

# Impact of Digital Communication on Empathy among Teenagers: A Case Study of Goa

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## Abstract

India is one of the fastest growing market for mobile handsets which recently crossed billion users with almost 500 million using internet on smart phones. The rural penetration is much higher than urban users. Digital communication using social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and WhatsApp are becoming an integral part of teenagers' lives. Most of them spend more time on social media, which seriously affects face to face communication with family members, relatives and friends.

Increased and prolonged exposure to digital communication often affects the level of empathy among teenagers. Empathy is understanding the feelings and thoughts of other people. A rise in the use of social media has resulted in the reduced empathy and alarming stress levels amongst teenagers. Reduced empathy levels may result in loneliness, depression and increased violence in society. Also, teenagers are found growing up with more anxiety and less self-esteem.

**My present paper** deals with the impact of increasing use of social media on the level of empathy among teenagers. This Study has been carried-out in North Goa.

## Key words:

Social media Platforms, Empathy, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and WhatsApp

## Introduction:

India is one of the *fastest growing market for mobile handsets* which recently crossed billion users with *almost 500 million using internet on smart phones*. Social media platforms like *Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and WhatsApp* are becoming integral part of the teenagers' life. Most of them spend more time on social media, seriously affecting *face to face communication with family members*, relatives and friends.

Interpersonal communications (Soft skills and Hard skills) plays very important role in emerging job market and businesses. However increased use of social media is seriously affecting the development of the communication skills especially among teenagers. Textese (SMS language) frequently used on the digital platform negatively impacts the writing skills of teenagers. Most of the teenagers frequently used search engines like Google and Wikipedia to complete assignments or projects thus reading superficially rather than having a thorough and in-depth knowledge of the subject by reading books.

There are serious concerns expressed globally on the impact of digital communication on the decreasing levels of empathy. Empathy is a reaction to the perceived emotions or feelings of others. It acts as a bridge to develop and fulfill healthy relationships in family life and at the workplace. It is an interpersonal process. Literature studies (Mohammed M. Elsobeihi et al 2017, Brooks, S. 2015) have shown that increasing use of digital communication has resulted in individuals who are self-centered and remain isolated, reducing face

to face communication. Often, teenagers are happy to connect via social media platforms as this kind of communication that doesn't require the use of body language, facial expressions.

According to psychiatrist Dr. Gary W. Small, author of "*The Other Side of The Couch*", the digital world has rewired teenagers' brains and made them feel less able to recognize and share feelings of happiness, sadness or anger. When a teenager lacks empathy, they lack the ability to think about how their actions can impact others. They may lack the ability to think about others when making important life decisions. Without empathy, a teen's family and peer relationship may suffer. In today's world of intolerance and apathy, it becomes important that, alongside other advancements in major areas, we also focus on our children and their ability to live in harmony with themselves and with society. This is possible with empathy. Present paper deals with the study of the impact of digital communication on empathy among teenagers.

### **Objectives of The Research Work:**

- 1.To study the impact of digital communication on empathy amongst teenagers
- 2.To analyze the parent perspective on digital communication and its impact on teenagers

### **Research Methodology**

The study has been carried out in North Goa with sample size of 450 (Teenagers). The study is based on the primary data ie. Questionnaire (Survey method) and Interview (Parents).

### **Literature survey:**

Empathy may be classified as Cognitive empathy and Affective empathy (Davis 1980, Jolliffe and Ferrington 2004). Cognitive empathy is understanding the emotions of other persons rationally whereas Affective empathy is a personality trait to experience the feelings of others. Empathy helps us in understanding the outside world and establishing healthy relationships. Lack of empathy among teenagers may trigger some of the negative personality traits like mental health issues, teasing, bullying, cheating and overall increased crime rates in society. Enhanced use of digital communication may result in teenagers with low self-esteem, may lack integrity and morality. It is often a cause for social relationships which lack commitment and are less fulfilling. Reduced empathy at the workplace may induce stress among employees resulting in increased stress levels. Positive empathy at the work place helps in good teamwork and collaboration. However, in recent years, an increase in the suicide and crime rates, especially among the youth, increasing drug addiction, road rage and accidents have been found, which are a matter of deep concern as the lives of young promising youths are lost. Loneliness, depression and increasing violence among the youth can also be linked to the ubiquitous exposure to digital communication. Some of the studies (Albireo, Matricardi, Speltri and Toso, 2009 and Eisenberg and Strayer, 1987) have shown that females have higher empathy than males especially affective empathy. Mohammed M. Elsobeihi et al (2017) has studied the effects of mobile technology on *Human Relationships on students of Al-Azhar University in Palestine* which has found that there was decrease in the face to face communication due to mobile technology. Brooks, S. (2015) has concluded in their research a negative effect of digital technology

