

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL NETWORKS ON SEAFARERS

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Abstract: In the present paper we have attempted to highlight the impact of social networks in general and Facebook in particular on people, with a special focus on seafarers, who are, statistically speaking, more prone to spending their lives connected to the World Wide Web than their land-bound counterparts.

The paper has a fourfold design, as follows: the introduction, which briefly states the purpose of the paper and the personal viewpoint of the authors; the second part provides an empirical and theoretical outline of social networks and the impact on the work performance of seafarers; part 3 explains the research hypotheses and design; and part 4 discusses the main findings, conclusions and recommendations that resulted from this study.

The premise used in drafting our paper is that Facebook is similar to Plato's myth of the cave, as, from a certain point of view, the myth of the cave anticipates the virtual world. And thus we come, once again, to Eminescu's words that the man "is a mere dream of a shadow, a shadow of a dream".

Keywords: internet, seafarer, social networks, Facebook, questionnaire

It is beyond any doubt, that, from a sociological point of view, we have been witnessing lately a huge, special-implication mutation. To be more accurate, for the first time in the cultural history of mankind, image prevails over word. We have shifted from image consumers to image-organized pixels devourers. The written word appears to be cumbersome as compared to the synthetic power of virtual representations. The contemporary individual witnesses a slow, yet painful death of any intellectual effort triggered by a phony feeling that universal knowledge is but one-click away.

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

Although social networks facilitate communication and access to various sources of information, the excessive use of such means of communication may entail a number of negative consequences of social or emotional development for teenagers. You use Facebook excessively and you are trapped in a virtual world. Seagoing personnel should know that resorting to virtual communication excessively is a risky behavior. This type of connected existence targets both their training and their developing personality as well as the quality and value of communication.

Behind the screen, although we feel secure towards the relationship with the other, we are actually losing authenticity, offering others only those issues or pieces of information you want them to know. In general, communicating in the virtual environment gives us truncated information, incomplete and inadequate fragments of reality that we resort to. Although apparently Facebook facilitates the means of communication with others, it essentially does

nothing but further deepen the chasm between the person concerned and the social environment.

Therefore, interaction in the virtual space, like any other aspect of reality that we do too much or to which we attach too much importance stems from the exclusive interest for social networking entailing a number of negative consequences not to be overlooked.

SOCIAL NETWORKING AND BEHAVIORAL PATTERNS

One aspect which cannot be denied is that there are many people who consider that they have a certain dependence on Facebook. They connect to Facebook every day and this is the first thing they do when they turn on the computer. One may have more than 300 friends, many of whom are actual strangers added after various networking activities. In his view, the use of Facebook improves communication as you can keep in touch with people you know who live in other parts of the world, but also with people in real life who are unlikely that you could meet.

What is even more alarming is the tendency to spend money on Facebook. Some seafaring personnel are known to play social games for most of their time. It is nonetheless true that there are people worldwide who communicate on other topics outside the game. Yet, the boundary between addiction and communication is set in the way it affects your life. If one day users do not have internet access, in the evening they become anxious to see what happened on the network. Take for instance the Farmville site. Most people describe it as a calm game, where you do not have to fight for territory and does not require you to be at a certain level in the game. In fact, you are the owner of a virtual farm. The idea of this game is to have a number of friends to be your neighbors. You visit them and by visiting them you earn points and money and with that money you can buy different types of houses, decorations, vegetables etc. The satisfactions the game gives are simple joys like for example the tomatoes have ripened and you win some money which you can spend and the feeling that you get when spending money in a virtual game is identical to the one you get when you spend money in real life. But when you want something more exclusive in Farmville, like a house with a pool, you need to enter in the game and real money is needed. Many seafaring personnel reached level 41 of the game, currently the most advanced reaching 90. Research has shown that while working or because some objective causes, seafaring personnel left the game aside, but the feeling of having left the land unplowed and dry consumed them meanwhile. Farmville may be thought to develop a certain sense of responsibility (Flanagan, Nissenbaum 28-29).

Another interesting aspect of Facebook is related to marriage. From this point of view, there are clear advantages of Facebook for female seagoing personnel. Shyness and low self-confidence make users not want to ever send a picture in an envelope to a male admirer for example, and here the quantitative differences are obvious: on Facebook you can share with your friends entire albums. For timid people Facebook comes as a glove because of the difficulties in communication and social skills. Facebook offers these people a shield and a greater chance to express themselves a little more relaxed than in real life. Last but not least, when your self-esteem is low, Facebook gives a helping hand as it offers a safe haven for all those in search of getting in touch with others but not too close though.

