

Confession in the Digital Age

Report submitted by Rimi Nandy

Student, Digital Humanities and Cultural Informatics

School of Cultural Texts and Records

Jadavpur University

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Executive Summary:

The youth of today are born digital natives. In the fast paced postmodern world, the availability of digital technologies has made life much easier for the youth. The social networking sites have provided a substitute for face to face social interactions. This has enabled even the most socially awkward youth to create a virtual self for the sole purpose of interacting in the cyberspace. Using the platform provided by SNS's such as Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, Orkut, one can recreate himself/herself according to the manner they would like to be viewed by the people they interact with. In my report I propose to study the interaction of the Indian youth in the virtual space provided by the Facebook College Confession pages. Facebook being the most popular SNS in India, was selected for the study. The aim of this report was to investigate how the meaning of the term 'confession' has undergone a change in the age of the New Media. The craze of the Facebook Confession Pages is very recent in India. Probably the first Facebook Confessions page to be launched was the Stanford University Confessions. Before the spread of Facebook Confession pages online, a different kind of online confessions was being practised in the form of 'Post Secrets', started as early as the year 2005. This trend was slowly taken up by the various Universities in the Western Countries before it found its way into the Indian continent. The Western Countries influenced the birth of the Confession Pages in India¹. Through this study I propose to chart the changing attitude of today's youth to the notion of "confession" in the Indian context. The report also gives an analysis of the manner in which the digital technology has gone a long way in changing the attitude of the Indian youth of today. The methodologies used are described in detail. The report would also shed light on the various themes being discussed in these virtual communities and the manner in which the use of language also changes from one virtual space to another.

The anonymity factor plays an important role in the increasing craze for such pages. The anonymity provides an escape from the hands of the authorities and provides the users of the confession pages with freedom from any kind of fear of being taken to task for the confessions and the ensuing conversations. But even in the anonymous posts some amount of inhibition is reflected. While speaking about sexual activities, the Indian youth are not as candid in their use of language as their Western counterparts. The over burdening pressure felt by the Indian students due to the growing expectations of parents in a highly competitive market has made the Indian students to look for avenues to break free for a given period of time. The Confession pages act as a safety valve for the students where they can not only unburden themselves but successfully create a bond of understanding across vast distances of separation. The user friendly interface of Facebook as well as the quick access options is attracting more and students to turn towards the virtual space to escape from the real world and its problems. The availability to online video tutorials has made the creation of the confession pages on Facebook easily accessible. The option of creating the pages according to one's choice makes it flexible and hence more attractive. The use of Googledocs to post the confessions has earned the faith of the users. The options for liking a post and commenting on it helps in conducting conversations when the desire to do so is felt. The use of emoticons and memes to respond to the posts makes the conversation more interesting. If a user chooses neither to confess or comment, he/she could just enjoy reading them and 'enjoy'themselves and have a good laugh.

The confessions posted on the Facebook pages also brings to the forefront the desire to perform for the readers of the Confession pages on Facebook. There appears to be an overwhelming desire to create a common platform where the youth of India can reassure themselves that they are not alone in believing and acting contrary to the common beliefs of the Indian society. Most users of the confession pages believe that the 'confessions' made are "fake". According to such views, the confessions are merely a way to get attention. This particular detail will be elaborately in the body of the report.

¹ As mentioned in the following website articles: <http://www.quora.com/Indian-Institute-of-Technology-Bombay/Who-started-the-confessions-rage-on-facebook>

