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Identity Performance on the MTV India Facebook Fan Page  
Articulating Youngistan, Performing Indian-ness

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the everyday activities of Indian youth on the MTV India Facebook fan page. The two- phase research design included a period of participant observation, combined with conducting online interviews, and a visit to New Delhi, India to conduct offline interviews. The thesis analyzes several aspects of identity performance (e.g. online identity performance, relation between online and offline identity, ideal presentation of an online identity) in relation to Goffman's (1959) presentation of self in everyday life, and argues that the MTV India Facebook fan page has become a site for identity performance.

Since such identity performance is bounded by participants' everyday activities, the fan page can also be identified as a particular 'place'. I use Tuan's (1977) idea of 'place-making' and illustrate how the MTV India Facebook fan page has become a meaningful and familiar 'place' overtime through performance of routine activities and everyday practices (Seamon, 1979). These activities can be identified as articulating 'Youngistan' (voice of Indian youth) and performing Indian-ness, suggesting that fans have appropriated the fan page for performing specific activities that are particular to them.

In addition, the thesis takes the local-global character into consideration and argues that local-global combine together to form separate, unique cultures such as MTV India, which safeguard 'locality' within the global product and help in 'place-making' activities.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	7
CHAPTER 1: DEFINING THE OBJECT OF STUDY .....	12
1.1 Social network sites (SNSs).....	12
1.2 Social networking sites – a way to connect online and offline life.....	17
1.3 MTV India’s Facebook fan page.....	19
CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: LOCALITY, PLACE AND IDENTITY CREATION.....	25
2.1 The local-global MTV India.....	25
2.2 A familiar sense of ‘place’.....	31
2.3 Situational geography.....	36
2.4 Online self & the offline world .....	44
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....	47
3.1 My ethnographic approach.....	47
3.2 Online ethnography.....	53
3.3 Study plan.....	65
3.4 Conducting interviews.....	68
CHAPTER 4: SETTING THE FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS AND INTRODUCING FAN ACTIVITIES .....	72
4.1 Topics posted on MTV India’s Facebook fan page.....	72
4.2 Discussing fan activities.....	79
4.2.1 Wall posts.....	79
4.2.2 The like button.....	82
4.2.3 The share button .....	86
4.2.4 Comments .....	91
CHAPTER 5: IDENTITY PERFORMANCE ON THE MTV INDIA FACEBOOK FAN PAGE.....	95
5.1 The liking activity.....	96
5.2 The sharing activity.....	102
5.3 The commactivity.....	109
5.3.1 Accomplishing friendliness.....	111
5.3.2 Managing disagreements via turn taking.....	116
5.3.3 Space for knowledge sharing.....	127
5.3.4 Performing national identity through text talk.....	135

5.4 The role of Stigma.....	147
5.5 Performing identities in day to day life on the MTV India Facebook fan page.....	150
5.6 Creation of an online community.....	154
 CHAPTER 6: PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR USE OF SPACE.....	 160
6.1 The MTV India Facebook fan page as a space.....	178
6.1.1 Fan page – a space to perform routine activities.....	179
6.1.2 The fan page – a space to perform fans practices for online performance.....	181
6.1.3 Fan page – a space to perform fan activities on shared interests/to meet like-minded people.....	185
6.1.4 Fan page – a space for online and offline friending.....	189
6.3 The MTV India Facebook fan page – a useful space and a ‘place’.....	191
6.4 Place as a ‘meaningful’ construct.....	192
6.5 The MTV India Facebook fan page as a specific ‘place’.....	196
6.6 Developing a sense of belongingness.....	201
6.7 Creating an individualized sense of place.....	204
 CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.....	 211
 BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	 229
 APPENDICES.....	 241
APPENDIX A – QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ONLINE INTERVIEWS.....	242
APPENDIX B - QUESTIONNAIRE FOR OFFLINE INTERVIEWS.....	243
APPENDIX C – FACEBOOK RESEARCH PROFILE.....	245
APPENDIX D – ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	247
APPENDIX E – COPY OF CONSENT FORM.....	250
APPENDIX F - GLOSSARY.....	252
APPENDIX G - SELECTED ONLINE INTERVIEWS.....	254
APPENDIX H – OFFLINE INTERVIEWS.....	267

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## Introduction

In 2009, I moved to the United Kingdom for my PhD studies. Moving to the United Kingdom and living here was equivalent to my dreams come true. I had a family friend, who introduced me to the city- Sunderland and its people. In the beginning, I only knew him, but later I made friends and became part of a social circle. But I missed home- my family, my friends and relatives.

Mobile phones were not so cost efficient, so it was suggested that I use Skype or Facebook. I made an account on Skype and added family and other relatives. I had an account on Facebook, but I never used it much. I sent requests to all my friends and used it to get in touch with my friends in New Delhi and other places.

While Skype helped me to stay in touch with family, Facebook offered an opportunity to interact with my school/college friends. I also joined different Facebook fan pages representing various brands such as MTV India, New Look, FabIndia (an Indian garment brand) etc. The MTV India Facebook fan page took my attention on the first visit as most of my Facebook friends were already participants on it. The fan page featured various topics on MTV India's reality shows, sports activities, Bollywood etc. I was particularly interested in Bollywood and MTV India's shows, so I started following the fan page on a routine basis.

It is through the fan page, I met Gitesh, a 20 year old boy from New Delhi. We started interacting on the fan page about one of the reality shows on MTV India and got to know each other. He told me that he loves Facebook, especially MTV India's Facebook fan page, and logs in at every possible opportunity. He routinely participates on MTV India's fan page by posting comments, and takes particular pride in the way he expresses his ideas on various topics posted on the fan page. Through this activity he has formed allegiances with other like-minded people, and feels he has become part of an online community.

My online association with Gitesh and his online allegiances with other people on the fan page suggest that the fan page is used as a platform to create new connections and strengthen



existing ones. Launched in 2008, MTV India's Facebook fan page has evolved to support a wide range of everyday youth practices and activities. It has become a major site for young people's opinions and ideas on social reform, politics, sports and issues of national importance, and has constituted a space to perform what Baym (2000) terms 'friendliness' based on common interests.

The phenomenon of such online groups/communities is not new and has already formed the object of a number of studies. As early as 1996, Ananda Mitra studied a newsgroup 'soc.cult.Indian', and examined the traditional national identities that have been disrupted by the process of migration and immigration. In his study, he identified the diasporic communities that have embraced the Internet to produce a new sense of community by textually creating images of their own national and tribal issues. The text messages exchanged on the internet were artifacts that bound the community together. The identities within the community were produced primarily by the way in which participants insert themselves into the discourses. More recently, Nancy Baym (2000), in her book *Tune In, Log on: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community*, looked at an online fan community of geographically dispersed individuals, who formed allegiances on the basis of common interests and practices. Her object of study is a newsgroup, rec.arts.tv.soaps (abbreviated by its members to r.a.t.s), whose members have willingly agreed upon a similar purpose and protocol in an effort to connect with other kindred fans in a social environment. The study identified the online community as a site for interactions and shared practices that utilize technology and the structure of a newsgroup to facilitate activities of everyday life.

Building on the work of Mitra, Baym and others (e.g. Kendall, 2002; Boyd, 2004), I examine the everyday activities of Indian youth on the MTV India fan page, and identify how these activities shape certain aspects of sociality and friendliness. The participants engage in everyday activities by posting textual snippets (postings), either in response to an existing discussion thread or to create a new thread. These discussion threads can be viewed as a form of interactive 'text talk' that allow participants to voice opinions – particularly about important cultural and national issues – and create a group identity for people, who use the site for a specific purpose. My **first research question** aims to examine the activities of

participants and organization of the ‘text talk’ that takes place on MTV India's Facebook fan page in order to illustrate how identities are performed, especially in relation to the theme of ‘Indian-ness’.

Since identity performance on the fan page is bounded by everyday activities, the fan page can also be identified as a ‘place’ articulating ‘Youngistan’. Drawing on the other name for India (Hindustan), Young+i+stan refers to young Hindustan, which represents the broader youth culture in India. The term was first introduced by Pepsi in an Indian advertising campaign and was quickly adopted by MTV India to represent the broader youth culture. In Hindi language, the word ‘stan’ refers to ‘place’ and its use in the term ‘Youngistan’ highlights how the MTV India Facebook fan page has transformed into a place. My **second research question** examines how the fan page has transformed into a meaningful ‘place’ (Tuan, 1977) through routine activities and everyday practices.

Besides this, my **two implicit research questions**<sup>1</sup> examine the relation between online offline life and how the MTV India Facebook fan page has become a glo-local product.

## Dissertation organization

The thesis is organized around two core topics- identity performance of Youngistanis (Indian youth) on the MTV India Facebook fan page and the fan page becoming a particular ‘place’.

**Chapter 1** gathers literature on social networking sites, centers on the newly emerged social networking site ‘Facebook’, and explains how the site has become a space for identity creation. It introduces the object of the study. It then discusses the MTV India Facebook fan page and explains how the fan page has become a site for everyday activities performed by Indian youth.

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<sup>1</sup> The focus of this study is to examine identity performance and place making process on the MTV India’s Facebook fan page, but to find out how the fan page has become a particular place, it is important to understand the local-global character of MTV India and connection between their online and offline life. Therefore, these are questions are listed as implicit research questions in my thesis.

**Chapter 2** sets out the conceptual framework and explains the key concepts structuring the study. I explain the local-global character of the MTV India Facebook fan page and locate MTV India and the fan page as a particular hybrid culture formed through indigenization and localization. I argue that the fan page has created its own identity and has been transformed into a particular place through participants' routine practices and everyday activities. I take Goffman's (1959) work on 'presentation of self in everyday life' and 'role of stigma' into account and argue how the fan page has become a site for identity performance.

**Chapter 3** details the ethnographic approach employed in the study. I use qualitative methods such as participant observation and online and offline one-to-one interviews to study participants' mediated performances on the fan page. In addition to these qualitative methods, I use language methods (Hanks, 1996) to make sense of 'text-talk' posted on the fan page and illustrate identity performance on the platform. Like others (Williams & Copes, 2005; Farquhar, 2009), I have created a researcher Facebook profile separate from my personal Facebook account that clearly states my research interests, objectives and aims of the study. It is through the researcher's Facebook profile I participate, observe, collect online data and create connections with potential subjects for offline interviews.

**Chapter 4** sets out the analytical framework for the study; I select a range of topics posted on the fan page based on fan activities (like, share and comment) received by each topic. These topics will be used to study identity performance on the platform. I briefly explain fan activities (like, share and comments) on the fan page and illustrate how they are performed.

**Chapter 5** analyzes the liking, sharing and commenting activities and explains identity performance in relation to Goffman's (1959) concept of stigma and presentation of self in everyday life. I study liking and sharing activity on the fan page and illustrate how people communicate their interests and tastes in public, and how psychological traits such as sociability are associated with Facebook fan pages. To demonstrate the identity performance, I analyze comments (textual snippets) through language methods and detail on a set of qualities that have emerged from the fan page and its participants.

**Chapter 6** details the place-making activities and highlights how the fan page has been transformed into a particular ‘place’. It contains fans portraits and inputs from online and offline interviews, which illustrate that MTV India’s fan page participants’ online lives, are informed by their offline lives. Moreover, the chapter also gives an account of the ‘sense of place’ created through routine activities (Tuan, 1977) and a lived-in environment (Seamon, 1979).

**Chapter 7** discusses my findings in relation to the literature reviewed in previous chapters. It states my original contribution to knowledge, discusses useful findings and indicates areas of future research.

# Chapter 1: Defining the object of study

## 1.1 Social network sites (SNSs)

Social network sites (SNSs) such as Facebook are web based social networking services that fall under the umbrella of 'social media'. The term 'social media' refers to a set of tools, services and applications that allow people to interact and form allegiances by using network technologies. Social media includes an array of services such as instant messaging, blogging, forums, and emails etc, which support one-to one, one-to-many and many-to-many interactions. Social network sites (SNSs) incorporate a wide range of other traits of social media (such as online gaming, online forums and online newsgroups), and form a unique mix of social media services that support a wide range of activities.

Launched in 1997, the first recognizable social networking website was SixDegrees.com. It allowed users to create profiles, list friends and surf friends lists. The website was first to combine these features and allowed users to send and receive messages. Much later, a number of community tools such as AsianAvenue and BlackPlanet were introduced that allowed users to connect with people from their own linguistic and cultural communities. Users created multiple profiles for personal, professional and dating purposes. In 1999-2000, networking sites such as Cyworld and LunarStorm added features like photo-sharing, guest book and diary fan pages (Ellison & Boyd, 2013). The next wave of social network sites (SNSs) was the 'service specific' social network websites, such as Ryze.com, Tribe.net, LinkedIn, Friendster, which promoted the creation of specific online communities of particular interests and activities. LinkedIn became the most powerful business networking site and Friendster the most significant social gaming website (Ellison & Boyd, 2013). Other networking sites such as MySpace, Orkut and Facebook were launched during the same period, but rose to prominence after 2004.

Ellison and Boyd (2013) define social networking sites as web based services “that allow individuals to (a) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (b) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (c) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Ellison and Boyd,

2007). The profile of an individual on a social network site (SNS) often presents an individual's interest, activities and other details such as gender, location and age (displayed by birth-dates), which one might or might not offer for public display. After joining a social networking service, users are prompted to find 'friends' or people with whom they share a relation or acquaintance through common activities or interests or previous offline ties (Ellison, 2006). The term 'friends' is confusing in this context, as the association between two people does not necessarily indicate friendship, but a real or virtual connection based on common interests and activities (Boyd, 2006a). On Facebook, users can access the information of others, if they are added to the same network, i.e. a profile of a user can only be viewed if the other user is a 'friend' or has an acquaintance or connection with him/her based on similar activities or interests. The information on a Facebook profile is publicly available, unless a profile owner has restricted access to his or her profile (Ellison and Boyd, 2007). Structural variations in access and visibility may occur at different levels in different social networking websites.

Another important component of social networking sites is the public display of connections, which is popularly known as a 'friends list'. It contains links to other friends' profiles, enabling users to navigate friends across the same and other networks. SNSs also provide a mechanism for chat, photo-sharing, video-sharing, discussion forums and blogging.

While most of the social networking sites (SNS) are designed to be widely accessible, many attract different homogenous populations and linguistic groups. For instance, Orkut became the most significant social networking site in Brazil before developing an Indian user base (Madhvan, 2007; Ellison and Boyd, 2007). In 2007, Orkut was awarded MTV India's youth icon title. For a majority of Indian youth, Orkut was the first social networking website that offered an option of 'online friendliness'. It was soon joined by other global and local social networking services such as Facebook, Bharatstudent.com, hi5.com and ibibo.com. The Indian look and feel of Orkut (such as the use of tricolors of the Indian national flag with the logo of Orkut); and its integration with Gmail accounts<sup>2</sup> (Google contacts) made the use of

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<sup>2</sup> According to an article in hindustantimes.com (July 27, 2011), India has the highest number of Gmail users; and possibly, it could be one of the major factors behind the early success of Orkut and other Google

‘Orkut’ simpler, as people could connect to Orkut through their Gmail accounts or vice versa. Similar to Facebook, users of Orkut could make particular or any amount of information (including photo-sharing) available for public viewing. Orkut users initiated messaging through scraps (textual postings) that worked in a similar way to ‘short e-mails’ posted on a friend’s profile, and turned out to be the easiest and most effective way of connecting friends and peers. But, after some time, Orkut failed to meet the demands and expectations of ‘techno-savvy’ Indian youth. Unlike Facebook and Twitter, Orkut never offered any social sharing plug-ins/modules<sup>3</sup> (interactive buttons) such as the ‘like’ feature, friend recommendations, activity feed, etc. Similar to Google Earth and Google Chrome, Orkut turned out to be a Google application that connected people with no real time features and applications (such as group chats, public profiles, celebrity fan pages, fan pages etc.).

As a result, early adopters of Orkut migrated to Facebook. Facebook not only allowed users to share and connect with each other, but offered an opportunity to explore real time applications such as virtual gaming, active fan and celebrity fan pages. The integration of Farmville (farming simulation social networking game) and Mafia Wars (a gangster multiplayer, social networking game) etc., into Facebook grabbed the attention of several college-going groups and youngsters. Other applications such as virtual quizzes and birthday calendars allowed Facebookers to personalize profiles; and perform tasks such as comparing movies and charting travel histories (Ellison and Boyd, 2007). Users began sending and posting messages on people’s walls (profile), and such messages or ‘postings’ formed the major bulk of the ‘news-feeds’. A news-feed is a summary of a user’s activity that shows the recent interactions with friends, profile changes, upcoming events, birthdays and updates from friends. Unlike Orkut, Facebook allowed many-to-many interactions, and through Facebook’s ‘news-feed’ feature, people began interacting through posting replies to existing comments or by creating new textual threads.

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applications in India. Retrieved from <http://www.hindustantimes.com/technology/Market-Updates/India-has-highest-number-of-Gmail-users/SP-Article1-725966.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Orkut had limited features such as scraps(messages to be posted on friend’s wall) and photo albums, where as Facebook and Twitter have a lot more features like status updates (one-to many communication), photo albums and other interactive applications (Facebook’s ‘like’ and ‘share’ button).

More recently, Facebook has become an effective way of sharing information through the 'news-feed' feature, thereby becoming a platform for social interactions and knowledge sharing (Pew Research Centre, 2008; Greenhow, 2008). In India, Facebook fan pages have become a site for routine activities and youthful practices. Facebook fan pages are public profiles created by organization/companies with the intention of networking with people, who are interested in learning about their activities and campaigns through the internet. Facebookers can become "fans" by clicking the 'like' button and form part of an online network that specifically promotes an organization, product or service. The MTV India Facebook fan page is one such fan page that has a massive fan following (around 3 million fans) and ranks as the second most popular fan page in India.

In April 2011, the MTV India's Facebook fan page supported social activist Anna Hazzare's crusade for the anti-corruption law<sup>4</sup>. Hazzare started a hunger strike in New Delhi to get the anti-corruption law passed to create an independent body to register and investigate complaints against corruption. The campaign received online support in the form of letter signing petitions and posting fan activities (posting videos, liking and sharing status updates etc) to support the cause. Such activities on the fan page suggest that the fan page has become a site for users to perform particular activities that display their interests (social/national issues such as corruption) and project an identity (a performance of an identity through posting textual snippets, liking and sharing status updates).

Identity performance on such Facebook fan pages is a relatively new phenomenon; few studies have been conducted to examine identity construction on Facebook (Ellison et al., 2006; Faquhar, 2009). In his study of Facebook, Farquhar (2009) identified the common characteristics of Facebook profiles, and examined how dynamic components of Facebook profiles such as status updates, tagging pictures, use of bumper stickers, videos and gifting support social interactions among participants can construct an online identity or a group identity. The study suggested that identity performance on Facebook is primarily articulated via the news- feed feature, through which people send and receive feedback (postings) on

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<sup>4</sup> A law to be introduced in the Indian parliament to ensure transparency in the government system and fight against corruption.



their performances. Another study conducted by Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin (2008), noted that listing one's affiliations with certain groups, musical bands and other activities or hobbies constructs an implicit identity performance in public. Facebook enables users to present themselves in ways that can reasonably bypass physical obstacles such as gender, race or even body type to some extent, and can create a hoped-for possible self which one is unable to do in the offline world.

More recent research suggests Facebook has also become a particular space for relationships, kinships and friendships that are continuously developed and reinforced (Miller, 2011). In his latest book, *Tales of Facebook* (2011), Miller studied the impact of Facebook in everyday life, and narrated stories of 12 different people, who use the platform for specific needs. These stories were based on Trinidadians, and contain case studies of, for instance, an ageing but formerly active man who uses the platform to overcome his loneliness; a Trini music star, who faced the online and the offline aftermath of a leaked intimate video; and a church member who uses Facebook to promote church activities and connect with other church members. The use and adoption of Facebook by Trinidadians demonstrates how the global platform has become a site to perform 'Trininess'. For example, Miller explains how Facebook features such as status updates and Facebook chat, communicate Trini-ness (p75). These features (status updates and chat) allow people to post light topics, containing elements of humor/fun activities that goes in accordance with the Trini culture. Such activities allow Trinidadians to perform Trininess and allow people to interact in different ways (chat, status updates, likes, shares etc). At the same time, Miller also explained the negative impact of Facebook on the Trinidadian culture through the Trini concept of 'bacchanal' (the idea of scandal and controversy) and illustrated how Facebook's interaction can impact negatively and create tensions in public and private spaces. He explained this through "Fasbook" and "Macobook" – the two Trinidadian concepts, which imply the nosiness of the people to peek into others' lives and acts, (p101) causing tension and controversies among family and friends. For example, photos taken at a private party, uploaded by friends on Facebook profiles may create 'bacchanal' making people frightened of the consequences of being exposed via their online friends' network.

## 1.2 Social networking sites: a way to connect online and offline life

An online world ranges from the World Wide Web (WWW) to specific online social communities such as newsgroups, fan pages and MUDs, and may give rise to new forms of identity formation. This suggests that the internet is not only a carrier of information and symbolic content, but is also a site where individuals perform specific actions, interactions and social relationships. It can be described both as a culture and a cultural artifact (Hine, 2000:14-28), which is shaped by the social context (e.g. expectations of the medium and use of the medium by its intended audience). The internet as a culture refers to a social space of its own, that allows different forms of social interactions, content production and consumption, identity formation and patterns of online communication within a digital space. As a unique space, the online activities are considered different and even separate from one's offline activities that have a life of their own. However, this approach has a methodological implication. Conceiving internet culture as an object of study involves studying only the online communications or interactions, and online social norms, etiquettes and rules, without considering how these may draw on established offline social norms and values.

Alternatively, the internet can be seen as a cultural artifact because its makers and creators use technology to communicate, express and produce content in everyday life. This approach rejects the perspective of looking at the Internet as a culture, and suggests that digital spaces are socially embedded which allow users to create, share and exchange ideas and lived experiences. These digital spaces can be visualized as imagined communities, in which participants cultivate relations with each other, and produce a group identity.

Communities can be imagined in several different ways. One particularly useful way to conceptualize 'communities' is to imagine them around shared cultural practices and activities; Anderson (1983) argues that communities can be structurally and symbolically 'imagined', where participants share a common conception, context, belongingness or feeling without any personal connections. For instance, in a nation state, citizens share an embodied political system, that creates a common sense of belongings between people, who do not meet, but feel connected, and form a common basis for 'nationalism' through shared

experiences (Anderson, 1983:6). For example, the sense of belongingness I as an Indian share for my nation cannot be personally experienced, it needs to be filtered through a common context and experience of being an 'Indian'; the feeling, being very much intangible and abstract, requires 'imagining' and has to be represented symbolically, where everyone (including me) expresses love and patriotism in their own way (on the Republic day of India, I in the UK might put a patriotic status update on Facebook, whereas others may sing the national anthem at their house in Delhi or elsewhere in India). Likewise, MTV India's Facebook fan page can be conceptualized as an 'imagined community' that has formed through specific routine activities and everyday practices, and is unique to its own set of members (Indian youth), who share the same sense of belongingness, irrespective of knowing each other personally.

Baym's (2000) online study on soaps (rec.arts.tv.soaps) and Mitra's (1996) study on diasporas (Soc.cult.Indian) illustrated how the internet has emerged as a site for group interactions. Conceptualizing the place of the internet in the lives of participants involves recognizing the social embeddedness of technology and its variable outcomes (such as developing and creating technology applications and tools to simplify the routine use and activities). As such, technologies are developed by large companies; the uses and their usefulness are determined by the consumers who use such technologies in their routine lives. An engagement with a certain kind of technology not only demonstrates how technology shapes our understanding, but also how technology is shaped by those who create and use it, and the society in which it is embedded (Bijker et al. 1987). Miller (2011) illustrates this through a case study of a young college student Arvind, who devised methods of online farming on FarmVille. FarmVille is a social networking farming game and is available as an Adobe Flash application on Facebook. Arvind, a resident of Trinidad, used Facebook's game FarmVille a) to raise crops' through the assistance of his fellow FarmVille neighborhood; based on reciprocity and routine interaction, and b) to create and establish new relationships (Miller 2011,b:52). Mostly described as "quiet", "good hearted", "kind", Arvind lacked any kind of foundational self-confidence and hence found it difficult to make friends in his offline life. However, through FarmVille, Arvind discovered a system of socializing that allowed him to interact with peers and friends from the offline setup and

devise methods of digital farming along with his neighborhood that consisted of people from both his online (people whom he met through FarmVille) and offline life (people whom he knew beforehand). His socializing on FarmVille can be understood through Altheide's (1999) 'technological seam', which explains how the use and placement of technology is continuously re-fitted and negotiated in day-to-day life. Arvind's use of technology allowed him to fulfill his desires by creating the best methods of online cultivation and thus connecting people from the offline environment (with whom he already shares a connection). This suggests that an online self is not 'distinct' but a part of an ongoing world of relationships, dialogue formation and identity performance (Boyd, 2004; Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfeld, 2006). In addition to this, in her study of a MUD-BlueSky, Kendall (2000) found that participants' online selves incorporated practices from their offline social reality and argued that in order to understand a range of online identity performances; the researcher needs access to offline worlds to create the holistic character of a person (p.71). As, she explains 'nobody lives only in cyberspace' (p.70), and as offline experiences and practices are reflected in an online persona or self, these lives are often connected. Likewise in her latest book, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, Baym (2010) suggests that an online self is created through online identity cues such as screen names, pictures and use of other applications such as polls, quizzes, etc. She notes that an online self is a complex web of offline and online social interactions that do not divorce people from physical contact, but allow them to go continuously back and forth between the online and offline worlds. Therefore, in this study, I use offline interviews as a mechanism to discover participants' online everyday routines and practices.

### 1.3 MTV India's Facebook fan page

Facebook has become one of the fastest growing social networking sites on the Internet. Due to its increasing popularity, Facebook fan pages have formed an interesting site for routine interactions and community formation. The Facebook fan page feature was introduced in November 2007. Facebook fan pages are public profiles created by organization/companies with the intention of networking with people, who are interested in learning about their activities and campaigns. Facebookers can become "fans" by clicking the 'like' button and

form part of an online network that specifically promotes an organization, a product or a service. A fan page includes fans, wall posts (textual snippets posted by the company's moderator or a fan), comments (textual messages posted to the wall posts), a message box to send messages to the company's administrator; and discussion boards, information about events, photos and videos posted by companies and fans on their profile fan page. The MTV India Facebook fan page is one such fan page that has built a user base of 3 million fans and ranks the second most popular fan page in India.

After establishing the brand *MTV India* on television, MTV India began connecting its audience through SNSs like Orkut, Facebook and Twitter. In 2007, MTV India created the first fan page profile on Orkut. The Orkut fan page's participants described it as a living community (Ramkrishnan, 2007) that connected MTV India with their fans via the internet. Fans utilized this space to send personal messages, discuss and debate through community forums and maintain and create new connections through profiles and photo albums. The space was also used to connect to their favorite Vee-jays and participate in a variety of online contests and reality shows. But in 2010, Facebook became more popular than Orkut; Orkut's failure to innovate in line with users' expectations created an opportunity for Facebook to step in. Compared to Orkut, Facebook offered social sharing plug-ins/modules, interactive buttons such as the 'like' and 'share' features, friend recommendations, activity feed etc, which allowed users to interact in a number of ways. Moreover, Facebook features such as fan pages, games and the ability to connect people from around the world with one another made Facebook popular amongst young people. According to India Social's report (2011), Facebook had 7,809,800 users in 2010, as compared to 1,561,000 users in 2009 (an increase of 400% in 12 months). By 2011, the user base has risen to a phenomenal 24 million people (a further increase of almost 300 % in 12 months), and constituted 85% of the users from the age group of 16-34.

MTV India joined Facebook in May 2009; the fan page rose to prominence in 2010, when existing users of Orkut and new users began using Facebook to socialize with existing friends and initiate new contacts. A recent study conducted on social media usage, trends and applications confirmed that Facebook leads amongst the top SNSs (LinkedIn, Orkut,

Ibibo and BharatStudent) in India (Digital Strategy Consulting, 2012). The study suggested that people use Facebook to share moments (by sharing pictures and videos), as a knowledge bank (news, fan pages and searching for information), for entertainment purposes (chatting and playing games), and to strengthen existing and new social ties. The study included 78.5% males and 21.5% females from the age group of 13 to 34. In spite of the slight variation in the age-groups in the two studies (India Social's report, 2011 and Digital Marketing Consulting, 2012), both the studies suggested that young people are heavy users of Facebook.

A study conducted by Preeti Anand (2010) on the "Impact of Social Media on Consumer Behavior" suggested that the use of social networking sites is driven by the desire to build relationships<sup>5</sup>. A survey by the US-based Nielsen Company found that 70% of social media users in India access a social networking site every day. It was found that 89% of users between the ages of 16-20 years access a social networking site every day and 60% of them spend an average of half an hour on a routine basis. It was also found that 37% of heavy social media users in India (who use SNSs multiple times a day) fall in the age group of 21-30 years<sup>6</sup>. According to ViziSense report in 2011, the age group 25-35 increases its usage of social networking sites around 3 p.m., suggesting that working professionals begin to ease out at their workplace at this time. Users in the age group 16-24 are most active between 7 to 9 pm, which suggests that they are using home computers more than mobile devices and could fall in the category of students. The study also stated that more than 50% of users use social networking sites more than once a day and spend an average of 14.38 minutes per day<sup>7</sup>.

Alongside, my thesis analyses a subset of Indian youth that are heavy users of Facebook and are aware of Facebook's social sharing plug-ins/modules and interactive buttons (such as the like button and the share button). They are reasonably well educated, live in urban India and

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<sup>6</sup> Nielson, J. 70% of Social Networking Users in India Access a Social Networking Site Everyday . September 15, 2010. <http://www.alootechie.com>.

<sup>7</sup> Swetha,S . 60% of Social Media Users Belong to Non Metros - Vizisense Media Report". October 7, 2010. [http:// www.indiasocial.in](http://www.indiasocial.in).

have access to the Internet. The age range of such users varies from 13-34; these people use Facebook:

- a) To share ideas/opinions in the form of likes/shares and comments;
- b) To gain and share information with others;
- c) To strengthen offline ties and create new connections.

While the use of the MTV India's Facebook fan page varies from individual to individual, the above studies (study by Preeti Anand on SNSs, 2011 and ViziSense, 2010) show an interesting pattern of social networking sites usage of those who are in education or an occupation. For instance, students use such networking sites in the late mornings, whereas the young working population uses these networking sites in the late afternoons. I study this subset of Indian youth and find out the kinds of activities and practices performed on the fan page.

In addition to above studies, Savodnik's (2012) article in Bloomberg Businessweek also suggested that mobile phones are the 3rd most popular means through which people access social networking sites, but argued that people access SNSs from a combination of two, broadband (i.e. from home) and mobile phones. The data showed different patterns of SNS use by different groups (professionals, students, entrepreneurs, etc.) that utilize SNSs for various purposes<sup>8</sup>.

Facebook fan pages look and behave much like a user's personal profile and can have an unlimited number of "likers" (fans). A Facebook fan page can be customized by adding new tabs that can bring additional functionality to a fan page such as e-mail collection, specialized content, or a platform for sales activity. The fan page works like a blog, where control is managed by an individual or a set of moderators. The space is often used as a forum and allows people to share a single platform to discuss common topics that interest them.

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<sup>8</sup> Savodnik, P. The future of Facebook Is in India. BloomBerg BusinessWeek. May 31, 2012 <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2012-05-31/the-future-of-facebook-is-in-india>

The MTV India Facebook fan page is one such space through which MTV India's moderators connect to their fans. The fan page's original function was to inform fans about MTV India programs and provide them with information about MTV India's reality shows' audition dates and procedures. In 2010, however the platform also became a major site for the expression of young people's opinions and ideas on social reform, politics, sports and issues of national importance (Radioandmusic.com, 2010)<sup>9</sup>, and constituted a space to create many to many connections (MTV India to fans and fans to fans) instead of one to many connections (MTV India to fans). The fan page added 3846.80 fans per day and produced an average of 35.0 posts per month (i.e. an average of 1.2 posts per day) and an average of 62554.0+ comments per month (i.e. an average of 2085.0 comments per day) (Ranjan, 2010)<sup>10</sup>.

By 2011, the popularity of MTV India's Facebook fan page had increased and the fan page added 11538.00 fans per day and produced an average of 100-120 posts per month (i.e. an average of 3.0-4.0 posts per day) and an average of 187662.0+ comments per month (i.e. an average of 6255.0 comments per day). The increase in the number of wall posts and comments show that the fan page has become a major platform for young people's activities that allow them to express their opinions and perform everyday practices. Moreover, MTV India's reality shows such as *MTV Roadies*, *MTV Splitsvilla* and *MTV VJ Hunt* have directly involved young people in production, thereby maintaining a direct contact with its fan base. More recent shows such as '*Pepsi MTV Wassup: The Voice of Youngistan*' and '*MTV Style Check*' feature fans' views and opinions making the content more interactive and useful for the fans.

MTV India began the MTV India Facebook fan page in an effort to connect with fans throughout the nation and to communicate program updates and information. But, with the

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<sup>9</sup> IndianTelevisionBeta.com.. MTV India's Facebook fan page crosses 1 Million fans!. November 13, 2010. <http://www.indiantelevision.com/release/y2k10/nov/novrel33.php>

<sup>10</sup> Ranjan, P. Facebook: An Effective Marketing Tool- Indian Industry Trends. September 20, 2010. Slideshare. <http://www.slideshare.net/prakashranjansingh/facebook-an-effective-marketing-tool-india-industry-trends-5239304>



increasing popularity of Facebook and MTV India, the MTV India Facebook fan page has become a separate online entity through which people exchange their ideas on every day (social and national) issues, and feel that they are a part of a specific community. The MTV India admin/moderators post a range of diverse topics, from major events taking place across India to celebrities' birthdays, from updates on MTV India's programs to huge campaigns organized by MTV India for their fans, from sport to book launch events, as well as issues of public concern, such as posts condemning terrorist activities and supporting anti-corruption practices and activities etc. Every wall post specifies a topic that generates thousands of comments/ text talk. The topics posted by the MTV moderators are issues/events relating to everyday activities (including posts on MTV India programs, law and order, Bollywood etc.) that encourage people to react in specific ways, such as clicking the 'like' button to like the wall post, sharing the wall post on his/her or friend's profile or posting textual comments in the form of comments. I detail these fan activities in Chapter4.

Hence defined the object of study, my next chapter maps out the conceptual framework of the study and discusses literature on local-global nature of MTV India, place-formation, identity creation and management and relation between online and offline life.

## Chapter 2: Conceptual framework: locality, place and identity creation

This chapter explains the study's key concepts and maps out the relevant literature. The local element within the local-global MTV India and the MTV India Facebook fan page has a direct relation to place making. Therefore, firstly I explain the local-global character of the MTV India Facebook fan page and argue that MTV India and the fan page can be understood as particular hybrid cultures formed through indigenization and localization. The first section highlights the arrival of MTV in India, locates the global-local debate in a wider cultural perspective and argues that the global-local combines together to form separate cultures that have their own unique identity.

Second, I argue that the fan page has created its own unique identity and has been transformed into a particular 'place' through participants' routine practices and everyday activities. The second section borrows from Tuan's (1977) idea of place making and illustrates how places are formed through dwelling and habitation and environmental experience (Seamon, 1979).

Lastly, I use Goffman's (1959) work on 'presentation of self in everyday life' and 'role of stigma' to argue how the fan page has become a site for identity performance. The final section also argues that online identities are informed by offline lives and experiences and are not separate.

### 2.1 The local-global MTV India

In India, television was introduced in 1959. It was primarily used as a medium for the education and development of rural and urban India. Doordarshan, the public television broadcaster had a monopoly over the Indian television industry until the 1990s. In 1991, satellite television was introduced, and launched Star TV, which offered programming content from five transnational channels including MTV Asia. Owned by Viacom, MTV was first launched in 1981, in the United States, as a twenty-four hour music channel featuring

pop and rock music (Banks 1996; Cullity, 2000). The channel targeted youth in an unconventional style (e.g. poor lighting, messy sets and odd language style) and a casual attitude that immediately grabbed the attention of young people (Banks 1996; Cullity, 2000).

MTV started in India as MTV Asia, launched by Star TV<sup>11</sup>; in 1994, it broke from Star TV, launching independently as MTV India (Cullity, 2000). When MTV first arrived in India, it recycled western content (particularly the English music) in the Indian market. As a result, it lost a major share of the Indian audience due to an ‘unconvincing’ style of programming content and the foreign-ness of the English language. Moreover, the content was seen as a cultural invasion of Indian values and ethos, and the small audience of western music listeners did not provide a sufficient market for MTV global products, and MTV Asia was forced to shut down.

In 1996, MTV re-initiated programming as MTV India and adopted an indigenization policy. The new MTV (MTV India) kept its western format intact, but indigenized (localized) the programming to suit the Indian market (Cullity, 2000). A study conducted by Jocelyn Cullity on MTV India, offers an understanding of the indigenization process of MTV India and explains how local-global, cosmopolitan- traditional and modernity-tradition combine to form different kinds of ‘hybrid cultures’. Here I focus on the hybrid culture of MTV India, and argue that such trans-cultures can be understood in a broader context of cultural transformations, where global facts take local form through the process of indigenization and localization. I employ Arjun Appadurai’s anthropological framework of cultural systems, through which the larger outcomes of globalization can be understood; Ronald Robertson’s universalism-particularism continuum through which the formation and existence of ‘trans-cultures’ can be understood; and John Tomlinson’s work on cultural systems and identities. I synthesize their work and discuss a ‘local-global world’, where ‘global’ unites with ‘local’ to produce ‘glo-local (localized) cultures’ and glo-local products.

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<sup>11</sup> Star TV was a joint venture between Hutchison Whampoa and Li Ka-Shing. It was launched in 1991. The venture brought English language entertainment content into the Indian market.

In his book, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimension of Globalization*, Appadurai (1996:5) focuses on globalization's cultural dimension and looks into the sameness and differences caused by mass migration and electronic mediation. He argues that migrating people and electronic media, particularly television, produce new cultural resources and create regularities and irregularities in the modern social world. He studies these regularities and irregularities in a particular way that explains the dialectical relation between technology and culture and helps people create and interpret meanings in everyday life. He suggests an adjectival approach to the cultural systems at work, and stresses the contextual and comparative dimension of culture to understand the difference in group identities and cultures that have been created as a result of the globalizing process. Appadurai argues that this globalizing process is supported by electronic media and, due to globalization; it has become increasingly possible for media to transcend national boundaries and de-territorialize cultural experiences and social interactions. The increased use of electronic technologies such as satellite-TV and the internet, and a growing market for global products in local markets have broadened human experiences out to a globalized context (Tomlinson, 1999). It is now possible to interact beyond boundaries and cultural frontiers, and create a globalized experience of cultural products.

Appadurai's analysis of contemporary ethnography focuses on how 'deterritorialisation' (migration) of people can affect the positive possibilities offered by globalization. Stressing the paramount context of "Here and Now", he explains the rationale behind the complexities of everyday experiences and interactions that continually form and reform in the light of cultural changes. According to Appadurai, the global movement of media technologies in everyday life and the mass movement of people across territories empower the 'imagination' to associate with the transported 'aspirations' of the foreign land. The connection between mass migration and transported images helps to understand that the movement of people to different locations is connected to their understanding of mediated sound and images that are distributed globally. For instance, Turkish guest workers in Germany watch Turkish films in their German flats, and Pakistani cabdrivers in Chicago listen to cassettes of sermons recorded in mosques in Pakistan or Iran (Appadurai, 1996:4). Together, media and migration provide vast instability in the creation of identities and selves; instability, which, according

to Appadurai is positive and productive, and defines the core link between globalization and modernity, on the basis of which he argues that if modernity is “at large”, it is because it has now surpassed the boundaries of the nation-state.

In some way, electronic media technologies have allowed us to imagine independently and flexibly, allowing the juxtaposition of media and migration- which is no longer an ‘imagined community’ of the nation state, but several “diasporic public spheres” (66-85) that transport local products and create a hybrid of Holly-Bollywood movies, Desi-rap music, Indo-British food, Westernized- Indian clothes etc, which in turn produce new styles, symbols, expressions, meanings and fashions. For instance, the filmic genius of the English film, *Slumdog Millionaire* (directed by Danny Boyle in 2008) lies in the hybridity of language and the local (British) -global (Indian) have combined to suit the ‘viewing tastes and linguistic preferences’ of people situated cross-territorially (Pandey, 2010). Set and filmed in India, the film narrates a story of a teenager from the slums of Mumbai, who appears on the Indian version of ‘Who Wants to Be a Millionaire’? (Kaun Banea crorepati in Hindi version) and exceeds people’s expectations thereby arousing the suspicions of the game show host and law enforcement agencies. The film illustrates how visual English<sup>12</sup> functions in an aesthetic space of film-making and works as a ‘cinematic device’ that communicates ‘tokenized Hindi’ (Pandey, 2010) to the audience. The use of the special camera work, vibrant and different styles of subtitles and the use of ‘visual English’ help locate the western movie in a globalized context, thereby accomplishing a hybrid of local linguistic content and linguistically dominant global interests. The use of the visual English (technology) determines the ways through which communication technologies produce a mediated form of proximity and intimacy in everyday life, and facilitate mutual support, understanding and a sense of responsibility for distant others (Tomlinson, 1999). Such glo-local products and experiences can be seen as cosmopolitan forms of life and identities, which incorporate a wider cultural context and recognition of local-global. For instance, Appadurai (1996)

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<sup>12</sup> Visual English is a cinematic strategy that utilizes the aural and visual spectacle within the space of the film; in *Slumdog Millionaire*, the strategy consistently dominates the screen space and is especially designed through particular computer tools and software to give a visual dimension to the English language.

explains the discursive ‘domestication’ that takes place within general cultural forms, including sports. He illustrates, how the Indian population has ‘vernacularized’ cricket, how cricket has become one of the typical British cultural forms through electronic media; and how the game has been inscribed with an indigenized style by the local/national players to form ‘an emblem of Indian nationhood’ (p103-112). He notes that the notion of ‘glocality’ transcends the binary opposition between global and local, and provides a linguistic context for understanding the blending of global-local that takes place in various forms (Robertson, 1992).

The interplay between local and global cultures can be best conceptualized through the work of Robertson (1992). According to him, globalization is ‘the interpenetration of the universalization of particularism, and the particularization of universalism’. His analysis is based on the theory of “glocalization”, which on one hand explains how global culture tends to incorporate elements of every local culture through global media (satellite television), and on the other, how local cultures actively negotiate with the global culture in an ongoing process. The universalization of particularism can be understood through the formation of world or global culture, where the global culture is formed through the political economy of capitalism and the outcomes of the technological and electronic communication (King 1990: 409). New and advanced technologies have resulted in the production of cultural products such as films, television programs and music, and the commercialization policy has allowed the transportation of these cultural products across territories. Such transnational movements of cultural products have interconnected societies and cultures across the world, and have produced a global culture which is actually an assimilation of elements of all local cultures. Alternatively, the particularization of universalism involves the indigenization and localization of global culture. Local people negotiate global culture - corresponding to their local taste, traditions, cultural values and norms, and evolve, develop and supplement their own ‘local’ cultures. Appadurai (1996: 18) explains the same phenomenon through ‘indigenization’ or ‘localization’, where ‘local’ unites with ‘global’ and produces a ‘hybrid’ of two or more cultures. These ‘third-cultures’ safeguard the local element within the global, and function as specific, unique cultures that produce contemporary styles and symbols. In the case of MTV India, the MTV brand was kept intact, and the focus on the youth culture

was maintained with western formats refitted to suit Indian tastes presented by Indian players (Cullity, 2002). Moreover, VJs and anchors use Hindi<sup>13</sup>, with English in conversation with the audience in ‘phone-ins’ and other program formats to display their association with the ‘local’ language and connect with young people across India.

While there is a global rise in the degree to which people’s lives are mediated through the media, the homogenizing effects of globalization are much less clear. Some scholars have argued (e.g. Steger, 2003) that a global flow of cultural products has resulted in ‘cultural homogenization’. The idea of ‘cultural homogenization’ highlights the worldwide reach of capitalist consumerism and the growth of sameness and repetition, which has resulted in the loss of local cultures and cultural values. In a broader context, cultural homogenization refers to the idea of ‘cultural imperialism’ that explains the domination of one culture over another (connectedness to the ‘western’ or the foreign culture), which in one way or another influences people’s local identities and cultural forms. However, in my view, people who hold such perspectives have failed to understand how the world-wide cultural context has evolved in recent years, and how global flows of convergence and homogenization work together to produce glo-local products and services that are simultaneously ‘local’ and ‘global’ in nature. For instance, the popular chicken-tikka curry in the UK, or the hamburgers (without beef) in India, or Japan’s adoption of the western style of advertising highlight the fact that the local cultures and identities are never completely homogenized but indigenized and localized to specific and individual needs and purposes. People of local cultures find useful bits in global culture and adapt them to their cultural taste and preferences without losing the local character/taste of the cultural identity. For example, McDonald’s in India has adapted food to the Indian taste, and included vegetarian and chicken versions of hamburgers, as well as Indian versions of special meals such as spicy McChicken, Cottage cheese wrap, Egg muffins etc. Likewise, in the case of MTV India, the transition from western content to locally produced content, the use of Hindi and Hing-lish language, Bollywood Hindi music and other ‘Indi music’( Indian pop) can be interpreted as global-local content (glocalization), where youth position their ‘local’ experiences and traditions within the context of ‘global’ MTV formats.

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<sup>13</sup> Hindi is the primary official language of republic of India.

Thus, globalization is an important concept and helps understand the current cultural system that brings local-global together. Like other cultural theorists (Appadurai, Robertson and Tomlinson), I argue that globalization can be understood as a hybrid of ‘multiple globalizations’ or a ‘collision of globalizations’ that synthesizes a huge set of local and global elements. The question of how to interpret and govern the process of globalization is actually the key for understanding and analyzing the possibilities and outcomes offered by it.

## 2.2 A familiar sense of ‘place’

Globalization has not only produced cultural transformations and glo-local cultural products, but has also induced changes in our immediate sense of place, particularly with regard to how a familiar sense of place is created. Combining her personal observations and theoretical framework, Doreen Massey (1994) explores the issues surrounding globalization, and explains how a familiar sense of place is restored in the era of a changing world. She notes that globalization has resulted in a speedy movement of culture and people (deterritorialization), and has marked a new phase in the sector of international capital finance. People are now travelling to distant continents in less time with better communication systems; good quality ‘home’ food and local neighborhoods in global spaces have made the global experience on a par with the local experience. Massey relates this phenomenon to ‘the power geometry of time-space compression’ [originally taken from David Harvey’s (1990; 240) perspective on global social change] and explains how time-space compression regulates movement, communication, and cultural goods across the globe, and contributes to the changing experiences of people in everyday life.

