

# Social Networking in India by 2010

As I begin writing this, I'm in full knowledge of the risk that I'm running. The risk that this article will appear outdated very soon. And I'll be the happiest person when that happens! With developments in technology and user adoption growing a very rapid rate, we are in for an exciting journey ahead. Social Networking in the near future presents us with very interesting prospects for evolving personal identities, interaction with communities and information sharing. While most of the tools to enable these are present today, they are just what they are – tools. What will be exciting and equally challenging is how these tools are made more easy-to-use in order to facilitate richer and simpler user experience. Here's hazarding a peek into the future...

## I Am The Universe

It's a *me-centric* universe. It's about my college and my favourite hang-outs with my college buddies. It's about music I love and movies I love to hate. It's about places I travel to and people I meet. Also, I'm very clear about my choices and preferences. I make sure my views and opinions are not only heard, but counted as well. I'm at the centre of everything and own my space.

In an off-line world, not everything mentioned above is possible. Even if possible, it is perhaps not in the form that a user wants. The beauty of an online experience lies in its ability to create and provide a user an experience, in all possible forms yet, as fulfilling as the real world experiences. For a social network, it is possible to weave in all such experiences. The mix of people on it, media they generate and consume, and the platform that a social network provides is perfect for a *me-centric* universe, at the same time, give a common face to a social networking site.

As we move along, we will see the user universe becoming much smaller. This does not mean she will stop making *friends* online and *meet and discover cool new people*, but that her interaction with her immediate circle of friends, whether it is college buddies or colleagues, will become richer and stronger. She will open up more to this community, be more in constant touch with them compared to other online friends. Thus, while the universe shrinks in size, with *me* being the universe, the bonds within the different planets of this small universe will strengthen. We expect these clusters – like college and work communities supported by features for media-sharing, platforms for discussion like blogs, discussion boards etc. - to strengthen and grow over a period of time and collectively give a face to a social network like ours.

## I have the (technology) power

Not far are the days where a child will be said to be born with a '*blue tooth enabled mobile in her hand*'. While it is indeed an exaggeration (really?), in the days to come user will be adopting technology faster than before. And she will have better access to newer and better technology. In India, growing broadband penetration, cheaper internet-enabled mobile phones, more Wi-fi hotspots, roll-out of WiMAX present a huge opportunity for a social networking venture. One will be connected better and at all times. Technology will bring a user's online network closer and will enable much closer and a richer experience. Aditya walks into a

mall and wants to check out some cool deals. He also wants to catch up with the latest action flick. He sends out an SMS burst to his college buddies asking them to join for the movie. In the meanwhile, he checks his community's rating for the movie on his mobile and also gets to know the best discount deals on offer. As he has some more time to spend before his friends join him, he listens to his favourite songs streamed from his personalized JukeBox, replies to three scraps and posts a notice about the discount deal on his city group. With his blue-tooth enabled mobile, he plays a quick game with another person in the mall. The game ends with Aditya winning, and sending a 'See You on minglebox' message! Not too far are the days when we will see many such Adityas in action. With technology making it possible, expect to see a lot of action in the social networking scene. In other words, the game has just begun.

## Why is India different?

The current lot of Internet users in India has a sound knowledge of English, but the next surge in users in the Internet space will be fuelled by regional language usage. Regional language usage will not be restricted to consumption of regional language content alone and it will involve users interacting in regional languages. We believe in presenting users a very Indian-flavoured experience. So users identify themselves as *Bong-Kongs* or *TamBramWhams* and their occupation is their *Rosy-roti*. Such additions go a long way in making a user feel comfortable about the space and in turn, lead to quality interactions among users. This is just the beginning, and as we move along we will develop products which will enable users to interact in regional languages. To support such interactions, innovations in technology must keep pace with the demands accompanying the growth in the user base.

## Key Challenges:

1. Interface and user-experience will have to be very simple.
 

A social networking witnesses immense activity - people interacting with people, people generating content, people seeking to discover content, people consuming content, interest groups, campus and work communities. Each user comes for a certain need and expects to be served the same. It is indeed a challenge to present to the user what she wants, quickly, cleanly and in a simple way without exposing him to the chaos beneath!
2. Integration across devices.
 

While it is heartening to have more users joining the network or being able to engage existing users better through other devices, it is challenge to smoothly integrate the user-experience across these devices.
3. Maintaining a clean, safe and secure social network.
 

For a growing networking site, ensuring a safe, secure and healthy space for people to interact comes very high on our priorities. With authentic communities, high personalization options, multiple security settings, users feel more at ease in interacting with each other. Active communities ensure that unscrupulous elements are kept at bay. Fostering the growth of communities with Indian sensibilities ensures that users feel at home in the cultural context that they're most comfortable with.



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