

THE VALUE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES IN BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT: A REVIEW

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Abstract: *Social networking sites (SNSs) like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitters, MySpace and Orkut etc. allow users to create and maintain a network of close friends or business associates for social and/or professional reasons. While there are hundreds of SNSs, with various technological affordances, supporting a wide range of interests and practices; this paper examines the role of SNSs as a tool for business development. Firms across industries have discovered the potential of social media in a variety of business functions, from brand building, market research, consumer grievances handling to receiving consumer feedback. Therefore this exploratory study also focuses on how marketers are effectively using the SNSs for brand promotion taking up the successful case of ZooZoo, the Vodafone character for market expansion in India.*

Keywords: Social Network Sites, SNS, Brand Positioning, Value Added Services (VAS), Communities of Users, Privacy, Business Potential, Brand Campaign

Category : Marketing Flexibility

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INTRODUCTION

A social network is a set of people, organizations or other social entities connected by a set of social relationships, such as friendship, working as colleagues or information exchange. The movement which started off with Six Degrees.com has given rise to host of Social Network Sites (SNSs) like Orkut, LinkedIn, Twitters, MySpace, Facebook and so on. Since their introduction, social network sites have attracted millions of users, many of whom have integrated these sites into their daily practices. Just as people use public places like parks and malls to gather, socialize with their peers, and make sense of and help build the culture around them, Social networking portals, a recent development, allows a user to create and maintain a network of close friends or business associates for social and/or professional reasons. There are hundreds of SNSs, with various technological features, supporting a wide range of interests and practices. While their key technological features are fairly consistent, the cultures that emerge around SNSs are varied. For instance Myspace.com has earned the label of a site promoting dating whereas LinkedIn has emerged as a site for professional networking. Most sites support the maintenance of pre-existing social networks, but others help strangers connect to each other based on shared interests, political views, or activities. Some sites cater to diverse audiences, while others attract people based on common language or shared racial, sexual, religious, or nationality based identities. Sites also vary in the extent to which they incorporate new information and communication tools, such as mobile connectivity, blogging, and photo/video sharing. People connect and share their views through SNSs. Going a step further, today organizations are using SNSs for enhancing their business. As shown in Fig. 1 the popularity of SNSs spearheaded by Facebook has been a worldwide phenomenon.

Table :1 Top 30 countries with highest number of Facebook users

Rank	Country	Number of Facebook users March 2009	Number of Facebook users 31st March 2010	12 month growth %
1	USA	56,796,060	114,190,780	101%
2	UK	17,866,140	24,378,040	36.5%
3	Indonesia	2,325,840	20,775,320	793%
4	Turkey	9,759,780	20,538,740	110%
5	France	8,946,140	17,317,460	93.6%

6	Italy	8,260,300	15,486,480	87.5%
7	Canada	11,597,420	13,952,740	20.3%
8	Philippines	1,026,300	11,561,740	1027%
9	Spain	4,228,220	9,292,380	120%
10	Mexico	2,142,080	9,208,560	330%
11	Columbia	4,838,760	8,681,500	79.4%
12	Argentina	3,406,520	8,580,180	152%
13	Germany	1,955,240	8,454,240	332%
14	Australia	5,327,260	7,922,140	48.7%
15	India	1,561,000	7,809,800	400%
16	Chile	4,397,300	6,273,000	42.7%
17	Taiwan	205,500	6,107,100	2872%
18	Venezuela	2,658,140	5,765,240	117%
19	Malaysia	1,197,560	5,552,660	364%
20	Brazil	395,940	3,602,100	810%
21	Sweden	2,052,080	3,422,680	67%
22	Belgium	2,125,600	3,239,980	52.4%
23	Thailand	284,340	2,895,320	918%
24	Hong Kong	1,686,020	2,865,700	70%
25	Egypt	1,252,100	2,816,480	125%
26	Greece	1,306,600	2,611,420	100%
27	Israel	1,030,200	2,608,420	153.2%
28	South Africa	1,385,340	2,485,960	79.5%
29	Czech Rep	444,120	2,421,720	446%
30	Denmark	2,028,760	2,341,900	15.4%