Massey (1994) agrees with Harvey’s notion of time-space compression, but argues that different people experience this ‘time-space compression’ in different ways based on where they are located and how they relate to their neighborhood. She argues that places are open and permeable and are driven by many factors such as race, gender and economic forces which might contribute to a feeling of being ‘out of place’. The flow and interconnection of time and place vary according to certain parameters such as social class, economic standard, education and profession, and might affect how people experience a place. “The differential



access to control over events within the process” (Tomlinson 1991:132) may exclude and exempt people from many activities, as different social groups share different relationships based on differentiated mobility, which distributes people on the basis of power, i.e. people who initiate flow and movement have more control than those who are controlled and affected by the flow. She argues that the world is structured by hierarchical relations between territorial regions; and a globalized system would “not show a totally interconnected system”, since “there would be both long-standing absences and the systematic production of new disconnections” (Massey 2005:100). The issue of social class must be added to the asymmetries of global power geometry; for example, a Chinese businessman travelling first class for a meeting in a third world country would experience ‘time-space compression’ differently to a low-wage worker who has come to a foreign land to earn a livelihood. The difference in social class reflects asymmetries in global power geometry, which explains the irregularities in ‘deterritorialization’ and ‘hybridization’ as a cultural experience (Tomlinson 1999:130–137), and heterogenizes the experience of places.

She argues that the concept of ‘place’ is infused with cultural practices and products that may have different geographical origins are consumed worldwide through cultural fusions. For instance, the meat culture -rotating roast (originated in Persia and later adopted in the Middle-East) is now at home throughout the world, and is accepted by people from London to Bangkok, and Beijing to New York. The cultural products are ‘localized’ and adapted in local forms by different social groups, and can be understood as an interconnection, reproduction, extension and time-space contingent occurrences that create ‘a familiar sense of local’ or ‘familiar local’ within a globalized place. Massey explains this phenomenon further through an example of a local shopping center located on the Kilburn High Road in London that interconnects with and links many local and global experiences. The newspaper stand that sells Asian newspapers from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh; and an Indian sari shop that displays a poster on its door about a forthcoming concert at Wembley Arena presenting Indian Bollywood actors such as Rekha, with Aamir Khan, Salman Khan, Juhi Chawla and Raveena Tandon. Its proximity to Heathrow airport combines the sight of continuous airplanes and traffic on the streets, which positions London not only as a world city, but a spatial place that engages and recognizes ‘others’ (Massey, 2007). She notes that

such an engagement with 'elsewhere' locates 'Kilburn' as a dynamic 'place' that recognizes the local and global social, economic, and communication dynamics of the 'place' (Massey, 1994:24-29), and intensifies a familiar sense of 'local' within a global space.

However, in my view, a familiar sense of 'local' (place) is not only centred on the globalization process; there are other important factors such as dwelling, habitation and environmental experiences (Tuan, 1977), which contribute to one's familiar sense of 'local' (place). While Massey's approach centres on the kind of association formed with a place based on how an individual relates to locality in a global world; Tuan's perspective focuses on the relation formed to a place based on routine environmental experience and routine activities. The two perspectives differ in their approach (and are offered by researchers who define places in very different ways: Massey focuses on power relations, whereas Tuan focuses on humanistic geography) but the comparison between them contributes to an understanding of a creation of a place that is based on how an individual experiences a place through routine activities and associates with the surrounding (local) elements.

According to Tuan, a 'place' is constituted through repetitive habitual practices that give rise to 'affective' attachments in which 'people are emotionally bound to their material environment' [Tuan, 1996a (1974): 451-2]. He visualizes 'place' as a dynamic space, which is constructed through repetitive habitual practices and everyday experiences. For him, 'places' are not only regions or nations bounded in the territories, but an array of living experiences that come about as a by-product of the people and their associations. He notes when a space feels thoroughly familiar, it becomes a 'place', and 'places' are constituted when locations (spaces) are routinely lived-in (p73).

In his book, *Space and Place*, Tuan distinguishes the term space from 'place', and notes that there is a relational difference between the two, as space can be empty, but a 'place' includes the use of space by its inhabitants for routine activities. A 'place' can be measured in terms of people's beliefs, feelings, values and perception. His notion of place is concerned with an individual's attachment to and 'know-how' of a particular place that makes one 'feel at home' in everyday environments. For him, 'places' are emotionally bounded areas, and 'can

be as small as the corner of a room' (Tuan, 1996a [1974]:455), or 'a favorite armchair' (Tuan, 1977:149). He argues that places 'exist at different scales' (Tuan, 1977:149), such as a house as 'home' is 'full of ordinary objects' and the connection to each object is defined by its daily usage. An individual forms an intimate and emotional attachment with objects through routine usage. For instance, the habitual use of domestic furniture such as a desk, an armchair and the kitchen sink; or the daily use of the same route between workplace and home can constitute our day to day relation to a particular place. Even in everyday life, when we visit and revisit the photographs of our friends and family, we tend to form an attachment and 'develop a habit of dwelling imaginatively' (Tuan, 2004:50) in them, or an individual may repeatedly watch a movie because it has formed a 'place' for his/her lived experience.

However, in his discussion of photography, cinema and music, Tuan employs a different ranking for media settings, and equates them to 'surrogate places' (Tuan, 2004:49), or mere 'cousins to places' (Tuan, 2004:52). But I argue, if 'places' are to be conceptualized in terms of social interactions (Massey, 1995), and the information and communication flow construct the relation to a particular 'place'; then the use of electronic media in a physical setting or mediated settings (MUD's and newsgroups) can be conceptualized as specific 'places' that are formed by daily interactions and routine activities of the participants over a period of time. Digital spaces such as Kendall's (2000) 'BlueSky', Mitra's (1996) 'Soc.cult.Indian' and Baym's (2000) 'rec.arts.tv.soaps' became familiar enough to be ranked as 'places'. Digital places like these may require people to occupy more than one space (an individual's physical location and mediated location may differ) at one single time, but the mediated surroundings (the electronic location) are only 'mere' settings that allow people to interact electronically; it does not affect the intimacy or nearness shared in social interactions, as the interactions are based on emotional attachment and familiarity of a 'place' (Tuan, 1977). Nevertheless, it may be true, that the duality of place may create a double sense of place (Meyrowitz, 1985); or according to Tuan, a surrogate place, but only derivatively (for example, the intimacy shared between two friends on Skype is based on social interactions; the physical setting does not add any significance to it). This suggests that a 'sense of place' is connected to its character, where the uniqueness of the place is continuously reproduced in the process of social interactions (Massey, 1994). Likewise,

through my own study, I illustrate how MTV India's Facebook fan page has formed a 'familiar particular place' for its participants through everyday practices and routine activities.

The routine use and everyday activities of the participants of MTV India's Facebook fan page have given rise to 'imaginative' dwelling and habitation, and can also be interpreted through David Seamon's work on 'everyday environmental experience' (Seamon, 1979:15). In his study, he provides valuable empirical findings on the significance of 'everyday movements', and explains how even routine activities such as walking and driving can contribute to a process of place making. In his book, *A Geography of the Lifeworld*, he uses the concept of 'body-subject', and integrates the habitual routine activities into the wider 'time-space routines', to explain the emotional contact with environments that give rise to a condition of 'homeness' (Seamon, 1979:70). He offers an explanation of the 'morning routine' of a participant who wakes up, dresses and leaves the house at 8 am, goes to a café, picks up a newspaper, orders a portion of scrambled eggs and coffee and leaves at 9 am for the office, and repeats the same activities every day. The bodily mobility within and between thoroughly familiar spaces, and repetition of and return to the same activities in everyday life in a range of social settings, create a strong 'sense of place' (Tuan, 1977), and form an association with a particular 'place'. In her study of the MUD BlueSky, Kendall (2002) too found that participants had developed a level of trust and warmth as an outcome of everyday interactions. The virtual space, BlueSky, was inhabited by several 'regulars', who routinely interacted in a 'synchronous' media setting (Kendall, 2002:6), and their routine activities contributed to a process of place making. Although Kendall uses the term 'place' interchangeably with space, her understanding of 'place' moves closer to Tuan's and Seamon's definition of 'place', as she acknowledges the fact that 'places' are routinely lived-in, and an emotional engagement with a 'familiar' place contributes to a process of a 'place making'.

However, according to a few researchers (Relph, 1976; Meyrowitz, 1985), shifts in the concept and experience of place in the technological era have located place and identity in crisis. Using terms, such as 'no sense of place' (Meyrowitz, 1985) and 'placelessness'

(Relph, 1976), Meyrowitz and Relph argue that electronic media have weakened the authentic sense of place (Relph, 1976, p. 64), undermining the distinct experiences and identities associated with particular places, causing them to be the same or look-alike; for instance, according to them, people would experience Heathrow and airports in other big cities in the same way. This might be true, as it is getting difficult to define or to associate them with a particular place; in the age of electronic media, identities are characterized by several places (physical and mediated), and it is possible to experience culturally diverse places in a single location (Becks, 2000:73-74). However, for each individual, the notion of place carries a different meaning as people experience 'place' based on experiences that are often mediated through human relationships that take place in different socio-cultural contexts. By locating MTV India Facebook fan page as a particular 'place', I illustrate how an association with a place is based on individualized experiences and activities that create a unique sense of place, which differs from individual to individual.

By considering Tuan's and Seamon's argument that places are formed through routine activities and emotional engagement, I argue that places are not only mere locations [demarcated areas] (Massey, 1994), but a site for imagination, emotional engagement, habitual practices, routine activities, perception and previous experience (detailed in chapter 6) and can transcend physical boundaries (geographical locations) virtually instantaneously, creating a strong sense of place and contributing to the process of place making.

## 2.3 Situational geography

When people establish 'familiar places' through routine practices and everyday activities, identities are produced and reproduced; and to understand identity management on a social networking site such as Facebook, I employ Meyrowitz's (1985) work on situational geography. The theoretical framework employed by Meyrowitz, is a synthesis of two seemingly incompatible perspectives – situational geography and medium theory.

Meyrowitz focuses on the work of Marshall McLuhan and Erving Goffman, and finds a useful connection between interactions that take place in a mediated setting and a physical location (face-to-face).

In medium theory, McLuhan focuses on 'medium-technology', and states that 'the medium is the message' (McLuhan, 1964:5), by which he meant the capability of a new medium or type of media to alter 'the scale and form of human association and action' (McLuhan, 1964:5). He argues that the media of communication provides an 'extension' to the body and senses, transforming the temporal and spatial arrangements of social life. By 'extension', I mean the power of media to stimulate social changes, such as web pages connecting one space to another in seconds, or missiles communicating hatred in a minute. Meyrowitz (1985) welcomes such concerns, but at the same time notes that McLuhan's approach fails to see wider time-space relations in everyday social interactions. At the same time, he finds useful concerns in relation to social role playing and situations in which we are constantly occupied with 'impression management' (Goffman, 1959). Again, he welcomes Goffman's focus on the organization of 'social encounters', but notes that there is a significant limitation to the approach, as it is assumed that there is a necessary link between social situations and physical locations.

Meyrowitz combines the strengths of each approach and employs a theoretical framework to analyze the social situations - the social environments (not only the physical locations/boundaries) such as home, workplace, and public gatherings, in which certain types of behavior are created and exhibited. According to Meyrowitz, the social aspect of a situation is created by the communication and information flow through which we understand and interpret the behaviors and actions of ourselves and others (Meyrowitz, 35-38). He notes that physical boundaries such as roofs or walls do affect or shape the social gatherings that take place within them, but only derivatively, i.e., the physical aspects such as roofs and boundaries are dependent on the communication and information flows (although, such boundaries are often taken for granted, for example when we rely on closed rooms or houses for privacy). Therefore, Meyrowitz believes that social situations can be best thought of as 'information systems' that can create new patterns of communication: if we agree that social situations need not be associated with limited physical boundaries, then technologies such as the telephone, may give rise to new social situations, which in turn produces changes in behavior. For instance, when two friends communicate over the telephone, they are occupied in more than one kind of social situation; and despite the

physical distance, the 'shared mediated-social situation' brings them closer. Likewise, talking heads on television, such as TV anchors and popular celebrities develop 'para-social interactions' by looking straight into the camera and talking to viewers, as if they were communicating with acquaintances or friends (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Thus, by taking Goffman's idea forward, Meyrowitz explains the ways in which new media have changed society by creating new situations, and thereby affecting our behavior. For instance, when a reporter interviews a celebrity in front of the cameras, it becomes an intimate social meeting between two people, and also a public performance. Both social situations are distinct, and each calls for its characteristic manner of behavior and speech. The celebrity can neither act as if he/she is alone with the reporter, nor can he/she act if he/she is addressing the crowd. The introduction of new patterns of information flow (the use of electronic media) has given rise to new social situations, which calls for new actions and social meanings. Another useful example offered by Meyrowitz's analysis of the effects of new media (particularly television) are the changes introduced in the front/ back stage divisions. The front/ back stage division is one of the significant elements of Goffman's notion of social behavior, where he argues that participants in order to produce good performances on a certain 'stage' (i.e. the front stage), need a corresponding backstage to practice front stage performances and resolve problems relating to the front stage. (For example, the kitchen is notoriously the back stage of a restaurant dining area or; at night, in a house, a kitchen is often the backstage, where parents put an agreed framework or a coordinated show in place for the children). According to Meyrowitz (1985), a medium like television, which has a high level of accessibility across the globe, may move the boundary between front and back stage (front and backstage information systems): quite often television exposes children to adult content (front stage audiences) that is usually kept away from their eyes; or let us imagine how a situation would change if by mistake the intercom is left turned on in the kitchen and guests may overhear the 'backstage' gossip or conversation of the waiters. The introduction of electronic media such as the television and telephone has produced changes in the front and backstage situations, altering behaviors and actions. The front stage performances are governed by social environments and thus tend to be highly restricted; whereas the back stage performances take place in relaxed social environments

with fewer restrictions, where people have greater freedom to be themselves. On Facebook, it would appear that people are always performing on the front stage, unless the privacy settings are adjusted to hide particular web pages (Farquhar, 2009).

If Facebook is the front stage, then it's possible to argue that offline life is the 'backstage', where people prepare and practice their on-stage performances. Since each individual is different; the range of front-stage and backstage performances would vary depending upon peoples' (self) attributes, social affiliations, ethnic origin, etc. The backstage performances allow people to practice offline selves and represent them in a desired way in the online world, suggesting that the online selves are a derivation of offline identities. However, people may choose to behave in a desired way suggesting that an online self may involve an ideal representation.

In his book, *The Presentation Of Self In Everyday Life*, Ervin Goffman (1959) suggests that the presentation of self is continuously adjusted and is based on social environments such as the workplace, home, temples, etc.; and the actions and reactions people often get from their family, friends and work colleagues in the form of love, praise and care. He argues that when interactions take place between two people, the information exchanged between them is both presented and absorbed (Goffman, 1990a:13), i.e. people assess each other through the effectiveness of their actions and guide their future performances based on the cues received from others (Goffman, 1969). The performer gives cues to the audience; the cues given by the performer are the information or cues given (Goffman, 1959). Cues which are unintended or unconsciously given are called given off cues. Given cues are controlled messages, whereas given off cues are nonverbal gestures, body movements, such as gestures, nodding, frowning, etc. Online, cues that are 'given off' are generally not perceivable (except on video), but cues which are given are subject to people's manipulation. Self-manipulation of these 'given' cues or messages (including fake or fabricated behavior) are viewed to be very prevalent over the internet (Donath, 1998). Although the area of self-disclosure has been researched widely in computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Joinson & Paine, 2009), how online users manage and connect with others in light of a manufactured self (self-manipulated) have been researched in only a few specific contexts,



such as dating websites (Ellison, 2006), where people subconsciously describe their “ideal selves” (i.e., who they would like to be), in a way which is more aspirational and pretentious.

In general, people tend to desire social acceptance; and in order to facilitate a convincing performance, they maintain a consistency in their appearance and mannerisms. But, Goffman (1990a:40-42) argues that this can be difficult, as performing an identity is dependent on the role the individual is playing and what is visible to others. He explains this through an example of a hospital, where the activities of surgical nurses are much more visible and clearer than those of regular medical nurses (1990a:41)<sup>14</sup>. The performance of medical and surgical nurses is perceived by the roles they play, and it is very likely that some elements of the activities of medical nurses that have helped medical nurses create a performance are kept hidden because such activities are socially unacceptable to perform. Activities that involve any ‘dirty work’, such as criminal activities or physical abuse are concealed, but nevertheless contribute to the performance that helps create an impression. For instance, people do not tell their spouses everything: opinions and views about one’s family and relatives may be kept hidden or left unspoken. Therefore, the presentation of self may involve a constructed performance (performed-unseen elements) in which all elements (performed-unseen elements and performed-seen elements) combine together to form an impression for others.

On Facebook, complete messages in textual form are exchanged between the participants, which mean cues are given, and not given off. In his study of Facebook, Farquhar (2009) examines how “cues given” i.e. information given in the form of status updates, pictures, associated with certain groups etc, validate a presentation of self in an online environment. He argues that the ‘performing’ aspect of Facebook relies heavily on the “identity pegs” (Farquhar, 2009; Geidner, Flook, & Bell, 2007) that people give out through written textual snippets in the form of status updates and ‘comments’ posted on their wall and friends’ profiles. For instance, profiles on Facebook consist of a diverse mixture of biographical

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<sup>14</sup> Medical nurses look after patients that are suffering from chronic conditions such as electrolyte imbalances, low/high blood pressure etc, that require routine medications. On the contrary, surgical nurses deal with acute patients that require surgeries or diagnosis of serious disease such as cancer.

information, personal preferences, pictures, weblogs and other miscellaneous text that in turn builds the online personas of people. An identity peg is an impression given through ‘performance’ that generally reflects the attitude and activities of an individual (Goffman, 1959); on Facebook, it’s the personal information, birth-dates, names, educational and professional information, and interests that serve as the standard means of differentiating people.

Additionally, people carry a personal front (Goffman, 1990a:34), which informs their appearance and mannerisms. An appearance gives away the physical signs of people’s occupation and social status in society, whereas mannerisms explain how we interact in an environment and are judged as active or passive communicators. Online, a personal front (appearance and mannerism) is perceived through identity markers that are based on one’s previous experiences, opinions and ways of thinking (Murphy, 2010). For instance, extensive specialized knowledge is, arguably, a reliable indication that someone is either an academician or a subject expert. ‘Assessment signals’ such as appropriate grammar, relevant knowledge, argumentative ability and writing style define the personal front of the user in a mediated environment and allow him/her to perform an identity.

Other than identity markers, a performance is also influenced by physical settings, and verbal and non-verbal elements of communication such as gestures, words and body language (Goffman, 1982:5), which suggests that it is solely the individual that creates meaning for his/her actions. However, when people present themselves before others, their performance tends to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society (Goffman, 1990a:45). Thus, a presentation is not a construction of an individual’s ideas and opinions, but a combined performance of an individual’s actions and reactions, appearance and mannerisms and their society, which has a profound effect on the individual.

### Managing selves online

In India, Facebook users spend an average of an hour per day online (Soni & Kamboj, 2010), and the growing number of activities such as fan pages, blogging, forums etc, have made Facebook an important site of identity construction. The presentation of self on Facebook

incorporates extensive discourses of identity production, where people practice identity through status updates, postings, pictures, associations with bands and other particular groups. On social networking sites, people affirm their identities by choosing to be a member of a social group or page (such as MTV India's Facebook page), and tend to align with particular groups while trying to avoid identification with others (Cochran, Beeghley & Bock, 1988).

People choose groups on the basis of common needs and interests, or what Farquhar (2009) describes as ontological security which is gained when people interact in a desired way, knowing who they are, what they like and how they should interact with other online users. He suggests that categorizing oneself on Facebook is about 'uncertainty reduction' (Hogg & Reid, 2006) where everyone wants everyone to know, how they would like to be treated and how they should treat others.

It's been argued that identity performance tends to be exaggerated, since people in groups try to fabricate their identities and over exaggerate performance (Campbell, 2006). However, at the individual level, people construct their own guidelines for behavior and represent their individual identities in a mediated social world. People make choices about how they would like to be viewed, how they project themselves and what projection would be most effective to achieve a desired identity amongst people. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is a constricted medium in the sense that participants are required to use strategies such as linguistic styles, politeness tactics, social cues etc, convey information that influence impressions (Becker & Stamp, 2005). The constrictions of mediated channels (e-mails, chat, instant messaging) offer great control over performances as interaction takes place in a more flexible and forgiving environment (Boyd, 2002). Cues are given in the form of photo share, videos, written text and emoticons and are completely controlled by participants, for instance an emoticon such as "☺" (I'm happy) or "☹" (I'm sad) allows users to perform an action and 'give' an impression to the receiver.

People can purport to be anything or anyone, or practice multiple selves (Turkle, 1995) on computer-mediated communications (CMCs); and, therefore, it may happen that

participants' online selves aren't the same as offline personas, or there might be the possibility of exaggeration or misrepresentation. But, this is not necessarily problematic, as representations are a part of social life, not just the part of the online world (Carter, 2005). A study conducted by Boyd (2008) on Facebook agrees with earlier research which found that the ability to completely fake an identity is not so important on Facebook, as previous research has shown that most SNSs users perform a continuous version of their "true" selves online and offline- with key interactions conducted with people with whom they have offline pre-existing social ties (Ellison et al, 2007). Unlike chat rooms or MUD settings, which are anonymous in nature, social networking services such as Facebook is more 'nonymous' (in the sense that people get a rough idea of a person through their profile that includes pictures, continuous status updates and association with particular groups) and are designed to perform 'online friendliness' through exchanging information in the form of text, pictures, audio and video (Farquhar, 2009). The 'nonymity' of the environment narrows the discrepancy between 'actual' and 'ideal' self, and offers a more 'realistic' or 'honest' representation of a true 'offline' self (Ellison et al., 2006). However, there remains a possibility of fake identity and exaggerated presentation that may lead to an exaggerated group norm (Campbell, 2006).

Recent research has shown that computer-mediated communication (CMC) patterns have engendered a deeper level of trust and warmth with self-disclosure than face-to-face interactions (Ellison et al., 2006). Arguably, Facebook has induced changes in the ways, in which people perform online friendliness and sociality; the skeptics' perception about a higher level of deception or exaggerated identity online is contested by research supporting how deception (lying) is just as common in everyday face-to-face interactions (Ellison et al., 2006). Additionally, real time applications on Facebook, such as fan pages, forum discussions, and association with certain bands and groups build a relational context of an identity performance, and indicate appropriate behavior and identity management for participants in everyday life. I examine various aspects of identity performances (as discussed above) in chapter 5 and find out how online identities are created and practiced on the MTV India Facebook fan page. I detail identity performance on the fan page and discuss the various attributes that form an online identity of an individual

## 2.4 Online self & the offline world

It has been presumed that computer mediated communication (CMC) contains weaker ties than traditional 'offline' social relationships, and is no way comparable to face-to-face communication. But, the internet has become so powerful and almost necessary that it has not only allowed users to interact digitally, but to use the space as a channel for 'real-life' socializing. According to Haythornthwaite (2007), the online world bears close resemblance to the offline world, as people display similar kinds of characteristics, such as a common language, support systems during crises and rules of behavior and their enforcement, as they do in the offline world. However, some researchers oppose the idea of computer-mediated communication (CMC) as "real" in comparison to face-to-face interaction, and conceive the internet as a less specific space which is used by widely dispersed individuals to communicate with one another (Gochenour, 2006: 34).

The question of the relation between "online selves" and "offline identities" and corresponding social ties, remains open to debate, as different studies have produced different results and interpretations. As noted by Cavanagh (2007), the research evidence has more or less produced split results between two opposing points of view: primarily, the internet and mass media have resulted in weakening of social ties versus the internet that has enhanced offline social life (p11). Undoubtedly, the use of the internet in day to day activities has lessened face to face communications (due to busy lifestyle including professional and family life), resulting in weakening of offline social ties (Nie – Erbring, 2002: 283); but with the advent of social media such as social networking sites, chat groups, forums, blogging etc, the medium has become a channel for online interaction and has resulted in an expansion of online social networks that have created multiple online friendships, associations and kinships (Matei – BallRokeach, 2001: 553).

An individual's online self reflects an individual attributes, such as previous experiences, social affiliations, psychological attitudes, nationality and religion. People perform online identities in relation to their individual attributes, which they carry in their offline lives, so even if someone deliberately tries to exaggerate a performance or an identity, the relevant

knowledge and other 'individualized' attributes of an online user would restrict such performances. For instance, the relationship between an online self and offline identity can be best understood through role playing environments, such as Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs), where players create characters to interact in a mediated world. A MUD works in a controlled setting, and allows participants to choose any 'avatar' corresponding to their taste and choice. They might choose to idealize their avatars by emphasizing particular self-attributes such as stylized writing, colorful backgrounds etc. (Vasalou & Paine, 2009; Schrock, 2012). For instance, social roles such as that of a son, daughter or even a lover, can be determined in particular ways (Goffman, 1959), such as for an impending romantic date, a user would choose an attractive avatar and a background depicting romantic destinations and hearts. An ideal self may prevail in an online identity, but the personalized self-attributes and appearance of an individual would communicate the traits of an 'offline' identity. For instance, in an interview with a MUD participant, Turkle (1996) encountered a player who played 'Achilles', a poetic character, as his 'ideal self'. The virtues and characteristics that he holds in his 'ideal-self' reveal the aspirations and experiences derived from his offline life, which in turn show that an online persona is a construction of a more or less social 'offline' self that people carry in offline life. While studying the BlueSky MUD, Kendall (2002) found that participants created 'online' selves that reflected their offline identities, and developed a level of warmth and trust that enabled them to hang out digitally with a group of friends and acquaintances. Her study noted that people do not necessarily play roles all the time, and expect others will represent themselves much as they appear offline.

Likewise, users of other forms of computer mediated communications (CMC) such as social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace and Orkut intertwine offline identities into online personas (Boyd, 2008). Boyd's (2008) study on Facebook suggests that people use such platforms to intensify social ties that are characterized by some form of offline connection (Ellison et al., 2007). She notes that online social ties do not necessarily take people away from their offline world, but connect the offline identities and online personas in a way that communicates behaviors or selves that bear a close resemblance to offline social experiences. Such behaviors or selves in turn shape 'offline world' personas that carry the potential to place cyberspace as a new frontier in the mapping of one's overall identity

(Simpson, 2005). In my own study, I establish a connection between online self and offline life (detailed in chapter 6) and illustrate how Facebook allows Fan page's participants to link performances on the internet (online) to their performances in the offline world, encouraging them to view the internet not as secondary, but as an extension of their offline world, where social interactions take place in a mediated space and are considered 'equivalent'.

To study the identity performance of participants, I take an ethnographic approach (detailed in the next chapter) combined with language methods (Hanks, 1996) and illustrate how the MTV India Facebook fan page has become a site for identity creation.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 My ethnographic approach

I take an ethnographic approach to study identity performance on the fan page. This chapter details this approach, including a discussion of ethnographic methods taken to conduct this study and an introduction to a type of ethnography, which is called 'Netnography' - an ethnographic approach to studying activities on the Internet (Kozinets, 2010).

An ethnographic approach involves the 'qualitative' study of human social phenomena and communities, through the means of fieldwork. The use of the term 'qualitative' is meant to distinguish ethnography from other 'quantitative' methods that are statistically orientated. A more precise definition of ethnography is rooted in ethnography's disciplinary home of anthropology; it is defined as the research method through which a researcher interprets 'webs of meanings' (Geertz, 1973) and details experiences of the cultural construction in which participants live. Geertz (1973) believes that culture does not occur in the minds of humans, "Culture is public, because meaning is" (p12). He argues that people use the same mental processes to perform social actions, such as understanding language, decision-making and solving problems, but different symbols (such as language) to express themselves and understand others. To Geertz, these symbols are carriers of information through which people construct meanings and interpret each other. However, Ingold (2000) argues that it is not necessary that people construct meanings out of such symbols, but rather that they reconstruct an understanding of a culture by engaging with different elements of a culture in day-to-day life. He believes that human relations in an environment do not necessarily require 'significant symbols', and it may rarely be the case that 'we think before we act' (Ingold, 2000.p7) in routine living. Rather, a meaningful engagement is established through a 'practical engagement' in lived-in environments. In other words, people make sense of each other or a culture by engaging and associating themselves in routine practices, constructing a specific sense of place (or what geographer Yi-Fu Tuan [1977] identifies as 'environmental experience') for individuals. Therefore, it is imperative for an ethnographer



to engage with the day-to-day activities of the participants and understand them through an *emic* perspective or what might be described as the “insider's point of view”.

Wolcott (1995) defines ethnography as a form of inquiry that requires researchers to be immersed personally in the ongoing social and cultural activities of a group of individuals that they are intending to study. In this way, researchers not only become familiar with the spatial dimensions of the research setting, but also the socio-cultural dynamics that influence routine activities and everyday practices. An ethnographic approach also includes the *etic* perspective through which a non-member (outsider) perceives and interprets behaviour associated with a particular culture and collects information/data for the analysis. Agar (1982) has argued that the very name for “doing ethnography” is fieldwork. It can be described by the intellectual enterprise and the requirement for serious reflection, as much as by the practical preparation involved and the skill of an ethnographer. Fieldwork allows the researcher to observe and examine all aspects of a cultural system, especially those that cannot be addressed through laboratory or survey research alone. Spending long periods of time in the field is considered to be a crucial aspect of an ethnographer’s ability to comprehensively describe components of a cultural system as accurately or with as little bias as possible.

Epistemologically, an ethnographer can gain a native’s point of view by spending time in the field and by “participating in activities, asking questions, eating strange foods, learning a new language, watching ceremonies, taking field-notes, washing clothes, writing letters home, tracing out genealogies, observing play, interviewing informants, and hundreds of other things” (Spradley, 1980). Indeed, one of the primary methods used in ethnography is participant observation, which implies that the ethnographer not only observes activities in the field setting, but also participates in them wherever possible. Ethnographers have to be continuously immersed in the field and investigate a unique situated reality: a complex series of events that occurs in a totally unique context – time, place, participants, etc. They always work in a series of conditions that can never be repeated, even if rituals such as religious services are repeated, they cannot be the same because they are new events taking place at a different time and under different conditions. This allows the researcher to observe and

examine all aspects of a cultural system that increases the ability to comprehend the elements of a cultural system that he/she is intending to study. This defines ethnography as both a method of data collection and a kind of data or information.

This duality has created confusion, as Atkinson and Hammersley (1998) have rightly pointed out; for some, an ethnographic approach is a commitment to study a social or cultural phenomenon (through means of fieldwork), whereas for others it is a method that researchers use as and when required. As a method, ethnography is used to study a culture by utilizing its techniques, such as participant observation, structured/unstructured interviews, informal surveys, case studies, analysis of text, etc., to detail the investigation of patterns of social behaviour and elicit cultural knowledge, thus further allowing an investigation of patterns of social behaviour and an analysis of societies (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998). Given this, it can be argued that ethnography is essentially a social research method that helps in extracting information from a wide range of sources. For example, by participating in people's routine lives and by speaking the local language for a period of time, a researcher can collect much information about the cultural practices and activities of the people being studied.

In his account of the life of the Trobriand Islanders, the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (author of *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, published in 1922) stated that ethnographic writing is a means of expressing a shared interest in narrating stories about everyday practices and routine activities of a group of people. He emphasized the importance of detailed participant observation and argued that an ethnographer must be in routine contact with their participants if he/she is to understand the *imponderabilia* of their everyday life. He stated that the goal of an ethnographer is "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world" (Malinowski, 1922:25). His ethnographic account of the Trobriand Islands in Papua New Guinea and the study of the Kula Ring<sup>15</sup> gave an account of the cultural practices of a specific group of people that are particular to them.

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<sup>15</sup> The kula exchange or kula ring, is a ceremonial exchange system that takes place in various provinces of Papua New Guinea. People travel hundreds of miles by canoe to exchange Kula valuables

Malinowski carried out his fieldwork among the Trobriand Islanders of New Guinea between 1915 and 1918 and looked at social interactions such as their annual Kula Ring Exchange ceremonies, which he found to be associated with magic and religion, but also with kinship and trade. He developed a theory of social interaction, which he named “functionalism”. Particularly interested in the islanders’ Kula Ring Exchange, a systematic exchange of priced Kula shells across the islands, Malinowski argued that the Kula shells were not nearly as valuable to the islanders as the Kula partnerships which they developed through the exchange of Kula shells. The development of these partnerships ensured peaceful contact and communication between the people living in the islands and reinforced status distinctions, as traditional chiefs controlled the most valuable shell resources and organized the island-to-island expeditions. Drawing on the Kula exchange ceremonies, Malinowski argued that ethnographic research can act as both a method for analysis and a kind of information. Through his ethnographic inquiry, he found that each aspect of a culture plays an important role in fulfilling the psychological needs of a group of people where social institutions along with social relations assume particular functions for a stable and enduring system.

Observing ethnography as both a method for analysis and a kind of information, Hammersley suggested that ethnography is currently in a "crisis of fragmentation" (1998:18), but this is less important for researchers who wish to use an ethnographic approach to study a social/cultural construction. The nature of ethnography is such that researchers can use it as a research method (participant observation) and create a factual document, an end product (a kind of information), through data collection and analysis.

### Methods of ethnography

Ethnography may take a variety of written forms, based on a range of research methods (participant observation, interviews, surveys, etc.). An ethnographer closely monitors the peoples’ practices and collects data to understand a cultural frame of analysis. A long-term engagement in the field setting where the ethnography takes place is called participant observation. It is one of the primary sources of ethnographic data. The term describes the

dual role of the researcher – to develop an understanding of what it is like to live in a setting. The researcher must become a participant in the life of the setting, while also maintaining the stance of an observer. As an observer, an ethnographer must describe the experiences and activities performed by participants in routine life. Interviews are often used as another source of information. The “targeted” data is collected by asking specific, but open/closed questions. A closed question can be answered with either ‘yes’ or ‘no’, whereas an open question can be answered with either a single word or a short phrase. I used both open/closed questions while conducting interviews. An ethnographic interview is more like an everyday conversation in which researchers target information on specific topics. The interviewer goes to participants and interviews them at the place where the user uses the product and/or does the work under study. The idea is to interview users in their natural setting, while they are performing cultural tasks and activities, asking them questions about what they are doing and why (when necessary) along the way. The purpose of conducting interviews is to generate new insights and concepts; to expand understanding of the behaviour and activities of participants; to document historical idiosyncratic cases and personalities; and to validate findings.

Different kinds of interviews are conducted for various kinds of studies; the following are some examples:

- Topical interviews are conducted to know the facts and sequence of an event. Such interviews give information about the participant’s experiences of daily life.
- Life history interviews deal with individual personal experiences or rites of passage that result in narratives and stories that interpret the past.
- Evaluation interviews are conducted to examine new programs and suggest improvements; for example, interviews can be conducted with school staff members to improve curriculum activities for the students.
- Focus group interviews are conducted to share impressions and to see how a group of strangers react to an idea/information in a given situation.

Spradley (1979) argues that ethnographic interviews serve the same purpose as descriptive observations; such interviews are conducted to generate information from the participants

that include descriptions of their everyday activities and routine practices. Often ethnographic interviews are described as a grand tour and a mini tour of a participant's everyday activity. Descriptive questions are asked to get the information from the participants (p25); these are generally of two types: experience questions and native language questions. Experience questions are asked to find out about a participant's particular experience or things of interest that are particular to the study; native language questions involve asking questions in the native language using particular terms and phrases from the socio-cultural setting being studied. Interviews can be semi-structured or structured. Bernard describes them as having "much of the freewheeling quality of unstructured interviewing, but are based on the use of an interview guide... a written list of questions and topics that need to be covered in a particular order" (Bernard 2002:205). In semi-structured interviews, an interviewer has a written list of basic questions and follows a particular order such as name, age, sex, etc. Such interviews are conducted to gain a better understanding of the cultural context in which the activities are performed. Structured interviews are conducted to get specific responses from participants. Such interviews are conducted face-to-face, by telephone, or may be self-administered by the study participant. Participant observation and interviews are used in combination with other research methods or quantitative research methods to ensure the reliability and validity of the results produced.

The validity and meaningfulness of an ethnographic approach depend directly on the skill of the ethnographer. As writing an ethnographic report is a subjective process, it may contain a researcher's biases or personal beliefs; however, the level of subjectivity could be diminished by using technical devices (such as a tape-recorder) to accurately register the words of the participants. Although the term ethnography has been referred to as a method and a type of information in the above discussion, I see ethnography as the product of a research effort that helps analyse a cultural context or a cultural scene (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972). The main objective of an ethnographic approach is to build a holistic reconstruction of the culture or phenomena investigated. Given this, an ethnographer's primary concern is to produce faithful and accurate representations of a participant's way of life. An ethnographic study may involve collecting subjective and objective data or it may employ data-analysis strategies that range from interviews to discourse analysis. The validity

and reliability of the results are dependent on the strategies employed by the ethnographer. For example, sampling techniques are often viewed as merely a function of the standardization of instruments and procedures. They must be addressed through various strategies in relation to the research problem. A researcher may employ a random or non-random sampling technique, depending on the sample size and research methodology he/she is using. Attaining absolute validity and reliability is an impossible goal in any research. Nevertheless, investigators may approach these objectives by conscientious balancing of the various factors enhancing credibility within the context of their particular research problems and goals.

### 3.2 Online ethnography

Online ethnography refers to the online research methods that intend to study the communities and cultures created through computer-mediated social interaction. Prominent among these ethnographic approaches are "netnography" (Kozinets, 2010) and "virtual-ethnography" (Hine, 2000).

In conventional ethnography, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 105) have put it, "it is a distinctive feature of social research that the 'objects' it studies are in fact 'subjects', and themselves produce accounts of their world". Virtual ethnography (2000) explains how cultures/worlds produced by technology can be interpreted and studied. It includes moving back and forth between conventional and virtual ethnography and employing various methods (such as participant observation, conducting fieldwork, etc.) to study an online/mediated world. Virtual ethnography is a process of intermittent engagement that allows a researcher to study accounts based on strategic relevance to particular research questions rather than faithful representations of objective realities. This kind of ethnography is performed *of, in and through* the virtual – a researcher learns through immersing himself/herself in the study, talking to people, watching them use it and making sense of practices/cultures that are particular to them.

On the other hand, Kozinets (2010) suggests the use of specific procedures and standards for conducting online studies and argues for considering particular consensually agreed-upon

techniques, justifying the use of ‘virtual ethnography’ and ‘netnography’ instead of a modification to the term ethnography. He argues that studying online practices involve particular methodological and ethical procedures that could be different from traditional ethnographies. For example, factors such as entering the field, reach-ability of participants and observing participants can mean different things in mediated and face-to face interaction. He suggests that research methods should always be driven by researcher’s objective and research questions. The collected data should match the type of questions the researcher is trying to answer; a researcher should draw a methodological approach best fitted to the level of analysis, constructs and type of data. For instance, a researcher may use a combination of netnography and other methods, such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, etc., to examine different aspects of online communities and cultures. Studying online practices and experiences involves particular procedures and a researcher must focus on two important areas prior to conducting his/her research: first, a researcher should understand when and how to combine different methods with netnography and collecting data gathered through online interactions. Second, the researcher needs to understand the differences between traditional face-to-face interactions and those in an online social environment, in order to appropriately and consistently guide the adaptation of ethnographic techniques. For example, data collection strategies, such as field notes, data – to be stored and analysed – and ethical procedures to be followed in an online research can also contribute differences.

In addition to this, the internet being a public space may present a number of particular ethical issues in terms of privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, consent and potential harm or intrusion. The distinction between public and private is not clearly defined on the internet. Therefore, it is important to consider participants’ expectations of what the information might be used for, as well as their perceptions of whether it is public or private. Anonymizing information or quotes obtained from the internet could be another way to protect the identity of an individual. However, this does not guarantee of anonymity, as they may be recognizable by their pseudonym by others in a web community in which they participate. Therefore it is imperative to consider whether there are any implications of using direct quotations from web postings, and if so how identities might be disguised.

In an online study, obtaining consent can be difficult as the researcher is unlikely to meet the participants in person. In such a case, it could be helpful to seek advice from the owner/administrator of the web site as to how best to obtain consent from participants. Even if consent can be obtained, the degree to which it is informed is questionable. Therefore, in conducting online/offline interviews, consent forms should be filled and signed by the participants (see Appendices E). In addition to this, a researcher shall also consider the potential risks of vulnerable people inadvertently becoming involved in a research project because of the difficulty of verifying the identity of participants (see Appendices D). Therefore, research involving sensitive issues, or any information causing stress to participants or researcher should be avoided. Consideration therefore also needs to be given to issues of researcher safety.

### Studying online fan activities

In his book, *Fan Cultures*, Matt Hill (2002) offers a systematic approach to the understanding of 'media fandom'. He does not focus on fans that follow a particular media text, but rather on the "transmedia and multimedia consumption of media fans" (2). In doing so, he demonstrates multiple directions in which such studies could be pushed for more fruitful scholarship. Emphasizing the contradictions inherent in fandom, Hills investigates the presumed separation between the fan and the academic, arguing that the rigorous division between the two is enacted not just from one, but both sides of the debate, and further that "such mutual marginalization would suggest that fandom and academia are co-produced as exclusive social and cultural positions" (2). Here, the imagined subjectivity of the academic as "good subject" (i.e. rational) is dependent on the image of the fan for its cultural affirmation and institutional validation. Hills consider that it is not the actual behavior of fans and/or academics that is measured in the dichotomy, but rather a 'subjectivity', which is imagined and held in place through various operations of naturalization, including repetition and faith. However, in my opinion, such a moral dualism devalues the work of existing scholars (Baym, 2000; Mitra, 1996; Kendall, 2000), who have already established 'fandom' as a field of study and have shown how multi-sited ethnography can be used to analyze different activities taking place in an online environment. I argue that specific kinds of



fandom have practices of their own, which separate them from other cultures and create cultures of their own. For instance, *Doctor Who*'s fan activities could be very different to what people do on the MTV India's Facebook fan page. Hence, such online studies are dependent on the nature of participation, the routine activities and people (fans) that create a fan culture. On the MTV India's Facebook fan page, fans' activities performed on the fan page signal their association with the fan page and invite discussions of many academic discourses (such as place making, local-global, identity creation, connection between online and offline activities), suggesting that fandom activities are widely related to academics and may produce findings that could be helpful to understand how fan activities vary from one to another.

## Studying online cultures

All ethnographies of online cultures and communities extend the notion of traditional field and ethnographic cultural analysis and representation. Some ethnographical studies have been conducted on online groups (Turkle, 1995; Mitra, 1996; Kendall, 2000; Boyd, 2004), but only a few have contributed to the ethnographic study of SNSs (Boyd, 2008; Farquhar, 2009). These studies serve as a reference to how offline experiences can be transferred to online environments (Miller & Slater, 2000) and how online identities are managed in everyday activities (Baym, 2000; Farquhar, 2009). My study builds on prior ethnographic work (Baym, 2000; Farquhar, 2009), specifically addressing how online identities are performed on the MTV India Facebook fan page, how online performances can contribute to the process of place-making and how online performances are informed by offline selves (both discussed in detail in chapter 6).

The origin of "internet ethnographies" can be traced back to BBSs (bulletin board systems)<sup>16</sup>, role-playing games (e.g. MUDs) and newsgroups (Baym, 1992; Mitra, 1996) that brought people together in one space on the basis of shared interests, activities and cultural

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<sup>16</sup> Bulletin Board System or BBS is computer software that allows users to login to the system and upload, download, read bulletins and news, and exchange messages with other users through email and public message boards.

tastes for example, the fan culture studied by Jenkins, 1992<sup>17</sup> ). These online communities were text-based communities and invoked Goffman's theory of "symbolic interaction" and allowed users to interact in a social setting and interpret each other's actions through mediated symbols and texts.

In 2004, Boyd conducted the first ethnography on a social networking site called 'Friendster' (Boyd, 2004), which allowed users to contact other members, maintain a friends list and share multimedia messages with friends. Its members used the space to discover new events, bands, and hobbies. The study focused on users' profiles and highlighted the ways in which members used the space to display their ideas and creative abilities. Users created a group activity by introducing an art forum, where users contributed by creating fake profiles and representing themselves as iconic fictional characters such as Superman, Batman, etc. By connecting people based on shared interests or affiliations, the group activity supported networking between like-minded individuals (Fakesters) and created a network of Fakesters. However, the activity was not supported by the company and it began deleting fake profiles. The deletion of profiles resulted in a rupture of trust between users and the site operators (Boyd, 2006b) and the downfall of Friendster.

While the study addressed friendship and connections on SNSs, the ethnographic approach taken by Boyd helped to understand how the site and the relationship they shared with their users complicated the scenario and resulted in the decline of Friendster's use. The study illustrated how people use such platforms for various kinds of activities and project an online-self based on fake/real profiles.

While most of the social networking sites encourage users to build an accurate representation of their online selves, users do this to varying degrees. Some studies suggested that users follow different strategies to negotiate online identities in their routine life (Marwick, 2008). Boyd's study on the "Fakesters" phenomenon and Skog's (2005) study on the use of

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<sup>17</sup> Jenkins in his book *Textual Poachers* offers an ethnographic account of fan communities (fandom of *Star Trek*, *Blake's 7*, *The Professionals*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Starsky and Hutch*, *Alien Nation*, *Twin Peaks*, and other popular programmes), which use Internet spaces for fan activities (stories, songs, videos, and social interactions).

LunarStorm's applications and features by its users suggested that people choose particular elements of their identity (such as pictures, personal information, etc.) and use SNSs and its applications for creative activities and practices. The extent to which online identities are authentic or playful varies across SNSs; both social (popularity and demography) and technological forces (applications and features) shape user's practices. In the study of a SNS-LunarStorm, Skog (2005) found that LunarStorm's applications such as status updates, informed users' tastes and preferences, while profile pictures indicated the authenticity of users (e.g., using a "real" photo instead of a drawing). Facebook applications such as the 'poke' and the 'like' features made interactions socially meaningful by necessitating reciprocity or feedback. My personal experiences with Facebook suggest that the vast majority of interactions takes place in the form of wall-posts (textual snippets posted on the users' profiles and fan pages) and comments posted to the posts, suggesting that Facebookers are comfortable in displaying interactions in public (Farquhar, 2009). My thesis draws on an ethnographic approach to studying the posts and a comment posted to the fan page and analyses how identities are performed through social acts and interactions.

### Drawing from online and offline worlds

Early ethnographers bounded cultures by geography and identity (Boyd, 2008), whereas current ethnographers argue that global systems are at play (Appadurai, 1996), and that even supposedly remote cultures are shaped by larger global-local interests (Piot, 1999). Appadurai (1996) argues that the term 'culture', when used as a noun, represents a range of cultural practices that exist in a culture or cultures in the modern world. Nevertheless, many aspects of ethnography, its use and referents are contested; the method of inquiry allows researchers to make sense of the cultural practices in the context of everyday life. As a method, ethnography produces a topological map of a set of cultural practices and helps find out about the complexity and interconnectedness of culturally driven practices and norms. My interest lies in mapping out the everyday practices and activities of Indian youth on the MTV India fan page; I focus on studies and debates that specifically give an account of ethnographic studies of internet-enabled practices and activities that are shaped by both online and offline activities.

