

Social Networking Sites: Goldmines or Minefields?

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What are SNS?

Characteristics

- Most SNS support pre-existing relationships (Facebook)
- Others help strangers connect based on shared interests (e.g. Flickr)

Characteristics

- The cultures that emerge around SNS are varied
- SNS also vary in the extent to which they incorporate new technologies, e.g. mobile, photo/video sharing, etc.

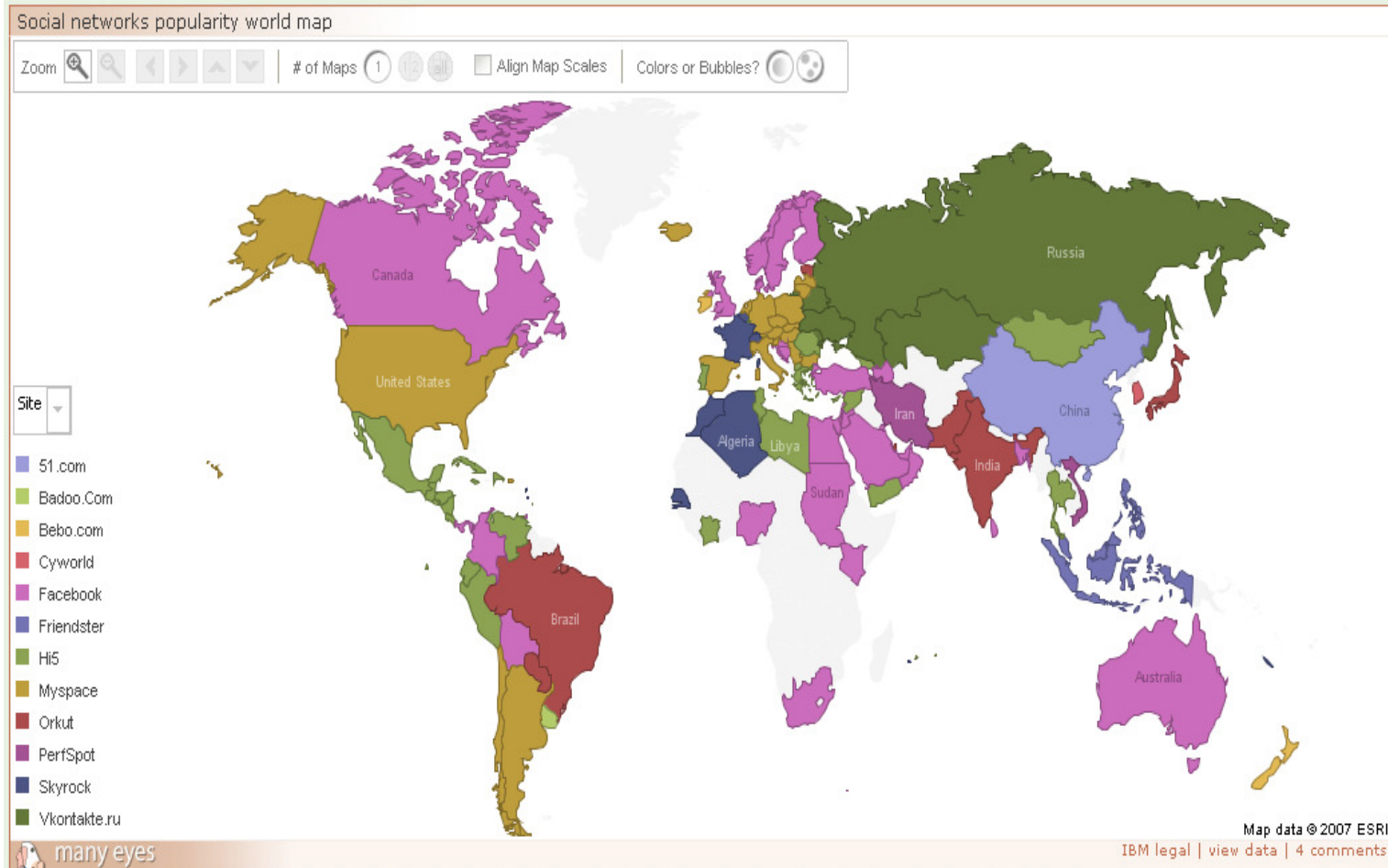
Early examples

- Classmates.com (1995),
- Company of Friends (*Fast Company*) (1997)
- SixDegrees.com (1997)

