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Consumer Behavior with Social Networking Sites

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ABSTRACT

Social networking sites (SNS's) are built with the idea of traditional social networks connecting common interest users to build new acquaintances, keep in touch with familiar contacts, browse list of friends made and promote users personally and professionally. This study tested attributes of SNS's as the target innovation and was conducted among Post graduate students connected to diverse SNS's. The study was limited to top five SNS's (as on 2012). Analytical techniques Principal Factor Analysis and Multiple Regression were used. Factor analysis revealed the constructs: relative advantage, complexity, and observability of SNS's do not positively affect the attitude towards using the technology while the compatibility and trialability of SNS's does positively affect the same. The study concluded that the attitude of the respondents towards SNS positively affects the intention to use the technology.

KEYWORDS: ICT- Social Networking Sites,Factor Analysis,Attitude,Technical features

Introduction

Social Networking sites are web-based services that connect people of varied age, color, religion, genders, educational background, profession, people with mutual interests, locations etc. The important aspect of using these sites is to initiate relationships and exchange ideas or information on a large platform i.e. world wide. Today the world is being viewed as a global village. The best contribution of emergence of these sites is that you get a wide range of population to chose from to interact and share your thoughts. It offers lot of technical features like Photo sharing, Video sharing, built-in blogging, instant messaging technology, mobile interactions, advertising & selling products , enhancing business relations, publishing news and keeping in touch with relatives and friends and for dogs (Dogster) and cats (Catster), although their owners manage their profile and many more such facilities . Today, we have a number of SNS's and what distinguishes one from the other is its structural variations, features, and different types of users and these are the reasons for user preferences to connect to these SNS's.

This paper, attempts to study the consumer behavior with Social Networking Sites, their usage, how the social life is molded by these sites and its impact on the mental and emotional state of the users, the attitude of the users towards SNS and the factors that affects the intention to use this technology.

Objectives of the study

To study diverse social networking sites and its features, to determine percentage of users visiting social networking sites, measuring the popular sites being visited and the frequency of visiting those sites. To find out the importance of the listed attributes and satisfactory levels attained by the users of SNS's using these attributes provided by five popular sites.

Literature Review

Boyd et al. (2007), published a timeline of the launch dates of many major SNSs their highlight key works, community sites re-launched with SNS features, and showed that, from 1997 onwards SNS's continue to grow with new features. Sunden (2003), states that profiles are unique pages where one can type oneself into being. One area that is expanding in the use of SNSs is the corporate environment as a means to help employees to connect and customers to obtain information or help. Andrew et al. (2011), stated that business companies using social networking services to support their products or customer services may be becoming a new trend. Brajesh (2011), found that India is a huge market place for Social Networking Sites with major population contributing to sites like Facebook, Orkut, Twitter and LinkedIn also networking domain was highly dominated by Google owned Orkut for long time and Ibibo (Indian company) has been competing with Global Social Networking Sites listed at the top. In recent times, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Orkut has improved their scores massively in terms of visitors count and global internet (penetration) usage proportion. Olusegun et al. (n.d.), investigated issues that influence users' attitude towards intention of using SNS's and stated that the relative advantage of using SNS; how hard it was to use; how compatible it were with the lifestyle of the users; how much has been registered about SNS by the users; and whether social networking sites could be tested before consistent use, were issues that influence users' attitude.

Research Methodology

Data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire administered to student respondents who are currently pursuing their post gr aduation. An attempt was made to cover 100 post graduate students and a total of 74 students reciprocated to the questionnaire. A study was undertaken to assess the various SNS's based on parameters like usage, frequency of visits to the various sites, importance of attributes available and the level of satisfaction attained in using the attributes provided by each of these sites. Secondary data analysis was done to study the history of SNS's, the launch dates and features of major SNS's.

Primary Data Analysis and interpretation:

Views about the current distribution of visitors to social networking sites, the frequency of visiting those sites, their importance of the listed attributes and satisfactory levels attained by using these attributes provided by five popular sites are collected. 27 attributes were listed by browsing through the social networking sites and related literature reviews for rating the importance and determining the satisfactory levels.

Figure1 shows the analysis of distribution of users visiting the social networking sites. It shows that 96% of users use social networking sites and only 1% does not use them. This leads us to understand that networking in today's era has become an integral part of our personal and professional life.

Figure 1: Distribution of users visiting social networking sites.

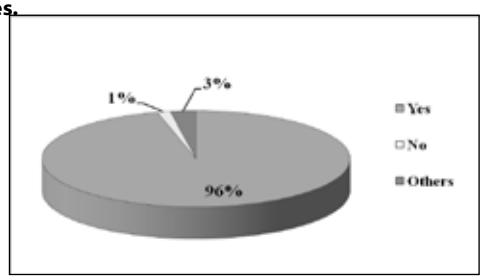


Table 1: (A).Frequency of visiting the social networking sites and (B) Importance of different Social Networking Sites.

