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A Review of Social Networking Today, Tomorrow and Beyond and the Challenges for AIDS Communicators



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aids2031[®]

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Section One - Social Network Services and their Uses

1. AIDS COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL NETWORKING

Introduction

The remarkable growth of Social Network Sites/Services (SNS) such as Facebook, MySpace, Orkut and their many relatives across the world is one of the clearest indications that digital technologies are changing radically the communication landscape. Many active users spend hours on the Internet working and socializing using SNS and they are perceived by some of these active users as a virtually indispensable form of communication. The principles of social networking are being woven increasingly into the very fabric of the Internet. While the current public debate around SNS is often dominated by concerns over their potential role in undermining privacy, or enabling bullying or predation, these platforms perform important roles in the lives of their active populations. There are many examples of how development and social change organisations are beginning to engage productively with these networks. This report therefore aims to gather learning from those experiments – and other relevant research – as a basis for forward-looking recommendations on their potential use in AIDS communication. The report is organized into three elements:

A) Social Network Services and their uses

This covers three topics:

- We introduce the subject matter and the methodology behind this report.
- We describe how young people are engaging with online social networking and the significant impact that social networking services are having on their users, activity and behaviours.
- We describe a number of existing approaches that communicators and individuals are taking to use social networking to share messages about health and social change issues. We end chapter three with a series of principles for social network aware communicators.

B) Under the Bonnet

This looks at background issues in more detail:

- We survey the features of social networks in more depth, and offer an analysis of how the design of different social networks create a range of challenges and opportunities for communicators.
- We examine the take up of online social networking in different parts of the world in the context of the spread of digital technologies, including the impact of the mobile phone. Through this we offer insights into the different dynamics of online social networking in different countries and contexts.
- We lift our eyes to the horizon and describe possible futures, in terms of drivers for change and trends we can identify.

C) Conclusions and Recommendations

This element draws together the different strands in the report:

- We summarise the main findings
- We develop a series of recommendations for AIDS communicators on how they can use online social networking to engage with young people
- We suggest some specific next steps.

Scope: a connected generation

The report focuses particularly, though not exclusively, on people aged 15-25 in 2009. This age cohort is far more likely to contain active users of Social Network Sites than older age cohorts. In many contexts across the world this generation has grown up with access to digital communication technologies and in societies conditioned by digital communication. Digital communication technologies have not been something they have adopted after learning about organisations, methods of communication and society, and after developing their own identities and friendship groups – but digital communication technologies have often been pervasive during their early years, during their formative experiences, and whilst they are making important life decisions. The differences between this connected generation (sometimes referred to as digital natives) and older generations are in some cases greater than conventional North-South digital divides.

“Although a great deal of respect is paid to the older generation in many developing countries, the newer generation of consumers are significantly younger than elsewhere. In the developed world, the average age of the population is 37.2 years, while in the developing world, it is just 24.1 years. The average age in Asia is 25.9 years and in Latin America it is 24.5 years - but in Africa it is just 18.2 years. Younger consumers tend to have different tastes to their parents and in the main to be more adventurous. There is a steady stream of anecdotal evidence from Africa suggesting that children and young adults in households have significant influence over media purchases like Pay TV channels. This sense of adventurousness is demonstrated in almost all of the 17 country surveys in Balancing Act’s African Broadcast and Film Markets (Balancing Act)².”

Definitions: online social networking and social network services

In this report we use the term online social networking as shorthand for communication between groups of people mediated at some point by Internet technologies. This mediation often (but not exclusively) takes place through Social Network Services (SNS) such as Facebook or Orkut, accessed via computers or, increasingly, mobile phones. More and more SNS are not accessed only as destination websites, but the features of particular SNS are made available in “widgets” which can be embedded on different websites and in devices such as televisions, games consoles and other Internet access devices. We have this multi-platform nature of Social Network Services in mind when we consider them, and SNS should not be read as simply referring to a collection of websites.

We adopt an intentionally broad definition of online social networking to take account of the importance of the mobile phone in many emerging markets across the world. We pay particular attention to both the emergence of smart phones (often as powerful as high-end computers, and with high-speed mobile Internet access) as Internet access devices able to view access fully featured SNS platforms, and to social networking tools such as the popular South African platform MxIT, designed to provide tools for text-based social communication across far wider range of mobile handsets. We also include in our definition of online social networking communication which may start on non-Internet channels, but which at some point makes significant use of the Internet, such as mobile phone text-message based access to Twitter, or the Nigerian microblogging service, Naja-Pulse³.



The chumby device is one example of a new generation of Internet access. SNS through ‘widgets’. The chumby device is an internet connected digital picture frame and media access device.

Widgets can be thought of like a window onto an SNS or other online service placed within another website or device. Widget platforms for televisions and phones are currently being actively developed.

Methodology: a global picture

This report is one component of the work being carried out by the Communication Working Group of the aids2031 initiative (www.aids2031.org/). The core question for the group is how social networking technology has changed and will change the way people communicate about issues and behaviours that impact on HIV vulnerability.

The research behind this report has been carried out by a group of people working in five countries in different regions of the world: Brazil, India, South Africa, Thailand and the United Kingdom. We have drawn upon established literature on social networking and SNS from the UK, US and Europe, and sought to complement this with direct field research (including focus groups and one mini-survey), case studies and analysis from non-OECD countries to compare and contrast the way in which social networking is developing across a range of contexts. Throughout this report we have tried to establish general features and principles of online social networking, which have saliency across the countries we have explored, whilst offering insights from particular countries and contexts to show how local patterns of SNS use have subtle variations of interest to communicators.

Glossary of Terms

The diagram below illustrates some key terms used in the paper:



2. CONNECTED GENERATION

Why are young people Online Social Networking and how does it impact upon their wider activities and behaviour?

Introduction

We are, above all, social animals. Throughout the history of digital communication ordinary people have used or subverted digital technology to communicate and make connections, and will only adopt them when they meet such primary needs.⁴ Consider 1980s Minitel, the French pre-Internet service intended primarily as a telephone directory which rapidly developed an active “messageries roses” sub-culture (‘pink messages’, adult chat services), or the pressure from mobile phone users in South Africa whose continuous use of miss-calls to prompt the recipient to call back stimulated providers in 2008 to develop a free (with advertising) “call me” service. Chatrooms and bulletin boards from the 1990s prefigured contemporary global social network services (SNS) which began to appear in their current form around 2002 with Friendster. The success of modern SNS is largely due to the fact that they exist simply to cater to our sociability.

It is common to talk about activity in SNS as ‘virtual communication’ – but this should not lead us to think ‘virtual’ is the opposite of ‘real’. This is a crucial point for understanding the nature of behaviour in SNS and other forms of online communication media. The communication that takes place through SNS is generally very real to those directly involved in the communication. For many users, SNS communication is woven into their day-to-day lives, with conversations continuing seamlessly between face-to-face meetings, on mobile phones and SNS.

Where SNS have been adopted they can lead to significant impacts upon individual behaviour and patterns of behaviour within groups and wider society. We can also observe communicators responding to the growth of SNS and changing or adding to their communication strategies. In this chapter we look at phenomena that have been observed in areas where SNS are extremely widespread amongst the population, and, where available, research data and analysis helps highlight social trends emerging from this. Predominantly this will cover the UK and USA, with some evidence from additional European contexts. We compare and contrast the phenomena observed in these contexts with our case study evidence from Brazil, India, South Africa and Thailand. Through this we hope to throw some light on the extent to which, as access improves, patterns of SNS behaviour in developing markets could follow patterns from established markets – or the extent to which user behaviours and the social impacts of SNS are likely to be entirely or predominantly conditioned by highly country and region-specific phenomena.

SNS will impact upon the behaviours of their users to differing extents. It is not the intention of this chapter to provide a statistical overview of behaviour change – but rather to highlight behaviour change trends and to give a broad indication of their intensity based predominantly on case study observations.

How are people interacting with SNS?

SNS are becoming an entry point to the wider web and are adding a distinct

social layer to users' experience of the web. In many areas SNS are now second only to – or competing with - search engines as users' first point of web access. A user's chosen SNS may be the first page loaded when they connect to the Internet – and many mobile handsets now come with one-click access to SNS (in preference to one-click access to a search engine for example). SNS offer the ability to search the web – all from within the network. Users increasingly stay with their social network site as they navigate the wider Internet.

For example, clicking a link within Facebook that has been sent to me by another user opens the relevant website, but with a Facebook menu bar across the top of the screen allowing the user to comment on the website, share it with their own Facebook network, or otherwise navigate the web socially rather than solely by search. Through the news-feed, news-reader and application/widget features increasingly integrated with SNS, users are able to access significant amounts of news, information and entertainment without ever leaving the social network (even though the content may be coming seamlessly from other areas of the web).

In some areas SNS are also 'starter' applications, in the sense of being the first online tool that people become used to. For example, '[in Brazil]...a significant percentage of Orkut users are relative newcomers to the Internet ...Orkut provides a simple, immersive experience that allows users with a low level of Internet literacy to gradually integrate the Internet into their lives with a minimum of expertise and training. [...] The result is that a significant percentage of the Brazilian user base relies on Orkut as an alternative to the larger Internet. [...] in the Brazilian context Orkut plays an essential role as an intermediary in the process of non-users transitioning from non-use to literate use of the Internet."⁵

In India, on the other hand, it would be rare that an SNS is set as the homepage of a user. As has emerged from the social networking survey, most users access the Internet only from office or when they are on campus. This restrains the user to explicitly display his/her presence on an SNS however prolific a user he/she may be. However iGoogle is catching up fast. This allows the user to access different SNS like Orkut, Facebook or MySpace widgets from a single platform.

Relationships

Online social networking is changing the way people keep in touch, and who they keep in touch with. Young people have been described as part of a "constantly connected"⁶ generation. They are as likely, if not more so, to use SNS to carry on conversations with friends who they see every day face-to-face as they are to communicate with old friends or with acquaintances who they do not meet regularly. Through status updates, private messages, messages on profile walls and comments on shared media young people are using SNS to share and discuss day-to-day experiences and activities⁷.

SNS can act as an amplifier of everyday interactions – increasing the space for events and activities to be discussed, whilst at the same time simplifying the communications medium. Short status updates and text-based messages lack the inherent complexity and nuance of body language and do not require a similar investment of effort as an e-mail or letter may demand. This can

increase the velocity at which messages and communication are exchanged – adding to the amplification potential of the social network. This said, users of SNS may spend significant effort in writing and posting text and image based messages, investing these messages with layers of meaning, and developing new linguistic and communication conventions.

Many SNS users will accumulate hundreds of friend-connections with friends and acquaintances from school, clubs and societies, university and work. These “persistent weak connections”⁸ allow SNS users to remain peripherally aware of the activities of people they formerly shared a year-group, workplace or club-membership with – and their SNS can act in place of an address book for finding how to contact members of their social network. Hogan (2009⁹) has highlighted how these persistent weak connections can act as a significant social capital resource for SNS users.

This is true, for example, in Brazil where the SNS Orkut has established itself as a platform used by the majority of the Internet-using population, across all levels of society. Brazilian Orkut users are chatting to friends and family across the country and keeping in touch with their communities. One user has explained: “I communicate with my birthplace, Bahia. Sometimes I follow the [political] parties there, (...) I was looking for information about politics there. I can be here and know what happens there.” For users keeping in touch with friends and family, the process of being connected and “in touch” can often somehow be more important than the content of the communication itself¹⁰.

This is mirrored in India. The India case study included an online micro-survey of Indian users of SNS. The main reason users gave for being on SNS was because their friends were there. In the event of SNS not being present, users explained that they would feel left out and disconnected. However, a majority of the interactions with SNS that users reported were primarily of a very light “Hiee-Hello-Wassup” form of communication (50% of survey respondents) – again showing the importance of SNS platforms as spaces for being in touch, not necessarily for extensive in depth conversations and dialogue.

However, for many SNS users in the UK, particularly young people, SNS have become a more significant messaging platform than e-mail – with users checking their SNS messaging inboxes daily, and e-mail far less frequently. In the UK in 2008 the growth in Internet traffic SNS for the first time exceeded email traffic growth, which in fact fell. Nielsen reported that in the countries it tracks¹¹ “social networks and blogs are now the fourth most popular online activity, ahead of personal email. Time spent on these sites is growing three times faster than overall Internet rate, and now accounts for almost 10 percent of all Internet time”¹².

Users are “hanging out” through online social networking spaces. In many senses this can be seen simply as an extension into online media of “hanging out”: the use of free time to be around friends, to be entertained or play games, to spark random connections and conversations and to generally engage in unstructured activities. Whilst hanging out on SNS, users may be interacting with amateur-produced content, or they may be engaging with advertising and marketer-produced media and content.



Studies have suggested young people in the UK can be spending upwards of two hours per night connected to SNS, at least part of this time being a virtual hanging out, often whilst consuming other media at the same time from TV, or being in touch with friends across a range of access devices such as mobile phone and instant messengers. SNS also play a part in face-to-face hanging out of friendship groups; when friends may help each other to create their SNS profiles, or a group may cluster around a shared computer monitor, logged in using the account of one of the group, to browse the people, content and media on the network.

Many Brazilian SNS users are accessing the sites through telecentres – shared Internet access venues with clusters of computers – so they can be both hanging out in an online shared space, whilst hanging out in a physical space also. However, telecentres amount to a small proportion of the use of Internet in public spaces. Private, usually run as small businesses, “LAN houses” have a much bigger scale and often also act as informal meeting points. (Younger people especially meet in such spaces for gaming, meeting people and flirting.) This behaviour is mirrored in the Internet cafes in residential areas of Bangkok. Some really young children who may not have money to play online games will just hang out in the cafes to watch friends playing, or even wait to use the remaining online time left by some cafe customers. Similarly, 24 percent of respondents to our survey in India were very active SNS users, browsing SNS to stay updated with regular happenings in their networks, playing games and using applications built into the SNS, and sharing or consuming photos, video and music content within their networks.

The patterns are repeated in South Africa, as illustrated in this extract from the focus group interviews. Users of mobile SNS and SNS-like services such as Mxit are turning to interaction with the online community through the mobile phones as a way to use dead time during the day, such as waiting around at work. Online hanging out again overlaps with and intermingles with offline hanging out.

Buhle: Before I deleted it, I'd spend time chatting especially if I didn't go to school from early in the morning until around 6pm

Lebo: What did your mother say?

Buhle: I didn't chat if she was home

Lebo: What about when she was home?

Buhle: I'd go to my room and lock myself in (girls laughing)

Lebo: Your mother doesn't want you on Mxit?

Buhle: She doesn't want me using it, yes.

....

Lebo: Ok. What if they close Mxit one day? How will you feel

Busi: (iyo – sigh) it would be really bad, (Busi – I'd get hurt)

(and from younger girls)

“i lyk mxit 2 couz u cn express ur feeling to ur mxit frnds”

“when i am in mxit i whant to speak some jokes I dont whant to speak whith strangers”

(South Africa Focus Group)

In Thailand, the teens interviewed detailed their activities on SNS, which can be dissected with two dimensions. One is the kinds of activities and the other is the circle of friends of different distance. Clearly, SNS like Hi5 mixes friends and provides the mechanism for members to add as many friends as possible. For uses, even teens, there is a clear distinction between close real friends that keep substantial contact and acquaintances that are online only. Within the closest circle of friendship, the kinds of activities youngsters do with friends include: updating and being updated of status and certain topics, reading and leaving comments, uploading and viewing pictures and posting videos and chatting (gossip-style conversation).



With the farther friendship or acquaintances, the reasons given by Thai young people for using Hi5/SNS are mostly to make new friends. Some of them will accept everyone on the Internet, including classmates, schoolmates and any strangers found on the net. Girls are likely to add more acquaintances to friend lists than boys. Therefore some of them have accumulated 600-1,000 even 2,000 friends. This is specifically on Hi5. This is like a social game with numbers. According to the active players, they keep adding friends on Hi5 in order to top the popularity list. The meter of popularity doesn't mean much to them in terms of friendship. Facebook or MySpace that is synergized with MSN are for closer friend circles but on Hi5 two different circles of friends are together, but to youngsters they don't get confused with these two circles.

Online social networking can change the scope, nature of friendship and relationship formation and how friendships and relationships operate. Imagine the following illustrative scenario:

Joanna meets James at a party. She wants to get to know him better. Before online social networking she may have asked mutual friends to tell her more about James, and she may have waited until future social occasions to develop the relationship. With Social Network Sites, Joanna is able to search for James's profile and find out about him from the public information and media he has shared. She is able to make an SNS friend-request, possibly even from her mobile-phone at the party, as a way of keeping in touch and developing conversations and potentially a relationship without waiting for future parties or events they are both attending.

Joanna and James initially converse on the SNS via public profile-wall message board, and comment on photos of the party that have been uploaded to the social network. They then use private messaging to arrange to meet up. After a date they both update their relationship status on the network – which informs their friends on the network that they are in a relationship. When Joanna and James, relationship ends their friends find out initially through the status update on the social network. Friends comment on the status updates as a way of offering sympathy to Joanna or James.

The impact of SNS on relationship formation and conduct illustrated above is not limited to romantic relationships, and SNS users may accumulate a significant network of contacts met once or twice at social or work events. Creating connections with people met only online (for example, by browsing

and searching profiles, or linking to friends of friends) occurs on most SNS platforms. It is also becoming increasingly common on SNS like Twitter which are open by default, in contrast to many SNS. This enlarges the number of people who view the update as does the fact that Twitter does not enforce reciprocal relationships (so you can link your profile to someone else, without them linking back).

This mixing of relationship types within SNS is a common feature in all the countries we looked at. In India, for example, while most people are on SNS for friends, dating through SNS is also becoming common. There are Indian sites like Fropper that have been positioned as a dating platform. But even then dating via SNS mostly happens in subtle ways and largely in urban areas only. On the other hand, matrimonial sites are doing quite well (the user is a member exclusively for the purpose of seeking a marriage alliance). Some examples are bharatmatrimony.com, shaadi.com, simplymarry.com, and jeevansaathi.com. In Brazil, there are cases of people who maintain separate profiles, depending on their interests. A common situation is having one profile for family, friends and work and another only for dating.

In South Africa participants in our girls focus group reported that they didn't talk to strangers, but that they might get to know an acquaintance better, as is illustrated below:

Katlego: (starts by laughing) at yet-me (chatroom) there re people labeled, there people who are lonely, heart-broken, etc.
...
Lebo: So you usually access if?
Katlego: Yes, but I talk to "skeem" (friends)
Busi: I prefer asking one of my contacts on Mxit and then the person would give me an advice
Lebo: is it someone you know?
Busi: Usually not from people I know, just a person I chat with on MXit.
Lebo: Did the advice help?
Busi: Yah it did help
Katlego: I chat mostly with people I know. To strangers, we only chat about ordinary stuff like the weather and they are boring anyway.
From focus group discussions, SA. March 2009.

SNS are becoming major media publishing and consumption spaces. SNS users are taking advantage of the content publishing features that the platforms provide and are actively sharing media through the platforms: whether photos from events with family and friends, or their own creative works of music and video. In the UK, for example, as use of the web by young people overtakes time spent watching television (upwards of 12 hours a week online)¹³, SNS have become major platforms for media consumption. MySpace is particularly recognised as a platform for both signed and unsigned bands to promote their music, and all the major UK networks are increasingly rich in video content. This includes re-packaged mainstream



media such as clips from TV shows, or specifically created online content (such as the Kate Modern micro-soap opera created for Bebo and funded almost entirely by product placement¹⁴). These exist alongside User Generated Content (UGC) and amateur-created video clips.

