

PROFILES OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES USERS IN THE NETHERLANDS

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1. ABSTRACT

Online social networking has become a reality and integral part of the daily personal, social and business life. The extraordinary increase of the user numbers of Social Networking Sites (SNS) and the rampant creation of online communities presents businesses with many challenges and opportunities. From the commercial perspective, the SNS are an interesting and promising field: online social networks are important sources of market intelligence and also offer interesting options for co-operation, networking and marketing. For SMEs especially the Social Networking Sites represent a simple and low cost solution for listening the customer's voice, reaching potential customers and creating extensive business networks. This paper presents the results of a national survey mapping the demographic, social and behavioral characteristics of the Dutch users of SNS. The study identifies four different user profiles and proposes a segmentation framework as basis for better understanding the nature and behavior of the participants in online communities. The findings present new insights to marketing strategists eager to use the communication potential of such communities; the findings are also interesting for businesses willing to explore the potential of online networking as a low cost yet very efficient alternative to physical, traditional networking.

2. INTRODUCTION

The upshot of business networking, the Social Capital, is one of the basic ingredients of the innovation process (Bass, 1969; Goldenberg et al., 2002; von Hippel, 1994, von

Raesfeld et al, 1996) and the process of innovation diffusion (Rogers, 1995; Golder and Tellis, 1997). Research has identified and analyzed the importance and role of social networks in entrepreneurship (Wakkee et al, 2001 ; Groen 2005), new ventures (Heuven and Groen, 2006) and firm performance (Boshuzen, 2009) and researchers agree that efficient and extensive business networks are important elements of the SME expansion process.

The value of networking is well understood by businesses and particularly businesses in the early stages of their life cycle but the way networks are born and mature is changing; recent technological developments are reshaping the way professionals create, expand and maintain personal business networks. These developments are mainly related to advances in the area of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

Linkages between ICT, innovation and competitive success of SMEs have been documented in the literature (Lefebvre and Lefebvre, 1993; Street and Meister, 2004). An important development in the IS domain during the last fifteen years was the wide public adoption of the Internet and its establishment as communication and commercial platform. The global character of the Internet opened new prospects for businesses and SMEs in particular: improved trading relationships and improved market intelligence (Mehrtens et al., 2001) and access to new geographical markets have been the main motivators for SMEs to invest in Internet technologies.

The evolution the Internet to its current stage, commonly known as Web 2.0, has brought about more opportunities as well as challenges for businesses. One of the major opportunities is the wide availability of new online applications commonly described as Social Media and in particular new online networking environments known as Social Networking Sites (SNS) (Tredinnick, 2006; Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Constantinides et al., 2008). Next to opportunities the Web 2.0 created also business threats; SNS in combination with other Social Media have given consumers and customers in general more power and control over the marketing process (Wind and Mahajan, 2001; Rha et al, 2002; Bush, 2004; Urban 2006; Constantinides and Fountain, 2008). The challenge strategists are facing is not just the competition from other businesses but also a new form of competition from the consumers themselves: consumers using Social Media applications can now generate, edit and share online information about businesses, products and services and also create online communities and networks allowing where information flows beyond the control of businesses. This information is widely perceived by customers as more reliable than business communication and therefore peer opinion becomes a major influencer of buying behavior (Evans, 2008).

Businesses and especially SMEs must device ways to transform the Social Media and particularly the SNS from strategic threats to strategic opportunities (Constantinides et.al. 2008). Using SNS as marketing tools is a very attractive option for SMEs that often face budget limitations: these tools are low cost compared with traditional communication tools and for all intents and purposes very cost effective. The objective of this article is to provide marketers with behavioral facts about the users of SNS as a first step in the direction of engaging these instruments as business networking platforms and strategic marketing tools. A survey held in The Netherlands identifies the elements underpinning the SNS adoption process and use of these sites by customers. This is a first step towards developing the right SNS propositions and tools likely to attract online users and help marketers to achieve their communication or other objectives.

3. SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES (SNS)

There is a variety of definitions of the term Social Networking Sites. User participation and user generated content is a common element of many definitions (Tredinnick, 2006; Constantinides et al, 2008). According to Constantinides and Fountain (2008) online social networks (or Social Networking Sites) are one of the five application types of the Web 2.0 domain (Social Media) and defined as “ applications allowing users to build personal web sites accessible to other users for exchange of personal content and communication”. Boyd and Ellison (2007) define the SNS “as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system”. Social Networking Sites (SNS) such as Facebook, Hyves, MySpace, LinkedIn, Twitter, Second Life etc. are a relatively recent Internet phenomenon; nonetheless they are already used by millions of web users worldwide who have integrated SNS into their everyday life (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Ofcom, 2008). According to data from ComScore Media Metrix (2008) this new form of human interaction through virtual social networks has become one of the most popular and faster growing Internet activities. Some SMS applications attract already tenths or even hundreds of millions of regular users.

There are already numerous SNS with various technological options supporting a wide range of interests and practices. While their main technological features are fairly consistent, various types of cultures emerge around SNS; some serve a diverse audience, while others attract people based on common language or race, nationality, etc. (Boyd and Ellison, 2008).

SNS are considered of great importance both for individuals and businesses, since they support both the maintenance of existing social ties and the formation of new connections between users (Donath and Boyd, 2004; Cliff, Ellison and Steinfield, 2006; Ellison, Heino and Gibbs, 2006; Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007; Lampe, Ellison and Steinfield, 2007; Boyd and Ellison, 2008). The connections between users in SNS can be important in facilitating other tasks of the group (Sproull and Kiesler, 1991; Preece and Maloney-Krichmar, 2003), decreasing bad behaviors (Donath, 1998; Reid, 1999) and building different types of social capital (Resnik, 2001; Ellison *et al.*, 2006); these are only some of the potential benefits of social networking (Wellman, 2001).

Previous research on SNS has been mainly focused on the nature and the strategic importance of the SNS. Given that only recently SNS have been actively engaged in business marketing and active online social networking there is less attention so far on the users of these applications. More specifically there is little known about the adoption process of SNS and user behavior, personality and actual use of these tools. Identification of users profiles through market segmentation is the first step in the direction of mapping the online behavior of this category of consumers. The objective of this study is to identify and examine the basic parameters of the online behavior of SNS users and classify the SNS users on the basis of their socio-demographic and behavioral characteristics.

4. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The fast growth of the SNS domain and the increasing importance of the online social networks as part of the everyday life for hundreds of millions of people is increasingly

attracting the attention of academics and observers. Researchers have been studying the status and effects of SNS on society and business (Keen, 2007; Boyd and Ellison, 2007), their role in identity construction and expression (Boyd & Heer, 2006) but also on building and maintenance of social capital (e.g., Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Other issues discussed in the literature are the motives and personality of users (Subrahmanyam et al, 2008; Correa et al, 2009), the role of SNS as marketing instruments (Constantinides et al, 2008; Watters et al, 2009; Spaulding, 2010; Hogg, 2010) and trust / privacy issues(Gross & Acquisti, 2005; Hodge, 2006; Dwyer et al, 2007; Hoadley et al, 2010). Online network security and privacy is an issue extensively discussed in the literature (Gross et al. 2005; Boyd & Heer, 2006; George, 2006; Kornblum & Marklein, 2006; Hodge, 2006; Acquisti and Gross, 2006; Stutzman 2006 Dwyer, Hiltz, and Passerini, 2007; Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Preibusch et al., 2007). An underlying theme of many of the articles mentioned is the potential role of online social networks as part of the business strategy. Looking to the practice one could argue that businesses are rushing to integrate SNS (and Social Media in general) into their communication strategies: according to a study of Barnes and Mattson (February 2010) 35% of the Fortune 500 companies have already active Twitter accounts and nearly 50% of the top 100 companies have such an account also. A study published on February 2010 by the Small Business Success Index (SBSI)¹ indicates that 75% of the surveyed small businesses in the USA have already a company page on a social networking site and 57% have built a network, either their own or through a SNS like LinkedIn. Similar findings indicating the start of a trend were reported in studies conducted earlier by McKinsey (2007a; 2007b) and Forrester Research (2008).

