

**TITLE: INDIVIDUALS & SOCIAL NETWORK SITES (SNS)
IN IRISH SOCIETY**

BY

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED AS PART OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR A
B.A HONS. IN SOCIAL SCIENCE**

CONTENTS

Acknowledgement	3
Abstract.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Existing literature on attitude to social networking sites	11
<i>Gender differences and social network use among countries</i>	13
Aims and objectives of the study	16
Hypotheses	16
Methodology	17
<i>Participants</i>	17
<i>Sampling Method</i>	17
<i>Design</i>	18
<i>Procedure</i>	20
<i>Ethical Consideration</i>	20
<i>Data Analysis</i>	21
Results.....	22
Discussion	32
<i>Limitations</i>	38
Conclusion	39
References.....	41
Appendix 1	44
Appendix 2.....	45

Acknowledgement

A massive and sincere thank you to my supervisor Vanessa Long, whose patience, understanding, guidance and support contributed to the completion of this thesis. Her support from the beginning to the end of this study is highly appreciated. A big thank you also goes to Dr Bernadette Quinn for her assistance in the computer lab. An unconditional thank you to my family and friends who offered continuous support and encouragement throughout this journey

Finally, thank you to all the participants because without their contribution the study would not have been completed.

Abstract

Despite how occupied our lives are and how spread out our families have become, the term social networking seems inevitable since it is now a place where new social connections both personal and professional are made (Waters, 2010,). As social networking sites become more embedded in daily life worldwide, they will play a more important role in our life (Kert, 2011).

In this study, sixty females (N=60) and sixty males (N=60) were surveyed. The sample selected consisted of people 18 years and older. The present findings showed that 41.7 % of males have been members of SNS for 1year to less than 3years while 53.3% of females have been a member of SNS for 1year to less than 3years. In addition, a significant positive strong correlation was found between the relevance of social network sites and social network site being inevitable in the society ($r = .515$, $N = 120$, $p < .01$).

Keywords: Social network site (SNS), computer mediated communication (CMC)

Introduction

In today's society, life without social network is almost unimaginable. According to Dijk, (2006), the pervasiveness of network structures in modern society is enforced by combinations of media and social networks. Dijk (2006) wrote that social and media networks in contemporary society increasingly create small worlds and clusters in such a way that any pair of individuals or organizations can be connected via short chain of intermediaries. These clusters are often linked by so called weak ties. Dijk (2006) describes the complexity of network society by stating that in the network society, social relations become increasingly interactive by the combination of social and media networks with multilateral communication compared to the mass society which has one way media and centralized institutions (Dijk, 2006, p.39). Dijk (2006) critically explained that, the combination of social and media networks causes the media to become social environments themselves. On the other hand, Kert (2011) asserted that as social network sites (SNS) become more embedded in daily life worldwide, they will play a more important role in our life and soon have a more diverse audience in terms of age, socio economic status and culture. Kert (2011) study also reported that, most users tend to log on to social network sites every day. While Waters (2010) stated that social networking remains one of the most popular and fastest growing behaviors on both PC based internet and the mobile web. Nevertheless, Dijk (2006) reported that there are growing concerns such as, if media and social networks will transform society gradually, if they will have implications for society or if they will have no substantial effect. Milroy and Gordon studies on social networks (as cited

in Meyerhoff, 2006) defined social network as the relationships individuals contract with others reaching out through social and geographical space linking many individuals.

On the whole, however, social networking is a specific type of social media service. It is also the fabric of community and the common threads that connect a person to the people in it (Waters, 2010). Social network sites(SNS) are web based services that permit individuals to build a general profile within an confined system, enunciate a list of other users with whom they share an idea and connection, extend their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). According to, (Boyd& Ellison, 2007) friendship through social network sites tend to leads to other types of connection in the midst of users that would not otherwise have been formed.

On the contrary, Dijk (2006) stated that computer mediated communication (CMC) has been accused of being asocial (i.e. cold and unfriendly) and even antisocial (diminishing face to face interaction) and added that, they were fears that computer mediated communication would reinforce loneliness and stimulate internet and computer addiction (Dijk, 2006, p.211). Although Kim and Haridakis (2009) with their exploratory research verified this, they reported that internet addiction manifested in three possible dimensions: intrusion, escaping reality and attachments. In relation to internet activities and social support, Lee and Leung (2004) implied that people who communicate their inner world with friends and strangers online and rely heavily on the internet for advice and information to help them understand personal problems are those who often receive guidance and assistance in times of crisis.

Considering how occupied our lives are and how spread out our families have become, the term social networking seems inevitable since it is now a place where new social connections both personal and professional are made (Waters, 2010,). Kelsey (2010) also concurred as he wrote that there has been rapid growth of social networks around the world.

In another context, social network was described Meyerhoff (2006) as medium that group people on the basis of factors that are more idiosyncratic. Social networks as Meyerhoff (2006) critically explained are defined by who your friends are, who live near, who you have dinner or drinks with and who you work with. By contrast, Dijk(2006) highlighted that the notion of network society emphasizes the form and organization of information processing and exchange. Dijk (2006) stated that, in social and media networks, goods, ideas and all kind of crises are exchanged and diffused quicker than ever and described the network society as a social formation with an infrastructure of social and media networks enabling prime mode of organization at all levels (individual, group or organizational and societal). Dijk (2006) added that, social networks are as old as humanity and that, human individuals have always communicated more with some people than with others since the time they lived in small bands and tribes. Nevertheless, the rise of connectivity in the network society has both social and technological reasons. According to Dijk (2006), the social reason is the scale extension of social relations in modern society with an increasing number of weak and strong ties across large distances while the technological reasons are the improvement of transport, the growth of the number and reach of mass media and the explosion of the use of telephony and email.

