

## Chapter 14

# Motivations for Social Networking Site Adoption

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### ABSTRACT

*Social networking sites (SNSs) are being increasingly used by businesses to add value to companies as well as consumers. Yet, very little is known as to why individuals adopt and use SNS. The current chapter reviews literature on uses and gratification and technology acceptance model (TAM) to propose a framework for SNS adoption. Six main motivational factors are identified from literature and are expected to influence SNS adoption: need to belong, entertainment, communication, information, commercial value, and self-expression. Further, two main barriers to SNS adoption, technology and privacy, are expected to hinder adoption. The proposed theoretical framework is a first step toward understanding SNS adoption and both managerial and theoretical implications are drawn.*

### INTRODUCTION

Social networking sites (SNS) provide a means for millions of users to communicate and network with friends and strangers. According to Nielsen, online social networking sites have surpassed email in terms of reach by the end of 2008 (Ostrow 2009). The number of people using SNS has increased rapidly from 10 percent of all U.S. households belonging to at least one SNS in 2007 (Lewis 2007), to over 35% by the end of 2008 (Lenhart

2009). The number of unique visitors to MySpace increased from 50 million in May 2006 (comScore 2006), to 117 million in June 2008 (comScore 2008). According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), the first social networking site, SixDegrees.com, was launched in 1997, which allowed users to create profiles and list their friends. In the following years, several SNSs like AsianAvenue, BlackPlanet, MiGente, LiveJournal, Ryze, Friendster, LinkedIn, MySpace, Hi5, Orkut, Flickr, Yahoo! 360, Bebo, Facebook, Twitter, and MyChurch were launched in that chronological order (for an excellent history of SNSs, please see Boyd and Ellison (2007)).

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Boyd and Ellison (2007) define SNS 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 transverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (p. 2). SNSs differ from AIM, ICQ, chat, or for that matter an address book in that there is an added networking component to SNSs. Other people can not only see who is on your friend list but also communicate with them and add them as their friends. As one might imagine, there are many types of SNS users. For instance, a recent Simmons Research study identified 38 consumer personalities, with common classifications such as socially isolated, approval seekers, health and image leaders, smart loyal, smart green, brand loyal, stay-at-home moms, upscale grays, first-time home buyers, and divorced (Bulik 2008).

There are two broad types of networking sites: business-oriented (such as Ecademy, LinkedIn, or Spoke) and social-oriented (Facebook, MySpace, Meetup, Orkut, or Tribe). Some networks such as Ryze serve both purposes. Members can join SNSs in one of the two ways—via registration or via connection. In the registration-based model, individuals sign in with a valid email address and the site is open to everyone without any sort of approval or moderation whereas in the connection-based model, individuals can only become members if they know someone who is already a member of that SNS (Murchu, Brestlin, and Decker 2004). Irrespective of the type of SNS, these sites are being increasingly used by both businesses and nonprofit organizations.

### **Social Networking Site Usage by Organizations**

With more people using SNSs, businesses, nonprofit organizations, churches, and even political candidates are looking at leveraging the power of these existing networks. SNSs are being used

to mobilize support for political candidates, causes, services, and even brands. During the 2008 presidential elections, both the Democrat and Republican presidential candidates have used SNSs to organize and raise money online. For instance, Barack Obama has over 500 groups on Facebook.com at the time of writing this chapter with as many as 500,000 members in them. He also has many applications and events in his name that are being used by users to organize rallies, meetings, fundraising activities, and even protests. SNSs provide for a quick way to mobilize people and rally them for a cause and many organizations are doing just the same.

Apart from political and non-profit organizations using SNS to rally people, several media outlets are also relying on them for news and networking. For instance, in the sex scandal involving Gov. Elliot Spitzer, New York Times identified the alleged call girl by linking to her MySpace page in their online article. Within hours several thousand user-created groups were formed on MySpace and Facebook that ensued a heated debate about the scandal (Simon 2008). Media outlets even reported that she was on Facebook till the wee hours in the morning deleting and responding to comments on her profile page (Simon 2008). Media organizations are forming alliances with SNSs in order to gain publicity, deliver content, and boost their ratings. MSNBC teamed up with MySpace to deliver coverage of “Decision ’08” just as ABC did with Facebook.com (McIntyre 2008).

Businesses are also using SNSs today to target consumers and create value for their brands. SNSs represent investments in establishing electronic gateways—as content aggregators or as web portals—for efficient access to information and services online for consumers (Murchu, Breslin and Decker, 2004). According to BusinessWeek, Nike in collaboration with Google created joga.com, an Orkut-like SNS for soccer fans, that runs in 140 countries and 14 different languages (Christopher 2008). Business owners and the PR

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