SNS have been identified in the literature as very important for both individuals and businesses, since they support the existing social ties and the formation of new connections and networks between users (Donath and Boyd, 2004; Cliff et al., 2006; Ellison et al, 2006; Ellison et al., 2007; Lampe et al., 2007; Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Connections between users have been found to be vital in facilitating other tasks of the group (Sproull and Kiesler, 1991; Preece and Maloney-Krichmar, 2003), eliminating the tendency to misuse the system (Donath, 1998; Reid, 1999) and building different types of social capital (Resnik, 2001; Ellison et al., 2006); the potential benefits of social networking are quite extensive (Wellman, 2001).

A number of researchers in the SNS domain are focused on the mapping of this terrain and the aptitude of the Social Media and Social Networks in particular as marketing tools for commercial organizations identifying several areas where SNS can play an important role as part of the marketing toolbox (Rogers et al., 1997; Bickart and Schindler, 2001; Subramani and Rajagopalan, 2003; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Hoegg et al., 2006; Korica et al, 2006, Costantinides and Fountain, 2008; Deighton and Kornfeld, 2009).

Not only commercial organizations can profit from engaging SNS as part of their marketing strategy; Waters et al. (2009) analyzed the use of a social network (Facebook) as part of the communication strategy of non-profit organizations concluding that a well-planned social network-based communication strategy can be beneficial for non-profit firms as well.

¹ <http://growsmartbusiness.com/>

5. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted by means of a survey of Dutch online users in the autumn of 2009. The Netherlands is an appropriate market for research of online issues due to high Internet penetration and sophistication of Internet users; according to the 2009 European commission's Digital Competitiveness Report² 83% of the Dutch population are regular internet users – connecting to the internet at least once a week - and 74% of the population has broadband connection; in both aspects The Netherlands is ranking nr 1 in Europe.

An online questionnaire by a panel of Internet users was used as a method of data collection. The panel consisted of 400 individuals, users of social networking sites from the whole country with ages ranging from 16 to 74 years. The non-probability method by quota sampling was used in order to ensure that the panel is representative of the Dutch population with regard to gender, age and area of residence.

The questionnaire was based on a combination of closed-ended, dichotomous and multi-chotomous questions, with single and multiple responses. The main aims of the questionnaire were, to obtain information about the Dutch consumer as to the experience and use of the Internet in general, the level of involvement and usage of social networking sites, the user motivations to participate in these sites, the types of profiles (public or private) preferred, the extend of network-based contacts, the ways people access SNS, the number of accounts in different SNS, and the socio-demographics of the users.

The analytical techniques used in this study were divided in two stages. A cluster analysis was used in the first stage in order to determine different clusters of social networking sites users; the criterion here was the level of individual participation in SNS.

In the second stage we analyzed the significant differences between the obtained clusters and the user profiles. These profiles were created on the basis of socio-demographic characteristics, aptitude as Internet users (based on the number of years of experience), intensity of Internet usage (based on the hours of usage per week), the extend of use of Internet tools in order to obtain information or generate content, the years of experience with SNS, the intensity (number of personal accounts, the frequency and hours of use) of interaction in SNS, the types of profiles (public or private) preferred, the size of personal networks (in the forms of "friends", "followers" etc), the way of accessing SNS, the motivations to participate in SNS and the types of activities carried out in SNS. The analysis of the data was done by means of the statistical program SPSS.

6. RESULTS

Boone and Roehm (2002) and earlier studies have indicated there are over 50 clustering methods that could be applied to market segmentation. Similar views are shared by

² http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/itemlongdetail.cfm?item_id=5146

Milligan and Cooper (1985) and Wedel and Kamakura (2000). However, none of the clustering techniques is generally superior across different data sets (Punj and Stewart, 1983; Arabie, Hubert and De Soete, 1996; Wedel and Kamakura, 2000).

Following the approach of Boone and Rohem (2002), the K-means criterion was selected because it has been frequently used as comparative standard in similar studies (Balakrishnan, Cooper, Jacob and Lewis, 1994, 1996; Hruschka and Natter, 1999). As K-means is a non-hierarchical clustering method, Ward and average linkage methods were selected as hierarchical clustering representatives .

