
To study the factors employed by Social Media Users in selecting appropriate Social Media tool : A study among “Generation Y” Cohort

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Abstract

Social Networking Sites (SNSs) are increasingly gaining popularity, affordability, usability and reach. It has become an emerging trend among the ‘Generation Y’ cohort. The relevance of this study is in the light of ever-growing number of users and also the networking sites. Now-a-days, students, service class and business community are spending time on these social sites. Moreover, these sites are also used for boosting up the business. Therefore, it becomes relevant to assess the factors, which are considered by the users of social sites which determine its usage by the Generation-Y in the present scenario. These sites are attracting large number of the users that belong to the age group of 15-28. It has been concluded that the growth of these sites is remarkable. The social networking is giving a new direction as well as platform to the SNS users. Now-a-days, social networking sites act as a major social influencer that impacts the personal life of the user. Despite of its disadvantages, social networking sites are gaining popularity and providing reliable & timely information, entertainment and fast communication to the users at the click of the mouse.

Key Words: Social Networking Sites, Usability, Generation Y, Influential Impact.

INTRODUCTION

Social Network Sites (SNSs) are increasingly attracting the attention of academic and industry researcher due to their affordances and reach (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). The most commonly used websites are Facebook with 750 million users, Qzone with 480 million users followed by Twitter with 200 million users. Other SNSs are Blogger, Linkedin, Freindster, My Space, IBIBO, Google Buzz, Ning, Classmates online, etc. These sites are technically supported and firmly consistent. The key technical features of these sites make them popular and supporting a wide range of interests and needs. These sites attract Generation Y on the basis of common language, common religion, common nationality, and common interest. People can present their political views, cultural views, religious views and shared common interests through this medium. These sites allow them to share photos, listen to music, join communities, play games and give access to the latest information about products and services.

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Basically, social networking is the clubbing of individual and social groups. These groups may range from individuals, urban or rural communities, neighbourhood, and friend circles within the boundaries of the country or abroad. It may also cover institutions, work places, universities, etc. It is the most convenient way of communication among the Gen Y in the 21st century. These sites enables the users to connect themselves by creating personal information profile, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to these profiles and sending messages, e-mail instantly between each other. The usage of social networking sites is very cheap and involves nominal cost. These days, the business community is using the social networking sites to target new markets and customers on-line and majority of these customers belong to Gen Y. These sites also serve the purpose of advertisement of products or services and helps in promotional strategies. The study explains understanding of social networking sites and its dimensions that determine its usage among the Gen Y.

Understanding of Social Networking Sites (SNSs)

Social networking sites are a group of websites that provide people with the opportunity to create an on-line profile and to share that profile with others (Timm, 2006). As mentioned earlier, social networking helps in making new connections. One can enlarge the circle of on-line friends to any extent. The interaction with the people becomes very easy and comfortable. While sites have developed a wide variety of technical features, their basis consists of building profile. The profile can include any type of information, including your photograph, video, audio files and blogs. Now, social networking sites are of very high popularity, especially among the educated younger generation (Kaplin et al., 2010).

What makes social networking sites unique is not that they allow individuals to meet strangers, but rather they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks (Boyd and Ellison, 2010). On these sites, people are not necessarily interested in meeting new persons; instead, they are more interested in communicating with familiar people and getting updates about them. In this way, these sites give them opportunities to extend their social life.

Social networking helps in building creditability. One can gain the customer confidence. If we can connect to them at both personal and professional level, large number of customers can be tapped for product and services. It can also help in building customer relationships. A profile or account is needed to set up at a popular social site that can provide relevant and useful information about the product/service. However, it is necessary to upgrade the profile and account timely. Social networking sites boost the business. If the links developed through these sites are aligned with business, it can result into new business heights.

Popularity of SNSs among “Generation Y” Cohort

Generation Y cohort encompasses all those born from 1977 to 1997. Generation Y is also known as Millennial Generation, Millennial, Eco Boomers and so on. Generation Y is the world's largest segment of population. It is the fact revealed by Johnson Controls that about half of the India's one billion people are under the age of 25. Technology is a principal part of the India's Generation Y identity. Younger generations (Generation Y) in India are the most sophisticated users of technology. These generations demand the latest and greatest technology tools like their global counterparts. Generation Y is aware and active and knows very well that how to use new technology, new software

and use social platform such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Orkut, etc. to make their life easy and stress-free.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Not a considerable extent of empirical research work has been found in this area. Though currently the concept of social networking sites in particular is being widely talked about as a contemporary mode of social media marketing, this research gap provided an insight to undertake this research endeavor.

