



Understanding mobile SNS continuance usage in China from the perspectives of social influence and privacy concern



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ABSTRACT

Retaining users and facilitating continuance usage are crucial to the success of mobile social network services (SNS). This research examines the continuance usage of mobile SNS in China by integrating both the perspectives of social influence and privacy concern. Social influence includes three processes: compliance, identification and internalization, which are respectively represented by subjective norm, social identity, and group norm. The results indicate that these three factors and privacy concern have significant effects on continuance usage. The results suggest that service providers should address the issues of social influence and privacy concern to encourage mobile SNS continuance usage.

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1. Introduction

The mobile internet enables users to access the internet through mobile devices, such as smart phones and tablet computers, and is experiencing rapid adoption throughout the world. According to a report issued by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) in January 2014, the number of mobile internet users in China reached 500 million, accounting for 81% of its internet population (618 million) (CNNIC, 2014). A few services, such as mobile instant messaging, mobile search, mobile social network services (SNS) and mobile games, are very popular among users and can be categorized into four types: communication, information, entertainment and transaction. As a communication application, mobile SNS have been widely adopted by users (an acceptance rate of 30.9%) (CNNIC, 2014). However, successfully acquiring users and promoting the initial adoption and usage is only half the task facing service providers. If users discontinue their usage of a service after its initial adoption, service providers will not be able to recover the investment spent launching their product. Research indicates that the cost of acquiring a new customer is five times that of retaining an existing customer (Reichheld & Scheffer, 2000). In addition, there is intense competition between mobile SNS providers for customers. The three leading mobile SNS providers in China are WeChat, Renren, and Kaixin, which offer similar services and features in trying to expand their user base. However, if they cannot retain users, they will fail to maintain their competitive advantage.

Another complication for SNS providers arises because switching costs are inexpensive for mobile users. This makes it relatively easy for users to switch from a mobile SNS platform to an alternative one.

Mobile networks and devices allow mobile SNS users to connect to their friends and peers around the clock and from almost anywhere. Hence, they can post messages, share pictures and track their friends' status at their own convenience. As a member of social networks, an individual's behavior may receive influences from other actors. For example, when a user's friends or peers recommend that she or he should use a specific mobile SNS platform, the user may comply with the opinions and expectations offered, although he or she lacks a positive attitude toward the platform. In social influence theory, this is called the compliance process (Kelman, 1958). In addition to compliance, two other processes, identification and internalization, may also affect user behavior. Identification means that users accept influences in order to build a satisfying, self-defining relationship with another person or group (Malhotra & Galletta, 2003), while internalization means that users incorporate the opinions of others into their own beliefs. Another issue that may affect mobile SNS user behavior is privacy concern, which is due to the fact that SNS providers have collected large amounts of information on users, such as demographic information and user preferences. Furthermore, service providers can also use location-based technologies to obtain location information on users, raising concerns about risks to their privacy, which can decrease their intention to continue using an SNS.

Extant research has examined user adoption of SNS from multiple perspectives, such as perceived value (Kim, Gupta, & Koh, 2011), motivational theory (Lin & Lu, 2011), sense of community (Zhang,

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2010), and user experience (Zhou, Li, & Liu, 2010). Motivations such as perceived usefulness, perceived enjoyment and perceived value have been identified as factors affecting user behavior. However, as a member of social networks, individual user behavior may be influenced by the group norm and other members' opinions. In addition, the user behavior may also be affected by privacy concerns associated with information disclosure. By integrating both the perspectives of social influence and privacy concern, this research examines the continuance usage of mobile SNS. Social influence includes three processes: compliance, identification and internalization, which are represented by subjective norm, social identity and group norm, respectively. These three factors and privacy concern are proposed to affect continuance usage.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. The research model and hypotheses are presented in the next section. Section three describes the instrument development and the collection of the data. The results are presented in section four, which is followed by a discussion in section five. Section six presents the implications and limitations.

