

Achieving Corporate agility Through Online Social Networks

A Framework for Strategic Business Networks

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050691

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Science in Information Technology at Strathmore University

Faculty of Information Technology

Strathmore University

Nairobi, Kenya

June, 2011

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My absolute gratitude to God for giving me the strength and aptitude to undertake successfully complete my thesis.

I am heartily thankful to my supervisor, Freddie R. Acosta, whose encouragement, guidance and support from the initial to the final level enabled me to develop an understanding of the subject.

Lastly, my appreciation and blessings to all of those who supported me in any respect during the completion of my thesis.

Daniel Kilonzo

ABSTRACT

When a computer network connects people or organizations, it is an Online Social Network. Yet the study of such computer-supported social networks has not received as much attention as studies of online person-to-person interaction and computer-supported communication within organizations.

The purpose of this research was to examine the effectiveness of Online Social Networks as business enablers. It reviews the prevalent online networks in use today, why they are preferred over others and applies them to business processes to determine the value they bring to the business. Finally, the information gathered from the research was used to define a framework to guide organizations on how to successfully implement Online Social Networks to achieve a strong business or marketing network strategy.

The study applies a qualitative and quantitative approach. The quantitative approach employed the use of an online questionnaire aimed at collecting data to establish usage trends of Online Social Networks. The qualitative aspect entailed collecting and analyzing data from businesses that had OSN presence on Rupu.co.ke, OSN application.

The results of the investigation revealed that businesses which had Online Social Network presence based on the framework developed indicated positive growth in visibility, profits, customer relationship management and as a result general performance.

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ABBREVIATIONS

K'T - Information Communication & Technology

OSN - Online Social Networks

SNS - Social Networking Site

SNA - Social Network Analysis

SNP - Social Networking Potential

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background of Social Networking

User generated content has grown exponentially. Websites allowing its users to share content are increasing rapidly. Companies such as Facebook, Bebo, and Twitter are valued at millions of pounds. Google even paid 1.5 billion dollar for YouTube; one the largest websites offering user generated content (Thackeray & McCormack 2008)

The primary service offered by SNS is the possibility to connect to people and create, share and collaborate. The extensive use of Social Networking Sites by individuals has allowed organizations to use it effectively for other activities.

Companies are willing to pay a lot of money to advertise on these websites and access the information made available by its users. Other organizations are using these websites to extend their marketing efforts and create loyalty among their customers. This report aims to investigate a neglected use of Social Networking Sites; it will focus on how these enormously popular websites can be used by organizations to recruit people.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

With the advent of Web 2.0 the need to use Online Social Networks as business enablers is fast becoming a critical factor in helping organizations harness the internet's potential to achieve agility and competitiveness in today's market.

The growth of SNS has also not gone unnoticed; within a few years, they have entirely changed the landscape of internet. The media is constantly reporting the growth and the use of Social Networking Sites, while investors are willing to invest in companies that lack even the most basic

This study aims to fill that knowledge gap, by researching existing literature from a range of sources and by conducting primary research among the users of Social Networking Sites; the study will assist organizations in understanding this new technology and how to successfully implement it using the framework developed.

1.3 Research Objectives

- i. Select suitable social computing tools based on the types of users, their capability and needs.
- ii. Identify business areas/ functions where application of OSN can be useful.
- iii. Integrate OSN into business processes and evaluate success.
- iv. Develop a working framework! model that can be used to adopt usage of social networks in organizations.

1.4 Research Questions

This study will attempt to answer the following questions;

- i. Which OSN are in use today and why are some preferred over others?
- ii. In which business processes are OSN being used?
- iii. What value do OSN add to the firms?
- iv. Is there a defined structure to guide usage of OSN in businesses?

1.5 Project Scope and Limitations

1.5.1. Scope

The researcher will setup an online questionnaire for SNS users over 18 to determine and what they use SNS for. The researcher will also interview businesses regarding their perception of SNS and **if** their take on OSN as a business enabler.

The researcher will also develop a Facebook application to engage participant-observation over a two month period. The researcher will typically observe the usage of Facebook Business Application tool - Rupu.co.ke, its usage, growth and statistics. To

1.5.2. Limitations

Although this research was carefully prepared there were shortcomings and limitations. Primarily, the research was conducted within a semester which presents a time constraint in conducting a more in depth study. Also, the population of the experimental group is small, only thirty-five users and ten business representatives responded to the questionnaire which presents the challenge of determining if the sample could represent the entire population.

Internet use in Africa is still relatively green and most of the information available in books, online and other sources is reflecting the Western Social traits which might not be the case here in Africa.

1.6 Justification of the Research

Social networking has been growing in popularity on the Web for several years now. In recent years, organizations have begun to see how much it can benefit them as well.

Social networking can help a business gain contacts, clients, and increased visibility and overall business performance.

To make the most of social networking, it's important to fully understand the concept of social networking and how it can be applied in ways that will help in business.

Chapter 2:Literature Review

This chapter discusses the findings derived from extensive secondary research that has been undertaken. The findings are primarily gathered from journals, textbooks, websites and academic literature. The researcher focused on retrieving information on the Impact of Web 2.0, Social Networking Sites, and usage of OSN in business today.

Web 2.0

The key characteristic of Web 2.0 is that it lets people collaborate and share information online. It has been described as an architecture of participation by O'Malley and Mitusis (2002). The term Web 2.0 became notable after the first O'Reilly Media Web 2.0 conference in 2004. Tim O'Reilly states that Web 2.0 is ultimately about harnessing network effects and the collective intelligence of users to build applications that literally get better the more people use them (O'Malley & Mitusis, 2002). One might recognize elements of this architecture in the form of blogs, wikis, podcasts, P2P file sharing, video sharing, photo sharing, virtual worlds and social networks.

Basically, Web 2.0 is about making computing and media social. It is built around social software' that enables people to connect or collaborate through computer-mediated communication and, enabling consumers to easily form, join and participate in online communities. It is not one single type of software, but rather to the use of multiple modes of computer-mediated communication that can result in community formation. Within online communities real-life meetings are a valued, and these online and offline meetings complement each other. This is highlighted out by Cooke and Butler (2008) -real-life meetings are a part of the communication repertoire, and this is one of the reasons that they have helped to transform the distribution of music through social network sites such as MySpace. Going to the

actual gig can become an integral of the as it might be recorded, shared and then relived via various Web 2.0 services. This is also evident with - Tweetups (see Figure 1), where people connected through the micro-blogging social network Twitter, will arrange a physical meet up of likeminded individuals in order to exchange knowledge and build social capital.



Figure 1: Tweet Deck (Source: tweetdeck.com)

Web 2.0 is about collaboration and interaction. These activities are performed in many different ways. Connode & Krishnamurthy (2008) listed some of the popular websites (see Table 1), however they indicated that some of these website, they consider to be Web 1.5, as it fails to offer sufficient ways for the users to interact with the content (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008).

Feature Class	Feature	facebook	YouTube	flickr	Live Journal	MySpace	Digg	Friendster	Amazon	Ebay	Craigslist	Slashdot
Profile Details	Age	✓	✓	□	✓	✓	□	✓	□	□	□	□
	Location	✓	✓	□	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	□	□
	Gender	✓	□	□	□	✓	□	✓	□	□	□	□
	Testimonials	✓	✓	✓	□	✓	□	✓	□	✓	□	□
	Other data	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	□	□	□	✓
Connectivity	Friends	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	□	□	✓
	Subscriptions	□	✓	✓	✓	□	✓	□	□	□	□	□
	Groups	✓	□	✓	✓	✓	□	✓	□	□	□	□
Content	Main content	profile photos	video	photo	blogs photos	profile blog photos	link	profile photos	product	product	ads photos	article
	Other content											
	Tagging	✓	✓	✓	✓	□	□	□	✓	□	□	□
	Friends only	✓	□	✓	✓	✓	□	□	□	□	□	□
	Comments	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	□	✓	✓	□	✓
	Editable content	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	✓	□	□	□
	Rateable content	□	✓	✓	□	□	✓	□	✓	✓	□	✓
	Viewing statistics	□	✓	✓	□	□	✓	□	□	✓	□	□
Technical	Public API	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Embedding allowed	✓			✓	✓						
	Many RSS feeds		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	
	Private messages	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				
	Web	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5

Table 1: Features of Popular Websites (Source: Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008)

In order to further understand how these websites have managed to grow exponentially, some of the elements of Web 2.0 technologies are discussed.

