

DETERMINANTS OF SOCIAL NETWORK TECHNOLOGY



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ABSTRACT

This research examines social media behavior to deliver valuable insights and advocacy to business organizations. The research attempts to identify factors contributing towards adoption of social media in India and proposes a methodology enabling organizations to find the true value of social media. This research includes an extensive literature review of both academic and practitioner sources and utilizes quantitative research technique to identify determinants of social network technology adoption. The empirical study is based on Technology Adoption Model and investigates the impact of Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use as well as Perceived Trust to use social networking sites (SNS). Results indicate a high impact of Perceived Trust to usefulness of SN technology. Results also indicate a positive influence of Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use to Behavioral Intention to use social networking.

KEYWORDS

Virtual networks, social media, Technology Acceptance Model, social networking

INTRODUCTION

Web 2.0 has taken the world to beyond the static web site pages. Contrary to web-sites which allow only passive viewership of content, Web 2.0 fosters collaboration and interaction amongst community participants. While few social networking sites (LinkedIn.com) allow professionals to exchange information, ideas and opportunities, the others (Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr etc.) are purely social in nature. Virtual channel owes the power to liberate control of time and space for communication. While on one hand, social media develops strong associations among likeminded community, on the other hand it's causing depression and addiction among disproportionate number of people.

Social sciences deploy social networks to understand the individuals, groups, organizations and societies. Lea et al. (2006) have provided a graphical depiction of social networks constituting a number of nodes connected together. These nodes represent individuals belonging to a community and the connections symbolize the relationships amongst those community members.

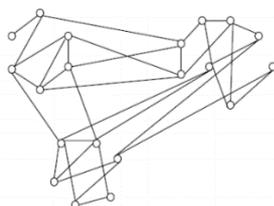


Fig 1: Graphical representation of a social network (Lea, Yu, Maguluru, 2006)

Social networking sites facilitate social networking. Abbreviated as SNS, a social networking site or a virtual community allows members to create public profiles and form relationships with other members (Boyd and Ellison, 2005). Users are able to articulate and make their social network visible. Strangers are able to initiate relationship building through such platforms. At times, it results in connections which are otherwise difficult to be made (Haythornthwaite, 2005). Kaplan & Haelein (2010) define a social network site as a place where users can create their own profile, become friends with other users, write updates or messages and share pictures.

Social networks have interested a lot of like-minded individuals to congregate on online channels and share common interests (Wertime et al. (2008)). Social media platforms have impacted contemporary consumer decision process by radically changing the interaction between customers and brands (De Valck et al. 2009). This has attracted marketers to understand consumer behavior. They can utilize the power of social networking sites to increase their visibility to consumers. Social networks facilitate a two-way communication between the consumer and

marketer (Uzkurt and Özmen, 2006). The volumes of blogs posted affect actual sales for organizations (Dwyer (2007)). A research by Trusov et al. (2010) highlighted the greater impact of online word of mouth communications through social media channels in comparison to traditional word of mouth interaction. This necessitates the importance of encouraging online word of mouth.

Social networking’s popularity is growing manifold. Be it LinkedIn invitations from brand icons, promotions on Twitter or advertisements on Facebook; social media has become the famous buzz-word. People are spending more time on Facebook than any other site (Nielsen, 2011). Accessing social media has become the most preferred choice of mobile owners. A study by Nielson (2010) regards social networking as the third most used type of mobile application among smartphone owners.

Social Media trends in India

Social networking in India is on the rise. From its humble beginnings to its explosive present, social media has come a long way. A peep into Social Media in India reveals interesting facts!

- Social networking in India evolved in the year 2005 with the launch of Hi5. The SNS had features like creating friend networks and user groups, photo sharing and status updates.
- Orkut, introduced in India in 2006 ticked the India user off on account of its exclusivity, simplicity and huge reach.
- 2007 was the era of Orkut vs. Facebook. Lot of additional features such as security, passive feeds and Apps made these SNS’s more exciting to use.
- The Facebook revolution started in 2008. Facebook chats, connections, interesting Apps and improved security features made it the most talked about buzz word among the younger generation.
- Twitter joined the bandwagon and became an instant attraction of glitterati and journalists.
- Year 2007-08 witnessed the birth of many Indian social networks such as Bigadda, Minglebox and Ibiboo. By this time Youtube had also acquired a share on Twitter and Facebook.