on efficiency at workplaces. Abdullah O. et al, (2016) has pointed out that there has been an increase in the number of seminars and conferences conducted on the topic of *effect of mobile technology on the society*. Authors have also stressed the need for evidence based policy and assessment of the effect of mobile technology on the face to face communication.

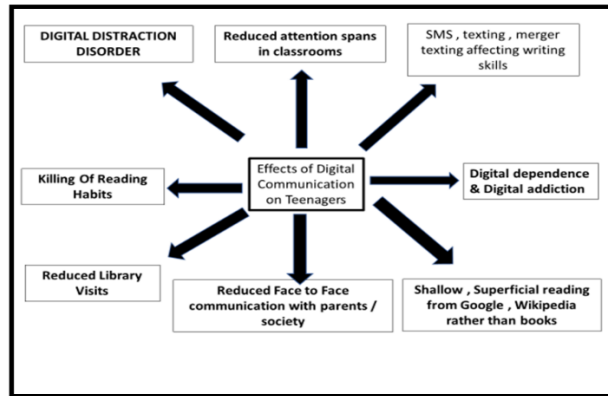


Fig.1 Effects of Digital communication on Teenagers

**Results and Discussions**

1. Demographic profile of Respondents: First year graduates from colleges in Goa in selected from Arts, Commerce and Science streams. Respondents were between 16- 17 years of age.

	Male	Female	Rural	Urban
Sample Size	( %)	( %)	( %)	( %)
450	48	52	54	46

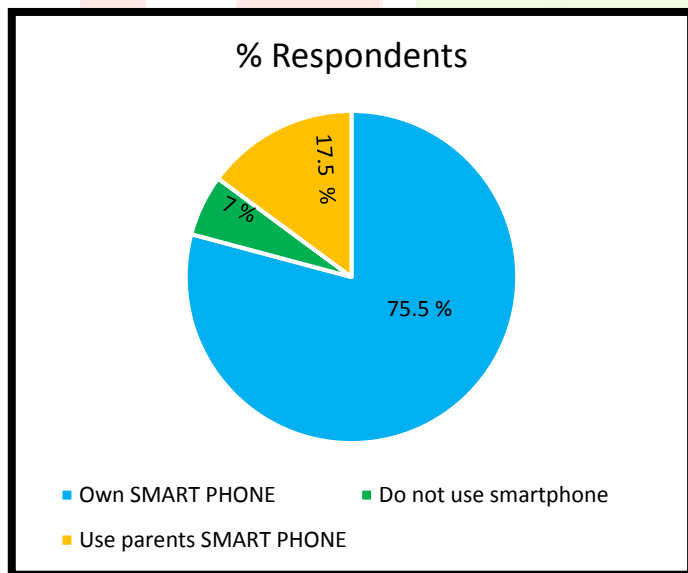
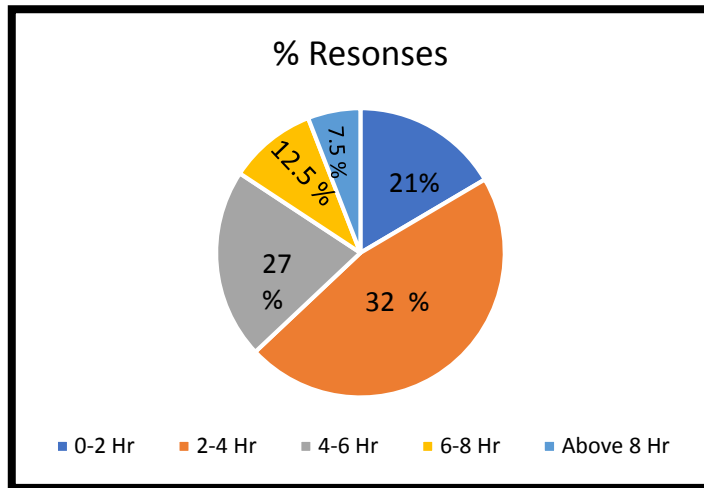


