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FACEBOOK'S FALL IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA AGE

By

SYDNEY MAYER GILLETTE

Undergraduate Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the University Scholar distinction

Davidson Honors College
University of Montana
Missoula, MT

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Approved by:

Lee Banville, Faculty Mentor
School of Journalism

ABSTRACT

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Journalism

Facebook's Fall in the Social Media Age

Faculty Mentor: Lee Banville

Almost from its inception, the social media universe was centered around one all-encompassing network, Facebook. Today, with technological advancements and an experienced audience of social networkers, Facebook is struggling to meet the increasingly sophisticated and complex array of demands from its users. That is primarily because social networking is now a mass media. Networks that focus on niche markets and specific uses are more effectively addressing the needs of specific groups and are therefore becoming more popular. Facebook is still the largest social network by size, but that is not enough to guarantee its future.

This project is based on my analysis of reports conducted in the field of social networking from academic articles and reports by think tanks and market research firms. To understand the current sphere of social media I analyzed users and their habits. This includes who uses social networks, how they are accessing them, how often and why. I also analyzed research describing the growth and populations of the largest and fastest growing social networks. I conducted a series of interviews with academics in the field of social networking to gain a further understanding of today's social media market and the future of social networking.

Through this systemic view of how people use social networks we can understand the market forces influencing and altering social media. Informed by this research I discovered a hole in the current social media market. Therefore, I have also created the framework for a social networking app to fill this void.

FACEBOOK'S FALL IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA AGE

Introduction

Four years ago, I was a senior in high school. Once arriving home from school, I would turn on my HP Pavilion, click open my browser and spend the next three hours on Facebook. There were status updates, Hanna “is in love with the new killers album!!!” There were new photo albums with photos from last weekend’s dance, party or sleepover. There were unread messages, a “hey” from a boy in class and a “what’s up?” from a friend. It was a notification for a poke or an invite to play whatever game was popular that week. In 2011, Facebook was free of advertisements and was the social encyclopedia for everything that couldn’t or wouldn’t be said in the school’s hallways.

I am a senior once again, and as a college student I still use Facebook. But, my social networking habits changed. I also use Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn and Facebook Messenger. I don’t spend hours at a time browsing Facebook, nor do I access it exclusively from my laptop. Instead, I visit the social network and others on my iPhone throughout the day. I scroll through photos friends, celebrities and bloggers post on Instagram. I browse Facebook for news articles, past a recipe my grandma posted for buttercream frosting and advertisements telling me to download Yik Yak. I tweet the new song I discovered on Twitter and listen to music artists post. I use Snapchat to share photos and short videos with a select group of people that expires after 24 hours. With multiple apps serving different purposes, Facebook is no longer my only outlet.

A Mass Media

Social networking is now a mass media, a form of communication reaching a large population of people. To understand the maturation of social networking, we can look to the evolution of broadcast television.

“Television was three broadcast networks and they did all. You had Walter Cronkite doing the news, and M.A.S.H. the sitcom, Dallas a drama and daytime programs that appealed to women. It was all on one channel,” said Lee Banville, a professor in the School of Journalism at the University of Montana. Broadcast television became a mass media when cable television provided a new medium of access. Instead of viewers tuning to one TV channel they watched multiple networks.

Facebook is the original broadcast channel, providing all the facets one wanted from a social network - connecting users through statuses, photos and messages. Now with the widespread use of smartphones, there is a new medium for people to experience social media. Just as the number of program networks jumped when cable television provided a new way to access them, we are seeing an increase in social networks and their apps with the new access smartphones and tablets provide.

Cable television networks gained audiences because they specialize in subjects. They cater to a niche like the Style Channel, HLN and The Weather Channel. We are seeing this today with new social medias and their apps. Like the maturity of television audiences, those who use social medias are now looking for new networks that target a specific utility.

An example of this is Instagram, which Facebook purchased in 2012 for \$1 billion in cash and stock. "Social media has always been a huge tool for sharing photos. Well, Instagram allows you to do that in a way that gets rid of all the other stuff...Therefore, it's a more efficient tool for sharing photos and it has challenged Facebook's dominance in this," said Banville. LinkedIn is another example. LinkedIn satisfies one utility of Facebook - connecting business professionals - and does it better. For this reason, LinkedIn's usership has grown significantly over the past couple years since professionals are choosing LinkedIn over Facebook.

Facebook is still popular today, because people who are new to social networking use it as a platform to learn this new form of communication. Facebook is the first social media to attract a large audience and is still being discovered by those new to social networking. "I think you see the growth from people who are still trying to figure out how to do social media, the old people," said Banville. "The people who grew up on Facebook, they get that, now they are bored by the limitations of it and now you have audiences that want something different."

Like broadcast television, Facebook will exist as it provides a utility, "Broadcast television still exists, there is still a fair amount of people that watch it. Is it the same number it was in 1984? Absolutely not," said Banville.

