Belief in dangerous virtual communities as a predictor of continuance intention mediated by general and online social anxiety: The Facebook perspective

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ABSTRACT

Despite increased understanding regarding the effects of individual and contextual factors on continuance intention, this study investigated individuals' beliefs in dangerous virtual communities as a predictor of the related psychological symptoms, general and online social anxiety, in relation to individuals' continuance intention to sustain participation in the social network of Facebook. Confirmatory factor analysis was applied to 230 effective questionnaires and the results revealed that belief in dangerous virtual communities was positively correlated to both general and online social anxiety, which results in a negative correlation with continuance intention. The implication was that if participants experienced high levels of both types of social anxieties, then they exhibited a low level of continuance intention. In conjunction with a number of studies, the findings suggested that belief in a dangerous virtual community serves as the antecedent of general and online social anxiety. In addition, recommendations for future research are provided by the study.

1. Introduction

When social situations change to become more dangerous and threatening, individuals' social beliefs should change accordingly. These changes in individuals' beliefs would then activate the motivational goals of social control (Duckitt & Fisher, 2003). Kahn (1990) highlighted that some individuals believe the world to be a dangerous place and generally feel vulnerable to interpersonal sources of danger. This belief suggests that a lack of confidence in the surrounding context can lead to threats in virtual communities (Zhang, Fang, Wei, & Chen, 2010). Previous studies suggest three non-altruistic motivations for participation in virtual communities: anticipated reciprocity, increased recognition, and sense of efficacy (e.g., Kollock, 1999). Koss and Oros (1982) stated that information technology (IT) serves two functions: reflection of the belief that the offender is unable to control their behavior; and reflection of the belief that external forces are beyond the offender's control. Thus, IT allows offenders to avoid responsibility and social disapproval regarding the offense, triggering the

prevalence of internet fraudulence. In addition, Duckitt (2001) proposed the influential theory that bias belief stems in part from stable, dispositional traits that are in turn reflected in social beliefs. Accordingly, this study extended the belief in a dangerous world to the belief in dangerous virtual communities (BDVC) to examine its correlations to individual differences such as social anxiety and continuance intention.

Scholars suggest that social attitudes are expressions of motivational need and beliefs that have been made salient for individuals from the activation of specific social schemas (c.f. Perry, Sibley, & Duckitt, 2013). Previous studies have mostly focused on the social and psychological correlates of social network use and attitude (e.g., Moore & McElroy, 2012; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Ryan & Xenos, 2011). Existing research also shows that behavior and belief in participation vary by the type of virtual community (Partala, 2011) and pertain to anxiety-related dispositions. Online communication has become a common way of interaction among users who suffer from social anxiety, and this anxiety is frequently associated with negative perceptions when communicating online. Negative expectations during face-to-face interactions partially accounted for the relationship between social anxiety and problematic internet use (Lee & Stapinski, 2012). That is, social anxiety in virtual communities has a variety of properties consistent with the face-to-face premise. This preliminary evidence highlights

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online social anxiety to show preference, or lack thereof, in the degree of engagement in the social world. Thus, the aim of this study was to examine whether trait and state anxiety are a combinative predictor of behavior intention.

Most literature on online service post-adoption behavior focuses on users' continued use after their initial acceptance of a specific information system (Chiu & Wang, 2008). Since consumers' experience with the system endow them new input for reevaluating the value of a specific system, post-adoption is considered as the initial adoption choice (Kim & Malhotra, 2005). Moreover, Bhattacherjee (2001) applied expectancy confirmation theory to investigate factors affecting internet continuance intention and found that post-acceptance is a vital object for successful continuation. Bhattacherjee's study brought attention to the differences between behaviors of a user accepting an information system, versus the behavior of trying to continue using it. It was an early hypothetical study on the continued usage of IS, and brought to light new correlates between factors (Lee & Kwon, 2011). In this sense, the purpose of this study was twofold: first, to develop a conceptual framework for identifying the role of individual differences relevant to BDVC and to understand the relationship between general and online social anxiety and continuance intention; second, to determine the validity of the pathway by testing the correlations of users' social anxiety and their intention to continue interacting with others on social networking sites.

