Full length article

Understanding online regret experience in Facebook use – Effects of brand participation, accessibility & problematic use

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A B S T R A C T

The past few years have witnessed the emergence of research examining online regret experience. The presence of online regret generates negative use experience and even leads to service switching and discontinuity. However, to date, only limited research has examined the conceptualization of this new yet very important phenomenon in the field of technology use. To address this research gap, the present study has examined the relative influence of SNS brand participation, technology accessibility attributes (including Facebook usage parameters) and problematic Facebook use in predicting regret experience regarding Facebook use. A pen-and-paper cross-sectional survey was administered to 804 adolescent Facebook users (aged 13–18 years). The study results suggest that adolescent users with varying technology accessibility did not differ in their online regret experience, but excessive Facebook users and those actively participating in brand communities tended to experience higher regret. Other findings suggest that two variables, namely parents' perceptions of problematic Facebook use and conflict with friends due to Facebook use, were significant predictors of online regret experience. This study presents different theoretical and practical implications for both research and practice.

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1. Introduction

The experience of an individual with any product or service is an important determinant of his or her intentions to continue using it. A positive experience providing enjoyment and satisfaction to an individual results in continued and prolonged use (Chang, 2013; Chiu, Cheng, Huang, & Chen, 2013; Shi, Lee, Cheung, & Chen, 2010) and brand loyalty (Gummerus, Liljander, Weman, & Pihlström, 2012; Kang, Tang, & Fiore, 2014). However, in contrast, negative experiences (e.g., poor usability, lack of customer support, etc.) lead to regret experience which later results in service switching (Kang, Hong, & Lee, 2009), service discontinuity (Kang et al., 2009; Lemon, White, & Winer, 2002), lower satisfaction (Bui, Krishen, & Bates, 2011; Inman, James, & Jianmin, 1997; Kang et al., 2009; Taylor, 1997; Tsiros & Mittal, 2000) and a negative

impact on repurchase intentions (Tsiros & Mittal, 2000). Regret can be defined as "*a negative, cognitively determined emotion that an individual experiences when realizing or imagining that their present situation would have been better had we acted differently*" (Zeelenberg, 1999). Prior literature suggests that regret causes bad or negative experience since individuals often tend to blame themselves for their actions that resulted in regret experience (Connolly & Zeelenberg, 2002). Furthermore, due to the unpleasantness caused by regret, it is usually seen as being avoided or suppressed by humans in all possible circumstances (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2006).

Prior consumer and marketing literature has mainly focused on the offline regret experience, i.e. those regret causing events, which takes place in offline situations. Some examples include buying goods in bulk and later realizing the absence of an actual need, overspending on one's credit card when shopping and later realizing the financial burden, and engaging in heated conversation and abuse in face-to-face discussion and later regretting that event. In comparison, only a limited number of studies have examined the events causing regret experience in the online space, e.g. sharing inappropriate content online, abusing someone on social media,

and other online activities due to which one experiences shame and embarrassment (Madden, 2012; Sleeper et al., 2013a, 2013b; Wang et al., 2011). Consequently, there is a need to examine and investigate different aspects of online regret experience.

The Internet plays an important role in the lives of young people. However, Internet use has also resulted in the exponential increase in incidents related to online regret experience (Stern, 2015; Tucker, 2009). For example, 11%–46% of young people have reported experiencing online regret after sharing online content (Common Sense Media, 2009; Family Online Safety Institute, 2012; Madden, 2012; Marist Poll, 2011; Yahoo, 2011; Stern, 2015). This statistic suggests that online regret experience is increasing at an alarming rate among young people. The possible reasons are the fast distribution, easy duplication and infinite life expectancy of the Internet activity, e.g. online communication and content sharing (boyd & Marwick, 2009). Recent research examining online regret experience has stressed the need to examine the antecedents and consequences of regret experience in the use of social networking sites (SNS) (Kang et al., 2009; Madden, 2012; Moore & McElroy, 2012; Sleeper et al., 2013a; Sleeper et al., 2013b; Wang et al., 2011). The use of SNS such as Facebook has become a popular online activity among young Internet users. Over 75% of Internet users are using some kind of SNS (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), while SNS users are spending one-third of their online activity time on SNS use (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). According to one recent estimate, there are over 1.55 billion monthly active Facebook users (Facebook newsroom, 2015), giving Facebook the largest number of SNS users in the world.

