SNS flow, SNS self-disclosure and post hoc interpersonal relations change: Focused on Korean Facebook user

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ABSTRACT

This study empirically investigates how the flow experiences when using SNS have impacted SNS interaction and interpersonal relationships. Using a survey of Facebook users, this study examines how the SNS flow as an intrinsic motivation have an impact on the self-disclosure on SNS and the post hoc interpersonal relations changes after using SNS. In addition, this study examines the moderating effect, how these relationships are affected by times which people spent in using mobile media for SNS. The survey was conducted for 263 users on two SNS communities in Korea from June 20 to July, 2012. As a result of this study, SNS flow has a close relationship with the increase of self-disclosure on SNS and impacts the post hoc interpersonal relations change positively. In addition, the result shows the positive effect between the self-disclosure on SNS and the post hoc interpersonal relations change. The result supports the interpersonal relationships are changed positively when SNS flow as an intrinsic motivation is incorporated with self-disclosure on SNS as an extrinsic motivation. Furthermore the result of moderating effect shows that the mobile SNS use impacts the relationship between the SNS flow and the self-disclosure on SNS.

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1. Introduction

Today, people spend much time on SNS (Social Network Service) and we easily find people accessing SNS during free time at work. In addition, people depend on SNS more for their CMC (computer-mediated communication) activities which have been performed by other web services such as chatting, messaging, and blogging, which has been performed by other web services. This implies that people are more satisfied with SNSs than other existing CMC channels. SNS is a web-based service which provides a function to form and share the social relation network. Boyd and Ellison (2007) explained the characteristics of SNS from three aspects: (1) Users can introduce their profile to others and share their opinions within this limited system; (2) users can add or combine their contact list in order to form or retain relationships by using the connection network; and (3) users can interact with others in a connection network, or they can view the interaction between other users. Facebook represents these characteristics better than other SNSs. Facebook users expose themselves to others by using 'Invite Friends.' Users who are connected as friends can view the other person's posts and status, write comments, and click the

'Like' icon. In addition, the users can observe the process of interacting with strangers, and establish or expand interpersonal relations by introducing themselves to each other (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007).

Indent the number of Facebook users has already passed 600 million in March 2011, and is expected to reach 935 million by the end of March 2013 (Internet World Stats, 2012). As the number of Facebook users is increasing rapidly and interest in SNS is rising, SNS has become an important academic subject in the communication field. Studies on SNS are mainly related to self-disclosure, privacy violations, or service trust relations (Burler, McCann, & Thomas, 2011; Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn, & Hughes, 2009; Qian & Scott, 2007), motives and satisfaction of using SNS, patterns of SNS use (Hargittai, 2007), and social capital formation in SNS (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011; Ellison et al., 2007). However, these studies do not fully discuss which factors increase SNS use, and there are few studies that explains whether the interaction in SNS actually contributes to changes in personal relations (hereinafter 'post hoc interpersonal relations change'). Some studies show the relation between self-disclosure behavior in Facebook and the depth of social relationship (Ljepava, Orr, Locke, & Ross, 2013) and the relation between the degree of closeness in the actual relationship and decision about negative action in the Facebook (Bevan, Pfyl, & Barclay, 2012). But there is not many

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studies showing how the relationship in the SNS effect the expansion or development of actual interpersonal relation.

According to recent researches on SNS, there are two reasons why people devote themselves to SNS like Facebook. One is the usefulness of SNS as a channel for interpersonal relationships (Pew Research Center, 2012a), and the other is that the interactions on SNS result in enjoyment and happiness (Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2010; Pew Research Center, 2012b). The former applies 'extrinsic motivation' to obtain the specific behavioral results or effects, and the latter corresponds to 'intrinsic motivation' as emotional satisfaction to be formed when people do something (Hoffman & Novak, 2009). Between the two, we need to focus on the intrinsic motivation because it is confirmed that people use SNS like Facebook to access the social relation network consistently rather than having conversations like chatting (Ellison et al., 2007). The characteristics of mobile devices also can be an important factor to provide emotional satisfaction from the SNS interaction. Because mobile devices can be used at any time, at any place, it gives optimal conditions for people to perform more activities and spend more time on SNS (comScore, 2011).

The 'flow' concept has been discussed frequently as an intrinsic factor in other studies on the relationship between CMC behaviors and computer environments. Csikzentmihalyi (1990, p. 4) defined the flow as "the state which people are so involved in and there is nothing else seems to be mattered." That is, the flow refers to the optimal experience which people are pleased with themselves when they do something. According to the existing studies on CMC, the users are disposed to experience the flow when navigating the web-services and the flow experience is reinforced when such web use is in accord with goal-directed activities (Hoffman & Novak, 2009). From this standpoint, it can be assumed that people depend on Facebook more and more in expressing themselves and interacting with others due to the flow experiences from using Facebook, and the characteristics in mobile devices in using Facebook can affect the flow experiences on Facebook use.

