

A Study on Private SNS (Social Networking Service) Usage of Seniors

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Abstract. As online SNS market has rapidly grown in recent years, the user preference has shifted from open SNS to private SNS which provides closer, more private communication space. Also, the age group of users has expanded to those in their 50s and above, forming a network with real-names and social relationships on a daily basis. Based on various ties, achievement, and social status built offline, the seniors are integrating their online and offline identity. Thus, this study has examined their private SNS usage patterns to explore how the SNS influences their interpersonal and social relationships, in terms of adding new characteristics. The ultimate goal of this study is to improve and enhance the social relationships of seniors offline through private SNS to boost their life satisfaction by expanding their social ties.

Keywords: SNS (Social networking service), Private SNS, Senior, Smart senior, BAND.

1 Introduction

According to UN, the definition of ‘aging society,’ ‘aged society’ and ‘super-aging’ society is when the population aged 65 and over is at least 7%, 14%, and 20% of the entire population respectively. According to data from National Statistical Office in Korea, the country has around 6.1 million seniors aged 65 and over, representing 12.2% of the entire population in 2013. The percentage could exceed 20.0% in 2030, indicating that Korea will rapidly become a super-aging society.

When the middle-aged smart device users become seniors, the number of seniors using smart devices is expected to skyrocket. As a result, their online activities and roles will have a major impact on their social relationships. In this thesis, ‘smart seniors’ refer to those in their later middle-aged years right before and after retirement. In other words, they are in the latter period of 2nd to third stage of life (Table 1) and familiar with smart devices. The term was used by Asahi Shimbun in Japan on September 15, 1999. [2]

As the number of smart seniors is on the rise and smart phones have become popular among all age groups, the number of seniors in their 50s and above using smart phones has substantially risen. When it was surveyed, 1 out of 4 respondents (25.3%) in their 50s and above responded they had used SNS before. (Fig. 1)

Table 1. Three Stages of Life of 30,000 Days ¹

1st	2nd	3rd
childhood, young adult years	middle-aged years early senior years	mid-to-late senior years
- 7,500 days	- 15,000 days	-7,500 days (20.5 years)

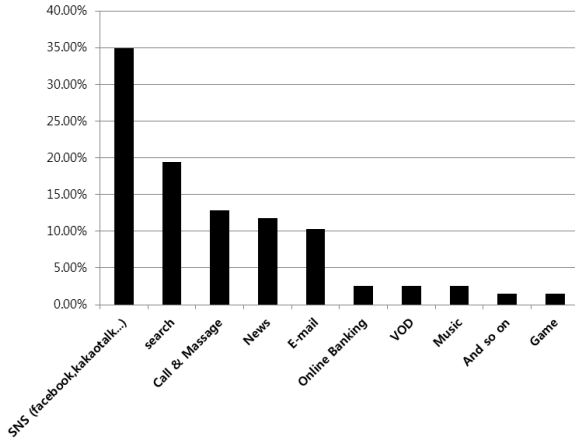


Fig. 1. Utilization of Smartphone Functions among Seniors (Source: Senior Portal ‘Your stage’, www.yourstage.com, 2012)

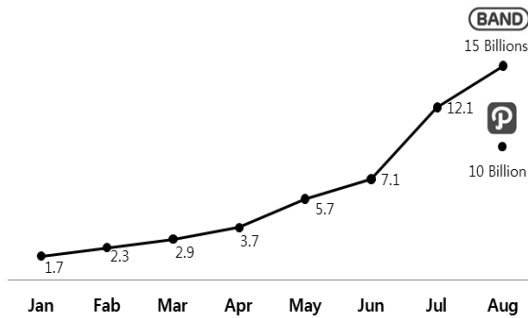


Fig. 2. Number of Monthly App Operation for BAND (Source: www.Flurry.com, 2013)

As online SNS market has rapidly grown, the user preference has shifted from open SNS to private SNS which provides closer, more private space; it reflects the issues with open SNS such as invasion of privacy and flood of ads. As a result, the age group of private SNS users has expanded to those in their 50s and above, forming a network with real-names and social relationships on a daily basis. Also, the private SNS has led to increased offline interactions and is being used actively. In particular,

¹ Hakuholdo Institute of Life and Living & Hakuholdo INC (2009).

'BAND' in Korea has established itself as a top, sustainable private SNS, as it allows users in their 40s and above to easily build their own network with friends and family members online.(Fig.2) Based on such phenomenon, this study has analyzed the private SNS usage of retired, alienated seniors, along with things they pursue, to boost their quality of life and satisfaction by enhancing their offline relationships through private SNS.

2 Features and UI of Private SNS

2.1 Classification of SNS

SNS is defined as a platform for establishing social networks of people who share the same or similar interests, activities, background or ties.[7] Also, SNS is a new communication mode with two-way functions that encompass virtual reality such as Second Life.[5] In a narrow sense, SNS refers to services aimed at forming and maintaining interpersonal networks. There are two types of SNS: open SNS and private SNS.

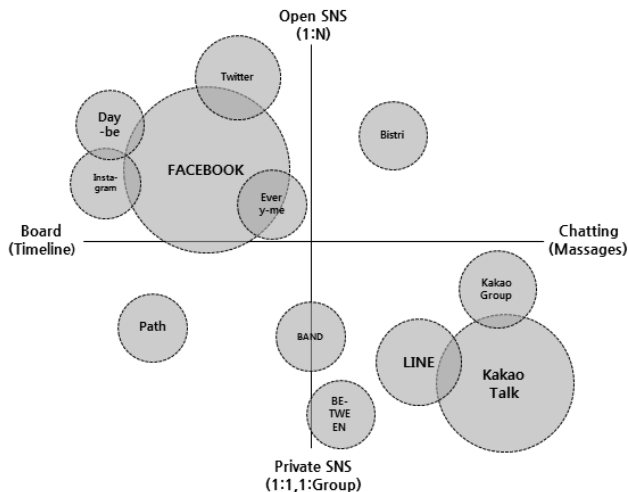


Fig. 3. SNS Positioning Map by Type


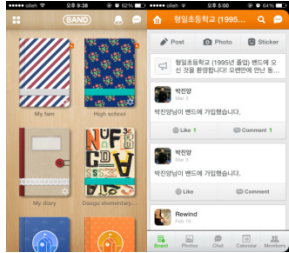

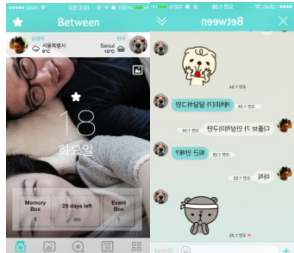
Open SNS revolved around online networking, which can lead to offline interactions, and the major ones are Facebook, Twitter, and KaKao Story. Users with similar interests can get closer to each other by posting comments and photos on a theme of their interest through the system of forming ties through online search.

Private SNS allows users to get closer to people they already know, and major ones are BAND, Daybe, and Between. Private SNS revolves around communication and ties, instead of contents.(FIG.3)

2.2 Classification of Private SNS

In this thesis, there are two types of private SNS: 1:1 SNS that offers a reserved space for only two people such as a couple and close friends; 1:n SNS that is smaller than open SNS and offers a space for the following individuals: friends; people with similar interests; parents and teachers; teachers and students; neighbors; people who went to the same school. Examples of 1:1 SNS are Between(Table 2) and Couple, and those of 1:n SNS include Path, BAND(Table 2), Kakao Group, Kakao Agit, With, and Daybe.

Table 2. Features and Main Functions of BAND and Between

	Features	Main Functions	Screen
 <p>BAND SNS that allows users to form a small group with people they are close to and share various information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easy and quick registration and invitation - Sharing schedules, announcements, photos, information, and anniversaries - Quickly collecting opinions through voting function - Network of emergency contacts - Entertaining Sticker function 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board Photo Chat Calendar Members 	
 <p>Between SNS that offers an exclusive space only for couples and close friends.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Location information - Sharing photos, information, and schedules - Counting days until anniversaries -Photo album function 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moments Chat Calendar Special-Day Event box 	

3 Private SNS User Behavior

3.1 Scope and Method of Research

Through an online pre-survey, in-depth interviews were conducted with diverse SNS users residing in Seoul, 10 for each of the following 3 age groups (A-people in 20s and 30s/ B- people in 40s and 50s/ C- people in 60s and above). To identify the SNS

usage of smart seniors and compare it with other age groups, two different age groups (A, B) were selected and they were asked the same questions. Group A had members who use both open SNS Facebook, and private SNS, BAND and Between. Group B and C had members whose mainly use Facebook and BAND.

3.2 Analysis

SNS activities have the following 7 characteristics: 'identity,' expressing oneself differently from other people online; 'presence,' allowing users to recognize the status of themselves and others; 'relationships,' forming ties with family members and friends and retaining them through the system; 'conversation,' communicating with others through chatting, Messenger and other methods; 'reputation,' allowing users to identify whether someone is good or bad; 'sharing,' forming a network through sharing, recommending, or distributing a content or information among users; 'groups,' a form of community created among people with similar interests or specific purposes.

The 7 characteristics of SNS organized by Gene Smith[3] were applied to the results of in-depth interviews to indicate the different characteristic of each SNS. The darker the color is, the stronger the characteristic is in each service. (Fig.4)

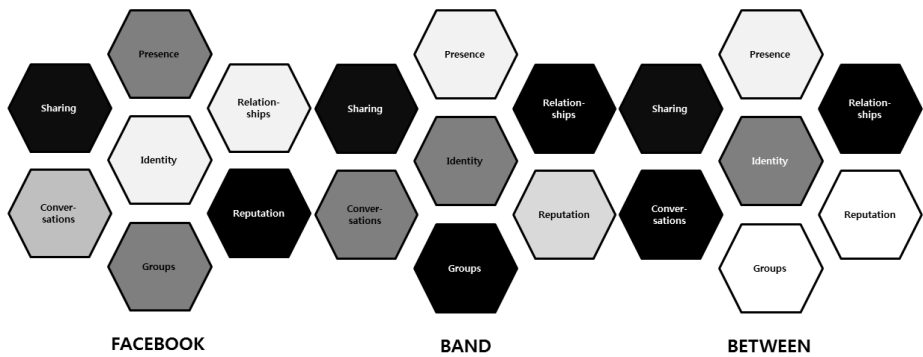


Fig. 4. Comparative Analysis of SNS with 7 Characteristics

4 Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to boost the life satisfaction of seniors through private SNS that is more developed for current and future seniors by strengthening and expanding their social ties, especially among smart seniors. To accomplish the objective, people who use both open SNS and private SNS were selected among different age groups for comparison with seniors in terms of user behavior. Open SNS has the following problems: invasion of privacy due to leakage of personal information; excessive exposure to unnecessary information. As a result, more and more users opted for private SNS. In particular, seniors had the most complaints about the problems of open SNS, leading to the highest popularity of private SNS among seniors. In terms

of age group, the following characteristics were identified. First, the younger the users were, the more they valued the ties and exchanges with current friends. The older the users were, the more they valued maintaining ties with old and long-time friends. Second, seniors who are more used to offline interactions had a tendency to get involved in both online and offline interactions. In other words, their online interactions often led to offline interactions. Third, seniors preferred UI that displays all main functions on one screen, instead of simple UI with functions hidden on the screen, due to their lower familiarity with devices and physical conditions than those of young people. It is worthwhile to develop a new UI that facilitates the interaction of seniors with old friends, based on the characteristics of seniors.

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