



## A comparative study of KakaoStory and Facebook: Focusing on use patterns and use motives



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### ABSTRACT

Before global SNS services, such as Facebook and Twitter, were introduced in Korea, Cyworld monopolized the Korean SNS market. However, Cyworld was left behind because it maintained a closed system, which no longer satisfied users. KakaoTalk, a popular Korean mobile messaging application has allowed the messenger itself to become a platform for various services including SNS. KakaoStory began as a photo-based SNS service; by integrating with KakaoTalk's profile pictures, it has become the most popular SNS in Korea. This study focuses on the usage patterns of SNS users to analyze how KakaoStory became one of the most popular SNSs in Korea. In particular, we have examined the differences in usage patterns between KakaoStory and Facebook, and the primary reasons why Korean users select one of these two social networking sites instead of the other. We conducted an exploratory comparison between KakaoStory and Facebook, specifically focusing on the usage patterns and motivations of both sets of users. We also analyzed how the different usage motivations linked to these two social media networks have influenced usage patterns.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the last decade, social media have gained popularity. Social relationships, which once were developed only through offline interactions, have begun to spread across the virtual space. This trend has accelerated since the emergence of the smart mobile environment. Social media now affect our daily lives, influencing society, economics, culture, and politics.

Having celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2014, Facebook now boasts up to 1.23 billion active users: one out of every six people uses Facebook worldwide. Although the launch of Facebook in Korea was delayed until early 2008, due to the prevalence of the Korean SNS, Cyworld, its proportion of Korean users has rapidly increased (Kim and Shin, 2013).

Launched in August 2011, Cyworld eventually accumulated 27 million members; it was once the most popular SNS in Korea. However, it soon began to lag behind Facebook in the number of monthly visitors. According to Kim and Shin (2013), the 2012 utility rate of SNSs was ranked as follows: 1) KakaoStory; 2) Facebook; 3) Twitter; and 4) Cyworld. The results were similar in 2013, with KakaoStory demonstrating a 55.4% utility rate, and a 23.9% increase from the previous year, while Cyworld had only a 5.5% utility rate, representing a 5.5% decrease from the previous year.

Before the advent of global SNS services such as Facebook and Twitter, Cyworld monopolized the Korean SNS market. However, Cyworld became too commercial and failed to follow global trends, instead adopting a closed system that forced users to leave the service. As a result, Cyworld soon yielded to Facebook. Smartphones began to penetrate Korea, creating a mobile culture. KakaoTalk, a mobile messaging application, led this trend with the largest share of users. KakaoTalk has

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created a model in which a messenger can become a platform for various services. In March 2012, KakaoTalk launched the mobile-contact-based SNS, "KakaoStory." KakaoStory began as a photo-based SNS integrated with KakaoTalk's profile pictures. This service was specifically aimed at KakaoTalk users who continually changed their profile pictures.

While Facebook remains the global leader, KakaoStory has become the preferred SNS among all Koreans except those in their 20s (Kim and Shin, 2013). 90% of smartphone users in Korea use KakaoTalk, which allows easy access to KakaoStory through KakaoTalk profile pictures. In addition, some Korean users, who previously lost interest in the closed system of Cyworld and moved on to Facebook, may have flowed back to the closed SNS, KakaoStory. It has been approximately 15 years since Koreans started using SNSs. During these years, the type of SNS preferred by customers has continuously changed. This study aims to investigate the cause of that change. We have therefore studied the differences in usage patterns between KakaoStory and Facebook and the primary reasons why individuals select and use one SNS rather than the other. We have also analyzed how different usage motivations related to these two social media networks have influenced usage patterns.

## 2. Theoretical background and study questions

### 2.1. SNS features and use patterns

SNSs provide functions that enable users to talk with their friends and acquaintances, to search for information, and to interact with target audiences. Facebook aims to create friendships through interactions, while Twitter delivers short messages promptly. These differences are reflected in user usage figures.

Facebook allows acquaintances to interact through text, photos, and videos. It also provides an open forum for sharing information. Through Facebook, users can share content, including photos, videos, and music. As a result, they form intimate human relationships and share their daily lives. By contrast, Twitter unilaterally receives postings and allows users to post content, such as short messages, photos, and videos. Users share timely information with strangers, using Twitter to form social opinions and promote activities (Kim, 2011; Yoon and Yim, 2012).

Hong and Oh (2010) found that users were highly satisfied with the connection aspects of Facebook, such as sharing and receiving content, while Twitter users were satisfied with its discussion and conversation aspects, such as expressing mutual opinions or communicating with acquaintances. According to Kim and Eun (2011), Facebook users, on average, had more online friends than Cyworld users, because Cyworld's mini homepage function was more closed than the Facebook timeline.

In this study, KakaoStory and Facebook have been compared to identify differences between the two services in relation to user behaviors and use motive factors. Since Facebook was launched several years ago and has grown worldwide, a number of studies have addressed the factors contributing to Facebook's success. However, very few studies have explored the success of KakaoStory. In this study, we have tried to identify the features of KakaoStory that explain its success in Korea.

One feature that differentiates KakaoStory from existing social media is the fact that it is based on a mobile instant messenger (MIM). KakaoStory represents the next generation of social media, able to increase its membership through its connection with KakaoTalk, the number one mobile messenger in Korea. It has succeeded as a new service because uses MIM traffic; MIM has been rated an efficient mobile platform. In addition, since the services provided by KakaoStory and KakaoTalk are practically optimized for mobile use, the company that produces them can easily build new service functions, enabling consumers to seamlessly connect with the services provided. In other words, anyone who uses KakaoTalk can also connect to KakaoStory and KakaoGame.

The second feature of KakaoStory is that it is a photo-oriented SNS. Since KakaoTalk and KakaoStory are connected through shared pictures, photos comprise the core of the Kakao platform. The differences between KakaoStory and Facebook can be confirmed by glancing at the organization of an average page. While the shared contents are arranged chronologically in Facebook, in KakaoStory, the contents are arranged by photo. Although Instagram is also based on pictures, KakaoStory shares Facebook's ability to promote interactions among friends.

KakaoStory's third feature is that it enables users to build human relationships around cellphone numbers. Of course, one can now search for friends on Facebook using cellphone numbers, as well as email addresses. However, the reliance of KakaoStory on KakaoTalk's powerful cellphone network allows users to meet and interact with friends in their cellphone contact lists much more easily than would be possible through any other SNS.

It is clear that KakaoStory and Facebook offer different features. If it can be confirmed that consumers demonstrate different use figures in relation to the two social media networks, it can also be confirmed that users recognize feature differences that help them choose which SNS to use. We could then deduce that many people use KakaoStory in Korea specifically because it offers different features from Facebook. In this study, therefore, the use figures derived from the SNS functions and features have been monitored to establish the following study question:

*Research question 1:* What are the differences between KakaoStory and Facebook in terms of use (average use time per day, posting frequency, number of registered friends, distribution of registered friend types, and shared content)?

### 2.2. Social media use motives

When consumers use new media, use and gratification theory explains how their psychological desires and needs are satisfied. In addition, it provides a structure that can explain the motive factor by which users choose and use certain media

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