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The wider world: social media and education in a knowledge economy

A day in the life of Ranjith

Ranjith is 15 years old and from an upper middle-class background. He attends an international school.

Wednesday

6 am – Alarm rings... snooze... catch another 5 minutes of sleep... hear mum shouting at the top of her voice... but go back to sleep again... it's all a dream... wake up in another 5 minutes to a WhatsApp message from Samvrat, asking if the basketball practice is still scheduled for 7 am and if the English essay is due at 11 am. Curse words used! Answer Yes to basketball practice and '****! I forgot' to English essay. Add a quick suitable smiley face and send off message on WhatsApp. [Here his mother shouts once again on seeing Ranjith's use of his phone as the first thing he does in the morning.]

6:15 am–6:45 am – Curse self and pray that English teacher will excuse the essay that is due today while brushing teeth. Have coffee while half asleep – hear mum shouting at the top of her voice that I shouldn't have gone to sleep at 2 am. Realise that she is right and promise self to have no gaming and chatting after 10 pm. Finish morning ablutions. Quick check of Facebook... 'like' Sowmya's picture with her new puppy. Check WhatsApp... feel happy looking at Samvrat's message that he hasn't finished the English homework either... all the while eating cornflakes. Rush off to basketball practice.

7 am–8 am – Basketball... snap pictures of others practising and post them on Facebook. Coach sneers at the smartphone. Promise coach

to leave it at home next time. Check post and see that it already has 10 likes.

8 am – Rush home to leave phone...quick wash...check WhatsApp...happy that only a few people in class remembered the essay was due today...appreciate Samvrat's quick WhatsApp homework status check with classmates...check Facebook...basketball post already has 12 likes. Maybe everyone is on their way to school...school doesn't allow mobile phones...so maybe the post will get more likes that evening.

8:30 am – School begins – physics class...listen to a 15 min lecture followed by a documentary screening from Discovery Channel video on YouTube...Smart classrooms are just awesome.

9:15 am – Maths class – Solve calculus...teacher checks to see if everyone watched the required assignment from Khan Academy.¹

10 am – Interval – quick check with everyone about essay and also let them know of the Facebook picture.

11 am – English class – Teacher excuses essay, as majority of the class hasn't completed it either. Rush to the computer lab, where the teacher asks class to type in the essay. Vijay, a classmate, stealthily checks email...site gets firewalled...lab co-ordinator must have seen him checking and restricted access.

Noon – Lunch...catch up with friends...

12:45 pm – Head off to biology and chemistry classes.

2:30 pm – Computer science lab session. C programming. Search Google for C routines...access online C classes and check for aspects of this routine. Try accessing Facebook...website blocked. Access YouTube...check for lessons on C.

3:15 pm – Head home...check WhatsApp...check Facebook ... still only 14 likes. Start gaming along with quick snacking.

4:00 pm–7:30 pm – Online gaming...check WhatsApp and Facebook...30 likes – awesome! Mum home...shouts to get back to studying.

8:00 pm – Mum calls for help with buying a flower vase from Flipkart²...watch YouTube...keep checking WhatsApp and Facebook. Dad arrives home from work. Eat dinner. Help Dad with some iPad issues.

9:00 pm – Research online for English essay...due date fixed for tomorrow...message Aditi and Samvrat to see if they have completed...everyone is online...in the process of writing/typing it. Call Samvrat to talk about essay and end up chatting about basketball.

11:00 pm – Complete essay...upload it to the school online assignment system...start online gaming...shift between WhatsApp and Facebook.

11:30 pm – Dad looks into the bedroom, says it's bedtime.

11:45 pm – Mum peeks in this time and shouts that it's bedtime.

0:30 am – Finally get to sleep early, after kissing goodnight to Aditi on WhatsApp voice message.

A day in the life of Pandian

Pandian is 15 years old and from a lower socio-economic background. He attends a private local school.

Wednesday

4:30 am – Wake up...sister's voice says it's time to wake up...rush to brush teeth and finish morning ablutions. Get to the paddy field...it's easy to receive a mobile signal there. Check Facebook. Vinoth and Suraj have uploaded pictures taken yesterday... 'like' and comment on them. Check to see if any new friends requests have come in. It's almost 30 minutes... need to rush to the cowshed.

5 am–7 am – Milk cows, work in the paddy field.

7 am – Check Facebook...Deepak has commented and liked too. Like Deepak's comment in turn...Browse through Friends profiles. Have tea and finish breakfast of rice gruel.

7:30 am – Quick wash and rush to catch bus to school. Check Facebook on the way to school. Listen to actor Vijay's 'Selfie Pulla'³ song and other Tamil film songs. Need to download some more songs. Should remember to buy new data pack this evening.

8:10 am – Arrive at school... talk to Suraj and Vinoth about their Facebook pictures. Listen to a new song from Vinoth's mobile phone.

8:30 am–11:00 am – Tamil, English and maths classes... need to copy notes quickly from the blackboard as English teacher erases them from the blackboard very quickly...submit homework notebook at the end of maths class.

11:00 am – Interval – Transfer a few new songs from Vinoth's phone.

11:15 am – Physical training class – Teacher asks to see if any new film songs are available...Vinoth transfers new songs...asks for new Tamil films downloaded from the internet...transfer it from Suraj's phone. Play football...Lunch.

1:50 pm – Computer science class. Computer science teacher asks everyone to copy a computer programme written on the blackboard...go to computer science lab. Run the programme. Get result. Chat with friends...Deepak helps teacher to fix a broken computer.

3:30 pm – Go to the roadside bunk-sized mobile phone shop with Suraj and recharge data plan for Rs. 15/-. Get new songs loaded for an additional Rs. 5/-.

5:00 pm – Quick tea...rush to the paddy field...tie cows...listen to new songs...check Facebook...post picture of Tamil film actor Vijay⁴ downloaded from Google. Never-failing friend Suraj always likes it first.

7:00 pm – Do homework...check Facebook.

8:00 pm – Have dinner...ask mum and sister to join in watching a new Tamil film transferred from Suraj...transfer film from phone to the government-provided laptop borrowed from cousin. Mum and sister express their admiration for the technical expertise and knowledge shown in not only getting the film, but also the ease with which it was transferred.

10:30 pm – Film ends...check to see if cows in the cowshed are all right. Check Facebook once again.

11:00 pm – Sleep.

In themselves these two highly contrasting accounts would seem to represent the daily lives of two 15-year-old schoolchildren and their relation to social media. Yet these are not two disparate scenes occurring in two different societies: they take place alongside one another at Panchagrami. In order to see what we can learn from them we have to step back a bit, then consider as background the macro-level social structures that enable both of these versions to happen within the same area. That is the precisely the task of this chapter.