As ethnographies of mediated practices emerged, scholars began struggling with the question of the relationship between the online and offline world; some viewed the internet as a space away from the real world, a third place that has its own cultural dynamics (Soukup, 2005), whereas others saw the internet as a tool of everyday life that infected everyday life in interesting ways (Haythornthwaite and Wellman 2002). Much of what these ethnographers were concerned with was the idea of whether the Internet can be treated as a separate space with a culture of its own or the ways in which the 'online lives' were like or unlike the offline lives. While the latter has value, there is little discussion of how mediated and unmediated interactions are often seamless. As a consequence, some ethnographers began studying both online and offline practices (Kendall, 2002) and followed the participants' activities and practices as they moved between mediated and unmediated environments (Kelty, 2008; Miller and Slater, 2000). For instance, both Wakeford's (2003) study of London cafes and Miller and Slater's (2000) study on Trinidadians use and adoption of Facebook involved a mix of online and offline interviews, which helped to understand how online lives are often connected to offline lives. Wakeford's (2003) study illustrated how local cultural dynamics are embedded in global communication technologies through London cafes. Likewise, Miller and Slater's study on Trinidadians demonstrated how Facebook plays a crucial role in their cultural activities and practices.

In their book, *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach*, Miller and Slater (2003) argue that the Internet can be understood as a phenomenon that comprises "different social relations" rather than "a single 'object' with inherent properties" (p52). According to them, the Internet can be located as a material culture through which people perform routine practices and everyday activities and feel at home (Miller & Slater 2000: 1). In his recent book *Tales of Facebook*, Miller (2011), through his ethnographic case studies, explains how "Facebook" in Trinidad has become 'Fasbook'. He argues that Fasbook is a Trinidadian conception, "rather than an imported facility"; and the use of Facebook in Trinidad is influenced by a specific set of activities and practices that are particular to Trinidadians, therefore reflecting their unique usage of 'Fasbook' (p.159). Therefore, it can be argued that Facebook complements offline identities, internationalizes local events and shrinks social worlds, and can be seen as a space that reconstructs connections between people who are connected

through a network or have previous offline ties. .

But, according to a different set of scholars (e.g. Boellstoroff, 2008), online worlds (communities and groups) are separate entities because such groups/communities are away from offline life. As researchers began to employ multi-sited and social approaches to the Internet, the claim that the Internet is a culture began to fade and a few started questioning its disappearance. For instance, Tom Boellstoroff (2008) located his fieldwork in the mediated world and argued that it is important to study virtual worlds as a culture within their own context. He further argued that ethnography involves studying participants in the actual world, so if a researcher intends to study an online world, he/she should take into account the participants' activities in the mediated world only. While he acknowledges that some studies require multi-sited ethnography, he challenges the assumption that the online and offline worlds are connected. His later argument forced me to ponder on one of my implicit research questions, which argued that mediated interactions are informed by the offline world.

Boellstoroff's decision to locate his fieldwork in SecondLife was informed by his assumption that most SecondLife participants do not interact with one another outside of the virtual environment. However, by taking into account the work of scholars like Baym (2000), Kendall (2002) and Mitra (1996), it is possible to question his assumptions. In many online environments, participants connect with people they meet across a variety of online networks (Taylor, 2006), and more commonly, people interact online with people with whom they share a previous offline connection (Ellison et al. 2007). Thus, his idea of SecondLife as a self-contained culture, which is entirely separate from a participant's 'first life', does not match other researchers' findings regarding mediated environment and practices.

In more recent times, ethnographers studying unmediated practices have started to shift away from bounding projects by regional or geographical proximity, emphasizing global forces shaping the local cultural dynamics (Appadurai, 1996) and have argued that ethnography must adapt to the ways in which mediated and unmediated practices co-construct the cultural

landscape. Henceforth, it is important to take into account both the 'first' and 'second' lives of people to fully understand their activities and practices in the online world.

While I agree with Boellstoroff that mediated practices inform how online identities behave in a mediated world and how such practices shape the cultural context, I oppose Boellstoroff's idea of online worlds as separate entities and also argue that it is important to study offline worlds, since online selves are to a greater or less extent informed by offline selves and experiences (Kendall 2002). In my study, I use offline fieldwork as a mechanism to probe peoples' mediated representations and find out how participants of MTV India's Facebook fan page perform an online identity in relation to their offline selves.

An ethnographic approach, of course, offers both advantages and disadvantages. First, among the advantages, when studying an online group, it is logical to use methods that place the researcher in the actual environment. I work both as a participant and participant observer to keep a record of the day-to-day activities of participants. Second, participants in an online environment are usually interactive (Waskul, 2002) and enjoy a higher level of comfort (safety, perhaps) in such interactions (Miller & Slater, 2000). I conduct online interviews to gain information from the participants and also to recruit participants for my offline study. The benefit here was that participants who have already interacted online are more comfortable with offline interactions, and hence more likely to give productive responses/information. Third, online interactions are based on the characteristics of digital data; activities such as coding, archiving, sorting by topics and presenting data have become easier with digital data (Thomsen et al, 1998). I conducted a pilot study to identify trends of topics to be analysed in the study, in which I used Microsoft Office applications, such as Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel, to sort the data. Fourth, it saves time and money for both the researcher and the participants. Fifth, being an Indian national and a resident of New Delhi, I understand the cultural context of the study and engage with them easily.

There are, of course, disadvantages to online ethnographies. First, the online interactions lack non-verbal cues, which in turn affect the information flow, increasing the possibility of misinterpreting the other's intent. Furthermore, an ethnographer may over-exaggerate with

little information, which may lead to wrong interpretations of the information; for example the ethnographer might miss a user's intended identity. But, such problems can be dealt with via the use of a multi-method approach that may include offline one-to-one interviews or discourse analysis. Another characteristic of online data is the lack of cues in the asynchronous nature of computer-mediated interactions (CMC) which allow a much more controlled presentation of the participants to the researcher, or vice versa (Thomsen et al., 1998). In some cases, the performance can be an over performance or under performance (Goffman, 1959); but the same can be dealt with by taking into account their performances in online and offline environments separately. I examine participants' online and offline activities separately and establish a connection between their mediated and unmediated lives (detailed in Chapter 6).

### Other methods used in my ethnographic approach

Ethnography is a logical method of inquiring into social acts and interactions that derive meaning from symbolic interactions (Goffman, 1959). The study involves observing the fan page's participants' online performances and how they move between their online and offline lives. Like Baym, I use an ethnographic approach, which is grounded in a set of related theories that are termed a 'practice approach' (Baym, 2000; Hanks, 1996). The 'practice approach' locates language in the situated process of verbal communication and explains how verbal communication (speech) is related to other aspects of the social world (Hanks 1996). When people engage in ordinary activities in day-to-day life, they become part of an activity system, through which they understand and interpret meanings of everyday life. These activities then become a part of everyday life and determine the course of action and construct communities in practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991:98). For example, a family constructs a community of practice through their engagement in routine activities and everyday practices. By community of practice, I mean a group or community, which through the pursuit of a joint enterprise develops shared practices and common perspectives. Wenger (1998) explains that communities of practice are formed through three major dimensions: mutual engagement, a joint practice and a shared repertoire (p73). The mutual engagement between the members of a group connotes deep involvement in everyday activities, which

then form a part of our daily routine life. Joint practice brings the members of a community together, where people respond and negotiate with each other in a shared situation and develop a shared repertoire – the everyday routines, rituals and traditions, or particular concepts or ways of thinking.

Language activities have been given particular attention in practice theory for their community-instantiating process. They work as a microcosm in a community and help understand the social meaning invoked by language in the situational structures and goals and the frame and genre of events (Baym, 2000). Through language activities (language methods), routine interactions and everyday practices can be studied, as it helps create a common context through which people create interpretations (Gumperz, 1982). For example, in addition to human communication, verbal communication involves kinesics and paralinguistic elements (meta-communicative signals such as letters, algorithm signs, and paralinguistic signs) which help in the interpretation of messages. Meanings are not always dependent on solely verbal communication, but are codetermined in a crucial way with other non-verbal elements like intensity, the inflection of voice, facial expression, accompanying gestures and secondary signals sent to bystanders. The same verbal message framed by different meta-communication can mean something entirely different, including its opposite.

Language methods are best suited to study an online community as it explains the genesis, reproduction, change of form and meaning of a social/cultural community (Ortner, 1984:1490). Most communities use a structured set of distinctive communication practices through which culturally conventionalized and culture-specific cues are communicated, and by studying such cases, an analysis of a community can be accomplished. In the case of MTV India's Facebook fan page, participants approach the fan page to engage in specific practices and activities and combine these activities with other resources (web addresses, pictures and videos) in unpredictable yet patterned ways, constructing a specific social space for a group of participants that feels like a community.

I began participating in MTV India's Facebook page in 2010, a year before I began to study it and have continued to participate actively thereafter. MTV India's Facebook fan page is



written in both Hindi and English and has its own style (use of poetic language and other fan activities) and referents (use of smileys and other internet abbreviations that are common to the page, for example: PS – Post script, LOL – Laugh Out Loud, etc.). As a participant–observer, I sought to remain sensitive to how my status as a researcher can influence the patterns of interactions that take place on the Facebook fan page. I planned to refrain from any evaluation or beliefs about the behaviour of the MTV India Facebook fan page participants on the fan page. Also, as several practice theorists (e.g. Baym 2000) have pointed out, there are two major flaws in cultural studies: first, the close analysis of language may generate incorrect interpretations of the details as it may reflect the researcher’s point of view. Second, data samples or case studies selected by the researcher may confirm the researcher’s beliefs creating a reflection of his/her assumptions rather than the actual findings of the community. In order to overcome such problems, along with online data analysis, I use online/offline interviews to understand the terminology specific to the fan page.

I use a combination of qualitative methods, including online data analysis and conducting online/offline interviews that help me understand terminology specific to the fan page. Also, when selecting participants for online/offline research, I use a random selection of people, which ensures an equal probability of each participant being selected for online/offline interviews. The other two methods that I use in this study are participant observation and language methods. I collected online and offline data based on a statistical analysis of wall posts and comments for a set period of time.

The study is also shaped by other important aspects of Facebook, such as privacy, which occupies the forefront of computer-mediated communication (CMC). On Facebook, people share most of their information with friends and are generally comfortable sharing their identities in public (Gross and Acquisti, 2005). MTV India’s Facebook fan page is a public fan page and fans’ profile names and profile pictures are visible with comments posted by them. To view a user’s profile, a fan may click on the profile name, which directs users to the profile owner’s information. Many studies (Boyd, 2004), including Gross and Acquisti suggest that Facebookers are less comfortable in sharing information with strangers and

usually give access to information (such as age or workplace) to people who are either connected to them through a network or have an offline association. In the case of the fan page, fans interact on the basis of common interests and create connections. This suggests that friending on the fan page is based on previous interactions/connections, suggesting that people are aware of privacy threats online and carefully control and manage impressions in everyday life.

While my study supports Boyd (2004) and Gross and Acquisti's (2005) basic framework (such as my status as a researcher and dealing with privacy) of conducting an online ethnography, it expands to examine how people, through MTV India's Facebook fan page, create connections on the basis of routine interactions and everyday practices and feel the page has become a specific place for particular kinds of activities. Although the research relating to the 'place-making' process in CMC has not been dealt with directly, a few researchers, through their studies, have demonstrated that Internet spaces can behave like particular places for certain activities. Much of the work on online communities such as Mitra (1996), Baym (2000) Miller & Slater (2000) and Kendall (2002) focuses on how online spaces have formed specific sites for routine interactions and everyday activities. These studies suggest that the Internet is not a world apart, but a part of everyday life, which is constituted through everyday activities and routine activities. My study builds on the above studies and shows how the interactive and experiential attributes of the medium can create an association and attachment to a space, which then forms a particular 'place' through routine activities.

### 3.3 Research Plan

I employed William and Copes' (2005) building approach to plan my data management. The building approach allows researchers to make connections with their potential subjects in the participant observation stage and find interviewees who could give information about the internal workings of the community. Like others (Williams & Copes, 2005; Farquhar, 2009), I have made a researcher profile separate from my personal Facebook account (attached as an annexure at the end of the thesis); my researcher profile clearly states my research interests, objectives and aims of the study. It is through the researcher's Facebook profile

that I participate, observe and create connections with potential subjects for offline interviews. My objective is to identify a set of participants who are willing to meet face-to-face in a public area and give guided tours of their “average” daily online activities on MTV India’s Facebook page, including their views on their own performance of self. Along with guided tours, I conduct interviews both online and offline; the interviews are largely semi-structured, with a small set of guiding questions in the beginning (Waskul, 2002). I address a few topics such as the medium used to access the Facebook fan page, age group, profession, reasons for joining the page, frequency and duration of visit, information about their offline and online lives and friends, relationships between online network and offline lives, interpretation of others’ online identity and identity management in their day-to-day life. Beyond these elements, questions are asked depending on the interests and emphasis of the participants.

In both semi-structured online and offline interviews, I addressed the following topics: (1) name, age, occupation and membership history, (2) reasons for joining, (3) frequency and duration of site visits, (4) with whom they interact (5) connection between online and offline lives, if any (6) presentations of self, and (7) interpretations of others’ presentations through performing fan activities (detailed in Chapter 5).

Beyond these elements, each online and offline interview evolved further, depending on participants’ interests and preferences. I used the observation period to view the fan page’s dynamics, to begin to discern topics and to understand participants’ online activities.

I chose New Delhi, and one of the union territories of India, to conduct offline interviews for a number of reasons. First, New Delhi, being the capital of India, has people from various ethnic origins, castes and cultures. Linguistic groups from all over India are well represented in the city; amongst them are Punjabi, Urdu, Bihari, Kannada, Tamil, Telgu, Oriya, Gujrati, Sindhi, and Bengali, etc. Apart from the major population of Hindus (14,541,807.98), there are large communities of Muslims (1,055,453.80), Sikhs (469,090.58), Jains (184,285.58) and Christians (15,077.91). While Hindi is the principal spoken language, English is the official written language of the city. Second, the vast Indian bureaucracy, the two houses of

parliament (the Council of States and the House of the People) and the judiciary (the Supreme Court and the High Court) are located in New Delhi. Most of the major events (MTV Roadies auditions<sup>18</sup>, Bollywood events, cricket matches) take place in the capital city and are shared on the fan page. Third, amongst 31 states, Delhi ranks fifth with 1,774, 220 Facebook users in the age group between 18 and 34 years. This could give diverse perspectives on the range of activities and practices of Indian youth on the fan page. Fourth, being a Delhi-ite, I understand the cultural context of the capital city. It is easy to locate youth and places where they congregate. I can easily travel to interview potential participants around the city and get information about their activities on the fan page.

Initially, my focus was broadly on Indian “youth”. But the term ‘youth’ lacked clarity, as I was identifying a category of Indian youth who are from urban India and are from a specific age range, stage in life (unmarried or married with no children) and a range of occupations. I chose not to include those under 16 in my study, as participants in this age group may have less Internet access and are more likely to be under parental control. Interviewing young people under 16 would also require parental permission. I decided to focus my attention on those who can legitimately participate with their input and knowledge without any influencing factors. Age tended to play a significant role in the choices made by college students, school students and young professionals. Older youth appeared to be more likely to leave home and have flexibility in their routine life. Narrowing my focus to a particular age group, stage in life, profession and lifestyle helped me to reconsider what I exactly mean by youth. I struggled to define the term; I rejected terms like students, children and teenagers. Not all college-age people are students and not everyone in the age group 16–30 is a student. The term ‘children’ was problematic as the term puts young people in relation to adults, failing to describe the exact population. I also decided against the term teenagers, since the age group 16–30 includes people from different professional backgrounds, who might be married and cannot be categorized as ‘teenagers’. I finally decide to use the term youth, and address them as ‘young people’, ‘participants’, ‘users’ and ‘fans’, since the term defined the idea behind a set of people that have their own set of practices and activities.

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<sup>18</sup> MTV Roadies is a popular reality show, which features bikes and contestants and is aired on MTV India.

### 3.4 Conducting Interviews

Having my researcher's Facebook profile, I initiated contact with potential participants through common membership within the Facebook fan page. I began contacting fans, by commenting on the posts/topics posted by the fan page moderators and later, approaching them through text-talk or sending personalized messages to their profiles from my researcher's profile. I introduced myself, stated the objectives of my study and asked if they wished to continue the interaction. Online interviews were relatively unstructured (see Appendix A) and are more or less equivalent to guided conversations. In the process, I worked as a participant–observer and recorded field notes as I observed participants and their activities on the fan page. At times, I identified participants who would work as key informants and provide information on culture and other participants that are willing to share their everyday experiences and information about the culture being studied. This allowed me to observe behaviour, note interactions, and create field notes for in-depth analysis. Extracts of online/offline interviews are included in Chapters 5 and 6 to illustrate identity performance and place-making activities.

The recruitment of participants from the large group (the fan page's participants) began through searching the fan list based on two randomly selected letters. The random sample ensured that participants were arbitrarily selected; each potential participant was sent a "friendship request" from my researcher profile. Participants who accepted the friendship requests were contacted for online and offline interviews (see Appendix B). In their online interviews, fans suggested other fellow fans for recruitment. The following exchange with Arjun is an example of this snowball recruitment:

4:17pm Me: How often do you come on Facebook and MTV India's fan page.

4:17pm Arjun: I check my Facebook profiles 5–6 times a day, but I come on the fan page to talk to friends whom I know through the fan page. Hiral, Sulabh and Ashish join the same time, when I come online.

4:18pm Me: huh... maybe I should recruit Hiral, Sulabh and Ashish for the study.... What do you think...

4:18pm Arjun: I will ask them, if you want don't really know how they will react, but I can always say that I am chatting to you.

4:19pm Me: Thanks, that would help Arjun.

4:19pm Arjun: cool

4:19pm Me: great... thanks for the tip

Each of the interviews began with a discussion of how the participant got started with the Facebook fan page. This was intended to both elicit background information and put the participants at ease by having them answer an “easy” question (not hard to remember or difficult to talk about). The intention here was to have the participants talk about what is most important to their Facebook fan page activities (liking, sharing or comments) and with what aspects they spent most of their time. In online interviews, I started the interview by exchanging the customary greeting ‘Namaste’ and then focusing on their likes, interests and preferences. I used ‘Namaste’ to greet fans, as the customary greeting is often exchanged on the fan page before the start of an interaction. Moreover, it signals cultural roots and offers an opportunity for people to connect. This starting point guided my interactions. As a participant, I was already familiar with most aspects of the Facebook fan page, but hearing each participant discuss it in his or her terms informed my overall understanding of each component. The responses to these questions helped me shape my initial impression of participants’ routine activities and practices. It also helped me in developing a rapport with participants. I approached these participants for offline interviews.

I selected 20 participants for offline interviews, out of which 14 responded. They were contacted for offline interviews in January–February 2013 in New Delhi. I used semi-structured interviews for offline one-to-one interviews. Semi-structured interviews are often the sole data source for a qualitative research project and are often scheduled in advance at a specific time and location outside of everyday events. Such interviews were generally organized around a set of predetermined open-ended questions (see Appendix B), with other questions emerging from the dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewees. It also

offers several advantages: for instance, it allows the interviewer to delve more deeply into social and personal matters, whereas the group interview allows interviewers to get a wider range of experiences. I organized my offline interviews in cafes, public libraries and colleges. Out of 14 offline one-to-one interviews, I conducted 12 one-to-one and a group involving two participants at the same time. This allowed me to record multiple perspectives, varied knowledge and various interpretations of a specific culture.

Spradley (1979) notes different stages of building a rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee, which generally include apprehension, exploration, cooperation and participation. The first stage is characterized by uncertainty stemming from the strangeness in which the interviewer and interviewee are thrown into. To ease this, I began interviews with open-ended, non-threatening questions asked in a friendly tone and explaining the nature of the study. For instance, during the interview, I often repeated my questions, giving the interviewee time to hear what is being asked and to think about how to respond. This led me to the stage of exploring various issues and exchanging details with participants resulting in the giving of trust and confidence. In the process, participants co-operated by providing their interpretations/observations of various things and participated by giving their input on various elements (such as the “like” button or the “share” button). All interviews ended with an exchange of email addresses and phone numbers. Additionally, at the end of each interview, I asked participants for any suggestions or information they may want to share later.

### Difference between Online and Offline Interviews

Offline interviews were shorter and more to the point than online interviews. I experienced online interviews to be a bit longer due to necessary turn-taking (time delay involved), but interviewees opened up a lot in online chats, gave elaborate answers and explained their relations with other participants whom they have met online. Additionally, slow Internet connections and power cuts in India caused technical delays in the interaction. However, a review of both online and offline interviews made me come to the conclusion that participants opened up more in online interviews than offline interviews. The reasons could be their anxiety in meeting face-to-face and sharing information with an individual who is

not well known to them. To overcome this, I tried creating a friendly environment, ensuring that the information exchanged would be kept confidential.

Online chats helped me to gain most of the information, as interviewees provided more elaborate answers and explained how time-lapses between turn-taking performed by me and him/her gave time to reflect and exchange their Facebook experiences. Moreover, online interviews were easy and convenient and made scheduling easier by decreasing the time between recruitment and the actual interview. Additionally, online interviews allowed the interviewing of young Indian fans across the world, who contributed to the study through their input.

Scheduling face-to-face interviews was a little problematic, as the interviewer often has to settle on a suitable time and place for the interviewee. Online interviews offered flexibility in timing and allowed me to chat with participants for most of the day. Participants, who were willing to meet for face-to-face interviews were asked to meet in public or semi-public areas such as universities, colleges and companies. Some participants met in their morning coffee break, some at university libraries and others at coffee shops, youth clubs, community parks, etc.

My observation stage began in August 2011 and continued until March 2013. During the winters of 2013, I travelled to New Delhi for two months and conducted the offline interviews with participants. Appendixes A and B detail participants' biographical information and extracts from their offline interviews. Extracts from online and offline interviews are extensively used in chapter 4-introduction to fan activities, chapter 5- identity performance and chapter 6 place creation.

In my next chapter, I introduce fan activities (like, share, comment) and discuss how these fan activities help create an individual's identity.



## Chapter 4: Establishing the framework for analysis and introducing fan activities

### 4.1 Topics posted on MTV India’s Facebook fan page

During my observation period (2011), I noted that a range of topics are posted on the MTV India Facebook fan page by its administrators. Below is a table that lists those topics and the number of fan activities (comments, likes and shares – per wall post) received by each topic. I counted the number of times each topic was posted on the fan page between July 2011 to December 2011 and the table starts with those that were most posted by MTV India and ends with those that were least discussed.

The table is divided into two major sections: posts by MTV India (posts posted by MTV administrators) and fan activities (performed by the participants). ‘Posts by MTV India’ is subdivided into two columns, which show the range of topics and the number of times these topics were posted on the fan page in the six month period. Fan activities are subdivided into three columns: the number of comments, likes and shares (average per wall post) generated by each topic.

Through this table, I analyse, compare and select topics, which will illustrate how the fan page has become a site for identity performance.

Table 4.1 Identifiable Trends in Fan Activities

Posts by MTV India		Fan activities		
Topics	Wall posts (July 2011 to December 2011)	Comments per wall post (Average)	Number of likes (Average)	Number of shares (Average)
Quotations	110	1200-1300	3000–4000	400–500
MTV programs’ updates and information on audition dates/MTV Vee-jays	70	1800–2000	4000–4200	400–600

Posts by MTV India		Fan activities		
Bollywood	50	2500–3000	6000–7000	550–650
Fun videos/photos	40	600–1500	3000–3200	200–300
Sports	30	2500–3500	12000–14000	600–700
Campaigns (AIDS awareness)	30	2200–3000	3000–3200	500–550
Law and order situations in cities (including Hazzare’s anti-corruption campaign)	30	4500–5500	5000–6000	890–1000
Birthdays	30	2500–3700	3000–3500	400–500
Events/festivals	20	1500–2200	3500–4300	400–500
National festivals	20	1000–1200	4000–4200	250–300
Updates condemning terrorist activities	15	4000–4500	7600–7800	750–800
Government activities	12	2800–3200	1400–1500	150–200
Celebrities	10	1900–2300	2000–3000	200–400
National holidays	7	1600–2000	3000–3500	150–200
Foreign affairs	6	2000–2200	2000–5000	0–50
Delhi/Bombay news	6	2000–2500	2000–3000	200–300
Hollywood	3	1500–1700	3000–3500	300–320
Tributes	3	400–500	2500–3000	300–400
Book launch	2	300–400	500–600	0–50

A post can be liked by clicking the ‘like’ button. Liking a status update, picture, video or a web link is a unique activity that can only be performed once. During online interviews, participants explained that they like a status update because they have enjoyed reading it and want to leave positive feedback in the form of ‘liking’. According to the table (4.1), sports which include cricket are the most liked, attracting around twice as many likes as next most liked topics such as Bollywood and updates on terrorism activities. Other than this, updates on law and order and commonwealth games are the next most liked topics after sports,

Bollywood and updates on terrorist activities, and garner less than half the likes received by sports.

A post can be shared by clicking the ‘share’ button and choosing to post to your friend’s or own profile. Users may share similar content, multiple times on their own or a friend’s wall. Sharing the fan page’s post in this way involves showing an association with a particular idea or belief and creating awareness about an issue or problem. For instance, posts relating to condemning terrorist activities and to law and order generate the top most shares on the fan page because people are motivated to share social messages to increase society’s awareness of particular issues. The table also highlights that the number of shares are fewer than the number of likes suggesting that fans may not feel comfortable sharing content with others that are either included or are outside of their network. This also applies to comments, where people express their opinions and views publicly. Commenting or sharing content within Facebook involves displaying or endorsing a set of opinions to others and may involve concealing information/opinions that may offend people or may not comply with generally held views. This gives rise to online identity performance and will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Fan activities; involve time, especially where fans communicate their viewpoints through ‘comments’ posted on the posts. A ‘comment’ can be posted by adding a word or a phrase to a wall post. A user may post multiple comments to a status update. By commenting on a post, people show a need to respond to issues/ideas posted by the moderators on the fan page. For example, posts relating to law and order and terrorist activities generate the top number of comments because by commenting on such posts, fans demonstrate their informed selves and a willingness to exchange opinions with others who may or may not have a similar view.

## Selecting topics for the analysis

Based on the above overview of fan activities (table 4.1), I chose four topics for in depth analysis and to illustrate identity performance on the fan page. Firstly, I select the sub-group of **MTV programs**; most people connect and become fans to receive updates on the channel's activities. This association and familiarity are informed by the connection they share with the 'MTV India' brand in their offline lives, suggesting that the online lives of fan page's participants are informed by their offline interests and choices.

Although the fan activities received by such updates are less than a quarter of activities received by some other topics; such topics are the most posted topics (other than quotes) and highlights the core business of MTV India as a *national* channel that promotes their programs and activities on the fan page.

Quotations	110	1200–1300	3000–4000	400–500
MTV programs' updates and information on audition dates/MTV Vee-jays	70	1800–2000	4000–4200	400–600

The sub-group includes updates on MTV India programs, updates on Vee-jays' activities, web episodes, etc. The liking/sharing/commenting on such topics stems from the fact that MTV programs, such as MTV *Roadies*, etc., are popular amongst Indian youth and any update/information regarding auditions for various reality shows, information on new programs etc. is shared through the fan page to reach the maximum number of fans. For instance, MTV *Roadies* is one of the oldest youth-based reality-shows in India and features contestants that are selected through a process of group discussion and personal interviews, who then perform tasks and travel on pre-determined routes on their Hero Karizma bikes. Each episode features a vote-out performed by its participants, and one contestant is eliminated, thereby decreasing the number of contestants carrying on with the journey. Each episode consists of a number of tasks/challenges, which contestants perform to win immunity/cash (money tasks). The immunity safeguards a roadie from the vote out; the tasks

are performed by an individual or a team. The one who survives till the end is declared the winner and walks away with the total cash accumulated by performing the money tasks.

Along with the full-length television episodes, MTV *Roadies*'s web episodes are frequently posted on the fan page, which give extra information about its contestants and their lives. The show has successfully finished eight seasons and is currently airing Season 9. Often, MTV India's moderators use the fan page to inform fans about new developments in the show and any controversies arising. In response, fans support their favourite contestants by adding comments in their favour and try to predict the current week's vote out in advance. The sub-group can be analysed to find out how, by engaging in fan activities on such topics, fans perform knowledge sharing and perform an online identity that is closely related to Indian-ness.

Secondly, I chose to analyse status updates relating to **Bollywood** as such topics are the most posted topics other than topics relating to MTV programs and quotes posted on the fan page.

Bollywood	50	2500–3000	6000–7000	550–650
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As representative of the youth music television channel of India, the fan page's moderators post posts relating to actresses/actors, Indi-pop albums, Bollywood songs, actor/actress controversies and gossip. In response, participants perform fan activities (like, comment and share) and show an association in the form of aggression, happiness, excitement, etc. and create an identity on the platform.

Posts/updates relating to Bollywood display a certain amount of connectivity to the national culture, which in turn illustrates Indian nationalism and a sense of belongingness. For example, most of the recent films with expatriate characters show that being a part of the national ethos is no longer determined by nationality or place of residence but by blood ties and morality (Deprez 2010: 145). For instance, the rich American Indian played by Amrish Puri in Subhash Gai's *Pardes* sings 'I Love My India' and recites '*Karam Mera India, Dharam Mera India, Vatan Mera India, Sajjan Mera India*' ['India is my destiny, India is my

religion, India is my motherland, India is my beloved’]. The fact that he belongs to the nation is constantly underlined through the use of the possessive pronoun before the words ‘country’, ‘India’ or ‘Hindustan’ and, despite going through all types of ordeals, his ‘Indian-ness’ is always reaffirmed at the end of the Bollywood film. I analyse posts and fan activities relating to Bollywood and show how these posts and fan activities represent Indian-ness and a common culture shared by all.

Thirdly, I chose to analyse **sports** activities; topics related to sports that include a wide range of games, such as cricket, Badminton, Tennis, Kabaddi,<sup>19</sup> etc. Such topics generate the maximum number of likes on the fan page and are the most shared topics other than law and order and updates condemning terrorist activities.

Sports	30	2500–3500	12000–14000	600–700
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Although Hockey is the official national sport of India, cricket matches are regarded as the most popular sporting events in the country. During the 2011 Cricket World Cup, the fan page became a space where people exchanged and shared information on the daily matches, updated scores and celebrated the success of the Indian team in the World Cup.

In India, cricket has united Indians, regardless of caste, class, religion, region, or language. When the Indian cricket team won the World Cup, for once ‘being Indian’ was a matter of collective pride. In more recent times, cricket has become a symbol of national identity and has represented India in a global context. On the fan page, updates relating to cricket and cricketers are posted on a routine basis. Such updates can be analysed to demonstrate how the fan page has become a site for performing national identity that represents Indian-ness.

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<sup>19</sup> Kabaddi is a South Asian game and is derived from the Tamil word "kai" (hand), "pidi" (catch), which could be translated into "Holding Hands". People are divided into two groups that occupy opposite halves of a field and take turns sending a "raider" into the other half, who then win points by tackling members of the opposing team.

Although, topics such as Bollywood and cricket are in the wider interest of the cultural/national population, the fan page has formed a site to discuss **social/national issues**, which generate the most number of comments.

Law and order situations in cities (including Hazzare's anti-corruption campaign)	30	4500–5500	5000–6000	890–1000
Updates condemning terrorist activities	15	4000–4500	7600–7800	750–800
Government activities	12	2800–3200	1400–1500	150–200
Campaigns (AIDS awareness)	30	2200–3000	3000–3200	500–550

In fact, these tend to be topics that are not so frequently posted on the fan page, but generate either the most or a high number of comments and shares, suggesting that fans have appropriated the fan page for their own interests/concerns that include sharing and expressing an opinion/viewpoint. The sub-division of social issues includes topics relating to law and order situations, updates condemning terrorist activities, government activities and other national events like Hazzare's campaign, and awareness campaigns. The increased fan activities around such issues suggest peoples' awareness of and concern about the society they live in. This suggests that the fan page has become a specific site to perform various fan activities that are particular to Indian youth. I analyse topics relating to social/national issues in detail in chapter 5 and illustrate how performing fan activities on such topics gives rise to identity performance.

## 4.2 Discussing fan activities

Fan activities involve posting wall posts, likes, shares and comments on the fan page. On MTV India's Facebook fan page, fans select topics based on their interests and preferences and post a like, share or comment. In an offline interview, Gitesh explained that he likes a wall post, when he agrees or appreciates it; for instance, he routinely likes anything that has grabbed his attention, and he shares pictures/videos on his profile to support a cause/issue. Alternatively, he shares funny pictures/videos with his Facebook associates<sup>20</sup> to show an association. He comments on topics relating to his interests and preferences; for instance, he often comments on topics relating to MTV *Roadies* and cricket, displaying his individual interests and preferences. This suggests that fans like, share and comment a) to show a shared interest or preference, and b) to show an association with someone with whom they share a connection, but in different ways that communicate various aspects of their online identity. I detail this identity performance in chapter 5. Below, I introduce these fan activities and explain how they are different from each other.

### 4.2.1 Wall Posts

A wall post allows users to post a text snippet on his/her or a friend's profile. Wall posts are also called status updates that are updated by profile owners on a routine basis. The most recent posts appear at the top of the profile wall and are placed under the "recently updated" section of a user's profile. By posting updates, users can share an idea, feeling or thought with their Facebook associates.

This feature first became available on December 13, 2007. In 2009, Facebook added a "tag feature" through which a user can tag certain friends (or groups, etc.) within a status update

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Boyd (2008) is critical of the term 'Facebook friends', as the connections on SNSs are not only created to perform friending, but to 'keep in touch' with people with whom one might not share any offline association. Hence the term 'friends' is confusing. In the case of the fan page, fans create connections on the basis of shared interests with people with whom they have no previous connections. Hence I used the term 'associates' (fans that associate on the basis of common interests), instead of 'friends', as it could be misleading.



by adding a “@” character before their name, turning the friend's name into a link and posting the update to the user’s and a friend’s profile. Posts posted to one’s profile become a part of the news feed. In the case of a fan page, like MTV India’s Facebook fan page, the news feed consists of wall posts posted by the fan page administrators, wall posts posted by fans, fan activities such as comments likes and shares posted to such wall posts, profile changes, such as the changing of a profile picture by the administrators, and information on upcoming events.

A wall post is usually accompanied by a picture, video/audio track and web addresses, posted on the fan page’s wall. MTV India’s Facebook fan page also allows fans to post wall posts, video/audio track and web addresses that may generate comments/text talk. The default setting of the fan page shows only the wall posts posted by MTV India’s moderators. However, fans can select a tab (button available on the right side of the fan page) and see the wall posts posted by everyone (including fans, as well as MTV India’s moderators). Due to the increase in the number of wall posts posted by fans and MTV India moderators each day, the fan page can be adjusted via a tab that allows fans to move between the pages and view each page separately (the page that shows posts posted by MTV India’s moderators and the page that shows posts posted by fans).

Fans’ wall posts generally contain textual snippets (mostly greetings, such as hi/hello), video tracks, pictures, web addresses and creative fan activities like self-composed songs and video tracks. Compared to wall posts posted by fans, MTV India’s wall posts generate a lot more comments, shares and likes, because such wall posts appear on the profile page of MTV India’s Facebook fan page and the fan page is subscribed to by more than a million people. The activities (wall posts by MTV India) of the fan page get posted to various fans’ walls, which then garner responses in the form of comments, shares and likes. Fan activities are routinely promoted by MTV India’s moderators by sharing or liking a fan video, and the fan page also contains links to MTV videos, photos and list of events.

During my observation stage, and while gathering input from online and offline interviews, I discovered that wall posts posted on the fan page can be categorized as:

- Direct marketing of products or services (e.g., MTV *Roadies*)
- Promotion of events that interest youth (e.g., hunger strike or cricket tournaments)
- Surveys (e.g., polls and quizzes for the viewers)
- Information announcements (e.g., launch of new programs, Bollywood movies, cricket matches)
- “Entertaining” posts, relating to recent or upcoming events

These topics are posted on the fan page with the intention of creating awareness and sharing information. I found the following qualities in wall posts that attract participants to perform fan activities on the fan page:

- Showing disagreement with an idea – wall posts posted to show a negative view on a topic. For example, ‘Is India is ever going to be safe? India Shining? We think not. Read on to know more about our nation’.
- Information posts – posts that inform people about specific events or particular news. For example, “The parliament house is being prepared to welcome the 13th president of India, a choice of 713937 politicians; Mr. Pranab Mukherjee will be taking oath at 11:30 am on Wednesday!”
- Ironic posts – Posts that are written in a style that has a sharp or cutting remark, usually conveyed through irony or understatement. For example, “It’s the match day and our team is not playing well. Dear Indian cricket fans, Stop praying for Sachin's 100th 100. Start praying that we can put up a total score of 100! Sincerely, you’re faithful fans and the Indian test cricket team”.
- Humour – posts that can be described as funny and humorous. For example, "There are three kinds of men who do not understand women: Young, old, and middle-aged”.
- Socio-political awareness – posts that relate to the social/national issues of the country. For example, “65 years until Independence, the colonial powers looted our country. 65 years after the corruption is looting our country. Freedom is nothing but a chance to be better. Let’s fight to make India better! HAPPY INDEPENDENCE DAY!”

- Good wishes – wishing birthday greetings or celebrating victories. For example, “BREAKING: It's a DJOCKO VICTORY in the Wimbledon Final! At the age of 24, Novak Djokovic wins his 1st Wimbledon title against Rafael Nadal! Congrats to the WORLD NUMBER 1!”
- Quizzes – Asking questions and getting votes on the choices given. For example, “How many GOLD medals do you think India will win in the Olympics? a) 1, b) 2, c) 3, d) 4, e) 5, f) More than 5”.
- Tributes – Posts that pay tribute to well-known people and personalities. For example, “On this day, 2 years ago, a legend died. It didn't matter whether he was Black or White, or whether some thought he was bad. Just Remember the Time when he Beat it and The Way he Made Us Feel Dangerous! Today, we look at the Man In the Mirror and tell him, ‘Michael Jackson, you Healed the World with your music.’ RIP MJ- KING OF POP”.

Fan activities such as likes, shares and comments are then posted to these wall posts.

#### 4.2.2 The ‘like’ Button

On Facebook, the ‘like’ button is presented through a thumb up icon accompanied by the word ‘Like’. As described by Facebook, the ‘like’ button is a way to "give positive feedback and connect with things you care about" (Facebook Help Centre, 2011). Users can ‘like’ status updates, comments, photos, and links posted by their friends, as well as advertisements, by clicking the ‘like’ button at the bottom of the content. This makes the content appear in their profile and also in friends' Newsfeed.

In general, a participant of a fan page can perform likes, shares and comments. In the case of MTV India’s Facebook fan page, a non-participant may also perform likes, shares and comments on the posts posted by the MTV moderators, but such activities do not get posted on his/her profile since he/she has not joined the fan page.

A 'like' button allows profile owners to see how many friends have liked their status (figure 4.1). The 'like' button was introduced in February 2009 and quickly became a widely popular way for users to express positive opinions about shared content.

Facebook's own description of how this feature works is as follows:

*We've just introduced an easy way to tell friends that you like what they're sharing on Facebook with one easy click. Wherever you can add a comment on your friends' content, you'll also have the option to click "Like" to tell your friends exactly that: "I like this."*

Leah Pearlman, The Facebook Blog, 2009.

Retrieved from ([https://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?blog\\_id=company&blogger=1002102](https://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?blog_id=company&blogger=1002102))



Figure 4.1 Screenshot of the news-feed that shows the number of likes received by a wall post.

On the fan page, fans like a status update when they want to show agreement with an idea or give positive feedback. Below, I take a few illustrations of wall posts from the fan page and demonstrate how liking activity is performed on the fan page:

### Example 1

BREAKING: Virender Sehwag just became the second cricketer in history, after Sachin Tendulkar, to score 200 runs in a one-day match!

Posted on November 8, 2011. The post generated 10,311 likes.

### Example 2

10,820 runs in 343 ODIs. Not bad for a 'test specialist' right!?

Wishing the irreplaceable Rahul Dravid good luck for his last one-day match today!

We will miss this true gentleman in the gentleman's game.

Posted on September 16, 2011. The post generated 11,287 likes.

### Example 3

Guys, with great regret we inform you that the Metallica – Live in India concert to be aired on MTV at 7.30 pm today has been postponed... come back to this space for updates.

Posted on September 11, 2011. The post generated 2926 likes.

### Example 4

Today is the 76th birthday of the Dalai Lama - the spiritual leader of the Tibetan Buddhists. This Nobel Peace Prize winning monk has been exiled from his own country for his non-violent crusade to free Tibet from China. He is one of the most influential advocates of world peace today.

Here are 5 of his simple, yet strong teachings:

- 1) Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible
- 2) If you can, help others; if you cannot do that, at least do not harm them.
- 3) We can live without religion and meditation, but we cannot survive without human affection.
- 4) Happiness is not something ready-made. It comes from your own actions.
- 5) Remember that not getting what you want is sometimes a wonderful stroke of luck.

Posted on July 6, 2011. The post generated 3227 likes.

### Example 5

She aimed for the moon and reached the stars. Today we remember Dr Kalpana Chawla, India's first woman to fly in space, on her 50th birth anniversary.

Here are 5 facts about this inspirational woman:

- 1) Kalpana was born in the small town of Karnal in Haryana. Her pet name was 'Montu'.
- 2) She became the 2nd Indian person to fly in space with NASA.
- 3) Her first words in space were: "You are just your intelligence."
- 4) She had traveled 10.4 million km, as many as 252 times around the Earth.
- 5) She passed away in 2003 during her 2nd space mission when her shuttle disintegrated on returning to earth.

Posted on August 6, 2011. The post generated 2967 likes.

All examples state the number of likes posted to each wall post. In Example 1, the wall post on cricket generated 10,311 likes and was posted to congratulate Virender Sehwag for his double century in the test match. This suggests that likes to a post are often posted to share the pleasure of success. In another wall post (Example 2), 11,287 likes were posted in relation to wishing success to Rahul Dravid, in his last test match. Rahul Dravid is the third Indian cricketer to cross the 10,000 runs in both Test matches and ODIs (One Day Internationals). Both the wall posts garnered more than 10,000 likes indicating that cricket is the most appreciated topic amongst the examples.

Likewise, In Example 3, the administrators posted an apology regarding the Metallica – Live in India concert, which was scheduled to happen on September 12, 2011. The event was postponed for security reasons. The wall post generated 2962 likes (far fewer than cricket), suggesting that the information proved useful for fans and the likes were posted to express gratitude. The smaller number of likes suggests events such as Metallica concert are not as popular as cricket.

In Example 4, likes are not only posted to wish happy birthday to the internationally renowned, Dalai Lama, but to share his views and teachings and learn from them. Similarly, in the next example, likes are posted in relation to paying tribute to Dr Kalpana Chawla, the first Indian-American, who travelled into space and made India proud. The post generated 2967 likes, suggesting that people responded to the post to acknowledge her achievements and contribution to mankind. But again their achievements do not generate as many likes as cricket.

Although, in the above examples, fans have used the like feature to pay tribute, to acknowledge peoples' achievements, to show support and to wish happy birthday to people, it is foremost used to appreciate/agree with the views/opinions discussed in the wall posts. Also, likes generated by the two posts about cricket are around three or more times higher than the other topics that are featured in the above set of examples, suggesting that cricket is more central to peoples' lives.

I analyse the liking activity in detail in chapter 5 and illustrate how liking a post communicates an individual's taste and interests and creates an online image of an individual on the fan page. Besides this, I also discuss the factors that motivate a user to like a post on Facebook or Facebook fan pages.

### 4.2.3 The 'Share' Button

The 'share' button allows users to share a text snippet, web link, photo, video, etc. within Facebook. To share content within Facebook, a user can use the 'share' button (figure 4.2) to share resources from the Internet, or, alternatively, a user can simply type the URL into the "share a link" box under the 'my shares section' (figure 4.3).



Figure 4.2 Screenshot of the news feed that features a shared link.

## Post to Profile



Great Article!

via Andrés Monroy Hernández (Remove)



**Cooperative behavior cascades in human social networks — PNAS**

<http://is.gd/b3W6j>

Edited\* by Daniel Kahneman, Princeton University, Princeton.

Figure 4.3 Screenshot of a section of a page showing automatic attribution of a status message on Facebook.

Recent shares feature in a user's activity stream and automatically specify who it is from. The share button has been tweaked to include "via [friend]", which provides automatic attribution to the post; for example, in figure 4.2 the shared post shows the source (MTV India's photo) through which it has been shared. In figure 4.3 the post shows the user's name (as a link), to indicate where the information has originally come from. When a user clicks on a share button, the users are usually confronted with a pop-up window that displays a description of the post and a link to the post. The post shared on the user's profile allows the re-poster to add her own comment about the posting (see Figure 4.3). However, this feature does not retain the original poster of the status update; users only get to see the immediate re-poster. The original source of the content gets lost in subsequent re-postings suggesting that the share button is often used to display an individual's interests and preferences or to support another user's interests and preferences by including their names in the post.

A 'shared' link is only visible within Facebook, which means that a user has to be logged into Facebook to see shared links and other updates. The share button allows a user to share any internet content. Social plugins, such as Facebook, Twitter, Google plus, etc., available on various websites, such as YouTube, Google, etc., allow users to share information on their SNS profiles (figure 4.4). Depending on the platform, users can add information before sharing the post on their profiles. The share application allows users to share weblogs, web applications, articles, videos, etc. by using social plugin buttons.



