

Facebook clinches top spot in India: research

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Facebook has become the number one social networking site in India, toppling Google-owned Orkut in one of the few major markets the site had a leadership position, a survey showed Thursday.

US-based global research firm comScore said Facebook had moved into the top spot in July, backing up separate research by Indian online monitor ViziSense which showed a similar trend.

Facebook had 20.9 million unique users in India in July, almost three times more than in the same month last year, while Orkut had 19.9 million, according to comScore.

Since Orkut's India launch in 2004, the website has enjoyed a majority share in the social networking market, mirroring its popularity in Brazil, another giant [emerging market](#).

But online analysts say it has struggled to innovate and has finally succumbed in India to the Facebook machine, which has surpassed the [Google](#) service in most developed markets.

"Even though Orkut belongs to Google it is not as cool as the rest of Google, it feels like Orkut is always trying to play catch up in terms of features and functionality," said leading Indian blogger Kiruba Shankar.

According to comScore India is the seventh largest social networking market, with the audience up 43 percent in the past year.

The firm estimated that there were 945 million unique users of [social networking sites](#) in July worldwide, with the United States, China and Germany the biggest markets.

Internet use is much higher in Indian cities where infrastructure is more complete and where more people have access to computers.

In a nation of more than a billion, only around seven million people are broadband Internet subscribers, according to a recent report by consultancy Booz and Company.

Many analysts hope the advent of new high-speed third-generation mobile phone networks will greatly increase Internet usage in the country because far more people have mobile phones than computers.

Between 16 and 20 million new phone subscribers sign up every month and in the past year, the number of mobile customers soared 49 percent to 617.5 million, industry figures show.

In March, Facebook announced a new office in the southern Indian IT hub of Hyderabad, which will deal with online advertising and customer support, much like other Facebook centres in the US and Ireland.

The move was seen as a commitment to the growing market and a sign of its growing importance for the California-based company.

Animesh Nayak, a 32-year-old architect, said he had switched from Orkut to Facebook because the latter site was easier to use.

"I joined Facebook because a lot of my American friends are on it. Orkut does not have an attractive and user-friendly interface like Facebook does", he told AFP.

However, not all believe Orkut is out of the race in India.

"If we categorise the usage, what I personally see is that smaller cities and towns is where Orkut is most popular," technology columnist Amit Aggarwal told AFP.

"Orkut is still the most popular networking website in quite a few cities and it is too premature to say that it is dead."

Use of microblogging site Twitter has also taken off in India, where it registered growth of 239 percent to 3.3 million visitors over the 12 months to July.

Mark Zuckerberg founded [Facebook](#) in his Harvard University dorm room as a networking tool for students, but within months the website was taken up across America and was quickly catapulted into a national obsession.

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