We will continue to see new apps and social networks develop that focus on a niche in social media. These apps, if they take a facet of Facebook and improve user experience, will steal Facebook's audience. Like broadcast television, the Facebook's population will fall.

Mobile Networking

In 2007, Apple released the first iPhone and within the next couple years other companies like Microsoft, Google and Samsung followed suit. Smartphones allow users to go beyond making phone calls and text messaging. The device provides a new way for users to access their social networks through apps. Today, people are more likely to access their social media accounts through mobile devices than laptops or desktops.

Pew Research Center's report, "U.S. Smartphone Use in 2015," said 64 percent of American adults own a smartphone. To understand the significance of this number, the number of smartphone users has nearly doubled since 2011. For younger demographics, the percentage of smartphone ownership is even higher. In Pew Research's latest survey on teens, they reported 73 percent have smartphones (Lenhart). In the 18 to 29-year-old range, 85 percent have smartphones (Smith). GlobalWebIndex studied smartphone ownership across 32 countries in their report, "Audience Report on Millennials." It said 84 percent of 17 to 31-year-olds own smartphones.

These reports reveal the majority of the population owns smartphones. People are taking advantage of having this constant access to their social medias. The "Adobe 2013 Mobile Consumer Survey," stated the number one way people use their smartphone is to access social media. "People still predominantly use their mobile devices to gain information, including social. Of those surveyed, 71% reported using their mobile device to access social media" (Adobe). Among the time people spend on social networks in general, 60 percent of it is spent on a smartphone or tablet, according to a Business Insider report (Adler).

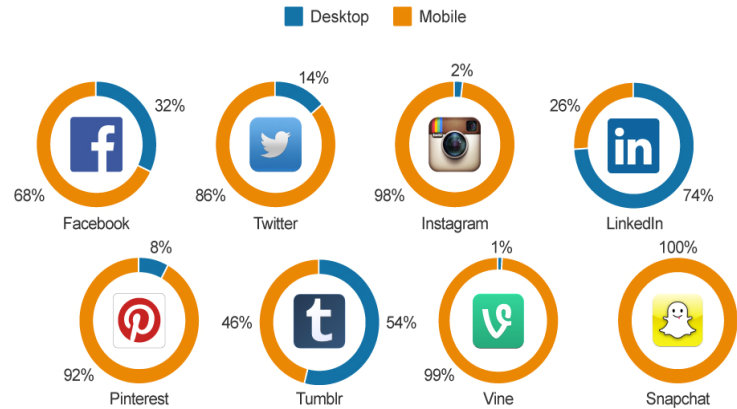
GlobalWebIndex studied people across the globe access social networks. In the "Social Summary Q3 2014," it concluded mobile and tablets have the largest increase for use of social networking. Audience engagement on PCs and laptops is declining. According to this report, over the last two years there was an 11 percent increase in both mobile and tablet use. Two percent fewer people are using their PC/laptop (Mander). This is significant as it reveals social media users are transitioning accessing networks from computers to phones and tablets.

Michael Brito, head of social strategy of WCG, said in a one-to-one interview, also explained that mobile phones are changing the way people access social networks. "They have been paramount. That is what is driving 90 percent of usage, especially with millennials and students. That's why laptop sales are going down. People rely on their mobile phones and tablets to consume content."

In the U.S. social media users access the most popular social networks more often on their phones than their desktops. From analytics released by Statista, people access Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Vine and Snapchat on their phone more so than their desktop. This proves that social media is going mobile. In order to stay relevant to social networkers, social medias will need to have a mobile app to remain relevant.

Most Social Networks Are Now Mobile-First

% of time spent on social networks in the United States, by platform*



THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. * December 2013, Age 18+ Source: comScore © statista

Accessing Social Media Habits

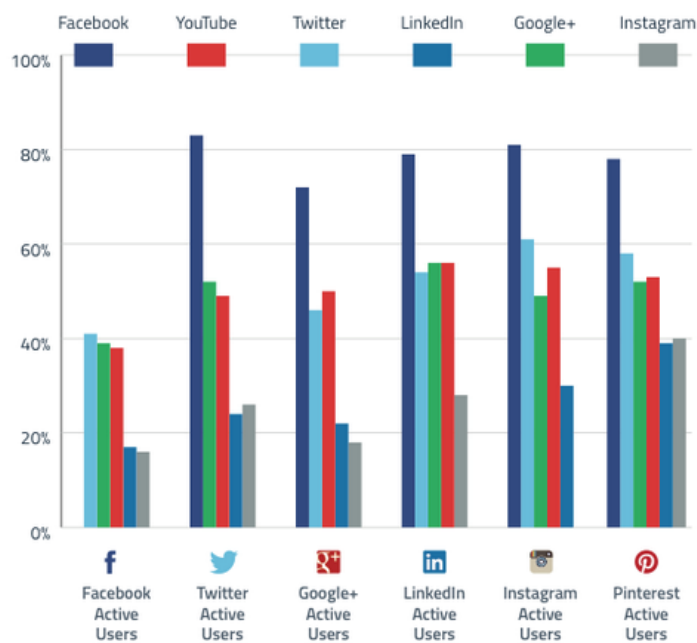
According to Business Insider Intelligence, the number one internet activity among Americans is social media (Adler). GlobalWebIndex asked internet users aged 16 to 64, over the course of three years, “On a typical day, roughly how many hours do you spend on/doing the social networking?” Since 2012 this number has increased every year. In 2014, the average daily time spent on social networks was 1.72 hours. This means that people spend almost 30 percent of their time online engaging on social networks (Mander).