Despite this rising percentage of online regret experience and the rising popularity of Facebook use, only a limited amount of research has been undertaken for better understanding the conceptualization of online regret experience related to Facebook use. In addition to this, it was observed that almost all prior studies examining online regret experience in SNS use focused only on undergraduate students and adults (see Moore & McElroy, 2012; Patil, Norcie, Kapadia, & Lee, 2012; Stern, 2015; Wang et al., 2011). However, an important user group, i.e. adolescent SNS users, has not yet been studied. Adolescents tend to use computer-mediated platforms such as Facebook for developing and building their self-identity, and expressing, connecting and communicating with peers and the outside world (Livingstone, 2008; Lenhart et al., 2010; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Yermolayeva, 2009). Furthermore, these online activities are very important for the psychological development and wellbeing of adolescents (Brown, 1999; Dhir & Al-kahtani, 2013; Livingstone, 2008). However, online regret experience can disturb adolescents' psychological wellbeing. Prior developmental literature has suggested that adolescents are currently in the developing psychosocial state and possess less cognitive and emotional maturity compared to their adult counterparts (Leontjev, 1978; Piaget, 1970). Therefore, it is likely that adolescents are not as competent as young adults in handling any negative experience, stress or anxiety in the wake of any possible online regret-causing event. This is consistent with the observations of Livingstone (2008) and Livingstone and Brake (2010) that adolescents possess weaker understanding of how to properly deal with the online risks related to their privacy. Furthermore, Madden (2012) also found that the young population experiences more regret as compared to the older population. Therefore, there is an urgent need to understand the online regret experienced by adolescents.

To bridge these open research gaps and contribute to the limited available literature, the present study involved a cross-sectional study of adolescent Facebook users, examining the relationship between technology accessibility (including Facebook usage parameters), SNS brand participation (e.g., Fan pages), problematic Facebook use, and online regret experience. The two main research questions are: **RQ1**. What is the relationship between SNS brand participation, technology accessibility and problematic Facebook use and regret experience in Facebook? **RQ2**. What is the relative influence of the technology accessibility attributes, SNS brand participation and problematic Facebook use in predicting the regret experience in Facebook use? This study utilized three different theoretical frameworks, namely the stop-start relapse cycle, the Internet sex addiction model, and theories on Internet addiction. The present study has made the first attempt to apply and also integrate the concept of online regret from the consumer behavior and Internet addiction literature to the use of computer-mediated platform use (i.e., Facebook).

2. Background literature

2.1. Online regret experience

The phenomenon of regret experience is well researched in offline environments (Knapp, Stafford, & Daly, 1986; Meyer, 2011; Meyer & Rothenberg, 2004). The prior research examining offline regret experiences focused on three aspects: First, the development of regret experience as a concept (Giorgetta et al., 2013; Inman, 2007; McConnell et al., 2000; Su, Chen, & Zhao, 2008; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007; Zeelenberg, van Dijk, van der Pligt, Manstead, van Empelen, & Reinderman, 1998; Zeelenberg et al., 1998; Zeelenberg, 1999); Second, understanding its relationship with consumer decision-making (Bui et al., 2011; Inman et al., 1997; Kang et al., 2009; Lemon et al., 2002; Taylor, 1997; Tsiros & Mittal, 2000); and third, understanding the role of cognitive and behavioral aspects of the offline regret experiences (Giorgetta et al., 2013; Inman, 2007; McConnell et al., 2000; Su et al., 2008; Zeelenberg, van Dijk, & Manstead, 1998; Pieters & Zeelenberg, 2007; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007; Zeelenberg et al., 1998; Zeelenberg, 1999). However, only recently have researchers started examining the regret experience in the online environment (Kang et al., 2009; Kaur, Dhir, Chen, & Rajala, 2015; Wang et al., 2011). Prior research suggests that the nature and conceptualization of offline regret is different from that of the online regret experience. The possible reasons could be the lack of guidelines on socialization and self-discourse practices in the online space unlike in the offline world (Wang et al., 2011). Other differences could be the complexities in locating the potential receiver of the online communication and content shared, loss of control due to content visibility, difficulties controlling one's online actions, and anticipating the reaction of others to self-posted content (Wang et al., 2011).

2.2. Online regret & Facebook

Recent times have witnessed the outbreak of online communication and content sharing on popular SNS such as Facebook and Twitter (Dhir, Buragga, & Boreqqah, 2013). This popularity and increased online activity has led online users to express, self-disclose, connect and build social relationships for quality wellbeing (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009). However, disclosing too much personal information on SNS can lead to regret experiences at a later stage (Moore & McElroy, 2012). The possible reasons could be embarrassment, social blackballing and revictimization (Xu, Burchfiel, Zhu, & Bellmore, 2013). Relatively recent research suggests that SNS users tend to experience online regret (Madden, 2012; Sleeper et al., 2013a, 2013b; Wang et al., 2011). Regret usually arises from a comparison of the outcomes of the decisions made by the users with the other possible alternatives. For example, the decision to post or share content in SNS could lead to