Nevertheless, the rise and availability of social network sites (SNS) is now the medium by which people communicate. According Waters (2010) among the early social networks which people communicated with are: Classmates.com -Founded in 1995, Friendster- founded in 2002, Hi 5- founded in 2003 and MySpace established in 2003. Waters (2010) wrote that reports revealed that Friendster has more than 115 million members with 90% of its traffic coming from Asia while MySpace between 2006- 2008 was the leading social network in terms of the number of monthly visits (Waters,2010). Nonetheless, the reports have changed as Facebook a social networking site founded in 2004 as a student oriented SNS is now the

largest social network in the world today with more than 500 million members (Waters, 2010). Pew Internet and American Life Project (2010) also echoed this finding as it reported that Face book is currently the most commonly used online social network among adults. In their study on social networking, Pew Internet and American Life Project (2010) found that people use social network sites on a daily basis to keep in touch with others.

Since the introduction of the above mentioned social networks and other social networking sites available, studies reveals that these sites most of which tend to be free service, have attracted millions of users many of whom have integrated these sites into their daily practices. For instance, people use social network sites to promote their business, stay connected to family and friends, organize social events, and socialize both personally and professionally. Politicians also use this medium to organize campaign. For instance, in 2008 president Obama was the first politician to fully exploit the potential of social networking sites. President Obama used the social networking platform such as Facebook so effectively, to build, support and raise money for his campaigns that it became the organizing principal for his campaign (Waters, 2010). This effect of social networking was highlighted by Meyerhoff (2006) who indicated that social networks have been found to have a big impact on how innovations are spread through society. Similarly, Dijk (2006) acknowledged this as he theorizes that, new media such as social networking sites have so much merged in society that they touch about every aspect of it. Kelsey (2010) also concurs by adding that social network is a great way for people to stay in touch, capture, preserve and share their life story. In addition, it can be used to promote any organization such as a band, a cause or business. Kung, Picard, and Towse (2008) highlighted this impact in a different angle.

According to Kung, Picard and Towse (2008), it would be very hard to argue that the internet has not affected the way in which people work, study, communicate with others and look for information. On the other hand, (Meyerhoff, 2006, p.185) using the work of James

and Lesley Milroy's research in Belfast, Northern Ireland highlighted that the Milroy's argued that social networks are at least as important as macro social categories like class for understanding how changes take place and spread across a community. Nonetheless, Kung et al.(2008) found that users who have been influenced by information and communication technologies do not only substantially modify their work or information-getting routines, but they also affect the way people around the world interact with media, content and other users. Dijk (2006) explained that networks are the social counterpart of individualization. Using them, the individual creates a very mobile lifestyle and a kris-cross of geographically dispersed relations. Nevertheless, like any community social networks post codes of conduct that include basic courtesies we would extend to each other in any civilized social environment. In addition social networks add boundaries that are unique to online world. For instance, it prohibits the posting of copyrighted material (Waters, 2010).

Currently in today's society, there are hundreds of social network sites with various technological features encouraging a wide range of interests and practices. According to Pew Internet and American Life Project (2010) a think tank that provides information on attitudes and issues in the USA, online adults in the USA between ages 18 and 24 have a social networking profile as do 57% of wired adults between 25 and 34. In terms of interest, Pew Internet and American Life Project (2010) reported that 19% of adult internet users use twitter or similar services to post short status updates and view the updates of others online while young adults lead the way when it comes to using twitter or status updating. Pew Internet and American Life Project (2010) added that, 93% of young adults ages 18-29 go online while one quarter (74%) of all adults ages 18 and older go online

Ofcom (2008) Britain's communication regulator also found that just over one fifth (49%) of young adult users have set up their own profile on a social networking site while for adults, the chance of setting up a profile is highest among 20 – 24yr olds and decreases with age.

While the key technological aspects are fairly consistent, the beliefs and values that are connected with social networking sites vary. Sites also vary in the way new information and communication tools such as mobile connectivity, blogging, and photo or video sharing are added (Waters, 2010).

Pew Internet and American Life Project (2010) study on social network sites users found that the specific sites on which young adults maintain their profiles are different from those used by older adults. Pew Internet and American Life Project (2010), discusses the idea that even though social network users are equally likely to be male and female, the users is more likely to be young. Pew Internet and American Life Project (2010) study on social network users highlighted that young profile owners are much more likely to have a profile on MySpace than other sites. The study also found that, among adult profile owners 73% have a profile on Facebook, 48% have a profile on MySpace and 14% have a linked in profile. In contrast, adult profile owners under thirty and those thirty and older are equally likely to maintain a profile on Facebook .

Nevertheless, in another study conducted by Pew research Centers Global Attitudes Project (2010) on computer and cell phone usage among countries, although social networking is popular among people less than 30 years, based on the findings for the twelve countries surveyed, three countries were only found to have social network users ages 30 to 49 year-olds and they are Britain, Poland and the U.S.A.

Existing literature on attitude to social networking sites

Attitude can be seen as an individual's positive or negative behavior towards something. Influential members of a group can change group attitudes, motivations and opinions (Barbier, Tang, and Liu, 2011). On the other hand, Valenzuela, Park and Kee (2009) stated that a medium's technological capabilities as well as the actual content it transmits can influence person's attitude and behavior. Previous research study by Ducoffe(1996) and Bracket and Carr (2001), discusses the idea that media context tend to have an important influence in a person's behaviour and argued that there are three positive factors and one negative factor that determines the attitude or behaviours of young adults towards web based services. The positive factors identified are credibility, entertainment, informativeness while the negative factor was irritation. Bracket and Carr (2001) critically explained that credibility is a factor that has positive effect on site users since most young people tend to join or visit web based services based on the fact that the site can be trusted. While (Ducoffe, 1996) argued that, most young adults tend to join or visit web based serviced because of its entertaining nature which includes lots of fun and games. (Ducoffe, 1996) While Irritation was a negative factor due to the things posted on a social networking site, e.g., nude pictures and this could make young adults refrain from joining or visiting a site. The negative factor which was highlighted by previous studies was also echoed by Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn and Hughes (2009) who asserted in their study that almost 18% of their respondents reported personally experiencing negative effects of Facebook, such as unwanted advances, stalking,

and harassment, damaging gossip or data theft. Consequently Ofcom's (2008) report found that online bullying is negatively related with the attitude of young adults in the UK.

