

Social media users need help to adjust to interface changes

April 30 2014

Social media companies that give users a greater sense of control can ease them into interface changes, as well as curb defections to competitors, according to researchers.

"Several studies have looked into how social [media companies](#) have failed," said Pamela Wisniewski, a post-doctoral scholar in information sciences and technology, Penn State. "What we need to think about is how [social media](#) companies can be more adaptive and how they can improve the longevity of their sites.

In a study of the reaction to the introduction of Facebook's Timeline [interface](#) between 2011 and 2012, researchers found that users considered the mandatory transition to the new interface highly stressful. They also found evidence that suggests that giving users a voice can give them a sense of control to better adapt to new online environments.

Facebook's Timeline interface allowed users to access posts by date, highlighted certain events and set privacy controls to remove, modify visibility or hide posts on their page. The company initially provided a blog to release information to users, but then closed the blog, said Wisniewski, who worked with Heng Xu, associate professor of [information sciences](#) and technology, Penn State, and Yunan

Chen, assistant professor of informatics, University of California, Irvine. Denying users the ability to use the blog as a place to voice their concerns and give feedback may have thwarted one of the positive

strategies people use to cope with changes in their environment, the researchers said. People who feel more in control become focused on solving problems and adjusting to the change, while those who do not feel they have control tend to focus on their emotions and resort to more negative coping strategies.

The researchers, who presented their findings today (April 30) at the Association for Computing Machinery's Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, said that 67 percent of users' coping strategies in the Timeline transition were negative. The users complained, threatened to switch to another social network and urged others to drop Facebook.

"Without giving people a way of offering feedback, you make them feel less empowered and they have more of a feeling of hopelessness," said Wisniewski.

Some users did adapt more successfully and took positive steps to use the new interface, including learning about Timeline and finding new ways to customize it.

Companies that halt communication run the risk of allowing false information to circulate among users.

"Without providing more users feedback, not only was there more negativity, but a lot of the information that was causing the negativity was actually based on misinformation," said Wisniewski. "Being more responsive and sharing information with users can stop some of this misinformation."

The researchers also said that changing too many features at once can confuse users and may lead to a harsher backlash.

"In the Timeline rollout, they added several other features at the same

time as Timeline," said Wisniewski. "These weren't necessarily part of Timeline, but were thrown in at the same time."

The researchers examined users' perceptions and signs of coping strategies by reviewing 1,149 comments posted to Facebook's Timeline release blog from September 2011 to April 2012. Facebook first made the transition to the new interface on Dec. 15, 2011, as an opt-in feature. The interface became mandatory for Facebook [users](#) on May 21, 2012.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

Citation: Social media users need help to adjust to interface changes (2014, April 30) retrieved 16 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-04-social-media-users-adjust-interface.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.