Gen X and Y's Attitudes on Using Social Media Platforms for Opinion Sharing

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Abstract
In this paper, we investigate opinion sharing attitudes and behaviors of 13 – 24 year olds on social media platforms. This research utilizes data from 34,514 survey respondents from users of the social media site, myYearbook. Results show that those more engaged with multiple social media platforms are more willing to share opinions, seek opinions, and act on these opinions. However, there were statistically significant differences among users of myYearbook, MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter. Findings show that the reported demographic differences and social network service chosen have an effect on behaviors. These results have implications for businesses and others interested in advertising on these platforms, and researchers interested in investigating these populations.

Keywords
Social media, social networking, myYearbook, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, information sharing

ACM Classification Keywords
J.4 [Computer Applications]: Social and Behavioral Sciences - Sociology

General Terms
Experimentation, Measurement, Human Factors

Background

- The information sharing process involves both providing information that one possesses and seeking information that one desires.
- There is great potential in social media technologies, such as MySpace, Facebook, MyYearbook, Twitter, etc., as information sharing platforms. However, there has been little research into the use of these platforms as information sharing technologies.
- Much of the prior information sharing research has been conducted within organizations.
- Prior research that has focused on social media platforms, indicate that these sites can be rich sources of information.
- Therefore, investigations of these social media sites could be a fruitful area of investigation.

Introduction

The theoretical foundation for this research is human information processing, which is the is the process of acquiring, interpreting, manipulating, storing, retrieving, and classifying recorded information [8]. One component of information processing is the information sharing process, which is providing information one possesses to and/or seeking information one desires from others. There are four primary information sharing patterns, namely one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-many, and many-to-one [4]. There is a variety of social media technologies to meet these information sharing patterns. In this research, we are specifically interested in the sharing of opinions on social media platforms.

Social media platforms are among the fastest growing segment of the Web and hold the potential as valuable information sources. While there has been research on information sharing in some social media (e.g., blogs), information sharing in other social media sites (e.g., Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter) is not as well understood. To date, investigations of these particular social media platforms have primarily focused on the social networking connections. There has been less research into their use for information sharing.

In this emerging domain, there are several unanswered questions concerning the topic of opinion sharing. What is the relationship between social media and opinion sharing? Are there differences among users of difference social media platforms? If so, what are these differences with regards to opinion sharing? Does opinion sharing in social media services have an effect on behaviors? These questions motivate our research.

In this study, we examine opinion sharing on multiple social media platforms using survey data from users of myYearbook (see figure1 and http://www.myyearbook.com/).

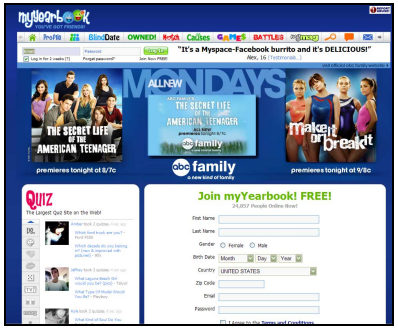
Prior Studies

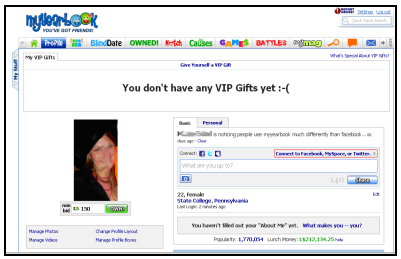
Much of the prior work in information sharing investigating factors that motivate people to exchange information [6], highlight elements such as trust. However, social media platforms on the Web, such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and others, are introducing new affordances for opinion sharing on a scope and scale not previously examined [7]. There has been limited research into opinion sharing aspects on these social media technologies. Java, Song, Finin, and Tseng [3] studied Twitter's social network, reporting that people did use their status updates to seek or share information, but they did not comment on what this information was. Burkey, Marlow, and Lento examined aspects of information sharing by Facebook users [1], again without reporting on content. Oded, Maaman, and Ye [5] examine motivations for information sharing on Flickr, without insights into what the content of this information was. Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, and Chowdury [2] report information sharing among Twitter participants, reporting that people share opinions about brands.