Later examples

- Friendster (2002)
- MySpace (2003)
- Hi5 (2003)
- Facebook (2004)
- Orkut (2004)
- Bebo (2005)

SNS popularity, by country

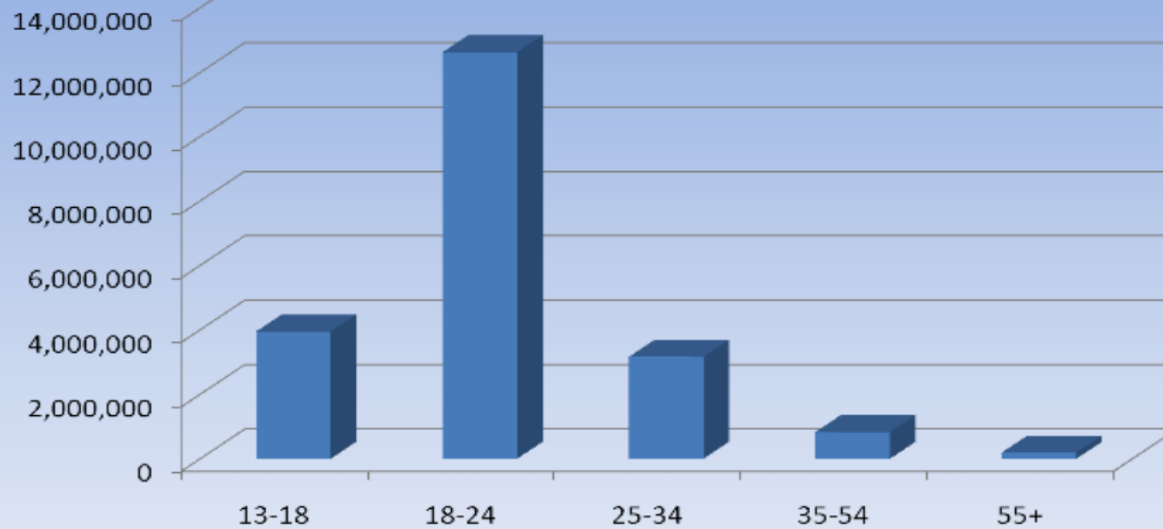


How do people share personal information on SNS?

Demographics

- Most Facebook users are between 18-24
- Compare to LinkedIn (average age is 41) or Geni (majority of subscribers are over 50+)

US Facebook Users by Age Group



Age and privacy

- Correlation between being young and having a lower expectation of privacy
- Norms of sharing differ
- Lack of perspective on consequences of sharing

Accelerated Intimacy

- Beth Hedva, psychologist and author of *Betrayal, Trust and Forgiveness* warns:

“All barriers are removed, so you can be whoever you want to be and share your innermost feelings.”

Permanence and Ubiquity

- Easier to disseminate personal information than to get it removed
- Personal information can follow you around for a long time...
- And end up in places you did not anticipate

Rhode Island v. Lipton

- Facebook photos of convicted drunk driver used as extenuating evidence at sentencing by prosecution
- Photos showed “unrepentant partier” in jail bird outfit at Hallowe’en party, while victim lay in hospital

Farm Boy'd

- Ottawa grocery chain fired employees who made inappropriate posts on Facebook group
- Group was accessible via regular search engine query

Mimic vs. Mirror

- SNS do not mirror social relationships, only mimic them
- SNS can distribute personal information in non-intuitive ways

Zuckerberg's Law

- The amount of information an individual shares will double every year.
 - Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook, Nov. 6, 2008,

(In)Accuracy of Information

- Accuracy of information available depends on network
- SNS based on pre-existing social relationships are more accurate

Estrada v. Clace Holdings

- BC employer terminated employee for SNS profile which indicated criminal record
- Profile had been set-up by ex-girlfriend without employee's knowledge
- Tribunal found discrimination

Lessons Learned

- Employers should take care in using SNS to investigate candidates or employees
 - Information may not be accurate
 - Prohibited grounds of discrimination
 - Work/private dichotomy
 - Establish expectations of behaviour

Lessons Learned

- Employees must be aware that using SNS comes with risks:
 - Information is persistent and public
 - Information can travel to unintended places
 - Judgements will be made based on your ‘digital persona’

Thank you

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