



Multi-homing on SNSs: The role of optimum stimulation level and perceived complementarity in need gratification



Rui Gu ^{a,1}, Lih-Bin Oh ^{b,*}, Kanliang Wang ^{c,2}

^a School of Information Technology and Management, University of International Business and Economics, Beijing 100029, China

^b School of Computing, National University of Singapore, Singapore 117417, Singapore

^c School of Business, Renmin University of China, Beijing 100872, China

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 20 March 2014

Received in revised form 21 December 2015

Accepted 26 February 2016

Available online 2 March 2016

Keywords:

Social networking site

Multi-homing intention

Multiple usage

IT adoption and use

Service complementarity

Optimum stimulation level

ABSTRACT

Given the increasingly intense competition for social networking sites (SNSs), ensuring sustainable growth in user base has emerged as a critical issue for SNS operators. Contrary to the common belief that SNS users are committed to using one SNS, anecdotal evidence suggests that most users use multiple SNSs simultaneously. This study attempts to understand this phenomenon of users' multi-homing on SNSs. Building upon optimum stimulation level (OSL) theory, uses and gratifications theory, and literature on choice complementarity, a theoretical model for investigating SNS users' multi-homing intention is proposed. An analysis of survey data collected from 383 SNS users shows that OSL positively affects users' perceived complementarity between different SNSs in gratifying their four facets of needs, namely, interpersonal communication, self-presentation, information, and entertainment. Among the four dimensions of perceived complementarity, only interpersonal communication and information aspects significantly affect users' intention to multi-home on SNSs. The results from this study offer theoretical and practical implications for understanding and managing users' multi-homing use of SNSs.

© 2016 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Social networking sites (SNSs) have become increasingly pervasive in recent years. Globally, more than 1.8 billion people have participated in SNSs as of 2014, and this number is expected to reach 2.3 billion by 2017 [35]. It has been reported that users spent an average of 28% of their Internet time on SNSs in 2014 [42]. The social networks constructed on digital platforms have penetrated and significantly changed various aspects of individual and organizational life [1]. Users can satisfy multiple facets of their needs on these platforms. By using SNSs, users share and communicate with friends, seek information about events and celebrities, express thoughts and opinions, learn about products and services, and play games, among other activities [13,34,118].

Since the first SNS SixDegrees.com was launched in 1997, hundreds of SNSs with various technological affordances have emerged to support a wide range of interests and practices [13].

It is noteworthy that we do not see a single dominant SNS in most countries. Rather, at least two prominent SNSs are coexisting. In China, the world's largest Internet market with 649 million users [24], the two major domestic SNSs are Renren (literally means everyone) and Tencent Qzone [23]. In the United States, Google+ is replacing MySpace as a direct competitor to Facebook in the SNS market [40]. Similar situations exist in many other countries and regions, such as Naver and Cyworld in South Korea, Mixi and Facebook in Japan, V Kontakte and Facebook in East Europe, and Hyves and Facebook in the Netherlands.

Interestingly, instead of pledging loyalty to one SNS, a considerable proportion of users adopt several SNSs simultaneously, that is, users are multi-homing on SNSs. A survey conducted by iResearch showed that 81.2% of Chinese bulletin board system users use more than two SNSs, among whom half use two SNSs and one-third use three SNSs [56]. A survey by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) also revealed that most SNS users in China show multi-homing behavior, using an average of 2.78 sites simultaneously [22]. Similarly, in the United States, most Americans do not use just one SNS but instead embrace several SNSs [38]. This usage pattern has led to the proliferation of Internet tools, such as GrabInBox, which help manage multiple SNS accounts.

Different from the use of a single SNS, multi-homing use explicitly entails users' making choices among multiple SNSs.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +65 6516 3796; fax: +65 6779 7365.

E-mail addresses: gurui@uibe.edu.cn (R. Gu), ohlb@nus.edu.sg (L.-B. Oh), klwang@ruc.edu.cn (K. Wang).

¹ Tel.: +86 10 6449 5140; fax: +86 10 6449 5029.

² Tel.: +86 10 6251 4650; fax: +86 10 8250 9169.

As the competition between different SNSs becomes increasingly intense, understanding the factors that affect users' multi-homing decision has important implications for the development of competitive strategies of SNS operators. However, the multi-homing use of SNSs has received scant attention from academic researchers. Moreover, extant studies on SNS use have focused mostly on the underlying reasons for users' adoption, usage, and (dis)continued use of a particular SNS, and have largely neglected the intriguing questions on the underlying drivers of concurrent use of multiple SNSs. Although a few studies (e.g., [47,117]) have noted users' multi-homing use of SNSs, the research focus has been elsewhere. For instance, Turel and Serenko [117] have suggested users' simultaneous use of multiple SNSs (at least 46% of the respondents use both Facebook and MySpace), but they investigated the two-sided effects of users' perceived enjoyment on usage outcomes. Thus, this study attempts to address a gap in literature by developing a model that explains *what motivates users to multi-home on SNSs and what type of users are more prone to explore and multi-home*.

