

Pros And Cons Of Social Networking Sites

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Abstract

Social network sites (SNSs) are increasingly attracting the attention of academic and Industry researchers intrigued by their affordances and reach. Today social networking commonly refers to all those activities that are carried out within specific online services that provide free space and software tools which allow creating networks of people. In other words, a social networking service is a Web site that allows individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile.

Users' data are not only constituted by vital statistics, but they include a lot of other information which pertains to user hobbies, passions, interests, professional background and so on. This kind of personal data, all spontaneously provided by the user her/himself, permit to create interconnected networks of people who decide to put in common their interests and to have an online identity which fully describes them.

Introduction

Imagine the year 2000 - six years before idea of Twitter became a reality, four years before Mark Zuckerberg launched Facebook from his college dormitory, three years before Myspace was converted to support the idea of social networking. The thought that people might someday spend over 700 billion minutes per month on a single website such as Facebook was unthinkable. These social networking sites along with hundreds more were just a spark in designers' minds. Social Networks are used by hundreds of millions of people around the world. A Social Network is defined as an internet-based service that allows individuals to [1] construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, [2] articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and [3] view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.

There are many questions and discussions occurring today about Social Networks. This paper is not meant to be exhaustive of the possible questions or issues surrounding Social Networks, but rather to focus on the following topic areas:

Provide an overview of Social Networks,

Identify the real—or perceived—issues that exist due to the generation gap,

Identify specific characteristics that impact professional, and

List some of the legal considerations perceived to be emerging issues from using Social Networks.

“Social networking sites are the reality television of the Internet,” said Jon Gibs, senior director of media, Nielsen//NetRatings. “The content is relatively inexpensive for publishers to produce, and social networking is not a fad that will disappear [4] . If anything, it will become more ingrained in mainstream sites, just as reality TV programming has become ubiquitous in network programming,” Gibs continued. “However, again like reality programming, the concept

of ‘reality’ alone, or in this case ‘social networking,’ is not enough. In this competitive marketplace, sites also have to provide consumers with distinct content they can identify with.”

Background

Flash forward to the present. College students in the year 2010 can’t wait to update their status. It is urgent for them to let their three-hundred and twenty Facebook friends know about the assignment they have due in two days. While paging through their live feed they realize, from a status update, they have an unknown assignment due the following day. In the news feed, they recognize their favorite sports team has won. They can see what their friends had to say about the game[6]. If a college class is moved or a high school day is canceled, students are often more likely to find it out on Facebook rather than through communication with their school or university.

Facebook first went online for social networking in February 2004, from a college dormitory at Harvard.[7] It was initially restricted to Harvard students until expanding first to area colleges, then all colleges, and eventually the world. Facebook currently has expanded to over 500 million users, surpassing MySpace in registered users and web traffic. Myspace allows its users to customize their own profile page and provide status updates similar to Facebook. It provides its users with the option of adding music and multimedia to a user’s profile page, which is a feature Facebook does not allow.[8] Myspace is essentially a single webpage devoted to the user which can be used to communicate with friends. Both sides allow a user to post comments to friends. Perhaps the reason Facebook became more successful was due to its simplicity of operation and greater continuity throughout user profiles.

The idea of Twitter takes the concept of Facebook and simplifies it further. What sets Twitter apart from both Facebook and Myspace is that it only allows users to post up to 120 character comments. This equates to faster, easier message reading. Users can read four tweets in the time it would take to read one Facebook comment. A Twitter even has a simpler profile page which shows the users tweets in large font on the left of the page, while displaying followers on the right. Traditional Facebook or Myspace profiles display what can be an intimidating amount of information. This “ease of use” may help Twitter to grow in the future.

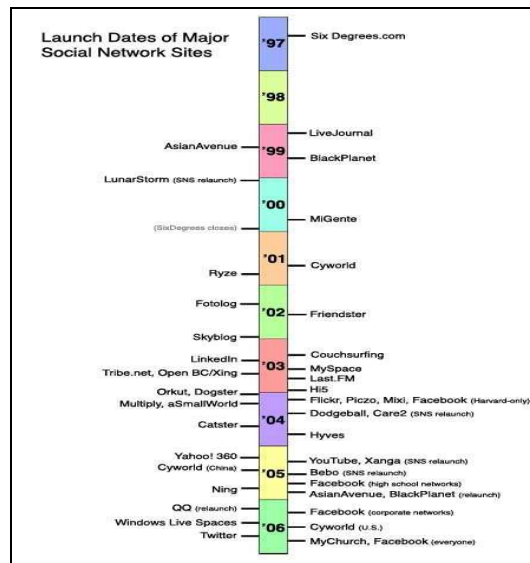


Figure 1. *Timeline of the launch dates of many major SNSs and dates when community sites re-launched with SNS features*

