



Profiling the non-users: Examination of life-position indicators, sensation seeking, shyness, and loneliness among users and non-users of social network sites

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 8 June 2012

Keywords:

Facebook
Digital divide
Sensation seeking
Life satisfaction

ABSTRACT

The aim of the current study is to explore if there are differences between users and non-users of social network sites in terms of their sensation seeking, life-position indicators, shyness, and loneliness. Using data from a survey of adults 19–76 years old, results revealed that compared to an average Facebook user, a non-user is significantly older and scores higher on shyness and loneliness, is less socially active, and less prone to sensation seeking activities. Facebook is not a substitute channel of communication for those who are shy and lonely and lack face-to-face interactions. This study extends our knowledge of digital divide, uses and gratifications theory, and social enhancement hypothesis.

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1. Introduction

While the world's population is 7 billion, the estimated number of social networking users is 1.2 billion. In the United States, nearly 22% of overall time online is spent on social networking sites (SNSs) (Nielsen (June 15, 2010)). More than 50% of all Americans used a social networking site in 2011 (Pew Research Center, 2011), which is a 10-time increase since 2005. The most active age group on SNS are millennials (18–34), followed by teens (12–17), GenX (35–46), then Baby Boomers (47–65), and seniors (65+) (Pew Internet, 2012). Women have continuously been heavier users of social networking sites, spending more time on the site and having more Facebook friends (Acar, 2008; Pew Internet, 2012; Sheldon, 2008).

According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), social network sites serve three functions: “(1) users construct a public or semi-public profile; (2) present a list of other users to whom an individual is connected; and (3) view and follow that list and the lists of others within the system” (p. 211). With over 850 million users from across the globe, the most popular social networking site today is Facebook. Facebook's mission is “to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected (facebook.com, 2012).” The website allows users to build online profiles, share information, pictures, and video clips with other “friends.” Studies have shown that the use of SNS can be effective at building high-quality friendships and have an overall positive impact on one's well-being (Kim & Lee, 2011; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). Presidential candidates are using social media to reach potential voters. B2B

companies are using “fans” as a part of a successful inbound marketing strategy. With easy access to the Internet today, why do some people still not participate in social networking? Are they demographically, socially, or psychologically different from the users of those sites?

Most studies to date have focused on the users of SNSs, their personalities and psychosocial outcomes, while biological predispositions and life position indicators have been ignored. Relatively little is known about the non-users of SNSs. This study will compare how the non-users of Facebook differ from the users in terms of their life position indicators (interpersonal interaction, life satisfaction, social activity), biological and psychological factors (sensation seeking, shyness, loneliness). To our knowledge, Hargittai's (2008a) study is the only one examining differences among users and non-users of social networking sites. The study focused on college students and their living arrangements' influence on having an account. SNSs have changed dramatically since 2007, and therefore we expanded our sample size to include not only college students but participants of different ages.

While many adults today have a Facebook account, it is also important to mention that there are differences in technology adoption and use along gender, racial, and socioeconomic lines, or what researchers refer to as the *digital divide* (Cooper & Weaver, 2003; Hargittai, 2008b; Junco, 2012; Junco, Merson, & Salter, 2010). As pointed out by a number of researchers (e.g., Gunkel, 2003; Selwyn, 2004), there is still no agreement about the meaning of the term digital divide. However, the most frequently reported socio-demographic parameter of the digital divide has been age (Broos & Roe, 2006). Elderly people have the lowest adoption rate and level of use of information communication technologies of all age categories (Flanagan & Metzger, 2001).

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1.1. Literature review

Few media can fulfill all the goals audiences seek. An uncountable number of studies have been conducted to test how and why people use the Internet. Researchers have focused on the gratifications and audience motivations (e. g., Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Sheldon, 2008).

According to uses and gratifications theory (U&G), media interaction has certain consequences when communicators seek to satisfy their needs or wants. U&G theory has also been applied to understanding the uses of social media and social networking sites (e.g., Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Sheldon, 2007; Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011). Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011) found nine distinct motives for using Facebook. The theory has also been used to predict the frequency of Facebook site visits (Joinson, 2008), as well as gender and age differences in Facebook use (Sheldon, 2007). Smock et al. (2011) extended U&G theory by studying the motivation for using specific Facebook features as opposed to generic use of the site. In this study, we focus on social, psychological, and biological differences that may lead individuals to create an account on a social networking site. We first discuss life-position indicators.