Source:<http://www.nickburcher.com/2010/03/facebook-usage-statistics-march-2010.html>

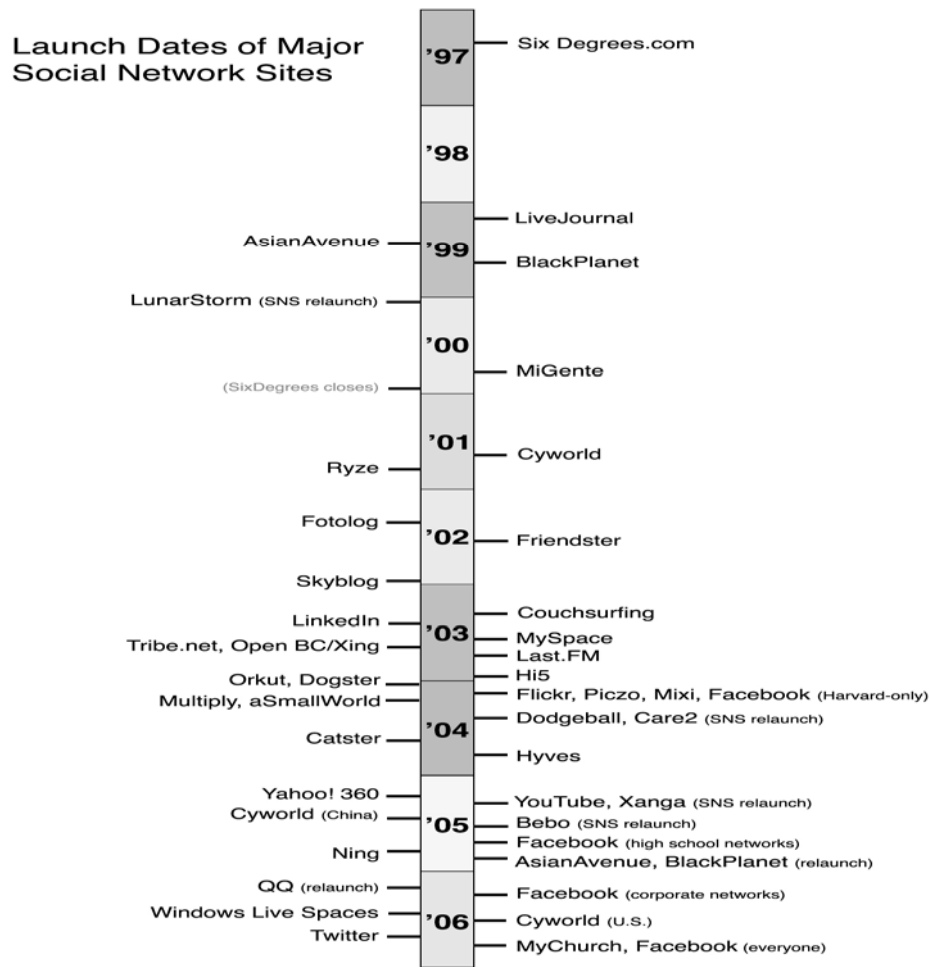
In this paper, we present an exploratory study wherein an attempt is made to bridge the gap that exists in literature focusing on the role of social networking to promote business, in this new era of Internet development. We attempt to find answer to the question whether marketing through these channels prove effective.

Social Networking Sites: The Chronology of Development

Boyd and Ellison (2007) defined SNSs as web based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. A social network site emphasizes on developing and reflecting social relations among people, e.g., who share interests or activities. A SNS provides a service that essentially consists of a representation of profile of each user, their social links, and a variety of additional services. Most of these social network services are web based and provides means for users to interact over the internet, through e-mail and instant messaging although mobile telephones also offer access to these services. What makes social network sites unique is not that they allow individuals to meet strangers, but rather that they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks. This can result in connections between individuals that would not otherwise be made, but that is often not the goal, and these meetings are frequently between "latent ties" (Haythornthwaite, 2005) who share some offline connection.