We are spending more time on social networks than ever before. Because of mobile connectivity we are now able to access these social networks anytime and anywhere which is driving up time users spend on social medias.

Multi-Networking

Another key aspect defining the landscape of social networking, is the way people use social networks. Today, social networkers access a multitude of platforms, rather than just one or two. Thus, creating a fragmented and individualized social networking experience.

% of Active Users Who Use the Following Services Too



According to GlobalWebIndex’s “Multi-Networking” report, the average internet users has five social network accounts. Those between the ages of 16 and 24 have an average of 5.8 (Mander). In the graph to the left, the multiple networks people use and at what percent is pictured. The graph shows people who have a presence on the most popular networks, also have a Facebook account.

A similar study, “A Network for Every Interest,” focused on social networking users in the U.S. The report

said 52 percent of U.S. adults use multiple networks, compared to 28 percent who use just one, and 20 percent who use none. Of the 52 percent of adults who use multiple networks, 73 percent used three or more, 56 percent used four or more, 40 percent used five or more, 30 percent used six or more and 27% used seven or more (IPG Media Lab).

This data is significant when we compare it to the number of adults with multiple social network profiles in 2008. According to Pew Research’s project, “Social Media and Young Adults,” 54 percent of adults had one social network (Lehnhart, Purcell, Smith and Zickuhr). In just five years the majority of users changed their habit- from using one social network to four or more. This shows the new trend of social networking is to be active on multiple accounts rather than one all-encompassing network, like Facebook.

The Multi-networking report by GlobalWebIndex predicts this trend will continue with the rise of new social networkers, “Multi-networking is becoming still more ingrained ... In fact, new networkers have entered a space where multi-networking is the normal and expected approach” (Mander).

What this means is the way people use social networks is diversifying and so are their behaviors. People are using multiple platforms as each offers a different social media experience. For the first time people don’t depend on one network to fulfill their needs, but close to six. This

balancing act of using different app and sites means Facebook isn't the key network it once was, but why?

In an interview with Larry Rosen, a research psychologist specializing in social networking, he explained people join multiple networks because their social circle is using them. This is based on the “fear of missing out” or FoMO.

“We are all about communication and connection, but we also have intense anxiety about making sure that we are connecting with everyone, everywhere as rapidly as possible. People feel compelled to sign up for any social media site that even on friend is on so that they have yet another way to communicate and if they don't then they will miss out on something potentially important,” said Dr. Rosen.

This idea presented by Rosen helps explain why people are so quick to react to someone's post on Facebook, tweet on Twitter or picture on Instagram. Since smartphones provide instant connectivity anytime, anywhere, people check their social networks continually throughout the day as to not miss out on any friends' activities.

The app market also influences why people are using more social media applications. “It's easier than ever to create a web server and mobile applications. If you have something that just either a little bit better or a lot more interesting, or for whatever, we can go viral with it. The tech infrastructure today has never seen as much of a rapid spread and adoption of a new product,” said Steven L. Johnson, Professor of Social Media Innovation at Temple U. Fox School of Business.

Michael Brito explained people use multiple social media networks as they provide different functions. Before we had Facebook, which encompassed photo sharing, messaging, and status updates, but now have access to different applications that does just one of those things.

“The main reason why consumers are using more apps is mainly because of different use cases. I think part of it is the apps themselves work differently. If you think about Twitter it's mainly for millennials. It's about the conversation, it's having the conversation about things that are important to you. Instagram is photos with your friends and you don't care who sees them. Snapchat is more private and more provocative. People share things you wouldn't want your parents to see,” said Brito.

Current Popular Networks

To analyze the market of social networking we need to understand which social medias internet users access the most. Of the people who use social networks, more than 80 percent have a Facebook account, almost 50 percent have a Twitter account, 30 percent have a LinkedIn profile and about 23 percent have an Instagram profile (Mander).

