



# New gratifications for social word-of-mouth spread via mobile SNSs: Uses and gratifications approach with a perspective of media technology



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## ABSTRACT

Media technology may shape consumers' new motivations for disseminating social word-of-mouth (sWOM) via mobile social networking sites (SNSs). Most previous literature, however, has discussed sWOM motivation from a social psychology perspective but has neglected the perspective of media technology. This study adopts the uses and gratifications (U&G) approach with a perspective of media technology to explore consumers' motivations for disseminating sWOM in mobile SNSs based on sequential qualitative and quantitative methods. The exploratory findings in the qualitative study form the basis for the quantitative study survey research. The results demonstrate that not only are social benefits, social enhancement, economic incentives, and message intrigue the factors driving consumer sWOM intention in mobile SNSs, but also that immediate social affective communication and the motivation to offer immediate information support, which are novel in WOM literature, are revealed through technology affordances of media. Further, based on weights of our sWOM motivations, this study classified disseminators of sWOM through mobile SNSs, suggesting that managers can design different marketing campaigns to encourage sWOM intention. This study originally provides a much-needed complete description of the motivations affecting consumer sWOM intention in mobile SNSs.

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## 1. Introduction

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has been shown to play a major role in customers' buying decisions (Park et al., 2007). The emergence of mobile social networking sites (mobile SNSs, e.g., Facebook and Twitter apps) has extended consumers' options for collecting product or service information from friends and provides opportunity for consumers to share their own consumption experiences with friends by engaging in social word-of-mouth (sWOM). Hajli (2013, 2014) indicated that consumer recommendations are necessary for successful social commerce, and this requires consumer trust in the environment of social commerce. Specifically, social interaction via social media platforms is an important part of social commerce (Wang et al., 2012), as consumers providing comments on products, services, and shopping experiences to their friends

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through social media affect their friends' behavior (Do-Hyung et al., 2007; Hajli, 2013). In reference to this literature, the current study defined sWOM as, "Positive or negative statements made by strangers, friends, and family within personal existing social networks about a product, service, or company. These statements are made available to a multitude of people and institutions via social media."

Given the unique characteristics of mobile SNSs (i.e., compared to PC-based SNSs, mobile SNSs are more accessible, convenient, and immediate, further enabling consumer communication unfettered by constraints of time and space), sWOM has garnered much interest from academics and marketers. Although a number of recent articles have discussed the relevant issues of sWOM through PC-based SNSs (Hajli et al., 2014; Luarn et al., 2015a,b; See-To and Ho, 2014; Wang et al., 2016), the reasons behind consumers' dissemination of sWOM in the environment of mobile SNSs has seldom been investigated. Current publications primarily explain WOM communication from the related theories of social psychology, such as social interactive utility (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), social identity (Okazaki, 2009), social relationship (Chu and Kim, 2011), social capital (Wang et al., 2016), social cognition (Lee et al., 2012), and attachment (Kim et al., 2015). That being said, a successful approach from a social psychology perspective is uses and gratifications (U&G), which means that people using media create gratifications (Ruggiero, 2000). Through this approach, researchers have examined motivations behind the use of various media (Doty and Dworkin, 2014; Ha et al., 2015; Pornsakulvanich and Dumrongisiri, 2013; Reychav and Wu, 2014; Wei and Lu, 2014).

Media technology, however, can shape consumers' new motivations to fulfill their gratifications (Ruggiero, 2000). Dimmick and Albarran (1994) conceptualized this in the form of new gratification-opportunities, which are created by certain attributes of media sources that match consumers' expectations. For example, the Internet affords the gratification of modality, enabling consumers to feel a sense of reality when they are communicating or to feel that somebody is always accessible (Sundar and Limperos, 2013). Mobiles afford the gratification of mobility and can allow social game users to play anytime and anywhere (Chen and Leung, 2015). Similarly, tablets afford the gratifications of connectivity and mobility, enabling consumers to connect anytime and anywhere (Leung and Zhang, 2016).

However, previous literature regarding WOM communication via various media has seldom considered technology characteristics of media. Furthermore, most of the aforementioned U&G and WOM literature relies solely on measurement scales designed by past researchers to capture motives. They may thus miss nuanced or potential new motivations and create an outdated paradigm (Sundar and Limperos, 2013). This is especially egregious considering that innovations in media technology change user expectations regarding gratifications and shape how using these media fulfills them (Ruggiero, 2000). A valuable method to fill these gaps includes (a) adopting a U&G approach combined with sequential qualitative and quantitative methods provided by Stafford et al. (2004) and (b) considering the technology affordances of emergent media (Sundar and Limperos, 2013) to explore the motivations behind a consumer's decision to engage in sWOM communication via mobile SNSs. As Pai and Arnott (2013) assert, applying the U&G approach would be particularly well suited to qualitative exploratory investigations, and incorporating these qualitative results as the basis of quantitative surveys would further increase the value of this investigation. sWOM communication often occurs on PC- or mobile-based SNSs such as Facebook or Twitter. This study focuses on the Facebook app of mobile-based SNSs because, compared with PC-based SNSs, consumers spend more time on mobile-based SNSs, and the Facebook app has the highest usage rate among all existing downloadable apps (comScore, 2013). Recently, relevant research also indicated that mobile device users often use the Facebook app to share advertising messages and their opinions or experiences regarding goods and services with friends and family (Kaplan, 2012; Zickuhr and Smith, 2011). Moreover, compared to a virtual community composed of people unknown to each other, most SNS members comprise people from an individual's interpersonal networks. In Taiwan, which has the highest penetration rate of the app in Asia (He, 2013), 10 million of the 14 million monthly active Facebook users access the Facebook app on their mobile devices daily. With these millions of registered users visiting the Facebook app on a daily basis, the potential business value of the Facebook app has become too great to be ignored by marketers (Tan et al., 2012), and the adoption of this app as an m-commerce platform will only continue to spread in the near future (Ozok and Wei, 2010). How to use mobile SNSs effectively for sWOM marketing is one of the primary questions marketing executives must decide.

This study aims (1) to better understand the motivations that drive consumer decisions to engage in sWOM communications via mobile SNSs, and (2) to develop motivation-based patterns and characteristics of sWOM disseminators in mobile SNSs. This study begins by reviewing the literature on consumer motivations behind various forms of WOM engagement and gratifications afforded by emerging media. Using the U&G approach as a theoretical framework (Stafford et al., 2004) and considering the technology affordances of emergent media (Sundar and Limperos, 2013) for discussion, this study identifies potential motivations for consumers disseminating sWOM in mobile SNSs. These motivations for sWOM communication, which are developed after having derived motivational descriptive items through in-depth interviews with 48 mobile SNS users, are tested via factor analysis and multiple regression analysis to verify their structure and examine dimensionality with 310 mobile SNS users. Finally, we present a discussion of our findings and the implications for theory and practice.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Motivations behind various WOM communication behaviors

Most mobile SNS users' contacts derive from their existing non-mobile social networks. Hence, literature on non-mobile social networks that mentions consumer motivations online should bear relevance to sWOM in mobile SNSs. Table 1

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