Introduction

Every book in this series has a similar heading to the sixth chapter, signifying a common objective. The task of these chapters within this series is to analyse how larger social structures and infrastructures impact upon social media or may be transformed by social media. In some cases the authors have considered several such structures, among them politics, the state, religion and commerce.⁵ But in the case of Panchagrami many of these wider issues such as politics and caste have been discussed throughout this book; to deal with them as a whole would simply be too complex. Instead this chapter seeks to provide an in-depth

analysis of one particular context, that of education. Education brings with it a wider arena of aspiration and the struggle for prosperity, or at least a decent living. It follows on naturally from the themes of the last chapter, as it is highly relevant to the specific work practices that have developed around the IT sector. By focusing on this single field, it is possible to give a depth of analysis that a broad-spectrum approach would not permit.

The following sections provide a glimpse of how the development of educational infrastructure has in a way become a symbol of how this area is perceived as a 'knowledge economy'⁶ – thereby kindling aspirations across all socio-economic classes, which in turn go on to influence the provision of education in this area. We then survey the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in schools, where internet access, social media and mobile phones play a significant role. Next we explore how the different school systems at Panchagrami perceive social media, and move on to discuss the aspect of teachers becoming friends of students on social media. Finally the chapter ends with a case study of how certain affluent schools create their own social media, in order to discourage students from accessing popular social media sites.

The influences of other socio-economic factors on education are also discussed. An attempt is made to showcase how macro-structures operate in the background, influencing the seemingly disparate everyday use of social media, as in the two cases given above.

Knowledge economy: an identity that inspires aspirations

While researchers debate whether a knowledge economy is appropriate for India,⁷ the Indian government has adopted the idea in earnest. The concept is also reflected in how the local government in Panchagrami, as well as the region's private IT enterprises, have struggled for over a decade to ensure that this area projects the image of a knowledge economy. They have set up IT companies and managed to attract a skilled and educated workforce. To a certain extent they seem to have achieved their intention, as outsiders also ascribe such an identity to this area. Though an inhabitant of Panchagrami might not understand the term 'knowledge economy', he or she would certainly understand that this area is transforming to an economy that values knowledge above anything else, and this is reflected in their educational aspirations.⁸

As seen in Chapter 1, establishing an IT park brought with it several infrastructural changes. Educational institutions catering to the emerging needs of IT companies for skilled labour was one of them. An upsurge in the number of schools and colleges in and around Panchagrami occurred along with other forms of expansion, including the building of more sophisticated housing, commercial spaces and other affiliated services to cater to a skilled incoming population. For a long-term Panchagrami resident, all of these changes, combined with laptops and mobile phones, came to symbolise an economy that placed an immense value on knowledge and skills.

For the lower socio-economic classes at Panchagrami, the word 'IT' has now become a synonym for prosperity. They perceive 'IT' as computers inside massive buildings with visibly intimidating architecture,⁹ symbolising development and prosperity that can be attained only through knowledge and education. Thus, for the lower socio-economic classes, working for an IT company translates directly to social mobility. People's aspiration for such mobility is reasserted on an everyday basis – not only by the architecture in this area, but also by the visible use of newer resources in this area (such as upscale housing, expensive restaurants, newer smartphones etc.) by the educated middle-class population that has recently arrived.¹⁰

The parents from the lower socio-economic class strive to attain this aspiration for social mobility through their children. They provide their children with computers, which to them signify knowledge. Accessing the internet and social media such as Facebook through these computers is viewed as further proof that their children are on the right path for achieving social mobility. The next step is to send their children to the right school, which for them roughly translates as a school that provides education through computers.

Rani, aged 36, is a housemaid and a long-term resident of Panchagrami. She works at one of the multi-storeyed apartment complexes that symbolise the massive infrastructural transformation that the area has undergone. Rani understands IT as those massive air-conditioned office buildings, where well-educated and well-dressed people work on computers all day and get paid a lot to do it. Having dropped out of school at the age of eight, while still in the third grade, she now wants her twin son and daughter, now in the ninth grade, to study well and gain jobs in the IT sector in the near future. She had bought them a second-hand desktop computer and a second-hand, originally government-provided laptop a couple of years ago, hoping to inspire them and drive them hard to fulfil her ambition.

Similar to the aspirations of the lower socio-economic class, upper middle-class families (mostly comprising the 'double-income' IT employees) also aspire to send their children to the right schools. For this group the 'right' schools consist of English-medium schools following either international or national-level syllabi. With the proliferation of such schools in this area, one distinction that these schools tend to showcase is the 'smart classroom' facility, meaning that the classrooms are ICT (information and communication technology)-enabled and are connected to the internet. This also means that they have access to newer learning platforms such as the Khan Academy,¹¹ open courseware¹² and video documentaries on YouTube.

Ashwin, aged 41, works for a multinational IT company. For over four years he worked in the US as a consultant at one of its client's offices, based in Arizona. As his company wanted him to return to India for some time, Ashwin bought himself an apartment in Panchagrami. Since he was not sure about his long-term plans in India (he might return to the US at some point, depending on his career and the company's plans) and his 11-year-old son was studying in the sixth grade, he wanted to ensure that the boy went to an international school. This would provide him with internet access and include sufficient emphasis on ICT in its teaching curriculum – something Ashwin felt was important in case the family decide to go back to the US. Even if they do not, and his son wishes to get into a premier engineering college in India instead, this exposure would stand him in good stead.

One can find many people like Rani and Ashwin at Panchagrami. They are examples of how parents plan their children's education strategically, hoping to give them a secure future. Another kind of parent, usually from the lower middle class, is happy to send his/her child to a private school where English is the medium of instruction with a state-level syllabus. In so doing they hope to ensure that the child studies hard to become a graduate in engineering or a scientific or commercial subject, and so may enter the IT sector that way.

Parental aspirations can thus be seen to form a pattern. Irrespective of the school in which the children study, or the social class to which the family belongs, the IT sector seems to be the destination of choice for their children. In summary, for these parents getting their children into respectable positions in the IT sector symbolises getting them settled in life while at the same time attaining social mobility. To achieve this the children need to study in an English-medium school, which gives preference to technology (at least as a learning platform); the ICTs¹³ in such schools symbolise this.

