To Investigate the usage of Social Networking Sites as a Career Enhancement Tool among Generation Y: an Empirical Research

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ABSTRACT

Social Networking Sites (SNSs) have turned out to be the major platform for communications by becoming the "most trafficked" websites. SNSs provide user-friendly personalized services with various functionalities and networking applications to control the way information is shared. These SNSs have embedded integrated platform that facilitates users to integrate their profiles with social networks and obtain access to users in that network. This facility enabled business organizations to employ SNSs for finding the right potential employees in this user market. While studies have conducted in the past on how these SNSs are changing the consumer behavior, little is known on whether users utilize them to enhance their careers. The purpose of this research is to investigate the usage of Social Networking Sites as a career enhancement tool (CET) among Generation Y. This paper will also analyze the attitudes and intentions of Generation Y in using SNSs as a CET.

Keywords: s*ocial networking sites (SNSs), career enhancement tool (CET), generation Y, intentions, structural equation modeling.*

INTRODUCTION

Today's internet communications have taken rapid transitions as a result of three major epochs: the internet portal era, search engine optimization era and social networking era. These transformations have changed the way young adults find jobs, through an ad in the daily newspaper or internet site, to emailing resume in organization websites and to finding the right people in organizations by connecting and interacting with them through SNSs (Kibbe, 2009). The concept of using "social graphs" and "digital mapping" of people to their "real-world social connections" have changed the way people connect, communicate and interact in a "trusted social environment" (Facebook.com, 2010).

These Social Networking Sites (SNSs) have incarcerated many young adults as the research survey of U.S. youth conducted by Pew Internet and American Life Project studied that these sites are used by 41% of children ages between 12-13 years and 61% of children ages between 14-17 years (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). In college students, about 88.5% to 91% of respondents found to use these sites every day among students from several universities in the Midwest (Miller et al., 2010; Wiley & Sisson, 2006). Although young adults find SNSs very magnetizing, it is vital to investigate their attitudes and intentions for using them. Nevertheless, SNSs are crafting a fundamental transformation in the consumer behavior as research states that two-thirds of world internet users have visited these sites in 2010 (Nielsen.com, 2010).

Among U.S. young adults, social networking sites have become part of their daily lives. In the past, studies reported that young adults spend an average of ten to thirty minutes every day and children with eight to eighteen years old spend approximately 6.5 hours per day with media (Ellison, et al., 2007; Roberts et al., 2005). The most popular social networking site Facebook.com stated in their site that it has more than 500 million active users with 50% of these users log on to the site every day. This integrated "social utility" has average user with 130 friends and are connected to 80 community sites or groups, along with one million websites integrated to its platform (Facebook.com). Today there are at least 200 active Social Networking Sites (SNSs) in the web that provide a customized search engine with its multifaceted integrated network.

Social Networks are ranked one out of top ten sectors by share of U.S. Internet time in June 2010, and the top five of these sites as of 2009 are Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, Classmates and LinkedIn (Nielsen.com, 2009). Many young adults may not be aware that, due to this integrated platform as much as 34% of Internet searches of potential job seekers resulted in hiring managers finding some content that has unconstructively influenced a hiring decision (Miller et al., 2010; Prost, 2007). According to the survey conducted by Carrerbuilder.com (2006), it is found that at least one out of ten i.e. 12% of hiring managers used SNSs to screen job candidates and significant 63% did not employ the job candidate based on their profile page. Miller et al., (2010) and Prost (2007) found that around 23% of hiring managers review potential job candidate profiles on SNSs. Many hiring managers would like to see what network and professional groups job candidates belong to and how committed they are to their future career (Sherman, 2008).

Kibbe (2009) stated that hiring managers are "looking to hire the people with personal brand as well as the right person to fit the job position". In the past, researchers found that college students basically use social networking sites for interacting with offline contacts with the intention to keeping in touch with friendships rather than making new friends (Ellison et al., 2007). Another study found that online teens squander significant time "lurking," or reading others' messages without sending a reply (Suziki & Calzo, 2004). Pempek et al., (2009) found that for college students the vital aspects of using SNSs are "friendships, romantic relationships, and ideologies" that play an important role in an adolescent development, and to use these sites for conveying "who they are". While comparing the perceptions of faculty and college students, Roblyer et al., (2010) found that students are more likely to use SNSs and that they are open to use these sites for education purposes such as classroom work.

Generation Y

Consequently, the great bulk of new job seeking college students is Generation Y or also called Millennials or Echo Boomers. Oxford Dictionary defines them as "generation born in the 1980's and 1990's" and covers as much as 76 million here in the U.S. (Trunk, 2007). This generation has people who are in early teenage to early thirty's and are considered as newly existing "today's younger workforce". Ervin (2009) states that Millennials consider their jobs as additional wing to their lives, quite contrary to Generation X and Baby Boomers who consider "you are what you do". This generation is usually perceived as "fast-paced, communication-saturated, friend-rich and changed-filled" with progressively tech-savvy multitude.

Most of these studies found in SNSs have explored the perceptions of college students for using them, but so far there are no studies that focused on what are the attitudes and intentions of college students in using them for their career enhancement tool. Challenger (2009) stated that SNSs enhances the opportunities for job seekers in building their network by connecting and interacting with former colleagues, classmates, fellow alumni and industry professionals. As most organizations are available in SNSs and are seeking potential employees in these sites, there is a lot of potential for college students who are Generation Y to use them as a Career Enhancement Tool (CET).