Section 1: Introduction

Words to Binary Digits: Journey of Confession from the Real to the Digital

Confession originated in the Greek society, where “confession” was considered to be the method of ‘self-improvisation’. The concept of guilt and punishment was not linked to the idea of “confession” in the Classical Age. It was based on the principle of self-surveillance. With the passage in time the method and principles of “confessions” underwent a change. In the Christian society “confession” became a mode of repentance. It offers a cathartic effect by helping one unburden their deepest and well-guarded secrets. But the role of “confession” was not restricted to curing the confessor from the burden of guilt alone, instead it was also used as an agent of instilling fear and yielding of power mechanisms. In the pre-digital age, the confessions were either carried out to oneself in seclusion or on a one to one basis. It was never performed in front of a gathering of people as that would be responsible in instilling a greater amount of fear in the confessor. There is one exception to this in the form of courtroom confessions. The courtroom confessions were a public affair, but the confession is initially made behind closed doors in the presence of the law enforcing officers. A major problem with such confession is understanding whether the confession is true or coerced. Most often the confessor is victimised by extreme conditions coupled with suggestions made by the officers. In most cases it becomes an act performance almost in the vein of the confessions made on the facebook pages. In the digital age. The Facebook Confession pages are a space for the gathering of confessors. The most important aspect of this virtual space is the fact that it easily crosses boundaries and makes the world a very small place by bringing people across continents together. Another important factor and probably the driving force behind its popularity is the fact that the confessor can easily hide his/her identity and just present the self as a confessor before other confessors. It is almost like an anonymous support group, only on a larger scale. The members of the Confession pages can sit behind their screens in the comfort of their surroundings without having to travel and face unknown people and looking at their faces wondering how they would react to the confession to be placed before them. The cyberspace due to its fluid nature provides a better sense of security than the real world. In the virtual world every word typed and the ensuing comments are born digital and stay locked within the digital sphere. It becomes nothing more than a combination of binary digits, which if not found to be palatable can be easily deleted with a few clicks of the mouse and the ‘backspace’ key. In the real world it is impossible to undo confessions and comments made. The arrival of the digital confession pages has randomised the act and its effect. Further it has also changed the very essence of confession. Most of the confessions appear to be boastful rather than having a note of repentance. In most cases the space provided by the confession pages are used to challenge authority by disclosing daring acts performed. It has become a form of community building which houses the various youth who would like to share desires which are not supposed to be performed. Another issue which normally finds its ways into these spaces is that of romantic and sexual encounters. Some instances of academic discussions are also seen in some pages pertaining to the stress of semester exam, future job prospects, discussions about the curriculum of the institute. Apart from this a lot of mud-slinging is carried out within the institute between various departments as well between several different institutes.

The confession pages also become a conglomeration of various digital technologies. Most pages do not restrict themselves to plain writing of posts. They also include links to other web pages, mainly youtube, which can be considered to be an archive of various videos and audios. Some pages also include links to e-books, or use memes to bring forth their ideas and emotions. The internet has successfully become an irreplaceable aspect of the youth’s life across the globe. It has broken all boundaries making the world a very small place where a post uploaded in India can be perused anywhere in the world.

Language helps create an identity. It is a tool which can be used and moulded to describe specific emotions, feelings and attitude of a person. How the English language and its use changes in the Indian context is proof of its importance in the life of the Indian youth. In spite of the fact that many vernacular language tools are available in the market, the students resort to using the English language to put forth their views and opinions. This might probably be because of the ease of access provided by the English language as vernacular keyboards has still not been made available. This has in turn resulted in the creation of a new corpus of language systems which uses the English alphabets to write the Vernacular language. This language system can only function within the digital space where the speaker and the receiver both are aware of the rules connected to the language. In most cases, the language structure and syntax is completely broken down which might be considered to be an outcome of the user's growing impatience with rules and regulations. Besides almost all institutes work hard in creating specific 'lingo' which helps in the creation of a unique identity. Use of words specific to the digital space becomes rampant in these Confession pages. The use of language also helps in distinguishing and categorising the various Indian colleges and universities. It also brings to the forefront the age old battle of the sexes raging in every part of the world. Language becomes essential in creating identities and personalities.

The position of youth in the Indian society and their attitude to the same is also very well reflected through the confessions, the issues being confessed and the attitude visible in those confessions. The confession pages were started in India in the wake of the success gained by them in the Western Countries. Not much thought is given to what the term 'confession' stands for. According to most of the users it is just a space where people can speak their minds without any fear. Though some pages advertise their confession pages as being a substitute to Church Confessions, either through their words or cover photo^{1,2}. This is surprising as India being a country where Christianity is a minority, Church Confession would not mean much for the larger population. But this has probably been done because the pages want a universal readership which would cross the boundaries of India.

Put together the various aspects of the use of Facebook Confession pages in India helps one identify the importance of digital technology and its overwhelming effect on the society at large.

² "Lil sweet,lil bitter...lil thoughts...memories....sme not so good moments.../Share them.../We all would like to be a part of it.../And yes ! do confess your sins without going to a church /we will be your Priest /The name is a secret and shall always be" - Administrator's note on Loreto College Confession Page

Section 2: Data

Methods and Problems of Data Collection

Methodology:

The data was mainly collected online by thoroughly studying a number of College Confession Facebook Pages in India. The following Confession pages were used in the study:

- IIT Confessions³
- IIT Kanpur Confessions⁴
- IIT Bombay Confessions⁵
- IIT Kharagpur Confessions⁶
- IIT Delhi Confessions⁷
- IIT Crush Confessions⁸
- IIT Madras Confessions⁹
- IIM Bangalore Confessions¹⁰
- IIM Ahmedabad Confessions¹¹
- Non- IIM Confessions¹²
- Delhi College Sex Confessions¹³
- BITS Pilani, Goa¹⁴
- TISSConfessions¹⁵
- JU Confessions¹⁶
- JU-Jadavpur University Confessions¹⁷
- St. Xaviers College, Mumbai¹⁸
- St. Xaviers College, Kolkata , Confessions¹⁹
- Bhawanipore College Confessions²⁰

³<https://www.facebook.com/IITConfess>

⁴<https://www.facebook.com/IITKanpurConfessions>

⁵<https://www.facebook.com/Confessions.IITB>

⁶<https://www.facebook.com/TheIITKGPCConfessions>

⁷<https://www.facebook.com/pages/IIT-Delhi-Confessions-V-20/543143705720239>

⁸<https://www.facebook.com/iit.crush>

⁹<https://www.facebook.com/iitmadrascfessions>

¹⁰<https://www.facebook.com/pages/IIM-Bangalore-Confessions/451079881627540>

¹¹<https://www.facebook.com/pages/IIMA-Confessions/336041499846988>

¹²<https://www.facebook.com/NonIIMConfessions>

¹³<https://www.facebook.com/DelhiConfessions7>

¹⁴<https://www.facebook.com/bitsgoaconfessions>

¹⁵<https://www.facebook.com/pages/TISSConfessions/587172477977359>

¹⁶<https://www.facebook.com/JuConfessions>

¹⁷<https://www.facebook.com/juconfessionsreloaded>

¹⁸ Confessions <https://www.facebook.com/XavieritesConfessions>

¹⁹<https://www.facebook.com/xavconfess>

A questionnaire was circulated among all the above mentioned Confession Pages. The questions included were:-

What according to you is Confession?

Why do you feel the need to confess online?

What are the things you prefer confessing online?

Do you feel safe confessing online?

Have you ever been bullied as a result of confessions made by other people?

Various users of the confession pages were randomly interviewed and their responses duly noted and analysed. As a researcher, my task of collecting data became easier due to the presence of Facebook. Most of the interviews were conducted by me in the form of chatting over Facebook Messenger. I could reach students across India while not having to travel away from my familiar spaces.

The various Confession Pages were separately analysed using a free Text Mining Tool²¹ available online. It helped in the study of the use and structure of language used in respective pages. The details of the Study will be given in the following chapter on Language.

As reference material I looked into various online posts on blogs and newspaper sites such as:

- Quora.com
- <http://www.firstpost.com/living/with-confession-pages-gossip-girl-is-now-on-facebook-727695.html>
- <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/02/26/college-confession-and-makeout-pages-raise-privacy-anonymity-issues>
- http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/27/confessions-facebook-page-cu-boulder-students_n_2962252.html
- http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-03-10/deep-focus/37597441_1_posts-sites-lamebook

Problems of Data Collection:

Though the presence of Facebook helped me to a great extent in my data collection, it also hindered the process of data collection. Though I had reached out to a number of people connected to the Confession pages, only a handful of them replied and were willing to share their views. Apart from the online interviews, when I tried to interview students face to face, most students denied being a part of any such pages. Due to the provision of anonymity, it becomes difficult to challenge the discrepancy between the real and the virtual world.

