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Behavioral intention in social networking sites ethical dilemmas: An extended model based on Theory of Planned Behavior

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ABSTRACT

The expanding use of social networking sites (SNSs) and their flexible functionalities allow individuals to use these sites in unexpected and unethical ways. SNS users face ethical dilemmas each day and they need to decide how to behave in these cases. The aim of this study was to identify the influential factors that have an impact on individuals' ethical decision-making and propose a model of the factors that are significant in the ethical decision-making process in the SNS context. This study employed the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and included personal normative beliefs, moral intensity, perceived threat of legal punishment to the main constructs of TPB namely attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control to predict the behavioral intention using a scenario based questionnaire. The moderating effects of several factors, including age, gender, level of income, ego strength, locus of control and religion, were investigated for the probable effect on the proposed model. Derived from a designed procedure, several scenarios were constructed, of which four were selected to be embedded in the survey instrument. With 441 returned questionnaires in hand, the collected data were analyzed using the partial least squares – structural equation modeling technique. The results showed attitude to be the most influential factor, followed by subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, personal normative beliefs, and moral intensity. Level of education, age, and scenario also showed a significant effect on the relation between predictors and behavioral intention.

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1. Introduction

During recent years, Social Networking Sites (SNSs) have become a major communication vehicle in all societies. Facebook alone has more than 2.2 billion users which means one-third of the world's population are using it (Edwards, 2014). The uptake of SNSs has attracted many concerns about the different ethical issues regarding their usage, such as employee surveillance (Byrnside, 2007; Rothberg, 2008), application of users' data for advertising purposes (Reynolds, 2011), privacy (Hull, Lipford, & Latulipe, 2011), identity theft (Bilge, Strufe, Balzarotti, & Kirda, 2009), inappropriate profile content (Peluchette & Karl, 2009), cyberstalking (Haron & Yusof, 2010), cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Huang & Chou, 2013; Kwan & Skoric, 2013), cyberloafing (Krishnan, Lim, &

Teo, 2010; Liberman, Seidman, Mckenna, & Buffardi, 2011; Tang & Austin, 2009), self-disclosure (Livingstone, 2008) spreading rumors and false news (Leitch & Warren, 2009) and SNS addiction (Balcı and Gölcü, 2013). SNSs are among the powerful Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools that link people to each other and provide a vast range of information and entertainment on the Internet. This potential makes them a ground for new ethical challenges (Light and Mcgrath, 2010).

In order to increase the moral responsibilities that consequently cause ethical actions, the only option is to help individuals' development through initial stages to higher stages of moral development (Kohlberg, 1975). This aim could be achieved by moral discussions and education based on ethical dilemmas. Making ethical decisions is a complicated process which an individual goes through to come out with a do or don't intention. However, this might be a strenuous task since there is neither generally recognized approach to teaching ethical issues nor a generally accepted theory of Computer Ethics (Floridi & Sanders, 2002). In such case,

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the most pragmatic way may be a behavioristic approach (Namlu & Odabasi, 2007).

Unethical behavior among SNS users is affecting Malaysian society like the rest of the world. Individuals' intentions to behave unethically in SNSs are more accepted than other kinds of unethical behaviors. The reason may lie in the ease with which the unethical behavior can be carried out and other factors such as opportunity, belief systems, or cultural or social elements. However, the lack of attempts to systematically theorize unethical behavior in the context of SNSs leads preventive plans and actions to fail. This failure affects the society and people who are bound to the Internet and other ICTs. Although some researchers have tried to propose models to show the important factors that lead people to behave unethically, few studies have been conducted in Asia or Malaysia, specifically in the SNS context. Malaysia's multi-cultural population and the different norms and beliefs among its citizens make it a unique field of study for social and cultural-oriented research. Ethical studies are contingent on the cultural and social environment. This research identifies the important factors and their level of impact on unethical behaviors in the SNS context. The resulting contribution to knowledge will provide planners with useful guidelines on how to promote an ethical environment in the use of SNSs and other ICTs with the potential to affect the whole society. This research focuses on the factors that have an influence on students' ethical decision-making process when using SNSs. The aim is to identify the factors that drive individuals to act ethically or unethically in the SNS context in order to propose a model of ethical behavioral intention in the case of SNS ethical dilemmas. In this regard, this research looks for answers to the following key questions:

- i. What are the important factors that make individuals intend to carry out unethical behavior with computers?
- ii. How to measure the relationships between influential factors and intention of unethical behavior?
- iii. What are the strength of the relationships between influential factors and intention of unethical behavior?

