

# A study of user preferences and reasons for using popular social media networking websites: preferential mapping analysis

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**Abstract:** Purpose – The aim of this paper is to study the user preferences of social media and the reasons why consumers, specifically the millennials use the popular social media networking sites. The paper will look into the preferences and reasons attached to each of the popular social media networking site.

Design/methodology/approach – Primary data is collected from 350 Internet users using structured questionnaires. In order to understand the preferences of users of social media networking websites, discriminant analysis is applied on the collected primary data using SPSS software. The primary data consists of the ratings of the users for the different uses of the selected social media networking websites.

Findings –According to the study, Facebook is the most preferred social media site by the consumers followed by YouTube. The generation which is often referred to as the Echo Boomers or the millennials spend maximum time, which is one hour on a daily basis on Facebook for networking with friends and relatives. Results also reveal that these social media networking sites are used more by males as compared to females.

Originality/value –This paper provides a perspective for the user preferences and reasons of using social media networking websites which can give practical insights to managers for marketing their products and services.

**Keywords:** Social media, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, uses of social media, millennial, preferential mapping

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## I. INTRODUCTION

A business can continue in a highly competitive market only if it is able to have a competitive edge from the rest by providing unique and desirable products and services (Bridges et al., 2003).

The massive increase in the use of the Internet and its extensive applications has created online media, or social media (Jones, 2009; Williams, 2009; Ghali, 2011). The term social media refers to the use of web and mobile technology to turn communication into a two way dialogue. Social media includes various platforms such as Internet forums, social blogs, wikis, weblogs, microblogging, videos, pictures, podcasts and social bookmarking. Today social media networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram and others are used extensively for both personal and professional communication. Today's youth, the millennial generation is hooked on to the social media networking websites in order to stay connected with their peers. Social media networking sites have brought people close to one another in the virtual space. (Baruah, 2012) One of the most important advantages of social media is the online sharing of information and knowledge among people. Businesses are benefitting by introducing social media into their marketing programs (Falkow, 2009). The notion of marketing products using social media has increased, and this growth in usage has attracted many businesses to follow the trend. Companies have even employed personnel to engage with customers online and to maintain social media websites such as YouTube, Facebook, or Twitter. This activity allows businesses to stay in touch with their customers.

This paper explores participants' preferred social media sites among the five types, namely Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Instagram and identifies factors that influence their decisions or choices. These decisions or choices of using the preferred popular social media networking websites stems from the age group that the consumers fall under. Research suggests that the Generation Y, which is also known as the Echo Boomers or the Millennial are the ones who are using social media the most. It is important to study the reasons why social media is used by this generation.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Social Media

Social media refers to "online tools where content, opinions, perspectives, insights and media can be shared. Social media is about relationships and connections between people and organizations" (Nair, 2011,

