

Understanding the Motivations of Online Community Users - A Comparison Between Younger and Older People

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Abstract. With the arrival of an aging society, the major users of social network services include not only young people, but also older persons. The purpose of this study is therefore to understand the motivations of online community users. Data from younger and older people were compared; both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. This study first reviewed the literature regarding the purposes of using an online community. Second, based on the literature, a survey was conducted among college students. Finally, interviews were conducted with both younger and older people. The results were summarized and compared between the different age groups. First of all, the major motivations of young people to use SNSs include maintaining interpersonal interconnectivity, entertainment value, and purposive value (especially for homework and learning). Second, the major motivations of older adults to use SNSs are to contact friends and share information and knowledge. Finally, the major difference between young people and older adults' motivations is the use of SNSs by the young for entertainment purposes and to kill time. These findings will contribute toward understanding the motivations of online community users across different age groups.

Keywords: Online community · Motivations · Older people · Age

1 Introduction

In recent years, social network services (SNSs) have become major communication tools. Among these services, the growth of Facebook has been particularly fast around the world, Taiwan being no exception. According to the official Facebook figures (<http://newsroom.fb.com/>), Taiwanese have the highest Facebook stickiness rate in the world. Young and old people both like to use it as a social platform. However, most previous studies have focused on users in Europe and America. Ji et al. (2010) found that users' behavior within online social communities varied across different national cultures. Kim et al. (2011) also proposed similar opinions. Additionally, most of these studies examine younger users, while little research focuses on older adults.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand the motivations of online community users and to compare younger and older users. Both quantitative and

qualitative data were collected. First of all, this study reviewed the literature regarding the purposes of online community use. Second, based on the literature, a survey was conducted among college students. Finally, interviews were conducted with both younger and older people. The results were summarized and compared between different age groups. The findings can contribute toward understanding the motivations of online community users across different age groups. The three research questions of the present study are as follows:

1. What are major motivations of young people to use SNSs?
2. What are major motivations of older adults to use SNSs?
3. What are the differences between young people’s and older adults’ motivations in using SNSs?

2 Literature Review

Why is it critical to understand behavioral motivation? Teo et al. (1999) indicated that different motivations will affect users’ online behavior in different ways. From the perspective of motivation theory, Ridings and Gefen (2004) found that people have various motivations to participate in communities and that these motivations affect their behaviors in these communities, online communities being no exception. Lin and Lu (2011) proposed a similar viewpoint. Therefore, understanding the motivations for using SNSs is becoming critical for forum management.

Table 1 summarizes the motivations for using SNSs proposed by previous studies. We can see that most previous related studies are focused on younger users from the United States and Europe. Studies that examine older people’s motivations for using SNSs are particularly rare. Besides, Table 1 also indicates that the top three motivations proposed by previous studies include social purpose, entertainment, and kill time.

Table 1. Motivations for using SNSs (order by published year)

Authors (Year)	Motivations of using SNSs
Lee et al. (2015)	Social interaction, archiving, self-expression, escapism, and peeking
Wang et al. (2015)	Social interaction, entertainment
Holton et al. (2014)	Seeking and sharing (seek information by linking from other users)
Park and Lee (2014)	Entertainment, relationship maintenance, self-expression, and communication
Wang et al. (2013) ^a	Maintain relationships, extent social network, seek popularity, express emotions, get information, entertainment, kill time
Welbourne et al. (2013)	Informational and emotional support
Nadkarni and Hofmann (2012)	Belonging requirement and self-expression
Moradabadi et al. (2012)	

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Authors (Year)	Motivations of using SNSs
	Information sharing, free communication, information distribution, information control, the principle of equal, information requirement, entertainment
Alhabash et al. (2012) ^a	Social connection, sharing (pictures, content...), social network, update status
Dogruer et al. (2011)	Self-expression, applying media, kill time, search information, personal status, maintain relationships, entertainment
Cheung et al. (2011)	Social presence
Lin and Lu (2011) ^a	Enjoyment, number of peers, usefulness
Hew (2011)	Maintain relationships, meet more people, fashion, make oneself becoming more popular, kill time, self-expression, learning
Kim et al. (2011)	Seeking friends, social support, entertainment, information, and convenience
Ross et al. (2009)	Personality
Pempek et al. (2009)	Interact with the friends in the real world, expression personal identification
Ridings and Gefen (2004)	Exchange information, social support, friendship, entertainment

^a Conducted in Taiwan

3 Research Methods and Results

This research is divided into two parts. Both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interview) methods were employed. Study 1 undertakes a survey of college students, while study 2 employs the interview method for ten college students and four older adults. Following are the details and results.

