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PHOTO-FRIENDLY FACEBOOK TRUMPS PHOTO-SHARING SITES

In India, nearly 64 per cent Facebook users access its photo-sharing services

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It's known for being the world's largest social networking site with around 500 million users. However, the lesser known fact is that over three billion photos are uploaded on the site each month.

Facebook, which has Microsoft Corporation among its investors, is growing at three times the speed of top specialty photo websites, according to data from comScore.

In India, Facebook attracts close to 18 million unique users every month, which is larger than any other photo-sharing site. In comparison, Flickr.com attracts 1.91 million unique users per month (according to Vizisense) from India while Picasaweb.google.com gets about 1.61 million users every month.

So, when Amrit Bharadwaj, an associate with Nomura India, wants to show off pictures of his recent visit to a foreign locale, he prefers social networking sites like Facebook. "But if I want these pictures to be available to a select few - say acquaintances who can appreciate the photography - I prefer a place like Picasa or Flickr," he says.

Technology blogger Amit Agarwal (www.labnol.org) concurs, "Data or images that are meant for sharing with friends and family members go to my Facebook page while everything else goes to YouTube and Flickr like sites."

The potential is huge. A recent global report by IDC Research predicts that more than 124 billion photos will be shared through social networks by 2013.

Mindful of the competition from social networking sites, photo-sharing



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sites are building their own social capabilities. The latest version of Picasa, for example, allows visitors and album owners to share photos with users on different social networks.

Google says it understands album owners may not want to share their albums publicly. Ping Chen, a software engineer at Google, writes in the company's official blog, "We know that sometimes you don't want to share quite so publicly, but actually just want to share a link to a single unlisted photo, without revealing the whole album. We have now made this possible, by updating the "Link to this photo" URL so that the album name is hidden on the viewer's photo page (the "Share" button still works as normal)."

Yahoo-owned Flickr too boasts itself

as a community specifically built around photos and videos and provides tools that help members connect through photography. Users like Paavani, a professional photographer, claims, "I used the Flickr platform to sell a few images but through Facebook I could not. Flickr seems to be both accessible and yet more secure to host my images. Facebook is often plagued with privacy or copyright issues."

She also believes that images on sites like Flickr are less prone to be misused as they allow the user to control copyrights effectively, an area where social networking sites fail.

"Flickr has established itself as the eyes of the world, with millions of people all over the planet sharing photos and video of every imaginable

aspect of life," asserts Arun Tadanki, managing director, Yahoo India. As per the latest Comscore data, Flickr in India has a presence of 2.3 million users who upload 3.5 million photos and videos every day.

On the other hand, Snapfish, which claims to have over 900,000 registered users in India, with over six million pictures uploaded quarterly, is enabling users to share their uploaded photos with blogs, Facebook pages and Twitter feeds, in an attempt to succeed through ease of integration with the online leaders. With India's total internet user base pushing at 75 million users where 42 million people actively use internet, it has become a serious playground for players.

"When I take photos of friends at parties, I almost never think of putting them on Flickr, Snapfish or Picasa. I just put them on Facebook where almost all my friends are and can give me a feedback on my pictures. It is instant gratification for me," said Girish Shelar, an independent ad-film maker, who goes on to add, "Facebook is about people while Flickr is about photographs."

According to Global Web Index, nearly 64 per cent Facebook users in India access photo-sharing services on the social networking portal and about 36 per cent users access the videos. Snapfish, owned by HP, recently announced that it would open its application programming interface (API) to allow designers, developers and printing partners to reach the 85 million registered users to market and sell creative designs, merchandise and services, tapping right into the \$1-billion market for online photo ordering.