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Motives for using Social Network Sites (SNSs) – An analysis of SNS adoption among students

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Abstract

Social Network Sites (SNSs) are widely used and have been object of research for some years. Existing studies have investigated single Social Networking (SN) phenomena or the usage of particular SNSs. However, only little research has been conducted on the motives for using SNSs. The paper at hand will present a survey for gaining insight into the motives of SNS usage and potential contextual factors that might shape these motives. The study was conducted in two steps: 1) Generation of hypotheses by guided interviews; 2) Test of hypotheses by two online surveys. Drawing on the results as well as the current body of research, the authors will identify different motives for the usage and none-usage of SNSs and determine potential contextual factors.

Keywords: Social Network Sites, Web 2.0, Web community, Motives

1 Introduction

With a rapid growth in user counts Social Network Sites (SNSs) have come into focus of media and research over the past few years. SNSs like Facebook.com and MySpace.com account for more than one hundred million users (Schonfeld, 2008; Zuckerberg, 2008) and belong to the most frequently visited websites on the Internet (Alexa.com, 2009). Especially teenagers and young adults have incorporated SNSs into their lifestyles (Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Ofcom, 2008), most notably high-school and college students (Lampe & Ellison & Steinfield, 2006). But the popularity of SNSs does not only manifest in the large user counts on major SNSs. Moreover, various new, smaller and more specialised SNSs have emerged over the past few years, further signifying the success of this new business model (Costa, 2008; Green, 2008). Also, a new industry is currently developing around the phenomenon; some providers deliver technologies (like www.elgg.org) or even full services (like www.ning.com) that enable

web site providers to integrate their own social network services, which essentially makes possible and drives the emergence of a plethora of new specialised SNSs. Consequently, thousands of SNSs have been created over the last year alone, providing a networking-space for smaller communities, which are for example characterised by geographical proximity or special interests.

To date, most research on SNSs concentrates on specific phenomena with regard to usage (see Choi, 2006; Ellison & Steinfield & Lampe, 2007; Lampe & Ellison & Steinfield, 2007) or focuses on single SNSs (see Govani & Pashley, 2005; Gross & Acquisti, 2005; Holme & Edling & Liljeros, 2004; Schaefer, 2008). However, only little research has been conducted on the motives for using SNSs (Schaefer, 2008). Most notably, it remains unclear what motivates the usage of a specific SNS. In this paper we begin with the following question: What are users' motives for using SNSs? Drawing on our findings and the existing body of research we will identify motives of SNS usage and none-usage as well as contextual factors shaping these motives.

We start by presenting a qualitative and quantitative survey of the usage and especially the motives for SNS usage of students from two universities, one in Germany and one in Liechtenstein. Students can derive an above-average benefit from SNSs for two reasons. 1) Considering the group of former school mates, these friendships are often characterized by geographic distance and can benefit from tools supporting contact maintenance (Paul & Brier, 2001). 2) Starting their studies at a university, students enter a new social environment, in which many new contacts emerge. SNSs can support the creation and intensification of new social relations in this situation (Ellison et al., 2007).

Our paper proceeds as follows. In section two we begin with a short discussion of the term SNS and have a brief look at the current body of research. After that we present an overview of the study. In section four we present our hypotheses and discuss them in the context of the existing body of research. In section five we present the results of our online surveys with respect to our hypotheses. Based on this, we deduce two motive-classes and seven contextual factors shaping these motives, which we present in section six. We conclude the paper with a short summary.

2 Social network Sites

SNSs focus on the creation and maintenance of social relationships between individuals, and with that a social network (Hippner & Wilde, 2005). Generally, SNS research is closely related to the fields of CMC (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), Computer Supported Collaborative Work and Web 2.0 (Allen, 2004). The core functionality of SNSs is the display of connections between users. Users can create a profile including a vita, list of hobbies and pictures as well as other additional information. Users can then set up connections to other users mostly by placing a friendship invitation. In case of acceptance, the connection will then be displayed in the SNS. By drawing on these connections not only the profiles of one's own friends but also those of the friends of a friend (foaf) can be viewed. Browsing the graph created by the friendship connections the whole social network can be explored. Depending on the SNS the value of the connections can vary, friendship is just one example, others being business contacts or fans. Most services

offer users the possibility to organize themselves in interest groups, to leave messages on a bulletin board or in a private mailbox.