Hoegg, Martignoni, Meckel, and Stanoevska-Slabeva (2006) state that from a business model perspective, not the resulting community but the service is of importance that has the potential to result into a community. Hoegg et al (2006) indicate that the main focus in Web 2.0 environment lies on tools and services that allow content to be collaboratively created, managed and shared. The participation model offers a great visual of what has been said previously (see Figure 2). The

objective and the vision is what the tool or service wants to achieve, User is responsible for the content and the service provider supplies the technical framework.

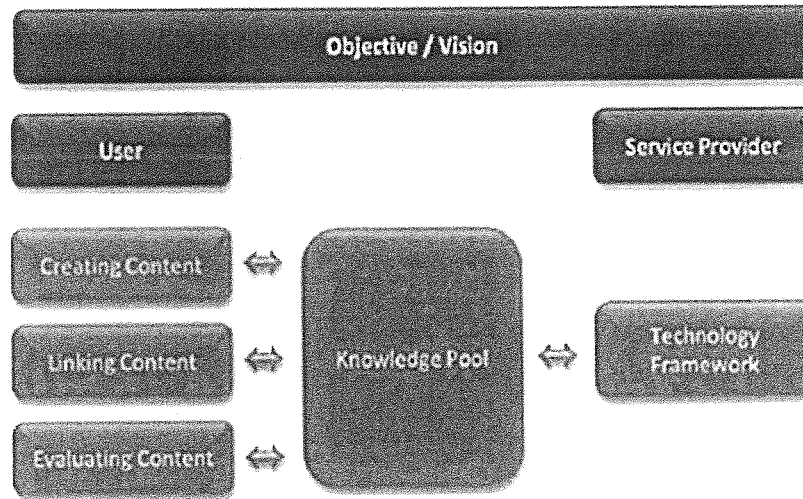


Figure 2: Participation model of a Web 2.0 service (Source: Hoegg et al 2006 p.9)

As mentioned, Web 2.0 consists of several new Web Technologies (see table 2). A highly accepted feature of the new Web is Blogging, although it is basically a personal homepage in diary format. (O'Reilly 2007). Skrenta (2005) comments on the chronological organization of a blog "it seems like a trivial difference, but it drives an entirely different delivery, advertising and value chain" The description that is provided by Skrenta is very true and not limited to blogs as this is confirmed by the latest wave of business start-up where the business models seem to be completely different to traditional models.

The part that has made a difference in Blogging and in Web 2.0 is the RSS technology, O'Reilly (2007) describes it as: "RSS allows someone to link not to just a page, but to subscribe to it, with notification every time that page changes". It has been very effective in sharing content among a large group.

Another very useful Web 2.0 technology is tagging. With enormous growth of web pages; tagging allows the content to be categorized by the web users (Murugesan 2007). Folksonomies are a consequence of all these tags, their advantage over the traditional taxonomies is that they are more quickly able to response to users' needs and adapts the categorization based on the use of users. Tagging is described by Marlow, Naaman, Boyd and Davis (2006) as not a welldefined, vertical and centralized classification, users develop personal tags as a new way of organizing information, which is a compromise between personal filing and collective production of taxonomy.

Another very popular tool from the Web 2.0 stall is Social Bookmarking. This tool can be used by any webpage to make the content on the page 'shareable' among the Web 2.0 community. The content can be immediately shared on many popular Social Networking Sites, Le. Facebook, Digg and Delicious. Organizations apply this method to make their content more shareable without having to build a proper Web 2.0 compatible site.

<u>Technology</u>	<u>Description</u>
Blogs	Two way Web-based communication tool
RSS	Feeds summarising information
Tags	Keywords added to blogs or articles
Folksonomy	Refers to user generated taxonomies of information
Mashups	Web page combining information from several sources
Wikis	A collaborative authoring system for creating and editing content

Table 2: Overview of the technologies (Source: Murugesan, 2007)

All these different tools take us back to the definition of Web 2.0; which is a collectivist online society, or as Aguiton and Cardon (2007) describe Web 2.0 services as being characterized by the astonishing rise of public interpersonal relations in mediated communities, the extension of number of contacts and the growth of a new form of weak friendship.

The underlying technology is far more complex and involves AJAX, FLEX, Blog ware etc. However due to the nature of the contemporary study, this will not be discussed in further detail, According to Hoegg *et al* (2006) services on Web 2.0 are offered in three different forms. There are platforms, which offer the means for users to express themselves; online collaboration tools, which aim to improve processes by making information accessible from every location and lastly there are community services: unifying users through a common objective (see Figure 3).

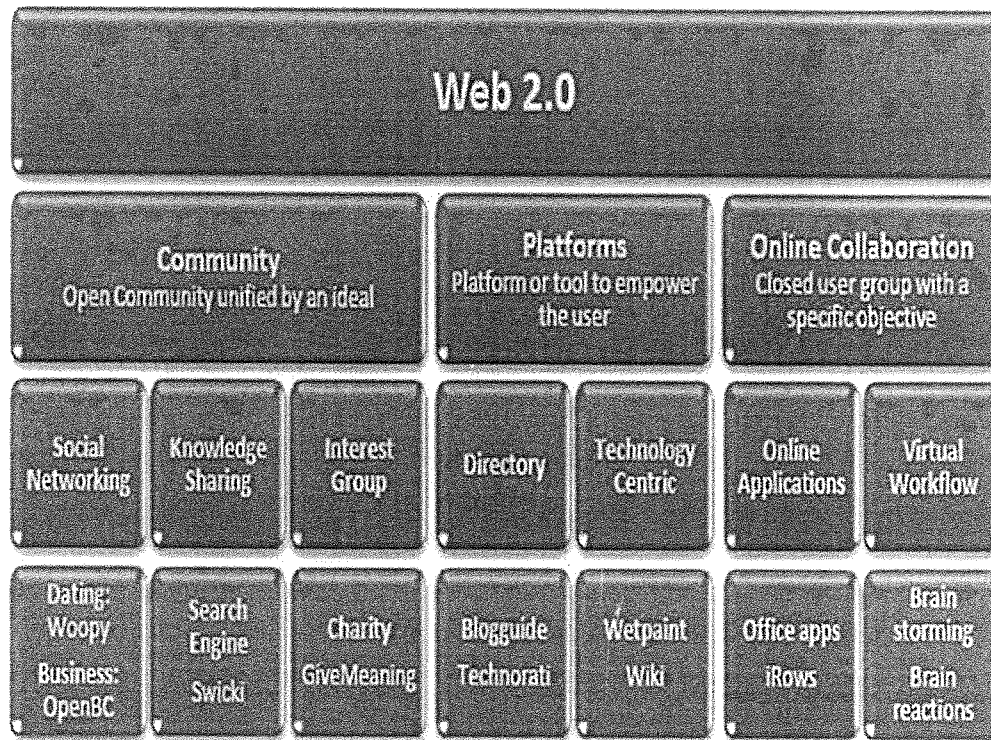


Figure 3: Overview of Web 2.0 apps (Source: Hoegg *et al*, 2006)

2.2 Online Social Networking

2.2.1 Introduction to Online Social Networking

The latest trend in online world is social networking portals (O'Marchu, Breslin and Decker 2004) Social networking sites have rapidly gained popularity, with Twitter posting growth rates exceeding 1300% (Seeking Alpha, 2009). Globally the active memberships on Social Networking Sites were expected to reach 230 million by the end of 2007 (Data Monitor, 2007), Today Facebook alone boasts with more than 200 million members. Social Networking Sites are considered to be one the most prominent activities within the Web 2.0 arena. Although they have become increasingly interesting in marketing context, literature is still limited.

A definition of Social Network Sites is provided by Boyd and Ellison (2008) defines social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or a semipublic profile within a bounded, system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system"

What must be noted is that Boyd and Ellison (2008) use the term 'Social Network Site' rather than 'Social Networking Site'. They justify this by saying that networking is usually done between strangers, while a network is the people already familiar to the person. Although networking is possible on these websites, it is commonly not their primary intention (Boyd and Ellison 2008). The definition provided by Weaver and Morrison (2008) does focus on social networking stating: "In the context of today's electronic media, social networking has come to mean individuals using the Internet and Web applications to communicate in previously impossible ways".

