

Understanding Behavior of the Users of Social Networking Sites

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ABSTRACT

Online social networks have emerged as the new way in which people connect socially. Social networking websites connect users to familiar and new people through mutual acquaintances and common interests. Today, use of Social Networking Sites (SNS) is a major activity for internet users from a wide range of demographic groups. The present study aims to understand the behavior of SNS users, and whether usage of SNS gives them pleasure or not. It is based on the survey of respondents from across different regions.

Key Words: Neutral Operants, Reinforcers, Punishers.

1. Introduction

A few years ago, the idea of an online social network was not only unheard of but was also unthinkable. But, internet which in itself has been a marvelous invention of mankind is in itself a creator of new trends and technological advancements with each passing day. While the web has always provided a way for people to make connections with one another, social networking sites made it easier than ever to find old friends and make new ones. Today, we hardly find any educated person who has not heard of Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, LinkedIn or other social networks. With the introduction of smart phone, the social networking sites are now at just a thumb's press away.

Social Networking Sites (SNS) is the phrase used to describe any website that enables users to create public profiles within that Website and form relationships with other users of the same website who access their profiles. It is simply a way to use our computer with an internet connection to connect with people all around the world. These sites allow a person to connect both on a personal & professional level. According to Boyd & Ellison (2008), SNSs are web-based services that allow individuals to

- (i) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system,
- (ii) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and
- (iii) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

1.1 Literature Review

Studies of human conversation have documented that 30–40% of everyday speech is used to relay information to others about one's private experiences or personal relationships (Dunbar, Duncan & Marriott, 1997). Through

a series of experiments, the researchers at Harvard University (Diana, Tamir & Jason), learned that the act of disclosing information about oneself activates the same part of the brain that is associated with the sensation of pleasure, the same pleasure that we get from eating food, getting money or having sex. In the experiments, the Harvard researchers asked test subjects a series of questions about their and others' opinions while hooked up to an MRI machine. The researchers found that the regions of the brain associated with reward were strongly engaged when people were talking about themselves, and less engaged when they were talking about someone else.

Test subjects indicated that they would turn down money (a few cents) to talk about someone else, preferring to talk about themselves instead. Also, researchers performed a secondary experiment that was geared to help them learn how important having an audience to listen is to a person's self-disclosure. Through the secondary experiment, researchers found that when people got to share their thoughts with a friend or family member, there was a larger amount of activity in the reward region of their brain, and less of a reward sensation when they were told their thoughts would be kept private.

Nauert (2010) had a similar response when students expressed hatred for the loss of personal connections. The students felt that the strength of these relationships was based entirely on their use of social media. Ultimately, both studies arrived at similar conclusions where students felt that they were isolated from their friends and family in the absence of text messaging or Facebook.

According to McQuail (1994), there are four main motivational needs within a person: (i) information, (ii) entertainment, (iii) social interaction, and (iv) personal identity. An article published in the Times of India, dated June 14, 2012 mentions that Shashank Kapur,

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behavioural psychologist, explains that such online behaviour takes root in American psychologist Abraham Maslow's theory on the three basic human psychological needs — love, affection and a sense of belonging and the constant updates, photo albums and profile stalking is an attempt to seek attention and a sense of belonging.

The behavior underlying usage of Social Networking Sites can also be explained by B. F. Skinner's theory of operant conditioning (McLeod, 2007). Operant conditioning can be described as a process that attempts to modify behavior through the use of positive and negative reinforcement. Through operant conditioning, an individual makes an association between a particular behavior and a consequence. Skinner believed that the best way to understand behavior is to look at the causes of an action and its consequences. Skinner identified three types of responses or operant that can follow behavior.

- Neutral operants: Responses from the environment that neither increase nor decrease the probability of a behavior being repeated.
- Reinforcers: Responses from the environment that increase the probability of a behavior being repeated. Reinforcers can be either positive or negative.
- Punishers: Responses from the environment that decrease the likelihood of a behavior being repeated. Punishment weakens behavior.