²⁰<https://www.facebook.com/BhawanipurConfessions>

²¹<http://textalyser.net/index.php?lang=en#analysis>

Section 3: Categorizing Spaces of Discussion

As mentioned earlier in the Introduction, during the Greek age, Confession was related to self improvisation. In the Greek context there existed four different types of speeches, namely 'prophecy', 'wisdom', 'rhetoric' and 'parrhesia'. The term 'parrhesia' denotes the original concept of confession, which is the act of truth telling. The speaker had to identify himself with what he is saying. The function of truth is purification of the soul. Hence truth has to be natural. Only someone who lives a natural and true life can speak the language of truth. The art of truth telling and transformation of oneself to lead a true life was the original idea behind confession. With time though this idea underwent a change. With the advent of the Catholic Church, confession became the mode of purification of the soul by speaking about 'sinful' acts, which rests outside the domain of the societal norms. As mentioned in the Introduction, the Digital space has broadened the sphere of Confession. It is no longer restricted within confines of pages or solitary hearing by the Priests and the Idols. A person can sit back relaxed in the place where he/she feels comfortable, sipping tea/coffee, listening to music and multitasking while transforming the deepest thoughts and desires into the binary digits 0 and 1. The Confessor can make as many changes desired to the post before and after uploading. If the confessor fails to access the post after uploading the administrator can be requested to do the needful. This has resulted in a shift in the attitude towards confession. It is no more restricted to the idea of purgation of the soul, rather it has become the vehicle for challenging authority and accessing power. It has become a tool in the hands of the youngsters used to cater to their narcissism, helping them in creating a virtual identity which would fuel their desire for self proclamation. The guise of anonymity provides a good cover for the confessor. As evident from the interviews conducted most students believe that the posts of admiration for a person is normally written by the very same person. This was revealed during my conversation with two students of Jadavpur University, Economics Department. The standards for which is right and which is wrong is set up by the society and the individual has no say in it. In most cases the societal repression is the reason behind the 'sinful acts'. But the act of confession need not specifically speak of "sinful" acts, rather it can also be about hidden desires, proclamation of love or any subject that the confessor fails to share in public. The Facebook Confession Pages displays a plethora of issues being discussed starting from declaration of love and infatuation to sexual encounters. The issues discussed differ from one page to the other. According to an article in Times of India by Narayanan Krishnaswami, "A lot of these confessions are light hearted. Some are funny, some are passionate and some can be deeply moving. There are the usual suspects, like the staples of hostel life — bathing: "I once went on without having a bath for 10 straight days..."; underwear : "When I run out of clean underwear I just flip them inside out and reuse them" ; unrequited love: "I was in love with the TA of last sem's ID1100.

Then there are the more serious posts — students declaring their sexuality and their frustrations with the cruelty and stereotyping they face from their peers. There are, inevitably , arguments about reservation policies and caste discrimination , which can set off flame wars."²²- The degree colleges/undergraduate colleges normally discuss about proclamation of love or infatuation with very few instances of discussions related to studies. For example, the following "confession", taken from University of Hyderabad Confessions page:

- #99: "Cute boys in HCU are so rare that I can't not notice you in Gopseveryday at the lunch hour in loose, low-waist jeans. It's ridiculously stupid cuz I don't even know your name. The next time you are buying your watermelon juice after lunch look around and if you see a pretty girl smiling at you go talk to her."
- #164: "I always thought it'd be super hot to date a prof's daughter and when I saw 'her' I was determined to get her, failed attempts! She doesnt even know I exist"

²² Krishnaswami, Narayanan, Times of India, March 10, 2013

There are sometimes some discussions about grave issues pertaining to the state of the society. This is very well depicted by the following "confession":

- #326: "I wanted to say just a few things,, first of all no women wants to expose her body wantedly and if it is the reason for rape attempts, then you can find many women at railway stations, roads, and slums exposing their body due to lack of proper clothing, why doesn't any 1 attempt a rape on them,, dear brother it's not what women expose that matters its what a men's mind is exposed to,that matters. Instead of suggesting them to properly dress up, why don't u ask ur brothers to stay in home,, instead... Even this will solve the problem.... By Raghav Singh..."

In contrast to this IIT's have a completely different approach to the concept of 'love' altogether. In most confessions by IITians academic problems are interlinked to the problems faced in their "love" life. There is a strong presence of the parents in their confessions. Apart from this there are a lot of discussions relating to sexual encounters. The following "confessions" will be able to prove these points:

- #1037 "Hey everyone. I'm not into confessions too much but guess I needed a break to vomit some stuff from my inside. So, I'm kinda belching it all out. The keyboard I'm typing with & my typing skills are too pathetic. So ignore any spellchecksnd other frigging things.So, here it goes : After having wasted your 30 seconds, I would like to tell you that I am a mechanical engineering fuchha from IITG. Umm, not to brag or something, but I know I deserved more than that. But shit happened. I was in kota. And, I got addicted to Cyber Cafe, I was too easily tempted. And, I fell in love. And, It was bloody awesome and all. It still is. I somehow made it to the IITs. But, " WE" belong to different castes.My Mummy and Papa know about her. They were not very happy bcoz of the impact it had on my career (And, I know that they are right.) but, they appreciate that I love them & I would have had my own reasons.But, that was not the trouble. I was happy. Even with my pathetic JEE rank I was happy. Then came the Counselling date. Here's the catch. I have always loved physics. LOved in the very literal sense of the word. I want to be a researcher of fundamental physics. You should see my smile and how my face lights up when I hear someone talk of the NO hair theorem. So, I SHOULD HAVE TAKEN ENGINEERING PHYSICS / PHYSICS. And, I should have ben at IIT DELHI now. But, due to lack of information, Me my mom & dad, came to the conclusion that EP didn't offer much prospect of a job, which is the soul purpose of a B Tech from IIT. So, My Dad advised me to take Mechanical. I thought that If I earned more , I would be in a better position with respect to getting approval from HER parents'. So, I joined IITG Mechanical Engineering, thinking I can let go of my passion for my love. But, I can't. I have always wanted to work in physics and physics only. And, I was a foolish teenager to think that this would help me with HER parents'. Too late for that now. That's the point of time I'm stuck at. MAny of you now, after this idiotic jargon, would be asking " Are Bhai KEhnaKYachahtehO???" .. So, let me sum it down. Most of my problems are created by the genius, evil part of " Me". So, The good Me can handle that. My one great love life, Her parents, MY awesome mom nd loving dad.. THEY are my domain. My real problem is : " Is there any way to work as a researcher in fundamental theoretical physics after doing a btech from mechanical engineering ? " PLeaseDon't suggest branch change. that is impossible as of present. And,,UNpossible,, doesn't say I'm possible. Help will be appreciated. I'm really glad for having wasted 10 minutes of You. P. S. DEarDAd, I love u alot. A lot lot.BUt, I can never say it to your face. We both dislike such awkward conversations, Don't we?"
- #888 "I wouldn't call this a confession, but i would rather call it a dilemma. To begin with, passed out from one of the old IITs. Fell in love with my schoolmate after meeting her in 3rd year & we got married a couple of years ago. All is well and life looks as if living "Happily ever-after"... BUT, there is an incident which bothers me alot and that is what this confession is about... I got placed in an MNC in Gurgaon and was having a long distance relationship with my GF(who was working in Bangalore). Being from a very traditional and conservative family my

GF never allowed me to even touch her intimately during the early days. It took almost an year for me to touch her and it was after some 1.5 years I kissed her. This was my first kiss to her, but was my second to a woman. That is what bothers me a lot... During my early days in Gurgaon I got a call from my Dad saying that one of his friends' friend's daughter is coming to Gurgaon to join her company and since she is new to that place and doesn't know Hindi, I should help her in settling. I met this typical dusky, big eyed south Indian girl at her company's guest house, helped her out with some Dos and Dont's. The second time I met her, I took her out for lunch and we had a nice friendly chit-chat. After that day, I felt that she got settled and haven't contacted her for a few days. After some 5 weeks I got a call from her saying that she is moving to Bangalore as her company agreed for a transfer. Incidentally I have planned to visit Bangalore that weekend, and i told her about travel plan. She asked me if she could travel with me for which i said Yes. The Journey... I booked a cab from my place and picked her up on the way to the airport. We sat for breakfast at the tiffin center outside the Delhi airport(there used to be one...south Indian) and were totally in a fun mood... She wore a shirt and a denim which looked a bit out of sync with her typical south Indian long hair. Breakfast was over and the trouble started.... I was standing in the line for the security check and she was standing behind me, she suddenly asked me about something & I turned around, as I was turning with my jerkin in my hand I felt something very soft got in touch with my elbow. To my surprise, she was very close to me and the softness was of her breast. I was startled and said sorry to her and moved a bit away from her. Now, that was

- something which I have never ever experienced...not even in crowded bus nor in a busy market. After a while, she again asked me something and the same thing repeated... things are getting heated up... Though I was doubtful, my mind was telling that she is doing it on purpose. Security check was over and we moved into the bus which takes you to the aircraft. She stood beside me and was so close that the minute jerks always reduced the gap between us. I am experiencing something new, was uncomfortable but was enjoying and after sometime even i was finding a way to touch her. We reached the aircraft and got into our seats. I took the window seat, she sat beside me and some old guy sat beside her who fell asleep right after taking his seat. Btw, we were talking a lot of fun stuff all the way making jokes of others and laughing among over selves. I showed her a lady who was seated on the other side and was reading a novel.. she turned the other way to see that lady & I turned my eyes towards her shirt, I noticed that when she turned the other side the shirt came into such a position that was showing me her cleavage and hence I found every damn reason to make her turn the other side. After a while I told her that I can see the river Ganges through the window and she leaned on me to have a look. She made sure that while leaning her left breast in directly pressing with my right upper arm. This continued for around 20 mins and after that we could see nothing from that altitude. We knew we both were turned on... she leaned back and sat normally on her seat and I was staring through the window. She took my hand into her arms and acted as if she is reading my hand... I gently pressed my hand towards her chest and she covered my hand with her stole... This continued until the announcement came that the flight is going to reach Bangalore in 20 mins. This was the moment I turned towards her and she too was staring into my eyes, I came close to her and told her that the journey was too short to which she replied by kissing me on my cheek... I was surprised and not knowing what to do kissed her back on her cheek... We landed...picked our luggage and I left with my friend who was waiting for me and she took a cab. After that day, neither she called me nor she shared me her new number, but she wished me on my birthday and I wished her on her birthday and that's it.. I got married and she too got married... I never dared to confess this to my gf/wife and never got in touch with her. My biggest dilemma... did I do something wrong ? I still feel I have cheated my loving wife..."
- #2: "I am a fourth year student at IITB. I stole 13 Bras from the rooms of H10 and H11 during last year's valfi. Almost all of them were of different sizes if you take the alphabet after the number into account. I have kept all of them safe in my room with their room numbers written

over them. I am gonna keep them with me as long as possible. I am planning to make it big this year. Beware girls.”- IITB