School system at Panchagrami

The schools¹⁴ found at Panchagrami fall into three different systems: the state board schools,¹⁵ which follow the Tamil Nadu state syllabi; CBSE schools,¹⁶ which follow the national-level syllabi; and IGCSE schools,¹⁷ which follow an international syllabus. In and around Panchagrami you can find two international schools, half a dozen CBSE schools and at least a dozen private and government-owned state board schools. For ease of understanding, this chapter will use terms such as 'affluent schools' and 'less affluent schools' instead of the actual school boards. Generally an affluent school would be one in which middle- and upper middle-class children study (they are mostly the international and CBSE schools, though a few privately owned state board schools can also be classified in this way), while the less affluent schools are the government and other private local state board schools. The latter cater to the lower socio-economic class and the lower middle class, and charge a fee¹⁸ that is significantly lower than their affluent counterparts. However, the infrastructural facilities at these schools are less good.

While all affluent schools have English as the medium of instruction, less affluent state board schools have either Tamil or English as their medium.¹⁹ However, in this area a rise in demand²⁰ for English-medium schools over Tamil medium schools was to a large extent fuelled by the employment practices of the IT sector, though a desire for English education had begun to creep in around 30 years ago. Ironically, the children who now study in the primary classes of the Tamil-medium government schools are those of poor migrant labourers who have migrated to Panchagrami from other Indian states to work in construction.

Though both the affluent and the less affluent schools at Panchagrami advertise their ICT infrastructure, a significant distinction between these schools is highlighted through smart classrooms and internet connectivity. This factor makes or breaks a school's popularity and the demand for places it experiences. While several affluent schools rationalise their steep fees through the smart classroom system, the less affluent schools make do with a computer lab.

ICT and social media in schools

Not surprisingly the affluent schools in this area have the best ICT and smart classroom facilities, with several of their computers connected to

the internet. A popular pedagogical method adopted in these schools is to show videos from YouTube. Another source that the teachers tapped into was the Khan Academy.²¹ Google Search and Google Images also provide additional resources for these teachers to research for class presentations and projects. Other than this, these affluent schools also had a few systems with unrestricted internet access in the staff common room. Some schools also encouraged students to ask teachers for help in downloading material from the internet during activity-based projects.

However, when it came to students, most affluent schools had strict rules restricting access to the internet; almost all of them ban access to social media sites on school computers. Though children of the fifth grade and above are actively encouraged to access the internet under the guidance of teachers and a lab instructor, the teachers invariably complain of a few disobedient children in the higher grades (usually the tenth or eleventh grades) accessing certain restricted sites unbeknownst to them. It was apparent that this was new to these schools, which were also constantly experimenting in their approach to the internet and social media sites.²²

The affluent schools, as they come to terms with the internet-enabled ICT infrastructure, also strive to satisfy the parental demand for practical lessons on safe internet browsing habits for their children. This was in part because these children often belonged to 'double-income' families, in which both parents were employed, and so children were usually alone at home until mid-evening. Both teachers and parents saw the combination of a lonely environment at home, an iPad or a laptop and an unrestricted internet connection as dangerous, and so teaching children how to browse the internet safely became the responsibility of teachers. Though parents set parental controls, they knew that it would not be difficult for children to bypass such restrictions. However, in most schools these lessons are not taught through a one-day workshop, but instead take place on a continual basis in the classrooms.

Some of these affluent schools also conduct safe internet browsing sessions for teachers, in order to train them in handling and advising the browsing habits of their students. These schools normally discourage parents from allowing their children (especially those below 14 years of age)²³ to become members of social media websites, especially Facebook. They see Facebook as a site that is not only distracting, but also potentially dangerous for young children, as they might be inadvertently exposing themselves on the space to antisocial elements and school bullies. Nevertheless they are pretty certain that several of their

students were on social media, especially Facebook.²⁴ These students do not just stop with signing onto Facebook, but also friend their teachers who are on the platform. However, such concerns about the internet and social media were only expressed orally, never made into an official regulatory policy by these schools. Very often these concerns were only conveyed to the parents during parent–teacher meetings.

The concerns that these schools had about social media also influenced how they categorised the internet and social media. While the teachers identify the internet and YouTube as a knowledge resource,²⁵ they categorically differentiated Facebook and other social media; to teachers these platforms were just frivolous, with no educational merit. They were thus shunned as distractions.²⁶ Such beliefs also influence the rules on accessing the internet from schools. These were usually simple: no access to websites other than Google and YouTube. Nor do the YouTube videos have the recommendations that normally come up while you are viewing one. In addition, the schools also ensure that advertisements do not pop up. Parental controls and other security features are normally enabled in the school labs. Yet even these were made concrete only after experiences such as Madhuvanathi's.

L. Madhuvanathi, 38, is a secondary school science teacher in an affluent school. In a computer lab session with her students she wanted her students to watch a YouTube documentary, but soon discovered a couple of students accessing Facebook from the school's computers. Immediately she had to shut down their access and coach them. She felt as the school did not have a firewall restricting such access, the students were always tempted to access social media sites during lab sessions. Only after a series of such complaints did the school take the serious step of restricting access to certain sites through firewalls; it also appointed a qualified lab administrator to keep a watchful eye on any students who circumvented firewalls in the computer labs. Several IT lab instructors in such schools agreed that firewall restrictions on their systems were sometimes lax, particularly with the restriction of access to social media sites. Even when these were in place, they noted that a few children always knew how to bypass them.

On the other hand, most of the less affluent schools did not have their computers connected to the internet. If they had a connection at all, it would be with one or two specific computers, which might also be under the supervision of the lab administrator or the teacher in charge.

For students in these less affluent schools, even owning gadgets was a luxury. With the government's policy of 'one laptop per child',

several secondary-school students from the lower socio-economic class now own laptops. These students either had no internet access or tethered it from a cheap smartphone that had internet access. However, this was only possible for male students;²⁷ female students accessed the internet for shorter periods of time by tethering from a borrowed phone (normally from their elder brothers or other relatives). Use of a USB dongle internet connection is now becoming a symbol of knowledge in itself, as it is immediately related to accessing the internet.²⁸ However, even in the use of such devices, gender-based controls were evident. As discussed in Chapter 2, access to social media for female students belonging to the lower socio-economic class was normally restricted or even banned by other family members.

As social media was not something that these less affluent schools had to handle systemically, they invariably never discussed this with parents. As a result the parents of these children (especially boys) more or less consent to the children's accessing of social media, perceiving social media to be one of visible symbols of technological advancement that requires mastery in the knowledge economy.