The Pew Research Center project focused on the adult population of social network users, ages 18 and up. It revealed the population of internet users who access the top social networks. From 2012 to 2014 the number of adults using Twitter grew by 7 points to 23 percent. Instagram’s population doubled, now with 26 percent of online adults using the image driven network. LinkedIn grew by 8 points to 28 percent of online users. And, Pinterest grew by 13 points to 28 percent.

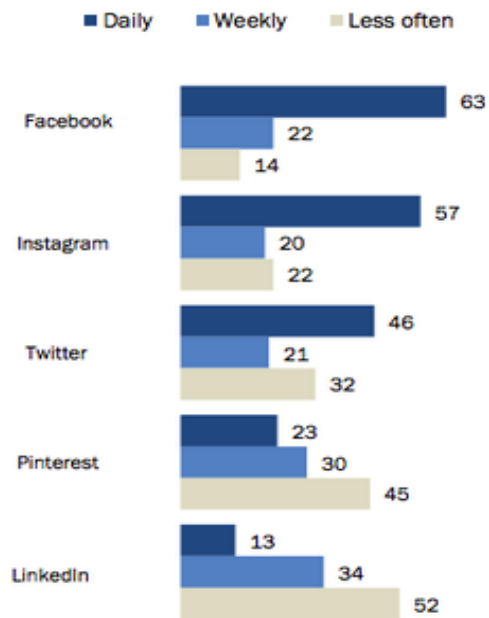
The fastest growing network was the mobile exclusive, photo and video messaging app, Snapchat. Its user population grew by 57 percent in 2014, according to Global Web Index.

This year, Facebook was the only major network to experience a decline in active users (Mander).

The next important thing to study is how often users visit a network. Facebook had the highest percentage of daily users at 63 percent. Not far behind was Instagram with 57 percent and Twitter at 46 percent. When focusing on weekly usage LinkedIn had the highest percentage at 34 percent, followed by Pinterest at 30 percent then Facebook at 22 percent. Twitter was not far behind with 21 percent of its users visiting weekly and Instagram with 20 percent of its users visiting weekly (Smith and Duggan). What can be taken away from these numbers is that although Facebook still has the highest percentage of users visiting daily, user engagement of alternative networks are reaching levels close to Facebook’s.

Frequency of social media site use

% of social media site users who use a particular site with the following frequencies (% is reported among each specific site’s user groups, e.g., 63% of Facebook users use the site on a daily basis)

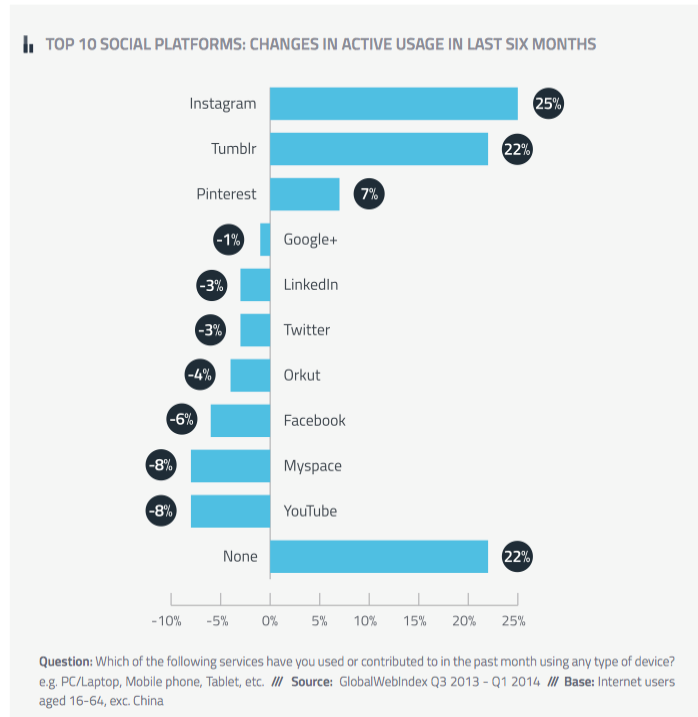


Pew Research Center’s Internet Project August Tracking Survey, August 07 –September 16, 2013. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

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Facebook is the most used network, with the largest population of users. Although the number of people on Facebook dwarfs that of other networks, it is important to look at the number of active users on the top networks.

An active user is someone who contributes to the network, rather than passively viewing it. In GlobalWebIndex's, "Social Summary Q2 2014" report Instagram, Tumblr and Pinterest were the only social networks to see a growth in active users over a six-month period. Twitter and LinkedIn's active usage fell three percent, and Facebook experienced a drop of six percent (Mander). Although Facebook may be the most popular and widespread used network, it is losing users who actively participate on the site. Instead, people are using alternative networks to share their lives.