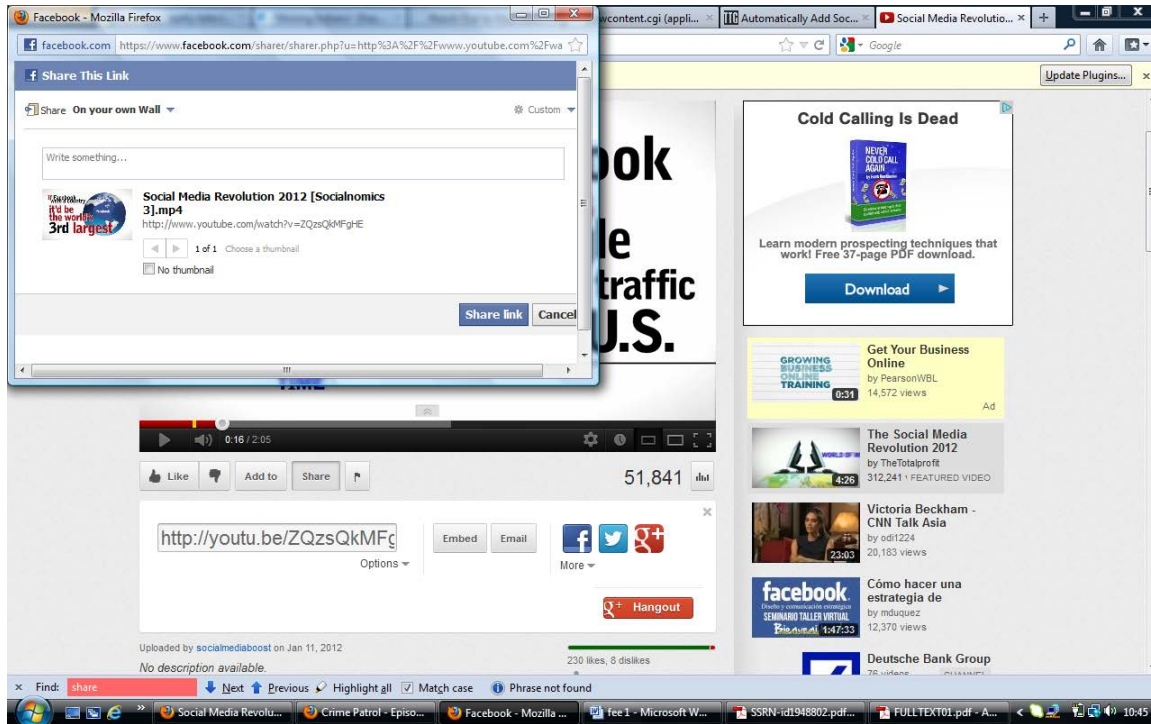


Figure 4.4 Screenshot shows how a link can be shared anywhere from the Internet.

Fan pages use the 'share' button as a mechanism to distribute content to different subscribers and create awareness for a product, an issue or a problem. It is also used by the fan page to inform and entertain people. Below, I give a few illustrations of wall posts from the fan page and demonstrate how sharing activities are performed on the fan page:

#### Example 6

On Sunday, LAKHS of Indians across the country did not sit down and relax. They STOOD UP and FOUGHT with one man and his dream to make India corruption-free.

Everyone is doing ANNAGIRI...are you?

Pledge your support to Annagiri on [www.annagiri.in](http://www.annagiri.in). [Satvik\\_kuk,nomaihan](#) and [167 others](#) shared it.

Posted on August 12, 2011. The post generated 554 shares.

#### Example 7

BREAKING: Bomb blast outside the Delhi High Court. Hope everyone in Delhi is OK.

And what is happening to our security!?

A place that represents law and order has been attacked to create disorder!

Posted on August 24, 2011. The post generated 514 shares.

#### Example 8

The city of London is burning since 4 days as gangs of youths are rioting, looting and burning shops all over. Police are finding it hard to control them.

But in the suburb of Southall, hundreds of Sikhs stood guard outside their temple to protect all the area's

residents from the rioters.

This is what you call true courage! We salute the Sikhs!

Posted on August 10, 2011. The post generated 526 shares.

#### Example 9

BREAKING: India's former cricket captain Mohammad Azharuddin's 19-year-old son – Ayazuddin - passed away today, 6 days after he was critically injured in a speeding sports bike accident.

RIP Ayaz. Sadly, death is the fastest for those who love speed. Guys, please be safe on the road to prevent such tragedies.

Posted on October 12, 2011. The post generated 276 shares.

#### Example 10

Love songs are in the air. We like this one.

Tell us which one you like or share the song which we have chosen for your beloved.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1iKMI9w3M>

Posted on December 19, 2011. The post generated 212 shares.

The number of shares received by each wall post varies from 212 to 554 shares, suggesting that the wall posts generate a substantially smaller number (about 10 %) of shares than likes. This results from the fact that people have to invest more time in sharing status updates, pictures, videos, etc. than in liking wall posts, as it involves directing messages to specific people and exchanging views with people who are included in or outside of their network (with respect to privacy settings). For instance, in Example 6, the post was directed to 167 people, including Satvikkul, Noamikhana and others, and received 554 shares, suggesting that fans, including people to whom the message was directed, shared the post to support Hazzare's campaign.

On Sunday, LAKHS of Indians across the country did not sit down and relax. They STOOD UP and FOUGHT with one man and his dream to make India corruption-free.

Everyone is doing ANNAGIRI...are you?

Pledge your support to Annagiri on [www.annagiri.in](http://www.annagiri.in). [Satvik\\_kuk,nomaihan](#) and [167 others](#) shared it.

The post is referring to a campaign headed by anti-corruption activist Anna Hazzare to introduce an anti-corruption bill in parliament. The post narrated a scene on Indian streets, where Indian youth across the country stood together and campaigned against corruption and

demanded transparency in the system. The campaign was called ‘India against Corruption’ and people who contributed through online and offline (field) campaigns were called Annagirians performing Annagiri.

In Example 7, the post condemned the terrorist activity that took place in New Delhi. The post generated 514 shares, suggesting that people shared the wall post a) to express concern for their friends and peers and b) to express anger about the miserable state of security in the capital city.

Likewise, in Example 8, London suffered huge losses in terms of money and people. Hindu Punjabis staying in Southall, London, were petrified at the thought that their temple and community might be harmed. As an outcome, most of the Sikhs (Hindu Punjabis) stood outside guarding the temple to protect their community and religious place. The wall post generated 526 shares to salute and respect the bravery, courage and wisdom of the Hindu Punjabis. These examples suggest that sharing a status update can also include the desire to raise an issue for discussion (in the case of the bomb blast in New Delhi) and to show respect (in the case of the London riots) for people and/or a community.

In Example 9, the wall post paid tribute to the 19 year old-Ayaz, son of India’s former cricket team captain Mohammad Azharuddin, who lost his life in a sports bike accident. Given the popularity of cricket in India, the post generated 276 shares, to share his family’s sorrow/grief and to make people aware of the consequences of high speed sports

In Example 10, the administrator shared their favourite love song. The wall post received 212 shares, suggesting that fans shared the video with their friends/loved ones. In this case, the sharing of the video was influenced by the emotion of love.

Although, in the above examples, fans have used the share button to raise an issue, share an emotion, or show respect, it is foremost used to support and create awareness amongst people. For instance, the number of shares generated by Hazzare’s campaign and terrorist activities are far higher than those sharing emotions, because such issues are routinely posted to garner support from people.

MTV India's Facebook fan page uses the share button to share routine social and national issues and create awareness amongst people. For example, topics or useful information on law and order situations, social campaigns, updates condemning terrorist activities, etc. are routinely shared on the fan page. The purpose is to inform fans about current events, creating awareness amongst people and getting feedback through comments posted on the 'share' or via further shares.

While the number of likes to a post shows the level of agreement received by a specific post, the number of shares to a post shows the level of concern/awareness a social/national issue has received. In Chapter 5, I detail how sharing activities are performed on the fan page and how such activities display the online persona of an individual.

#### 4.2.4 Comments

The comment box is a social plugin that enables users to comment on the posts that are posted on a user's profile. The comment box shows comments made by different users about a particular piece of content and a comment box for more comments to be posted on the post. When a user posts a comment, a story appears on his/her friends' Newsfeed indicating that she/he has made a comment on your fan page/profile and will also link back to the user who has actually commented on the post. The Facebook comment plugin is popular and offers some advantages to users:

**Accountability** – Facebook's comment plugin does not allow anonymous comments. Because users contribute comments from their real names (or profile names), it significantly reduces the number of posts received from spammers and increases the credibility of the discussion taking place through comments.

**Familiarity/Ease of use** – Comment feature is easy to use as the 'comment box' allows people to post comments to a topic and interact with others.

In online interviews, users often referred to the social pleasure and information gained during interactions with others through comments posted on various topics. Networks of people interacting in this way are often referred to as virtual communities (Rheingold, 1994), which inform people's social relationships and their interactions. In Facebook, interactions are made possible through the 'wall', a component of the Facebook page available to every registered individual and organization. A company's administrators and people post on the wall and interact via posting comments. They take turns and create a thread of discussion, which carries views/perspectives of fans who participate in the discussion. Below is an example showing turn-taking and an exchange of various perspectives amongst participants.

### Example 11

Virat Kohli – an awesome performance. Applauds!  
India wins against Srilanka!

Comments - 2037  
Posted on 29 October, 2011.

Shubham Mittal -Virat Kohli made his 9th hundred.... Proud of you.

Kalyani Yeotikar- I wish I could have seen this live, you played simply awesome Virat.

Manav Sharma- they have'nt scored 300+ runs in the entire CB series but when it mattered the most they played out of their skins to pull this one up, well played guzzz ..

Sandeep Chowdhary - For some reason, I cannot help but remember this game.

India was on the verge of losing another final, was banished for 314 in 48 overs in the days when chasing down 300 was not a common phenomenon. They started off well through Tendulkar, and the momentum continued through Robin Singh, who was promoted to the number three position. Interestingly, there was a light problem there too – that of the natural light. The game went right to the wire and with the sun setting and the game carrying on for way longer, it kept becoming difficult for the batsmen. In the end, India won off the penultimate ball. 10 likes

Manav Sharma- @ sandeep, how can you forget Kohli's batting in your comment. He is a must mention.

Sandeep Chowdhary- @ manav, without a doubt, he played well. Kohli is the man of the match. As expected, he gives the entire team, credit for the performance. In his speech at the end of the match, he told that he would not repeat the mistakes from the previous games where he had tried to hit everything off the middle. This game, he says, he tried to play on despite not getting it in the middle.

Aman Tribedi- True, Sandeep it's a team work, Virat cannot take the credit alone, but what is the scene like. How we are placed in the series. 5 likes

Sandeep Chowdhary - India now awaits the winner of the game between Australia and Sri Lanka to understand their fate. If Sri Lanka win, they will still go through to the final, but if Australia can put it across Sri Lanka (to whom they have lost two in a row), then India will face the home team in the final. A tie will also see Australia and Sri Lanka through.

Rajkiya Sehrat – Not to forget, Sehwag’s five boundaries and a six off just 16 balls. Marvelous. Gambhir and Kohli added 115 runs for the third wicket. Tendulkar hit five boundaries during his 30-ball stay, scoring 39. Kohli clobbered 16 boundaries and two sixes during his stunning knock of 133 not out. PS21- I am sure Malinga’s night dreams will be filled with Kohli’s batting☺. 8 likes

The discussion above feature fans’ names, comments posted by each fan, and the number of likes received by a fan’s the comment. Fan-names appear as a link, the link can be clicked to reach the profile of an individual.

A user can choose to view the posts posted by the most recent users, or alternatively a user can click the option of “view previous comments”. To see a discussion thread from the beginning, a user may have to click “view previous comments” several times until he/she reaches the first comment on the post (see figure 4.5).



<sup>21</sup> PS is an internet abbreviation and is used to highlight something important. It stands for post script.

Figure 4.5 Screenshot of the MTV India Facebook fan page showing the “view previous comments” tab.

Comments posted by fans are often informative and suggest that fans like to share their ideas and views with other like-minded people. The process allows people to view messages posted by other fans and post their opinions in the form of comments. Each set of comments is a discussion thread (figure 4.5) and may include multiple comments from one person. Other fans may post a comment to respond to another fan or like his comment to show an agreement with his/her idea. The number of likes received by each comment shows the extent to which fans appreciate or show a positive feedback to a topic discussed, signalling that a topic is most liked on the fan page. “Liking a comment” shows agreement with a fan’s idea or alternatively fans write comments to disagree with a certain idea. For example, when Sandeep briefly explained the highlights of the match and forgot to mention Kohli’s batting that made India win, Manav, another fan, intervened in the interaction and prompted Sandeep to acknowledge Kohli’s batting and his performance. In his next comment, Sandeep addressed Manav and then acknowledged Kohli’s role and provided input on what Kohli thought of his own performance.

Views/opinions posted in the form of comments create an individual’s online identity and suggest that the fan page is used as a site for identity creation. My next chapter details commenting activity and illustrates how online identities are created through posting textual snippets on wall posts posted by MTV administrators.

## Chapter 5: Identity performance on the MTV India Facebook fan page

My last chapter gave an account of fan activities and explained the functioning of the like button, share button and comments. This chapter details liking, sharing and commenting activity and illustrates how identities are performed via these activities. Along with identity performance, I also demonstrate how performing such activities relate to the idea of national identity and performing Indian-ness, and have in turn created a familiar sense of space.

The study involves examining ‘textual snippets’, i.e. comments posted in relation to the selected topics (see chapter 4), but I also intend to study how liking and sharing activities on the MTV India Facebook fan page relate to participants’ routine and everyday activities. I study the ‘liking’ activity on the fan page, and illustrate how, by liking posts, people communicate their interests and tastes in public, and how psychological traits such as sociability and signalling are associated with Facebook fan pages. By studying sharing activity, I illustrate how fans become the brand advocates of the shared content, and show how fans’ sharing their profiles and fan pages helps create awareness around a topic.

I use Goffman’s concept of cue management, performance of self in everyday life and identity management in day to day life. According to Goffman, performance is “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants” (Goffman, 1959, p15). In other words, an individual’s identity is created by a performance, rather than being a result of any pre-existing or claimed identity. He argues that performances are continually molded and modified to suit the social expectations of the society in which they take place (p35). However, these social expectations, incorporated in performances, are an idealized version of society’s values (p35). Therefore, Facebook users may avoid or conceal actions that are inconsistent with societal standards.

On a platform like Facebook, where identities are performed in front of an entire network (friends’ network) or group of people (audience), users create consistent front-stage



performances that may involve constructing a performance. For example, an individual may like/share/comment on a status update/comment so as to please another individual, even if he/she does not actually appreciate/support it. It can be argued that identities are constructed and reconstructed in particular ways, such as 'reflexively constructed' through interactions in the social world. I study these social interactions by analyzing how participants construct online identities through the use of specific language and style, and how these identities are created and re-created in different social situations and performed on the MTV India Facebook fan page.

## 5.1 The 'liking' activity

Social buttons such as the 'like' button allow users to like a wall post on a Facebook fan page or personal profile. Liking content on a fan page leads to sharing information on the user's profile, i.e. when a user likes specific content, the activity gets posted to his/her news feed and the fan page on which the user has liked the content. On the MTV India Facebook fan page, topics such as Bollywood, cricket, city news and social/political issues are posted. Fans perform the liking activity in response to such topics, i.e. they press the like button and show their appreciation or give positive feedback.

Helmond and Gerlitz (2012) argue that Facebook's like button is similar to the earlier 'hit' button, which allowed users to express agreement with an idea or perspective; for example, early websites carried messages like 'Hit the button above if you agree'. Every hit or click represented a visitor to a web site. Soon, the 'hit' economy was replaced by the 'link' economy, where the information was presented through a web of 'hyperlinks'. A user could access a web of data by clicking on the hyperlinks available on the web page or web site. Currently, the link economy has been replaced by the like economy, where information is experienced as a social activity. For instance, likes/comments posted to the web-blogs and/or on Facebook fan pages are always more than one because the posts cater to and reflect peoples' common interests and preferences.

Helmond and Gerlitz (2012) argue that Facebook's like and share buttons allow users to perform routine activities more socially. Users can like, share and comment on the fan page's wall post, and use the space for group activity. Visitors to the fan page, use the like button to give positive feedback, indicating that they have enjoyed reading a status update or viewing a picture. In an online interview, Saloni, stated that she likes it when a status update acknowledges or appreciates a shared idea or perspective (online interview conducted with Saloni on August 23, 2012). Saloni said, "I like a wall post when I think it's worth liking! Not just anything, but posts that relate to pop albums, bands, Sufi music". She added that by subscribing to the MTV India Facebook fan page updates, she gets information on the events and bands playing in each city. Her liking activity on the fan page suggests her passion for music, and constructs her online identity as someone who appreciates music. Likewise, when people 'like' cricket updates or post on cricketers, they construct their identity as cricket lovers, or as someone who supports cricket.

On the fan page, users create connections on the basis of similar interests and preferences. Therefore, wall posts posted on a fan page receive many more likes than wall posts posted to a profile. In their study of Facebook, Egebark and Ekstrom (2011) argue that liking a wall post on a fan page is either informed by a) signalling, b) genuine interests c) social proximity. In the fan page's context, signalling takes place through a dual process of 'knowing something new' and 'agreeing to others'. Egebark and Ekstrom (2011) argue that when a wall post has already received more than one like, the same wall post may receive many more likes, because it signals people to like a post that has been already liked. They note that such behavior is informed by an intrinsic inclination towards following others, which is driven by factors such as popularity, esteem and respect (Bernheim, 1994). For instance, a user browsing a specific fan page may come across specific topics that might not relate to his/her interests, but motivates him/her to like something because it's known to others. In her interview, Saloni said, "sometimes I like things that are completely new to me, liking a topic is not only agreeing with an idea/belief, but appreciating a whole new set of ideas that are fresh and are unknown".

Liking as an activity includes showing positive feedback and appreciating ideas/opinions that are new to an individual. Important factors, such as high visibility – users observing each other’s actions at any given time – allow signalling, in which people continuously express their beliefs and attitudes through Facebook features such as posting likes, comments and shares. Such an environment allows people to share their ideas/opinions with others who may hold a different set of ideas/opinions. This suggests that Facebook caters to individuals’ interests and allows users to discover new things and increase their knowledge which may in turn inform their online/offline interactions.

The following example illustrates what can motivate/influence fans to like a topic discussed in the form of wall post. For instance, the administrators of a fan page may share a status on reality program, set up a competition, show a contestant’s picture and ask for fans’ views. The following wall post garnered 4001 likes.

Wall post – Do you think Roopa from MTV *Splitsvilla* is intelligent and happening? See her exclusive pictures here: <http://mtv.tl/ki>



Posted on August 24, 2011.

Fans that follow *MTV Splitsvilla* would know Roopa and will be aware of her qualities, such as beauty, intelligence, etc. They might like the wall post because of their genuine interest in the show. Alternatively, fans who do not follow the show, or who do not know Roopa, might like the wall post because they think Roopa is beautiful (i.e. they have started developing an interest in something they were unaware of), or there is a willingness to know about Roopa and the show through people that are already aware of her and are better informed (a desire to create a connection).

Egebark and Ekstrom (2011) list three possible reasons for such behavior: a) due to high visibility on Facebook fan pages, people express themselves and observe each other, allowing signalling (suggesting to people what to like); b) often, such activities project an online image of an individual in the form of representing his/her tastes and preferences in public; hence users are guided by factors such as popularity, respect and esteem; c) people follow those who they believe to be better informed, i.e. a user would follow a fan page or a wall post according to the amount of fan activities generated by them, assuming that a high level of activity indicates that those following are better informed.

Whilst there are strong reasons to believe that people signal on Facebook, other scholars argue that factors like social proximity can influence people to like a wall post (Boyd, 2008). In his online interview (September 2, 2012), Satyajeet stated that “sometimes me and my school friends like the same wall post or the same fan page. It’s not something pre-planned or intentional, but our association and familiarity with specific topics such as football, cricket, car racing etc. result in liking the same content on Facebook”. His statement showed that offline experiences inform online selves, which may then influence a decision to like a wall post posted by friends or peers.

Satyajeet illustrated this through a picture posted by his friend on Facebook. The picture was taken in his school, and featured him, his headmaster and his classmates. The picture generated 40 likes, and the likers included people who were in the picture and people who were associated with the picture (other school mates, Satyajeet’s friends and family) in some way or other. This suggests that people’s motivation for liking a status update is not only determined by their tastes and preferences, but also by offline life and experiences, i.e. offline interactions influence online behavior.

Furthermore, social proximity may play an important role in signalling practices. Research on peer effects have found that peers may play an important role in affecting social preferences (Bandiera et al., 2005). For example, when a peer likes a status update, he/she signals affiliation to an individual, a fan page or an idea by expressing similar preferences. A social networking site like Facebook is built around the concept of friendship, which means

that people follow or like a post because it has been liked by his/her peer or friends. Imagine a user scrolling through a news feed and finding a status update liked by four known friends or users. It is very likely that the user will read the status update and respond in the form of liking, sharing and commenting. In her online interview, Macky said that the news feed on her profile contains updates from her friends and administrators of fan pages who have liked, shared and commented on other friends' and fan page wall posts (conducted on April 2, 2012). She explained that most of the time she tends to follow something which is liked by her friends because they share similar tastes and interests. For example, she and a few of her Facebook friends like the same rock band; any new song by them is either shared by her or another friend, and is liked by the rest.

Salabh, another interviewee, illustrated this through a wall post. He provided an activity log, including his and his offline friends' activities, which shows how offline associations may influence the liking activity on the fan page. An excerpt from the log follows.

December 26, 2011: 2:15 PM – Salabh likes a wall post created on the MTV India Facebook fan page. His activities are posted to his friend's profile and news feed. Nakul, his Facebook friend, finds the update in his news feed and chooses to like the status update. Nakul's news feed reported:

You and Salabh like MTV India's Facebook status update

*Guess who's back... back again... ZAK IS BACK...*

*2 wickets back-to-back and Zaheer Khan is on fire in the epic India-Australia Boxing Day Test match!*

*Let's hope Zak KNOCKS OUT the opposition!*

You, Salabh and 10,159 others like this.

Nakul likes the wall post because 1) of his interest in cricket; 2) to show his affiliation with Salabh, who has already liked it; 3) it has already been liked by many others (10,159), signalling him to like the post.

December 26, 2011: 2:20 PM – Shail, Nakul’s Facebook friend, finds the liking update posted to his news feed, and chooses to like the status update. Shail’s news feed reported:

You and Nakul like a post on MTV India’s fan page.

*Guess who’s back... back again... ZAK IS BACK...*

*2 wickets back-to-back and Zaheer Khan is on fire in the epic India-Australia Boxing Day Test match!*

*Let’s hope Zak KNOCKS OUT the opposition!*

You, Nakul and 10,160 others like this.

Shail likes the wall post because 1) of his interest in cricket; 2) to show affiliation to Nakul, who has already liked it; 3) it has already been liked by many others (10,160, including Salabh), signalling him to like the post.

The activity log suggests that the motivation to like a post is driven by peer behavior and social proximity. The post was initially created on the MTV India Facebook page and was liked by Salabh, followed by Nakul and Shail. Interestingly, this behavior demonstrates shared interest and group membership amongst friends, where the motivation to like a status update is derived from social proximity and signalling practices.

When content is liked or shared on a user’s profile, a user publicly agrees with/appreciates an idea/viewpoint. However, this involves risk, as the user may feel that he/she will be the only one to endorse it; the presence of a large and unfamiliar crowd (friends of friends) could therefore lead to self-censoring, and may influence him/her to act in a certain way. For example, a user may not like a fan page, photo or video directed against a religion or ethnicity (even if she/he agrees with it), as people may think of him/her as someone who is intolerant of other peoples’ thoughts and beliefs. This suggests that people craft their front-stage performances by keeping in mind how such performances are interpreted by others. For instance, Facebookers may limit certain information, or make it only available to certain people by using the privacy settings. Participants may use different privacy settings for

different groups of friends, and choose to conceal fan activities such as likes, shares and comments performed by them. This suggests that an online identity may involve a constructed performance, which would communicate users' interests and tastes, but with a certain amount of exaggeration. But this could be equally possible in offline, face-to face interactions, where people may conceal their inhibitions or ideas, as it may impact peoples' sentiments and ideas.

Liking as an activity involves cueing. The number of likes generated by the status updates work in a similar way to 'unintentional cues' passed by a few fans to other fans, influencing them to like the same status update. The practice is often referred to as 'signalling', and encourages users to like the same idea that has been previously liked. It is more likely that people will like content that has already received many likes because a) they want to create connections with fans that may have common interests/preferences; b) they want to demonstrate awareness and gain respect within the group; and c) they want to socialize and interact with offline friends by agreeing with and appreciating common interests and shared knowledge. But the examples above demonstrate that users may like a wall post for many reasons, foremost of which are to endorse and appreciate it. On the fan page, people may signal because they want to know something new or to create connections with people that are better informed, but social proximity remains an important factor for liking a wall post, as it allows them to associate and interact with others by liking/sharing similar tastes and preferences.

## 5.2 The sharing activity

The 'share' button allows users to share information on their profile or friends' walls. Facebookers can share information in the form of textual snippets, web links, photos, videos, etc. To share content via Facebook, a user can use the 'share' button; and, to share resources from the internet, a user can type a web link into the 'Share a Link' box under 'My Shares' section, or use the social plugins available on websites like YouTube, TOI, MTV India's official website, etc such as Facebook, Twitter, Google + etc (figure 5.1). By clicking on the desired social plugin, a user can share content on his/her SNS profile.

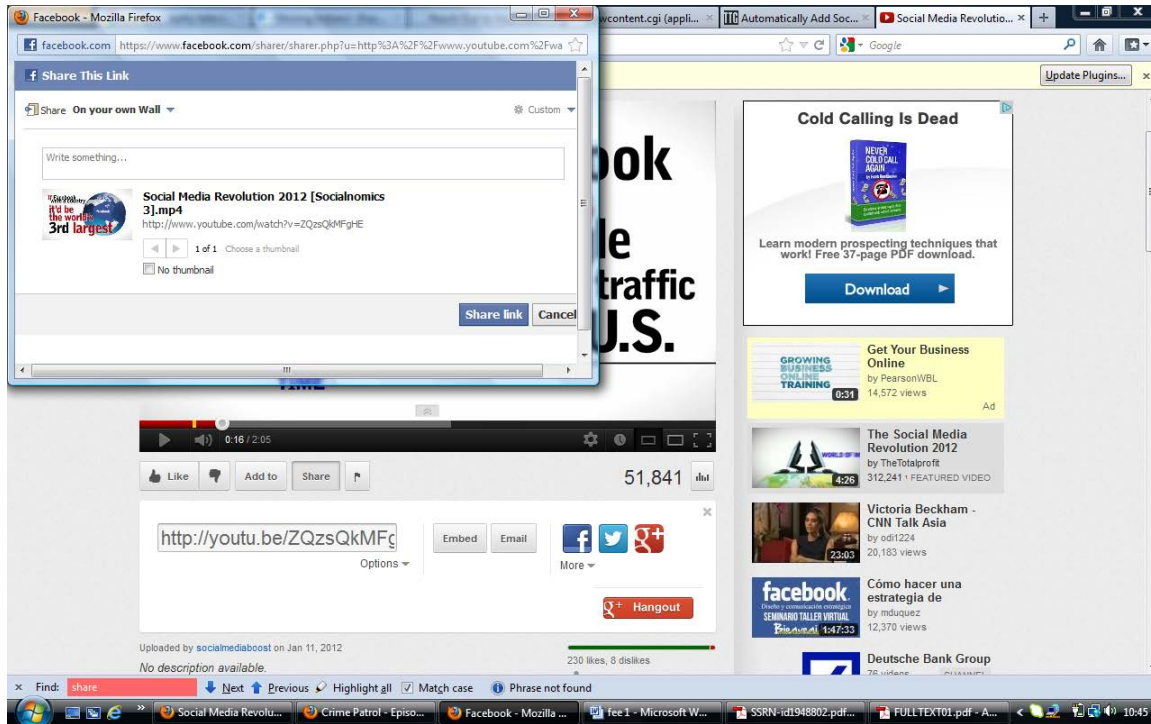


Figure 5.1 – Screenshot showing social plugins (Facebook, Twitter and Google +) available on YouTube, and a pop-up window of the Facebook page showing the information to be shared and the ‘write something’ box.

The ‘write something’ box allows users to add his/her views in the form of a textual snippet, which is also called a ‘comment’. Users can add comments in the ‘write something’ box before they post content to their own or their friends’ profiles. The content that gets posted to a user’s activity stream automatically specifies who it is from. The share button is tweaked to include ‘via’, which provides an attribution of the shared content, i.e. it states through whom (i.e. the source, which could be a friend/website/blog) the content has been shared. However, the original source of the content gets lost in subsequent re-postings, as users only get to see the immediate poster. For example, if a user shares content from YouTube, which has already been shared by a friend, the user’s activity feed would reflect the user’s friend’s name instead of the original YouTube link.

Users who willingly subscribe to companies’ Facebook fan pages (such as MTV India’s fan page, Primark’s fan page, etc.) also subscribe to their updates and perform fan activities such as liking, sharing and commenting on such fan pages, becoming ‘brand advocates’ in the process. For instance, by sharing the MTV India Facebook fan page’s status updates,



pictures, videos, etc., users advocate the 'MTV India' brand, and propagate their topics amongst people added to their friends list.

The share button is often used as a mechanism to share and exchange content with fans, and to create awareness of a product, issue or problem. For example, on the fan page, topics such as Hazzare's anti-corruption bill, and wall posts directed against terrorist activities, generate the largest number of shares (an average of 750-1000 per post – see chapter 3), suggesting that fans use the share button to garner/show support for an idea/view posted through a wall post/status update.

Unlike the like button, which allows users to agree with or appreciate an idea or perspective with others, the sharing activity allows fans to express and communicate a perspective to others. It is a purposeful activity that allows users to add text in the 'write me' box and tag friends in the shared content. The 'write me' box allows users to add his/her opinion on the shared content, and the 'tag' feature allows users to tag friends (or groups, etc.) within a status update, picture, video etc by adding the '@' character before their name, turning the friend's name into a link and posting the update to the user's and friend's profile – for example, if a user posts "this is funny @Aman Khan, you must see the video", followed by the video. The user's profile and friend's profile will display "this is funny, Aman Khan" (the name would appear as a link); "you must see the video". The tagging feature allows users to direct specific messages to particular people in public, e.g. when a user is tagged in a wall post, picture or video, the entire network or the friends network (according to the privacy settings) can see the update on the user's profile. Users can tag friends added to their network, and fan pages can tag people who have liked the fan page and who are fans of the fan page.

On the fan page, the MTV India's administrators tag fans in their shared posts. In an online interview, one administrator stated that he and other administrators tag specific people on various topics. He said that "if we know that a fan or a group of fans are active on the fan page and routinely update status relating to specific topics and tag us in their wall posts, shares and comments; in return, we tag them in topics relating to their interest" (online

interview with Akhilesh, one of the administrators, conducted on August 21, 2012). He added that during Hazzare's campaign, fans who actively participated in online campaigns on the fan page were mostly tagged in Hazzare's campaign pictures, videos or posts. Fans then share these pictures, videos and wall posts amongst their friends via links, URLs, weblogs and other mediums in order to create awareness and garner support for the event. Although no research has argued that tagging leads to sharing activity, a minor observation conducted on the fan page suggests that people often share updates/pictures/web pages that they are tagged in. For example, the following wall-post and pictures tagged 87 fans and received 559 shares (including 54 shares from the people who were tagged in it).

Post – The very talented Rabbi sings the beautiful song 'Tere Bin' ('Without You') on MTV Unplugged (India). The song is dedicated to the thousands of people who lost their lives in 9/11. May their souls rest in peace. Share the link and spread the message.

With [Ashutosh Singh Sengar, Zinnan Akhtar Xenon, Sudarshan Sharma and 84 others](#) [fans who were tagged in the pictures and the link].



The post generated 4165 likes, 559 shares and 1906 comments.  
(September, 2011)

In online interviews, fans stated that they tagged others on pictures/posts that were either entertaining or informative; or they shared a post to support a cause. In the above example, fans shared information to show support for Rabbi and MTV India's initiative and hard work for a good cause. This suggests that tagging may play an important role in generating support from people by sharing the message across the networks.

Also, the tagging feature in the sharing activity allows people to direct messages to specific people by mentioning their name, but, since such activities get posted publicly (i.e. an entire network is able to see it) on fan pages and tagged profiles, other people may respond through shares, likes and comments. This suggests that the number of shares received by a wall post prompts people to perform the sharing activity.

Users can also personalize shared content by adding textual snippets to it. Such textual snippets are also called textual messages that are posted in the 'write-me' box. By adding personalized messages, a user can reflect on new ideas/opinions, which may generate new insights/ideas from others, in the form of fan activities.

In another example, a fan, Nina, shared a photo of Psy, the South Korean singer, taken from his video album, 'Gangnam Style'. She added a comment to the picture and tagged Tom, her Facebook and fan page friend. Nina's news feed reported:

Nina has shared Psy picture.

*It started with the flash mob at CST, progressed to Kolaveri, and now we're addicted to GangnamStyle. 2011 has been the year where viral videos have taken over our lives, Felix Baumgartner to Psy – they are our everyday heroes! @Tom I know you love Gangnam Style, I dedicate this picture to you and all Gangnam lovers.*



Tom liked Nina's post, and decided to share the picture along with his own comment. Tom's news feed reported:

Tom shared Nina's (appears as a link) picture

*Essentially, it is just an over-the-top video where a fat man does a comical dance and sings repetitive lyrics that don't make sense to most of us. I like the video because*

- 1. He is cute not fat, especially by Indian standards.*
- 2. The colors are super-saturated, like most of the crap you watch on TV – your brain is addicted to bright colors.*
- 3. What is over-the-top about it? Entertaining, especially the dance steps...*
- 4. It's awesome.*

*(Comment added by Tom)*



The shared content on Tom's profile reflected Nina's attribution. Tom received 4 likes, 11 comments and 2 shares on the shared picture.

The example above suggests that people use tagging and sharing activities to initiate interactions and strengthen connections with existing contacts. Nina's shared content signaled/suggested Tom to share the same wall post. These signalling activities work in a similar way to the unintended cues communicated by people to others that they should like, share and comment on shared content. Alternatively, Tom shared Nina's picture to show an affiliation with an offline contact, suggesting that social proximity may influence people to share a status update/picture/video on their profile.

Nina's and Tom's personalized comments reveal individual perspectives and identity traits that are specific to them. For instance, by posting a status update on a viral video, Nina demonstrated her awareness of music videos, and used the opportunity to create connections with others. At the same time, Tom portrayed an online image of a music album critic, and used words such as 'cute', 'fat', 'comical dance', 'repetitive lyrics' and 'entertaining' to describe Psy's performance in the video.

By sharing the MTV India Facebook fan page's status updates, pictures and videos, people show an affiliation to the fan page and its activities. Through everyday sharing and tagging activities, people exchange their views and ideas with others, create connections, and strengthen previous offline contacts. During Hazzare's campaign, the share button allowed users to perform the sharing activity within networks. The fan page's activity associated with Hazzare's campaign involved having more Facebook friends, having more friends-of-friends

who were interested in the same activity, sending personal messages, receiving status updates on news feeds, tagging more friends in pictures, and being tagged themselves in pictures so that the shared content is reflected on friends' news feeds.

Similar to liking, sharing activities may suggest what people like or are interested in, but liking focuses on positive social interactions and could be interpreted as a lighter way to express a positive sentiment. By contrast, sharing focuses on both negative and positive social interactions and allows users to show an agreement or disagreement by writing in 'write me' box. Factors such as social proximity, signalling behavior and individuals' interests and preferences may play an important role in sharing wall posts, pictures, web links, etc. The examples above demonstrate that users may share a wall post for many reasons, of which foremost are to show support, initiate an interaction and create connections.

Although research on specific social plugins, features and applications of SNSs is a growing line of inquiry, and further examinations and studies are required to understand the factors involved in liking and sharing status updates, pictures, videos etc; my observations suggest that liking and sharing activities communicate individuals' interests and preferences, and construct partial online identity suggesting their likes and dislikes in public.

### 5.3 The commenting activity

Facebook's comments box is a social plugin that enables users to post a comment to a wall post on users' profile and fan pages. It is placed next to the 'like' and 'share' buttons, and also features comments on the wall post made by different users. When a user posts a comment, the story appears on his/her news feed, indicating that she/he has commented on a fan page or a user's profile.

The comments posted to a specific post are presented in a single thread; i.e. all comments to a particular wall post can be viewed as a separate set of interactions (discussions on a specific topic) created by a group of people, either on a fan page or on a user's profile. Comments carry users' profile pictures and profile names, and include textual snippets

posted by them. In both online and offline interviews, people explained that they use their real names and pictures to increase the credibility of the discussion taking place through comments. Sakshi, a fan on the fan page, asserted that, “I wanted to add a friend from school time, I typed his name in the search box and I got him; it was easy to locate him as I could recognize him through his profile picture. Likewise, he accepted my friend request by recognizing me through my profile name, picture and other details like my school, college, location, etc” (online interview conducted on September 21, 2012). This suggests that people use real names and profile pictures in their online profiles in order to increase their visibility amongst friends and reassure them that the available information – such as their name, education, birth date, pictures, occupation etc. – belong to people who exist in the offline world.

I analyze textual snippets created through text-talk and illustrate how online identities are created via performing commenting activity on the fan page. The fan page is written in both Hindi and English, has its own style (use of language) and referents [use of smileys and other internet abbreviations, such as ps (post script), lol (laugh out loud) etc.]. Therefore, I use a ‘practice approach’ (Baym, 2002; Hanks, 1996) to find out how the use of a specific language (which includes Hin-english), particular styles, vocabulary and smileys, and other fan activities, such as likes, shares and comments, all of which are unique to the MTV India Facebook fan page, lead to the performance of an identity.

A performance may involve some hidden elements. In online interviews, people explained that they are often cautious when commenting on the fan page, as the activities performed on Facebook are available for public display, so that others might judge his/her actions based on the comments posted by him/her (online interviews conducted with Saunkta and Rashi in December, 2012). For example, fans may not like/share an idea/opinion in a form of wall post as it may shape their online identity in a manner that is not appreciated/ accepted by everyone inside or outside his/her network. This has been described as ‘social stigma’ (Goffman, 1959), which allows people to conceal actions that may form an important part of an identity performance. I use Goffman’s notion of social stigma to explain how

disagreements (polite disagreement or disagreeing through personal messages) are managed on the fan page (section 5.3.2)

These identities are performed in mediated environments, and are often capable of creating new patterns of communication that may give rise to new social situations (Meyrowitz, 1985). For example, turn-taking on the fan page may give rise to new social situations as fans respond to others after those others have interpreted their comments. I use Meyrowitz's work on situational geography to explain how turn taking can be understood as 'information systems' that connect people on the fan page and create a sense of community and belongingness amongst fans through continuous social interactions.

In order to analyze comments (textual snippets) posted to wall posts, I focus on a set of qualities that will demonstrate the range of activities practiced on the fan page. These qualities have emerged from the sense of the group that I gained from my role as a participant and a participant observer. Information gained through online and offline interviews also helped me to select the qualities that were particular to the fan page and its participants. The qualities/characteristics of the fan page are: a) accomplishing friendliness; b) managing disagreements via turn taking; c) space for knowledge sharing; and d) performing national identity through text talk. I use extracts of comments from the fan page and inputs from online and offline interviews to demonstrate how these qualities have transformed the fan page into a specific space via routine activities and everyday practices.

### 5.3.1 Accomplishing friendliness

By posting a comment to a wall post or to a previous comment made by a fan, a fan expresses his/her interests and a need to respond to or exchange his/her views on the topic. By posting a comment to a wall post, a fan becomes a participant in the process and takes his/her turn to show agreement or disagreement with a topic. While sharing allows fans to share posts, videos and pictures with their Facebook friends, commenting involves participation (offline interviews with Rita on January 13, 2013), where fans discuss topics with people with whom they might or might not have a previous connection.



On the fan page, it is very likely that fans may not share any previous connection; hence, fans looking to initiate connections/interactions will perform fan activities on the basis of their individual interests and preferences. For example, a fan may choose to respond to a wall post or a comment because he/she finds it interesting. In his online interview, Ratnesh said that people greet, introduce and interact with others through continuous turn taking. This helps them in knowledge sharing and in creating connections with others based on common interests. He stated that the bonds/friendships between fans are developed through this continuous turn taking and interaction. For instance, a fan may like a comment on a topic and choose to like the post or send the poster an appreciation message. Alternatively, fans might show disagreement with an existing comment by sending the poster a personal message or responding to his/her comment.

On the fan page, people exchange greetings with each other, exchange their views, and introduce them. People take turns and create connections on the basis of shared interests, communicating in ways that can be informative and entertaining.

### Customary greetings

In offline interviews, people referred to the fan page as the 'views' page. They explained that they joined the fan page to express and exchange opinions/ideas on MTV India's programs, and on everyday issues, including social and political issues and other topics. In the beginning, the fan page was used as a channel of communication between the fan page's administrators and fans, but more recently it has been used as a site to perform routine activities and everyday practices.

Fans post comments in relation to a wall post or a previous comment, and also initiate interactions with others. At first, a fan initiates a discussion by greeting the group, followed by sharing his/her opinions on the topic. The following extracts of text talk are taken from the fan page, and show some of the different ways people greet each other. The text marked in bold illustrates how customary greetings are used on the fan page. In other online

postings, I use underline text for participants' names and bold font to highlight participants' particular use of language and indicate an online identity.

### Illustration 1

1 Smriti Irani – **Namaskaar** friends.

2 Sandeep Chowdhary – **Hello** everyone

3 Manav Sharma – @ **Hi**

4 Aman Tribedi – **Namaste**...how's everyone!

5 Sandeep Chowdhary – Who is planning to go to *Roadies* audition? The post says the first audition is in

6 Delhi. I am going for sure. 10 likes

7 Raj Sehrat – **Good evening!** What's up.

8 Aman Tribedi – It's the *Roadies* fever again Raj.

9 Smriti Irani – @ I am good manav. Thank you. @ Hi sandeep, is it really in Delhi, as last time it

10 held in Chandigarh.

(August, 2011)

### Illustration 2

1 Rahul Lakra – **Namaskaar!** How's everyone. There is a cricket test match in Feroz Shah Kotla

2 Stadium. Anyone going?

3 Adarsh Bhandari – **Hello** Rahul.

4 Ashish Bardhan – **Namaste** Rahul. It's a Sunday, I am going to rest.

5 Rahul Lakra – I am good. Seems everyone is in Sunday's mood. Ashish watch it on TV.

(September, 2011)

In the first illustration, Smriti greeted the group with “Namaskaar” (line 1); Sandeep said “Hello” (line 2) to everyone; Manav said “Hi” (line 3); Aman said “Namaste” (line 4) and Raj said “Good evening!” (line 7). Similarly, in the second illustration, Rahul greeted the group with ‘Namaskaar’ (line 1), and was responded to by “Hello” and “Namaste” (lines 3-4).

Namaste (or Namaskaar) is the Indian way of greeting people, and is used by all age groups. In India, when people greet one another with Namaste, it means ‘may our minds meet’, and is often indicated by folding the palms in front of the chest. The bowing down of the head is a gracious form of extending friendship in love, respect and humility. On the fan page, the expression is often used as a greeting. In his offline interview, Lalit stated that people greet others with Namaste to initiate interactions.

*Talking on the fan page...is Facebooking...we do it day and night, say like when I get online, I post a comment, ‘available for Facebooking’, someone would greet me with Hello/Namaste...and we go on and on.*

(Offline interview with Lalit conducted on January 25, 2013)

By saying Namaste or Namaskaar, fans practice a specific kind of Indian-ness that reflect their offline culture of greeting and so create a familiar space for routine interactions online. For example, in her offline interview, Rita stated that she likes to greet the Indian way, which is Namaskaar. Ramesh commented that fans used different ways of saying Namaste (similar to ‘Hi’ and ‘Hiya’ in the UK), such as Namaskaar, Namaskaram and Namastey (the same word but with different spellings) to greet fans and initiate an interaction (offline interview with Rita Malik and Ramesh Sharma conducted on January 18, 2013 and January 21, 2013).

A few fans combine Namaste with English words, such as ‘Namaskaar friends’, ‘Namaste, how’s everyone’ or ‘Namaskaar, how’s everyone’, to create Hing-lish phrases, and use them on the fan page to interact with others. The use of these hybrid forms highlights the use of a specific language derived from Hindi and English, and is particular to the fan page and its participants.

## Forming connections

On the fan page, fans routinely interact and post their views and opinions on topics posted by the fan page's administrators. During my online observation, I found that people create connections on the basis of turn taking, where fans initiate and participate in a discussion of their shared interests.

### Illustration 3

1 Shashank Jadhav – adventurous match.

2 Manu Ramachandran – didn't expect India would win ☺.

3 Anuj Pratap – @ shashank – I loved every bit of it. **Between, when is Indian team playing**

4 **again.** I hope I am not going to college that day. I can't afford to miss when India is playing.

5 Mainka jain – Hello manu. Why did you think so? @Shashank – I would rather say adventurous yet

6 interesting.

7 Shashank Jadhav– @ **Anuj, the next match is on Sunday. No office. I am going to see it with my**

8 **brother.** @ Mainka...totally.

9 Anuj Pratap – Defo! Lucky us, I would finish up college work on Saturday, few assignments and I am

10 done.

(November, 2011)

In the third illustration, a group of active fans discussed a cricket match that had already taken place. The comments were posted in response to the status update on the MTV India Facebook fan page, which discussed the success of the Indian team. Anuj agreed with Shashank, and initiated an interaction thinking that Shashank would have information about the next match (Between, when is Indian team playing again- Illustration 3, lines 3-4). Mainka also initiated an interaction with Manu and Shashank by discussing the match. The exchange resulted, in turn taking and continuous interaction between people, creating connections between them.

### Illustration 4

1 Adarsh Bhandari – lovely post. I am a diehard fan of cricket. But I like other things too...love

2 listening to music, going for long drives and having Chinese food. Currently in college. **Is anyone like**

3 **me here!**

4Ashish Bardhan – @ Adarsh, I love Chinese food too, its yummm and cricket...when India plays 5and wins☺.

6Adarsh Bhandari – ☺ nice to see you Ashish. Same here.

(August, 2011)

In the above illustration, Adarsh is responding to a wall post that mentioned a quote by Sachin Tendulkar. Adarsh expresses his appreciation on the post and introduced himself as a cricket fan, but also as someone who has other likes and dislikes. The comment was responded to by Ashish, who expressed having the same interests as Adarsh.

Both of these latter illustrations show that participants initiate interactions in order to share their interests and preferences in public. This highlights the fact that individuals continuously take turns and create connections with each other based on a shared interest. These interactions are filled with warmth, comfort and personalized touches that help people create bonds with one another. The use of phrases such as “Between, when is Indian team playing again@ (Illustration 3, lines 3- 4) and “is anyone like me here” (Illustration 4, lines 2-3) show how an interaction is started on the basis of common interest.

Likewise, responses to such comments, such as “@ Anuj, the next match is on Sunday. No office. I am going to see it with my brother” (Illustration 3, line 7-8) and “@ Adarsh, I love Chinese food too, its yummm and cricket...when India plays and wins☺” (Illustration 4, line 4-5) highlight the beginning of new connections through which people exchange their interests and preferences.

### 5.3.2 Managing disagreements via turn taking

Text talk involves turn taking. It is through turn taking that people express their opinions and develop their ongoing interactions. Some fans might post a word or a sentence; others might use a smiley or long description to express their opinions on the issue discussed.

A thread of comments posted on a particular topic is available for public view. In both online and offline interviews, people stated that comments are filled with agreements and

disagreements (offline interviews with Nitin and Ratnesh conducted on February 14, 2013). While agreements are posted in the form of likes and comments, disagreements are posted through counter comments and personal messaging (offline interview with Salabh conducted on February 3, 2013).