Ofcom's (2008) reported that, online bullying can also be seen as a negative factor because when a person is being bullied online most of the time either by his peers or people older than him, he feels inferior. Ofcom's (2008) report also revealed that site users tend to fall into five distinct groups based on their behaviors and attitudes and these are as follows: Alpha socialisers: mostly males under 25 who use sites in intense short bursts to flirt, meet new people and are entertained. Attention seekers: mostly females who seek or crave attention and comments from others often by posting photos and customizing their profiles. Followers: males and females of all ages who join sites to keep up with what their peers are doing. Faithfuls: older males and females generally aged over 20 who normally use social networking sites to rekindle old friendships often from school or university. Functionals: mostly older males who tend to be single minded in using sites for a particular purpose.

Contrary to these findings, Dijk (2006) states that the interactivity of the new media enables a more active and more independent way of learning than we are used to but added that the availability of these media also increases everyone's expectation of each other's communication behavior.

Gender differences and social network use among countries

In the use of social networking sites by males and females, a survey conducted by Pew Internet and American Life Project (2011) a US based research organization, found that two-thirds of online adults (65%) use online social networking sites with people having two or more profiles but the oldest users are still less likely to be making regular use of these tools.”. In terms of gender differences and usage, Pew Internet and American Life Project (2011) reported that, social networking is most popular with women and young adults under age 30. According to Pew Internet and American Life Project (2011), for females, social networking sites are medium to reinforce pre existing friendship while for males; the network provides opportunity for flirting and making new friends. Nonetheless, as the teen social networking population has increased, the popularity of some site features has shifted compared with social networking sites activity in February 2008. Thelwall (2007) acknowledged these findings in his research on MySpace member profiles but added that the median age of users was surprisingly high at 21, with a small majority of females. In another study, Hargittai (2007) asserted that a person’s race, ethnicity and parental educational background are all associated with use, but in most cases only when the aggregate concept of social network sites is disaggregated by service. Hargittai (2007) highlighted that the unequal participation based on user background suggests that differential adoption of such services contributes to digital inequality. Ofcom (2008) using a mixed method research critically analyzed that young adults use the social networking sites to communicate and users communicated mainly with people with whom they had at least some form of pre existing relationship. According to this same report, 69% of adults who have a social networking page or profile used social networking sites to talk to friends or family who they saw regularly compared to 17% of

adults who used social network sites to talk to those they didn't know already. Among those who reported talking to people they didn't know, there were significant variations in age but those who talked to people they didn't know were likely to be aged 18-24. Similarly, study after study of social networking behaviors reveals that a large percentage of network members accept random friend requests (Waters, 2010).

Furthermore, Pew Research Centers Global Attitudes Project (2010) who conducted a survey for cell phone and internet usage around the world found out that countries like Poland, Germany and Britain were close behind the United States when it comes to social network usage. Their findings are that in these countries, one in four adults indicated they use social network sites. The percentage is as follows: Poland (43%), Britain (43%) and South Korea (40%) While in countries like France, Spain, Russia and Brazil, one third of adults are involved in social networking. The study also reported that, Germans and the Japanese stood out for their low levels of engagement in social networking. According to the study, While 31% of Germans use social networking sites however 49% of people who go online occasionally, still decide not to use SNS. In Japan the findings was that although 24% participates in social networking the 44% who have internet access do not participate in social networking. Furthermore, Pew Research Centers Global Attitudes Project (2010) found out that participation in social networking is very low in countries that not developed economically since people in these countries do not go online at all. According to the study, when people in the middle and low income countries have access to the internet, they tend to join in social networking. For instance, in Russia and Brazil, majority of the respondents do not go online but among those who use the internet however, social networking is very popular. In both countries, 33% reported they use social networking sites while 10% have internet access but are not interested in social networking. In Kenya and Nigeria, around one in five Kenyans (19%) participates in social networking while 5% use the internet but are not

involved in social networking. The same apply in Nigeria as 17% of Nigerians go to these sites. Social networking was also found to be less popular in Indonesia as more than 9% of the population does not use the internet (Pew Research Centers Global Attitudes Project, 2010).

Integrating all previous research to understand the meaning of social networking and social networking sites, Taking into account the various background, characteristics and the variation of individual's goals and activities, investigating SNS users in Ireland with traditional survey instruments poses new and distinct challenges since the previous study was carried out in countries like the USA, Hong Kong, UK and Turkey and reported in an exploratory, qualitative and mixed method fashion.

Aims and objectives of the study

The objective of this study is to see if there is a relationship between age and SNS usage, to see if this form of communication is relevant in today's society. Finally, it aims to collect and analyse existing data in order to understand why people use social networking sites.

Hypotheses

Alternative Hypothesis (H1):- Social networking sites are inevitable in the society.

Null Hypothesis (H0):- Social networking sites are not inevitable in today's society.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1):- Level of education influences beliefs about internet and computer addiction.

Null Hypothesis (H0):- Level of education has no influence on beliefs about internet and computer addiction.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1):- There is a relationship between age and the usage of social networking sites.

Null Hypothesis (H0):- There is no relationship between age and usage of social networking sites.

Methodology

Participants

To further investigate the trends, the study consisted of one hundred and twenty participants (N=120). The gender breakdown were sixty females (N=60) and sixty males (N=60) and varied along several dimensions. The mean age for the total participants in the study was 32.63 (M=32.63). The minimum age of the participant was 18 while the maximum age was 62. Participants made up of people who lived in rural and urban area of Dublin. All participants were social network site users and participated voluntarily and no incentive was offered.

Sampling Method

In the present study, a non probability sample or convenience sample was justified based on participant's availability and convenience. Nonetheless, stratification was used since the stratum of interest is a small percentage of the population and any other method could miss the stratum by chance (Neuman, 2000). Stratification was used to ensure that the sample reflects the true proportion of social network site users of a population. Hence, the participants in this study were sixty females (N=60) and sixty males (N=60).

Design

The methodology chosen was a quantitative, cross –sectional survey design. Burns (2000) points out that, the design of a study can increase the power to detect significant differences. Therefore as a researcher who seeks to generalize findings to a population, the quantitative method of research was chosen because it gives room for comparison. The quantitative method was also chosen for the research project since a researcher can convert concepts about several aspects of social life into variables that can be measured with numbers (Neuman, 2000).