Facebook's Decline

From the data above, we see Facebook is losing users and popularity. In a GlobalWebIndex report, they asked people why they use the network less. From the report in the, "Social Summary Q3 2014," it said, "Fifty percent of members in the UK and US say that they're using it [Facebook] less frequently than they used to – rising to sixty-four percent among the key teen demographic (defined here as 16-19s)" (Mander). The top three reasons for a decline in usage were: "I'm just not as interested in using Facebook as I used to be," followed by, "I'm bored of Facebook" and, "I'm spending less time on social networks generally." This is important data as it supports the idea that the next generation of social networkers may avoid Facebook. The fourth and fifth reasons teens were using Facebook less were, "My friends aren't using it as much as they used to," and "It's not as cool as it used to be."

"Facebook is in danger of being really good at something people are no longer interested in: sharing content with their acquaintances," said Steven Johnson, in his article, "The Death of Facebook." He explained with the size of Facebook it is harder to make technological changes

that appeal to what the consumers want tomorrow. Johnson used the example of sharing photos. Originally, Facebook's photo albums were a "top-destination" on the site. However, that was in a time when people took photos with digital cameras and then uploaded those photos to Facebook in albums. Today, with smartphones we can take a photo and upload it instantly. Facebook's photo albums became dated. "The company acquired the photo-sharing service Instagram to address that issue," said Johnson.

Johnson also said Facebook's model is not relevant to the way people use social networking today. He said Facebook's model of "social interaction" is based on the idea that individuals have a single social identity. "This may have been true for the college students who were its first users, but it does not account for the multiple roles of adults in work, community, and family life."

There was a time when Facebook was an outlet for friends to share things and communicate. But now, Facebook "friends" are more than just one's social circle. They are one's peers, employers, family and professors. Users are limited to what they post in order to maintain a clean profile.

Multiple networks allow users to express one identity of their online character. LinkedIn is a network for professionals where users share their work history and a project they may be working on. Through Instagram users share their life through photos to create a personal brand image. Snapchat users are more likely to share their daily activities since they choose who sees what they post, leading people to post things they wouldn't share on Facebook as their family or future employer can't view their activity.

The very thing that makes for Facebook's success, a large user base and a public presence, is also failing it. With so many people on the site, one can no longer post what their life consists of and no longer see what their peers are actually doing. Instead, postings represent a shell of someone's life that creates a "safe" reputation on the site, rather than a real one.

Facebook lost exclusivity. Facebook began as a site where a user needed ".edu" to create a profile, now anyone can access it, and access you. This has led to the rise of messenger apps, as well as apps that offer users anonymity. Jason Mander, head of trends at GlobalWebIndex believes that messaging, a quick one-to-one interaction, is vital to the success of social networks today. He said the ability to share in a controlled way, in which the user chooses their audience and the permanence of what they post, is the key to a new network's success.

Facebook is not only losing its appeal, its remaining users are more likely to use the app passively than actively. This means people observe what is happening rather than share and contribute to the content posted. “There is a rise of people who are looking rather than necessarily interacting,” said Mander. He explained Facebook is no longer a sharing place, but a browsing place. Mander said the number of active Facebook users in 2012 was 70 percent. In 2014, the number of active users was 52 percent.

“Since the start of 2013, we’ve seen behaviors like sharing photos and messaging friends fall by around 20 percentage points” (Mander). In general, Mander said that passive networking is growing among social network users. He says that because of “anytime anywhere access” people are visiting social networks in shorter durations and doing fewer things, but people are logging on more frequently.

The Social Network Graveyard

To understand why Facebook is losing popularity, it is important to look at why former popular social networks failed.

In 2002, Jonathan Abrams launched Friendster. It was based off of Match.com, but instead of connecting strangers, Friendster connected friends of friends. Friendster was used as a way to meet potential romantic partners, but also to connect with one’s social network, online. One of the main reasons Friendster failed was because of the increase in users. Not only did this cause problems with the functionality of the website, but it also changed the social atmosphere. Users expected to connect with close friends, but then they began to encounter acquaintances, like a boss, on the site. For this reason, Friendster users abandoned the site. Facebook is facing the same problem today. When Facebook launched in 2004 it was a social forum for only those with a Harvard “.edu” email address. Then it expanded to include other universities and later high school students. In 2006, Facebook was accessible to everyone. Facebook was no longer a close social network, like Friendster, it became an everyone network. One of the reasons users are abandoning Facebook, and others don’t even bother to join it, is because their parents, grandparents, teachers and boss are on the site too.

Myspace launched in 2004 to capitalize on the purge of users on Friendster. Although people no longer liked to use Friendster, there was still a need for a social network. Myspace became popular quickly, especially among young adults. Myspace had features Friendster didn’t. On Myspace users could personalize their profile page through HTML code. But there were a

few problems with Myspace that lead to users abandoning the site and moving on to Facebook. One large issue was advertisements. Myspace became bogged down with cheap advertisements making it less visually appealing for users. Facebook was an attractive alternative. When it first began, Facebook was mostly ad free and clean. For this reason, among others, Myspace users abandoned the site and joined Facebook. Today, Facebook users not only see ads on the side column, but also within their newsfeed in the form of sponsored posts, suggested pages and apps.