By using extracts of text-talk from the fan page, I now explain the phenomenon of turn taking, and demonstrate how people manage disagreements and use it as a tool to build friendship on the fan page.

### Turn taking

The phenomenon of turn taking involves expressing an idea on the topic/issue discussed. On the fan page, turn taking takes place in different ways. For example, a participant might self-select another fan and initiate an interaction, which would mean that the selected fan would take the next turn and respond to the fan who initiated the interaction. Alternatively, a fan page's administrator might choose to respond to a wall post/comment that is posted in connection to them, which would mean the fan would take the next turn and respond to the administrators' comment.

#### Illustration 5

- 1 Sumitra Rahe- The second trailer of the film is out. Saif and Katrina Katrina sizzle together. 2 2likes  
3 Mahita Naave – which one Sumitra. I haven't seen any. Send me the link.  
4 Sumitra Raha – **Sure**, Mahita...do you want me to inbox or send you the link here.  
5 Mahita Naave – here. Let's all of us see it. I am sure everyone likes Saif...**4 likes**  
6 Navya Sharma – Share the video here ☺. I like Saif too.  
7 Sumitra Raha – **yeah!** @Navya only for you. Check the wall. 1 like  
(October, 2011)

The interactions above suggest that fans take the initiative and select people to interact with. For example, in this exchange Mahita took the lead and asked Sumitra about the film's trailer. Sumitra responded to her comment and directed a message to her. Mahita took her turn and requested a response from Sumitra, and invited everyone to look at the video. She

also initiated a different topic about liking Saif (a Bollywood actor), which was later responded to by Navya.

Likes received in response to a comment display agreement with that comment. 4 likes received by Mahita's comment indicate that other fans agreed with her idea.

The interaction above implies that turn taking is a cooperative process in which a group of people initiate interactions with each other, with the intention of creating connections. Fans take the speaker and listener roles, where listeners often 'like' in order to show the speaker that they are interested in, agree or disagree with, or are simply paying attention to the message. For instance, agreeing with an idea is usually shown by inserting words such as "sure" (line 4) and "yeah" (line 7).

Unlike oral communication, which involves the use of verbal and non-verbal cues, CMCs rely on textual, non-verbal cues to trigger interaction between participants. For example, on the fan page fans initiate interactions with others based on shared interests, post threads that are informative, entertaining or interactive, take turns, post agreements and disagreements, and/or use a particular style of language and customary greeting to start an interaction with others. The following is a discussion on whether the role of Indian Censor Board is justified in Indian cinema.

#### Illustration 6

1 Komal Nahata – **Hummm...** I **strongly agree** with Anchal. The deletion of vulgarity is NOT the sole  
2 purpose of the censor board. **Rather, it is** to supervise cinema content as being 3 appropriate and  
3 inappropriate to its viewing population. 2 likes

4 Rajeev Sachdeva – **Yay...** censorship is must, but not to an extent that it should interfere in  
5 creativity/thoughts/ideas of film makers.

6 Anchal Arora – **Thanks for the support** Komal ☺. Censorship is also about finding appropriate and  
7 inappropriate for its public. Films like Parzania wasn't released on time, as censor board knew that  
8 some segments may hurt people's sentiments in Gujrat. @ Rajeev, films are a public medium, **there**  
9 **is a strong probability** that messages sent to public through the movie may not be perceived from a  
10 filmmaker's point of view. Censor board is like a watch dog; they justify creativity/ideas of film  
11 makers. 1 like

12Rajeev Sachdeva – **ahhhan, you make a point** Anchal ☺. **However**, films are also a medium to  
13show things, situations, people and individuals as they ought to be. Again, **a matter of perception**,  
14**but** censoring may lead to unseen reality. 4 likes  
(November, 2011)

The illustration above highlights how disagreements result in turn taking and communicating perspectives/ideas. In their report, the Pew Research Centre (2008) uses the term ‘perspective taking’. According to the research, perspective taking is the ability to adopt the viewpoint of another person or to consider ‘both sides of an issue’. However, in the case of the fan page, fans may or may not consider other’s perspectives/opinions and may post a comment/wall post that completely focuses on their ideas/opinions. Henceforth, they may take turns other than always posting a perspective in terms of likes/shares and comments.

On the fan page, an individual may show agreement/partial agreement with a previous idea, or may show disagreement by completely rejecting it. For example, in the above illustration, fans used phrases like “strongly agree” (line 1), “thanks for the support” (line 6) or “you make a point” (line 12) to acknowledge another individual’s idea or perspective. The use of smileys and ‘back-channel’ vocalizations such as “Hmmm” (line 1), “Ahhhan” (line 12) and “Yay” (line 4), show partial agreement with a previously discussed idea.

In contrast, words and phrases such as “however” (line 12), “but” (line 14), “a matter of perception” (lines 13-14), “there is a strong probability” (lines 8- 9) and “Rather, it is” (line 2) were used to show disagreement with a previously discussed idea.

While agreements are often responses characterized by the likes and short comments (e.g. smileys, back-channel vocalization etc), disagreements often elaborate on and explain a viewpoint/idea that takes the discussion ahead and results in turn taking. Below, I analyze text-talk taken from the fan page, and explain how fans manage disagreement and use it as a tool to perform friendliness on the fan page.



## Dealing with disagreements

Disagreements are reactions posted to previous messages. Pomerantz (1984) defines disagreement as an unpreferred second-pair part that can be marked by a pause or delay markers (“uh”, “well” etc), partial repeats, requests for clarification, agreement tokens or qualifiers (Pomerantz, 1984, p70-73). A strong disagreement contains a contrasting element in relation to the previous proposition, whereas a weak disagreement contains a positive evaluation (partial disagreement) and qualification (ibid., p74-75).

Muntigl and Turnbull (1998: 242) argue that strong disagreement results in a fierce argument. A strong disagreement builds up into a fierce argument over the course of several turns taken by the speaker and the receiver. In such cases, a researcher can specify that the data are collected from people who have a positive and close relationship (ibid., p248), so that the responses (disagreements) that individuals create are in defense of their own ideas, rather than as a form of attack on their interlocutors. In other words, when an argument takes place through positive association, people tend to protect their own views rather than attack others, whereas an attack might damage/unpair the connection (ibid., p249).

On the fan page, disagreements are either posted in the form of comments or via personal messages (offline interviews with Lalita and Salabh conducted on February 10, 2013). While posting disagreements as comments on the fan page makes the comments available for public view, messages inboxed to fans’ profiles are only available for an individual to see. Disagreements posted through messages are part of an unseen identity performance that people may hide due to the ‘dirty work’ (Goffman, 1956) involved in it; this part of identity performance will be explained in the next section of the chapter, under social ‘stigma’.

In her study of a Usenet group, Baym (1996) found that mitigating potential offense and elaborating on arguments (Baym, 1996, p328) are shared characteristics of disagreement and agreement. The strategy of mitigating offense and using elaboration in arguments demonstrates the positive association of the community, which uses agreement/disagreement to create connections on the basis of shared interests. In this section, then, I take extracts

from the fan page to demonstrate how participants take turns, agree, disagree and perform friendliness on the fan page.

The first illustration discusses the Indian cricketer Rahul Dravid.

The second illustration discusses the film *No One Killed Jessica*.

The third illustration discusses Hazzare's hunger strike.

I examine the turn taking and points of disagreements through three illustrations, and find mitigating devices in the text talk.

### Illustration 7

1 Charan Rao – true cricketer...hats off!

2 Hardikh Mehta – He is the wall of Indian cricket team.

3 Charan Rao – The strongest and the toughest wall...Hardik

4 Taran Wadhwa – nobody in the world can doubt his abilities. When I remember him, all I can  
5 imagine him defending a cricket ball all day and each ball, he defends makes me a bigger fan of his  
6 batting... Genius! Simply Genius.

7 Ritesh Davak – **Is he really genius?** = =. **I mean he is not bad**, but he can't beat Sachin. Being an  
8 ardent Sachin Tendulkar fan, Rahul Dravid has always featured at the number 2 spot for me. No, I have  
9 never rated him above Tendulkar, and much to the dismay of the Dravid fans, will never do. However,  
10 to please their already bruised ego, I would say that although he doesn't top the charts of my favorite  
11 cricketers, **probably** I will call him GREAT.

12 Charan Rao – @Ritesh **I see what you are saying** and you mentioned that he can't be Sachin, true he  
13 cannot be. And he is only 'great'. But yes he is an individual, his species is rare, you will not find any  
14 other who will be willing to grind it out in difficult times, to stand tall in adversities, to be ever  
15 ready to do anything for the team, he is rare! He is amazing.

16 Ritesh Davak – hum...charan **I may be wrong**, I used 'great' to describe him as it is used too  
17 frivolously and every new kid on the block is tagged as a future great. But greatness is only  
18 achieved over a period of time and it's stupid to gauge greatness only through the kaleidoscope of  
19 numbers and stats. In my limited experience of watching and researching on Indian cricket, I

20associate the label of Greatness to only five Indian cricketers – Sachin Tendulkar, Sunil Gavaskar,  
21Rahul Dravid, Kapil Dev and Anil Kumble. **I would hesitate** to say that he is my favourite;  
22**actually** he is someone who is ‘great’.  
23 Taran wadhwa – .....(pause) it seems like you are not so diehard cricket fan ritesh. That’s what all I  
24have to say. From diehard DRAVIDfan!  
25 Charan Rao – I go with Taran  
26Ritesh Davak – **Taran, you may not like it.** But this is true. Although a lot has been spoken about his  
27flawless technique and impeccable defense but the most startling thing about Rahul Dravid was his  
28unquenchable thirst for improvement and his unflappable attitude. He was perhaps one of the few  
29batsmen who evolved with every series and rarely looked flustered when faced with a tough  
30situation. A living example of the phrase “practice makes a man perfect”, Rahul Dravid’s best trait  
31was that he knew how to improve. He started off being a good player but elevated himself to the  
32category of ‘great’ by sheer practice and patience. He was by no means a natural stroke-player but  
33he molded himself into a shield that allowed the stroke-makers around him to make merry. He  
34played in a team loaded with stroke-players, yet he didn’t replicate any of them and stuck to his  
35own game. 6 likes  
36 Charan Rao – for your information...Dravid was and always will be a better Test cricketer than  
37Sachin Tendulkar will ever hopes to be. Get your facts right, when you comment on a space that are  
38full of cricket and Dravid lovers.  
(October, 2011)

### Illustration 8

39Natasha Singh – Movies based on actual events are made less in Bollywood as compared to  
40Hollywood. Jessica Lal’s case was quite well-known and was appropriate as a movie’s subject.  
41Rajkumar Santoshi aptly used the case as a side-subject in his movie Halla Bol. However, ‘No One  
42Killed Jessica’ has Jessica Lal case as its main subject. Unfortunately, the movie isn’t up to the  
43mark. The story sounds good on paper, but the pathetic execution makes the storyline  
44worse.  
45Chitrangna Seikh – ☹ **Natasha, how come you didn’t like the movie?** I found it good and I  
46believe it is much better than any traditional hero-heroine films dancing around trees. **I think** that the  
47movie had excellent narration and electrifying performances. Apart from lame jokes and foul  
48language (which was definitely not required), the movie was a good entertainment  
49package.  
50 Natasha Singh – Chitrangna, somehow, the movie didn’t turned according to my expectations  
51T\_T. **Probably**, Rani Mukherji’s over acting, and Vidya Balan’s exaggerated performance killed the

52movie. And, yes, cussing more than required also served a drawback. May be in real life, people  
53cuss, but here cussing is used quite often needlessly and mostly to glorify a certain character.  
(November, 2011)

### Illustration 9

54 Harshita Kaje- People do not follow anyone like that. They want results. They want to bring  
55changes to our system and when it is for good then why not. And yes when you want to change the  
56system you have to start yourself. Think about this -if nobody gives bribe, these corrupt people will  
57become helpless! Everyone has the right to adopt fair means; hunger strikes could be a possible way  
58of telling government off!

59 Loveleena Lal - **Harshita, social movements (hunger strikes) can be a good way of bringing**  
60**awareness, but what would happen to the system that we should be or ought to follow? A**  
61system approved by us; a democracy that has representatives chosen by us, and if we are not  
62satisfied with their policies, then we have an alternative, we can always change them. Passing a bill  
63through hunger strikes is just not done, this means if next time the society wants a change, people  
64would go for hunger strikes. We are an educated society. We can challenge the bill constitutionally  
65by a judicial review and make the changes. What I am trying to say that all these strikes are  
66unnecessary. Although I believe in Anna and respect his work ... **(pause)** I do not support his  
67Blackmailing by any means hunger strike isn't required.

(August, 2011)

### Techniques used to manage disagreements

- Use of hedges and down-graders

Hedges are linguistic means through which the illocutionary force of the propositional content can be modified (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p146). They soften the impact of negative comments and attach an element of ambiguity, which means that the speaker does not take full responsibility for his/her own words (Tannen, 1993, p28). Hedges and down-graders are used to scale down the disagreement. For instance, the use of phrases such as “I think”, “just”, “maybe”, “actually” and “probably” shows how people lessen the effect of disagreements and so defends their statements. For example, the phrase “I think” (line 46) is called a

‘quality hedge’ (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p164), and is used to avoid any open imposition on the addressee(s). When Chitrangna argued that the film had excellent narration and electrifying performances (Illustration 8), she did not demonstrate direct disagreement with Natasha. Furthermore, Ritesh’s and Natasha’s (Illustrations 7 and 8) choice of words, such as ‘probably’ (line 51), ‘actually (line 22)’ and ‘may be’ (line 16), also indicate partial agreement with the post and the ideas discussed in the text talk.

- Asking questions

Questions can serve different functions. According to Verschueren (2003, p157), questions have the function of mitigating assertiveness. He also sees questions as a way of expressing relational work, even if they lack “the quality of challenging” (p133). From a conversational perspective, questions, as a first pair/part of an adjacency pair, invite the addressee to respond. On the fan page, questions are used in a way that can be seen as an invitation to show agreement rather than disagreement. For example, in his comment, Ritesh questioned Taran (“Is he really genuine? = =...I mean he is not really bad” – line 7), asking in an assertive tone if Rahul Dravid really is a genius. Furthermore, in her comment, Lovleena did not really challenge Harshita’s point of view, but toned down her direct assertion by asking a question that indirectly related to the previous argument, “Harshita: “social movements (hunger strikes) can be a good way of bringing awareness, but what would happen to the system that we should be or ought to follow?” (lines 59-60).

On the fan page, fans use questions to mitigate an offense, and to show a polite and humble attitude by minimizing the discrepancies between the participants.

- Partial agreement

Pomerantz (1984, p74-75) argues that partial disagreements are weaker forms of disagreements, used in response to the arguments made by the previous speaker. Brown and Levinson (1987, p112-114) consider a partial agreement to be a sub-

strategy of the super strategy of avoiding disagreement. In other words, partial disagreements are a way of showing the harmony (Baym, 1996, p335). For example, the use of phrases such as “I see what you are saying” (line 12) and “I may be wrong” (line 16) suggest that partial disagreements are used to lessen the impact of negative comments. In line 12, Charan showed an empathetic understanding of Ritesh’s sentiment and gave reasons behind his thinking and analysis, preserving the relational face (difference of opinions) between them. In line 16, Ritesh minimized his disagreement by stating his individual perspective and providing an explanation of the idea/sentiment he expressed.

Likewise, in line 26, Ritesh lessened the level of disagreement by sympathizing with Taran’s idea/view (Taran, you may not like it), and supported his own opinion by writing his ideas/thoughts.

- **Elaboration**

Although using brief words and phrases such as “no” and “I would hesitate” are a common way of disagreeing with a topic, most fans attached elaborate statements outlining their disagreement. Offering reasons in support of an argument are a common practice on the fan page. Both reasoning and elaboration involve speculation and personalization, which often move the topic on to new ground. For example, this can be seen in Illustration 9, lines 12-15, where Charan moves from the original topic, which initially discussed Sachin Tendulkar v/s Rahul Dravid, to explain how Rahul Dravid has learned through practice and patience.

The use of fans’ names in the comments can also be seen as an effective strategy in disagreements, where a fan specifically directs a comment to another fan, showing an association (agreement/disagreement) with his/her ideas.

Charan Rao – @Ritesh **I see what you are saying** and you mentioned that he can’t be Sachin, true he cannot be. And he is only ‘great’. But yes he is an individual, his species is rare, you will

not find any other who will be willing to grind it out in difficult times, to stand tall in adversities, to be ever ready to do anything for the team, he is rare! He is amazing.

- Use of emoticons

In CMCs, paralinguistic cues such as stress, pause and happiness are expressed through emoticons, punctuation and other symbols (Golato and Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006; Baym, 1996). Emoticons, pauses and repetition of punctuation are used in text talk to perform a disagreement. Three emoticons are found in the above illustrations: = =, ☹ and T\_T. The first, composed of two equating marks, represents eyes, and is used to show doubt. After expressing doubt about Taran's comment, Ritesh gave this doubtful 'look' (line 7). Chitrangna used the second, an unhappy face, to show disapproval of Harshita's comment about the movie (line 45). Natasha used T\_T, a sad/unimpressed emoticon, in order to show disagreement with Chitrangan's comment (line 51).

In the above context, emoticons were used to express disagreement in a very casual manner, so as to reduce the seriousness of the situation.

- Use of pauses

In the above illustrations, the use of dots represents pauses. Golato and Taleghani-Nikazm (2006, p315-316) found that pauses are used in online interactions to scale down disagreements. A pause can be at the beginning of a reply, in the middle or at the end. While their appearance at the beginning or in the middle expresses silence, dots at the end represent a 'fading away voice'. In the beginning, Taran used a pause to express a disagreement (line 23). The pause here highlighted that he heard/partially agreed with Ritesh's comment. Likewise, in her comment, Loveleena used a pause as a sandwich between agreement and disagreement, scaling down the argument (lines 66-67).

The tendency to explain friendliness in terms of disagreement shows that it is easy to create connections between fans who share similar interests; it is at the point of

disagreement that friendliness is most challenged. But the disagreements are scaled down and managed through techniques like partial agreement and elaboration.

The illustrations above suggest that disagreements contribute to the ethic of friendliness that builds social alignment between people and provides a platform for pooling knowledge from various sources (such as information from admin, fans, fan pages etc.). As well as providing a platform to perform friendliness, the fan page also acts as a space to exchange, compare and analyze facts/information. In my next section, I analyze textual snippets from the fan page, and demonstrate how the platform is used to create collective opinions on shared interests and preferences.

### 5.3.3 Space for knowledge sharing

*Consumption has become a collective, process – and that’s what this book means by collective intelligence, a term coined by French cybertheorist Pierre Lévy. None of us can know everything; each of us knows something; and we can put the pieces together if we pool our resources and combine our skills. Collective intelligence can be seen as an alternative source of media power. We are learning how to use that power through our day-to-day interactions within convergence culture. Right now, we are mostly using this collective power through our recreational life, but soon we will be deploying those skills for more “serious” purposes.*

Henry Jenkins. (2008). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (Kindle Locations 198-203). NYU Press. Kindle Edition.

Jenkins (2008) explains the notion of ‘collective intelligence’, and demonstrates how experiencing various forms of media is no longer considered to be an activity that takes place in the home or at a cinema, but is an active initiative taken by consumers (i.e. people who consume media), who use different forms of media to fulfil various needs and desires. For example, viewing television shows can primarily be done alone or with peers, but once



the show is finished, fans gather on message boards, websites, fan pages etc. in order to analyze, discuss and dissect an episode. Jenkins' first case study focuses on the *Survivors* 'spoiler' forum – a site where fans gather to discuss and dissect the popular CBS reality series *Survivors*. The forum works as an online knowledge bank, where people speculate about events and share undisclosed information – such as the locations that will be used in the next season – by hacking the email accounts of CBS employees.

Such 'shared knowledge' communities form a site to perform collective intelligence, where people share 'what they know' (Jenkins, 2008). Such collaborative tactics form an excellent way to pool people's perspectives, allowing knowledge transmission and active participation. For example, Wikipedia can be seen as a collaborative process rather than a final product, where participants add smaller portions of content, rather than lengthy articles (Shirky, 2009). Likewise, on Facebook fan pages, fans practice a collaborative process of exchanging, comparing and analyzing information to reach collective opinions/conclusions. Below, I take a few extracts from the text-talk, and illustrate to what extent fans exchange, compare and analyze information on the fan page and use it as a space for knowledge-sharing.

### Sharing facts/information

The MTV India Facebook fan page is often used as a site for knowledge sharing. Fans who are interested in various topics, share their perspectives/ ideas and offer creative input with the intention to create new connections and strengthen existing ones (Boyd, 2008). In their offline interviews, fans described the fan page as a site for knowledge sharing that allows people to exchange views on a range of topics. In her offline interview, Raina stated that she and her fan page associates perform a Sunday ritual on the fan page, which includes text-talking about the MTV *Roadies* episode after the show is aired at 7 pm. Likewise, in his offline interview, Salabh, a cricket fan, explained that they use the fan page to post activities relating to cricket matches and often use as a site to share information.

*Before any important match, say like the India-Pakistan, India-England, the administrators and fans start updating any pre-event activities (such as if we are planning to go to watch the cricket match live if it's taking place in Delhi/Bombay). On the match day, each of us would take turns and post scores, run rate, left out overs etc.*

(Offline interview with Salabh Singh conducted February, 2013)

In his book *Convergence Culture* (2008), Jenkins argues that pooling perspectives has given rise to a new 'participatory culture' in which people exchange ideas/perspectives and create a collective opinion in the form of textual snippets.

Gee (2004) refers to such information-sharing platforms as 'affinity spaces', and explains how such platforms have become sites for active participation and deeper engagement. He argues that they are sustained by shared interests and practices, and are dependent on the knowledge/information shared by the participants. For instance, Black (2005a) found that editorial feedback (beta reading) provided by online fan communities helped participants to grow as writers. In the beta-reading process, participants posted and received feedback on their articles, creating one-to-one connections. I observe a similar pattern of communication on the MTV India Facebook fan page, where fans engage in routine topics and exchange useful/entertaining information with one another as demonstrated by the following extracts.

The first illustration features comments on terrorism and terrorist attacks in the country.

The second illustration discusses measures to eradicate corruption practices in India.

The third discusses the advantages of T-20 cricket matches.

### Illustration 10

1Naval Shah – My friend...**I want to tell you that most** of the terrorists of the Mumbai attack were  
2young people in the age group of 20-25. Most of these terrorists worked and lived among common  
3people for months together before the attacks; terrorists at the Taj hotel had been trained as chefs for  
410 months before the attack. The pilots of the 9/11 (World Trade Center, USA) had attended flying

5school before the attack. Well, knowingly or unknowingly routine spaces have become a part of these  
6activities...we need to be vigilant and take care of our safety and security.

7Pritam Pandey – **Bilkul**...terrorism is a very big problem. Since, 2001...**I would like to update**  
8**everyone here** that we had a total of 63 major attacks in different cities. It is a serious threat and has  
9spread its tentacles all over the world.

(August, 2011)

### Illustration 11

10 Rajat Pandey – **Let me inform you** that corruption in real sense is defined as “the misuse of public  
11power for private gain”. It takes the form of bribery when public officials take anything in cash/kind  
12to do governmental favours. **And why is the country corrupt?**...most of us know this...or if not **I**  
13**would like to tell you**, corruption is caused by the maldistribution of wealth. In practical terms, some  
1490% of the country’s resources are owned by 10% of the country’s population and the remaining 10%  
15of country's resources are distributed among 90% of the population.

(November, 2011)

### Illustration 12

16 Keerat Kapoor –T-20 is not a killer, it’s a good launching pad, a short term entertainment. **We are**  
17**talking** about sachin and sourav but what about the domestic players those are not getting chance  
18to perform even they are more talented and skillful even, so it’s a platform where young generation  
19getting chance with veterans clash. Money, glamour these are now the part of every game, so there  
20is no problem of commercialization, this is modern twenty fist cricket, it not decimating the  
21gentlemen game, it uplifting the task, **tell me one honest answer? Did anyone know** about suresh  
22tiwari and sikhar dhawan? Because of IPL we saw such talented faces...defiantly T-20 is not a  
23murderer.

(July, 2011)

- 
- A genuine need to share  
On the fan page, information is exchanged between fans with the intention to communicate a perspective. In Illustration 10, Naval shared his thoughts on the recent terrorist attacks. The comment was responded to by Pritam, who showed his agreement with Naval by using the Hindi word *bilkul*, which means ‘for sure’, and

shared another piece of information (line 7). The use of phrases such as ‘I want to tell you’ (line 1) and ‘I would like to update everyone here’ (lines 7-8) demonstrates the urge to communicate with others. Likewise, phrases used in Illustrations 11 and 12 such as ‘let me inform you’ (line 10), ‘I would like to tell you’ (lines 12-13) and ‘we are talking’ (lines 16-17) also demonstrate a genuine need to initiate an interaction.

- Posing and answering questions is another way of sharing information

Answering a self-created question can be another way of sharing information/facts on the fan page. Most of the fans use this method to share information, and support their facts/information using his reasoning. For example, in illustration 11, Rajat explained the reason for the corruption and maldistribution of wealth in the Indian economy by answering his own question. Likewise, in illustration 12, Keerat argued that the T-20 format hasn’t killed the game, but has given a platform to young cricket stars. The use of questioning, and the inclusion of phrases such as ‘tell me one honest answer’, ‘did anyone know’ (line 21) and ‘why is the country corrupt’ (line 12), demonstrate the desire to share one’s perspectives with others.

### Voicing opinions through comparing and analyzing topics/issues

The fan page is often used as a platform to discuss and dissect topics. People compare and analyze various topics posted on the fan page. I now examine text talk on the fan page to demonstrate how fans compare and analyze topics/situations based on their understanding, and so reach a conclusion/create a public opinion. In the following example, comments were posted in relation to terrorism.

#### Illustration 13

1 Imran Kaur – Terrorism is a serious problem. The basic target of terrorism is to shatter the  
2democracy of a nation. Therefore, any such deviations on the part of the Government would render

3terrorism’s purpose to be served. Now, since the Indian constitution has special legislations (laws  
4such as TADA, POTA, 4UAPA, NIA) to deal with such extraordinary circumstances dealing with  
5terrorism establishment of military courts will not be of much use. This is because **unlike** the US,  
6where the terrorists are not even guaranteed habeas corpus writ, India has a much more civilised  
7criminal justice system which must be upheld. 2 likes

8 Rajat Shah – National Investigation Agency can definitely help Simran, but I think having military  
9courts (**other than** the normal ones) to deal with terrorist cases like that of US will be helpful. The  
10common courts (the supreme and the high court) normally take a lot of time for results to come  
11up...like the case of Kasab (it took three years to hang him, if military courts would have been  
12there, the decision would have been taken then and there and an outcome would have come the  
13same time). Also, this long time gives the terrorists a chance to hijack some aircraft and blackmail  
14the government to release the terrorist. A military court will decide the problem on the spot in its  
15own “inhuman” way. If the court wants to comes out on any judgment it will; if it finds the accused  
16guilty, they will shoot him...These courts doesn't work under any minister. It only knows one thing  
17– Army and nation. 15likes

(December, 2011)

In her comment, Simran compared the Indian judiciary with the US military courts. In the above context, the use of the word ‘unlike’ (line 5) suggests a contrast between the two systems, which are shown to work in entirely different ways. Likewise, in his comment, Rajat used the phrase ‘other than’ to show the dissimilarity between the two systems (lines 9).

Moreover, the number of likes received by a comment is an indirect way of supporting/appreciating/ agreeing with an idea discussed in it. For example, in the above extract, 8 likes received by Rajat suggest that fans favor military courts more than the Indian criminal justice system.

Often, fans share their interpretations based on their own understanding. They analyze topics and suggest measures to correct/rectify the problem. For example, in the following extract, Kaval posted a comment on a discussion of the increasing number of rape cases in the capital city of India.

#### Illustration 14

1 Kaval Kapoor – Rape exists **because** of a patriarchal, misogynistic culture that condones it, whether  
2 tacitly or explicitly; and **because** of widespread lawlessness that encourages it. **What we need to do**,  
3 and urgently, is two-pronged: systemic social change and legal reform. **We must** educate people,  
4 starting at the school level, about respect for women, for personal spaces and for the rule of law. **We**  
5 **need to introspect**, all of us, on how we contribute to the objectification of women, from the popular  
6 culture we consume to the way we bring up our children – from where it’s a slippery slope to a  
7 twisted and unjust understanding of sexual assault in legal terms. In terms of the law, **we urgently**  
8 **need** a more comprehensive and inclusive definition of sexual violence, critical amendments to the  
9 Code of Criminal Procedure that will reduce the time taken for trials, fast track courts for sexual  
10 assault cases, harsher punishments and a serious program of police reform and sensitisation. All of  
11 these are doable, and all are equally crucial – not just for better implementation, but also to signal  
12 the seriousness with which such crimes will be viewed.

(October, 2011)

In the above example, Kaval used ‘because’ (lines 1 and 2) to give reasons for an existing situation. In lines 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8, he used phrases such as “what we need to do”, “we must”, “what we need to” and “we urgently need” to suggest solutions to existing problems. Moreover, the use of “we” in the above phrases denotes the need for collective action; for instance, he used “what we need to do” to suggest measures he believed were needed to rectify the existing issues (line 2); he used “we must” to express a strong obligation to educate people (line 3); he used “we need to introspect” to express the need for careful thought about the current situation (lines 4-5); and he used the phrase “we urgently need” to express the seriousness of the matter (lines 7-8).

In another example, Kritika initiated a discussion by sharing her thoughts on the current state of corruption in Indian society. She began her comment by discussing the current state of the common man in India.

### Illustration 15

1 Kritika Malhotra – Whenever I think of our developing India, a question that haunts me is “**Will I be**  
2 **able to visualize a vivid, corruption-free and self-reliable INDIA.?**” ...and the answer is ‘may be’  
3 or ‘may be not’ ..... as said by a scholar, money is the root cause of all kinds of troubles and sins.  
4 It’s not an exaggeration to say that it’s being worshiped as God and has been growing incredibly  
5 swaying its wings to all departments to be taken as, what we call, bribe. **If** you want to study in a

6famous college, you need to pay bribe. **If** you want to settle in a good job, you have to pay some  
7money. **If** you have to register your land or building, bribe. To get food (for poor), pay bribe.  
8 Are **we** not aware of 2G spectrum scam, mining scandal in karnataka and “cash for vote” schemes?  
9It’s only **our** pride to say that we are placed 2nd in world population records. But it’s heartbreaking  
10for **us** to agree that more than half of the people are crying and begging on roads just for their food.  
11Then what about their daily needs? Why to go so far beyond our age? See how many children are  
12being malnourished every day in our village and observe their routine for one day in their slum. I  
13do not really understand why this situation has raised in spite of having a well-defined constitution  
14and highly educated economists as our finance ministers.  
15 What needs to be done – **We should** inculcate responsible nature from now itself and keep  
16ourselves away from this evil practice. **We should** play a pious role in molding this country into a  
17PRISTINE world that's free from all kinds of discriminations and corruption harassments.  
(November, 2011)

Kritika’s self-questioning “Will I be able to visualize a vivid, corruption-free and self-reliable INDIA?” (lines 1-2) followed by her own answer, demonstrates the fact that posing and answering a question is one way of sharing information on the fan page. In her comment, Kritika explained the prevalent system of bribery in all sectors of Indian society. She used the conjunction ‘if’ to describe different situations that influence people to pay bribes (lines 5-6-7).

*If you want to study in famous college, you need to pay bribe. If you want to settle in a good job, you have to pay some money. If you have to register your land or building, bribe. To get food (for poor), pay bribe.*

Thereafter, she stressed a picture of a corrupt society, and suggested measures to combat this existing problem. Moreover, the use of “us”, “our” (lines 9-10) and “we” (lines 8-15-16) in the above illustration indicate the shared responsibility of Indian citizens. In addition, the use of “should” (lines 15-16) implies expectations from the society to fight against the evil practices in society.

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The discussions on illustrations above suggest that the pooling perspectives are used as an efficient tool to discuss and dissect topics, where fans share, compare and analyze routine topics and form a collective intelligence; the fan page is used as a specific space to perform shared knowledge on some topics -cricket, *MTV Roadies*, Bollywood and social/ national issues. As discussed in chapter 4, these topics receive the most fan activities on the fan page.

In my next section, I analyze textual snippets on these four topics, and demonstrate how shared knowledge leads to performing Indian-ness on the fan page.

### 5.3.4 Performing national identity through text talk

According to Anderson (1991), nations can be understood as ‘imagined communities’. He argues that a nation is a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as a part of group. To understand nation as an imagined community, it is important to understand the terms ‘nation’ and ‘nation state’. A nation becomes a state when boundaries are constructed to establish territory and protect one’s sovereignty, with the term ‘nation state’ indicating that nations of people have achieved an independent state of their own. Alongside, both the concepts ‘nation’ and ‘nation state’ are bounded with perception and feelings of identity. It may be difficult to differentiate an ethnic group from a nation, because the moment when an ethnic group begins to view itself as a nation, it becomes one. Hence, the feeling of nationhood can transcend geographical boundaries and can differ from nation to nation depending upon the identity one associates with a particular nation. These feelings of nationhood can be expressed by a range of practices and activities that are common to a community. In the Indian context, the feeling of nationhood is demonstrated through various practices. On the fan page, such practices are performed through the discussion of cricket, Bollywood, *MTV Roadies* and social/national issues. Moreover, activities performed through these routine practices display a form of togetherness that is unique to Indian youth. This ‘together-ness’ is very similar to the ideas discussed by Trish Winter and Simon Keegan -Phipps (2013), in their book, *Performing Englishness: Identity and politics in a contemporary folk resurgence*, where they examine how popular



music might engage with and be a representative of national identity. Winter and Keegan-Phipps argue that the resurgence in Englishness across contemporary folk music and dance culture is in line with broader cultural and social concerns over national identity. In their case studies, they investigate folk as a part of 'wider cultural interest in Englishness' (p21), and emphasize that the choice of musical styles and melodic structures in folk and dance cultures display 'Englishness'. In Chapter 6, they concentrate on Englishness and position it as a national imaginary that focuses on locality, i.e. local music and argue that locality is far more significant than nation and is characterized by both rootedness and diversity, marked by inherent complexities and heterogeneities that herald 'multiple Englands' (p130). Similar to the concept of 'multiple Englands' residing in local folk and dance cultures, Indian-ness is performed through various 'local' activities that involve discussing their art and culture- Bollywood, popular sport- cricket, social/national issues and reality shows such as *MTV Roadies*. Below, I analyze comments relating to these four topics, and demonstrate how Indian-ness is performed on the MTV India Facebook Fan page.

### Performed through Cricket

Gitesh, a 26-year-old software engineer, explained that cricket is his favorite sport, and described it as a sport associated with victory and national pride.

*It's a beautiful feeling to win a match and when you love cricket, India's success is your personal success and vice versa. I have cried when my team was betrayed in Sydney, I rejoiced the 20-20 victory. When its cricket, India is one.*

(Offline interview with Gitesh Das conducted on January 7, 2013).

Likewise, another fan, Manisha, described cricket as an entertaining sport that joins together people from various cultures/castes/religions.

*We appreciate cricket the most more than anywhere in the world, even though it's not our national sport, we love talking and playing the game. I would say Cricket and India cannot be separated, it ties people together.*

(Offline interview with Mainsha Shah conducted on February 2, 2013).

In India, cricket is treated as “no less than a religion” (offline interview conducted with Salabh Singh on February 12, 2013). The popular sport has gone beyond the domain of entertainment and the spirit of sportsmanship, and now embodies a sense of national pride and Indian-ness.

Its role as a unifying agent was witnessed during the International Cricket Council (ICC) Cricket World Cup in 2011, when Team India played and won against the fourteen best cricket teams in the world.

I now examine the text talk posted on the pre-activities of the ICC World Cup 2011, and demonstrate how Indian-ness was performed through cricket text talking.

The following comments were posted to a wall-post that discussed India’s probability of winning the World Cup 2011.

#### Illustration 16

1 Ayesha Sheikh – Even a 300+ score on a batting-friendly pitch is not enough against high-scoring  
2 opponents. India may just succumb to England, New Zealand and West Indies. We need to strategize  
3 and work on our weaknesses. It’s not going to be easy for sure. We have some tough competition  
4 ahead.

5 Salabh Singh – True Ayesha, team India is under immense pressure. Opponent teams are really good,  
6 the chances to win matches against strong opponents like Australia, New Zealand are 50- 50. The  
7 team has to play well and keep the cool to survive in the tournament. Meanwhile, **all my wishes and  
8 luck to meri team India. Go my Indian team get us the trophy...**

9 Sidh Basu – Ayesha you make a point, but we have several advantages this time. India’s  
10 performance at South Africa series was excellent; and since most of the matches are scheduled to  
11 take place in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, the team would be friendly with the pitch conditions. And  
12 don’t forget **our Indian heroes...** best batsmen – Sachin Tendulkar, Sehwag and bowlers like  
13 Sreesanth and others.

14 Ayesha Sheikh – fingers crossed. We have advantages and we have the best players, but I want  
15 them to be in the form throughout. The team has to perform well to win the trophy. The team has to  
16 perform well to show the world that **we are the cricket champions**. The last time we won the

17World Cup, **our national flag was placed ahead amongst all the country's flag**; was such a  
18**proud moment**☺. I want the Indian team to repeat history and **bring the cup back to their**  
19**motherland**. My wishes are with you. **Jai Ho**.  
(September, 2011)

In the illustration, Ayesha posts her concerns and raises her doubt about the Indian team's victory in the World Cup. The comment was responded to by Salabh, who expressed agreement with Ayesha's comment, but wished victory for the team. The use of phrases such as "all my wishes and luck to meri Indian team" (lines 7-8) and "Go my Indian team gets us the trophy" (line 8) show the eagerness and enthusiasm amongst Indian cricket fans for their team to win the tournament. Also, the use of "meri" (which means 'my') indicates expectations from the team and a sense of pride they associate with the team (by saying meri Indian team).

In his comment, Sidh identified cricketers as "Indian heroes" (lines 12), who have achieved titles such as best batsman/bowlers and have placed India at an international level. In response, Ayesha showed a partial agreement to Sidh by agreeing on the quality of players and their playing skills, displaying her affection and praise to the Indian cricket team. The use of the phrases such as "our national flag was placed ahead amongst all the country's flag" (line 17), "proud moment" (line 18) and "bring the cup back to their motherland" (lines 18-19) show her connection to the idea of national identity, patriotism and Indian-ness. She chose to close her comment by saying "jai-ho" (which means 'may there be victory'), an Indian way of showing faith and wishing success to the Indian team (line 19).

The use of such phrases and use of Hin-lish suggest that the fan page is used by cricket fans to perform national identity that imitates their love and respect for team India. This kind of Indian-ness is filled with patriotism ('our national flag was placed ahead amongst all the country's flag') and displays pride (proud moments when the Indian team wins against any other national cricket team), which suggests that the victory of the Indian team is directly related to India's image at the national and international level.

Performed through MTV *Roadies*

MTV *Roadies* is an ongoing reality television show on MTV India, which began in 2003. MTV *Roadies* features contestants who travel to various locations and perform money-based tasks to survive in the game. The popularity of the show can be gauged from the fact that it has successfully completed eight seasons. Since its inception, *Roadies* has been a mix of various discourses; it includes performance, sports and consumer culture. It creates a sense of danger, endurance and adventure amongst viewers (offline interview with Gitesh conducted on February 1, 2013), and has fostered a young, Indian, sporty generation.

A generation of people has been influenced by MTV and its by-products, such as changing fashion trends, use of hing-lish, remix music, etc. In this section of the chapter, I argue that by adapting such products, fans have developed new forms of interaction and terminology that are unique to them. I examine text-talk posted on MTV updates to illustrate how these new forms of terminology/ phrases have led people to perform an identity that reflects Indian-ness.

The following is a discussion posted to a topic on the ‘MTV *Roadies*’ show.

#### Illustration 17

1Sahil Singh-Hi Shweta – I have been watching *Roadies* on and off since season 1. **I think you might**  
**2not have** clearly understood the essence of the show. It is an adrenaline pumping youth oriented show  
**3with aggression and lots of physical tasks involved. Be it pushing a person to stand up against**  
**4bullying or imbibing respect for women, Roadies** does all. India is a young country and shows like  
**5this helps in showcasing who we are and what we can do** for surrounding issues and people.  
6Shweta Salve – Really Sahil...so do we behave like how people behave in *Roadies* ...by using slangs  
**7and abusive language. I wonder if it serves any purpose.**  
8Sahil Singh – it does... it’s a reality show. I think most of us like Palak **for her hardcore Punjabi**  
**9style and slangs. It’s part of her personality....It’s her style.** I know many people who follow her  
**10and try to sound like her. I love when she says ‘Mein tah Roadies banagi, mein sab kar**  
**11sakdiya’....**Anyway that’s not the point here; I would say that you haven’t understood the  
**12treatment yet, MTV Roadies** is about much more – it’s about freedom to express, to perform and to

13win. It is a stripping down of a person until you take them beyond the comfort zone. It is not  
14mindless anger. It's an 'I'll-show-them' focused aggression.

15Shweta Salve – hummm...but...Is abusing necessary?

16Sahil Singh – Not really Shweta, but the program needs TRP's. And in a larger picture, It's about  
17Roadies, it's about **Indian youth**, it's about **us**, and it's about **our passion**. Unlike the societal  
18system, it has no class and caste system, it's an equal platform for **anyone who believes in oneself**.

19Nastasha Ahluwalia – Hello Shweta, I am sure you are aware of '**ABB**'. **If not it means add**  
20'**beep-beep**'. These beeps are added whenever foul language is exchanged on the program. So you  
21don't get to hear them... and if you watch the show like me and Sahil you will definitely get many  
22interesting reasons to watch the show. See the handsome Ranvijay, brave contestants, their zeal to  
23win the game, tasks, their journey, hardships and most important – the mind game. It's fun...

(August, 2011)

In the above illustration, Sahil politely responded to Shweta's comment by explaining about the show "I think you might not have" (lines 1-2) and said that *Roadies* is a *youth oriented* show that defines and identifies them. He argued that the show gives a platform to young people to express themselves and show their skills/talent in public. The use of such phrases such as "Indian youth", "us", "our passion" (line 17), "who we are and what we can do" (line 5) and "anyone who believes in oneself" (lines 18) show youth empowerment and their unity to fight against social odds. The identities represented through these text talks represent a form of Indian-ness, which is about "stand against bullying and imbibing respect for women", and include a set of activities that involve helping others and solving issues.

Moreover, such identities are characterized by new forms of interaction that include the use of mixed Indian languages, terminology and phrases that are unique to the fan page. For example, in his next comment, Sahil argued that the reason for Palak's popularity is her versatile use of language. Her combination of Punjabi, Hindi and English makes her stand out. Punjabi is a language spoken by a particular ethnic group that belongs to northern India. They speak Punjabi, which often includes Punjabi slang and other terms that may sound alarming to people from other ethnic groups (including the pitch and tempo used to speak the language, which is unusually high). Others may or may not appreciate the slang, tempo or pitch used in the spoken language. In the above instance, the use of phrases such as "it's her style", "it's part of her personality" and "her hardcore Punjabi style and slangs" (lines 8- 9)

show that people like her and her use of language. As an example, Sahil wrote Palak's most famous statement: "Mein tah Roadies banagi, mein sab kar sak diya" (lines 10-11), which means that she wants to be a *Roadie* because she believes that girls can be equally daring and adventurous. This imitates a particular kind of national identity that is specific to Indian youth, especially girls, who represent themselves as brave, bold, fearless, trend-setting Indian women.

Furthermore, the participants' use of self-made abbreviations (lines 19-20) such as, 'ABB' (an abbreviation which means 'adds beep-beep') and specific language (a mix of Punjabi and English) demonstrate that the fan page has become a specific space to perform activities of their interests. These new/unique forms of phrases, words, symbols etc are much practiced on the fan page and will be discussed in Chapter 6.

This form of online identities (Indian-ness performed through MTV *Roadies* is different from the national identity performed by cricket fans, as in the latter, a group of fans use the platform to show their love and respect to cricket and country, whereas, in the former, they use it as a site to represent a youthful identity that has freedom to express themselves. This suggests that the fan page has been appropriated for different activities performed by different sets of people, who not only use the site to perform specific activities, but also to show unity and practice nationhood through different means.

### Performed through Bollywood films

Scholars have argued that Indian cinema is an important and visible component of Indian culture and identity (Therwhat, 2010). In India, films are often based on social/national problems such as corruption in politics and games, brain drain etc.

Popular Indian cinema in Hindi (Bollywood) constitutes an interesting area of study because of its key role in the creation of national identity and performing Indian-ness (Therwhat, 2010). In her offline interview, Rita explained that she connected to the Indian movie *CDI*

(*Chak De India – Come on India*) because it had elements of sports, patriotism, oneness, etc. *Chak De India* (CDI, which means ‘Come on India’) is a non-fiction film based on the national sport – hockey. The film’s lead is SRK (Sharukh Khan), who heads the India women’s national field hockey team and wins the title of ‘International Hockey Tournament’.

*For a country like India with its national game as hockey, this movie was long due. I have never played or watched or been interested in hockey! But this movie does not need that to touch your heart. All it needs is some patriotism, humility and goodness in your heart.*

(Offline interview with Rita conducted on January 4, 2013)

Like Rita, fans support, criticize and communicate their viewpoints on movies. By examining examples of text talk on films, I now examine how fans perform Indian-ness by commenting on films on the fan page.

Below are comments posted to the film *Slumdog Millionaire*. The film features a Mumbai teenager who has grown up in the slums, but who manages to win twenty million rupees on *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, the Indian version of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*

### Illustration 18

1 Sameer Singh – Criticism aside, *Slumdog Millionaire* is a hard-hitting film for an average Indian. We  
2 always knew the truth, but couldn’t care less. Danny Boyle has just shown us the mirror. And yes we  
3 are embarrassed. The movie is important for the people of India. It makes you feel sorry for yourself,  
4 for the feeling of helplessness. **We are proud to be Indians** but don’t know how to help other  
5 Indians struggling with everyday problems. Each one of us has been blessed with abilities, but most  
6 of us tend to leave it unexplored. All that we need is the **‘WILL to SHARE’**. So the next time you  
7 see street children, don’t limit yourself to that leftover food or cold drink. Perhaps small,  
8 neighborhood groups for a start...Let’s try getting them to schools, RWAs can create small shelters  
9 and fund their food. Individuals can contribute clothes. Let’s start from somewhere...**they are our**  
10 **own people, they are our future.**

11 Kirti Seth – Sameer **you make a point** and we should help others to create a stronger future. But  
12 deep inside, **I feel terribly hurt** after watching the film. A foreign **film maker should be sensitive**  
13 not to project the negative aspect of the country he does not belong to. Will Danny go to the  
14 queen’s palace to make a movie on unethical and immoral lifestyle of the royals? Such a movie  
15 would probably bring those more awards. But, will he get himself do it, and will his countrymen  
16 and establishment allow?