The critical mind for this study starts from this viewpoint. This study attempts to empirically verify how the SNS flow can contribute to the user's self-disclosure behavior on the SNS and the post hoc interpersonal relationships change after using the SNS. Furthermore, how the SNS use via mobile devices affects the relations between the SNS flow and SNS self-disclosure will be analyzed. We would like to suppose that both SNS self-disclosure (concrete action of using Facebook) and its results (post hoc interpersonal relations change) will be affected by the SNS flow. In addition, the SNS use via mobile devices will increase the SNS flow and will give a positive impact on SNS self-disclosure.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1. The flow as an intrinsic motivation

The flow concept is a form of intrinsic motivation. Csikzentmihalyi (1990) explained that an 'intrinsically motivated act' is the act that is continued because the act itself is fun and pleasant, even though there is no special compensation from the outside. Therefore, the act itself is the compensation for intrinsic motivation, and the optimal experience obtained from this act is defined as 'flow.' The flow concept and experience are mainly applied from the study on CMC and the interaction between web service (computer environment) and human beings. It is because the flow is very useful in understanding consumer (users) behavior in the web service. Many studies attempt to verify how the flow affects the continuous use of the web service, or revisits or loyalty (Agarwal & Karahanna, 2000; Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Koufaris, 2002). It is also empirically proven that

the use of web service or online service provides pleasure and experience of concentration and then these emotions act as motivation.

Despite the fact that the flow concept has opened a new horizon by revealing intrinsic motivation in CMC and online interaction, meticulous care is required to apply for the study since there has been numerous ways to be operationalized, tested and applied (Hoffman & Novak, 2009). In reviewing past researches on the flow in computer-mediated environment, Hoffman and Novak has described it as a state that can be measured through leading parameters such as skill, change, focused attention, telepresence, and interaction (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). Koufaris (2002) has defined the flow experience into three elements; perceived enjoyment, perceived control, and attention focus. Finneran and Zhang (2005) has comprehensively analyzed the concept of flow into three-demensions; antecedents, experiences, and consequences. The leading parameter is interaction elements of computer-mediated environment, which includes change, skill, and clear goals. Also the empirical parameter is an experienced-dimensional concept which the users feel about activities, which includes enjoyment, concentration, time distortion, loss of self-consciousness, and telepresence. Lastly, learning, creativity, positive effect, autotelic experience, and the change of attitude and behavior had been used as outcome parameters.

In this study, we assume that the SNS flow is in its optimal satisfactory condition while using Facebook consistently. And the SNS flow will be conceptualized as a higher-order construct composed of antecedent and experience parameters. It can be assumed that the SNS flow is a multidimensional construct reflected by 'concentration,' 'time-distortion,' 'telepresence,' 'enjoyment,' and 'curiosity' as they relate to the SNS interaction. It has been proven constantly through previous studies that concentration, time-distortion, and telepresence are the main leading variables which bring the flow experience in online environment (Bridges & Florsheim, 2008; Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Hoffman & Novak, 2009). If a SNS user pays more attention to the use of SNS as much as he/she does not think of anything else and does not realize how much time has passed and feels the interaction with others through SNS more realistic, the user can obtain the flow experience more easily. And the evidence from the studies on the flow has shown that enjoyment and curiosity are the key values for the flow experience (Chen, Yen, Hung, & Huang, 2008; Wang, Baker, Wanger, and Wakefield, 2007; Wu and Wang, 2011) set concentration, enjoyment, escape and social interaction as variables which form the flow experiences. Then found that enjoyment, escape and social interaction have positive effects on the behavioral intentions on SNS. Therefore, when there is enjoyment and curiosity on the use of SNS, it can be predicted that the flow is experienced during the use of SNS.

2.2. The SNS flow and post hoc interpersonal relations change

SNS is a new type of communication channel to communicate, form, develop, and/or retain interpersonal relations with others by using the social relation network based on the web service. Particularly, SNS shows distinct differences with previous CMC in regard to the similarity between online personal relationship and offline personal relations are high (Ellison et al., 2007; Ellison et al., 2011). Previous CMC is characterized by performing online interaction based on anonymity. The existing studies on CMC and personal relations development agree that the CMC activities promote online interaction but do not provide a consistent answer to the question of whether CMC activities actually affect interpersonal relationship, not finished as simple online interaction. In other words, online relationship based on anonymity cannot be expanded to the offline relationship or it becomes imaginary relationship that cuts or distorts the offline relationship (Hampton & Wellman, 2003; Kraut et al., 1998).