

Chapter 51

Adoption of Social Networking Sites

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ABSTRACT

The adoption of social networking sites has become an international phenomenon. This encyclopedia entry synthesizes the literature concerning adoption of social networking sites. It offers a definition about adoption of social networking sites. It provides an overview on historical development by specifying the pioneering scholars of danah boyd and Nicole Ellison and current knowledge status of the adoption of social networking sites. It introduces the current scientific knowledge by specifying leading scholars' researches from five representative areas, namely adopters' characteristics, adopters' motivation, antecedents of adoption, adopters' behavior and consequences of adoption. It also concludes the entry and outlines future directions.

INTRODUCTION

Social networking sites (SNSs) are new type web-based services, which have a profound impact on the way people communicate and connect with each other. Adoption of SNSs can be described as the process of users' acceptance and usage of SNSs. The whole adoption process can be divided into three stages: the stage of acceptance, the stage of usage and the stage after usage. Despite SNS is a new phenomena, adoption of SNSs has attracted much attention in recent five years.

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HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The first recognizable social network site (Six-Degrees.com) launched in 1997; however, users' adoption of SNSs received little attention in the human behaviors literature before 2004. In 2004, danah boyd, the pioneering scholar of the field of adoption of SNSs, examined how users react to a popularity SNS (namely Friendster). She presented this study at *the Conference on Human Factors and Computing Systems* (April 24-29, 2004, Vienna). This paper is one of the earliest academic articles on SNSs.

Adoption of Social Networking Sites

boyd is known for her public commentary on the use of SNSs by youth. boyd did her Master's Degree at the MIT Media Lab's Sociable Media Group with Judith Donath. She began obsessing over social networks during her graduate studies. Her master's thesis focused on how people manage their presentation of self in relation to social contextual information in online environments. Later, she moved to San Francisco, where she met the individuals involved in creating the new Friendster service. In 2003, boyd went to the School of Information at the University of California-Berkeley as a Ph.D candidate and studied with Peter Lyman and Mizuko Ito. Her dissertation focused on the use of large social networking sites by U.S. teenagers.

boyd has made many studies in the field of users' adoption of SNS in recently years. boyd's study involves various subjects such as users' self-presentation, privacy setting behavior and social interaction on SNS, the reason users flock to SNS and the consequence of their participation. boyd usually employs ethnographic approach to do her researches.

Nicole Ellison is another pioneering scholar of the field of adoption of SNSs. In 2006, Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe presented their study about SNS at *the Annual Conference of the International Communication Association* (June 19-23, 2006 iDresden). In this paper, they primarily explored adopters' characteristic, adoption motivations, usage pattern by undergraduate adopters and the relationship between use of SNS and social capital. It was a rich and thought-provoking paper. Ellison is an associate professor in the Department of Telecommunication, Information Studies, and Media at Michigan State University. Ellison mainly focuses on the relationship between social capital and SNS use as well as a host of other questions.

In 2007, boyd and Ellison co-edited a special issue of the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* on SNSs. This special issue published several meaningful papers about adoption of SNSs.

The field of adoption of SNSs has received more and more attention since 2007.

In sum, boyd and Ellison are both pioneering scholars and play an important role in the development of the field of adoption of SNSs. Their researches not only contributed great knowledge to the field of adoption of SNSs, but also roused wide attention in the academic field. There has been a continuous increase in the number of studies in the field of adoption of SNSs in recently years, and scholars have examined users' adoption of SNSs from disparate fields. However, adoption of SNSs is a new research field, the development of which just undergone a few years. So far, research in this field is immature and research results are scattered. Overview of existing research on adoption of SNSs, previous studies relate to adopters' characteristics, the stage of acceptance, the stage of usage and the stage after usage. Study of adopters' characteristics mainly focuses on adopters' background and psychological characteristics. Study of the stage of acceptance mainly relates to motivations and antecedents of adoption. Study of the stage of usage mainly relates to adopters' behavior on SNSs. Study of the stage after usage mainly focuses on the consequence of adoption. Studies in these aspects are conducted in parallel. Most of these studies have focused specifically on college students and youth more generally.

ADOPTERS' CHARACTERISTICS

Adopters are the center of adoption of SNSs. Hence, the characteristic of adopter is an important topic area in the study of adoption of SNSs.

Background Characteristics

Hargittai plays a critical role in this field. Hargittai is an associate professor of Communication Studies at Northwestern University where she heads the Web Use Project. From the perspective

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