Today, social networking sites are acting as a web which links the people on different platforms and gives shape to their behavioral intention. User profiles in online communities can play a significant role in the functioning of these social sites. Profiles on SNSs help users in sharing of common referents that are highly associated with numbers of friends than fields that express personal likes and dislikes (Lampe et al., 2007). The propensity of individuals to join communities is on the rise which depend on the underlying network structure in subtle ways (Backstrom et al., 2006). Concerned to SNSs usage among young generation users, social grooming and privacy concern are identified as factors which influence the adoption of SNSs (Tufekci, 2008). Besides, public installation and visualization system were identified as other factors that support the system's usability, capacity for facilitating discovery, and potential for fun and engagement of young users in social activity (Heer and Boyd, 2005). Therefore, SNSs have been identified as a crucial self-presentation tool because it helps in expressing one's self during the early stages of a correspondence and can therefore create good relationship opportunities (Ellison et al., 2006). Open communication and trust which build and enhance the relationships among SNSs users were highly affected by informational information structure (Ismail, 2010).

In a study conducted by Bergman et al. (2011), findings showed that Gen Y or Millennials' usage of social networking sites is a product of the times. Generation Y users uses social networking sites not only to seek attention or maintain self-esteem but to seek attention or maintaining self-esteem but to stay connected with their SNS friends and to facilitate communication. Similarly, another study is there which explored the motivation for using social networking sites for SNSs activities. Cheung et al. (2010) focused on the exploring the factors that drive students to rise online social networks. Study revealed that social related factors or social presence has been most significant factor that determines the usage of online SNS among students. It encouraged the students to collaborate and work together and to be connected with their friends and to perform online chatting.

Dunne et al. (2010) have conducted a study on usage and participation in social networking sites of young people with specific reference to Bebo. The study indicated that youngsters use and actively participate for personal motives and to maintain a social identity and relationships. Few more studies reported that one of the important factors behind usage of SNS among college student is peer-to-peer communication network or social interaction. Few adults also use social networking sites to make new friends. SNS also facilitate the users to stay in touch and reconnect with friends. It provides opportunity to users to create or display social identity of the users. In addition, adults used SNS to provide strength to different connections within their offline networks (Pempek et al., 2009; Subrahmanyam et al., 2008).

Wilson et al. (2010) in their study stated that the attraction of SNS among young adults is due to the fact that these provides something extra and unique to users such as numerous functional abilities and unlimited contact with friends. Baruah (2012) listed out the benefits/ disadvantages of using social media (social networking sites as well). These included sharing of ideas, communication tool, bridging communication gap, source of information, marketing tool for marketing of products or services, customer interaction tool for marketers, communication tool at the time of crisis, cost effective, faster medium of communication, intrusion into privacy, breakdown in familial ties, reduction in worker productivity, and slightly impersonal. Focus was more on the fact that the basic purpose of the extensive use of social media is that it is faster mean of communication which supports the sharing of knowledge among different groups of people, emerged as an effective learning tool and enhances communication skills.

Jain et al. (2012) stated that today social networking sites have played significant role in the changing mindset of youth population special on social issues. Youth uses these social sites to communicate their views and ideas, expressing their opinions and discussing matters in front of the society without hesitation. These sites help in increasing awareness level about the social matters among different groups of people. Camilia et al. (2012) explained that the students use social networking sites for the reason to stay in touch with others. For this, they regular update their status, write on friends' walls and upload their pictures. In their study, they also highlighted the use of social networking sites as an effective teaching-learning process.

Manjunatha. (2013) explained in his study, the usage of social networking sites among the college students in India. Few purposes of using social networking sites have been listed out by this study. These included forum, blog, media sharing, messaging, chatting, browsing profile pages, file sharing, and browsing friend's profile. In the study, messaging and chatting were identified which encouraged the users to use and stay active on social networking sites.

Taking into consideration the evidence, the focus is on the investing the association that encourages the Gen Y users to utilize the SNSs as an active podium and link all the variables together which enhances the functionality of SNSs.