- #62: “I am a handsome guy in 4th year... so far on campus I have scored with 2 girls & heavily made out with 4 girls. Did some really *unspeakable* stuff with some of them. Each of them thinks they are special and they think I possibly feel the same but to tell the truth I don't find any of them attractive.”

The discussions revolve around these few instances, but there are few cases here and there which might relate to the working of the administration, the atmosphere within the college campus, retaliations against professors and so forth. A major amount of inter-college mud-slinging is also visible in some confession pages.” These pages act as the battle ground for various colleges trying to defeat each other when it comes to putting up the best confession page, or having a better curriculum or giving better job prospects. For example the following post from Bhawanipore College Kolkata:

- “Guys please share this page with your friends..without likes and shares this is going to be a very boring page..come on bhagguites we must take on sxc!!;D”

['sxc' here refers to St. Xavier's College Kolkata]

- “#45 So some Xaviers prick has written how we are copying them along with other colleges. Listen you fucked up chootfacebook is a public forum and what you do here is under public scrutiny. So you dont have any trademark over it and YOU DONT OWN IT! So we will do what we want and guess what? You cant do SHIT about it! Kiss Bhaggus ass you Xaverians cos thats as close as you'll come to coming up to our level! #bcom2ndyear”

According to Dr B R Madhukar, a leading Bangalore psychiatrist. "Initially, people would write letters or make phone calls, but social media allows you to reach a much larger audience, and a lot of these young people need to tell the world that 'they are there'. While the tendency to sensationalize is inevitable, there is also the hope that someone, somewhere, can understand, can empathise." Madhukar believes that confessions —even anonymous confessions can help one's emotional state.”- as quoted in TOI.

Various online articles have spoken about the growing trend of confession pages and they mostly point out the similar kinds of themes discussed on these platforms. For example in an article by ShrutiDhapola in Firstpost.com

“Some of the confessions are about the usual college/school politics - people complaining about their friends, people who steal and misuse positions in college societies; complaints about hostel food, roommates, professors, etc. Pages get blocked regularly, but like phoenixes they resurrect with different URLs. For instance, I know the St Stephen's page keeps dying and reviving. It's been blocked a number of times for 'offensive content' and it's hard to keep track of which is the real one, despite my experience of Facebook 'stalking'.”- Firstpost.com , 25th April , 2013.

These anonymous confessions might be having a cathartic effect but more than that it is about building a community of youth 'frustrated' with the overtly controlling society, dictating their every actions and choices. This digital space becomes a path to freedom and coming together of like minded people. But here too an act of performance is put up in order to be accepted within the folds existing outside the shackles of the society. This desire to perform is again made possible due to the presence of the digital space which is fluid and flexible and very tolerant of disguise. The digital space does not look for a proof of identity thereby resulting in creation of false identities and fake confessions to satiate ones desire of self praise and fame. The 'Like' option provides the necessary boost for the confessor. The act of the confession does not end with a single confession. Instead it starts a dialogues between the confessor and the reader. Not only the posts but also the comments compete to achieve that award of 'Like'. The one who receives the highest number of 'likes' wins the

race to fame. It is like any other competition the only difference being that in this case the results are published instantly.

Some amount of control is carried out even in these pages by the administrators in order to avoid clashes with the institute administrators as well as having a negative effect on students being bullied.

