PERCEIVED USEFULNESS OF SOCIAL NETWORKS IN VALUE CREATION FOR ITS USERS

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Abstract

Social networks are widely used by the users around the world for different purposes. They are used as tool for communication among the users in the network or, for increasing the network for spread of information, or for receiving information and opinion about the product and services to be used etc. Increase in usage of social network is due the perception of usefulness of the network for different things. This paper highlights features of social network which led to the perception about its usefulness. The researcher has tried to develop and discuss a model on perceived usefulness of social networks and its effect on value creation for its users.

Key words: Social Technology, social networks, perceived usefulness, value creation

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1.0: Introduction

Internet is one of the biggest gifts of the technology. It had emerged from the ARPANET which can connect many users at a particular point of time. People using Internet in India is expected to reach 500 million by June 2018, according the 'Internet in India 2017' report published by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and Kantar IMRB.The report examine number of Internet users inurban and rural areas of India as on December 2017 which are 295 million in urban areasand 186 million in rural areas (Tech Desk, 20, Feb, 2018).Use of internet for using the Social technology is one such purpose. Social technologies are Internet-based technologies that facilitate creativity, information, knowledge sharing, and collaboration (Anderson, 2007).Social technologies are primarily Internet-and mobile-based tools for sharing and discussing information among human beings. It often refers to those activities that integrate technology, telecommunications and social interaction, and the construction of words, pictures, videos and audio.Increase in use of internet in the country depicts increase in use of social technology by the people. This paper is written with an aim to highlights features of social network and discuss about the perception of usefulness of features of social networks and the different types of value created for the users by its usage. It is an initiative, which tries to develop a model on perceived usefulness of features of social networksand its effect on value creation for its users.

2.0: Key terms of the study:

2.1: Social Technology

Social Technologies begin in 1970s, through the first interactive computer terminals which was used by academics and computer scientists to created electronic bulletin board systems. Members used to post short messages about a specific area of interest on a central computer through these terminals. With the introduction of Usenet in late 1970s, the first distributed bulletin board system came into existence, which ran on university, research networks, and File Transfer protocol. Usenet help to share large content files to the computer users. In 1990s, the Internet brought data networks to the masses providing foundation for social technologies and e-commerce through Web 2.0. Web 2.0 provided large-scale social platforms by turning Internet users into content creators and distributors. Due to which Internet use became more interactive and social. Millions of Internet users share music and video files, create their own content, form

their own communities, and sharing information on a "virtual commons." People began publishing Web logs and blogs, to record their thoughts and ideas in online diaries, to comment on the news, and to create an audience of other social Web users. By the year 2012, more than 1.5 Billion people around the globe were interacting with social networks at least on a monthly basis (ComScore Media Metrix data). Social technology can be further bifurcated based on the usage into:

- **Social Networks**which areweb-based services that allow individuals to construct a semi-public or public profile in a bounded system. It also articulate list of others users of the site which help users to share connections, views and thoughts.

- **Blogs/ Microblogs**which allowsusers to express themselves in a chatty, conversational manner in as many words as they like.

- **Ratings and Reviews**which aregenerally used in e-commerce website. It helps to evaluates and rate products, services, and experiences of the e-commerce site.

- **Social Commerce**that is used topurchase in groups and share opinion on social platforms.

- **Wikis** whichallow users to create and edit content on the website.More advanced wikis have a management component which allow a designated person to accept or reject changes done on the website by the other users

- **Discussion Forums**create net around a specific topic of common interest or for a specific user group around a particular piece of work

- **Shared Work-Spaces**whichhelp tointer-connect environment in which all the participants in dispersed locations can access and interact with each other just as inside a single entity

- **Crowd-Sourcing**whichis viewed as aprocess of obtaining needed services, ideas, or content by soliciting contributions from a large group of people, especially an online community.

- **Social Gaming**is anactivity which connect user with friends and strangers to play games online

- **Media and File Sharing**thatprovides access to digital media. It helps in proving access to: computer programs; multimedia like audio, images and videos; documents and electronic books to the number of people through internet.

2.2: Social Networks

Social network services were viewed as web-based services which allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system. A social network helpsto communicateusers with the network.Users can also view the pages and details provided by other users within the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Thus, it is a combination of personalized media experience, within social context of participation. Practices that differentiate social networking sites from other computer-mediated communication are: uses of profiles, friends and comments or testimonials profiles are publicly viewed, friends are publicly articulated, and comments are publicly visible. Social networking websites provide rich information about the person and his network, which can be utilized for business purposes like: advertisers to promote their brands through word-of-mouth to targeted customers, new teacher-student relationship with more interactive online sessions, embedded advertisements in online videos, provide a platform for new artists for their creativity (Jain, Gupta &Anand, 2012).