The Next Generation of Social Media Users

Although Facebook is the largest and most popular social network today, it won't be in the future. In order to predict the future of Facebook and the social media sphere it is important to understand how next generation's social networkers are using and accessing social media. When I asked my 12-year-old brother if he would join Facebook, he told me absolutely not. Instead he uses Snapchat, Instagram and iMessage. And, he is not unlike other young teens.

From Pew Research Center's report, "Teens, Social Media & Technology Overview 2015," it said boys and girls are equally likely to use Facebook, but older teens are more likely to use the network than younger teens. Less than half of 13-year-olds use Facebook, just 44 percent reported having a profile. While 77 percent of 14 to 17-year-olds use the network. This is a significant difference and reveals Facebook may lose their young audience.

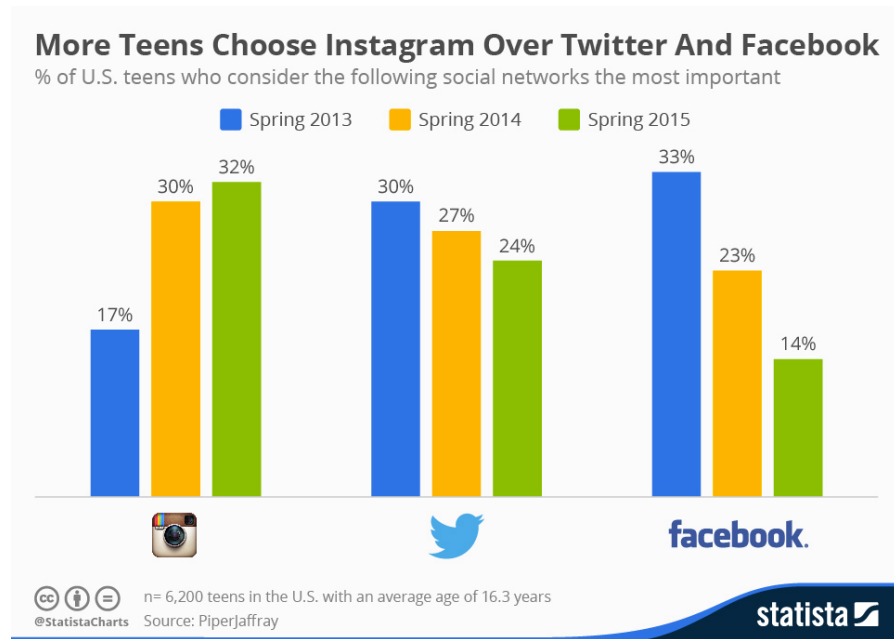
In a survey conducted by Niche, 7,000 members of the 2014 high school class were asked to rate which apps and websites they used most frequently. The data revealed text messaging was the number one way students communicated with friends and family, followed by Snapchat, then basic phone calls, and Facebook Messenger (Niche).

The study also ranked app engagement among the senior class. Instagram was number one with 77 percent engagement, followed by Snapchat with 71 percent, Facebook with 70 percent and then Twitter at 64 percent. However, the highest population of daily users among the social network apps is different. Facebook was first at 61 percent, followed by Instagram with 51 percent, and Snapchat at 46 percent (Niche). This data reveals Facebook is used the most, but teens are more likely to actively use Instagram and Snapchat. It becomes apparent that teens want to connect with people in social networks through photos and private messaging.

PiperJaffray's report on preferences of American teens studied which networks were most important to the young demographic. It concluded that Instagram and Twitter were the most important networks, and Facebook was the least. From the graph below we can see how

this is a recent change. In spring 2013, Facebook was the most popular. This data also reveals Facebook's decline in popularity among teenage users.

An iStrategyLab report actually revealed the decline of Facebook users in the 13 to 17 age range. The number



of users in this age group declined 25.3 percent in the last three years. Looking at the next demographic aged 18 to 24, there has been a seven and a half percent drop in users (Saul).

This data reveals a few things about teens and their networking habits. Facebook is still accessed the most among teens, but they are more likely to actively use Instagram and Snapchat. It becomes apparent that when teens are looking to connect with people through social networking they prefer to do so exclusively through forms of messaging. If Facebook wants to remain relevant to its younger audience it will have to change, otherwise it risks losing the younger demographic of social media users altogether.

Will Facebook Survive?

Steven Johnson, Michael Brito, Jason Mander and Larry Rosen all agreed Facebook is not facing an imminent end.

