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ABSTRACT

Social media has become one of the major channels that people utilize to connect with others and the rest of the world. This study used a large scaled survey to gather data from people that are using social media to investigate the benefits and concerns that end users have with regard to using social media. The results show that the most signification benefits survey participants perceive of using social media is to improve communication with other people. At the same time, most of people also believe social media is a good marketing tool and can help collaborate with others. As to concerns of using social media at work / school, many participants agree that there are additional barriers to using social media at work / school, relating to the extra security, privacy and legal concerns.

Keywords

Social Media, Users, Social Media Benefits, Social Media Concerns, Users Perspective.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, usage of social media has increased dramatically. Nowadays, people check what is happening in society, community, work, social groups, family and friends through social media. Over the last two decades, we have undergone a rapid evolution of how individuals access information, from in-person conversations and mailed letters, telephone calls and reading the daily newspaper, to the more recent habits of checking e-mail and websites, to now, when millions of people check on social media to get connected with the world around them, many connected to several social media sites from the time they wake in the morning until when they go to sleep. Social media may have started with the simple notion of casually connecting friends and relatives, but from those origins, they have become complex, an overlapping nexus involving every sort of human activity imaginable (Xu, 2015). Social media are changing the way people communicate, collaborate, consume, and create (Aral, Dellarocas, & Godes, 2013). The Internet, and mobile technology's development and improvement have also helped to bring about easy access to social media from anywhere and anytime. Through its focus on building relationships and fostering interaction, social media can serve as a channel to help users and consumers overcome their reluctance (Chaney, 2013) to services and/or products offered in that medium. Users of social media often seek information from trusted sites and other trusted people. Social media has observed a phenomenal growth in user participation through reactive interfaces, low barrier to publication, and zero operational costs (Agarwal & Yiliyasi, 2010).

There are numerous benefits to social media usage. Social networking sites (SNS) can help in carrying out many tasks. They can help improve communication with other people inside of an organization, and with people outside of an organization. Social media have been used as effective marketing tools. Social media can also aid collaboration (sharing knowledge, views) with others. There are some general benefits of using social media, as there are also some specific benefits for particular industry and different type of users. For example, a recent study in healthcare identified six key benefits of use social media for health communication, and they are: increased interaction with others, more available, shared and tailored information, increased accessibility and widening access to health information, peer/social/emotional support, public health surveillance, and potential to influence health policy (Moorhead SA, 2013) .

On the other hand, there are also many limitations and barriers related to using social media. They include security issues, privacy, legal issues, and confidentiality. For example, using an SNS at work / school can impact on the security of important data (i.e. , user details, other confidential information); it can interfere in the privacy of both the user and the organization. Originations may face legal consequences for activities carried out by students / employees on social networking sites (e. g. , posting comments, videos, pictures on Facebook or Twitter).

There are different types of social media, such as blogs, microblogs, social networks, social shopping sites, in addition to other Web 2.0 sites, such as YouTube and Flickr. The following is a list of the types of social media and examples of each (Liang & Turban, 2012):

-      Blogs, wikis, microblogs (Twitter, Plurk)
-      Social networking sites (Facebook, LinkedIn)
-      Presentation sites (YouTube, Flickr)
-      Social shopping Web sites (Kactoos)
-      Group buying Web sites (Groupon)

THE SURVEY

This study used a large scaled survey to collect data. People that have had experience in using any type of social media is the population of the study. The link of the survey questionnaire was distributed through different social media networks by open invitations. The participants were also encouraged to post the survey link at their own social media network. Control variables such as: age, gender, and occupation are used in order to distinguish different respondent groups and test whether there are any differences of the responses among different groups.

The first section of the survey questionnaire explained the purpose of the study and ensure the confidentiality of the response. The development of the survey instruments was based on the literature review of academic and practical articles in the related fields. Where possible, constructs that have been empirically tested as valid were adapted for this study. However, for the social media related constructs, due to the novelty of the research area, many of those are still in the developmental stage, or exist just as theory, or only come from a practical perspective, and do not have well-grounded theory paired with empirical validation. Therefore, in order to develop the constructs related to social media, the study used two different approaches, for the constructs that exist not exclusively in social media, the study 'borrowed' well-tested constructs for those components from related research areas. For the constructs that are unique to social media, the most recent academic studies, and practical insights from the social media field were used to help build the constructs of the survey questionnaire.

THE RESULTS

The preliminary results of the current research project is discussed in this section. There are in total 141 survey were completed, some of them have some missing data for some of the survey items. The participants are 57% female, and 43% male. For the age distribution, 5% under 20, 30% age of 21-30, 18% of age 31-40, 19% of age 41-50, and 29% over 50 year of age.

