A LEVEL SOCIOLOGY

Lesson Element

Social Relationships and Social Media

Instructions and answers for teachers

These instructions should accompany the OCR resource 'Social Relationships and Social Media' activity which supports OCR A Level Sociology.

The Activity:

This activity offers an opportunity for English skills development.

Associated materials:

'Social Relationships and Social Media' activity sheet

Aims and Objectives:

1. To understand the role of new forms of social media in shaping social relationships both personal and publically.

2. To understand different theoretical interpretations of social media and the self

3. To consider different interpretations and usage of social media

4. To consider methodological issues in relation to researching social media

5. To consider the role of social media in social movements and political protest

Suggestions for delivery

1. Students should begin by considering the impact of social media in their own context.
2. The research project on Facebook should highlight some of the challenges faced by sociologists in understanding the impact on personal relationships.
3. Students should consider how different social groups might use social media differently, considering both differential cultural interpretations as well as considering issues of access (who cannot access such new forms of social media and why). The impact of different variables would be worth considering here as well as asking the question about how sociologists know about such issues. Usage of social media is worth considering at the global level and the local level.
4. Given the global nature of social medial it is worth highlighting the ways in which different social media are interpreted differently by individuals and societies. Miller's study is a useful way to highlight this point.
5. Theoretical explanations of the role of social media; it is worth considering the usefulness of traditional theories in explaining the role of such media as well as considering more contemporary interpretations such as postmodernism. This can include a debate about structure versus action.
6. There is also the opportunity to explore the role of social media in relation to social protest and social movements. Students could carry out their own research into the role that social media has played in Egypt or Syria.

Formative assessment

It would be a good idea to engage students with their own experiences of social media in a reflexive way, to consider the range of ways in which people use social media in their own lives. Carrying out research will highlight some of the problems sociologists face in understanding the impact and implications of their findings. It will also reinforce some of the methodological concepts, which are integral to the course.

Summative assessment

'Examine the impact of social media on social relationships, at a personal and public level'.

This question invites students to explore the extent to which social media strengthen or undermine conventional relationships, as well as considering the ways in which such forms of technology can tell sociologists about the nature of relationships today. Theoretical interpretations should be considered here. Furthermore consideration should be given to the role of new forms of social communication in the context of global issues, and the impact of such forms of media in social protest, using a range of examples.

Suggested answers

Task 1 – Getting you thinking

Think about the possible effects of network sites such as Facebook on people's relationships.

- *Increasing communication between people that don't live close to each other, particularly strengthening kinship ties*
- *Increasing potential for communication especially with hand held devices such as mobile phones*
- *Greater, more complex social relations*
- *Greater choice about who to be friends with, more agency*

Working in pairs, create a list of the benefits and the potential problems of Facebook.

Benefits:

- *Can maintain friendship/family relationships with those who are not geographically close.*
- *Direct access to the powerful (for example politicians).*
- *Free.*
- *Anyone with internet can access it.*
- *Allows those to communicate who might be unable to communicate usually.*
- *A way of mobilizing protest and giving voice to those who are otherwise repressed or muted.*

Potential Problems:

- *Lack of privacy*
- *Hard to take back information*
- *People using it in very different ways*
- *People establishing inappropriate relationships*
- *Grooming/exploitation/bullying*

Expected duration:

20 minutes

Task 2 – Research project

Expected duration:

30 minutes to plan questions

30 minutes to conduct interviews

20 minutes for the write up

Task 3 – New patterns of technology based social relations: Tales from Facebook

1.   What are the benefits of studying Facebook using the ethnographic method?

*   *It is possible to gain depth and verstehen by understanding the underlying causes and meanings that people give to relationships created and maintained on Facebook*
*   *It is possible to ask people about their views and compare them with what they say on their Facebook page*
*   *It allows the researcher to explore the impact of Facebook on other areas of their life and relationships*

2.   What do Miller's findings suggest about different cultural interpretations of Facebook?

There are many different interpretations of Facebook – these vary within and between cultures. The different ways of using Facebook can reflect cultural values and perhaps create new ways of understanding relationships.

3.   What implications might Facebook have for social relationships, according to Miller?

Miller's research suggests that rather than people talking less today, social media such as Facebook actually allow social relationships to flourish. His research also suggests that the negative press about cyber bullying on Facebook is not as widespread as thought and in fact Miller regards Facebook quite positively.