Potential Benefits

Sixty percent of adults maintain a profile on a social networking site, and 70% read blogs and tweets (Galagan, 29). Social media has expanded from a small communication portal between students to an advertising gateway for business. Scott Cooley argues in an article titled "Social Networks and Facebook", that people can go on Facebook and read wall posts to get a sense of the reputation of a person.[9] Cooley says that if a company has a large Facebook following it will increase his chances of doing business with them. Many businesses will actually search a person's name on Facebook before considering them for hire.[10]

Companies big and small alike have also created fan pages to better promote their business. A Facebook fan page has become an important relationship builder with clients. The site has become the new marketing strategy, replacing older types of advertising.[11] With a fan page, companies can draw in Facebook users providing a brief summary of the operations of the business. If the user likes what they see, it is then possible to follow a link to the business website for more information. The best part, a fan page is free.

Colleges and Universities are also leaving traditional brochure and letter sending methods for the more favorable online approach.[12] Colleges have discovered that prospective students are more likely to respond to a counselor who attempts to contact through a networking site like Facebook.

Further Required Research

Handheld technologies are aiding the increase in social networking. According to an article by Pat Galagan, "91 percent of people with mobile devices use them to socialize". Why wouldn't they? With the amount of people logging on to social networking sites it only seems natural to be able to access your profile on the go. Most mobile technology supports a large number of social networking sites in order to please the customer.

The new movie "The Social Network" has brought to light the creation of Facebook. It chronicles the life of Mark Zuckerberg, the original founder of the social networking giant. The movie shows how Zuckerberg originally came up with the idea, and the early difficulties he experienced in maintaining the site. Mark eventually dropped out of Harvard in order to better sustain and expand the website.

Conclusion

It's hard for most college students to remember a time before social networks. Half of Facebook's 500 million users will log in on any given day. On that same day 65 million tweets are sent. The last 10 years have witnessed major advancements in global communication. It appears science fiction has become a reality. What will the future hold?

References

[1] Cooley, S.. (2010, March). Social Networks and Facebook. *Mortgage Banking*, 70(6), 84-85. Retrieved October 2, 2010, from ABI/INFORM Global. (Document ID: 1993896291).

This article from *Mortgage Banking*, explains the benefits of Facebook from a business standpoint. It's author, Scott Cooley claims to be a big Facebook junkie. He writes that other social networks such as MySpace and Twitter are no longer significant. Cooley also claims that your business needs both a Company Website and a Facebook fan page.

[2] "Facebook Statistics." *Facebook Press Room*. N.p., n.d. Web. 7 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>>.

This source contains official Facebook statistics in press releases on the topics of the number of **People on Facebook, Activity of Facebook users, Facebooks Global Reach program, the number of Facebook developers, and Facebooks mobile network.**

[3] Galagan, P.. (2010, May). Ready or Not? T + D, 64(5), 29-31. Retrieved October 2, 2010, from ABI/INFORM Global. (Document ID: 2034038381).

This was a magazine article which discusses how social media changes the workplace. It discusses how every business should have a Facebook page and comments on twitter. This article also explains the changing ways in which companies are now recruiting.

[4] Lewis, A.. (2010, February). Facebook and Twitter: Socially network yourself to success. Training and Development in Australia, 37(1), 8-11. Retrieved October 6, 2010, from ABI/INFORM Trade & Industry. (Document ID: 2011865811).

[5]Dr Angela Lewis writes this article also explaining how to effectively use both Facebook and twitter as communication tools for your business. She stresses how important it is to keep your personal life separate from your business on these social networking sites.

[6] Zuckerberg, Mark. "500 Million Stories." *The Facebook Blog*. N.p., 21 July 2010. Web. 7 Oct. 2010. <<http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=409753352130>>

This blog was the first to announce that Facebook had surpassed 500 million users. It was written by it's creator Mark Zuckerberg himself and discusses everything from how it's world readers made 500 million people possible to new applications Facebook is launching. It also contains a video made by Zuckerberg himself based on the blog contents.

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[12] O'Hanlon, C. (2007). If You Can't Beat 'Em, Join 'Em. *T.H.E. Journal*. 34(8), 39-40, 42, 44. Retrieved December 16, 2007, from ERIC database.