

Chapter 2

Social Websites: Practices and Tools for Emerging Markets

2.1 Understanding the Phenomenon

Characteristics of Social Networking Sites “Social networking websites provide rich information about the person and his network, which can be utilized for various business purposes. Some of the main characteristics of social networking sites are:

They act as a resource for advertisers to promote their brands through word-of-mouth to targeted customers.

They provide a base for a new teacher-student relationship with more interactive sessions online.

They promote the use of embedded advertisements in online videos.

They provide a platform for new artists to show their profile” (Ahmad 2011, p. 124).

Companies and Social Networks Options “The following are the main ways in which companies can exploit social networking.

- Work with and use the functionality of the large generic sites. For instance, Facebook enables developers to build applications that work directly within the site (Facebook Platform).
- Create company or brand-specific sites.
- Provide content to generic sites.
- Imbed social networking functionality with the company’s existing online presence.
- Advertise on the generic sites. Both MySpace and Facebook enable companies to target their advertising to appropriate member profiles.

The final alternative is to do nothing. For many companies, this will be the most appropriate strategy, but should only be pursued following a rigorous evaluation of the alternatives” (Stroud 2008, pp. 290–291).

Cyber Threats in Social Networking Websites “Lately, social networks attract thousands of users who represent potential victims to attackers from the following types...

First Phishers and spammers who use social networks for sending fraudulent messages to victims “friend”, Cybercriminals and fraudsters who use the social networks for capturing users data then carrying out their social-engineering attacks and Terrorist groups and sexual predators who create online communities for spreading their thoughts, propaganda, views and conducting recruitment” (Gharibi and Shaabi 2012, p. 4).

Social websites can be described as those websites that allow people to create online communities and share user-created content (UCC). Access to a particular social website may be open to anyone or limited to people belonging to a specific organization, for example, a firm or an academic institution.

“...the evolution of the web has brought about the Social Web which is based on dynamic public content that is changing depending on the people’s input. The communication inside this web is not just between the machine and the person, but between all the people that is using the web application.... And it is very important to remark how important has been the mind change into the users, that used to enter into the Internet just to read the webs and at the present time they are involved in the web creation process converting the web in a Social Web” (Lagares-Lemos 2011).

Communities can be made up of people who know each other offline and continue to keep in touch also online, or may be formed by people who have met via the Internet and share peculiar interests or are bound by specific features, for example, groups based on shared hobbies, or related to a particular job, age, or school attendance, etc. UCC may consist of videos, photos, links to websites, personal profiles, different kinds of text, such as reviews, blogs, comments, other types of updates, etc.

As the UCC is shared across the social website, it generally involves posting, viewing, and commenting, but the content may also be forwarded, saved, or subject to voting.

Social Media, Web 2.0, and UCC Kärkkäinen et al. (2010, p. 2) quote from Lehtimäki et al. 2009 that “web 2.0 means technologies that enable users to communicate, create content and share it with each other via communities, social networks and virtual worlds, making it easier than before, as well as to have real life experiences in virtual worlds and to organize content on the internet with content aggregators.” The concepts of Web 2.0 and UCC/UGC (user-created or -generated content) are at the base of the revolutionary trend of social media. The first model of creating and publishing content online was Web 1.0, which evolved into Web 2.0 in 2004. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, pp. 60–61) opine that “web 2.0 is a term that was first used in 2004 to describe

a new way in which software developers and end-users started to utilize the World Wide Web; that is, as a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion.”

The main difference between the two systems was that with Web 1.0 only specific individuals could control the creation and publishing of content, while with Web 2.0 the latter was expanded to all users of the World Wide Web. This model based on participation and collaboration triggered the concept that led to the ideological and technological creation of social media. Therefore, Web 2.0 is where anyone can share content, collaborate with others, and create something together. The many examples of Web 2.0 include wikis, blogs, podcasts, and all the different social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook.