3.1 Study 1: Quantitative Investigation

Study 1 is an online questionnaire survey of college students in Taiwan. Measurements are adapted from Cheung et al. (2011) and divide the motivations into hedonic and utilitarian categories. Nineteen items are included, comprising purposive value (9 items); self-discovery (2 items); maintaining interpersonal interconnectivity (2 items); social enhancement (2 items); and entertainment value (4 items) (see Table 2). A 7-point scale is employed in this study; each variable ranges from 1 to 7. The higher the value, the more important the variable.

At this stage, 209 valid questionnaires were finally collected. Among the respondents, 123 (58.9%) were female and 86 (41.1%) were male; 82.8% of subjects indicated that they used Facebook for 1–6 h daily on average. Using CR value >0.7, AVE >0.5, and Cronbach's alpha >0.7 as criteria, the results indicate that the measurements

Table 2. Measurements and values of study 1

Variables	Item numbers	List of items	Value (1–7)	Order
Purposive value	9	1. To get information 2. To learn how to do things 3. To provide others with information 4. To contribute to a pool of information 5. To generate ideas 6. To negotiate or bargain 7. To get someone to do something for me 8. To solve problems 9. To make decisions	4.7	3
Self-discovery	2	1. To learn about myself and others 2. To gain insight into myself	4.4	4
Maintaining interpersonal interconnectivity	2	1. To have something to do with others 2. To stay in touch	5.3	1
Social enhancement	2	1. To impress 2. To feel important	4.1	5
Entertainment value	4	1. To be entertained 2. To play 3. To relax 4. To pass time away when bored	5.1	2

have acceptable validity and reliability. Therefore, the following analysis can be conducted. From Table 2, we find that the order of the motivations for young people to use SNSs is maintaining interpersonal interconnectivity (mean = 5.3); entertainment value (mean = 5.1); purposive value (mean = 4.7); self-discovery (mean = 4.4); and social enhancement (mean = 4.1). Additionally, the mean and standard deviation (S.D) of each item is listed in Appendix. The top 5 critical motivations include to get information, to pass time away when bored, to stay in touch, to relax, and to have something to do with others.

3.2 Study 2: Qualitative Investigation

Interview research was employed in study 2. Two groups were interviewed: ten younger college students (five males and five females) and four older adults (two males and two females) among “evergreen” college students. Open-ended questions were employed to understand their motivations in using SNSs. Each interviewee was asked to share their experience of using SNSs such as LINE or Facebook. The questions

Table 3. Results from older adults interviewing

Interviewee	A	B	C	D
Gender	Female	Female	Male	Male
Age	61	73	69	65
Job before retired	Homemaker	Business (Bookstore)	Government employee	Stone sculptor
SNSs using experience	4–5 years	4–5 years	4–5 years	4–5 years
Most commonly used SNSs	Line and Facebook	Line and Facebook	Line and Facebook	Line and Facebook
Major motivations for using SNSs	Contact community members	Contact community members	Share creative writing and knowledge of everyday life	Share photography

examined both user motivations and user behaviors (frequency, interaction patterns with online friends, perceived advantages and disadvantages). The interviews were conducted by the author and research assistants. After recording and analyzing the content, we find the following results.

Results from young people. Ten college students participated voluntarily in this stage. Overall, the results of this stage confirmed the findings of study 1. Three major motivations are proposed in this phase, including maintaining interpersonal interconnectivity, entertainment value, and purposive value (especially for homework and learning). However, self-discovery and social enhancement as reported in study 1 are not found in study 2.