This is a noticeable trend in India where many SNS very actively seek to be entertainment and media spaces. They are particularly vibrant in their appearance and attempts to give a local flavour to the network, blending socializing with entertainment, drawing particularly on Bollywood influences. Indian SNS platforms often include features such as downloadable ring tones, wallpapers, screensavers, film music and videos. Some sites like BigAdda and Ibibo have tried to act as quasi-blogging platforms using celebrity bloggers like film star Amitabh Bachchan and cricketer Ravi Shastri to drive traffic. Ibibo has also developed in-site talent contests.

Brazilian users have been active in newer SNS almost since they emerged and a more diverse picture has emerged. Brazilian cultures of media appropriation and remixing provide a basis for media creation and consumption in the SNS space. Media consumption is related to SNS basically in two different forms:

- Indirectly, SNS act as commentary to other media, in which people learn about new features through their networks,
- Directly, through direct consumption of media in SNS (very often recorded mainstream media such as TV shows, and on a very small scale the consumption of independent, properly open-licensed media).

Note that bandwidth in telecentres or LAN houses in Brazil varies a lot, according to the local availability of access providers. Usually, flash videos can be watched with a little patience.

Social Network Sites and the media available through them are becoming key spaces of identity exploration and self-expression. Through the profile creation and sharing features of SNS, people become curators of their own content paces, storing, sharing, mixing and remixing media and media playlists. The group features of SNS, for example, have been widely appropriated as tools for users to express their views on particular issues, with users joining groups to show that they are fans of particular sports or music, or to show support for particular causes or issues. A user's group memberships are usually displayed on their public profile.

In the UK, many (younger) teenagers invest considerable time in crafting their SNS profiles as a means of exploring their own identities and expressing facets of their identity to their social network. This can include sharing revelations about risky behaviours¹⁵ or about affiliations and support for brands, bands and social causes. For older SNS users profiles continue to be a form of self-expression and a means of "writing oneself into being" online. Young people's concepts of private and public information are being influenced by SNS. Business focused networks such as LinkedIn are increasingly used by young professionals as spaces to share their career records and work interests. In South Africa we see how young people use multiple profiles to explore different possible identities.



Snapshot 01: MxIT Identities.

Simphiwe, 20, completed grade 11 at school, currently working, lives with his grandmother in Orange Farm. He got his first cellphone in 1998, and currently owns 2 cellphones and has 4 SIM cards. His preferred network is the one that offers him the most “freebies.” He is the only one at home with a phone, and doesn’t like to share his phone.

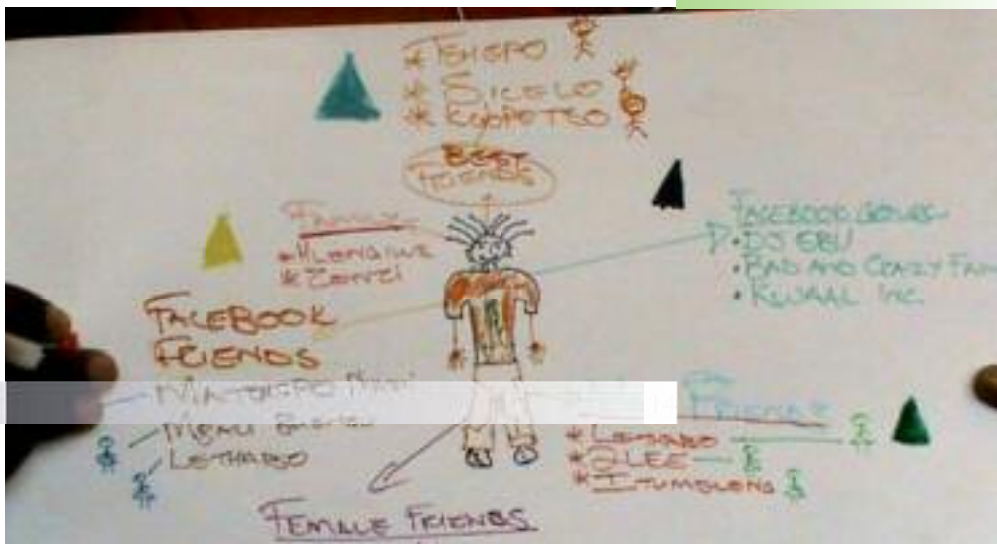
He uses Facebook too when he goes to the Grow Bacha office weekly. He is very good friends with Tshepo Tamae who works at Grow Bacha.

He is a dedicated MxIT user sometimes spending all day (and all night) MxIT-ing. He is described as a MxIT “boffin” and “well connected” by his friends.

Simphiwe drew two social networks, one of which is for his alter-ego – Snake. On one social network map you will find his friends – best friends, female friends, Facebook friends – all by name. On this other map Snake is friends with “cruel friends”, the Assassins, the naughties and Alcoholics.” Simphiwe’s use of MxIT is full of bravado and macho rhetoric he created another personality that is braver, more confident and more of a risk taker than he might be in real life. Another participant’s comment about MxIT; “you can lie and no one will be able to see you” is true for him.

He said: “MxIT is safe, you can chat while you are in your room. Lock the doors and chat and chat and no one will get you.” He did not cite MxIT as a source for information, for that he said, he would go to his best friend.

Simphiwe is typical of high risk youth; he is 20, has not completed his schooling, and lives with a grandparent (with no parental involvement). His communication is typical of the male Grow Bacha youth – full of bravado – though he must at times feel vulnerable and concerned for his future.



SNS users are becoming skilled in using a variety of media and forms to communicate and interact. Private objects that become social objects are the social lubricant within SNS, including, for example: photos published, tagged and commented on; links to interesting, funny, trend-setting content; event notifications, invitations and reports. Users appropriate the many features of SNS for their own purposes. For example, they use events and group features to ask friends to share their mobile phone numbers.



The short status update ('What's on your mind?') has become a communication short-form, especially with its extension into microblogging sites such as Twitter. As new media, however, SNS add in a more public dimension: depending on individual settings my status can be of interest to friends of friends who want to meet or talk to me (or avoid me). I can identify other people responding in the same way as me to events and ideas that move me. I can publically declare solidarity with political movements or campaigns and, if I am that way inclined, try to recruit my friends.

Activity in SNS often reinforces and enriches physical connections. Contrary to the stereotype that time spent online isolates individuals, groups of people arrange parties, events and gatherings through SNS. The more pervasive the connection, as people link SNS, phones and Twitter-like services, and the more connected the population, the more likely that people will seize opportunities to meet up corporeally. People linger in SNS for the same reasons they spend time in cafes or bars; to have fun, meet people and enrich their social lives. They also exploit the medium for more specific purposes such as political gatherings, coming together in flash mobs, connecting for random sexual encounters or playing artificial reality games¹⁶.

Social networking spaces can be spaces for gaming and play. The culture in SNS, as quintessential web 2.0 properties, is light, funny, quirky and casual. Games such as Scrabulous are popular. People exchange funny songs and stories, tell jokes and tease each other. They negotiate identities and relationships, define themselves through their reactions to and comments on issues, fashions, celebrities and events. They delight in playing with and influencing the development of Internet memes¹⁷ (a catchphrase or concept that spreads quickly from person to person via the Internet), contributing, adapting and sharing quizzes and competitions¹⁸. Pass-timing of this kind has always engaged social groups, but the specific added value of SNS is that they link people and groups to the global flow of ideas and trends, as well as to other groups with similar interests.

Social networks are being used functionally, to organise events, activities and campaigns or to manage professional networking. On the Feb 6, 2009 more than 7,000 people joined a flash-mob in Liverpool Street Station, London, taking part in a mock re-enactment of a recent TV advert. The event had been organised entirely in a very-short period of time through a group on the SNS Facebook, started by an individual who just thought the idea of the flashmob would be fun.

SNS tools have the power to rapidly spread information about events, activities and causes. Less dramatically, but of arguably greater significance, SNS are becoming key tools in many people's day-to-day organisation of both their social lives, and their wider engagement with groups and



Social Network Sites have facilitated the organising of large real-world gatherings, from political protests to 'just-for-fun' flash mobs.

Photo Credit:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/mrlerone/>
CC BY-NC-SA

associations. The event organising features of SNS are used to coordinate personal events such as birthday parties, or meetings of social or campaigning groups.

In India women's networks have recently used SNS groups to organise a creative mass protest against the Hindu Nationalist Party's' call for restrictions on public displays of affection. The irreverent call for women to send knickers to the HQ of the lead right-wing organisation on Valentine's Day (<http://tinyurl.com/aaqssc>) was smart marketing and the campaign went viral, not only attracting more than 2,000 members, to the group but global publicity.¹⁹

Rede Humaniza Sus, a national health humanization programme led by the SUS Brazilian public healthcare institution, has made use of a custom SNS that aims to humanize Brazilian Health services, making them more accessible and sympathetic to people's situations. They have made use of a custom SNS built for them to connect and facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing between professionals working on health humanization. The network has grown since early 2008 to more than 2,500 registered members. Network members have commented on the power of media sharing and informal conversation features within this network for facilitating dialogue: "If my colleague has a camera and in her everyday, in work, she does a snapshot of life, put it in the network and we get to talk about it, that can help us using that space not in a much formal fashion that enforces us to formal replies."

SNS are becoming more connected to the world of work. Some sites like Plaxo and LinkedIn identify themselves specifically as professional networking tools. Organisations, commercial and non-profit, with presences on SNS use them to advertise vacancies. Organisations are having to come to terms with newer employees used to engaging with their personal networks to advertise and support each other through finding work, daily work issues and moving on. These people want to stay in touch during the day, sparking debates about whether people should be allowed to access SNS at work, raising issues particularly for security-minded IT managers.

SNS users are creating, joining and engaging with groups and communities within the SNS to access and share information. A search on any of the major SNS of the term World AIDS Day is likely to turn up a number of groups or events posted to the site, often with many members. Many of these groups have been created by individuals operating independently of any campaigns or communication organisations, and contain messages and discussions between SNS users about issues connected to HIV/AIDS. SNS contain a myriad of groups on just about any topic, and SNS users may turn to the groups and user-contributed knowledge within the networks rather than to search engines and official information sources to help them explore an issue.

An informal survey of AIDS-related communities in the Brazilian Orkut discovered a number of groups, some of them with thousands of users: Aids, DST ... Conscientização (4,523 users); HIV/AIDS – BR (5,320 users); Prevenção à DST/Aids e Drogas (3,594 users, with focus on hearing impaired people). These communities feature a lot of forum discussions, with people offering help and useful information to each other. But their



attendance is usually restricted to gay public, and out of prejudice the heterosexual public tend to avoid these communities.

Special interest groups and marginalised groups are using spaces within SNS platforms, and are creating their own social network sites/services. Individuals and groups are making use of hosted SNS platforms such as Ning.com, and readily available open source tools to create niche social networks. These may be topic-based, or, for particular groups who do not wish to host their discussions and networking within wider SNS, possibly due to social stigma. For example, a recently launched SNS for young people from Gypsy and Traveller communities in the UK, built on top of the hosted SNS platform Ning.com, has grown to more than 1,000 active users and has created a space for otherwise marginalised and isolated young people to come together, socialise and to then join some discussions about issues that matter to them.²⁰

SNS have become a central place for constructing, negotiating and mediating group norms. The stereotypical image of a young person alone in front of a screen, isolated and anti-social, is in reality more typical of the previous generation of technology users -- TV addicts -- than young people active in SNS. The power of friendship groups, critical to the development and growth of young people's identities and equally important in adult life for support and feedback, is amplified in SNS. The regular constant interaction and feedback can be as constraining as it is supportive. But from the point of view of AIDS communication it offers a powerful vector for exploring sexuality and behaviour, as well as places for marginalised or stigmatised groups to find support.

Some SNS users are putting themselves at risk through their social networking activities. Through revealing personal information in public spaces, linking with strangers, and using commercial features in SNS without taking security precautions (e.g. setting secure passwords), users can put themselves at risk through their use of SNS. The UK Children Go Online project²¹ has categorised online risks into a matrix of types: "Commercial, Aggressive, Sexual, Values" and forms: "Content" where the individual is recipient of inappropriate, offensive or misleading content; "Contact" where the individual is directly involved in potential harms, which can include being bullied, groomed or physically abused as a result of online contact; and "Conduct" where the individual is involved as an actor – engaging as a bully, or in illegal activity through online tools. There are also suggestions that the desire to access SNS is linked in some areas to commercial sexual activity in order to obtain mobile access airtime.

In this chapter we have explored a range of ways users are engaging with SNS and the impacts it is having on their behaviours. In the following chapter we will explore how communicators are already responding, and we will draw together a series of principles for social network aware communicators, based on both this chapter and the next. In our recommendations we will return to the theme of risk, to set out a framework for addressing potential risks to individuals and organisations from engaging with SNS.

Snapshot 02: Volunteer-led Social Networking in Thailand

This example from Thailand illustrates how young volunteers with the Openmind Projects have naturally adopted SNS as a platform for promoting



the opportunities it offers, how SNS has kept volunteers connected with the organisation, and how it has impacted upon the movement of people, money and resources.

"Websites and the Internet are the only available marketing tools for small organizations," asserted by Sven Mauléon, the director of Openmind Projects (OMP). Their targeted audience are those who want to come to Southeast Asia to experience different cultures by volunteering to teach in rural communities in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Nepal. Since beginning three projects in 2001, they've found all their volunteers, or vice versa, from their own websites and social network site Facebook. Now it has grown to approximately 60 educational and eco projects in the four countries.²² Currently their three active recruiting windows are their official site (.org), own interactive networking site (.net), and more than one Facebook account and pages created by volunteers.



The differentiating point is that their several SNS, the most popular which has 560 friends, were created by their volunteers. The messages and images on the pages are about the training and the life volunteers had in the poorer northeastern part of Thailand. Messages are volunteers' reflections of their experience in Southeast Asia and reflect increased interest in volunteering for OMP. The networking effect, since a speech at the Asian Institute of Technology in 2002, boosted by SNS like Facebook, has taken the organization to a new sphere of work. Starting with the focus of bringing information technologies to rural villages in Thailand²³, with the incremental inflow of international volunteers, OMP has cracked into a very competitive "voluntourism" sector. The increase of volunteer numbers and income has enabled them to open more service sites in other southeastern and southern Asian countries. Volunteers are becoming more and more important to OMP. They are both the paying customers and the human capital for their organizational objectives of rural development.

The organizational development of OMP is tied with information communication technology and has been transformed and accelerated by social-network-function sites. As they reiterated their learning-by-doing experience, some old volunteers have given their hearts and become OMP's satellites in different countries around the world to outreach to more volunteers and/or represent OMP. Some volunteers come back to Southeast Asia to plan and do more work for OMP, for rural communities, and for themselves.

The testimonies of substance travel in both real and virtual worlds and reinforce each other. The friends marketing has never been planned by organizations like OMP. Ideas come from all sides and are pooled. Openmind implemented some and volunteers did others. From the example of Openmind Projects, we can see a cause of a local community development has triggered the movement of people, money and more potential resources via social network technology.

3. ENGAGEMENT: HOW ARE DIFFERENT ORGANISATIONS USING SNS?

As SNS have grown in importance, increasing numbers of organisations promoting and campaigning for social change have been experimenting and learning how to include them in their communication. Both SNS platform providers and agencies with an interest in health promotion have been part of this trend, actively exploring the role of SNS for health promotion and social-cause outreach. The following chapter offers a number of examples of how individuals and organisations are engaging with SNS as communication platforms. The examples draw mainly from the UK and US markets, which in many ways have been developing parallel to each other.

Large and small organisations are creating profiles and pages within Social Network Sites to raise awareness of their issues, to build their links with potential supporters or target audiences, and to crowd-source input into their work. By accepting friend or fan connections against their corporate presence within SNS, organisations build up an opt-in list of fans/friends who they can communicate with through status messages, shared media and using the messaging features on SNS. The communication can be two-way, allowing organisations to use their SNS profiles and presence to get input from their constituency and to engage in dialogue. Some organisations are empowering their staff to use personal (non-corporately branded) profiles for work-related conversations and communication, creating a very personal form of online outreach.

For example, Oxfam Great Britain has both a corporate presence within SNS, and campaign specific SNS profiles. Through a Facebook page Oxfam GB promotes its existing multimedia content to an audience of more than 5,000 fans of the page²⁴. Through the Fairtrade Woman Group,²⁵ Oxfam campaigner Becs Gowland developed an audience of more than 1,800 group members following her fortnight-long campaign to promote ethical consumerism.

Both MySpace with MySpace Impact, and Bebo with Bebo BeWell and BeInspired are encouraging non-profits to create and actively use profiles within their networks. Many of the larger SNS sites will also form partnerships with specific organisations, groups or movements for social change. One of the best known is the very active RED partnership with MySpace with more than half a million friends (558,394 – 12/3/09).

There is of course absolutely no guarantee of SNS profile-building leading to success. To build a community in the spirit of a given SNS needs consistent organisational commitment, notably: resources; training or recruiting expertise; and a degree of editorial freedom and flexibility. As Beth Kanter puts it, “Social media takes time to do well; a minimum investment of 5 hours a week to maintain.”²⁶ There is a need to update the pages, contact users, reply to comments and so on. Alongside examples of thriving non-profit profiles on SNS there are examples of untended profiles which have quickly become moribund.

Organisations are using the targeted and media-rich advertising features of SNS, including their standard online ad inventory. Because of the demographic data SNS hold on their users, some are able to offer advanced



targeting features. The image below shows the options available for anyone choosing to create a self-service Facebook advertising campaign, and the approximate audience that such a campaign would reach.

The image shows the Facebook targeting interface. On the left, there are various filters: Location (Thailand), Age (15-25), Sex (Male/Female), Relationship (Single, In a Relationship, Engaged, Married), Interested in (Men/Women), and Languages (Thai language). On the right, there is a 'Targeting' section with explanatory text about how Facebook targets users based on location and keywords. At the bottom, it states 'Approximate reach: 40,940' and 'I want to reach people between 15 and 25 years old who are single in Thailand.'

The context sensitivity of in-site advertising offer interesting opportunities and is being exploited by social change and commercial organisations. Searching on MySpace, for example, on HIV/AIDS brought these ads (generated by the Google AdWords search programme):

The image shows a MySpace search results page for the query 'hiv/aids'. The page displays several search results, including links to websites like 'www.hivinfo.org' and 'www.hivinfo.org'. There is also a small image of a man's face with text overlaid, possibly a meme or a specific advertisement. The page indicates 'Displaying 1-10 of 40,700 results for hiv/aids'.

More information is available on SNS site activity than simply visitor statistics. There is information, especially through advertising functions, that shows how people react to advertisements and pages. For example, Facebook offers information on, “user exposure, actions, and behaviour.” However, this is a new area and there is as yet little consensus on what is successful.²⁷ Gathering information and evidence on interaction is a more time consuming but vital process.

A number of networks offer product placement and home page takeover advertising – where an advertiser can significantly brand areas of the network for period of time.