While ICT facilities in well-equipped affluent schools may entail watching a documentary on YouTube, it more or less equates to watching a DVD²⁹ in less affluent schools, which are not connected to the internet. While teachers at several less affluent schools were not aware of the existence of open source resources such as the Khan Academy, they did know that YouTube had educational elements to it, and sometimes encouraged students to view YouTube videos on their mobile phones. However, it was not a part of their curriculum and therefore no YouTube-based homework or project was assigned, as it was in affluent schools.

Several teachers from these less equipped schools remarked that their students would do very well if such opportunities were available to them. Possibly this mindset influences their perception of social media as well. It was evident that several teachers in these schools did not differentiate between the wider internet and social media; they viewed both equally as opportunities for their students to explore knowledge denied to them through economic circumstances. This was also visible in the way that teachers treated and encouraged students with even a little competence and knowledge of the internet and social media, although it might not be directly related to their curriculum. This is in sharp contrast to affluent schools' view of such distractions.

This distinction becomes clearly apparent in the case studies of Ranjith and Pandian. When during their physical training activities the 'coach' (in Ranjith's case) and the physical training teacher (in Pandian's

case) saw the smartphones in their students' hands, their reactions were very different. While the coach sneered at the interruption that this phone could cause to Ranjith's session, the teacher in the local school that Pandian attends asked him for film songs. Though their reactions differed, it seems as if both now acknowledge the pervasive nature of such devices and the influence of social media on their students.

Accessing social media on mobile platforms

Though most school students operate and access social media through multiple devices (depending on their socio-economic background), smartphones seemed to be the most popular medium of access to the internet and social media.

All schools at Panchagrami have a strict 'no mobile phone' policy within their respective school premises and discourage students very strongly from bringing mobile phones to schools. However, teachers in both affluent and less affluent schools agree that they have caught numerous students with mobile phones within their respective school campuses.

As a disciplinary process, the school retains the mobile phone and lets the student know that the phone will be handed over only to his/her parents. This also creates an opportunity for the teachers to talk to the parents about such policies, and the issues that arise when they are broken. More often than not the teachers blame the parents for providing a child of 10 or 12 with a mobile phone. During the interviews for this book several teachers observed that this breach of rules normally happens with children whose parents (both father and mother) were working. According to teachers, the parents with a high disposable income seemed to shower their children with all kinds of gadgets in order to make up for the time they could not spend with them. In fact teachers in less affluent schools also complained of this, but here it was focused more upon male students, who sometimes received these phones from their extended families rather than directly from their parents (typically it was provided by an older male relative such as an uncle). But what differentiated these students from those of affluent backgrounds was that they owned second-hand non-smartphones, and sometimes also smartphones, while the children attending affluent schools generally owned new smartphones. In less affluent schools it was mostly the boys who got caught, while in affluent schools both boys and girls were caught with mobile phones. Certainly it appeared that children were caught in possession of mobile phones across all schools, irrespective of their affluence.

With the children in the affluent schools, the teachers rationalised that being attached to the device was a solution for a lonely child; for those whose parents were both working long hours, the phone seemed to interact with them more than their parents did. The phone or the iPad became an actual companion. Several younger children who ended up playing online games stated that these games kept them company while their parents were at work.

According to the teachers, gaming was one of the primary reasons why these children became attached to their mobile gadgets. Gaming takes places through several channels. Games could be downloaded as applications from the Google Play store, Apple's App Store or Samsung store. However, most parents also allow their children to sign up on Facebook, thus enabling them to play games on the platform. The teachers noted that the young children who sign up for Facebook only use the site for gaming purposes. Although they felt such social media memberships expose these children to unwanted distractions, the parents simply did not seem to mind their children being on Facebook.

One affluent school even carried out a surprise inspection of each student's school bags to see if someone was carrying a mobile phone, following a rumour that children were using mobile phones in silent mode during breaks for playing games and accessing social media, especially Facebook and WhatsApp. The inspection ended with 21 mobile phones being confiscated in the eleventh grade alone, which consists of 17 year olds. This led to stricter policies and rules being imposed. Although the schools hosted meetings of the parent-teacher association (PTA) and let the parents know of this, they noted that some parents just did not seem to care.

Regulation of mobile phones in less affluent schools happens too. They also have a 'no mobile phone' policy and, as seen earlier, students in these schools were also caught with mobile phones. In a few less affluent schools, however, even if teachers did see students bringing in mobile phones they did not make a fuss over it. These schools normally have students of the tenth to twelfth grades bringing in mobile phones, which are then caught by the teachers during inspections. While a few teachers might just confiscate these phones as a warning during surprise inspections, they also consider the student's economic background before imposing a monetary fine or instigating other disciplinary processes.

Sujatha, a teacher in one of these schools, recounted an incident from a PTA meeting. On this occasion the school had warned parents about the policy banning mobile phone usage within the school

premises. Parents were encouraged to check school bags and be on the lookout for children taking their mobile phones to school. Almost all parents seemed to have supported the school's stance. Yet within a couple of days, during a mid-morning break, two male students were caught talking on their mobile phones. When the phones were confiscated it was discovered that they had been talking to their mothers, asking them to deliver lunch at school. When the parents were summoned, they claimed ignorance of such a policy. Sujatha pointed out that several schools, including hers, had only made this as an oral policy and it was not written down, so claiming ignorance was easy. It is true that while some schools have a written policy on the use of mobile phones (banning their use within the school premises), most schools do not refer to it – nor do they express a view on social media. The prohibition of mobile phones was thus more of an unspoken/unwritten rule. Several teachers observed that while these rules did not need to be put in print, and it was just common sense to understand them, they expressed doubts over co-operation from parents when it came to following these rules.

Even in the case of affluent schools, with highly regulated policies banning mobile phones on school campuses, teachers often complained that these sometimes had no effect. This raises the question of children's autonomy, on why they choose to bring a mobile phone to school even when they knew it was prohibited. Several reasons for this emerged. Many children reasoned that they needed a mobile phone as this was the only way they could communicate with their parents (both working), childminder or other responsible adult at certain times of the day. Further, the kind of phone they carried helped them build a kind of social status among their peers that went beyond the opportunity for constant gaming. In fact a few secondary-school children even suggested that it was an act of rebellion against the authority of their parents and teachers.

On the positive side, the teachers acknowledge that such attachment to mobile phones has in a way helped these children to understand more about the intricacies and the mechanics of smartphones.

Kalpana, a systems administrator and a computer science teacher at one of the affluent schools, recounted that once when she had a problem with a new iPhone, she mentioned the issue to a pupil in class nine, aged around 15, who solved it for her within minutes. She was both surprised and proud of this student. She then found out that the child's parents had iPhones at home. When she casually mentioned this to the other teachers, word naturally got around to the school management.