The first recognizable social networks site SixDegrees.com was launched in 1997 which allow users to create profiles and list their friends and then contact them. SixDegrees.com promoted itself as a tool which helps people to stay connected and send messages to people. From 1997 to 2001 social networking sites like Asian Avenue, Black Planet, and MiGente allowed users to create personal and professional profile. Profiles-users could identify Friends on their personal profiles without seeking approval for those connections. In 1999, Live Journal was launched; it listed one-directional connections on user pages. The Korean virtual worlds site Cyworld was started in 1999 and added SNS features in 2001. Unlike the feature already present in other web sites. Swedish web community Lunar Storm refashioned itself as an SNS in 2000. Another type of social networking sites Ryze.com was launched in 2001 which help people to leverage their business networks. The other such social networking sites were Tribe.net, LinkedIn, and Friendster. Among all the social networking sites lounged till date Friendster, Myspace, and Facebook, were the three key SNSs that shaped the business, cultural, and research landscape (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Social networks like Facebook, Bharatstudent, Yahoo! Pulse, Twiter, LinkedIn, Zedge.net Google+ and YouTube represent some of the most dynamic and promising manifestations of

social networks in India. Social networking sites allow networking on a grand scale, where individuals can connect with others based on offline friendships, shared interests, common professional objectives, or mutual acquaintances. It also allows users to place comments, photos, videos and Web links on each other's pages also like blogs and review sites. A social networking site helps users to share information and topic of interests with dozens of other users of the sites. Thus, many times it is found that hundreds and thousands of users are depending upon the single click of one's network. Following section highlightsreasons of usage of social networking sites by the users.

With the rapid growth in the popularity of social networking sites, academic research were undertaken to examine usage patterns, self-presentation strategies, motivations, and social relationships associated with user and the social networking sites. The researches also provided an initial understanding of the phenomenon (Choi, Kim, Sung &Sohn, 2008). While the Industry surveys indicate that people join and use social networking sites to stay in touch with friends, make plans with friends and make new friends (Lenhart& Madden, 2007). Social networking sites satisfy the different needs including need for affiliation and belongingness, need for information, goal achievement, self-identity, values and notions of accepted behaviour (Ridings &Gefen, 2004). Thus it helps in satisfying the individual's cognition need to belong and level of collective self-esteem (Gangadharbatla, 2008). The extensive social interactions among many consumers of the product and services through their public personal networks have created an information-intensive environment of social networking sites where consumers can easily and quickly disseminate their thoughts and opinions. Opinion of users of social networking sites are also playing influential role on consumption and purchase of the product and services of the different business organisation. Thus social networking sites are becoming important for the users as they not only help them to stay connected but also guide them whenever they require guidance from the other users of the site. Diverse purpose of usage of social networking site is due to the features that are inbuilt in these sites.

2.2.1: Features of Social Networks

Features of social networking sites make them useful for the users. There are certain common features in the networking sites due to which users used them and get the perceived benefit from

the usage of the sites. Prahalad&Ramaswamy (2004) have viewed information access, global view, networking, experimentation and activism as features of social networks.

- *Information access* is understood as an access to unprecedented amounts of information from any corner of the world at any time at any place.

- *Global views* are opinions and interpretation of the people belonging to different culture, values, age, nationalities etc.

- *Networking*is an access to any users of the network at any time and place irrespective of where we know them or not.

- *Experimentation*is a feature, were users demonstrate their creativity and come out with innovative solution.

- When unsolicited feedback and opinion aid other people in the networks and the business organisation to take decision regarding the product and the services offered such feature of social network it termed as *Activism*(Prahalad&Ramaswamy, 2004).

Due to above mention features of social networking site it is perceived useful by the users of the site. There is no doubt that the degree of perception about usefulness of the sites do differ among the users. Degree for perception of usefulness of sites may be affected by the usage pattern, culture, age, adoption towards technology, situation, need etc.Section ahead describes the concept of perceived usefulness.