2. Literature review

Social networks (SNs) allows users to share information, such as uploaded videos or pictures, and also provides a platform for users to communicate with each other about shared content, to chat with others, and to post messages to smaller or larger audiences pre-defined by the users via friends-lists and other settings (Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011). All studies reported significant associations between personality traits and aspects of social network use (Partala, 2011). This section reviews belief in dangerous virtual communities along with general and online social anxiety in relation to continuance intention to develop a conceptual framework that guides a series of research hypotheses.

2.1. Continuance intention

Continuance refers to a form of post-adoption behavior (Chang, 2013), whereas post-adoption actually refers to routinization, infusion, adaptation, and assimilation. Jasperson, Cater, and Zmud (2005) defined post-adoptive behavior as a "myriad of feature adoption decisions, feature use behaviors, and feature extension behaviors made by an individual user after an IT application has been installed, made accessible to the user, and applied by the user in accomplishing his/her work activities" (pp. 525–558). Hong and Tam (2006) indicated that most research on information systems use continuance intention to measure users' likelihood to continue the use. Previous studies revealed that continuance intention exerts a key positive influence on the success of virtual communities, with effects including greater community participation in virtual communities (e.g., Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005). Furthermore, continuance intention is central to the internet context (Bhattacherjee, 2001). However, very few studies have been conducted on the relationship between user intention and social anxiety; thus, the present study included two social anxieties in the examination of continuance intentions.

2.2. General and online social anxiety

Spielberger (1966) suggested that conceptual anxiety could be distinguished as trait and state anxiety. He defined trait anxiety

as an individual's predisposition to respond and state anxiety as a transitory emotion. Individuals who experience social anxiety fear the negative appraisal from others in social or performance situations (Roth, 2004). Subsequently, they may be intimidated by situations such as speaking in public, meeting new people, talking to people in authority, or working under observation. Previous research suggested that socially anxious individuals may employ a self-protective communication style in their interactions with others, even with close friends and romantic partners (Cuming & Rapee, 2010). People with social anxiety appear to minimize self-disclosure to avoid a negative social outcome, i.e., much like a safety behavior (Arkin, Lake, & Baumgardner, 1986; Clark & Wells, 1995; Rapee & Heimberg, 1997).

In the past few years, a considerable number of studies have investigated the psychological characteristics of internet users, particularly users of social networks with a focus on the personality aspects and psychological outcomes of internet use (e.g., Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). McKenna and Bargh (2000) speculated online social interactions to be particularly appealing to certain types of people, such as those suffering from social anxiety. To ratify McKenna and Bargh's doubts, there is mounting evidence that social anxiety may play an essential role in the use of SNs (Buote, Wood, & Pratt, 2009). Nie (2001) discovered that internet use may reduce adolescent interpersonal interactions and communication. However, several other studies indicated that online communication is positively associated with participants' social connectedness (Bessière, Kiesler, Kraut, & Boneva, 2008; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). Furthermore, Torgrud et al. (2004) found that people with a high level of social anxiety receive less in the way of "social provisions", and Cuming and Rapee (2010) described this phenomenon as the lack of assurance in counting on others under any circumstances as a result of having low trust in the social network messages (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). To study online social anxiety, Oldmeadow, Quinn, and Kowert (2013) focused specifically on interactions of social networking; they discovered that high attachment avoidance is related to less Facebook use, less openness, and less positive attitudes toward Facebook.

As a result of anxiety, the availability of virtual communities does not guarantee that participants will share their feelings (Chen, 2007). Social anxiety has been conceptualized as the negative cognitive and affective response to social situations, and it is a unique predictor of endorsement that shyness interfered with willingness to be involved in a particular task (Akehurst & Thatcher, 2010). This study investigated possible moderating and mediating variables (general social anxiety) that could be relevant to further clarify the unique role of continuance intention in the process of social networking. Hence, the hypotheses are proposed as follows:

H1. General social anxiety is negatively correlated to continuance intention.

Internet social anxiety is associated with perceptions of greater control and decreased risk of negative evaluation when communicating online (Lee & Stapinski, 2012). Perceived social pressure is correlated to whether to perform or not to perform a certain behavior. Kim, Chan, and Chan (2007) argued for a balanced thinking–feelings model, with cognitive and emotional factors affecting attitude and intention, indicating anxiety is negatively associated with intention to use information systems. In online discussions with anonymous users, individuals are more likely to indulge in aggressive and disrespectful behaviors. McCord, Rodebaugh, and Levinson (2014) pointed out that participants who experience a high level of social anxiety when using Facebook are reported as