As well as feeding standard ad inventory and campaigns into SNS, organisations have been developing campaigns specifically targeted at, and integrated with, specific SNS.

For example, the UK Home Office-funded²⁸ anti-knife crime campaign It Does Not Have to Happen²⁹ has used a profile within Bebo.com as its primary website – regularly adding blog posts, videos and other interactive media content to the profile. Launched in the summer of 2008, the campaign has gained more than 9,000 friends on the network³⁰ and the ‘profile skins’ (graphic elements used by other users of Bebo to theme their profiles) created by the campaign are being used by more than 200 individuals, further spreading the campaign’s message.

Organisations are developing content for SNS. The rise of SNS as key web platforms is encouraging organisations to create videos, images, widgets, games and other media content specifically to spread within SNS. For example, www.Posornot.com illustrates a social media aware approach: a challenging and fresh interactive website that challenges stereotypes of those living with HIV designed to integrate social media with its own Facebook application and a widget³¹ that can be embedded on a range of sites.

Organisations are using and commissioning applications to spread their messages within SNS. SNS applications can add features over and above those built in by the network provider – embedding new information, functionality, games, widgets and other content and interaction within the network. Whilst many of the most used applications built on top of major SNS platforms are focused on media sharing and messaging between friends – or are purely-for-fun games – a number of organisations are looking at how applications can be used for education and communicating social change.

For example, the Facebook Causes application (www.causes.com) allows profile owners who add it to display their support for non-profit



organisations, to recruit other members of Facebook to support the organisation, and manage real-money donations to the organisations through the network. Any US registered non-profit organisation can use Causes for building a supporter base and for fundraising, such as these:³²



UNICEF has created an HIV Quiz application available on Facebook. The application encourages users to complete a quiz and share the application with friends in order to compare their scores upon completing the quiz.

UK public service broadcaster Channel 4 has re-allocated their education budget, formerly spent on schools TV, into online media,³³ including significant investment in the development of SNS applications for Bebo and MySpace. Applications such as Dictum.tv and AlterEgo.tv take a light-touch approach to education messages – creating tools that integrate closely with the self-expression focus of social network sites -- whilst encouraging their users to reflect more intentionally upon issues of identity or ethics. AlterEgo gained 1,600 users during its first four months.

Organisations are using SNS to get better metrics, to listen to and dialogue with supporters, and to crowd-source ideas for their work or communication. Because SNS are spaces where their users actively share a lot of information in public or semi-public spaces, organisations can actively listen to those conversations and can track trends. In communities with a high level of SNS use it is reasonable to expect a successful communication campaign (online or offline), depending on its content, may end up being actively discussed on SNS. By tracking conversations and media-sharing in SNS, organisations can integrate a range of new metrics into their evaluation strategies. For example, tracking not only how many hits a website gets, or how many people respond directly to a print ad, but also monitoring how much of a buzz a campaign generates through SNS.

Some organisations are also now turning to SNS to create, as well as to evaluate, their communication campaigns – crowd-sourcing content and messages. Crowd-sourcing is a distributed problem-solving and production model. Problems are broadcast to an unknown group of solvers in the form of an open call for solutions. Users typically form into online communities, and the crowd submits solutions. The crowd also sorts through the solutions, finding the best ones. These best solutions are then owned by the entity that broadcast the problem.³⁴ Organisations are using SNS for service provision and online outreach. Staff in both the voluntary and statutory sectors are exploring and using SNS profiles as key tools for communication, outreach and service delivery.

For example, the East Valley Clinic (California, USA) sexual health advice service set up a MySpace profile to promote their service and to provide advice and clinic bookings directly through the messaging systems of MySpace. In April 2008 23 percent of new clinic visits came through MySpace.³⁵

Youth and community development workers employed by local governments and churches in a number of UK regions are using SNS to keep in touch with young people, to organise group activities and to provide mentoring and support.³⁶ In some cases networking through SNS is being used as an active outreach tool to communicate with new groups of young people.

Organisations are using SNS as a locus for counselling, influencing and caring interventions, including facilitating peer-to-peer support. There are many examples of sites set up and used by organisations as a way to provide support, often as part of a larger scale campaign. From the UK, the Beatbullying and the FullStop (child cruelty) campaigns were linked to help



lines, advice centres and other resources and supported by traditional cross-promotional activities such as print and broadcast media advertising.



Organisations are using SNS for coordination and team support. The group features of SNS provide tools for co-ordinating a community of volunteers. For distributed teams of employees and volunteers, social networking tools can assist in information sharing and maintaining good social interaction between team members. Organisations and groups are also adopting SNS as complete virtual office environments.

For example, the editorial group of a young people's magazine in Norfolk UK decided that, instead of spending their budgets on transport to meet together physically, they would carry out their coordination by using word processor, photo sharing and discussion applications that they had added to Facebook.

Organisations are building niche SNS. Instead of, or alongside, engagement with the major SNS platforms some organisations have sought to develop their own online social networks using custom-built, hosted or white-label social network sites. Social networking features are increasingly being introduced into school-based virtual learning environments (VLEs), and VLEs are increasingly widespread in schools, colleges and universities.

For example, as describe above Savvy Chavvy is a closed SNS for young Gypsies and Travellers based on the Ning.com hosted SNS platform. The network, designed to provide support for this marginalised community based across the UK, grew to 500 members in its first month and now has more than 1,250.

MYMysta, a Love Life initiative, is a mobile social network that “provides a way to connect young South Africans to opportunities while at the same time helping them to define their identities through focusing on the empowerment of youth around HIV / AIDS and the social determinants of high-risk behaviour.” Launched in June 2008, it has a registered user base of 16,000 (Feb. 09) without any above-the-line marketing. Its primary objective is to create links to opportunities and links with Love Life's face-to-face network of peer educators. MYMysta allows users to interact with peers by joining groups, posting forums and making comments about news stories. Users are also able to manage their own user profile and ask questions to and get

advice from professional counsellors who monitor and moderate the network.

Organisations are using SNS to identify problem issues and to carry out targeted interventions. Law enforcement and support services have used information stored publicly by SNS users when targeting interventions. For example, UK police officers in Glasgow have trawled SNS to identify images where individuals are in possession of offensive weapons. Officers have then sought to identify and speak with the individuals in question, making arrests where the photo shows people carrying weapons in a public place illegally. (January 2009)

A US-based randomised control trial in summer 2007 found that 54 percent of profiles belonging to 18-20 year olds referenced sexual behaviours and 83.5 percent referenced substance abuse. An e-mail from a physician to the owners of these profiles led to a statistically significant change in profile owners behaviour with respect to displaying information about risky behaviours on their profiles.

Organisations have been established to address risks to young users of SNS. In the UK the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre has been established as a clearing house for reports of child abuse online. It is part of the Virtual Global Taskforce of similar organisations across the world. Organisations such as ChildNet International have been actively developing resources, education materials and programmes to educate young people about the potential risks of SNS. Local providers of services to young people in the UK have been encouraged to appoint e-safety coordinators who will ensure young people are aware of, and able to avoid, the risks presented by SNS.

It's not just organisations. So far we have looked at organisational responses to SNS, but virtually all of the approaches to SNS engagement listed above are fully within the means of individuals. Lone individuals or small unconstituted groups are responsible for many more of the interventions on SNS than established organisations are.

For example, the first image to the right shows a Brazilian based HIV/AIDS community on Orkut. The group, which has more than 5,000 members and a predominantly gay constituency, provides a space for discussion and for media sharing – and for individuals with shared interests, issues or concerns to connect.



The image opposite shows a series of profile pages created on Piczo, a SNS used predominantly for home-page creation by young teenagers, which are returned when searching for HIV/AIDS. These pages have been created by a man who has been living with HIV/AIDS for 20 years – and are intended to provide advice and support. The pages mention unsuccessful attempts that their creator has made to get support from formal agencies.



It has been pointed out that one of the key differences between the generation this report focuses on and older generations is not that this generation has access to multiple media channels and platforms, but is that this generation does not need to ask permission to publish content.³⁷ The organisational gatekeepers of media have been sidelined. This creates

significant challenges for organisations to identify how they should engage with individually created content and campaigns; to support individual effort, but to also encourage accurate and strategic communication. The following case study is of a user generated mass campaign in Facebook and how larger organisations can build on individual energy.

Principles for social-network-aware Communication

Drawing on evidence from the examples above of different approaches to communication through SNS, and on the user behaviours outlined in Chapter Two, we have set out a series of key principles for social-network-aware communication. We believe that attention paid to these principles will enable more effective communication in social networking spaces.

Be social

These environments are social spaces, varying mainly in how public or private they are. Operating effectively within them takes the same amount of time, sensitivity, reciprocity and commitment as corporeal social spaces. Organisations and groups therefore need to develop strategies that enable their staff and supporters to engage as individuals and to respond to interested individuals and groups personally.

Accept decentralised, peer-to-peer organisation

Organisations seeking to engage with SNS struggle with issues of control and access since the most effective forms of organisation and engagement mirror the nature and culture of the networks: self-organising, empowering, anarchic, fast-moving, peer-to-peer and susceptible to sudden, random surges of interest in the moving, surreal or amusing. Organisation and groups therefore need to develop strategies that are flexible and to have the resources to respond to unexpected developments in a campaign. Organisations also need to be able to trust and empower their supporters to be partners in a communication campaign.

Respect the personal, informal, playful culture in SNS

HIV/AIDS and sexual behaviour are profoundly important and serious subjects. However, while there is a lot of socially active and positive activity in SNS, communicators need to learn and adapt to the often playful culture pervasive within networks. For many users, their SNS is their space, and mainly a leisure and friendship space. This creates both challenges (organisations may not be welcome in this space) and opportunities (for building on personal, informal atmosphere to talk about topics of sex, or other HIV/AIDS risk behaviour such as intravenous drug use). Organisations need to be ready to assess and engage with the culture in the social network spaces they target.

Weaving together online and offline

Effective communication has always moved easily between electronic or digital media and physical spaces. SNS offer new opportunities for communicators to engage activists in campaigns at all levels. SNS are particularly suited to local-level communication. Organisations and groups should seek to integrate SNS in their offline activities rather than to treat it as a separate “virtual” communication medium.

Be interesting, support content, support remixing

Interesting, useful, engaging content is one of the main means of exchange in SNS. It is also a place where people delight in creating new content, either original or re-mixed. Those institutions that are successfully negotiating such spaces are experimenting with new forms of content; short, mixed, open to

adaptation and copying, Crucially, they are inviting people to co-create their content.

Take advantage of media alliances

SNS users are still consuming significant quantities of professional produced content in these spaces. Large entities such as the Murdoch group, music publishers and distributors, and TV channels are all investing heavily in social media. As part of their multi-channel approach AIDS communicators need also to consider how they can engage with the huge resources and groups of specialists these companies can command.

Snapshot 03: one person, virality³⁸ and mass protest³⁹



Johnny Chatterton was a volunteer activist for the Burma campaign. As the monks protests in Burma escalated early in 2008 he started the Facebook group above. The campaign rapidly went viral, doubling in size every day, culminating in more than 100,000 new users added for 2 days. At its maximum it had more than 400,000 members.

The UK Burma campaign engaged Johnny to work with them and as the campaign grew, and through their links, Amnesty UK became involved and with a number of other groups, began to organise for a day of protest. Avaaz, a global online campaigning group also got involved and the Facebook group became the key organising tool for a series of coordinated demonstrations worldwide. On October 6, 2008 protests were held in 30 countries and nearly 100 cities worldwide. It also helped promote the www.avaaz.org petition, which eventually gathered more than 840,000 signatures.



Throughout the process the team worked with established groups globally, gathering hundreds of thousands of new supporters. However, in a telling instance of the uneven spread of the technology, the Tactical Technology Collective, (www.tacticaltech.org) was working with groups of displaced Burmese people who were unaware of the global protest.

Snapshot 04: Sexual Health Targetted SNS Applications - Saliva Trail⁴⁰

In response to Channel 4 commissioning of SNS applications for education, Neontribe, developers of the Alter Ego SNS application mentioned above, put together the following proposal geared directly towards using SNS for sexual health education in a UK context. Whilst this application was not commissioned this year, the proposal below illustrates some of the opportunities that the SNS setting offers for innovative and creative communication on sexual issues.

The Need:

The UK's Health Protection Agency believes unsafe sexual behaviour among young people is increasing. They suggest that "all those interested in the sexual health of sexually active young people" should use their particular communication skills to relay the following key messages:

- Have fewer sexual partners and avoid overlapping sexual relationships.
- Use a condom when having sex with a new partner and continue to do so until both have been screened.
- Get screened for chlamydia every year and whenever you have a new partner.
- If you are a man who has sex with men, then always use a condom and have an annual sexual health screen, including an HIV test.

The Approach: 'Saliva Trail' - a SNS application.

Saliva Trail builds upon the potential for rapid spread of an application on a social network and uses this to spread sexual health education. The application encourages users to state which of their friends they have snogged, and identifies such contact after a confirmation from the friend in question. Users may block unwanted confirmation requests, and may recant their confessions at any time. Unconfirmed snogging is shown, but in anonymised form. It is likely that a large user base will quickly develop.

The project uses this apparently light-hearted social network activity to provide a platform for the delivery of sexual health education messages. Alongside delivering core sexual health messages, the application can use real-life statistics to suggest chances of infection had the "snogs" led to various kinds of sexual activity, particularly unprotected sex.

Benefit:

The application increases:

- understanding of the spread of disease using a clear metaphor familiar to young people – the spread of an application on a SNS.
- understanding of the risks of having multiple sexual partners, by showing statistics for chances of infection.
- consciousness of the effects of numbers of sexual partners. Users who report high numbers of sexual experiences may find this a salutary lesson, whether those reports are truthful or not.

The application increases the chances of a young person going for screening, both by reminding them that such services exist and by showing statistics for chances of infection.

Snapshot 05: Talking about sex in a traditionally conservative society.

In contrast to the previous example this project focuses on trying to build a community and provide a service to teenagers through a standard website.

Love-Care-Station for Chatty Teens

by Programme for Appropriate Technology in Health (Path), Thailand

Www.lovecaestation.com was launched with the objective to engage with youth aged 14-25 years old in Thailand and to “converse” with them about sexuality issues that are raised by them. There is a live-chat room mediated by medical workers. Topics occurred in the chat room and members' questions are constantly updated to FAQs. The newly created blog lets members initiate topics and post information to their interests. To make this space teen-friendly, all medical information and knowledge are transformed into simpler and more direct language. And one way of expanding the use of the site is hire some youngsters to “lure” more “friends” here.



By launching www.lovecaestation.com, only nine months after the successful launch of the sexuality teen-edutainment site www.teenpath.net for the adolescents, PATH Thailand is keeping abreast with the predominant communication technologies (or channels) their teen communities are using. The new website is intended to embrace the principles of social networks, but PATH is aware of its need for more decentralization in the next phase of development. Its bold and bluff language, like masturbation, is a sharp contrast to the conservative Thai culture in which sex topic is still considered a taboo.⁴¹

This communication style PATH Thailand is undertaking is to confront two challenges in the communication environment in Thailand. One is that there is no information and communication space in mass media carved out for teens. The message amidst available information about sexuality is either prejudicial or is about moral preaching, hence have pushed Thai adolescents to other sources. In addition to websites, PATH Thailand uses other digital and tele-tools including online games, short films and a call center. They've been tuned in to the channels that adolescents use and they provide an adolescent friendly space for teens to explore sexuality topics, including entailing myths and reality, without the cultural and attitudinal rejection and adults' judgment.

An insight into the potential impact of this open and frank site was demonstrated when the website was shown to an 18-year-old male, studying in Thai public school (matayom 6), who has declared his queer sexual orientation. Below is his murmuring during browsing and case-study author observations, in short-hand writing. Star signs indicate his viewing time.

--- At www.lovecaresation.com ----

*oh, this is about health information * (at FAQ). Oh, this is naughty.* after-pill?
* this is about sex problem * girl with HIV disease can have oral sex.. Wow,
and whether man will get HIV from her, and the answer is... * this is sexual
problem about after-pill, condom * and about HIV victim temple * some man
reflection on HIV/cheating and peeing problems, he said he wouldn't cheat
anymore * (At video) lovecare is a club. It has activities. They provide
education about sex, this is very good. * Oh blog, (about this site) it's
impressed /this will be interesting to teens like 13 to 14 years old"

(Author asked him his opinion about this website) It's really an active
website. But need to control. Someone posted her telephone number looking
for boyfriends. "lonely" someone responded to her. it feels comfortable about
learning safety sex * Parents and teachers will be interested in this site. * also
about drug campaigns. Activities news. * (at "teenguide") some boy worried
about the color of their balls and the use of cream... (giggle) (Again, he
clicked on the "naughty" topics and text. Because of his sexual orientation,
he clicked on and communicate (with the author) on the topics surrounding
male sexual organs, sex activities and problems and maybe rare problems.
The kind of words that he singled out and/or wanted to share with me were:
penis, sex, bitch, scam etc that were provocative in nature.)

Snapshot 06: Social Networking and the Obama campaign.⁴²

The campaign set a new standard on how to integrate traditional media with new media. They identified a key challenge as reaching young people who were critical to an Obama presidential victory. It was critical to talk with youth in their vernacular while remaining true to Brand Obama. They achieved this in a number of ways, developing communication using the idiom and techniques of new media such as the use of vernacular video: “when you make a video of a presidential candidate with his webcam you’ve made cinematic history.”

Building on this through using user-generated content (UGC) videos and blogs of people saying what the election, or brand Obama, means to them. Employing the youthful fascination with street art, they “set artists free to make posters in their own styles” and crowd-sourced ideas for the text of the campaign messages, as well as encouraged people to make their own posters.

Integrating virtual and physical in a variety of ways, including this real-time, dynamic, advertising projection that displayed ordinary people’s messages sent by text.



We enabled people to make the campaign their own

“The trick was pushing Obama’s positioning out to voters, literally every minute of the day, for 21 months, through the most aggressive, measured and successful social media strategy ever seen in politics, or consumer branding.” This was also the most expensive political campaign in history. This cash advantage enabled a micro-targeted campaign with many more messages aimed at different constituencies: ads about healthcare, the economy, Iraq, voting, with one consistent look and feel, all tagged with the same messages about hope and change.

The two most significant parts of the campaign were the website and the niche SNS my.barackobama.com.

The website offered up-to-the-minute top-down content, such as speeches, position papers, news releases, volunteer opportunities, training videos in text, audio and video.

MyBO is a social networking, community-organising engine that communicates ideas and connects people in a peer-to-peer sense based on interests and locations.

Importantly, MyBO **facilitates action both online and off**. MyBO does this by making it fun and easy, but also by incentivising supporters with points for taking real-world actions that helped the candidate win: making phone calls to voters, hosting house-parties and donating money. During the U.S. presidential campaign, there was an official Obama presence on virtually every social network beyond MyBO (Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Black Planet, Fanbase, Eons, Flickr, Glee, Digg, MiGente, Twitter, MyBatanga, Eventslut, AsianAve, DNC, Partybuilder etc) and a vast up-to-date video library on the Obama YouTube channel.

Social networks exponentially magnified the scale of the Obama grassroots political campaign by connecting with young supporters where they live online.