Research Question

Our research question is: *How does a person's engagement with social media services affect his/her information sharing behaviors?*

We define engagement as having accounts on various social networking platforms, namely myYearbook (which is our data collection site), MySpace, Facebook,





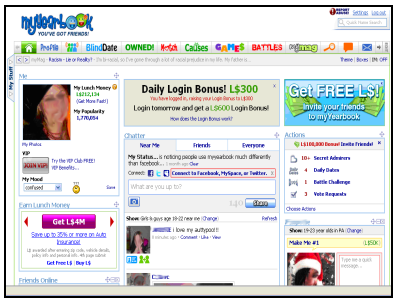


figure 1. Screenshots from myYearbook.

and Twitter. As these are exploratory results, future work will examine more nuanced aspects of engagement. From this engagement perspective, we investigate three hypotheses:

H01: *A person engaged with more social media platforms will be more willing to share opinion via sponsored polls* (i.e., polls placed on social media sites by individuals and organizations).

H02: *A person engaged with more social media platforms will be more willing to seek the opinions of others via status messages*.

H03: *A person engaged with more social media platforms will be more willing to act on the opinions of others via status messages*.

Our reasoning for these hypotheses is that a person more engaged with social media platforms is more willing to seek and share opinions. We focus on sponsored polls and status messages as the information sharing devices in these services.

Methodology

Data Collection Site (myYearbook)

Founded in 2005, myYearbook is a social networking platform designed as a virtual place to meet people. Although open to people of all ages, it is primarily aimed at teenagers, reflecting its beginnings from its teenage founders. The site features various widgets including Owned (to buy and sell your friends), Battles (to battle over photos and videos), Match (to create secret admirers), and Pimp (to decorate and design profiles). As of 2009, myYearbook was the fast growing online social network in the US, the 14th largest site in the US measured by page views, and 19th largest site in the US measured by total online minutes. Its 2009 user base was 20 million members, with approximately 40,000 new members being added per day. It has one of the most active user bases, with members logging in an average of 9 times per month and spending an average of 20 minutes on the site per visit.[1].

The myYearbook site attracts 6 million monthly unique visitors with just more than 1 billion monthly page views. It is one of the few profitable social networking sites currently on the market. Additionally, they are the one of the largest site in the comScore Teens category as measured by visits, minutes, and page views[2]. As such, myYearbook is an ideal site for data collection.

Data Collection Method

The data used in this research was compiled from survey responses from 34,514 myYearbook members in the 13-24 ages. This age range roughly corresponds to the age groups known as Generation X (born between 1974 and 1980) and Generation Y or the Millennials (born between 1981 and 2000). This age grouping is an important demographic for commercial and technologic factors, due to their economic purchasing power and trends as first adopters. As such, they represent harbingers of future social, cultural, and technological factors.

The survey was a 55 question instrument, with all questions being multiple items. Two of the questions were validity checks (i.e., pick the color green and a duplicate question). All surveys from participants that

[1] http://www.myyearbook.com/press/release20/
[2] http://www.comscore.com/content/download/3409/61749/file/comScore%20Media%20Metrix%20Ranks%20Top%2050%20U.S.%20Web%20Properties%20for%20July%202009.pdf

Age	#	%
13	1,419	4.1%
14	3,412	9.9%
15	5,036	14.6%
16	5,375	15.6%
17	4,713	13.7%
18	4,749	13.8%
19	3,101	9.0%
20	2,010	5.8%
21	1,462	4.2%
22	1,151	3.3%
23	1,059	3.1%
24	1,027	3.0%
Total	34,514	100.0%

table 1. Age of Respondents from myYearbook.

Age	Yes MySpace	%
13	941	66.31%
14	2,591	75.94%
15	4,140	82.21%
16	4,577	85.15%
17	4,110	87.21%
18	4,204	88.52%
19	2,686	86.62%
20	1,775	88.31%
21	1,250	85.50%
22	948	82.36%
23	861	81.30%
24	834	81.21%
Total	28,917	83.78%

table 2. Respondents with MySpace Accounts.

did not pass the validity checks were discarded. We pilot tested the survey, with minor wording changes occurring. The entire survey took approximately seven minutes to complete. The survey was administrated on the myYearbook website from 14-17 August 2009. Participants in the survey were offered Lunch Money (i.e., the myYearbook virtual currency) for successfully completing the survey. After eliminating incomplete surveys, those that did not pass the validity checks and those participants outside of the target age range, there were 34,514 complete survey responses for data analysis.