Results from older adults. The demographic data of the four interviewees are summarized in Table 3. The four interviewees are ranged from 61–73 years old. All of them have 4–5 years in using SNSs.

From Table 3, we find that older adults from Taiwan like to use LINE and Facebook in their daily life. Additionally, the major motivations for using these SNSs are contacting friends and sharing information and knowledge.

3.3 Comparison

The results of this study are summarized in Table 4, including the results from the literature review, survey, and interviews. Table 4 indicates that the major difference in the motivations to use SNSs between younger people and older adults is in the tendency for the young to use these services for entertainment purposes and to kill time. Additionally, both age groups, use SNSs to keep in contact with friends and share information. However, the content which they share is varied. For college students, the focus is on learning related information. However, older adults focus on sharing their work such as creative writing, photography, and so on. Finally, both younger and older people uses SNSs to maintain their interpersonal connections.

Table 4. Results comparison

	Literatures	Study 1	Study 2	
Methods	Content analysis	Quantitative	Qualitative	
Country	From different countries	Taiwan	Taiwan	
Subjects	Majority younger people	Younger people (ranged from 1 to 7)	Younger people	Older adults
Results (Motivations)	Social purpose, entertainment, kill time	Maintaining interpersonal interconnectivity (mean = 5.3), entertainment value (mean = 5.1), purposive value (mean = 4.7), self-discovery (mean = 4.4), and Social enhancement (mean = 4.1)	Maintaining interpersonal interconnectivity, entertainment value, and purposive value (especially for homework and learning)	Contact friends, share information and knowledge (Share personal works such as creative writing, photography, and so on.)

4 Conclusion

Based on the three proposed research questions, this study makes following findings and conclusions. These findings will contribute toward understanding the motivations of online community users across different age groups.

1. First of all, the major motivations of young people to use SNSs include maintaining interpersonal interconnectivity, entertainment value, and purposive value (especially for homework and learning).
2. Second, the major motivations of older adults to use SNSs are to contact friends and share information and knowledge (share personal works such as creative writing, photography, and so on).
3. Finally, the major difference between young people and older adults' motivations is the use of SNSs by the young for entertainment purposes and to kill time. Besides, although both of the groups use SNSs to share information and knowledge, but the sharing targets are different.

Although this study proposes the different motivations of using SNSs across different age groups, but this study only interviewed four older adults, this is the major limitation. Therefore, we suggest that future study can make more interviewing of the older people or conduct a survey of older adults to make the conclusions more rigorous. Besides, cultural effect (Kim et al. 2011) is not considered in this study, this is also one of the critical issues in the future. Finally, more and more different kind of SNSs appeared on the Internet such as Instagram, the motivations of using different kinds of

SNSs may also be various (Lee et al. 2015; Choi 2016). Future study can also consider the effects of this difference.

Acknowledgement. The author would like to thank the Ministry of Science and Technology of Republic of China, Taiwan, for financially supporting this research under Contract No. MOST 103-2410-H-025-024-).

Appendix - Younger Peoples' Motivations to Use SNSs

Item	Means	S.D	Order
1. To get information ^a	5.77	1.00	1
2. To learn how to do things	4.38	1.52	14
3. To provide others with information	5.07	1.23	7
4. To contribute to a pool of information	4.61	1.38	12
5. To generate ideas	4.60	1.43	13
6. To negotiate or bargain	3.44	1.48	19
7. To get someone to do something for me	4.91	1.30	8
8. To solve problems	4.81	1.25	10
9. To make decisions	4.70	1.64	11
10. To learn about myself and others	4.89	1.45	9
11. To gain insight into myself	3.89	1.46	17
12. To have something to do with others ^a	5.11	1.58	5
13. To stay in touch ^a	5.48	1.06	3
14. To impress	4.32	1.39	16
15. To feel important	3.89	1.50	17
16. To be entertained	5.10	1.40	6
17. To play	4.37	1.66	15
18. To relax ^a	5.14	1.35	4
19. To pass time away when bored ^a	5.59	1.21	2

1. ^a Top five motivations of younger peoples' motivation to use SNSs.

2. Each item ranges from 1 to 7. The higher the value, the more important the variable.

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