According to Cotriss (2008) social networking sites began in the form of generalized online communities such as The WELL (1985), Theglobe.com (1994), Geocities (1994) and Tripod.com (1995). These early communities focused on bringing people together to interact with each other through chat rooms, and share personal information and ideas around any topics through personal homepage publishing tools which was a precursor to the blogging phenomenon. There were some communities that took a different approach by simply having people link to each other through email addresses. These sites included Classmates.com (1995), focusing on ties with former school mates, and SixDegrees.com (1997), focusing on indirect ties. These sites help in creating user profiles, messages sent to users held on a "friends list" and other members could be sought out who had similar interests to yours in their profiles (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Whilst these features had existed in some or the other form in different portals when SixDegrees.com came about, for the first time these functions were available in one package as part of SixDegrees.com. Despite these new developments, the website simply wasn't profitable and eventually shut down (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Owner of the sites even described it as “simply ahead of its time”. Epinions.com in 1999 brought about one such model of social networking which was trust-based. They brought about new innovations that included not only showing who is "friends" with whom, but also giving users more control over content and connectivity. Between 2002 and 2004, three social networking sites emerged as the most popular form of social interaction on internet, causing such sites to become part of mainstream users globally. First there was Friendster in 2002 (which Google tried to acquire in 2003), then MySpace and LinkedIn a year later, and finally, Bebo. By 2005, MySpace, emergent as the biggest of them all and was reported to be getting more page views than Google. In 2004 Facebook emerged as a competitor, which is rapidly growing in size. Twitter has been yet another entrant in this space. The timeline of launch of major social networking sites is depicted in Figure 1.



Source: <http://www.danah.org/papers/JCMCIIntro.pdf>

Figure1-Timeline of the launch dates of major SNSs and dates when community

sites re-launched with SNS features

Review of literature

Most sites support the maintenance of pre-existing social networks, but others help strangers connect to each other based on shared interests, political views, or activities. Some sites cater to diverse audiences, while others attract people based on common language or shared racial, sexual, religious, or nationality based identities. Sites also vary in the extent to which they incorporate new information and communication tools, such as mobile connectivity, blogging, and photo/video sharing. The research thus far on social network sites (SNSs) has been focused on various aspects such as privacy issues (Stutzman and Duffield, 2010), communities of users (Ehrlich, and Shami, 2010), self presentation (Dimicco and Millen, 2007), network analysis (Heer and Boyd, 2005) and social capital benefits (Ellison et al, 2007). Butts (2008) reviewed the fundamental concepts of network analysis and different methods currently used in the field. The study highlighted issues pertaining to data collection, analysis of single networks, network comparison, and analysis of individual-level covariates. Burger and Buskens (2009) examined how actors change their networks to reach better positions in various contexts. Experiments were used to test whether networks that are theoretically predicted to be stable are also stable experimentally. They found that emerging networks correspond to a large extent with the predicted networks. Consequently, they are contingent on the incentives present in various social contexts. In addition, they found that subjects tend to form specific stable networks with a higher probability than predicted, namely, efficient networks and networks in which everyone is equally well off.

Lampe et.al. (2007) explored the relationship between profile structure and number of friends, giving designers insight into the importance of the profile and how it works to encourage connections and articulated relationships between users. They described a theoretical framework that draws on aspects of signaling theory, common ground theory, and transaction costs theory to generate an understanding of why certain profile fields may be more predictive of friendship articulation on the site. With dataset of 30,773 Facebook profiles, they determined which profile elements are most likely to predict friendship links and discuss the theoretical and design implications of our findings. Ellison et.al. (2007) examined the relationship between use of Facebook and the formation and maintenance of social capital. In addition to assessing bonding and bridging social capital, they explored a dimension of social capital that assesses ones ability to stay connected with members of a

previously inhabited community, which we call maintained social capital. Regression analyses conducted on results from a survey of undergraduate students ($N = 286$) suggest a strong association between use of Facebook and the three types of social capital, with the strongest relationship being to bridging social capital. In addition, Facebook usage was found to interact with measures of psychological well-being, suggesting that it might provide greater benefits for users experiencing low self-esteem and low life satisfaction.