The use of social networking sites among online users has risen to nearly 52% since 2011 (eMarketer, 2012). Statistics indicate that more than 76 million people are hooked on to social networking sites in India. The growth of social media in India is expected to exponentially rise to about 83% by the end of 2014 (eMarketer, 2012).

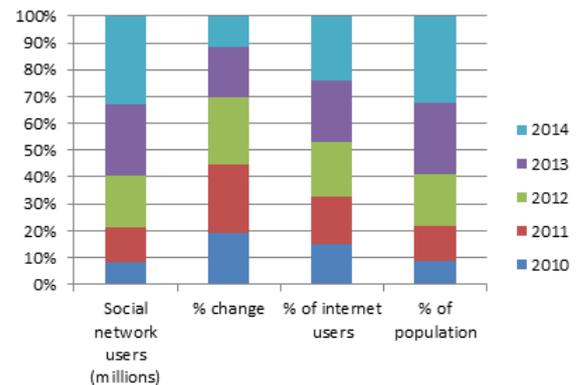


Fig 2: Social network users and penetration in India, 2010- 2014. Source compiled from eMarketer, Aug 2012

Facebook’s market has dominated social networking sites. India is the 2nd largest country, next to US, in terms of Facebook usage. Social Bakers(June, 2012), a social media analyst company in India, found out that 50 million online users hooked on to Facebook as their most desired social media website. The figure almost equates to 3.9% of the total population and 56.54% of the total internet population of the subcontinent. Social media, in India, is mostly visual; debarring the need of language proficiency skills for online communication. One of the main reasons of the overwhelming Facebook consumption in our economy is the growing penetration of inexpensive smart phones coupled with reduced internet usage costs. The *Facebook enabled phones* are heavily in demand not only amongst urban and semi-urban population but in rural India as well. The mobile phone shipment in India in the year 2011 was 184.4 million units which is expect to touch 301 million by the year 2015, at a CAGR of 13.03% (IDC, 2012). Ethinos Digital Marketing(2012) has provided following important data with regard to Social Media Usage in India.

- 65 million Facebook users by Nov’ 12
- 33 million Twitter users by Nov’ 12
- 17 million LinkedIn users by Nov’ 12

- 1,680,000 Pinterest users in Nov' 12
- 7.2% of the Pinterest users worldwide come from India
- Buying products off Social media is not very popular in India
- 67% online visitors use social media to help and guide them in purchase decision making process

India, one of the fastest growing economies also ranks third among the top three growing online markets across the globe. Nearly 75% of the internet audience is constituted by youth in the age bracket of 15-34 years. India is a culturally diverse country on account of which the behavioral differences amongst people are quite evident. This contributes to social media adoption to a fairly large extent as people of similar culture or behavior tend to gel well within their communities. Social media platforms allow this networking practically conveniently.

Literature Review

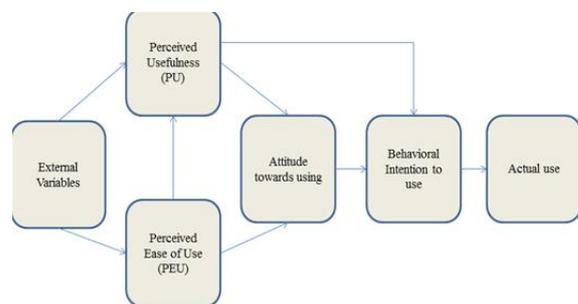
The internet has gifted mankind an exciting channel to create communities and public spaces. The biggest advantage of virtual channel is the power to liberate control of time and space for communication. Of course it has a positive and a flip side. While the rosy side talks more about developing strong associations amongst likeminded community, the antagonistic aspect is that virtual community is causing depression and addiction among disproportionate number of people. Lonely and depressed people tend to find solace, support and companionship from virtual partners (Morahan-Martin, 2005). Nevertheless, social networking sites have become a part of our day to day life. This has impressed marketers to use the power of social media to build successful business applications (Taylor and Weiland, 2011). Unfortunately, organizations are not completely successful in laying down formats which utilize social media holistically to support their business processes.