Fig.2 Ownership of Smart phones

- Data shows that there is high penetration of smart phones with almost 75.5 % teenagers use their smartphones. About 17.5 % of the teenagers also use their parent’s phones.
- There is high penetration of smartphones across Goa with 93 % possessing smart phones this is mainly due to increasing affordability and aggressive marketing strategies

2. How frequently do you use smartphones?

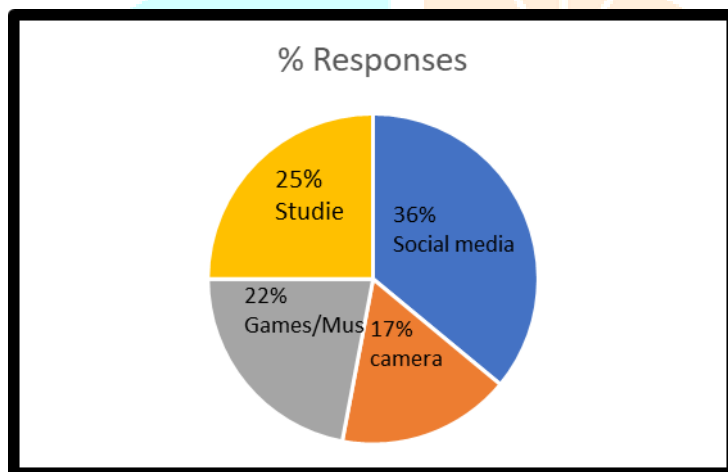


- Almost 80 % of the teenagers use smartphones from 2 – 6 Hrs / day and the remaining 20 % use the smartphones almost for 6- 8 hrs / day.
- Use of smartphones for almost 2-6 Hrs , has reduced the time spent by teenagers on reading and other physical activities like sports or

Fig.3: Frequency of smartphone use

3. Besides Basic Communication (Calls , Messaging ) I use my smartphone mostly for

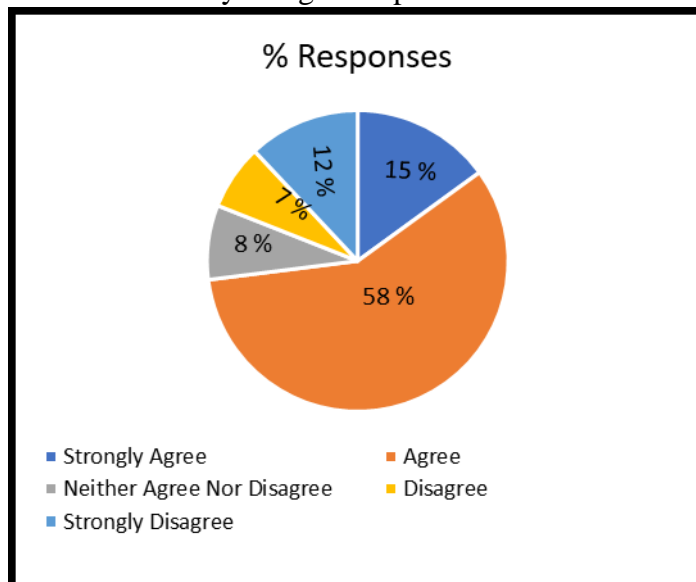
- a) Social Media    b) Camera    c) Studies    d) games & Music



- Almost 75 % of the teenagers uses smartphone for social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, camera or selfie and Games and Music, however only 25 % used it for study related activities.

