

Why People Use Social Media Platforms: Exploring the Motivations and Consequences of Use

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Abstract This paper proposes a value based view to analyze the motivation to use social media platforms. A research model exploring the motivations and consequences of the use of social media platforms is developed. The model includes the perceptions of the social capital and the social rewards as consequences of the use of social media platforms. Understanding the use motivations becomes increasingly important when more and more businesses and not-for-profit organizations start using these platforms as part of their daily business processes.

1 Introduction

The use of social media platforms, such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter, has become widespread over the recent years. For many, the use of these social media platforms has become daily routine. Particularly for younger generations social media has become an integral part of their social life. For others, these platforms don't seem to be so interesting or they might be interested in using them for a purpose, such as for searching information. Businesses have become interested in social media, too, and are establishing their presence in platforms, such as Facebook. Researchers have been able to indicate that social media can be used successfully e.g. for marketing processes [1, 2]. However, for many businesses the application of social media is still in its infancy and more about presence than integrating it as part of daily business processes, and the businesses are likely to move through different stages regarding their social media maturity [3]. Understanding why people use social media platforms would provide organizations with guidance when designing services for their clients.

Why do people use social media platforms? It's all about social interaction. Or is it? There is still a rather limited understanding of why people use social media platforms or why would they use them in the future. The reasons might also be

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different depending on the type of social media platform used and whether people are interacting with their friends or with businesses. However, it might not be that different, since people engage in social relationships with other people with expectations of receiving social rewards from the interaction [4]. In line with this, it can be argued that people want to satisfy certain needs when they interact with other people in the social media.

In the information systems literature a useful concept to address the satisfaction of needs is the concept of user's perceived value of the information system [5–7]. In the field of consumer research consumer values related to buying behavior have been widely researched [8, 9]. In the most well known technology adoption model, the TAM model, usefulness together with ease of use are seen to predict the intention of use of a technology (see e.g. [10]). However, in the present paper, the focus is not on confirming the predictive ability of these concepts but rather on understanding on a more detailed level what explains the use of social media platforms. That is why I argue that the user value concept is a more useful theoretical basis and can provide more depth to understanding what are the needs that using social media satisfies.

The concept of trust has been proven to be important in both the social interaction between people and as a factor affecting technology adoption. Trust can thus be seen as a factor affecting the consideration to use a social media platform as a technology artifact. In the present study the perceived realized value is suggested to be measured as the amount of social capital one can derive from one's social network. Trust makes utilizing one's social capital more effective since it reduces the need for control [11] and may thus affect the realized value of the social media use.

The present research in progress paper aims to develop a theoretical research model to study the following research questions:

1. Why do people use social media platforms?
2. Does using social media platforms result in social capital and social rewards?

The theoretical research model developed in the paper will be used to design a survey on the motivations and consequences of social media use.

In the next section social media platforms are discussed briefly. Section 3 describes the theoretical development and the resulting research model. Finally, Sect. 4 discusses the research model and summarizes the paper.

2 Social Media Platforms

The use of various social media platforms has become every day routine for many people. The number of active Facebook users has more than doubled in a couple of years being around one billion users in 2012 [12]. Web 2.0 and social media applications allow individual users and organizational users to interact dynamically and share as well as produce content using these platforms.

For many organizations, the first step in the use of social media platforms is to use them for information announcements. This would then develop into more interaction with their clients and finally the use of social media platforms may become institutionalized as part of daily business processes [3].

From the perspective of an individual the social media platforms can be utilized for searching information, maintaining contact networks, locating job opportunities etc. For the purposes of the current paper, I am focusing on the general motivation to use and the consequences of using social media platforms. More specifically, the present research aims to find out whether the social media platforms allow individuals to enhance their social networks and social ties [11] and whether they can draw social capital from their social media networks. Focusing on these aspects a research model is developed in the next section.

3 Theoretical Development and Research Model

The research model developed in this section is aimed towards investigating established social media platforms such as Facebook. That is why the aim is not to predict the adoption of these platforms but rather to investigate what needs drive the continued use of the platforms [13, 14]. Consequently the research model is not based on any of the models predicting behavior such as TAM, TRA, or TPB [15]. These models also exclude emotions such as enjoyment [16], which is proposed as one of the factors affecting continued use of social media platforms in the present paper. Moreover, distinguishing intention to use and actual use is useful when predicting use; i.e. whether intention leads to actual use. However, in the current study this distinction is not considered necessary because the research focuses on established use of social media platforms and their continued use.