1.2. Facebook use and life-position indicators

While chronological age has been applied rather extensively in the social science field as a predictor of communication and social behavior (also cited in Rubin & Rubin, 1982), the contextual age has been ignored. Rubin and Rubin therefore suggested that an individual's physiological, psychological, and social life condition is more indicative of aging than chronological age. They have developed a life-position indicator consisting of physical health, interpersonal interaction, mobility, life satisfaction, social activity, and economic security that can explain communication behavior. For example, older people use media to maintain social connections and psychological satisfaction when their mobility and social contacts are restricted (Swank, 1979). Talk radio served as a substitute for interpersonal communication for those who were less mobile (Avery, Ellis, & Glover, 1978). A 25-year-old and a 65-year-old might be quite similar in terms of their levels of interpersonal interaction, social activity, and life satisfaction. Today, grandparents are creating social media accounts, while some young adults resist it. This study explores the relationship between life-position indicators and the use of social networking sites. The following research question is asked:

RQ1: Is there any difference in life-position indicators (life satisfaction, interpersonal interaction, social activity) between users and non-users of Facebook?

Another personality trait that might be related to the use of social networking sites is sensation seeking.

1.3. Facebook use and sensation seeking

Sensation seeking is a biological trait that has proven to be a key predictor of human behavior (Zuckerman, 1996) and individuals' need for novelty, complexity, and intensity (Arnett, 1994; Zuckerman, 1979; Zuckerman, 1994). Zuckerman (1994) defined sensation seeking as "the seeking of varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences and the willingness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experience" (p. 27). Compared to low sensation seekers, high sensation seekers have lower baseline arousal, which prompts them to seek out highly arousing experiences. As a result, high sensation seeking has been associated with many problem behaviors, such as sexual

risk taking (Hoyle, Fejfar, & Miller, 2000), alcohol, and drug use (Helme, Donohew, Baier, & Zittleman, 2007; Stein, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1994; Stephenson & Helme, 2006; Stephenson & Palmgreen, 2001). Zuckerman (2006) found that high sensation seekers tend to have high levels of dopamine which means that their biochemistry favors approach over inhibition. Furthermore, they also tend to have relatively low levels of serotonin, resulting in their biochemistry failing to inhibit them from risks and new experiences. Sensation seeking has also been related to a variety of what might be termed social interactions (Arasaratnam, 2004; Hwang & Southwell, 2007; Morgan & Arasaratnam, 2003; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). Sensation seeking varies over time, reaching a peak during adolescence (Zuckerman, 1994).

However, not many studies have been conducted testing how sensation seeking influences media choices, and to date no study has examined its relationship to social networking sites use. Only recently, Jensen, Ivic, and Imboden (2009) have examined the relationship between sensation seeking and online use. They found that it is positively related to surfing the Internet. High sensation seekers (HSSs) are drawn to the Internet because of its potential to be dynamic, arousing, and fast-paced (Jensen, Ivic, & Imboden, 2009). Jensen et al. (2009) also suggested studying sensation seeking across the life span. HSSs participate in more self-disclosure in casual and close friendships than low sensation seekers (LSS; Zuckerman, 1994) and have more friends.

Because sensation seekers do not like to be bored and continuously search for excitement, in this study we predict that Facebook users will score higher on sensation seeking than non-Facebook users. We therefore propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. Non-users of Facebook will score lower on sensation seeking than the users of Facebook.

1.4. Facebook use and social enhancement hypothesis

Early Internet research had found that the Internet primarily benefits introverted individuals (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). According to this social compensation hypothesis, or the poor-get-richer hypothesis, the Internet's anonymity and reduced cues might stimulate online self-disclosure because there is no fear of being rejected. However, most recent studies report opposite results (Kraut, Kiesler, Boneva, et al., 2002; Peter, Valkenburg, & Schouten, 2005; Sheldon, 2008). According to the "rich-get-richer" or the social enhancement hypothesis, extraverted and outgoing individuals are motivated to add online contacts to their already large network of offline friends. Extraverted adolescents self-disclosed and communicated online more often than introverts (MacIntyre, Babin, & Clément, 1999; Peter et al., 2005; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). Research on Facebook (e.g., Orr et al., 2009; Sheldon, 2008) has also supported the "rich-get-richer" hypothesis. First, unlike previous types of CMC where users could stay anonymous, Facebook does not allow much anonymity to its users. The main reason for using Facebook is maintenance of social ties.

In this study we measure shyness and loneliness. Shyness has been defined as "discomfort or inhibition in interpersonal situations that interferes with pursuing one's interpersonal or professional goals" (Henderson, Zimbardo, & Carducci, 2001, p. 1522). Although some studies (e.g., Mesch, 2001; Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2000; Morahan-Martin and Schumacher, 2003) have suggested that shyness might be associated with increased Internet use, Facebook research confirmed (Orr et al., 2009; Sheldon, 2012) that shy students have fewer Facebook friends and fewer face-to-face friends than individuals who are less shy. For this reason, we assume that the non-users of Facebook will also score higher in shyness.

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