p.45). Social media networking sites can be described as networks of friends for social or professional interactions (Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009). Social media is an online platform which allows customers to create and share content, communicate with one another, and build relationships with other customers (Gordon, 2010; Hennig-Thurau, 2010; Libai et al., 2010). Social media as a medium of communication came into existence in the 1990s and has gained popularity across the globe over the past few years. It offers a variety of ways through which communication takes place. Over the last 30 years, communication has undergone a major change and is still changing. Emails and instant messaging has created another mode of communication, wherein the length of messages is short and style of communication more interactive. Online social networks have profoundly changed the propagation of information by making it incredibly easy to share and digest information on the internet (Akrimi & Khemakhem, 2012). Social media networking websites provide an opportunity for companies to engage and interact with potential and current consumers, to encourage an increased sense of intimacy of the customer relationship, and build all important meaningful relationships with consumers (Mersey, Malthouse, & Calder 2010) especially in today's business environment when consumer loyalty can vanish at the smallest mistake, which can additionally have online propagation of their unfortunate encounter with a particular product, service, brand or company. Online communication tools have the possibility of increasing our awareness of the movements of our professional or social contacts. The interaction that takes place on these online channels center around shared interests both professionally and socially. The origin of social media dates back to the years when people would go online because of dating sites. It was these sites which encouraged individuals to create their profiles upload their pictures and start communicating with other users across the globe. It was in the year 2004, when Mark Zuckerberg, started Facebook. Facebook permits users to post photographs, upload videos and get connected to friends, family and others. YouTube was launched in the year 2005, and is the first video hosting and sharing site, while Twitter was founded in 2006. It involves a communication method which is called tweets, real time status updates which everyone can see. Research showed that people on twitter spent roughly thirty - six minutes per month communicating on this platform. (Grove 2010). Social media has transformed the way firms communicate with their customers. Past few years have observed the growth of social media channels such as Facebook, YouTube, Google, and Twitter, which permit customers to take a more dynamic role as market players (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). Today, marketing communication has grown from print media to social media in the cyberspace. Customers have moved to online shopping and choose to find information through social media before making a purchase. Therefore, customers have a tendency to trust their circle of friends or colleagues much more than they trust the companies' advertisements (Woodcock & Green, 2010). The exclusive aspects of social media and its enormous popularity have transformed marketing practices such as advertising and promotion (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011). According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) social media has many benefits as it helps connect businesses to consumers, develop relationships and foster those relationships in a timely manner and at a low cost. Other purposes of social media involve affecting and influencing perceptions, attitudes and end behavior (Williams & Cothrell, 2000), while bringing together different like-minded people (Hagel & Armstrong, 1997). According to Laroche (2012) people like the idea of contributing, creating, and joining communities to fulfill needs of belongingness, being socially connected and recognized or simply enjoying interactions with other like-minded members.

#### ***Social Media Usage***

Although social media has existed from the birth of Generation Y (1981), they were widely adopted after 2003 (Boyd and Ellison, 2008). They encompass user-generated services (such as blogs), social networking sites, online review/rating sites, virtual game worlds, video sharing sites and online communities, whereby consumers produce, design, publish, or edit content (Krishnamurthy and Dou, 2008). Research on social media broadly classifies consumer activities as either contribution (posting) or consumption (lurking or observing) activities (Schlosser, 2005; Shao, 2009); it suggests that most users consume rather than contribute to social media (Jones et al., 2004). About 53 percent of active social media users follow a brand (Nielsen, 2009) rather than actively contribute content about the brand. A minority of users usually accounts for a large proportion of generated content (Bughin, 2007). However, over time, some less active consumers do become active (Hanna et al., 2011). Shao (2009) has noted that some social-media activities, which are conceptually distinct, may be difficult to differentiate due to interdependencies as they unfold over time. In a survey done on ten global markets, social networks and blogs are the top online destinations in each country, accounting for the majority of time spent online and reaching 60 percent or more of active internet users (Nielsen, 2009). Social media usage behavior is developing and transforming at a rapid rate.

#### ***Millennials or Echo Boomers***

According to Brodsahl and Carpenter (2011), the generations can be categorized using birth dates such as: the Silent Generation (1925 – 1945), the Baby Boomers (1946 – 1960), the Generation X (1961 – 1981) and finally the Generation Y also known as Millennials or Echo Boomers (born after 1981). This research is based on the respondents born after 1981 as they are the most frequent users of social media. This generation is frequently exposed to technology which has its advantages and disadvantages. They rely extensively on

technology for entertainment, to interact with friends, family and others and even for emotional support. Social media has deeply influenced the buying behavior of this generation. Generation Y consumers have benefited from the increased availability of customized products and personalized services (Ansari and Mela, 2003; Berry et al., 2010; Bitner et al., 2000; Peterson et al., 1997). They “want it all” and “want it now,” particularly in relation to work pay and benefits, career advancement, work/life balance, interesting work and also want to contribute to society via their work (Ng et al., 2010; Twenge, 2010).