Since my aim is to shed light on what drives the use of social media platforms the analysis is based on the concept of user's perceived value of using these platforms. Additionally, complementing the technology adoption models, the current research model aims to examine the perceived consequences of using social media platforms. It is suggested that using social media platforms would affect the perceived social capital derived from one's social network, which in turn would affect the perceived social rewards gained from the social interactions. These rewards represent the perceived realized value of using the social media platforms.

3.1 Continued Intention to Use a Social Media Platform

There is a large body of literature utilizing TRA, TPB and TAM theories that use the concept of behavioral intention to predict technology usage. However, in the case of technologies that are not new, such as SMS or established social media platforms (e.g. Facebook), researchers have suggested the use of the continued

intention to use as a proxy for the behavioral intention [13]. The concept of continued intention to use a technology has been applied in the earlier research on social networking sites by Lin and Lu [14]. Since the focus of the current paper is on established social media platforms, such as Facebook, we adopt the concept of the continued intention to use for our research. The factors affecting continued intention to use social media platforms and the consequences of the use are elaborated in the following sections.

3.2 *User Values and Needs*

User values and needs define the intended purpose of using the social media platforms. As Kujala and Vaananen-Vainio-Mattila [7] define: user values “describe users’ psychological values that affect their views as to what kind of purpose, functions and characteristics are important to them in a certain usage situation and context”.

Sheth et al. [9] defined five categories of values that influence the consumer choice behavior: functional value, social value, emotional value, epistemic value, and conditional value. They maintain that these categories are consistent with earlier research on value in different disciplines such as sociology or psychology [9]. These value dimensions are used in our research model to represent the needs that could be satisfied by the use of social media platforms. The value categories are defined in Table 1 based on [9] and the application to social media platforms has

Table 1 Value categories, adapted from [9]

Value category	Definition
Functional value	Perceived utility acquired In the case of social media: the capability of social media platforms to provide functionality or means to achieve one’s goals
Social value	Perceived utility related to associating with specific social groups In the case of social media: the social value acquired from associating with social groups through using social media platforms. Maintaining one’s social image through using social media platforms
Emotional value	Perceived utility related to arousing feelings In the case of social media: emotions aroused by the use of social media platforms such as enjoyment
Epistemic value	Perceived utility related to arousing curiosity, providing novelty or satisfying a desire for knowledge In the case of social media: the capability of social media platforms to arouse curiosity, provide novelty or knowledge
Conditional value	Perceived utility related to a specific situation (e.g. seasonal value of Christmas cards) In the case of social media: value related to social media use in a certain situation, such as one’s birthday

been added by the author. Moreover, the application of the value categories in the case of social media platforms is sketched.

Based on the discussion above the following hypotheses can be made:

- H1: Perceived utility gained from the use of a social media platform favorably affects the continued use of the platform.
- H2: Perceived social value gained from the use of a social media platform favorably affects the continued use of the platform.
- H3: Perceived emotional value gained from the use of a social media platform favorably affects the continued use of the platform.
- H4: Perceived epistemic value gained from the use of a social media platform favorably affects the continued use of the platform.
- H5: Perceived conditional value gained from the use of a social media platform favorably affects the continued use of the platform.

3.3 Role of Trust

Some scholars have defined trust as a situation, where individuals are acting against their rationale when they are willingly becoming vulnerable to their counterparts' actions [17]. In the organizational context, trust can decrease the need for control and improve cooperation, and can be defined as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" [18].

It can be assumed that trust affects directly the continued use of a social media platform. According to the literature on social capital trust is an important factor affecting the formation of social ties and the ability to draw social capital from one's social network [11]. Thus, it is theorized that trust affects the perceived social capital that can be derived from the social network.

Trust may thus affect the attitude towards the use of the social media platform directly and it may also affect the formation of social ties and the ability to draw social capital from one's network. The following hypotheses can be made:

- H6: Trust affects favorably the continued use of social media platforms.
- H7: Trust enhances the potential to draw social capital from social media networks.