SNSs are part of what is termed Social Software (Bächle, 2006; Boyd, 2006; Hippner, 2006; Richter & Koch, 2007; Tscherteu, 2003). Social Software is functionally closely related to groupware (Allen, 2004; Groß & Koch, 2007), but is developed in a "Bottom Up" instead of a "Top Down" approach (Richter & Koch, 2007). This way, the users generate the content and define the rules and reasons of usage (Boyd, 2006), which typical for Web 2.0 tools (O'Reilly, 2005; Richter & Koch, 2007). Hence, Social Software can be seen as tools in the context of Web 2.0 (Alby, 2007; Boyd, 2006; Hippner, 2006; O'Reilly, 2005). Major enabler in this context is the "Architecture of Participation" that describes a massive involvement of users in the content creation of online services (O'Reilly, 2005).With Social Software this participation is partly even extended to the creation of the service itself (Schmidt, 2006). Hence, the users of a SNS and their motivation can shape not only the usage but even the SNS itself (cf. MySpace case in Boyd, 2006).

Research on SNSs rests upon a large foundation of research on CMC (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), and can be characterized as highly interdisciplinary due to the mixture of social and technical aspects. Present research is often characterized by a focus on one specific SNS (Schaefer, 2008). Most studies thereby concentrate on single aspects of this SNS, like self-presentation in profiles (Lampe et al., 2007), the value of friendship-links (like Ellison et al., 2007; Fono & Raynes-Goldie, 2006; Lampe et al., 2006), the network-structure (e.g. Holme et al., 2004; Maia & Almeida & Almeida, 2008), the relation to offline-networks (like Choi, 2006; Ellison et al., 2007; Lampe et al., 2007) or security issues (e.g. Govani & Pashley, 2005; Gross & Acquisti, 2005). Only some studies handle multiple SNSs (e.g. Ahn & Han & Kwak & Moon & Jeong, 2007; Dwyer & Hiltz & Passerini, 2007; Lenhart & Madden, 2007) or take a more general view on the phenomenon of SNSs (e.g. Donath & Boyd, 2004; Kreps, 2008). The vast majority of studies that concentrate on one SNS deal with Facebook. Even though similarities can be found in the results that derive from different SNSs, these results cannot be generalized (Hargittai, 2007). The structure and usage of different SNSs can differ highly even if targeted to a similar user group (compare Facebook and MySpace in Rosen, 2007). Online little work exists (Schaefer, 2008) that focuses on deriving a better understanding of the motives of SNS usage (like Ofcom, 2008). Mostly, specific behaviour of SNS users is analyzed (Hargittai, 2007). The majority of this work is based on quantitative studies using online or paper-based questionnaires. They highlight various behaviours but only rarely explain the motivation behind it.

3 Study Overview

In this paper, we present an analysis of the motives for using SNSs and the resulting behaviours of students of two universities in Germany and Liechtenstein. The empirical survey is divided into two parts: 1) Generation of hypotheses; 2) Verification of the hypotheses (Scholl, 2003). We conducted guided interviews with the German students, as a semi-structured form of qualitative research, for generating hypotheses. The hypotheses are discussed in the context of the existing body of research. Subsequently, we applied two online questionnaires for verification.

Table 1. Leading questions of the guided interviews

Section	Leading-question
Introduction	How do you communicate in general and do you differentiate different communication groups?
General position	Do you use SNSs? Why and how?
SNSs usage	How intensively do you use the specific SNSs you are a member of and within which communication groups?
SNSs functions	Which functionality do you use on SNSs and why?
Network management	Could you characterize the way in which you manage your social network on SNSs?

In the first questionnaire we tested our hypotheses on experimental group A (the German students), which we already addressed in the qualitative interviews. In the second questionnaire we addressed students from the University of Liechtenstein (experimental group B). With this second online survey we can show that our results are significant not only for students of a specific university in Germany. Due to the size of Liechtenstein and the fact that it is surrounded by Switzerland, Austria and Germany, the University of Liechtenstein offers the opportunity to analyse a very heterogeneous group of students. Many of the students live in one of the surrounding countries and are thus potentially involved in very different real-world social environments. In addition, we changed some details in the online survey to gain more insights into motives for none-usage and further test some of the findings form the first online survey. Based on our findings, motives of SNS usage and none-usage as well as contextual factors shaping these motives will be deduced.