17 **India has rich cultures, it’s a unity in diversity, it has so many ethnic groups, and there are so**  
18 **many festivals...I don’t understand why slums?**

19 Sameer Singh – Relax Kirti...did you by any chance see Boyle's film *Trainspotting*? It was based  
20 on drug scene in Edinburgh, Scotland? No need to be defensive. Boyle is not trying to paint all of  
21 India one colour. He has an artistic interest in telling the stories of those living on the edge of  
22 society, whatever country they are from.

23 Pallavi Rathi – Interesting discussion...Kirti/Sameer...Kirti...I’d like to note that though this film  
24 the filmmaker has shown poverty and painted a picture of India which is objectionable to you and  
25 my other friends. But I don’t see anything wrong here, it’s another commercial film with a basic  
26 plot line, and the truth is, this is what makes the film mainstream and hit screens around the world.  
27 The impact of this is huge – people from all over the world can see the underbelly of Mumbai slum  
28 life, and this will allow a space for the unheard voices. **India is not only about successful people**  
29 **like Ambani’s, Birlas, it is also about the middle class and people living in the slums too.** Even  
30 if the film was not your cup of tea, it highlighted various aspect of the society that are existent and  
31 needs attention. And coming to the artistic side, movie did wonders...it won 8 Oscars award...and  
32 those awards were for the best direction, best screenplay and best acting.

(November, 2011)

Posted comments discussed whether the film portrayed India in a negative light. While a few supported the film and discussed its artistic style, Oscar nominations, etc. others felt that the movie painted India as an ill-trodden country (slums, poor people etc). Moreover, Kirti’s disappointment with the film shows her concern about the awkward projection of *India’s image abroad*. Her partial agreement, ‘you make a point’ (line 11) and disagreement, ‘I feel terribly hurt’ (line 12) indicate her possessiveness towards painting India in a negative film in an international film. She argued that India has a lot of *positive sides*, such as *various cultures, ethnic groups, festivals* etc, which could have displayed India in a much better way.

Her disagreement stems from the fact that there is a larger picture than that shown in the film. For example, in her comment she highlighted the diversity of Indian culture, ‘India has



rich cultures, it's a unity in diversity, it has so many ethnic groups, and there are so many festivals' (lines 17-18); and her defensiveness against the negative aspect of the film shows that she is not open to dispute. This kind of performance imitates an association and a sense of belongingness for her country.

On the fan page, fans share their views and discuss how they can make India a better nation, for example, Sameer redefined the idea of national identity and explained that it is through helping "our own people" that the country can progress. His use of words such as 'we are proud to be Indians, but don't know how to help other Indians' (line 4), 'WILL to SHARE' (line 6), 'they are our own people, they are our future' (lines 9-10) shows connections to his national identity and a sense of oneness and equality with his fellow Indians. Likewise, in her comment, Pallavi affirmed that oneness and equality are important ways to bring stability to the country. Her statement '*India is not only about successful people like Ambani's, Birlas, it is also about the middle class and people living in the slums too*' (lines 28-29) displays a sense of inclusiveness (as they are all Indian and a part of India) amongst people, suggesting that this form of Indianism imitates equality and demands unity amongst the Indians to solve social problems.

### Performed though social/national issues – Hazzare's campaign

Similar to Bollywood films, social/national issues are routinely posted on the fan page and generate the most number of comments (table 4.1 in chapter 4). People discuss and dissect topics of social/national importance, and express their opinions and ideas. I argue that such opinions/views expressed in the form of comments voice Indian-ness and a connection with a national identity. I now examine text talk on Hazzare's campaign, and demonstrate how fans perform Indian-ness by posting comments on social/national issues.

Hazzare's campaign was launched to pass the anti-corruption bill in the House of Parliament, and introduce a more flexible and transparent system for keeping an eye on public money. The campaign was led by Anna Hazzare, a social activist, who went on hunger strike to influence the government to pass the bill and create a new law. The

movement was supported by thousands of people, who protested through online and offline campaigns (offline interview with Ram Sharma conducted on February 1, 2013).

Below are comments posted to the topic that discussed whether Hazzare's campaign was really required to pass the anti-corruption bill in the Indian parliament?

In her comment, Natasha initiated the discussion, and showed her discontent with the current situation and belief that campaigns aren't the right way to get the bill passed.

### Illustration 19

1Natasha Khurana – You know Saransh...I don't know if this helps...I mean **people on the streets**  
2against corruption...**revolution**...is it practical. In a country where corruption has become a way of  
3life and 3source of livelihood for people from all walks of life, thinking that just a bill would  
4magically cure all ills is just ridiculous. Somehow I don't think that will work. We need something  
5that could be more transparent and flexible.

6Ritesh Khan – Well Natasha you need to look at the larger picture. People joining their voices to  
7Anna's call don't belong to one caste or class. They are all only **Indians today, rising together**  
8**against corruption**, as they once did against slavery. It's heartening to see that the **great Indian**  
9**unity** in diversity is still alive. It may not be visible all the time. But thankfully, it revives and gets  
10charged up every time there is need. I am also delighted to see **Indian youth being concerned**  
11**enough for their country** to even pull themselves away from their laptops and mobiles to really  
12come up on the streets.

13Akash Tusi – **Team Anna deserves a salute** not just for their victory, but also for the way they  
14managed such huge crowd. I'm glad that finally Government has done what they should have done  
15several days ago...Let's just hope the Government would behave more sensibly now. And I also  
16hope that the fervour of unity and patriotism that this Aandolan has revived won't slip back into  
17slumber again. Long live our unity!

(November, 2011)

In his comment, Ritesh makes a reference to slavery and explains the importance of campaigning. The use of phrases such as 'Indians today, rising together against corruption' (lines 7-8), 'great Indian unity' (lines 8-9) and 'Indian youth being concerned enough for their country' (lines 10-11) show a sense of unity and oneness – of people standing up for a

good cause. Moreover, phrases such as ‘people on streets’ (lines 1-2) and ‘revolution’ (line 2) show the momentum of the movement in support of Hazzare’s campaign.

In response, Akash congratulated the campaigners on the success of Hazzare’s campaign. “Team Anna deserves a salute” (line 13) and praised Indians for their unity and patriotism shown during the *Aandolan* (revolution).

Similar to cricket and Bollywood, this form of Indian-ness imitates unity, patriotism and oneness. This form of identity performance suggests participants’ connection to Indianism that is performed through *Aandolan*, where people unite to fight against society's ills like corruption.

The above illustrations suggest that the fan page is used as a platform to perform friendliness through creating connections and performing disagreements. It is also used as a site for knowledge sharing and performing national identity in various forms. For example, the last section demonstrates how the idea of national identity is redefined as per the individual and people around. In the case of cricket, films and social/national issues, the identity performance centers on oneness, unity and patriotism, where as in the case of MTV *Roadies*, the performance of identity is youthful and claims equality in gender. These different kinds of identity formation on the fan page have transformed the site into a space for specific activities that are particular to Indian youth. However, these various forms of identity formation do not suggest that the identities produced on the fan page are ideal or are performed in relation to offline self. Therefore, my next section discusses the role of ‘stigma’ (Goffman, 1959) in performing identities and explains how performed identities may result from a combination of ideal and offline self.

## 5.4 The role of stigma

In offline social situations, people tend to know who is present to witness a social act. This is not often the case in mediated environments, where users are invisible and access is asynchronous. In such environments, people often want to appear more competent in what

they do and how they present themselves to others. For instance, in an offline interview, Salabh stated that fans might use private messaging rather than commenting when communicating an opinion/idea so as to hide a disagreement or an unpopular view from public scrutiny (offline interview with Salabh conducted on February 4, 2013).

On public sites, we tend to constrain the “kinds of images we claim and [...] regulate our impressions to compensate for our current social image” (Leary, 1996, p135). People tend to conceal their performances because they either want to avoid awkwardness /embarrassment in public spheres, or to create an impression that does not contradict previous performances. Therefore, self-presentation is affected by our avoidance of embarrassment, i.e. an embarrassing incident that might be connected to social stigma, and that might paint an individual’s identity in a specific manner (Goffman, 1959). For example, in online spaces, people tend to avoid commenting on someone’s religion/ethnic values, as doing so may suggest they are intolerant of others’ cultures/ethnic values.

Goffman defines stigma as the devaluation of an individual based on societal norms that govern what is acceptable or not acceptable, the denigration of those who are different or perceived not to reflect the values of the particular society in which they live, or those who encounter difficulties in obtaining a respected status amongst a group of people. Stigma is clearly a ‘gap’ between how others look and behave, and how we think they should look and behave. It is created when people fail to meet stereotyped expectations set by others. According to Goffman, there are three types of stigma. The first type of stigma is ‘abominations of the body’, which refers to ‘physical deformities’. This type of stigma is visible. Secondly, there are ‘blemishes of individual character’; these can take the form dishonesty, unemployment and addiction. Finally, there is tribal stigma – of race, nation and religion (Goffman, 1963, p10).

On the fan page, identities are performed in an online space, where fans practice the last two types of stigma. These stigmas are also called discreditable stigmas, as they involve people concealing/hiding information so that their stigma remains undiscovered. In such scenarios, fans choose to ‘blend in’ rather than disclose such information and thus be exposed to

possible stigmatization. However, on the fan page, the ‘blending in’ process is performed differently. Fans post partial disagreements in the form of comments, and use ‘personal message’ applications to post severe disagreements (offline interviews with Salabh, Lalit and Rita conducted on February 4 and 12, 2013).

In his offline interview, Salabh explained that he often receives partial/polite disagreements through the comments, and serious disagreements through inbox messages. For instance, Salabh posted the following comment on the fan page and was responded with a partial agreement through a public comment and total disagreement through a personal message.

**Salabh Singh**- Virendra Sehwag is my favorite. He is an absolute genius, his two-hundred runs in 20-20ty, century in ODI against England has made him stand out.  
(November, 2011)

His comment was responded by another comment.

**Kabir Singh**- **I may be wrong**, but I have found his performance inconsistent. He was a good player and is trying hard to perform well in the coming matches.  
(November, 2011)

He also received a response in his profile’s inbox, i.e. personal message:

You are **completely wrong** Salabh. **‘He is good’** (= =) - that is **a complete bullshit**. **I had to write you** to inform you about his performance in last few matches. Since 2003, his form has been inconsistent. He only has one century and 3 fifties that too against minnows – Bangladesh and Zimbabwe and one against Pakistan in 22 matches. He never secured any century in ODI’s and couldn’t participate in ODI tour in Pakistan in early 2006 because of his shoulder injury. And **I don’t hesitate** to say he was one of those players who are known for his long span of poor performance.

**I don't want to sound rude and odd** by mentioning that he is arrogant and lazy. He was a good batsman, but not anymore. His current performance sucks and he is not good at batting or vice versa.

**I couldn't write it there, but I wanted to tell you** that cricket is played more in mind than in the field, in his case; he neither plays in mind nor in the field.

(Via personal message to Salabh's profile on November, 2012)

The message received in his inbox shows a complete disagreement; the respondent used his name 'you are completely wrong Salabh' and expresses his discontent with Salabh's view. He raised his concern through stating 'he is good' and using an emoticon (= =), which is often used on the fan page to show or raise a doubt.

The use of phrases such as "completely wrong", "complete bullshit" and "I don't hesitate" show a strong disagreement with the existing view. Moreover, the use of the phrase "I had to write you" shows urgency on the part of poster in responding to the user. His use of the phrases "I don't want to sound rude and odd" and "I couldn't write it there, but I wanted to tell you" show serious disagreement with a popularly held view, as the respondent believed that other fans, who could be Sehwag supporters (including Salabh), might feel offended by his opinion.

This suggests that the management of information (posting profound disagreement in messages and agreements/partial disagreements as comments) can lead to a double life, as in the above case. To specific people such as Salabh, the stigma would be known, and the responder would be able to share his dislikes/disagreements with the poster, whereas in front of others he could hide his stigma and perform an ideal self. For example, publicly, the responder posted a comment in a more polite/partial disagreement with the views posted by Salabh. He posted the phrase "I may be wrong", which suggests that he does not want to give, but wants to share his views with others. The change in how he expresses his views is due to the performance created on a public platform, which is open to public view. This

suggests that performing selves in front of public involve a combination of ideal and offline identity as per the norms/standards set up by society.

In general, it can be assumed that public displays of an unpreferred (unwanted) identity are avoided on Facebook because it may damage an individual's identity. Fans perform ideal selves to create self-presentations, and by doing so they represent themselves as being part of a group that share more or less the same perspective/opinion.

On the fan page, fans try to act out an identity that is close to others' expectations, and to the social standards set up a group/society. However, the performance is not only derived from an ideal self in order to please others, but also from the individual's perspectives, ideas and opinions. An individual might conceal/hide some important elements of their identity, but that could be equally possible in unmediated environments, where people try to perform ideal selves to be on a par with societal standards/norms. Therefore, it can be argued that the online self contains a partial ideal self, which is influenced both by society/ one's social group, and by offline activities that embody his/her personalized opinions.

## 5.5 Performing identities in day to day life on the MTV India Facebook fan page

Facebook performances are given, not given off; i.e. offline gestures such as blushes, eye twitches or even emotions, which form an impression of an individual, are not available in online spaces. The creator of the message has both time and the tools to create the desired impression and use the right techniques, such as providing accurate information and appropriate length, pacing and tone to create the desired impact on others or groups of people. However, identity-related texts, images, videos, etc. serve as important cues to identity formation on the fan page. For instance, liking and sharing a picture/video can inform others of an individual's likes and dislikes. Likewise, tagging an individual's name in a video, using status updates and posting comments suggest that the presented activity might interest the individual, thereby informing his likes/dislikes.

The performative aspect of Facebook relies on the use of identity pegs (Geidner, Flook and Bell, 2007). Statements given in the form of comments/status updates/liking/sharing activities inform about peoples' interests and preferences and create online personas on the fan page. Status updates and comments posted on topics often encourage the individual to adopt an identity (friendly, humorous, kind, sympathetic etc.). These activities provide a relational context, indicate appropriate behaviors and set the space for identity creation.

Identity creation on the fan page can be best understood through Meyrowitz's (1985) theoretical framework, which analyses interactions that take place in mediated and physical settings. He combines situational geography and medium theory to explain how identities are influenced by social situations (physical settings) and are created and recreated in a mediated setting. He argues that these social situations can be best understood as 'information systems', which create new patterns of communication through mediated settings. For example, when two friends communicate over the telephone, they are occupied in more than one kind of social situation and, despite the physical distance; the 'shared mediated-social situation' brings them closer. Likewise, on the fan page, each like, share, comment and status update gives rise to a new situation and influences people to react in a certain way. A comment posted on a specific topic might move the discussion on to a different topic from the one previously discussed in the wall post, suggesting that the introduction of new patterns of information flow (the use of electronic media) gives rise to new social situations, which call for new actions and social meanings.

In routine activities, fans create an identity by acting according to different social situations and creating and recreating social meanings. For example, in the following instance, identities are created and recreated through interaction between two people.

1Ram Singh: Golmal was super hilarious. I loved every bit of the movie. It was so  
2entertaining.

3Raj Chauhan: **Really?** I though you liked sensible movies.



4Ram Singh: No. I like all kind of movies.

5Raj Chauhan: **Great, that you liked the movie.** Everyone likes entertaining movies.

6Ram Singh: Yes, I liked the movie. But I am always on for sensible stuff too.

(August, 2011)

In the above instance, Ram commented that he liked *Golmaal* (an Indian film directed by Rohit Shetty in 2008) because it was entertaining. Raj responded with a query ‘Really?’ (line 3), as he assumed that Ram likes sensible movies. In his next comment, Ram explained that he likes all kind of movies. Finally, Raj acknowledged his comment by saying ‘Great, that you liked the movie’ (line 5). This illustration suggests respondents introduce new social situations and call for new actions and interpretation of social meanings.

In an effort to create a good impression, people tend to look around, see how others are acting in that context, and choose their performance accordingly. Depending on how they are received, people alter their behavior to increase the likelihood of being perceived as they intend. Goffman (1959) calls this behavior ‘impression management’, and explains how ‘presentation of self’ works in everyday life. He argues that people ritually seek to manage the impressions they give by negotiating, expressing and adjusting the signals that they explicitly and implicitly present. Goffman (1959) explains the ways through which people act and react in social situations, and how they use body language, speech and other people to convey an impression. However, in online spaces such as on Facebook fan pages there are no bodies; people engage in explicit acts to express their liking/disliking by liking, sharing and commenting on topics discussed on a fan page and create an identity that reflects their interests and preferences.

Similar to previous studies (such as Jenny Sunden’s, 2003- online game playing), the fan page involves active participation of fans, who, by posting comments/status updates, reflect an identity that is communicated as a preference/interest. Sunden’s (2003) research focused on multiplayer online role-playing games, known as MUDs (a.k.a. Multi-user Domain or Multi-User Dungeon), and she argued that the online identity of an individual is produced

merely through text. From the chairs and tables in a room to the fashion accessories, participants textually produce every aspect of the imagined world.

In unmediated/offline environments, it is easy to interact with bodies, and the roles they play are often taken for granted. By locating an individual in time and space, the body signals cues, including a person's identity, gender, race and age. Through attitudes and mannerisms, bodies convey a wide variety of attitudes, emotions, affiliations and identity information. But this is not the case in mediated settings; bodies do not exist in the traditional sense, but their representations, mannerisms and attitudes are fundamentally influenced by their embodied experience. In her study, Sunden found that participants had no face-to-face interactions with one another, and that the norms in MUDs did not require participants to model their online presentations as an accurate recreation of their offline selves. As such, performed bodies in MUDs might not represent or define the exact offline persona of an individual, but such deviations are not considered deceptive in MUDs since these environments encourage identity play, and participants do not assume that the performed identities are a sincere representation of the individual's unmediated body.

In contrast, for Indian youths, SNSs are not distinct online spaces in which people perform role play/imaginative play. The performances, interactions, connections and context of social network sites are tightly intertwined with other aspects of participants' lives (their likes, interests and preferences), which suggest that most of their online performances are closely connected to their offline selves. I detail offline interactions with participants in Chapter 6 and demonstrate how fans move between online and offline worlds and participate through fan activities that are often influenced by or linked to unmediated encounters. The performances that take place on the fan page are not isolated, but are conscious acts that rely on their offline experiences/online activities involving people with whom they might or might not share a connection.

Although some scholars suggest that identities created through the Internet tend to involve the creation of fictional characters unconnected to embodied reality (e.g. Turkle, 1995), this was not something evident in my study. Some participants depicted an idealized self, but few

generated self-representations that were completely disconnected from their everyday lived experiences (for instance, one offline interviewee narrated an incident where she had to act as though she knew a particular famous foreigner rock star, about whom she had no information). More often, these participants seek to represent themselves in the most positive light, showing and assuring their association with a group/standard set up by their society.

At this stage, it can be argued that fans use technological tools to articulate an identity that shows them in a positive light. On the fan page, this identity creation is based on the individual's personality and self-reflexive identity production (i.e. an identity created by performing activities based on shared preferences/interests), which includes a combination of ideal/embodied experiences that help them to create connections and form a community in which to exchange ideas/opinions on shared interests/preferences and perform online/offline friending.

## 5.6 Creation of an online community

The notion of 'community' has often been caught between concrete social offline connections and imagined groups of people that are perceived to be similar. The Internet has allowed people to know each other and create contacts without meeting in person.

Boase and Wellman (2006) argue that online and offline contacts extend and enhance each other, rather than replace each other. This has been the case in most modern forms of electronic media (such as e-mail or instant messages), including social media, which allow people to stay in touch with existing or newly formed connections.

Facebook fan pages allow people to interact, inter-connect and exchange likes/preferences/interests with others (Facebook friends) in the form of fan activities (like, share and comment). Facebook interactions enable people to form close connections and perform a sense of solidarity, leading to the formation of imagined communities that may share preferences/interests. The term 'imagined community' was coined by Benedict Anderson (1989), who proposes that shared practices provide a common context within which communities could be imagined. He explains that a community is a construct based on

the ways through which the members of community imagine their relation to each other, and provide a face to the community that explains their internal workings. He focuses on developing societies, such as Indonesia, and explained how a common identity is built and communities are constructed around ethnic groups. Likewise, the MTV India Facebook fan page can be perceived as an imagined community created by its participants with an intention of exchanging views/opinions on shared interests and forming connections.

Moreover, MTV fan page's imagined community has a few things certain to it that makes the fan page different from other fan pages. The qualities are summarized as follows.

- Specific language and styles

In general, Facebook propagates the use of at-the-rate (@) to tag friends in pictures, videos and weblogs. Thus, if one is interested in sharing content with specific friends, one can tag friends in the shared content and so communicate the message. Anderson (1983) argues that a key element of community formation is the development of a common language. For example, every country has developed protocols for answering phone calls, such as 'Hello/Goodbye' in North America, 'Moshi Moshi' in Japan, etc. – on the fan page there is 'Namaste', the term used by participants to greet one another when starting an interaction.

On the fan page, fans use a mix of Hindi and English. For example, opening phrases such as 'Namaste friends' and 'Hello mitro' (friends) are routinely used by fans to greet one another. Fans also use specific symbols to communicate with the MTV fan page's community, such as happy smileys (☺)/sad smileys (☹) are used to communicate a victory/failure in a cricket match. Often four smileys (☺☺☺☺) and six smileys (☺☺☺☺☺☺) are posted to communicate sixes (six runs at a time) and fours (four runs at a time) in a cricket match. In addition, back-channel vocalizations, such as 'Hmmm', 'Ahhhan' and 'Yay', are commonly used by fans as 'listening' or 'non-interrupting' signals.

In addition to language conventions, fans also use the tag feature to communicate their viewpoints/opinions of specific users. For instance, when a user responds to another fan's message, he/she often uses first names of the previous poster (e.g. 'Harish') followed by the comment. For instance, in the following illustration, Sarika responds to a previous poster using his name:

“@harish you are right. The movie was released yesterday”.

Harish then responds back to Sarika

“@sarika, I thought so, since most of them release on Fridays”.

The use of hashtags, Hing-lish and emoticons (used to perform text talk) suggest that participants have adopted and extended their own unique linguistic conventions, facilitating productive conversations, allowing an individual to identify his/herself as part of the fan page's community.

- Temporality

Temporality is defined as the presence of 'homogenous' time in which a community exists, i.e. a consciousness of a shared temporal dimension that allows people to exchange ideas that are very much related to the current topics. The MTV India Facebook fan page can be argued as a site, which shares/discusses current topics such as social/national issues that allow people to exchange ideas and raise public awareness. For example, Hazzare's campaign (discussed in the commenting activity) and wall posts condemning terrorism or corruption illustrate that the fan page has been appropriated as a site to perform activities relating to day-to-topics that help raise a voice against the ills of the society. In addition to this, entertaining topics relating to cricket, Bollywood and MTV programs etc, are routinely posted on the fan page, which suggest that the fan page caters to Indian youths' activities and preferences.

- Privacy

Facebook fan pages are public spaces. This means that any information (wall posts, comments, etc) on a fan page is available for a public view. On the MTV India Facebook fan page, participants create connections on the basis of shared interest, which suggest that any interaction/connection is based on a common preference. This implies that any associations on the fan page are informed by a common link, reducing the chances of any potential threats posed by others. Alternatively, by using Facebook privacy settings, fan page's administrators may delete any comments containing abusive language and block users to ensure that the site is used for interactions, discussions and creating connections. In addition to this, a fan may choose to block (using his/her profile's privacy settings) another fan based on his/her activities or possible threats posed by him/her.

This suggests that the fan page and its users are aware of online threats and privacy settings, thereby creating a community based on association and connection.

- Generating a sense of online community

A wall post/comment posted on the fan page is available for public view, which means everyone can choose to connect to everyone else based on their shared interests. Also, individuals who are interested in one area are also likely to be interested in another, creating a space for many intergroup connections. Signalling is a common practice in SNSs, which influence users to like/share/comment on topics that are liked/shared/commented on by others. As discussed earlier, Egbarak and Ekstrom (2011) lists two possible reasons for such behavior: a) people express and observe each other – allowing signalling (suggesting people what to like); b) often, people like/share/comment on topics liked, shared and commented by others to project an online identity that is driven by factors like respect, popularity and esteem.

In previous research on online communities (e.g. Wellman et al., 1996), scholars argue that people join and continue to participate in online communities to access the information on various issues/topics. In his online interview, Niketan said that the fan page works as a knowledge bank for its participants, allowing continuous exchange of information/facts between people. For example, during a cricket match, fans exchange information and provide input as per their knowledge/experience.

In addition to offering information, online communities provide emotional connections between the participants. According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), having shared emotional connections relates to sharing common spaces (such as the fan page), spending time together and having similar experiences. For example, in her offline interview, Rita, a housewife, explained how she connected to Seema - another housewife, because they share similar offline lives. They interacted on the fan page and developed a friendship on the basis of common interests and practices. During the study, I found that humorous exchanges (more than 5% of all messages) are also important in developing social connections between the participants. For instance, Baym (1995) illustrates how humor creates group identity and solidarity. Below is an example of humorous comment, posted by Raj:

*Raj Sharma: I might be a victim soon. Getting married ☹️. Anyway, someone has said that a successful man is one who makes more money than his wife can spend. A successful woman is one who can find such a man.*

(July, 2011)

The example above illustrates that the fan page can be seen as an imagined community that is both collective and personal. It is collective in the sense that all posts/comments belong to the fan page and are posted by administrators/participants, who understand the fan page's norms, language, techniques and governing structures, creating a particular 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991:98); a community of practice that has developed through engagement in routine activities and everyday practices. Moreover, all comments/posts are available for public

viewing – except for a small number of spam messages that are deleted by admin. Yet the community on the fan page is also personal, because participants imagine that they are posting to specific individuals on particular topics.

Therefore, the fan page can be argued to be an ‘online -imagined’ community that allows participants to interact and perform group communication and are based on sociable and mutually supportive relations created through interaction based on common interests and practices. My next chapter paints a number of portraits drawn from offline interviews and argues that along with an ‘online-imagined’ community, the fan page can be seen as a ‘place’ for particular activities that are specific to Indian youth.



## Chapter 6: Participants and their use of space

The aim of this chapter is to explore the day-to-day activities and routine practices of participants to find out a) how the fan page has become a space for various activities, b) how the space has become a particular place over time, and c) how place-making has created a sense of place. Furthermore, I argue and illustrate that an online identity is closely connected to people's offline life and experiences. To do this, I will draw extensively on offline interviews conducted as part of my study.

I conducted 14 interviews (12 one-to-one and one group of two). While I draw on all 14 interviewees, four have been selected for in-depth discussion and analysis (Salabh, Raina, Rita and Ram) to illustrate particular kinds of practices that take place on the fan page; and one for ethnographic thick description (Rita) to clearly illustrate the relationship between online and offline lives.

I chose to create portraits of these four fans because:

- a) They agreed to both online/offline interviews – While I interviewed most of the participants online, few were selected for offline interviews. These are the participants who agreed for both online and offline interviews. Offline interviews were held in public places in New Delhi.
- b) These participants were active on the fan page throughout 2011, which is when I conducted my observation on the MTV India Facebook fan page. During this period, the above participants performed routine activities on the fan page, either by commenting or sharing a status update, as illustrated in the text talk extract below:

1Salabh: I am amazed by the score rate. India played well. @Ritesh, **you asked me last week**, If

2India would win and I said yes. India won.

3Ritesh: @Salabh, yes we won. I wasn't to sure about the victory. But, you were right.

(November, 2011)

4Rita : Where is everyone, I could only see Rajat and Parul , we are waiting for others.

5Parul: I am here.

6Rajat: I am here, Seema got late. **She was late yesterday too.**

7Parul: Her son is not well.

8Rita: Is it

(August, 2011)

In the above illustration, the use of phrases such as ‘you asked me last week’ (line 1) and ‘She was late yesterday too’ (line 6) show that these participants routinely participated on the fan page.

c) Performed fan activities relating to their interests and created connections – Initially, when I started interacting with the participants, I met Salabh. Salabh, a cricket fan joined the fan page to meet like-minded people and create connections. His interests and willingness to connect with people led me to interview him in offline life. Likewise, Raina, the MTV Roadies fan joined the fan page to interact with existing offline contacts. Information gained through Raina provided insights about how similar /dis-similar online and offline lives are. Rita, the house maker, was particularly interested in discussing activities relating to Bollywood. Her practices on the fan page reflect how the fan page has become a space for particular activities that are particular to her. Ram, an NGO worker uses the fan page as a platform to support a social crusade. Gaining information from the above participants helped understanding the kinds of users and their activities on the fan page.

d) Provided useful insights about the fan page and others that they have befriended through the fan page – These four participants used the fan page to perform activities relating to their interests and to create connections with others that are interested in their kind of activities. For instance, Raina uses the fan page to perform activities relating to the reality show, *MTV Roadies*. Through the fan page, she interacts with and connects to people who are interested in topics such as *MTV Roadies* contestants, eliminations etc. Likewise, Ram, the NGO worker uses the fan page to connect to

people who are interested in voicing opinions on social/national issues. Interacting with them helped understanding the kinds association formed through the fan page.

In addition, these participants represented the sampled population as it included people from a range of castes, creeds and cultures who worked in different occupations and lived in different social settings.

Below, I introduce these interviewees and detail their relation and association to the fan page.

### The commentary guy - Salabh Singh

Salabh is pursuing a Commerce degree at Hindu College, Delhi University. He started studying when he was precisely 3.5 years old and remembers most things from his childhood. For instance, he remembers missing mathematics classes to play a block tournament (a cricket match played between kids from neighbouring communities) with his childhood friends, missing evening tuition to watch cricket matches at his friend's place, and spending his pocket money on an Indian cricket team t-shirt.

Salabh has always been a huge fan of Indian cricket. He currently plays cricket for his college team, and has been involved in many small interstate cricket tournaments. In his spare time, he either likes to read his course books or watch matches on television, which he records and keep in an archive of his favourite matches. But he considers television to be a passive, sit-back medium that only allows you to receive information. He stated:

*Watching a repeat telecast or highlight is fine, but watching a live cricket match on television can be boring. You need people around to cheer, to tell who performed well and how the team played.*

People may gather in groups in clubs/pubs and cheer on the team and communicate viewpoints, but this may not always be possible as they might be busy or physically distant.

In such situations, fan pages may serve as a platform to bring people to one space and perform sociality through Facebook liking, sharing and commenting activity.

Salabh stated that he was introduced to the fan page through his profile's suggestion list that showed 88 friends from his friend list were following the MTV India's Facebook fan page. He joined the fan page and became a fan; but it was his journey from being just a fan to becoming a participant that is of particular interest.

*I joined the fan page as a routine reader, but initiated commenting after watching some useful content. Initially, I interacted with strangers, but later I made some friends who were regular on the fan page and discussed cricket.*

Salabh started interacting with people based on his interest, and began developing connections with them. His posted comments are amongst the most liked/commented upon on the fan page, and he is popularly called the 'commentary guy' on the fan page. For example, the following comment was posted in response to a previous comment posted by Rahul.

*Sehwag was good, but wasn't in form. We won, but we could have done better. Thanks to Salabh for descriptive updates, I could figure out what's happening without seeing it.*

*(Posted by Rahul, September, 2011)*

Salabh takes pride in his commentary-guy tag, and interacts with other participants through turn-taking.

*Whenever you post a comment, there is always a curiosity to go back and see how many have responded back to your comment, or how many have liked it.*

Fans post responses to comments with an expectation of feedback from the original contributor. In the case of serious disagreements, fans continue or end an interaction based on the behaviour and language adopted by the other individual, which is often termed as

‘face-value’ on the fan page. Face value can be defined as a construct through which participants represent their online personas to others. In his interview, Salabh stated that fans earn face value through the kinds of comments and responses they post on the fan page. Comments that contain information, humour, facts etc build up the face value of an individual, whereas the use of abusive language or intolerance of other identities/groups can erode an individual’s face value.

Face value is also determined through the construction of comments that include specific styles and particular language. For instance, Salabh builds his face value on the fan page through exploiting his expertise in cricket. His posts/comments employ Hing-lish language and emoticons that are specific to the fan page and its users. For example, the following comment taken from the fan page highlights how ‘face value’ is built through the use of fan page’s symbols and language:

*Despite the bad weather, both teams played well. Dhoni’s three chakkas (3X ☺☺☺☺☺) and Kohli’s century were the highlight. Australians were in form, but luck favoured us. Never mind, next match would be exciting. Stay tuned ☺.*

(Posted by Salabh, December 2011)

Emoticons are used to present scores (3X☺☺☺☺☺) and the use of Hing-lish – three chakkas (3 times 6 runs) indicates a desire to inform/entertain other like-minded people. The fan page’s symbols and language are often used to perform textual commentary. On the fan page, textual commentary is performed at various stages, which can be categorized as pre-match, during-match and post-match activities. In the pre-match activities, administrators and fans post updates on pre-event activities like practice matches, any important information related to the match and players, etc. On the match day, fans gather on the fan page and perform ‘textual-commentary’ by posting recent updates such as scores, run rate etc. As Salabh explains:

*Latika posts, 'Warney runs out', I post 'commercial break – Abhi aaya (be back)', Hitakhsi posts, 'match shuru (begins)', Raman posts, 'look at the look of the new batsman, he thinks he is going to make it, 😊 (happy smiley) Bhaji is bowling.... He will be soon off the pitch' and then Raman posts, '😞 (sad smiley)... (pause) here is the first four by the new batsman. Bhaji isn't in form today, Srinath ko bowl karvao ('we need Srinath to bowl').*

Emoticons are often used to represent sixes/fours or an emotion, such as sadness or happiness. For instance, the boundaries (four runs/six runs) are written as happy smileys (😊😊😊😊😊 for a six or 😊😊😊😊 for a four); when an Indian player is out, fans post a sad smiley (😞), and when an opponent is out, fans use a happy smiley with a heart shape (😊 <3).

This suggests that face value on the fan page is created by adding useful elements, such as using the fan page's language and style and avoiding serious disagreements, use of foul language etc. Salabh's use of the fan page, his efforts in building face value, including the use of a familiar language/style, highlight different ways through which a favourable image or a standard face value is created on the fan page. This suggests that online presentations are managed, negotiated and adjusted to match the standard set up on the fan page by its participants. However, on a platform like Facebook, people engage in explicit acts to express their liking/disliking by liking, sharing and commenting on topics, which reflect their interests and preferences. Such performances (creating face value) are only performed to create connections, to perform friendliness and to create a value system on the fan page by adhering to specific do and don'ts that are accepted in public sites such as Facebook.

### Performing the Sunday ritual -Raina Khan

Raina is a fashion-design student. In 2011, she finished her BA in Arts and joined the Appejay Institute of Fashion Designing to study for a master's. Her interest lies in fine art. She often attends design workshops, and enjoys meeting new people. She uses SNSs such as Twitter and Facebook to connect to new people she meets in day-to-day life.

Beside her studies, she enjoys spending time with relatives and family, and likes to be connected to her friends 24/7 through her android phone and broadband connection. Her android phone has Facebook and Twitter applications that allow her to stay connected to her friends day and night. For example, she and her best friend Rajan exchange messages on a daily basis and chat about their favourite television programs, social life, clothes, food etc.

An entrepreneur by profession, Rajan is Raina's childhood friend. He loves *Roadies*, and follows the MTV India Facebook fan page and the *Roadies* fan page on Facebook. He introduced Raina to the fan page, and they both became fans. In the interview, Raina explained how the fan page has become a part of her routine activities.

*It's 7:30am, my phone alarm wakes me and I notice the notifications from Facebook, Gmail and Twitter.*

*I need to get up and take a shower, but without thinking about it, I can see that Neeraj and other four fans have liked my comment on the MTV fan page. Tina has responded to one of my comments and has tagged my name.*

*At the same time, I am alerted that my friend has checked into the college 'canteen'; she has shared her location on her profile and I worry that I am already late. Without wasting any time, I notice that a few friends have responded to a wall-post shared by me. Some have liked/shared it, others have commented on it. There are few messages in my inbox too....Drawn in, I slide my finger along a Facebook notification and I am taken to the Newsfeed. Since yesterday night, the MTV India Facebook fan page has posted two new status updates, my friend, Latika has put up her engagement picture and most of my friends have liked it. Someone I don't even remember (I'm*

*sure I know her through the fan page, but we aren't online at the same time or she is not online often) has given birth to a baby boy, and me and my friends are tagged in a picture featuring the new season of Roadies.*

*I put the phone down and it's almost 8 am, I need to buck up and leave for college, as I will miss the class which is at 9.*

Raina's Android phone lets her connect to her Facebook profile, and allows her to view activities performed by her Facebook friends and fan page associates. Although her Android phone is capable of performing fan activities similar to a computer/laptop, the cost of using the Internet over the phone is almost four times that of the broadband connection. Raina favours the laptop/computer for longer chats and fan page text talk, but uses the mobile phone to perform activities like check-ins to various food joints/friends' places, posting short wall posts/comments etc.

The above interview excerpt highlighting her routine shows an interesting correlation between the fan page and her offline life. The fan page allows her to connect to people and develop connections by responding to fan activities that may interest her. For example, in the above context, she may post a response to Tina or share a picture featuring the new *Roadies* season.

Raina uses the fan page to connect with her fan page associates and discuss her favourite show, *Roadies*. She and her fan page associates use the platform to vote for their favourite *Roadies*, and to discuss the twists and turns of the show.

Raina likes Nauman, a strong contender for the 'favourite Roadie' title, and performs fan activities supporting him and the tasks he performs. However, her offline friend Rajan supports another contender, Palak, and posts fan activities supporting her strong personality and witty nature. Raina's and Rajan's fan page associates Raghav, Smriti and Rayan join the discussion and post textual snippets in support of their own favourites, creating a thread of discussion that contains minor disagreements based on individual perspectives and ideas.



Such minor disagreements are either patched up or re-established through the ‘Sunday ritual’ that is performed after the episode is aired on Sunday at 7 pm. For instance, the following comment was posted as a response to Raina’s comment on the fan page.

*I can’t disagree anymore, Nauman is good. But, Raina, the point I am trying to make that he hasn’t won a task yet. Although, his performance is always consistent, but his team is loosing task every week and is voting against him. I think the next Sunday episode will only decide if he is still in the game or voted out. The possibility is that he might be voted out.*

(Posted as a comment by Deepak on the MTV India’s Facebook on August 12, 2011)

In the above comment, Deepak, a participant on the fan page shows a minor disagreement (can’t disagree anymore) and concludes his comment by saying that he is waiting for the next *Roadies* to see if one of the participants is voted out suggesting that he might come back to the fan page to discuss whether his prediction came true.

While Raina and her fan page associates participate in the ‘Sunday ritual’ and support their favourite *Roadies* by discussing performances and tasks, a few of them communicate their viewpoints in creative and/or artistic ways. For instance, Raina met Sourabh, a writer, through the fan page and formed a connection based on their common interest:

*Sourabh shares his opinion through his writings. His writings usually narrate the catfight on Roadies or the performances of their favourite Roadies in weekly tasks. Like, Shambhavi would be paired with Neeraj, whom she hates, the most; comments would be made on palak, her ugly lipstick and macho look...*

Raina’s use of the fan page displays how the MTV India’s Facebook fan page has allowed her to perform friending with her existing (offline) ties and create new connections through the fan page based on common interests. Moreover, in the case of Raina, the combined use of her mobile phone and broadband connection highlights different ways through which

people access SNSs in India and associate themselves with the fan page through various media.

Furthermore, the Sunday ritual performed at 8 pm (as the show is telecasted at 7 pm and the ritual is performed afterwards) also highlights the ways in which broadcast media and new media have combined together, and have offered fans the opportunity to perform a new form of sociality. In *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins (2000) explains that when old media such as television (with limited interactive features such as emails, phone-in programs, etc) and new media such as the web (allowing interactivity and participation) meet together, the convergence results in 'water cooler conversations' that allow individuals to participate and synthesize knowledge through the 'collective sharing of information'. However, on the fan page, these 'water cooler conversations' are not limited to exchanging information, but are used as a starting point to initiate an interaction and create connections based on common interests and preferences. Moreover, the use of television to see broadcast programs on a specific day of week and at a specific time suggests fans' habit (Tuan, 1977) of performing routine activities that explain how people are often habituated to a process or to a place. In the case of *MTV Roadies* (given that *Roadies* is running its 9<sup>th</sup> season), fans watch *MTV Roadies* as a part of their routine activity (every Sunday at 7 pm) and engage in 'water cooler conversations' via the fan page, after the show is finished.

In her study of BlueSky- an interactive, text only forum- Kendall (2000) discovered increased activity during the shared lunchtime period, Pacific Standard Time, when several regulars working in the computer industry in California chatted in their lunch hours. This suggests that online forums/Facebook fan pages work like a community, where participants are aware of routine activities and might connect on particular days and at particular times depending upon the nature of the activities performed in an online space. For instance, the fan page not only brings *Roadies*'s fans to one space at a particular time (8pm, after the show), but gives them a chance to perform water cooler conversations and knowledge sharing.

## The 2 o'clock affair -Rita Malik

I met Rita through the fan page. During the observation period, I found that she actively participated on the fan page at a particular time. Moreover, her personal life, interests and fan page associations could show a unique pattern of routine activities and led me interview her online and offline. Although the information gained from the online interview informed her everyday practices, tastes and connections formed through the fan page, the offline interview revealed an interesting but complex mix of her online and offline life.

Rita was born and brought up in Delhi. Belonging to a conservative Muslim family, she got married at the early age of 19, and had to opt for household work and family life. Although I found her family to be supportive and caring, she said that her husband never allowed her to go out and work with men. In conservative Muslim families, women are supposed to live in the house and take care of the household activities. Like Rita, her mother and mother in law also lived in the house and took care of their families; hence Rita never disagreed with this setup as she believes that is how women live in a Muslim society. On the other hand, Rita's family favoured education for girls and taught her until high school. Rita also did a diploma course in computers that introduced her to the internet and gave her basic information on computers. It is through this diploma course that Rita joined a few social networking sites and created a basic profile that mentioned her interests and activities.

Rita's routine activities involved taking care of the family and their needs and spending time with her computer, which was gifted to her by her parents. She told me that her appointment with the computer on weekdays is special to her, as it allows her to stay in touch with her family and friends.

Rita has a Facebook and Twitter profile, but she uses Facebook more than Twitter because she has more connections (friends) on Facebook than on Twitter. She has 768 connections on Facebook, as compared to 219 followers (friends) on Twitter, suggesting that her use of social networking sites is primarily based on connections that are either informed by offline lives or is interaction based on common interests and practices. Her Facebook's friends list

includes family and school friends and people added through the MTV India Facebook fan page. When asked how she began text-talking on the fan page, she responded:

*When I read posts/discussions – comments – it felt familiar; it was my kind of people exchanging their ideas and perspectives. At first, it felt scary as you are talking to complete strangers, but interacting on Facebook is different from Yahoo chat or any other chatting sites; people know your name, the way you look and other details, like where you work or study.*

Rita joined the fan page after watching an episode of *MTV Style Check*<sup>22</sup> that mentioned the MTV India's Facebook fan page, wishing to participate in the featured contest. She participated in the contest with other fans and won a voucher for a movie. This led to continuous participation on the fan page, which then created connections with other Facebook associates. These connections then turned into routine interactions, and resulted in an everyday 2 o'clock appointment.

*I finish kitchen work, give food to my in-laws, send my daughter to tuition and get ready for the fan page at 2. It's the time when Seema, Neerja and Daksha are online. We talk about movies, Roadies, Splitsvilla ... (pause) almost everything and anything we like.*

Despite her busy schedule at home, Rita fulfils her duties as a mother. She dresses her daughter, takes her to school, finishes her kitchen work, brings the daughter back and sends her for tuition. Afterwards (about 2 o'clock), she logs in to the fan page and text-talks with others until the time her daughter returns from the studies. This routine activity (i.e. coming to the fan page at the same time) highlights how the fan page caters to individuals' daily schedules in a way that allow them to connect to participants at a specific time and perform friendliness based on shared interests and practices. Not only this, Rita found Seema, another housewife/mother through the fan page, who also logs in to the fan page after 2.

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<sup>22</sup> MTV Style Check is an Indian entertainment show, which features youth and fashion. The show is popular amongst the young people.

*Seema and I met through the fan page on a discussion of a Hollywood movie. She was witty and was quick to pick up my sarcasm.*

Rita chose the fan page with the intention of creating connections and exchanging views/opinions. Although connections on the fan page are primarily created on the basis of common interests and preferences, Rita's interaction highlights that connections on the fan page can also be formed on the basis of similar offline lives shared by the participants. For instance, in the excerpt below Rita shares her experiences:

*She has two cute twin daughters and is an extrovert like me. We could talk almost about everything. We have a lot in common: sweet daughters, complaining husbands and a lot of free time. Moreover, she likes Roadies and the American mystery show Dexter. She follows it every day and updates me if I miss an episode.*

Rita connected to Seema as they shared common online interests and offline lives. Their offline lives and common interests form the heart of their routine interactions and made the online space ideal for one-to-one interactions. Furthermore, in her offline interview, Rita added that the fan page allows her to use personalized styles of communication and Hinglish while performing text-talk that eases the interaction and let her communicate in a way that is similar to her offline forms of communication. For instance, Rita participates in 'Bollywood Thursdays' and posts comments on her favourite movies. 'Bollywood Thursdays' is a custom performed by administrators/fans to discuss new releases/ box office performances/ review old movies, etc. Bollywood fans use this as an opportunity to connect to like-minded people and strengthen connections with existing contacts. For instance, the following wall-posts were posted by Rita to create a connection with *Iqbal* fans.

*For a country like India with its popular game as cricket, this movie was long due. Heck, even if you take Shreyas Talpade out of it, I would still love it! Would you....  
(August, 2011)*

*This movie was about a man trying to prove his dedication and love for his sport, his people, and his country. Like if you agree, share if you remember the movie, comment if you know the name*  
(September, 2011)

*@Manya and @karan... I am sitting in a horse shelter and remembering Iqbal's journey from a villager to a cricketer.*  
(September, 2011)

The movie (*Iqbal*-directed by Nagesh Kuknoor in 2005) follows a cricket-obsessed boy from a remote Indian village. He aims to overcome any difficulties, become a cricketer and fulfill his dream of playing for the Indian national cricket team. The above posts were specifically designed (via the use of signalling and tagging) to generate responses from people that either like or associate with the movie. These practices highlight different kinds of activities that are performed on the fan page and suggest how the fan page has become a site to perform specific activities that are particular to its participants.

