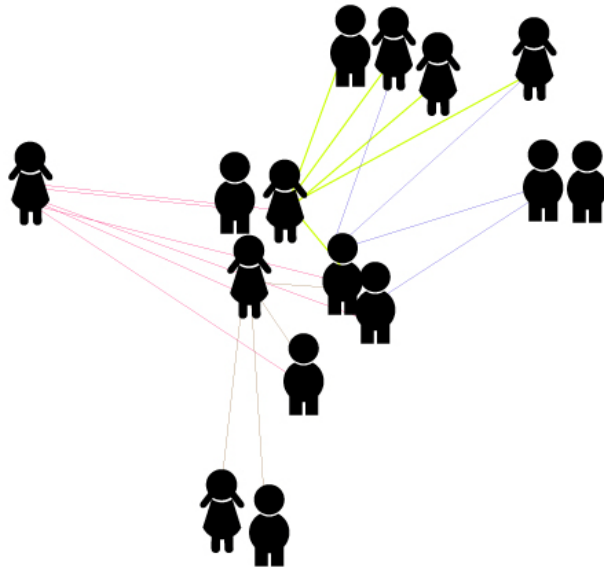


Online Social Media

“What makes it popular?”



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1. Introduction

1.1 A New Phenomenon

It goes back to 1997 when media and communication took a totally different route. The revolution of the media began. Rare of us had a clue how much media concepts, communication methods and information flow would change in one decade. Although internet was already in the air it was still a narrow source of information which was stuck in one way communication. E-mails, websites, online gaming and online shopping was introduced to the public but the real development, real progress was creation of Social Media. In short time whole world became twice smaller, hundreds of thousands even millions of people logged on Social Media websites sharing information, ideas, opinions, videos and pictures. The whole society jumped a few steps forward. We headed to the virtual world, the world of online communities where everyone is equal, everyone has his or hers chance to speak for oneself. Facebook and MySpace became more popular than pornographic websites, millions of people logging in everyday checking their walls and updating their statuses. Who would have thought 20 years ago that we would spend hours and hours online on one website to communicate with our acquaintances and share our everyday life by using such thing as status update. Already now Facebook has over 350 million users and that phenomenon is unique, no other thing has ever managed to capture attention of such a big crowd. Some may think it's a trend that will pass, but at least we can be sure that Social Media isn't going to anywhere in near future, it obviously will change and develop again and again but ideas and contests are here to stay.

1.2 What is Social Media?

In autumn 2009, a group of exchange students in Hogheschool University of Applied Sciences of Utrecht got a task to make a research on the current situation of Social Media. The group consisted in 5 people with really different backgrounds and opinions. Two Finnish, one Austrian, one Belgian and one Taiwanese put their heads together to explore the enormous world of Social Media.

At this point it's probably wise to explain what they mean by Social Media. Although all of us know what the words "social" and "media" mean, if we put them together, it is not that easy to define anymore. There are not that many people that will give you a straight definition to "Social Media" and that's because there is no simple and commonly admitted definition that will satisfy everyone. In this paper, Social Media stands for Online Social Media in other words; websites that allow people to communicate with each other, share opinions and ideas, public or semi-public profiles for the users and possibility to view those profiles. Most known examples of Social Media at this moment (01.2010) would be Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr, flixter, LinkedIN, Tagged, Twitter and Plurk. There are hundreds and hundreds more Social Media websites and each of them has its own purpose and idea. Some of them concentrate on one topic or subject and some websites are more expand. Most of the Social Media websites give the opportunity to their users to upload pictures, videos and other data but the most important thing is that social media allow people to communicate "one to many and many to one" and not as the old fashion media "one-way communication".

1.3 Setup for The Research

The group of students also known as JUMP-group had a long conversation and used many relevant arguments. They needed bases for their research, the line. After they've been through a lot of questions, they stopped on one specific which interested them all: What made Social Media become so popular so fast? After a discussion, the group agreed on having main research question as **"What makes Social Media so popular?"** As you probably can see, there is already an assumption in the main question (Social Media is popular) but hopefully after reading this paper you will agree with that statement or at least partly. It may sound like an easy question to answer but there are more sub-questions to answer in order to answer the main question. Here are the selected sub-questions relevant to answer the main question.

- When did online networking become a trend?
- Is Social Media the answer to a need of people? Do people have an urgent



need to communicate in different ways and why?

- How much time do people spend online networking in average and what is it based on? (E.g. background, ethic, age, education...)
- What makes online Social Media platforms good and useful?

What students realized during their research is that the subject Social Media is an incredibly big field of information. Although Social Media is a relevantly new phenomenon, there are hundreds of books and studies made on the subject. It's the field which interested investors, social workers, communication professionals, journalists..., basically everyone who has to deal with modern media in their everyday life. In the modern life, social media is part of a normal behaviour not only for teenagers and students but also for anyone who feels the need to communicate, share and keep in touch with acquaintances. People consider websites such as Facebook or YouTube ligament websites with trustful information. How many of us have been sitting in front of YouTube for an hour watching videos without purpose or reading status updates on Facebook without any actual interest.

This paper is going to show how huge is the world of Social Media and is going to explore the different aspects of these Social Media Websites that made them so popular.

2. History of Social Media

2.1 Early Years

The first recognizable Social Media website was launched in 1997. It was SixDegrees.com. It allowed users to create profiles, list their Friends and, in the beginning of 1998, surf the Friends lists. In the year, 2000 SixDegrees.com was closed down. Looking back, its founder believes that SixDegrees was simply ahead of its time, because people did not have access to the internet as only few households had an internet connection. Also, the users were uncomfortable with putting information online and interact with strangers (Weinreich, 2007).

Despite the early demise of SixDegrees.com, it helped creating the main characteristics of social media that we know these days.

In 1999, LiveJournal was founded. LiveJournal is a virtual community where users can write their blog, journal or diary. Considering this fact, LiveJournal was one of the first successful blogging-websites, which helped creating micro-blogging later on.

2.2 Social Media Hits the Mainstream

In 2002, when Friendster was found, many more Social Media started to appear. By 2003 there were dozens Social Media websites available for different purposes: for instance CouchSurfing for travellers, MyChurch for people who are interested in religion, LinkedIn for business and many more.

All of them had three things in common:

- (1) Public or semi-public profiles for users
- (2) The possibility to connect with other individuals
- (3) The users had some sort of shared interests.

In 2004, Mark Zuckerberg found the most popular Social Media Website of our days: Facebook. Facebook is a private company that was launched in 2004, just for students of Harvard. Nowadays it is also known as the biggest competitor of MySpace. In 2006, Facebook hits the mainstream and in 2008, it overtakes MySpace. Today, Facebook has over 350 million active users (Facebook press room, 2009). Users can add friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles.

Another advantage of Facebook is that there are a lot of applications available, for example games and quizzes.

MySpace is a social networking website, which was founded in 2003. Until 2008, it was the most popular networking website in the USA. In 2006 MySpace hit 100 million accounts and now there are over 120 million accounts worldwide (2009). MySpace is also known to be a follower of Friendster, which was also created by Fox Interactive Media. MySpace was able to grow rapidly by capitalizing on Friendster's alienation of its early adopters. While MySpace was not launched with bands in mind, they were welcomed. Indie-rock bands from the Los Angeles region began creating profiles, and local promoters used MySpace to advertise VIP passes for popular clubs. Intrigued, MySpace contacted local musicians to see how they could support them (Anderson, 2006). Bands were not the sole source of MySpace growth, but the symbiotic relationship between bands and fans helped MySpace expand beyond former Friendster users.

Then, in July 2005, News Corporation purchased MySpace for \$580 million (BBC, 2005), attracting massive media attention. Afterwards, safety issues plagued MySpace. The site was implicated in a series of sexual interactions between adults and minors, prompting legal action (Consumer Affairs, 2006). A moral panic concerning sexual predators quickly spread, although research suggests that the concerns were exaggerated.

YouTube is video-based online social media that offers opportunities to watch different videos like music, news, trailers and any kind of videos that people can come up with. Steven Chen, Chard Hurley and Jawed Karim launched YouTube in December 2005 after what it was bought by Google Inc and became a huge success in the last five years. Most of the videos on YouTube are posted by individuals but some organizations as BBC, UMG, Warner Music Group, CBS and many more are broadcasting their material as part of the YouTube partnership program. Nowadays there are over a billion views every day.

