



Social media adoption: The role of media needs and innovation characteristics



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ABSTRACT

This research is designed to empirically investigate how social media needs and innovation influence the adoption of social media amongst Internet users. The theoretical perspective of the uses and gratifications, and Rogers' five characteristics of innovation are reviewed and extended to explain the needs and motivations of the consumer. The study is conducted by testing and quantifying the relationship between the uses and gratifications of social media, while taking into consideration the mediating effect of social media technology innovation. This research applies a two-phase, multimethod strategy in the context of Malaysia. The strategy comprises the qualitative approach via focus group discussions (FGDs) with 48 respondents and the quantitative approach via online survey questionnaires with 428 respondents. Overall, the findings suggest that social media adoption is significantly driven by three types of need category – personal (consisting of enjoyment and entertainment), social (consisting of social influence and interaction) and tension release (consisting of belongingness, companionship, playfulness). In turn, these needs are motivated by the social media innovation characteristics (relative advantage, observability, compatibility) that increase the likelihood of the adoption. The research makes a significant contribution in the area of media and technology adoption, which can be used to help marketers understand the factors that motivate social media usage, particularly the UXDs in designing human–computer interaction strategies.

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1. Introduction

The widespread global usage of Internet media has had a tremendous influence on the social interaction between individuals, the community and society. Based on the statistics released by Internet World Stats in 2012, the number of global Internet users amounted to 2,405,518,376 worldwide, which shows an increment of 544% since 2000 (Internet World Stats., 2012). Of these, each month, one billion Internet users actively used Facebook, 800 million used YouTube, 343 million used Google+ and 200 million used Twitter and LinkedIn (Pick, 2013). These numbers position social media as the most engaging online sites worldwide (Radwanick, 2011) and depict phenomenal changes in media consumption patterns (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Social media initially started as a medium of interaction that allowed Internet users to create, generate and exchange media content between users (Cooke & Buckley, 2008; Kaplan &

Haenlein, 2010), and initiate voluntary participation and communication (Bernoff & Li, 2008; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). As the Internet users experienced the ease of use and usefulness of social media, it encourages immense adoption of the medium and enables the Internet user to gain power over information selection, thereby affecting their behavior and attitude by the new ways it brought to their lives (Durukan, Bozaci, & Hamsioglu, 2012; Preece, 2001).

Internet users have many options concerning their intention to experience and use social media, due to the availability of hundreds of such social media sites with different features and target user groups. For example, sites like Xanga and MySpace place emphasis on journaling activities, classmates.com and ziaonei.com help former classmates reunite, while match.com and jiaoyuan.com are used to search for personal relationships. Moreover, social media sites vary in the degree to which innovative tools, such as instant messaging, blogging, video/music sharing and games, are provided to the users. While the number of social media sites is increasing at a phenomenal rate, some have received less traffic or have even been terminated as a result of assertive competition. For instance, MySpace failed to provide a simple means of

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navigation for its users (Wunker, 2011) making its users to cyber-migrate to other social media (Zengyan, Yinping, & Lim, 2009). Friendster received less traffic in the US since 2005 after encountering technical and social difficulties (Goldberg, 2007), while SixDegrees, which has been recognized as the first social media site in the world, failed to sustain its business and was terminated in 2000. On another instance, it is projected that Facebook to lose 80 per cent of its frequent users between 2015 and 2017 (ABC News., 2014) as the younger users are cyber-migrating to other social media that better satisfy their needs. These real life examples indicate that at some point during the lifecycle of the social media, users will reach a certain level of gratification and gain benefit out of the usage. Hence, the tendency of media adoption relies on the psychological reasons that Internet users develop toward it (Cheung, Chiu, & Lee, 2010; Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004; Lee & Ma, 2012; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010).

One of the prominent theories that explain social and psychological needs that motivate users to adopt the media is the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) (Blumler, 1979; Katz, Haas, & Gurevitch, 1973). Previous studies that utilized UGT suggested various understandings of media needs and motivation; for instance, media is used to satisfy immediate and deferred gratification, as an informational and educational resource, for fantasy and escapism, and also as a means to connect or disconnect from reality (Charney & Greenberg, 2002; Diddi & La Rose, 2006; Kaye, 2004; Ko, Cho, & Roberts, 2005). Besides media uses and gratifications, the innovation characteristics of social media also exert an important influence over the adoption decision. Being built based on Internet technology, social media has emerged as one of the most influential innovative media in the twenty-first century (Lee & Ma, 2012). The five characteristics of innovation by Rogers (2003) are employed to describe the important innovations that take place in manipulating the adoption decision. As social media users are active and use social media to meet psychological needs, the innovation characteristics constitute a significant driver that motivate usage. Evidence from past studies have so far little emphasized the technology innovation characteristics, which represent added value to the social media (Cheung et al., 2010; Shin & Shin, 2011; Fischer & Reuber, 2011).