Social Networking sites tend to support the maintenance of pre-existing networks, others help strangers meet online based on their interests, political views or activities. Some sites attract a range of audiences based on common language or shared racial, sexual, and religious or nationality based identities. The difference between Social Networking Sites can also differ in which information and communication tools they offer, such as mobile connectivity, blogging, and photo/video-sharing (Boyd and Ellison 2008).

Gerbranda (2007) concluded that although differences exist between Social Networking Sites, they are all considered to be Social Networking Sites. However he continues with stating that when these websites are evaluated on their purpose and technology; it is possible to make three categories (see Figure 4).

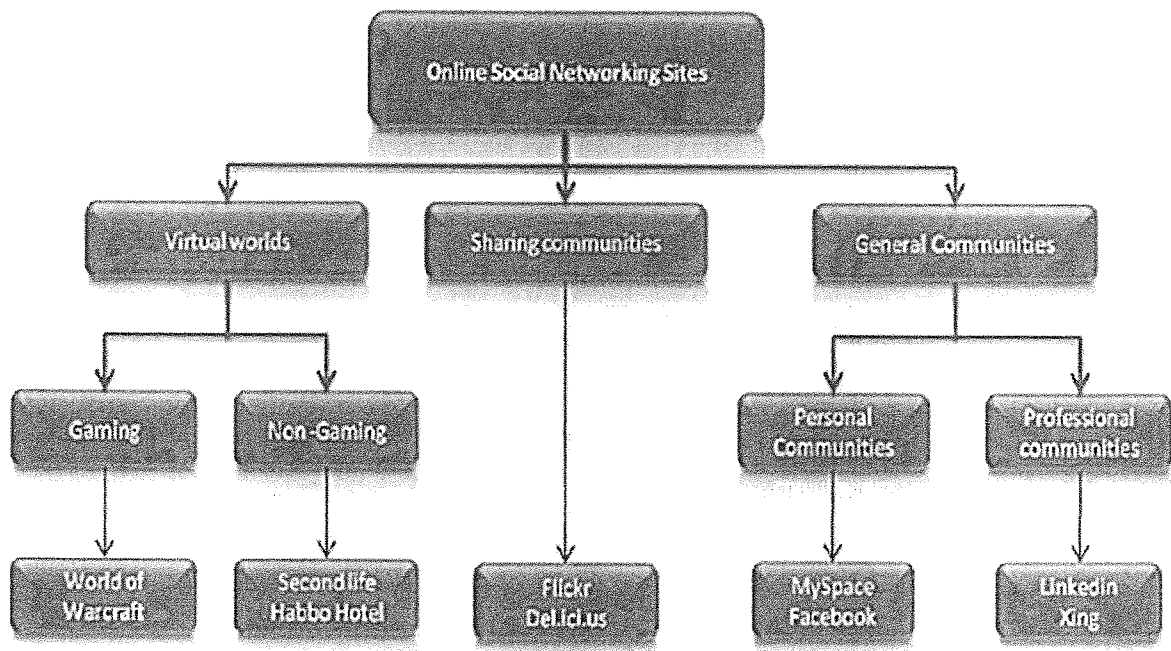


Figure 4: Overview of Social Networking Sites (Source: Gerbranda 2007 p. 10)

2.2.2 Mapping - Offline Social Networks to Online Social Networks

One can compare social networking to the concept of the six-degrees of separation. Based on the idea that any two people can be connected through a chain of five or less intermediaries, social networking can occur through social network sites and communities that may not have formed before the Internet. Through these sites, people join, and then invite their established contacts to do the same. Those contacts will likewise invite other individuals (Gilbert & Karahalios, 2009).

SNS are created to assist in online networking. These sites are generally communities created to support a common theme. Since the creation of social networking sites such as MySpace, LinkedIn, and Facebook, individuals are given opportunities to meet new people and friends in their own community and across the world.

Businesses can follow this trend. MySpace encourages smaller and medium-sized businesses to set up an online storefront as a way to advertise and promote business activities. By doing so, individuals can become "friends" or "fans" of the profile, and will be updated on current events, specials, and other essential information the business would like to share.

As described in the six-degrees of separation concept, a new friend will expose an organization to a new set of people who are listed as their respective friends.

2.2.3 How SNS Work

While SNSs have implemented a wide variety of technical features, their backbone consists of visible profiles that display an articulated list of Friends who are also users of the system. Profiles are unique pages where one can "type oneself into being" (Sunden, 2003). After joining an SNS, an individual is asked to fill out forms containing a series of questions. The profile is generated using the answers to these questions, which typically include descriptors such as age, location, interests, and an "about me" section. Most sites also encourage users to upload a profile

photo. Some sites allow users to enhance their profiles by adding multimedia content or modifying their profile's look and feel. Others, such as Facebook, allow users to add modules (Applications) that enhance their profile.

The visibility of a profile varies by site and according to user discretion. By default, profiles on Friendster and Tribe.net are crawled by search engines, making them visible to anyone, regardless of whether or not the viewer has an account (Ellison, Nicole, Lampe, Cliff, Steinfield & Charles 2009). Alternatively, LinkedIn controls what a viewer may see based on whether she or he has a paid account. Sites like MySpace allow users to choose whether they want their profile to be public or "Friends only." Facebook takes a different approach—by default, users who are part of the same "network" can view each other's profiles, unless a profile owner has decided to deny permission to those in their network. Structural variations around visibility and access are one of the primary ways that SNSs differentiate themselves from each other.

After joining a social network site, users are prompted to identify others in the system with which they have a relationship. The label for these relationships differs depending on the site. Popular terms include "Friends," "Contacts," and "Fans." Most SNSs require bi-directional confirmation for Friendship, but some do not. These one-directional ties are sometimes labeled as "Fans" or "Followers," but many sites call these Friends as well. The term "Friends" can be misleading, because the connection does not necessarily mean friendship in the everyday vernacular sense, and the reasons people connect are varied (Boyd, 2006).

The public display of connections is a crucial component of SNSs. The Friends list contains links to each Friend's profile, enabling viewers to traverse the network graph by clicking through the Friends lists. On most sites, the list of Friends is visible to anyone who is permitted to view the profile, although there are exceptions. For instance, some MySpace users have hacked their

profiles to hide the Friends display, and LinkedIn allows users to opt out of displaying their network.

Most SNSs also provide a mechanism for users to leave messages on their Friends' profiles. This feature typically involves leaving "comments," although sites employ various labels for this feature. In addition, SNSs often have a private messaging feature similar to webmail. While both private messages and comments are popular on most of the major SNSs, they are not universally available.

An OSN can therefore be defined as a web based social structure made of individuals (or organizations) called "nodes," which are tied (connected) by one or more specific types of interdependency, such as friendship, kinship, financial exchange, dislike, sexual relationships, or relationships of beliefs, knowledge or prestige.

2.2.4 Growth and evolution of Social Network Sites

The first recognizable social network site launched in 1997. SixDegrees.com allowed users to create profiles, list their Friends and, beginning in 1998, surf the Friends lists. Each of these features existed in some form before SixDegrees, of course. Profiles existed on most major dating sites and many community sites. AIM and ICQ buddy lists supported lists of Friends, although those Friends were not visible to others. Classmates.com allowed people to affiliate with their high school or college and surf the network for others who were also affiliated, but users could not create profiles or list Friends until years later. SixDegrees was the first to combine these features.

SixDegrees promoted itself as a tool to help people connect with and send messages to others. While SixDegrees attracted millions of users, it failed to become a sustainable business and, in 2000, the service closed. Looking back, its founder believes that SixDegrees was simply ahead

of its time (Spertus, Sahami, & Buyukkokten 2007). While people were already flocking to the Internet, most did not have extended networks of friends who were online. Early adopters complained that there was little to do after accepting Friend requests, and most users were not interested in meeting strangers.

From 1997 to 2001, a number of community tools began supporting various combinations of profiles and publicly articulated Friends. AsianAvenue, BlackPlanet, and MiGente allowed users to create personal, professional, and dating profiles—users could identify Friends on their personal profiles without seeking approval for those connections (Steicher & Counts, 2008).

Likewise, shortly after its launch in 1999, LiveJournal listed one-directional connections on user pages. LiveJournal's creator suspects that he fashioned these Friends after instant messaging buddy lists (Ryberg & Larsen, 2008)—on LiveJournal, people mark others as Friends to follow their journals and manage privacy settings. The Korean virtual worlds site Cyworld was started in 1999 and added SNS features in 2001, independent of these other sites. Likewise, when the Swedish web community LunarStorm refashioned itself as an SNS in 2000, it contained Friends lists, guestbooks, and diary pages (Skog, 2007).