Furthermore, the criterion variable in the study was attitudes and use of social networking sites while the predictive variables were age and gender. Information about the participants was collected by means of a survey questionnaires developed by the researcher. The questionnaire was used since survey gives the researcher a picture of what many people think or report doing, using the close ended question format (Neuman, 2000).

Regarding the data collection tool (questionnaire) used the questionnaire consisted of three sections in order to get reliable and valid data. In the first section, the demographic characteristics of social network sites users were collected, the second section of the survey consisted of eight questions to determine, if the participants were SNS users and if so which of the SNS sites do they use while the third section consisted of nine Likert's type scale questions with responses such as 1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree.

To ensure participants the study fulfils its objectives, participants were asked questions such as “ how long they have been a member (less than 6 months, 6 months to less than 1 year,

1 year to less than 3 years, 3 years to less than 5 years, 5 years or more), how often they use their social networking site (everyday, weekly, sometimes, rarely, never), how much time they spent on their social network sites (under an hour, 1-2 hours, 3-5 hours, more than 5 hours), their level of education (primary, secondary, third level, postgraduate).

The Likert type scale question asked included positive and negative questions. The positive questions were included in order to access some of the perceived benefits of SNS. The participants were asked about their agreement with a seven-item scale using 5 point scale with “1” = strongly agree, “2” = agree, “3” = neither agree nor disagree, “4” = disagree, and “5” = strongly disagree. The seven items include: (1) on the whole, I am happy with myself as a social networking site user; (2) social networking sites are relevant in today’s society; (3) the availability of social networking sites increase everyone’s expectation of each other’s communication; (4) I feel like I am missing out when I don’t use social networking sites; (5) social networking sites has become my main source of communication; (6) social networking site is the best means of communication created by man; (7) social networking sites are inevitable in today’s society. To assess reason for usage of SNS, participants were given the option (1) professional reasons; (2) academic reasons; (3) keeping in touch with family/friends; (4) make new connections; (5) entertainment/diversion; (6) other.

Participants were asked how often they use SNS. A 6-point scale was used with “1” = more than once a day, “2” = everyday, “3” = weekly, “4” = sometimes, “5” = rarely, “6” = never.

In order to access, if SNS has some negatives, participants were asked about their agreement or disagreement with a two-item scale using 5 point scale with “1” = strongly agree, “2” = agree, “3” = neither agree nor disagree, “4” = disagree, and “5” = strongly disagree. The items include: (1) at times I think social networking have caused more harm than good in

today's society; (2) computer mediated communication like social networking sites would reinforce loneliness and stimulate internet and computer addiction.

Procedure

In order to ensure the validity of the data collection tool, a pilot study was conducted on five participants. Based on this, the data collection method (self administered questionnaires) was modified and finalized. The questionnaire was then administered through the chosen locations. The data collection took place over a two week period to achieve gender balance. After the required sample was gathered, the data was coded and computed with the aid of SPSS 18 (software used in computing for quantitative research). The convenience sample which was adopted increased the efficiency of the survey as it gave room for balance.

Ethical Consideration

Why ethics? Ethics is required since it is a moral principle. It is also needed as it helps to easily identify where unethical conduct has occurred in any given activity. With this in mind, ethical responsibilities lie in either an individual or a social group as it flows from humans professional, social or personal relationships.

For this reason, in the present study participants were informed on the first page of the questionnaire that the research sets out to explore individuals & social networking sites. They were also informed that estimated time for the questionnaire completion is 2-5mins. They were also assured that, the results of the questionnaire will be used for academic purpose only. Participants were all informed that the questionnaire is anonymous, confidential and does not require any personal details. Finally, on the first page of the questionnaire and on collection of the questionnaire, they were thanked for their valuable

contribution, time and support. They were also advised to contact the researcher's supervisor if they require any further information concerning the study.

Data Analysis

The data analysis procedures used in the study were, both univariate and bivariate analysis such as, descriptive statistics, Pearson r correlation coefficient and independent T-test using SPSS 18 (a software used in computing for quantitative research)

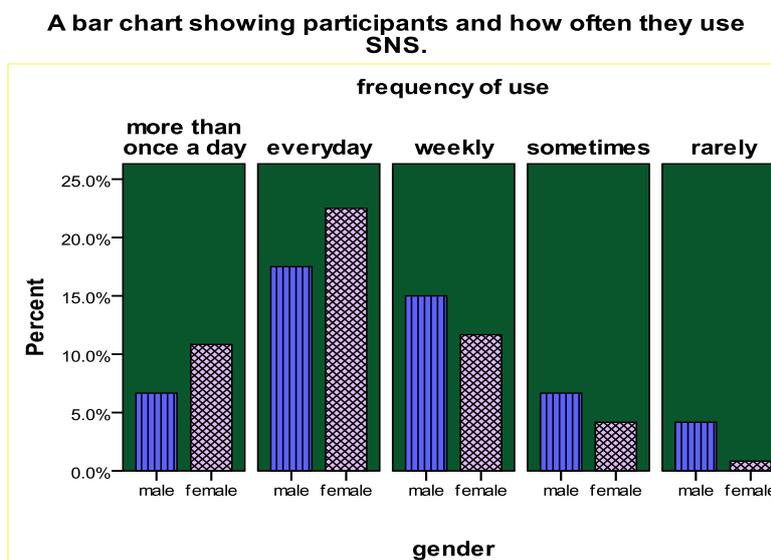
Results

The number of participants in the current study were one hundred and twenty participants (N=120) and were 18 years and older. Sixty females (N=60) and sixty males (N=60). The mean age of the total participants in the study was 32.63 (M=32.63) with a standard deviation of 8.33(SD=8.33). Of the one hundred and twenty participants, the descriptive statistics conducted showed that six participants (N=6) did not disclose their age. Nonetheless, the mean age for females was 31.74 with SD=9.00 while the mean age for males was 33.55 and SD=7.53. The result also indicated that most of the participants 57.5% of participants had acquired third level education, 17.5% attained a post graduate education, 24.2% secondary school education and 0.8% primary school education. The gender breakdown indicated that of the one hundred and twenty participants, 37 males (61.7 %) attained third level education while 32 females (53.3 %) attained third level education. The descriptive statistics also revealed

Regarding participants who were studying and working at the same that 59.2% of participants are in full time employment, 12.5% are in part time employment while 2.5% are unemployed. The result also showed 79.2% of participants lived in the urban area of Dublin while 20% live in the rural area of Dublin. The result showed that 15.8% go to college and at the same time are in employment. While 10% are students and unemployed. Overall, among males and females, the result revealed 65 percent of the male participants were in full time employment while 53.3 % were employed full time.

