



Decomposing perceived playfulness: A contextual examination of two social networking sites



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ABSTRACT

Social networking sites (SNSs) are focused on providing playful services for users that will keep them engaged without losing their interest. Perceived playfulness is derived from the user's subjective evaluation of their interaction with technology and is represented through the subdimensions: concentration, enjoyment, and curiosity. Results show that there is a positive association between perceived playfulness and their attitude toward using the technology. However, the existing studies do not provide a clear direction about conceptualizing and measuring the subdimensions of perceived playfulness. The lack of conclusive evidence, despite the IS literature, shows the need for more empirical studies investigating the actual effect of the distinct subdimensions of perceived playfulness across various contexts. This study develops a context-specific model by decomposing playfulness to completely identify the extent to which specific dimensions are influencing the user's attitude and further clarify their relative importance. An empirical study was conducted with a total sample size of 551 participants, from two different types of SNSs, to test the context-specific model. The results showed that the relative importance of the subdimensions is significantly different between the two SNSs. The findings make the relationship between perceived playfulness and the user's attitude more context sensitive and provide a useful guide to formulating greater user experience in constructing SNS services.

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1. Introduction

The rapid advances in social media and the wide application of social networking site (SNS) usage have changed the way people interact and communicate. The population of social media users has increased to 1.5 billion, and >80% of them are online community users [15]. Attracting an even larger number of committed users has become a significant issue for administrators. A sufficient number of members with a high participation rate can promote the ongoing social interaction to attract potential users and yield user-generated content to sustain the entire community [27,96]. Users are not only drawn to technology for the expected benefits [6] but also for playful experience [95]. Hence, various behavioral models have been established to study the role of

perceived playfulness in the user acceptance of the SNS [26,39,40,68,72].

The emerging IS literature offers ambiguous definitions and inconsistent measures about perceived playfulness; thus, it is difficult to compare and interpret research findings [1,37]. Most previous studies have not clearly conceptualized playfulness as a state of mind or an individual trait in the context of the Internet [37,66], and the measurement of perceived playfulness has been structured in many different ways such as a single-dimensional construct or a multifaceted construct [41] (see Appendix A). This issue demands that researchers reconcile the measures of perceived playfulness presented by previous studies. Perceived playfulness represents a short-lived subjective experience that resides between a user and an information technology (IT) in which it is temporarily unconstrained and easily modified [95]. We argue that perceived playfulness is represented from the individual's subjective experience of the interaction with an SNS; therefore, its attribute is a playful state inherently represented by concentration, enjoyment, and curiosity.

Perceived concentration, enjoyment, and curiosity theoretically represent three correlated yet distinct dimensions. Enjoyment is an emotional construct, whereas the dimensions of concentration

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and curiosity represent cognitive functions [88]. Based on Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory [16], perceived concentration is defined as an individual's temporal patterning of optimal experience with system usage. Perceived enjoyment is system dependent and refers to the extent to which the activity of using a specific system is perceived to be enjoyable [77]. Perceived curiosity is often embedded in the aspect of physical reality and induced by an external stimulus [47,49]. Without distinguishing these dimensions, the empirical findings would conclude that perceived playfulness, in general, produces biased results. We define perceived playfulness as a superordinate construct, given it involves more than one single theoretical dimension. The concept of perceived playfulness will be explicated through an examination of the subdimensions. Combining concentration with enjoyment or curiosity as one theoretical construct will mask the common variance of each dimension.

Using an SNS is a voluntary behavior with significant influences from interpersonal effects. The theory of reasoned action (TRA) explicitly considers the effect of individual attitude as well as social influence and has been applied to different contexts to predict the user acceptance of technology. The high predictive validity of the TRA mode serves as an effective model to develop a context-specific one [29]. Research to date has expanded perceived playfulness in different Internet contexts to successfully predict a user's attitude [39,40,44,57,68]. We incorporate perceived playfulness as a context-specific construct to serve as the antecedent of individual attitude in the SNS context.

An SNS is characterized by reduced anonymity and increased offline-to-online social interactions [21,39]. Empirical results show that the dimensionality of playfulness may not be represented together in explaining a user's attitude but have an insignificant factor structure across different contexts [1,40,57,79,89]. Further, the implications of a user's attitude may be similar across different SNSs, but its manifestation may vary in different SNSs. Following Hong et al. [29], the decomposition approach is applied to a study where a certain part of the dimension of perceived playfulness could be considered as more influential when individuals decide to use a particular SNS. This approach allows differential effects of perceived concentration, enjoyment and curiosity to be apparent without sacrificing theoretical rationalization [7,29] and makes the relationship between perceived playfulness and individual attitude clearer.

