Implications of Social Networking Sites in Modern Environment

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Abstract

Over the years lots of plans have been developed in a number of ways to involve students in campus life, inside and outside the campus with proper and constructive intentions from most of the college managements. One of the initiatives, under this task, is a printed book or a booklet which contains photographs and relevant information about incoming students. The main idea behind this is to help students navigate in a new and unknown environment. Now – a – days the communication environment of colleges has become very complex, as students combine the use of electronic mail, open forums, chat rooms, Instant Messenger and social networking sites etc. In the last few years, some web sites such as MySpace, LinkedIn, Orkut, Facebook have expanded heavily. This is the core concept of online social networking (OSN) which enables and assists students to communicate with friends, initiate friendships, join groups, and locate people of similar interests. With addition to all these activities, OSN is used and executed as an efficient approach to get admission and retain the already established student body at the college campuses, to promote various activities and events of the colleges, and to strengthen relationship with the governing bodies. This paper focuses on the implications of Social Networking Sites and how management of the colleges are responding to OSN and integrating OSN into their strategy for all communication purposes. Applications mentioned are of OSN sites used by the management of the college to communicate with students, potential students, alumni, and other key stakeholders involved in the modern era.

Keywords: Social network, Online Social Networking (OSN), Communication environment
Introduction
Way back in 1995, when social networking was unheard of, Classmates Inc. created classmates.com, an on-line community based networking site for members to connect with their friends from school and work. Our cluttered technological and media environment affects almost all of us on a daily basis, yet no where has the impact of new media innovation been more evident than on college campuses where the Millennial, individuals born between 1981 and 2000, remain unaware of what life before the Internet entailed. In addition to courses being taught completely online or supplemented with web-based applications, universities and colleges have adapted pedagogy to benefit today’s learners—a techno-savvy generation who expect to be connected to professors and peers at all times (Baird & Fisher, 2006). Perhaps the most astounding technological development on campuses in the last five years involves the innovation of online social network sites, public Web sites specifically developed to promote socialization. Sites such as Orkut, LinkedIn and Facebook—considered the premiere site at the college level—enable students to communicate with friends, initiate friendships, join groups, and locate people with similar interests. They differ from other online networking opportunities, such as instant messaging, chatrooms, and electronic blackboards, found on campuses in that the sites are a public online gathering point rather than a closed site constructed in relationship to a course or a particular program of study.

As information and communication technologies are developing a rapidly advancing history of technological innovations, the past, present and future of students’ associations and communication are indistinguishable from the various technologies that were and are available. From electronic mail and newsgroups, from open forums to open chat rooms, from Instant Messenger to social networking sites, the prevailing technologies partially define the structure and content of social communication and association. Furthermore, young people's communication environment has become increasingly complex, as the different technologies listed above are used simultaneously.

Over the years college administrators have developed a number of ways to involve students in campus life. One such mechanism many colleges and universities have historically utilized is a printed a “facebook,” a booklet containing photographs and information about incoming students, in order to help students learn about their peers and identify potential friends as they navigate in a new environment. Online social networking sites, though, have not only served a similar function, but also they are emerging as an innovative approach to recruitment and retention of the student body, promotion of activities and events, and strengthening ties to the colleges.

Sociological Viewpoint
From a sociological viewpoint, Mesch (2007) has argued that an important motivation for participation in online communities (forums and chat rooms) is social diversification. Societies are characterized by varying levels of social segregation. In societies that reward individuals differentially according to income, prestige, ethnicity
and power, stratification systems result in a differential ability of individuals to gain access to jobs and residential locations. As a result, individual social associations tend to be with individuals of similar social characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, religion, and nationality. Studies on the formation, development, maintenance, and dissolution of close social relationships have emphasized the importance of network homophily (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2002). Social similarity in the social network is the result of the opportunity structure for interaction that emerges from the social structuring of activities in society. Feld (1981) used the concept of foci of activity, defining them as “social, psychological, legal or physical objects around which joint activities are organized.” Whether they are formal (school) or informal (regular hangouts), large (neighborhood) or small (household), foci of activity systematically constrain choices of friends. From this perspective, association with others is the result of a two-step process: foci of activity place individuals in proximity (for example, they provide opportunities for frequent meetings), which causes individuals to reveal themselves to each other. Specifically, people tend to choose their friends from the set of people available through these foci.