Another stream of literature focused on the business application of SNSs. Murchu et.al. (2004) studied social networking portals that allow a user to create and maintain a network of close friends or business associates for social and/or professional reasons. They suggested a classification schema for the main types of social networking sites and conduct an evaluation in terms of features and functionality. According to Putnam (2000) people are able to use social networking sites for personal and professional use, communications, establishing new business developments and contacts, scheduling meetings offline, dating without initial real-world communication, and to build and manage their offline social networks online. Communities can be better informed more quickly through online social networking, and become more engaged and involved with one another in an era when social capital is on the decline. The most popular public site for professional networking is LinkedIn.com, with over 20 million registered users. LinkedIn is most commonly used for generating sales leads, finding potential hires, and in general, leveraging the contact lists of fellow colleagues (Salz, 2006). Again, the focus of users is on information providing and gathering, not on socializing.

Comprehensive review of the sites

No	Theme of the Research	Year	Author	Findings of the study
1	Social network site changes over time: The case of MySpace	2010	David Wilkinson and Mike Thelwall	The paper examines the impact of mobile telephony on four social institutions of democracy, bureaucracy, education and also adolescence. The paper observes that the mobile telephone will impact the level at which communication takes place within the various institutions and also the independence of the actors within the institutions.
2	The success factors of the Social Network Sites "Twitter"	2010	Masoud Banbersta	The paper examines, the success factors of Twitter are investigated from two perspectives: one from the business perspective and one from the user's perspective. In the business perspective, the factors which influence Twitter's success as a (business) organization are discussed. In the user's perspective, the influential factors which motivate people to use Twitter are addressed. In this part, the UTAUT model and the Tiger pleasure framework are used as the theoretical framework for the influential factors.

Covering Different communities of users

No	Theme of the Research	Year	Author	Findings of the study
1	Microblogging Inside and Outside the Workplace	2010	Kate Ehrlich, N. Sadat Shami	This study examined microblogging in the workplace by conducting a content analysis comparing posts from individuals who were using an internal proprietary tool and Twitter simultaneously. Qualitative interviews explored users' motivations regarding microblogging behavior. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of microblogging for business use
2	Application of Social network to improve /help LIs Professional/ Professionals: a case study of HDLS	2010	Vinod Kumar Mishra	The paper discusses the application of help desk for library society (HDLS). The present paper also discusses the significance of social network/ web 2.0 in present digital era.

Privacy Issues

No	Theme of the Research	Year	Author	Findings of the study
1	Friends Only: Examining a Privacy-Enhancing Behavior in Facebook	2010	Fred Stutzman, Jacob Kramer-Duffield	In this study we theorize privacy in social network sites as a contextual information practice, managed by a process of boundary regulation. The paper emphasizes on the relationship between network composition, expectancy violations, and discursive privacy practices and setting the profile friends-only.
2	Privacy in Online Social Networking at Workplace	2009	Yang Wang, Alfred Kobsa	The paper emphasize on the privacy aspect of this practice at workplace. This paper aims at starting the groundwork towards filling the gap. The paper hypothesize a number of potential privacy issues in

				work practice and suggest future research directions in this area.
3	An Evaluation of Identity-Sharing Behavior in Social Network Communities		Frederic Stutzman	The paper analyzes the identity information disclosure in social network communities and opinions regarding identity protection and information disclosure.

Business Potential

No	Theme of the Research	Year	Author	Findings of the study
1	Social networks enabling matrimonial information services in India	2010	Jiban K. Pal	The paper presents the state-of-the-art of popular matrimony service portals emerged in India for providing SDI (selective dissemination of information) based personalized services to multifarious groups of the nation. It also examines the potentialities of the four biggest matrimonial players (viz. shaadi, bharatmatrimony, jeevansathi and simplymarry) in the country consistent with the present and anticipated needs of the marriage-information-seekers. The paper noticed that online matrimony services would have ever-increasing importance in satisfying the objectivity of social networking practices.

