From Facebook to WhatsApp: The Changing Mood of Social Networking in India

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ABSTRACT

Social networks have witnessed phenomenal growth over the past decade, across the world. These networks have given a global platform to people—to connect and express. They have rewritten the laws of social communication and interaction; limitless expression, cross-border association, and free sharing of text, pictures and videos. Somewhere during the journey, the networking sites seem to have lost their charm and appeal. Inroads made by newer and more user-friendly applications like WhatsApp seem to have made matters worse. In addition, the failure of the site owners—at checking and curbing the misuse of users’ profiles and personal data, and obscene/malicious misrepresentations of individuals—is leading to a state of ‘complete avoidance’. As a cumulative effect, social networking is fast losing steam, and if predictions and apprehensions are to be believed, in about five years’ time, the likes of Facebook and Twitter would only be found in books of History. This study aims to analyze the changing ‘social networking scenario’ in India, majorly focusing on the young population; the main subscribers. This research is based on the facts analyzed after a comprehensive survey conducted on a sample picked up from four Indian metro cities. It takes into account factors that have resulted in ‘interest loss among the youngsters.

Keywords: BBM, Facebook, Orkut, Skype, Social Media, Social Networking, Twitter, WeChat, WhatsApp

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INTRODUCTION

The social networking phenomenon in India started with a bang as it did elsewhere. The first to appear on the scene was Orkut, in the year 2004. It had a monopoly of sorts for some time, only to be replaced by Facebook in the year 2010. However, after a long spell of unprecedented success, the social networking saga—as it seems from the ongoing trend—is on the wane. The hype and craze that were once integral to the online buzz, have been overpowered by natural tendencies of boredom and obsolescence. The recent acquisition of WhatsApp by Facebook is an indication that the social networking scenario is fast changing in India. The 19 billion USD deal (USD 4 billion in cash, USD 12 billion in Facebook stock and USD 3 billion in restricted cash) (Stone, 2014) is being looked at as the acceptance of the messaging App as the major ‘threat’ to the world of Facebook. While announcing the acquisition, Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO of Facebook, acknowledged WhatsApp thus: “WhatsApp is a simple, fast and reliable mobile messaging service that is used by over 450 million people on every major mobile platform. More than 1 million people sign up for WhatsApp every day and it is on its way to connecting one billion people. More and more people rely on WhatsApp to communicate with all of their contacts every day” (Zuckerberg, 2014).

Until February 2004, he was just another college going student. But once Mark Elliott Zuckerberg, along with Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz, and Chris Hughes, from Harvard University, launched Facebook, he became a household name, and an iconic image of innovation. His success could be gauged from the fact that the number of active Facebook subscribers was over 1.23 billion at the end of year 2013 (Kiss, 2014).

Initially, it was Orkut that was high on popularity charts in India. But Facebook, offering the ease of surfing, and a number of additional features, has stayed number one. “Millions of people use Facebook everyday to keep up with friends, upload an unlimited number of photos, share links and videos, and learn more about the people they meet” (Facebook, 2014).

Wikipedia defines Facebook as “a social networking website... users can join networks organised by city, workplace, school and region. People can also add friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves” (http://en.wikipedia.org). Facebook, popularly known as FB, allows the members to:

- Create profiles and regularly update their information;
- Form an extensive Friends’ network wherein they can post messages on the ‘Wall’;
- Upload pictures and videos;
- Comment on others’ pictures;
- Chat with their friends;
- Become members of ‘like’ pages.

USA tops the list of world’s Facebook users, followed by India and Brazil. Facebook has strict security checks that
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