UCC/UGC consists of all the possible ways social media are utilized by end users of the Internet. Examples include anything produced by web users such as text, audio, and video. The Organization of Economic Co-Operation and Development (2007) stated that UCC/UGC must: (1) be publically accessible to a selected group of people, (2) show creative effort, and (3) be built outside of professional routines and practices. According to the first condition, content must be publically available. To do so, online publishing is required, and this excludes e-mails and instant messaging. In compliance with the second condition, users must upload original content, and this excludes reposted material. The last condition is linked to the idea that content creation must be based on the willingness to connect to others, as a matter of personal expression, even if only finalized to become famous and well recognized. This implies that UCC/UGC does not include content with a commercial market.

Among the most widespread social networking sites today, Facebook, MySpace, Habbo, Badoo, Bebo, and many others can be mentioned. Social media sites are websites through which anyone can share UCC. These include YouTube, Flickr, Digg, and many others. Users of the most popular social websites are young people, and many of them are only teenagers. There is a substantial equality between the number of male and female users.

From a historical point of view, social networking sites preceded social media sites. The first social networking sites were Classmates.com (1995) and SixDegrees.com (1997). Then came Friendster (2002), MySpace, Bebo, and Facebook (2004). Later, social media sites such as Flickr (2004) and Youtube (2005) appeared. A history of social networking sites is given by Boyd and Ellison (2007) and Urstadt (2008). Naone (2008) provides a history of microblogging sites that are social networking sites, which utilize microblogs to maintain connections among friends.

TYPES	Definition	Purpose
SN sites Facebook LinkedIn Bebo Hi5	People stay connected with other people	General sites for the public Vertical sites for specific groups Open Sites Closed Sites
Social Media sites YouTube Flickr MetaCafe Digg	People share user created content	Media Types such as blogs, music, news, photos, etc.

Table 2.1 Types of social websites

According to Kim et al. (2010), certain types of websites and parts of websites should be excluded. They refer, in particular, to groups in portal sites (e.g., Yahoo Groups), blogs, news websites, and dating sites, which allow people to share UCC, but cannot be described nowadays as social websites, because communities cannot be created within them. Websites such as Ning and KickApps allow people to form social networking sites and host them at the same time. According to the authors, these sites cannot be regarded as social websites.

The union of social networking sites and social media sites gives birth to social websites. Basically, these two types of sites are places where people socially connect, and this is their most important point of intersection, which is interesting to investigate. It also has to be considered that these two types of sites cannot be so easily distinguished nowadays, because, on the one hand, the fundamental features of social media sites are being constantly added to social networking sites, and the sharing of UCC is basically one of them; and, on the other hand, the peculiar features of social networking sites, such as personal profiles and the creation of communities, are being generally added to social media sites.

In Table 2.1, taxonomy of social websites can be viewed (Kim et al. 2010; Conry-Murray 2009). Social networking sites are divided into general-purpose sites and vertical sites. These are further divided into open sites and closed sites. The former can be accessed by the general users of the Internet, while the latter are reserved to members of specific groups or firms. Closed sites may be incorporated in a general-purpose site, such as LinkedIn, because they can be utilized, for example, as corpo-

rate intranets. Vertical sites are specifically built around peculiar interests such as traveling, shopping, job hunting, etc. Examples of vertical sites are Edreams.com, Google Products, and Kelkoo.com. The social media sites are also distinguished by the media types used, such as photos, videos, blogs, bookmarks, consumer reviews, etc.

“A limitation of current Social Web sites is that they are isolated from one another like islands in a sea. For example, different online discussions may contain complementary knowledge and topics, segmented parts of an answer that a person may be looking for, but people participating in one discussion do not have ready access to information about related discussions elsewhere. As more and more Social Web sites, communities, and services come online, the lack of interoperation among them becomes obvious: a set of single data silos or *stovepipes* has been created, that is, there are many sites, communities, and services that cannot interoperate with each other, where synergies are expensive to exploit, and where reuse and interlinking of data is difficult and cumbersome. The main reason for this lack of interoperation is that for the most part in the Social Web, there are still no common standards for knowledge and information exchange and interoperation available” (Kinsella et al. 2009, p. 124).

In the following section, a partial list of social websites is provided in order to highlight their popularity in different areas of the world.