Though the head of the school warned her against asking students to help with repairs of personal devices, Kalpana feels that teachers need to acknowledge the fact that children these days know a lot about phones and other gadgets. She says having internet access or a mobile phone is not necessarily a bad thing for children, and teachers needed to understand that neither can be avoided. She would prefer a holistic understanding of children's needs and backgrounds, so they can be taught how to use technology responsibly. This was her personal view, however, and none of the other teachers felt the same way – at least not at her school.

Teachers in both affluent and less affluent schools speak of technically competent students who may be able to handle and repair a range of smartphones and other varieties of phone. However, while stories of technical competence in less affluent schools would typically feature a student from the tenth or twelfth grades, aged around 16 to 18, such stories in a well-equipped affluent school would be about a child in the seventh or eighth grade, aged around 12 to 14. Such stories clearly reveal the knowledge gap between these school students in exposure to technology. In affluent schools, though individual teachers might encourage such competence, doing so as a regular thing is frowned upon and seen as a distraction. However, in less affluent schools with less sophisticated technology infrastructure, both the individual teacher and the system itself would regard this technical competence as a symbol of the technical knowledge required to thrive in modern Panchagrami. For example the teacher who asked Pandian for songs, in the case study discussed at the start of this chapter, views his expertise in downloading songs as a technical competence. Similarly the computer science teacher who got help in fixing a computer from Pandian's friend Deepak also sees this as a technical competence; no-one in these schools complains or frowns when teachers accept help from their students.

Irrespective of the schools' systems or their perception of mobile phones, internet access or even social media, it was apparent that the schools were extremely aware of the growing impact on their students of technology in general and social media in particular.³⁰ Having discussed above how schools view social media formally, we now move on to see what happens when students extend their relationship with teachers by friending them on Facebook. The following section explores how teachers view such friendships.³¹ In other words, it considers whether teachers take students' friend requests as an affront to the traditional hierarchical power structure and discourage them, or whether they

welcome such acts as a sign of their students' technical competence, and so encourage such friending.

Social media: friending teachers

As seen in the earlier sections, several teachers knew that students in their early teens were on Facebook, a situation that troubled them since they did not think of Facebook as a site for children. Although they kept restating the Indian legal rule that children below the age of 18 years should not be allowed access to Facebook,³² they acknowledged that banning the platform for children was not possible. Most seemed to have reluctantly come to terms with the reality facing them.

However, a couple of significant aspects soon became apparent. Many of the teachers who expressed such concerns were also friends with their students on Facebook, and though the schools had an informal policy of not encouraging teacher–student friendship outside the school premises, in reality none of the schools seemed too worried about what happened outside school. Nevertheless, the teachers did not appear comfortable discussing their Facebook friendship with their students within their school premises. The students who friended their teachers did it for a variety of reasons. Some did it to show off their closeness to power centres within their peer group, while others seemed genuinely interested in what was happening in their teachers' lives. Interviews carried out with a few students made this apparent.

For example, 14-year-old Rajeev, a student in the eighth grade of an affluent school, commented:

I am a friend of Prema mam on Facebook. I told my classmates...they sent a request and became friends too. She posts little. She had gone on a trip to Malaysia...I saw the pictures on her album. The girls in my class liked her dress...the boys liked the theme park.

Varenya, a student in the ninth grade of another affluent school, explained:

I greeted my teacher on her birthday when I friended her on Facebook and she liked my comment and I told this to my classmates...I never ended up greeting her when I saw her in school.

While Dhandapani, a tenth-grade student from a less affluent school, remarked:

Only my computer science sir is on Facebook. I sent him a friend's request when I signed up on Facebook – my friend Arulraj asked me to friend him, as he was friends with him. My sir immediately accepted the request. I thanked him when I saw him at school the next day... he just smiled.

Though a few teachers who had their students as friends on Facebook seemed pretty conscious of their activities on the platform, there were others who did not appear to care. Some had even forgotten that their Facebook friends network also included their students. For example Manjula, a teacher of the eleventh grade in a CBSE school, said that she only remembered having friended one of her students on Facebook when the student had questioned her about the absence of recent updates. Others said that they maintained a close surveillance of the activities of their younger students (aged 14 or below) on the platform by becoming friends with them. This, they hoped, would exert some control over what their students post (both in terms of pictures and the language used). They agreed that if they saw something inappropriate they would either question the student about it directly or would refer to it indirectly.

This kind of surveillance and social control seemed the reason why the students in the higher grades avoided friending their teachers on Facebook. Many, especially male students, felt that such friendships would be an invasion of their privacy. Female students in these grades seemed more relaxed about friending their favourite teachers. A few even said that their teacher had sent them a friend's request and they had simply accepted it. Other students felt compelled to friend their teachers when they were a part of an event organised at school and informal co-ordination happened over Facebook. However, all of this depended on the school, the relationship that a student shared with his/her teacher, who a favourite teacher might be and his/her attitude to Facebook, the number of other students or classmates who were friends with their teacher on Facebook etc. In some cases students agreed that they experienced peer pressure to friend a teacher when their network of friends were also Facebook friends with him or her, and this trend was evident across schools.

While a few teachers were fine about friending all of their students, others were cautious of friending them, particularly those in

higher grades. Most teachers noted that they would be comfortable only if they knew the student well (i.e. had known the student for several years or had taught their class); in other cases they would have a look at a student's profile before accepting such requests. Several teachers also noted that they would be very wary of friending their students in the absence of a clear profile picture.

Karuna, 49, is a twelfth-grade English teacher in an affluent school. She had worked out a set of rules to apply in deciding whether to friend a student from her school. She had to know who they were and to gauge their attitude. Karuna seemed to have become more careful after an incident that involved a new male student who had recently arrived in the eleventh grade. She had encouraged students from her school to friend her on Facebook and as a result several of them had done so; this particular student did that too. After a few months she discovered that he had also friended her daughter, who was in her tenth grade, through Karuna's profile. She discovered this only after she had seen his comment on her daughter's picture. Though the student had started commenting and liking pictures of her daughter, she had at first considered it only a harmless friendship. However, shortly afterwards she realised that he had unfriended Karuna but was still friends with her daughter. Karuna was also shocked when she came across another comment of this student on her daughter's profile, which she considered bordering on lewdness. She had immediately asked her daughter to unfriend him. She could not raise the matter with the school head, however, as the school had actively discouraged personal social media contacts between teachers and students.

Though this might have been a one-off case, teachers were generally sceptical and careful when it came to friending students of higher grades due to privacy issues and concerns arising on both sides. However, teachers of lower grades were keen and actively encouraged students to friend them. This was in part their way of ensuring that the students did not get into any trouble on Facebook, and that no cyber bullying was taking place.