Results

Before addressing our research questions, we provide some aggregate results of the sample. From table 1, we see most of the respondents (approximately 80%) were 13 to 19 in age, with the remaining 20% of respondents in the 20 to 24 age range. Therefore, our sample is weighted towards teens, generally US high school and two years post high school.

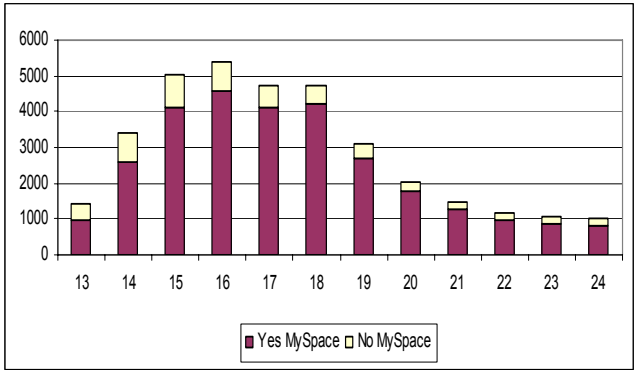


figure 2. Respondents with MySpace Accounts

From figure 2 and table 2, we see that most respondents have MySpace accounts (nearly 84%), in addition to being on myYearbook.

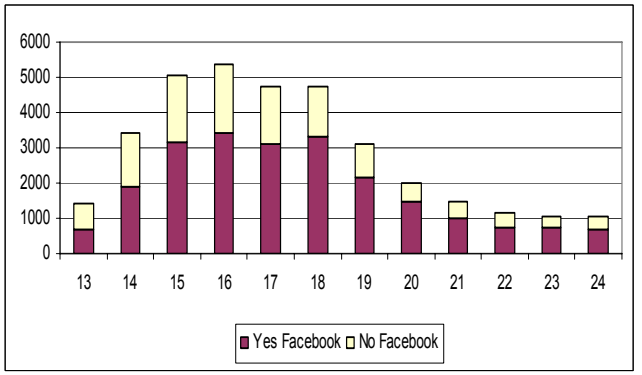


figure 3. Respondents with Facebook Accounts.

We see from figure 3 and table 3 that most respondents also have Facebook accounts (65%), although the percentages are lower relative to those with MySpace accounts.

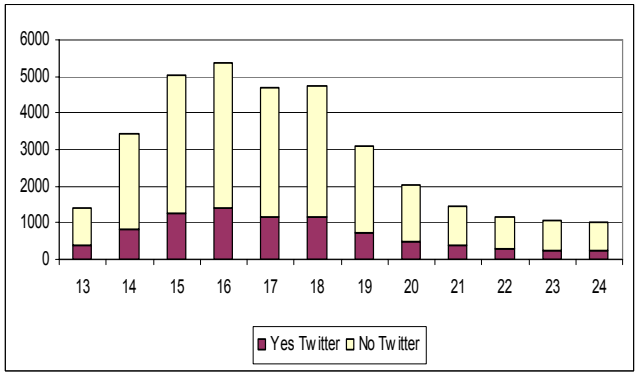


figure 4. . Respondents with Twitter Accounts.

Age	Yes Facebook	%
13	699	49.3%
14	1,920	56.3%
15	3,161	62.8%
16	3,427	63.8%
17	3,121	66.2%
18	3,293	69.3%
19	2,173	70.1%
20	1,452	72.2%
21	1,021	69.8%
22	759	65.9%
23	734	69.3%
24	707	68.8%
Total	22,467	65.1%

table 3. Respondents with Facebook Accounts.

Age	Yes Twitter	%
13	370	25.8%
14	839	24.5%
15	1,264	25.0%
16	1,406	26.1%
17	1,163	24.6%
18	1,143	24.0%
19	748	24.0%
20	492	24.2%
21	363	24.5%
22	271	23.1%
23	249	23.0%
24	228	21.7%
Total	8,536	24.6%

table 4. Respondents with Twitter Accounts.

Figure 4 and table 4 show the distribution of respondents with Twitter accounts (approx. 25%). The percentages were much lower relative to MySpace and Facebook.