Cluster analysis is intended to group the individuals of our sample into groups according to the level of their participation in SNS. With this analysis we identified four differentiated SNS user segments which we have identified as “Beginners”, “Habitual Users” , “Outstanding Users” and “Experts”.

As shown in Table 1, there is an association³ between group allocation and gender, age, marital status, work situation, information-oriented activities, content generation oriented activities, number of accounts and use of these accounts in SNS, the amount of contacts and the reasons to participate in SNS. On the other hand, there is no relation between the variables related to group membership and the education level, duration of use of the Internet and SNS (most of them are users for more than 8 years), the number of hours spend on the Internet, the kind of profiles preferred (most users have a private profile) and the way to access SNS.

Profile description:

- “*Beginner*” This segment represents the majority of the population: 45% of the SNS users. This group, compared with the rest, is characterized by a limited activity in SNS. Most of them connect to SNS for sending private messages (80.6%), searching for people (79.5%), updating their profile (73.9%), and sharing or uploading photos (67.8%). The majority have accounts in one SNS only (58.3%) and the highest proportion of users have between 10 and 50 contacts (33.3%). The main reason for them to use SNS is to keep in touch with their friends and relations (51.1%).

The socio-demographic analysis of Table 1 shows that the majority of Beginners are female (55%), between 25 and 34 years (46.7%), married (54.4%) and employed (63.3%). While Beginners engage in different information-oriented activities in the Internet (that can be described as passive) this is the group with lowest proportion of users who carry out this type of activities. Regarding the activities related to content generation (active participation), they are limited to expressing opinions and valuations (60%). In that respect the Beginners can be characterized as mostly passive SNS users.

- “*Habitual*” user: This segment includes 18.2% of total SNS users. Compared with the other clusters, Habitual users are characterized by the intensive use of SNS as channels to send private messages (97.3%), get information about things that interest them

³ To determinate the existence of an association or relationship between group membership and each of the studied variables, the Chi-square test of Independence had been used. For the test of Independence, a chi-square probability of less than or equal to 0.05, for a confidence level of 95%, is commonly interpreted by applied workers as justification for rejecting the null hypothesis and therefore we can conclude that there is an association between the studied variables.

(97.3%), update their profile (95.9%), search for people (94.5%), communicate news or information they think might be interesting to other people (64.4%), search for job opportunities (53.4%) and engage in other activities that are more common among the other groups. While the highest proportion (37%) of Habitual users have one SNS account, this is the group with the highest percentage of individuals with more than two accounts (30.2%). The highest proportion of these users (35.6%) has between 10 to 50 contacts. Main reasons for using SNS are the ease of staying in touch with their friends and acquaintances (65.8%) and entertainment (58.9%).

Most users in this category are male (57.5%) between 25 and 44 years old (57.6%), married (43.8%) and employed (65.8%). Concerning the use of Internet in a passive way, the behavior of the this category is similar in some aspect to Beginners but they are much more involved in activities with an interactive character: Transfer files (57.5%), participation in chats (69.9%), receiving email alerts (82.2%) and creating virtual personalities(avatars) (42.5%). Regarding the content generating activities they are in their majority posting opinions and product valuations (84.9%), participate in forums (79.5%), send messages to distribution lists (64.4%), create/send files through the Internet (58.9%), and provide comments on other blogs (53.4%).

- “*Outstanding*” user: This segment includes 26.2% of the SNS users. Individuals in this segment, use mainly SNS to send private messages (98.1%), to search for people (97.1%), to update their profile (96.2%), to report about what they are doing (90.5%), to discuss about what people they know say or do (88.6%), to send public messages (78.1%) and to gossip (52.4%). Most individuals in this group are active members of a one SNS with a high proportion of them (40%) having more than 100 online contacts. Among the main reasons for using the SNS is staying in touch with their friends and acquaintances (77.1%), entertainment (60%) and invitations by others to participate (54.3%).