The next wave of SNSs began when Ryze.com was launched in 2001 to help people leverage their business networks. Ryze's founder reports that he first introduced the site to his friends—primarily members of the San Francisco business and technology community, including the entrepreneurs and investors behind many future SNSs (Boyd, 2008). In particular, the people behind Ryze, Tribe.net, LinkedIn, and Friendster were tightly entwined personally and professionally. They believed that they could support each other without competing (Festa, 2003). In the end, Ryze never acquired mass popularity, Tribe.net grew to attract a passionate niche user base, LinkedIn became a powerful business service, and Friendster became the most

significant, if only as "one of the biggest disappointments in Internet history" (Chafkin, 2007).

Figure 1 illustrates the growth of major online social networks from 1997 to 2006.

2.3 Business use of Online Social Networks

The use of OSN is not exclusively for individuals, organizations are just beginning to recognize and utilize the power of Web 2.0 social media (Thackeray & McCormack, 2008). Organizations that understand the benefits of using tools can internally allow their employees to communicate faster, more flexible and use it practically anywhere in the world, while allowing them to connect with their customers. Innovapost for instance began developing strategies to make the most of the opportunities this new environment offers (Xarchos & Charland, 2008). Innovapost used Web 2.0 technology to develop a new portal that allowed its employees to seek new opportunities within the companies, while allowing other employees (primarily managers) to post opportunities. Other technologies are being developed to further exploit the capability of Web 2.0.

In the report 'A new marketing paradigm: share of customer, not market share' Peppers and Rogers (1995), describe the new method of relationship marketing enabled by technology. They state:

"The relationship marketing approach has the potential to change radically the rules of business competition, for example growth driven by mass marketing encourages businesses to chase short-term profits based on transaction volume. In contrast, one-to-one marketing gives businesses new incentives to invest to gain more loyalty of their most profitable customers"

(Peppers and Rogers 1995 p. 48)

They conclude by using extensive data gathering through new web technologies, organizations can create a competitive advantage. This can lead to extended customer loyalty and higher customer satisfaction.

As traditional online marketing tactics, such as banner ads and pop-ups, are becoming less applicable in the world of social media (eMarketer 2008), it is up to the organizations to embrace the new technology and put it to full use.

Chapter 3:

3.1

This chapter details the research design, discusses the variables and shows the setting of the study and target population. It also, looks at sampling techniques and sample size, the construction of research instruments and where the pilot study took place. Finally, the chapter discusses validity and reliability, data collection procedures and data analysis techniques.

3.2 Research Design

The researcher has adopted a descriptive survey design utilizing both qualitative and quantitative approaches. A descriptive approach aims at getting information that describes a situation, behavior, attitudes of the individual and the community.

A Descriptive approach is ideal for this study because the aim of the study is to factually, accurately and systematically explore emerging issues associated with certain occurrences associated with harnessing the power of OSN in organizations as envisioned by the study.

The rationale for adopting a survey design is that it is useful in gaining insights into the general picture of a situation without utilizing the entire population, because it would be taxing to try and study the whole population. SNA of the designed SNS business page based on the most popular SNS forms the qualitative aspect while questionnaires provide for the quantitative part (see Figure 5).

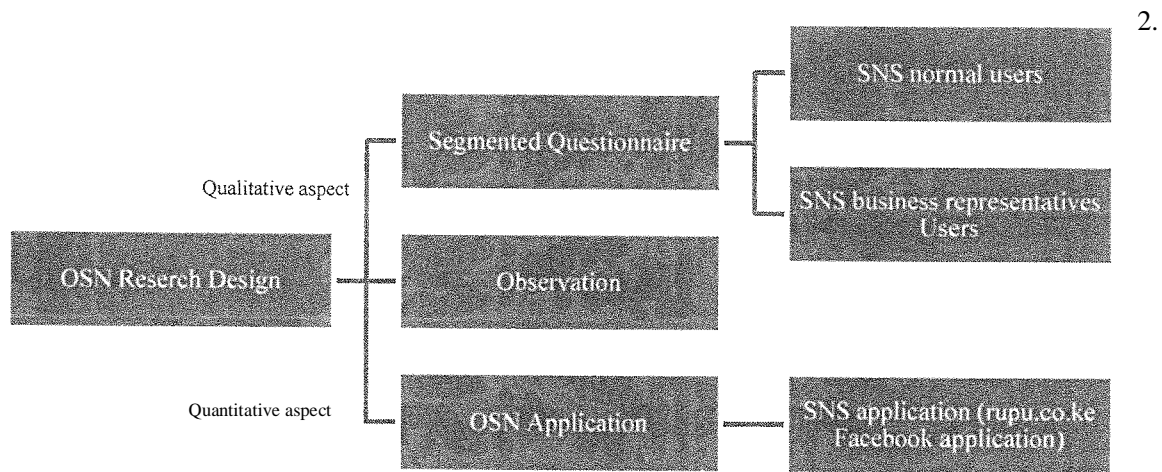


Figure 5: Research Design

3.3 Study setting

The research was carried on online using Survey Monkey, a free on line survey and analysis tool, to collect and analyze the responses gathered. An application was developed on Facebook, a popular OSN, to model a business OSN and to evaluate success of using OSN in business.

3.4 Target Population

The target population for SNS usage was standard SNS users who were over the age of 18 years and who had knowledge and at least 2 month's experience in using any SNS.

3.5 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

The sample of the study was from described target group. The study was first to employ purposive sampling to frequent users of SNS. Stratified random sampling was then employed to select 10 % of the total number of users.

Questionnaires and a SNS business funpage were constructed in line with the objectives and used to collect information from sample. The SNS business funpage was to investigate the viability of OSN presence.

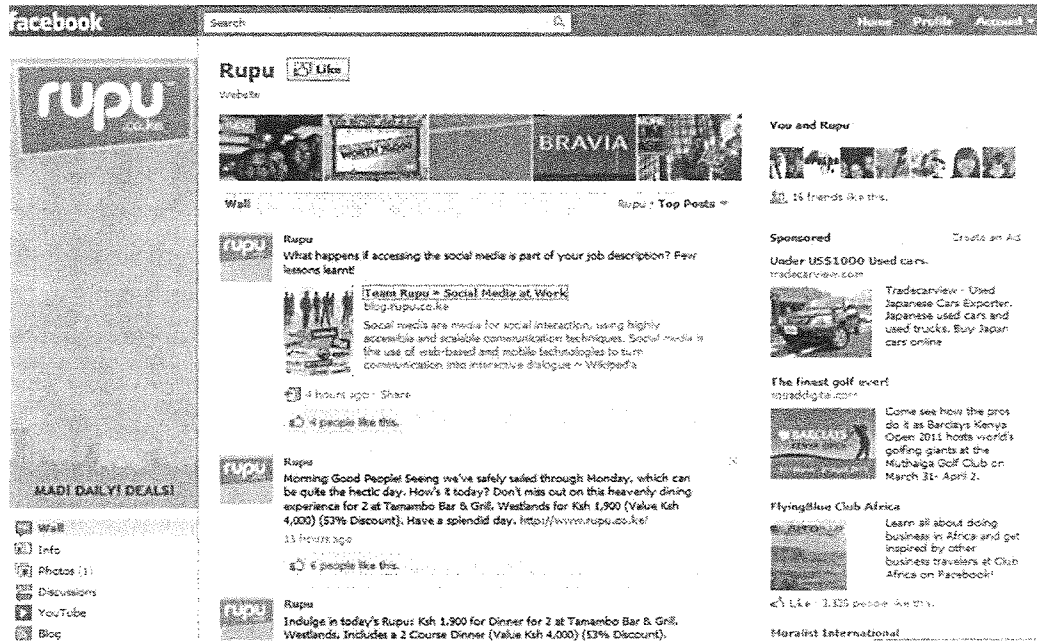


Figure 6: Rupu.co.ke Facebook application (Source: Facebook OSN)

Rupu.co.ke is a group marketing tool that features heavily discounted deals on products and services from companies in various industries including food & beverage, insurance, entertainment, health and beauty just to name a few.

3.7 Pilot Study

The instruments were piloted online on Survey Monkey and Facebook, a progressive SNS. The purpose of the pilot study was to ensure usability and objectivity of the instruments. The instruments were then adjusted accordingly.

