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Babajide Osatuyi

Computer Information Systems & Quantitative Methods College of Business Administration, University of Texas Pan American, Edinburg, TX, United States., osatuyib@utpa.edu

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Babajide Osatuyi

Department of Computer Information Systems & Quantitative Methods

College of Business Administration

University of Texas Pan American

osatuyib@utpa.edu

ABSTRACT

This study reports on a survey that was conducted to investigate the use of social media technologies for seeking information. The objective of this study is to gain an understanding of how best to provide information that is useful to information seekers. Four categories of information were explored: sensitive, sensational, political and casual information, across five social media technologies: social networks, micro-blogging sites, wikis, online forums, and online blogs. The results show that information seekers tend to use social networks, followed by microblogging sites for seeking information more than they do other social media technologies. This paper concludes with implications for practice and future research.

Keywords

Information seeking, social media, information search.

INTRODUCTION

The use of social media technologies such as social networking sites, blogs, and microblogging tools is gaining profound interest in a wide variety of fields. Organizations are continuously implementing social media interventions to maintain competitive edge (Sjöberg, 2010; Wu & Pinsonneault, 2011). Government agencies are exploring ways to utilize social media technologies to better engage with the citizens they cater to (Asuni & Farris, 2011; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2009). Educational institutions are conducting research to understand ways to use social media technologies to enrich student learning as well as engage communication among students (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). A common problem that researchers in the variety of fields mentioned face is the lack of proper understanding of how best to use social media to provide information to the target population. This study seeks to contribute to knowledge in this area, by exploring specific social media technologies that users tend to engage for seeking different types of information.

The term, social media, is a label for digital technologies that allow people to connect, interact, produce and share user-generated content (Lewis, 2010). There exists a plethora of labels for such technologies such as social networking, peer media, new media, digital media, Web 2.0 and Web technologies. Some of the most widely used social media technologies are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace, FourSquare, Flickr, Delicious, Digg, YouTube, Wikipedia, and Wordpress. The above list is by no means exhaustive as more and more tools are developed and made available on the Internet on a daily basis.

There is an emerging nomenclature that is used to define different social media technologies based on their capabilities. So far, social media technologies have been classified as social networks, microblogging sites, wikis, online forums, and online blogs, among others (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Social networks tend to be used to define social media technologies that allow users maintain exclusivity to gaining access to their profiles and generated contents (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Examples of some popular social networks include, Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn. Microblogging sites allow users to create and share short messages with the public or a targeted audience. Wikis are typically websites created to provide educational information. Permissions may be given to users based on their status, to modify content on the website. Online forums are discussion sites where participants hold conversations that are posted to a board. Forums are usually focused on a specific topic, product or event. For example, online retailers such as amazon and eBay, have forums for customers to discuss their experiences. Online blogs are personal journals published on the Internet. Blogs are often created and maintained by an individual or occasionally by a small group with the goal of discussing a specific topic. Traditional media companies are

increasingly keeping blogs to continue interaction with customers that subscribe to their publications (Chung, Kim, Trammell, & Porter, 2007).

Social media technologies appeal to a great variety of people due to the ubiquity associated with its reach and use. Mobile telecommunications network technology and personal document assistants equipped with Internet capabilities have provided the opportunity to use social media technologies to stay connected to others anywhere and anytime (Lewis, 2010). Similar to face-to-face interactions, social media allow users to build on existing relationships, connect with old and new friends, and gather information and community knowledge (Lewis, 2010). The use of social media platforms for information seeking is becoming a common practice. However, it is interesting that different social media platform support specifically different ways of presenting information shared by users. For instance, microblogging tools such as Twitter, allows for only a short burst of information at a time, whereas, social networks, such as Facebook permits the sharing of lengthy articles.

In order to understand how to effectively utilize the affordances provided by social media for individuals and organizations, there is need to identify how users interact with different social media technologies. This study attempts to address this issue by providing groundwork to building information seeking models that can be utilized for strategic communication and decision-making.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The next section presents related studies that have been conducted to explore the use of social media technologies for information seeking. The research design and procedure are then briefly described. The paper concludes with the discussion of the results and their implications to practice and research.