2.3 Change of Technology

The first Social Media platform that used “social bookmarking” was Delicious. They pioneered this system and now it is common in nearly every Social Media website. This concept dates back to April 1996. “Itlist” uses this feature for public and private bookmarks and in the next three years, it became popular. In 1996, “social bookmarking” was useful because people with knowledge in a special part linked websites or articles together (e.g. <http://en.wikipedia.org>).

Nowadays “Social bookmarking” is still there but in another way. “Tagging” made its way to the foreground. This system is used in social network websites. It creates, with the help of shared pictures, links, videos, and so on, an account to be more personal. This means, having an account on for example Facebook or YouTube means having a personal website. Every person is able to tag

another person of its friend list on pictures, videos and so forth. For instance, if you click to a friend's page on Facebook you will recognize that it is very individual. People are able to get a lot of information about this person. This information can be personal pictures, information about the job, e-mail, phone number and so on.

Another important feature finds its use for instance in the Social Media websites Last.Fm and YouTube. The website remembers your last seen video or song and gives people proposals for further approximately equivalent results. This feature helps people to find relevant things of their interest. They do not have to search for similar belongings with the search function; they get it next to their results listed. This is just a short overview of the features right now.

3. Privacy

According to *Xavier Marvaldi*, the French founder of *YooWalk*, the social media network is nowadays still in its developing phase, we are still discovering what the social media really is and the effects that it has on our society. "Privacy is not important right now, it is not at stake for the Social Media popularity, but in the long term, a good privacy policy will make a big difference." But how did the privacy issue evolve with the Social Media?

Some years back, people saw viruses, undesirable advertising and spam as a real danger. Today, they see them as a simple nuisance. According to a study lead by the *American Consuming Institute*, 75% of the people in 2008 were scared of having their computer contaminated by a virus, when in 2009, that number decreased to 55%. Why is that? It is probably because of the development of very powerful antivirus software's, but the main reason is that the internet users become familiar with these undesirable nuisances, and are now able to make the difference between what is a nuisance and what is a real threat for your computer.

But when it comes to a threat on the social networks, people are not very cautious. The *University of Carnegie Mellon* studied that fact and came to the conclusion that the users of Social Media do not draw attention to the protection of their personal data until somebody warn them of the danger or they become a victim of fraud. Warning people about privacy and giving them advices about how to protect themselves in order to reassure them is even counter-productive. They will not be reassured and will even reduce their use. The *University of Carnegie Mellon* made a survey among students. Some of them knew that the questions asked, were about privacy, the others didn't have a clue and were told it was completely anonymous. The results showed that when you are not told about privacy, you answer more freely, without reserve, which brings to the conclusion that sharing information is influenced by the environment. From this survey we understand that the Social Media enterprises do not like people to be reminded about privacy issues as it stops the users from acting freely on the networks. What *Xavier Marvaldi* added to that remark is that when the context is funnier, not serious and less formal, the users will tend to feel more free and will share more

information than on a formal platform. We see then that there is a lack of information about privacy. But in the same time, nobody read the terms and conditions of the Social Media they join. So if the minimum of information provided is not read, why should we bother?

Users of Social Media create their own profiles, their own pages to which they add pictures and videos. The very interesting fact is that these profiles are very close to the reality. No one dares to lie on the social media. Your profile is not an avatar. Why? *Catalina Toma, psychologist at the Cornell University* says it is because your contacts know you already and it is not worth lying, you'll be unmasked very quickly and very easily. That is an interesting fact for employers who examine a lot the candidate's profiles online in order to make a decision.

All the more, according to the *Journal of experimental social psychology*, there is a resemblance between people's personality and their behaviour on the social networks. The searchers of the *Cornell University* found that, for example, a very expressive and talkative person will be the one who shares the more pictures, videos and creates a lot of content towards its social media profile and people tend to see these "big" profiles as more appealing and friendlier. But at the same time, it's very easy to make your profile more appealing or more friendly-looking without lying. To control your image while uploading pictures or hiding the ones you don't like is very satisfying and doesn't give a feeling of lie!

One of the problems with privacy is that people tend to confuse anonymity and privacy. They think when they are simply navigating, they are anonymous and so they preserve their privacy. In reality, every time you make a research on the internet (yahoo, google), the research engine is stocking demands you made, and these information are kept and studied by the research engine's engineers or can be used by scientists to study the users' behaviour. That means if you enter some personal data, they could be seen by these people. The best way to avoid that and keep a little privacy while searching on the net is to search a lot of common things, so that your personal information will be lost into a sea of common demands (*New Scientist study*).

We all know that our requests on research engines were analyzed for commercial purposes. But another risk is about to be born: A team of the *University of Austin, Texas*, succeeded in creating an algorithm capable to re-identify the navigators by spotting them in relation to their social media profile. It was apparently very simple to build up, and that means while navigating, we are not anonymous anymore and our profiles can be seen outside of the online communities.

Nowadays, people are not concerned about privacy. Maybe it is because the technology of information is developing more and more everyday which makes people think that the Information Security is flourishing as well. However, it is not the case because it is not in the interests of the big internet companies to raise concern about privacy. Maybe in the future this tendency will change, as *Xavier Marvaldi* believes.

But why are people not concerned about privacy? Do these online social websites offer so many advantages that the users become blind to the new risks they include or they just do not care enough? Every new technology brings new disadvantages as well, and the users tend to forget them. In the case of social media, it comes to publicity, but one more time the user is blind to that fact.

There are some negative cases that social media brought to us:

- **“Facebook and MySpace drive teens to suicide, says Vincent Nichols”**

British archbishop Vincent Nichols thinks that online social media platform such as MySpace can be one reason for teenagers to make suicides. Nichols says that MySpace leads teenagers to seek transient friendships and that exclusive use of electronic information has a dehumanising effect on community life.

- **“Two girls, 12, suspended over YouTube film of “threat to kill their headteacher”**

Two British girls were excluded from school after they put a threatening film on Youtube.

All these cases are of course extreme cases but the danger is never very far. On every online network, you have the impression you can control your content, what you are sharing with the others and what you are hiding to the rest of the world. But very often, and even if you are not a member of any social media website, other people have the control on your image. You don't need to be on Facebook to be recognized on a compromising picture. Knowing that, we would better be a member so at least we have the occasion to react on something that is concerning ourselves.

Another type of privacy danger is what concerns art. Internet is a springboard for many musicians, artists or comedians, but on the other hand, internet is one of the places where all art production is the less protected.

We also observe the fact that the social websites mostly used for art diffusion do not require a login account for the visitors (MySpace, flickr, art forums, skyblogs and so on). One more time, it seems like artists as much as any other social media user are ready to accept the risk of plagiarism compare to the wonderful advantage of having more chances to become known or even famous in their art. And it is the same for every person having an idea or looking for a fame through these social networks.

“What these and other cases show is that employers and authorities are now monitoring what people imagined were private websites – and using the contents against them” says an article in the Independent newspaper called “Facebook can ruin your life, and so can MySpace, Bebo...”.

This article also reveals a high number of negative cases and lights up new practices in hiring applicants for a job. “A survey released by Viadeo said that 62 per cent of British employers now check the Facebook, MySpace or Bebo pages of some applicants, and that a quarter had rejected candidates as a result.”

“Young people today do the same thing they have always done on paper, but now they do it on a web page” says Michael Fertik, the Chief Executive Officer of ReputationDefender, a firm that propose softwares capable to defeat an other type of software used by employers in the USA and made to monitor the Social Media and the applicants’ pages.

A hidden danger also lays in the applications on Social Media. There are tens of thousands applications available and most of them are configured by individuals, not by companies or firms. Before you can actually begin the application, some of your personal details will be asked from you, and a thief might just know your name, address, date of birth and a pet’s, parent’s or sibling’s name.

And it’s not to forget the existence of sexual predators on these pages. The article in the Independent says that “Virtually every week a sexual predator is found to have used MySpace or Facebook pages to groom young girls”.

What can we do to protect our privacy and personal information? William Malcolm is a specialist of the Privacy issue and works at the Pinsent Masons law firm. He says “Rather than looking at what information constitutes a risk, it's better to think, 'Who am I sharing this information with?' If you're not sure about the identity of a third party on the website then you have to ask yourself if you would do that in an offline context, and the answer is that you probably wouldn't.”

4. Diversity of Social Media Platforms

These days we have hundreds of different social media platforms, there is something for everyone. It is a new big world where you can find communities for anything you want or are interested in. There are forums for pro-gamers for different games and there are even micro-blogging systems for pro-gamers. You can find over hundreds of virtual worlds with cute avatars and with enormous amount of possibilities to entertain yourself. Although variation of social media websites is huge they still have a lot of things in common and thousands of topics have been covered on hundreds of different social media platforms. Below you can see most known examples of social media platforms of our days.