The Internet as a focus of activity becomes an institutional arrangement that brings individuals together in repeated interactions around the focal activities. In this sense, as many societies are ethnically and racially segregated, chat rooms and forums provide a space of interaction in which teens are exposed to others of different ethnic origin and can discuss different family practices and different perspectives on history, and can interact with others based on common interests and topics without the barrier that race and ethnicity imposes in everyday life (Tynes, 2007). A study that compared racial and ethnically related comments and stereotypes in two youth chat rooms found reference to these primordial categories in the discussions, but the number of racial remarks online seemed lower than in everyday life. Furthermore, a more positive approach and openness to members of other ethnic groups was found in chat rooms in which the discussion was moderated (Subrahmanyan & Greenfield, 2008). These studies indicate support for the diversification perspective, and for the view that chat rooms and forums organized around specific topics and interests tend to support the development of friendship across ethnic and racial lines; this is an important development in highly residentially segregated societies.

**Process**

Participation in chat rooms and forums is often motivated by the need for specific and round-the-clock social support. Online support groups differ in the degree of involvement of professionals. Some have a professional moderator, others lack any moderator. But the common characteristics are that members are youth with a shared condition such as hearing impairment, diabetes, recovery from cancer, sexual abuse, or pregnancy, who assemble to cope with their condition through sharing knowledge and providing mutual support (Mesch, 2006).

This type of communities attracts interest mainly because social support is deemed to require the exchange of verbal and non-verbal messages conveying emotion, information, and advice on reducing uncertainty or stress associated with the
condition. Social support is exchanged through computer-mediated communication in relatively large networks of individuals who do not know each other and do not communicate face to face. Also, non-geographic computer-mediated social support communities develop among strangers whose primary connection is sharing a concern over a source of personal discomfort. Social support online is available day and night. As the Internet is a global communication technology the likelihood of finding social support when needed, at any time of the day, is high. An important characteristic of online social support communities is that a very narrow and specific topic is defined, and this attracts individuals who when joining tend to identity themselves as having the particular problem or concern.

An obvious advantage for online social support is its avoidance of the embarrassment that ordinarily follows the voicing of personal and intimate problems in face-to-face relations. Online social support also facilitates interaction management, namely taking time to elaborate and write thoughts online (Walther & Boyd, 2002). These three characteristics, shared identity, anonymity, and interaction management, provide an ideal context for social support (Turner, Grube & Myers, 2001; Walther & Boyd, 2002).

**Instant Messaging and Social Networking**

Instant messaging and social networking sites differ from other online communication channels in a variety of characteristics. The adoption of the technology is social, as it results from a group of friends settling on a particular IM or social networking system. IM is adopted because of peer pressure that helps to create a critical mass of users in a social group. Today, for adolescents to be part of a peer group they must engage in perpetual communication online after school hours. Those who do not cannot be part of the peer group. Not being online or not having an IM user name means exclusion from most of the daily social interaction. Using IM requires having an active list of buddies and being on a friends' list by the authorization of peers. In that sense, the use of IM with strangers is uncommon as its appeal is mainly to existing friends.

While chat rooms and forums are technologies that link individuals around a shared topic of interest and concern, Instant Messenger, text messaging and social networking sites are technologies that link teens that have some knowledge of each other and belong to the same social circle or to the social circle of their friends.

Compared with other communication channels such as email, forums and chat rooms, IM has unique features. It is synchronous communication, mostly one-to-one or one-to-many. IM chatters enjoy real-time conversations and have a short spell to think before replying. Users are aware of other users’ online presence, and can choose to communicate to others and communicate their status (online, offline, away or busy). The application allows multitasking, namely to perform other tasks and chat at the same time. A blocking mechanism allows users to remove themselves from another user's list or remove a friend from the list. At the same time, users are not able to communicate with others who are not enrolled with the same provider.
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Conclusion
This paper reviewed current studies on young people's use of different types of social media. The most important conclusion is that the new social media have important implications for the understanding of adolescence. Youth face a media environment and conduct their social interactions using multiple channels of communication. Adolescents that have not access to the Internet very rapidly find themselves at a disadvantage, with the risk of being excluded from the most significant social activities of the peer group and access to information. At the theoretical level, theories of youth friendship formation and adolescence need to incorporate this emerging digital divide that affects the opportunities and impact of digitally based exclusion in peer groups.

Second, for adolescents that do have access, different motivations shape their choices of technologies and the different choices have different outcomes. The need to expand the social network and to diversify entail greater use of forums and chat rooms, which results in diversification and increase of network size; but this is at the expense of closeness to face-to-face friends, at least in the short run. The need to be highly involved with the face-to-face peer group and to increase belonging drives the use of IM, SMS and social networking sites, resulting in a higher perceived closeness to members of the peer group, and greater ability to coordinate joint activities.

References