Rita's routine activities and everyday activities highlight the individual use of the fan page and demonstrate how the fan page not only caters to the young college or working Indian population, but young home makers who have similar interests/tastes and a willingness to share their views through the fan page. In Rita's case, the fan page has provided her with the freedom to express and connect irrespective of geographical boundaries. Through the Internet and the fan page she has formed connections with like-minded people, who not only have common interests and preferences, but also similar offline lives, suggesting that fans' online lives are informed by their offline self, whereby they try to connect to people who have common interests and may share similar offline experiences (e.g. being housewives). Her participation in different activities on the fan page also demonstrates how she uses her creative abilities and skills to participate in different activities such as Bollywood Thursdays, polls/contests organized by the fan page's administrators etc, to create new connections and strengthen the existing ones. Furthermore, Rita's availability at a particular time (2'o clock) and her active participation suggest that the fan page can be used by different groups (such

as students, working people) for particular activities at specific times. Studying this may produce interesting findings on how Indian youth schedule their time to perform activities that are particular to them.

### Offline friending -Ram Sharma

Ram Sharma is 28 years old. He finished his education in a small town close to Delhi and has been involved in social work from college days.

After finishing college, Ram joined a NGO (Non-Governmental Organization), and has been involved in street campaigns, candle marches against social/national issues, etc. More recently, he has been involved in Hazzare's campaign, and has been managing the online and offline campaign to support the Jan Lokpal bill (Ombudsman Bill) designed to ensure a corruption free governmental system.

While the offline campaigns, such as candle marches, hunger strikes, etc., were organized in major locations in New Delhi, the online campaigns were promoted through SNSs such as Twitter, Facebook and Orkut. The MTV India Facebook fan page supported Ram NGO's campaign and began promoting Hazzare and his campaign against corruption.

Ram's offline life included managing campaigns and informing the fan page's administrators about recent updates and everyday activities. These updates/activities were then posted by administrators to garner public response (in the form of likes, shares and comments), and to encourage people to support the campaign by participating in offline/online signature campaigns. In his free time, he prefers to spend his time on the fan page and interact with people about any new campaigns and activities started by his NGO.

By looking at his activities in online and offline life, it can be argued that Ram's online and offline life complement each other, as on one hand, the offline settings allow him to organize events such as hunger strikes, campaigns, candle march, etc, and on the other, the online settings allow him to combine experiences from the offline activities and

communicate/promote events and activities on the fan page. For instance, the following comment taken from the fan page illustrates how people combine experiences from offline life and presents an online self.

*@Snehill, we need to fight for corruption. In the past, Gandhi has marched to Dandi to gain our independence. It's time again to march against corrupt political system. Troops, we are all set for the candle march tonight. Hazzare sir and many other celebrities would be joining us to fight against corruption. Let's have one aim – to make India CORRUPTION FREE. Join us on the MTV India fan page or Hazzare's blog <http://www.annaHazzareblog.com/> and become a part of the campaign.*

(August, 2011)

For instance, in the above illustration, Ram shares information about an event from the past that reflects his knowledge and interests in history and political activities. This suggests that an online self is informed by offline life and experiences. It is true, however, that one may purport to be anyone in an online life, but fan activities on the fan page illustrate that fans perform online selves close to their offline identities, as it allow them to initiate interactions and perform text-talk.

Apart from his activities in online and offline life, Ram also likes to read e-magazines, e-newspapers and perform text talk on the fan page. He said that the fan page contains comments that are filled with various ideas/perspectives, and allow participants to express, formulate, raise and support an issue discussed through wall-posts. For example, the Hazzare campaign was heavily promoted through SNSs to garner support from the public for eradicating corruption from the Indian governmental system. During the campaign, Ram created connections with people – connections that turned into continuous work-related/personal offline meetings. For instance, Ram met Satya through the fan page and developed a friendship on the basis of similar interests/activities. They met for work-related reasons, then, but their connection turned into offline personal meetings, creating a stronger bond of friendship. Ram discovered Satya's hidden talents (such as technical skills, fixing



laptops etc) through continuous offline meetings; he used this as an opportunity to create connections outside his work life.

Ram’s use of the fan page highlights the dynamics of Facebook fan pages, which allow people to air an opinion publicly through continuous interactions/text-talking. It also shows how online selves are often informed by offline experiences/activities, which allow people to share useful information and create connections that may turn into offline meetings/strengthened connections.

The above, four portraits of fan page participants suggest that the fan page has formed a site to perform various fan activities. However, the medium they access the fan page from and their online activities vary. Below, I draw a table which compares these different activities and argue that the fan page has become a space to perform such activities.

How MTV India’s fan page has become a routine space for youth activities (Facebook fan page to be operated via mobile phones/laptops)				
Meet the participants.				
Participants	Salabh (18-year-old student; uses laptop)	Raina (24-year-old student; uses a laptop/mobile phone connection)	Rita (24-year-old housewife; uses computer)	Ram (28-year-old social activist; uses laptop)
	Was introduced to the fan page through ‘suggestion list’.	Was introduced to the fan page by an offline friend.	Willingly became a participant.	Was introduced to the fan page through his organization.
	Uses the fan page to perform fan activities relating to cricket.	Uses the fan page to perform routine activities such as commenting on her favorite show – MTV <i>Roadies</i> .	Performs fan activities relating to Bollywood and connects to fan page associates.	Performs fan activities relating to social/national issues.
	His offline interview	Her offline interview	Her interview highlights the	His interview highlights how online

	highlights how practices such as turn taking, managing disagreements through elaboration/partial disagreements, and appropriate face value (Hinglish/specific styles) are used to perform text-talk and to form connections on the fan page.	highlights how the fan page is used as a platform to perform friendliness with her offline and online contacts.	use of the fan page by a young housewife who uses the platform to perform fan activities relating to her interests, and connect with people whom she befriended through common interests/similar offline lives.	selves are often informed by offline life/experiences.
	Use of specific styles and Hinglish.	Allows signalling, i.e. influencing people to perform likes, shares and comments.	Prefers Facebook to Twitter.	Appropriates the space to raise a public opinion.
	Defining face value.	Sunday ritual	The everyday 2 o'clock affair	Online connections turning into offline meetings/strengthening connections.
		Highlights her use of mobile phone/laptop to perform different kinds of activities.	Participating in Bollywood Thursdays to strengthen connections.	
Fan activities are based on	Shared interest.	Routine activity/shared interest.	Routine activity/shared interest.	Shared interest.
Uses the fan page to	Create connections	Create connections	Create connections	Create connections
Has led to	Developing friendships	Developing friendships	Developing friendships	Developing friendships

Table 6.1: Table showing fan activities of Salabh, Raina, Rita and Ram.

The table above highlights fan activities of four participants, who use the fan page to perform fan activities that are particular to them. For instance, Salabh started using the fan

page to perform fan activities relating to cricket and became the commentary guy on the fan page. In his interview, he explained how by using fan practices such as use of Hing-lish and scaling disagreements through partial agreements helped create an appropriate face value on the fan page that helped him in creating connections. Likewise, Raina, who accessed the fan page from her android phone and broadband, uses the fan page to perform activities relating to her favorite program – *Roadies*. Through the fan page, she maintained existing connections (from offline life) and created new connections. She participated in the Sunday ritual and performed friending on the fan page, suggesting that the fan page became a particular site for her activities. Similarly, Rita, the house maker used the fan page to connect to the outside world and create connections on the basis of her interests. She participated in many group activities such as Bollywood Thursdays and the 2’o clock affair and created connections on the fan page. Ram, another offline interviewee used the fan page to perform fan activities relating to social/national issues. His online friending resulted in offline associations suggesting that the fan page is also used as a site to create offline connections.

This suggests that the fan page has formed a space to create connections and perform friendliness. In my discussion below, I use extracts from offline interviews (from both the portraits above and other offline interviewees) and online interviews to illustrate how the fan page has become a space that caters to individuals’ interests and experiences.

## 6.1 The MTV India Facebook fan page as a space

According to Tuan (1977), space can be understood as a distinct, physical, real or empirical entity. He refers to several definitions of space, such as absolute space, relative space and relational space. Out of these, his idea of relational space is particularly useful here.

Relational space refers to the idea of space-place as intrinsic to our being in the world, measured and defined through the degree and nature of people’s value, feelings, perceptions, or ideas about locations, cities, regions etc. Consciously or unconsciously, we relate to other people and partly interpret them through their environment/location. Thus, relational space is embedded in our intentions and actions.

I use his idea of relational space to illustrate how the fan page has become a space to perform fan activities that are specific to the participants. I use extracts from online/offline interviews, and demonstrate the MTV India Facebook's fan page is a space where fans perform routine activities and use online practices particular to fan page such as disagreements and creating face value, activities relating to shared interests, and online/offline friending.

### 6.1.1 Fan page – a space to perform routine activities

It is possible to argue that the fan page is a space to perform routine activities. Raina, an offline interviewee and student, uses the fan page to perform fan activities, to stay in touch with existing contacts, and to create new connections with people who share similar interests (Table 6.1). Like Raina, Aditya, an MBA graduate, explains his routine activities as follows:

*For me, logging in to the fan page is equivalent to any daily habit, such as brushing teeth, flossing, showering, etc. I go to the fan page almost twice-thrice a day.*

(Offline interview conducted with Aditya, February 14, 2013)

Like his other routine activities, then, Aditya's logging on to the fan page is a daily activity that involves checking updates and responding to comments directed at him. He explained that the fan page caters to his interests, and allows him to carry out routine activities on various topics. Aditya gains a sense of his belongingness to the fan page by performing friendliness with his fan page associates. He performs particular activities relating to cricket with specific people, who in turn like to share their experiences/knowledge with him; and together they perform a group activity that is enjoyable or entertaining.

Lalita, another offline interviewee, likes music. In her interview, she stated that she can't live without her guitar, her iTunes, her iPod, her MTV and the MTV fan page. She uses the fan page to get updates on the latest music albums and remixes, and she talks to her friends, whom she has befriended through the fan page. She explains her use of the fan page:

*Talking on the fan page... is Facebooking... we do it day and night, say like when I get online, I post a comment, 'available for Facebooking', someone would greet me with Hello/Namaste... and we go on and on.*

(Offline interview conducted with Lalita, January 13, 2013)

She described the fan page as an everyday activity and even insisted that if one visits the fan page regularly, it becomes an addiction. Being a part-time DJ, Lalita enjoys text-talking with people who like music and hip-hop, and they routinely share useful information about concerts, events etc.

While a few participants, such as Raina, Lalita and Aditya, performed fan activities relating to their interests, others used it as a platform to market products and services. I met Geeta, a public relations practitioner, who became a participant on the fan page while promoting the brands she publicizes. She found the fan page interesting, and began commenting on various topics such as Bollywood actors, healthy lifestyle, etc. She explained that comments posted by other participants felt 'familiar', signalling that that they were posted by participants who talked and spoke like her.

Geeta, along with Rita (another offline interviewee), participates in Bollywood Thursdays, and has created connections with people who are either interested in buying her products or learning about the lifestyle products that she sells. Her regular visits suggest that the fan page has become an integral part of her life, and helps her to perform friending and earn a livelihood.

Raima, a data-entry operator, uses the fan page as an escape from her office work. Her work includes spending long hours on computers and websites. She often browses the fan page during her break or free time. She was introduced to the fan page by her office colleagues, who spent their free time on the fan page talking to people about their work, interests and activities.

Initially, she was hesitant to talk to strangers, and commented only in response to comments that were posted by her office colleagues. But later, she began interacting with others (outside her office), who responded to her posts, and who were interested in exchanging information.

Her interests include the MTV India reality shows - *Roadies* and *Splitsvilla*. She routinely participates in discussions and topics relating to these shows during her office hours, and makes herself available on Sunday evenings to perform the Sunday affair with the group.

The above examples demonstrate that the fan page has become a space to perform specific activities that are particular to fans. Furthermore, performing these routine activities bring like-minded people together who share common interests and preferences.

*I am a cricket fan. I understand jargons of the game and the way it's played and I like to share how I feel for the game on the fan page.*

(Offline interview conducted with Salabh on February 2, 2013)

*The topics posted on the fan page are very much 'up-to-date', something I always related to, like the post on Rabbi's performance, Indian teams match and my favorite Roadies.*

(Offline interview conducted with Lalita, January, 13 2013)

Consequently, these continuous fan activities, interactions and connections have resulted in the fan page becoming a routine space for active participation and everyday practices.

### 6.1.2 The fan page – a space to perform fans practices for online performance

In everyday activities, participants use a number of online practices to perform friendliness on the fan page: turn taking, managing disagreements, building face value, using Hing-lish and Internet terminology and managing privacy controls are major practices used by participants to perform the ethic of friendliness on the fan page.

Turn taking involves taking turns and posting messages in the form of comments to create a dialogue between participants. In his offline interview, Nitin, a former intern explained that turn taking is one of the important reasons people return to the fan page. He illustrated this through an example, in which two imaginary participants, Tom and Harry, visited fan page to perform activities on topics relating to their interests and preferences.

‘Tom’ and ‘Harry’ like cricket and often post comments on this topic. The comments they post contain information, questions, disagreements, elaborations etc., which lead to further, continuous posting of messages, resulting in turn taking. Nitin explained that Facebook works through a notification system: for every fan activity performed in relation to an individual, Facebook notifies that individual. Each notification helps an individual to keep a track of his/her activities and respond to any queries/questions/disagreements directed at him/her in the form of comments.

On the fan page, participants use turn taking to communicate their agreements and disagreements with people. While agreements are usually posted in the form of likes and comments, disagreements are posted through comments and personal messages. In offline interviews, participants stated that a disagreement posted through a comment/personal message might contain the use of foul language or serious arguments.

According to my findings (Chapter 5), comments that contain foul language/serious argument are scaled down through partial disagreements and elaboration. However, people manage disagreements in various ways, which can involve elements of partial disagreement, elaboration, use of questions, etc. (see Chapter 5). For example, in his offline interview, Salabh stated that he always responds to a comment directed to him, but if a comment contains abusive language or a very individual perspective, he either responds through a polite message containing elaboration or ignores the message completely.

In contrast, Rita and Lalita prefer to respond to such comments by providing factual information in support of the argument they have made earlier. Lalita argued that responding

to a comment is important on the fan page, as others might think that you have ignored them or disrespected their views. She added that one may choose to ignore a comment, but it is considered no less than an offence, as others will publicly mention one's name in comments and might rate one's behaviour as rude or arrogant for no response. It may also erode the 'face value' of an individual.

In some situations, participants may choose to ignore foul language/serious arguments; for instance, in his offline interview, Salabh explained that he often scaled down disagreements through continuous turn-taking, resulting in online friending. In this way, fans not only discover or exchange information/facts that are new to them, but create connections on the basis of newly formulated interests and preferences.

In a scenario where disagreements/serious arguments are posted through Facebook's personal messaging (PM), the intention is to hide such things from public view. In his offline interview, Salabh explained that people often posted a disagreement through the personal message application, which allowed them to hide their opinions and posted a partial agreement in the form of a comment to show an agreement to a publicly held view, thereby creating an online image, which is on a par with the society or peoples' views. For instance, Aditya, an offline interviewee, explained:

*You may write anything what you like. But, there are people with whom you already share a connection and others who may judge you by what you post. For instance, I avoid posing on anything I dislike.*

(Offline interview conducted with Aditya on February 14, 2013)

Fans stated that they avoid commenting on ethnic identities, castes and creeds (even if they have an opinion on/idea about such things), as it may put them in a bad light. In an offline interview, Lalita, said, "On the fan page, constructing face value is important, as people may choose to interact with a fan on the basis of it". For example, fans may can frame or end an interaction based on the behaviour and language adopted by another individual.



Additionally, face value is also constructed through the adoption of fan page language (Hing-lish) and privacy control settings.

Other fan practices such as fan page greetings, such as ‘Namaste friends’, ‘Hello Mitro’ (friends), ‘Namaskaar friends’ etc. are usually a combination of Hindi and English, and illustrate how Hing-lish infuses the fan page’s vocabulary. Fans also use specific words/phrases such as ‘kewl’ instead of ‘cool’ and “I am from the MTV/Facebooking generation”, which were used to show belongingness to the fan page (offline interview with Rita, February 10, 2013).

Likewise, people also use/employ privacy control settings to create face value. For instance, Raina, an offline participant prefers hiding her personal details (such as birth date, place of education, location etc.) and only shares that information with particular people. This gives her freedom to interact with fans with whom she might be only interested in exchanging views, but not any other information other than her name.

Manisha, another participant said that the fan page allows her to connect with offline contacts without ‘being close’.

*I don’t prefer adding people to my friends list if I don’t like them. On fan pages, you can interact with such people without being ‘Facebook friends’ with them. There is Rahul, Raghu and Smita, we are friends and we know each other from school, but I prefer saying ‘hi’ or ‘Namaste’ from a distance (Facebook greeting), not adding them to my Facebook profile, which tells what time I am waking up or where I am going for the party.*

(Offline interview with Manisha, February 12, 2013)

She explained that she prefers text talking rather than using a PM application or adding people to her Facebook profile, suggesting that text-talk enables fans to interact via the fan page, without adding them in their friend list, allowing them to set various privacy settings for different people (including Facebook associates and Facebook friends), and create a

particular impression and exercise control in order to manage any threats in day-to-day life. This suggests that the fan page is used as a space to perform different kinds of presentation (controlled or flexible) depending upon the kind of connection they want to create with other fans.

### 6.1.3 Fan page – a space to perform fan activities on shared interests/to meet like-minded people

Being the most well-liked and well-accepted SNS in India, Facebook has become a site for keeping in touch with existing contacts. More recently, with the advent of fan pages, it has also become a site for creating new connections based on common interests and preferences. For example, participants on the fan page creates connections on the basis of common interests, which could be *Roadies*, Bollywood movies etc (detailed in chapter 5).

On the fan page, fans interact and create connections with other participants through text-talking. The points of connection are often topics discussed on the fan page, which allows people to post comments and familiarize themselves with each other. For example, the following extract, taken from the fan page, highlights how turn taking on shared interests leads to formation of connections.

Mili Sen: Oh Mehak, do your best. I am with you. We want a girl to win *Roadies* this time.

Shalini Rahi: Oh Mili, do you like Mehak. I like her too.

Kirti Nahata: She is strong and bold.

Rahul Khel: Smart and sexy too...

Mili: Yes Shalini, I like her, she is the best. @kirti...strong and smart bhi hai (yes, she is strong and smart). @yes...boy she is smart and sexy.

(September, 2011)

The above extract shows how turn taking can result in interaction between like-minded people (in the above example, *Roadies* fans) and the creation of online connections. Sakshi, an offline interviewee, stated that she found similar people on the fan page that spoke like her, liked the same topics and were available to interact with. She met Chitrangna, another participant, who hails from Dehradun (a small town near New Delhi) and works in a small

production house. Like him, she wants to make a career in the movies and become an actress. Their interaction began through a movie update posted by the administrators, and turned into online friending within a few days. Both share similar taste in films, and share information on film releases, events and screenings in the city.

Likewise, Rita, the housewife, uses the fan page to create connections with like-minded people. She described her connection with Seema, her fan page friend, and explained how their interaction started with common interests and a similar social life. Their similar offline lives and common interests formed the heart of their routine interactions and made the space appropriate for one-to-one interactions.

Aditya, the MBA student, uses the fan page to create connections with people who specifically like *Roadies*. In her offline interview, she stated that fans use different artistic styles to communicate their viewpoint and to catch the attention of others who share similar interests/preferences. Aditya showed Vijay's cartoons and said:

*We have a cartoonist in our group; he shares his opinion through his work. His cartoons are usually a depiction of one of the characters from the show. He created this comic strip of Nauman, the ideal roadie, who couldn't lift 10kgs of weight and lost the task. People liked him for what he is...but his reality came out soon and he turned out to be a loser. Ha-ha... (laughs). He was dumb.*

(Offline interview conducted with Aditya, February 14, 2013)



Figure 6.1- Snapshot showing Nauman (Roadie, Season 6, one of the strong contenders who couldn't perform the task in Episode 4.

While cartoons are one way of sharing ideas/opinions and creating new connections with people, others use the status update/comment application to share an emotion attached to a movies or actors that acted in a movie. For instance, Rita, a participant on the fan page, likes the film '*Cheeni Kum*' (means 'Less Sugar', directed by R. Balki in 2007), and often post comments and wall posts on the fan page relating to it. *Cheeni Kum* is a Bollywood 'rom-com' which shows a 64 year old man romancing a thirty four year old woman. The movie earned applause for best storyline and great performances by its actors.

Below are a few illustrations of comments posted on the fan page by Rita:

1I don't think light romantic comedy is easy to do - at all - and this movie does it very well --

2according to me there's not a sloppy or wince-inducing moment. (August, 2011)

3Tabu emanates the kind of intelligent, self-confident, unsentimental, serious young woman

4who often is happiest with an older man -- like Jo in Little Women. **The movie has her best**

5**performance. Name the movie?** (September, 2011)

6**@Manya and @karan...** it's very well scripted, and even more wonderfully enacted.

(September, 2011)

Rita's use of the fan page demonstrates that she uses the fan page to memorize events from the films by posting fan activities, and she strengthens connections with people who have a similar interest. For example, lines 4 and 5 (The movie has her best performance. Name 5the movie? ) show comments created in a question format to generate fan activities in the form of comments and likes. In line 6, Rita has tagged her friends (@Manya and @karan), which suggests that she has directed the message at specific people (with whom she already shares a connection) with the intention of getting feedback.

Both the examples above illustrate that the fan page and participants support various forms of online activities such as cartoons, Bollywood quizzes, etc. with the intention of sharing a common interest/preference.

Furthermore, the fan page also supports discussion of social/national issues that receive the most fan activities, suggesting that the fans have appropriated the site for their own set of interests. For instance, Hazzare's campaign was widely promoted on the fan page to reach thousands of people online. The MTV India Facebook fan page was used to garner support for the anti-corruption bill intended to introduce transparency in the system. Many online campaigns, as well as the offline candle march at Ramlila Maidan, were promoted on the fan page and received the highest number of shares and comments (as compared to other popular topics on the fan page such as cricket, Bollywood, etc) suggesting that people perform these activities to exhibit a shared interest, and also to support a cause through online activities. In his offline interview, Ram said that the fan page's administrators posted status updates relating to Hazzare's moment and likes, shares and comments were posted to support the campaign and raise public awareness.

Other social/national issues, such as terrorism etc, are routinely shared with the intention of serving the shared interests of participants on the fan page.

#### 6.1.4 Fan page – a space for online and offline friending

Ram's online interaction (table 6.1) suggests that the fan page has become a space to perform online friendliness that can turn into offline friendships. Ram met Satya on the fan page, and they developed a friendship on the basis of similar interests/activities. The online connection turned into offline work meetings, and then, finally, turned into offline personal meetings based on mutual understandings/activities (e.g. Satya helping Ram with his computer/laptop and going for tea/coffee).

This suggests that the fan page can be used as a space to create online connections that may turn into a series of offline meetings, depending on the willingness of the participants.

Aditya, an MBA student, explained that online friending leads to an exchange of information and Facebook friendships, which may in turn result in offline meetings. He narrated his story of meeting Ankur, the rapper:

*I met him through the fan page. We started interacting on a video posted on the fan page, he looked interesting, plus the knowledge and experience he had in rapping amazed me. His talks looked genuine and matched his profile details (such as his profile showed that he has liked famous rappers from US and India, his pictures with DJs and rappers and his profile name 'The rapper Ankur'). We have been friends for more than a year, and I have invited him to perform at my annual function in college.*

(Offline interview conducted with Aditya, January 6, 2013)

Although Aditya and Ankur met through the fan page, their online relationship turned into an offline association because of their similar tastes. She explained the phenomenon as being like the first day at school, where people introduce each other, exchange information and become friends based on similar interests, such as movies, sports, reality shows, fashion statements, etc. Likewise, the fan page allows participants to post their views/ideas on topics and create and re-create connections with existing contacts in order to develop a bond of connection between the participants. For instance, Rita explained how continuous interactions may result in close friendships:

*I am tagged in different posts and comments; it feels good to be connected to so many people. Arun wants to know if Parul's dress during the task in Roadies was appropriate; Seema is tagging me in most of the comments on the movie she just saw; Kirti wants to know how to make okra curry. It feels good to talk to people, who understand that I like Roadies, love movies and I know how to cook okra.*

(Offline interview conducted with Rita, February 4, 2013)

Being a housewife and mother, Rita comes online at a specific time, when her Facebook mates are available to chat. In her interview, she stated that she shares good connections with most of her Facebook associates, but confines some to the online space of the fan page, and takes others to offline connections. Her phrase "it feels good to be connected with so many people" suggests bonding, association and a sense of community. She explains her connection with Seema, whom she befriended through the fan page and connected with her on the basis of common interests and similar offline lives. Since they had a lot in common, their friendship moved to the next stage, of exchanging personal information such as phone numbers, which allowed them to connect outside their usual 2 o'clock affair.

Likewise, Geeta, the public relations practitioner met Sakhi, Rathi and Shruti through the fan page, and their interest in contemporary Indian cinema led to them creating another fan page controlled by the four of them as administrators. Geeta stated that the newly formed fan page focuses on films that belong to the genre of contemporary Indian cinema, and has been created to appeal to cinema lovers.

The new fan page created by them is managed through online group chats and offline meetings, which has further resulted in close friendships, suggesting that the fan page has become a space to create online connections that may turn into offline associations/meetings depending upon the closeness/intimacy shared by the participants.

The examples above illustrate that the fan page has formed a space to perform everyday practices such as turn taking, expressing agreements/disagreements, creating face value, sharing collective knowledge and controlling privacy settings, through which fans create

connections resulting in online/offline friending. It also demonstrates that the fan page has become a space to perform various activities (such as Hazzare's campaign, the 2 o'clock affair, Bollywood Thursdays, the Sunday ritual) that are particular to different groups who are interested in different topics/issues of everyday life. But with the formation of such a space, the fan page has also become a place, which has created an association and belongingness to the fan page. In my next section, I explain how space and place differ, how a sense of place is created within a space and how the fan page can be argued to be a specific 'place' for everyday activities and routine practices of Indian youth.

## 6.2 The MTV India Facebook fan page – how space becomes a place

Although, the discussion above highlights how the fan page has become a useful space for various activities, it has equally transformed into a 'place' to perform particular activities that are specific to Indian youth. Yi-Fu Tuan (1974, 1977) explains how people attach meaning to a place and argues that what begin as spaces evolve into places as we come to know spaces better and endow them with value.

Places acquire a deeper meaning through the "steady accretion of sentiment" and experience (Tuan 1974, p. 33). A variety of concepts and models have been developed to explore people's connection with place, most importantly 'place attachment' (Altman and Low 1992) and 'place identity' (Proshansky, 1978). Also, the notion of belongingness (rootedness) has also been given importance in the attempt to understand people's involvement in a culture or a community.

Altman and Low (1992) define place attachment as an affective bond between people and places that involve people, social relationships and locations (places). For example, someone who has lived in New Delhi throughout their childhood and teenage years would be attached to the city because it is where they had their formative experiences. Place attachment, thus specifically refers to the routine activities and everyday experiences through which people attach to a place.



Place identity can be defined as a dynamic phenomenon that grows and is transformed through lived experience (Proshansky, 1978). Place identity consists of those dimensions of 'self' which develop in relation to the physical environment by means of a pattern of beliefs, preferences, feelings, likes/dislikes etc.

Drawing on the work of the above theorists, place is formed through routine activities, everyday practices and the experience or connection one shares with the place. In the case of the MTV India Facebook fan page, the fan page transforms into a meaningful 'place' through the performance of routine practices and everyday activities of Indian youth, suggesting that places are not mere locations/boundaries, or a geographical territory (Massey 1994), but are meaningful constructs that are created through lived in experiences by its participants. The notion of 'place' is central to my thesis and I combine Massey (1994), Seamon (1997) and Tuan's (1977) work on 'place' and devise a unique approach to understand the fan page as a 'place', which involves participants' lived-in experiences that create familiarity with a space, turning into a particular 'place' (Seamon, 1997); performing routine activities and engagement in everyday activities - dwelling and habitation (Tuan, 1977) and creating a progressive sense of place that tie people together on the basis of social interactions (Massey, 1994). Although the fan page bears no relation to a physical place, it possesses similar characteristics to a physical place such as, coordinate systems (posting on Facebook fan pages, text-talking on the fan page) and the places within them (web pages are located within a domain, personal profiles, pictures etc) that allow people to perform friending and create connections in spite of being physically distant. This suggests that virtual 'places' such as Facebook fan pages are informed by social processes such as lived-in experiences, routine activities, etc. and can act like offline 'places' that allow people to form associations with one-another and become attached to the 'place' by engaging in routine activities (Tuan, 1977).

### 6.3 Place as a 'meaningful' construct

Place can be conceptualized as a particular location/space that has acquired a set of meanings and attachments through routine activities (Tuan, 1977). Place is a meaningful space, which combines locale, location and sense of place. Location refers to an absolute point in space

that has a specific set of coordinates and measurable distance from one point to another. Locales include neighbourhoods, consisting of streets, parks, and other visible and tangible aspects of a place. Sense of place refers to the feelings and attachments linked to a place. The meanings that are attached to a particular 'place' can be individual, and so based on personal experiences, or can be shared. Shared senses of place are based on mediation and representation. For example, when we write 'New Delhi' or 'Maharashtra', even if we haven't been to these places we still attach some sense of place to them through movies, literature, advertising and other forms of mediation.

Location in absolute space situates the city of Ahmedabad in Gujrat. While its location tells us where Ahmedabad is and enables us to locate it on a global map, this does not really tell us much. Ahmedabad is also a locale. It has supermarkets, green zones, mosques, etc. And finally, it has a sense of place – a sense of attachment/belongings for Gujratis and its residents.

In any given location, we encounter a combination of meaning, materiality and activities. Most obviously, some places have material structures (monuments). New Delhi has India Gate; Paris has the Eiffel Tower. Locales all across the world have their material forms: libraries, shops, places of worship, parks, rivers, etc. In addition, places have material things that pass through them, such as vehicles, people, commodities etc. The sense of imaginary evoked by novels usually involves description of material environments. This suggests that a location becomes a place when it becomes meaningful.

Meanings can be personal and may connect to individuals – places that remind us of our childhood, our teenage activities, etc. For instance, whenever I go to India, I always visit the same shopping mall because it has an ice cream parlour that sells my favourite ice-cream. Every time I visit the shop the ice cream man greets me with a smile and asks after my well-being. Although our interaction is limited to exchanging 'Namaste' and 'kase hai aap' (asking how you are), the familiarity with the ice cream man, with his ice cream flavours, and the chair-table I always sat in, informs my association with the place.

Alternatively, meanings can be shared, and could be social. For instance, the British-Indian film *Slumdog Millionaire* (January 22, 2009), filmed in India, had many shared meanings—most people criticized the film for portraying the negative side of India and highlighting social/political problems, economic instability, unemployment, etc., whereas others, who have been raised in the slums of Bombay/Delhi, enjoyed the movie as it portrayed their lifestyle and routine activities, suggesting that the meanings of a place are also constructed through peoples’ interpretation of a ‘place’ and how they connect with it.

Finally, it can be argued that places are created through the meanings we attach to them. Places are continuously enacted as people perform routine activities, such as going to work, shopping and going to religious places. The sense of place we derive from these places is dependent on practice and routine. Space becomes a place when it’s routinely lived-in and experienced.

While most of us think that places are of the kind mentioned so far – New Delhi, Maharashtra etc. – places can exist in many degrees of magnitude. A busy street in London might become a favourite place for an individual who likes to shop and eat specific food available only on that street. Alternatively, a single room could be a place created through memorable objects and routine activities.

Seamon argues that places are made and rooted in specific local settings, such as markets, cafés, etc (Seamon, 1979). He adds that a sense of place is created through a mix of time-space routines and ‘body ballets’, which effectively transform spaces into significant places. According to Seamon (1979, p. 25), “When humans ... become attached to ... a portion of space”, it becomes a place. He illustrates this through an example of a morning routine, where local inhabitants visit a coffee shop in the morning and create an everyday environmental experience (Seamon, 1979) that is familiar to those involved.

*Several ‘regulars’ come in during that period ... the undertakers across the street, the telephone repairman and several elderly people, including one woman named Claire, whom I know and say ‘Good morning’ to each day. ... Many of these people know*

*each other. The owner of the place knows every one of the regulars and what they will usually order. This situation of knowing other people – of knowing who's there at the time, recognizing faces that you can say hello to – somehow makes the place warmer.*  
(Seamon 1979, p. 171)

Semaon (1979) provides a humanistic account of place and uses the term 'body-ballet' to refer to how the body moves habitually as it is performing some tasks such as driving, typing, or cooking. When these 'body-ballets' are strung together through a day, they produce what Seamon called a time-space routine. He argued that individuals follow time-space routines' throughout the day. Often these routines become habitual. We walk to the grocery store, drive the car to work or go running on an almost routine basis. The above illustration suggests a similar pattern where visitors' feelings of attachment to the café have transformed it in a specific place. While the café experience highlights how public settings can be used as sites to create warmth amongst a group of people, a specific space in the corner of a room or a house may have the same place-like feeling. Seamon narrates personal stories of interviewees, and suggests that domestic spaces may form important centres of everyday activity, suggesting that their routine use can convert spaces into specific places.

Likewise, on the MTV India Facebook fan page, fans have transformed the fan page into a specific place through performance of 'body-ballets' that include moving between the fan pages and discussing topics relating to their interests and activities. Alongside, in her study, of a MUD called, 'BlueSky', Kendall (2002) discovered that it had its own sense of warmth and friendliness developed by a group of 'regulars' who were recognizable to each other. Kendall argues that a 'synchronous' online forum such as 'BlueSky', which allows people to gather at a site and interact with each other (even if they are physically distant), can provide a strong sense of place, suggesting that spaces in cyberspace may be transformed into places through routine activities and shared environmental experiences gained through routine activities.

Kendall (2002) also proposes that participants in online settings are doubly situated, noting that, while the MUD participants' routine activities suggest that BlueSky is a particular

place, users are also located in a physical environment. For instance, Kendall's routine interactions in the MUD depended on hand movements across the computer keyboard, and her attention could be distracted by something/someone physically (Kendall 2002, p. 7). Therefore, people who engage in online interactions are present in "two experiential worlds" (Kendall 2002, pp. 7-8), each of which may influence the other: online activities may influence the offline environment, or vice versa. Kendall notes that "online relations do not occur in a cultural vacuum" (2002, p. 225), and that the activities in the online and offline environments are interwoven.

Indeed, one of the findings of Kendall's ethnography is that 'offline meetings' take place as a result of online connections, which suggests that online activities and offline lives are interconnected. Likewise, on the fan page, online activities may turn into offline meetings, as demonstrated by some of my interviewees, suggesting that people associate with others through the fan page and the fan page has become 'place' overtime.

#### 6.4 The MTV India Facebook fan page as a specific 'place'

Hay (1998) suggests that "sense of place studies ... can be broader than those on place attachment by assessing ... subjective qualities (the sensing of place to create personal meaning) and social context in a geographic region, as well as community and ancestral connections to place" (p. 7). His conceptualization of 'sense of place' and his emphasis on 'personal meaning' and 'social context' focus on participants' relations with space, and the process of forming these relations. This suggests that, rather than merely being a collection of universally defined attributes, places can also be social constructs imbued with meanings. These meanings emerge and evolve through ongoing interactions with other participants and the environment, and so create a 'feeling of local' or 'familiar' place for an individual.

This process of place-formation also enables the creation of individual and collective identities. Through place affiliation, each group of people distinguishes themselves from others. For example, online groups such as Kendall's BlueSky, Baym's 'rec.arts.tv.soaps' and Mitra's 'soc.cult.Indian' illustrate how affiliations amongst members creates a strong sense of place, which is later reflected in community practices and activities. For instance, in

the case of the MTV India fan page, weekly rituals such as Bollywood Thursdays and the Sunday ritual demonstrate each community's activity and exhibit their group identity. Other factors, such as emotional attachment, routine activities and familiar spaces, can also contribute to place-making.

In their study of teen clubs, Henderson and King (1999) found that teens associated the clubs with safety, friendship and freedom. Teens had reconfigured these spaces as places where they felt free to talk to each other without any parental control; and so they defined the area as their own. For example, as part of place creation, teens painted the walls with psychedelic colours and placed chairs all over the club, suggesting that the teens created their own 'place' within the wider 'space' to perform activities that they liked. In another study, Stedman et al. (2004) examined the place-meaning process of residents living within and around a Canadian national park. They found that the meanings these residents associated with these communities were driven by past life experiences. Below, I use illustrations from online/offline interviews and illustrate how the fan page has become a specific 'place' through everyday engagement, familiarity and community activities.

- Engagement through everyday activities

During my observation period in New Delhi, I conducted offline interviews and met people of different caste, culture and occupation. I met Manisha, who was originally from Gujrat, India, but who was studying in New Delhi, and lived with her aunt. Her wall-posts/comments posted on Facebook communicated her interest in cricket and cricketers. Moreover, her time spent on the fan page in the form of fan activities such as posting comments, pictures, videos etc suggested that the fan page had become a space in which to perform activities relating to her interests and preferences.

The space had been converted into a specific place through online friendships and routine activities performed by her and her Facebook associates. In her interview, Manisha said:

*I have been a participant on the fan page for two years. I visit the fan page to update myself on various events. And when Sunny, Geeta and Shweta are online at the same time, we talk about cricket, and other people join in when they come online.*

(Offline interview conducted with Manisha, February 12, 2013)

According to Seamon (1979), the experiences of daily life can construct a sense of place. In the case of the fan page, participants' routine activities, such as text talking, and fan activities, such as liking, sharing and commenting, etc, transformed the space into a particular place. For example, Manisha used Facebook to talk about cricket and related activities, share her everyday activities, and connect with similar people (Sunny, Geeta and Shweta) and familiar environments (the fan page), so transforming the space into a particular place.

In another example, Lalita explained that she engaged with the fan page through the 'comment' feature, which included sharing experiences and ideas with various people whom she hadn't met previously. She said:

*There is everything on the fan page one could relate to – music, Bollywood, the maddening cricket and my favourite Roadies. The posts often discuss music related shows – MTV India unplugged and nonstop hits, which are particularly my favourite, and the number of likes, comments and shares these posts receive shows they are liked by many.*

(Offline interview conducted with Lalita, January 13, 2013)

Lalita, an offline interviewee, studied at university, and works as a part-time DJ in a club. Her interests included Western and European music; she had been a viewer of MTV India since childhood, and believed that the channel serves various expectations and needs of Indian audiences in the form of Indian-global music.

She explained that she used the fan page to find information on international music albums and concerts, and often met like-minded people who were interested in what she liked. Continually sharing views with different participants led to place-making, allowing her to create new connections based on common tastes and preferences. Aditya, another offline interviewee, also friended Ankur through the fan page, and formed online and offline connections.

This suggests that the place-making process on the fan page is based on routine experiences and everyday activities, irrespective of previous online/offline connections. Place-making is constructed through routine activities and the associations created through the fan page.

- Familiar environment

*When I read posts/discussions – comments – it felt familiar; it was my kind of people exchanging their ideas and perspectives. At first, it felt scary as you are talking to complete strangers, but interacting on Facebook is different from Yahoo chat or any other chatting sites; people know your name, the way you look and other details, like where you work or study.*

(Offline interview conducted with Geeta, February 9, 2013)

In her interview, Geeta said that she felt *familiar* with the fan page, as she found others that had similar interests and preferences and interacted in a style that is common to Indian youth. For instance, on the fan page, people interacted in Hinglish, a common language used by young people in India to communicate in day-to-day life. Moreover, fans, personalized the use of emoticons and used them to communicate an idea or emotions, for instance, during cricket matches, fans often posted six/four happy smileys to communicate if an Indian batsman has scored a boundary. Alternatively, sad smileys are used, if the batsman of opponent team has scored a boundary.



Moreover, the brand 'MTV India' is known to Indian youth. In their offline interviews, most of the fans explained that they have grown up watching MTV programs, and joining the fan page was replicating the experiences on another medium that allowed them to initiate interactions and participate in on-going discussions with people that had similar tastes and preferences. For instance, in his offline interview, Ram and Satya started text-talking about a post that related to Hazzare's campaign and became fan page's associates before forming an offline association. This suggests that familiarity on the fan page is not only informed by common practices such as use of Hing-lish, emoticons, but also by engaging in routine activities such as text talking through which the space transforms into a meaningful place for them.

- Group activities

By group activities, I mean activities that are particular to the fan page and are performed by its participants that create an attachment to the fan page and its users, and contribute to the process of place-making. For instance, Raina, an offline interviewee explained the Sunday ritual, which is performed by its participants on every Sunday at 8pm, after the telecast of *MTV Roadies* at 7pm. It can be argued that *MTV Roadies* works like 'fodder' for water cooler conversations that bring people to one space and allow them to exchange information and perform sociality. For instance, Raina said:

*I am on the fan page by 8 and others join too. By the time, administrators have already posted some updates about the show. I start posting our views and respond to any comments directed to me.*

(Online interview conducted with Raina, January 12, 2011)

*MTV Roadies* began in 2003. MTV India broadcasts *MTV Roadies* on Sunday at 7pm. The program was broadcast during prime time to reach the maximum number of

viewers across India. In his offline interview, Ratnesh said that he has been watching *MTV Roadies* from Season 1 and is usually glued to the television set by 6:50pm. He added that when he joins the fan page's Sunday ritual, fans are text talking about the same episode suggesting that others have watched the same episode on their television sets. This explains people habituation of performing routine activities (waiting for the broadcast every week) through a medium (in this case, its television set) and illustrates the importance of 'scheduling' television programs in prime time. It also adds to the debates of old media v/s new media, where old media does not necessarily die, but are dependent on the habituation of an individual (like for many people, reading a newspaper with the morning tea is more a ritual than a medium through which people keep themselves informed).

The Sunday ritual involves posting comments and wall posts, discussing tasks, evaluating *Roadies*' performances and posting their predictions about the next episode, suggesting that participants and administrators actively participated in the ritual, making it one of the unique activities performed by participants as a group.

In another interview, Rita explained 'Bollywood Thursdays'- another custom performed by administrators/fans to discuss new releases/box office reports of Bollywood movies and review old movies. The weekly custom allows fans to perform activities relating to Bollywood and exchange information on Indian pop albums, discussing the personal lives of actors and posting biographical information about actors. In her online interview, Sharda explained that often fan page administrator's post biographical information relating to actors, which are often responded to with comments that contain information on their personal and 'reel' lives. Likewise, the 2 o'clock affair is another time based routine activity performed by a group of young house wives, who often use the space to discuss their favourite programs and offline lives. As the name suggests, 2 o'clock refers to mid-afternoon, when young housewives such as Rita, Seema and others finish their housework and come online at a particular time. They then greet each other by saying 'Namaste' and perform activities on different topics of their interests and activities.

These activities suggest that fans have appropriated the fan page for their own set of activities and have transformed the fan page into a particular place through routine activities that may be time-based like the one above, practised by Rita and Seema.

## 6.5 Developing a sense of belongingness

The activities discussed above suggest that the fan page has become a ‘familiar’ place, which allows people to connect and perform group activities. Additionally, the fan page can also be argued as a place formed through people’s attachment to other participants and the place itself.

While scholars have researched and distinguished between geographically defined groups (Miller and Slater 2000) and spatial communities of interests (Kendall 2000; Baym 2000), I am particularly interested to know how communities are formed through a sense of belongingness created through routine interactions and everyday activities. Studies conducted by Mitra (1996) and Baym (2000) have shown how online spaces can act as places for specific activities. For instance, Mitra studied a newsgroup ‘soc.cult.Indian’, and examined the traditional national identities that have been disrupted by the processes of migration and immigration. He found that diasporic communities have embraced the Internet to produce a new sense of community by textually creating images of their own national and tribal issues. Likewise, Baym looked at a newsgroup: an online fan community of geographically dispersed individuals, where people form allegiances on the basis of common interests and practices. She found that people use the newsgroup as a site for interactions and shared practices, and utilizes technology and the structure of a newsgroup to facilitate everyday activities. Combining pertinent elements of both the studies, i.e. how people create a sense of belongingness to a particular place, I argue that the MTV India Facebook fan page fosters a strong sense of belongingness and has become a specific place for Indian youth’s everyday activities.

On the fan page, the sense of belongingness is built via engaging in group activities and everyday interactions, but the greatest commonality revolves around the feeling of

belongingness to a group, including attachments based on shared interests and practices. It is important to understand that an emotional connection or attachment to a place is at the core of a sense of community. An emotional connection to a place can create a sense of belongingness, since it motivates people to participate in everyday activities and practices. For example, on the fan page, participants have developed attachment to the place through particular activities performed by specific people. For instance, for Salabh, a student, the space has transformed into a place through his routine activities that include posting on cricket and interacting with others that have a common interest or preference. Likewise, for Rita, the housewife, the fan page has transformed into a place through everyday activities that involve creating connections and performing online friending.

Moreover, place-attachment is manifested through participation, creating a feeling of mutual trust, social connection, shared concerns and group values amongst the participants. On the fan page, these qualities are put into practice. For instance, feelings of mutual trust are developed through text-talk on the fan page. Participants interact with one another and create connections. These connections then result in Facebook friending or the exchange of information, such as emails, phone numbers, etc. For example, in her online interview, Geeta explained that her online friending with participants has resulted in offline meetings and also connecting through other internet applications such as emails, Gtalk etc. Working as a public relations executive, Geeta joined the fan page to promote a range of lifestyle products on the fan page and interact with people that are either interested in knowing about the products or buying them. But, along with these 'purposeful connections', Geeta has also formed useful connections based on her interests and preferences that have resulted in offline friending and in exchanging emails and phone numbers, suggesting that feelings of mutual trust are informed by previous interactions that are performed through text-talk.

Social connections are built through sharing and commenting activities performed on the fan page. Participants share their opinions and ideas about a picture/video/web page, etc with other people through the 'write me' box. These activities allow for signalling, i.e. encouraging other people to write their views on a picture/video and share it with their own friends, or to post feedback through a comment. While fans do post their opinions and views

in the form of sharing activities, posting comments is one of the more popular ways of responding to/expressing a view on a topic. The interaction results in text-talking and the formation of social connections between people, which in turn leads to online associations and offline ties.

Topics that are posted on a daily basis form the common ground for shared interests and preferences. For instance, on the fan page, participants have formed niche groups based on particular interests and preferences, such as Bollywood Thursdays, the Sunday ritual and the 2 o'clock affair, which bring people of similar interests together. People then exchange their views, create connections and form a place for shared concerns. For example, Rita found Seema on the fan page; they share similar interests and, moreover, have a similar offline life in common, playing different roles such as the combined role of housewife, mother etc, which has given them an opportunity to interact and perform friendliness. This suggests that everyday topics posted in the form of status updates bring participants together, which then develops into a sense of belongingness.