Youtube.com

Video based online social media which offers opportunities to watch different videos like music, news, trailers and any kind of videos that people can come up with. YouTube was launched in December 2005 by Steven Chen, Chard Hurley and Jawed Karim after what it was bought by Google Inc and became a huge success in the last 5 years.

YouTube is using Adobe Flash Video technology to display users' videos which accepts videos uploaded in most formats, including .WMV, .AVI, .MKV, .MOV, MPEG, .MP4, DivX, .FLV, and .OGG. It also supports 3GP, allowing videos to be uploaded directly from a mobile phone. Most of the videos in YouTube are posted by individuals but some organizations as BBC, UMG, Warner Music Group, CBS and many more are broadcasting their material as part of the YouTube partnership program. Nowadays there are over a billion views a day.

There are hundreds of different reasons why people use YouTube. The most common reasons are listening to music or entertainment like stand-up comedy, seeking for information and education like news, educational videos you name it. YouTube doesn't require people to be signed in to watch videos but if you want to comment on videos or post your own videos you need to have a user account which can be made really easily. It is the fourth largest site on the internet, and the first largest video site on the web. It serves 75 billion video streams to 375 million unique visitors in 2009. Fifty-one percent of users go to YouTube weekly or more often. The users' age range is between 18 and 55 years old, evenly divided between males and females, and is worldwide.

Flickr.com

The founders of Flickr are Stewart Butterfield and Caterina Fake. Flickr is a photo and video sharing website. It is an online community platform or better known as online social media where people share their photographs. Recently they added video function on the site, the idea of it is to

grow out “long photos”. They have tried to include video on Flickr gently, so the users can choose to set the videos not playing automatically or even exclude the videos within their search results in their account. Flickr was launched in February 2004 by Ludicorp and is today owned by Yahoo! Inc. At the beginning Flickr was more focused on streaming chat room which was called FlickrLive. In 2005, Flickr invited a tagging system which means that people can tag each other in their pictures. It grew 29% and had over 27.5 million monthly visitors in 2008. Nowadays Flickr has more than 4 billion images and more than 32 million accounts (19 May 2009). A lot of people have more than one account and there are also a lot of people that never use their account which makes it almost impossible to say how many active members Flickr has.

There are two ways to register for Flickr. One is free where you are allowed to upload 100 MB of images a month and 2 videos, and Pro where you are allowed to upload unlimited number of images and videos. Everybody can upload HD video, but the option to view in HD will only show on pro accounts. You can name different reasons and ways to use Flickr but the most common would be socializing through pictures, watching different images.

Facebook.com

Facebook is a well known social networking website found by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004. Today, it is the most used online social media worldwide. Facebook is a private company which was launched in 2004. It is also known as the biggest competitor of MySpace. In 2008 Facebook overtook MySpace and nowadays Facebook has over 300 million active users (Facebook press room, 2009). To use Facebook you have to have your own account and it is free. Users can add friends and send them messages, update their personal profiles and there are also a lot of applications available. Some Facebook games are very popular. Users can join and create up to 200 groups according to their interests or areas of expertise.

There are more than 350 million active users on Facebook, and 50% of the active users log on to Facebook in any given day. More than 35 million users update their status each day, and more than 3.5 billion pieces of content (web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photo albums, etc.) is shared each week. The popularity of this platform attracts more than 700,000 local businesses to put their active pages on Facebook.

Twitter.com

Twitter is a free social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read messages known as tweets.

Micro-blogging is a networking service that allows mobile users of cell phones and other Internet connected devices to stay abreast of activities within a group by receiving frequent published updates, typically of 140 characters or less. Text messages are uploaded to a micro-blogging service such as Twitter, Jaiku and others, then distributed to group members (R. Kayne, 2009).

Twitter is a private company which was found in 2006 and became a huge success through different festivals and events where Twitter messaging made a big impact, for example in Iran or South by Southwest festival. According to the analysis by Alex's web traffic, it is ranked as one of the 50 most popular websites worldwide.

At the moment Twitter has over 32.1 million accounts (May 2009), although the daily users vary because the company does not release the number of active accounts. According to Comete.com blog entry on February 2009, twitter is the third used social network. The first is Facebook, and the second is MySpace.

MySpace.com

MySpace is a social networking website which was founded in 2003. Until 2008 it was the most popular networking website in the USA. In 2006 MySpace hit 100 million accounts and now there are over 120 million accounts worldwide (2009 June). MySpace is a fast working website where people can keep in touch with their friends and people they know. Some of the people are using MySpace as a dating service but over the years it has not been proved to be an effective website for that purpose. MySpace is also known to be a follower of Friendster which was also created by Fox Interactive Media.

In MySpace you can add photos and even modify them with MySpace programs, also blogging is available and video sharing is possible. MySpace is really popular between artists and bands as they can share their music and upload their full discography if they wish so. Some of the well known artists like Lilly Allen became famous thanks to MySpace.

Facebook is always playing the role of the big competitor of MySpace. Before 2008, MySpace was the largest social network in the United States. However, the growth rate of Facebook in the U.S. averaged 3.8% compared to MySpace's U.S. growth rate of 0.8% per month. Even though Facebook is more than 2/3 the sizes of MySpace in the U.S. today, some key engagement metrics show more activity per user at MySpace. MySpace has almost two times the total time spent (17.5 billion minutes v. 9.3 billion minutes). MySpace generated 40 billion page views in December to Facebook's 18 billion.

5. Users' Behaviour

5.1 Generalities

Studying the behaviour of the users of Social Media is a tough job and is too fragmental to be precise. Nevertheless, some studies have been made and in this section we will give some general information about the users' behaviour.

According to LBi group which is a Belgian company that offers perfectly adapted communication campaigns to the brand you want to launch, there are 10 categories of social media users'

behaviour. Here are the 10 categories represented by 10 individuals. By identifying these people LBi wants to find the perfect strategy to reach each of them.

(1) The status seeker:

Description: He or she believes visible accomplishments make a good impression and are socially recognised. Relationships can be understood in terms of exchange, trade and collecting.

Interest and behaviour: He or she checks his or her own status as well as leader boards. He accumulates friends, symbolic tokens and other social status symbols.

(2) The Critic:

Description: A writer and an author, interested in substance and content. He or she may see in audience approval a measure of his or her intelligence, rather than popularity or status.

Interest and behaviour: This person is an important contributor, blogger, and commenter. He or she takes a committed interest in online discussions or publications

(3) The Socializer:

Description: This person believes in online community, using it to keep informed about friends, events and social news. He or she pays attention to invites and notifications. This person accepts to be a (active) member of an online community.

Interest and behaviour: He or she wants to have fun when networking and can thus be an engine for social interaction. He or she participates in ratings, voting and respects the social conventions and etiquette.

(4) The Em-Cee:

Description: He or she uses one's performance to get attention and may therefore be more interested in capturing an audience than in the contents. Social validation is important for this person.

Interest and behaviour: He or she attracts audiences and helps to create a centre of activity on UC(unified communications) platforms. This person is interested in tools that allow him to broadcast his postings i.e. RSS(Really Simple Syndication), blogs, twitter...

(5) The lurker:

Description: The lurker doesn't draw much attention but is an observant participant. He or she logs into sites, browses, subscribes and follows others.

Interest and behaviour: This kind of person generates a lot of page views as a more passive user. He or she may have concerns about security and privacy, but once these issues are properly addressed, he or she represents a large market.

(6) The buddy:

Description: "The buddy" has a strong sense of friendship and sees online activities as a vehicle for maintaining relationships.

Interest and behaviour: He or she joins social media because one's friends are there. The distribution of promotional messages using friend networks may be successful.

(7) The creator:

Description: He or she creates, builds, makes and publishes. Creator provides contents that will be shared and/or mashed up

Interest and behaviour: He or she is an early adopter of new trends and tools. This person may invest time and energy in collaborative and creative efforts.

(8) The rebel:

Description: Rebel is a frequent heckler and when annoyed, he or she might identify oneself as being in the opposition. This person will focus more on content or on a group.

Interest and behaviour: Rebel is subversive and may use social media to distribute opinions on commercial organizations. His or her opinions drive indirect traffic to the places where one's opinions are aired.

(9) The pundit:

Description: This person considers oneself as an industry leader or an expert, and routinely offers latest news, opinions and observations. "The pundit" is a contributor and can capture the interest of an audience.

Interest and behaviour: He or she plays an important role in making the web as the fastest source of news. This person helps to validate the claims of net journalists and bloggers.