2.2 Popular Social Websites in Different Areas of the World

Facebook

To access Facebook.com, you must create an account on the site which is free. Facebook’s terms of use state that members must be at least 13 years old with valid e-mail addresses. After updating your details, your Facebook profile is generated. Using Facebook.com you can:

- Browse and join networks, which are organized into four categories: regions, colleges, workplaces and high schools
- Pull contacts from a Web-based e-mail account, into Facebook.com
- Find friends in several ways, including search engine to look for a specific person and lot more
- Facebook has recently crossed 500 million users and is the most popular social networking site of the world

MySpace

On MySpace, your social network starts growing from the first day. When you join MySpace, the first step is to create a profile. You then, invite friends to join you and search for your friends already profiled on MySpace. These friends become your initial friend space. Once the friendship is confirmed all the people in your friends' friend space become part of your network. In that sense, everyone on MySpace is in your extended network. As part of the terms of MySpace, the user must be at least 14 years old to register.

Twitter

Twitter is a very simple service that is rapidly becoming one of the most talked-about social networking service providers. When you have a Twitter account, you can use the service to post and receive messages to and from a network of contacts, respectively, as opposed to sending bulk e-mail messages. You can build your network of contacts, invite others to receive your Tweets, and can follow other members' posts. Twitter makes it easy to opt into or out of networks. Additionally, you can choose to stop following a specific person's feed.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is an online social network for business professionals, which is designed specifically for professional networking, to help them find a job, discover sales leads, connect with potential business partners. Unlike most of the other social networks, LinkedIn does not focus on making friends or sharing media like photos, videos and music. To start using LinkedIn you need to register and create a profile page. To register to LinkedIn, you need to provide personal information. You can update the profile with your education and job details and a summary. Additionally, you can also give and receive recommendations from coworkers and bosses. There are more than 75 million professionals registered on LinkedIn.

Bebo

In the UK, Bebo is the second best social network. Bebo allows users to create social networking profiles for free. It offers many of the same features as other social networking sites. You can register a free account with Bebo and upload photos, videos and information. The site lets you connect with old friends and make new ones using a unique user interface. The site boasts of users from more than a dozen countries, including the USA, Australia, Canada, Poland, France, and Germany.

Friendster

Friendster was one of the first websites to bring it into mass culture. It was designed as a place to connect with friends, family, colleagues, and make new friends over the Internet. However, it went beyond just a one-way communication. Using Friendster, you can connect with friends and family, meet new people through the connections you already have, find people with similar interests, backgrounds or geographical locations, join groups using an activity, school or interest, interact through message posts, games, blogs, and application sharing, and share your details with the Internet community.

Hi5

Hi5 shares many similarities with many social network sites; however, it introduces some twists that make it worthwhile for people who love trying out new and interesting online communities. However, it is not one of the popular sites in the USA. This was a strategic move from the founder, therefore, Hi5 claims around 60 million members from more than 200 countries other than the USA. One of the site's biggest transformations is the addition of many entertainment options, including games.

Habbo

The Habbo online community is inhabited by pixelated, cartoon-character alter egos. You can meet friends in public rooms (nightclubs, restaurants, shops) and create private rooms for selected friends. Habbo employees heavily moderate the site to cater to its solid teen user base. Most of the users of Habbo are aged 13–18 years. Although, a major part of the users are from the USA, the Habbo social network is very popular in places like the UK, Japan, Sweden, Spain, Italy, Finland, and more.

NING

Ning is the leading online platform for the world's organizers, activists and influencers to create social experiences that inspire action. It helps you create a safe and secure place online for like-minded people. Ning takes the idea of groups to a whole new level. The ability to create your own community makes Ning a great home away from home for organizations and groups looking to fill the social void.

Classmates

Classmates.com is different from most social networks, in the sense that most of its features are available to premium members. The price for premium members depends on the length of the agreement—shorter term results in a higher cost per month. Classmates.com is primarily used to reconnect with old classmates. The site features a search engine that lets you view other people who went to the same school you attended. Creating a basic Classmates.com profile is free and easy. However, most of the advanced features in Classmates.com are only available to paid users.

