Understanding factors affecting users' social networking site continuance: A gender difference perspective

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A B S T R A C T

Social networking sites (SNSs) have attracted more and more people to interact on line. Because of their popularity, firms and organizations are now marketing their business on SNS pages. It is essential for both SNS providers and firms to retain their current members. Consequently, use continuity of SNSs has gained the attention of both practitioners and researchers. However, few studies have systematically examined gender differences in such a context. To address this gap, we have developed an advanced framework to explain and analyze gender differences in users' SNS continuance decisions. We propose an SNS continuance model by integrating SNS-oriented constructs (perceived privacy risk, perceived enjoyment, perceived reputation, and community identification) into the established ECM-ISC model and introduce gender as a key moderator. Our research results indicate that all the added SNS-oriented constructs influence users' SNS continuance directly and indirectly. Furthermore, the impact of each factor on SNS continuance varies by gender. Each gender bases SNS continuance decisions on a different set of factors and/or different weights of the same factors. This study provides evidence that gender effects should be considered in understanding the continued usage of SNSs. It also provides an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of gender differences in SNS continuance and fills the research gap regarding this. The theoretical and practical implications of these results are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Information systems (IS) research has paid a great deal of attention to people's initial adoption of information technology (IT) [1,2] and continuance use of IT [3]. However, studies on continuance of social networking site (SNS) usage are limited. Our review highlighted only few studies. For example, Wang, Xu, and Chan [4] used computer self-efficacy and the technology acceptance model (TAM) to examine Facebook continuance, while another study by Yin, Cheng, and Zhu [5] explored SNS continuance through the lens of the expectation–confirmation model in IT (ECM-IT). Today, many firms and organizations have moved their businesses online and engaged their customers on SNSs. SNSs have created new opportunities for firms and organizations to gain business values through both internal and external interactions with their stakeholders. Retaining existing subscribers is critical for firms and organizations to continue gaining profit values. For example, in online businesses, individual users' continuance has contributed to the success of online service businesses [6] and online banking [3]. Given this evidence, studying individual users' SNS continuance is critical for SNS firms to retain membership and for businesses to gain profitable values. The success of SNSs depends largely on users' continuance usage. However, in the context of SNS, research on people's adoption, post-adoption, and continued usage remains scarce, and few studies have attempted to examine the factors that influence users' SNS continuance. Our first research question is: what are the primary antecedents of continued usage of SNSs?

A recent review by Trauth [7] highlights that many studies where gender has been used falling into two broad categories including: one is concerned with gender and the IS workforce, focusing typically on the underrepresentation of women in the IS professions; and the other focuses on the adoption and use of IT, typically searching for gender differences. Gender must be considered in order to achieve a fuller understanding of technology

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about its adoption, use, and impacts [8–10]. However, gender research in IS discipline lacks sufficient theorization, as stated "a considerable amount of the gender research that is being published isn't sufficiently theorized" (Trauth [7], p. 278). If gender continues to be inadequately studied and theorized, the gender implications of potential transformation from new information and communication technologies will continue being ignored [10]. Thus, it is essential to research into gender issue in the adoption and use of IT in order to provide further insights into the design and development of IT. In IS research, some studies have investigated gender differences in the use of IT. For example, Gefen and Straub [11] found gender differences in the perception of e-mail use when they integrated gender as a moderator into the TAM to explore the role of gender in the IT diffusion model. Venkatesh and Morris [12] posited that women are more strongly influenced by subjective norms and perceived ease of use and men are more strongly influenced by their perceptions of usefulness in their decisions to use a new technology. However, in the context of IT continuance, no known work has yet examined the role of gender in people's decision-making. A review of the current IS continuance literature of the eighth basket of IS journals (see Appendix A) reveals two underrepresentation areas: (1) IS continuance in the context of SNS and (2) the role of gender in the IT continuance literature. Research on the role of gender in the context of SNS continuance has been neglected. This lead to our second research question: does gender play a moderating role?