This exploratory study is aimed to close the existing literature gap concerning usage of social networking site particularly pertaining to Generation 'Y'. The study considered the issues such as concerns among Gen 'Y' cohort and influential impact of these sites.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Since their inception, these sites are attracting large number of the users which belongs to age group of 15-28. These sites become the integral part of their lives. In fact, every youngster daily browses on these sites and is engaged in social networking, on-line purchasing, etc. The study is very much needed especially in the era of ever growing number of social networking sites and daily visitors. Increasing number of login per day by daily visitors is another metric which shows the popularity of the social sites. Now-a-days, many educated, service class and business community are spending time on these social sites. Therefore, the study becomes relevant to assess the significant factors which determine the degree of usage of SNSs by the Gen Y users. Further an increased relevance of the study is due to the negative effects such as cyber-crime like hacking and other such things. The negative aspects of usage of social sites also cause wastage of the time, energy and resources of such users.

Keeping in view the utmost importance and usefulness of the social networking sites, the present study has been conducted to meet the following objectives:

- To study the status of social networking usage by the Generation-Y in the present scenario.
- To explore the dimensions influencing the usage of social networking sites.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Universe of the study comprises of those respondents which belongs to Gen Y and which are active or highly active on the SNSs. The Sample consisted of 159 respondents categorized as active users and highly active users of SNSs, belonging to age group of 22-26.

Due to time constraints, the study has been restricted to the respondents of the Jalandhar city. The respondents have been selected on the basis of random-judgmental sampling technique. Activeness of users on social sites is the criteria for judgment sampling. For the present study, students of various commerce and business management colleges are respondents. The research methodology includes the primary data which has been collected through structured questionnaire to gather the required information. The questionnaire contained 17 statements with specifying set of alternatives responses. Questionnaire has been prepared using various research papers on social sites. The respondents were required to select an alternative which closely reflect their choice on a 5-point Likert scale regarding their degree of the agreement or disagreement with respect to each of the statement related to social networking sites. The data has been analyzed with the help of simple percentage method for determining the status of SNSs and factor analysis for extracting the factors that have been considered significant by the social networking users. Factor analysis using Principal Component Analysis and Varimax Rotation has been applied to Social Networking Sites dimensions to identify the factors. The questionnaire has been verified with the help of content validity (face validity). For this purpose, opinions of experts have been used to determine validity of scale represented for measurement.

To assess the reliability of the scale, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used.

Limitation of the Study

The results of the study are specific to the sample selected and dimensions used. Hence, they may not be generalized for overall population.

Validity and Reliability Test

Possible values for alpha coefficient range between 0 and 1. Generally, 0.6 value or above is considered a satisfactory reliability level. For the entire scale, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was 0.780 which was above 0.6 and satisfactory (as shown in Table-A1).

Factor analysis on studying variables

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy is computed which is found to be .788. It is indicated that the sample is good enough for survey.

The overall significance of correlation matrices is tested with Bartlett Test of Sphericity approx. chi square = 550.901 and significance at .000 provided as well as support for validity of the factor analysis of the data (as shown in Table-B1).

Five factors have been selected with factor loadings greater than 0.5. These five factors explained 54.919 percentage of cumulative variance (as shown in Table-D2).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research paper has been divided into two parts. The first part explains the status of the social networking sites usage among the Gen Y, whereas, the second part of the paper explains the dimensions that are considered by the Gen Y before using the social networking sites.

Part 1: Awareness Status of Social Networking Sites Usage by Generation Y

In current scenario, the social networking plays an important role. As already discussed, social networking sites have become an integral part of the users' life. Social networking sites assists in the communication process throughout the world and helps in narrowing down the gaps.

Table C1. Tabular Presentation of Awareness Level of SNSs Users

	Number of users (Total= 159)	Percentage
Tenure		
less than 1 year	21	13.21
1-2 year	49	30.82
more than 2 years	89	55.97
Time Spend Per Day		
less than 1 hour	96	60.38
1-2 hour	41	25.79
more than 2 hour	22	13.84
No. of Friends on SNS		
Below 50	18	11.32
51-100	31	19.50
101-150	24	15.09
above 150	86	54.09
No. of Communities Joined on SNS		
less than 2	108	67.92
2 to 4	28	17.61
more than 4	22	13.84
None	1	0.63

Table C1 shows that out of 159 respondents 13.21 percent respondents are using social networking sites for less than 1 year, 30.82 percent respondents are using social sites for 1-2 years and 55.97 percent respondents are using social sites for more than 2 years. It shows that majority of the respondents are using these social sites. It shows that social sites are having a long-time impact on the lives of the users.

Majority of the user i.e. 60.38 percent respondents spend less than 1 hour on social networking sites. 25.79 percent respondents spend 1-2 hour followed by 13.84 percent respondents

who spend more than 2 hours on these social sites. Less time spending on social networking site may be result of user's perception that it is wastage of time.