Children studying in affluent schools in this area very often come from 'double-income' families in which both parents work. After school they either stay at home with their grandparents or in some cases return to an empty house. With unrestricted internet access and plenty of tech gadgets around, it is no wonder that several children sign up on Facebook at an early age. Although most begin their Facebook journey by playing online games, very soon they start connecting with their peer

groups on Facebook. This is also the point at which they start friending their teachers. Rahul's case illustrates this clearly.

This is another example of a family that inhabits two different apartments within the same complex, as discussed in Chapter 4. Rahul, a 15-year-old student, attends an affluent school at Panchagrami. After school he generally stays at his grandparents' apartment until his parents return home late in the evening, during which time he says he feels lonely. His lack of friends in the apartment complex contributes to this. Rahul attributes his lack of friends to his varied interests and, since he is not as interested in sport as he is in computers, he feels that none share his passion. Further, he does not go to the same school as most other children in the complex (in this case the school run by the apartment complex itself), which makes him feel like an outsider. Conscious of his loneliness and lack of friends, his grandparents seem worried. They are now pressing Rahul's parents to move him to the school in the apartment complex itself, hoping that at least then he would have more friends and some physical activity.

Rahul's grandmother was pretty frank about his activities once he returns from school. The first thing he does is to switch on his laptop and his Samsung Galaxy notepad and start playing games, and this goes on until his parents are return. In practice, therefore, Rahul is on a gaming platform for at least four hours every evening. Otherwise he is on Facebook, chatting with his school friends as he plays these games.

Rahul was also pretty open about his interests in gaming and networking on Facebook at the same time. He updated his friends on his scores and, most often, played games online with his other school friends (whose parents also typically seemed to be still at work). He had a WhatsApp account activated on his Samsung smartphone and through this communicated with his gaming friends group. Rahul had his Facebook account activated a year ago, which he claims was done by his friend from school. One of the first things he did on Facebook was to search for his schoolmates, and he appeared happy to have found most of them on this platform. Once he knew that several of his teachers were friends of his friends, he wanted to friend them as well and started sending them friend requests. While still in ninth grade, he had sent a request to a teacher of the twelfth grade; he was friended immediately, even though he did not know her personally and had not attended any of her classes. Rahul claims that almost all of his schoolmates and teachers have friended him within hours of him sending the request, and now reckons that all of them spend more time on Facebook than he did. So, as he keeps asking his grandmother and parents, why should he move out

of Facebook when everyone else seems to be on it? His mother even went so far as to call his teachers hypocrites; they advised parents to discourage children from using Facebook, but at the same time friended their students on it. She described such an approach as ‘pinching the baby and rocking the cradle’.

However, it soon became clear that Rahul’s parents were actually encouraging him to be on Facebook; they claimed that all his cousins who lived abroad used it and he should be using it as well, to feel a part of his extended family. His mother even claimed that Indian schools needed to grow up! She is pretty forthright in stating that the schools need either to recognise that students use social media or to take a firm line and actively ban it. She did not agree with a policy of advising parents to keep their children off social media while simultaneously friending a student if a friend request is sent. Rahul’s father was also vocal in claiming that the schools were only bothered about what happened within their premises, thus contradicting their idealistic claims of a holistic education.

However, the case in less affluent schools seems to be very different. Here even teachers of higher grades actively encouraged students to friend them on social media, which was seen as a way of encouraging students to explore new horizons. Once again, the issue of gender arose; it was mostly male students who were on social media, especially Facebook. In less affluent schools interviews with several female students of the eighth to the twelfth grade revealed that they were not on social media, either because of economic circumstances or through restrictions exerted by their families.

Ramesh, a twelfth-grade student attending a Tamil-medium school in Panchagrami, signed up on Facebook three years ago. He had helped a few of his classmates sign up on Facebook as well, and had also spoken about his Facebook account to a couple of his male teachers, who wanted Ramesh to create accounts for them too. As news of his technical competence on Facebook spread, requests from other teachers for Facebook accounts started to pour in. Very soon Ramesh’s image as a tech geek started to take shape. He was seen as someone who knew more about the internet and computers than his teachers did. Though he previously wanted to be a Tamil scholar, his success with Facebook and his rising personal status as a tech geek has influenced Ramesh’s choice of a career in computer science.

In affluent schools, while friending on Facebook was still fine, precautions were taken among both teachers and students when it came to WhatsApp. The teachers were not really keen on passing on their phone

numbers to students, a feeling that seemed to be mutual. Teachers were apprehensive, not only about the students' use of mobile phones but also, to a very large extent, on the parents calling teachers and bothering them about their children's performance at school. WhatsApp did not therefore seem to be a particularly liked or favoured channel of interaction between teachers and their students.

For most school students from the lower socio-economic class – though their teachers (mostly men) were far more open to exchanging their phone numbers – use of WhatsApp becomes limited due to the cost of mobile internet access. Even for those who subscribe to the mobile internet, their use of WhatsApp largely depends on who on their network was using it. Only when these students moved on to college did it become a major communication channel. However, in the last phases of the field work this seemed to be changing, with many more male students from lower classes adopting WhatsApp as a communication platform.

Exploring the student–teacher relationship on social media is crucial, since it is only now that this relationship is being tested in a space that breaks down the traditional hierarchy of this relationship. As seen above, it is still in the process of being tested. It was apparent that both students and teachers were careful and apprehensive when it came to revealing their personal lives, something seldom seen in a formal school environment. There also seemed to be an inherent tension in the relationship between parents and teachers, at least when it came to their children's social media activities. However, the relationship between parents and schools on social media is also crucial – since the very set of affluent parents who expressed anxiety about their child's activity on social media also view Facebook as a convenient platform for staying in touch with the schools and influencing them.

Social media and parent–teacher associations (PTA)

Subhashini, aged 37, is the mother of two children who study in an affluent school at Panchagrami. The elder, aged 11, is in the sixth grade and the younger, aged 8, is in the third. Subhashini and her husband had returned from the US a couple of years earlier, after having lived there for nearly eight years. Once her children were admitted to the school in Panchagrami, she wanted to take an active part in its parent–teacher association. However, she soon found that there were limitations in India, in contrast to her involvement in school PTAs in the US. She also

found that while the parents were individually involved and invested in the education of their children, it was not a united association.

