



# Determinants of users' continuance of social networking sites: A self-regulation perspective



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## ABSTRACT

Social networking sites (SNS) have transformed how individuals interact, build and maintain social relationships. We proposed a research model on the determinants of user continuance using Bagozzi's framework of self-regulation as the theoretical foundation. Following the process of appraisal → emotional reactions → coping responses, we developed the model by leveraging findings from social presence and IS continuance research. Based on survey data from Facebook users, we found that appraisal factors (pleasure, awareness, connectedness, and system quality) were strong determinants of emotional reaction (user satisfaction and sense of belonging). User satisfaction and sense of belonging together positively influenced continuance intention.

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## 1. Introduction

The use of social media such as social networking sites (SNS) and blogs has become ubiquitous. The number of SNS users has grown exponentially in recent years and individuals are incorporating it as part of routine activities to socially interact with one another. Social media has redefined the ways individuals connect with each other, disseminate information, express themselves, and socialize with others. Through social media like SNS, people are finding new ways to manage and expand their personal network more efficiently and effectively [25,32].

Among different types of social media, SNS especially have gained tremendous momentum and have revolutionized the way individuals build and maintain interpersonal relationships [8]. A SNS allows individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, to communicate with other users with whom they share a connection, and to view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system [7].

Individuals worldwide have incorporated SNS into their lives and made using SNS a frequent and sometimes daily activity. Many SNS aim at the general population while some may cater to a specific audience or purpose. For example, LinkedIn is the world's largest professional network and MedicalMingle is a SNS created specifically for medical professionals. Among the most popular SNS, Facebook has made a huge and enduring impact in the world. As of March 2012, Facebook reports that there are 901 million monthly active users and on average 526 million daily active users. Indeed, various sources of evidence show that users are spending a great deal of time on SNS and that it has become a significant component of people's daily lives [12].

Due to the undeniable popularity and diffusion of SNS, they have become increasingly interesting and intriguing to researchers. Academics have examined SNS using a variety of methodologies and theoretical underpinnings from multiple disciplines. Researchers have examined topics such as the formation and maintenance of social relationships on SNS [10,19] and industry competition dynamics [11]. Our study contributes to the literature by focusing on the determinants of SNS continuance. Recent statistics show that the growth of SNS has decelerated and SNS usage has leveled off in recent periods [17]. The second tier networks, such as Tagged and Hi5, are beginning to receive more attention from users as the competition becomes fiercer among SNS providers. Industry analysts have noted that MyYearbook and

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Tagged users spend more time on these sites than the average MySpace user. According to analytics released by ComScore in 2011, Twitter has proven to be a major competitor of Facebook, as the micro-blogging service has managed to increase its number of regular users by more than 500% since 2009. Thus, the exploration of determinants of SNS continuance is both relevant and timely as it would help reveal the factors that cause users to attach to a SNS. The results can provide insight to SNS service providers regarding the factors that may retain active and regular users and evolve infrequent users into committed ones.

Thus, the objective of this study was to examine the determinants that impact users' SNS continuance. We aimed to answer the following research question: *what and how do determinants collectively affect user satisfaction, sense of belonging, and SNS continuance intention?* Specifically, our focus of study centered on SNS established for social communication and interaction in general. We used Bagozzi's framework of self-regulation of attitudes, intention, and behavior [4] as the overarching theoretical framework to establish relationships between the determinants, attitudes, and continuance intention. We applied research findings from social presence and system continuance research to identify the factors in the research model. We empirically tested the model by surveying users from one of the most popular SNS, Facebook. The survey results provided support for the research model and offered insights on the social implications of SNS and the various factors that impact SNS continuance.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, we discuss the theoretical background which is followed by the research model and hypotheses in Section 3. We then describe the research methodology and present data analysis and results in Sections 4 and 5 respectively. Next, we discuss the research and managerial implications, research limitations, and future research opportunities in Section 6. Finally, we conclude the research in Section 7.