The distribution of the number of accounts used among respondents is shown in figure 5. Of the respondents, 7% had only myYearbook accounts. The number of social media platforms for which a respondent has a registered determines which engagement group they are assigned. Most respondents had profiles on multiple social media platforms (typically myYearbook, MySpace, and Facebook, with a smaller number on Twitter). Therefore, we expect our results to provide insights into users of these other services.

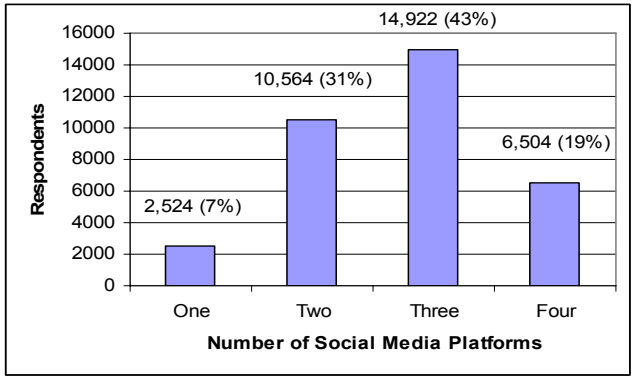


figure 5. Respondents across Social Media Platforms.

Sharing Opinions via Sponsored Polls
H01: *A person engaged with more social media platforms will be more willing to share opinion via sponsored polls.*

We used a multiple ANOVA (MANOVA) statistical analysis to compare means and variance between the groups. The MANOVA tests whether two or more groups are significantly different. By default, MANOVA produces a model with all factorial interactions, which means that each combination of factor levels can have a different linear effect on the dependent variable. The critical value of F = *2.01.* The overall model was significant ($F(7) = 45.9$, $p < 0.01$).

A test of between subjects effects showed that significant fixed factors were MySpace ($F(1) = 39.42$, $p < 0.01$), *Twitter* ($F(1) = 179.40$, $p < 0.01$), while Facebook was not a significant factor in sharing opinions via sponsored polls. Also, the interaction of MySpace * Twitter ($F(3) = 21.33$, $p < 0.01$) was significant, while MySpace * Facebook, Facebook * Twitter, and MySpace * Facebook * Twitter were not significant. So, if a respondent had a MySpace or a Twitter account, they were more likely to share their opinion via sponsored poll. If the respondent had both a MySpace and Twitter account, they were even more likely. An account on Facebook had no effect on openness to sharing opinion via a poll. In all cases, though, the more social media accounts, the more willingness to share opinions.

Seeking Advice in Status Messages
H02: *A person engaged with more social media platforms will be more willing to seek the opinions of others via status messages.*

A chi-square test shows a statistical difference on seeking opinions on potential product purchases (chi-square(6) = 935.41, $p < 0.01$). Investigating layering factors (i.e., Just myYearbook, MySpace, Facebook, and

Key Implications

- The more social media site accounts one has, the more willingness there is to engage in opinion sharing activities, including acting on these opinions.
- There are differences among sites, most notably with Facebook. This probably represents the more closed nature of Facebook relative to MySpace and, especially, Twitter, although further investigation is necessary.
- Although people share information with companies, organizations, and others via mechanisms like polls, they are more trusting of those in their known social network.
- Not only do people seek and share opinion on social media sites, people act on the opinions received.
- These insights have ramifications for businesses, researchers, and other who use social media sites for information gathering.

Twitter), all platforms were significant, but the symmetric measure evaluating the strength of each was low. This indicates that the difference among each platform was small and the key factor was just that the respondent had profiles on different platforms.

Influence of Advice in Status Messages
H03: *A person engaged with more social media platforms will be more willing to act on the opinions of others via status messages.*

A chi-square test shows a statistical difference on seeking opinions on potential product purchases (chi-square(*6*) = 795.01, p<*0.01*). Investigating layering factors, all social media platforms were significant, but again, the symmetric measure of each was low. The key factor appears to be the level of engagement with social media platforms.

Discussion, Conclusion, and Future Research

One trend that emerges is that the more social media platforms that a person has the more willing they are to engage in opinion sharing practices, both responding to sponsored polls and engaging with status messages. Concerning polls, there is a difference among participants based on platform, while we do not see this difference with status messages. This would indicate that people might trust their social network more than sponsored information gathering practices.

These exploratory findings show that engagement with multiple or particular social media platforms point to a difference in opinion sharing which further indicates that there may be clusters of opinion sharing personas. This is an area for future research.

Acknowledgements

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