Fig.4: Purpose of smartphone use

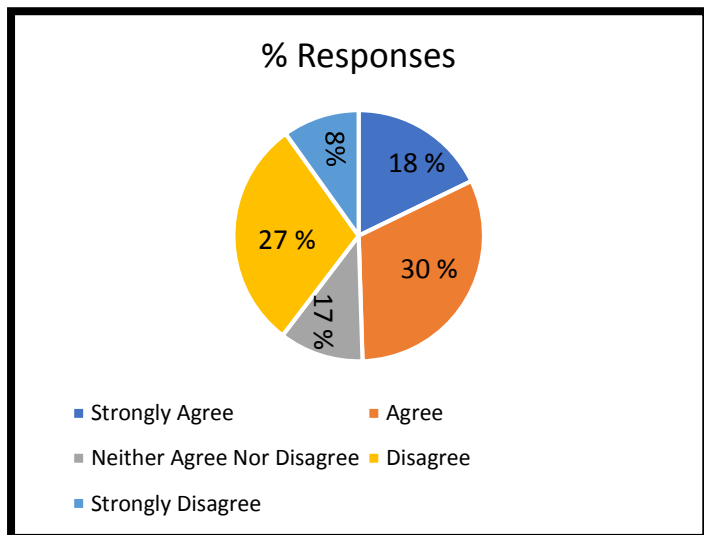
4. I am often busy using smartphone /Internet when my parents / family members wish to talk to me



- About 73 % Teenagers agree that they remain busy when parents or family members wish to talk to them, however 19 % of the Teenagers disagree.
- Thus, digital communication has reduced the empathy levels among teenagers as often not only miss the important communication with parents who wish to talk to them but also hurt their feelings.

Fig.5: Effect of digital communication on empathy

5. I communicate with my friends and family members more frequently via social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, e-mail) than meeting them personally



- Almost 48 % of the teenagers agrees that they communicate with friends and family members using social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp.
- Another 17 % did not agree or disagree, however 32 % disagree. Digital communication has reduced their time for face to face communication resulting in poor communication skills.

Fig.6: Mode of communication

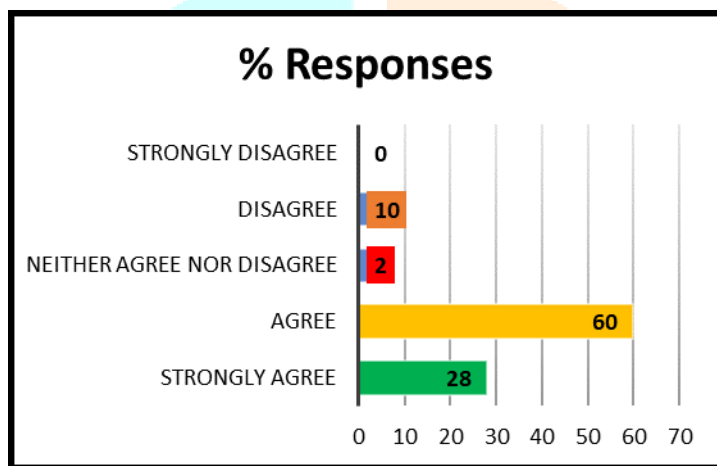
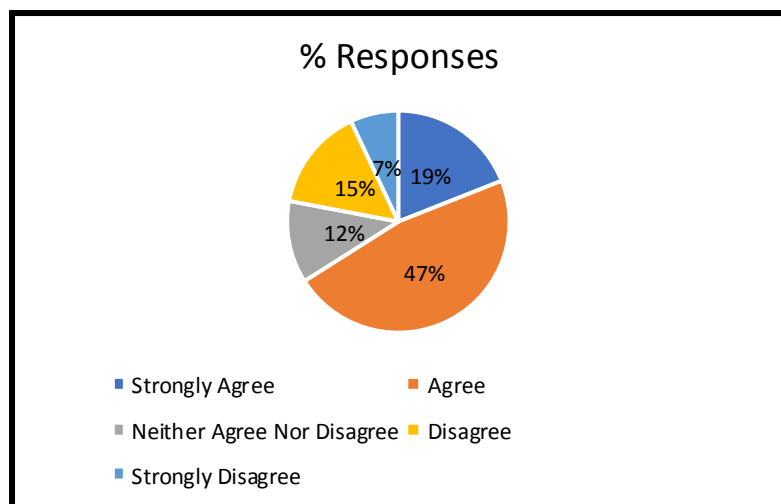


