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Examining the beneficial effects of individual's self-disclosure on the social network site

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A B S T R A C T

Today, individual's self-disclosure on the social network sites (SNS) have become a prevalent phenomenon. This study proposes a research model for investigating the beneficial effects of individual's self-disclosure on the social network sites (SNS). In this study, social support and online social well-being are seen as the beneficial effects of individual's self-disclosure on the SNS. Furthermore, this study examines whether self-disclosure increases social support and online social well-being. For developing a more parsimonious research model, this study chose self-disclosure and social support as second-order constructs. Self-disclosure is devised as a formative second-order construct that includes five components: amount, depth, honesty, intent, and valence. Social support is used as a reflective second-order construct comprising two factors: informational support and emotional support. In addition, this research also proposes that social support increase online social well-being. Further, online social well-being is hypothesized to positively affect the continuance intention in relation to the SNS. Data collected from 333 Facebook users provided support for all the hypotheses. Implications for theory and practice are discussed, and suggestions are made for future research.

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1. Introduction

Social network sites (SNS) have become an international phenomenon. SNS are online services, platforms, or websites that enable the construction and reflection of social networks or social relations among individuals. Recently, scholars have begun exploring the social impacts of SNS (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). As of November 2015, SNS were the second most popular websites worldwide (Facebook; Alexa Top Sites, 2015). Globally, increasing numbers of people have begun to use SNS. For example, Facebook, the dominant player of the social networking industry, has on average 1.01 billion active, daily users logging on to Facebook on any given day (Facebook Newsroom, 2015). Online social networking not only represent a prevalent phenomenon but also a trend that offer many potential opportunities for business.

For better enhancing the impact of branding or increasing demand for products, business would like to use an ideal source of marketing research (Kozinets, 2002). In other words, the potential business benefits of self-disclosure in online communities are

profound (Posey, Lowry, Roberts, & Ellis, 2010). Kozinets (2002) indicated that consumer's disclosed information can be seen as an ideal and unique source of marketing research. Through the SNS, business can gather the consumer's disclosed information and build the connection between the brand and consumers. Therefore, this study would like to examine individual's self-disclosure and its beneficial effects in the SNS context.

According to social penetration theory (SPT) (Altman & Taylor, 1973), self-disclosure is the key concept in relationship development. Self-disclosure can contribute to not only developing a close relationship but also maintaining a relationship (Derlega, Metts, Sandra, & Margulis, 1993). The development of interpersonal process is orderly and proceeds through stages over time (Altman & Taylor, 1973). As interpersonal relationships develop to more intimate levels, individuals generally disclose more private information on a more personal level (Derlega, 1984). Individuals may receive support from their social networks after they disclose their personal emotions, feelings, and the situations they find upsetting (Derlega et al., 1993). Therefore, social support can be seen as the social benefit derive from the reactions others provide (Derlega et al., 1993).

On the other hand, from the perspective of positive psychology, self-disclosure would improve the individual's physical and mental

health (i.e., subjective well-being) (Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2002). When people share their story with others, i.e., communicate personal information, thoughts, and feelings with other people, whether the experience is positive or negative would gain a psychological benefit to themselves (Esterling, L'Abate, Murray, & Pennebaker, 1999; Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004). Therefore, online social well-being can be seen as the beneficial effect of self-disclosure. Consequently, in this study, social support and well-being can be seen as the beneficial effects which derived from self-disclosure.

Broadly, the purpose of this study is to examine the phenomenon of individual's self-disclosure on the SNS context. In addition, the beneficial effects of self-disclosure, i.e., social support and the satisfaction with individual's online social life (i.e., online social well-being), would also be examined. Further, this study investigates whether individual's online social well-being increases their continuance intention toward the SNS. Specifically, the research questions of interest are as follows:

(1) How does an individual's self-disclosure impact social support and online social well-being in the SNS context?
(2) To what extent do self-disclosure and social support matter in driving individual's online social well-being?
(3) Does an individual's online social well-being increase his/her continuance intention toward the SNS?

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next section discusses the conceptual foundation of the research. Section 3 develops the research model and hypotheses. Section 4 explains the methods and analyzes the data. The results and their implications are discussed in Section 5. The paper concludes with the limitations of the study, along with suggestions for future research directions.

