Chapter 19

Facebook Losing to WhatsApp: The Changing Social Networking Patterns in India

Roshan Lal Raina
J. K. Lakshmipat University, India

Iftikhar Alam
University of Otago, New Zealand

Faizia Siddiqui
IISE, New Zealand

ABSTRACT

This chapter describes how over the past decade, there has been a tremendous growth in the subscriber base of social networking sites. These networking websites or SNS have provided a global platform to people—to connect and express. However, SNS platforms seem to be fast losing ground to Instant Messaging (IM) Applications (Apps), WhatsApp being the frontrunner. WhatsApp offers a much superior user experience in terms of connectivity, expression, and security. WhatsApp is simple to use: it can be downloaded on any smartphone, and only needs a mobile SIM card and an internet connection. At the same time, security issues are also working against the SNS. This study aims to analyze the changing ‘social networking scenario’ in India. This research is based on the facts analyzed after a comprehensive survey conducted on a sample picked up from four Indian metro cities. Findings reveal that the young population is fascinated by WhatsApp due to the ease of operating the App and the quick communication that it provides. Users reported spending less time now on Facebook than they did before WhatsApp was introduced.

INTRODUCTION

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has brought a tremendous reform to the relationship patterns among people across the globe, particularly in terms of the communication media used. With personal and professional communication getting global, people now communicate more than they did

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in the past. Courtesy the social media revolution, both professional and social connections have seen an unprecedented transformation.

Being a relatively new and emerging discipline, social media offers tremendous scope for research. Last five years in particular have witnessed a number of researchers navigate through the fascinating world of online social media. Research contributions have appeared in areas like online communities, E-marketing, networking, social networking, etc. The world of communications is fast moving in a digital direction, and those who understand this transformation, will communicate much more effectively than those who do not (Karjaluoto, 2008). Today, we realize, how accurate, the prediction was.

Anthony Mayfield, in his book, 'What is social media' (2008), had opined that social media is all about communication between human beings. It enables them to share ideas, cooperate, collaborate, find friends, and entertain themselves. It is spreading rapidly because it allows people to be their original selves. And sociologists, the world over, agree that because it allows better expression through profiles, walls, like option, etc., social media is such a hit. In a global study carried out by Wright and Hinson (2008), about 66 per cent of the respondents were of the view that social media had enhanced public relations.

According to Baruah (2012):

Social media refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue.

Raina, Alam, and Siddiqui (2010) state that:

Social media provides users with attractive platforms so that they can create profiles and socialize with people all over the world. The awesome world of social media comprises websites that allow users to represent themselves through profiles and personalized web pages. They can share data, upload pictures and videos, chat and make friends.

Raina, Alam, and Siddiqui (2012) have proposed seven categories into which social media contents may be classified (See Figure 1).

BACKGROUND

The current research focuses on Facebook and WhatsApp, which are Social Networking Sites (SNS). The following section discusses the background of the research in the context of these tools. SNS platforms provide a previously unthought-of communication experience to people across all ages.

According to Boyd and Ellison (2007):

We define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site. SNS sites allow users to become members through a unique email id and password. The registration process hardly takes 4-5 minutes, and the users are required to fill in general information such as name, date of birth, gender, and city.