Group values are also one of the important traits of a group, as they define communities/groups and separate them from each other. The elements of the fan page, such as a) posting feedback to a previous comment; b) sharing customary greetings; c) posting a comment in response to a previous comment; and d) creating face value through fan activities and use of the fan page's style and Hing-lish language, all create a strong sense of belongingness amongst people and create stronger online/offline friendships between them. Moreover, these qualities also help understand how the space is transformed into a specific place for particular activities by creating a sense of belongingness to the place and a sense of place within it.

In my next section, I explain how this sense of place is fostered amongst individuals and how it varies from participant to participant.

## 6.6 Creating an individualized sense of place

A place comes into existence, when humans give meaning to a larger, undifferentiated space (Tuan, 1977). Places that we associate with or have a sense of place have a strong identity and character which are deeply felt by local inhabitants. Being a social phenomenon, sense of place may mean something different to each individual, and is dependent on one's experiences of and association with a place. It can be argued that there is no single sense of place; instead, people bring a whole set of cultural perceptions to a space, which then shape their individual relation to the place (Massey, 1994).

During the course of my analysis, I discovered that participants related to the fan page based on their individual experiences, thereby creating an individual connection to the place and a unique sense of it. I found that a 'sense of place' is composed of the relationship with the place, the ways in which people relate to a place, or the kind of bond they share with the place.

The fan page's participants described different types of connections with place, which I have categorized into four kinds of bonds: moral or social; based on desirability; based on desire; based on interests. Below, I detail a typology that includes participants' name, the kind of bond they share with the fan page and various uses of the fan page. I draw a table that illustrates how the fan page is capable of creating individual places within a place catering to participants that carry various interests and preferences.

Table 6.2 kinds of bonds developed on the fan page over time

Participants	Kinds of bond	Uses of the fan page
Ram	Moral or social	Guidelines for human responsibilities towards a nation or a place
Raina	Based on choice and desirability	Choosing a place based a list of desirable traits and lifestyle preferences;

		comparison of actual places with ideal
Rita	Based on desire	A desire/need to create social bonding
Salabh	Based on interests	Hobbies, interests and preferences

- Moral or social

The first type of bond is moral/social. On the fan page, fans discuss social/national issues, and create awareness by performing sharing and commenting activity. Moral or social relationships are founded on the conscious values and beliefs of individuals, who use the fan page to communicate their viewpoints and suggest corrective measures for any unresolved issues and problems. The defining characteristic of moral or social bonds is a well-articulated ideology about how better surroundings can contribute to an improved sense of a place. Fans use the fan page to discuss matters of social/national importance and form an opinion by supporting a cause/concern. For instance, Ram, an NGO support worker, used the platform to support Hazzare’s campaign and garnered support for the anti-corruption bill. Likewise, other topics, such as scams involved in the Commonwealth Games held in 2011, are widely discussed on the fan page.

In her interview, Lalita said:

*There are issues that concern youth and need to be redressed. Being an Indian, I strongly feel that terrorism is a psychological disorder in a democratic establishment. This is the futile concept of killing innocents. The need of the hour is to think about our posterity and development, and bringing youth collectively at one space on the fan page is one such initiation – a start for revolution.*

(Offline interview conducted with Lalita, January 13, 2013)

The extract portrays her individual perspectives that are posted in the form of comments and wall posts; it also highlights her association with the place and her sense of place, formed through meeting like-minded people who raise issues of social and/or moral responsibility through the platform.

- Based on choice and desirability

Although my analysis suggests that an online identity 'reflects' offline life and experiences, it may contain an ideal performance. The fan page may work as an apt place to perform ideal selves that are based on the choice and desirability of an individual. The defining characteristic of such kinds of bond is choice: i.e. the ability to choose a place with the best possible combination of desirable features.

Participants with this approach join the fan page to gain popularity, esteem and respect, and to create connections with like-minded people. Because such kinds of bonds are founded on choice and a list of desirable traits, they may result in the dissatisfaction with one community and the quest to find a more desirable place. For instance, the fan page became a place for Antonio's routine activities because it helped him to portray a self that may not closely connect to his offline life.

*I am on the fan page most of the time; I think I just love telling people what I do. And often I met people whom I haven't met at all in life. We would interact and at times if I like someone and I know it's a girl, I would talk about my work and say that I have travelled to different cities and have worked on many big and interesting projects, whereas in my real life I travel to a few cities in a year and work on 2-3 projects.*

(Offline interview conducted with Antonio, January 31, 2013)

The extract suggests that some participants use the fan page to perform routine activities, which involve portraying an ideal self to match the norms set by the other participants on the fan page. The portrayal of such selves is informed by a



combination of desirable features (such as popularity, esteem and respect) and choice, in the case of Antonio, an ideal self is created to make an impression on others and create an interaction with other participants. But, in the long run, such participants may not create an online/offline connections or perform friendliness because connections on Facebook are often based on previous online and offline ties (Boyd, 2008), which confirms credibility or the genuineness of an individual.

In the case of Ramesh, the fan page allows him to portray an ideal self, or a combination of both, forming an apt place to perform activities that are central to him.

- Based on desire

The third type of bond is based on a desire to create social connections online. For instance, Rita, the housewife chose Facebook to meet people that may have similar interests and activities.

*It is different to be young, a housewife and a mother. Married at an early age, I never had the opportunity to go out and make friends like other people. So, I started spending time on the internet, and there I found the MTV India Facebook fan page. (Offline interview conducted with Rita, February 4, 2013)*

In the case of Rita, the fan page became the first choice, as she was aware of the 'MTV India' brand and wanted to connect with people who are more like her and may have common interests and preferences.

Rita represents a category of Indian youth, who is married at the young age of 20-22 and are forced to live their life with minimal freedom. In the case of Rita, her husband loved and supported her, but never allowed her to work outside the home. Clearly, she never had the option to go outside of her house and perform sociality like others do. As a result, her computer became a medium through which she connected to the outside world. The computer lets her open websites, gain

information, access knowledge, but it was the MTV India Facebook fan page, where she could find people that shared similar interests and preferences or had a similar offline life. In this context, it is interesting to understand how the fan page has formed a place for a group of people who are socially restricted and forced to live within four walls and use the fan page to express her desires and create connections. Even if external features such as her culture and family restricted her freedom to go outside, the fan page provided an opportunity to perform interactions, to meet like-minded-people and to create online friending. Her routine interactions with her friend Seema (who is also a young housewife) and the other Facebook fan page associates suggest that the site has created a unique individual sense of place for her individualized activities and experiences.

- Based on interests

Finally, as described by interviewees, the fan page is a space to discuss activities and topics related to Indian youth activities and practices. Many join the fan page to receive updates on day to day happenings, whereas others use the platform to create connections on the basis of common interests and activities. For instance, Salabh joined the fan page because there he found a group of active participants who were interested in cricket. The group gradually got to know each other and started performing activities relating to their interests; for example, the group developed symbolic terminology to represent various scorecards on the fan page.

Likewise, others found like-minded people on the fan page, i.e. people who share similar interests and preferences. Their individual activities and interactions with specific people who share similar preferences highlight how the space has been transformed into a particular place for their routine activities, thereby creating multiple 'sense of place', which is personalized to each individual.

In separating these kinds of bonds and the processes involved in forming a 'place' and creating an individual' sense of place, my intention is to highlight that the complexities involved in this process re not same for everyone and differ from

individual to individual, resulting in the creation of a specific sense of place for every individual, based on past and present offline experiences and cultural elements. These complexities also co-relate to the concept of 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983), which highlight the ways through which individual's connection are formed with the specific 'place' and a unique sense of belongingness and attachment are created by participants and place.

At this point, I can argue that the MTV India Facebook fan page has been transformed into a place, where people perform routine activities relating to his/her interests and preferences and, create an individualized sense of place based on their routine activities on the fan page.

## Chapter 7 Discussion and conclusions

### Concluding discussions

In this conclusion, I return to my two explicit and two implicit research questions and illustrate how the fan page has become a 'place' to perform sociality, friendliness and enhanced citizenry. I review my findings in relation to relevant literature and demonstrate how the MTV India Facebook fan page has become a site for identity performance. In this study, I argue that the fan page has transformed into a particular meaningful 'place' through routine and everyday activities. This 'place' formation has further resulted in a) connecting participants' online-offline lives, suggesting that online lives are informed by offline lives and experiences; b) mixing the local-global (MTV India and Facebook) elements to understand how locality is created through glocalisation. Below, I discuss these topics in detail and identify how my findings are useful to understand the concept of 'place-creation'. Finally, I state the original contribution to knowledge and flag up areas of future research.

**My first explicit research question** examined the activities of participants and organization of the 'text talk' that takes place on MTV India's Facebook fan page and studied how identities are performed, especially in relation to the theme of 'Indian-ness'. I found that participants use the Facebook fan page to create connections on the basis of shared interests and activities and to perform friendliness.

While social networking sites such as Facebook have brought the potential for new configurations of friendliness and online/offline friending (Boyd, 2008), participants' engagement with MTV India's Facebook fan page reveals an interesting yet complex set of practices inflected in new ways. Participants via performing fan activities such as liking, sharing and commenting communicate their interests/preferences in public and start an interaction with others. For example, a comment posted by an individual may invite counter

comments from other participants. These interactions then communicate participants' view points and present the online identity of an individual.

On a platform like Facebook, where identities are likely to be performed in front of an entire network (friends' network) or group of people (audience), users create consistent front-stage performances that might involve performing ideal selves as per the standards set up the society. However, as evidenced by my findings, participants may choose to perform identities away from their offline self, but, in reality they perform a self that is much closer to their offline self that may have a few elements of an 'ideal self' performed at various stages of a given social situation. For instance, an individual may partially agree to a commonly held view in public, even if he/she strongly disagrees with it. This behaviour/phenomenon can be understood through Goffman's (1959) 'role of stigma', wherein people willingly hide or conceal information and present ideal selves that are consistent with the society's choices and preferences. For instance, in his offline interview, Salabh explained how he received strong disagreements through a PM application that only were seen and responded to by him (hiding his/her performance) and partial agreements through comments (showing an acceptance to an idea discussed). This social situation explains the kinds of danger/security issues available in an online setup, where people incorporate an ideal self to fit in a social situation or show an agreement to be on a par with others. This is also suggestive of how fans use various techniques such as partial agreement, skilful use of Facebook's applications (PM and commenting) to create connections and use the fan page as a space for friending.

As the purpose of performing interactions on the fan page is to perform sociality and friendliness, disagreements (if posted as a comment) are either responded to lower down with a polite explanation or are ignored/deleted by fan page's administrators and fans.

Another important finding of my project is that such identities are performed in relation to national identity and communicate Indian-ness (see chapter 5). Fan activities such as liking, sharing and commenting are used to appreciate, support and communicate viewpoints relating to topics that concern India as a nation and its citizen. For instance, text-talk posted

to the MTV program *Roadies* shows a form of Indian-ness, which is defined by youth actions that are informed by activities like imbibing respect for women and helping others.

In the case of cricket, Indian-ness is performed via fan activities, which shows support/faith in the team and their game. The kind of Indian-ness performed shows connections to patriotism, a sense of national pride, eagerness and enthusiasm amongst fans for their team to win a tournament. This form of Indian-ness is slightly different from the kind of Indian-ness performed through MTV programs as it shows association with youth activities and involves campaigning against issues/problems that are prevalent in the society. This suggests that the fan page has been appropriated for different activities; most of the practices demonstrate Indian-ness performed by various means. At times it is through showing faith and support in their Indian cricket team, at other times it involves performing an identity that shows a connection to local cultures and languages signalling a sense of unity in diversity.

Likewise, fan page participants perform Indian-ness through an engagement with Indian cinema and topics relating to Bollywood actors. For instance, many Indians expressed disappointment about India's projection in the film *Slumdog Millionaire* (featuring India and Indian actors) and argued that the film represented the nation in a negative light. Fans' comments showing possessiveness and defensiveness show their respect and a sense of belonging-ness to the nation. Similarly, discussion on social/national issues shows an awakening, a healthy spirit and a revolution that has introduced a new form of Indian-ness in youth. It is also suggestive of communicating a national identity, which is connected to the idea of 'belonging' - being part of a community that takes pride in associating themselves with youth activities (such as Hazzare's campaign) and recognizes its cultural products (MTV India, Indian cricket team, Indian cinema) as part and parcel of Indian society.

Such identity performance on the fan page also suggests that these identities are not created in isolation, but are connected to offline selves. It tends to answer one of my implicit research questions, which was directed at finding out how online and offline lives are often related.

On Facebook, it would appear that people are always performing on the front stage (Farquhar, 2009); but an online performance is not only derived from an ideal self, it is also influenced by an individual's offline life. For instance, on the fan page, participants create connections on the basis of shared interests and practices, suggesting that an individual's online self may reflect an individual's attributes, such as previous experiences, social affiliations, psychological attitudes, etc. In one of the offline interviews, a participant explained that even if a participant on the fan page deliberately tries to exaggerate a performance or an identity, the relevant knowledge and other 'individualised' attributes of an individual would restrict such performances. For instance, in an online interview, Aanadya, a call centre employee explained how she interacted with few people that had profile names such as 'cool dude', 'handsome boy' and 'Delhi Maverick', but couldn't create any online/offline connections as these Facebookers didn't come across as 'cool', 'dude', 'handsome' or 'maverick' (as suggested by their profile names) during the text-talk. This suggests that Facebookers gauge the genuineness/credibility of others through various means- in the above case using ideal names such as 'dude', 'handsome', 'maverick' may create an initial favourable impression on others, but may not result in friending as connections on Facebook are either informed by common interests, or previous interactions (Boyd, 2008).

In the study, I found that a SNS such as Facebook is not a distinct online space that allows people to perform role-play/imaginative play; the performances, interactions, connections and context of social network sites are tightly intertwined with other aspects of participants' lives (their likes, interests and preferences), which implies that most of their online performances are closely connected to their offline selves. This suggests that online identity performances that take place on the fan page are not isolated, but are conscious acts that rely on individuals' offline experiences/online activities involving people with whom they might or might not share a connection.

Researchers such as Haythornthwaite (2007) argue that the online world bears a close resemblance to the offline world, as people display similar kinds of characteristics, such as a common language, support system during crisis, etc. For instance, the combination of two

languages, Hindi and English, on the fan page suggests that ‘Hing-lish’ could be the routine language of Indian youth. This suggests that such forms of computer-mediated communications (CMCs) intertwine with offline identities (Boyd, 2008) and are used as a space to intensify social ties that are characterized by some form of offline connections (Ellison et al., 2007). Hence, online social ties do not necessarily take people away from their offline world, but connect the offline identities and online personas in a way that communicates behaviours or selves that bear a close resemblance to offline social experiences. Therefore, the online world and the activities within are not a separate entity, but are an extension of the offline world. However, as argued before, people may purport to be anyone in an online setup, but in the case of the fan page, I observed that participants perform an ideal self or construct a performance so that a) it might not hurt other peoples’ sentiments and, b) will not show a wider disagreement to a popularly held view. This suggests that users on the fan page care about others’ opinions/ideas and use the fan page as a space to perform sociality and friendliness rather than showing hostility to any caste/creed/culture. Additionally, it can be assumed that public display of an unpopular identity is avoided on Facebook because it may damage an individual’s face value/reputation. Therefore, an ideal self may prevail in an online identity, but the personalized self-attributes and appearance (such as profile names, use of language in text-talk) of an individual would communicate traits and characteristics of an ‘offline’ identity.

Moreover, these online activities (often informed by offline life) performed in everyday life have resulted in ‘place’ creation; **my second research question** examines how the MTV India Facebook fan page has become a meaningful ‘place’ overtime. I found that the fan page has become a meaningful ‘place’ through a creation of a progressive sense of place (Massey, 1994), routine activities and everyday practices (Tuan, 1977) and environmental experience (Seamon, 1979).

Massey (1994) argues that a productive sense of place is built through an engagement with ‘elsewhere’, i.e. recognizing and intensifying a familiar sense of ‘local’ within a global space. One of my research questions also addressed how local-global elements combine and create a hybrid culture, such as MTV India; I found that these cultures are formed through



“glocalization” (Appadurai, 1996), which on the one hand explains how global culture tends to incorporate elements of every local culture through global media ( such as adopting foreign reality shows formats and remaking it to the suit an Indian audience), and on the other, how local cultures actively negotiate with the global culture and incorporate local in the global. For instance, MTV India and the MTV India Facebook fan page – the official Facebook fan page of MTV India -incorporated locality and were continuously evolved to suit the Indian audience. The brand MTV was kept intact, and the focus on the youth culture was maintained, with western formats refitted to suit Indian tastes presented by Indian players (Cullity, 2002).

On the MTV India Facebook fan page, locality has been incorporated through posting everyday topics (such as MTV programs, Bollywood, cricket, social/national issues) that relate to Indian youth and MTV programs. Fans respond to such topics through liking, sharing and commenting and exchange their ideas with MTV administrators and others. For instance, Lalita, a part-time Disc Jockey from New Delhi, India explains how the fan page serves a group of fans that are interested in world music:

*I listen to Rihanna on MTV Late Night show, dance to Michael Jackson’s song that features in Non-stop Hits and sing to Indian Sikh-Rabbi’s performance in MTV Unplugged.*

(Offline interview conducted with Lalita Yadav, January 13, 2013)

She argues that MTV India- the glocalised product has-opened up a flow of global content, which is remade to suit Indian audience, thereby creating a demand for such products amongst the local audience. Both the channel- MTV India- and the fan page- the MTV India Facebook -serve the local–global needs of Indian youth and provide a mix of global-local content to fit to the Indian television audience. Earlier, when I mapped literature on MTV India (see chapter 2), I explained how MTV’s global strategy has always been to reinvent itself in every market; for example, in Italy, the channel airs what Italians like, and in India, the programming caters to what Indians like. I argued that MTV India can be understood as a hybrid culture that has formed through a combination of western formats and the Indian

look. For example, Indians, by nature, are bilingual and by adopting ‘Hing-lish’ in most of the programs, MTV directly connects to the Indian culture of speaking Hing-lish. MTV shows such as *MTV Fully Faltoo* (Totally Useless) and *MTV Bakra* (MTV Fool), are creatively named (mix of Hindi and English) to connect to the masses. This suggests MTV India and the MTV India Facebook fan page have adopted locality through a process of indigenization and localization and has created a familiar ‘local’ within a global space.

Furthermore, I argue that a familiar sense of ‘local’ (place) is not only centred on the globalization process; there are other important factors such as dwelling, habitation and environmental experiences (Tuan, 1977), which contribute to one’s familiar sense of ‘local’ (place). Tuan (1977) argues that a specific space can be transformed into a familiar ‘place’ through routine activities and everyday practices. Furthermore, the ‘place-making’ process is informed by participants’ lived-in experiences that create familiarity with a space, turning into a ‘place’ (Seamon, 1997) for particular activities that are specific to them.

For instance, the following routine activities have transformed the fan page into a particular ‘place’.

Firstly, the fan page allows fans to participate in various topics such as cricket, Bollywood; social/national issues etc and has formed a particular ‘place’ to perform Indian-ness.

Secondly, the fan page has become a place for *group activities*. Some group activities that are particular to Indian youth, such as Sunday Ritual, Bollywood Thursdays etc, are performed on the fan page. For example, Sunday ritual- *MTV Roadies* episode’s discussion performed every Sunday- highlights how the fan page has become a specific place for *Roadies* fans who are interested in evaluating the tasks and participants of the show. Furthermore, the ritual performed at 8 pm (at a specific time) also highlights the ways in which broadcast media and new media have combined together, and have allowed fans to perform a new form of sociality. Likewise, Bollywood Thursdays are performed to exchange news relating to Bollywood movies, actors, their lives, etc.

Thirdly, the fan page has become a place by engaging in everyday activities. In her interview, Lalita explained how the fan page has become a specific site for her activities. It is through the fan page that she finds information on international music albums and concerts, and meets like-minded people who are interested in what she likes. Her routine experiences have created an individual sense of place that has led to the creation of place.

Fourthly, the fan page has become a familiar 'place' through routine activities performed in everyday life. In offline interviews, people explained how the fan page has incorporated MTV India's local-global element and has offered a platform, a) to provide feedback on MTV programs, and b) exchange ideas and voice opinions on various prevailing social/national issues. Moreover, the use of Hing-lish and customary greetings such as Namaste helps people to familiarize themselves with each other and initiate an interaction.

Fifth, the fan page has also formed a place through the sense of belonging-ness and place-attachment gained through participation in routine activities through which fans have developed mutual trust and created social connections and have promoted community values. For instance, on the fan page, community values such as responding to a comment directed to a particular fan is important (even if it's a minor/major disagreement) because the poster (individual who posted the comment) may feel ignored or other posters posting on the wall post may feel that the responder is either inactive or does not care to respond to a view/opinion exchanged in the form of a comment.

Sixth, the fan page has become a place for online/offline social bonding, which is built through sharing and commenting activities. Participants share and exchange ideas from offline life and strengthen their online connections, creating online associations that sometimes result in offline meetings.

Just as the MTV India's Facebook fan page has formed a particular place for the above activities, it has also contributed to an individual sense of place, providing a personalized 'place' for everyone's routine activities and everyday practices. This suggests that a connection/sense of a place is formed through individualized routine activities and practices,

and may differ from individual to individual based on past/present offline experiences and cultural elements. Coming back to Massey's (1994) concept of place, it can be concluded that peoples' connection to a place is informed by various elements such as local-global products (MTV), power geometry (in the case of the MTV India Facebook fan page, only fans who can access the internet through broadband or smart phones can become familiar with the fan page and create connections) and a personalized connection or sense of 'place' is developed through how an individual relates to a 'place' and his/her experiences are formed through the performance of routine activities in a place. For instance, fans that access the fan page from a mobile phone will experience the fan page much differently than people who access the fan page from the broadband. This could be an area of future research to identify how a sense of place may differ, if people access online environments through various means such as mobile phones or iPads that are portable.

### The MTV India Facebook fan page – a place to perform sociality and enhanced citizenry

Although Goffman's (1959) cue management and identity presentation provides the basic underpinning for my study and the framework for analysing the results, my findings are also suggestive in various ways with respect to how people connect online and perform sociality. In considering fans' strategic interaction patterns with others, my study provides some useful insights into the idea of an individual connecting to hundreds or thousands of weak ties (with whom they do not share any connection) to fulfil their needs as compared to a handful of strong ties. In the case of MTV India's Facebook fan page, fans connected on the basis of shared interests and preferences and used the site to initiate, restore and maintain connections through online/offline friending.

In response to scholars who suggest that the Internet has created isolating effects (Bakardjieva, 2004), and is a complete world in itself (Boellstorff, 2005); I disagree with their views and argue that online lives are more or less a reflection of people's offline selves that may involve elements of self-censorship or ideal presentation. During the analysis, I

found that much of the fan page's activity focuses on planning and discussing the experiences of offline life. The kinds of activities performed on the fan page also suggest that participants often draw from their offline activities. For instance, a few participants explained how fans connect through a casual greeting – usually Namaste or hi/hello – and take a conversation ahead, which is very similar to how people perform friending in their offline lives. On the fan page, fans strive to perform a self that is closely connected to their offline self, however fans may take greater control of their presentation and represent an ideal self as per the group norms or the standard set up by society. Boyd (2002, 2004) calls this a 'collapse of context' - an opposite setting from the offline environment where users try to influence others through online performance. In such situations, Facebookers are unable to act simply in the context of connections that one creates on the fan page, but also for the public (fans and administrators) that exist on the fan page. But, on the fan page, people perform an 'ideal self' to offline identities to hide a stigma or a behaviour that may not be apt in public or may hurt people's feelings, suggesting that the site is used to foster social interaction and perform online/offline friendliness through various online techniques. For instance, in his offline interview, Antonio, an aspiring model, explained how sometimes he introduced himself as an experienced television artist to begin an interaction with another fan. However, later he told that he created useful/friendly connections based on the information that represented his offline life.

Apart from this, there was an evidence of enhanced citizenry. The fan page is also used as a site to discuss social / national issues and raise an opinion in a public forum. In offline interviews, fans told that they joined the fan page because it provided information on various social/national issues and encouraged them to routinely participate by liking, sharing and commenting. For instance, activities relating to law and order, etc., were the most discussed topics during the period of the study. In his offline interview, Ram, an activist in Hazzare's campaign said:

*When a protest is done electronically, it invites discussions and participation. And the dynamics of Facebook fan pages are such that one cannot simply ignore what others are doing. And as a result, there was a continuous sharing and liking of videos, posts*

*and pictures, etc. on the fan page and profiles that helped the campaign to reach the target people.*

(Offline interview with Ram conducted on February 14, 2013)

Links to Hazzare's campaign and online petition signing were widely circulated on the fan page and created the maximum number of fan activities in comparison to cricket and Bollywood on the fan page, suggesting that fans used the site to maximize its reach and increase awareness amongst people. In another online interview, Sakshi said:

*I personally think that the Indian youth isn't a homogenous group. Everyone has got different demands, ideas and perspectives. I want a more stable and less corrupt government, whereas others want a better education system and more college and universities. I want government policies that should bring about more job opportunities and others want the freedom to enjoy life.*

(Offline interview conducted with Sakshi on January 2, 2013)

Sakshi explained how the fan page helps her express herself and share her views with people that are unknown to her. This suggests that fans, including Sakshi and Ram, have appropriated the site to perform a unique set of activities that display the fans' awareness and active participation in day-to-day activities.

The norms and the culture of MTV India's Facebook fan page can be summarized as having a focus on issues that interest youth. There is a preoccupation with posting topics, resulting in turn-taking, which allows people to voice an opinion while creating connections with people that they have found through the fan page, suggesting that the MTV India Facebook fan page is not only used to perform sociality, but also as a site for society construction and civic engagement.

Undoubtedly, Facebook and Facebook fan pages are becoming socially driven. This has offered an opportunity to people to use the site for various kinds of activities, but in light of

constant changes and the repeated introduction of new elements, Facebookers' use of these elements for civic engagement and society construction needs to be studied further.

## Significance of my findings to the broader academic field

Drawing on previous fan studies (Baym, 2000; Jenkins, 2006), it can be argued that 'fandom' has been established as a field of study. Jenkins (2006) argues that a familiarity with fandom may provide an understanding of new forms of cultural production and participation. Furthermore, Baym's (2000) work on soaps and fandom add that "mediated communication is not a space, it is an additional tool people use to connect, one which can only be understood as deeply embedded in and influenced by the daily realities of embodied life" (152). She argues that in studying fan cultures, a contextual approach is required for the study of the online communication used by a group of people in some circumstances for particular activities. Returning to the social shaping of technology perspective (discussed in chapter 2), it can be argued that both the nature of media and the needs and desires of its users shape the meanings and utility of a medium at a given time. Thus, drawing from both studies, it can be argued that digital communication technology provides a space to perform new forms of fandom activities that augments social relationships and results in the creation of friendliness, new associations/connections and production of cultural artifacts. Although my study is in line with the findings of the above researchers, it combines fandom studies with place-making activities (Tuan, 1977; Seamon, 1979; Massey, 1994) to explore how an online 'space' created by such fandom activities becomes a 'place' through 'familiarity', 'lived-in experiences' and 'locality'. My study locates the MTV India Facebook fan page as a meaningful online 'place', which is created through a) the performance of everyday activities; b) lived-in experience created through routine activities; and c) a progressive sense of place created through the familiarity with the elements of the place gained over time. By combining the work of Tuan's human geography (1977), Seamon's work on environmental experience (1979) and Massey's work on progressive sense of place (1994), I argue that online spaces such as MTV India Facebook fan page can function in a similar way to offline geographical places and provide a space to connect with like-minded people based on

common interests and preferences. For instance, according to Tuan (1977), a place becomes meaningful through routine activities. On the fan page, participants perform fan activities on a routine basis and have formed an association with the fan page and its elements (such as the comment feature etc.), transforming it into a particular meaningful place. Likewise, Seamon's (1979) environmental experience, such as performing particular activities – in my study, the Sunday ritual, Bollywood Thursdays, the 2'o clock affair, etc – have transformed the MTV India's Facebook fan page into a routine 'place'. Alongside, the use of western literature (Seamon, 1979; Tuan, 1977; Massey, 1994) in this study highlights how global literature can be used to study local elements that may contribute to the understanding of universal concepts such as place-making.

Similarly, the fan page has become a place through the incorporation of locality (Massey, 1994). By using Hing-lish language and posting updates relating to Indian youth and MTV India programs, the fan page has transformed into a place for specific activities that are particular to fan page's participants. Furthermore, the use of the fan page to perform activities relating to Indian-ness also suggests that the fan page has been transformed into a particular place.

This unique 'place' creation suggests that a) fans have appropriated the fan page for particular activities such as performing friendliness; b) the fan page has been transformed into a particular 'place' over time through the performance of routine activities; c) and it is formed through a mix of elements, which are necessary to create a familiar 'meaningful' environment. In the case of the MTV India Facebook fan page, the elements such as locality within the MTV India Facebook fan page helped create **familiarity** with the fan page. The familiarity has brought people together who then created <sup>23</sup>connections on the basis of common interests. These connections have resulted in routine interactions and everyday activities, which transformed the fan page into a **meaningful** place. Since these connections were maintained through routine activities performed on the fan page, such activities continuously produced **lived-in experiences**, which are capable of creating a unique sense of

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<sup>23</sup> Lived-in experiences are produced through performing routine activities at a given place.



place that is individual to each participant, suggesting that people's attachment to a place is informed by routine activities and relation shared with a particular place.

I argue that this particular 'place' can be identified as 'Youngistan', a place where Indian youth draw on experiences from the offline world and perform activities online. The word 'stan' means place and its usage in the above context illustrates how the fan page has transformed into a place over time through everyday practices such as practicing knowledge-sharing, performing friending and managing disagreements.

In addition, my study also highlights how CMCs such as Facebook interactions can create a sense of belongingness to a site and may transform the site to a particular place over time. This suggests that places are not mere physical territories (Massey, 1994), but can be a complex mix of various elements such as local culture, routine activities, live-in experiences, which can create a sense of place for a space/site, transforming it into a particular place. Hence, new media, especially Facebook fan pages such as the MTV India Facebook fan page can act like a 'place', created through routine activities and lived-in experiences.

The study also serves as an extension to Baym's (2000), Mitra's (1996) and Kendall's (2000) findings, whose work illustrated how routine interactions and everyday activities constituted community formation processes over the internet. I argue that these so formed unique online communities are not only the result of like-minded people coming together on a common platform and performing friendliness (Baym, 2000; Kendall, 2000) or displaying a national identity; but are the outcome of place-making activities created through repetitive routine activities (such as performing the Sunday ritual every Sunday or performing the 2'o clock affair every afternoon), lived-in experiences created through the performance of everyday practices and a sense of belongingness to the place created overtime, building a 'stan' for various online communities.

## Reflections from the study

The value of this research is generated through my interpretation of the data, the exploration of 'the dynamics of the researcher-researched relationship, which is seen to fundamentally shape research results' (Finlay, 2002b, 534). Finlay notes that the reflexive analysis could come into play] to 'examine the impact of the research and the participants on each other and on the research' (p535). However, there are concerns, first is the reflexivity in respect to the researcher's social position; and second is the 'interpretation and representation of people's lives from the analytical foreground' (p537). To respond to this, when writing this section, I adapted Mauthner and Doucet's (1998: 126-8) voice-centred relational method that allows a reflexive account of the study, which, on the one hand, reveal my constructivist driven ontological and epistemological perspective, and on the other, is concerned with the correlation and asymmetry between my experiences as an overseas student and those of my participants.

While researching the MTV India's Facebook fan page has been a time taking exercise, the difficult part was to study this local phenomenon from a distance. This gave me the status of a diasporic Indian. As an outsider (living abroad for almost six years), I found that Indian youth is active and are informed citizens of our nation, who use various sources such as fan pages to express opinions/ideas in a public arena. Although interacting with them online provided useful information about the fan page and its uses, interviewing some of them in offline life gave an insight about their association with the fan page and the connections they formed through it. For a few, the fan page has become a site for friendliness, whereas for others, the fan page is used as a platform to perform routine activities that are specific to them. Through this study I found that the theme of Indian-ness has been redefined to an extent where it represents unity and harmony amongst people. For instance, discussion on social/national issues on the fan page highlights a public opinion and a social awakening gained through the comments on the fan page. As an ethnographer, I discovered that the activities performed on routine basis highlight a form of Indian-ness that has a sense of 'belonging' to the community of which they are part. Furthermore, it is through this study, I found how global products such as MTV and Facebook hybridise with local elements (MTV

India) to produce a local-global culture (Appadurai, 1996), such as the MTV India Facebook fan page that may have practices of their own.

In addition to this, the fan page turned out to be a home away from home. I could find Facebook associates and other fans that wrote the same language and discussed the same topics I was interested in. My journey as a participant (as an insider) helped me to redefine my own sense of Indian-ness that allowed me to express opinions and share ideas from a distance. It is through the performance of routine activities on the fan page, I understood that performing a national identity is not limited to celebrating national days, events or festivals, but showcasing a feeling of identity via its favourite sports such as cricket, Indian cinema, i.e. Bollywood, MTV programs such as *MTV Roadies* and social/national issues.

Moreover, this study helped me to regain the sense of place that I thought I lost six years ago when I left India. Through the study I discovered that a meaningful 'place' is created through a progressive sense of place (Massey, 1994), routine activities and everyday practices (Tuan, 1977) and environmental experience (Seamon, 1979). Each familiar place carries a unique sense of place. In fact a relation to a place is built through routine activities and everyday practices performed over a period of time. A strange space may become a 'familiar' place over time. For instance, the chair and table I have used for writing this thesis, the cosy bed I have slept in, and television as my only source of entertainment have contributed to a unique sense of place, which I have gained over a period of time. In addition to this, I argue ideas such as 'no sense of place' (Meyrowitz, 1985), 'placelessness' (Relph, 1956) may not exist, because a 'sense of place' is connected to its character, where the uniqueness of the place is continuously reproduced in the process of social interactions (Massey, 1994). It could be true that the presence of mediated surroundings in a physical environment may create a 'double' sense of place, but only derivatively, as such surroundings are only 'mere' settings that allow people to interact electronically; it does not affect the intimacy or nearness shared in social interactions.

## Areas of future research

As a practical (and methodological) matter, a SNS such as Facebook turns out to be especially productive terrain for researching impression management, as it allows the researcher to examine online identity performance and find out how online activities of the online world are related to participants' offline practices. Using Goffman's (1979) techniques, such as impression management, cue management and the role of stigma, etc., future research may be conducted to find out how various Facebook applications/features (such as the share button, uploading pictures/videos) are used to create an individual's online identity. For instance, on the MTV India Facebook fan page, fans create an online identity by building appropriate face value by performing fan activities (like, share and comment) and adhering to accepted norms/values (such as responding to a comment, using explanations and partial agreements to scale down disagreements).

My findings illustrate that online identity construction may incorporate an ideal performance subject to the standards set up by the society/participants. An area of future research could be the forms of identities displayed in regard to the incorporation of ideal selves in online performances that may be subject to different social situations such as the public display of an identity within a specific group. For instance, on the fan page, fans acknowledge that they express/present themselves in a way that relates to their offline self, but partially agreed with others, even if they strongly disagree with the idea/view posted by others. This suggests that the incorporation of an ideal self into an online identity is informed by a) care and concern, and b) friendliness developed through routine activities and everyday practices. However, in other online environments, an online self may be influenced by several factors (e.g. offline identities) and need to be studied separately.

Moreover, Facebook underwent two major format changes after I completed this study. New features, such as the timeline and security changes were added to fan pages and profiles; the timeline is the new profile page design that includes a list of most recent updates in addition to a complete summary (photos, videos, status updates) of activities that have been performed on one's profile or fan page. The new timeline only changed the way the news-

feed look on a user's profile, hence didn't really affect any area of my study. Moreover, the recent security changes in Facebook only allow members to send friend requests to people who are either connected by a common network or are in the friend's friend list (people may send a friend request or a message outside of their networks, but it's usually treated as 'spam', unless the user wants to see his/her spam messages or friend requests), suggesting that Facebook promotes connections that have common links (such as common friends or friends' friends that have attended similar educational institutions etc). More changes could occur on the site, and researching this ever-changing scene must be an on-going process.

Furthermore, the findings of the study suggest that online activities are informed by offline lives and the MTV India Facebook fan page has become a place for such activities that not only allows people to create connections, but to perform online/offline finding based on common interests that are discussed in the form of wall posts/comments on the fan page. Facebookers from other nations would likely have different sets of norms/practices depending on the platform (for instance, in this study it is MTV India's Facebook fan page), they may choose to perform activities relating to their social/national issues [in the case of Trinidadians, the social medium was 'Fasbook' (Miller, 2000) which allowed them to perform activities that were central to them and their culture]. Moreover, the age range (16–29) studied in this thesis allowed the analysis of a range of practices that are specific to Indian youth; studying a younger or older population may require other research methods and collecting data that may have different outcomes. Furthermore, the norms of youth shift over time; for instance, on the fan page, cricket is the most liked topic on the fan page (Chapter 4); this may change over time. Additionally, the practices/norms practiced on the fan page may also change. For instance, the norm of 'coming back' (re-logging on to the fan page) may change as people may increasingly access the fan page from mobile media, such as smart phones/iPads, which allow them to be logged in 24/7. This may affect their immediate sense of place and will hence need further studying.

Perhaps the greatest strength of the study is to understand the relationships we carry on in digital forms, while providing a clear focus on how complex social and technological dynamics interacts on SNSs and contribute to 'place-making' activities. Yet this study

remains fairly firmly in an Indian, and largely urban Indian, perspective on digital communications. Though there are issues such as inequalities of access, digital divides, and global differences in use of technology, these are not central to my study. In addition to this, privacy has attained new prominence with the rise of SNSs such as Facebook and GooglePlus, but is only mentioned in the passing. This does not detract, however, from the value of this study for a researcher who is interested in establishing how online spaces can act similar to offline 'places' through place-making processes.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A - Questionnaire for online interviews

Gender      Male/Female

Occupation

Age

Place

Do you use broadband/mobile to access MTV India's Facebook

Frequency and duration of visits on the fan page?

What time do you come online. Is there a specific time?

What topics do you like? What kind of topics you like, share and comment?

Ever had any issues with fan's comments on the fan page? If so, how did you resolve them?

Have you befriended anyone through the fan page? Have you met those people outside the fan page?

Would you like to add me in your friend list and meet for face-to-face interviews?

## Appendix B - Questionnaire for offline interviews

Name

Gender Male/Female

Age range 16-29

Profession

Connection Broadband/Mobile

Ethnic origin

Reasons for joining the page. What got you started?

Tell me about your overall experience.

Frequency and duration of visits. What do you typically spend your time doing?

What topics do you like, comment and share the most? Are there any specific topics?

Tell me about your discussions with other fans... who are these people, what do you talk about?

How do you rate other fan's comments? Are they friendly, sarcastic or rude?

Do you think by posting fan activities on the fan page, an identity is reflected?

Do you see any relation in your online activities and offline life?

Have you set any particular privacy setting on your profile. If yes, what kind of privacy setting and why?

Do you think MTV India is playing a unified role by providing a common platform for Indian youth?

## Appendix C - Facebook Research Profile

### **About Neha**

I am a PHD student at the University of Sunderland, UK. I am currently examining the MTV India Facebook fan page to find out what exactly people do online. I study various activities that take place on the fan page and illustrate how the fan page has become a site of identity performance (usually performed by showing interest, preferences, agreements, and disagreements in the form). For the purpose of this study, I collect data ( wall posts and comments available on the fan page) and monitor fans' day –to- day activities.

Please note that I am ACTIVELY OBSERVING the publicly available pages for my research. However, I am NOT collecting, identifying information (names, D.O.B.s, courses, addresses). I am observing these pages in an effort to understand how these pages have contributed to the larger role of online community formation. Further, I am looking for people who would be interested in talking to me in greater detail about their Facebook experiences. Your participation would be strictly confidential and I am using pseudonyms for everyone involved. No identifying Information will be used.

If you are interested in being a part of my research, please contact me using the above information.

Contact Information

Email: [sunderlandresearch@gmail.com](mailto:sunderlandresearch@gmail.com)

### **Places Lived**

[Newcastle upon Tyne](#)

Current location

**New Delhi, India**

Home town

**Basic Information**

Gender        Female

Interested in    Men and women

Languages        British English, Hindi, Punjabi and Arabic



## Appendix D - Ethical Considerations

For entirely practical reasons, I decided to focus on young people who spoke English, Hindi or a combination of both. I also plan to conduct all my interviews in both the languages. Prior to contacting any participant's, I created a researcher profile which included a description of me, my objectives, my intentions; my larger research interests and my contact information (see Appendix C). The research profile also included a recruitment statement asking for willing participants to contact me on the Facebook profile or the email given. I also took into account some ethical considerations such as what is public and private behavior and what needs consent and what doesn't (Cavanaugh, 1999), and tried incorporating these in my study plan. I adopted the following ethical guidelines (Mann & Stewart, 2000):

- a. Data to be collected for a specific purpose.
- b. Participants should have access to the information collected about them.
- c. My profile stating information explicitly identifying me as a researcher with intent to monitor actions within the site.
- d. Informed Consent –Since the MTV India's Facebook fan page is a public fan page, analyzing data available on the fan page does not need consent. However, data collected through online and offline one-to-one interviews needed consents of participants who participated in the study. In on-line data collection, it is critical that the consent form uses clear, simple language as it may be awkward or time-consuming for potential participants to obtain clarification. I used clear and simple English to avoid any confusion and mentioned my email address/phone number on top of the consent form for any clarifications. Finally, it is important that participants

have the opportunity to say that they want to or do not want to participate in the study. In my opinion, consent forms should provide two choices: one that indicates consent and one that does not, I provided both. Following information were included in the consent form: a) information about the nature and purpose of the research; b) a statement that participation is voluntary, including the choice to opt out of the research at any time; c) information about the data collection method and the option to agree/refuse to being recorded (if applicable); d) a description of the extent to which confidentiality will be maintained and an option to choose anonymity; e) a description of any possible risks or discomforts to the participant; f) a description of any possible benefits to participant or others; g) contact addresses and/or telephone numbers for any questions about the research; h) an option to agree or refuse to participate (signature of participant, date, signature of witness/researcher); i) a description of the intended uses, and disposal/storage and documentation procedures for data including an option to agree/disagree with these procedures.

People who gave their consent to use their names and information, their offline names are published along with the information provided, whereas people who ticked the option of publishing information, but not names, changed names have been used throughout the thesis. In addition to this, consent forms were uploaded in my researcher's profile under 'notes', which can be accessed by all the participants. Also, the consent forms were sent through Facebook chat option or were mailed directly to online interviewees. Alternatively, the hard copies were handed to offline interviewees before the commencement of offline interviews. Most of the consent forms were either received through Facebook's chat option /mails or were handed back after the offline interviews, whereas a few of them were not received. The possible reasons of this could be that participants found filling consent forms a time consuming activity. They either forgot to return the consent forms or intentionally ignored it. In such scenarios, reminder emails were sent to selected participants. A few of them responded back with messages such as 'they are currently busy with college projects' and 'office projects' and would respond later. In such cases, changed names are used to protect the identity of participants, as verbal consents

were obtained at the beginning of the interview and participants were informed about the possible risks/benefits resulting from the research and how data would be used in the study.

e. Debriefing- although my researcher's profile clearly mentions aims and objectives of the study, I debriefed all the participating fans in the beginning of an online/offline interview. This gives scope to the participants to discuss the nature of study and raise any doubts/confusions they may have in regard to their role in the study.

f. The Right to Withdraw- at all times, participants were given freedom to withdraw from the study or destroy any information given any prior. If any of the interviewee raised any ethical issues (such as the confidentiality of information); such matters were dealt immediately to the satisfaction of the interviewee and records of any information was destroyed. In online interviews, disruptions were involved due to the slow connection or time zone's difference, in such situations I always asked participants' consent to move ahead and continue the interview. The information gained was either recorded on my researchers' Facebook profile or tape recorder; it was then transcribed word-to-word in English<sup>24</sup> and the copy of the same was kept safe in the locker. A few illustrations of online interviews and offline interviews are included in the Appendices.

g. Confidentiality – Researchers have a primary obligation to secure the information obtained through participants. I used an audio recorder to record all my interviews and played the information only on my personal and work laptops.

h. Other safety precautions such as meeting in public places, etc. were taken into consideration to ensure my safety and comfort of both interviewer and interviewee.

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<sup>24</sup> The information gained from participants contained Hindi and English.

## Appendix E – Copy of Consent Form

### RESEARCH ETHICS: SAMPLE CONSENT FORM

#### Identity Performance on the MTV India Facebook Fan Page Articulating Youngistan, Performing Indian-ness

Neha Gera, Phd Student, University of Sunderland

UK Address – Faculty of Arts, Design and Media, The David Puttnam Media Centre, St Peter's Way, Sunderland, SR6 0DD

**Please Initial  
Box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.

3. I agree to take part in the above study.

4. I agree to the interview / focus group / consultation being audio recorded

5. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications

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Name of Participant	Date	Signature
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Name of Researcher	Date	Signature
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## Appendix F-Glossary

- a) Social networking sites (SNS): are semi-public networks based on profiles with articulated lists of friends and an array of hyperlinks, which serve to form the web of users. Example – Orkut, Facebook etc.
- b) Facebook fan pages: public profiles created by organization/companies with the intention of connecting people who are interested in knowing their information and routine activities and campaigns. Facebookers can become “fans” by clicking the ‘like’ button and form a part of an online network that specifically talks about an organization, product or service. Fans post status updates (textual snippets posted by the company’s moderator or fan); post likes, shares and comments (textual snippets posted to the wall posts) to status updates; send messages to the status updates and send individualized messages via message box.
- c) Wall posts: textual snippets posted on people’s profile or a fan page by the profile/page owner.
- d) Facebook’s Like button : allows users to like status updates, comments, photos, and links posted by friends/fans on the fan page or personal profiles.
- e) Facebook’s Share button: allows users to share status updates, photos, and links posted by friends on their wall, friend’s wall or on fan pages.
- f) Comments: Textual snippets posted in response to wall-posts that usually form a thread of discussion containing agreements and disagreements on various topics.
- g) Face value: An individual’s reputation or esteem with others, created by using online techniques by adding useful elements (such as using the fan page’s language and style) and omitting elements (such as serious disagreements, use of foul language etc).
- h) Namaste: (or Namaskaar): A customary Indian way of greeting people, meaning ‘may our minds meet’, and often indicated on face-to-face meetings by folding the palms in front of the chest. On the fan page, participants often use this customary greeting at the beginning of an interaction.

- i) Suggestion list: On Facebook, when friends are added to an individual's network, their preferences/interests are shown in the form of likes, which then pop up in a suggestion list placed on the right of the screen and invite people to like the fan pages that have already been liked by his/her friend.
- j) Hing-lish: A language that blends Hindi and English words and phrases, and is generally used as a 'conversation language' in the urban and semi urban centers of India.
- k) Turn taking - The art of taking turns during an interaction, that allows each member of a group of speakers to put forward an idea/opinion on the topic/issue being discussed.

