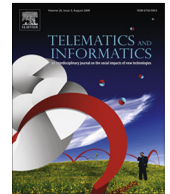




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Examining information sharing in social networking communities: Applying theories of social capital and attachment



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ABSTRACT

Information sharing is one of the essential functions in social networking sites. Social linkages through interaction has grown explosively ever since. However, there are little theoretically explained what factors have different effects for on the members' activity. We bring an attachment theory from social psychology literature to understand how online members exchange their information. We studied information sharing behavior in groups on SNSs from the perspective of information contributors and their characteristics by using the lens of identity-and bond-based attachment theory. We collected 502 data using an online survey of the members who joined groups (open, closed, secret) such as school alumni in South Korea. We tested with a structural equation model (SEM) for research model by AMOS using the survey data. Network externality, social interaction, enjoyment of helping, and self-image expression are significant for the two types of attachments. Interestingly, identity-based attachment showed much stronger impact on information sharing.

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1. Introduction

Online communities, as well as social network service sites, are growing at a surprising rate among the general populace. Social networking sites (SNSs), whose use is rapidly increasing, represent a communication tool that appears in various forms (Chang and Zhu, 2012). For example, Facebook, a leading SNS tool, can broadcast messages to large audiences through chats, status updates, and wall posts. Such communication methods of SNSs lead their users to develop various usage motivations (Smock et al., 2011), as people use some sites more frequently and densely than others. We have found that people have reasons for using SNSs that can generally be classified into the following categories: relaxing entertainment, information sharing, escapism from reality, social interaction, and habitually spending time. Among such usage motivations for SNSs, "information sharing" is noteworthy as useful information (Ren et al., 2012) in exchanging idea, opinion, news, and experiences.

In a consumer behavior study, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) have focused on brand community (e.g., Saab, Michelin, Bronco, Mac) based on social relationships among admirers of a brand in a certain site (e.g., Fairlawn and Vicinity). This perspective of community activity underlies that consumers use their product as a special object with a social identity as well as

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expression of self-concept (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988). The nature of the activity is about people form to object that they designate as special things or favorite products. Regarding the early studies of brand or communities, literature have been studying why people with the sense of attachment feel a belong to product or place (Kasarda and Janowitz, 1974; Riger and Lavrakas, 1981). Since Internet began, online communities have become increasingly emerged, the attachment becomes an important dimension as a crucial predictor of community members' behavior, thus, some studies have largely studies on the activity of other in online communities from information and other resources (Ling et al., 2005; Wang and Fesenmaier, 2004). At this point, if SNSs can be used in a more explorative way, the ultimate purposes of information sharing may be achieved among communities' members (Cai, 2005; Hall and Graham, 2004; Kim et al., 2011a). SNSs play a critical role in facilitating collaboration among community members in which attachment because of adherence to a clear set of value despite the absence of social affinity, which formerly bound people to neighborhoods (Riger and Lavrakas, 1981). Thus, we argues, with the review of the existence of early and recent studies, that researchers should complementarily investigate on researches which are capable of social network members' attachments who can benefit values bounding people to SNSs community settings.

In marketing study, Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) explored the attachments people from to objects they designate as favorite, whereas, in information systems study, there researched on engaging community members and contributing reasons for members why are intent to share (Ren et al., 2012). Meanwhile, existing SNS studies have looked at the motivations for using SNSs (Smock et al., 2011), the network externality that influences the use of SNSs, factors influencing product purchases (Pookulangara and Koesler, 2011), and risk-taking, trust, and privacy concerns in social network communities (Fogel and Nehmad, 2009). Virtual communities are online social networks in which people with common interests, goals, or practices interact to share information engaging in social interactions (Chiu et al., 2006). However, the SNS is limited in addressing what components are within a social network and how they attach in newly emerging SNSs online communities. Interestingly, there has been very little research on members' logins and participation in a certain community or the practice of posting interesting topics and valuable contents, so-called information sharing in SNSs. In particular, group members' reasons and purposes related to attachment have not been explored empirically. In order to understand these, we draw on social capital theory and the promotion of collaborations among individuals, where social capital such as resources and mechanisms among people arises in the daily relationships of individuals with their friends and acquaintances. Thus, social capital can be applied to explain many pro-social behaviors, such as group actions carried out for other people or community involvement. As a result, we may assume that attachments arise from various factors in a continuous fashion, and some roles of identity and bonds among members in SNSs would lead to consequences (i.e., information sharing, feedback). The aim of the current study is to examine information sharing in groups belonging to SNSs, for example alumni groups, as a reflection of social capital; furthermore, two types of attachment (identity vs. bond) will be explored. Specifically, this paper seeks answers to the following research questions:

- (1) What factors and features of social capital do facilitate information sharing among SNS group members?
- (2) In order to share information well, how do people attach to a specific group and activate interpersonal relations of the specific group? We assume which two types of attachment (identity-based attachment vs. bond-based attachment) involvement might mediate between social capital related factors and information sharing.

The major contribution of this study will be elucidate mediating roles of two types of attachment to affect information sharing in the SNS, and then to empirically test the results. Furthermore, this study will provide practical implications to help organizations promote information sharing via SNSs. The rest of the paper is organized as follows. To complete this investigation, this paper introduces the some background on attachment theory, specifically, social capital theory in theoretical background. We begin this discussion by presenting the research framework and establishing hypotheses in research model and hypotheses. Research methodology describes the data collection methods and measures for this study. The methodology and data analysis are presented. Implication and conclusion discusses the results with some theoretical and practical implications identified, and included the paper summarizing the issues and potentials for future research.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Attachment theory

Attachment theory has identified three forms of attachment in the literature. Firstly, its theoretical emphasis has applied on the territorial instincts to situational or social structural conditions that influence the generation of local bonds. It has focus on social ties to local organizations and people, and a person who feel a belong to place (Riger and Lavrakas, 1981). Thus, attachment and social interaction in early studies have been usually studied within geographically bounded areas. However, the attachment theory is transforming to marketing area, consumers use their product as special objects with a social identity. Thus, another aspect of attachment to objects is explained as expressions of self-concept and as signs of one's connection to or differentiation from other members of society (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988). The nature and meaning of the attachment is about people form to object that they designate as special things or favorite products. In emerging of online communities, the attachment becomes an important dimension as a crucial predictor of community members'

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