Instead Subhashini set up two Facebook groups, each of which involved parents from her children's respective grades. The groups were specifically intended to discuss and debate any changes in the way in which education in these schools was supposed to happen. Further, they were also intended to discuss their children's homework and future events, and to arrange get-togethers. Though the group was active when it started, it soon became a place where the mothers gossiped and discussed their cooking and sarees. Bad-mouthing a few teachers of this school also occurred. Subhashini felt that the focus changed because this was a mothers-only group. She knew that there were other Facebook groups in which both parents participated, and those seemed to function well.

The school's head teacher soon recognised that several groups of parents had formed Facebook groups to discuss their children's schooling, and a few of them had genuine concerns. As it was difficult to address these concerns when they were expressed in disparate channels, regulation of such groups became necessary. She actively encouraged parents such as Subhashini to form one Facebook group that had a high-level parent-teacher committee, and to have several teachers as school representatives in this group. In this way communication could be channelled and concerns proactively addressed. This soon became a reality, with Subhashini taking over as one of the group administrators. She feels that this group has much more regulation and has created a sense of community. Several members have also taken to passing information through WhatsApp rather than through Facebook alone. This group now seems to have spawned several subgroups. Among these are a group of mothers (specifically homemakers) who bring lunch to their children at school, a fathers' cricket group (which involves cricket with a group of children every Saturday) and a mentor group (which involves the corporate fathers mentoring children for success through life skills etc). These groups are active on both Facebook and WhatsApp.

The school for its part encourages only one online channel of communication, as well as the monthly face-to-face meetings to help address concerns. While it encourages communication over Facebook, therefore, it strongly discourages communication over WhatsApp – for which teachers' personal phone numbers need to be exchanged, possibly requiring them to respond to queries from parents outside school hours. From the school's point of view, formalising such online communication channels encourages healthy debates on educational practice and the

curriculum. It also regulates and restricts any 'blame game' activity and the questioning of individual teachers.

Alternative social media: a case study from an affluent school

In exploring cases of how schools discourage children from using social media, the situation becomes complex when we consider the most affluent schools. These schools have recognised the contemporary need not to keep the children away from social media, but to ensure that they use it responsibly and avoid being caught up in embarrassing, awkward, unhealthy or dangerous situations. These schools realise the benefits of a common forum for interaction among their constituencies and are experimenting with different ways of creating such interactive platforms. This can be illustrated through the case study of a very affluent school, located very close to the field site. Several children from the affluent families of Panchagrami study there.

DMG is one of the new breed of affluent international schools that have appeared in the area. The brainchild of an entrepreneurial family, who compose the senior management of the school, it has been in existence for about two decades. During that time it has metamorphosed from being a conventional school following the local curriculum to its current form as a school following an international curriculum. International schools in India differ from regular schools in the curriculum they follow, which may be either country-specific (for example an American International School) or global (for example IGCSE or IB). To meet the demands of these curricula requires a different approach to education from other domestic schools. The overall approach is geared towards nurturing the different facets of a child's development including cognition, emotional responses, sensory growth, kinaesthetic awareness and interpersonal communication. To achieve such multi-faceted development, the school relies on a variety of pedagogical approaches, ranging from activity-based learning (learning through class activities, presentations and exhibitions), peer-to-peer mentoring (in which older students often address younger ones about social and civic issues such as bullying, waste management etc.) and extensive use of ICT.

The use of ICT is especially visible in this school. All the classrooms are connected to the internet through smart boards and computer terminals, and there is also a fully equipped computer lab (for hands-on

use by the children) plus internet-linked computers in the staff room (mainly for staff to use for their own research and occasional teaching to a smaller group of students). As well as students researching on the internet for their classroom projects, teachers are encouraged to engage in virtual research for drawing up their lesson plans, preparing assessment questions and devising worksheets for classroom purposes. Communication of important news to parents is almost exclusively through e-mails to the students' school e-mail accounts (each student has his/her own school e-mail ID), while group mailers to the staff are often also through e-mail.

A new initiative in the ICT sphere in this school is an online assessment tool (created in-house by the school director and external colleagues). This attempts to make online testing and formative assessment easier and more intuitive for both teachers and students. One set of members of staff that are exploring ICT to the fullest are the team of special educators who help children with different needs, both in the regular classroom and in the specialised resource centre catering for children with special needs. These teachers have found ICT to be the ideal platform for providing different sensorial experiences to children who do not respond well to traditional oral teaching methods. ICT also helps such teachers to keep abreast of the latest happenings in their fields of expertise, and more effectively to research pedagogy for students not served by the regular curriculum.

In the school itself ICT complements classroom-based pedagogy that relies a lot on activities to stimulate learning and reflection. These activities range from session-long intra-class activities (such as debates, presentations and so on) to exhibitions and project work of longer duration (ranging from a couple of days to a month). One of the main activities is the school-wide, two-day exhibition on a common theme, preparations for which begin weeks beforehand. These activities are showcased to the outside world through regular updates on the school's Facebook page, drawing comments and likes from regular visitors including alumni and ex-teachers.

This international school has created its own intranet social networking website that aims to give the experience of a public social networking site in a controlled environment. 'Relate', as the website is called, is open only to the staff and students of the school; entry is controlled by the school through login usernames and passwords. Further, as the school provides every student with an email ID when admitted, the sign-up site is accessed through this email ID. It works as a forum for students and teachers to interact with and among one another for

academic and social purposes. The site mimics the layout of Facebook, allowing each user to post on a wall, 'friend' other members, create groups and forums and start chat conversations. However, usage is carefully monitored, with a prominent notice informing members of the appropriate 'etiquette' to be followed in the site and the consequences of breaching rules of conduct.

The main objective of this internal social networking site is to make sure that children, especially those in fifth to ninth grade, receive coaching and instruction on how to use an external social networking site such as Facebook responsibly. Further, the management and teachers view this simulation of a social networking site as a two-way learning experience, in which both sides gain knowledge through ICT.

Students and teachers use this website in different ways and for various purposes. Social greetings for festivals or other holidays are common among students. Staff members also 'friend' other members of staff and have social interactions on this site. Teachers also use the website to comment on curricular events, such as projects and exhibitions conducted by the students. In turn, students conduct polls on issues of interest among other students and teachers, giving them a taste of the democratic process. Last but not least, homework assignments have also been posted on the site for students to complete, with immediate clarifications made possible through chat with the respective faculty members. Along with facilitating interactions among members, 'Relate' also allows users to post videos (mostly educational and only posted by teachers), appropriate photographs (posted by students and teachers) and links to external sources such as websites and blogs.