2. Objectives & Methodology

The study has been designed with the following objectives:

- Understanding the behaviour of SNS users.
- Finding out whether people are comfortable in disclosing information about self.
- Assessing to what extent people enjoy getting information about others.
- To ascertain whether accessing SNS satisfies social needs of users.
- Identifying what makes accessing SNS a pleasurable experience for SNS users.

Keeping into view the above objectives, the research was conducted using exploratory research design. For collection of primary data, a questionnaire containing 20 statements based on the objectives was constructed on a 5 point Likert scale. Secondary data was collected through journals & internet. The universe of the study is India & the researchers have drawn 200 respondents trying to cover the different regions. The analysis was done on SPSS by applying Descriptive Statistics & Cross Tabulation.

3. Data Analysis & Interpretation

Objective 1: Understanding the behaviour of SNS users.

For understanding the behaviour of SNS users researcher has to analyse every statement of the questionnaire. There are a few positive statements and a few negative statements in the questionnaire (Refer Table1: which is generated by using Frequencies under Descriptive Statistics in SPSS).

Interpretation: From Table1 (Row 14) it is clear that in India about 38% people use SNS for satisfying their social need of remaining connected. Majority of respondents have accepted that they do not feel uncomfortable when they find that others have more online friends than them (Row 2). They agree that online relationship is of poorer quality than face-to-face relationship (Row 12). Respondents do not love to share information about themselves with others (Row 17). Most of the respondents feel delighted in receiving favourable comments (Row18). The lesser is the time gap between posting something & getting a favourable comment on it, the happier they feel (Row 19).

Objective 2: Finding out whether people are comfortable in disclosing information about self.

From Table1 it is clear that about 49% respondents are comfortable in disclosing information about self. Now this is analysed on the basis of age, gender and marital status of the respondents. For this Crosstab under Descriptive Statistics in SPSS has been used. The processed information is given in Table 2.

Interpretation: From Table 2, it is clear that younger respondents (below 20 years), those between 40-50 years, male respondents and single respondents are more comfortable in disclosing about themselves through SNS in comparison to respondents of older age group, female respondents and married respondents.

Objective 3: Assessing to what extent people enjoy getting information about others.

From Table1 (Row 6), it is clear that about 48% respondents feel that getting information about activities of others gives pleasure. Now, this is analysed with reference to age, gender and marital status of the respondents. For this Crosstabs under Descriptive Statistics in SPSS has been used. The processed information is given in Table 3.

Interpretation: From Table 3, it is clearly seen about 50% respondents feel that getting information about activities of others gives more pleasure to the respondents of each age group except the age group between 40-50 years probably because of more work pressure and higher accountability towards their personal & professional roles. Female and single respondents are more interested in getting information about other's activities in comparison to male and married respondents.

Objective 4: To ascertain whether accessing SNS satisfies social needs of users.

Appendix
Table1: Behaviour of SNS Users

S No.	Statements	Respondents Agreement	Respondent Disagreement
1	I deliberately give favourable comments to others to avoid unnecessary conflicts.	33.3%	50%
2	It bothers me when I find that others have more friends on SNS than me.	14.3%	73.8%
3	I hate unfavourable comments.	42.8%	41.7%
4	I actually like all the people with whom i am Friends on SNS.	40.4%	35.7%
5	I am comfortable in disclosing about myself through SNS.	48.8%	41.7%
6	Getting information about activities of others gives me pleasure.	48%	28.6%
7	I access SNS because everybody does it & if i don't i will be called outdated.	29.8%	59.5%
8	I put in a lot of effort to keep relationships created through SNS going.	30.9%	46.2%
9	If I do not get comments on my post my eagerness to post the next time decreases.	33.3%	56%
10	I withdraw & never post something similar again if i get lots of negative comments on it.	33.3%	47.6%
11	I make sure to give even a fake favourable comment to someone who has given me a favourable comment in the past so that i receive a positive comment in future as well.	32.1%	53.6%
12	Online relationship is of better quality than face to face relationships.	20.2%	60.7%
13	SNS help me to escape the daily frustrations & low phases.	39.3%	44.1%
14	After connecting with SNS, i feel that my social needs have been satisfied	38.1%	44.1%
15	SNS gives me the convenience of connecting with people at my convenience without bothering about time or physical distances.	44.1%	35.7%
16	I always get genuine comments from others.	51.1%	11.9%
17	I love to share about my day to day activities with others.	23.8%	61.9%
18	I feel delighted to receive a favourable comment	86.9%	6%
19	The lesser the gap between posting a comment & getting a favourable response, the better I feel	64.3%	14.3%
20	I often talk to my friends more online than offline	53%	37.4%