In one of the survey conducted among Purdue University college students using SNSs, 28% thought that they would make modifications to their profile pages before sharing them with the potential employees (Shea, 2006). While social networking is prevalent among Generation Y but studies in the past have not explored whether students have intentions to use them as a CET. It is suggested that these SNSs could become a valuable tool for students, hiring employers and organizations beyond social connections (Shea, 2006).

Attitudes and Intentions for using SNSs as a Career Enhancement Tool (CET)

Social Learning Theory (SLT) derives human behavior based on the continuous reciprocal interaction among the cognitive, behavioral and environmental influences (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1977) also explains that this behavior is a result of multi-faced factors and in social context, human behavior is learned in terms of interaction and observation of others. A four step method was described to analyze human learning process that takes place in a "reciprocal determinism" with interactive associations among environmental, social and individual factors that influences individual behavior (Bandura, 1977). The technology acceptance model (TAM) is originated from SLT, where individual experiences of new technology significantly impact the attitudes and intentions to use it.
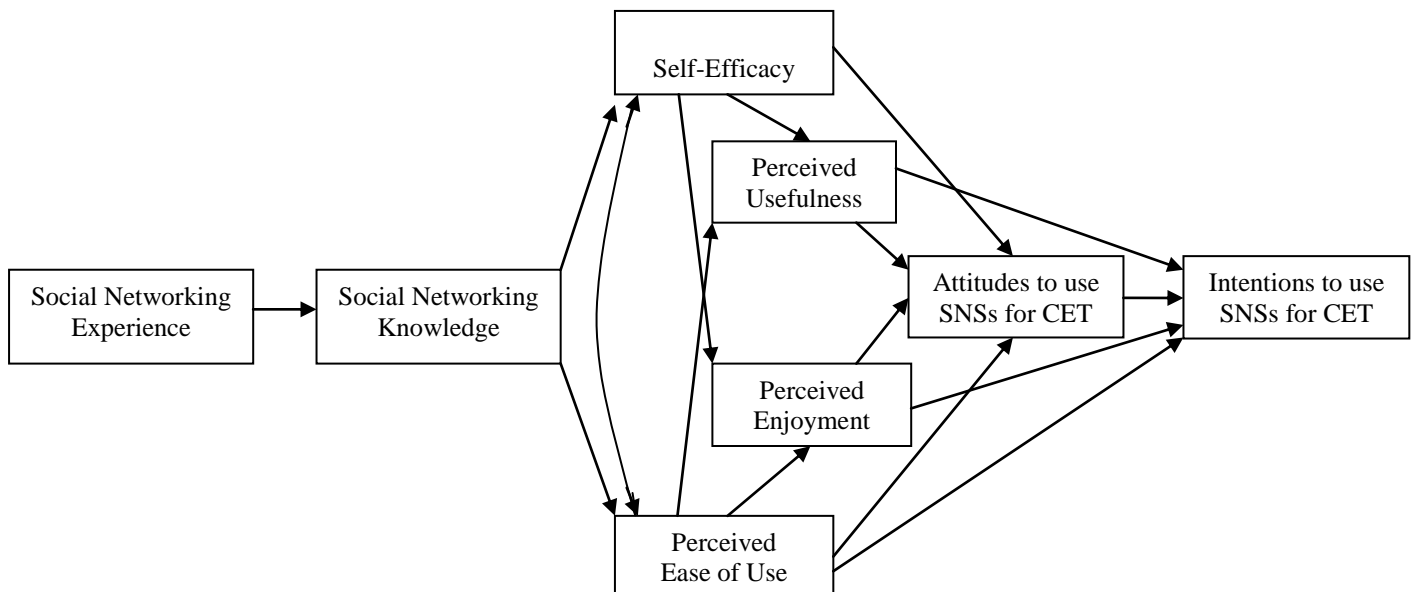

Fig 1: Research Model

Based on Page and Uncles (2004), knowledge in using SNSs may have two aspects of using them similar to that of Internet. The two aspects are what people know about the SNSs and what they can do by using them. Experience is used as a moderating variable in using new technologies in the TAM models (Venkatesh & Davis 2000; Venkatesh et al., 2003). Bandura (1977) explains self-efficacy as the integrated series of action that provide numerous purposes that instigates from cognitive, social and behavioral set of skills from general capability of the individual. Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) play a vital role in individual's expected beliefs in determining the attitudes and intentions of the students to use SNSs as a Career Enhancement Tool (CET). While PU is referred to as "extrinsic motivation" of the individual, Perceived Enjoyment (PE) is the "intrinsic motivation" that is perceived beyond performance consequences of using the technology (Lee et al., 2005).

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) explain that beliefs to use new technologies have significant impact on the attitudes and intentions to use them (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980; Davis 1989; Davis et al. 1989). Based on this research model (Fig 1) this study will investigate the relationships between all the variables to know the attitudes and intentions of Generation Y to use SNSs as a CET. This research is using survey methodology for collecting and analyzing data. The researcher had developed a forty-item instrument quantifying the respondents' attitudes and intentions to use Social Networking Sites (SNSs) as a Career Enhancement Tool (CET). The instrument was developed based on the Social Learning Theory (SLT), Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). The respondents to the survey are the Generation Y (mostly college students) identified in the major mid-western university.

The survey is currently implemented over the internet during Fall 2010. The full paper with the complete results will be available in Spring 2011. The implications of this research will have immense practical learning to all students (especially Generation Y), faculty, universities and organizations. Such knowledge can influence the millions of students among Generation Y in using SNSs as a Career Enhancement Tool (CET).

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