



Exploring influential social cognitive determinants of social media use

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ABSTRACT

This study explored relationships between social cognitive determinants and examined their associations with social media usage. Overall, the model exhibits a goodness-of-fit and secures generalizability. In examining the social cognitive determinants of social media usage, habit strength was found, with statistical significance, to be the sole and immediate antecedent of social media use. Discussion and implications are further offered.

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1. Introduction

The emergence of social media stems from the introduction of Web 2.0 (e.g., Adobe Flash, and RSS),² a tool that empowers users to develop, contribute to, collaborate on, customize and distribute web content (O'Reilly, 2005; Vickery & Wunsch-Vincent, 2007). Social media has become a common platform for sharing various types of user-generated content such as news, photos, and videos made public within a bounded system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Since the inception of social media, diverse applications have been developed, gaining popularity in users' daily lives. Social media networks such as Facebook, Flickr, Google+, Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia and Second Life represent the user-generated world of Web 2.0.

As of January 17, 2014, the popular social networking application Facebook had globally registered more than 1.15 billion active users (Bennett, 2014). In the United States alone, 128 million users log onto the site daily, and Facebook traffic constitutes up to 41% of all social networking traffic. Moreover, 100 h of content were posted every minute to the popular video sharing platform YouTube, and the image hosting site Flickr has a total of 87 million registered members and more than 3.5 million new images uploaded daily (Jeffries, 2013).

With the rise of varied platforms of social media, the online environment has become fully interactive and collaborative, allowing individuals to actively engage in two-way communication, post reviews of services and products, upload self-created videos, and even engage in virtual lives. In fact, social media offer a common platform for sharing user-created content, fostering users' active participation through interactivity, and providing the public with much deserved control (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009). Thus, these advanced features of social media are thought to inspire user motives distinct from those associated with established Internet usage. Scholars have thus raised their interests in examination of factors affecting people's social media use.

In earlier studies, for example, perceived encouragement and perceived orientation were found to be significant factors that affect use of social networking services (Kwon & Wen, 2010), while enjoyment was also deemed an influential antecedent of SNS use (Lin & Lu, 2011). For social network games, in particular, perceived playfulness and security of SNGs were found to be a distinct construct (Shin & Shin, 2011). According to those studies, variation in the influential factors on SNS use seems to be coming from theoretical approaches (i.e., technology acceptance model, motivation theory, etc.) employed in measurement. Due to the heuristic nature that earlier findings provide, it would be intriguing to apply social cognitive perspective (Bandura, 1986) in examination of factors affecting one's use of social media, since it has been a robust perspective in explaining individuals' media use behaviors (Larose & Eastin, 2004).

Social cognitive perspective posits that anticipated outcomes of potential actions significantly influence individuals' actual behavior, and expectations are built on direct, indirect, and collective

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E-mail addresses: khang@apr.ua.edu (H. Khang), bird24@skku.edu (E.-K. Han), ki@apr.ua.edu (E.-J. Ki).¹ Tel.: +1 205 348 8271.² Adobe Flash refers to a method adding animation, interactivity, and audio/video streams to web pages. RSS (Really Simple Syndication) indicates a kind of web feed formats used to publish frequently updated content (e.g., blog entries and news headlines) in a standardized format.

experiences of the behavior in question (Bandura, 2002a, 2002b). Along with identifying anticipated outcomes, this theory organizes habit strength, deficient self-regulation and self-efficacy as factors that affect the behavior. In earlier research, the perspective has been primarily employed in examining predictors of Internet use behavior (i.e., LaRose & Eastin, 2004). Thus, it merits examining its applicability to social media use behavior by comparison or contrast with previous findings.

Employing social cognitive perspective, this study therefore aims to explore antecedents of social media use behavior. The findings of this study are expected to highlight social cognitive theory as an alternative perspective in explaining one's social media use behavior. Moreover, the theory's generalizability is anticipated to be corroborated by evaluation of the proposed model alongside another form of media use behavior.

2. Theoretical backgrounds

2.1. Nature of human capabilities

Social cognitive theory addresses determinants of human thoughts, feelings, and behavior in identifying reciprocal causation among personal factors (e.g., cognitive, affective or biological), behavioral patterns, and environmental events (Bandura, 2002a, 2002b). Through the processes of interaction and influence among the three determinants, individuals tend to retain, change or solidify their thoughts, affections, and actions, which constitute the intrinsic nature of human beings, also referred to as "plasticity" (Bandura, 2002a, 2002b, p. 121). When separated from other living things, people therefore demonstrate a distinctive capacity composed of four human capabilities: symbolization, self-regulation, self-reflection, and vicarious capability.