Fig.7 Mode of communication ( Parents perception)

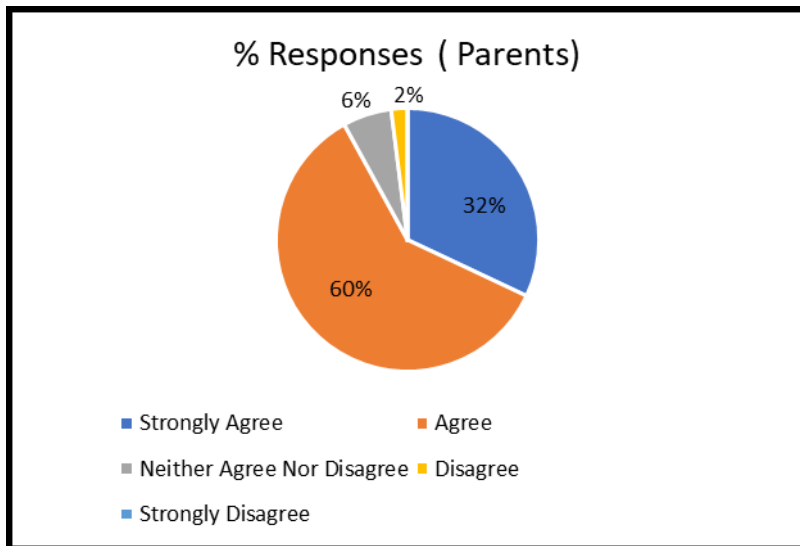
- The response for the above question was taken from randomly selected 100 parents, who perceive totally different response.
- 88 % of the parents agree that teenagers prefer to communicate via social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook or e-mail rather than face to face communication

6. I think the use of social media /smartphone has reduced my communication with my parents



- 66 % of the teenagers agrees to the fact that Social Media and Smartphones has resulted in reducing their communication with parents
- 27 % of the respondents disagree with the above question reduce

Fig.8 Effect of digital communication on face to face communication with parents.

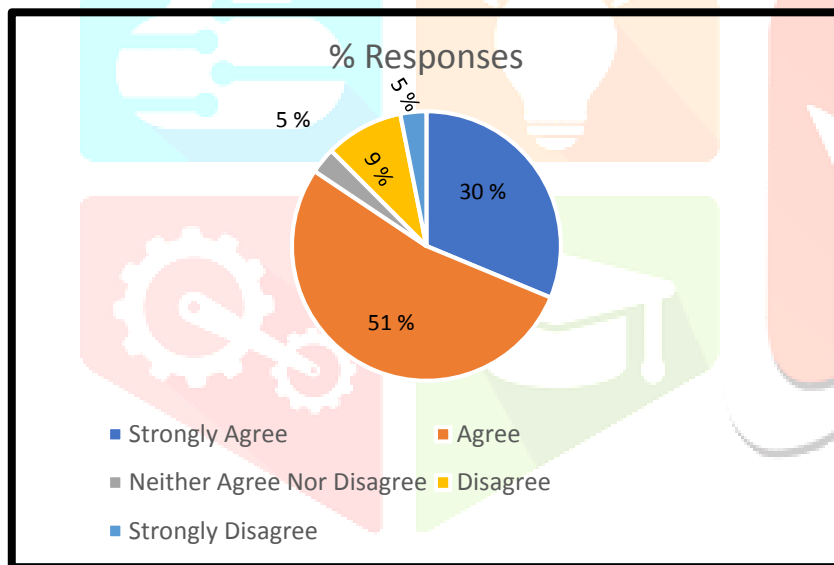


- 92 % of the parents agree to the fact that Social Media and Smartphones have reduced communication with their parents
- Smartphones and Internet are the new technologies wherein most of the parents perceives its usage as waste of time and has resulted in reduced communication with the parents

