Building Digital Relationships through Social Networking Applications

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ABSTRACT

Gone were the days when only trading was done on internet. The mirage advantages offered by internet has given space to people around the world to stay connected across the boundaries anywhere in no time. More and more people are showing eagerness in connecting themselves socially not only with their friends but with the people whom they even don’t know. One such medium is social networking sites. With increasing interest of people in these networking sites, companies are developing and coming up with special applications that cater these networking sites only, through which people can do anything from chatting with their friends, playing games, searching from new job opportunities, sharing photographs, connecting to the blogs, making groups, popularising their brands, even if individual is on the move. A whole new world of digital relationships is created for the individual once they enter into this social networking sites. This paper highlights the increasing attention of different sections of society to these social active networking sites and shows the growing fondness towards different applications offered according to the interest.

Keywords
Internet, Friends, Chatting, Digital Relationship, Social networking

I. INTRODUCTION

“Networking is not about hunting. It is about farming. It is about cultivating relationships”
- Dr. Ivan Misner

The “social networking” term defines a place that gives space to individuals to build a relationship that necessarily does not exists in the real life but exists digitally. In other words, a social networking allows individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile. It builds a nomenclature of connections, so it refers to all those activities that are carried within specific online services which allows to create network of people. Social networking helps people connect with those who share common interests. When people find other like oneself it starts bonding with that person. The idea of social networks has been studied by sociologists for decades as they analyze the ties between people in families, organizations and even in towns or countries. According to Wikipedia: "Research in a number of academic fields has shown that social networks operate on many levels, from families up to the level of nations, and play a critical role in determining the way problems are solved, organizations are run, and the degree to which individuals succeed in achieving their goals.”[1]

So making such degree of relations and achieving goals, social network sites are being made that not only allows individuals to meet strangers, but rather enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks. This can result in connections between individuals that would not otherwise be made, but that is often not the goal, and these meetings are frequently between “latent ties” (Haythornthwaite, 2005) who share some offline connection. On many of the large SNSs, participants are not necessarily “networking” or looking to meet new people; instead, they are primarily communicating with people who are already a part of their extended social network.[2][3]

II. THE COMMUNICATION RESOURCES USED

Communicating over the social network sites helps the individuals in start making digital relationships. The process is simple; the user creates a profile for them, by inserting their personal details. The user data includes all the personal information beginning from interests, hobbies, background whether personal or professional and so on. Thus in return, user data is spontaneously available to all those who are connected over the network. The main strength of social networking lies in the way how these networking sites provide different ways of communication. Some of the broadly defined communication resources that are used to build relationships are as follows:

- Chatting which could be video or voice chatting;
- Messaging which includes email sending, instant messaging;
- File sharing which provides photos uploading, document sharing;
- Blogs;
- Discussion groups.
Once the user enters into the world of this social networking, making digital relationships becomes easy for them. As these sites give every niche to the user to connect to not only to the dear and near ones but it gives a platform in which they start connecting with the individuals who are unknown to them but on the basis of the common interests they start bonding with.

The above mentioned communication resources are not new to the web users. Early internet applications allow people to just send simple email messages, some documentation but that too often in the closed systems. But with the beginning of the web in the mid-‘90s people have started connecting in a more visually appealing manner which includes Six Degrees.com, LiveJournal, AsianAvenue etc. But the most prevalent innovation comes with web 2.0 in early ‘20s which gives users the chance to directly and easily create contents, even though they don’t have that kind of technical skills. Thus adding to the growth of social networking sites like Friendster, LinkedIn, MySpace, Yahoo, Youtube, Facebook and the list goes on.

III. SHARING DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

Today, some of the most prominent web 2.0 social networking sites which help in connecting the users digitally and give them the space for showing creativity, sharing their ideas are:

- Facebook – a social networking service where users create personal profiles, add other users as friends and exchange messages, including automatic notifications when they update their own profile. Additionally, users may join common-interest user groups, organised by common characteristics (e.g. workplace).
- Twitter - a microblogging service enabling its users to send and read publicly visible messages called tweets. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the user’s profile page. Users may subscribe to other users’ tweets.
- LinkedIn – a business-related social networking site mainly used for professional networking. Users maintain a list of contact details of people with whom they have some level of relationship, called connections. This list of connections can then be used to build up a contact network, follow different companies and find jobs, people and business opportunities.
- MySpace – an online community of users’ personal profiles. These typically include photographs, information about personal interests and blogs. Users send one another messages and socialise within the MySpace community.
- YouTube – a video-sharing website on which users can upload, share, and view videos. A wide variety of user-generated video content is displayed, including film and TV clips as well as amateur content such as video blogging. Media corporations including the BBC also offer some of their material via the site. Most videos enable users to leave and exchange comments.
- Wikipedia – a collaborative web-based encyclopedia project; its 18 million articles have been written collaboratively by volunteers around the world, and almost all articles are freely editable by any visitor. [4].