#### **Social Media Use by the Millennials**

Many consumers have grown up with computers. The computers, primarily the Internet has mastered the lives of many consumers, particularly their communication. These consumers are also social media users who use social media for interactions with acquaintances, friends and family. They also value the opinions of others on social media and want feedback about brand or products they use. Some studies suggest that Gen Y actively contributes content, creating and mashing (i.e. combining of content from multiple sources); that they gravitate toward social media sites where they can participate (Dye, 2007); and that they prefer to stay connected and multitask through technology (Rawlins et al., 2008). On the other hand, studies of college students suggest that they spend a considerable amount of time simply consuming content (Pempek et al., 2009), just like other generations. Moreover, Generation Y uses social media for the same purposes as other cohorts: for information, leisure or entertainment (Park et al., 2009), for socializing and experiencing a sense of community (Valkenburg et al., 2006), and for staying in touch with friends (Lenhart and Madden, 2007).

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

The objective of the research was to study the user preferences and reasons for using popular social media networking websites namely, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Instagram. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire with a sample of 350 respondents who were social media users. A pilot test of the questionnaire was done on a sample of 50 social media users and modifications were made to some of the questions after the pilot test results. The questionnaire comprised of twenty nine questions which included the demographic profile of the respondents, the social media sites respondents prefer to use, average time spent on these social media sites and finally the respondents had to rank the reasons for using the most popular social media sites on a scale of one to ten.

**Table1: Sample composition**

<b>Demographic profile</b>	<b>Scale</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
Age	Less than 25	134
	Between 26 – 33	128
	Between 34 – 41	54
	Between 42 – 49	19
	Above 50	15
Gender	Male	208
	Female	142
Occupation	Student	85
	Self Employed	56
	Government Service	2
	Private Service	123
	Professional Service	53
	Others	21
Education	Undergraduate	66
	Postgraduate	284

Majority of the respondents were between the age of less than 25 years to 33 years, which means that the people born in Generation Y use social media the most. Most of the social media users were males and worked in private sectors. The respondents also had a post graduate level of education.

### **IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

A number of social media networking websites are available for the users. The users of social media networking websites are significantly using these websites for different purposes. This research study focuses on identifying the preferences of users for using the selected social media networking websites. In total five social media networking websites are selected for the study namely *Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Instagram*. In order to identify the purpose of using these networking websites a detailed literature review is done along with discussion with many users about their preferences. Eight most preferred attributes are identified in the study for which these social media networking websites are used by the users. These attributes are mentioned below:

- Networking with friends and relatives

- Marketing the business
- Getting information about products and services
- Interacting with service providers for purchase
- Business networking
- For entertainment
- For opinion sharing
- Sharing photos or videos with others

According to the study, Facebook is the most preferred social media site by the consumers followed by YouTube. The least preferred site is Foursquare while LinkedIn takes the third place followed by Twitter. Instagram is still in its nascent stage and trying to step up the ladder since there is not much scope on Instagram besides sharing photos or videos with friends, families and others. The Echo Boomers or the Millennials spend maximum time, which is one hour on a daily basis on Facebook. Second is line is YouTube where the respondents spend less than thirty minutes on a daily basis watching videos for entertainment or getting information about products and services. The time spent on LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram is also less than thirty minutes on a daily basis. In order to understand the preferences of users of social media networking websites, discriminant analysis is applied on the collected primary data using SPSS software. The primary data consists of the ratings of the users for the different uses of the selected social media networking websites. The results of the discriminant analysis is shown and discussed below. In table 2, the Eigen values of the different functions are shown.

**Table2: Eigen values and canonical correlation**

Function	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Canonical Correlation
1	13.005 <sup>a</sup>	48.1	48.1	.964
2	11.418 <sup>a</sup>	42.2	90.4	.959
3	1.738 <sup>a</sup>	6.4	96.8	.797
4	.865 <sup>a</sup>	3.2	100.0	.681

a. First 4 canonical discriminant functions were used in the analysis.

As reported in the results, the Eigen value of the first function is found to be 13.005 which explains that 48.1 percent of the variation is explained by the first function only. The Eigen value of the second function is found to be 11.418 which explains that 42.2 percent of the variance of the data is explained by the function 2. In total both the function 1 and function 2 explained 90.4 percent of the total variance of the responses. The canonical correlation indicator which explains the strength of the relationship between the different social media networking websites and the different preferences of the users is also reported in the table. The canonical correlation indicator of first function is found to be 0.964 followed by the 0.959 for the second function. The results of the discriminant analysis indicate that both the functions (first and second) are indicating the significant relationship in the analysis. Thus it can be concluded in the study that both functions are significantly useful in understanding the preference of the users for the selected social media networking websites. Eigen value in the discriminant analysis indicates the goodness of statistical fit of the preferential mapping. However the Wilks Lambda measure indicates the poorness of statistical fit of the preferential mapping. The result of the Wilks Lambda is shown in table 3.

**Table3: Wilk's Lambda measure of fitness**

Test of Function(s)	Wilks' Lambda	Chi-square	df	Sig.
1 through 4	.001	11830.481	32	.000
2 through 4	.016	7231.283	21	.000
3 through 4	.196	2841.601	12	.000
4	.536	1086.439	5	.000

The results as shown above indicate that at the Wilks lambda of the both first and second function is low, i.e. 0.001 and 0.016 respectively. The significantly low values of the Wilk's Lambda are considered to be good. The results of goodness of fit as indicated by the Eigen and Wilk's Lambda indicators of both the functions indicates that the preferential mapping have good statistical fit and can be generalized.

The purpose of the study is to plot a preferential mapping indicating the preference of the users of social media networking websites with respect of the selected attributes of the networking websites. The preference mapping is plotted with the help of the first and second functions coordinates estimated in the discriminant analysis. The coordinates of the first and second functions are reported in table 4. These coordinates of both the functions have both positive and negative value of the coordinates. The first column of the table represents the attribute vectors (the various uses of the social networking websites). The second column of the table indicates the coordinates of the function (represented by x axis of the preferential map) i.e. x coordinates. The third column indicates the coordinates of function 2 i.e. y coordinates of the preferential map. The straight line joining the origin of the graph to the different coordinates of the different attributes provides

the attribute vectors. The square root of the sum of the squares of attribute coordinates provides the magnitude of the attribute vector as represented in the preferential map

**Table4: Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients**

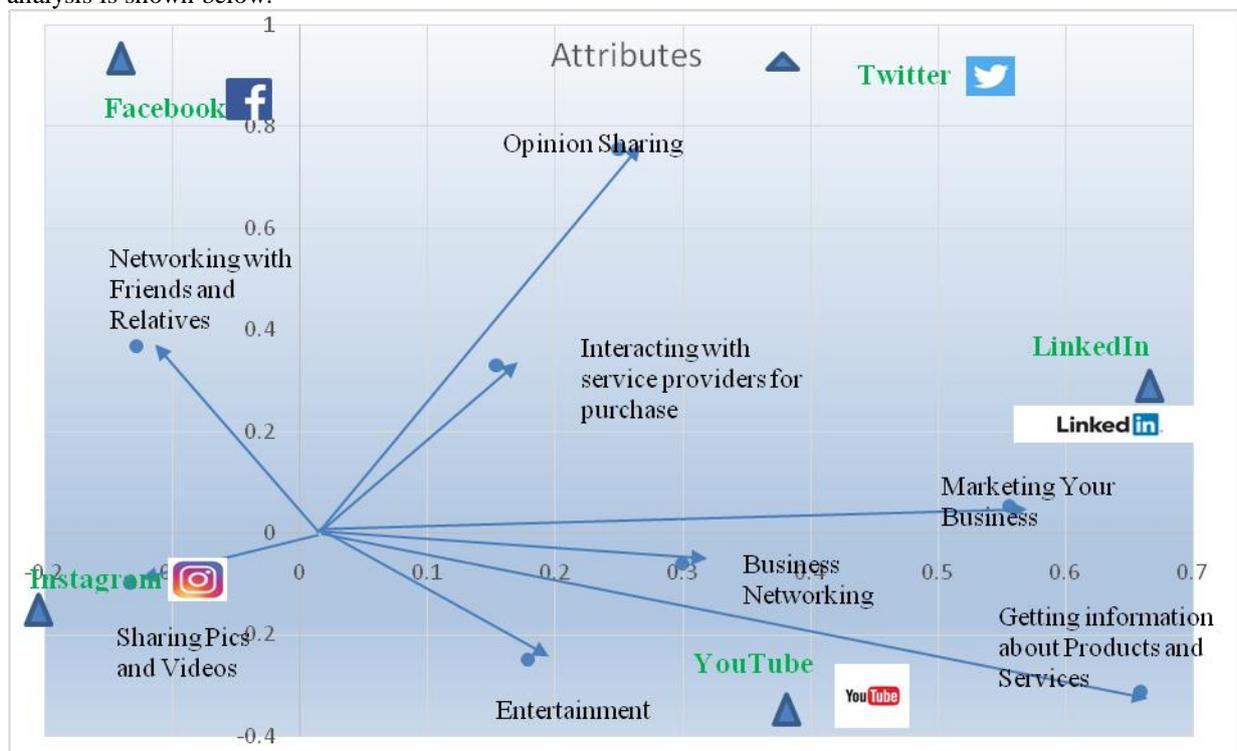
	Function			
	First (X Axis)	Second (Y Axis)	3	4
Networking with friends and relatives	-.128	.367	-.195	.746
Marketing your business	.556	.053	.139	-.058
Getting information about products and services	.659	-.312	.163	.212
Interacting with service providers for purchase	.154	.329	-.048	-.501
Business networking	.300	-.061	-.671	.203
For entertainment	.179	-.249	.183	.189
To share opinions	.250	.754	.265	.047
To share photos or videos with others	-.133	-.098	.587	.313

In the preferential map diagram, the coordinates of the selected social media networking websites are estimated with the help of group centroid methods in the analysis. The position of the selected social media networking websites is estimated with the help of x and y coordinates given in the second and the third column in the table shown below.

**Table5: Coordinates of the selected social media networking websites at Group Centroids**

Social Media	Function			
	1	2	3	4
Facebook	-.615	3.414	.641	1.529
Twitter	.664	3.007	1.379	-1.343
LinkedIn	3.396	1.164	-2.254	-.200
YouTube	3.095	-5.547	.908	.268
Instagram	-6.548	-2.032	-.664	-.257

With the help of the selected social media networking websites coordinates estimated in the discriminant analysis, the preferential map is plotted on graph paper. The preferential map obtained in the analysis is shown below.