Drawing upon optimum stimulation level (OSL) theory, uses and gratifications theory (UGT), and literature on choice complementarity, this study develops a theoretical model of users' intention to multi-home on SNSs. This study theorizes that users' perceived complementarity between SNSs³ on gratifying four facets of their needs, namely, interpersonal communication, self-presentation, information, and entertainment, constitutes a main driver of users' multi-homing intention. Users' personality trait, that is, OSL as a distal influence on multi-homing intention, has a positive effect on users' perceived complementarity regarding the gratification of the four needs.

This research contributes theoretically by investigating users' multi-homing intention in an SNS context. It adds to the information systems (IS) adoption and use literature and enriches our understanding of the factors affecting a user's decision to adopt multiple SNSs. Practically, this study should be of considerable interest to SNS operators who desire to achieve sustained growth in user base and website traffic. The results of this study can offer guidance to SNS managers in formulating appropriate user-centric strategies and provide empirical evidence to SNS operators in identifying user segments and adapting marketing activities to compete in this intensely competitive market.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 describes the relevant theories and how they lead to the theoretical model of users' multi-homing intention on SNSs. Section 3 presents the research model and develops the hypotheses. Section 4 discusses the methodology and reports the results of our empirical analysis. Section 5 provides a discussion of the findings, the theoretical and practical implications, and limitations of this study. Finally, Section 6 concludes.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Uses and gratifications theory

UGT is a media use paradigm originating from mass communication research and guides the assessment of users' motivations for

media usage and access [109]. This theory is grounded primarily on five basic assumptions [2,59,74]. First, audiences are not passive recipients of media content. Instead, they are active gratification seekers in the interaction with media. Second, audiences are goal-directed. They select and utilize a particular medium or content to fulfill a particular set of socio-psychological needs. Third, audiences are sufficiently self-aware to recognize and articulate the reasons for their choice and consumption of a medium. Fourth, different medium outlets have distinct capabilities to satisfy audience needs. Multiple media compete for audience selection, attention, and use. Lastly, the degree in which audience needs can be properly satisfied by the consumption of a medium varies from person to person.

Unlike traditional media effect theories on powerful media and passive audiences, UGT emphasizes what people do with media rather than what media do to people [58]. According to UGT, people are motivated by their self-defined social and psychological needs to choose and consume a medium [59,62,76]. Given that media differ in their capacity to fulfill individual needs and that the same medium can be used to satisfy different individuals' distinct needs, individuals will select the appropriate media for the most satisfying gratification [62].

Audiences can derive gratification from the process of using media (e.g., being entertained by the recreational act of browsing a website), as well as from the content carried by media (e.g., gaining information from a website) [59]. On the basis of this notion, some early studies have divided audience gratifications into two types: process gratification and content gratification [29]. However, as evidenced by subsequent research (e.g., [76,108,129]), this simple dichotomous classification is limited because it cannot describe the specific diverse motives of audience media adoption. Furthermore, some gratifications cannot be simply categorized as either process or content type. For instance, Stafford, Stafford, and Schkade [109] have suggested a distinct gratification type, namely, social gratification, which reflects individuals' Internet use for interpersonal communication purpose. Thus, to obtain a comprehensive view of audience's specific motives for accessing and using a medium, researchers have generally applied the two-stage approach by first generating an item pool that describes audiences' diverse uses and gratifications and subsequently performing factor analyses on the items to identify and profile audience motives.

UGT is a powerful approach for understanding the motivations of people using mass media and the gratifications obtained from different media [76]. It has been widely applied to investigate individuals' uses and gratifications in various media contexts. For example, this theory has been applied to the contexts of traditional media, such as newspapers and televisions (e.g., [33,103]), "digital media" Internet (e.g., [109]), web-based services (e.g., [76]), and mobile services (e.g., [66]). By using the two-stage approach, these studies have identified a list of gratifications that influence different media use, such as entertainment, social interaction, escapism, time passing, information seeking, and interpersonal utility [76,129].

With the increasing popularity of SNSs in recent years, UGT has also been employed by many researchers (e.g., [99]) to analyze why individuals use SNSs and what gratifications are obtained from such media use. The tenets of UGT have an important implication for the current study. In the SNS multi-homing use context, users actively explore and evaluate SNSs and make purposive choices about which sites to use. UGT focuses on the drivers of users' media choice rather than the effects of media on users and assumes that audiences are active, goal-directed, and select the appropriate media to gratify their diverse needs. Hence, this theory is particularly suitable for explaining the motivational factors of SNS users' multi-homing decision.

³ The scope of this paper is limited to open-to-all general SNSs, such as Facebook, Google+, RenRen, and Mixi, which cater to diverse audiences and primarily serve the purpose of creating and maintaining relationships with known or unknown offline friends and family. This research does not include non-general SNSs, such as professionally oriented (e.g., LinkedIn), dating-oriented (e.g., match.com, zhenai.com), picture-sharing (e.g., Pinterest, Flickr), and microblogging SNSs (e.g., Twitter). The main purposes of non-general SNSs are distinct; thus, the complementarity between these sites in gratifying user needs is conceivably higher than that between general SNSs. Hence, the inclusion of non-general SNSs could dilute the focus of this study.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/553087>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/553087>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)