BACKGROUND

Social media is becoming the new "go-to" source of information rather than the traditional media sources, such as television, newspaper, and radio. The use of social media for seeking information is becoming a common practice across several domains. Governments are aggressive to finding ways to engage their citizens via social media technologies. The recent 2011 presidential elections in Nigeria was tracked and communicated via social networking and microblogging sites (Asuni & Farris, 2011). Citizens' responses to this initiative were positive, as it provided true transparency for the first time, to the election process. For instance, cases were reported of citizens sharing their experiences at the polling stations, which triggered interventions from law enforcement agencies to curb attempts to conduct any form of malpractice.

Emergency response agencies use microblogging sites to seek and convey updates on developments to the response progress after a catastrophic event (Qu, Huang, Zhang, & Zhang, 2011; Starbird & Palen, 2012). Social networking sites have also been used to solicit support for affected victims during disasters (Vieweg, Hughes, Starbird, & Palen, 2010). In addition to providing status updates and soliciting support, social networks have also been utilized as a means of publicizing the picture, names and addresses of missing persons so that relatives, friends or anyone that finds them can easily help with reuniting them to their loved ones.

Individuals turn to their social networks to seek status updates of their friends as well as share information about their experiences as they go through each day to maintain a sense of connection as well as build social capital (Erickson, 2011). Social media usage among high school and college students is becoming prevalent in recent times. A recent survey released in February 2012 by ebrary[1], shows that 41.3% of students use social media for research purposes. This study also reported students' use of social media for sharing sporadic information about their favorite shows, movies as well their opinions on matters that their peers considered important and relevant at the time of discussion.

These examples show that social media tools have the potential to create opportunities for organizations to reach their target population, in ways that are seemingly ubiquitous and casual, as opposed to structured outlets such as pamphlets, billboards and media advertisements. Although there is a significant increase in the adoption and use of social media across different domains, there is a conscious perception that it is effectively underutilized due to the vast amount of potential it affords (Mergel, 2010). Vance et al. (2009) report that social media is not as rapidly adapted in the public health domain as it is in the music and film industries. One of the reasons offered for this behavior is that people typically prefer not to communicate their health issues on platforms that will expose their private matters to the public. Other studies that have explored the use of

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[1] The ebrary survey was conducted in September and October of 2011, and had 6,329 participants. Nearly 70% of respondents were from the US or Canada. The student level from freshman to doctoral was nearly identical with approximately 70% undergraduate, almost evenly split among 1st through 4th years. Accessed on February 29, 2012 < http://www.marketingcharts.com/print/4-in-10-students-use-social-media-for-study-purposes-21275/ebrary-social-media-use-by-students-feb-2012jpg/>

social media in government also report that political information is carefully crafted before presented to the general public in order not to misinform citizens (Mergel, 2010).

Social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) proposed that attitudes and behaviors are partially determined by the type of information embedded in the social context. The information types suggested by the studies presented so far relate to political (e.g., presidential election), sensitive (e.g., health issues), casual (e.g., social events) and sensational information (e.g., a release of a new song by a favorite artist) that are commonly discussed on social media platforms. Social influence processes may affect how individuals interact with social media tools based on the information that is of interest to the individual (Fulk, Steinfield, Schmitz, & Power, 1987). For instance, people will generally feel more comfortable discussing *sensitive* information with other people they consider friends, compared to *casual* information that may be directed to the public.

The study described in this paper seeks to understand how the characteristics of the information provided on social media sites attract users to the content of the information. The characteristics explored include, *link to other sources*, t*opic*, *embedded video or audio,* and *familiarity with the information provider*. These characteristics emerged from a debriefing session after an experiment conducted to understand how users exchange information on computer mediated technologies (Osatuyi, Hiltz, & Fjermestad, 2012).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology described in this study is in the domain of exploratory research. The objective of exploratory research is to gather preliminary information that will help define problems and suggest hypotheses to be tested in the following studies (Babbie, 1989; Shields & Hassan, 2006). The research described in this study uses a survey instrument to gather user perceptions toward the use of social media sites for seeking different kinds of information. This study is thus exploratory as it builds on prior research to investigate the types of information that people tend to look for on social media sites.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument used for this study was pretested by 4 faculty members and 4 graduate students in the Information Systems department at a northeastern technical university. Suggested modifications were incorporated and a second pretest confirmed understandability of the questions and instructions provided to complete the survey before it was made available to participants.