Fig.8 Effect of digital communication on face to face communication with parents. ( Parents perspective)

7. I always use social media / smartphone when alone

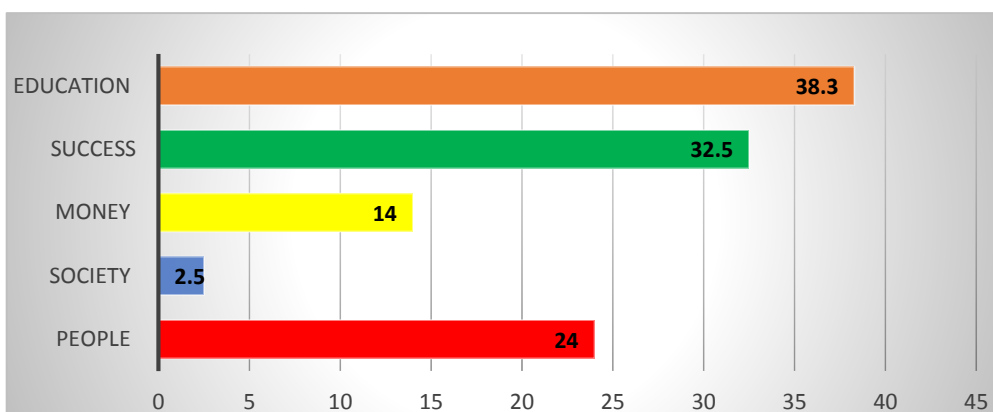
a) Strongly Agree b) Agree c) Neither agree nor Disagree d) Disagree e) Strongly Disagree



- ❑ 81 % of the teenagers agree that they use social media/ smartphone when alone.
- ❑ Most of the teenagers are comfortable with smartphones mostly using social media platforms like Facebook or WhatsApp when left alone.
- ❑ There is decreasing trend of reading newspaper or books when teenagers or even others are alone.
- ❑ Teenagers often lack the

8. For me, the important thing in life is

a) People b) Education c) Money d) Society e) Success



- ❑ 70 % of the teenagers considers Education (38 %) and Success (32 %) are the important things in life
- ❑ Only 24 % of the teenagers considers people or human relationship as important thing in life, however only 2.5 % of the teenagers feel society is important in life

## Conclusions

Over 80 % of the teenagers use their own smartphones, while 21 % share parent's smartphone, thus there is high penetration of smartphones in Goa. One of the effects of the digital communication is lot of awareness and information sharing on the internet (Positive effect). Teenagers are more practical with high aspirations for success and higher education. However, they don't consider relationships (People and Society) important. 70 % of the teenagers considers Education (38 %) and Success (32 %) are the important things in life. Only 24 % of the teenagers consider people or human relationships as important in life, however only 2.5 % of the teenagers feel society is important in life indicating teenagers moving towards more materialistic and self-centered society. Rapid urbanization and breaking down of joint family system may also be other contributing factors for reducing empathy among teenagers. 61 % of the teenagers agrees that they do not feel lonely and depressed when they are not using social media/ smartphone (Often people do not wish to share the feeling of loneliness and depression) . Over 66 % of the teenagers agrees to the fact that social media and smartphones has reduce their communication with parents, However, 92 % of the parents agree to the fact that social media & smartphones have reduced communication with their children. About 73 % Teenagers agree that they remain busy when parents or family members wish to talk to them. This is important as it increases communication gap in relationship with parents. Often these teenagers not only miss conversation, but do not feel the hurt caused by them. Increased use of digital communication has also resulted in killing the reading habits among children, who are happy with the superficial knowledge using Wikipedia or google search rather than deep and thorough knowledge of the subject using books or novels.

## Acknowledgements

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