Features, functions and Technology

No	Theme of the Research	Year	Author	Findings of the study
1	When Social Networks Cross Boundaries: A Case Study of Workplace Use of Facebook and LinkedIn	2009	Meredith M. Skeels, Jonathan Grudin	The paper discusses the use of social networking software by professionals. The paper observes that it is predominantly to support weak ties whose contribution to productivity can be difficult to prove, we anticipate rapid uptake

				of social networking technology by organizations.
2	Online Social and Business Networking Communities	2004	Ina O'Murchu, John G. Breslin, Stefan Decker	The paper examines social network sites and classifies them in terms of features and functionality.

Promoting Sustainability

No	Theme of the Research	Year	Author	Findings of the study
1	Social Networks as a support of marketing for nonprofit organizations	2009	Drago Ruzic, Antun Bilos	The paper examines users in the Croatian internet scene with estimates of further development in near future.
2	Leveraging Social Networks To Motivate Individuals to Reduce their Ecological Footprints	2007	Jennifer Mankoff, Deanna Matthews, Susan R. Fussell, and Michael Johnson	The paper proposes comparison of different motivational schemes in three ways: Reduction in CO2 emission; lifestyle changes; and ongoing use by users who join the site (retention).

Emerging trends in social networks : Leveraging Social Networking Sites to Generate Business

There are number of services available to entrepreneurs and businesspeople that are helpful in generating business and are growing day by day. One of the sites is LinkedIn that strikes users as the easiest to embrace, and the most effective. The sites include information relating to current job, previous positions, and general interests. It also enables users to publish their

own blog or even allow users to join specific community discussion groups. Most of the online business networks are currently free but it is expected that the model will soon change to a subscription basis. Therefore, social media participation is an essential tool in networking with professional contacts, making new contacts, recruiting employees, and keeping in touch with the world. But a broader view of business networking is creating a pool of contacts from which you can draw leads, referrals, ideas, and information for your job search. With the internet experience like social networking sites - most notably Orkut and Hi5 - as well as blogging catching on especially among the youth, ad agencies are coming up with different ways of targeting these channels. Therefore, our paper focuses on the advertising industry and how effective SNSs are in building brand promotion.

Advertising through SNSs- A Worldwide Trend

Firms across industries have discovered the potential of social media in a variety of business functions, from brand building, market research, consumer grievances handling to receiving consumer feedback. Today, social media networks such as Facebook, Orkut and Twitter accessed by 8% of the India's Internet users — are among a marketer's best tools to interact with and respond to consumers. Vaseline has released a skin-lightening application for Facebook in India that allows users to make their faces whiter in their profile pictures, It's promotional campaign promises to "Transform Your Face On Facebook With Vaseline" using a line of skin-lightening creams for men. It features a Bollywood actor as spokesperson, depicting his face divided into dark and fair halves.

Companies are realizing that through social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and blogs, feedback about products and services used are instantaneously transmitted to a wider community of users. Therefore quick redressal of consumer complaints is a competitive advantage. Consumer grievance redressal, if delayed, can generate bad mouth, which travels faster on social medium .Travel portal Cleartrip had to deal with an incident initiated by a Twitter user, @Kiruba. Kiruba tweeted "Cleartrip.com took my money and did not book my ticket to Malaysia. Had a harrowing experience at airport..." Within days, 40 other Twitter users took it up: The portal apologized to Kiruba on Twitter and promised to look into the issue immediately. It also paid to upgrade the return ticket of Kiruba and his wife from Malaysia to business class.