The timeline below shows the rising of usage of web because of various social networking sites.

![Timeline of the launch dates of many major SNSs and dates when community sites re-launched with SNS features.](image-url)

IV. APPLICATIONS FOR STAYING IN TOUCH

With the advancement in technologies from desktop to palm-tops and continuous increasing interest of users towards these social networking, the makers of these sites are developing applications which are suitable for these technologies. In particular, all the software tools that deal with digital communities are available for free and are very easy to use; as a consequence, every user can add or modify contents, search for existing ones and
be part of a large number of communities. Everyone can be an author. Looking into the upsurge eagerness of socially connecting, networking sites are coming up with various applications. Some of the popular applications which cater to interests of all users and give them user friendly programs are provided by the social networking sites which are as follows:

1. Facebook, for keeping up with your friends
The number one social network in the world is still trying to figure its place in the mobile world. Facebook has an app for almost every platform. Until recently, Facebook was a slow, clunky experience on the iPhone and iPad.

2. Foursquare, for discovering new places to visit
Foursquare is the champion of check-ins. With over 20 million users, Foursquare helps you to keep in sync with your friends and what they are up to. There is a badge system, which encourages visiting new and unique places. Foursquare is also an excellent way to discover new places to visit based on your friends’ recommendations.

3. Google+, a way to connect with your friends via your Google Account
Google+ is the search giant's social network. And it happens to have a very excellent mobile app for Android and iOS. A neat feature is the ability to video chat with up to 9 friends with mobile Hangouts. And if video isn't your thing, the app allows you to chat with a friend or all your friends at once with the text-based Messenger

4. Imo.im, for chatting on all popular instant messaging services
Imo.im is a convenient way to stay on top of your instant message conversations. The app is available for all major mobile phones and allows you to keep in touch with friends through Facebook Chat, Google Talk, Skype, MSN, ICQ/AIM, Yahoo, Jabber, Hyves, VKontakte, Myspace, and Steam

5. Instagram, for sharing photos
Instagram changed the way we share photos using our mobile phones. The app is fast, fun, and simple. With Instagram, you snap a photo, add a funky filter and other effects, and upload it to a news feed. Like any other social network, you can follow people to keep track of their photos.

6. LinkedIn, for keeping up with your professional contacts
The official Twitter app allows all the Twitter features you're used to while on the go. You can Tweet, retweet, share photos, videos, web pages and more. TweetDeck is the go-to app for Twitter power users. TweetDeck allows seamless maintenance of multiple accounts in a handy column view.

7. Path, an alternative social network for mobile devices
Path takes the social network concept and makes it even more personalized. Path is meant for you to connect with family and close friends, limiting you to 150 connections. Unlike other social networks, Path is mobile-only, meaning you can only access it on your smartphone or tablet.

8. Pinterest, for sharing photos of things you love with friends
Pinterest has taken the world by storm. The social network encourages you to find things you're interested in and "pin" them to your virtual pinboard. Friends and fans can then follow along and comment or re-pin your items. Just recently, the network released Android and iPad versions of its popular app.

9. Tumblr, a great way to blog and follow cool people
WhatsApp is a cross-platform, real time mobile messenger. WhatsApp is an excellent alternative to text messaging because there is no cost to message and stay in touch with your friends. Think of it as a version of Apple's iMessage or RIM's BBM that will work across any device.

10. Yelp, for discovering new restaurants and places to visit
Yelp is an easy way to find information about local businesses no matter what city you're in. The app has a huge list of reviews for restaurants, bars, shops, and more. It's one of the best ways to get recommendations or tips on local venues [5].

Because of the open accessibility, ease of use, user friendly, free availability of the applications by the social networking sites, the number of unique visitors has increased. The figure is given by ComScore, up to end of November 2011: [6]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worldwide</th>
<th>Unique Visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook.com</td>
<td>792,999,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter.com</td>
<td>167,903,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn.com</td>
<td>94,823,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google+</td>
<td>66,756,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MySpace</td>
<td>61,037,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>255,539,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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From the above mentioned applications, it can be seen that because of the easily availability of connectivity to the network, people are building relationships with the individuals not known to them. They are getting into the relationships which are virtual and have started living a virtual life because they share their things online and have common interest. The result is people have started finding their happiness in being socially connected through these sites. It can also be seen that social networking applications are fastly becoming a relevant element in ones digital lives, by giving an access to different communities for subscribing to specific services that offers specialized platforms for video, blog, photos, etc.

CONCLUSION
Man is a social animal. The social networking sites together with free applications gives the individuals a space in which they can do what they want to, virtually, by giving their digital identity. A world where the use of these applications provide an easy access of the things which is otherwise difficult to achieve or grab. From chatting, blogging, video conferencing, voice chatting, messaging, video – pictures uploading to advertising their brands. The social networking applications proved to be a benefit to create strong digital relationships across the different sections of society.

REFRENCES

Websites:

Journal papers and books: