



# Understanding the motivation to use web portals



Junghyun Nam\*

Communication and Information Sciences, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu, HI 96822, United States

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to study the motivation attributes of information products from the end-users' perspective, and to measure the impact of these attributes on intention-to-use. In the context of Web portal use, the information product generally includes three types of services: personal services (e.g., email), information services (e.g., online news) and search services. The literature underscores the importance of motivational factors such as social escapism and privacy concerns on the intention to use. Drawing from this theoretical background, an initial set of motivation attributes has been identified, and an experimental study using 142 subjects as Web portal users has been conducted. As far as impact analyses are concerned, social escapism motivation, information motivation, interactive control motivation, and socialization were found to highly correlate to all of the three types of services and the combined use. Lessons learned from this study should also help IT professionals to design, develop and deploy more effective general web portals.

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## 1. Introduction

Web portals are one of the commonly used information products nowadays. Web portal means “a web site or service that offers a broad array of resources and services, such as e-mail, forums, search engines, and on-line shopping malls” (Webopedia, 2005). A portal is a ‘supersite’ that provides a variety of services including web searches, news, free e-mail, chatting, shopping and links to other sites. Nowadays, web portals play a role as full size hubs of electronic commerce, mail, online communities, and customized news and have become the most visited sites on the web. A general web portal can be seen as a general-purpose, non professional gateway that allows visitors link to other sites. A typical general web portal offers services such as email, links to search engines, blog, chat rooms, online messengers, news. A general portal is not targeted to a specific group of people with special interests, and aimed to provide their services to general Internet users. People often set up a web portal as the first page of their web browser. This results in the use of web portals for a considerable amount of time everyday.

People may use web portal for various reasons. Their motivations are also important determinants of the use. For general web usage, various types of motivations in web usage have been identified. Although it is clear that using web portals is an

important activity for many people, little is known regarding the influence of these determinants on a general web portal use. Since many people spend a significant of their time on the use of web portals everyday, it becomes important to investigate what motivates people to use web portals. In this study, the influence of motivations on intention-to-use was investigated. For this purpose, various discourses of information system motivations were considered. In the following sections, theoretical foundations of this research problem will be discussed (see Fig. 1).

## 2. Foundations for motivations to use information system in general

Motivation is defined as “the forces either within or external to a person that arouse enthusiasm and persistence to pursue a certain course of action” (Daft, 1997). To understand the motivation to use web portals, we may need to understand why people use information in general. For this purpose, various discourses of information system motivations were considered. Various theoretical perspectives address this question from rational, interactionist, entertainment, or postmodern perspectives. In the following sections, each perspective will be discussed.

Rationalists posit that information use is a rational choice in human behavior. The rationality of information use results in alternative actions and choices when applying the concept of the artificial to information use (Simon, 1969). This classical view of information use is challenged by Feldman and March (1981). They studied the symbolic use of information. Sometimes, they argue,

\* Present address: Kwanak-Gu Sinsadong 480-38, Seoul, Korea. Tel.: +82 2 10 9599 5404.

E-mail address: [jnam@hawaii.edu](mailto:jnam@hawaii.edu)

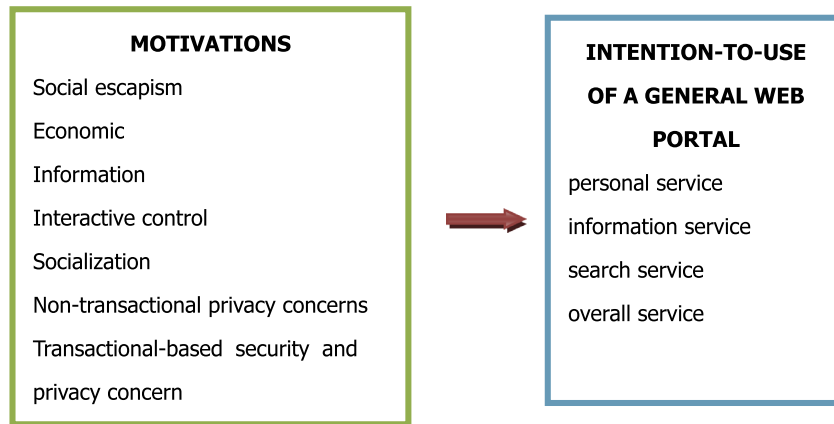


Fig. 1. Research model.

people gather information just to show their competence about their decision making, or to provide verification of their intelligence. This explains why people would like to gather more information than they actually need in order to make decisions.

