

Chapter 6

Analysis of Success Factors in Social Networking Website Development

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ABSTRACT

The popularity and rapid growth of social networking sites is undeniable. However, it is hard to guarantee the success and sustainability of these sites. This study will focus on identifying the key success factors for each phase in agile iteration development for social networks. A qualitative and quantitative analysis was adopted using web analytical tools to gather and measure these success factors. A comparative study between popular and unpopular social networking was undertaken to gather realistic data. Results reveal that determinants of success for agile development phases include: goal setting, developing brand image, quality content, trust building, user-centered design, technology and client server platform, service quality, user satisfaction and stability. The successful implementation of these factors will benefit developers and users in order to achieve the success and survival of the social networking website development.

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INTRODUCTION

Research into online communities is abundant and they have been studied from the various perspectives of many academic disciplines such as psychology, sociology, information systems, communication, management, health, education and economics. However, only a small amount of research proposes and verifies the success factors of online communities. In order to develop long lasting social networking sites, there are different factors in different phases of development that determine the success. This paper will benefit website designers and developers by suggesting the success factors for each phase in agile iteration development. Most social networking sites fail because several important factors are missing in the development phases, for example the goal and purpose are not defined clearly, too much attention is focused on technology rather than usability and social design, they lack appeal which results in user inactivity and low quality content. With the goal of identifying the success factors of social networking website development, we survey the social networking and agile software development process model. We review metrics of success and integrate the findings of success factors with the six phases in social networking website development. Finally, we conclude this paper and provide recommendations for future research.

BACKGROUND

People of all ages and backgrounds use social networking to enrich their lives through the contacts they make on social networking sites. Three of the most popular social websites are Facebook, Youtube and Wikipedia (The Nielsen Company, 2010). In addition, different social networking sites emphasize different aspects of human interaction (Weaver and Morrison 2008). Social networking sites allow users to set up online profiles and develop their online social network. The profile page

contains personal information, such as interests, activities and contact information. Moreover, some social network sites allow users to design the appearance of their page and upload photos and videos. When users sign up for social network sites, they are able to socialize and build a network of connections to friends. Being affiliated with a network also allows the users connect to each other, share content and disseminate information. There are many applications and types of content that can be used on social networking sites.

The history of social networking began with the launch of Six Degrees in 1997 with basic features such as being able to create profiles, list and search for friends and send messages (Boyd and Ellison, 2010). Several other major social networking sites, namely Live Journal, Asia Avenue, Black Planet, LunarStorm, MiGente and Cyworld, followed this, which supported various combinations of profiles and friends from 1997 to 2001. Social networking sites expanded from personal to business networks when Ryze.com was launched in 2001. In 2002, the launch of Friendster resulted in social networking hitting its stride, boasting more than three million users a year later. LinkedIn, networking resources for business people and MySpace were introduced a year later in 2003. Facebook was launched in 2004 as a Harvard project for two years before opening to the public in 2006, and now leads all other social networking sites.

Software Development Process Model

Social networking sites evolve in stages and have a life span as a software development process model. The basic popular models used for software development are *System Development Life Cycle (SDLC)*, *Rapid Application Development (RAD)*, *Prototyping* and *Agile Development*. See Figure 1 for the agile iteration life cycle.

We have chosen Agile Development for this study as it is quite similar to the waterfall model

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