2.3: Perceived Usefulness

Davis (1989) proposed perceived usefulness is an important factor of Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). The model was originally developed to understand the causal link between external variables and user acceptance of PC-based applications, but then after it was widely used by different authors to study the acceptance of diverse technologies within and outside the organization. Similarly, Technology Acceptance Model was also used to study the different applications of social technologies by the various authors like (Moon & Kim, 2001; Gillenson&Sherrell, 2002; Koufaris, 2002; McCloskey, 2004). TAM states that when user find it is easy to master of the technology, the technology is perceived to be more useful by them. This feature of technology in turn helps in generating positive attitude and greater intention for usage of technology by the people. Perceived usefulness is the consumers' subjective perceptions about the usefulness of using any particular technology. Technology is perceived to be useful, when

consumers find it helpful in increasing their performance (Yang, 2006). Increase in the usage of technology is dependent upon the acceptance of technology by the users.

Lee (2009) found significant positively relation between adoption of information technology and the users perception about the usefulness of a system and was supported by different studies undertaken by the authors at different period of time.Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use the social network technology affect the attitude towards the favorable or unfavorable feelings of using such technology. People use Social network technology as it allows them to form their profiles and enable people to connect with one another, increase the effectiveness of users in building and maintain relationships with other users, or allow strangers to become acquainted and keep in touch (Li &Bernoff, 2008; Pfeil,Arjan, &Zaphiris, 2009). All this things help in perceiving the technology useful for the users. Perceived usefulness was discovered an important factor that positively affects the intention to use of social network technology by (Kang & Lee, 2010; Kwon & Wen, 2010; Sledgianowski&Kulviwat, 2009). Thus it is due to the perceived usefulness that people use technology and due to the usage of technology value is created for the users of the technology. Section below discusses the concept of value creation.

2.4: Value Creation

Value creation involves innovation that establishes or increases the consumer's valuation of the benefits of consumption (use value). When value is created by the technology, the customer either is willing to pay for a novel benefit, willing to pay more for something perceived to be better, or will choose to receive a previously available benefit at a lower unit cost which often results in a greater volume purchased, or spend more time with the application to get more and more benefit from it. Thus, from the customer's viewpoint, value creation involves increasing use value or decreasing exchange value, each of which can increase the consumer surplus (V (Value)-P (Exchange Value)) (Priem, 2007). Value being a relative concept, not only differs from one user to another but is also affected by different situation faced by the users during acquisition, consumption or disposal of the offering by the organisations. Value is thus, a trade-off between the costs and benefits perceived by the users from the usage of product and services of the organisation (Brady,Knight, Cronin, Tomas, Hult&Keillor, 2005; Holbrook, 1999). Value is conceptualized in two ways by Brady et al. (2005) and Sweeney,Soutar& Johnson. (1999),

first is the generic value which is cost and benefit trade-off and the other is the service value which is between service quality attributes and sacrifice made by the users of the services.

Value creation for the users of the technology occurs when they feel getting something more by the usage of such technology, which is understood as a successful outcome of the process than just an experience of using it (Mathwick,Malhotra &Rigdon, 2001). Through the usage of social networking site users create different types of value like:

- *Functional value* which is an expectations of the users for the quality and technical support from the usage of the social network technology.

- *Social value* which is obtained when users feel to be connected with others by using the product or service of the organisation (Sheth,Newman& Gross, 1991)

- *Emotional value*which refers to the meeting of mental or psychological needs of the users of product or service of the organisation.

- *Monetary value* which is determine and created on the basis of the satisfaction of users regarding cost, time or effort spent in using a product or a service of the organisation (Sweeney &Soutar, 2001; Bolton & Drew, 1991; Monroe, 1990; Cravens, Holland, Lamb& Moncrief, 1988).

3.0: A BriefReview of Literature:

Hemmi, Bayne& Land (2009) examine usage of social technologies from education perspective. They scrutinize different kinds of teaching and learning contexts using dissimilar social technologies for diverse purposes in on-campus undergraduate courses and distance e-learning programme for postgraduate. Finding of the study concluded social technologies to have significant potential as new collaborative, volatile and challenging environments for formal learning environment whether on-campus or distance learning courses.Das &Sahoo (2011) discusses negative effect (stranger friends, health risk, reduction in work productivity, addition of social networking sites, increase in cybercrime and destroying the relationship) of social networking sites when personal information's posted. Study suggested that it is upon the individual how to use information posted on social networking site. Some use it for good purpose while some misuse the information. They instructed users to carefully utilize social networking sites for posting information which will lead to the benefit of individual and society at