**Figure1: Preferential Map**

## V. FINDINGS

As shown in the preferential map, it is found that Twitter is preferred by the users for sharing opinions and to interacting with the service providers for purchasing the products. Twitter initially started with a tagline “What are you doing?” They wanted the users to discuss real time things happening in their lives. As the prominence of Twitter started growing, it evolved organically. Users of Twitter started sharing real time information; businesses got involved and encouraged discussions about their brand and news or information about the products which got viral through this platform. For these reasons, the Twitter tagline now reads, “The best way to discover what’s new in your world”. Twitter has opened a new dimension of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) for businesses as people can express their interests and share opinions with others through shorts posts. With respect to LinkedIn, the results indicate that it is preferred by the users for the purpose of marketing their business as well as for business networking. LinkedIn is a platform to network professionally. It is the way to identify people working at specific organizations. Comer (2010) defines the strategic uses of LinkedIn as follows, building relationships, understanding prospects, handpicking specific prospects, attracting prospects to a particular brand, and listening to clients. YouTube is preferred primarily for getting information about products and services followed by entertainment. Millions of people use YouTube on a daily basis; some use it for entertainment while others use it for information. Ruddock (2006) expresses that recording of television and radio broadcast programs is acceptable to watch and enjoy these at a convenient time repeatedly. Corey. K, (2007) declared that the youth had ranked YouTube as the top ten most popular website on the internet, over 100 million videos had been watched each day and more than 65,000 new videos uploaded every day. To some extent it is also preferred for business networking along with the LinkedIn. The results also indicate that Facebook is only preferred by the users in order to network with their friends and relatives as compared to other social media networking sites. Facebook which is getting popularity nowadays seems to be preferred for only networking with friends and relatives. According to Capua I.D (2012), Facebook is used for six major reasons, initiating and maintaining relationships, learning about others, recognition, personality and willingness to communicate, social influence, and experience. Finally the last social media networking site, Instagram is preferred for sharing pictures and videos. Instagram is a medium designed specially for visuals, its capability to easily share photos on social platforms contributed to its tremendous growth. In terms of time and energy required, Instagram does not require a conversation after snapping the picture and uploading it, Twitter followers expect conversations and participation, sharing, commenting and responding. A tweet can live for only a few minutes; while a picture posted on Instagram can stay for a month. (Miles 2013). Hence, the different preferences of social media networking website uses can be summarized in table 6 below.

**Table6: Preferences of social media networking websites**

Social Media Networking Websites	Primary Preference	Other Secondary Preferences
Twitter	For opinion sharing	Interacting with service providers for purchase
Facebook	Networking with friends and relatives	For opinion sharing
Instagram	Sharing photos or videos with others	Networking with friends and relatives
YouTube	For entertainment	Getting information about products and services
LinkedIn	Marketing the business	Business networking

## VI. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The use of social media networking sites is undoubtedly expanding at a very high pace and so companies are left with no choice but to join the bandwagon. Consumers are using social media to keep in touch with friends, family and for entertainment and while doing so are also exposed to ads placed by advertisers. With the new media taking over the traditional media, companies are encouraging consumers to not just interact with their friends and families but also with brands and organizations. There is a tremendous rise in the social media usage as compared to few years back. A major contributor for this could be the mobile devices which offer Internet facilities on the go. No longer have we depended upon laptops to access the Internet. Telecommunication providers have broken all barriers and have provided consumers with high speed internet facility.

According to research conducted in this field, there are over 1.94 billion monthly active Facebook users worldwide; therefore it is not surprising to note that according to this study Facebook is the most popular social networking site amongst the age group of 18 – 34 years. Every minute on YouTube, 60 hours of videos are uploaded on a daily basis. Over 4 billion videos are viewed every day. YouTube has over a billion users, almost one third of all people are watching hundreds to millions of hours of YouTube videos and generating billions of views. Twitter gained a lot of popularity because it offered different options such as micro blogging and also

because it was used by some celebrities. LinkedIn is another social networking site that is geared towards a more professional audience. According to research, Instagram is a new platform in social media which is visually very attractive.

This paper is aimed at discussing the various uses of social media networking sites and the reasons why a particular segment of the society uses these sites. It has been observed that the results of the study are in line with the literature review which suggests that social media is considered to be a platform for communication, not just between people but also between consumers and organizations. The study has segmented the sample on the basis of age and their reasons for social media usage. The paper looks into the preferences attached to each social media networking site. This study provides a scope for future studies that could draw comparisons on the basis of gender, age, occupation, and time spent on using social media sites to determine further results that might lead to insight into social media network usage and preferences among different groups of people. The study can be taken to another level where other age groups like the baby boomers or generation X can be studied to understand their reasons and preferences for using social media. Also, the echo boomers are changing the market and the business models due to awareness and education. Therefore it is important to study how this generation's usage and preference of social media will influence the society and business in future.

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