Putting this into perspective, we integrate UGT and Rogers' five innovation characteristics to examine the antecedents of social media adoption. We attempt to address this phenomenon by extending the prior work of UGT to explain users' needs and motivations, as well as incorporating innovation characteristics to further understand the decision-making concerning adoption, which are both presumed to hasten the process. Hence, this study aims to investigate the following: *what explains consumer adoption of social media?* The needs and motivations to use social media are a very important consideration for future knowledge concerning consumer and social media marketing. This research is of the utmost importance both academically and practically to fill the gaps in the current understanding on the consumer predictive needs and their relation to the adoption behavior of social media.

This article is structured as follows. We first survey the literature in order to learn about the past results regarding needs with respect to media adoption. A thorough review is provided in the earlier part to ensure that the antecedents of media adoption are carefully captured as a prelude to the extension of a multidimensional conceptualization of social media adoption. These factors are subsequently used to construct a set of hypotheses and a research model. In addition, social media innovation characteristics are emphasized to determine the connection between the needs and adoption. This is followed by a description of the empirical study, discussion of its results and make suggestions for future research. Through this research, we describe the potential outlook of the antecedents of social media adoption so that future

researchers can further extend other intensifying mechanisms of social media adoption for other countries or cultural background.

2. Literature review

2.1. Social media

We define social media as a group of Internet-based applications that are built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0,¹ which allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Parra-López, Bulchand-Gidumal, Gutiérrez-Taño, & Díaz-Armas, 2011; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). Social media is a social site that has so far received an enormous number of users and has managed to attract Internet users more quickly than any other medium online in terms of interaction and personalization. It has seven functions – identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputations and groups – in which each function allows the user to reveal and examine a specific facet of the social media experience (Kietzmann, Kristopher, McCarthy, & Bruno, 2011). Irrespective of the functions, its benefits and uses were developed from the exclusivity of user-generated content features that were incorporated within the system. In turn, these transform passive individuals into active producers (Nov, Naaman, & Ye, 2010); share opinions, insights, knowledge and content (Cho, Chen, & Chung, 2010); create and maintain relationships with other individuals with similar needs, interests or problems (Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011); and as a source of entertainment and self-expression (Kim, Jeong, & Lee, 2010). Behind these functions lies social media innovation attributes that give the user ease of use and usefulness when using the medium (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

In sum, the functions, uses and benefits of social media provide a high level of online and offline integration through which the user shows affective engagement. We contend that the innovative features afforded by social media are the indicators that induce Internet user psychological temptation to adopt social media.

2.2. Media needs

In reviewing the media needs that lead to social media adoption, previous research mostly employed UGT. UGT redefines how and why the individual uses media; explains the motivational needs that motivate the user to select the media, media channel or media content; and also describes the subsequent attitudinal and behavioral effects (Diddi & La Rose, 2006; Lee & Ma, 2012; Rubin & Perse, 1987; Ruggiero, 2000). UGT assumes that users are goal-directed in their behavior and are aware of their needs. Purposive value, self-discovery, entertainment value, social enhancement and maintaining interpersonal connectivity are the key needs that are widely adopted for online media (Cheung et al., 2010). UGT also outlines the ways of classifying needs and gratifications. For instance, Schramm, Lyle, and Parker (1961) classify media needs as immediate and deferred gratifications, Weiss (1971) classifies them as informational-educational and fantasist-escapist, while McQuail, Blumler, and Brown (1972) suggest diversion, personal relationship, personal identity/individual psychology and surveillance as important dimensions for the development of UGT.

The key concept of UGT is that the choice consumers make when consuming media motivates their desire to gratify a range of needs. In UGT, the basic human needs that interact with the individual characteristics refer to the psychological setup, social position, life history and society, which include a media structure that produces

¹ The term Web 2.0 refers to the changes in Internet Technology from that of one-way communication to two-way communication, which exercises positive and negative control over consumer opinion and behavior (Cooke & Buckley, 2008).

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