Table C1 also depicts number of friends on the friend list of the respondents. It depicts that majority of the respondents i.e. 54.09 percent respondents have more than 150 friends on friends list. Whereas, results show that 15.09 percent respondents have 101-150 friends and so on. It shows that users mostly have contact with their friends through social sites. They feel convenient to have interaction with their friends on these social sites networking. They usually keep up-to-date with friends' life. So, these SNSs help in building stronger friendship networks.

67.92 percent respondents have joined less than 2 communities, whereas, 13.84 percent respondents have joined more than 4 communities and 17.61 percent respondents have joined 2 to 4 communities. Out of 159 respondents, only 0.63 percent respondents have joined no community. It depicts users are very active on these social sites. Through these communities, they are influencing and viz-a-viz influenced by the other users of social networking sites.

Part 2: Dimensions Influencing the Usage of SNSs among Gen Y

Table A1. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
.780	15

Table B1. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Adequacy	Measure of Sampling	.788
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-square	550.901
	Df	136
	Sig.	.000

Criteria of Factor Loadings:

Those factors are considered significant which have factor loadings of 0.4 and above. The variables having a factor loading nearest to 0.5 are also considered because of their significance. All the five factors have been given appropriate names on the basis of variables represented in each case (as shown in Table- D1, Table D2).

Table D1. Rotated Component Matrix

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
Play games	.663				
Use various applications	.652				
Can stay up to date	.633				
Can interact with people who live far away	.631				
Inspired by celebrities for using these sites		.723			
Intimate events		.656			
Provides timely and reliable information		.618			
Contribution towards social responsibility		.553			
Quite active on social sites due to extrovert nature		.541			
Interaction with close friends			.747		
Safety on social sites			.569		
Build strong friendship networks			.414		
Convenient than e-mail for data transfer				.772	
Poking people on social site is a fun				.565	
Favorite pass time				.526	
Ruining our social values					-.819
Do not follow ethics (R)					.714
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.					
a. Rotation converged in 10 iterations.					
Note: (R) represents item with reverse coding					

Table D2. Labeling Table Shows Dimensions of SNSs Usage Extracted by Factor Analysis

F. no.	Dimensions	Variables	Eigen Value	% of variance explained
F1	Convenience & Communication	S14, S13, S3, S2	2.370	13.942
F2	Social Influence	S15, S12, S16, S9, S11	2.337	13.748
F3	Safe Networking	S1, S4, S17	1.689	9.935
F4	Entertainment	S6, S8, S5	1.613	9.488
F5	Social & Ethical values	S7, S10	1.327	7.807
Cumulative Variance Explained				54.919

Factor 1: Convenience & Communication

It is most important factor as it has explained 13.942 percentage of the total variance. This factor includes four variables i.e. S14, S13, S3 and S2. It discussed about the convenience and communication feature of social sites. Social sites are very popular among the Gen Y users, because these sites entertain the young users by providing access to various applications, on-line games, and communication in a very convenient way. Convenient access to these entertaining features provides

relaxation and freshness to the users in leisure hours. In no time, one can easily get updated about the others and communicate them.

Factor 2: Social Influence

The total variance explained by this factor has been 15.748 percent. Under this factor, social influencers have been discussed. This factor includes five variables; S15, S12, S16, S9 and S11. The unique feature of the social site is its ability to influence the users and society. Users generally interact on the social sites and get positive and negative influences from various sources such as friends, society, etc. People including celebrities present their views on various aspects of the society on these social sites, which enlighten the spirit of unity, freedom, and responsible citizens in them. Users usually intimate the events such as wedding anniversary, birthday, and other social events on social sites and share their joy and happiness with others. Besides, information communicated on these social sites creates a sense of responsibility in the society as a whole. Events intimated and information circulated in relation to the country, environment protection, poor section of the society, child labour etc. generally teaches the lesson of social responsibility to users.

Factor 3: Safe Networking

There are three variables enclosed under this factor S1, S4 and S17. This factor explained 9.935 percentage of total variance. Social networking sites helps in frequent communication which strengthen the relationships. Users can communicate to the others in safe mode. Privacy of the users is ensured while interaction.

Factor 4: Entertainment

This factor explained 9.488 percentage of total variance. Under this factor, three variables are included i.e. S6, S8 and S5. Social networking provides significant information to the users with no time and no money. It is a reliable source of information and provides up-to-date information conveniently. Users can send messages to their friends and others. The interesting part of these social networking sites is that it has been emerged as a favourite pastime among generation 'Y'. Poking to others, on-line games, surfing from one site to another, using links displayed on these social sites provide a good and healthy source of entertainment.