3.8 Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected by the use of questionnaires, growth statistics from the OSN and feedback from users who applied OSN for business.

Additional information was also received from participating businesses in regard to the percentage growth realized from participating in Rupu.co.ke Facebook application vis-a-vis the overall growth. This information was based on the client segment that learnt about the business! product from Rupu.co.ke Facebook application.

3.9 Variables

The dependent variable was the usage of SNS for networking automation and expansion of contact base in line with the objectives, while the independent variable were other business enablers like customer relationship management and currently employed marketing strategies.

3.10 Assumptions

The study assumes social relationships to be seen in isolation from the physical environment, economy and other factors - as if social relationships were the only enablers of business. Also, the starting point of seeing social relationships as the basis for development may require the researcher to underplay unsupportive or destructive social ties.

3.11 Data Analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected for the four objectives. Quantitative data collected were keyed in and cleaned using Survey Monkey's online statistical tools. Excel was used to analyze usage statistics of the OSN.

3.

Chapter 4: Presentation and Analysis of Findings

4.1 Age and gender of users

Respondents are primarily under 45 years old, with women slightly outnumbering men.

Respondents between 25 and 34 and between 35 and 44 years old each comprised about a fourth of the respondent base (see Figure 7)

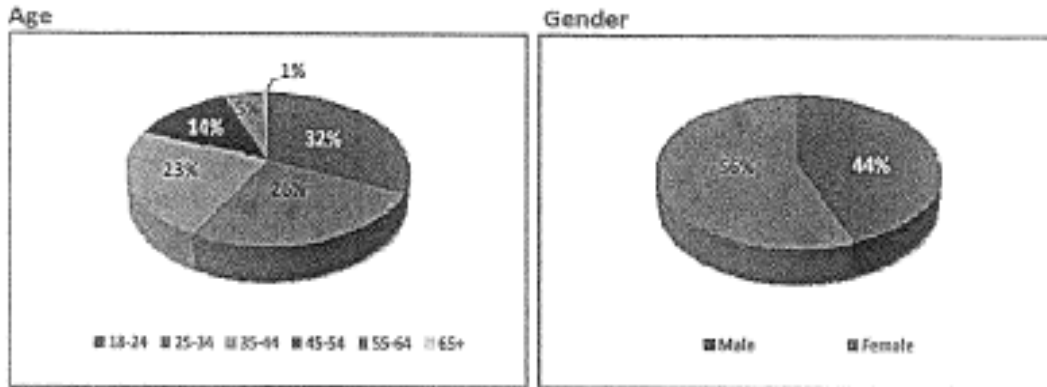


Figure 7: Comparison of Age and gender Factors

While most of the social networking sites have a balanced male vs. female audience, MySpace is the exception, with men significantly more likely to use this site. Additionally, MySpace users are also significantly more likely to describe themselves as "single" or "unmarried" rather than "married." (see Figure 8)

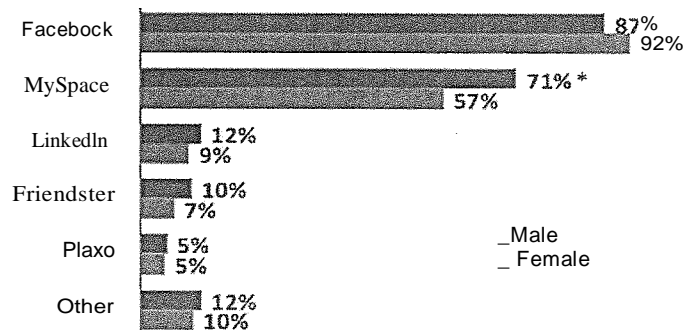


Figure 8: Social Network use by gender

5.

4.2 OSN preference

Facebook is the most popular social networking site with most of the respondents (42%) using this site.

MySpace is also popular among social networking users, with two-thirds of the respondents currently using the site (see Figure 9) .

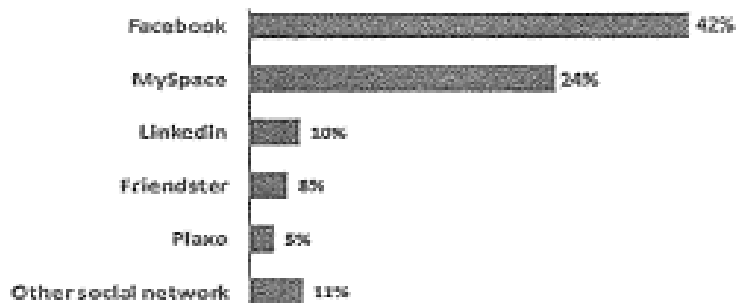


Figure 9: Online Social Networks Usage

4.3 User Networks

MySpace users have the largest average number of friends, 174, possibly reflecting the relative age of the site (My Space was founded in the fall of 2003.) Facebook and Friendster users also have large numbers of friends (138 and 117, respectively). Facebook is a relative newcomer, having opened up membership beyond enrolled college students in the fall of 2006 (Figure 10)

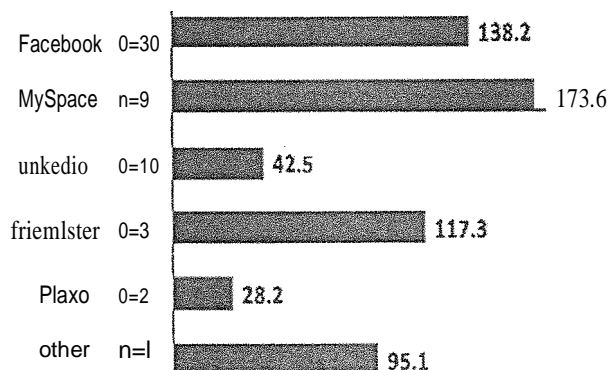


Figure 10: Average number of friend! contact by site

6.
4.4. use of online social networks

Most facebook users (88%) are checking the site at least once a day. Over half the respondents using MySpace and Friendster are also checking these sites at least once a day. Plaxo

Linkedin users tend to check these sites less frequently. (see Figure 11)

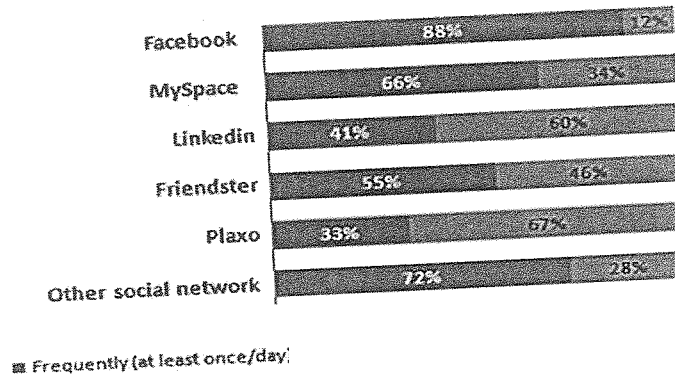


Figure 11: Frequency of checking OSN

Social networking users check on their OSN accounts for extended periods" 22 hours weekly on average _ with women significantly higher than men (24.9 hours and 18.0 hours, respectively).

Facebook users are spending 15.4 hours on average per week on the site, significantly higher than the time spent on any other social networking site. MySpace users are spending about 9 hours per week, significantly higher than time spent on LinkedIn and Plaxo. 31 % of the sampled OSN users have only been at it a year or less. Another 30% have been using social networking sites for one to two years, with the rest having used these sites for at least three years. (Figure 12)

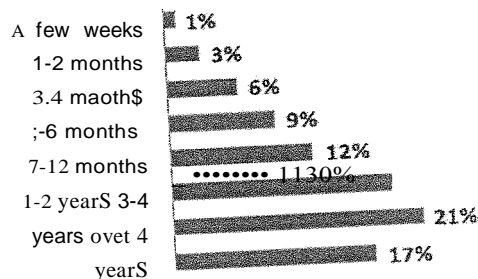


Figure 12: Length of time using OSN

7.
4.5 OSN Access

As expected, most respondents (95%) access social networking sites from public computers (e.g. cyber cafes). Just under two out of every five users (38%) also access their networking sites from work. (see Figure 13) While only 12% of the mean time spent accessing networking sites is from work computers, those who access their networks from a work computer do so for an average of 6.6 hours per week - about an hour and twenty minutes daily (see Figure 14)