large.Harris & Dennis (2011) observe influence of recommendations of Facebook friends on shopping behaviour. Study found respondent (student) initially display little interest in Facebook for shopping but trust on Facebook friends played an important role for becoming open to social e-shopping sites.Harvey, Stewart & Ewing (2011) examined the effect of involvement with YouTube mediated by sender's tie strength, sender's knowledge of sharing and amount of online communication that a sender has across the tie on forwarding videos across YouTube. Study found significant positive relationship between sender involvement with the YouTube video and the likelihood of forwarding a YouTube video across a tie. Sender's tie strength was found to have a multiplicative effect with sender involvement in decreasing likelihood of a YouTube video being forwarded across a tie. Sender's knowledge of sharing YouTube videos online did not significantly multiplicative effected sender's involvement in increasing likelihood of a YouTube video being forwarded across a tie. While amount of online communication that a sender has across the tie was found to have a significant multiplicative effect with sender involvement in increasing the likelihood of a YouTube video being forwarded across that tie.

Heinrichs, Lim & Lim (2011) study perceptions of professional consumers of three social networks: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. They viewed how consumer profiles their responses and the different mode of access adopted by them. Study found difference in use of social networking sites by user of mobile, notebook and desktop. The difference in responses was from the view point of perceive ease of use, usefulness, information quality, and feelings of enjoyment. Findings of the study are useful for designing the technology of different social networks to give maximum benefit to its users.Social networking sites facilitate the spread of information among the users, but as social networking sites have user generated information its transparency, quality and content are questionable in terms of reliability. Grill (2011) discusses whether social networking sites can be considered as a tool to elevate democracy in the country. He concluded his study with a remark that even though social networking site is a powerful tool for communication among the people, it cannot be considered a tool for promotion of democracy.
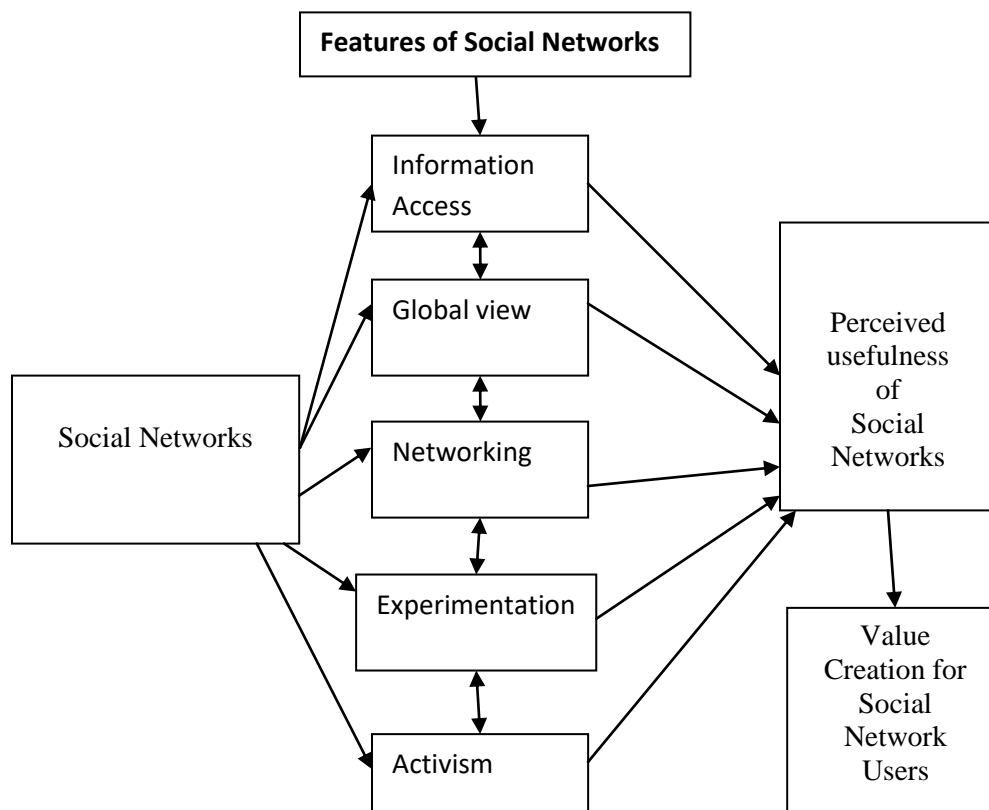
Macaulay,Keeling, McGoldrick, Dafoulas, Kalaitzakis& Keeling (2007) examined difference in the motives of users, for visiting social networking sites. Some of them visited for product