Example: Through Facebook Connect, the Obama campaign was able to let supporters provide their Facebook friends with updates on the campaign activities that they recorded on their profiles on MyBo.⁴³

The Obama campaign strategy was based on leveraging learning from previous experience in using both conventional and social media; about how young people live and communicate.

Social Media does not mean exclusively Digital Media

Online SNS are not the exclusive province of human conversation.

The campaign facilitated social media tools can be used to facilitate conversations both online and offline, such as using videos with celebrities to creating tangible assets to be shared, like palm cards (small cards to be used in campaigning or recruitment) or customisable posters.

Despite the success of mybarackobama.com, work to get youth vote out was substantially offline, using street art, palm cards, posters and interactive billboards to spread the word. "By creating a collectible set of artwork, campaign leadership encouraged discussion, swapping and exchanges about the campaign, both online and off."

Balancing control and empowerment

The campaign "knew the difference between conversations among voters, which need to be respected, and the campaign for voter conversation which must be controlled and directed from the top."

The campaign earned young voters, trust by respecting peer-to-peer conversation and making sure not to interrupt it or interject the Obama brand inappropriately. As well as promoting an idea it was promoting meaningful personal action, using merchandise, making phone calls, registering, turning out, etc. The aim is to turn this group into peer influencers for the future.

Editor's note: The information on President Barack Obama's campaign techniques had not been published at the time of this writing. Such information, however, is now publicly available from many sources.

Section Two - Under the Bonnet

4. UNDERSTANDING SNS: THE ARCHITECTURE OF SOCIAL NETWORK SERVICES (SNS)

In Chapter Two we have explored a wide range of different behaviours linked to social networking and in Chapter Three we have drawn out a number of principles for social network-aware communication from this survey of behaviour and a survey of how organisations are already engaging with SNS. In this chapter we take a broader look at the relationship between technological platforms and their social impacts, seeking to highlight further key considerations that the communicator must have in mind when approaching social networking based communication.

Social networking tools range from those like the South African MxIT mobile phone-based instant messaging and group messaging tool which allow their users to manage their own social networking activities by keeping in touch with friends more easily and cheaply; through to full social network services like Orkut and Facebook, which are based explicitly around the idea of a centrally maintained, digitally stored and navigable network of people, media, conversations and other content accessible because it is stored digitally, sometimes in one network but increasingly accessible across networks and Internet platforms.

The features that are available in different social networking tools significantly affect the way their users behave and the potential opportunities for success in different communication approaches. The table below shows how some of the technical and feature set differences between text messaging (SMS) platforms, instant messaging, chatrooms and Social Network Sites (SNS) affect the forms of social interaction that they support.

SMS or Phone	Instant Messaging e.g. Mxit	Chatrooms & Forums e.g. Hi5	Social Network Sites
			
<p>Users have a phone number which they give to anyone who wants to contact them.</p>	<p>Users have an IM name and they create a mutual friend connection with people they want to talk to.</p>	<p>There is a persistent 'chat' or 'forum' space which users choose to visit. Their messages may remain in that space after they leave it.</p>	<p>Users create a public or semi-public profile and link to others by making mutual friend connections⁴⁴. Others can browse the connections. An action feed keeps a user informed of the messages and media their friends have posted.</p>
<p>Text messages are sent to a particular individual. Each additional person contacted adds additional cost. You have to explicitly choose who to share what information with. You don't know if the person who you message has their phone on them. It costs for the person you message to reply.</p>	<p>Messages are sent to particular individuals selected from a contact list which shows who is currently available and who is not. It is possible to add multiple people from your contact list to an ad-hoc group discussion, or to create ongoing discussion groups. You only pay for the costs of connection / data transfer – far cheaper than an SMS.</p>	<p>Messages can be posted in a shared space of synchronous & asynchronous discussion around a given topic, or in order to meet new people. You can watch the conversations taking place between people you do not already know, and you can start private conversations with these people also. You can post messages without having a set idea of who will read them – but expecting other current participants to read them.</p>	<p>Messages and media can be posted to your own profile page. Using privacy settings this can be public, accessible to selected friends, or to friends of friends (who may be strangers to you). The network will show your latest updates to your friends in an action feed along with the updates of all their other friends. You post messages and media knowing that people in your 'network' may see them. It is possible to browse the network, from person to person – seeing who is friends with whom – and who has posted what.</p>
<p>Messages are exchanged for: organising; asking short questions of particular friends; expressing ideas, views or feelings to a particular chosen friend. You don't always expect a reply. Group conversations are rare. Conversations end up being one-to-one and are personal or transactional in nature.</p>	<p>Messages are exchanged with people who you can see are online and only and free to talk creating more opportunities for 'chat' and informal conversation. Conversations can be private and personal, or can be group conversations following the norms, dynamics and patterns of a groups offline discussion.</p>	<p>Messages are posted to discuss topics, or for individuals who did not already know each other to get to know each other. The possibility of anonymity and the existence of private chat rooms may support deeply personal discussions between friends and strangers. Users may feel ownership over the chat room space. New users can be invited to the space.</p>	<p>Messages are posted to public/semi-public spaces to share something of interest, to spark discussions, to share information & to relive shared experiences. Users can comment on each others shared messages and media. You can 'overhear' other conversations taking place between friends and people you don't know. New conversations and contact can be formed with 'friends of friends'. Loosely bounded group conversations can form, and users can keep weakly in touch with a large number of friends and acquaintances.</p>

Even once we have identified the potential user behaviours and forms of communication supported by different social networking tools, we need to understand the further diversity within different social networking services. Communicators are often used to considering which channels to use to reach a given target audience. SNS can be understood as channels, but also, more importantly, they can be understood as platforms on which a range of activities take place and as locations of interaction between groups and communities.

Whilst a large number of a communicator's target audience may be using a particular social tool, each of those individuals will be operating in and engaging with very different aspects of the network, from their own private view of the network (linked to a profile) through to a wide range of different public and semi-public communities, groups and media-sharing spaces.

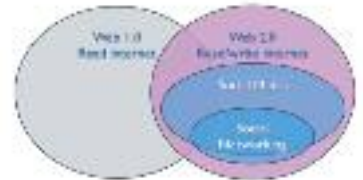
The majority of social network services do a lot more than just allow individuals to have a profile and a friends list; they build upon and integrate many prior communication tools and technologies (e.g. e-mail like messaging, instant messaging, and video sharing). This inheritance of characteristics means communicators must similarly mix traditional communication strategies with newer approaches. As SNS introduce new forms of communication they can change the way that their users experience older forms of communication. For example, social video sharing affects the video content users consume, and the ability to comment on and rate videos. To see the comments left by friends can change a user's experience of video watching.

We can trace a trajectory of communication technologies from the emergence of digital communication through to the modern social network service.

- Digitising communication allowed it to become faster, global, asynchronous and replicable (minimal marginal cost of taking a copy). Digital tools allow for new forms of measurement and analysing communication. Digital tools enable ordinary people and specialists alike to intermingle different forms of media promiscuously.
- The early Internet, now referred to as Web 1.0, significantly lowered the cost of publishing content to a global audience. Anyone with a connection could read content and traverse manually created links between items of content. The content of websites was generally still controlled by the individual, company or organisation that had created it. A set of software tools were developed for contributing content, using new standards for information and data exchange. E-mail and instant messaging tools made it possible to keep in touch with existing contacts, and forum and chatroom spaces made it possible to discover and temporarily interact with new people or groups.
- Web 1.0 has been followed by the emergence of Web 2.0⁴⁵ which allows anyone with a connection to write as well as read. Online publishing tools have been massively simplified and the cost of publishing to a global audience has collapsed. High-powered search, user controlled content-tagging to supplement formal classifications, and user-generated content have all emerged to make it far easier to navigate topic-driven, or even person-driven cross sections of the web. Rather than surfing around a single site for information on a

given topic, users hop from site-to-site, or find that content is brought together from many different sources and sites and is presented to them seamlessly.

- The pace at which content is published has accelerated even more, and context is not static, but is contained within “flows” of media.⁴⁶ Web 2.0 has supported the emergence of social media, in which individuals and organisations can easily publish media, discuss it online and in which media objects can act as loci for people to connect, converse and network.
- The Social Web and SNS build upon Web 2.0. By making the social object not an item of media but a personal profile, they shift the online experience from one of consuming and contributing content to one of participating in a shared space with friends and contacts. Individual people and their online interactions are captured as published content on the web in a way that allows content and people-as-content to be traversed through social, rather than thematic or editorially curated links. Virtually everything is read-write with space for added meta-data and comments. New categories of communication spanning broadcast, narrowcast and private messaging are created.



Within SNS new forms of communication have developed, in particular, the individual status update. SNS such as Facebook, MySpace, Bebo and Orkut all allow their users to post a short limited length message sharing what they are doing or how they are feeling. These messages are made visible to friends of the user in action feeds. That status message is both a tool for self-expression and sharing many small nuggets of context-specific social information (“Tim is elated after hearing the news about the project.”), and a tool for starting discussions or sharing information that a user feels may be of interest to his or her friends/network (“Tim would welcome your input into a research project on Social Network Sites and AIDS communication.”). Most SNS allow for status updates to be commented upon.

A generation of SNS based predominantly around status updates have recently emerged, most prominent amongst them Twitter, (cloned in Nigeria by Naja Pulse). With Twitter— where a user's presence within the service consists of a very short profile and a flow of status update messages -- users of the service choose to follow other users. But Twitter does not require the connection to be mutual (note that most traditional SNS explored above have some form of mutual connection). Users can use their status update messages to reply to others using a simple convention of messaging with @username at the start of the message. It is possible to traverse the network and explore who is connected to whom, both by looking at who an individual follows or is followed by, or by looking at who is replying to whose update messages.

However, as a platform that is open by default, in contrast to other SNS, Twitter widens the number of people who view the status update. It has, therefore, also become a micro-blogging platform where people post links to interesting news, content and projects as well as a promotional channel for organisations and products.

Most SNS also include a wide range of other features, both built into the platforms directly and provided by third-party applications. These can plug into and use the information the network holds about an individual's friendship network. Features commonly found in SNS include tools for organising events, sharing photos and videos, joining interest-based groups (often with individuals outside your immediate friendship network), playing games and accessing information sources.

For example, the Make Your Mark application on Facebook, created by a youth entrepreneurship charity, allows its users to share ideas about issues they want to create change on. By drawing on the social graph from Facebook it can show its users ideas that any of their friends have already suggested, using the application, without them having to tell the application about their friends. The application adds to the underlying network in order to connect people around issues and causes.

This ability of applications to draw on pre-existing information that users have given to the social network about their friends is very significant. It both opens up a range of risks to users (unscrupulous applications could exploit this information) but also a wide range of opportunities. For example, a user is far more likely to adopt a given application if they can see that their friends are already using it.

As well as allowing features and tools developed by third-parties to be added to their platforms, a number of major SNS providers (Facebook, Google) are allowing aspects of their SNS to be layered on top of other websites and Internet-connected services (such as digital TV and mobile services) meaning that SNS users can take their digital identity with them across a wide range of online spaces and platforms, sharing content, conversation and information from a wide range of different places with their friends.

For example: If I sign a petition or buy a product on a website using Facebook Connect, I may be presented with the option of posting a message back to my Facebook profile saying I have done this. This potentially alerts all my friends to the petition or product, with only one click from me.

SNS do not wholly replace old media and existing forms of communication. However, they can lead to both new formats for old media, and new ways in which older forms of media are produced, distributed and consumed.

- News headlines and content can be fed into SNS and can be shared by users. They may be more likely to spread on the basis of a user seeing that a friend is interested in a particular news story than they are to spread on the basis of users subscribing to a given news source or topic of interest.
- Video can be published through many SNS and media-driven SNS such as YouTube which often includes significant quantities of professional broadcast video content. However, the content is usually reduced to clip-form, with advertising breaks removed, and users come to expect the right to comment on and interact with the content.
- Many SNS allow for online advertising through text and banner adverts. Because they have access to significant quantities of demographic data from users profiles, they can often offer highly

targeted advertising. (For example, on Facebook you can target users based on location, age, interests, relationship status and language). SNS are also introducing concepts of social advertising where an individual's response to an ad is shared with their friends, potentially creating a buzz around an issue.

- Word-of-mouth or street-team style marketing can take place within SNS but the presence of privacy controls, the social norms, and the existence of a public or semi-public digital trail for each street team marketer changes the nature and norms appropriate for this form of engagement. For example, in some contexts it may be more difficult for an outreach worker to approach people hanging out in the SNS space as privacy controls may prevent the outreach worker messaging individuals, or users may quickly delete unsolicited messages. The outreach worker will then need to find the right spaces and sorts of approach to engage with those hanging out in virtual space.

Users of SNS do not necessarily abandon old patterns of media consumption. Many still enjoy broadcast television or newspapers. However, their consumption of old media is dropping overall⁴⁷ and their remaining old-media consumption is conditioned by their experience of SNS (for example, wanting more opportunities to participate and feedback on broadcast TV).

Amplifiers of action

The degree to which individuals have access to social networking tools in different countries of the world and in different socio-economic contexts varies. Chapter 5 will explore levels of access to SNS in different countries and contexts across the world. However, it is useful to set the specific variations in SNS usage in the context of wider conceptual frameworks which help us understand the impact of social networking tools.

The network effect matters.

The more people who are present within a network and the larger the number of them who are willing to share information and the larger the number of non-overlapping friends they have to share that information with – the more rapidly and the wider it is likely to spread. The gain in potential for a message to spread within the network (and the increase in uncertainty about how far it will in fact spread) does not grow steadily with the growth of the network, but can follow a pattern more akin to exponential growth depending on the structure of the network.

The value is in the network.

The value of a social networking tool to a user depends upon it linking them into a network which is meaningful to them. At present most SNS are relatively limited in their interoperability; a user's choice of network or tool will often depend on which network their friends, or the people/profiles they wish to connect with, are using. SNS users may have profiles on more than one network in order to communicate with different (but often overlapping) groups of friends, or in order to operate in different contexts (e.g. personal / professional). The choice of network by members of existing friendship groups or communities may depend on the network chosen by the early-adopters or influential individuals in that group/community.

SNS increase the velocity and persistence of information.

Social networking tools can both speed up communication and information flows, and make information and conversations more persistent and long-lasting. Many recent news stories have broken first through the SNS Twitter, spreading in a matter of minutes across the world, and sparking a myriad of overlapping conversations about the news.

SNS are as much about localising as they are about globalising.

Whilst SNS can act as a globalising force, shrinking time and distance, they can also be a hyper-localising force – keeping neighbours who are connected via SNS in touch with each other's status updates and shared media – and leading to online communities and networks that map onto very tight local geographic communities and local areas.

SNS lower the burdens off organising group activities.

Features of SNS such as groups and events can make organising activity amongst large and small, local, national and international groups far easier. Shirky highlights how Internet technologies in general lower the transaction costs for group action and coordination. SNS are a key part of this. SNS can also facilitate emergent organisation; where the combination of easy-to-join groups and information spreading through updates shared automatically with the friends of individuals who join a group can lead to the rapid articulation of a constituency around an issue.

SNS can impact on the distribution of power and influence.

Professor Bill Dutton of the Oxford Internet Institute has talked about the role of the Internet in reconfiguring access to information, people and resources and the potential impact of this on the communicative power (and as a result political influence) of individuals, groups and nations. In so far as SNS can act to increase the supply of information about political decisions to citizens, and in their ability to connect previously unconnected or coordinated groups, they can play a role in this reconfiguration of access and power. This said, if the networks within SNS mirror offline insider and outsider networks of power or cliques, then SNS can be less conducive to this redistribution than other online tools and spaces. However, it is crucial to recognise in either case that SNS can play a political role.

SNS are involved in remaking key social concepts.

Concerns about an abandonment of privacy are often raised when observers explore how SNS users, particularly young people, share, via online publicly accessible spaces, information that may have historically been considered private information. Similar concerns are raised about how SNS users may use the term 'friend' to refer to people who they have never met and who they only know online. It is clear that SNS impacts upon concepts of both privacy and friendship, and that it will impact upon other shared social concepts. These concepts are being re-negotiated in light of new technologies of communication, particularly SNS. It is perhaps useful, by analogy, to look to how notions of celebrity and the privacy of celebrities were re-negotiated in an era of multi-channel TV and low cost glossy magazines as opposed to an age of black and white newspapers.

SNS create new models of metrics, measurement and evaluation.

SNS provide new opportunities for measuring the impact of communication strategies—adding to the previous generation of quantifiable metrics (how many times has an advert or item of media been seen, clicked, downloaded, shared) the ability to “listen” to conversations taking place on a particular topic in public and semi-public online spaces.

SNS are not standing still.

SNS are constantly evolving, both with the creation of new services, and due to regular updates and developments of the existing major services. The SNS of today are significantly different from those we were using just 12 months ago, and there is no sign that the pace of change is likely to slow significantly.

SNS are increasingly mobile.

Mobile phones are both a new platform and a driver for change. In markets where smart phones are becoming the norm, they are being used to access social network services. The simple, “what are you doing now” message of Twitter (and status updates in SNS) is tailor made for browsing and contributing on the move. At the same time phones already incorporate functions to assist location finding services, and these are being integrated into services such as SNS, increasing the connection between physical and virtual world networking.

In chapters five and six we look in more detail at the technical and economic trends that impact the growth and use of SNS. We also reflect on some of the patterns in global use suggested by the research.

5. GLOBAL SOCIAL NETWORKING

In this chapter we look at five very different country contexts: South Africa, UK, Brazil, India and Thailand⁴⁸ and at some of the cross-cutting trends.

National and regional context

Brazil

The growth and widespread use of Social Networking in Brazil illustrates both how national and local cultures define the nature of technology appropriation and the commonalities between countries among populations engaged actively in SNS.

Brazil is part of the BRIC group, typically countries with large populations in poverty but whose wealth and global exports have increased over the last 10-20 years. Until not that many years ago, information technology in Brazil was regarded as a restricted asset, accessible and even important only to the dominant classes; instruments for management, profit and control. Until 1990, there were only state-owned companies offering landlines. Importing equipment was extremely complex and expensive, due to bureaucracy and over-taxation. Two aspects were crucial in the development of current high usage rates. First, the understanding, gradually spreading through the non-profit sector and governments, that information technologies can be used to extend the reach of democratic awareness and action, which influenced the development of ICT-aware public policies. The creation of free Internet access spaces (telecentres), subsidized affordable computers by tax exemption and other initiatives. The other important aspect was finding purpose for information technologies in popular contexts. Used to a scenario that for decades favoured a quasi-monopoly in electronic media, in a country in which literacy (and economic) levels were historically low, the promises of Internet in the 90s – contents and commerce - were simply not appealing to a great part of the population. There are plenty of academic analyses that define Brazilian cultures as intrinsically conversational, and indeed the Internet only entered popular imaginary once social networks started to be developed. In a sense, for most Brazilian Internet users content is way less important than relationships.

Since 2003 Orkut has gone from a highly elitist 'club style' project to being almost universally used by people at all levels in society to chat to their friends and family across the country. Being connected and in touch was found to be more important than content. The natural tendency of Brazilians to absorb and mix/remix processes if available – particularly by means of dialogue and networked communication, online or offline - meant that this system was readily absorbed and taken probably in directions that Google were initially unable to conceive.