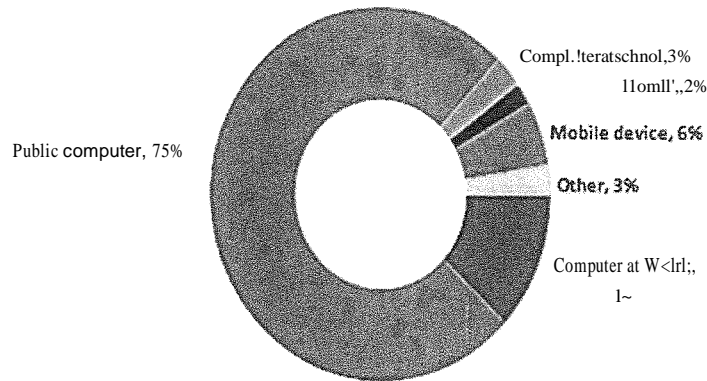


Figure 13: Modes of accessing OSN

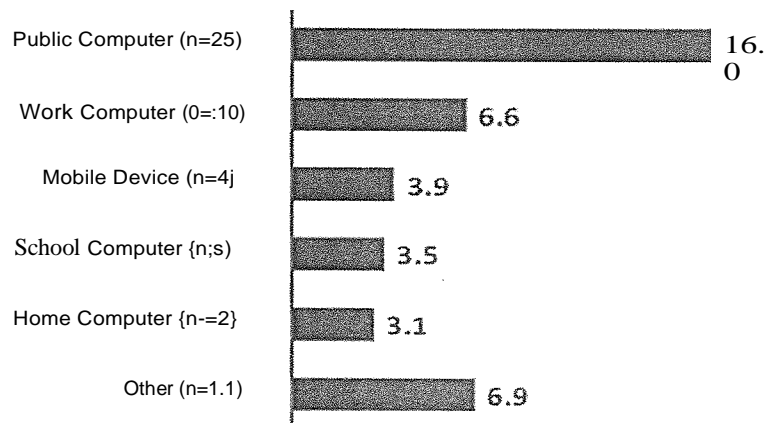


Figure 14: Mean percentage of time spent accessing OSN from each location

OSN usage: personal Vs. Business use

Online social networking is predominantly a personal tool, with 72% of respondents using social networking sites exclusively for personal use. The remaining respondents are using these sites for both personal and business use. (see Figure 15)

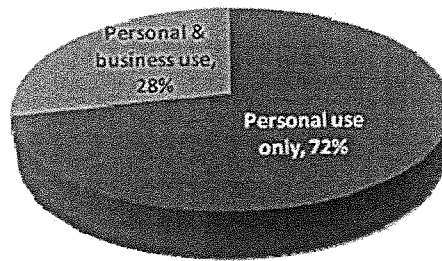


Figure 15: Personal Vs Business use of OSN

LinkedIn has the highest percentage of users for both personal and business use (65%). A small minority of LinkedIn users (2%) use online social networking exclusively for business use. Only a third of MySpace and Facebook users (30% and 28%, respectively) are using the site for reasons other than personal use. (see Figure 16)

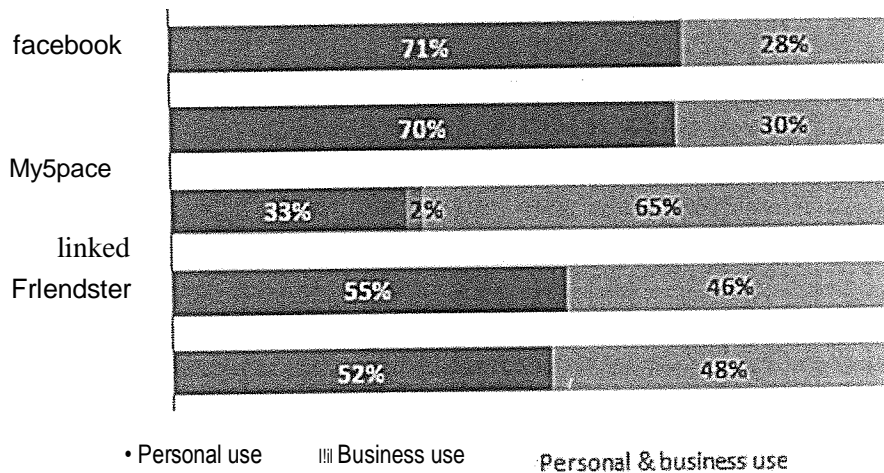


Figure 16: Personal Vs. Business use by site

Most respondents use OSN to stay in touch with family and friends. Nearly all of respondents (91%) use social networking sites to a moderate or great extent to stay in touch with friends, while about two-thirds use the sites to a moderate or great extent to stay touch with family. A quarter of respondents use social networking sites (to a moderate or great extent) to stay in touch with business associates. (see Figure 17)

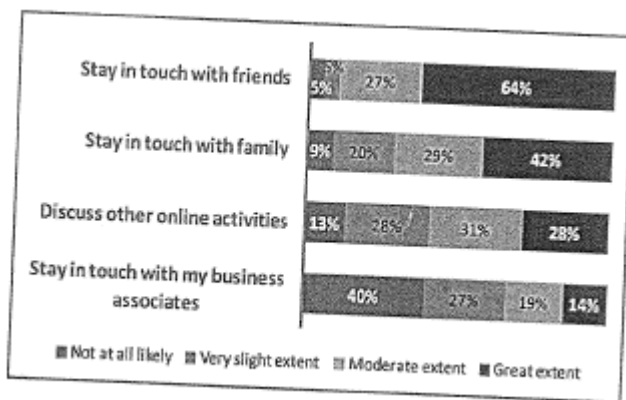


Figure 17: Level of agreement with activities

4.7 OSN and Business

45% of business representative respondents who reported to have OSN presence, of these 100% reported to have no formal processes to guide usage of OSN. 27% .Those with OSN presence admitted to having a marketing/ social capita! budget to employ someone to update and participate in the OCS. The highest percentage of OSN use was for advertising and Marketing (see Figure 18). The rCT, Retail and Media & Marketing sector proved to be strong OSN users (see Figure 19).

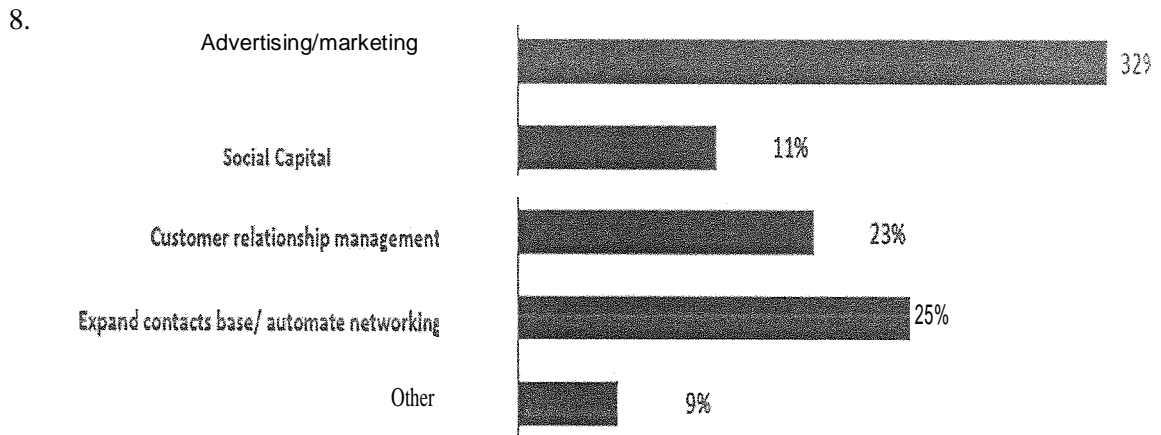


Figure 18: Business applications of OSD

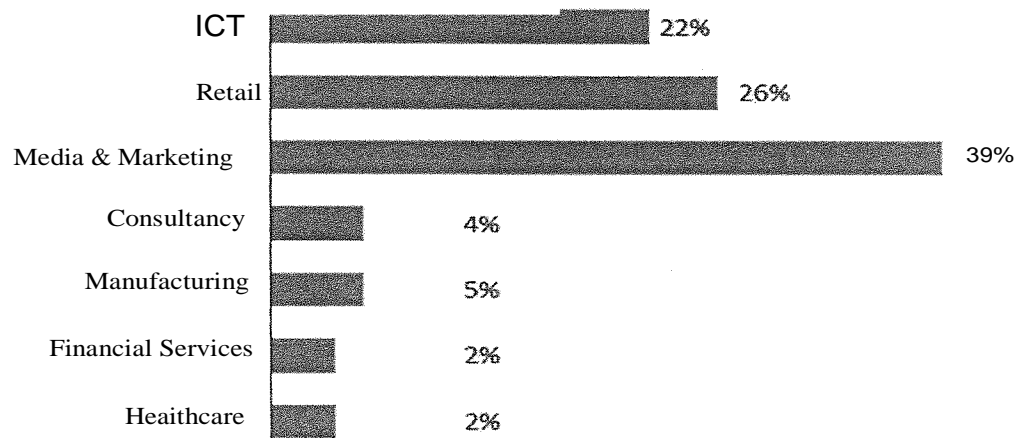


Figure 19: Industry usage of OSN

4.8 OSN Business Viability Funpage Statistics

4.8.1 OSN network Growth Statistics

The Rupu.co.ke Facebook application was developed in January 2010. The monthly increase in users was recorded monthly and is represented by the graph in Figure 20