3.1 Qualitative Interviews

We conducted eleven guided interviews with students aged between 21 and 25. Each interview took about twelve minutes. The interview guideline was divided into five major sections: Introduction, general position towards SNSs, SNSs usage, SNSs functions and network maintenance. In

Table 1 the leading question for each block is displayed. In addition, the guideline included fourteen key-questions and nine optional questions.

3.2 Quantitative Interview

To verify our findings from the qualitative interviews we invited students to participate in two online surveys.

A	General Communication Behaviour	What communication channels do you use and how often?
		Do you distinguish between different communication groups?
		↳ What groups do you distinguish?
		↳ Which communication channel do you use for which group?
	IT affinity	How often do you use a computer?
B	Perception and usage of SNSs	Are you registered on any Social Network Site on the internet?
		↳ On how many SNSs are you registered?
		↳ Which SNSs do you know?
		↳ On which SNSs are you registered?
	Motives of usage	↳ Why did you register for these SNSs?
	Frequency of usage	↳ How often do you log-in on these SNSs?
		↳ Which functions of the SNSs do you use and how often?
	Relationship-Management	↳ What criteria determin your decission on the acceptance of freindship-invitations?
		↳ What criteria determin your decission on the dispatch of freindship-invitations?
C	Usage of primary SNS	↳ Is there on SNS that you use predominantly?
		↳ Which SNS do you use predominantly?
		↳ Which functions of this SNS do you use and how often?
		↳ Which functions of the SNS could be spared?
	Usage of SNS for business contacts	↳ Do you use a SNS for business contacts?
		↳ Which functions of this SNS do you use and how often?
		↳ What criteria determin your decission on the acceptance of freindship-invitations?
		↳ What criteria determin your decission on the dispatch of freindship-invitations?

Figure 1. Online Questionnaire

The questionnaire for our first survey was divided into three major sections as displayed in **Figure 1**. A total of 326 participants took part in the survey, 199 of these answered the questionnaire in full. Of these, 59 participants were college students, employees or others. In the qualitative interviews we only interviewed university students; consequently, other participants could not be considered for verifying our hypotheses. Hence, our final sample consists of 140 interviews with students aged between 20 and 30. Most of the participants can be categorized as IT savvy, with 67% using the computer more than four hours and only 3% less than one hour per day.

In the second questionnaire questions concerning the general communication behaviour have been reduced. Instead we concentrated on the detailed usage of different SNSs as well as motives not only for the usage but also for none-usage of SNSs. In this survey a total of 478 participants took part, of which 307 answered the questionnaire in full. 14 of these were employees of the university. Hence, our sample consists of 293 students aged between 18 and 50 with 96% of the participants being between 20 and 30 year of age.

4 Presentation of results

4.1 Generation of Hypotheses

We deduced from the qualitative part of the study four major hypotheses on SNS usage (see table 2).

Table 2. Leading questions of the guided interviews

Hypothesis	
H1	The use of SNSs is established within the group of students. The usage is highly dependent on the communication group. SNSs are mostly used as a communication channel to firstly stay in contact with friends and schoolmates and secondary with co-students.
H2	SNS users have one primary SNS, which is selected depending on the best covering of real world contacts. Other SNSs are used for specific kinds of contacts or to include contacts not represented on the primary SNS.
H3	The usage of SNSs is mainly focused on the maintenance of existing contacts; establishing new contacts is rather uncommon.
H4	Business-oriented SNSs are to a large extent used for contact management and very rarely for communication purposes.

In the following, we will discuss these hypotheses in the context of existing research. We will state the number of participants of the guided interviews that articulated a statement in squared brackets.

