Towards Definition and Typology of Niche Social Networking Sites: An Abstract

Jelena Filipovic*, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia, jelena.filipovic@ekof.bg.ac.rs

ABSTRACT

Social networks (SN) have become focal points for businesses due to their vast consumer bases (Alves et al., 2016; Dwivedi et al., 2015; Evans et al., 2021). The term "homophily in social networks" introduced by McPherson et al. (2001) highlights the homogeneity in individuals' personal networks across various sociodemographic, behavioral, and intrapersonal characteristics. This led to the rise of niche social networking sites (NSNS). However, limited literature on NSNS (Darban, 2019; McIntyre, 2014) creates a gap in understanding their business and social roles. This study aims to define and categorize NSNS for future research in international marketing. Despite attention from various academic fields and early recognition by marketers (Baker, 2008; K.M., 2008), academic research on NSNS remains scarce. The study synthesized various definitions from literature, proposing that niche social networking sites are online platforms that enable users to (1) create profiles, (2) interact with other users who share specific demographic or geographic characteristics, careers, lifestyles, circumstances, or interests, and (3) exchange multimedia content such as text, images, videos, and audio. NSNS can be classified based on attributes like demographics, profession, interests, life situations, location, dating preferences, and virtual worlds. They also differ by medium (mobile or computer) and content type. They provide specified and targeted content for an engaged and interested community, while competing among each other for audience attention, aiming to attract smaller communities of users and advertisers that share common interests. This study compiled a comprehensive directory of niche social networking sites (NSNS) using multiple sources and a systematic approach. The initial roster of NSNS was based on Xu's (2022) online material, Statista's search engine, and the Crunchbase directory. Content analysis categorized 318 active NSNS, revealing that most are text- and picture-centered, with around 40% video-based. The majority are computer-based with only a small percentage (less than 5%) being mobile-based. The study concludes that NSNS vary by purpose and content type but does not find sufficient evidence that they differ by the facilitating medium. The research highlights a need to distinguish between SN, virtual worlds, mobile apps, and messaging tools. Although virtual worlds sometimes overlap with SN, they often stand as unique online platforms. Mobile SNs are typically extensions of computer-based versions. As for NSNS classifications, patterns emerge based on shared demographic, geographic, social, professional, and interest attributes among users. Limitations include the lack of comprehensive SN directories and limited academic focus on NSNS. Despite this, the study provides a framework for understanding NSNS, paving the way for future research in the evolving digital world.

Keywords: Niche; Social media; Social platforms; Vertical networks; Homophyly; Definition; Categorization

References Available Upon Request