This research aims to study the relationship between the use of social networking media and technology acceptance by user. As discussed above, there has been a significant rise in the use of social media over the past few years. Websites such as Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn and Twitter are elaborately used for both business and personal reasons. This research objects to examine the social networking users and their perceptions of the usefulness and ease of use of the

technology. Though some preliminary research has been conducted in this area, there has been no academic investigation of the perceptions and use of social network systems by college students in India.

Technology Acceptance Model

The technology acceptance model (TAM), introduced by Davis (1989) focuses on user's intention to accept a technology. TAM originates from Ajzen and Fishbein's (1975) Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). The latter assumes that individuals are usually quite rational and make systematic use of information available to them. Theory of Reasoned Action postulates behavioral intentions in comparison to attitudes are more relevant predictors of actual behaviors. While TRA explains general human behavior, TAM is more specific to information technology usage. There are two specific concepts of TAM, viz. Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEU) While PU is the individual's feeling towards a particular technology which will enable a user to enhance performance; PEU is the individual's belief that using information systems would be free of physical and mental effort (Davis 1989). Parameswaran and Whinston (2007) suggest that a new perspective of TAM to capture the behavior of users in a social environment. In affirmative opinion, Baron and Harris (2006) believe that social influence affects technology adoption. Since a very less attention is paid towards understanding the impact of social networks that surround the user. This research fills in the gap by nature of technology acceptance in social computing situations.



TAM by Davis, F. D. (1989)

Fig 3: Technology Adoption Model

Perceived Usefulness (PU)

Based on TAM, PU is the evaluation of the degree to which a person believes that use of a particular technology would enhance his or her job performance (Davis, 1989).

Virtual communities are playing a commendable role in dissipating information to individuals on diversified topics as goods, services, hobbies and interests (Hagel and Armstrong, 1997). People are also tempted to join e-communities to serve their functional needs. They engage to supply food for their knowledge seeking mind or indulge in other consumption activities such as exchanging information and resources within the community (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2004). This not only facilitates education and information but also satisfies content related motives of participating members (Safko and Brake, 2009). Nevertheless, such communities bring similar mindsets in a common space to share thoughts, opinions and comments (Weber, 2009).

Lenhart and Madden (2007) highlighted that people join and participate in SNS primarily to stay in touch with friends, make plans with friends and make new friends. Ridings and Gefen (2004) regarded need for cognition and belongingness, goal achievement, values and notions as the riding factors to use SNS. Friendship is the most important factor attracting people to become part of in social online communities (Coon, 1998). SNS enhance maintenance of interpersonal relationships and give meaning to self identities (Peters et al., 2007). SNS enable more clarity in publicizing friend connections (Boyd, 2008). Besides, SNS render emotional benefits to its members. They feel part of the group and get attraction (Lenhart and Madden, 2007). Genovetter (1973) has introduced the phenomena of "strength of weak ties" in social networking. The phenomena highlights that the strength of any social network is exhibited by its power to connect to new social clusters of people who share common interests. This creates a heterogeneous group of people common information, opportunities and skills. Weak ties in social communities are manifested through "friend of friend" option.

Within the context of TAM, PU is an important determinant of adoption of social networking as a technology.

H1: If the social networking technology is perceived to be useful it is associated with increased intention to use the technology.

Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)

Davis' technology acceptance model (1989) has evolved from perceived ease of use of technology. This also forms the base to use technology for

building relationships on social media sites as well (McDonald, 2009).