Hypothesis 1: Channel choice and usage patterns

Some participants [4/11] of our study mentioned SNSs already, when answering the initial question, which asks for the communication channels they use. Different studies show that the usage of SNSs is well established among teenagers (Boyd, 2007; Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Ofcom, 2008) as well as students (Hargittai, 2007; Lampe et al., 2006). Nevertheless, it is notable that SNSs are named on an equal footing with communication channels such as the telephone or email, which have been around for decades, considering that SNSs have only become available a few years ago. All remaining participants stated on request that they use SNSs. Most of the participants [9/11] stated to differentiate between different communication groups (family, friends and co-students). The communication group hereby has a major influence on the communication channel they chose. SNSs are mostly used for communication with co-students [6/9] and former schoolmates [7/9]. Other factors influencing the communication channel choice are liability, synchrony, habits of the communication partner, geographical distance (also see Mok & Wellman, 2007) and estimated chance of availability using a particular channel.

Hypothesis 2: Primary vs. secondary SNSs

The market for student-focused SNSs in Germany seems to be dominated by StudiVZ. All [11/11] participants stated use this as their primary SNS. Additional SNSs are only

used when needed for a special purpose, like Xing [5/11] for business and Facebook [5/11] for international contacts. The participants reasoned that the effort necessary for keeping the profile and contact-list up to date on multiple SNSs is too high to justify being active intensively on more than one SNS. People choose their primary SNS the site on which most of their peers are active. Other SNSs are only used in case they provide an additional specific benefit (also see Hargittai, 2007). An analysis of the average search traffic of SNS names using Google trends as well as the traffic ranks on Alexa.com reveal a predominance of different SNSs in different countries. Most markets are not dominated by one, but by a few SNSs. For example, Facebook.com and MySpace.com dominate the US-market. This can be explained by different real world groups being active on these SNSs. Whereas Facebook.com mostly inhabits current or former students, on MySpace.com teenagers and musicians are the dominating user groups (Lampe et al., 2006; Lenhart & Madden, 2007). We conclude that home country and belonging to certain real world groups seem to be the dominating factors for choosing a primary SNS.

Hypothesis 3: Motives

We identified two motives for the usage of SNSs concerning the social environment of the users: Curiosity, which aims at the real world social neighbourhood [6/11], and the maintenance of real world contacts, which the participants do not meet on a daily basis [6/11]. The curiosity motive manifests in a behaviour also known as *social searching* (Lampe et al., 2006). Social searchers utilise the SNS in order to gather knowledge on people to whom they have an offline connection (Lampe et al., 2006). For maintaining real world contacts users can utilise the SNS to find these contacts and to stay up to date on their lives (Paul & Brier, 2001; Rosen, 2007). Many SNSs tell their users of special events that occur, like birthdays, which can greatly contribute to maintaining friendships (Dwyer, 2007). SNSs can therefore be used for both maintaining a form of social relatedness known as weak ties (Donath & Boyd, 2004; Ellison et al., 2007), as well as to support the intensification of social relations through gaining new knowledge with respect to one's contacts (Ellison et al., 2007).

None of our participants used the SNSs to get into contact with people they didn't known from the offline world. Friendship invitations were only sent out to [11/11] and mostly only accepted in case they originated from already known individuals [10/11]. Related research on the usage of Facebook.com have come to similar results with respect to the connection between online- and offline-contacts (Ellison et al., 2007; Lampe et al., 2006). Studies on US teenagers (Lenhart & Madden, 2007) and the usage of business related SNSs (Schaefer, 2008) additionally indicate that this phenomenon is not restricted to this specific group. Even though SNSs offer the opportunity to extend one's social network beyond the boundaries, which are usually set by the real-life environment, people seem to rarely take this opportunity (Dwyer, 2007). With the exception of dating sites offering SN functionalities (Ellison & Heino & Gibbs, 2006), SNSs seem not to be used for the generation of new contacts but rather only for maintaining or intensifying them.

Hypothesis 4: Business-oriented SNSs

Besides using a primary SNS, people often use an additional SNS for business contacts [5/11]. Here, in contrast to primary SNSs, the messaging functionality was not used by any of our participants [0/5]. This is quite astonishing as the messaging feature was generally rated as being most important on SNSs [8/11]. A related study on Xing users (Schaefer, 2008) also points to the existence of this phenomenon. The study identified three major motives for using SNSs for business contacts: Staying in contact, reactivation of contacts and most importantly the management of one's existing contact network. Contact management in this case does not seem to aim at increasing the awareness on contacts and with that at maintaining an intensive relationship. Rather, users want to collect contact information on potential future business partners (Thew, 2008), which is comparable to the collection of business cards. Users want to manage their professional network rather than single contacts. Generally, the degree of commitment was named as a major criterion for choosing communication channels, with SNSs being perceived as a channel with a low degree of commitment. Most likely, this degree of commitment is not sufficient for business-related communication.