The philosophical discourse of postmodernism provides different perspectives dealing with social power structures to explain information use. Poststructuralists have studied how people use languages to politically affect other people (De Certeau, 2002). De Certeau (2002) studied how ideology may affect information to disguise a real fact. This implies how information, which may be believed just as a fact, can be contaminated by ideology and may be used for different purposes to control the information users politically.

At other times, people use information for entertainment. They use mass media to purposely change or control their mood or excitatory states (Bryant & Zillmann, 1994). Entertainment, as an “activity designed to give pleasure or relaxation to the audience” (Wikipedia, 2008), has been considered a significant motivation to actual use and intention-to-use. Continuance intention and hedonic enjoyment influence postadoptive use of Facebook (Magro, Ryan, & Prybutok, 2013). I-Ping, Yi-Hsuan, and Yu-Chi (2013) found that entertainment is significantly related with all of blog behaviors (basic journaling, advanced publishing, and interactive feedback) meaning that users are seeking out all three types of blogging in order to entertain themselves. Social motivations, goal orientation, and entertainment orientation all made impacts on blogging behavior and its perceived outcome (I-PING et al., 2013). Entertainment was identified as the strongest predictor of perceived importance of Facebook (Zhang, Tang, & Leung, 2011). Bondad-Brown et al. (2012) found that entertainment is the primary motivation for TV viewing, whereas Online user-shared video use is motivated by more instrumental (informational) purposes, unlike traditional TV. Their study identifies motivations for, and their influence on, traditional TV viewing and online user-shared video use among a U.S. adult Internet users (Bondad-Brown, Rice, & Pearce, 2012). Lin, Wang, and Chou (2012) found that perceived enjoyment have a significant influence on behavioral intention to play physical tennis games.

We know that people use information for various reasons. Similarly, media users choose and use media to meet their needs. The Uses and gratifications (Blumler & Katz, 1974) approach is one of several significant trends in media research. This approach concerns itself with why people use and choose specific media. The assumption is that people’s need may affect how they use and respond to a medium. The approach focuses on the media user’s role in choosing and using media, so they are actively involved in communication processes and in choosing media sources

Sometimes, media use can be habitual, ritualistic and unselective (Barwise & Ehrenberg, 1988). The “Use and gratifications” approach is focused on the choice of media by individuals. However, media can be forced on some people rather than freely chosen. Poststructuralists’ discussions of socio-economic or political forces may complement the “Uses and gratifications” approach in this sense.

As PCs, digital devices, and the Internet allow individuals to communicate and share their own knowledge with others easily, people also become information providers as well as information users and this intrigues new cognitive and affective needs (Havick, 2000). For example, the blog is a trend nowadays to share information. In blogs, people upload pictures and stories that they created for themselves. “Blog” refers to online journals in which authors deliver highly personalized information. Readers may visit these websites and leave their own message or comment on the content. While they are doing this, they present their own ideas, pictures, audio or video files to others, and interact with others by sharing opinions. Internet functions meet various users’ needs such as finding a great depth of information about a specific topic, searching for information, and receiving frequent updates. Technology has provided access, quick delivery, capacity, and efficiency for information providers to meet consumers’ various needs (Flournoy & Stewart, 1997).

According to motivation theory, behavior is influenced by intrinsic as well as extrinsic motivation (Deci, 1972). Intrinsic motivation derives from within the person or from the activity itself (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation refers to the act of doing an activity for its own sake—the activity itself is interesting, engaging, or in some way satisfying. Extrinsic motivation emphasizes performing a behavior to achieve a specific goal (Deci & Ryan, 1987), and motivates the person to action because of some external reward such as improved job performance and advancement, and/or the attainment of various kinds of external rewards (Igbaria, 1993) like pay, material attainments from others, recognition or the approval or admiration of other people.

In the field of organizational behavior research, human motivation at work has been studied. Behavior can be both extrinsically and intrinsically motivated. Venkatesh, Speier, and Morris (2002) include both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations as predictors of behavioral user intention. Davis, Bagozzi, and Warshaw (1992) investigated the effects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations on intention-to-use of computers. They regard enjoyment as a type of intrinsic motivation and perceived usefulness as a type of extrinsic motivation. They found that enjoyment had a significant effect on the intention-to-use, controlling perceived usefulness. Usefulness and enjoyment affected usage indirectly through their effects on intention. Technology Acceptance Model posits that perceived

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