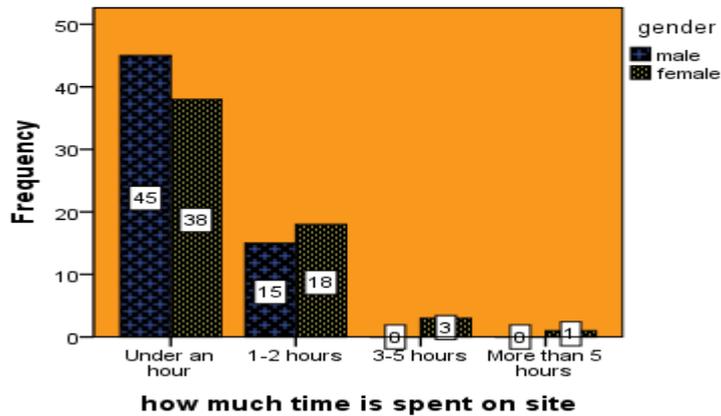
The present study also revealed that 47.5 % of the participants have been a member of social network sites for 1year to less than 3years. Among the males and females, the descriptive statistics showed that, 41.7% of males have been members of SNS for 1year to less than 3years while 53.3 % of females have been a member of SNS for 1year to less than 3years. While for 1year to less than 3years has the highest percentage in terms of how long participants have been a member of their SNS. Descriptive statistics revealed out of the sixty males only five males have been a member for less than six months while for the females only two females have been a member for less than six months. The statistics also revealed that of the one hundred and twenty participants surveyed, 29 participants strongly agreed they were happy with themselves as a social network sites user, 38 participants agreed they were happy, 35 participants neither agreed nor disagreed they were happy as a social network site user, 6 disagreed they were happy while 12 strongly disagreed they were happy as a site user. Nonetheless, the results indicated that 40% of the participants use social network sites everyday and spends under an hour as displayed in graph A and B.

Graph A.



Graph B.

A bar chart showing male and female participants in relation to the amount of time they spend on SNS.



As can be seen in the graphs, the gender difference showed forty five out of the sixty females used SNS every day while thirty- eight of the sixty males used SNS everyday. When it came to the amount of time spent 75% of males spend under an hour while 63.3% of females spend under an hour. The result also showed that fifteen out of the sixty males spend 1-2 hours while eighteen out of the sixty females spend 1-2 hours. The results also showed that male participants did not spend more than 2 hours while for females three women indicated they spent more than 2 hours and one female indicated she spends more than 5hours. The statistics also indicated that 10% of the participants access their SNS from their work computer, 46.6% from their mobile phone, 85% from their home computer, 5% from college computer and 4.2% from other means such as I-pad. Among the males and females, results showed that 91.7% of males tend to access their SNS from their home computer while only 21.7% of females access SNS from home.

According to the results, half of the females tend to access their SNS from their mobile phone. Females also topped the males as the result indicated that 13.3 % of females access their SNS from their work computer while only 6.7% males use this access point. The descriptive statistics also showed that Facebook was the popular social network site used as it indicated that 98.3% of SNS users use Facebook. Having compared both groups, result shows that 58 males out of 60 males used Facebook while 60 females out of 60 females use Facebook. The results also showed 19.2 % of the participants use Twitter, 8 percent use Friendster, 13.3% use LinkedIn, 3.3% use MySpace, 2.5 percent use Bebo and 3.3 % use other accounts. In relation to SNS being participant's main source of communication, results revealed that 11.7% of males agreed they use SNS as their main source of communication while 18.3% of females use SNS as their main source of communication. While 20% of males neither agreed nor disagreed and 10% of females neither agreed nor disagreed.

Descriptive statistics was also conducted to reveal the participants reasons for using SNS. The result showed that, 11.7% of the participants used SNS for professional reasons, 3.3% use SNS for academic reasons, 91.7% of the one hundred and twenty participants use SNS to keep in touch with family or friends, 20.8% use SNS to make new connections, 41.7% use SNS for entertainment or diversion and 2.5% use it for other reason. Nonetheless between the males and females, results revealed that 25% of males use SNS to make new connection while 16.7 % of the females use SNS to make new connections.

In terms of using SNS for entertainment or diversion, descriptive statistics revealed that 50% of males indicated they use SNS for this reason compared to 33.3% of females.

The statistics conducted also indicated that 25 percent of male participants revealed that SNS has caused more harm than good in the society. While 31.7% of female indicated that SNS has caused more harm than good in the society.

Regarding SNS relevance in society, the result showed that, 35.8% of participants strongly agree SNS is relevant in the society. While 25.8% neither agree nor disagree. In terms of disagreement of SNS relevance in the society, the result indicated that 8.3% disagreed and 2.5 % strongly disagreed. In the context, of SNS being inevitable in the society, descriptive statistics revealed that only 5 percent of participants strongly disagreed, 30.8% strongly agreed SNS is inevitable in the society while 16.7% of participants neither agreed nor disagreed.

In terms of the availability of SNS increasing everyone's communication of each other, 43.3 percent indicated that SNS increases expectation of communication. The result showed that, 46.7 percent of females agreed while 43.3% of males agreed SNS availability will increase people's expectation of communication. The study showed that 21.7 % of the participants tend to miss out of on things both good and bad when they do not use SNS. The gender difference showed fifteen out of the sixty females indicated that they miss out, fifteen neither agreed nor disagreed, fifteen disagreed, five strongly agreed and nine strongly disagreed. On the other hand, ten males strongly agreed they miss out, eleven agreed they miss out, nine neither agree nor disagree, and seventeen disagreed while twelve strongly disagreed.