4.2 Verification of Hypotheses

In the following, we will present the results of our online surveys. The results will be presented as percentage-values in brackets for experimental group A and in square brackets for experimental group B.

Hypothesis 1: Channel choice and usage patterns

Most users draw on face-to-face conversations (92,9%) for communication purposes. In order to communicate over distance, instant messaging (63,6%) or e-mail (61,4%) are being used frequently, followed by SMS (57,1%), mobile phones (53,6%) and landline phones (50,7%). A total 42,1% of users quote that they use SNSs frequently for communication. Traditional mail (4,3%) and other communication channels (2,1%) are rarely used. The above is an indicator that SNSs have become an established new communication channel. However, when it comes CMC instant messaging and e-mail are still dominant. But nearly half of the participants (47,1%) stated to log onto an SNS on a daily basis; while 30,7% use SNSs several times a week, 7,1% weekly and only 15.1% less often. E-mail [92,1% use e-mail daily] is the dominant form of CMC in experimental group B. SNS are the form of CNC, that are used second most, as they are used on a daily basis by 49,4% of the participants, followed by instant messaging [47,4%].

More than half of the participants in experimental group A differentiate between different groups when communicating (56,4%). The most common groups are friends (outside college and university) (87,3%) and co-students (82,3%); others are family (54,4%), co-workers (44,3%) and schoolmates (41,8%). SNSs are used mostly for the group of schoolmates (42,4%), friends (outside college and university) (34,8%) and co-students (26,2%). Only few use SNSs to communicate with other groups like family (7%) or co-workers (5,9%). Facebook.com and StudiVZ.net were most dominantly used in

experimental group B. Most of their contacts on these SNSs are co-students [Facebook: 39,4%; StudiVZ: 56,8%], followed by former schoolmates [18,6%; 22%] and other friends [29,6%; 16,4%].

When communicating with schoolmates, SNSs (42,4%) are the second most important communication channel after instant messaging (45,5%), followed by face-to-face conversation (36,4%). When communicating with co-students, face-to-face conversations (86,2%) are most common, followed by instant messaging (63,1%) and e-mail (44,6%). SNSs are much less important (26,2%) . This division of usage in experimental group A indicates a much stronger usage of the communication functionality of SNSs with former schoolmates. Still, our participants stated to use SNSs in the context of co-students even more intensively. Taking a look at the functionalities used by our participants can give an idea of what SNSs are used for in this context. The functionality mostly used is the messaging functionality (53%), which underlines the importance of SNSs as a communication channel. Other actions executed are browsing the network of friends (48,4%), searching for known users (43,2%) and the composition of messages on a bulletin board of other members (38,6%). The second and third mostly used functionalities do not aim at interaction, but at gathering information on other users. This potentially reflects that people seek for information on new co-students. Such behaviour has already been documented in (Lampe et al., 2006).

In experimental group B, SNSs are used more intensively for communicating with co-students. This difference can potentially be explained by the fact that many students did not move to live in Liechtenstein but are still staying in their home countries. Opportunities for face-to-face communication thereby do not exist to the same extent as in experimental group A. Hence, the usage of SNSs as a communication channel seems to highly depend on geographical distance. SNSs seem to be a good medium to chat with friends once in a while. In case this chatting can be executed using a richer communication channel (like face-to-face) the usage of the messaging functionality on SNSs seems to be omitted.

Hypotheses 1b was therefore confirmed by our quantitative surveys for the communication of students with schoolmates and friends (outside university). For the communication with co-students, SNSs are used frequently as well, but in comparison to the total amount of communication taking place SNSs are used less. Instead, functionality for gathering information (social searching) seems to be predominant.