Social networking sites can be accessed through any internet connection. Users access SNS in the comfort of their homes or workplaces. Younger generation is more likely to access them on the internet at home than anywhere else (Boyd, 2008). Students are more motivated to use social networks for legitimacy and socializing (Ross et al., 2009). Faster broadband connections allow more creative use of such sites as it takes less time to upload pictures and stream music and videos. SNS also allow an easy way to bond with the outside world (Wink, 2010). Users can create profiles, view, visit and share experienced with chosen friends (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Private connection can be conveniently configured to foster concealed communication (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Compared to real world, SNS provide more visible reference points to judge a person's identity (Boyd, 2007). The friend connections are clearly displayed which could provide meaningful information to others.

TAM postulates that perceived ease of use of technology positively affects the behavioral intention to adopt it. Besides, the online social networking is intended. Therefore, we expect perceptions of ease of use to have a positive influence on perceived usefulness. Thus,

H2: Perceived Ease of Use of Social Networking positively affects the intention to use the technology.

H3: Perceived Ease of Use positively affects Perceived Usefulness of social networking technology.

Perceived Trust (PT)

A plethora of research efforts highlight the importance of trust to building interpersonal and commercial relationships (Butler, 1991; Doney and Cannon, 1997; Ring and Ven, 1992; Ganesan, 1994; Dwyer et al., 1987; Williamson, 1991).

Trust is perceived as a basis for partnership and either party would be willing to fully commit to a relationship if trust exists (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Trust is an expectation, rather than conviction and influences a partner's future behavior (Zaheer et al., 1998). Social relationships and emotional bonds enhance trust and commitment (Hakansson, 1982). SNA could enhance the fortification of interpersonal associations (Peters et al., 2007).

In a consumer based environment, privacy is a key determinant of trust and a high level of perceived trust increases engagement in e-transactions (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). Trust is manifested in external behaviors in the form of cooperation (Nicholson et al., 2001). One party could rely on another party more if their relationship generates a feeling of care, empathy, politeness, concern and similarity (Rempel et al., 1985). Emotions constitute an important determinant to build trust (Nicholson et al., 2001; Chowdhury, 2005).

To establish trust over internet communication is an exceedingly complicated issue. In social media sites, the traditional markets of trust such as body language and voice intonations are absent. E-mails and emoticons are imperfect substitutes for facial expressions. Trust protracts the continuity of a social media community (Shankar et. al, 2002). Once the members of a community have established trust amongst themselves, the communication naturally becomes more open and honest (Ridings et al, 2002). The Edelman Trust Barometer report (2012) reveals that public trust in social media sites have increased globally since 2011. Statistics portray that 61 percent more people now trust in social media since 2011. Perceived Trust therefore becomes a noteworthy extension of TAM. Besides, it is valuable to include the Theory of Commitment- Trust (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) in the theoretical framework as it identifies trust and commitment as important determinants to build a relational cooperation. Thus,

H4 Perceived Trust to Use Online Social Networking affects intent to use of the technology.

H5 Users who perceive higher trust to use Online Social Networking will consider the technology to be more useful.

The following figure illustrates the modified TAM developed for this study to understand the perceptions of social networking users.

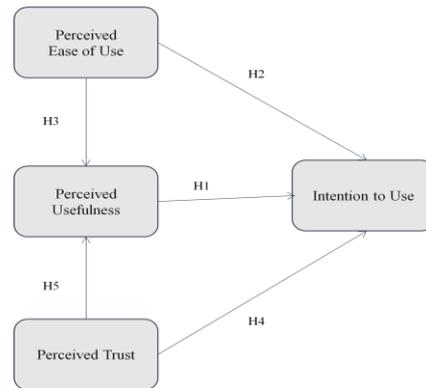


Fig 4: Hypothesis Generation

Research Methodology

This study involves non-probabilistic convenience sampling. 230 business management school students participated in the survey. Participation was voluntary and data was collected through survey questionnaires which were distributed both manually and electronically. Utmost care was undertaken to make sure that there is insignificant sampling error and the results of the sample study can be applied, in general, for the universe with a reasonable level of confidence. The questionnaire included statements which the respondents were required to rate on the basis of a Likert scale.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perception of SN technology users. Three predictors including PU, PEU and PT were identified as determinants of intention to use SNS. The questionnaire constituted measures which were validated by previous studies with revised wordings. All items used 7 point Likert scale where 1= Strongly Agree and 7= Strongly Disagree.