(10) The harmonizer:

Description: Harmonizer appreciates group membership motivated by the group's relationships. He or she may do things to make others happy, particularly if it serves the group's activity

Interest and behaviour: This person is sensitive to group participation and engagement. He or she uses a range of communication tools and applications, especially when it is group-oriented.

That is one vision of the users, and it has been categorized like that in a commercial purpose and in order to analyze each user, their proper behaviour and their commercial tendency.

As you can probably see it is possible to identify yourself in more than one category as we choose to act differently on different platforms and sometimes we tend to change our behaviour due personal reasons. According to Tampere's University research in most cases our behaviour on social media reflects on the behaviour we have in our everyday life which would mean that highly social people on Social Media are also social in the real world. Although we have to remember that there are always exceptions and behaviour studies will never be hundred percent accurate.

Another company who studied the users' behaviour is Iprospect.com, a search engine marketing firm. They made a study on Social Media behaviour. This study focus a lot on the link between search engines and access to social media website but some of the facts they came to are interesting to our research:

- iProspect notes that most visits to social networking sites come from search engine referrals. Correct order: "navigation/bookmarking", Google search, yahoo search and links in e-mails.
- Social marketing isn't a separate beast from search, but rather is designed to work in concert with an effective search marketing campaign.
- **One out of three Internet users is already taking advantage of a site containing user-generated content to help make a decision to buy, or not to buy something.**
- **Roughly one out of five visitors does not perform a search once they arrive at a social search engine.** Why? Probably because they use a normal search engine to reach the content on social media they were looking for so they don't use the search engine of the social media websites itself. (graph 2)
- Internet users who visit social networking sites do so for a **variety of reasons** (or intents) including: for entertainment, to connect or network with others, to research a product or

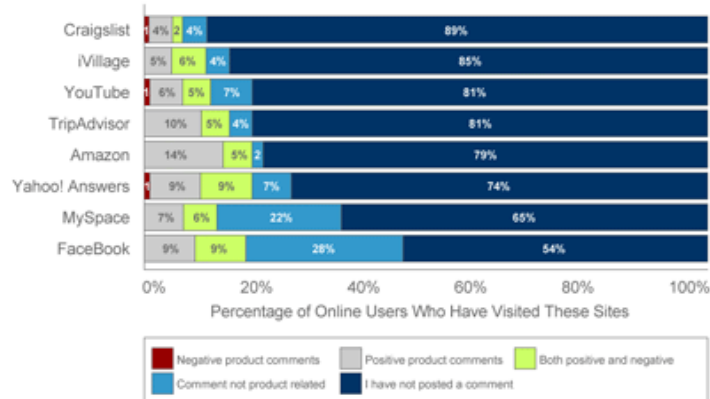
service, to purchase a product or service, and "other." → **No intention to purchase a product**

BUT marketers place their product icons in the hope to change their intention of visiting

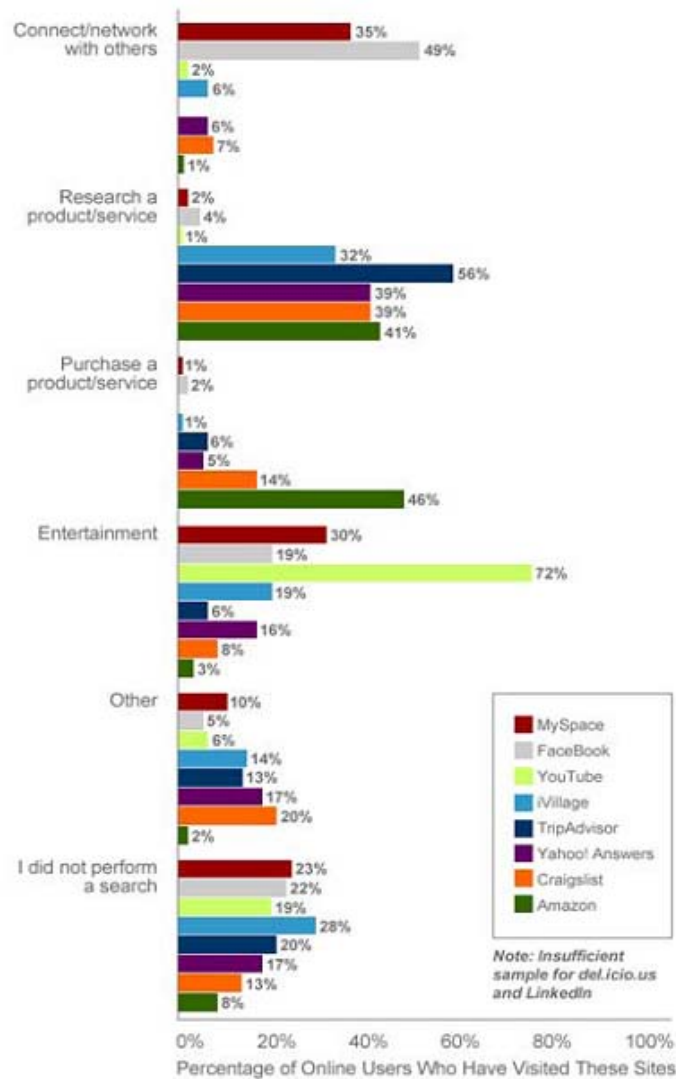
- **The majority of visitors to social networking sites have not posted comments on those sites.**
(graph 2)
- **The 18–24 year old age group is more prolific at visiting social networking sites** and the major search engines weekly, as well as at posting content on social networking sites. This was the youngest age group surveyed and it's no surprise that the extremely Internet-savvy users visit these sites more frequently and are more interactive once they arrive.

Although we have to stay critical and we cannot deny the fact that this survey has been lead by a search engine marketing firm, so we should maybe reconsider the results boasting the search engine role in the access to social media (and thus in the social media popularity).

Posting of Comments on Websites



Reason for Website Search



(Jupiter Research, 2007)

5.2 Applications

Nowadays, there are more than 40.000 applications on Facebook and they are still growing. It has to be pointed out that a lot of these applications are made by users themselves. They are named for instance, “How good do you know me?” where users place some questions about their behavior, past life, hobbies, etc. Most of Facebook-users see these spam invitations negatively and they do not have a chance to stop that. Nearly everybody with a Facebook-account has already got a virtual gift.

Of course, producers are not dumb and know how to create games, quizzes or often useful applications like “My calendar” to make users inviting their friends. The schedule of events is also a common way inform people about any happening or event. Most popular games are “Farmville”, “Poker”, “Mafia Wars” or “Pet Society”. In these games, you often need to invite many friends to have more chance to win and so it is no wonder that they invite as many friends as possible. It would not be a problem if the users did not have to confirm to the rules of applications. To say it, their personal information is used through the applications by individuals – or better, by companies behind these applications.

On the other hand, there is a minority that uses Facebook mostly to play these games. They are not really interested in sharing information about themselves or showing themes they are interested in. But it is a fact that in many of the games you have to stay logged-in because in order to be successful, people have to watch out what is happening inside the game. This fact tends more and more to result in addiction.

Although most of us consider applications as annoying pop ups they have grown Facebook’s popularity in remarkable way. It may be that applications is a boom which will die in near future but at this stage use of them is rapidly growing and new ideas are increasing tremendously.

5.3 Social Media and Addiction

If people are living more online than offline, psychologist agree, people are on the way to get addicted to social media. A lot of students are seeing Facebook more as an addiction than a networking tool. And it is growing dangerously. The reasons therefore are, especially at campuses of universities, the free internet access, unstructured blocks and schedules and web-based assignments.

If you compare that to other addictions like an alcohol, they can cut down their drinking but for students it is even harder. They are not able to cut down the usage of the internet because students need to communicate, work or stay in contact with team-members or colleagues. Social media is becoming for many of us an online “drug”.

In these times, kids are used to use the internet and make these kinds of experiences what in earlier times kids made offline. Susan Greenfield, a British brain researcher said that kids in the UK are 900 hours a year at school, spend 1.300 hours with the family and sit 2.000 hours in front of the computer. This means that in average 550 hours are left for other activities like meeting friends, sports or hobbies. She states that kids in the future should learn that happiness cannot be found in front of the computer. Although online activities can bring entertainment, on the long shot it has been proven that kids who spend more time in front of the computer are more depressed than kids with interactive social life.

An activity with a computer needs a quick reaction because of the fast changing pictures and information. The brain gets used to this process and the result on the long term is that the attention span becomes reduced. Nowadays, more and more Kids suffer from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

5.4 Social Media at Work

Social media issue is becoming more and more relevant to a lot of companies. General opinion is that social is a just a disadvantage. Nearly 70 percent of the companies in the UK and 54 percent in the United States forbid or lock the usage of Facebook and Co.