Although Johnson made arguments against Facebook he still thinks it will stay relevant in the culture of social networks. "It's very difficult to predict long term trends, but I do think there's going to be a role for a place like Facebook," said Johnson. He explained that since Facebook has such a wide audience, people want a general "commons" to run into each other. Johnson explained Facebook also has a high network effect. A network effect is when the success of a product or service, in this case a social network, depends on the number of people using it, "With any kind of social network you have very strong network effects, the more the people the more valuable for you," said Johnson. He also said that once a user has invested to

produce a lot of information about themselves on a network they are in a position where they don't want to give that up. Having invested in a Facebook profile over years and years discourages people to leave since they would have to begin again on another network.

Michael Brito said if Facebook wants to continue attracting a large audience it is going to have to change, "I think they will have to change who they are. They will always look to ways to innovate. They will never be relevant to everyone, but their goal is to make it relevant to as many people as possible." Brito said Facebook has remained relevant so far by purchasing apps such as Instagram and WhatsApp.

Jason Mander said even though we are seeing low rates of growth on Facebook that doesn't mean that it's no longer relevant, "Facebook is so big, its hard for it keep growing at such a fast rate. I think its pretty clear that its lost its cool factor. It's no longer exciting. But Facebook doesn't need to be cool it just needs strong engagement rates." He also said that it doesn't matter if people are actively using it or not, just as long as people are using it. Mander, like Brito said Facebook is trying to stay relevant by purchasing networks people like. "Facebook is notoriously bad at innovating anything itself. It has a special innovation house, but it is more likely to buy something it likes," said Mander. He mentioned that Facebook could potentially keep its "cool factor" as long as it does continue to buy other apps and networks that people are interested in.

Iris

The most popular and fastest growing social media networks are those that improve upon a function of Facebook. These social medias cater to a niche and create a better user experience. Facebook has done this by forcing users to download Facebook Messenger to communicate with friends in private messages, rather than through the Facebook App. Facebook purchased Instagram in 2012, to cater to user's favoritism of sharing photos via the app than on Facebook through albums. LinkedIn is essentially a Facebook for professionals, it's a source for resume like profiles and a "newsfeed" for professional projects, studies, etc. The list continues with Twitter that acts as a newsfeed for everything from people's thoughts to breaking news.

For a new network to become popular there are a few key components necessary for success. Currently, the fastest growing sector of media applications is messaging apps. We have also seen that these are among the fastest growing populations for social medias. Therefore, a new application should include a form of messaging. The network must also create a sense of

urgency, a sense that if a user is not connected they are missing out on what their social circle is up to. It must also be inclusive, a network that isn't available for the common internet population to see. Since the majority of people access their social networking applications via their smartphone, a new social network's application design is just as important as the function itself. It must be easy to use, clean and attractive.

Through my research, I discovered there is a function of Facebook that a new application has yet to update and improve, Facebook's "Group Page." It is used to connect a variety of groups from students in the same university course, to people planning an event and a hub for businesses to connect with customers. Groups is an alternative to group messaging, it can be private or public and is a way to organize people with a common interest. Since there are no social medias to improve upon this facet of Facebook, in the next few paragraphs I will explain the framework for a social network application that fills this void while improving user experience: Iris.

Accessing groups on Facebook on a desktop or laptop is easy, but on a tablet or mobile device it takes users multiple steps. First, one must open the Facebook app and wait for the page to load. Second, a person has to click on the tab at the bottom left which lists the profile name, then favorites (Friends, Events, etc.) followed by Pages and then finally groups. Lastly, the user clicks on their desired Group and waits for that page to load. Having to wait for this process can take minutes. Compared to opening other apps which is a one step process, Facebook takes too long. This in itself reveals the need for a simpler access, a one-touch need to connect with one's group network.

Another issue with Groups is how Facebook notifies users of changes in the page. Facebook sends users notifications every time someone posts something to the group page, whether that post is relevant to a user or not. This can lead to an overabundance of alerts that fill up one's notifications. When accessing one's notifications to get rid of the alert, they have to open Facebook, click on the notifications button, and then click on the notification which reroutes the user to the group page. This notification will not disappear until one looks at what it's notifying the user about.

These two problems could be simply solved. With Iris, users would be able to choose when they are notified of group activity. For example, when a person is invited to a group there is a checklist that appears for the user to go through and choose when to receive notifications,

one could also choose not to be notified at all. The checklist would feature questions such as: “Notify me when I am tagged in a post or comment,” “If one post is directed to a specific user and not me, don't notify me.” “Notify me when someone posts a photo” “Notify me when someone posts a video” “Notify me when someone posts a link to an article.” Users can change these settings anytime they choose. When a user opens Iris a notification page will load first. Having this as the first page allows users to see what they have been notified of and simply delete a notification by placing a finger on the alert and swiping their finger to the left.

