



The effects of personalization on user continuance in social networking sites



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ABSTRACT

Social networking sites (SNSs) enable user to personalize their contents and functions. This feature has been assumed as causing positive effects on the use of online information services through enhancing user satisfaction. However, unlike other online information services (non-participatory information services), due to the results of personalization in a certain situation, SNS users cannot help using the SNS even though they feel dissatisfaction on using it. SNSs are different from other information services in the sense that they create and sustain their own value based on the number of participating members. In SNSs, personalization, reflected by updates and maintenance of profile pages, results in such participation. This study hypothesizes that personalization influences on the continued use of SNSs through two factors: switching cost (extrinsic factor) and satisfaction (intrinsic factor). Web-based survey was conducted with the samples of 677 SNS users from six universities in the US. In-person interviews were conducted with 25 university students to elicit their thoughts on the SNSs. Quantitative analysis employed by testing the proposed model with five hypotheses through a structural equation modeling (SEM) technique. The transcribed interview data was analyzed following the constant comparative technique. The main findings indicate that, as expected, the personalization increases its switching cost as well as satisfaction, which results in further use of SNSs. These findings suggest that it is necessary to consider both extrinsic and intrinsic factors of user perceptions when adding personalization features on SNSs.

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1. Introduction

With the development of information and communication technologies, social networking is getting saturated attention these days. In particular, personal profile-based social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn present many emerging opportunities in various fields by facilitating communication and social relationships. For example, social-networking-based personalization services such as the instant personalization of Facebook have emerged to more appropriately meet users' needs (Chen, 2012). These services are implemented to facilitate personal use more effectively (Chen, 2012). In addition, SNSs have shown positive effects when used for marketing purposes by some commercial companies. It is also reported that the revenue of social networking service providers is expected to rapidly increase and overtake other Web 2.0 technologies such as wikis and mashups by 2013 ("A World of Connections," 2010).

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The utilization of SNSs is based on the network effects theory, which states that the value of a network increases as the number of the participatory users increases (Reed, 1999; Shapiro & Varian, 1999). While face-to-face information services allow a service provider to interact with only one user at a time, SNS-based services make it possible for users to interact with each other and also to the service providers themselves. This extension of the interaction ensures more reliable information through more diverse verification (Lankes, Silverstein, & Nicholson, 2007). The recent increase in the number of mobile contributors is helping improve the currency of information as well as the accuracy in public news or in any other information-service area.

User participation is essential for achieving these positive network effects. Particularly, continued use is highly demanded for SNSs because they have already passed the initial adoption stage and arrived at the post-adoption stage (Boehnke, 2011; Kim, 2011; Shiau, Huang, & Shih, 2011). Maintaining continued users requires less effort and cost than discovering new users in online services (Spiller, Vlasic, & Yetton, 2007). This means that sustaining SNS traffic is critical for the survival of SNS service providers.

A typical characteristic of SNSs is to allow users to create and maintain their own independent profile page to represent a personal image (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Some active users devote much time and regular effort to updating their profile pages' design and content. This personalization helps them network with others by attracting them to their own profile page. As personalization refers to a process that changes the system's functionality, interface, and content to ensure compliance with an individual user (Blom & Monk, 2003), it requires some time and effort.

Personalization is believed to increase and sustain initial and post-adoption rates respectively (Rogers, 2003). Personalization that provides users with compatibility is likely to increase initial adoption rate. For post-adoption, the users should invest some time and effort to maintain their profiles, which as a result makes it difficult to switch to an alternative online service (Kim & Son, 2009). Such a lock-in phenomenon has also been believed to sustain the post-adoption rate.

However, in participatory sites such as SNSs, somewhat different results have been reported. For example, Tiwana and Bush (2005) found that the degree of personalization is likely to reduce the post-adoption rate of online services up to a certain threshold, then conversely it increases the rate. Park (2008) also found that personalization does not significantly influence the continuance of SNSs directly despite its positive influence on user satisfaction. Also, privacy has become a critical issue in SNS personalization as more advanced and flexible personalization features such as the instant personalization of Facebook are available these days.

Despite the importance of continued use of SNSs and the differentiated and emerging effects of personalization, studies focusing on SNS personalization are very rare in the information science field. Especially, the influences of personalization on the post-adoption of SNSs is still unknown. There are some studies on personalization in relevant studies. However, their focuses and notions are different. For example, in information retrieval research, personalization is to increase the relevance of search results in a tailored interface (e.g., Clements, de Vries, & Reinders, 2010; Teevan, Dumais, & Horvitz, 2010). Similarly, personalized recommender systems are suggested to more efficiently deal with information overload problem (Zhou, Xu, Li, Josang, & Cox, 2012). Considering this gap and attempting to extend the understanding of post-adoption behaviors of social websites in the social-exchange theoretical perspective, this study aims to examine the effects of personalization on user continuance intention in SNSs.

The following section reviews relevant literature on SNSs, personalization, and post-adoption. The subsequent section develops a conceptual model that provides hypotheses. In the methodology section, interviews and survey methods are described in the sense of mixed methodology. The data analyses and results are shown to test the hypotheses. This study summarizes its conclusions with a discussion of findings.

2. Related works

2.1. Post-adoption research

The information research community has often addressed post-adoption behaviors with various artifacts such as face-to-face reference services in libraries (Durrance, 1989, 1995; Rimland, 2007), digital reference services (Desai, 2003; Ross & Nielsen, 2000), collaborative digital reference services (Hall, 2008), Web browsers (Ye, Seo, Desouza, Sangareddy, & Jha, 2008), social Q&A sites (Kim & Han, 2009), and institutional repositories (Jean, Rieh, Yakel, & Markey, 2011). All of these studies have their theoretical foundations on the diffusion of innovation theory (Rogers, 2003). Since its first introduction in 1962 by Everett M. Rogers, it has been one of the most cited works in communication studies and other social science areas. Among several its contributions, the major ones include the discovery of the four elements of diffusion process (innovation itself, communication channel, time, and social system) and the five-stage model in the innovation-decision process (knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation). Especially, these three last stages of the five-stage model, decision, implementation, and confirmation stages, are the origin of the initial adoption and post-adoption studies in various fields. The terms, "continued adoption" and "discontinuance" (Rogers, 2003, p.170) was used for the post-adoption behaviors. Under this background, this study also uses "user continuance" to represent post-adoption behaviors.

Following the tradition of the diffusion of innovation research, the related post-adoption studies introduced above emphasized individual users' perceptions, which assumes that the fit between an individual user's rational needs (e.g., perceived accuracy, perceived usefulness) and the characteristics of the information artifacts (e.g., reference services, Web

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