Data Analysis

SAS version 9.2 was used to conduct all the analyses in this study. Response frequencies were conducted, followed by a series of exploratory analysis to explore variations in users' preferences for different social media technologies for seeking information. A paired t-test was conducted for the exploratory analysis. Tests were considered significant if $p < 0.05$.

Data for this study was collected via an online survey. There were a total of 122 participants that started the survey, but only 109, out of the 114 that completed the survey, answered all the questions on the survey. The response frequencies presented are the raw values from the participants that completed the survey. The paired t-test analysis was conducted based on the data from the participants that completely answered all the questions on the survey. Paired t-test was employed for examining individual preferential differences in the usage of social media sites for seeking different information types. This test is appropriate as it tests the null hypothesis that the difference between two responses measured on the same statistical unit has a mean value of zero (David & Gunnink, 1997).

Participants

Participants were college students in classes ranging from freshman to senior levels. 79.8% of the participants were males, and 20.2% were females. This is indicative of the population of most engineering universities such as the one in which this study was conducted.

RESULTS

The analysis begins by examining the key features that information seekers consider to be the most important when looking for information on social media sites. Next, the response frequencies of each question on the survey are presented followed

by a paired t-test to compare the preferences for seeking the different types of information. The result in Table 1 shows that the most important characteristic that attracts users to information presented on social media sites is the topic of discussion. This behavior is consistent across all the social media sites (shown in bold).

Question 1: What do you consider to be an important characteristic of the information you seek on the following social media sites?

Percentage (Frequency)	Information Characteristics				
	Link to other sources	Topic	Embedded Video/Audio	Familiarity with post creator	Response Count
Social Networks	54.8% (63)	**66.1% (76)**	63.5% (73)	61.7% (71)	115
Microblogging site	58.7% (64)	**63.3% (69)**	22.0% (24)	49.5% (54)	109
Wikis	70.4% (81)	**85.2% (98)**	17.4% (20)	13.0% (15)	115
Forums	57.1% (64)	**85.7% (96)**	28.6% (32)	24.1% (27)	112
Blogs	51.8% (57)	**84.5% (93)**	34.5% (38)	40.9% (45)	110

Table 1. Response Frequencies for Information Seeking on Social Media Sites

Table 2 below shows the paired t-test result of users' preference between social media sites for seeking information. The column labeled 1 shows that the difference between the preferences for seeking information on social networks is significantly different (preferred), from microblogging, wikis, forums and blogs. However, the other social media sites, as shown in columns 2, 3 and 4, are not significantly different from one another with respect to users' preference to use them to seek information. This result suggests that people tend to look for information on social networks compared to other social media sites.

t-value, *p* (Mean, SD)	1	2	3	4	5
1 - Social Networks	-				
2 – Microblogging site	**5.85, <0.0001 (2.87, 5.24)**	-			
3 – Wikis	**4.16, <0.0001 (2.00, 5.14)**	-1.78, 0.777 (-0.87, 5.21)	-		
4 – Forums	**4.49, <0.0001 (2.10, 4.99)**	-1.53, 0.1293 (-0.77, 5.39)	0.22, 0.8230 (0.10, 4.60)	-	
5 - Blogs	**3.96, 0.0001 (2.03, 5.47)**	-1.59, 0.1148 (-0.84, 5.51)	0.05, 0.9570 (0.026, 5.20)	-0.18, 0.8611 (-0.07, 4.27)	-

Table 2. Paired t-test Results for Information Seeking

The next four questions (Questions 2-5) compare the likelihood rankings of users to seek personal, sensational, political and casual information across five social media sites: social networks, microblogging sites, wikis, forums, and blog using a 7-point Likert scale where 1 is "very unlikely" and 7 is "very likely."