The brand managers are seeing social networking sites as an alternative means for promoting products as they are cost-effective platform for ad campaigns. Also, SNSs is a quicker medium that can provide an interactive connect with consumers. This trend can be seen in not only in India, but in other developed countries too. A recent report by Nasdaq-listed comscore, which measures the digital world, has shown that about one in every five Internet display ads in the US is viewed on a social networking Web site such as Myspace or Facebook. According to another report by the e-marketer (2008), business to business (B2B) marketers are expected to spend approximately \$40 million on social network advertising. The report also states that by 2012, it will increase by 500 percent, which is expected to grow to \$210 million.

Brand Campaigns through SNSs-The Indian Experience

In India, companies such as Vodafone, Airtel, Samsung, Kwality, Adidas and a host of other companies across sectors such as FMCG, mobile handset makers and consumer durables are increasingly positioning their brands on some of these sites. In India, a recent report by Webchutney, a digital agency which works with HUL, P&G, Airtel and Microsoft, among others, found that the overall advertisement spends from the 445 advertisers it surveyed were likely to fall by 10 per cent to reach Rs 4,663 crore, but their ad spends on digital media will grow by 44 per cent (from Rs 278 crore to Rs 399 crore) in the year 2009-2010..

The large Indian social networks are bigadda, ibibo, minglebox, fropper, desimartini and recently launched itimes and rediff social. Samsung Mobile has positioned its campaign for its touch-screen mobile sets with ibibo. They found social networking sites useful and a highly effective interactive medium for communicating with the youth, which is a key target segment especially for their touch-screen and multimedia phones. The mushrooming audience these sites are getting is the main reason which prompted brand managers to view this as a platform for brand campaigns. According to a report by comscore, Inc. (NASDAQ: SCOR), a leader in measuring the digital world, on the top social networking sites in India, Orkut reigned as the most visited social networking site in December 2008 with more than 12.8 million visitors, an increase of 81 percent from the previous year. Orkut's audience was three times the size of its nearest competitor in the category. Facebook.com captured the second position with 4 million visitors, up 150 percent versus year ago, followed by local social networking site Bharatstudent.com with 3.3 million visitors (up 88 percent) and hi5.com with 2 million visitors (up 182 percent).The study had shown that in that month the

total unique visitors to such sites were 19.3 million, up by 51 per cent from the same month in the previous year (12.7 million).

But the question still remains whether increased level of visits to these sites offer business value. According to the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASSOCHAM) the employees actively use the social networking sites just for the sake of socializing and romancing. The survey also showed that 19 per cent of the companies give access to the social networking sites for business purpose, whereas 40 per cent of the companies give full access to these sites. This survey conducted from 4,00 corporate employees disclosed that the firms are losing their productivity of around 12.5 per cent, as the employees spend an average of an hour, each day on social networking websites and in this way; they are wasting their time. Nevertheless, advertising on social networks has become very popular because of the amount of traffic social networks attract. Businesses can advertise in the form of banners and text ads, which will be viewable to millions of web users (Williamson, 2006).

SNSs-Online Advertising Opportunities for Brand Promotion of ZooZoos

After viewing the commercials, the participants were asked to describe what they liked about the advertisements. Overall, the respondents from the two focus groups in each of the five cities were unanimous in pointing out the reasons for liking the advertisements. Funny, amusing/humorous and interesting were the commonly sighted reasons for liking the advertisements.

Vodafone in India has used it effectively to create market buzz around the animation character Zoozoo (Sinha et al , 2009). Vodafone's rebranding of the Indian mobile operator Hutchison Essar following its \$10.9 billion cash acquisition of the company in May 2007. Initially, the advertising campaign focused on conveying the simple message that 'Hutch is now Vodafone' and then came up with "Zoozoo" campaign in an effort to differentiate itself from other telecom operators through its value added services (VAS). With the remarkable success of Zoozoos on television ads during the Indian Premier League, the lovable egg-headed Zoozoos quickly made their way onto comic strips, newspaper mastheads, birthday cakes, wedding cards, shoes, T-shirts, key chains and even rakhis, as clever local and Chinese marketers cashed in on their popularity with fans. The Zoozoos campaign resonated strongly with viewers in creating an emotional connect and communicating various offerings. The Zoozoos tell viewers about Vodafone's various innovative and customer-centric offerings in

a simple and endearing manner. Not surprisingly, Vodafone considering the character’s broad appeal and popularity. Even though there was a gap of almost six months since a new Zoozoo ad was released on television, the ads and especially the characters were kept alive by the company and the fans through various other mediums and platforms such as social networking sites.