However, as the management themselves agree, though 'Relate' is open for all students from the fifth grade upwards, and is completely voluntary, they see it being used more by middle-school children than older students. Further, there seems to be a difference in the pattern of how the girls use the site compared to the boys. Most postings on Relate by girl students were related to paintings and creative design, while those by boys leaned towards sports such as football, basketball and even baseball.

The sign-in page of this networking site is shown in Fig. 6.1 below.

Extensive usage of ICT has also challenged the school's IT team, which is now scrambling to keep pace with ICT-related challenges such as cyber bullying, posting of inappropriate pictures and other media on the common social networking platform and general use of the internet for purposes other than classroom or education-related research.

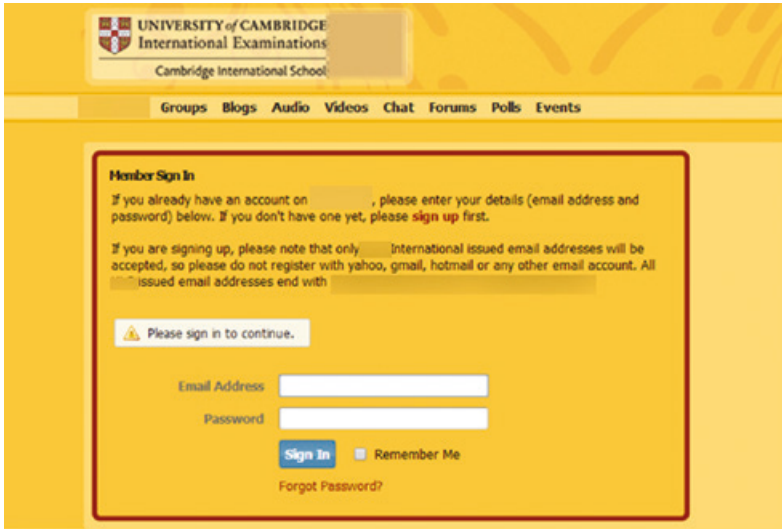


Fig. 6.1 The log-in page of an intraschool networking site

Conclusion

This chapter started by considering the two seemingly disparate case studies of Ranjith and Pandian. However, viewing the same case studies again, with a deeper understanding of how the macro-structure of education and other socio-economic factors influence this seemingly micro-level use of social media in everyday life, reveals the issues underlying the exploration. To comprehend these fully the diversity of schools in the area, ranging from expensive, fee-paying affluent schools to free government schools serving the lowest-income migrant workers from other states, had to be reviewed. We can now see why this introduction was so important, since almost every aspect of social media use in the school system seems to differ systematically along this spectrum, from the most cosmopolitan schools to the most local. The use of social media in this context reflects the attitudes not only of teachers but also of pupils, as well as the expectations and aspirations of parents. In turn this reflects the wider context of a field site in which the imposition of a new IT complex also reflects a top-down imposition of ideas – as indeed does a ‘knowledge economy’ itself. Even if these are at times poorly understood, it is clear that all sectors of the population, even those with the lowest incomes, recognise that their children’s futures will be enhanced if somehow education can also mean access to technology and

skills related to IT. In a sense everyone at Panchagrami has embraced the concept of a knowledge economy at some level or other.

In this chapter we have also explored the implications that this has on the presence of social media in schools, starting from the attitude that these schools have towards mobile phones and access to technologies and progressing to personal connections on social media between teachers and students. The categorisation of social media and technology as useful educational tools, and as distractions by some teachers, also had to be considered in order to understand why the teachers in affluent schools frowned upon certain social media, while those working in less affluent schools encouraged its use.³³ This kind of categorisation was also apparent in how the students' parents viewed social media. While parents from lower socio-economic classes who sent their children to the less affluent schools saw their child's engagement with social media as an exhibition of a technical competence needed to survive in the knowledge economy that Panchagrami had grown into, upper middle-class parents viewed social media as a distraction to education. This is in a way similar to how social media was viewed in the respective schools that their children attended.

However, it was evident that the idea of understanding and handling social media was still a confusing mix throughout the school system. None of the schools had a clearly defined social media policy and, although some had an internet policy, there was no mention of social media. Rules regarding social media were constantly in flux, as the schools grappled with the ever-changing issues it raised. Finally, while all schools acknowledged the inescapable, pervasive presence of social media, not everything was discussed proactively and acted upon by these schools.

While some students were friending teachers on Facebook, in affluent schools anxiety, confusion and caution were common among teachers with respect to friending students, or even asking them for technical help. In less affluent schools, on the other hand, friending on social media was encouraged and even acted upon. The business of friending teachers was more visible among the middle school students, aged between 12 and 15; older students hesitated to do so, due to concerns about constant surveillance.³⁴ Such concerns were much more apparent in the case of WhatsApp, with both parties reluctant to connect since that involved exchanging personal phone numbers. Such reservations were also visible in the schools' practice of discouraging teachers from sharing phone numbers with students' parents, fearing possible disturbance and invasion of privacy.

Privacy in these cases was layered, based on the social media in question. Whereas Facebook was still viewed as a legitimate platform for official institutional communication, WhatsApp was seen as a private channel and was consequently discouraged, since it allowed one-to-one interaction with teachers.³⁵ While Facebook and WhatsApp seemed to be the platforms most discussed within these circles, Twitter appeared virtually invisible, with the exception of one very affluent international school. However, even this school used Twitter along with other platforms. Twitter was not as popular as Facebook or WhatsApp among students in affluent schools, a trend that differs from the use of Twitter among students in the UK field site, The Glades.³⁶

In addition, while friending between genders was apparent in affluent schools, only male teachers friended male students in the less affluent schools – the result of socio-cultural issues surrounding female students' access to social media or even mobile phones. The deeper we probe, the more we realise that schools' perceptions about social media are relative to the socio-cultural aspects of a wider society, which in turn influence the schools themselves.

Most significant is the process by which the schools handle these apparently relative perceptions of social media, often by adopting contradictory practices. The last case study of a social media platform that an affluent school had created for its students is noteworthy. In this instance an affluent school that actually discourages, cautions and frowns upon its younger students using social media has ended up creating another social media platform strategically to combat and drive their students away from Facebook. In contrast less affluent schools, though they encourage and support social media, do not have the economic resources required to create a new platform for their use. The striking contradiction that emerges here is the use of social media by systems of education that frown upon it, juxtaposed with the non-use of social media by systems of education that in reality support it.

In conclusion, social media is an unprecedented development which schools are coming to terms with by constantly testing and experimenting with it. They all seem to be handling it in their own style, which in reality is relative to the socio-cultural scenario in which they are embedded – as was very apparent in the cases of Ranjith and Pandian.