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The Diffusion of Facebook in Rural, Southwestern Pennsylvania Baby Boomers

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THE DIFFUSION OF FACEBOOK IN RURAL, SOUTHWESTERN
PENNSYLVANIA BABY BOOMERS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: The Diffusion of Facebook in Rural, Southwestern Pennsylvania Baby Boomers

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In October 2012, Facebook, the world's largest social networking site, welcomed its one billionth user. What catapulted this company, which opened to public users just six years prior, to attract such a large audience and how can this growth be continued in order to maximize profits for this publicly traded company?

Young adult Internet users comprise the largest consumers of social networking sites; however, their current rate of adoption pales in comparison with gains made by members of the baby boomer generation. Nearly half of the boomer cohort has a Facebook account. By identifying factors that influence the adoption of Facebook by baby boomers, developers can target the holdouts in an attempt to grow usage by this demographic and increase company profitability.

Diffusion of innovations is the theoretical framework used to study adoption trends for innovations. The theory identifies a cyclic pattern of adoption along with factors that affect the adoption of an innovation throughout the cycle. Diffusion studies have identified that the socioeconomic characteristics and communication behavior of an individual are more highly related to the adoption of an innovation early within the adoption cycle. However, the theory has yet to be tested for social networking sites.

This research project is a case study that examines factors that influence the adoption or non-adoption of Facebook by a group of baby boomers residing in Somerset

County, Pennsylvania. The study discovered that the use of modern communication technology on a regular basis to include text messaging and videoconferencing was more highly related to the adoption of Facebook while education level and annual income were found to have little influence in adoption of the social networking site.