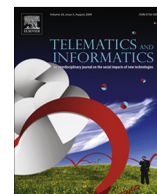




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Understanding the relationship between intensity and gratifications of Facebook use among adolescents and young adults

Amandeep Dhir^{a,b,*}, Chin-Chung Tsai^c

^a Optentia Research Focus Area, North-West University, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa

^b Department of Teacher Education, University of Helsinki, Finland

^c National Taiwan University of Science and Technology, #43, Sec. 4, Keelung Rd., Taipei 106, Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

Facebook is a well-known computer-mediated communication platform considered popular among adolescents and young adults. New media scholars have coined the term “intensity of Facebook use” (IFU) for the concept that measures the emotional and affective attitude towards Facebook use among young people. IFU is an important service use concept that has been positively linked with the different psychosocial outcomes of student well-being. However, only a limited amount of the prior literature has investigated the relationship between IFU and different Facebook uses and gratifications (U&G). The existing literature suggests inconsistent findings with a sole emphasis on young adults. To address these gaps, the present study has investigated the differential role of different Facebook U&G among adolescents and young adults in predicting IFU. A total of three cross-sectional data sets (N = 373, 107, 105) represented adolescents and university-attending young-adult Facebook users. The study results suggest that process U&G do and content U&G do not play any significant role in predicting IFU. Adolescents and young adults differ in their sought Facebook U&G. In addition to this, cultural differences were observed in the sought Facebook U&G and their differential role in predicting IFU.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the use of online social networking sites (SNS) including Facebook has become much more diversified, popular and acceptable due to various inherent social and interpersonal affordances (Park and Lee, 2014). The use of Facebook enables people to create their own profile, make new friends and participate in computer-mediated environments via sharing, tagging and commenting on different forms of content (e.g., photos, videos, web-links, status posts) (Dhir et al., 2015, 2016c; Dhir, 2016a,b). Consequently, Facebook is now used by people from different demographic, cultural as well as geographical settings in different ways and to satisfy different motives and needs (Dhir et al., 2016b; Dhir, 2016a). Facebook use has a special relevance for both adolescents and young adults (Hofstra et al., 2015; Dhir, 2016b). It offers various uses and gratifications (U&G), including communication, entertainment, escape, connecting, self-expression, online self-presentation, exposure and various other professional and academic uses (Lenhart et al., 2010; Pempek et al., 2009). The intensity of Facebook use (IFU) of young people (i.e., college attending students) has been associated with various social

* Corresponding author at: Department of Teacher Education, University of Helsinki, Finland.

E-mail addresses: amandeep.dhir@helsinki.fi (A. Dhir), ccttsai@mail.ntust.edu.tw (C.-C. Tsai).

and psychological outcomes such as satisfaction with college life (Valenzuela et al., 2009), civic and political participation (Valenzuela et al., 2009; Vitak et al., 2011), higher self-esteem, and bridging and bonding of social capital (Ellison et al., 2007; Steinfield et al., 2008; Zanno, 2013).

IFU is an important measure that has been widely utilized in the computer-mediated communication and new media literature. It was developed by Ellison et al. (2007) to measure affective and cognitive attitudes towards Facebook use, and is considered to be a more holistic conceptualization in comparison with other traditional notions such as frequency of use and time spent in service use (Valenzuela et al., 2009). IFU is of special relevance to scholars as well as practitioners engaged in the field of educational research since it has been linked to various important aspects concerning the academic well-being of students, for example, their academic performance (Junco, 2012; Kirschner and Karpinski, 2010), satisfaction with college life (Valenzuela et al., 2009; Ellison et al., 2007), self-esteem (Gonzales and Hancock, 2011) and classroom collaboration (Lampe et al., 2011). Similarly, several prior studies have found positive relationships among different Facebook U&G and IFU, suggesting that certain Facebook U&G drive IFU among young adults (see Alhabash et al., 2014; Alhabash and McAlister, 2014; Mo and Leung, 2014; Park and Lee, 2014).