India

Also one of the BRIC countries, less than 5% of India's population has access to the Internet, but India has one of the fastest-growing Internet populations in the world and online social networking has caught up very fast with Indian Internet users. Sixty percent of Indian Internet users – comprising young users largely in the age group of 15 to 25, who are studying or have just started their career – are on some or the other social media platforms.

This aggressive enrollment into social-networking platforms is seen more from users in tier II and tier III cities in India - a growth that has been fueled by the increasing Internet penetration in the country.

South Africa

South Africa illustrates the power of the social driver in determining how populations appropriate technology. Often spoken of as a country that is both “first world and third world”, it combines considerable wealth with a great deal of poverty. However since the end of the Apartheid era a black middle class has come into existence. As one of the most important countries through which many international investors address Africa, it has a significant scale of service economy, including outsourcing through call-centres. The ‘first world’ element in South Africa socially networks in the same way as its counterparts in the rest of the world. Facebook dominates and South Africa is the eighth largest user of Facebook globally.

However our research focused on the other South Africa, the vast majority whose primary – and usually only – digital device is the mobile phone and the evidence that young people in particular are using actively their mobile phones for social networking, primarily on Mxit. Set up in 2003, it processes 250m messages daily, sent primarily via mobile phone by young people. According to BMI-TechKnowledge Group's Digital Lifestyles Predictions South Africans aged between 16 and 24 years old preferred using Mxit to using Facebook (61% Mxit, vs. 27% Facebook 16 to 24 year olds). In 2007, Facebook users who identify with a South African network numbered 87,000, while Mxit boasted 5.2 million South African users in the same year.

Thailand

As a more developed, mid-scale Asian economy, Thailand illustrates an area where social networking has expanded enormously in the last two or three years, but where civil society and Government have yet to engage with the phenomenon.

There has been a drastic jump of hi-speed Internet users in Thailand since 2007. The main reasons are the encouragement by government policies and the competition among Internet service providers. Without waiting for too long, social network sites (SNS) became popular fast following the speedy distribution of hi-speed Internet and has created a contemporary social phenomenon.

In TOT Annual Report 2007, the penetration of fixed-line is 10.6% of the total population, but the subscribers of mobile phones has reached 89.5% in the country mid of 2008⁴⁹. The subscribers of hi-speed Internet increased to 15.1% of Internet users from 8.9% in 2006. Mobile Internet is not as distributed because of the stalemate of licensing process. The active exchange of messages, pictures, video and music among youngsters relies on websites, as well as on mobile phones. Bluetooth technology enables the mesh network of exchange.

The Internet has changed viewers' viewing behaviours. Not just the people between 12 to 35 years old get more information online; traditional media also digitalized their programs and put them online. The convergence effect speeds up when viewers, especially the young ones, spend more time online,

and information providers have to extend their reach to Internet users. According to NECTEC's survey, 36.8% of the Internet users are online more than 20 hours a week, which should equal 3 hours a day. The percentage of the usage of the Internet is the same among the interviewed teens.

The top online activities, reportedly, are information search, email and reading news and timely report. In 2008 alone, there was also significant increase of online activities about blog and diary and music, whilst the teens' activities are keeping friends circles on SNS and playing games.

SNS is a special phenomenon in Thailand; some call it "social phenomenon." Using SNS, together with other online activities, is a significant new routine among school-age youngsters. The most popular SNS in Thailand in 2008 are: Hi5 (47.5%), Wikipedia (14.4%), YouTube (12.6%) and MySpace-MSN (0.3%). Among the teens in the focus group discussion, 90% of them use Hi5. Within the short past two years, Thai youngsters literally have rushed to be part of Hi5 network. Other mentioned network sites are of particular interest, for example, Imeem for music and fashion information, Storythai for diary and Camfrog for sharing of self-made video clips.

The reasons for the popularity of Hi5 in Thailand, at the beginning stage, was its first introduction of Thai interface and the commercial purposes, for one, the personalized profile of nationally famous and controversial stars. Many of stars' news, activities and personal messages are accessible by Hi5 friends. Then, people and their friends "clustered" on Hi5 rapidly.

United Kingdom

The UK is one of the world's top ten economies with close ties to USA, including a (more or less) common language and a shared culture of television, cinema and Internet. With a population of 61 million, the UK has 39.5 million PC based Internet users (with 16.6 million broadband connections). Whilst the PC remains the primary Internet access device, there is rapid growth in mobile Internet access, driven in part by SNS access on mobiles. Mobile Internet user numbers now stand at 7.3 million (a 12.9% penetration rate).

78.4% of British web users 15 and older visited a Social Network Site in September 08 and 54% of 16-25 year olds report having profiles on Social Network Sites. The highest SNS penetration rate is currently amongst 16-17 year olds, with at least 67% owning a profile (Figures from the Guardian newspaper put the rate for 11-20 year olds as high as 93% penetration)

UK Internet users on average make 23 visits, and spend an average of 5.3 hours a month on SNS. For a younger audience some studies have anecdotally cited teenagers spending upwards of two hours every night connected to SNS. The main Social Network Site platforms (the big-three) in the UK are Facebook, Bebo and MySpace. The majority of access is via desktop or laptop computer, although mobile access and access from other devices is increasing. Facebook.com is currently the top mobile web destination in the UK.

There are a growing number of SNS-like platforms targeted at children, with 27% of 8-11 years olds reporting they have profiles on SNS. These may be profiles on a dedicated Children's SNS environment, or may be profiles on

one of the major sites in breach of their terms of service, which usually set an age limit for joining of 13 or above.

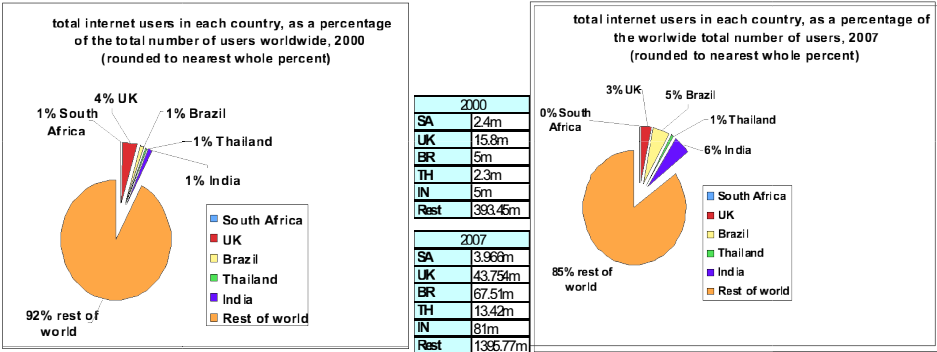
Language

All of the countries in our analysis have significant connections with the global economy but only in the UK is English the majority language. Whilst it is understood by most people in South Africa, only a minority would choose it as the language they would speak at home. Portuguese is almost universally spoken in Brazil as the common language but in India there is a considerable diversity of languages. Although both latter countries have English-speakers, these are very much a minority.

One in every five people globally can speak English to some level of competence. This provides a considerable pool of potential users, many of whom view English as an aspirational language: it is a key language for global higher education, multinational employment and often the key to migration. That said, a majority of existing users of the Internet in developing countries would prefer it to be in their own language. For example, in India, the majority of people use English on the Internet but only 28% prefer it and the rest would like to have it in their own vernacular language.

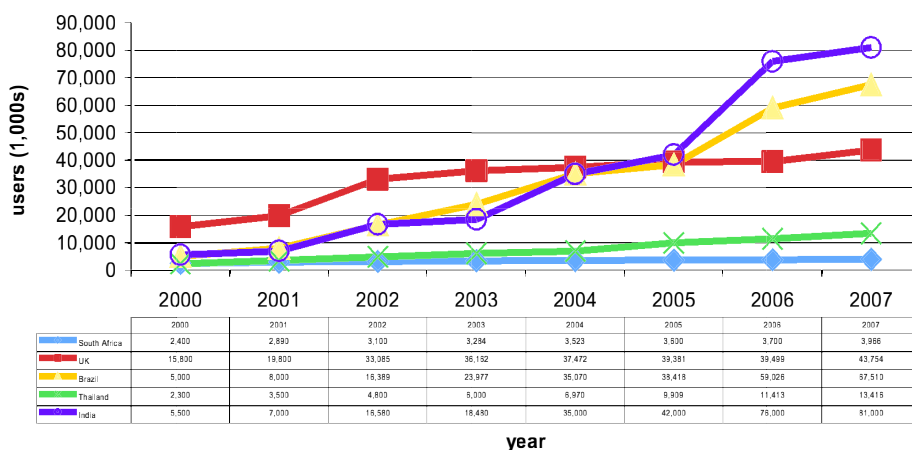
Access and Connectivity

There have been significant changes since 2000, when the Internet was still very much the domain of the minority, wealthier people in poorer countries, and the tech-savvy in the developed world. Nine years of online activity has transcended our everyday lives: we communicate, learn, shop, search, study, bank, and socialise online. In the following paragraphs we track recent trends



since 2000, and provide a snapshot of current levels of Internet access and SNS activity.

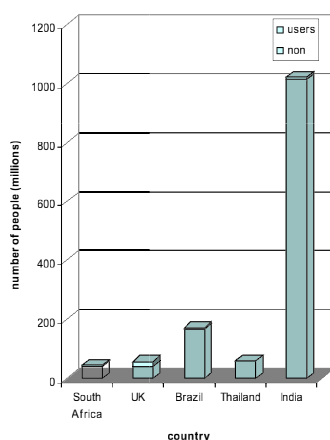
total number or internet users per population 2000-2007



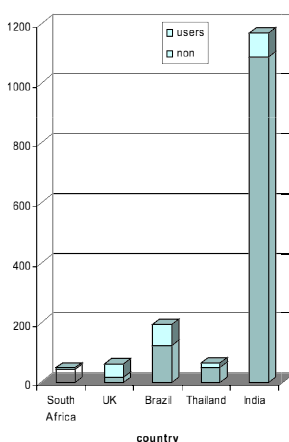
There has been substantial ICT development on a global level, both in terms of broadband and phone technologies. India in particular has shown significant levels of increase since 2004⁵⁰. However, while growth has been particularly high in developing countries, these figures are still dwarfed when set against the countries' overall populations.

(millions)	2000	2007
SA-users	2.4	44.6
SA - non	43.2	44.6
UK-users	15.8	43.8
UK-non	42.9	17
BR-users	5	67.5
BR-non	169	124.3
TH-users	2.3	13.4
TH-non	59.1	50.5
IN-users	5.5	81
IN-non	1014	1088

number of internet users compared to non-users 2000

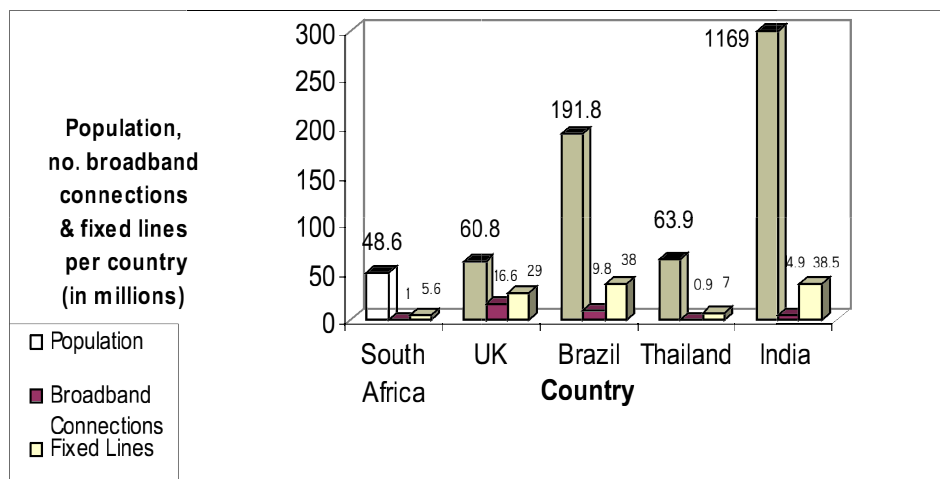


number of internet users against number of non-users 2007 (millions)



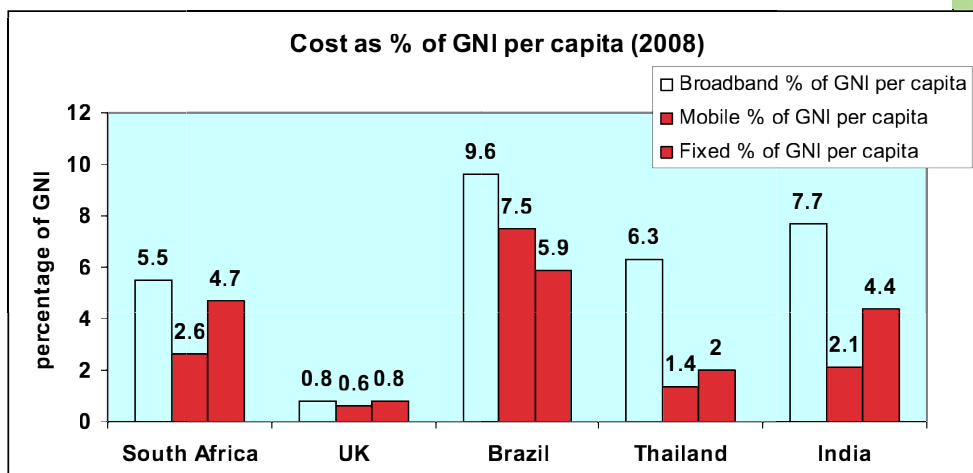
The disparity between those with Internet access and those without can no longer be put down to cultural barriers or general lack of interest – as was the case in Brazil when the Internet was first catching on – but is rather the result of persistent disparities holding back economically disadvantaged populations. Although recently-opened markets have led to a huge increase in access to hardware in developing countries, poor technological infrastructure and high costs are slowing the growth of Internet access. For over a quarter of India's subscribers, for example, their Internet is too slow to connect to broadband, and the majority of users are unable to benefit from many of the functions now available via Web 2.0. The Internet infrastructure

in Brazil follows the general characteristic of economic centralisation. A few, bigger urban centres have a good variety of broadband providers, whilst in most small cities there usually is not more than one company. Rural areas depend on very expensive, slow and unreliable satellite connections.



At the time of writing, connectivity remains limited in many parts of the world, particularly in rural areas and especially in Africa. The temporal nature of Internet based social networks is greatly dependent on strong connectivity for real-time interaction and regular engagement, so inevitably there are huge differences at the moment in the level of engagement in Internet-based Social Networks.

Cost is the second major constraint to access. Perversely, the higher a country's level of Internet penetration, the lower the cost. The poorer the population the more they will have to pay to get online. At US\$88 a month⁵¹, broadband rental in Brazil has one of the highest rates worldwide; equivalent to 9.6% of an individual's income⁵². It is also how much it would cost to buy around 127 kilos of flour⁵³, and represents a very unrealistic option for the shopping basket of the average Brazilian. By comparison, people in the UK use only 0.8% of their income on broadband rental, roughly equivalent to a couple of drinks after work. By comparison paying for broadband rental in Thailand, which is both more expensive and far slower than in the UK, means parting with over 3 times what the average person spends on medical and health expenses⁵⁴.

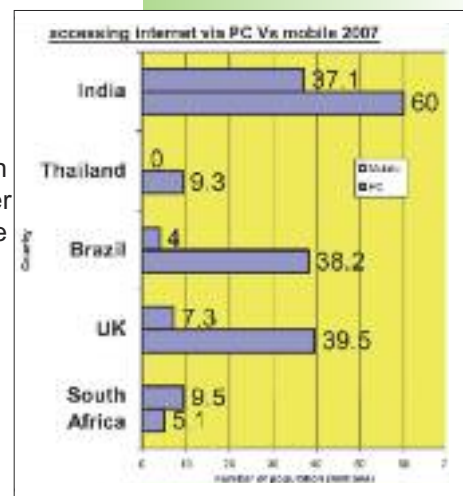


However, in Thailand the spread of Wifi wireless Internet access, particular in Bangkok removing the economic barrier of personally owning an Internet connection. High broadband rental costs mean that Internet cafes are an increasingly popular option in rural regions⁵⁵ where income levels are substantially lower than in Bangkok⁵⁶. However, Wifi is available in the capital, and the decline in café-goers here reflects how people are now benefiting from the 16,000 hotspots around the city. As a result, they are able to stay connected while on the move; passing in and out of spots as they commute to work on the skytrain or walk to school.⁵⁷

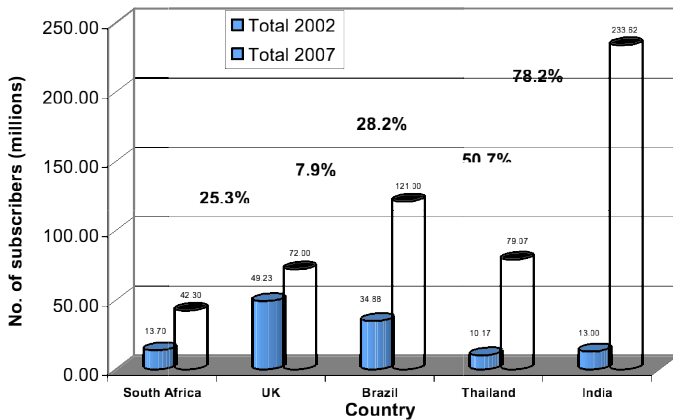
Mobile Phones and the Internet

Evidence of a global desire to connect with people online, despite barriers, is demonstrated by the consistent growth in Internet activity.⁵⁸ Users in developing countries are increasingly getting around the issue of broadband rental costs. For example, in South Africa only a third of PC owners are connected,⁵⁹ while the number of people accessing the Internet by mobile phone is almost double that of PC-based users.⁶⁰ This is not the case in Brazil, however, where charges are still too high for the majority.

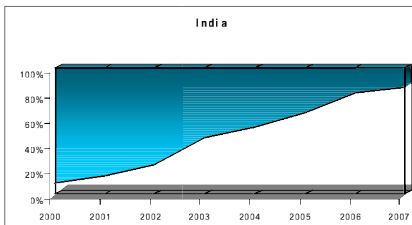
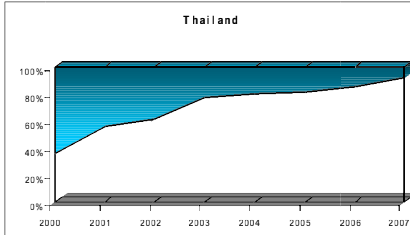
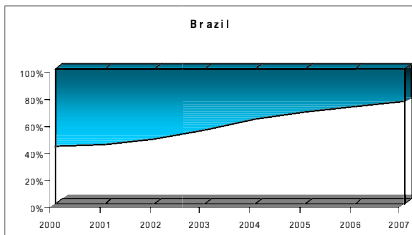
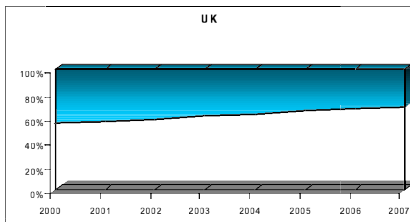
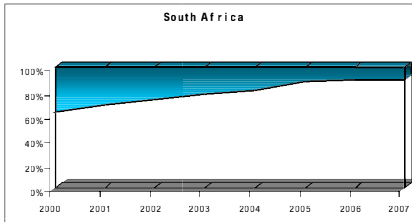
There has been phenomenal growth in mobile phone subscriptions in the past 5 years, and fixed-line telephones have become almost redundant in India. Mobile phone charges are significantly lower than the cost of a landline or broadband rental in developing countries such as Thailand and India and, unlike broadband fees, are relative to income levels.⁶¹ While mobile based instant messaging tool Mxit dominates the South African market by providing a cheap online messaging service, India's huge mobile-user base is yet to be capitalised on. While the Internet is not directly accessed via mobile phones in Brazil, young people do use them as an indirect tool, by uploading photos from their phones onto their Orkut profiles.