What is noteworthy is the fact the readers of these confessions mostly believe that the confessions made are all fake. To the readers it is nothing more than a mode of entertainment. Their attitudes towards these confessions are similar to that of a reader of a fiction. Following entries are taken directly from online interviews of certain users-

- "I think Facebook confession was just a blow which was not used for actual confession but to read and have fun. Most of the confessions were actually fake." ²³
- "Confession pages are good for secret admirers to get their feelings out under the guise of anonymity but it is mostly used for vengeful purposes, I find this to be an act of cowardice and condemn to the extent possible."
- "i feel fcbk confession is just a way to tell thngs u want to anonymously.. it is hardly a confession
i spend around 10 odd mins ,not everyday(as and when notifications come) on my clgconfessinos page and it is just a mode of entertainment" ²⁴
- "I don't usually participate in confessions pages on facebook. Mostly I think they are meant in jest or atleast the reality is twisted out of proportions." ²⁵
- "fb is for time pass, just the idle minds banter, loose if i may say so . looks out as if we have much time to spend idly and so we go on browsing whatever may come our way ... that's all" ²⁶
- "i spend no time on confession pages unless im bored to death and have nothing better to do, which is like once a year for about 5 minutes.

for me it cant be equated with church confessions since those are of a more serious sort

for others i guess it might be different" ²⁷

- "neither do i believe in church confessions, nor facebook confessions. i feel, if at all we need to confess something, it is to ourselves. so, i personally find them baseless. also, facebook confession pages are a farce. nobody actually confesses abything. most of the people are posting fake stories for some sheer entertainment." ²⁸
- "Nothing. Mostly a source of entertainment. I have not confessed in any forum, but I have read some posts and laughed. I think it provides a platform for some people to know others' views while maintaining anonymity. I doubt there are many confessions seeking forgiveness or out of remorse or to appease one's conscience." ²⁹

By analyzing these responses it becomes evident that the Facebook Confessions page is not a platform which is taken seriously. For the digital youth of India, it has become just another mode of "entertainment", which allows one to depressurize by having a good laugh at others hidden desires

²³ A user of IIT Kanpur Confessions Page

²⁴ A user of BESU Confessions Page

²⁵ A user of IIT KGP Confessions Page

²⁶ A user of BESU Confessions Page

²⁷ A user of Loreto College Confessions

²⁸ A user of Jadavpur University Confessions

²⁹ A user of IIT Bhubneswar Confessions

and in the process gaining a voyeuristic pleasure. This mode of entertainment is inexpensive and it also provides the viewer with the option to participate in the formation of the entertainment while sitting in one's own room and multitasking. The students can easily sign into their Facebook accounts within seconds, visit the Confession Pages, read the posts and contribute to it, while taking a short break from their studies to refresh their minds. Once their daily dose of entertainment is taken they can as easily sign off from Facebook and get back to their studies. In the views of many, the confessions are mostly fake , made for the purpose of seeking attention. In an example provided by the administrator of BITS Pilani, Goa Confessions Page he clearly proves this need for attention felt by the youth of today-

"like one day there was a confession "Don't you think sunitjain is the next quora god of BITS Goa after Manas J Saloi." It was said that it was confessed by a second yearite, but Sunit Jain at that time was a firstie, he entered the campus only 15 days back and why would any senior care to confess about him? I didn't post it and the same confession kept coming again and again, it was obvious that it was he himself who did it for popularity.."

Section 4: Digital Confession and Language

Language plays an important role in the creation of identity. According to Saussurian linguistics, language is a system of rules which help in the use of the words in the language. Therefore language and its rules pre-exist an individual's use of it. The Confession pages provide a space where stories of various instances of rule breaking are rampant. The language used to write these "confessions" breaks all set patterns of grammar and language structure. Most of the confessions are written using a combination of vernacular and English. The vernacular words are again written using the English alphabets. In spite of the availability of various vernacular language softwares, students prefer to use the English language. This is an interesting angle. This is probably due to the influence of the Western countries or the growing trend of the digital making the world a global village. Using English gives it a universal appeal. Also as mentioned earlier the ease of access provided by the English Keyboard makes it easier to use. The myriad issues dealt with in these confession pages are reflected in the pattern of the language. Each page creates a unique identity through the manner they play with words in the confessions as well as in the comments.

The language also depicts the customs and culture specific to certain institutions. For example the terms "valfi" and "Maatka" used by IIT Bombay. While the term "valfi" stands for a customary event called 'Valedictory Profile', the term "Maatka" is used to refer to the undergraduate students. Both of these terms are a clear reflection of a culture followed within the boundaries of the campus.

Each of the Confession pages were analysed using a free online text mining tool³⁰ to give a detailed understanding of the language practice. The analysis brought out the 'Lexical Density' and the 'Readability Index' for each of the pages.³¹ The results clearly indicate that language becomes essential in proving uniqueness to each of the pages.