3.4 Social Capital and Social Rewards

"Social capital represents the resources that accrue to an actor through the actor's social relationships, facilitating the attainment of goals" [11]. An individual would thus use the social capital from his/her network for achieving his/her goals. Trust may enhance drawing social capital from one's social network since it reduces the

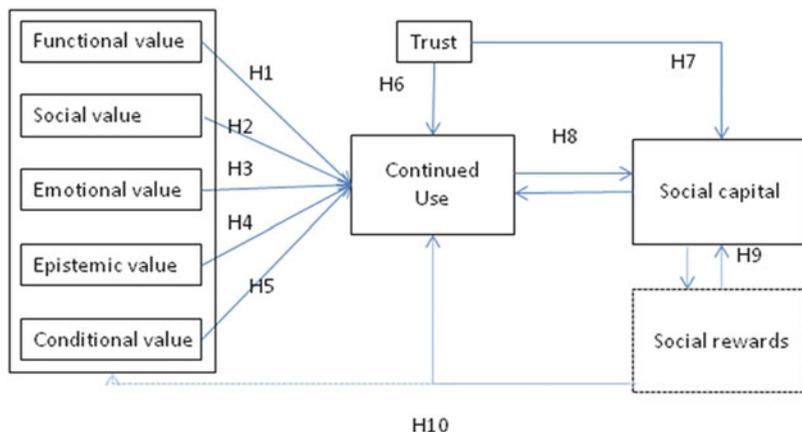


Fig. 1 The research model

need for control [11]. Social exchange theory [4, 19] uses the concepts of social rewards and costs to describe the total value that a person receives from the social interaction. If one is able to use the social capital from his/her network to achieve his/her goals it is likely that he/she would have a favorable assessment of the social rewards received from the social interaction. High perception of the social rewards from the social interaction on social media platforms is then expected to result in continued use of these platforms. The rewards resulting from the use of the social media platform may also change one's mental model [20] about the use and could result in a change of perceived value driving the use of social media.

Based on the discussion above the following hypotheses can be made:

- H8: Continued use of social media platforms increase one's perception of the social capital available from the network and this in turn enforces the continued use.
- H9: Perceived social capital and perceived social rewards have a reciprocal influence to each other.
- H10: Favorable perception of the social rewards enforces continued use of the social media platform and may also affect the perceptions of the value driving the use of social media platforms.

The full research model is depicted in Fig. 1. It should be noted that at this point the research model is on a general level and it would probably need to be adjusted for conducting empirical research related to a certain social media platform.

4 Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this research in progress paper was to develop a research model to be used in a future survey on the motivations and consequences of the use of social media platforms. The model is based on the assumption that one's values and needs drive their use of social media platforms. A set of five value categories found in the literature on consumer values was used to describe these user needs. Moreover, it was assumed that users would aim to derive social capital from their social networks to achieve their goals. Consequently, the perceived social rewards gained from the social interaction through the social media network were assumed to be affected by the ability to draw social capital from one's social network.

I believe that the approach presented in the paper adds to the current research on technology adoption and use in two ways which are discussed in the following paragraphs.

First, it opens the "black box" of usefulness by describing in more detail the needs that motivate people to use social media platforms. Researchers have pointed out the problem that the concept of usefulness in the TAM model lacks detail and the model presented here contributes to solve this problem. Moreover, researchers have pointed out that the TAM model does not include emotions, such as enjoyment [16] and some researchers have contributed to solving this problem by including "enjoyment" as part of their model [21–24]. Emotions are explicitly included in the research model of the current paper.

Second, the research model presented here extends the analysis beyond the intention to use and actual use, to the consequences of use. The model includes the perceptions of the social capital and the social rewards as consequences of the use of social media platforms. This contributes to the current technology adoption literature and has been called for by researchers [16].

As the use of social media platforms has exploded in the recent years it is important to develop knowledge of what exactly are the needs and motivations why people use the social media platforms. This becomes increasingly important when more and more businesses and not-for-profit organizations start using these platforms as part of their daily business processes. Better understanding the needs and motivations could help organizations to design services using social media platforms that meet the needs of their customers. As many organizations are currently in the early stages of exploiting the possibilities of social media developing this understanding can provide them with guidance to move forward.

It should be noted that the model presented here is rather general and it is aimed for conducting research on already established social media platforms, such as Facebook. It might be necessary to adapt the model to be used in different contexts of social media platforms. Moreover, depending on the context, there might be variables that need to be controlled, such as the age and the gender of the users. Other factors, such as experience, might influence the use of social media platforms as well.

The next step of my research is to operationalize the research model and develop a survey instrument for conducting the empirical research on the use of social media platforms. Initially, the survey will be conducted among a student population in Finland and in Australia, and potentially later in other contexts. The survey is a starting point for a larger research project with the aim to design effective social media platforms for organizations and their clients.

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