Table 3 below, shows the response frequencies for participants' preferred social media site for seeking personal or sensitive information. The result shows that social networks (M=5.24, SD=2.00) are ranked as the most likely social media site used for seeking personal (or sensitive) information. Majority of the participants indicate that microblogging sites, wikis, forums and blogs are very unlikely social media sites that are consulted for making enquiries about personal issues.

This is an interesting result, since it opens up a new viewpoint that seems contradictory to the privacy norm, which stipulates that private things are better kept private (Johnson, 1992). Social networks and microblogging sites can be likened to high traffic, less private platforms, while wikis, forums, and blogs can be considered somewhat private, since they are only usually visible to an exclusive set of individuals that share a particular need or interest. Based on the behavioral norm, it is expected that people will prefer to look for personal information on sites with low, exclusive, and secured traffic. However, the results in Table 3 show that people tend to look at those high traffic sites for sensitive information. This gives a whole new meaning to social networks, which can be valuable for organizations such as healthcare and judiciary institutions. Social networks tend

to be an avenue for people to view their friends' past experiences that may relate to a current situation they are experiencing, thereby leading to an opportunity to connect or re-connect to seek advice on how to handle the situation.

Question 2: What medium are you most likely to use to seek personal or sensitive information (e.g., health, relationship, family) on the following social media sites:

Percentage (Frequency)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Response Count
Social Networks M=5.24, SD=2.00	8.8% (10)	4.4% (5)	7.0% (8)	3.5% (4)	19.3% (22)	19.3 (22)	**37.7%** **(43)**	100% 114
Microblogging site M=3.88, SD=2.32	**23.9%** **(27)**	10.6% (12)	13.3% (15)	4.4% (5)	13.3% (15)	16.8% (19)	17.7% (20)	100% 113
Wikis M=3.29, SD=2.22	**34.2%** **(39)**	12.3% (14)	9.6% (11)	7.9% (9)	14.0% (16)	10.5% (12)	11.4% (13)	100% 114
Forums M=3.31, SD=2.13	**30.1%** **(34)**	14.2% (16)	8.0% (9)	13.3% (15)	12.4% (14)	14.2% (16)	8.0% (9)	100% 113
Blogs M=3.24, SD=2.10	**31.9%** **(36)**	12.4% (14)	9.7% (11)	12.4% (14)	12.4% (14)	15.0% (17)	6.2% (7)	100% (113)

Table 3. Response Frequencies for Seeking Personal (Sensitive) Information on Social Media Sites

Table 4 below shows the paired t-test result of users' preference between social media sites for seeking personal or sensitive information. The test results in columns labeled 1 and 2 show that there is a significant preference for seeking personal information on social networks and microblogging sites compared with the other social media sites, i.e., wikis, forums and blogs. This result suggests that people tend to look for sensitive information in places where they are more familiar, and possibly comfortable with the audience, compared to other sites where the information content is the sole reason for a connection. The results show that there is no significant difference between the use of online wikis, online forums and online blogs for seeking personal information.

t-value, p (Mean, SD)	1	2	3	4	5
1 - Social Networks	-				
2 – Microblogging site	**7.03, <0.0001** **(1.37, 2.08)**	-			
3 – Wikis	**7.74, <0.0001** **(1.97, 2.70)**	**2.40, 0.0181** **(0.59, 2.62)**	-		
4 – Forums	**7.69, <0.0001** **(1.94, 2.69)**	**2.53, 0.0128** **(0.57, 2.77)**	-0.11, 0.9093 (-0.02, 1.64)	-	
5 – Blogs	**8.35, 0.0001** **(2.01, 2.57)**	**3.02, 0.0032** **(0.64, 2.27)**	0.29, 0.7711 (0.05, 1.93)	0.55, 5.867 (0.07, 1.37)	-

Table 4: Paired t-test Results: Seeking Personal (Sensitive) Information

Table 5, shows the response frequencies for participants' preferred social media site for seeking sensational information such as rapidly breaking news, celebrity gossips and academy awards. The result shows that participants generally tend to consult all five social media sites for sensational information. Notably, social networks (M=5.89, SD=1.64) and microblogging sites (M=5.26, SD=2.13) were respectively ranked as the top two most preferred sites to use for seeking sensational information. We explore this further by comparing how each social media technology is used for seeking sensational information.

