



What drives successful social networking services? A comparative analysis of user acceptance of Facebook and Twitter

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ABSTRACT

This study identifies perceived mobility, security, connectedness, system and service quality, usefulness, attitude, and flow experience as key motivational factors for using social networking services (SNSs), and develops a theoretical model that explicates the process in which users adopt Facebook and Twitter by integrating these factors with the technology acceptance model (TAM). While results of structural equation modeling (SEM) on the collected data ($N=2,214$) verified the validity and reliability of the research model, Facebook and Twitter users were found to emphasize different motivational factors when deciding to use SNSs. The implications of notable findings and directions for future studies are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Social networking services (SNSs) are actively used by individuals who desire social interactions with others via online communities. SNSs have become not only an increasingly important research topic because of their ability to offer more diverse ways of communicating with others compared to traditional communication (Harrison & Gilmore, 2012; Park, Yun, Holody, Yoon, Xie, & Lee, 2013; Sultan, 2014) but, more importantly, an essential part of a billion users' daily lives in the ubiquitous digital environment (Hargittai, 2007). However, research on the psychological factors that motivate SNS use has not

been sufficiently conducted, and research on related topics primarily focuses on the technical background of SNSs (Skeels & Grudin, 2009). It is important for developers, engineers, service providers, and marketers to identify key psychological determinants of SNS usage and understand their contribution to shaping user perceptions of—and attitudes toward—SNSs. The goal of this study is, therefore, to develop and validate a user acceptance model that identifies critical motivational determinants of Facebook and Twitter use and integrates them with the technology acceptance model (TAM). Facebook and Twitter are selected because they are conventionally considered the most successful SNSs in the market (Hughes, Rowe, Batey, & Lee, 2012; Lee & Cho, 2011). In doing so, this study addresses the following research questions in an attempt to explicate the process by which users adopt SNSs and explore whether these two popular SNSs have different adoption patterns:

RQ1: Does the proposed research model successfully predict SNS adoption?

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RQ2: Do Facebook and Twitter have similar or different adoption patterns?

2. Theoretical background

SNSs are online-based services that typically include web pages of users' profiles and their social circles, and enable establishing and maintaining social relationships with others (Baden, Bender, Spring, Bhattacharjee, & Starin, 2009; Shin, 2010; Sultan, 2014). Most SNSs are believed to have three social functions (Baden et al., 2009; Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010; Kwon & Wen, 2010). First, they help strengthen existing personal connections both online and offline. Second, they help users establish new social relationships. Third, they offer various useful, advanced services beyond mere exchanges of messages. By utilizing these social functions of SNSs, users can communicate with their friends and share common interests.

Among the numerous SNSs currently available, Facebook and Twitter have emerged as the two most popular, providing interactive and real-time networks of friends (Baresch, Knight, Harp, & Yaschur, 2011; Gusic, 2009; Peterson, 2012). These two SNSs are distinguished by their unique characteristics. Therefore, this study examines Facebook and Twitter, develops a research model that predicts user acceptance of both SNSs, and explores whether users adopt Facebook and Twitter through similar or different patterns.

2.1. Facebook

Since its debut in 2003, Facebook has become the biggest SNS, boasting more than 900 million users (Goldman, 2012). Researchers highlight the following distinguishable features of Facebook (Boyd & Hargittai, 2010; Hoadley, Xu, Lee, & Rosson, 2010; Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010; Miller & Jensen, 2007; Parris, Abdesslem, & Henderson, 2010; Shin & Shin, 2011; Stone, Zickler, & Darrell, 2008): users can create their own profiles to include personal photographs and information; create or join groups for specific interests and purposes; customize privacy settings in detail; view and track activity histories, changes in their friends' profiles, and comments made by others via News Feed; upload pictures containing locational information; tag their friends in pictures, and send automated notification messages to tagged friends; play social networking games and use various application, such as mobile map services.

These key features affect the daily lives of Facebook users by allowing anywhere-anytime social interactions (Watkins, 2009). Facebook also provides timely updates on social and cultural issues and current trends (Kwak et al., 2010). Furthermore, Facebook has become an increasingly popular and open discussion forum for media, politics, and economics (Johnson & Perlmutter, 2010). As such, politicians and organizations actively use it as a communication tool that effectively conveys their agenda and messages.

2.2. Twitter

Twitter is an online social networking and micro-blogging service. Since its debut in 2006, the SNS has gained more than 500 million users (Koetsier, 2012) who exchange more than 15 billion messages each day (Twitter, 2012). Twitter has the following four notable characteristics: it offers various ways to exchange messages, including SMS, RSS, instant messaging, e-mail, and third-party applications (Wigand, 2010) and limits a message to 140 characters (Manzo, 2009); users do not need approval to follow other people and receive their messages (Cha, Haddadi, Benevenuto, & Gummadi, 2010); users can post links to pictures, videos, and music (Angwin, 2009). These characteristics distinguish Twitter as an effective communication, industrial, and marketing tool, especially for mobile-based platforms. For example, a recent poll revealed that more than 80% of users access Twitter on mobile devices, whereas only 20% access it through web browsers on desktop computers (Accenture, 2012).

2.3. Facebook versus Twitter

Although both Facebook and Twitter are designed to promote social interactions, there are clear differences between them. Facebook provides a full array of functions, whereas Twitter is primarily a micro-blogging service with a relatively light, simple interface and simple navigability. That is, Facebook tends to be more versatile and dynamic than Twitter (Davenport, Bergman, Bergman, & Fearrington, 2014; Evans, 2010; Tagtmeier, 2010), allowing users to post various types of multimedia materials such as videos, games, and photos (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010; Stone et al., 2008). In contrast, Twitter merely allows posting texts and links to stored photos.

Another difference is that communication via Facebook is more passive than Twitter (Glasson, 2008). Users can communicate with others in a more casual, conversational manner via Twitter, thereby allowing more active communication. For example, Glasson (2008) notes that people are more likely to use Twitter when they wish to invite their friends to an informal gathering, while Facebook is more frequently used to announce a more formal event, such as a wedding reception. In addition, these two SNSs adopt different privacy policies. While content on Twitter is open to the public, Facebook offers complex and customizable privacy measures that allow users to specify what information can be shared and accessed by which users (Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn, & Hughes, 2009).

Therefore, Twitter's simpler user interface, greater openness to the public, and more conversational interaction make it ideal for mobile-based platforms such as smartphones and tablet computers. Conversely, Facebook offers more diverse functions in a full capacity as well as stronger privacy and security measures, making it more suitable for desktop users.

2.4. Technology acceptance model (TAM)

TAM (Fig. 1) explains and predicts user attitudes toward and acceptance of a specific technology or service (Davis,

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