information and purchase, some for seeking social support and information, others for more intense experience and greater social involvement. Author emphasises on taking care in designing web sites by the organisation for successful achievement of varied goal of users and organisation. Because failure to recognize separate needs of these clusters, may result into the difficulty in achievement of business and community building goals.Dwyer (2007) explores the use of social networking sites and instant messenger by people for interpersonal relationships. He tried to understand attitudes of user of social technology towards privacy and impression management while interacting with people. Study discovers convenience, easy access, low cost and enjoyment as the main drivers for using social networks as a communications media.Oh, Ozkaya&LaRose (2014) surveyed effect of supportive interactions on social networking sites, mediate the influence of SNS use and number of SNS friends on perceived social support, affect, sense of community, and life satisfaction. Study also looked at the relationship between supportive interaction and immediate affect after the interaction over a period of 5 days. Results of the study revealed positive relationship between supportive interaction and positive affect after the interaction. A path model revealed positive associations among the number of SNS friends, supportive interactions, affect, perceived social support, sense of community, and life satisfaction.

Nešić, Gašević, Jazayeri&Landoni (2011) studied usefulness of social networking site and how it helps in improving performance of authors in the world. In order to see the usefulness of social networking sites a software named SDArch was develop for the study. The prototype was based upon semantic web technologies and social networking. Finding of the study demonstrated the usefulness of prototype in improved effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction of the authors, which in turns help in improving their performance.Oiarzabal (2012) inspect use of Facebook by migrants, who share a collective identity in their homeland, and are forced by structural socioeconomic or political conditions or have chosen to leave their land of origin to settle in other countries (Basque diaspora). Survey led to the conclusion that Facebook had not only help this migrant to stay in contact and be informed, but also had aid them to be reaffirm and maintain their identity in a collaborative manner.

4.0: Model of the study

There is a constant increase in the usage of social networks by the people. It may be due to its features and perception on its usefulness by their use to the users.Researcher has modified &developed a model for the study, which is broadly bifurcated into three sections. First section is 'features of social networks'adopted fromPrahalad&Ramaswamy (2004) and Di Gangi (2010); second section is 'perceived usefulness' of social networks adopted from Sledgianowski&Kulviwat(2009) and Yang (2006)and last third section is of 'value creation' for the users through the usage of social networks adopted from Yang (2006).

Model of the proposed study

5.0: Significance of the study

The study has its significance not only in marketing theory, but it has extended its significance to the discipline of consumer behaviour specifically to the value creation also. The study focuses on the social networks users, and emphasis is on how social networks' help in value creation for its users. The creation of customer value has long been recognized as a central concept in marketing

(Woodruff, 1997) and the fundamental basis for all marketing activity (Holbrook, 1994). Businesses are adopting one or the other tool for value creation for its customer in order to stay and expand in the market. This study provides the detail insight on how social networks can help in creating value chain and value networks to customers as well as for business firms.

6.0: Key Discussion

Social networks are becoming prominent mode of communication among the people. Features of social networks, time convenience offered by it, economies it offer in communication and level of trust in communicating with the network had made it more popular for the usage. Present research study has identified features of social networks like:

- Access to boundless information,

- Enhancement of observation from the global point of view,

- Building and developing relation with known and unknown people around the world,

- Enhancing creativity of users through global vision and unlimited information and

- Providing unsolicited feedback that aid in taking decision regarding product and services offered by organisation.

Users of the social networks assess the networks to take benefits from these different features. Moreover each userhas their own objective for using the networks and thus perception on the usefulness of the social networks also differ from one another. Due to difference in the use of social network different types of values are created for the users. These values can be further bifurcated into functional, social, emotional and monetary value. Value so created may be individual or combination of any of them for the users of the networks.

7.0: Implication of the study

When more useful networks are perceived, more will be its usage. But the question comes that why people will perceive social networks to be useful and, the reason for the usefulness can be the diverse value created for the users by its usage. Present study will help in identifying the features of social networks which is perceived most useful for the users. It will aid in determining actual usage of social networks based on perceived usefulness and value created for the users after its usage. Simultaneously the model will help in designing more features in

present social networks or designing features for new social networks which are perceived more useful and are capable of creating more value to the users.

8.0: Conclusion

Technology is changing the ways of living of the people. Usages of social networks are one of them. It has change the way people use to communicate with one another individually or in a group. This new form of communication has not only changed the way individuals look at the things but also have brought changes in the outlook of the business organisation.Social networks are becoming new tool for idea generation, innovation and marketing for individuals and business organisation.This research paper presents the discussion on the features of the social networks which led to the perception of its usefulness and the types of value it can create when used by the users from different perspectives which will also help business organisation for developing new type of value networks which will lead to satisfaction of the customers of the organisation.

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