## 2. Theoretical background

To investigate the determinants of SNS continuance, we applied Bagozzi's self-regulation framework of attitudes, intentions, and behavior [4] as the overarching conceptual framework to understand the process that users experience leading to SNS continued usage. Bagozzi's framework seeks to understand the interrelationship between cognitive, affective, and conative variables. It posits that attitude generates desire, which then leads to individual behavioral intentions. Specifically, individuals first appraise a situation and assess whether it will enable them to achieve their goals. The appraisal process will lead to emotional reactions which may be positive or negative. As a result, an individual will then form intentions to either maintain the positive experience or cope with the situation by forming intentions to avoid or change the negative consequences. Thus, the process consists of three major steps: appraisal, emotional reactions, and coping responses. The tenor of Bagozzi's framework lies in its emphasis on the role of cognitive and emotional self-regulation mechanisms. To understand the relationship between attitudes and behavioral intention, one needs to consider self-regulation processes of appraisal → emotional reactions → coping responses. Self-regulation is accomplished by conative processes and emotional responses caused by outcome-desire interactions. Outcomes are events such as SNS continuance. Desire refers to wanting to pursue or avoid a given situation. If a past or present experience is pleasant, positive emotions (e.g., satisfaction, enjoyment) will develop which then leads to behavioral intentions to cope with the result of this outcome-desire fulfillment [4].

Prior research in IS has used Bagozzi's framework to examine the factors and processes that lead to website usage [16], while various adaptations of Bagozzi's framework have shed light on consumer behavior and loyalty [e.g., 3]. In consumer behavior research, perceived quality and perceived value are part of the appraisal process in Bagozzi's framework. After appraisal, a consumer will form emotional reactions such as satisfaction. These emotional reactions accordingly affect consumers' coping responses such as usage intentions and behaviors. We posit that a user's decision to continue using a SNS is similar to a consumer's repurchase decision. Specifically, after users visit a SNS and utilize the service for a period of time, they will have a general perception about the perceived system quality of the SNS and the values they gain from usage. Users will then likely form a desire to use the SNS if they experience pleasant encounters and develop favorable emotional reactions. In other words, favorable cognitive appraisals would trigger positive emotional reactions from using a SNS, which will then lead to continuance intention.

In order to better adapt Bagozzi's framework within the SNS context and develop the appraisal and emotional reaction factors, we turned to relevant research in online community and social presence theory [e.g., 5,31] to further identify the factors in our research model of SNS continuance. First, we included sense of belonging as an emotional reaction factor because it has been shown to have a significant impact on usage in virtual environments [22]. Users develop a sense of belonging to SNS via managing personal relationships and developing feelings of membership, identification, and shared socio-emotional ties as a result of continued exposure and usage of the system. Sense of belonging is different from satisfaction in that the former refers to the user's identification with the SNS and its affiliated members, whereas the latter measures the user's overall contentment with a system. Moreover, sense of belonging is considered more enduring and long-lasting (long-term emotional reaction) while satisfaction is more transient (short-term emotional reaction). Thus, in our research model, we included both sense of belonging and satisfaction as emotional reaction constructs affecting SNS continuance.

Second, we included both system quality and perceived value as the appraisal factors in Bagozzi's framework. In a SNS, system quality refers to the overall technical adequacy of the website. Findings from online community research show that system quality positively influences member satisfaction and sense of belonging to the community [21]. Perceived value has been found to be an important construct affecting user satisfaction and repeated purchase decision in consumer behavior research [18].

Third, to effectively contextualize perceived value in the SNS context, we used social presence theory to define the benefits of SNS from the users' standpoint. Social presence research has increased in the recent years due to technical and social developments of computer-mediated communication and social interactions that have evolved from face to face to entirely virtual interactions [32]. Short et al. [30] defined social presence as the "degree of salience of the other person in a mediated communication and the consequent salience of their interpersonal interactions" (p. 65). Biocca and Harms [5] extended social presence theory by defining three levels of social presence. Level one is the perceptual level which primarily deals with the detection and awareness of the co-presence of the other's mediated body. Level two, the subjective level, consists of the user's awareness in addition to his or her ability to access others' emotional state, comprehension, and behavioral interaction. Level three, the dynamic or inter-subjective level, is comprised of the user's sense of the other's sense of social presence in relation to the user. In this study, we apply the first two levels of social presence as perceived values in a SNS where users achieve both awareness and

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