalism, Technology, Change, Student*

INTRODUCTION

Structural Functionalism has a broad perspective in anthropology, which interprets society as a structure with interrelated parts that perform various functions. Social structures are placed at the center of analysis and social functions are deduced from these structures. Functionalism explains the society as a whole in terms of function of its constituent elements such as norms, customs, traditions, institutions, etc. The mobile phones too are structures playing various functions. They are handheld portable devices that help people communicate without any restriction of place. Thus, chang in the function of a single technology, i.e. from wire to wireless communication system the overall social structure of the community has visibly altered. The paper explores the effects of structural change in mobile phone, on its functions and use in relation with students. The technological change in mobile phones has completely changed the lives of students. The change is visible to such an extent that children using the technology and those deprived of it can easily be recognized and tagged as the I-Generation. "The I-Generation" is the generation "born with digital technologies such as the iPhone, iPod, iPad, and iTunes"[1]. Technology thus dictates and defines the personalities of the youth now days. "Youth and children of the new generation are defined by their technology and media use, their love of electronic communication, and their need to multitask"[1]. The majority of the population today owns latest technology mobile phones because it is the most common and easily assessable technology present. The purpose of mobile phones is social networking, however, it starts regulating our lives to the extent that we are dictated and controlled by it. The severity is observable as, "If you lose your mobile phone you lose part of your brain" [2]. Hence, mobile phones are unavoidably an essential part of every individual.

Developments in mobile phone information technology are characterized by the ongoing technological progress and the growing distribution requirements, particularly in professional setup [3]. "The new digital environment presented an exceptional array of possibilities for communication, interaction, and information retrieval at the fingertips that was never before available" [4]. Education in particular is a very traditional system, but has always had space for new developments [5]. Students now have to work with communities, governments, local authorities which have increased the interaction level. The increased need for interaction has thus inculcated the need to utilize mobile phones.

Structural change in mobile phones influences its functions and also the student's educational environments. Mobile phones play an important role in supporting personalized learning experience of students. The use is also associated with instant access to knowledge, thus students are able to receive immediate information and feedback [6]. Mobile phones also provide an alternative to traditional learning tools such as flash cards. Social networking accounts, like Facebook offers an online platform on which users creates accounts, share information, and interact with other known and unknown contacts [7]. Students often use facebook for learning, completing academic tasks, acquire skills in problem solving and continuous academic development [8], which pushes students to perform well and helps in academic achievement.

Studies made while designing mobile learning programs, showed that 90% of the world population has accessibility to mobile phones. Further the studies show that "using mobile technologies in learning environments can offer diverse opportunities for educators and learners" [9,10]. Mobile phones have become information tools, with gradual changes in its structure. The functionalities have diversely increased including web-browsing, sending and receiving e-mail, using Face book, audio/video capturing and data saving. Mobile phones have, "Morphed solely as a way to hold a conversation with someone into a way to consume more media" [11]. Thus, cell phones having wireless internet capabilities have increased the potential for inquiry and information gathering [12]. Due to cell phones, students improve concentration and participation in their studies [12].

They said that student's are neglecting their formal writing patterns. Proper use of grammar rules is compulsory for writing but students forgetting how to use commas, apostrophes, and even capital letters to begin sentences. To sort out this problem students attend the classes regularly,

records the lectures to clarify most complex part of the lecture. The writing skills also have the benefit that texting actually promotes "the ability to summarize and express oneself in a few words". Texting also helps students to learn an "element of writing," develop their own "individual voice".

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The data collection for the paper was done from the University of PMAS Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi comprising of a sample of 100respondents.The sample included both male and female respondents who selected through non-probability convenience sampling. Data was gathered using semi structured questionnaires, while it was analyzed using SPSS. The questionnaire consisted of four major parts:
1.   Demographic information.
2.   Information about cell phone type owned and preference type.
3.   Uses of cell phones and role of cellphones in education.
4.   Opportunities and constraints of cellphones.
The respondents belonged to three Major Degrees; MPhil, MSc and BBA Students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table.1: Cross Tabulation

Do you have internet access in your mobile phone?					
		Yes		No	
1. Which account do you often access?	Face book	47	68%	22	31%
	Email	13	41%	18	58%
2. Do you think that students use mobile phone as an informational tool?	Yes	30	43%	39	56%
	No	14	45%	17	44%
3. Do you think that recording lecture through cell phone negatively affects students writing skills?	Yes	51	73%	18	26%
	No	22	70%	9	29%

The cross tabulation table shows that 60 % students had internet access while the 40 percent did not have internet access on their phones.

Internet access and Applications used (Social Networking sites Vs Email Accounts:

The students that did have internet access on their phones revealed that, (68%) of them used it to access Facebook while only (41%) percent of them used it to open their email addresses. Facebook is a social network used for enhancing one's social life. "Students spend hours in there even though online seeking and learning platforms provides the discussion forum messaging and features, students mostly prefer communicating and discussing on Facebook"[13]. Facebook has become quite popular now a day's especially among students of university, college as well as school. People are increasingly using Facebook for social networking,

communication, and interaction. Facebook is a necessary element in student's daily life.

While (40%) of the respondents who did not have internet have internet access on their phones and had to use an alternative device to access the internet facility, only (31%) used Facebook while a majority of (58%) used internet for only using their email address and important educational purposes.

The results clearly show that since the structural change in phones and availability of internet on it the use of social networking sites increased rather than educationally utilized email addresses. Strikingly lack of internet on phones made students focus more on their studies rather than their social relationships.

2. Use of Mobile Phones as Tools of Information

The results of the cross tabulation table shows that out of the (60%) students having internet access, only 43 percent agreed that they used cellphones for information while the other (45%) disagreed. Research shows thatthree major uses of cell phone are: 1) as a response system, 2) as a research tool for students, and 3) as a tool for collecting data of student work through video recordings and photographs" [14].The responses were mostly that "It helped me to better memorize the steps during my lecture".

On the other hand (56%) students said no because, mostly students spend their time using Facebook, play games and waste their time in watching movies. (44%) students considered that mobile phone use as informational tools because internet technologies give latest information, student did not use mobile phone as informational tool but use for entertainment.

3. Recording Lectures through Cellphones Negatively Affects Students Writing Skills:

The results further show that (73%) students said yes that the habit of recording lectures in their cell phones affects writing skills negatively. It slows down both their hearing abilities and writing speed. "One school of thought argues that the services like recording aids are a curse, because it affects negatively the student's communication skills, mostly writing skills" [15]. Further, use of abbreviated language on cellphones for messaging and chatting, adversely affects the students ability to write proper language. This result also shows that (31%) have not internet access in their mobile but (70%) students said yes recorded lectures affects writing skills because student recall more lecture material if they write in the form of their notes and writing skills are an important tool for learning. Whereas (29%) said that although they do not have internet access, but the student said that due to lack of writing skills students prefer to record lectures and the recorded lectures changes the student's way of learning.

Technology has been changing rapidly; the changes however are not always for the better. Research shows that cell phones have become a basic necessity of students, due to its multi functions. Many applications like email, Facebook, twitter etc., are being used, as means of forming cyber relationships instead of face-to-face social relations.

CONCLUSION

The results show that a cell phone is even though is an informational tool as it provides platforms and applications that helps the respondents for study purposes, however it is rarely used it for that purpose. It affects the personalities, studying and learning patterns, making the students more dependent rather than being independent. Majority of students have two mobiles one for their social status and another for common use. They prefer using cellphones for social networking sites leading to various personality disorders in them.

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