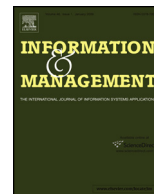




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# How attachment influences users' willingness to donate to content creators in social media: A socio-technical systems perspective

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### ABSTRACT

As a relatively new behavior, donation to content creators in social media has become very popular in the last few years. Different from traditional donation to nonprofit organization or victims, donation to content creators in social media has received little attention from academic researchers. On the basis of the socio-technical systems framework and attachment theory, this study develops a model to investigate the effects of social and technological factors on users' donation behavior. Our results indicate that donation intention is determined by the emotional attachment to the content creator and functional dependence on social media, which are influenced by both social factors (identification, interaction, and information value) and technical factors (sociability and personalization).

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## 1. Introduction

Social media encompass a wide range of websites such as social networking sites, blogs, microblogs, and websites such as YouTube and Flickr that support content sharing [88]. Social media play a vital role in the creation and sharing of information through user-generated content (UGC) within online social networks [130]. In recent years, social media have become increasingly popular and attracted not only businesses' participation and contribution but also researchers to investigate the motivation behind their use [114].

To be an attractive platform to users, especially content creators, social media provide various functions such as allowing users to create their own channels, post contents that can be instantaneously shared with a wide audience, choose to be friends with others or subscribe to other channels, and comment on or choose favorite contents [37]. Because encouraging UGC and opinion formation are the core goals, some social media sites in China provide a new function—donation—that allows users or the audience to donate to content creators. Users donate on the basis of the knowledge and service provided by content creators, and content creators can gain monetary or nonmonetary rewards as a

result. Therefore, such a function provides an incentive for the content creators. In addition, content creators also share the revenue generated from users' donation with the platform, which can support social media in ensuring their innovativeness and long-term survival [81].

The donation function as a business strategy has become quite popular, particularly in China. For example, Sina Weibo, the most well-known microblogging platform in China, has provided the donation function since 2014, and the revenues through donation reached more than 40 million yuan in 2015. YY platform, a user-generated live video streaming site similar to Twitch.tv, obtained 676.2 million yuan in revenue from donation in the fourth quarter of 2014 and attracted more than 200,000 content creators in its music channel [90,148]. In 2015, WeChat Public Accounts also tested the feasibility of the donation function by allowing personal public accounts to add the donation button at the end of the contents they propagated. However, social media are usually free of charge, and most users do not need to pay to view contents [86]. Therefore, an understanding of users' motivation behind donation in social media is important for researchers and social media developers to help businesses to unleash their potential. Although donation to social media content creators is not prevalent in the Western culture, its success in China makes it an attractive feature to consider for social media providers there. Our research provides social media providers around the world with important practical implications on how to understand and motivate users' donation behavior.

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Given that donation is a relatively new function in social media and no research has investigated this phenomenon yet, our study first compares it to donation to street performance or busking, and then we focus on the charitable and consumptive attributes of this behavior. This study draws upon the socio-technical systems framework to examine the influence of social and technological characteristics on users' affection toward and intention to donate to content creators in social media. As social media is a socio-technical information platform [140], the socio-technical systems framework allows us to capture both the social and technical aspects of social media in our understanding of donation behaviors there. In addition, we investigate users' motivation by applying the attachment theory, a theoretical framework that has been used to study the relationship between attachment and donation. Attachment theory helps us to empirically test the distinction between emotional attachment and functional dependence considering that such attachments are induced by different aspects of users' affection. In addition, we examine the effects of emotional attachment to the content creator and functional dependence on social media on donation intention. Moreover, the combination of the socio-technical systems framework and attachment theory can provide us a better understanding of which type of social and technical factors influence attachment to predict social media donation behavior.

The present research makes the following contributions. First, this study extends the literature on donation behavior to social media, whereas previous research mainly focuses on charitable organizations and victims. Specifically, we examine the Pay-What-You-Want (PWYW) donation model in social media, where the original motivation of the knowledge contributor or content creator is not financial gains. Second, we extend the understanding of the motivation of users' donation intention using attachment theory and examine the crucial roles of social and technical aspects as antecedents of attachment on the basis of socio-technical systems.