Expected duration:
30 minutes

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Task 4 – Sociological interpretations of Facebook

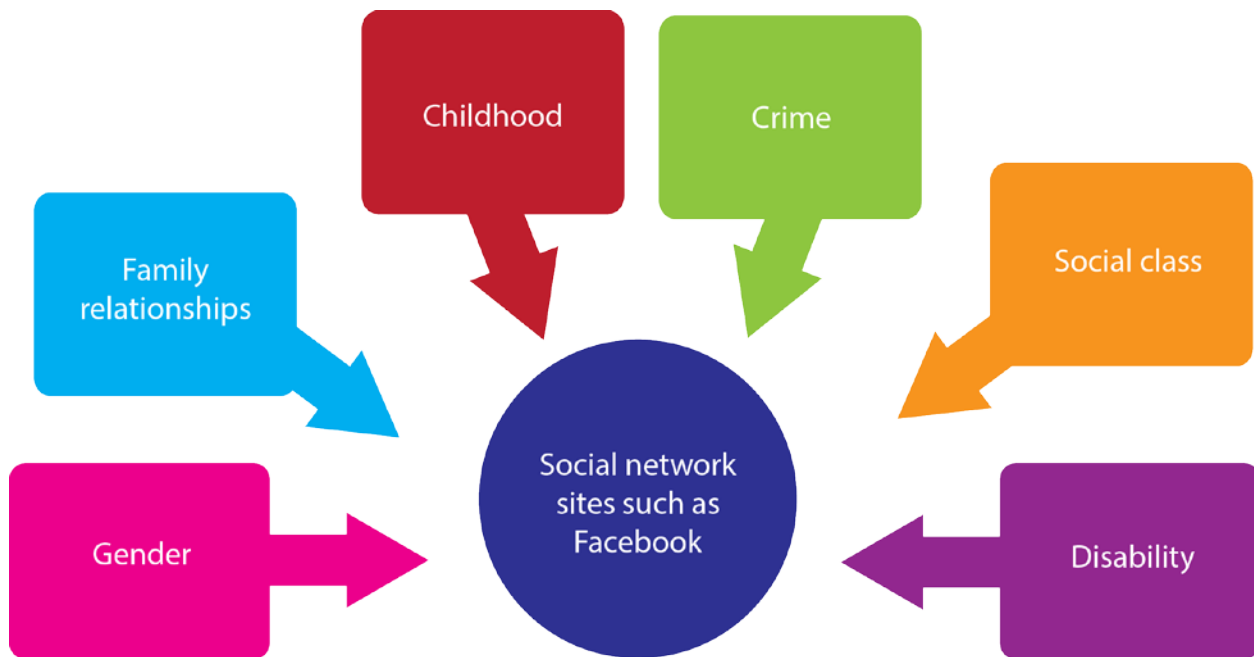1.   According to some postmodernists, how is Facebook useful for understanding identity?

Facebook acts as a biographical tool – rather than waiting until people reach the older stages of their life to reflect on their lives, Facebook acts as a biographical tool throughout people's life. As such it is a useful way of understanding people's identity.

2.   What might be difficult about trying to apply traditional theories to sites such as Facebook?

Modern social theories may be problematic because they do not take into account the huge changes in the way that people communicate today. Structural social theories tend to assume that the individual is passive whereas some might argue that the individual has considerable agency (free will) in deciding who we choose to have relationships with via social media.

Gender in societies where women might be unable to vocalise politically might find they have a platform to express views online. Gender in terms of different patterns of use of social network sites.

Family Relationships the strengthening or maintenance of family relationships. Alternatively the creation of families of choice. An opportunity to maintain relationships with long distance relatives.

Childhood children who might otherwise be fairly regulated physically are able to socialise more freely online. This might also leave children open to exploitation and abuse, or bullying.

Crime new forms of crime might emerge, deviant behaviour such as inciting hatred or bullying might also occur.

Social Class different attitudes towards Facebook and different ways of using social media.

Disability those whose disability might usually prevent access to socialising may be given voice.

Expected duration:

30 minutes reading and questions

15 minutes discussion in small groups

10 minutes to feedback and discuss

Task 5 – Social media and social protest

1.   Summarise the impact of social media in political movements and social protest using the concepts below.

2.   What are the challenges for sociologists trying to understand these forms of media and the impact that they might have?

Sociologists need to consider which methodology is most appropriate for understanding forms of social media. Traditional research methods may need to be combined with careful research of the events that occur online. There might be ethical issues with getting to know people on websites such as Facebook. Furthermore there may be access problems. A different set of skills might well be necessary for exploring such social media. Given the private and highly individualized nature of social media, little is really known about the extent of the usage, or the nature of usage.

Expected duration:

1 hour documentary

30 minutes reading and questions

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