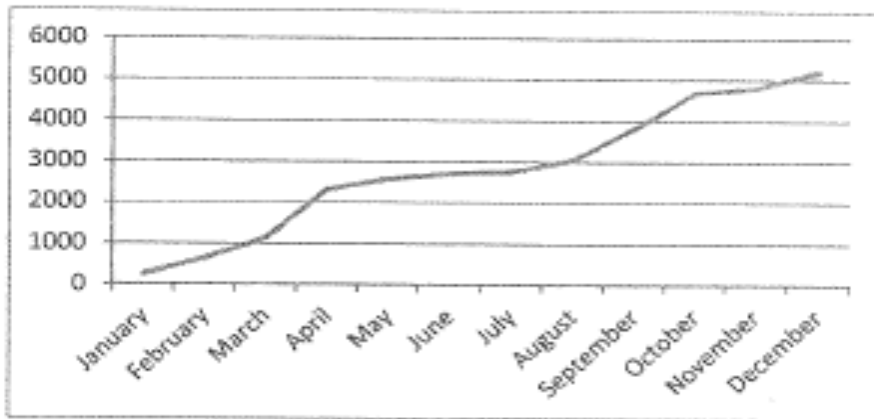


Figure 20: Rupu.co.ke Facebook application growth statistics 2010

During the month of January, there was little exposure of the Rupu.co.ke Facebook application to OSN. An advertising strategy through Facebook ads, dramatically increased awareness of the site resulting in a 17% jump in growth between January and March 2010 (250 - 1125 users).

Further advertising coupled with shared links on member users walls, registered a 31 % increase in the second quarter of 2011 (1125-2705 users). By the fourth quarter the total number of users totaled to 5200 users i.e. double the number of users in quarter 2.

This strong and steady increase in the user! client base can clearly be attributed to the networking ability of OSN

4.8.2 Business Growth Statistics

Information on business results received from the following companies as of Quarter 4 2010 in relation Quarter 1 2010 as a result of participating in Rupu.co.ke Facebook application. The participating businesses produced the information based on the client segment who reported having learnt of the product/ business through Rupu.co.ke Facebook application as a percentage of their overall progress.

	Client Base (Visibility)	Business Performance (profits)	Customer Relations Management (Efficiency)
Nyokabi Designs	67%	20%	85%
Jude Xavier (Photographer)	23%	5%	42%
Geco Car Wash	25%	40%	30%
Penya Africa (Music Shop)	52%	25%	31%
Kiola (Africa Cultural Clothes)	60%	11%	70%
Kitengela Paintball	40%	30%	15%
Waterless Control Carwash Karen	15%	40%	36%
Aqua Massage Mall	45%	32%	60%
Umba Home Accessories	34%	41%	45%

Table 3: Business growth statistics

As per the information received from the various companies who were featured on the Rupu.co.ke Facebook application, most companies registered an above average efficiency in customer relation management, mostly by being up to speed with trends.

A significant increase in profit was also realized in relation to the increase in the customer base in the participating businesses.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and recommendations

Results from the study reveal that most companies have realized the potential in OSN and they are now actively used by businesses for marketing/ advertising as well various networking functions while also being used for customer relationship management. Of the specific industries surveyed, ICT, Retail, Media & Marketing and Consultancy have high usage of business social networks. Manufacturing, Financial Services and Healthcare were below average. Overall an above average proportion of respondents in the Retail and ICT sectors made personal use of social networks, which may help explain why the take up of business social networking is more extensive in these sectors. Respondents from these two industries were into developing contacts and social capital indicating usage of OSN to develop social capital. It was discovered that only few business representative respondents are making use of OSN as business enablers and to develop social capital. It is also important to note that OSN have become trusted resources as most respondents revealed that OSN influenced their decisions toward a course of action. Finally, feedback from users who joined Rupu.co.ke Facebook application indicates significant growth in client base, profits and better customer relation management which is a strong indicator of OSN as business enablers.

There are however hindrances to effective use of OSN in regard to the results of the study. Firstly, some businesses find it hard to commit resources, both financial and human, to managing your social media presence, responding to feedback and producing new content. It may also be difficult to quantify the return on investment and the value of one channel over another in regard to OSN and other business factors. Ineffective use - for example, using the network to push for sales without engaging with customers, or failing to respond to negative feedback - may damage your reputation. Despite, the lift in organizations presence on SNS, there does not seem to be a

structured approach on to into business operations order to harness their full potential. Finally, achieving an edge through on line social however requires organizations to invest time in understanding how these networks work and how to successfully incorporate it into their strategy. All this boils down to a lack of structure or framework to guide organizations on how to successfully use OSN as a business enabler.

Overall this study confirms the rising role of social networking in the world of business. As more and more individuals make use of social networking to maintain contact with friends and acquaintances, the natural development has been for them to also establish bonds with past business contacts, existing colleagues and people they may want to do business with in the future.

The research also reveals that when it comes to business use, a growing number of companies are actively doing business through social networks. Although the most popular function of these networks is to keep in touch with contacts as social networks were traditionally conceived to enable, business has stretched the use of this channel to include new customer acquisition, customer retention, information sourcing and creation and management of customer groups and even monitoring of trends in special interest groups.

Experts have claimed that usage levels of business social networks do not prove that they are delivering a return on investment from such activity. Commercial organizations that have not yet explored professional social networking would be well advised to do so, unless they wish to become marketing laggards and out to their more nimble competitors.

Chapter 6: Framework for Successful OSN-Business Intergration

6.1 Online Social Network Implementation Framework

In order to understand how OSN can add value to a business, it is useful to take a step back and look at how IT is more broadly conceptualized to add value in the business environment.

