

Section 2

Strengthening Community Ties through ICT

In this section, we will consider the potential of using ICT as a communication tool to revive the local community ties that have been lost and restore vitality to Japan's communities.

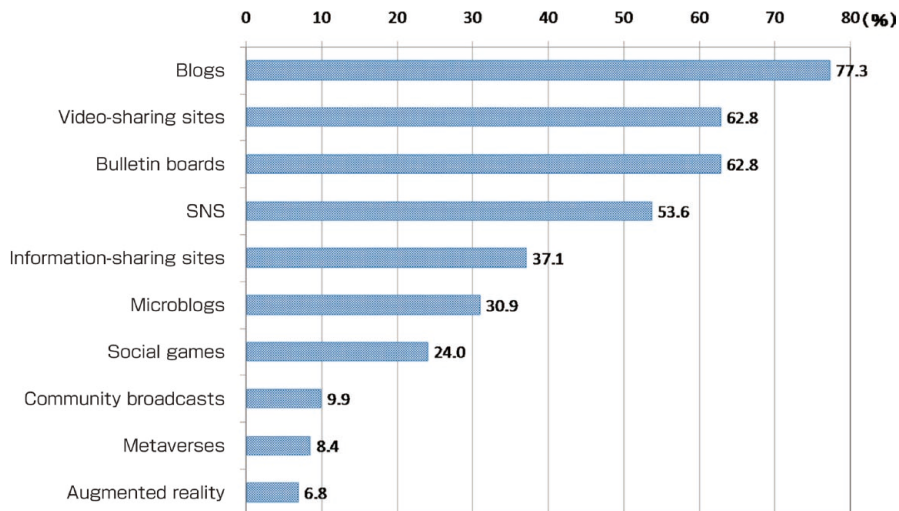
1. Strengthening ties through social media

In local communities, where nuclear families continue to take the place of extended families, familial ties themselves are becoming weaker, interaction among neighbors is dwindling, and neighborhood and residents' associations are lacking in power, it is hoped that ICT can play a role in strengthening community ties. Social media such as blogs and SNS (social networking sites) are representative examples of applications that make maximum use of the communicative power of ICT. Here we will examine this issue based on the results of a survey of social media users on how such social media actually reflect users' sense of social bonding.

(1) Use of various types of social media

Figure 1-11 shows ten categories of social media, and the percentage of respondents who have used the various categories of media at least once. The categories are: blogs, video-sharing sites, bulletin boards, SNS, information-sharing sites, micro-blogs, social games, community broadcasts, metaverses, and augmented reality. The most frequently used were, in order, blogs with 77.3%, video-sharing sites and bulletin boards with 62.8% each, and SNS with 53.6%, all of which had been used by over 50% of respondents. Meanwhile, 37.1% had used information-sharing sites, 30.9% micro-blogs, and 24.0% social games, while less than 10% had used community broadcasts, metaverses and augmented reality respectively.

Figure 1-11 Types of social media used at least once in the past



(Source) Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications "Survey of Social Media Usage" (2010)

The following is an analysis of the ways in which people use social media and the effects thereof, focusing particularly on blogs and SNS.

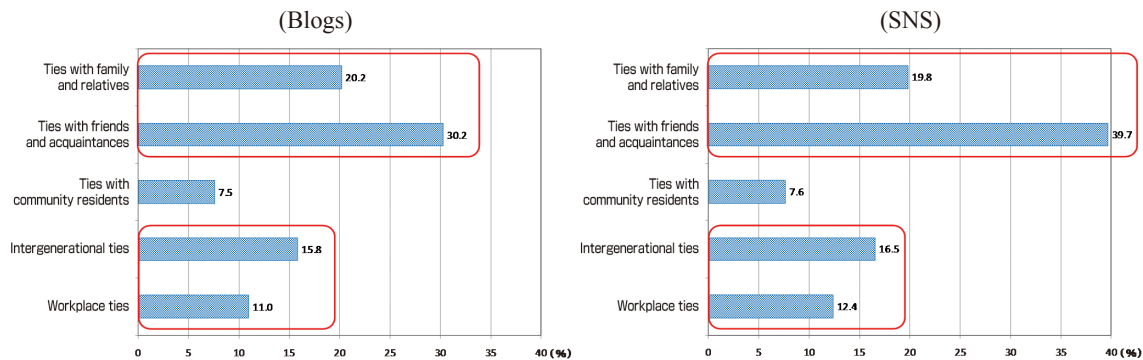
(2) Strengthening ties through social media

A. Effects of social media on geographic, familial, workplace and other ties

Figure 1-12 shows the percentage of people who said that certain types of ties had been strengthened through their use of social media. Of those who used blogs, 30.2% said they had stronger "ties with friends and acquaintances," 20.2% stronger "family and relatives ties," 15.8% stronger "intergenerational ties," and 11.0% stronger "workplace ties."