**Mobile telephone subscribers - total per country - comparison
between 2002 and 2007
(with compound annual growth rate %)**



**Mobile phone subscribers as a percentage of all phone subscribers
2000-2007, by country (blue top = fixed line phones; red bottom = mobile phones)**

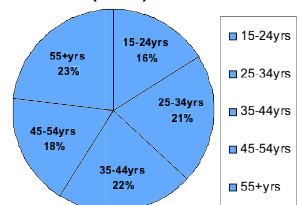


year	SA	UK	BR	TH	IN
2000	62.7	55.2	42.9	35.3	9.9
2001	68.7	57.2	43.4	55.5	15
2002	73.9	58.6	47.3	60.8	24
2003	77.8	61.1	54.2	76.7	45
2004	81.1	63.3	62.4	80.1	53
2005	87.8	65.8	68.4	81.6	64
2006	89.4	67.5	72	85.2	80
2007	90.1	68.1	75.4	91.8	86

Demographics of Internet access

While females are very active in sending SMS, the Internet remains a largely male-dominated domain, both in PC and mobile access. South Africa has

**Internet Users by Age
(2008): UK**



seen a 3.2% rise in the number of male Internet users in the period December 2007 to December 2008; with 16% more male than female users in 2008. This trend is particularly evident in developing countries such as India, as opposed to the greater gender balance witnessed in the UK; arguably due to greater inequalities in developing countries in terms of access to education, which has been identified as an indicator of increased Internet usage. Findings from a Nettec study in Thailand conflict with this however, showing a far greater number of females than males.

Internet users are spread right across the age spectrum, with differing trends between the countries. Half of India's urban Internet users fall into the 18-35 category, similar to figures for South Africa, but a larger proportion than in the UK. Although there are a large amount of young users in South Africa, we can see they are getting slightly older, with the 50+ age group increasing their share the most. Users accessing the Internet via mobile phones are generally younger than those using PCs.

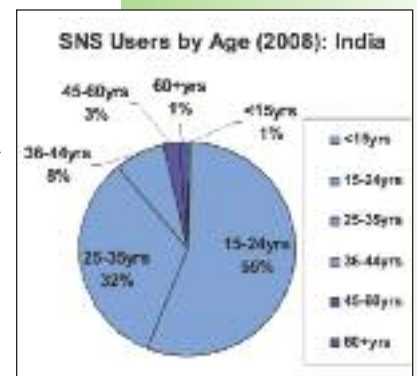
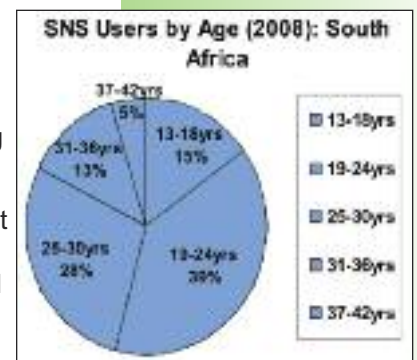
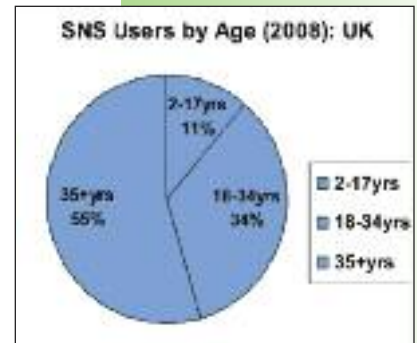
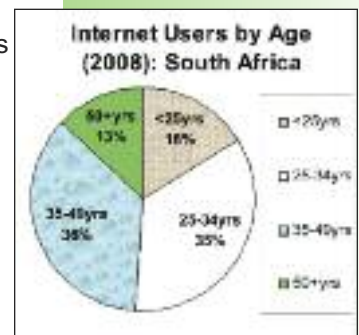
Demographics of SNS access and use

The number of people visiting social networking sites is high, accounting for well over half of all Internet users.

Thailand, India and Brazil have all shown significant growth in SNS access over recent years. There was a slight drop (< 1%) in visits to SNS in the UK between 2007 and 2008,⁶² suggesting a limit to SNS growth at around 80% of the Internet using population. Time spent on SNS by UK users has marginally declined over the last year – as growth has slowed -- but there are no signs that users are abandoning SNS.

When we look specifically at social networking against general Internet use, it's evident that the average age drops. In Thailand, 60% of users are aged between 18 and 29.⁶³ Likewise, most SNS users in India and South Africa are under 30 years old. By contrast, while over a quarter of 8-11 year olds in the UK have a profile on a social network, and over half of all SNS users are under 25, the remainder fall outwith the youth category, and the average user profile is getting older.⁶⁴ Of all UK Facebook users, less than 40% are under 25. This is due partly to growth in the site LinkedIn, which has an older user-base, and an increase in older people increasingly joining Facebook.⁶⁵ India, meanwhile, shows a younger overall age of SNS visitors.⁶⁶ As with the Internet, SNS are male dominated, particularly in India and Thailand.⁶⁷ South Africa however shows a different trend, with 6% more females than males.⁶⁸ This is closer to the pattern in the UK and US.

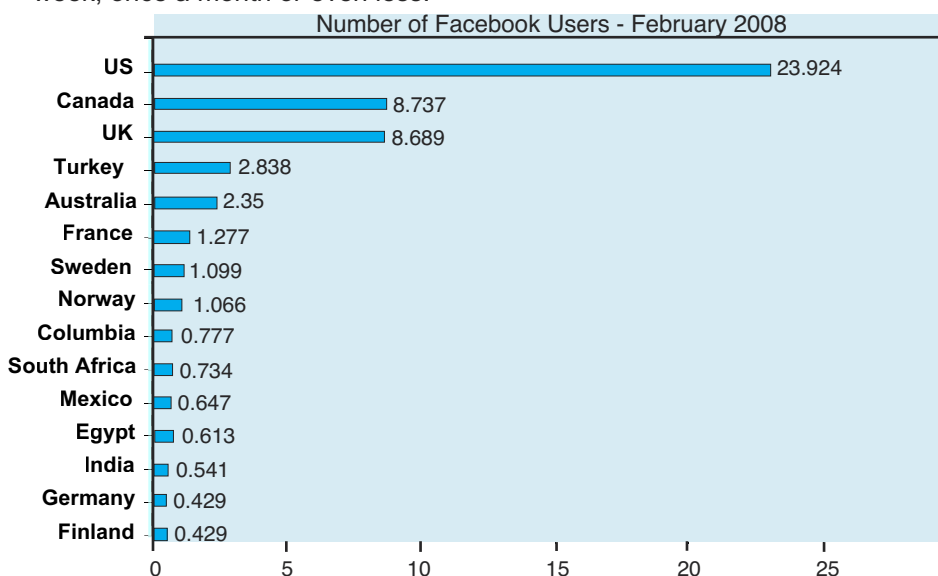
Class and income are another key determining factor in usage of the Internet and social networking. In the UK, low income and low levels of education have been associated with lower Internet use, especially amongst older people.⁶⁹ Income related disparities are replicated to some extent amongst younger populations, although they will have access to and use public and other shared-use facilities. However, in Brazil, which is a maturing Southern SNS market, the pattern is different. A 2006 survey of Accessa SP users showed that in all income bands, over 50%



of users use social networking sites. Family income does not have a direct effect on participation in social networks. It is perhaps possible to say that at either end of the scale (highest or lowest income levels), there is less participation, and the people in the middle income bands participate more, but that is not entirely true.

Income bands with highest levels of participation are: 2-4 minimum wages (64.7%) and 8-10 minimum wages (64.5%). Next comes 1-2 minimum wages (63.6%) and 4-6 minimum wages (63.0%). The bands with lowest rates of usage are over 10 minimum wages (62.0%), 6-8 minimum wages (60.8%) and less than 1 minimum wage (59.2%)⁷⁰

In all 5 countries, websites falling into the SNS category represented at least 5 of their most popular websites. Facebook is the most popular site overall across the countries in our analysis and the UK has the 3rd largest number of users worldwide, with South Africa and India not far behind. Orkut is the most popular site in India, with more than 12.8 million users; constituting over 16% of all Orkut users. It is also the most popular social network site in Brazil, and viewed as the key that drew Brazilians to the Internet by expanding their opportunities for social communication. It is the second most accessed website in Brazil, and the majority of Brazilian Internet users have a profile in the website. There are lots of cases of people – especially younger or those with low income – who check Orkut every day, but only check email once a week, once a month or even less.



National language sites are particularly important in native English speaking countries. India's SNS users are very active on local language sites, and international sites are consequently recognising the need for greater localisation to suit the Indian context.⁷¹ Despite this, awareness of online local-language content is very low, as the initial language barrier prevents many non-English speakers from venturing online.⁷² Whereas Hi5's popularity in the UK was relatively short-lived, it is the most popular SNS in Thailand with 42% of the 18-24yrs age group using it⁷³, attributable to the fact that it can be accessed in Thai.⁷⁴

Five most popular international social network sites 2008

	South Africa	UK	Brazil	Thailand	India
1 st	Facebook	Facebook	Orkut	Hi5	Orkut.co.in
2 nd	YouTube	Bebo	Yahoo Geocities	Facebook	Facebook
3 ^r	Blogger	YouTube	Multiply	Wikipedia	Orkut.com
4 th	Gumtree	MySpace	MySpace	YouTube	Bharat Student
5 th	Flickr	Blogger	Hi5	MySpace	Hi5

6. TECHNOLOGY DIFFUSION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

This chapter contains extracts from Russell Southwood's thoughtful trends briefing paper. It paints the backdrop for any discussion on SNS trends, especially one that attempts to include non-OECD countries.

Introduction

The realities of a country's potential to adopt technologies can readily be defined by a set of factors: wealth and education; underlying technological infrastructure and the uses it supports; and culture and language. There is no inevitability about whether a country moves along this spectrum of technology and wealth. Some travel at a significantly slower pace than others, which makes it clear that if certain factors are in place, changes will occur.⁷⁵ However, these trends are not simply a function of crude economic growth but of an interplay between wealth, the impact it has on how people act, how Governments use additional wealth (for things like education) and the culture and languages of people themselves. Therefore although it is helpful to isolate these elements to understand more about them, it is also important to understand that as with cooking, varied ingredients and cooking times produce very different dishes.

And if Africa is used as an example of ICT implementation in a range of developing countries, it is easy to see that everything's the same as in the developed world but the timescale runs behind. All the same technologies make an appearance and liberalisation and its different impacts follow similar patterns to those found in Europe. However if everything is the same in some ways, everything is also different in others. The broad changes that come about with changes in the economy and increased levels of wealth make broadly similar things happen. But because circumstances are different they take dissimilar forms.

Wealth and education

Developing countries are increasingly becoming urbanised and it is the cities and towns of developing countries that wealth is focused. The steady growth in urbanisation mirrors the type of changes European countries went through during the Industrial Revolution. For example, UN projections show the urban population of Kenya as 41.6% in 2005 and set to reach 51.8% in 2015.⁷⁶ The impact of these urban areas often spreads to surrounding areas. In South Africa, Gauteng Province (which includes Johannesburg and Pretoria) contributes disproportionately to GDP. In the UK, the south-east conurbation with London does the same.

But outside of these urban areas wealth is also spatially distributed. Other cities and towns represent smaller clusters of wealth. For more distributed populations, some rural areas will be significantly wealthier than other rural areas: even within a single developing country not all rural areas are universally poor.

The level of urbanisation in a country will often reflect changes in its wealth and its distribution. Whereas countries with low levels of urbanisation may have a relatively small (ruling) elite, countries with higher levels of urbanisation will tend to have more complex economies with an emerging middle class.

And increasingly the wealth of a developing country relates to the scale of its

diaspora populations. The communication needed to organise these wealth flows are in themselves a significant driver of individual use of both international voice and Internet services.

In terms of individuals buying certain kinds of services, there is another layer that affects the size of these numbers. For services delivered to the household, you need to take into account the number of persons in each household. For example, in Kenya there is an estimated average of 3.5 persons per household thus the potential for services based on relatively costly technologies is as follows: the middle class population divided by the average number per household. In developed countries, it is more complex as there may be multiple PCs or televisions per household.

It should be emphasised that most “opinion-formers” in developing countries will be found amongst the middle classes in urban areas, especially those working for civil society organisations. For Internet use is an activity that is disproportionately to be found amongst the predominantly male, well-educated, young. They can easily be described as the next “power generation”.

However this generalisation masks significant variations. For example, in India women are more likely to use SMS than men and women are increasingly the predominant users of the new social websites. Also the gender balance tends to even up over time as usage becomes more widely dispersed. So in the UK it more or less matches the overall balance of the population. But the “balancing up” effect will be less pronounced in places where women have less access to education and jobs.⁷⁷

The most successful widely distributed communications technologies require “critical mass”. When mobile phones were owned by only a few hundred thousand people, it was unusual to know someone who owned and even rarer to ask for their number. When a significant majority own one, it becomes the number of choice for reaching someone. The same arguments apply to the Internet. E-mail took time to take off and was not widely used in the early days. In developing countries, as with mobile phones, there will be a point where “critical mass” is reached and the technology entrenches itself on this basis.

Whilst mobile use involves a great deal of social communication (ringing friends and family) that is of direct relevance to its users, the use of Internet content from other countries is not always so compelling. However, large numbers of people use e-mail (through cyber-cafes) for broadly similar social purposes. It is around the social use of the Internet where the most significant changes have and will occur (our italics). It is perhaps no surprise that Facebook, YouTube and Orkut are amongst the most used sites in the developing countries that have been researched. Most strikingly, South Africa is the eighth largest user of Facebook globally.

What is more surprising is the fact that according to Alexa.com, the English-language international social websites are amongst the top ten most used in a disparate group of nine African countries.⁷⁸ Internet material from the second series of Big Brother attracted 5 million downloads, 90% of which came from Africa: of these, 33% came from South Africa and 37% from Uganda and Nigeria.⁷⁹ This demonstrates that if there is content that interests

potential users, they will find a way to get that content. The table shows the top ten countries in terms of blogs as counted by South African blog aggregator Afrigator in autumn 2008:

Table 2: Top 10 African countries by number of blogs

Country	Number of blogs
South Africa	2,123
Africa – general	429
Kenya	303
Nigeria	301
Egypt	102
Tanzania	69
Ghana	59
Uganda	52
Madagascar	50
Zimbabwe	39
Cameroon	33

All of this is happening in Africa before people have access to cheap bandwidth so once the Internet is both faster and cheaper, levels of use will inevitably increase. For example, in Egypt which has promoted cheap broadband prices for its citizens, according to an Intermedia national survey 48.6% of those interviewed downloaded music. This pattern is clearly nearer to that found in a developed country, the only difference probably being the types of music downloaded.

Factors influencing technology diffusion

Operators delivering mobile services and Internet follow the pattern of the market. The spatial descriptions of wealth outlined in the previous chapter exactly mirror the cascading roll-out plans for these services. In broad terms, the infrastructure to make them happen is rolled out first in the largest city, then in smaller cities and towns, followed lastly by the less densely populated rural areas. Service innovations like mobile Internet follow the same pattern.

In network terms, the traditional mobile operators are rolling out data services with increasingly fast speeds to compete with fixed broadband in the home. Therefore in places like Africa where the mobile is widely available, when prices are competitive with fixed broadband, the number of users increases very rapidly. The introduction of smart, touch screen phones will simply reinforce this trend. For both voice and the Internet, bandwidth is effectively the petrol of the new economy. Put crudely, if a country's international and national bandwidth prices are high then less people will tend to be connected and if low the reverse happens.

With lower prices, the number of users will increase to match the number of PC owners: this is what economists call price elasticity and few developing countries have reached the point on the price curve where further reductions do not produce more revenue and more users. With faster, cheaper, always available bandwidth, users in developing countries will begin to make everyday use of the Internet without the need to ration the amount of time they spend on it.

A key obstacle is the high cost of international bandwidth. It can perhaps be most dramatically illustrated with the example of Kenya. Current international wholesale bandwidth costs by satellite are between US\$4000-5000 per mbps per month. These are set to fall to US\$500-1,000 when two international fibre cables start operating in 2009. India's regulator TRAI addressed various monopoly pricing and access issues that encouraged the delivery of cheaper international bandwidth.

The third part of the technology triangle is the cost of entry for the user. A wireless modem using WiMAX may cost US\$200 even before the user has purchased a PC. The price of the latter in Africa may vary between US\$200-300 for a second-hand machine to between US\$500-1,000. Laptops are more expensive. The handset for a mobile phone can cost upwards of US\$50 and with smart phones is often between US\$200-400. Hence the focus of many on lowering the price of the entry level device: the US\$100 laptop and the US\$35 low-cost handset. But there are already several other strategies to overcome cost barriers. Users share handsets: a survey of the inhabitants of the Kibera slum in Nairobi found that nearly ten users made use of a single mobile handset. Cyber-cafes are a way of sharing the cost amongst multiple users. Lastly operators will often subsidise the initial cost of the entry device by increasing the amount charged to the user slightly to recoup their costs.

Internet and SMS as media

Whether on the phone or PC, services tend to make a transition from the simple to the complex. In the beginning there was just voice, now there are probably hundreds of services associated with the use of voice. Likewise in the beginning in developing countries, the Internet is really largely about e-mail and very time-limited browsing. Broadband delivers more complex services and applications. For example, there is a Google map application for Lagos that allows you to pinpoint locations and services.

The wide use of SMS illustrates that millions of people can use the equivalent of e-mail if the interface is kept simple and charging is by the message. With a different application for the user and a different charging structure, larger numbers of people would use mobile Internet. A company called Synchronica has already produced mobile software to give users a low-cost Blackberry for e-mail on a wide range of phones. MxIT with its 11+ (largely young) million users in Africa, projects that its users in Africa and the Middle East will grow by 414% by 2013. It has 1.2 million users in Indonesia.

The high use of mobile phones in India illustrates that what was once thought of as a luxury service has become everyday.⁸⁰ Currently users of mobile phones tend to make only limited use of their functionality because they are often not intuitive to use. The increased use of smart phones with simpler visual and touch interfaces opens up wider use. For example, in Nigeria in the middle of last year one of the larger operators had 20,000 Blackberry users. Alongside the total number of mobile users in the country this figure is tiny but it will continue to grow and as we look at SMS and Internet as media, its significance will become apparent.

It is obvious that levels of education (or the lack of it) and the functional literacy it produces are a limiting factor in the use of some technologies. However, quite often technology drives simple learning. Often the illiterate will know how to use phone numbers, send a simple SMS and use SMS to

recharge their phone. This kind of effect has enfranchised larger numbers of people to communicate and the level of learning will become more complex as vital services appear on mobiles in the future.