Our goal is to fill in the research gaps by developing a model of SNS continuance and to examine the role of gender in SNS users' decisions. It is among the very first studies to focus on and compare men's and women's decisions to use such a timely technology as SNSs. New opportunities and challenges continue to arise as technologies evolve; awareness of gender differences in SNS continuance has valuable implications for SNS firms to successfully retain their current members. Therefore, determinants of continued use for each target market and gender deserve sustained research. We seek to inform both academicians who study the use of SNSs for business purposes and practitioners who seek to grow SNS usage. Thus, this paper contributes to the IS continuance literature by extending gender differences into SNS continuance. It also informs SNS firms how to better retain their current members by gender awareness in SNS continuance decision-making. This study has two objectives:

1. to identify the factors affecting SNS continuance, and
2. to investigate gender differences regarding users' SNS continuance

The paper proceeds as follows. First, we provide literature on our theoretical foundations, which leads to our research model and justification of hypotheses. Second, the chosen research methodology, data analysis, and results are presented. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the research and its practical implications.

2. Theoretical background and research model

Our research uses two main theoretical foundations: the expectation–confirmation model and IS continuance (ECM-ISC) and social role theory (SRT). ECM-ISC is used to develop our conceptual model, while SRT serves as the theoretical frame to posit that the influence of each construct on users' decision-making about continuing to use SNSs varies by gender. In this section, we first review the literature on ECM-ISC, and then explain why we chose perceived privacy risk, perceived enjoyment, perceived reputation, and community identification as the key antecedents affecting SNS continuance intention from several theoretical underpinnings. Lastly, we explain why SRT is selected

as the theoretical lens to study gender differences in this paper. This leads to our research model of SNS continuance.

2.1. IS continuance and SNS

IS continuance research examines the factors that contribute to system usage over time. IT continuance involves investigating the long-term factors (i.e., post-adoption) that contribute to the recurring use of the system [13,14], and is thus integral to the success of a system [3]. Bhattacherjee [3] developed the ECM-ISC by borrowing the expectation–confirmation theory (ECT) from the consumer behavior literature and empirically examining factors affecting continuance intention of IS directly and indirectly. The ECT is a cognitive theory that explains consumer satisfaction as a function of expectations and expectancy disconfirmation/confirmation, which in turn influences consumers' repurchase intention [15]. ECT is widely used in marketing discipline to study consumer repurchase behaviors and continuance service use [16,17], as satisfaction is a key factor that builds and retains customer loyalty for a long-term success [18]. In the IS discipline, users' continuance decision is similar to consumers' purchase decision, which could be influenced by user satisfaction with previous experience of IS usage [3]. Furthermore, Bhattacherjee proposes user satisfaction could be determined by confirmation of expectation and expectation of the IS that is captured by Davis et al.'s [19] perceived usefulness. ECM-ISC could be briefly summarized as follows: (1) user satisfaction is influenced by users' confirmation of expectation and perceived usefulness; (2) user satisfaction and perceived usefulness determine their continued intention of using an IS; and (3) users' perceived usefulness is influenced by their confirmation of expectation from previous IS usage. The ECM-ISC focuses on users' post-adoption expectations and requires empirical validations when studying IT continuance across different technology contexts to determine its generalizability (Hong et al. [13]). To date, it has been extensively tested in a number of IS continuance research and confirmed as a strong theoretical underpinning of IS continuance in the context of relatively new technologies [5,20].

Moreover, new features of technology should be incorporated into the original continuance model when studying IT continuance in new technology contexts. In the context of SNS, some notable initial IT continuance studies incorporate various constructs derived from previous literature into IT continuance research. For example, Wang, Xu, and Chan [4] examined the influence of general and Facebook-specific computer self-efficacy on Facebook users' continuance intention based on an extended TAM. In a more recent study, Yin, Cheng, and Zhu [5] incorporated both individual motivations (namely, perceived enjoyment and perceived privacy risk) and nonindividual motivation (namely, structural embeddedness) into ECM-ISC to study users' SNS continuance usage intention in the Chinese context. The proposed models in these studies have good predictions of users' SNS-related technology continuance intention; however, they do not account for such primary individual difference factors as reputation and community identification, which are identified as important factors in users' decision-making about SNS usage [21,22]. Each of these factors is critical in understanding users' SNS continuance decisions. Furthermore, previous continuance research also fails to examine gender differences in studying SNS continuance and usage. In this study, we try to fill this research gap by investigating gender differences in SNS continuance decision-making, which is our key contribution. Thus, we propose a comprehensive model of SNS continuance by incorporating more SNS-oriented constructs from the previous literature into ECM-ISC and introducing gender as a key moderator. The original ECM-ISC is shown in Fig. 1. We will explain why these constructs are integrated into our proposed model below.