Regarding the socio-demographic profile of this group, most are female (65.7%), and the highest proportion are between 25 and 34 years old (39%), married (37.1%), and employed (79.5%). With regard to the use of SNS the Outstanding user participates in passive activities (search for information) in ways similar to other groups. However, the active participation (generating online content) is not the expected in this segment since this activity in some aspects is lower than Habitual user’s. Outstanding users prefer expressing opinions and valuations (71.4%) and participating in forums (64.8%).

- “*Expert*” user: This is the smallest segment representing 10.5% of SNS users but Experts tend to spend more hours online than any other segment and have the most active and engaged online social life. The segment has the highest percentages of users engaged in most categories of passive and active types of SNS activities than any other segment (sharing or uploading photos, discussing about what people say or do, getting information about things of interest and communicate ideas/thoughts. The overwhelming majority of them update their profile (97.6%), send private messages (97.6%), share links about interesting web sites (97.6%), report about what they are doing (97.6%), discuss about photos posted by their friends (95.2%), share mood (90.5%), send public messages (85.7%), gossip (83.3%), download applications (81%), communicate news or issues that they think might be interesting to other people (78.6%), tag friends’ photos (76.2%), report about brands or products they use (76.2%),

write or comment about advertisements (76.2%), and download games (61.9%). Most Experts are active users of one SNS (38.1%) but they are also the segment with the highest proportion of owners of more than six SNS accounts (2.4%). Moreover, the highest proportion (45.2%) has more than 100 contacts on these sites. Finally, the main reasons that motivate them to use the SNS are usually to keep in touch with their friends and acquaintances (78.6%), entertainment (66.7%), because all their friends were users (57.1%), and because they were invited (52.4%).

Most Expert users are female (69%), between 16 and 24 years old (31%), although there are a high percentage of users between 35 and 44 years old (28.6%). Also many of these users are married (31%) and employed (45.2%). Concerning the use of Internet in a passive way they use it in a similar proportion to other groups, but also make use of peer to peer file sharing (61.9%), and visit web sites using avatars (54.8%). On the other hand, Expert users are the most active Internet users, as they generate content in a variety of ways. Specifically they express opinions and valuations (95.2%), provide comments on other blogs (83.3%), participate in forums (73.8%), publish content to their blog (66.7%), create/send files through the Internet (64.3%), and send messages to distribution lists (59.5%).

An extensive analysis of the study findings per segment is presented in Table 1

Table 1. SNS user segments

		Beginner 45%	Habitual 18.25%	Outstanding 26.25%	Expert 10.5%	χ^2 value	Sig.
Gender	Male	45.0%	57.5%	34.3%	31.0%	12.326	0.006
	Female	55.0%	42.5%	65.7%	69.0%		
Age	16-24	17.8%	8.2%	23.8%	31.0%	31.161	0.008
	25-34	25.6%	28.8%	39.0%	19.0%		
	35-44	21.1%	28.8%	20.0%	28.6%		
	45-54	16.7%	13.7%	10.5%	16.7%		
	55-64	13.9%	13.7%	4.8%	4.8%		
	65-74	5.0%	6.8%	1.9%	0.0%		
Education level	Not graduated from high school	3.3%	2.7%	1.9%	7.1%	18.204	0.110
	High school	27.2%	23.3%	21.0%	47.6%		
	Professional School/College	48.9%	56.2%	59.0%	35.7%		
	University	8.9%	9.6%	8.6%	7.1%		
	Postgraduate course	11.7%	8.2%	9.5%	2.4%		
Marital status	Unmarried living with my parents	14.4%	15.1%	25.7%	35.7%	33.377	0.004
	Unmarried living on my own	10.0%	4.1%	9.5%	7.1%		
	Married	54.4%	43.8%	37.1%	31.0%		
	Widows/Widower	0.0%	2.7%	1.9%	0.0%		
	Divorced	5.6%	9.6%	1.9%	7.1%		
	Unmarried living with partner	15.6%	24.7%	23.8%	19.0%		
Work situation	Self-employed	5.0%	6.8%	2.9%	11.9%	26.264	0.010
	Employee	63.3%	65.8%	70.5%	45.2%		
	Student	12.2%	6.8%	15.2%	26.2%		
	Housewife	6.1%	9.6%	3.8%	14.3%		
	Unemployed/Retire	13.3%	11.0%	7.6%	2.4%		
Length of Internet use	Less than 6 months	1.7%	1.4%	1.0%	0.0%	20.075	0.329
	Between 6 and 12 months	1.7%	0.0%	1.9%	0.0%		
	More than 1 year and less than 2	2.2%	0.0%	2.9%	2.4%		
	Between 2 years and less than 3	4.4%	2.7%	1.0%	7.1%		
	Between 3 years and less than 5	11.1%	12.3%	4.8%	7.1%		
	Between 5 years and less than 8	20.6%	16.4%	32.4%	28.6%		