Symbolization refers to an individual's capacity to symbolize through cognitive processes related to his/her experiences with the external environment. In this process, people tend to create symbols (e.g., meaning, form, continuity, etc.) pertaining to their experiences. This cognitive capability is positively associated with one's capacity to comprehend the world and regulate external events (Bandura, 2002a, 2002b).

Self-regulatory capability involves one's responsiveness to external sanctions and demands. When reacting to the world or environmental events, one's capacity to steer him/herself influences the process. Self-regulation is typically demonstrated in the form of either proactive or reactive control. Proactive control involves motivating and guiding ones' actions by establishing and carrying out higher goals, while reactive control refers to one's efforts to bridge the gap between perceived performance and a personal standard (Bandura, 1991a, 199b).

Self-reflective capability refers to one's retrospective assessment of him/herself, including thoughts and behaviors, through comparison with indicators of reality. By examining themselves, individuals are able to identify and verify thoughts shaped by the following four modes: enactive, vicarious, social and logical forms (Bandura, 2002a, 2002b). Thus, one's thoughts are verified through his/her direct or indirect experiences, social norms, and inferences based on available knowledge. Perceived self-efficacy is considered a central component of self-reflective thought, influencing varied aspects of cognitive process (e.g., optimistic or pessimistic), behavior selection, and outcome expectations (Bandura, 2002a, 2002b).

Vicarious capability is related to the premise that learning is possible through, not only direct, but also indirect experience provided by mass media. Indeed, mass media sources, such as television, newspapers, and Internet, provide consumers with considerable information regarding life values, moral standards, and behavioral patterns. Cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning

can therefore be achieved vicariously through observation of others' behaviors and the consequences conveyed and portrayed by mass media. In fact, Bandura (2002a, 2002b) found that individuals' perceptions of social reality are largely influenced by their indirect experiences.

2.2. Social cognitive determinants of media use behavior

Perceived self-efficacy has been identified as one of the notable determinants of individual motivation, affect, and behavior (Bandura, 1989; Zimmerman, 2000). Self-efficacy refers to one's self-assessment of his/her capacity to design things to do and then carry out the activities to achieve one's goals (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 2000). Bandura (1999) noted that one's perceived personal efficacy is likely to affect that individual's selection of activities associated with the goal of eventual success. As such, this notion can be applied to an individual's media activities. A study by LaRose, Mastro, and Eastin (2001), for example, indicated that Internet self-efficacy was a significant predictor of Internet use. Furthermore, Gunn (1998) maintained that people who display Internet addiction-like symptoms also tend to demonstrate low self-efficacy. Thus, this study intends to examine the predictability of perceived self-efficacy on social media use.

Deficient self-regulation refers to one's lack of self-regulatory capability. As Bandura (2001) argued, people possess the ability to control their choices, feelings, and behaviors through self-monitoring processes (Bandura, 1986). When self-regulation fails to effectively operate, problematic behaviors may arise, such as addictions. Problematic uses of communication technologies (e.g., Internet, mobile phones, game, etc.) stem largely from users' failure or lack of self-regulation, which this study identifies as deficient self-regulation. LaRose, Lin, and Eastin (2003) determined that deficient self-regulation was directly related to participants' Internet usage and was also associated with habit strength.

Habit strength is a representation of individuals' behavioral patterns (LaRose & Eastin, 2004) and is, therefore, believed to influence their current behavior. Furthermore, habit strength is identified as a significant predictor of self-efficacy and is determined by expected outcomes (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). Thus, habit strength is expected to be a key factor in testing the causality of social use.

Past experiences. By considering past experiences of a particular behavior, people can assess the potential consequences of that behavior, as well as the potential effects on themselves and their environments (Bandura, 2002a, 2002b). In addition, individuals are able to anticipate outcomes according to their behavior. As such, past experience of a particular behavior is considered an important predictor of one's engagement in that behavior (Triandis, 1980). In a study examining Internet usage behavior (LaRose & Eastin, 2004), however, past experience did not demonstrate a direct impact on Internet use; rather, users' past experiences indirectly influenced this behavior via self-efficacy. Thus, this study aims to reevaluate the explanatory power of past experience on social media use.

Expected outcomes have been identified as a significant predictor of one's behavior (Bandura, 1986). Indeed, users' outcome expectations act as cognitively influential motivators guiding the ways in which individuals take action, such as adopting innovative communication technologies. Individuals' expectancies depend largely on their direct or indirect experiences of the behavior being considered. Expected outcomes are constructed according to the six following types: novel sensory, social, status, monetary, enjoyable activity, and self-reactive incentives (Bandura, 1986, pp. 232–240). Similarly, individuals integrate media use, which is partially mediated by the anticipated outcomes they aim to

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