In the second phase, after the release of these ads, Vodafone promoted these characters on social media sites, which was another wise decision. Zoozoo fan clubs are there on social networking sites like Facebook, YouTube, Orkut, Twitter, and many more, where they have a huge followings. Mere,the official Zoozoo fan club page on social networking site Facebook has at least 313,129 fans, which is a rare distinction for any advertisement character. According to experts this helps in maintaining the branded merchandise serves well for the brand as well as the retail partner.

Interestingly, Vodafone has a special quiz page to know 'What kind of Zoozoo are you'. And yet another page allows you to download wallpapers, mobile wallpapers and screensavers. On YouTube too ZooZooos are real sensation. One ad about beauty tips over the phone was reportedly viewed 13,000 times on YouTube, in a few days. On Twitter Zoozooos have nearly 150 followers. According to Neo-Ogilvy, the digital arm of O&M, which is managing the Facebook brand page of Zoozooos, the page has received more than 2.6 million page views till last week, since its launch on April 20 2009. Curiously enough this is much higher than the page views of IPLT20.com, the website of Indian Premier League, of which Vodafone is a partner. A brief analysis of the various social media tools used in the campaign is depicted in Table 2.

Table-2 Social Media Sites and Zoozoo campaign

Social Media Sites	Viewership
YouTube	The channel has 129 in-links coming from various blogs. Most viewed ad and also the public favourite in conversations was Vodafone Busy Message generating a total of 197,837 views. It must be considered that multiple copies of the video are available on YouTube and other video sharing sites so the real number of views is pretty high.

Facebook	The official fan club on FaceBook has 294,669 fans. The Zoozoo quiz app is the only attempt made to engage the public around the Zoozoo characters. The quiz is based on identifying “What kind of Zoozoo are you?”. The same app is available on the official site. FaceBook was the centre of all web activities with all videos.
Twitter	The efforts on Twitter were a complete fail with only 327 followers. People did tweet about how they loved Zoozoos but no one really followed the official tweets. The sole reason was that the content was not engaging. It was not a value add-on. The tweets were simply links to the various videos. Instead, had there been some ‘Zoozoo facts’ and insight into the making of the ads, more conversation could have been created. The Indian users on Twitter are mostly media and technology people who have an appetite to digest more behind the scene content and more value content. A simple tweet like, “The total cost of production was Rs. 3 crores” could have gone a long way in retweets and thereby making the conversation and engagement truly viral.
Orkut	It has 49,637 members on this community, which is pretty low. MTV Roadies had made a perfect use of Orkut for promotion. Ogilvy should have borrowed some insights from there. The reason for not considering Orkut might be that Orkut doesn’t have these options of creating brand pages etc. A lesser accepted reason we believe is that media people are suave and have mostly graduated from Orkut to Facebook. So instead of understanding user behavior, they consider themselves as the user, which is a blunder in marketing. When using social media you have to put the product where the audience is. Doing it the other way around is less effective and costlier as well.

Conclusion

Emergence of Social Networking Sites such as LinkedIn, orkut, etc created communities of users. Research studies about SNS broadly cover profiling of users, technical features of these sites, applications and its business development potential. The success of these sites in developing business depends on the extent to which marketers use it effectively in conjunction with the traditional channels of advertising.

Future Scope of Research

The research underlying this work is exploratory in nature as use of social networking sites for business promotion is a recent phenomenon in India. In order to reach conclusive results, further study can be undertaken covering empirical study for different demographic segments like teenagers, elderly, single woman, and so on to challenge, confirm or add to the aspects covered by this research.

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