How addicted are users to social networking?

Social networks have become an essential part of a person's everyday life. The purpose of this study is to explore the preferences of a user on notification settings, addiction rate of a user on social networks, and compare prompt vs. non prompt usage behavior. Semi structured interview was the methodology used in this study.

The study was conducted at computer science building of Dalhousie University, Halifax. The interview was conducted with 21 students' participation. All the participants were male students pursuing Undergrad/Grad/PhD at Dalhousie University. The participants were of age ranging from 17-30.

There was no limitation or criteria to participate in the interview except that the participants must be a member of any social networking site. The interview was conducted by 5 interviewers. The participants were asked to sign a consent form in order to use their data for further analysis. The whole interview was audio recorded with participant's knowledge.

The duration of interview ranged from 5-20 minutes depending on the users' response to specific questions. The questions were framed in a way that useful and relevant data can be collected during the interview session to answer all the research questions. The data collection and analysis will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

The participants were not limited to focus on a specific social networking application but allowed to think broadly on their experiences with any social networking media. The participants were allowed to answer beyond the

given choices and include their own concerns about their interaction using the social networking media.

Data Analysis

a) Addiction

The word ' Addiction' implies how a person tightly bound with particular action. In this report, addiction refers to a person addicted to any of social networking site. There are enough reasons for a person to become addicted to social networking sites such as: chatting, gaming, status updates, sharing pictures or posts, and keep in touch with their friends. In a simple words social networking sites are just clouding the people with most advanced features as well as cost efficient services. Social networking sites open a door to track people with less effect. Initial findings to support the people addicted with social networking sites were projected below.

Success of any social networking site depends on making users to stay connected by offering extraordinary features. There are number of social networking sites out of which only few seems to be interesting or engaging to users. With this initial finding, we analyzed the list of social networking sites that play a major role in the present. Participants have an account with Facebook, Twitter, and Google+ etc., and Facebook plays a major role with 14 participants out of 21 choosing Facebook as their primary social networking site. There are few participants having the account in more than one site, one for the friends and another for their own interest. The previous response makes clear that success of any social networking site is based on how many active users it has.

To find how addicted people are with social networking, the survey was included with the research question as ' how frequently do you use social networking'. The response for this question is categorized as people visiting social networking site every hour, few times a day, always and less active (once a day or less than that). 13 out of 21 (62%) participants said they would visit their site account few times a day. Participants visiting their account every hour, less active, and always in social networking are 5, 2, and 1 respectively. This clearly indicates that more addicted people are far less from frequent users. As the response doesn't contain any negative value, it reflects that everyone is bounded with social networking regardless of its service.

The following graph implies the response from the participants. Interest of every individual differs depending on the features they like or use and those features makes them addicted with particular social networking sites.

Figure 1: Frequency of social networking usage

The way participants admired by social networking sites are depends on fun, interaction with friends and family, and games (I don't understand the sentence). Even though every social networking sites offer numerous features, chatting plays a vital role and the communication with family & friends through text or video keeps the participants more involved. Other features that the participants were attracted to were games and fun activities. Participants mention fun activities as picture sharing, tagging, news feeds, status updates, tweets, and other activities of their own as well as others.

Figure 2: Major role in social interworking

b) Prompted Vs. Non-Prompted

Users are prompted by means of notifications. Notifications can be through messages, friend requests, news feed etc. If a notification makes a participant to login into the system, the user is considered to be prompted user and vice versa if not. A participant can be prompted by many ways like email notification, push messages. Most of the participants interviewed were prompted.

The graph below shows the first login of the day; say morning, afternoon, evening, night, anytime (always) compared with quick response for the notification. A participant's first login is considered to know how obsessed he is with the social networking site. Quick response to notification indicates during which part of time the participant were prompted. Nearly 48% (10 out of 21) of the participants were logged-in in the morning and 24% (5 out of 21) of users were logged in always. This tells the participants were prompted as the day starts as shown in blue color bar in the graph (figure 3). About nine participants respond quickly to the notification anytime. Six participants respond to the notifications in the evening more often than any other time. From the red bars, participants were considered as prompted because of the intention to look into the social networking site by the notification.

Figure 3: Participant first login VS quick response to notification

c) Notification

Notification is one of the very important aspects of the social networking sites. Social networking site's notification system intimates the user about

any new activity that occurred in user's network space on that specific social network. In this semi-structured interview different questions were framed to elicit important information from the user regarding their perspective about different aspects of notification system.

In order to determine the users' likes and dislikes of notification settings, few questions were asked relating to their preference in notifications and settings management. Users' interests or reactions on specific notification settings were also analyzed. Analysis of the collected data uncovered very interesting information about user's experience with notification system. The results are represented as graph in the following section:

E-mail notification

Figure 4: Participant's response to e-mail as their mode of notification

The study indicated that 86% (18 out of 21) of participants disliked the e-mail notification feature in social networking site. This is because most of participants found e-mail notifications as spam and it required significant time for checking each and every notification whereas few participants said that the push notifications facility provided by smart phones are convenient than e-mail. The result indicates that the e-mail notifications are the

Notification Settings Management

The study shows that majority of users want to have control over their notification management. The participants were asked if social networking sites can change their settings on their own without prior information, or they should allow customization of settings. Though the result was as expected, few interesting responses were captured during the interview where six participants said that the social networking sites have full rights to change their settings as per their wish since the sites are used at no cost.

71% (15 of 21) participants reported that they would like to customize their settings whereas the remaining 29% participants reported that they have no problem with social networking sites changing their settings without notifying them.

Figure 5: Participant's response to notification setting management

Discussion

The study to identify the interests in notification settings, prompted vs. non-prompted usage behaviour, and addiction gave many valuable and interesting results. The analysis of the collected data gave us both expected as well as unexpected results on the usage of social networking media. The voice recordings of the whole interview session helped us to understand the mood of the candidate and also aided in double checking the obtained results.

The methodology of semi structured interview gave us a huge amount of data and helped us to understand the activities of users under different categories. It allowed us to make comparisons between the participant data

for the same set of questions. It also helped to form a more general and flexible question base to get an overview of the general opinion in great detail. It made the candidate to speak easily on sensitive topics related to social media. On the other side, we as a team encountered some difficulties in adopting this methodology one such is that we were unable to evaluate the participant's data in the real world by making them use their favourite social media application and analyse them. The semi structured interview seemed resource intensive in some scenarios while collecting user data. As interviewers we cannot guarantee the honesty of the participants in answering the imposed questions. In some situations the cause and effect of the participants' response will be very difficult to compare. As an interviewer specific skills are required to obtain a better result.

The results obtained from the semi structured interview gave us a comprehensive conclusion on the various activities in a typical social networking application. The usages of social networking have gained widespread importance especially among the teenagers, adolescents and adults. The main reason for such a huge user base is the basic functionality of staying connected with friends, family and acquaintances. The various options of sharing media within a group and communicating with their friends over text, voice and video chats are very prominent in many social networking applications.

The three topics of the social networking which the semi structured interview dealt were addiction, prompted versus non-prompted use and notifications. As researchers we were well satisfied with the data collection from these descriptions of use by the participants. We were well convinced to provide

conclusive results on the collected information and achieve the goal of this

semi-structured interview