Data Analysis and Results

Most of the respondents were males (76%). All respondents were post-management students in the age bracket of 21-29 years. R-type factor analysis was deployed to understand the structure of the psychographic variables. Metric variables chosen for the purpose of this research constituting a homogenous set of perceptions are found to be most suitable for conducting factor analysis. The output of factor analysis indicated that the first four components explained 66.66% of the total variance.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5.755	35.972	35.972
2	2.040	12.749	48.721
3	1.550	9.686	58.406
4	1.321	8.258	66.664

5	.925	5.778	72.442
6	.838	5.237	77.680
7	.776	4.852	82.532
8	.709	4.433	86.965
9	.438	2.737	89.702
10	.371	2.317	92.018
11	.325	2.032	94.051
12	.282	1.761	95.811
13	.230	1.441	97.252
14	.177	1.104	98.356
15	.167	1.046	99.402
16	.096	.598	100.000

Table I: Factor Analysis

The reliability and validity of all 16 instruments was tested through Cronbach Alpha. Cronbach Alpha ranged from 0.67 to 0.82.

Factor	Cronbach Alpha	Number of items
Perceived Usefulness	0.721	5
Perceived Ease of Use	0.742	3
Perceived Trust	0.816	5
Behavioral Intention	0.672	3

Table II: Cronbach Alpha

Naming Factors

Perceived Usefulness

I am more interested in keeping in touch with family and friends on SNS

I only contribute information of value to gain recognition from the community

I feel social networking bring people with similar interests together

I feel virtual communities give me an opportunity to educate myself on goods and products

Social Networking has become part and parcel of my life

Perceived Ease of Use

I find social networking sites are easy to use

Interactions on social networking sites is easy and understandable

I intend to join virtual communities to satisfy my quest of knowledge

Perceived Trust

I trust my peers' opinions over social media advertisements

I feel an honest and open communication fosters trust amongst community members

I feel experiences shared in social media help others in their decision-making process

I feel SNS is an easy medium to meet likeminded people and receive companionship

Social networking sites have improved my ability to communicate with others

Behavioral Intention

I intend to "follow" companies that develop apps for iPhone / ipads or other smart devices

I intend to join communities solely for the purpose of entertainment and enjoyment

I feel social media helps me to say what I can't say in person

Regression Analysis

The concern of our model is whether the variables have an influence as hypothesized. To serve this purpose, five multiple regression analysis (MRS) were conducted. The first is used to analyze the relationship between PEU and PU, the second between PEU and BI, the third between PU and BI, fourth between PU and PT and the final between PT and BI.

Factor1	Factor2	R ²
PEU	PU	0.34
PEU	BI	0.31
PU	BI	0.34
PT	PU	0.44
PT	BI	0.33

Table III: Multiple Regression

R² values indicate presence of a strong relationship between PU and PT. Therefore H5 is supported. Between PU and BI, the relationship as indicated by the regression coefficients seems to be not very good. However, it appears that the hypothesis H1 is pointing in the right direction. Similarly, the relationship between PEU and BI does not seem to be strong, but since the hypothesis is pointing in the right direction, H2 is accepted. The regression coefficient depicting relationship between PEU and PU indicate moderate level of positivity. Therefore, H3 is accepted. Between PT and BI, the relationship as indicated by the regression coefficients seems to be not very good. However, it appears that the hypothesis H4 is pointing in the right direction.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study validate TAM. The results display significant relationships between research variables which include Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use, Behavioral intention and Perceived Trust. The results suggest that PU is an