It is easy to forget that these technologies exist for a purpose. For example, mobiles are not only used to communicate for social and business purposes. SMS in developing countries has been used for as widely diverging things as learning election results, voting for performers on television and simply responding to marketing that offers prizes. Literally millions of people are involved in just these three activities.

So both SMS and the Internet in developing countries are making a transition from being simply a communications tool to become media. The survey findings from North Africa illustrate the point:

Most used information sources in North Africa (daily)

Country	Television	Radio	Internet	Newspapers	SMS
Algeria	71.8	24.7	9	35.5	6.9
Egypt	76.2	31	5	12.7	0.8
Morocco	85	36.8	14.8	12.3	3.3
Tunisia	81	39	2	7	3

Source: Intermedia, African Broadcast and Film Markets

Where advertising spending is tracked by media in Africa, Internet spending is 1% in both Kenya and South Africa. As usage increases, this is likely to go up to 3-5% in larger markets. The use of SMS as an advertising medium is usually below the line “spend” on promotions and therefore goes unrecorded. There is enough anecdotal evidence to suggest that this might also constitute around 1% of advertising spend. High-end phones bring the Internet and mobiles together and expand the potential reach for advertisers amongst key demographics: advertisers will be interested in reaching the smart phone users more than the less differentiated newspaper audiences.

7. TRANSITIONS

The ever perceptive and often prescient John Naughton frames trend-spotting:

"Know the old joke about the drunk and the lost keys? A policeman finds a guy scrabbling under a lamp-post and asks him what he's doing. "Looking for my keys," he replies. "Is this where you dropped them?" asks the cop. "No," replies the drunk, "but at least I can see what I'm doing here."

When it comes to technology futures, we're all drunks, always looking in the wrong place". (<http://tinyurl.com/ddw4wk>)

Nonetheless, this paper would be incomplete without at least an attempt to identify some of the trends impacting the development of SNS globally and consider their implications. We discuss of three sets of drivers whose interplay have influenced the development of the behaviours and technologies we have described above:

- **Technological innovation**, looking at evolutionary trends, such as the continued convergence of online software and other services onto mobile platforms and domestic TVs, and disruptive technology -- products and services that change the environment in which users and other technological developers operate, with the iPhone as the obvious recent example.
- **Monetisation**, by which we mean the search for commercial return by the innovators and their backers.
- **Behaviour**: one of the fundamental tenets of this paper is that people's behaviour is both influenced by and influences the development of technology and its associated business models.

SNS trends and technology

One of the most interesting features of the digital spaces is the astonishing scale of the innovation taking place. Famously, this isn't simply derived from massive corporate investments in R&D but is an open space for thousands of individuals in bedrooms and sheds to try and attract funding from venture capital. The massive potential gains from the next eBay or Google means there is a lot of money available from both sources. It is hard to say whether the centrally directed resources that produced the iPhone are more disruptive and long lasting than the garage-started Google. The only certainty is that there will be many generations of new systems and technologies by 2031, and we will only recognise the defining trends in retrospect. John Naughton again:

"The First Law of Technology says we invariably overestimate the short-term impact of new technologies while underestimating their longer-term effects."⁸¹

The following are some of the trends that we believe will continue to influence the development of SNS in the short and medium term.

Platform convergence

This is the process by which tools and packages that until recently could only be accessed on one platform such as a TV, Radio, computer or mobile phone can now be accessed on any one of them, and in new combinations of content and services. It is a transformative, continuous tidal movement rather

than one or more waves of change. From the user point of view the consequence is the breaking down of boundaries between what until recently were separate channels of information, entertainment and communication. If I am watching a TV soap opera on my mobile phone, either in real time in a free wifi zone or as a previously downloaded episode, while I am logged into an SNS and communicating – swapping text and pictures -- with my friends, one of whom is watching on a digital TV and browsing the Internet through the TV and the other is ostensibly doing her homework in her bedroom on a laptop, then what technology am I actually using and does it matter? It is a technological innovation in the sense that it is derived from advances in all the technologies mentioned above, but one of its more long-term impacts will be that technology per se recedes further into the background for users who concentrate on communicating and consuming media or content.

Mobile phone applications

Initially a slowly growing and innovative sector, the development of specialist applications exploiting the features of mobile phones, it has been energised by the impact of the iPhone. The trend has been accelerated by the range of competitor phones being rushed into the market, notably phones using Google's Android development platform. There is an extensive range of technical innovation on these phones, from the mould breaking finger-tip screen control or sensor-based hand-movement awareness of the iPhone to features like high-end video cameras and GPS functions which are extensions of previous waves. This new territory offers a compelling proposition both to technology innovators and those looking for revenue models. The applications are also relatively cheap to develop, since they are small programmes that exploit existing functions on the machines and, as described above in 1.3, are often small multi-platform widgets.

A mobile window on the web

MxIT represents a relatively small step for users of SMS on phones, to the majority of whom the Internet based architecture behind the platform remains hidden. MxIT itself seeks to migrate users to other services using their phones, and more and more functionality is becoming available to phone users, such as mobile banking or simple SMS browsing.⁸² The important point is that people will be adapting to this technology not as a subset of hugely richer functionality available to those with access to the mainstream Internet but as will still perceive them as a series of phone-accessible services. Users will only pay for those services that cater for their specific needs, in a constrained technical environment. In that sense, in areas of low Internet access, the phone represents a clean sheet, a development platform that can learn from the wider web but will need to meet the specific needs and interests of its specific audience of users, generating in the process tailored services specific to phone users.

Mobile access to the wealth of the web

In contrast to the previous item but also a consequence of convergence, cheaper and more widespread connectivity through the addition of options such as wifi to mobile phones may finally deliver on the promise of access to the abundance of the web. As the spread of wifi widens the cost of competing connectivity channels such as GPRS will be forced down. The ability to connect over wifi on my phone massively extends the accessibility of the

Internet since, as is dramatically evident on the Sky Train in Bangkok, it means that I can use the richer functionality of web platforms such as mature SNS to connect to my network as I circle over the city. In some senses this adds little to a MxIT user, already comfortably engaged within narrow bandwidth constraints. However, what we have learnt about the nature of web browsing behaviour, with users' rapid, sudden and relatively random interests in suggested links means that a wider set services related to health communications, for example, would be accessed by people on the move, or outside the home as and when the need or interest occurred.

Location-based services

We separate out this particular feature because it represents a radical departure from a previous state. Location services can be either active or passive. Active services allow mobile users to ask for a service based on their current location and nearby facilities -- for example, to help find a cash point or be informed of events happening in an area. A specific application example is JotYou, which enables users to send a text message to someone's cell phone and they will receive the SMS message only when they enter into the exact location specified.⁸³ Passive services allow others to request to locate your mobile. These can be used to track the whereabouts of children or the location of farms and villages relative to disease or available support services in relation to epidemiology. Clearly, there are massive risks associated with these kinds of services and they will only tell you where the phone is. In the context of SNS the attraction is applications like Loopt or Brightkite which enable people to connect location-tracking with friend's networks.⁸⁴

SNS trends and monetisation

SNS have attracted a huge amount of money, both from venture capital and more established corporate budgets, especially from the media industry. The primary Internet business model for content and social media services is advertising so the target for these funds is increased audience – both in terms of size and depth of engagement. However, as we note below, there are strong examples of successful content related purchasing models. Trends in SNS that relate to this driver include the following.

The complete online experience

By this we mean increasing functionality within an SNS to make it unnecessary for users to leave the site, and lend their eyeballs to competitors. While this repeats the pattern of early Internet portals, such as AOL, the difference is that SNS are social in origin so start with community rather than content and thus more attractive as a one-stop experience.

Platform interoperability

Another learning point from the earlier portal experience is the relatively recent acceptance by the major SNS of the need to enable people to connect and share content with users in other platforms as well as to support developers with easier ways of deploying their applications across systems. There are two competing trends, which are also converging. Firstly, the definition of technical standards and interfaces between systems intended to open up the closed worlds of the SNS. One of the strongest moves is led by Google (OpenSocial) and another, overlapping initiative centres on OpenID.

However, the second trend is for the SNS themselves to enable access from within their own platforms. Facebook Connect is the most current example.

Rich Media Channels

The uniqueness of SNS in this context is the mixture of social and media. On one level Kate Modern in Bebo or the dancing queen's competitions in Ibibo are relatively simple channel extensions of a broadcast model into SNS.

However the multi-channel UK teen drama *Skins* demonstrates more of their potential. The TV soap is cross-promoted and distributed across traditional media and online, with its own sites and text messenger system but also very active presences in a number of SNS. The series is crowd-sourced, in the sense that viewers contribute and comment on plot development or suggest music tracks. More significantly the characters have their own profiles in SNS, with each of whom thousands of users connect, as friends, commenting, connecting with other viewers and so on.



Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOG)

With colossal audiences of committed, mainly younger, players games such as World of Warcraft or Halo are both personal and social spaces. Users spend hours playing the games but with players from all around the world. They engage creatively at several levels. For example, Halo users enter competitions where they use in-game facilities to develop short videos of game scenarios, done individually or collectively. Users have active online groups that discuss and promote elements of the game and organise themselves collectively. Their games have long been seen potentially fertile ground for social change campaigns and as the Obama campaign demonstrates, there are opportunities for social change advocates in terms of in-game advertising. However, cross-promotional and advertising approaches aside, attempts to construct games that both engage players and carry messages or engage people in action have rarely succeeded. Although there are examples of, generally quite small-scale, message-based games that get favourable reviews from players few are very good to play, at least more than once or twice. It may be more productive to attend to how the game developers themselves are enriching their products socially and in media terms.

Micro-purchases and content platforms

The iPod was not successful simply because of its technology but because Apple was the first company to develop a business model that addressed the new commercial environment created by the convergence of the Internet and mobile devices. Able to buy one track at a time for the music player made selling music on the Internet a viable proposition. Amazon's new Kindle book reader, in itself simply a practical niche application for early adopters, has connected with Apple to make content available for download via the iTunes store. Rating, commenting and sharing content is one of the central elements in social media so these kinds of portable media platforms already link to social media service, or include them as part of the service ("recommend this book to your friends")

SNS trends and behaviour

The issues we note here have to do with patterns of human behaviour that can be seen as related to the growth of SNS.

Privacy, openness and transparency

The extent to which people are open and forthcoming about aspects of their private lives on SNS is one of the features that attracts most comment from those still willing to engage in the platforms. While it's undoubtedly true that many people may regret in later life the material that is available online about their colourful pasts this phenomenon affects large parts of an entire age cohort, which in turn is going to influence that generation in how they operate in later life. While Ewen Williams, the founder of both Blogger and Twitter, may be in a minority in believing that a life lived openly is "more authentic"⁸⁵ it is surely true that such openness challenges many aspects of traditional and hierarchical cultures. It is certainly one in which it may be easier to challenge stereotypes and discuss contentious issues relating to sexuality in public spaces.

Multiplicity and diversity

People spend time on SNS to connect and a recurrent feature of online groups is how people connect in a variety of different ways, using different points of contact and interest, which in turn lead to different arrangements and types of online communities. This is absolutely not a new phenomenon associated with SNS, but SNS facilitate finer levels of segmentation. Within SNS there are both open and closed groups, based around personal interest, which can cut across primary friendship groups. People will join groups or online communities according to cultural or religious affiliation, hobbies and sports, politics and sexual orientation. They will often belong to several at the same time. So while there will still be mass movements on SNS it is certainly possible that people will increasingly operate in and around interest and identity groups, difficult for outsiders to find and sometimes penetrate.

The visible

The progress of the generation active in SNS is marked by a volume of pictures, songs, carefully adapted profile pages, subversive art and other public expressions of activity and curiosity. This is a differently visible and graphical segment, enormously more media literate than previous generations, and also expectant of similarly rich communications from its sources and connections.

***The best way to predict the future is to invent it.*⁸⁶**

The central recommendation of this report is that organisations and individuals engaged in combating the spread of AIDS can and should engage actively with social media to engage with and connect young people across the globe. Through active participation AIDS activists can become part of the interplay of forces that are shaping the way that the media are developing. The considerable experience and resources available for these HIV/AIDS programmes could be leveraged and have significant impact on how these spaces develop, what attention they pay to health messaging and how they engage with AIDS activists.

Section Three - Conclusions & Recommendations

8. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Our research confirms that the interaction between people and social networking technology has changed and will change the way people communicate about issues and behaviours that impact on HIV vulnerability across the globe. It also answers one of the key questions in this research which is that young people in non-OECD countries actively social network using digital technologies when it becomes affordable and practical for them. In this chapter we summarise what we have learned about the implications of this new environment for communication professionals.

Digital and generational divides

We have seen that in areas of the world where there is relatively cheap, reliable and fast access to the Internet and other forms of digital communication young people aged 15-25 are using digital technology, particularly social media, differently than their predecessor generations. Digitally enabled social media play a central role in their communication and lives. In the context of the global fight against AIDS, this research has also been looking at the extent to which this is already, or likely soon to become, relevant to those parts of the world where cost or technical constraints limit people's access to such tools. Constraints are very real to millions of people, but they are nonetheless slowly becoming less significant and this trend is likely to accelerate, for several reasons:

- The explosion in the use of and access to mobile phones and networks;
- Long standing plans for investment in new infrastructure being realised, such as the fibre-optic cables landing this year in East Africa;
- Governments, donors and multilateral institutions recognise the central role of digital communication and continue to invest in capacity and training (for those living in poor communities; more should be done)
- Competition in many markets is intense, forcing down cost and, to a certain extent, rewarding innovation;
- Growth in prosperity and leisure time in fast-growing countries such as those in parts of Asia.

The crucial change is that those people who are connected, whether by phone or through the Internet, have reached a new plateau in terms of how they engage with their social network and the external world. Subtle variations aside, economic and social developments in non-OECD countries along with trends in telecommunications and digital technology are likely to increase significantly access to digitally enabled social media platforms over the next 5 to 10 years. The recommendations in this report address those growing connected populations in the belief that the forward-looking nature of aids2031 means we must consider the opportunities and risks of this new reality.

Note: the current global economic crisis will obviously have a profound impact on these trends. However, for the purposes of this report, we assume that this will slow down but not reverse these trends.



The growth and usage of social media follows the same pattern as previous generations of digital media in that people are using or subverting the technology for their own social purposes. The primary focus of this report is people and how their social behaviour is shaping and being shaped by technology. What emerges from the research is that people replicate and extend patterns of face-to-face social networking using whatever technology is available. South African school students, for example, are using mobile phones for the majority of their communication. They mainly use SMS with each other but also interact with friendship networks using the phone enabled SNS Mxit. It is striking how they are operating with their friendship groups and wider networks in ways similar to Orkut users in Brazil, or Indian users of Hi5 or Ibibo or European users of Bebo. They hang out, arrange events, flirt and exchange media using their phones. They consume multiple-media, often in short nuggets, and they are multi-tasking whilst browsing their favoured media, commenting and sharing with their friends as they consume. They are able to move rapidly from one platform to another, although this fluidity across platforms does not imply literacy across platforms.

How old are you, the reader, and why is that important?

This is a difficult subject to broach in a report for communication professionals but it is critical. If you are under 25 then you are probably already engaged in a lot of this already and you can see how you would implement it. If you are under 35 you may well be using it, and are likely to be more influential so you are a key change agent. If you are over 35, and not a technical specialist or neo-geek, then our experience is that you are more likely to be sceptical about the importance of this area, possibly see it as a passing fashion, and certainly to question whether the organisation or group you work with should change the way that you work. Your position may be influenced by the limitations of your own direct experience; you may be amazed at how like your own parents you sound when you talk to young people you know about why they spend so much time online, and media-snack all the time (“How can you work with that music on” and “GET OFF THE PHONE”). You may be engaging gingerly with sites such as LinkedIn, or noting how people are engaging with social aspects of blogs or broadcast sites. Yet you are also more likely to be a budget holder and have influence on other management decisions so your willingness to learn and be persuaded by evidence is crucial. (If you are over 60, with time on your hands and good access to the Internet, then you are increasingly likely to be delightfully discovering the new media.)

Web 2.0 and Social-Network Aware

Online social networking is a web 2.0 phenomenon therefore communicators need to operate in Web 2.0 aware ways. The underlying principles are rehearsed in a myriad of websites and manuals, although not always accessibly.⁸⁷ We summarise the key elements in Chapter 3 above. The central point for communicators is that Web 2.0 reflects a state of mind as much as a set of technical features: informal; participative; playful; careless of copyright and applauding innovative re-combinations of content; encouraging of self-promotion while developing and negotiating new norms of privacy; social; and many more. The combination of features and mindset results in an identifiable culture within which communication can appear clumsy, alien and forced. traditional



Agenda setting and Buzz generation

Among Web 2.0 aware organisations, individuals and campaigns – as well as advertisers and marketers – a consensus on good practice and effective engagement with the Web 2.0 spaces has emerged over the past four or five years. In essence it involves strategically embedding the issue the communicator wishes to raise awareness of into the matrix of overlapping online spaces and services that make up the social web. Those communicators who are adept at this operate like an energetic honey bee, visiting blogs, reference and tagging sites (e.g. Digg, Stumble upon) alongside SNS, adding value to such sites by increasing traffic to them from their home pages and leaving traces that track back to them. The model is well established enough to have become a commercial service offered by commercial Internet companies.

The particular added value of SNS is that they are a low cost way to “identify the communities where your supporters and activists are already and join in the conversation.” The aim is to “share your message with enthusiastic supporters and they in turn may choose to pass it to others with a similar interest in your organization or campaign.” Two examples, “Support the Burma monks” and “Pink Chaddi campaign,” show how individuals as well as organisations can quickly generate enormous amounts of attention and engagement that, crucially, washes into other broadcast, online and print media, thus achieving an integrated multi-channel campaign with a fraction of the budget available to organisations, private, public or non-profit.

Where there are budgets and resources available these can also generate significant communication and campaign impact if, and only if, they are context aware. While the claim that President Obama won the 2008 election because of his online campaign can be questioned, it is hard to argue that the sophisticated and widespread online campaign didn't make a critical contribution to his victory.

Riding a bike doesn't equip a person to drive a car.

Communicating using social media, or social technology, requires an additional and different set of skills and attitudes than communicating via broadcast and print media. However, the learning about how to operate within a road system, about how other people behave and how we ourselves react and deal with sudden incidents is infinitely transferable. Similarly, the basic principles of successful communication remain the same. Effective communicators are able to extend and integrate social media into their work so that they operate across the complete media mix. In the following paragraphs we draw on the summary principles we outlined in chapters two and three above.

Social Networks for social change communication

SNS are digital platforms in which people behave socially. They offer rich communication tools. They therefore present enormous opportunities for the implementation of communication strategies which “include a focus on seeing people and communities as agents of their own change, emphasise community empowerment, [seek to] create an environment of change and provide a voice for communities and opportunities for dialogue and debate rather than focusing on products and messages.”⁸⁸

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter we consider the implications for organisations, in terms of strategic direction and management, and for practitioners, in terms of ways to engage with the new media effectively. We also consider some of the policy implications, particularly in terms of access and security.

Markets and bedrooms

SNS present two very different sets of contexts for organisations and individuals seeking to engage in those spaces to influence and move its users to action.