This paper is organized as follows. In the next section, the theoretical background of the research is presented. In the third section, we discuss the research model and hypothesis, followed by the research methodology including measurement development, data collection, and analysis in the fourth section. In the final section, discussion of the results, the theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and future research are presented.

## 2. Literature review

In this section, we review the theoretical underpinnings of our research by first providing an overview of donation in social media and its two attributes. Then we introduce the attachment theory and the socio-technical systems framework.

### 2.1. Donation in social media

Researchers in various social science disciplines including psychology [77,146], economics [28,60], marketing [94,98], and nonprofit organization domain [19,116] have examined the donation behavior. In these literatures, donation is defined as charitable giving behavior to organizations or others beyond one's own family. Donation may be both monetary and nonmonetary such as donating organs, blood, clothes, and toys [15,19,53,56]. In social media, the donation function is used by social media platforms as an incentive to improve the richness and quality of UGC [35].

Donation in social media is similar to busking or street performance because a performer or content creator first delivers service or knowledge, and then the audience gives a voluntary amount [84]. As a joint product, busking includes both music and

charity, whereas charity is exhibited by the audience only and is considered as the price paid for the music. Therefore, performers even though freeriding behavior exists (e.g. [84]). "Busking" in social media also involves a joint product: charity and the service or knowledge provided by the content creator. Thus, we argue that donation in social media has two inherent attributes: the charitable attribute and the consumptive attribute.

The consumptive attribute of donation implies that the donors pay for the consumption of goods or service, such as contents or service provided by the creators. From this perspective, the performers have to make sure their performance appeals to the prospective audience, visitors, or buyers. Some researchers have investigated how intercultural and intracultural identities exhibited by street performers increase the attention of the audience (e.g. [25]). The audience can set the price for the street performance and use the PWYW pricing scheme. However, as street performance lacks the mechanisms to ensure payments or donations and are vulnerable to freeriding, some researchers noticed that charitable causes may also be the major motivations for the audience's donation behavior [65]. Kushner and Brooks [84] modeled the audience's payment intention and found both musical service and reputation influence the decision to pay. Similar to the donation behavior examined in the busking context, donation in social media also presents freeriding opportunities and employs the PWYW pricing scheme. However, the lack of social pressure in such a virtual context might further decrease users' donation intention. Considering more and more social media platforms have started to support the donation function as a revenue source, it is important to understand what motivates users' willingness to donate to content creators.

#### 2.1.1. Charitable attribute of donation in social media

Charitable- or gift-giving behaviors as a type of donation behavior have been studied in various social science disciplines including psychology, economics, and anthropology, and in marketing and the nonprofit organization domain [15,19,81,95,116]. Researchers view the act of gift giving as symbolic or even a "labor of love" for some. When individuals make a payment or donation, they usually do not receive direct commensurate tangible benefits [118].

Research on donation has studied why people give or donate by applying the motivation theory. Such research has classified motivation to donate into two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivations to donate can be closely associated with the "warm effect," the positive emotions associated with doing good and helping others, which is also called altruism or benefit to others [5,6,146]. Many individuals donate to nonprofit organizations out of a desire to help these organizations to achieve their mission or to support a particular cause. That is, they enjoy the satisfaction from the experiences of making the donation [69,127]. Sargeant et al. [116] concluded that empathy, sympathy, and emotions such as guilt, pity, and fear can considerably affect individuals' intrinsic motivation. In contrast, extrinsic motivations are the means through which individuals can gain rewards or benefits from engaging in a behavior. These benefits can be tangible such as tax breaks [124] and monetary rewards [54] or intangible such as praise, recognition, or grades [59,79]. For example, an individual who donates to an arts organization may gain a better seat at an event, and the "purchase" of a brick in a community garden can have one's name displayed as a donor. Extrinsic motivations promote donation because individuals will consider them before donating [118].

In addition to motivation theory, research suggests relationships between donors and nonprofit organizations in terms of trust, commitment, and identification influence the donation behavior [81,116,117]. One of the effective tools to let individuals

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