Question 3: What medium are you most likely to use to seek sensational information (e.g., rapidly breaking news, sports, celebrity gossips, fashion) on the following social media sites:

Percentage (Frequency)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Response Count
Social Networks M=5.89, SD=1.64	3.5% (4)	1.8% (2)	1.8% (2)	1.8% (2)	15.9% (18)	25.7% (29)	**49.6% (56)**	100% 113
Microblogging site M=5.26, SD=2.13	11.6% (13)	2.7% (3)	1.8% (2)	3.6% (4)	15.2% (17)	27.7% (31)	**37.5% (42)**	100% 112
Wikis M=3.99, SD=2.13	17.7% (20)	11.5% (13)	10.6% (12)	12.4% (14)	13.3% (15)	**22.1% (25)**	12.4% (14)	100% 113
Forums M=4.55, SD=2.07	12.5% (14)	6.3% (7)	6.3% (7)	8.9% (10)	**25.0% (28)**	23.2% (26)	17.9% (20)	100% 113
Blogs M=4.48, SD=2.15	13.4% (15)	8.9% (10)	6.3% (7)	8.0% (9)	19.6% (22)	**25.0% (28)**	18.8% (21)	100% (112)

Table 5. Response Frequencies for Seeking Sensational Information on Social Media Sites

Table 6 below shows the paired t-test result of users' preference between social media sites for seeking sensational information. The test results in columns labeled 1, 2 and 3 show that there is a significant preference for seeking sensational information on social networks, microblogging sites and wikis compared to forums and blogs. The negative t-value for the comparison between microblogging sites and wikis (t=-4.03, *p*=0.0001) means that participants preferred to use wikis to microblogging sites for seeking sensational information. Similarly, there is a negative t-value for the comparison test between wikis and forums (t=-2.85, *p*=0.0052) and between wikis and blogs (t=-2.26, *p*=0.0255).

For the comparison between wikis and forums, the negative t-value shows that people tend to prefer forums compared to wikis for seeking sensational information, while for the comparison between wikis and blogs, the negative t-value shows that people tend to prefer seeking sensational information on blogs compared to wikis. These results confirm the commonly perceived use for wikis; which is primarily used for seeking "static" kind of information. Sensational information is by nature, dynamic and as such not expected to be found on wikis.

t-value, p (Mean, SD)	1	2	3	4	5
1 - Social Networks	-				
2 – Microblogging site	**4.03, <0.0001 (0.63, 1.67)**	-			
3 – Wikis	**7.95, <0.0001 (1.90, 2.56)**	**-4.03, 0.0001 (-0.63, 1.67)**	-		
4 – Forums	**6.43, <0.0001 (1.34, 2.23)**	**4.70, <0.0001 (1.27, 2.89)**	**-2.85, 0.0052 (-0.56, 2.10)**	-	
5 – Blogs	**6.08, <0.0001 (1.41, 2.48)**	**3.23, 0.0016 (0.71, 2.35)**	**-2.26, 0.0255 (-0.49, 2.32)**	0.44, 0.6626 (0.07, 1.71)	-

Table 6: Paired t-test Results: Seeking Sensational Information

Table 7, shows the response frequencies for participants' preferred social media site for seeking political information such as the death of Gadhafi and US presidential election. On the average, the result in Table 4 shows that participants were likely to seek political information on all five social media sites considering that the mean ranking for each site was greater than the mid-point value, i.e., 4.0. Participants ranked social networks (M=5.06, SD=2.08) as the most preferred social media site for seeking political information, followed by wikis (M=4.73, SD=2.13), forums (M=4.35, SD=2.13), microblogging (M=4.51, SD=2.29), and then blogs (M=4.42, SD=2.25).

This result suggests that people tend to search more than one information source when looking for information about a "burning" issue that is of interest to a great population of people. It can also be inferred that people go to various information sources to gather several pieces of information while validating the information sought from other social media sites. For

instance, it is not uncommon for microblogging sites to be used as a means of directing traffic to a social network site, or a blog of particular interest.