important determinant of acceptance and usage behavior of social networking technology. Reduced hardware cost, affordable internet and massive propagation of wireless to cater to social networking needs have intensified perceived usefulness of SN technology. Human being, a social animal, longs for social relationship for survival. Online technology is perceived to be useful to cater to this basic human need. The “presence” that an online social network can provide to an individual is much higher than what an offline channel could provide. Social networking renders socialization, learning and recognition which together positively affects the intention to use SNS. Social networks offer users a broader world-view by providing useful information. The findings also suggest that perceived trust plays a strong role in affecting perceptions of usefulness of social network technology. Quality, credibility and flow of information are some of the determinants of trust building in a social community (Kelton et al., 2008; Mayer et al. 1995). Trust is an outcome of an emotional relationship among community participants (Rousseau et al., 1998; Baumes et al., 2006). Interestingly, social media have enabled users to specify whom they trust and whom they do not. Trust is a vital constituent of human behavior in an offline or online communication channel. Social networking facilitates trust building by allowing its users to select their own community. Higher the trust, stronger is the community and superior would be the perceived usefulness of SNS.

The findings prove that PEU has conclusive impact on intention to use social SN technology. Participants found that social networking is fairly easy to use. Higher perceived ease of use leads to higher perceived usefulness and thereby higher intention to adopt SN technology. Hedonic and utilitarian benefits of social networking entice people to join SNS.

Limitations and scope for future research

Despite meeting the objective of the present research, a few limitations were identified in the course of this study. This research investigates the determinants of social network technology in India wherein the participants were post-graduate students only. Also, since social networking is an emerging concept in India, its penetration to semi-urban and rural India is still in its nascent stage. Thus, the outcomes of this research are best suited

to Indian education domain. These findings cannot be replicated to other nations owing to differences in terms of economy, culture and technology. Future research can incorporate a wider spectrum of participants to validate the more generalized model. Also, future researches could focus on more definitive understanding of these determinants to develop successful business strategies by utilizing the power of social media.

Managerial Implications

It has become essential for organizations today to understand the relationship between business practices, culture and technology in order to promote teamwork and drive business success and continued performance. Embarking social media strategies will guide them in meeting such goals by adequately monitoring, engaging, managing and measuring social media. The proposed research endeavors to identify successful social media strategies to improve business performances. The results will benefit marketers (both pure-play and bricks-and-clicks) to devise appropriate strategies to maximize their profits from social networking. Internet retailers can create curiosity value for their customers rather than economic value.

This study focuses on the impact of trust, ease of use and usefulness on SN media. Hence it contributes to entrepreneurship research domain. Also, as the research involves post-graduate students, it can be utilized as a predictor for higher learning. Academic institutions can benefit by investigating their existing social networks and remodel them to suit their needs. For example, students can use social networking to share information related to their courses with their peers. Healthy engagement in a social community can boost performance of university students. Looking at the popularity of social media and the massive use of smart phones by students, it's wiser to utilize the influence of SN technology in academics than discouraging them against social media use. Advocacy can play a key role to alter youth's perspectives toward SNS. They can be educated to utilize social media more for academic purpose and to quench their social needs. This will lead them to invest their time and skills for better academic communication and learning. Another realization recommendation would be to encourage

academic staff to adopt SN technology and utilize it as an effective communication tool.

Organizations can utilize this study to enhance technology acceptance among their employees, business partners or customers. An important criterion is to align social media with organization's strategic business goals. With reference to mass market adoption, social media is a relatively new concept. Social media has a lot to offer. Apart from being an easy channel to share humungous amount of relevant information, careful analysis of social communities can excavate strategic details related to consumer behavior. Significant details such as number of links, information quality, number of community member and their interests etc can be uncovered by executing Social Network Analysis tools. This in turn can be used as inputs to devise successful digital marketing strategies focusing on the right target audience. Contrarily, attempt to generate an online noise with an intention to build potential audience could prove to be fatal to the organization!

This research identifies trust as important determinant to adopt social network technology. Organizations' endeavor should be to meticulously monitor their SNS to be more "liked" and "followed". One suggestion is to implement generational segmentation for community engagement. A generational attitude and intention could be extensively understood to create better value proposition through social networking. Building a social media dialogue could be a precursor of a trusting relationship. Organization can "listen" to their customers in social channels rather than "shouting" about their products or services. Ensuring transparency in information flow, entertaining engagement and responsive customer communication can also contribute to building trust through social media.

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