Meanwhile, for SNS, 39.7% said they had stronger "ties with friends and acquaintances," representing the highest value for all media, 19.8% stronger "family and relatives ties," 16.5% stronger "intergenerational ties," and 12.4% stronger "workplace ties."

Figure 1-12 Effects of social media on geographic, familial, workplace and other ties

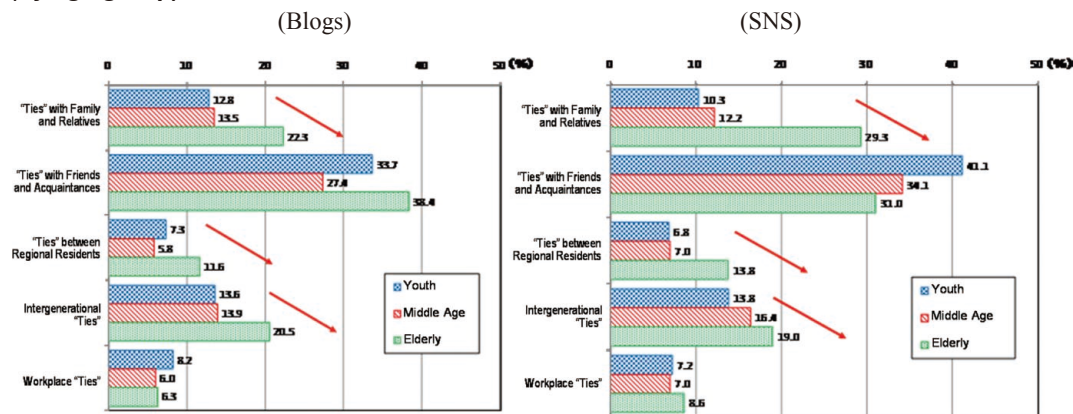


*Portions inside solid lines indicate categories with responses of 10% or over

(Source) Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications “Survey of Social Media Usage” (2010)

While the older respondents were, the more likely they were to say that “family and relatives ties,” “ties between Regional Residents” and “intergenerational ties” were weakening. However, at the same time the older respondents were, the more often they stated that blogs and SNS contributed to strengthening these same ties. It follows that blogs and SNS can be considered highly effective means of strengthening ties (Figure 1-13).

Figure 1-13 Effects of social media (blogs / SNS) on geographic, familial, workplace and other ties (by age group)



(Source) Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications “Survey of Social Media Usage” (2010)

2. Revitalization of local community ties via local SNS

As of February 2010, there were 519 local (community) SNS³, which seek to facilitate “face-to-face” communication within specific regions. While the number of such sites is growing year by year, there appear not to be many local SNS that enjoy the highly active participation of local residents and foster dramatic vitalization of the community. In order to examine the characteristics of those local SNS that are vigorously active, and their benefits to users, the MIC has conducted a survey of administrators and users of local SNS, and analyzed their effects on said administrators and users.

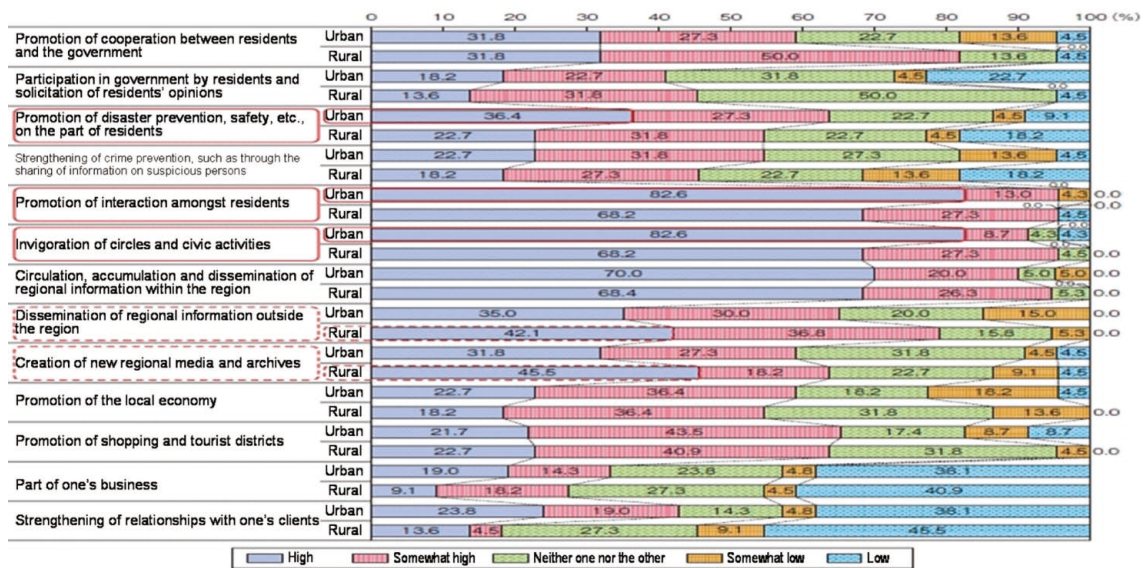
³ The difference from normal SNS (Mixi, GREE, etc.) is that normal SNS provides nationwide service, while local SNS are limited to specific regions

(1) Objectives of local SNS administration

Figure 1-14 shows the objectives for administering local SNS, categorized as either “urban” or “rural area.”⁴ The results show that in urban areas, notable objectives include “Promotion of disaster prevention, safety, etc., on the part of residents,” “Promotion of interaction of city residents” and “Invigoration of circles and civic activities,” while in local areas “Dissemination of local information outside the region” and “Developing new regional media and archives” were emphasized.