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, a theoretical background of this research is provided. It contains a short review of SNSs in addition to Theory of Planned Behavior which is the theory which this research is based on. In Section 3, some related works are presented which is the precursor of hypothesis development in Section 4. In Section 5, the method used in this research is elaborated. Section 6 presents the results of data analysis which is followed by a discussion in Section 7. Sections 8 and 9 is devoted to limitation and implications of this study. Finally, conclusion and future work is presented in Section 10. Theoretical Background.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Social networking sites

Boyd and Ellison (2007, p.2) defined SNSs as “Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site”. SNS are the websites who aim to build up a community over the Internet which enables its users to remove time differences, cultural and geographical barriers to interact with others (Reynolds, 2011). SNSs enable their users to share information, opinions, interests, insights and experiences with people they may

know, like their family and friends, or even those who they do not know and want to make new personal and professional relationship with. The most popular SNS is Facebook which has more than 1 billion active users (Whittaker, 2012). Other popular SNSs are Google+, Twitter, Qzone (popular in China), LinkedIn, Instagram, etc.

2.2. Theory of Planned Behavior

Different theories and models have been proposed to examine the relationship between different factors and behaviors (Olson & Zanna, 1993). Among them, Wicker (1969) looked at the relationship of attitude and behavior and concluded that these two probably have no relation. “Out of frustration with traditional attitude-behavior researches that much of them found weak correlation between attitude and performance of a volitional behavior” (Hale, Householder, & Greene, 2002, p. 259), Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) proposed the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) which aimed to explain volitional behaviors. Later, they extended TRA and the outcome was the TPB (Ajzen, 1985). TRA and TPB became the most widely researched models of behavior (Armitage & Conner, 2001).

TPB suggests that Attitude, Subjective Norms (SN) and Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) are good predictors of intention and consequently of behavior. The TPB claims that the performance of deliberate intentional behaviors could be predicted with high accuracy from intentions and perceptions of behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). As Ajzen (1985) suggested, this theory could be applied to all volitional activities and behaviors such as skiing, swimming and mountain climbing. TPB can be used to predict specific behaviors across occasions, situations and different forms of action. TPB claims that intention to a great extent influences the actual behavior (Beck & Ajzen, 1991). The five constituents of TPB can be defined as below:

- i. Behavior is an individual's act in a certain case which is the result of intention and PBC, such that a desired intention will only lead to behavior if PBC is strong.
- ii. Intention is the core element of TPB and refers to individuals' readiness to perform a given behavior.
- iii. Attitude refers to the evaluation of an individual about the question of how favorable or unfavorable an act is. It depends on an individual's beliefs and the evaluation of those beliefs.
- iv. SN is defined as an individual's perception about what most others who are important to him or her think he or she should do.
- v. PBC refers to the perceived easiness or difficulty of an act to be done.

Armitage and Conner (2001) conducted a review of 185 studies and found evidence to support the TPB as an efficient predictor of intention and behavior. In addition, many studies claim that this theory is appropriate in ICT contexts (Banerjee, Cronan, & Jones, 1998; Chatterjee, 2008; Ifinedo, 2012; Leonard, Cronan, & Kreie, 2004; Namlu & Odabasi, 2007). Hence, the TPB is applied in this study to address the factors that are important in people's behavior in the SNS context.

In line with TPB's variables, and based on a literature review, another three constructs namely personal normative belief (PNB), Moral Intensity (MI) and perceived threat of legal punishment (PTLP) were included to be embedded in the TPB to investigate behavioral intention in SNS dilemma cases. PNB refers to an individual's feeling about his or her moral obligation to do or not to do an act. MI is a construct that relates to issues in terms of their perceived moral significance (Jones, 1991). Finally, PTLP is defined as the probability of legal punishment in the case of doing an act

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