Factor 5: Social & Ethical values

It has explained the 7.807 percentage of total variance. It included two variables i.e. S7 and S10. Social networking's negative influence may be in the form of unethical content which ruin the social values and culture of the society.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- i.** As the study revealed, it has been found that *Convenience & communication, Social influence, Safe networking, Entertainment, and Social & ethical values* are the factors that have an influence on the usage of social networking sites among the Generation Y. They have considered these factors as motivation factors, which have made SNSs an important part of their life.
- ii.** Now a day, the most popular social networking sites among Generation Y is Facebook followed by Orkut.
- iii.** Generation Y users are using these social sites from more than two years. Some of the respondents are using these sites from more than 4-5 years. It shows Gen Y is quite aware and active on these SNSs.

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- iv.* Though the users are active on these SNSs, yet they spent on an average less than 1hour or 1-2 hours per day on SNSs.
 - v.* Generation Y usually uses SNSs as a mean of socialization. Mostly, they have interaction with their friends on these social sites.
 - vi.* Most of the respondents have more than three accounts/profiles on different social sites, which show that these social sites act as a platform to present their moral, ethical and social views.
 - vii.* It also helps in the breaking of the monotony of the individuals by providing them different kinds of applications and games which lead to their entertainment.
 - viii.* It can also be seen as a source of increasing awareness among the users, who get enlightened about various aspects of which they were ignorant earlier. It inculcates in them the moral and the ethical values which are desired today.
 - ix.* Now a days, social networking sites acted as a major social influencer which influences the personal life of the user.

CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

The primary goal of this research study is to bring to light the emerging trends of social networking sites among the Indian youth. The study has concluded that the growth of these sites has been pretty good over time. Now, the social networking sites have been giving a new direction as well as platform to the users. There is also a fusion of personal and business aspects over the social networking media. Advertisement and promotional campaigns are very active on these social sites. Product endorsement on social sites is very popular among the marketers. It provides them an opportunity to make better use of this media and to better serve the market.

The empirical study also revealed that online social networking offers people with great convenience for social networking. It allows users to keep in touch with friends, reconnect with old friends; meet new people with common interest and organize events through these sites. Online communities and blogs are also becoming very popular which create awareness among the people about their social responsibility towards society as a whole.

However, these sites also reflect the negative aspect. Online social networks offer exciting new opportunities for interaction and communication, but also raise new privacy concerns (Acquisti and Gross, 2006; Fogel and Nehmad, 2009). The privacy of social networking sites' users has been an issue, and the safety of user account has been compromised many times. It also leads to the cybercrimes such as hacking, dissemination of offensive material, electronic vandalism, terrorism and extortion, sales and investment frauds, etc.

Despite of these disadvantages, social networking sites are gaining popularity and providing reliable & timely information, entertainment, and fast communication to the users. These all features make these sites an integral part of the users' life which significantly influence the life style of the users. Now, the users only need to have an access to their systems and the internet connection in order to get entertained. While relaxing at homes, it is possible to have access to different kinds of applications within no time.

The users of these sites consider reliability and safety as an important issue. Hence it is recommended that, these sites should emphasize more on these parameters in providing service to its users (Generation Y). These sites should also emphasize on the ethical standards of the society. Moreover, these sites could also be used for educational purposes, rather than only being used for

entertainment. Thus, SNSs are acting as a major device in the spreading useful information among the youth and enlightening them towards their duties.

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APPENDICES

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Intimate events		.656			
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Contribution towards social responsibility		.553			
Quite active on social sites due to extrovert nature		.541			
Interaction with close friends			.747		
Safety on social sites			.569		
Build strong friendship networks			.414		
Convenient than e-mail for data transfer				.772	
Poking people on social site is a fun				.565	
Favorite pass time				.526	
Ruining our social values					-.819
Do not follow ethics (R)					.714

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

b. Rotation converged in 10 iterations.

Note: (R) represents item with reverse coding

Table D2. Labeling Table Shows Dimensions of SNSs Usage Extracted by Factor Analysis

F. no.	Dimensions	Variables	Eigen Value	% of variance explained
F1	Convenience & Communication	S14, S13, S3, S2	2.370	13.942
F2	Social Influence	S15, S12, S16, S9, S11	2.337	13.748
F3	Safe Networking	S1, S4, S17	1.689	9.935
F4	Entertainment	S6, S8, S5	1.613	9.488
F5	Social & Ethical values	S7, S10	1.327	7.807
Cumulative Variance Explained				54.919