Despite the fact that a considerable amount of the prior literature has investigated Facebook U&G and different facets of IFU, an important service use phenomenon, there are still many open research questions. For example, it is currently unknown which specific Facebook U&G drive IFU among adolescent Facebook users. Furthermore, how do different Facebook U&G of adolescents and young adults differentially predict IFU? Similarly, it is also unclear how adolescents and young-adult Facebook users differ in terms of their sought Facebook U&G. It is important to understand these relationships since it will enable scholars and practitioners to understand which media U&G translate into intensive service use. Furthermore, this investigation gets to the heart of what it means to use SNS. Recent literature has suggested that adolescents are a dominant and influential demographic group that is less researched in prior new media studies (Dhir, 2016a,b; Kaur, 2016a). Apart from this, the recent Facebook-based literature has favored the need to examine culturally diverse study samples, unlike the prior IFU literature. All of these open research gaps clearly suggest the need to investigate the relationship between Facebook U&G and IFU among adolescents and young adults by recruiting culturally diverse Facebook users. This will enable the research community to strengthen the empirical foundation of this important service use phenomenon, considered essential for the viability of every online service. It will also enable scholars to better understand the conceptualization of intensive service use. To achieve our research objective, a total of three different cross-sectional studies were carried out with adolescent and young-adult (i.e., attending university) Facebook users. The present study utilized the U&G theory for understanding different underlying U&G of Facebook use. The U&G theory is a popular theoretical framework which enables scholars to understand how and why people tend to use a specific type of medium. We recruited two different user groups, adolescent and young-adult Facebook users, in order to identify whether these population groups differ in terms of their IFU.

2. Background literature

2.1. Intensity of Facebook use (IFU)

The use of any service, platform or medium is often measured using traditional notions of total time spent, frequency, or duration of service use. However, this traditional approach fails to take into account the richness of the user experience provided by today's computer-mediated platforms (Valenzuela et al., 2009). To address this need, Ellison et al. (2007) developed the IFU measurement scale which measures the complex integrated user engagement in Facebook-based activities. It represents a holistic concept that measures the emotional connectedness with Facebook use (Ellison et al., 2007). Furthermore, it addresses an urgent need since the use of Facebook has become much more integrated into our daily lives. Prior literature has shown that the IFU measure has sufficient internal consistency, and it has been evaluated with a variety of different Facebook users (Ellison et al., 2007; Steinfield et al., 2008). Furthermore, it has been re-assessed and adapted by other researchers (e.g., Tomai et al., 2010; Valenzuela et al., 2009). Binder et al. (2009) developed another measure using IFU for understanding online tensions, representing two aspects of intensive use, namely traffic intensity (e.g., how many posts sent or received in a week) and time spent on Facebook use. Similarly, the IFU measure was adapted to address the intensive use of Twitter (Petersen and Johnston, 2015; Alhabash and McAlister, 2014; Buehler, 2014), micro-blogging sites, e.g. Weibo (Mo and Leung, 2014), and other SNS (Phua and Jin, 2011).

2.2. Adolescent Facebook users

Prior literature has argued that adolescents are technologically savvy, dedicated and are known for their innovation regarding technology use (Kaur, 2016a). Adolescents are valued as an important customer segment that can play a key role in the early adoption of any product, service or brand through their own family and friend networks (Lapowsky, 2014; Kaur, 2016a,b). Furthermore, adolescents are considered loyal users of mobile-based applications and SNS (Dhir and Al-kahtani, 2013). Facebook has been recognized as still the most popular and actively utilized SNS among adolescents (Hofstra et al., 2015). According to various recent studies, nearly 81% of adolescents are using some form of SNS, and nearly 94% of these adolescent SNS users are using Facebook (Madden, 2012). Lenhart (2015) found that a staggering 71% of adolescents were using Facebook in 2015. Similarly, 93% of Indian pre-teens and adolescents were using Facebook in 2014 (McAfee, 2014).

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