

Social Software: Issues & Challenges

By

Rajesh Kumar, Sanjaya Tripathi, Tanisha Mishra

Research Scholar, Jiwaji University Gwalior

(Asst. Prof.) GCET, Gr. Noida

B.Tech(CSE), PDPM IITDM, Jabalpur

rbhagat007@gmail.com , sanjayatrip@rediff.com

ABSTRACT

The origins of social software—from blogs to facebook to instant messaging to wikis—are firmly based in the information technologies of the past few decades. This research bulletin explores the genesis of some of the current social software products, helps define common characteristics, describes how the software is being used in higher education, and examines the implications for activities in colleges and universities. In today's world where Internet has experienced tremendous growth, social networking sites have become highly significant in peoples' lives. This study will concentrate on youngsters more precisely college going students in India. The research explores how college students create identity for themselves in the virtual world and how they relate to others online. It will analyze the cultural differences from the youth and discuss whether social networking sites isolate youngsters from the society or help them to build relationships; the participation in these sites is also explored. Survey technique, interview, and online observation were the research methods used. Findings show that Indian students spend more time in these sites. It was also found that virtual interaction taking place in these sites is just a supplement to real life interaction.

1. INTRODUCTION

This research paper is about computer software. For the study of social procedures from a computer science perspective. Social software encompasses a range of software systems that allow users to interact and share data. This computer-mediated communication has become very popular with social sites like MySpace, Facebook and Bebo media sites like Flickr and YouTube as well as commercial sites like Amazon.com and eBay. Many of these applications share characteristics like open APIs, service-oriented design and the ability to upload data and media. [2] The terms Web 2.0 and (for large-business applications) Enterprise 2.0 are also used to describe this style of software. The more specific terms collaborative software and groupware are usually applied narrowly to software that enables collaborative work. Distinctions among usage of the terms "social", "trusted" and "collaborative" are in the applications or uses, not the tools themselves, although some tools are used only rarely for collaborative work. We are living in a world primarily characterized by objects in motion. Appadurai (2001) states that, "These objects include ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, technologies and techniques" (p. 5).

Media has always played a crucial role in the stepping up of globalization and Internet can be considered as a breakthrough in the globalization era. The Internet has provided an opportunity to build a global communication base that would link people around the world together. It allows groups of computers to interact simultaneously. This technical consideration signifies that the Internet can support and mediate new forms of communication, thus bettering the social relationship between individuals. 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.

2. THE EVOLUTION

Miller and Slater (2000) argue that most discussions of the Internet have accentuated both the abolition of distance and a following detaching of relationships from particular place. In their research they showed this conclusion to be deceptive. They state that, "the Internet media are very capable of bringing dispersed things into immediate, virtually face-to-face, contact: prices and commodities, families, music, cultures, religious and ethnic diasporas" (Miller & Slater, 2000, p. 1). They found that in Trinidad, online relationships were treated similarly to offline relationships and therefore they emphasize that Internet is not a virtual or a disembodied world set off from the real but connected to the everyday lives of the people. This theory is tested by comparing the role of Internet in the students' lives in India as they also emphasize that Internet may be different in different places.

With Web 2.0 technologies, the Internet has become a communication platform on which virtual communities are formed and it provides scope for interactivity, collaborative learning, social networking and participation (Flew, 2007). So, there are tremendous advancements taking place and most importantly youngsters form the majority of the consumers.

In order to examine the Internet in a more precise and measurable way, this study focuses on social networking sites. Social networking sites (SNSs) are now among the fastest growing Internet resources. The chances for the young people to

form and maintain relationships on the Internet have increased in the last few years. SNSs have become the choice for the youngsters, who reach out to others on the web, receiving and distributing information on a real-time basis. Today almost each and every youngsters has a profile and is part of the virtual world. There are different types of SNSs depending on the relationships they focus. In this study only generic friend SNSs like Facebook are concentrated.

The key point to examine is not only what is happening on these sites but also why it is happening since human beings relate to people both in the virtual world as well as real world. Nowadays, young people seek to have more interactive communication and have become producers of content rather than consumers. This paper primarily focuses on college going students. The effectiveness of virtual communities and the impact the SNSs have created among young people. Media consumption habits and preferences show a discrepancy significantly across the countries, where one is a developing and the other is a developed country.

It is assumed that the consumption of social media where Internet plays a vital role generally ascends with socio-economic status. Hence a significant need to figure out how far the change has influenced both the countries makes it essential to survey and explore as to why youngsters prefer and interact with the social media. The objectives of the study are as follows: To find out how social networking websites help in building relationships among the college going students; To study the level of participation of the young people while at these sites; To analyse whether these sites are isolating youngsters from society or vice versa; 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. 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.

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. 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. Colleges have discovered that prospective

students are more likely to respond to a counselor who attempts to contact through a networking site like Facebook

3.SOCIAL SOFTWARE ISSUES & EFFECTS

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. ATwitter 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

4.KINDS OF TOOLS FOR ONLINE COMMUNICATION

Social software applications include communication tools and interactive tools. Communication tools typically handle the capturing, storing and presentation of communication, usually written but increasingly including audio and video as well. Interactive tools handle mediated interactions between a pair or group of users. They focus on establishing and maintaining a connection among users, facilitating the mechanics of conversation and talk.

