

# Current Status and Issues of Social Networks in Kazakhstan

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**Abstract.** Social networks nowadays play very significant and important role in world's communication system. Ever since their introduction, social networks have attracted millions of users. Social networks are now becoming a useful to develop business, social and educational spheres in the country, but also can have their own limitations and problems. The primary goal of this research is to reveal attitudes of Kazakhstan social network users to worldwide and domestic resources, their preferences, and to investigate the question of further domestic networks development. Current position of domestic Kazakhstan social networks is weak and requires improvements. Further integration and development can bring benefits to businesses, educational sphere and to the whole society. Benefits of strong social network extend to the level of individual person, giving new opportunities and options. Social networks can benefit education in different ways. For example gives opportunity to learn across different geographical locations, share information about cultures and work collaboratively.

**Keywords.** Social Networking, Benefits and Challenges of SNS

## 1 Introduction

Social networks are defined as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

Only a little number of social networks is known worldwide like Facebook, Myspace and Twitter. Others are either regional or popular only in one county. Internet users in Kazakhstan are members of some worldwide networks and also of some domestic. The most well known Kazakhstan networks are kiwi.kz, yvision.kz ,jnet.kz etc.

The main goal of this research is to reveal attitudes of Kazakhstani social network users to worldwide and domestic resources, their preferences, and to investigate the question of further domestic networks development. Social networks are now becoming a useful to develop business, social and educational spheres in the country, but also can have their own limitations and problems. And many discussions concerning this are still open.

## 2 Literature review

### 1. History of Social Network Sites

Since SixDegrees.com was the first recognizable social network site, that was launched in 1997, the market of social networks is large today and is still growing. Networks users in different countries vary not only in number of participants but also in the purpose of usage. As we can see from the map below Chinese population is the most active in social networking with 155,29 millions of users. U.S is in the second place with 144,55 millions of users, who tend to be either messengers, content sharers of group joiners. Oppositely Chinese users tend to be all three at the same time.<sup>1</sup>

There are many worldwide social networks users in Kazakhstan. Also there are some domestic networks, like: ct.kz, kiwi.kz, nur.kz, yvision.kz, jnet.kz. But Kazakhstan networks are not popular enough, comparing with some others. It is partially explained by the short period of time passed after their introduction and difficulties in implementation. According to the study of the Institute of Parliamentarism, "Socio-political mood of the population in Kazakhstan", conducted in September 2011, the most popular social network is "Moy Mir" used by 50,4% of all respondents followed by "VKontakte" 15.2%, Facebook 8% and Twitter 3.8% of the respondents (International Informatization Academy, 2011).<sup>2</sup>

This country is #100 in the ranking of all countries using Facebook. The table below shows some general statistics concerning Kazakhstan.

Social network is a useful tool for businesses; it helps to increase brand awareness among population and also to interact with customers. The most popular brands on Facebook in Kazakhstan are listed below. With high level of Internet penetration, online media tools are gaining popularity. Table below shows most popular Media brands on Facebook in Kazakhstan.

The fact that mostly young people use social networks is proved by the pie chart below showing that 66% of Facebook users in Kazakhstan are 18-34 years old.

### 2. Benefits of Social Networking Service

There is evidence of a broad range of benefits to young people associated with the use of SNS.

Below we summarize these as Media Literacy, Formal Educational Outcomes, Informal Education and Learning, Creativity, Individual Identity and Self-Expression, Strengthening Social Relationships, Belonging and Collective Identity, Building and Strengthening Communities, Civic and Political Participation, Self-Efficacy and Wellbeing.

**Media Literacy.** The role of media literacy for digital literacy and cyber safety has been well established, although policy and practice has been slow to respond to new ways of thinking about media literacy in a digital world. Traditionally media literacy has been understood and taught in relation to mass media, addressing issues of media

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<sup>1</sup> Socialbakers.com. (n.d).

<sup>2</sup> International Informatization Academy, 2011

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ownership, censorship and advertising. However, today's online and networked media environment requires a more complex digital or web literacy that is often not explicitly taught in school.

**Education.** Maximizing the benefits of SNS for these groups specifically requires addressing access and digital literacy. Yet, where access and skills are promoted, SNS and social media can enhance the interactions of marginalized young people with their teacher and increase their confidence in educational activities (Blanchard, et.al., 2007). Utilizing different formats – for example, attaching a multi-media file or attaching clip art – enables individuals to articulate and explain themselves when faced with cultural, social, language or learning barriers (Blanchard et al 2007:32).

Informal knowledge and skills SNS can facilitate learning and skill development outside formal learning environments by supporting peer-to-peer learning of knowledge and skills, collaboration, diverse cultural expression, the development of skills valued in the modern workplace, and a more empowered conception of citizenship (Ito, et.al., 2006; Jenkins, 2007:3).

**Creativity.** Creative content sharing practices (such as blogs, animations, videos, photos and digital collages) form an increasingly integral part of young people's communicative exchange and play a significant role in young people's developing sense of identity and community.