Another fundamental issue of Groups on Facebook is one can not search for a post within the page. If someone needs to find a certain link, document or post, they must scroll through every post that comes after it. This is time consuming and difficult. In Iris users could search for a post within the feed of the circle by user or keyword. If someone wants to see all the posts made by one person they can simply search that individuals name and the page will filter all other posts out. If someone searches for a keyword, the same thing will occur. This allows for easier access to information.

Iris would connect people for professional reasons, but also provide a place for friends to connect privately. Instead of using group messages people could use Iris as a place to post photos for one another, videos or general interests. Users would have the option to choose whether a group is private or public upon creating it. Iris would be a place for users to connect with the friends they are interested in communicating with, not their entire network like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or LinkedIn.

When focusing on the layout of Iris it must be clean and simple. Upon opening the application, users will see one of three options. The first: if a user has a new alert a notification page will open that shadows the main interface of Iris. This would list one's alerts as mentioned above, if one wants to view an alert they can click on it and the user will stay within the notification tab, but the item will show up, so users can take care of it easily and not have to wait for a group to load. To be notified about the alert again, swipe to the right. To hide the alerts page a user can simply swipe down. If the user last closed out of the app without exiting a group, when they open the app they will be within the same group. If the user did exit out of a group before closing Iris, then the main page of groups will load first.

The main page will be a series of circles, each with a photo and name. The size of the circles on the main page will be based on a user's activity within the circle. The most used circles

larger and the less accessed, smaller. Users could simply scroll down to see other circles, or choose to zoom out by swiping their forefinger and thumb inward to see other circles or swiping their forefinger and thumb outward to zoom in, much like how users look at photos. Users of Iris would have the option to choose what color would be behind their circles, the default white. Iris would allow users to create an account by linking it to their Facebook, or e-mail for easy accessibility.

Michael Brito discussed how apps are created, he said at first an application focuses on gaining users and making sure the application is engaging. Then one needs to strategize and figure out how to monetize the app. Once Iris develops a large user base, it would sell advertisements. Brands, restaurants, local event groups, etc. could create a circle. Users would have the ability to choose and enter these Circles to connect with businesses. The next step would then be selling advertising spots. Businesses and other apps could pay to have their circle featured on a user's page, the amount of money a business invests in the advertisement determines the size of a circle. However, an advertisement circle could not be larger than a user's largest circle. Advertisement circles can be just post a photo like a billboard, an invite for users to join a circle, or even a video of the advertisement. An advertisement would disappear from a user's main page after 24 hours. If the user wishes to no longer see the ad they can click on it and swipe it out of view. The advertisement will then disappear.

If users want to go through and delete some of their groups they can do so by clicking on a circle and holding down until all the circles shake with an X on the front, a user can touch the X and a circle will be deleted from their network. Administrators of a circle also have the capability of deleting a circle if it's no longer useful, for example if a circle was created to plan an event. Users can also choose to have a circle expire, and it will delete itself on the desired date and hour. If users would like to search for circles that are public to join, they may do so by clicking on the search bar at the top of the application.

Iris combines exclusivity, messaging, and multimedia. It can be used professionally or leisurely. It has potential for profit and most importantly takes an aspect of what Facebook does and improves user experience.

Conclusion

Almost everyone with internet access is using social networks. Most popularly is Facebook which has the largest user base and the greatest population of daily users. However,

since people are no longer using one network but multiple, there is a rise in active users and user population among the top social networks such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter. From the data and research, it can be concluded that people are still accessing social networks on their computer but more and more people are using their smartphones. The rise of mobile social networking and the slow fall of desktop or laptop access reveals people's need for constant connectedness. People are more likely to use multiple networks not just because of the access that smartphones have created, but because of functionality. The applications that are most popular behind Facebook are those that take what Facebook does and creates a better experience. This explains why Instagram which is a photo sharing application, Twitter that focuses on written updates and LinkedIn that specializes in the professional sphere are among the most popular.

Since social networking users are spreading themselves across a variety of niche networks active users on Facebook is decreasing. The younger generation of teens that are joining the social network sphere, and who were born into a multi-networking environment are less likely to use Facebook than other demographics. This is hurting Facebook as people are more likely to use other applications. A growing population of teens are joining Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter as well as engaging in one-to-one messenger applications.

Although Facebook is losing popularity, it is still relevant in the space of social networking. Most people who use social networks use Facebook. Since its audience is so vast and it is a gateway network to others it is plausible to say it will not be buried in the social network graveyard with Myspace and Friendster.

Facebook is the number one social network for account ownership and active users. It also ranks first for most frequent users. Facebook's end is not imminent, but it is in danger of no longer being relevant to seasoned networkers. As smartphone usage becomes more widespread globally, the way people use social networking will continue to diversify. Today, Facebook is 11 years old. Although new social networking apps lack the large user population of Facebook, they are young and growing rapidly. In the next five to eight years, when they too will be 11, their audience may be just as vast.

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