They think that people who are using social media at work are not efficient because of constant quickly changing between their work and the social websites. The brain, ones in a thinking process should not be interrupted because then the quality and efficiency of this process decreases. This has nothing in common with the time spent on the internet or social websites. It is just the interruption that makes the difference.

Nearly 65 percent of students expect that a prospective employer allows using social media at work. So why should companies avoid to risk losing motivated and qualified employees? There are a lot of reasons why. Below we spotlight the important ones:

- (1) A human gives his whole potential just to people who trust them.
- (2) People are communicating – with or without permission. Nowadays, via smart phones, people are able to use social media websites and they will do it if there is no other possibility.
- (3) It is free professional development in reference to media expertise.

- (4) It is very important that employees of a big company are networking and creating connections because who knows if these connections will bring a profit one day to company itself.
- (5) Allowing the use of social media at work boosts the internal communication.

6. Survey

6.1 Setup for The Survey

Considering our research questions and the information we managed to gather we decided to make a survey to know a little bit more about the behaviour of the users (and non-users) of the Social Media.

We divided our survey into two parts: one for those people who are using social media networking websites, and the other for those who refuse to use social media websites. We hoped to discover from the second questionnaire what are the reasons why some people do not want to follow the trend of having an account on Facebook, MySpace or on any other social media platform. That would help us answering our sub-question “*What makes online social platform good and useful?*” and finding the lacks of the social media.

The first questionnaire was meant to answer to some of our research questions such as “*How much people in average use online networking and of what is it based on? For example – background, ethic, age you name it.*” Or “*What makes online social media platform good and useful?*”

In general, our questions were oriented to have an answer to our main research question: “*What makes online social media so popular?*”

6.2 Distribution of Survey

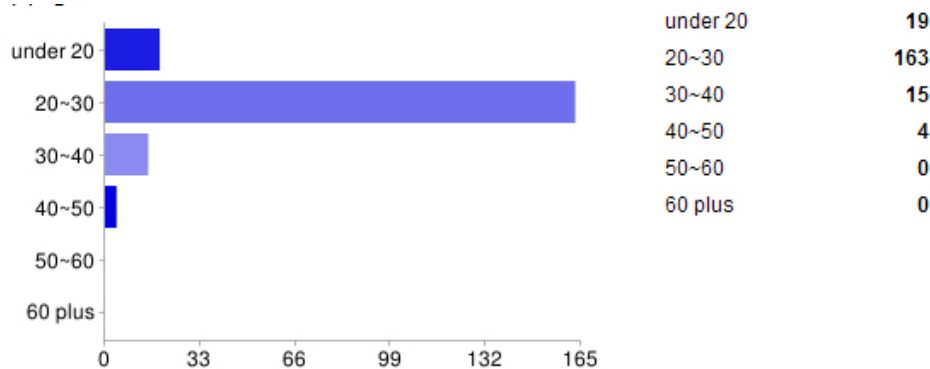
We decided to spread the survey among our acquaintances here in Holland and in our respective countries and that is why the current place of living and nationality were important questions in our survey. In order to reach a maximum of answers, we made an online questionnaire that would easily give us the latest results. Here are the two URL's of our survey and the typed versions are in attachment 2 and attachment 3.

- Questionnaire for social media
users: http://spreadsheets.google.com/viewform?hl=zh_TW&formkey=dHhhVnZPYU01aVFDeS01b2c2aGRZQUE6MA
- Questionnaire for social media non-
users: http://spreadsheets.google.com/viewform?hl=zh_TW&formkey=dENYeElQZmU5ZUtOX2cyN3VEMng3eGc6MA

6.3 The Results of the Survey Social Media Users

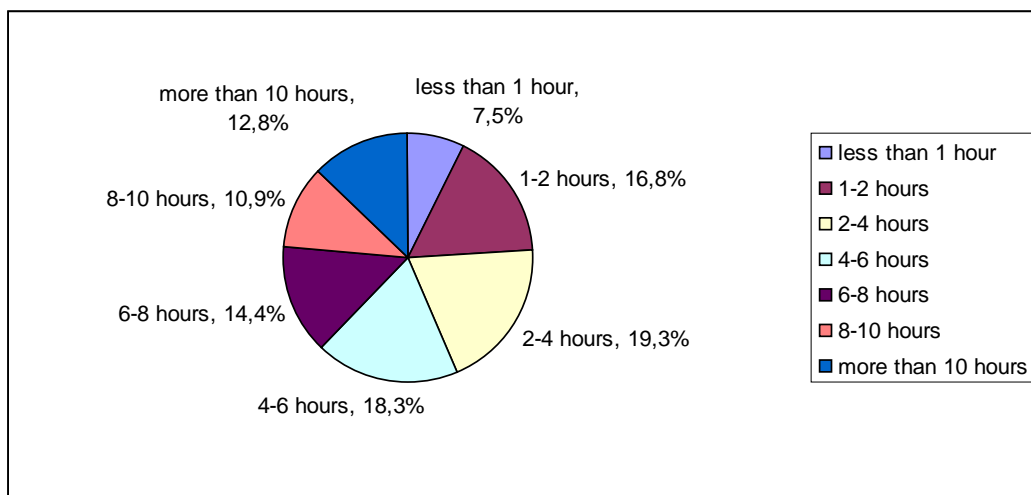
(1) Background Information

Over all 202 people participated in our survey, below you can see age range of the interviewees. As you can probably see the biggest groups consists of 20-30 years old, the reason is because our group falls under this category as well and most of the answers came from our fellow students across the globe. There are 64 male interviewees (32%) and 137 female interviewees (68%) in total.



(2) The usage of Social Media

In our survey 181 people out of 202 said, that they are using social media websites every day. This means that 89,6 percent of all respondents are using minimum once a day a social media website. Let us take a closer look to the sum of total usage a week. The smallest part is the `less than one hour` with 15 people (7,5 %). If we compare this group to the `1-2 hours`- usage with 34 people (16,8%) we can see that the difference is significant. This means the usage of social media is growing constantly and we estimate that there is just a really small part which will use social media websites less than one hour a week in the future.



Usage of social media websites a week

According to our survey 42 people (20,8%) are using their smart phones for checking their status, sharing pictures or information on social media websites. In future this aspect will be more and more important. Many mobile phone-providers offer smart phones for lower prices and the technology in this sector is still going forward. We suggest that in the future it will be common among all the people in western countries to use mobile phones for Social Media instead of laptops and personal computers. This question is unreliable as no one of us ever counts the time we spent in front of the computer but if we trust the outcome we can say that most of the people are checking their profiles at least twice a day with range of ten minutes at the time. Probably all of us who fallen under the influence of social media had experience to check our profiles much more often than needed.

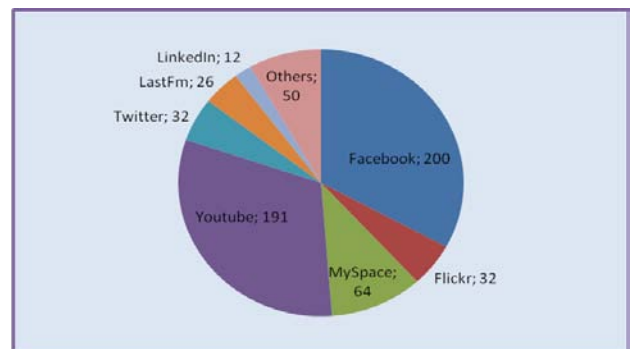
(3) Reasons

We asked the question of the reasons why people use certain social media platforms. Question was divided into 9 parts, each part for one social media website and one part for others. Through that



question we believed to find more information about why people using

social media, what keeps them hooked on it. In the diagram on the right you can see amount of users of each platform we questioned about. Below each part will be explained separately.



Facebook is very famous. 182 people out of 202 use it and another 20 people know it. In the 182 people, we asked them what were the reasons they use it in order to know why do they love Facebook, why is it convenient and so popular? The most important thing was to keep in touch

with friends (97,5%). But the fact of watching pictures is also very popular on Facebook (63,5%) followed very closely by sharing pictures (54,5%). Another applications possible on Facebook and beloved by its users is to keep up with what acquaintances are doing, also known as Events. 50% of the interviewees chose that reason.