Question 4: What medium are you most likely to use to seek political information (e.g., death of Gadhafi, US 2012 presidential election) on the following social media sites:

Percentage (Frequency)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Response Count
Social Networks M=5.06, SD=2.08	8.8% (10)	5.3% (6)	8.8% (10)	3.5% (4)	21.2% (24)	16.8% (19)	**35.4% (40)**	100% 113
Microblogging site M=4.51, SD=2.29	17.9% (20)	5.4% (6)	8.0% (9)	5.4% (6)	16.1% (18)	**24.1% (27)**	23.2% (26)	100% 112
Wikis M=4.73, SD=2.13	12.4% (14)	7.1% (8)	6.2% (7)	8.0% (9)	19.5% (22)	21.2% (24)	**25.7% (29)**	100% 113
Forums M=4.35, SD=2.13	17.0% (19)	4.5% (5)	7.1% (8)	10.7% (12)	21.4% (24)	**25.0% (28)**	14.3% (16)	100% 112
Blogs M=4.42, SD=2.25	18.8% (21)	5.4% (6)	6.3% (7)	3.6% (4)	**24.1% (27)**	21.4% (24)	20.5% (23)	100% (112)

Table 7. Response Frequencies for Seeking Political Information on Social Media Sites

Table 8 below shows the paired t-test result of users' preference between social media sites for seeking political information. The test results in columns labeled 1 shows that there is a significant preference for seeking political information on social networks compared to microblogging sites, forums and blogs, but not for wikis. One characteristic that is common to social networks, microblogging sites, forums, and blogs, is that the kinds of information discussed on these sites are "dynamic." Wikis on the other hand, are used to compile "static" information that tends to be consistent over time such as history, politics, and documentaries among others. However, political conversations can be dynamic or static to the extent that it is useful to steer the audience in the direction desired by the discussants. As such, the preference for seeking political information on social networks compared to other "dynamic" sites is to foster arguments on varying political views.

The results also show a significant preference for seeking political information on wikis compared to forums, as shown in column 3 in Table 8. This result confirms the distinctive preference for seeking political information on dynamic to static information sources discussed above.

t-value, p (Mean, SD)	1	2	3	4	5
1 - Social Networks	-				
2 – Microblogging site	**3.18, 0.0019 (0.55, 1.86)**	-			
3 – Wikis	1.43, 0.1565 (0.33, 2.49)	-0.87, 0.3835 (-0.22, 2.68)	-		
4 – Forums	**3.01, 0.0033 (0.71, 2.52)**	0.77, 0.4444 (0.16, 2.20)	**1.92, 0.0568 (0.38, 2.09)**	-	
5 – Blogs	**2.48, 0.0145 (0.64, 2.75)**	0.43, 0.6689 (0.09, 2.18)	1.40, 0.1638 (0.31, 2.34)	-0.49, 0.6219 (-0.07, 1.52)	-

Table 8: Paired t-test Results: Seeking Political Information

Table 9, shows the response frequencies for participants' preferred social media site for seeking casual information such as fun hangout locations and great restaurants. Generally, the result shows that participants are likely to seek casual information on all five social media sites. Social networks (M=5.84, SD=1.55) were ranked as the most likely social media site for participants to look for casual information, followed by microblogging sites, forums, blogs and wikis. This result follows the expectation of the social behavioral norm (Johnson, 1992) that casual, and possibly informal information tend to be discussed with less privacy concern for people with access to the discussion content.