Hypothesis 2: Primary vs. secondary SNSs

The SNSs known by most participants of experimental group A are StudiVZ.net (97,7%), YouTube.com (70,5%), MySpace.com (62,9%), Facebook.com (62,9%) and Xing.de (51,5%). Most of the participants (94,3%) are registered with at least one SNS, only 13,6% on more than three. Taking SNS users, 92,5% are registered with StudiVZ.net, 28,8% with YouTube.com, 25% with Facebook.com and 21,2% with Xing.de. 84,9% of the users stated to use one primary SNS, which in most cases was StudiVZ.net (84,9%). The major reasons for joining the different SNSs are: StudiVZ.net - most fri-

ends are registered here (76,2%); Facebook.com - maintenance of foreign contacts (73,1%); Xing - professional contacts (77,4%).

In experimental group B, most users were registered with Facebook.com [74,1%], StudiVZ.net [67,2%], YouTube.com [52,1%] and Xing.de [40,5%]. Hence, besides StudiVZ.de, Facebook.com can be seen as co-dominant in experimental group B. This does prove that different SNSs can be dominant in different regions as well as that a small number of SNSs and not only one might dominate a market. Our data gave some input on the different social groups that were covered by these two SNSs. Besides the fact that users of Facebook.com [24,3 years on average] tend to be slightly older than those of StudiVZ.net [23 years on average], the country they live in seems to be the most important factor. Participants choosing Facebook.com as their primary SNS live predominantly in Switzerland [41,9%] and Liechtenstein [30,1%]. Those that chose StudiVZ.net as their primary SNS live predominantly in Austria [59,1%], nearly no participants living in Switzerland [6,8%] chose to use StudiVZ.net as their primary SNS.

Motives for SNS usage in experimental group B match those of experimental group A. The main motive for the choice of a primary SNS in experimental group B was which one did best cover the range of real world contacts [65,7%]. Interestingly, the second most important motive was the provided functionality [26%]. Reasons for the usage of secondary SNSs are: Not all known contacts are registered with the primary SNSs [47,5%]; to stay in contact with foreign friends [34,8%]; the management of business contacts [28,2%]. Only few users are interested in making new contacts [11%] or exchanging information on a specific topic [12,7%]. We can conclude that the results of our online surveys correspond to a high degree with our Hypotheses 2.

Hypothesis 3: Motives

The participants in our survey almost always (97,7%) accept friendship invitations by well-known individuals, most often those offered by acquaintances (69,2%) and sometimes those by individuals they know from the Internet (19,4%). Friendship invitations by unknown individuals are very rarely accepted (3,9%). When sending friendship invitations, our participants are even more precautious. Invitations are nearly only sent out to well-known individuals (96,2%) or acquaintances (51,1%) and very rarely to individuals that were only known from the Internet (9,9%). 3,1% of the participants sent out friendship invitations to unknown users.

The main motive of people in the experimental group B for using SNSs is to stay in contact with friends [95,4%], followed by the intention to be informed about changes in the life of one's friends [52,9%] and in gaining knowledge about newly made contacts [40,2%]. When it comes to old friends, users are mostly interested in new pictures [84,7%] and personal information (like birthdays) [83,9%]. They are also interested in changes in others' relationship status [49,6%], new friends [44,9%] and job changes [43,4%]. With newly made contacts, pictures [91,4%] and friends [77,9%] are most

interesting, followed by the relationship status [58,3%], hobbies [56,4%] and contact details [46,9%].

In contrast to experimental group A, one-quarter of the participants of experimental group B also use SNSs to search for new contacts. In comparison to users that do not use SNSs for getting in contact with unknown users, these are to a higher degree male [80% cp. to 66,5%] and single [55,4% cp. to 35,6%]. Hence, it could well be that these individuals try to utilize SNSs for searching a romantic partner. However, people name as their major interests for gathering new contacts: »the integration into a new social environment« [41,5%] and the »search for partners to execute a certain hobby« are named [38,5%], while only 29,7% of these users are interested in the »search of a romantic partner«. The behaviour of the participants that took part in our online surveys matches our hypotheses 3, except for the relatively high amount of participants in experimental group B that use SNSs to get into contact with previously unknown users.

Hypothesis 4: Business-oriented SNSs

The primary usage of business-related SNSs for contact management is reflected in the results of the quantitative survey. In contrast to SNSs in general (53,0%) the messaging function is rarely used on SNSs for business contacts (10,0%). Also the creation of bulletin board messages is rather uncommon on these SNSs (3,3% vs. 38,6%). Actions, which are executed most frequently, are the search for other members (36,7%) and the sending of contact invitations (35,5%). This reinforces the finding of Schaefer as well as our hypotheses 4: Business-SNSs are used primarily for network management.