Site Name	(A)Maximum No. of Times visited(Analysis usingmode)	(B)Importance of Different Social Networking Sites (Analysis using mean)
Facebook	69	14.09
LinkedIn	33	12.64
Twitter	24	12.01
Orkut	34	11.43
Ibibo	7	9.86

Table 1(A) shows that most of the users visit facebook. Ibibo site is given the lowest preference by the respondents (All the results are interpreted using mode). It has been observed from Table 1(B) that Facebook gains the highest importance followed by LinkedIn, Twitter, Orkut and Ibibo. For analyzing the importance of popular SNS's, 27 listed attributes were taken (refer Table 2 for attributes).

Table 2: Overall attitude of users towards each SNS attribute

		Mean of Attributes					
Sr. no.	Attributes	Facebook	LinkedIn	Twitter	Orkut	Ibibo	Mean of attributes
1	Ease of connection	19.51	17.08	15.50	16.35	15.40	16.77
2	Connecting with/tracking old friends	19.21	17.08	14.95	16.27	13.50	16.20
3	Ease of Communication	17.92	16.30	15.05	15.20	14.00	15.69
4	Performance of the site	17.23	15.96	15.63	15.75	11.50	15.21
5	Helps in Chatting	18.03	12.52	13.55	14.63	13.20	14.39
6	Helps in making groups	17.14	13.62	13.15	13.68	13.20	14.16
7	Interaction with friends and relatives	19.83	13.81	13.70	13.48	8.57	13.88
8	Visual aspects of the site	14.72	13.70	14.14	12.46	12.60	13.53
9	Customization of the site	15.20	14.37	13.53	11.74	12.50	13.47
10	Creating new contacts	16.56	15.74	11.00	12.00	9.57	12.97
11	Colour schemes of the site	14.38	12.56	13.85	12.71	11.00	12.90
12	Publishing news	13.15	12.79	15.64	10.42	8.83	12.16
13	Layout of the site	13.97	12.23	13.05	9.63	11.00	11.98
14	Need for information	13.64	14.73	11.95	10.76	8.14	11.85
15	Getting job recommendations	11.05	16.03	10.75	9.69	8.80	11.26
16	Helps in blogging	12.32	11.09	11.11	10.46	10.40	11.07
17	Receiving assistance when in trouble	12.98	11.77	11.89	9.24	8.83	10.94
18	Photo sharing	15.89	8.88	10.33	11.60	7.50	10.84
19	Complexity of use	11.81	11.46	9.65	10.54	10.67	10.83
20	Enhancing / promoting businesses	11.60	11.78	12.27	9.17	8.17	10.60
21	Advertising of products	13.21	9.89	11.71	10.15	6.17	10.23
22	helps to get study material	10.11	12.50	9.62	9.33	8.00	9.91
23	Getting new employees for an organization	9.68	14.71	9.19	8.44	7.00	9.80
24	Selling products	10.74	8.64	11.36	9.92	8.00	9.73
25	Video sharing	13.18	8.32	6.95	10.48	6.86	9.16
26	Advising people on health and other issues	9.94	7.38	8.30	8.18	6.43	8.04
27	Finding property	7.53	6.26	6.50	6.36	6.50	6.63
	Average	14.09	12.64	12.01	11.43	9.86	

Table 2 shows the attributes of five social networking sites and their mean and is in the descending order in terms of overall mean. It indicates that ease of connection is the most preferred attribute and finding property is the least. The highlighted cells show the highest mean for each attribute amongst the five SNS's. This shows that for Twitter, Publishing news, Enhancing / promoting businesses and selling products are the preferred attributes. LinkedIn is the preferred site for attributes 'need for information', getting job recommendations, for getting study material and for getting new employees for an organization. Facebook is the most ideal site for personal use and socializing rather than for business use. Also, facebook ranks the highest for the entire attribute taken collectively.

Conclusion

Although there are various social networking sites, only some have become popular and are being used frequently. The main reason for their existence is for personal use mainly for socializing. With the rise of internet marketing, social media is being embraced by business world as they see it as the best way to maintain business relations with their customers directly. Twitter being especially useful for this. We may conclude from this study that Facebook gains the highest rank in terms of usage followed by Linkedin, Twitter and Orkut.

Secondary data study showed that the history of social networking sites started way back in 1997 Considering the fact that since then, more and more SNS's with newer features have been introduced as a result of advancement in technology and increase in the number of users visiting these sites which is dependent on the users attitude towards the attributes that each of these sites provide, we conclude that social networking sites will remain competitive in the years to come. This is also because of social needs of larger number of people and from business viewpoint revenue generation for service providers in the form of advertisements, affiliate programs, and subscription-based services. More online social networking services are now giving their members some referral points for referring friends to the service.

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