

Examining users' intention to continue using social network games: A flow experience perspective

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ABSTRACT

Social network sites games (SNGs) are growing in acceptance for users, but the intention to continue using such games requires further exploration because of the acceptance–discontinuance anomaly phenomenon (i.e., users discontinuing use of SNGs after initially accepting them). The study integrates interaction and value as the antecedents of user satisfaction and flow experience; furthermore affects the SNG continuance. The results reveal the importance of flow experience, which plays a mediation role and produces indirect effects in predicting the SNGs continuance in the model. Based on the results, practical implications for SNG marketing strategies and theoretical implications will be provided.

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1. Introduction

Internet users often want to meet and communicate with other people, just as they do in the real world. The social network is a social community via online communication, where people meet online to post messages and pictures, chat, and play games. An increasing number of games have found their way onto these platforms. Among SNSs, the number of Facebook users is quickly increasing, with over 700 million users throughout the world in 2012, compared to the 500 million users in 2010 (Statistics Facebook, 2012). Facebook applications attract millions of users, and game applications frequently reach the top-10 popularity lists of the platform (see <http://www.appdata.com>); online social network games, also called Social Network Games (SNGs), have spawned a whole new subculture (Shin and Shin, 2011). Compared to online games, SNGs are played through social networks, and typically features multiplayer and asynchronous game play mechanics. However, if a person is not satisfied with a current SNG, he/she will switch to other SNGs. Since a person can easily switch from one SNG to another, user retention is an important issue. Although past research has demonstrated the continuance intention in IT/IS contexts, such as online banking (Vatanasombut et al., 2008), e-learning (Lee, 2010), and short-message service (Kim et al., 2008), few studies have focused on SNG continuance, although the continuance intention has emerged as a critical issue in the setting of SNGs. This study fills that gap.

Based on Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975), a flow experience is both an overall assessment and a kind of mental state that engages an individual in one activity. Among the determinants of the intention to continue using web systems, users' satisfaction and flow are considered relatively important (Tiwana and Bush, 2005). Therefore, this study also proposes that the flow experience is representative of a high level of customer satisfaction and influences SNG continuance.

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2. Research model and hypotheses

As depicted in Fig. 1, this research model is derived from the separation of, on one hand, satisfaction found in the information technology acceptance literature and, on the other, flow experience found in the information system acceptance literature. The objective is not to propose a model that delineates all of the links explaining SNGs continuance nor is it to generate a list of possible antecedents that affect satisfaction and flow experience; furthermore determine the continuance intention of using SNGs. Instead, the emphasis is on building theoretical logic that links user satisfaction and flow experience to continued use of the SNG. Therefore, this model highlights the major antecedents and determinants that can explain a large portion of the variance in SNGs continuance. This model enables us to link continued use with its predicting variables.

2.1. Social network sites and social network games

Social network sites (SNS) are defined as Web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the systems. When users join an SNS, they are given a page on which to create a profile and are urged to enter personal information, such as their home towns, work histories, hobbies, favorite movies, and interests. The growth and success of SNS can be attributed in part to what the “network effect,” which states that the more people use a website by adding profiles and content, the more valuable it becomes to each of its users. As a result, an increasing number of firms sponsor SNS by offering free online games because games are regarded as the content that most attracts and retains consumers. Games offer sponsors an important benefit as a viral marketing tool.

While the primary practice of SNSs services is to facilitate individuals to “articulate and make visible their social networks” (Boyd and Ellison, 2008), other types of applications, such as gaming, are appearing in SNSs. In order to illustrate the potential impact of augmented tabletop gaming and to improve accessibility for a broader audience, previous analyses have suggested that the SNS structure itself can be used to play relational games with friends or other users. However, gaming applications are not, in fact, part of the SNS but came about as external applications added (installed) to users’ profiles since the Facebook architecture dictates that every action a user performs within the system is, or could be, public. A Social Network Game (SNG) is a structured activity that has contextual rules permitting user engagement (Shin and Shin, 2011). It is a type of browser game that is distributed primarily through social networks and typically features multiplayer and asynchronous game play mechanics (Järvinen, 2009). Unlike causal gaming, where users play alone and titles cost a fee to download, social games are built to be enjoyed and shared with friends through existing social networks and platforms like smart phones (Shin and Shin, 2011). When gaming online, users may seek utilitarian benefits, such as ease-of-use and adequate outcome, and/or hedonic benefits, which enhance enjoyment of the online experience (Bridges and Florsheim, 2008).

2.2. Continuance intention

Continuance refers to a form of post-adoption behavior. Although the term “post-adoption” actually refers to a suite of behaviors that follow initial acceptance (Rogers, 1995), including continuance, routinization, infusion, adaptation, and

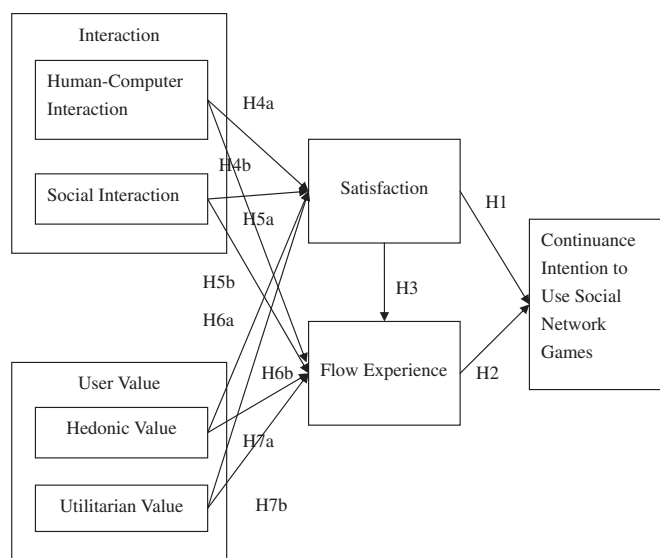


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

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