	8 years or more	58.3%	67.1%	56.2%	54.8%		
Number of hours spend on the Internet	0-4 hours per week	42.8%	37.0%	26.7%	31.0%	11.488	0.074
	5-13 hours per week	40.0%	38.4%	51.4%	38.1%		
	14 or more hours per week	17.2%	24.7%	21.9%	31.0%		
Activities carried out to obtain information	Use e-mail	100.0%	100.0%	99.0%	100.0%	10.637	0.560
	Transfer network file (FTP)	40.6%	57.5%	46.7%	50.0%	31.293	0.008
	Use instant messaging	60.0%	69.9%	78.1%	85.7%	35.054	0.002
	Participate in chats	46.7%	69.9%	60.0%	78.6%	48.588	0.000
	Make phone calls over the Internet	32.8%	35.6%	36.2%	35.7%	17.785	0.274
	Consult forums for information	78.9%	90.4%	87.6%	90.5%	33.211	0.004
	Reading reviews about products, news,...	81.7%	94.5%	92.4%	92.9%	51.033	0.000
	Consult distribution lists	88.9%	95.9%	93.3%	95.2%	31.829	0.007
	Consult wikis	70.6%	91.8%	75.2%	88.1%	31.983	0.006
	Consult blogs	53.3%	86.3%	81.0%	83.3%	73.623	0.000
	Watch and listen to files by the Internet	80.6%	95.9%	91.4%	95.2%	41.479	0.000
	Make use of P2P file sharing	35.0%	45.2%	38.1%	61.9%	34.087	0.003
	Receive e-mail alerts and subscriptions	53.9%	82.2%	73.3%	83.3%	53.133	0.000
	Visit web sites using avatars	17.2%	42.5%	31.4%	54.8%	64.147	0.000
Activities carried out to generate content	Participate in forums	41.7%	79.5%	64.8%	73.8%	58.982	0.000
	Express opinions and valuations	60.0%	84.9%	71.4%	95.2%	43.245	0.000
	Send messages to distribution lists	23.3%	64.4%	38.1%	59.5%	84.587	0.000
	Incorporate content in wikis	7.8%	34.2%	9.5%	45.2%	81.150	0.000
	Publish content to my blog	11.1%	32.9%	36.2%	66.7%	84.393	0.000
	Provide comments on other blogs	17.8%	53.4%	46.7%	83.3%	113.802	0.000
	Create/Send files through the Internet	30.6%	58.9%	42.9%	64.3%	43.119	0.000
	Design/adapt products or services	16.7%	47.9%	22.9%	47.6%	44.182	0.000