These were the most popular reasons for using Facebook. Apart from these big reasons, there are others which are less obvious. For example watching and sharing videos is not the first purpose of Facebook and about 15% of the people ticked that, just like “meeting new people”, “gaming/entertainment” and “using it in work”. What is quite interesting is that 20,5% of the interviewees admitted that they’re following the trend because their friends are on Facebook. Music listening is only a reason for 12 people (6%) and looking for a job only for 3 (1,5%). As it was expected Facebook is mostly known for networking and pictures sharing, and it wasn’t a surprise as all of us are using Facebook regularly as well.



Among 202 responses, there are only 20 (9%) using Flickr. The interesting phenomenon is the number of people who don’t know about Flickr (82 people). This number is almost equally the same as people who have heard of it but don’t use it (83 people). The main reasons for using Flickr still remain on photo sharing and watching. Although Flickr already has a video sharing function, there are only two users who are using Flickr to watch videos, and none of them is sharing video on Flickr.

32 (16%) people of whole survey are using Twitter for some reasons, we can see that Twitter is not that popular yet although amount of users have been growing in past two years exponentially. 50% of the Twitter users are using Twitter to keep in touch with their friends and 66% using Twitter to share information. 4 people admitted that they use Twitter only because it’s a trend that they

decided to follow. What is interesting is that 4 people said that they using Twitter in their work and we can assume that use of Social Media in work will be increasing in next few years as it's a good way to advertise your products and effective place to gather public opinions. 9 people of the survey said that they using Twitter to meet new people and 9 more using to keep up with what their acquaintances are doing.



It turned out that just 11 (5,5%) of 202 people are not using YouTube. They all know this social media website but they are not interested in. This means that YouTube is the second popular social media website after Facebook. Although YouTube rarely hits the chard as one of the most popular Social Media websites, the reason is that a lot of people do not consider YouTube as a Social Media and majority of users do not own an account on YouTube. It can be used as effectively without account as with one for listening music and watching videos.

As we expected most of the users, 191 people (94,5%), use YouTube for just watching videos and only 39 people (19,3%) are also sharing videos. Normally the percentage of these people is lesser but most of our respondents are aged between 20 and 30 years who are active consumers of YouTube. It turned out that 109 people (54%) use YouTube for listening music and interestingly 23 people (11,4%) are using YouTube just for listening to music and not for watching videos. Another 17 people (8,4%) are using YouTube in their work. It is becoming more and more popular to use videos from YouTube as educational packages and intro for presentations. In some cases it goes even so far that people are using YouTube as a primary source of information.



According to our survey, MySpace has seen its best days. Only 32 (16%) of answers use it, and 35 (17,5%) used to use MySpace. 65 answers described how they have been using MySpace. The most

popular reason to use MySpace is music listening (60%). Also watching videos was pretty popular, about 31 % of answers are/were doing that on MySpace. Keeping up with friends (23%) and sharing information (18,5%) were also quite popular ways to use it. Only 4 persons (6%) admitted to use or have used MySpace only because it is a trend. It is even more rare to use MySpace for work purposes. Only one answerer is doing that.

From the survey 26(13%) people are using LastFm for some reasons, obviously all 26 people said that there are using LastFm for listening music, some people added though that they are using also LastFm for watching videos and photos. 20% of LastFm users said that they use it also for sharing information. What came as a surprise was that most of the LastFm users turned to be women and some people are even using LastFm in their work (musicians or people who work in music field assumedly).



12 (6%) of people who answered to the survey are using LinkedIn. As LinkedIn is aiming for business field it wasn't a surprise that 50% of users are looking for a jobs through LinkedIn and 5 people answered that they use LinkedIn in their work, 10 people sharing information through LinkedIn and as many as 5 are meeting new people in LinkedIn. What was surprising is that all

the people from the survey who are using LinkedIn were from Finland.



Only 4 people from the survey said that they are using Hyves, although it is not a surprise as only few people in the survey were from Netherlands and Hyves is aiming for Dutch population. All 4 people said that they are using Hyves to keep in touch with their friends and two said that they meet new people through Hyves.



Others: 50 people of the whole survey mentioned they also using other Social Media websites to communicate with people, share information, keep in touch with friends, gaming and so on. Such websites were mentioned as Plurk (micro-blogging website similar to Twitter), Vkontakte (Russian version of Facebook), StudiVZ (German version of Facebook), IRC-Galleria (Finnish photo sharing website similar to Flickr), Xing and Ning (Both similar to LinkedIn), hi5, muusikoiden.net (Finnish website for music sharing), Wretch, Vimeo and Couchsurfing. What was common in 90% was that people are using different websites for sharing information and 65% are using them to keep in touch with their friends.

(4) Socialization

One part of our survey was to ask how people are social in their everyday life, outside online social media. The answers (202 people) could choose none, some or all of the given choices. And there was also a possibility to tell by yourself how you spend your spare time. Most of the answerers said that they are spending time by going out a lot (about 83%). It was surprising how doing voluntary work was also so popular (about 32%). Our answerers were also very much into culture, because being an active member of cultural society got a lot of answers (approximately 30%). Answerers also spend their spare time by being an active member of a sporting club (about 25%) and/or a political party (about 5,5%). The free answers included for example being with family and meeting friends for theatre or coffee.

(5) Other Ways of Communication

Apart from the online websites, what other Social Media do these people use in order to communicate? The answer is just below, showing the real popularity place of the Social Media websites compare to older means.

Unfortunately to some romantics, the letter is not the most loved media anymore as it comes at the last place. After the letter come the Internet calls. They are not commonly admitted so far but it's no doubt everybody will adopt them in the coming years if they can propose some valuable advantages. Then the instant messaging is still in use but far less than some years back, at the apogee of MSN messenger. On the third place, we have the E-mails who are still a safe bet. The second place goes to the telephone calls. It's a pretty good score for such an old device. And, ladies and gentlemen, the first place of the most used Social Media goes to... the text messages! Yes, they probably have the advantages of being almost free, easy of access (in your pocket), direct and you don't need an internet connection! But for how long? The smart technology is evolving at a very high speed but that's another survey we're talking about.

6.4 The Results of the Survey Social Media Nonusers

Today, it is hard to find people who do not have an account on a social media website by choice. But we thought it could be interesting to find at least some of them, and ask them why they still haven't joined one of these social communities.

In our survey, 10 people answered to our 'nonusers questionnaire' (8females-2males). 4 of them refuse to use a social media in particular (Facebook or Twitter). These 10 people have never had any social media account before. But why is that?

(1) Reasons

We gave them some reasons to tick if they agreed with them. 6 of them said they don't feel the need to join a social network. The half of them (5) said they were concerned about privacy, just like 5 people also agreed they have other ways to find people with the same interests. 4 of them declare not having the time for that and 3 believed it's going to affect negatively their daily social life.

There were 4 other reasons that don't seem to be problem-related to the platform but more to the interviewees who ticked them: "I'm not familiar with the new technologies", "I don't want to follow the trend", "I have an identity so I don't need social media platforms to create one" and "I want to

have the freedom to represent myself as I want to and I don't want to be part of a prefabricated media platform" only got ticked by one person each.

(2) Socialization

Now we wondered in what way these persons were social in the real life and 7 said they were going out a lot, 6 are doing voluntary work, 3 are active members of a cultural society and 1 of a sporting club while one persons feels social in his/her work by the relation with the colleagues.

7. Future of Social Media

It is quite certain that online social media is here to stay. But what will online social media look like in the future? Will platforms like Twitter and Facebook still be popular or will there be some new platforms that become even more popular? These questions are not easy to answer, because online social media seems to be a phenomenon that changes faster than we are used to see media to change. Books published about online social media are often already too old when published and not relevant anymore.

Sometimes researchers have been able to foresee what the future of constantly changing social media is going to look like. For example Giuseppe Mantovani claims in his book "New Communication Environments" first published at 1996 that in the future, virtual realities will be used more and more as valid instruments for learning and manipulation, for teaching and scientific or operational aims. That has already happened. For example we have been using online social media to do our research. Facebook is an easy way to connect many hundreds of people with just a click of a mouse.

However, we decided to interview researchers and other online social media experts about the future of online social media. All the answers are of course only assumptions, but maybe some of them are going to happen.

7.1 Expectations of the popularity

All the experts interviewed believed that online social media will still be here after ten years. Experts also thought that online social media is going to be even more popular than it is now. At the moment the two big ones are Facebook and Twitter. You could expect them to have a competition of users during the next few years, but it is almost impossible to say if Facebook and Twitter are here to stay. It is also probable that there will be a lot of different kind of online social media platforms. Facebook and Twitter work mainly between people who already know each other. Online social media platform Ninq is different, because it is based on people who share the same interests. On January 2009 Ninq had already 4,7 million unique visitors.