5 Discussion

In our survey we identified two basic motive classes for using SNSs. The first one originates in the social network, in which an individual is involved, the second in the specific interests of an individual. We will refer to these classes as **social motives** and **interest motives**. An overview of motives and contextual factors is displayed in **Figure 2**.

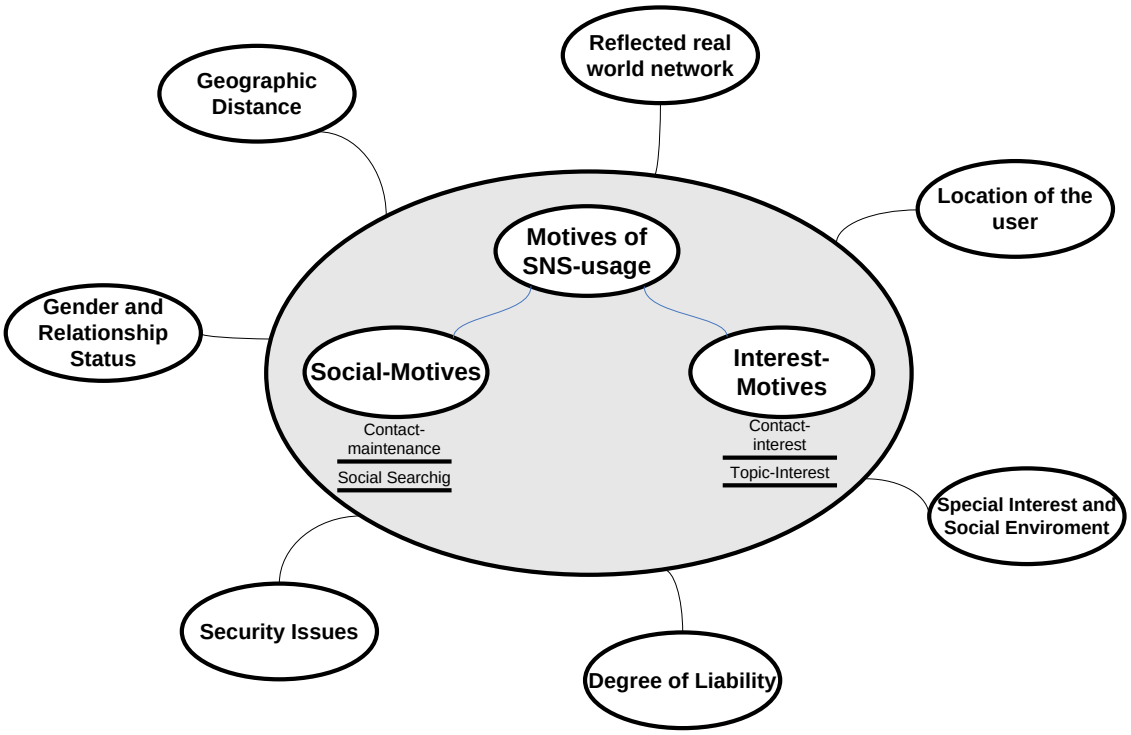

Figure 2. Motives for using SNS and contextual factors

Motives for using SNSs

Keeping in contact with friends, for instance over a geographical distance is an example for a social motive (**contact maintenance**). In our survey this motive is reflected in the maintenance of contacts with former schoolmates. Certain usage patterns emerge from this motivation: SNSs are used to a high degree for communication. While it is also used for information seeking, like changes in the life of friends, this aspect is far less important. In contrast, information seeking behaviour becomes more important on contacts less related to the individual, like acquaintances or newly established contacts. Curiosity as well as the will to integrate oneself into the new social environment of the university can also motivate the usage of SNSs. Typical usage patterns in this context are the browsing of the friend network and studying of user profiles. This behaviour has already been described by (Lampe et al., 2006) using the term **social searching**. However, neither one of the two motives alone can explain the usage of a SNS. Most users will use such SNSs for both contact maintenance and social searching.