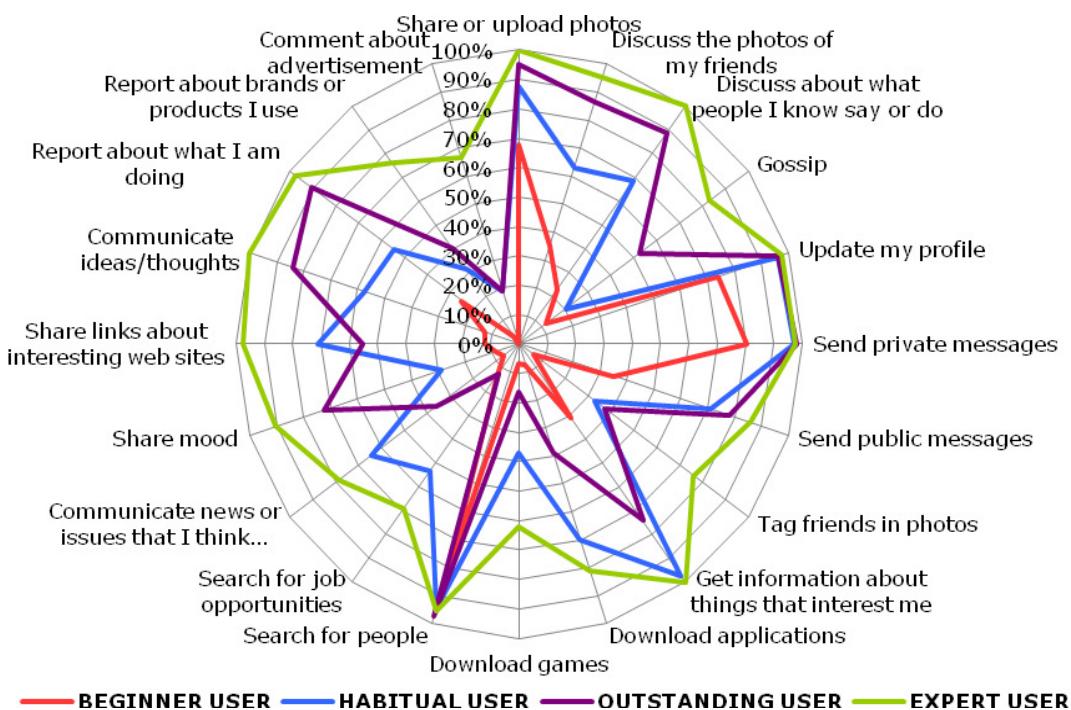
	through the Internet						
Antiquity of use of SNS	Less than 1 month	3.9%	5.5%	3.8%	2.4%	9.552	0.388
	Between 1 and 6 months	11.1%	12.3%	5.7%	7.1%		
	Between 6 months and 1 year	13.9%	6.8%	7.6%	16.7%		
	Over 1 year ago	71.1%	75.3%	82.9%	73.8%		
Number of SNS in which have account and use them	None	8.3%	6.8%	1.0%	7.1%	38.050	0.004
	One	58.3%	37.0%	53.3%	38.1%		
	Two	21.7%	26.0%	24.8%	28.6%		
	Three	8.9%	12.3%	13.3%	19.0%		
	Four	1.7%	11.0%	3.8%	2.4%		
	Five	1.1%	5.5%	3.8%	2.4%		
	Six	0.0%	1.4%	0.0%	2.4%		
Profile	Public	22.8%	21.9%	21.0%	26.2%	11.127	0.267
	Private in some and public in other	15.0%	26.0%	24.8%	28.6%		
	Private in some and public in other	49.4%	41.1%	47.6%	40.5%		
	I do not know	12.8%	11.0%	6.7%	4.8%		
Amount of contacts	Less than 10	23.3%	21.9%	7.6%	9.5%	39.523	0.000
	From 10 to 50	33.3%	35.6%	17.1%	26.2%		
	From 51 to 100	22.2%	23.3%	35.2%	19.0%		
	More than 100	21.1%	19.2%	40.0%	45.2%		
Way to access SNS	Computer	95.6%	91.8%	91.4%	85.7%	8.290	0.218
	Mobile phone	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%		
	Both	4.4%	8.2%	7.6%	14.3%		
Reasons to participate in SNS	Entertainment	37.2%	58.9%	60.0%	66.7%	22.928	0.000
	Professional interest	14.4%	31.5%	10.5%	33.3%	20.767	0.000
	Because I was invited	45.0%	47.9%	54.3%	52.4%	2.542	0.468
	For novelty. It is fashionable	17.8%	21.9%	33.3%	42.9%	16.288	0.001
	Keep in touch with my friends and acquaintances	51.1%	65.8%	77.1%	78.6%	24.628	0.000
	Because all my friends were users	17.2%	27.4%	42.9%	57.1%	37.230	0.000
	Keep informed of events, parties	2.8%	6.8%	7.6%	23.8%	23.223	0.000
	Keep informed of new product reviews that interest me	2.8%	16.4%	3.8%	14.3%	20.630	0.000