The phenomenon of social networks has escalated ever higher, and there may be noticed aberrant behavior from people in our entourage. For example, it was reported when two colleagues in the same room could have real eye contact, and they preferred communicating through the social network Facebook. This pattern of behavior can easily lead

to the idea that online social networks is a factor that can lead to social isolation, at least in people who have a predisposition in this regard.

In conclusion, the use of social networking sites should be treated with extreme care and it is recommended that we use weighted immediate recognition of events that could lead to psycho pathological manifestations.

UNDERLYING FACTORS OF FACEBOOK DAILY USAGE

Recent trends show that social media usage has increased. As of October 2011, one of the most well-known social media sites is Facebook. This site currently boasts 800 million active users, and over 50% of active users log on to the site every day. Members are able to connect with friends on the site, and the average user maintains approximately 130 friends. Further, more than 350 million of these users access the site through a mobile device.

According to Eldon (2016), 51.2% of users are male, whereas 48.8% are female. In terms of age, 20.6% of users are between the ages of 13 and 17; 25.8% are between the ages of 18 and 25; 26.1% are between the ages of 26-34; and 27.5% are over the age of 35.

A similar study, conducted by the authors of this paper, sought to understand seafaring personnel' motivation in using Facebook and fanning, or liking, particular brands on the social networking site. The researchers found seafaring personnel use the site to establish personal connections with others and use the site to create affiliations with brands that define who they are and help them establish a sense of self. Thus, these motives are similar to the "social benefits" motive discovered by Hennig-Thurau in 2004, the desire to display their personality discussed by Casteleyn and his fellow researchers in a study of 2009, and the desire for self-expression cited by Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calvert in 2009.

In addition, we have found that seafaring personnel choose companies and brands to become market mavens who could receive and disseminate information about brands. This motivation is consistent with the "concern for others" motive and "self-enhancement" motives discovered by researchers, as seafaring personnel could improve their knowledge about a product (self-enhancement), and then share this information with friends (concern for others). In 2011, Smock, Ellison, Lampe, and Wohn applied the uses and gratification approach to analyze why individuals use Facebook in general, as well as why they use certain functions on the website.

The researchers found that users who update their status are motivated chiefly by a desire for expressive information sharing, whereas individuals who post comments do so for relaxing entertainment, companionship, and social interaction. However, individuals who posted on friends' walls did so for professional advancement, social interaction, and habitual pass time. Two motives, professional advancement and social interaction, were discovered as underlying reasons why users sent private messages. Smock et al. (2011) also found social interaction was the only significant motive discovered in the usage of Facebook chat feature. Finally, the usage of groups on the site was positively influenced by expressive information sharing, and negatively by social interaction.

We have sought to understand how seafaring personnel in particular used Facebook. In this study, the selected seafaring personnel recorded their Facebook usage in terms of time and the functions they used on the site. Respondents were also asked why they used the site. Based on the findings of the study, respondents reportedly averaged 110.93 minutes on the site on weekdays and 178.44 minutes per day on weekends. The majority of seafarers also

used the site in the evenings as the hours of 8:00PM to 11:00PM were the mostly commonly reported log-in times.

In terms of motivation, seafarers used the site to communicate with friends. The researchers also discovered that seafaring personnel spend a greater amount of time receiving content than posting it because they read the content posted by friends on the site. Many respondents also reported that they used the website to express themselves.

In this study, 73 seafarers were surveyed and 93% of them used Facebook. We have also discovered that these seamen spent between ten and thirty minutes per day on the site and these findings on daily usage are consistent with those of Facebook researchers.

DATA COLLECTION

Data are collected using snowball sampling which is a method of sociological research aimed at a study sample through analyses made among people who share the same characteristics or the same areas of interest. The overall objective of the study is to gain some understanding of how seafaring personnel manage their time on Facebook and how they succeed in achieving social recognition. After checking the eligibility of the respondents chosen, we have established to use a sampling technique meant to help us analyze the issue.

The reason why snowball sampling is preferred is obvious in the sense that the population that we are interested in studying can be hard-to-reach, in our case seagoing personnel working across the seas. Snowball sampling is a non-probability based sampling technique that can be used to gain access to such populations.

To create a snowball sample, there are two steps:

- (a) Trying to identify one or more units in the desired population;
- (b) Using these units to find further units and so on until the sample size is met.