An independent t-test analysis was also conducted since descriptive statistics revealed that 91.7% of the overall participants use SNS to keep in touch with family and friends. The t-test conducted comparing the males and females reason for keeping in touch with family and friends indicated that the mean score for females was .91(SD=.27) while the mean score for males was .96 (SD=.36). Although the mean score for keeping in touch was higher in male than females, there was no significant difference between both groups $t(118) = .841, p > .05$

Pearson's correlation statistic was also used to determine if there is a relationship between the amount of time participants spend on SNS and the frequency of use. The result showed

there was a significant small negative correlation between amount of time spent on SNS and frequency of use in the present study ($r = -.293$, $N=120$, $p < 0.01$) thus indicating that the time participants spend on their SNS contributes to how often they use the site. However, no significant correlations were found between gender and the amount of time they spend on SNS ($r = .175$, $N=120$, $P > .01$). See table 1.1 and 1.2

Table 1.1 Displays the correlation between amount of time Participants spend on SNS and the frequency of use.

		how much time is spent on site	frequency of use
how much time is spent on site	Pearson Correlation	1	-.293**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	120	120
frequency of use	Pearson Correlation	-.293**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	120	120

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1.2 Showing no significant correlations were found between participants and the amount of time they spend on SNS

		gender	how much time is spent on site
gender	Pearson Correlation	1	.175
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.056
	N	120	120
how much time is spent on site	Pearson Correlation	.175	1

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to see if there is a relationship between participant's age and how long they have been with their social network sites.). However, there was no statistically strong significant correlation between participants age and their length of time with SNS ($r = -.054$, $N=114$, $p > .05$). Pearson correlation analysis was also conducted to see if there is a relationship between participant's happiness and their use of social network site and revealed there was a significant negative small correlation. Thus indicating, that participants where happy as a social network site user ($r = -.181$, $N=120$, $p < 0.05$). Pearson correlation was also conducted to determine if there is a relationship between participant's happiness and their age. The result showed that there was a significant positive small correlation between users happiness and their age ($r = .272$, $N=120$, $p < 0.01$). Pearson correlation was also used to see if there is a correlation between participant's happiness and their reason for using SNS as their main source of communication. The analysis revealed that there was a significant positive small correlation between participants happiness and why they use SNS as their main source of communication ($r = .203$, $N=120$, $p < 0.05$). In addition, 35.8 % of the participants indicated that SNS is relevant in the society. While 19.2% disagreed SNS has caused more harm than good. Pearson correlation statistics was conducted and indicated that there was a significant positive moderate correlation between the happiness of SNS users and the relevance of SNS in the society($r = .402$, $N=120$, $p < .01$). See table 1.3

Table1.3 Showing correlation between SNS users happiness and its relevance in society

		happy as a user	relevance in society
happy as a user	Pearson Correlation	1	.402**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	120	120
relevance in society	Pearson Correlation	.402**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	120	120
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Furthermore, in relation to SNS relevance in society and its inevitability in society, the current study indicated that there was a significant positive strong correlation between the relevance of SNS and SNS being inevitable in the society ($r = .515$, $N = 120$, $p < .01$). See table 1.4.

		inevitable in society	relevance in society
inevitable in society	Pearson Correlation	1	.515**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	118	118
relevance in society	Pearson Correlation	.515**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	118	120
**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Discussion

The aim of the current study was to determine possible correlations between age and SNS usage, to determine if this form of communication is relevant in today's society, to collect and analyse existing data in order to understand why people use social networking sites.

Looking at the mean age of the total participants 32.63 ($M=32.63$), the percentage of the participants who have attained third level education, the 59.2 percent of participants in full time employment and the percentage of participants that use SNS every day, the current study is evidence that SNS usage is not only for teenagers as stated in the earlier study carried out by Pew American Life project (2010). It also reflects Dijk(2006) study who described the network society as a social formation with an infrastructure of social and media networks enabling prime mode of organization at all levels (individual, group or organizational and societal)

Nevertheless, the current study is in agreement with Kert (2011) who wrote that as social networking sites become more embedded in daily life worldwide, they will play a more important role in our life and soon have a more diverse audience in terms of age, socio economic status and culture. This study also supports Pew Internet and American Life Project (2011) study who reported that social networking is most popular with women since the current study revealed forty five out of the sixty females used SNS every day compared to the males who were thirty- eight of the sixty males. However, the findings did not support their study in terms of SNS being popular among young adults under age 30 since the current study indicated that the mean age for females in the study was ($M= 31.74$) while the mean age for males was ($M=33.55$).

The study is also in support of Dijk (2006) who theorizes that, new media such as social networking sites have so much merged in society that they touch about every aspect of it. The current study also echoed the findings of Waters (2010) & Pew Internet and American Life Project (2010) who reported that Facebook is currently the most commonly used online social network among adults since statistics for the present study indicated that 98.3 percent of participants in the study use Facebook.

Overall, there are three hypotheses in the current study. The first hypothesis stated predicted that social network site is not inevitable in today's society. Having used Pearson correlation statistics, the results in the current study revealed that there was a significant positive strong correlation between the relevance of social network sites in the society and it being inevitable in the society ($r = .515$, $N = 120$, $p < .01$). This shows that the findings accepted the alternative hypothesis and rejects the null hypothesis which states that social network sites are not inevitable in the society. By comparing the findings in the current study to previous research, the results supports Waters (2010) which states that the term social networking seems inevitable since it is now a place where new social connections both personal and professional are made. The result also supports Kert (2011) who reported that, most SNS users tend to log on to social networking sites every day.

In relation to the second hypothesis which states that, a person's level of education influences their belief about computer addiction, Pearson correlation indicated that there was a significant negative small correlation between level of education and SNS reinforcement of loneliness and computer addiction in the present study ($r = -.245$, $N = 120$, $p < .01$). Therefore the study rejects the null hypothesis and accepts the alternative hypothesis that proposed level of education influences beliefs about computer addiction. Although participants in the current study did not accuse computer mediated communication like SNS of being asocial (i.e. cold and unfriendly) the findings in this study concurs with Kim and Haridakis (2009) &

Dijk (2006) whose study reported that there were fears that CMC would reinforce loneliness and stimulate internet and computer addiction.