5. INSTANT MESSAGING

An instant messaging application or client allows one to communicate with another person over a network in real time, in relative privacy. Popular, consumer-oriented clients include AOL Instant Messenger, Google Talk, ICQ, Meebo, MSN Messenger, Pidgin (formerly Gaim), Skype and Yahoo! Messenger. Instant messaging software designed for use in business includes IBM Lotus Same time, XMPP and Microsoft Messenger. One can add friends to a contact or "buddy" list by entering the person's email address or messenger ID. If the person is online, their name will typically be listed as available for chat. Clicking on their name will activate a chat window with space to write to the other person, as well as read their reply.

6. TEXT CHAT

Internet Relay Chat (IRC) and other online chat technologies allow users to join chat rooms and communicate with many people at once, publicly. Users may join a pre-existing chat room or create a new one about any topic. Once inside, you may type messages that everyone else in the room can read, as well as respond to messages from others. Often there is a steady stream of people entering and leaving. Whether you are in another person's chat room or one you've created yourself, you are generally free to invite others online to join you in that room.

Instant messaging facilitates both one-to-one (communication) and many-to-many interaction.

7. INTERNET FORUMS

Originally modeled after the real-world paradigm of electronic bulletin boards of the world before internet was born, internet forums allow users to post a "topic" for others to review. Other users can view the topic and post their own comments in a linear fashion, one after the other. Most forums are public, allowing anybody to sign up at any time. A few are private, gated communities where new members must pay a small fee to join, like the Something Awful Forums. Forums can contain many different categories in a hierarchy according to topics and subtopics. Other features include the ability to post images or files or to quote another user's post with special formatting in one's own post. Forums often grow in popularity until they can boast several thousand members posting replies to tens of thousands of topics continuously. There are various standards and claimants for the market leaders of each software category. Various add-ons may be available, including translation and spelling correction software, depending on the expertise of the operators of the bulletin board. In some industry areas, the bulletin board has its own commercially successful achievements: free and paid hardcopy magazines as well as professional and amateur sites. Current successful services have combined new tools with the older newsgroup and mailing list paradigm to produce hybrids like Yahoo! Groups and Google Groups. Also as a service catches on, it tends to adopt characteristics and tools of other services that compete. Over time, for example, wiki user pages have become social portals for individual users and may be used in place of other portal applications.

8. WIKIS

A wiki page whose content can be edited by its visitors. Examples include Wikipedia, Wiktionary, the original Portland Pattern Repository wiki, MeatballWiki, CommunityWiki and Wikisource. For more detail on free and commercially available wiki systems see Comparison of wiki software.

10. BLOGS

Blogs, short for web logs, are like online journals for a particular person. The owner will post a message periodically, allowing others to comment. Topics often include the owner's daily life, views on politics or a particular subject important to them. Blogs mean many things to different people, ranging from "online journal" to "easily updated personal website." While these definitions are technically correct, they fail to capture the power of blogs as social software. Beyond being a simple homepage or an online diary, some blogs allow comments on the entries, thereby creating a discussion forum. They also have blogrolls (i.e. links to other blogs which the owner reads or admires) and indicate their social relationship to those other bloggers using the XFN social relationship standard. Pingback and trackback allow one blog to notify another blog, creating an inter-blog

conversation. Blogs engage readers and can build a virtual community around a particular person or interest. Examples include Slashdot, LiveJournal, BlogSpot. Blogging has also become fashionable in business settings by companies who use software such as IBM Lotus Connections.

11. SOCIAL NETWORK SERVICES

Social network services allow people to come together online around shared interests, hobbies or causes. For example, some sites provide dating services where users post personal profiles, locations, ages, gender, etc. and are able to search for a partner. Other services enable business networking (Ryze, XING and LinkedIn) and social event meetups (Meetup). Some large wikis have effectively become social network services by encouraging user pages and portals. Anyone can create their own social networking service using hosted offerings like Ning, groups or rSitez or more flexible, installable software like Elgg, BuddyPress, phpFox or Concur's ConcourseConnect.

12. SOCIAL NETWORK SEARCH ENGINES

Social network search engines are a class of search engines that use social networks to organize, prioritize or filter search results. There are two subclasses of social network search engines: those that use explicit social networks and those that use implicit social networks. Explicit social network search engines allow people to find each other according to explicitly stated social relationships such as XFN social relationships. XHTML Friends Network, for example, allows people to share their relationships on their own sites, thus forming a decentralized/distributed online social network, in contrast to centralized social network services listed in the previous section. Implicit social network search engines allow people to filter search results based upon classes of social networks they trust, such as a shared political viewpoint. [3] This was called an epistemic filter in the 1993 "State of the Future Report" from the American Committee for the United Nations University which predicted that this would become the dominant means of search for most users. Lacking trustworthy explicit information about such viewpoints, this type of social network search engine mines the web to infer the topology of online social networks. For example, the NewsTrove search engine infers social networks from content - sites, blogs, pods and feeds - by examining, among other things, subject matter, link relationships and grammatical features to infer social networks.

13. CONCLUSION

It is clear that the use of social software in ARL member libraries has rapidly increased—from two institutions in 1996 to 63 institutions in early 2008. The range of social software applications has also diversified in that time span—from chat and instant messaging in 1996 to ten, or more, types in 2008. Accompanying this diversification, social software has also been streamlined to some extent. A decade ago libraries implemented one, or perhaps two, applications. Today, libraries implement

multiple applications as part of larger integrated tools, e.g., subject guides that are part wiki, part blog, part instant messaging, part social tagging, etc., and social networking sites that are part widget, part media sharing applications, part instant messaging, etc. While the data in this survey offers a snapshot of the past, it also offers a glimpse of the future. Whatever the future holds, it is certain that ARL libraries will continue to offer communication. It appears science fiction has become a reality. What will the future hold? and expand upon the social software offerings today. 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 advancements in global.

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