2. Research model and hypotheses

2.1. User adoption of SNS

As an emerging service, SNS user adoption has received much attention in information systems research. Various theories such as perceived value, sense of community, motivational theory, flow theory, and trust theory have been used as the theoretical bases (Zhang, 2010; Zhou et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2011; Lin & Lu, 2011; Lankton, McKnight, & Thatcher, 2012). Flow theory proposes that flow, representing an optimal experience, may affect the behavioral intention of users (Hoffman & Novak, 2009). Trust theory suggests that trust, which reflects a willingness to accept vulnerability based on a positive expectation toward another party's future behavior, has a significant effect on the behavioral intention of users (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Kim et al. (2011) suggest that perceived value affects a user's intention to purchase digital items in social networking communities. Perceived value includes functional value, emotional value and social value. Zhang (2010) noted that system quality and information quality affect a user's sense of community, which has a direct effect on social network usage. Lin and Lu (2011) integrated network externality and motivational theory to examine user usage of SNS. Their results indicate that enjoyment, the number of peers a user has and usefulness are the main factors affecting user continuance. Zhou et al. (2010) report the effect of flow on mobile SNS user loyalty. Lankton et al. (2012) state that privacy restrictiveness and site experience moderate the effects of trust and habit on the continuance intention to use social network websites.

Previous studies have also paid attention to the effect of privacy concern on user adoption of SNS. Xu, Michael, and Chen (2013) note that four factors, which include information sensitivity, privacy risk, information control and subjective norm, affect privacy concern, which further affects the privacy disclosure of SNS users. Zhao, Lu, and Gupta (2012b) state that privacy concern in combination with personalization and connectedness affect a user's intention to use location-based SNS. Chen (2013) found that privacy value moderates the effect of attitude on the privacy self-disclosure intention of SNS users. Feng and Xie (2014) noted that privacy concern also affects the intention of teenagers to adopt various privacy-setting strategies on SNS. These studies identify the significant effect of privacy concern on user adoption and initial usage of SNS. Based on these studies, we propose that privacy concern may also affect the continuance usage of mobile SNS as users may still be concerned with their personal information privacy when determining whether to continue using mobile SNS.

2.2. Social influence

Social influence reflects the extent to which an individual's attitudes, beliefs and behaviors are influenced by referent others (Wang, Meister, & Gray, 2013). Social influence includes three processes: compliance, identification and internalization (Kelman, 1958). Compliance shows that an individual complies with other users' opinions to gain rewards or avoid punishment. This represents a normative influence. Identification reflects how a user conceives of him or herself in terms of a group's defining features (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004). Internalization reflects how users assimilate and incorporate the opinions of others into their own beliefs.

Information systems researchers have noted the significant effect of social influence on user behavior. The unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) proposes that social influence is a significant factor in determining user acceptance of an information technology (Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003). Wang et al. (2013) examined the effect of social influence on the use of knowledge management systems (KMS) by testing the social influence of four groups, which include superiors, subordinates, peers and the extended professional population. Shen, Cheung, Lee, and Wang (2007) found that social influence affects the desire and intention to use instant messaging. Dholakia et al. (2004) report that value perceptions affect consumer participation in virtual communities through social influence, which includes group norms and social identity. Hsu and Lin (2008) state that social influence affects user adoption of blogs. In their research, social influence includes social norms and community identification.

Recently, social influence has also been identified as a factor affecting SNS user behavior. Ku, Chen, and Zhang (2013) drew on the uses and gratifications theory and found that subjective norm is a significant determinant of the continuance intention of SNS users. Baker and White (2010), employing the theory of planned behavior (TPB), found that subjective norm and group norm affect how adolescents use social networking sites. Kwon and Wen (2010) state that social identity has an effect on a user's acceptance of SNS. Although these studies have reported the effect of social influence on SNS user behavior, they are not based on social influence theory and have not provided a complete understanding of the effect of social influence as reflected by subjective norm, social identity and group norm. This research attempts to fill that gap by comparing the effect of those three factors on user behavior.

Compliance represents a normative influence and it can be reflected by subjective norm (Shen, Cheung, Lee, & Chen, 2011), which means that users comply with the opinions of those they consider important. When users perceive pressure from important others, they may continue using mobile SNS, even if they have not formed a positive attitude toward a SNS platform. Subjective norm is also a factor in both the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and TPB (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1991). Numerous studies have validated the effect of subjective norm on user adoption of information systems (Hwang & Lee, 2012; Lankton et al., 2012). Thus, we suggest,

H1. Subjective norm is positively related to continuance usage.

Identification is reflected by social identity, which captures a user's identification with a group, such as feelings of belonging and membership. Social identity includes cognitive, affective and evaluative identity, which reflect an individual's self-awareness of group membership, a sense of emotional involvement, and an evaluation of self-worth, respectively (Dholakia et al., 2004). Social identity is similar to sense of community, which includes four components: membership, influence, fulfillment of needs and emotional connection, and has an effect on social networking

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