In relation to the third hypothesis which predicted that, there is a relationship between age and SNS usage Pearson correlation was conducted on how often participants use their SNS, length of time with site (i.e. when they set up their SNS), how much time is spent on SNS, and the different SNS used by participants. Pearson correlation analysis indicated that there was small positive correlation between age and how often participants use SNS however, it was not statistically significant ($r = .176$, $N = 114$, $p > .01$). The findings indicated there was no significant correlation between participants age and their length of time with site ($r = -.054$, $N = 114$, $P > .01$). In terms of participants age and how much time they spent on their SNS the findings in the study showed that there was a negative insignificant correlation ($r = -.025$, $N = 114$, $P > .01$). While for the different SNS sites used, Pearson correlation also revealed there was a negative insignificant correlation ($r = -.121$, $N = 114$, $P > .01$) and so rejecting the alternative hypothesis and accepting the null hypothesis which states age has no relationship with the usage of SNS.

Nonetheless, the findings in the study revealed that there was a significant small positive relationship between age and participants happiness ($r = .272$, $N = 114 < .01$). Based on this finding, it is safe to say that the current study can be identified with Bracket and Carr (2001) whose study states that, credibility, entertainment, informativeness as three positive factors involved in determining attitude. The findings also correlates to Valenzuela, Park and Kee (2009) study which reports that a medium's technological capabilities as well as the actual content it transmits can influence person's attitude and behaviour.

Furthermore, the current study also echoed Dijk (2006) who theorized that the availability of these media also increases everyone's expectation of each other's communication behavior. Since the current study showed that 43.3 percent of the participants surveyed, agreed to the

statement “the availability of SNS will increase everyone’s expectation of communication behavior”. In terms of gender differences and usage of SNS, the current study although acknowledged the study conducted by Pew Internet and American Life Project (2011) a US based research organization, who found that two-thirds of online adults (65%) use online social networking sites with people having two or more profiles. It did not support their findings that social networking is most popular with women and young adults under age 30 since the current study indicated that the mean age for females was 31.74 with $SD=9.00$ while the mean age for males was 33.55 and $SD=7.53$. The study also contradicts Ofcom (2008) who research in the UK found that just over one fifth (49%) of young adult users have set up their own profile on a social networking site while for adults, the chance of setting up a profile is highest among 20 – 24yr olds and decreases with age.

In relation to the reasons why people use SNS, the study revealed one female participant use SNS for stalking as the other reason for using SNS. Although the statistics is not much, it can be said that this result echoed the findings of Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn and Hughes (2009), who in their study reported that 18% of their respondents reported personally experiencing negative effects of facebook, such as unwanted advances, stalking, and harassment. In another context, it also concurs with Valenzuela, Park and Kee (2009), Ducoffe (1996) and Bracket and Carr (2001) studies in relation to users attitudes. The study also found that two male participants use SNS to organize events like birthday party.

In terms of gender differences, the findings in this study is parallel to Pew Internet and American Life Project (2011), who highlighted that social networking sites provide males with the opportunity for making new friends since fifteen out of the sixty males revealed that they use SNS to make new connections compared to the females as only ten women ten females indicated they use this medium to make new connections. However, the study did not support Pew Internet and American Life Project (2011) and Thelwall (2007) on the basis that

females use social networking sites as avenues to reinforce pre existing friendship. In contrary, the findings in this study were that 91.7% of males and 91.7% of females tend to use SNS to keep in touch with families or friends. Based on the findings, the study concurs with Dijk, (2006) who described the network society, by stating that the in the network society, social relations become increasingly interactive by the combination of social and media networks with multilateral communication compared to the mass society which has one way media.

The study also supports Kelsey (2010) who highlighted that social network is a great way for people to stay in touch, capture, preserve and share their life story since one hundred and ten participants indicated they use SNS to keep in touch with families or friends.

Also, among the males and females, findings in the study were that thirty out of the sixty males tend to use SNS for entertainment or diversion while only twenty out of the sixty females use SNS for entertainment or diversion. Although this study did not identify the five distinct group which site users tend to fall under as reported by Ofcom's (2008), the findings in the study in another context reflected one of the distinct group Ofcom's (2008) explained. Based on the findings in the current study, twenty five percent of males indicated that they use SNS to make new connection while fifty percent of males indicated they use SNS for entertainment or diversion. With this finding, the study is proof that males derive entertainment from using SNS which would make the fall under the alpha socialisers category discussed by Ofcom's (2008) even though ages of the males were not identified as being less than 25 years. On the other hand, the current study also supports Bracket and Carr (2001) who explained media context have an important influence and mentioned entertainment as one of the three positive factors involved in determining the attitude of young adults towards web based services. Findings in this study, also reflects previous study conducted by Ducoffe (1996) as he argued in his study that most young adults tend to join or

visit web based services because of its entertaining nature which includes lots of fun and games.

The findings in the study also acknowledge Waters (2010) who reported that social networking remains one of the most popular and fastest growing behaviors on both PC based internet and the mobile web as the current study revealed 46.6 percent of the participants surveyed, access SNS from their mobile phone while 85 percent from their home computer. The literature reviewed showed that Dijk, (2006) reported that there are growing concerns such as, if media and social networks will transform society gradually, if they will have implications for society or if they will have no substantial effect. By comparing the literature and the current study which indicated that forty-three participants (35.8%) strongly agreed that social network site is relevant in the society, the findings in the study is evidence that although SNS is having a huge impact in today's society there is still a growing concern as 28.3% of the overall participants surveyed still believe SNS has caused more harm than good. Therefore in parallel with Valenzuela, Park and Kee (2009) study in which they asserted that a medium's technological capabilities as well as the actual content it transmits can influence person's attitude and behavior.

The study also revealed that participants did not regard SNS as the best form of communication created by mankind as twenty five percent of the overall participants strongly disagreed. This finding is in parallel to Dijk, (2006) who reported that human individuals have always communicated more with some people than with others since the time they lived in small bands and tribes. The current study when compared to previous study has shown that internet usage is popular in a developed country such as Ireland as the finding in this study revealed that forty percent of the participants use social network sites everyday thus in support of Pew Research Centers Global Attitudes Project, 2010 survey who found out that

involvement in social networking is relatively low in countries that are less economically developed since people in these countries do not go online at all.