Since snowball sampling does not select units for inclusion in the sample based on random selection, unlike probability sampling techniques, it is impossible to determine the possible sampling error and make statistical inferences from the sample to the population. As such, snowball samples should not be considered to be representative of the population being studied.

Snowball or chain referral sampling is a method that has been widely used in qualitative sociological research. The method yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest. The method is well suited for a number of research purposes and is particularly applicable when the focus of study is on a sensitive issue, possibly concerning a relatively private matter, and thus requires the knowledge of insiders to locate people for study.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Our study confirmed a phenomenon became widespread in recent years: seafaring personnel spend increasingly more time on the Internet. 86% of them deploy two hours each day surfing the Internet, and on days without work more than four hours.

For the present study 73 subjects were sampled, ratings and officers, Romanians, Russians, Ukrainians, Polish, Croatians, Turkish, Filipinos, Venezuelans and Burmese, all of them using social networks, especially Facebook.

RESULTS

Given the fact that the methodology we used in this study (snowball sampling) is rather traditional, in the sense that it is aimed mainly at measuring duration and frequency of exposure to the social network called Facebook, we cannot say that the results clearly show a connection between the virtual component and seafaring personnel' behavior and attitudes.

We assumed that high usage of Facebook increases users' satisfaction with life, in that it represents a primary modern leisure activity. It is also a communication tool that seafaring personnel use often to keep in touch with their friends and family members.

In our study, the findings highlighted the fact that extraverted seafaring personnel are outgoing, and their sociable character definitely affects their attitudes. They are very active on social networks, particularly on Facebook and are highly proficient at initiating and managing groups of people on online platforms. They are very talented in starting discussion on new and popular topics. They are very active with likes and shares as they strive to a part of everything going on in the online environment.

According to many researchers, Facebook can be an effective tool for coping with feelings of social disconnection: being disconnected drives its use and getting connected its rewards. Exclusion from the social group impacts negatively on a variety of variables, including one's self-esteem and sense of belonging, emotional well-being, and sense of life meaning, purpose, self-efficacy and self-worth.

Self-worth and self-esteem seem to be closely associated with the need to belong. It has been proposed that self-esteem may act as a "socio-meter" an indicator of one's acceptability to the group. A drop in self-esteem serves as a warning signal of a potential social exclusion and urges the individual to take necessary precautions to avoid rejection and improve one's standing in the social hierarchy.

The second basic reason for using Facebook is self-presentation. Activities such as posting photographs, profile information, and wall content are utilized to self-present. Research has shown that extravert users are inclined to post related information on Facebook (Christofides, Muise, and Desmaris 441-444). It has also been found that self-presentation is the strongest and most consistent predictor of social network behaviors. The users are found to be engaged in strategic self-presentation and enhance their profiles.

In relation to the need to belong, to evaluate the extent to which the participants used Facebook for experiencing a sense of belongingness, two criteria were utilized. One of these gauged actions or behaviors pertaining to belonging, namely seeking information and communicating (their number of friends and likes received, not given). The other criterion (seafaring personnel' likes received and tags) measured the motives behind seeking acceptance and providing support or care.

In relation to the need for self-presentation, to evaluate the extent to which Facebook was used for self-presentation purposes, three criteria were prepared, two assessing behaviors pertaining to self-presentation in terms of general self-disclosure and disclosing feelings, one assessing attention seeking motivation.

CONCLUSIONS

Nowadays, more and more vessels offer free access to internet and more and more seafarers have the means and devices to connect to it.

Facebook is considered to be the most popular social networking source among seafaring personnel. Seafaring personnel' level of involvement shows that they consider it an important part of their daily social activities.

Several reasons were given as to why seafaring personnel were using social networking websites. The most important reason given was to communicate with family and friends. Entertainment and boredom were also prominent reasons for use social networking sites. It seemed that seagoing personnel were using social media sites to communicate with others as well as to occupy free time when they were bored.

Social networking sites have made it much easier for seafaring personnel to communicate with friends and family. Like Baym, the current study found that with so many people having busy lives or having friends and family that live far away, these sites have helped to maintain contact with those individuals that seafaring personnel rarely saw.

The number of “friends” seafarers have on social networking websites may affect their self-concept. The current study found that most seagoing personnel have from 107 to 3865 friends. These findings were consistent with Pempek, who also found similar numbers of friends on social networking sites. However, the current study found that the number of friends individuals have on social networking sites is increasing.

To conclude we would like to state that, due to its multi-functionality, this social network is far too complex to simply consider how much time is spent on Facebook by seafaring personnel or the frequency of their use of activities on the network.

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