'Lexical density is the term most often used to describe the proportion of content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and often also adverbs) to the total number of words. A text with a high proportion of content words contains more information than a text with a high proportion of function words (prepositions, interjections, pronouns, conjunctions and numerals). Therefore, lexical density says something about *information packaging*."³²

"Gunning's Fog Index (developed by Robert Gunning in 1952) is a metric that has been designed to measure the readability of a document. The computed metric value (fog index) of a document indicates the number of years of formal education that a person should have in order to be able to comfortably understand that document. That is if a certain document has a fog index of 12, anyone who has completed his 12th class would not have much difficulty in understanding that document."³³

The text analyser also gives a list of-

- Total number of words
- Total number of characters
- Number of characters without spaces
- Average Syllables per Word
- Sentence count

³⁰<http://textalyser.net/>

³¹ For the complete chart please see Annexure II

³² As defined in page 145 of "Developmental aspects of text production in writing and speech" by Johansson, Victoria.

³³ As defined in page 330 of the "Fundamentals of Software Engineering" by Mall, Rajib

- Average sentence length
- Max sentence length
- Min sentence length

By analyzing these data it becomes evident that each page has a characteristic of its own. No two data sets are the same, which makes it possible to differentiate one page from the other. The 'Readability Index' is below 8 for all the pages. This proves that the confessors want to reach a broader platform of audiences across continents. This is made possible as all the Confession Pages are open to all.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the dialogue taking place within the space of the Facebook Confession Pages creates a new language system altogether. The rules for the functioning of this language is known to the users of this digital space. In keeping with the impatient nature of the youth and perpetual lack of time in their lives, the words are shortened to convey the thoughts. For example words like 'whn', 'fb', 'wen' which are shortened version of 'when', 'facebook' and 'when' respectively. A list the commonly used word forms is given in the Annexure.

Section 5: Conclusion

This report gives a comprehensive understanding of the youth culture in India through the use of the Facebook Confession Pages. Being a space which allows freedom of expressing the best kept secrets from the comforts of one's zone without having to face the audience. While comparing the confession pages of the colleges in western countries and that in India, I did find that some inhibition is practised in India even on the anonymous platforms. In the Western countries the posts in the confession pages are much bolder, difficulties related to sexual organs or sexual activities are freely discussed. In comparison in India the confessor attach some amount of taboo to such issues. While words like "fuck" or "fucking" or "vagina" are used without inhibition in the Western countries, in India the confessors still use the "*" sign instead of pronouncing the entire word. For example:

"I get really horny on my period and I wish my boyfriend would have sex with me during that time of month." – From the confession page of University of Maryland

The psychological pressure felt by the youth of new India is clearly reflected in the Confession pages, where guilt has been overtaken by boasting of tricking the authority. The readership of the confession pages shows an enormous amount of voyeurism. The replies to most of the confessions are a means of generating entertainment through ridiculing the confessor.

Most newspaper articles talk about the negative impact such pages impart on the society at large. A lot of confession pages have been closed down under the pressure of the institution authorities. It is also seen as a vehicle for cyberbullying. According to Madurai-based Psychiatrist Dr. Shefali Singh, who did a study on the Confession pages,

"This is not just confessions but cyber bullying. Most confessions target a particular individual. The person who is targeted would be mentally agonised if he/she comes to know of it. The 'likes' and comments that these confessions get just trigger the students to post more candid posts. It is a mere attention seeking gimmick."

"Too much of personal information out in these pages in the form of confessions is highly dangerous for the students as they automatically become vulnerable targets for the "mobs", who have fun in passing comments on such posts. It's time parents monitor their children in social networking sites," she warns.³⁴

This report raises a few questions regarding the way the digital youth of India function. What is the prime reason behind engaging into confessing online if it is really not important and true enough is something that have to be looked into. It appears that the students engaging into the activities of the various confession pages do not really try to question what urges them forward to confess online. To the readers of the confessions it is nothing more than a mode of entertainment which is availed in moments of boredom. In spite of all its negativities this has been able to create a platform for building a bridge of kinship of like minded students. What lies in future for the confession pages is still to be seen. Whether the advancement in digital technology further the mushrooming of such pages is something that also has to be studied. At present in order to counter the loopholes of anonymity, a mobile application called 'Whispers', has been developed and is slowly becoming popular. This might substitute Facebook Confessions or run as a parallel alternative to it. Some pages are already falling into disuse. The final social implication of the confession pages can be charted only through a broader study through a longer period of time.

³⁴ As reported by G. Madan Gowari in THE HINDU edition MADURAI, July 4, 2013
<http://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/society/confessions-or-cyber-bullying/article4880962.ece>

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- <https://www.facebook.com/JuConfessions> 30th nov
- <https://www.facebook.com/juconfessionsreloaded> 16th dec
- https://www.facebook.com/BesuConfessions?ref=br_tf 20th dec
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