Limitations

Limitations in a study is unavoidable as it serves as an eye opener. Basically any limitation however small it may be broadens our understanding and knowledge of what could have been done differently. In this study, the limitations encountered were the participants used as more than half of the participants lived in the urban area of Dublin which may have an effect on their responses.

Another potential limitation in relation to the participants was the numbers of participants surveyed as the number of participants do not represent a diverse audience. However, the participants in the present study represent a highly educated group of individuals since (57.5 %) had acquired third level education while 59.2% are employed full time. The fact that the study required sixty males and sixty females was also a limitation as it had a huge impact on the amount of time spent on data collection.

Taking these limitations into consideration, the study if conducted again would make changes in terms of the number of participants and their area of residence. The study would ensure a bigger sample would be surveyed and participants are drawn from all over Ireland. The study would also use the Eysenck personality questionnaire which is designed to determine attitudes to showcase the different types of attitudes that exist among SNS users. The questionnaire would ask participants of their ethnicity, and parent's educational background since Hargittai (2007) highlighted that a person's race, ethnicity and parental educational background are all associated with use.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results mentioned in this study provide quantitative evidence to backup previous studies in relation to social network site users, at least in relation to the most popular SNS in today's society and the reasons why people use SNS. The study has also shown that the term social networking seems inevitable since previous studies and this study has shown that people log on to social network sites everyday. The current study has shown that as the world changes so can the age of SNS users and patterns of social networking change. The current study has shown that social network is no longer a thing for teenagers since findings in the study showed the mean age for females was ($M=31.74$) while the mean age for males was ($M=33.55$). Thus adding Ireland as the fourth country with SNS users over 30 years since Pew research Centers Global Attitudes Project (2010) highlighted that three countries were only found to have social network users ages 30 to 49 year-olds and these are Britain, Poland and the U.S.A.

The study also showed that participants are happy as a social network site user hence there was a small correlation between participant's happiness and why they use social network site as their main source of communication.

With regards to future study, the results of this study provide groundwork for further study into social networking and the influence it has on personality as only a handful of study has been done in this area such as Ofcom's (2008). In addition, future study should also look at what actually makes SNS relevant in the society since 35.8% of the participants in this study, strongly agreed that SNS is relevant in the society. Study should also be conducted in relation

to SNS and its harmfulness since people still indicated it has caused more harm than good even though they strongly agreed it is relevant in the society.

Furthermore, usage of SNS should be studied in relation to user's cultural difference and profession since the current study although asked if users were employed or unemployed did not go in depth as to users profession and profession can be a variable that contributes frequency of use . Since previous study, reported that President Obama as a politician used social network site like Facebook during his campaign. Future study should also use large scale quantitative research and investigate the use of SNS over time since we are in changing world and people still have limited understanding of what is SNS, who is a SNS user, what is the purpose and effects of SNS in our life.

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Appendix 1



Dear participant,

My name is Chika Agbalusi and I am currently a student at Dublin Business School completing a piece of research for a B.A. in Social Science. This research sets out to explore individuals & social networking sites.

Estimated time for the questionnaire completion is 2-5mins.

Please be assured that, the results of the questionnaire will be used for academic purpose only. The questionnaire is anonymous and does not require any personal details. All information provided here is confidential.

Thank you for your valuable contribution, your time, your honest response, your help and your support.

If you require any further information concerning this research; please feel free to contact me via email at 1281238@mydbs.ie or my research supervisor Vanessa Long, at the address below.

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Appendix 2

Section a

Please complete the following information

Gender:

Male:

Female:

Please indicate your age in years:

Is your area of residence:

Urban

Rural

Please indicate your highest level of education achieved to date:

Primary school

Secondary school

Third level

Postgraduate

Section B

INSTRUCTIONS: Please read and circle the following as appropriate.

1) Are you currently one of the following?

- a) Student-Unemployed
- b) Employed- Part time
- c) Employed- Full time
- d) Unemployed
- e) Student - Employed
- f) Retired

2) Do you currently use social networking sites? (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, etc.)

a) Yes

b) No

3) If yes which of the following social networking sites do you use?

a) Facebook

b) Friendster

c) LinkedIn

d) Twitter

e) Bebo

f) MySpace

g) Other (please specify) _____

4) How long have you been a member?

a) Less than 6 months

b) 6 months to less than 1 year

c) 1 year to less than 3 years

d) 3 years to less than 5 years

e) 5 years or more

5) How often do you use your social networking site (s)?

- a) More than once a day
- b) Everyday
- c) Weekly
- d) Sometimes
- e) Rarely
- f) Never

6) How much time do you spend on your social networking site (s)?

- a) Under an hour
- b) 1-2 hours
- c) 3-5 hours
- d) More than 5 hours

7) Where do you access your social networking site from?

- a) Home- PC
- b) Work- PC
- c) College –PC
- d) Mobile phone
- e) Other (please specify) _____

8) What is your reason for using social networking site(s)?

- a) Professional reasons
- b) Academic reasons
- c) Keeping in touch with family/ friends
- d) Make new connections
- e) Entertainment / diversion
- f) Other (please specify) _____

Section C.

INSTRUCTIONS: Please read the following statements and indicate how much you agree or disagree with them by circling the appropriate number to the right of the statement as follows:

1 = strongly agree

2 = agree

3 = neither agree nor disagree

4 = disagree

5 = strongly disagree

9) On the whole, I am happy with myself as a social networking site user

.....1 2 3 4 5

10) Computer mediated communication like social networking sites would reinforce

loneliness and stimulate internet and computer addiction.

.....1 2 3 4 5

11) Social networking sites are relevant in today's society

.....1 2 3 4 5

12) The availability of social networking sites increase everyone's expectation of each other's communication behavior.

.....1 2 3 4 5

13) At times I think social networking sites have caused more harm than good in today's society.

.....1 2 3 4 5

14) I feel like I am missing out when I don't use social networking site(s)

.....1 2 3 4 5

15) Social networking site has become my main source of communication

.....1 2 3 4 5

16) Social networking sites is the best means of communication created by man

.....1 2 3 4 5

17) Social networking sites are inevitable in today's society

.....1 2 3 4 5

Thank you for your participation