The purposes of using social media

What do people use social media for? In order to find out what are the major purposes for users to use Social media, we asked the survey participants to select all the purposes why you use social media. The following table shows the results from the survey.

Purposes of using social media	%
Business / School / Academic	54%
Lifestyle	43%
Leisure time	72%
Networking	68%
Personal	73%

Table 1: The purposes of using social media

Please note that the participants were asked to selected all that apply for this questions, one person could selected one to five of the options given, therefore, this question's total percentage is more than 100%. Four out of five purposes have more than 50% of people selected them, they are 'business/ school / academic', 'Leisure time', 'networking' and 'personal', which the highest percentage of 73% for 'personal' purposes. The only purpose have less than 50% is 'lifestyle', which is 43%, but still very close to 50%. It is interesting to note that participants use social media for personal, leisure time and networking more than for business / school.

Types of Social Media

There are many different types of social media, some are used more than others. The survey looked at what types of social media the participants use. Similar to questions ask for purposes of the social media usage. We instructed the participants to select all types that they use.

Which of the following social media do you use? Please select all that apply	%
Blogs, wikis, microblogs (Twitter, Plurk)	51%
Social networking sites (Facebook, LinkedIn)	97%
Presentation sites (YouTube, Flickr)	66%
Social shopping Web sites (Kactoos)	4%
Group buying Web sites (Groupon)	36%
Other (please specify)	13%

Table 2: Type of social media the participants use

Almost all the survey participants (97%) use social networking site such as Facebook and LinkedIn. This is not surprising as social networking sites are one of the most popular type of social media. In fact, when people mention social media, they mostly thinking about social networking sites rather than other types of social media. Presentation sites such as YouTube and Flickr is also a popular type of social media, with 66%.

Social Media Benefits

There are many reasons people use social media, one main reasons is that users' perceive that there are various benefits. This research looked into a few major benefits of social media as identified by previous literature.

Social media benefits	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total Responses	Mean
Social media is really useful	5	4	20	57	36	122	3.94
Social media can improve communication with other people	4	4	16	57	40	121	4.03
Social media is a good marketing tool	5	10	26	45	36	122	3.8
Collaboration (sharing knowledge, views) with others can be improved by using social media	6	9	17	60	28	120	3.79

Table 3: Benefits of social media

As you can see from the survey results, users rated all the listed social media benefits as high (mean above 3) to very high (mean above 4). The most significant social media benefits is that social media can improve communication with other people, with a mean of 4.03 on a 5 point Likert scale. For the overall benefit, majority of respondents agree or strongly agree that social media is really useful (mean 3.94).

The Barriers of Using Social Media at Work / School

With many benefits that social media might bring, it also came with some limitations and barriers. Especially while using social media at work / school, using company / school accounts and network, which are governed by stricter rules and organization guidelines. Table 4 shows the results of user's perceptions of certain barriers of using social media at the participants' work or school.

Barriers	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total Responses	Mean
Using social media at work / school can impact the security of important data (i.e. user details, other confidential information)	6	7	34	58	17	122	3.6
Using social media at work / school can interfere in the privacy of both the user and the organization	6	6	24	63	23	122	3.75
Organization may face legal consequences for activities carried out by students/ employees on social networking sites(e.g. posting comments, videos, pictures on Faceboook, Twitter ...)	6	10	30	55	21	122	3.61
Users should be extra careful while using social media at work / school	3	2	13	53	51	122	4.2
It is safe to use social media at work / school	7	20	42	49	4	122	3.19

Table 4: The barriers of using social media at work / school

The most noticeable result from the survey regarding the barriers is that the overwhelming majority of the participants think 'users should be extra careful while using social media at work / school,' which is very significant and has the mean of 4.2 on a 5 Likert scale. Most people agree that using social media at work / school would cause additional confidentiality, security, privacy, and legal concerns. However, at the same time, most of people also think it is safe to use social media at work / school (mean 3.19).

CONCLUSIONS

Social media has become one of the major channels that people use to connect with others and the rest of the world. Many people using social media for both personal and business purposes. This study used a large scaled survey to gather data from people that are using social media to investigate the benefits and concerns that end users have with regard using social media. The concerns are particularly related to the barriers of using social media at work / school. The results show that the most signification benefits survey participants perceive in using social media are to improve communication with other people. At the same time, most people also believe social media can be good marketing tools and can help collaborate with others. As to concerns of using social media at work / school, many participants agree that there are additional barriers to using social media at work / school, in regarding to the extra security, privacy and legal concerns. Use of social media has become part of many people's daily life, therefore, this study of the benefit and concerns of using social media, can help both users and organizations better understand what is important for end users, and become more aware of certain issues.

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