Collaborative creative production, in turn, gives rise to a stronger sense of connection with others and the formation of strong communities. These communities may be enduring or more ephemeral in nature. However, evidence suggests that, either way, they have positive impacts on participants' sense of community and connection (Richardson, Third and MacColl, 2009).

**Individual Identity & Self-Expression.** SNS are increasingly important for the expression of identity. This articulation is not merely narcissistic, but supports critical peer-based sociality (Boyd 2007). Because SNS are essentially flexible and designed to promote individual customization (Valtysson 2010:203) SNS can also reinforce parts of their identity, such as ethnicity or cultural background (Blanchard, et.al. 2008:38), particularly important for young people with chronic illness, newly-arrived migrants and minority ethnic groups (Stephens-Reicher, et.al. 2010).

**Strengthening Interpersonal Relationships.** People's use of SNS is important for the strengthening and development of social relationships, particularly as the online and offline worlds converge.

SNS also play an important role in young people's development and exploration of intimate relationships (Boyd 2007; Berk 2007; Cobb 1995). Once contact between young people in an intimate relationship outside of school hours usually occurred on the family phone which was shared and regulated by parents. Now SNS, along with the mobile phone, have provided a space in which this communication can occur (Livingstone 2008; Sprecher 2009).

**Sense of Belonging and Collective Identity.** SNS play a significant role in the formation of new forms of „collective identity“. This sense of belonging and

acceptance can mean that young people who may be more vulnerable to isolation – such as those with chronic illness or a disability – often remain members of an online community long after their initial impetus is gone (Richardson and Third, 2009).

Content sharing plays a major role in cultivating belonging and a sense of collective identity. Sharing written, visual or audio content on SNS that represents or portrays an individual or community experience invites others to engage and relate.

**Civic Engagement & Political Participation.** SNS constitute new spaces for civic engagement and political participation including information sharing and bringing together new networks for action utilizing email, user-generated content and other networking practices (Montgomery 2007; Vromen 2007; 2008). Studies in the US find that 37% of 18 – 29 year olds use blogs and SNS for political or civic engagement (Smith et.al. 2009). SNS are being used for discussion, organization and mobilization as part of emerging political discourse in young people’s everyday life (Kann 2007).

**Wellbeing.** While research specifically on SNS use needs to be conducted, it has been argued that SNS functionality has a key role to play in strengthening social connectedness, self -efficacy, general knowledge and/or life skills and is critical for the promotion of young people’s overall mental health and wellbeing (Boase et al 2006; Burns, et.al. 2007; Burns et.al, 2008; Burns & Morey, 2009). It is also argued that a sense of community and belonging has the potential to promote young people’s resilience, giving them the ability to successfully adapt to change and stressful events (Oliver et al 2006:1).

### **3 Survey on Social Networks in Kazakhstan**

#### **1. Methodology**

A survey was created using a questionnaire. It was distributed on the territory of KIMEP and Omega Sector internet club. Sample totaled 100 respondents and a breakdown of demographics is

Male N=22 (22%), and Female N=78 (88%). The questionnaire included 13 multiple choice questions. The survey also included 5 point Likert scale questions, which examined the degree of:

- satisfaction with features of international social network
- satisfaction with features of Kazakhstani social network
- usage of services of international social network
- usage of services of Kazakhstani social network
- effectiveness of advertising in social networks
- effectiveness of advertising in social networks comparing to other types

#### **2. Findings of the Research**

21 % of respondents spent 21-25 hours online every week while 6-10 hours of usage is responded by 20 % of respondents. This sample can’t represent the entire

population, because of over-representation of women and people aged between 18-25 years. Sample size is only 100 respondents, which is not enough to derive significant conclusions for the whole population.

#### **4 Discussion and Suggestion**

Social Networking Services (SNS) are significant players in the Web 2.0 environment, transforming communication practices, opening new spaces and processes of socialization and impacting upon traditional social structures. Through increased internet and media literacy – ensuring all young people develop the skills to critically understand, analyze and create media content – these challenges can be overcome and risks mitigated in a way that ensures the many benefits of SNS can be realized.

Development of domestic social networks is an important issue. But currently there are a number of obstacles and factors stopping this process. Most of worldwide successful social networks are based on profitability concept. According to Nurlan Isin, “Kazakhstan Association of IT companies” domestic network will be profitable only in case if all Kazakhstan population is Internet users. Current rate of Internet penetration is far from this number. It must be made available, easy accessible and free of charge. Coverage of all this issues can help to establish strong and competitive domestic social networks. Based on the experience of worldwide social networks, domestic ones can expand and create wide spread, full of information and content Kazakhstani social network system. Current position of domestic Kazakhstan social networks is weak and requires improvements. Further integration and development can bring benefits to businesses, educational sphere and to the whole society. Benefits of strong social network extend to the level of individual person, giving new opportunities and options.

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