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## Marketing Research regarding the Usage of Online Social Networking Sites by High School Students

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### Abstract

This paper aims to present the concept of online social networks (OSN) and its evolution in the world of business as well as several important advantages and disadvantages of using online social networking sites. We are presenting a quantitative research on the main reasons for using online networking sites by high schools students from the several counties of Romania. The authors will present the results of the research which underline: the main activities undertaken by students with this new communication tool, the average number of friends the students have and the selection criteria for them as well as the influence level of OSN sites on the life and activity (school and private) of the students.

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*Keywords:* online social network; marketing; information technology; business strategy.

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### 1. Introduction

The world we live in is in a continuous state of change and development. Every day we hear of new technologies and new discoveries that can and will affect our lives. But no technology has had a greater development as the information and communication technology has in the last decades. The development of the Internet in the last years, the increase of usage by businesses and by private individuals alike has brought forth a new environment and a new method of reaching the clients and the companies' partners and suppliers.

The business world can no longer ignore these new communication and information tools. With the help of them, the managers and the marketers alike can reach their consumers faster, better and in a more personalized manner. One

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such tool has developed in the last decade: the online social networking site or how is most commonly called the social networks. These new methods of communication have had such a great impact on the world that no organization that respects itself can do without. Of course it is not just the business world that has benefited from this tool, the private individuals are the ones that have had the most to gain, and some say maybe even to loose, from its development. Probably the most social structure that has received the greatest impact from this new communication platform is the young individuals. In order to reach the minds of this target group the managers and their marketing specialists need to understand the main reasons and the main activities that the young individuals undertake on such sites and how these sites can influence their behavior.

## **2. Online social networking sites – what are they and how they came to be?**

All individuals need to feel like they are part of a social network which consists of friends, family, colleagues, acquaintances etc. This is the base of the human society. If we look closely to the structure of the OSN we see that it has similar attributes as the concept of social networks. A social network consists of all the people — friends, family, colleague and others — with whom one shares a social relationship, say friendship, commerce, or others. Traditional social network study can date back about half a century, focusing on interpersonal interactions in small groups due to the difficulty in obtaining large data sets (Wasserman and Faust in Hu and Wang, 2009).

Like stated before, the online networking sites (OSN) have had a great development in the last decade, and especially since the year 2006. But the question still remains: What are they? The online social networks are defined (Boyd and Ellison, 2007) 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.

Other authors stated that an OSN is a site through which people connect with friends/acquaintances, either people they know from outside the virtual or the online environment, or the ones only from the virtual environment (Veghes and Pantea: 2009, Zarella: 2010), whom they have common interests, activities, needs and aims.

If we look at the above mentioned definitions we can observe several important common traits that are underlined by all the authors: (1) the existence of an online site / platform; (2) a connection between individuals, which can be strong or weak; (3) there exists a common interest from those that want to connect to one and the other. So all these sites are just online networks developed by individual and organizational users that have a common goal or interest. All the activities that develop around these sites are actually social relations that have transcended the usual face to face communication to the online communication system.

But why is the need for such a communication tool? We consider that over the years, our life has become more and more active, fast, our perception of the time has condensed and we no longer have enough time for social interaction in classical manner. We are so preoccupied with our daily life that we sometimes no longer have time for friends, family or acquaintances. So with the help of the information and communication technology development in the last decade new methods of inter individual communication has arisen. The Internet, Smartphone, laptops, tablets etc. are the new communication tools used by individuals to communicate with others.

In an increasingly dynamic and globalised world, ruled by Internet and mobile 24 / 7 communications, consumers and the individuals must find the best organizations that would provide them not only the functional and emotional satisfaction, but also the fulfillment of human spirit (Kotler et al. 2010). This is where we are today. The online social networking sites can be such tools that the individuals and organizations may use. They have made their first appearance in 1997 with the birth of SixDegree.com (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Some specialists (Nickson, 2009) state that these sites were born in the late 1980's when the concept of Bulletin Board System (BBS) has come alive. BBS were online meeting places that allowed users to communicate with a central system where they could download information and post messages to other users.

But the most common online social networking sites were developed after the .com boom of 2000 – 2001. If we look at a timeline of online social networking sites we see that the period between 2003 and 2006 is the time zone when the most important online social networking sites are born (Boyd and Ellison: 2007; Ulmanu: 2011; Kaplan A. M., Haenlein M: 2010): 2003 – LinkedIn, MySpace, Hi5; Open BC/Xing;

2004 – Facebook (at Harvard); Orkut; Flickr; Hyves; 2005 – YouTube; Bebo; Yahoo 360; Facebook (High School Network); 2006 – Facebook (worldwide); Windows Live Spaces; Twitter.

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