Interest-related motives originate either from the interest in a certain type of contacts (**contact interest**) or a certain topic (**topic interest**). The usage of Xing in our case was mostly motivated by contact interest, particularly for business contacts. This motivation induced a usage pattern that was mostly reduced to the search for and the creation of new contact links. However, we do not think that this pattern is necessarily common for usage motivated by contact interest. It might, at least to a certain degree, be dependent

on the specific type of contacts. An example illustrating this could be the usage of SNSs for the search of a romantic partner (Ellison et al., 2006), or in the case of experimental group B, the search for partners for a certain hobby like sports. SNS usage induced by a topic interest was found in the usage of more specialized SNSs, such as YouTube.com, which, not surprisingly, evolved around the usage of the main functionality of YouTube.com, the sharing of video files.

Security issues seem to be the major reason for not using SNSs. 48% stated that they do not want their personal data to be published online. Other reasons were: I rather communicate face-to-face [21,7%]; I do not find SNSs useful at all [13%]. These motives are reflected in two of three none-user classifications described in a study by (Ofcom, 2008); these are the classes »Concerned about safety« and »Intellectual Rejecters«. We could not identify the third class »Technically inexperienced«, probably due to the high affinity towards computer usage in our experimental groups.

Contextual factors that shape motives

Geographic distance: High geographic distance seems to fuel the usage of SNSs as a communication channel. Communication features, such as the messaging function, are more intensively used in comparison to other functionalities provided by an SNS. An example is the communication with former schoolmates in experimental group A, where SNSs are the communication channel used second most, whereas in communicating with co-students SNSs are far less important. This indicates that SNSs have benefits compared to other long distance communication channels. In short-distance communication it makes sense for channels like face-to-face communication to dominate.

Reflected real world network: Most users in our study stated to have one primary SNS, which they use most often. The major factor influencing the choice is the number of real world contacts covered by a SNS. This seems to have two reasons: 1) The number of registered known users on a SNS should highly correlate with the benefit a user can generate by joining. 2) On all SNSs represented in the survey »Recommendation by a friend« was upon the two most important reasons for joining a SNS.

Location of the user: Different SNSs dominate depending on the country and region. The relationship between SNS usage and real world groups consequently drives inhabitants of one country or region to use the same SNS. An example is the usage of Facebook and StudiVZ in our experimental group B. Hence, SN cannot be seen as an internationally equivalent phenomenon, but cultural differences may have a strong influence on the SNS usage. This has major implication for research, as the significance of studies might be highly bound to the location of the users being included.

Special Interest and Social Environments: Apart from their primary usage, SNS users only made use of additional services, when they expected some additional benefit. The benefit might be related to both social motives and interest motives. The usage of Xing for maintaining business contacts is an example of an interest motive, while the usage of Facebook (in experimental group A) for maintaining international contacts is an example for a social motive.

Degree of Commitment: The degree of commitment was named as a major criterion for the choice of a communication channel. SNSs are perceived as a channel with a low degree of commitment. Hence communication, which requires a high degree of perceived commitment, as in business-related communication, is not being done via SNSs.

Security Issues: 73% of SNS users stated that security issues influenced their SNS usage, some of these even said that security had a major influence [14,3%]. Most users were very restrictive with the data they put online. Half of the participants of experimental group B hid their profile from anybody they did not share a friendship link with [52,5%]. Only 20% had their profiles viewable for every member of the SNSs. This of course limits the potential of SNSs to be used to get into contact with new users.

Gender and Relationship status: In our experimental group B, a quarter of the participants partly used SNSs to make new contacts. Most of these participants were both male and single. The participants seem to match the user type »Alpha Socialiser« as described in a study by (Ofcom, 2008).

6 Conclusion

We presented the results of a two-step survey on SNS usage. First, we generated four major hypotheses on the usage of SNSs using data from guided interviews and then verified our results. This was done in two online surveys with the same experimental group and a second similar group. We discussed the hypotheses against the backdrop of current research. We differentiated two major classes of motives for using SNSs: social motives and interest motives. Additional work needs to be conducted to verify and complete our list of motives, as they might be regionally biased. Moreover, we identified seven contextual factors that seem to shape the motives. We hope that our work can help to integrate the current body of research in order to arrive at a more general understanding of the phenomenon. Since the market of SNSs is still evolving, findings also need to be revised from time to time.

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