Question 5: What medium are you most likely to use to seek casual information (e.g., interesting quote from a book or TV show, fun hangout location) on the following social media sites:

Percentage (Frequency)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Response Count
Social Networks M=5.84, SD=1.55	1.8% (2)	1.8% (2)	2.7% (3)	5.3% (6)	16.8% (19)	25.7% (29)	**46.0% (52)**	100% 113
Microblogging site M=5.03, SD=2.26	12.5% (14)	5.4% (6)	5.4% (6)	4.5% (5)	14.3% (16)	19.6% (22)	**38.4% (43)**	100% 112
Wikis M=4.48, SD=2.06	11.4% (13)	9.6% (11)	11.4% (13)	8.8% (10)	**21.1% (24)**	16.7% (19)	**21.1% (24)**	100% 114
Forums M=4.74, SD=2.04	10.6% (12)	7.1% (8)	7.1% (8)	8.0% (9)	19.5% (22)	**27.4% (31)**	20.4% (23)	100% 113
Blogs M=4.53, SD=2.17	14.3% (16)	7.1% (8)	5.4% (6)	8.0% (9)	**25.0% (28)**	17.9% (20)	22.3% (25)	100% (112)

Table 9. Response Frequencies for Seeking Casual Information on Social Media Sites

Table 10 below shows the paired t-test result of users' preference between social media sites for seeking casual information. The test results in columns labeled 1 shows that there is a significant preference for seeking sensational information on social networks compared to microblogging sites, wikis, forums and blogs. Column 2 also shows there is a significant preference for seeking casual information on microblogging sites compared to wikis and blogs, but not for forums. The results in columns 3 and 4 show that there is no significant difference in the preference for seeking casual information on wikis, forums or blogs.

These results suggests that social media sites that are designed to foster connection by familiarity such as social networks and microblogging sites are more prone to discussing casual (or informal) information compared to blogs, wikis and forums where the tone of discussion is somewhat formal.

t-value, p (Mean, SD)	1	2	3	4	5
1 - Social Networks	-				
2 – Microblogging site	**4.68, <0.0001 (0.82, 1.86)**	-			
3 – Wikis	**5.74, <0.0001 (1.36, 2.53)**	**1.98, 0.0502 (0.54, 2.93)**	-		
4 – Forums	**4.79, <0.0001 (1.11, 2.47)**	1.29, 0.2000 (0.29, 2.39)	-1.36, 0.1760 (-0.25, 1.99)	-	
5 – Blogs	**5.44, <0.0001 (1.32, 2.58)**	**2.06, 0.0416 (0.50, 2.59)**	-0.21, 0.8373 (-0.47, 2.27)	1.31, 0.1930 (0.21, 1.72)	-

Table 10: Paired t-test Results - Seeking Casual Information

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the use of social media technologies for information seeking, with the aim of gaining an understanding of how best to provide information that is useful to information seekers. The findings from this study reveal that information seekers tend to use social networks, followed by microblogging sites for seeking information more than they do other social media technologies. The preference shown towards online social networks by information seekers might result from the fact that online social networks are generally used more frequently compared to other types of social media technologies.

In addition to the speed of spreading information on microblogging sites such as Twitter, there is a multifaceted approach that social media technology users employ to share information. Multiple social media technologies are commonly used to convey the same information to provide validation and completeness about the information shared. For instance, it is commonplace for users to use tweets to provide a link to videos uploaded on YouTube, pictures on Facebook, and more detailed information available on forums or blogs.

The results of this study show that social networks and microblogging sites are mostly consulted compared to other social media technologies for seeking information. This result does not imply that other social media technologies are invaluable; rather it provides a strategic insight on how to leverage social networks and microblogging sites to create awareness to information shared on other social media technologies. For instance, personal medical information or experience shared among focus groups on forums and blogs are not usually readily visible, unless when searched with complex keyword search. However, access and traffic to those "hidden" forums and blogs can increase when their links are provided on social networks and microblogging sites. Organizations can become more visible to the public by advertising services they provide on social networks to draw attention to their business.

Future research directions will include the exploration of triggers from one social media site to the other, and the frequency of such occurrences. Understanding why and under what conditions people go from one social media site to the other can be invaluable to building information seeking models that can become predictive models for modeling diffusion of different kinds of information during computer mediated communication.

Limitations

The author reckons that the results of exploratory research are not usually generalizable to the population at large. However, the results provide significant insight into how information seekers interact with different types social media technologies, which could lead to the formulation of theories to model information seeking on social media. Another limitation to this study is that it was conducted in an environment with unbalanced gender differences, in favor of men. However, women studies have been shown to constitute an important part of the users of social media technologies and the behavior of information search may be gender-specific.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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