A Finnish researcher team of Somus Project (Social Media for citizens and public sector) think that the hype name "Social Media" is going to disappear, when Social Media will become a natural part of people's life.

There has also been a lot of hype about the "Web2.0", web in which most of the content is user-generated. If Internet is constantly changing into Web2, online social media is going to be a very notable part of it.

Austrian media consultant Jörg Hofstätter thinks that geo-based services and augmented reality will gain more relevance within the next years. The idea of augmented reality is interesting. The huge popularity of for example Second Life (about 750.000 active monthly users) can be an example of the becoming web: could online social media turn more and more into an augmented reality?

We believe that in the future aspect of privacy and legal issues will be a bigger concern than now, which will limit usage of social media at some stage unless privacy will be secured and using social media will be safe and trustful. At the moment privacy is not such a big concern and only website WeOurFamily have been working on high protect environment. Maybe one day when people will be more concerned about their privacy websites like WeOurFamily will become even more popular than Facebook.

Austrian pro-blogger Ritchi Pettauer also adds that the evolution of social media will continue to happen at an amazing pace, so it is rather impossible to predict the future. “Actually, there’s only one fact I’m 100% sure about: in ten years, folks will use social media in ways we could never imagine today”, he says.

7.2 Smart technology

Taiwanese Assistant Professor Teng-Wen Chan at Graduate School of Computational Design from National Yunlin University of Science and Technology believes that online social media will transfer into a different form when new technology develops. How, we can just try to imagine. Phonecalls with picture seemed to be possible only on James Bond movies 15 years ago, now they are normal life for people using for example Skype for talking.

Jörg Hofstätter points out that the mobile phone is going to turn into a computer (like the iphone). Mobile phones are already becoming closer and closer to a computer. People can already change their Twitter status via mobile phone, so we can assume that maybe in the future online social media can be used more and more via mobile phones.

Smart technology might also affect advertising in online social media: “Additionally, new software development will utilize social media as a way to test beta products, and that will translate into user-generated and free social media marketing, a synthesis of conversation, creation and marketing”, says blogger Murray Newlands in his marketing blog.

7.3 Commercial parts

Austrian blogger Ritchi Pettauier thinks that in the near future online social media is going to be increasingly connected to the economic viability of the underlying business models. As a blogger he also thinks that citizen journalism and hyper-local news will replace a lot of newspapers and magazines. One example of this trend is fashion blogging, which has become extremely popular. For example in Finland all ten most popular blogs are fashion blogs, according to blogilista.fi. The change that Pettauier foresees has started to happen with fashion blogs: more and more companies are inviting fashion bloggers to their press events and bloggers sit next to professional fashion journalists. For example Marketing manager Kati Kivimäki of Finnish fashion company Seppälä told in the news of TV channel MTV3 that clothing companies can save up money with marketing when they move their advertisements increasingly to online social medias. In the same article it was claimed that American fashion magazines have become thinner because companies have moved their advertisements to online social media, such as Twitter and Facebook.

However, when marketing moves more and more to blogs, there are also going to be some problems with ethics. Proper journalists have ethics rules saying that it is not proper journalistic behavior to, for example, take a free trip from a company to Bahama and write a positive article about it. This way companies might be able to molest for example very young bloggers.

Companies also have to adapt how to do marketing with online social media. For example Murray Newlands writes how marketing is going to change because of online social media: advertisements are going to be more personalized and localized than ever before. Newlands points out also one other interesting point of view about online social media marketing: it is important what other people know and trust. For example on Facebook people can be fans of different kinds of companies. As being a fan of the company, people are in one way advertising the company to their Facebook-friends. This phenomenon is not small, because for example clothing company H&M has for this very moment 1 428 100 fans. So companies' aim in the future should be to get normal people to think positively about their company online and by doing this, they could get a sort of free advertisement. Blogger Murray Newlands also thinks that companies should cut a dash in online social media, but not too clearly, so people would start to discuss about the company, share video links and do research about the subject by themselves. So that way information and even advertisements will be generated by users and evaluated by costumers. People tend to trust more their acquaintances than big companies and commercials.

8. Conclusion

In this conclusion, we will answer to our sub questions and our main question by the best knowledge we have. Through our research work, we have learned a lot and have gathered a lot of different information concerning social media websites. This conclusion is a summary of the literature we have read, the paper we wrote, the survey we have carried on and the reflection we have had all together.

What makes online social media platforms good and useful?

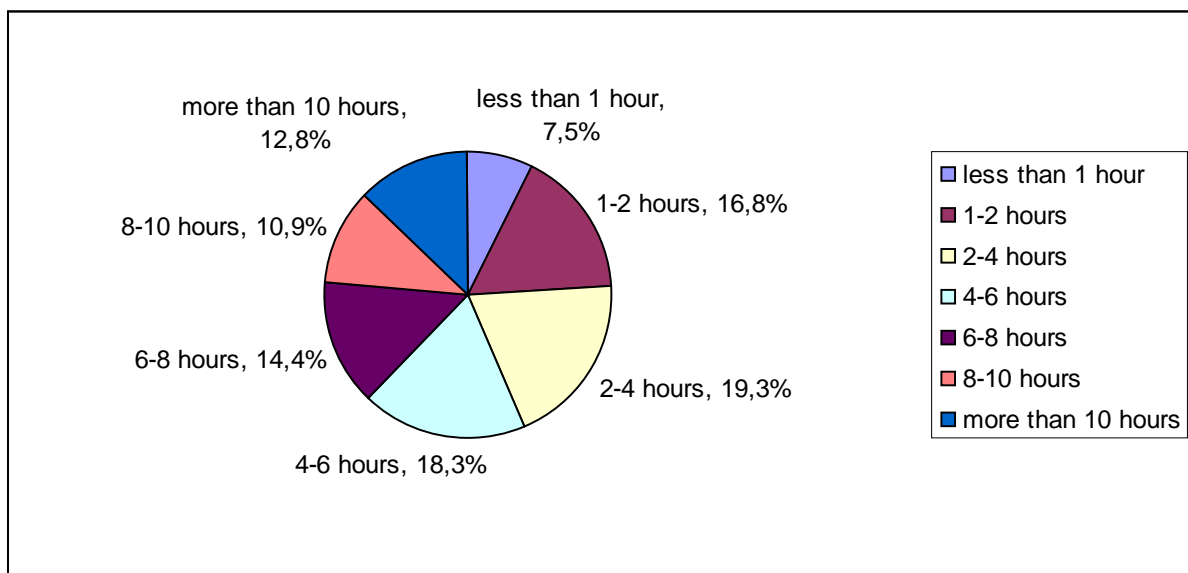
According to our survey good social media platform is fast growing society which has a lot to offer for its users. Most of the people use Facebook to keep in touch with friends and acquaintances. It is not a surprise that human connections play a huge role in popularity of social media. Then again most of our interviewees use YouTube mainly for watching videos and listening to music, so this clarifies that social media has different dimensions and purposes. Sharing and watching photos were also listed to be popular in many social media platforms. This brings us to the conclusion that big part of social media is entertainment and easy access. Videos and pictures make social media visually pleasant experience for its users.

Our survey answerers usually use online social media platforms for more than one reason, so presumably there has to be enough versatility in a platform to make it good. It is important to keep in mind that people have different reasons and needs to use social media, that's why operators of social media have to know their target when they creating a new networking website. No website can be aimed at the whole population as it is not possible to please everyone.

How much do people use online networking in average and what is it based on?

Most of the answers of our survey said that they are using online social media platforms every day (90% of all the answerers). Of course you have to notice things such as high amount of Finnish interviewees (86 out of 201 answers), but presumably our survey tells something about how much

and how people between the age of 20-30 (81 % of answerers) use online social media. Most of the online social media users use it daily, and the weekly time spend on platforms is usually between 4-6 hours (18% answered so). The second highest time using online social media platforms is 6-8 hours (14%). These days the access to world wide web is still playing a big role, as only rare of us have mobile phones with internet connections and Wi-Fi is not accessible everyone we go. Also busy life style limits our use of social media especially in entertaining way. But as the access to social media will grow the use of it will expand as well.



When did online networking become a trend?

The first online social media platform (Friendster) was created in 2002. However, MySpace created in 2003 was the first online social media platform to become a big phenomenon. Until 2008 it was the most popular networking website in the USA. In 2006 MySpace hit 100 million accounts and now there are over 120 million accounts worldwide (2009 June). Facebook, which is the most popular online social media platform these days, was founded in 2004. Nowadays it has approximately 350 million active users. It is hard to say exact year when online social media networking became a worldwide trend, but in year 2006 MySpace hit the 100 million accounts and started to have different versions in different countries. Same year Facebook also became open to everyone. We can say that creation of MySpace was one of the big success that made social media later on so trendy trend.