In urban areas, an aging society is accompanied by a dramatic rise in the number of elderly people living alone, meaning that watching over and protecting the safety and security of these people has become an important issue. Meanwhile, in rural areas, there is perceived to be a pressing need for dissemination of local information and “local color.” It is evident that the issues addressed by local SNS are quite different depending on where they are based.

Figure 1-14 Objectives for administering local SNS (for “urban” and “rural” areas)



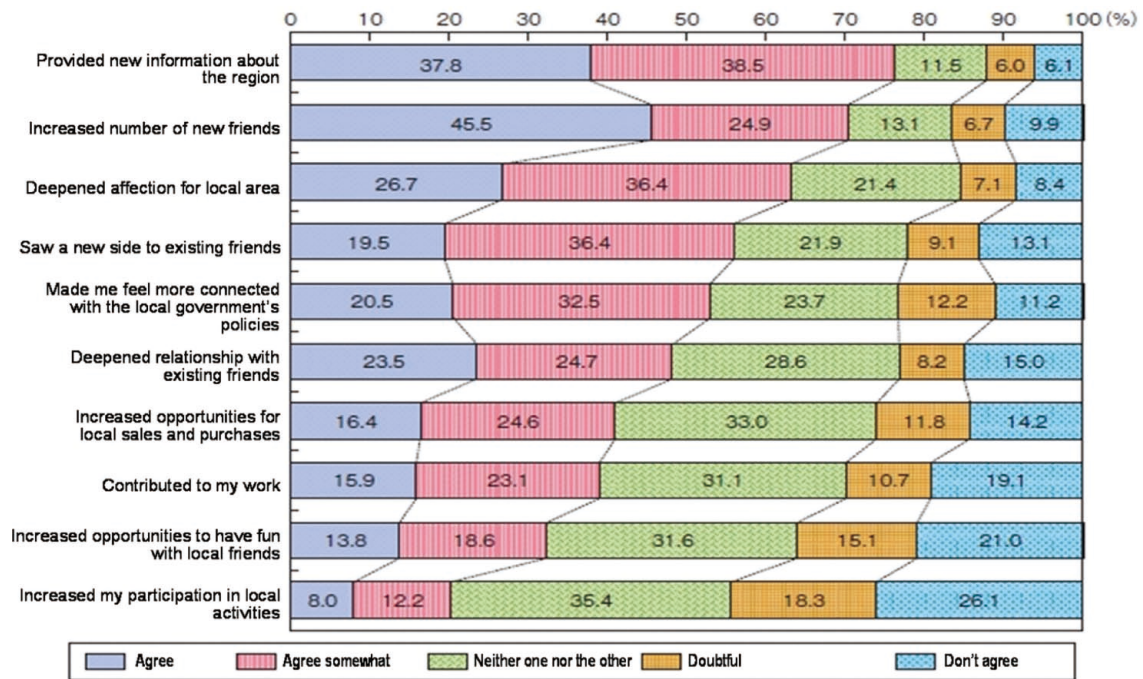
*Portions inside solid lines had high response rates in urban areas, portions inside dotted lines had high rates in rural areas
 (Source) Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications and International University of Japan GLOCOM 'Survey of Local SNS' (2010)

(2) Benefits to users of local SNS

Potential benefits of using local SNS have been classified in 10 categories, and one of five survey responses – “Agree,” “Agree somewhat,” “Neither one nor the other,” “Don’t agree somewhat,” and “Don’t agree” – obtained. As shown in Figure 1-15, there was a high rate of “Agree” or “Agree somewhat” responses for the categories “Provided new information about the region” (76.3%), “I made new friends or acquaintances” (70.4%), and “Deepened affection for local area” (63.1%). These results indicate a high level of appreciation for the benefits unique to local SNS including “meeting new people,” “Obtaining Regional Information” and “Developing regional attachment.” Furthermore, for nearly every category 30% or more of respondents recognized benefits, and it is evident that local SNS have much to offer in terms of deepening ties with existing friends, gaining familiarity with local government measures, and increasing opportunities for local sales and purchases.

⁴ SNS serving one of the three major metropolitan areas were classified as “urban” and those serving other areas classified as “rural.” However, even outside the three major metropolitan areas, if they are based in prefectural capitals or other major cities, the SNS were classified as “urban.”

Figure 1-15 Benefits to users of local SNS



(Source) Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications and International University of Japan GLOCOM 'Survey of Local SNS' (2010)