2. Literature reviews

2.1. Social media usage

Today, social media usage, such as weblogs, social network sites, and video platforms, has become a prevalent phenomenon and brings significant impacts to our daily lives. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media is a group of Internet-based applications that allow people to create and exchange the user generated content. See-To and Ho (2014) indicated that because of the rapid development of social media usage, prior studies examined the impacts of social media to different facets in the society via the theoretical lens of information systems (Pai & Arnott, 2013), marketing (Naylor, Lamberton, & West, 2012), academic performance (Alwagait, Shahzad, & Alim, 2015), and social networking activity and connectivity (Shahzad & Alwagait, 2014; Shahzad, Alwagait, & Alim, 2014).

Park, Jin, and Jin (2011) proposed that although scholars make an effort in understanding the rapidly growing use of SNS, few studies have examined the SNS usage from the interpersonal relationships perspective. According to Pornsakulvanich, Haridakis, & Rubin (2008), self-disclosure is a key component of processes of relationship formation and maintenance. Prior studies that examine individual's self-disclosure in SNS context mostly focus on the relational outcome, such as intimacy with relational partners (Park et al., 2011) and quality of friendship (Wang, Jackson, & Zhang, 2011). Therefore, this study investigates the beneficial effects of people who disclose their personal or private information to others within an SNS.

2.2. Social penetration theory

Social penetration theory (SPT) was formulated in 1973 by psychologists Altman & Taylor. It is a theory on communication and psychology, which provides a better understanding on relationship development. According to Altman and Taylor (1973), social penetration deals primarily with "(1) overt interpersonal behaviors occurring in social interaction" and "(2) the internal cognitive processes that precede, accompany, and follow relationship formation." Altman and Taylor (1973) argued that this theory hypothesizes that relationships develop gradually, moving from superficial, non-intimate levels to more intimate, deeper levels. Therefore, SPT explains and predicts relational closeness, which is seen in the superficiality of self-disclosures in a relationship (Posey et al., 2010).

The powerful metaphor of SPT is its "onion" analogy. Altman & Taylor compared individuals to a multilayered onion. When individuals get to know each other, the layers will shed away to disclose the inner self. Therefore, disclosure plays an critical role in interpersonal relationship development. People who develop the interpersonal relationships from more superficial exchange of information to more personal levels of interactions (Altman & Taylor, 1973). They further suggested that the development of interpersonal relationships (the social penetration process) progresses through four stages: orientation, exploratory affective exchange, full affective exchange, and stable exchange (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

According to Altman and Taylor (1973), *orientation* is the earliest stage of interaction, which is supposed to take place at the periphery of the persona in "public" fields. At this stage, the interaction is mostly limited to public fields, and communication is cautious and tentative such as a conventional formula. The stage of the *exploratory affective exchange* is similar to that of relationships between casual acquaintances or friendly neighbors. In other words, relationships at this stage are friendly, relaxed, and casual. Although this represents an extension of the richness of communication in public outer fields, the exchange is still based on stereotyped responses. *Affective exchange* characterizes a close friendship in which individuals know one another well and the exchange is freewheeling and loose. In other words, the relationship is enjoyable and comfortable. Although communication at this stage is characterized by an obvious increase in the very private and central fields of the person, in core fields, willingness is mixed with hesitancy. *Stable exchange* is the final stage of relationship development, and few relationships achieve this level. Communication at this stage is one of oneness, richness, and spontaneity. Dyad communicators know one another very well and can easily and immediately interpret and forecast the other's feelings and probable behaviors.

2.3. Self-disclosure

SPT states that the process of interpersonal-relationship development primarily takes place through self-disclosure. Wheeless and Grotz (1976) conceptualized self-disclosure as "any message about the self that a person communicates to another." Derlega (1984) reported that self-disclosure makes individuals show others who they are and what their needs are. Therefore, self-disclosure can refer to what people voluntarily and intentionally reveal about themselves to others, which includes thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Derlega et al., 1993). Although self-disclosure is not equivalent to have a close relationship, it can contribute to develop a close relationship and to relationship maintenance (Derlega et al., 1993).

According to Altman and Taylor (1973), and Cozby (1973), there