A theoretical justification of the attribute of playfulness is necessary because studies conducted earlier on playfulness have found it difficult to explain its effect across different contexts. Perceived playfulness is a state of mind that will change according to the context of the SNS; the test of the interaction effect between perceived playfulness and the different types of SNSs provides evidence to explain the inconsistent effects of perceived playfulness regarding a user's attitude in previous studies and, in turn, enhance the explanatory power of perceived playfulness to specific context. In this study, the reconceptualization of playfulness outlines the scope of its measurements and resolves the conflicting perspectives on measuring it in the IS literature. The empirical results suggest that perceived playfulness may not be estimated in the absence of a dimension such as perceived concentration, enjoyment, or curiosity. Compared to the influence of extrinsic motivational factors, our findings successfully prove that perceived playfulness directly accounts for the context distinguishing effects on individual attitude. The decomposition approach provides an alternative view that the individual attitude toward SNSs should not be treated as a monolithic structure of general beliefs [29], and the results formulate context-sensitive versions of the individual attitude and elucidate the relationship between perceived playfulness and individual attitude in different SNSs. These findings can be used by administrators in light of

the general characteristics of SNSs for constituting greater user acceptance.

The following section of this study presents the theoretical framework, research model, and hypotheses. We detail the research method, sample collection, and a survey with two famous SNSs and then report the research findings. Finally, we discuss the implications of the findings and provide suggestions for academics and associated practitioners.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Perceived playfulness

The technology acceptance model (TAM) has been proposed to study user acceptance of the utilitarian system from the extrinsic motivational perspectives [17]. The intrinsic motivations often direct behavioral intention more strongly than the extrinsic ones do [84]. Moon and Kim [53] introduced perceived playfulness as an intrinsic motivational factor to influence user acceptance of the World Wide Web (WWW). They discovered that when a user perceived playfulness with the WWW, the resulting perception would make them concentrate on, and be curious about, the interaction, and would make them feel that such interaction was enjoyable. They successfully combined playfulness with the TAM model and provided insights for the IS community in understanding how playfulness influences a user's attitude and intention. Their critical findings constitute theoretical support concerning the role of intrinsic factors having a more powerful effect than extrinsic ones. Based on their work, Lin et al. [46] integrated perceived playfulness into the expectation–confirmation (ECT) model to explain why people continually use a particular Web portal. A significant relationship between perceived playfulness and satisfaction supported the extended ECT model, showing that perceived playfulness contributed significantly to users' intention to reuse a Web portal. They concluded that perceived playfulness is a vital consideration in the design of WWW systems.

Ahn et al. [1] investigated the effect of playfulness on user acceptance of online retailing and probed the antecedents of playfulness from the perspectives of design quality. Drawing from the IS success model, they identified three Web features: information, system, and service quality as considerably influencing the extent of perceived playfulness. They corroborated the findings of previous work that playfulness is one of the salient beliefs in constructing user attitude and intention to use in the Internet context. Chang [9] contributes to the current understanding by empirically investigating the fit between an online auction task and an agent's technology toward a user's perceived playfulness on a Web site. The results suggested that the task–technology fit (TTF) was significantly related to perceived playfulness. In addition to studying the antecedents and consequences of perceived playfulness, a portion of the IS literature has detailed data investigating whether perceived playfulness would have a detrimental effect on a user's attitude and use intention toward SNSs. The findings showed that the more playfulness they perceived in the IT interaction process, the more likely they would be to use the Web site [26,39,40,68,72].

Although perceived playfulness has been incorporated into different theoretical models, it is often measured from different perspectives in the IS literature, giving rise to some variation in its application. We have summarized previous studies entailing its use in different contexts (see Appendix A). Many studies have developed different scales for playfulness reflecting the unique aspects of their analysis. Shang et al. [66] adopted cognitive absorption to conceptualize it, asserting that perceived playfulness includes temporal dissociation, focused immersion, enjoyment, control, and curiosity. Terzis and Economides [82] conceptualized

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