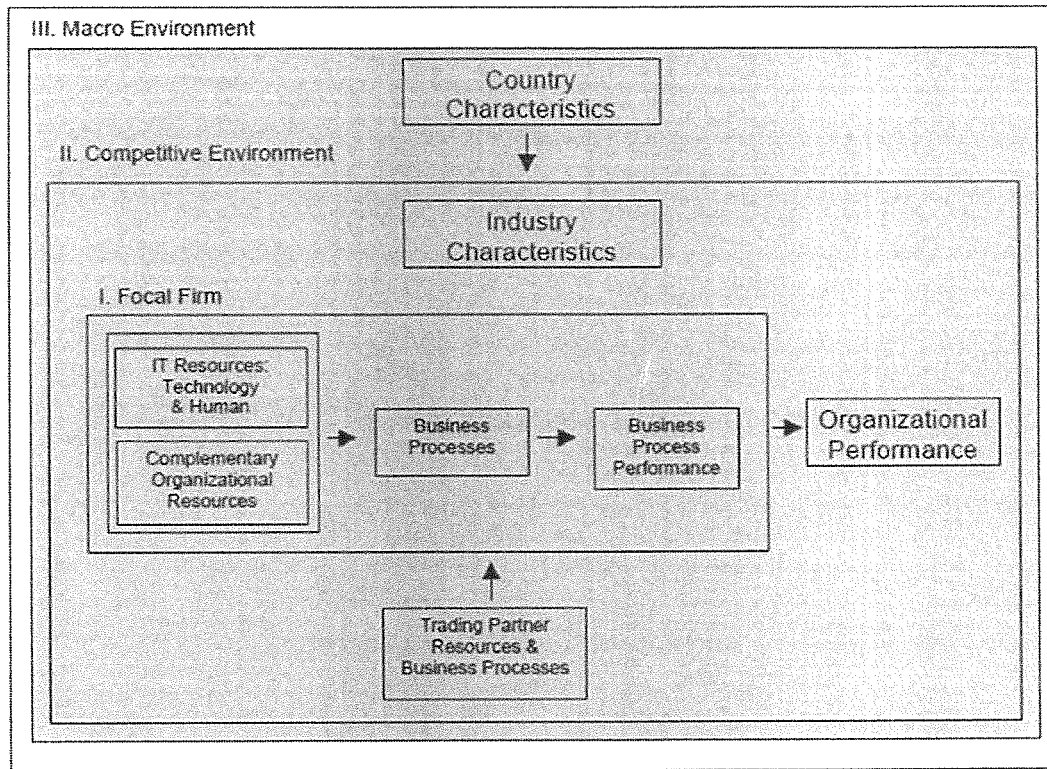


Figure 21: Business Value Model (Source: Melville, Kraemer & Gurbaxani, 2004) Melville, Kraemer & Gurbaxani (2004) conducted an extensive literature review through which they proposed a general business value model of IT (De Paula, 2007). A predominant viewpoint of the research on the Value from IT is that on the firm level, information technology indirectly affects Organizational Performance, such as increasing sales or reducing costs. Although a direct link from IT investments to organizational performance would be an ideal outcome of the research, scholars recognize that organizational performance can be affected by numerous factors

including governmental regulation, competitors, and business processes the organization

itself. The model highlights difficulties that can come into play when measuring the IT impact. An IT impact that results in improving or even retarding the performance of a business process can be completely lost when taking aggregate measures of organizational performance such as sales or cost because of the presence of other mitigating factors, such as industry impacts, regulations, or changes to resource costs as affected by partners.

The OSN features implemented can directly impact business processes, and those business processes affect organizational performance. In addition to affecting internal processes, they also impact processes that directly involve trading partners or customers. However, to develop a rich framework for evaluating the business value of OSN, it is important to specify the range of capabilities which are available in each OSN and potential business process impacts that each may make.

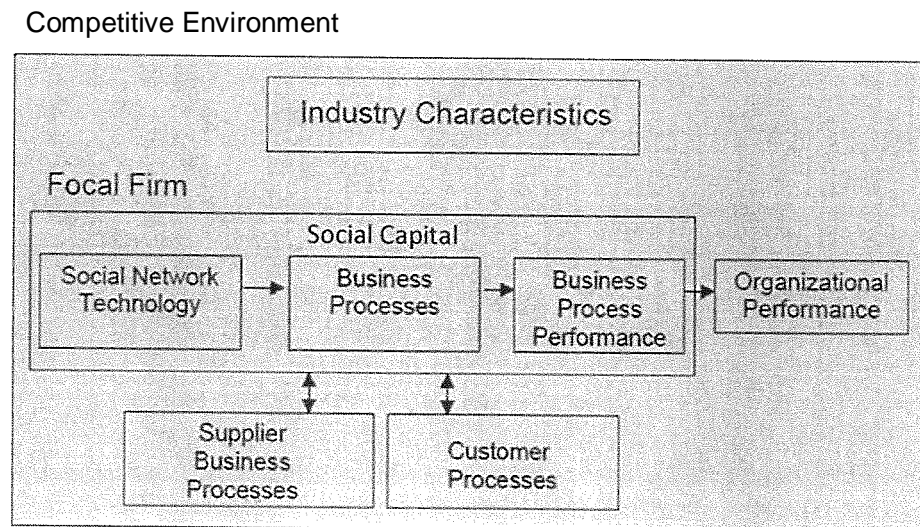


Figure 22: Business Value Framework for OSN

From Figure 20, the first phase is to determine the social networking requirements for the organization. This involves, identified the organization's stakeholders and opportunities for collaboration between and across stakeholder groups and mapping them to the organization's strategic plan and objectives. It also entails identify the opportunities for collaboration between stakeholder groups.

The second phase is about reviewing many current vendors! available OSN platforms to determine which meets the majority of your requirements. This involves analyzing the capability, functionality, application and popularity of the OSN.

The third phase involves building upon the required feature set which defines the framework for of OSN, by identifying business processes that can be supported by the social network features and their performance impacts.

The fourth phase involves implementation and mapping by incorporating the various features of the OSN into their associated business processes e.g. you can map the dynamic ads and sharing links function to the marketing business process. This phase also involves mobilizing social capital i.e. identifying a person! team specifically to manage the OSN.

The final phase involves monitoring and evaluation of the organization performance in regard to use of the OSN. This can be identified through increased sales, growth in customer base, more efficient customer relations management and overall profits.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Introduction Letter to the respondents

Thank you for taking a few minutes to answer some questions about social networking. The information collected will be used in a study of how online social networking affects business. Your insights are invaluable. *The survey is anonymous and the Individual answers will be used in a research paper.*

Please feel free to contact me on kishskill@yahoo.com.

Thank you.

Appendix B: Questionnaire Social Networking Survey

1. To ensure we get a good representation of people in groups, please state your age

18-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

54-Above

9. Which of the following online social networks do you use (check all that apply)

Facebook

Myspace

Linked
in

Friendster

Hi5

Plaxo

Other (please Specify) _____

3. For each of the contacts you use, please approximate how many friends you have

Facebook

Myspace

Linked in

Hi5

Plaxo

Other (please Specify) _____

4. How frequently do you check your online social network account

	Always logged In	5-6 times a day	1-2 times a day	Weekly	Monthly
Facebook					
Myspace					
Linked in					
Friendster					
HiS					
Plaxo					
Other (please specify)					

5. How many hours do you spend each week on your online social network site

Facebook

Myspace

Linked in

Friendster

HiS

Plaxo

Other (please Specify) _____ -

6. How long have you been using your online social network 2-4

months

5-6 months

6months -1 year

1-2 years

Over 2 years

7. What percentage of time do you spend on each device while accessing your online social network (please use whole numbers e.g. 100%)

Computer at work

Computer at home

Computer at school

Computer in cyber/Jibrary

Mobile device

Other (please Specify) _____ -

Section B (Business & OSN)

8. Do you use the online social network for

Personal use

Business use

Both personal and business use

9. Which industry do you work in

ICT

Retail

Media & Marketing

Consultancy

Manufacturing

Financial Services

Healthcare

10. Does your company have Online social Network presence

Yes

No

11. What does your company use Online

Advertising/ Marketing

Social Capital development Customer

relationship management

Customer relations management

Expand contacts base/ automate networking

Other (please Specify). _____

12. Does your company allocate a marketing/ social capital budget to online social

networking?

Yes

No

13. Are there formal processes associated with adopting consumer-based social networking tools for

business purposes

Yes

No

14. What do you use your online social network for

Great Extent

Moderate

Slight

Not at all

	extent	extent
Stay in touch with friends		
Stay in touch with family		
Stay in touch with business contacts		
Discuss other online activities		
Discuss offline activities		

15. How much do you agree with the following statements

	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree	Moderately disagree	Strongly agree	Not at all
When deciding on an action, my network influences my decision					
I'm Generally logged into my online social network all day and keep on checking on it					
Online social networks are a waste of time					

16. Where does online social networking rank in comparison to the following activities

(rank 1-most important)

Online social networking

Email

Online chat/ instant messaging

Online discussions

Online forum/ message boards

Online news feeds

Micro blogs (e.g. tweeter)

Texting using mobile device

Web browsing (sites)

Blogs

17. Please state your gender

Male

Female

18. Please state your marital status

Single

Married

Appendix C: List of Businesses who participated in the study

1. Nyokabi Designs
2. Jude Xavier (Photographer)
3. Geco Car Wash
4. Kenya Africa (Music Shop)
5. Kiola (Africa Cultural Clothes)
6. Kitengela Paint ball
7. Waterless Control Carwash Karen
8. Aqua Massage Mall
9. Umba Home Accessories
10. Tatyana Garden Spa
11. DJ Clinic
12. Jewels by Angeline
13. The Muffin House Nairobi Ltd.
14. Brew Bistro & Lounge
15. Cucu's Chicken Restaurant
16. Chemtrade Ltd.
17. Frank Okullu art
18. Aerobics Kenya Ltd.
19. Aqua Massage Mall
20. Bakers Bounty