SNS can be very public spaces. Thinking of them like a music festival or an open plan office -- perhaps even a large open-air market -- generates useful images. They are busy, noisy, active places where crowds can gather or be gathered, exert influence, generate buzz or have fun. Music is performed, art and media displayed and passed around. Entrepreneurs hunt for clients and opportunities, campaigners beat their drums, friends operate together in groups and people seek out new connections. As we have seen, this dimension of SNS offers enormous opportunities for organisations and movements. It can appear that a traditional broadcast-model communication is effective here but, although loud one-to-many messaging will generate a response, the most effective forms of communication combine this with more sophisticated approaches that are sensitive to the culture of the spaces and the way that people operate within them. Below we summarise some of the learning we have gathered from our own work as well as from the community of communicators and activists who have been engaged in this work since social media emerged.

However SNS also provide very private places. Thinking of them like a teenager's room, or a private club or even as places where people can squat and claim ownership over small territories generates equally useful and valid images. They are places to present self, experiment with identity, hang out with small groups of friends and share intense development phases. They are places to be found, to be introduced to new ideas and to secure help and support. This dimension of SNS is important territory for supportive outreach and counselling services. It is also a crucial area for HIV/AIDS communication because it offers opportunities for engaging at a more intimate level than many traditional modes of communication, one where the intensely personal centre of sexual behaviour -- with its confused supporting assembly of myth, identity and personal knowledge -- might be navigated by peers or professionals alike. It is certainly one where crass trumpeting of simplistic messages simply drives people away.

It is certain that both dimensions of social networking sites -- public and private -- and all the representations that exist in the space between these polar opposites are rich hunting grounds for predators. There are many, many tragic stories of young, and older people first contacted through SNS and then cheated, groomed and later exploited, or even damaged through embodied contact, including cases of sexual abuse. These dangers exist in physical spaces, and such incidents make up a small minority of the transactions that take place in SNS. However learning about effective measures and policies to minimise the risks and dangers in SNS activity has also emerged over the past five years as a top priority and we outline below some of the key areas for consideration.

Learning socially

Social media is a maturing technology and increasing numbers of people and groups can confidently navigate the environment and operate effectively within it. Facebook was five years old on February 4, 2009, an age in Internet time. For the past five years, digitally active organisations, individuals and campaigns have learned and shared how to operate effectively in the emerging environments. The very nature of social media means that users were also doers, and the learning is itself social. This learning is freely available from social media sites, in many cases prepared and shared by a smallish number of acknowledged thought leaders. A selection of reference sites is included in this report, but more easily accessible online by searching for snsac or aids2031 at www.delicious.com.

Organisational and Individual Responses

In considering appropriate responses for the communicator to take to the emergence of SNS we explore two levels of activity: the organisational response (where questions of strategy, policy, capacity building and evaluation are salient) and the individual response (where we specifically address tools, skills and approaches of relevance of practitioners). We divide our recommendations into those that are most suited to the public SNS space, and those which are more applicable to engagement in the personal aspects of SNS. The matrix below indicates where some of the examples above might fall:

	Organisational Strategic, capacity building, collective large scale interventions.	Individual Practitioner level/ interventions led by single actors/local interventions.
Public (open/ group experience of SNS)	<i>See UK Government Development Department, DfID on Facebook</i>	<i>Burma campaign on Facebook</i>
Personal (closed/ individual experience of SNS)	<i>Cell-Life South Africa is experimenting with outreach on Mxit</i>	<i>HIV Help and Advice pages on Piczo, referenced above</i>

Public Spaces - Organisational Responses

For communicators, SNS are a new form of environment. Responding to the opportunities SNS present requires a conscious evolutionary response from organisations. Individuals within those organisations will already be experimenting and pushing the boundaries (at work or in their free time) and a more coherent, planned response will include them and build on their work. It is our experience that many organisations underestimate the scale of the changes and how they need to adapt. As in all strategic organisational responses there is value in a staged approach.

Research the relevant changes in the environment in which the organisation operates and determine the state of play in terms of connectivity and SNS.

- Which assumptions need to be challenged, what is different about the way that specific groups of 15-25 year olds are operating and how is that likely to change in the next three to five years?

To what extent are your key constituency already connected to SNS? Which groups are likely to adopt SNS in the near future? Which SNS are they using?

- Are the professionals, volunteers, street or grassroots practitioners you work with connected to SNS, with what capacity and, if not, when will they be?
- What is the capacity within the organisation and supporters for working with SNS and Web 2.0?
- Does the IT infrastructure in the organisation constrain or support SNS activity through its security policy, equipment and software update process?
- If the organisation is part of or linked to a Government Department then there may be specific legal constraints or specific requirements, as there have been recently in the United States.⁸⁹

Learn how the new environments work through experimenting. Web 2.0 is participatory and social, so practical engagement is by far the most effective approach: learn by doing, putting in place light structures to balance risk management and innovation. Make sure you are listening on the social web, able to respond to feedback on your interventions, and able to track emerging trends.

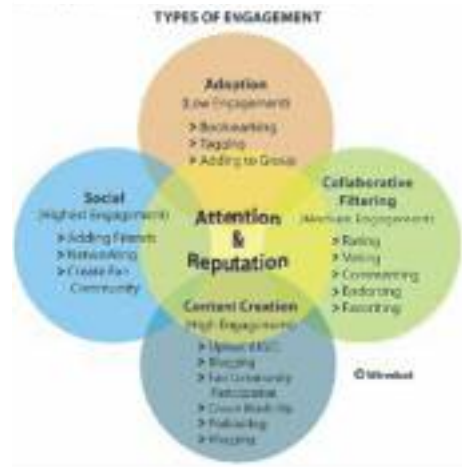
For example, Oxfam GB established a Social Networking Central Coordinating Team. It was deliberately made up of practitioners and internal advisers and designed as a peer-learning group as well as a light-touch approvals mechanism for activity in SNS. The communication director reviewed its recommendations on larger proposals and was told about smaller-scale activities but rarely refused recommendations since they had been worked through by people who were learning on the job.

A common key objective for organisational engagement with SNS is to grow followers or friends groups. Profiles or groups in SNS take time to establish, and the learning about resources and tactics is fundamental. Equally important, these supporters will be a core element in any communication, as ambassadors for action or information and as a feedback community. It is important to:

- Establish early on whether a niche SNS start-up, centred on the organisation or campaign, might generate traction. The evidence to date is that there has to be a compelling brand at the centre to bring people to a specialist site. Few organisations have brands that appeal like President Obama's, or Manchester United or Beyonce, all of whom built successful online communities from their support base.
- Learn how much resource is required for your chosen strategies, noting again Beth Kanter's rule of thumb, "Social media takes time to do well, a minimum investment of 5 hours a week."⁹⁰ Do Return on Investment (ROI) analyses.
- Become part of the learning communities already active, online and offline. Use the SNS and other Web 2.0 such as blogs or www.delicious.com to share learning and ask for advice.⁹¹

Recognise structural and cultural changes are needed within the organisation to exploit the opportunities. Organisations need to become more permeable, flexible and collaborative. They need to recognise where central, top-down control is still necessary but also where to let go. This diagram, already two years old, encapsulates the central challenges for managers in organisations around engagement with SNS and Web 2.0. It depicts indicators of audience engagement in terms of online activity and highlights two fundamentals:

- You will lose “control.” Content and activity is in the hands of the users. This is a dramatic shift from traditional communication and websites where visitors are taken along carefully crafted supporter journeys, viewing professional content only published after painstaking approval processes.
- Most social media/SNS engagement happens away from the organisation’s online properties, on other people’s sites and so is harder to measure directly.



Those organisations that are successful in these new environments – and there are many – have found ways to **marry the need for flexibility, speed, and independence with control and management structures**. This is critical when working with SNS since social engagement, seen above as of the highest order, requires above all else for people to take the messages and causes to their friends. Whether it is in information dissemination (important given that peers play such an important role in sex education) or building support for a campaign, the prime indicator of success is the extent to which people feel moved and empowered to act on their own.

Product and message-based communication are therefore unlikely to be the most effective ways of working with SNS. Practitioners must find ways of building the confidence of funders and leaders to try more fluid, less output-based approaches.

- One of the key activities that can be carried out through online social networking is to arrange physical meetings, parties or events. SNS users can respond well to action oriented activities such as campaigns and fund-raising projects. The style of operation within SNS, however, focuses on social recruitment: people talking to and recruiting their friends and friends of friends. The target is as much to build the network and its conversations as it is a particular event or campaign.
- Content is currency, but only if it is a successful means of exchange. This means experimenting with new forms of content – short, mixed, open to adaptation and copying – and, crucially, inviting people to contribute their content. This has important implications for copyright and other forms of intellectual property rights.

Involve the intended audience in a participatory way as much as possible throughout the communication project from the beginning and at the end to help evaluation.

- “Social networking plays into the three triggers of social change: a sense of identity, belonging and purpose.”⁹² Responses to a well constructed, personalised campaign are often direct, individual and supportive.

- Crowdsourcing is an increasingly popular and effective method of engaging or recruiting a community of supporters. Typical uses have included gathering slogans, pictures, videos and other content to support campaigns as well as engaging with activists in developing campaign or strategy suggestions.
- A valuable added benefit of crowdsourcing is in helping make more permeable the corporate boundaries through the creation and brokering of links with external people and organisations.

Develop good practice guidelines, management frameworks and human resources policies for staff and volunteers in terms of training, principles of engagement and support. These need to cover who is allowed to use SNS as part of their work and in what ways; how staff/volunteers are to manage personal and/or professional SNS profiles.

Where organisations are encouraging interventions with SNS which involve direct interaction with minors or at-risk groups – or interventions that involve collecting, or encouraging users to share, personal data – then organisations should have a clear **risk assessment framework** in place.⁹³

There is value in **investing strategically in the convergence of old and new media** in the SNS space. As noted above, news media, music publishers and distributors, TV channels are all investing heavily in social media. There are major opportunities for AIDS communicators to develop partnerships, such as:

- Seeking the inclusion of HIV/AIDS messaging into SNS media productions such as Bebo's Kate Modern or iBibo's iVideostars – bespoke and interactive soap operas and video series.
- Directly creating, commission or collaborating in the development of storylines and productions for social network spaces focussed on AIDS messaging.

There is a wealth of material sharing learning about effective engagement with SNS and there are legions of advisers working in this field who can be engaged for support, virtually as well as physically.

Public Spaces – individual and practitioner responses

SNS are also powerful tools for practitioners or small communities and offer opportunities to **build strong communities of practice**, knowledge sharing groups, and support networks for front-line AIDS educators, whether those educators use SNS as their communication medium or not.

Practitioners should be enabled and encouraged to **make use of professional online networking tools in their day-to-day work** where this adds value to an organisations work by increasing the flow of information, creating space for practitioners to offer support to each other, and creating collaboration spaces.

Organisations should consider **supporting the development of interest specific groups within SNS**, or professional SNS platforms to support practitioner networking. This is obviously important in areas where workers are geographically distributed, with limited resources. However, it is also especially important for people working with HIV/AIDS issues to be able to find and network with others facing the same challenges, particularly in countries or cultures where the issues and associated groups are exposed to

stigma and discrimination.

Individual **practitioners may also find it useful to explore their role as convenors of local networks** – able to support the people they work with. Similarly, practitioners at the local level have a key role to play in feeding relevant local content into networks through both a professional presence in SNS, and through their personal presence.

Where a network lends itself to users having celebrities or high-profile individuals within their networks, the potential of working with these individuals to capitalise on their status as role-models within the networks, with significant personal audiences, is worth exploring.

Personal spaces – organisational responses

It is difficult for large scale organisations to engage directly with individuals in the personal layer of SNS. Primarily such engagement will come through supporting local practitioners and volunteers to use SNS as communication tools (with an emphasis on supporting peer-to-peer communication likely to prove fruitful). However, organisations can supply media and applications which individuals can use as part of their self-expression in personal SNS spaces. A simple example of this may be applications which allow individual SNS users to display a red ribbon on their personal profile, or an application which allows a user to send AIDS awareness advice to their friends in an engaging way.

When it comes to practitioners responses to SNS, there are two levels at which individual practitioners can respond.

- Identify the impact of SNS on the populations they work with, and ensure they address it in their work. This does not necessarily mean directly using SNS tools – but might involve monitoring how SNS are affecting young people's relationship formation – and including messages that address risks factors this may create in conventional outreach.
- Actively using SNS as a communications tool, for organised outreach, support and counselling amongst other things.

There are direct analogies between physical world outreach activities, such as “detached youth work” and virtual world activities which require similar kinds of organisational frameworks setting out whom by, how and why certain approaches should be adopted.⁹⁴ Organisations should address such issues as:

- Who is allowed to use SNS as part of their work and in what ways?
- What guidance is provided for staff to manage their personal and professional SNS profiles and how to operate between them?
- What recording of contact should take place?
- What guidelines exist for workers and young people about conduct in online SNS spaces?
- How should workers deal with concerns about young people's safety or conduct?

Personal Spaces, personal responses and sex

SNS offer new and potentially significant opportunities for engaging with people directly and individually and on sensitive issues.

- An SNS profile is a personal space, where users project an image of themselves to the outside world, mainly of friends but sometimes also reaching out to a wider world. It connects them to a sense of self. If this sounds unlikely, notice how often – and with what care and attention – people choose and change their photos. A profile tells the story of my life as I want it to be seen: the irreverence, tough love and playfulness of the average group of friends means that it has to be a credible story but it is a place where “I” locate elements of my identity. That sense of self, that identity connects to that part of “me” that engages in relationships, sexual or otherwise.
- It is a space for private conversations. In one sense it is no different from using email or text, and indeed both of those media can be and are being used as part of personal support and counselling. However the SNS traffic is largely restricted to groups of friends, sometimes a small group of close friends and it is often frequent. This turns the SNS space into one of the primary communication channels for discussing personal issues.
- The evidence from working in SNS, even in quite public spaces, is that people respond in a personal way to other individuals. This is notable when working in an organisation, but visibly identifying oneself as an individual: responses are to the person in the organisation in a style that is more personal than typical responses to issues or organisational messaging.

As discussed earlier, organisations, groups and individuals are using SNS for outreach and counselling work in different ways.

- Providing help lines on issues of sexual relationships and behaviour that connect either to direct support in the SNS (through chat or messaging) or linking to other media like recorded information obtained through telephone hot lines.
- Trying to encourage group conversations and discussions using chat or wall postings.
- Responding directly to messages, status or otherwise. Clearly this is only appropriate if the message is already public or when the responder is accepted as a friend or group member.
- Setting up anonymous message boards.

Peer mentoring and support is a traditional and effective approach to working with young people around all aspects of their lives, including sex and relationships. SNS are tailor made to facilitate or support this kind of work. Young people have always tended to get most of their information about sex (accurate or not) from their peers. So SNS are a potentially useful extension of that which could possibly enable practitioners to influence their conversations. Clearly, the most appropriate way of participating will vary with the contexts, the people concerned and the applications available. However, here are some general principles for engagement:

- Be real: the workers must be themselves, identified and open about their affiliations and able to confirm their official backing.

- Be supported and mentored: able to discuss issues with people more experienced in the general areas of support and health, if not in new media.
- Be consistent and engaged: SNS conversations are typically made up of short, frequent exchanges over time. Peer and other mentors need to be a fixed point in this constantly changing world.
- Be informed: either directly or through rapidly available back-up support, able to respond as issues arise.
- Be pragmatic: SNS may be the primary point of conversation but there are many more specialist services to which people can be referred.

10. MOVING THE AGENDA FORWARD: SOME TANGIBLE NEXT STEPS

People and organisations across the globe will continue to take up and use social media as their use and availability continues to grow rapidly. This will happen whether or not AIDS organisations and funders concentrate energy on this area. However, those efforts could be supported, extended and made many times more effective through targeted programmes. This would require new or diverted resources being made available. We outline below some areas we believe would deliver the best return on investment.

If not now, when?

Invest in building capacity and sharing learning in non-OECD countries where social media are taking off.

Our research shows that people and organisations in the South are only just beginning to use social media for social change purposes. From activity in the UK and US over the past five years, there is a growing body of evidence of how organisations and individuals can use new media effectively. New media itself makes connecting these constituencies easier and more cost effective than traditional capacity building activities since regional, national and local face-to-face activities are more easily facilitated and supported.

Specifically, we suggest:

- Develop a social network/group within SNS for practitioners involved with aids2031 and associated programmes and commit resources to community management to help this grow as a knowledge and practice sharing hub.
- Establish programmes to test and innovate in SNS based outreach, bringing together people who work in social media with those experienced in working with young people in specific locations. The experience and good practice standards that youth workers bring to the table needs to inform application and programme development while enabling them to operate without having to scale a long social-media learning curve.

Research the known unknowns

While it is traditional for research reports to recommend new areas of research we believe that this area of work is both growing in importance and changing so rapidly that continued primary research is essential to be able to keep pace and identify the most promising areas for AIDS communicators to develop. Specifically, we suggest:

1. Develop a social media monitor (research programme) focused on HIV/AIDS education. This would aim to:
 - Update and maintain the information we have gathered on our target areas; develop similar data sets for other locations of specific interest to the HIV/AIDS activists or where usage is exploding
 - Research in more depth and over a longer time period behaviour and usage patterns in non-OECD countries than we have been able to do in this first rapid study
 - Continue to monitor technological and business driven innovations in both developed and newer markets, reporting on their implications for health communicators

2. Develop a light-weight monitoring and evaluation framework to calculate the ROI of SNS based interventions
3. Develop a risk assessment framework for engagement with SNS.⁹⁵

Try again. Fail again. Fail better.⁹⁶

Engage in a structured way with major players, particularly in the area of cross-media applications, including in mobile phone environments.

We note above the important trend within SNS of integrating broadcast and online media in multi-platform productions. Soap operas and community narratives have been used for development communications in Radio and TV. We believe that extending this approach into SNS is a major opportunity. We also believe that there would be interest from major platform players, who have already shown their preparedness to work in the HIV/AIDS field and for whom such a partnership offers increased access and reach in critical developing markets.

Establish innovation funds to pilot new ideas for SNS based outreach and communications

As we note above, working with social media in particular and Web 2.0 in general requires a very different approach to traditional principles for engaging with technology. We argue that organisations and campaigns should engage with established social networks and this needs to balance working to a standard structured, managed framework with relaxing control in terms of content and engagement activities. Many of the most successful activities started informally, often with an “amateur” look that gave space to more informal conversations. Establishing funds, possibly channelled through competitions, is an effective way of encouraging innovation at arms length.

11. ENDNOTES & REFERENCES

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- ²⁶ <http://tinyurl.com/cwxcum>, Beth Kanter, NTEN and TechSoup Webinar: Share Your Story - ROI and Social Media
- ²⁷ Christian Kreutz has a useful summary of resources on his blog: <http://www.crisscrossed.net/2009/02/26/metrics-for-social-networks-what-does-really-happen/>
- ²⁸ <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.com/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm081126/text/81126w0170.htm>
- ²⁹ <http://www.bebo.com/itdoesnthavetohappen>
- ³⁰ 9,041 Friends on 11th February 2009.
- ³¹ A web widget is a portable chunk of code that can be installed and executed within any separate HTML-based web page by an end user without requiring additional compilation. They are derived from the idea of code reuse. Other terms used to describe web widgets include: gadget, badge, module, webjit, capsule, snippet, mini and flake (Wikipedia)
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