Activities carried out in SNS	Make new friends	4.4%	20.5%	20.0%	40.5%	40.359	0.000
	Make new contacts/professional relations	13.3%	23.3%	12.4%	31.0%	11.257	0.100
	Know more about or have a closer relationship with certain people who I do not have a direct relation	6.1%	12.3%	11.4%	21.4%	9.558	0.023
	Search partner / to pull	2.8%	8.2%	2.9%	7.1%	5.149	0.161
	Share or upload photos	67.8%	87.7%	95.2%	100.0%	166.761	0.000
	Discuss the photos of my friends	35.0%	63.0%	86.7%	95.2%	193.979	0.000
	Discuss about what people I know say or do	22.8%	68.5%	88.6%	100.0%	237.343	0.000
	Gossip	11.7%	20.5%	52.4%	83.3%	136.313	0.000
	Update my profile	73.9%	95.9%	96.2%	97.6%	142.229	0.000
	Send private messages	80.6%	97.3%	98.1%	97.6%	104.939	0.000
	Send public messages	35.0%	71.2%	78.1%	85.7%	107.218	0.000
	Tag friends in photos	6.1%	32.9%	37.1%	76.2%	128.662	0.000
	Get information about things that interest me	31.1%	97.3%	74.3%	100.0%	212.546	0.000
	Download applications	7.2%	69.9%	39.0%	81.0%	190.838	0.000
	Download games	6.7%	37.0%	16.2%	61.9%	110.087	0.000
	Search for people	79.4%	94.5%	97.1%	95.2%	80.276	0.000
	Search for job opportunities	13.3%	53.4%	12.4%	69.0%	111.212	0.000
	Communicate news or issues that I think might be interesting to other people	6.7%	64.4%	36.2%	78.6%	181.179	0.000
	Share mood	8.3%	28.8%	72.4%	90.5%	229.661	0.000
	Share links about interesting web sites	12.3%	71.2%	55.2%	97.6%	208.315	0.000
	Communicate ideas/thoughts	12.8%	57.5%	83.8%	100.0%	249.435	0.000

	Report about what I am doing	25.0%	54.8%	90.5%	97.6%	226.902	0.000
	Report about brands or products I use	3.3%	31.5%	40.0%	76.2%	150.599	0.000
	Write or comment about advertisement	0.0%	19.2%	19.0%	66.7%	142.411	0.000

Differences between the segments are visible by depicting four main categories of SNS-related activities in spider diagrams. Figure 1 illustrates the differences in the intensity of various activities of the four segments related to the use of the SNS as information sources.

Figure 1. Activities carried out to obtain information in SNS (Passive use of SNS)



From the graph is evident that some activities like searching for people online, sending private messages and updating profiles enjoy high popularity among all four segments while large differences exist in other types of activities like reporting about products used and commenting about advertising are popular mainly among the Expert Users.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Understanding the market is the first and most basic step in order to communicate efficiently with it. This paper argues that the Social Networking Sites provide many opportunities to SMEs as a domain attracting an ever-increasing number of online customers. Segmenting this market is a first step towards better understanding it and it is the basis for developing effective marketing programs.

The classification of Dutch users of SNS resulted in four distinct segments: The Beginners, the Average Users, the Outstanding Users and the Expert Users. The results indicate that socio-demographic characteristics are not suitable segmentation criteria for this market; the best criteria are criteria related to behavior and motivation of SNS users when using such applications. The study reveals in this sense the specific behavioral characteristics of these segments and provides marketers with important information as to designing marketing programs making use of SNS. For SMEs in particular the segments identified provide a good insight on the possibilities to use SNS as part of their marketing strategy depending on the type of customers they want to reach.

The study provides information as to what SNS are popular in the Netherlands and identifies ways people use the SNS, mainly as platforms of networking but also as forums of criticism, complaints and product reviews. Such forums can deliver high quality customer information, customer insights and complains at much lower cost and much faster than traditional market research methods. Taping the online customer voice requires that businesses engage seriously in such an activity by creating the necessary organizational and budgetary facilities and infrastructure.

7. LITERATURE

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