Table1 (Row 14) clearly shows that 38.1% of respondents agree while 44.1% disagree with the statement that after connecting with SNS, their social needs have been satisfied. Now their responses have been analysed with reference to their age, gender and marital status. The processed information given in Table 4.

Interpretation: From Table 4, it is clear that after connecting with SNS, the social needs of younger age group are more satisfied and this satisfaction level decreases with increase in age. There is a very minute

difference in this satisfaction between males and females. Social needs of single respondents are more satisfied than married respondents.

Objective 5: Identifying what makes accessing SNS a pleasurable experience for SNS users.

From Table 1, it is found that there are 5 major factors which make a SNS a pleasurable experience for SNS users. These are given in Table 5.

(Insert Table 5 from Appendix)

Table 2: Comfort Level in Disclosing Information About Self

Statement	Pattern	Parameters	Respondents Agreement
I am comfortable in disclosing about myself through SNS	Age	Up to 20 years	50%
		20-30 years	37.7%
		30-40 years	25%
		40-50 years	66.7%
		More than 50 years	0%
	Gender	Male	37.5%
		Female	33.3%
	Marital Status	Single	43.6%
		Married	20.6%

Table 3: Extent to which Information About Others is Enjoyable

Statement	Pattern	Parameters	Respondents Agreement
Getting information about activities of others gives pleasure	Age	Up to 20 years	50%
		20-30 years	49.1%
		30-40 years	50%
		40-50 years	33.3%
		More than 50 years	50%
	Gender	Male	45.8%
		Female	52.8%
	Marital Status	Single	50.9%
		Married	44.8%

Table 4: SNS Satisfy Social Needs

Statement	Pattern	Parameters	Respondents Agreement
After connecting with SNS, I feel that my social needs have been satisfied	Age	Up to 20 years	50%
		20-30 years	45.9%
		30-40 years	18.7%
		40-50 years	0%
		More than 50 years	0%
	Gender	Male	37.5%
		Female	38.9%
	Marital Status	Single	43.7%
		Married	27.5%

Table 5: Reasons Making SNS a Pleasurable Experience

S. No.	Factors	Respondents Agreement
1.	I feel delighted to receive a favourable comment	86.9%
2.	The lesser the gap between posting a comment & getting a favourable response, the better I feel	64.3%
3.	I often talk to my friends more online than offline	53%
4.	I always get genuine comments from others.	51.1%
5.	I am comfortable in disclosing about myself through SNS.	48.8%

Interpretation: Table 5, shows top 5 reasons which makes accessing SNS a pleasurable experience for SNS users. These factors are as follows:

- Receiving a favourable comment.
- Lesser gap between posting a message & getting a favourable comment for it.
- Facility of communicating with friends online.
- Belief that comments from others are genuine.
- High comfort level & pleasure in disclosing about self through SNS.

4. Conclusions

The study led to the following conclusions:

Social Networking Sites satisfy social needs of younger, male & single users.

Respondents, particularly under 20 years & between 40-50 years, males & singles are very comfortable in disclosing information about self to others.

The lesser the gap between posting a message & getting favorable comments, the more is the pleasure of users.

Receiving information about the activities of others gives immense pleasure.

Though online relations are of poorer quality than face-to-face relationships but they provide the convenience of connecting with others whenever the user wants without bothering for physical distances.

Respondents feel that they get genuine comments from others.

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