Tagged

Tagged is a blend of social networking features that MySpace and Facebook users will find very familiar. Tagged was designed to help users meet lots of new people with similar interests in a short amount of time. You can access and register directly or be invited by a friend to join Tagged. This is a free social network that allows you to view your friends' newly uploaded Tagged photo album. Tagged encourages its users to meet strangers based on shared interests, with the idea of growing your network to meet as many people as possible.

myYearbook

myYearbook is the best place to meet new people and one of the 25 most trafficked sites in the USA. myYearbook has Flash-based games, and the games incorporate lunch money (the myYearbook virtual currency). It includes a virtual economy through which members can purchase gifts and send them to each other. Lunch money is also donated by members to their favourite charity. In 2010, myYearbook donated money to the Haiti Relief Fund to help victims of the earthquake in Haiti.

Meetup

Meetup is an online social networking portal that facilitates offline group meetings in various localities around the world. It makes it easy for anyone to organize a local group or find one of the thousands already meeting face-to-face. More than 2,000 groups get together in local communities each day, each one with the goal of improving themselves or their communities.

MyLife

MyLife (formerly Reunion.com) is a social network service. MyLife can search over 60 social-networking sites and other information resources on the Web. MyLife searches the web to deliver accurate and timely results. Even in cases when you do not immediately find who you are looking for, MyLife continues searching and provides updates and alerts. MyLife suggests friends and contacts you may know based on your profile information and existing contacts. It also intimates you when someone else is looking for you. MyLife gives you a global view into the most popular sites your friends are part of, including LinkedIn, Facebook and MySpace as well as 50 other sites.

Flixster

Flixster is a social networking site for movie fans. Users can create their own profiles, invite friends, rate movies and actors, and post movie reviews online. From the site, people can also get information about movies, read user-generated movie reviews and ratings, converse with other users, get movie show times, view popular celebrity photos, read the latest movie news, and view video clips from popular movies and TV shows. Flixster.com also operates leading movie applications on Facebook, MySpace, iPhone, Android, and BlackBerry.

myHeritage

MyHeritage is a family-oriented social network service and genealogy website. It allows members to create their own family websites, share pictures and videos, organize family events, create family trees, and search for ancestors. There are more than 15 million family trees and 91 million photos on the site, and the site is accessible in over 35 languages.

Multiply

Multiply is a vibrant social shopping destination, but faster and more convenient, where sellers and buyers interact. A user's network is made up of their direct contacts, as well as others who are closely connected to them through their first-degree relationships. Users are also encouraged to specify the nature of their relationship with one another, making it possible to share content based on relationship. Many shoppers in the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam have made the Multiply marketplace a favorite shopping destination.

Orkut

Orkut is a free social networking website where you can create a profile, connect with friends, maintain an online scrapbook, and use site features and applications to share your interests and meet others. The prerequisite for logging on to Orkut is that the user must be over 18 years old. Currently, Orkut is most popular in Brazil. The number of orkut users in India is almost equivalent to those in its original home, the USA.

Badoo

Badoo is a multilingual social networking website. It is gaining popularity in emerging markets like Russia and Brazil. The site allows users to create profiles, send each other messages, and rate each other's profile pictures at no cost. However, features that are designed to make user profile more visible to other users are provided at a cost. Badoo includes geographic proximity feature that identifies users' locations based on analysis of their network connection. This lets users know if there are people near their current location who may wish to meet.

Gaia Online

Gaia Online is a mix of social networking and massive multiplayer online role-playing games. It is a leading online hangout for teens and young adults and offers a wide range of features from discussion forums and virtual towns to fully customizable profiles and avatars. It provides a fun, social environment that inspires creativity and helps people make meaningful connections around shared interests such as gaming, arts, and anime.

BlackPlanet

Initially, BlackPlanet was designed as a way for African-American professionals to network. Since then, it has grown and evolved as a site operating under the principles of Web 2.0. Members can read other members' blogs, watch music videos, chat with one another, look for new careers, and discuss news. Though BlackPlanet is not restricted to any community, this site is more popular amongst African-American. This site helped Obama to connect to nearly 200,000 potential supporters.

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