Is Social Media the answer to a need of people?

There has probably always been a need for people to gather together and create groups or communities, and Facebook is currently the most effective way to do that. We are social animals and we will always have that need to socialize. As we evolve, the technology evolves as well and creates for us better and better platforms to help us fulfilling that social need. We think that the technology has always served the need of humans and it is not the opposite that happens as technology does not create the need. Humans didn't wait the internet 2.0 to communicate and gather together according to their interests. Although growing addiction to computers has also increased depression we believe that social media is not responsible for that as social media opened a new gate for communicating and entertaining people. We all have heard stories when people have met their perfect partner through Internet or that relationships have been saved thanks to Internet. For shy people it is easier to approach other people through Internet and it's definitely faster way to find person with similar interest like you, all you need is to log in to social media which fulfils your needs.

Do people have an urgent need to communicate in different ways and why?

Yes, humans need to communicate and will always find new ways to do that as long as these new ways have advantages compare to the other older ways. It has always been the case and answering the question "Why is that" is more related to psychological and socio-anthropological studies. However, we can understand that with the evolving technology offering new ways, new engines and devices to facilitate the men's life, this need is not ready to change. We wanted to communicate through the internet? Now the next step is to facilitate the access to internet and smart technology is ready to explode.

Why is online social media popular?

This was our main research question that has determinate the information we have reassembled and the survey we have made. After having done that, we hope we can give a relevant, complete and relatively correct answer to that question.

According to our survey, different online social media platforms are popular because of various reasons. Each platform can offer different entertainment or community for the individual. Variation of social media websites nowadays has managed to fulfil different needs and provide as many communities as people require.

Facebook, MySpace and YouTube are the three most popular online social media platforms, according to our survey. That is why we are going to analyze them in details and see what they have in common that makes them so popular. Twitter is not that popular as it has only 7 million people but it is growing exponentially and by this rhythm it will be one the biggest in near future. Although at the moment we cannot consider Twitter as a major social media as if compare 120 million users of MySpace and 375 million unique visitors of YouTube. And is has been mention before Facebook is the biggest with over 350 million accounts.

What are the things that YouTube, MySpace and Facebook have in common? Firstly, all the online social media platforms that we analyzed are free to use and that is certainly an important factor of their popularity. They are also open for everyone and have no restriction of users. They do not have a specific target group and all three are also very entertaining platforms with the different kinds of applications and possibilities.

Sharing content (photos, videos...) seems to be a common trait for these three popular platforms as well. In that case YouTube differs from Facebook and MySpace, because it has also a lot of visitors without accounts and most of users do not distribute any kind of data of themselves. In Facebook you have to be a member to be able to see the shared content when MySpace has certain amount of content visible also for users without account of themselves. YouTube is probably very popular not only because it is a social website but mainly because it is entertaining and offering a lot of visual and audiovisual content.

Once a platform is created it is up to users what will be the content as they make the content so initial idea never stay the same. For instant MySpace was meant for everybody, but then the users started to use it mainly for music purposes and now it is famous for music friendliness. Twitter was also meant for everyone, but for the moment more and more companies are using it for advertising reasons and celebrities to promote themselves. Could that be a reason of the decrease of the popularity of Twitter and MySpace because once the public of a platform is reduced, the popularity is decreasing as well?

We also have to admit that a website in general has to be accessible, usable and reliable to become popular. These are three criteria for any website to work, and there is no doubt that the most popular social websites do have usability, reliability and accessibility qualities.

We also have to consider that hype can be a cause of the growing popularity of Social Media platforms and even if it's not the main reason, it has certainly increased the number of users at a time being. We realised that in our survey, 20,5% of the people chose the reason "following the trend because all my friends are on Facebook" and another 97,5% chose "keep in touch with friends" which also means that they are following friends who joined a platform before.

We also realized that even though people use more and more social media platforms to communicate, they tend to stay social in the real life. According to our survey, 83% of the people consider themselves social in the real life because they are going out a lot. Another surprising 32% of them are doing voluntary work. 30% consider themselves active in the culture life and 25% are member of a sport club. Not only there is the fact that people stay social, but social media also helps most of them to be even more social in the real life, for example by getting to know what are acquaintances doing by the events' tool, which was the reason of using Facebook chosen by 50% of the people interviewed in our survey. Due shared information people also get to know each other better than they would ever in the real life.

There is no doubt that Social Media is popular and we believe that it will become even more popular in near future. Today we use Facebook and YouTube, only god knows what we will use in ten years.

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Attachment 1: Interview for Specialists

Attachment 2: Survey for social media users

Questionnaire for Social Media Research

As part of our research into the use and experience of social media, we would like to ask you some questions. This will take about 10 minutes of your time. Please concentrate and answer each question as good as possible. Your contribution is precious to our research.

Social media is media designed to be disseminated through social interaction. Social media uses Internet and web-based technologies to transform broadcast media monologues (one to many) into social media dialogues (many to many). It supports the democratization of knowledge and information, transforming people from content consumers into content producers. Contemporary well known social media are like Facebook, Myspace, Flickr, Twitter, Plurk,...etc.

1. Background information

(1) Age: under20/ 20~30/ 30~40/ 40~50/ 50~60/ 60plus

(2) Gender : male / female

(3) Nationality: _____

(4) Current place of living: _____

(5) Study/ Occupation: _____

2. Which social media platform do you know and use?

	I don't know it	I've heard of it but I don't use it	I use it	I used to use it	I'm planning to use it in the near future
Facebook					
Flickr					
MySpace					
Youtube					
Twitter					
LastFM					
LinkedIn					
Hyves					

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3. Do you use social media every day? YES/NO

4. How much time do you spend in total on social media per week?

<1hour	
1~2 hours	
2~4 hours	
4~6 hours	
6~8 hours	
8~10 hours	
More than 10 hours	

5. Why do you use certain kind of social media? (Please tick the reasons that you agree corresponding to certain kind of social media platform)

[illegible]

6. Do you use your mobile phone for social media purpose? YES / NO

If yes, what for?

Chatting/ e-mail	
Watching pictures, videos, information	
sharing pictures, videos, information	

7. What are the means you communicate with your friends? (Put next options in order from 1 to 7 In the way that 1 is the one you use the most and 7 is for the one you use the least.)

Telephone calls	
Text messages	
Internet calls (skype, msn...)	
Instant messaging (eg. msn messenger...)	
E-mail	
Letters	
Social Media	

8. In what way you are social in real life?

Being an active member of sporting clubs	
Being an active member of a political party	
Being an active member of a cultural society	
Doing voluntary work	
Going out a lot	
Others:	

Thank you for your attention. It's precious to our research!

Attachment3: Survey for social media non-users

Questionnaire for nonuser of Social networking website

As part of our research into the use and experience of social media, we would like to ask you some questions. This will take about 10 minutes of your time. Please concentrate and answer each question as good as possible. Your contribution is precious to our research. A social networking website is a web based platform that mainly focuses on building online communities in which you can interact with people who have similar concern or interests like you, and you can also explore the interests and activities of others. For example, Facebook, Myspace, Flickr, Twitter, Plurk,...etc.

1. Background information

(1) Age: under20/ 20~30/ 30~40/ 40~50/ 50~60/ 60plus

(2) Gender : male / female

(3) Nationality: _____

(4) Current place of living: _____

(5) Study/ Occupation: _____

2. Which social media platform do you know?

	I don't know it	I've heard of it but I don't use it	I used to use it	I'm planning to use it in the near future
Facebook				
Flickr				
MySpace				
Youtube				
Twitter				
LastFM				
LinkedIn				
Hyves				

3. If you have used some other social media before, please specify which one.

4. What are the reasons you don't use social media? (tick any of the following reasons that you agree with)

Don't feel the need	
Have other ways to find people with the same interests	
Don't want to follow the trend	
Believe that it is going to affect negatively the daily social life	
Don't have the time	
Are not familiar with new technologies	
Are concerned about privacy	
Others (*Please specify):	

5. Is there any social media you refuse to use? YES/ NO

If yes, please specify which ones.

Answer: _____

6. In what way you are social in real life?

Being an active member of sporting clubs	
Being an active member of a political party	
Being an active member of a cultural society	
doing voluntary work	
going out a lot	
Others:	

Thank you for your attention. It's precious to our research!