

Social media ‘on the go’: Examining the impact of age – Working Paper

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Introduction

In recent years it has become apparent that social media has had a huge impact on the way people communicate via the Internet. As people are constantly attempting to stay connected with peers, the audience engagement through social networking sites (SNS) has drastically increased over the past decade (Alloway and Alloway, 2012). Due to the increase in SNS usage, major networking sites have adopted the use of mobile applications to allow users the freedom to communicate whilst on the go. This impacts on what individuals do during the day and evening and who they do it with, it even effects how they meet new people and socialise amongst work colleagues (Brown et al., 2002). Although extensive number of studies explored the consumers’ adoption of mobile technology (Barwise and Strong, 2002; Jarvenpaa and Lang, 2005) and adoption of social media (Steyn et al., 2010; Chao et al., 2011; Hajli, 2014), adoption of mobile social media (consumption of SNS on mobile devices) remains underexplored. Moreover, existing research on social media adoption (Vanslyke, 2003) has identified two generational groups, generation Y (aged 18-25) and generation X (aged 35-60) which have active use of social media, although their motives and attitudes towards social media as well as consumption patterns differ. With the increased use of social media ‘on the go’, no existing studies have investigated the generational gap in the adoption and use of mobile social media (MSM). Hence, this work-in-progress paper aims to address identified research gaps by proposing and justifying conceptual model to be examined via mixed research method.

Theoretical Background

Social media, defined as technological platforms and channels which enable interaction, exchange of information and content virtually between individuals, groups of individuals anywhere anytime (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2010), represents an increasingly important way for brands and businesses to connect and interact with consumers (Murdough, 2009). The challenge, however, lies in viewing social media as simply another technological tool that facilitates conversations and exchange of information. With time social media has become a platform, which individuals rely on and are dependant upon during their daily lives and business activities. Social media can, therefore, be seen as an extension of people’s lives with opportunities to construct virtual identities as well as personal, social and professional spaces that altogether extend boundaries of offline contexts (Correa et al., 2010). Social media consumption is particularly immersive and complex in the cases when individuals are accessing and using social media on the go, via mobile devices.

Consumption of social media via mobile devices (MSM) is compelling to individuals because of the means of production, distribution and consumption – all found on a single device, which individuals can carry anywhere anytime (portability) and can personalise according to own interest and needs (Humphreys, 2013; Bolat, 2014). Simple rationale for the increased usage rates of MSM is in a convenience deriving from ability to quickly share timely and, therefore, relevant footage, data and content with others (Bolat et al., 2016). Due to SNS being embedded within mobile phones and tablets computers, there was a noticeable increase in mobile phone usage rate over the past decade (Goggin, 2010). This is due to their integration within individuals’ lives. Social media is on the rise due to the fact that it is widely accessible and to some degree essential. Accessing social media on the go enables continuous accessibility and connection with social ties as well as creates opportunities for constant

presence and engagement in the social media context (Bolat et al., 2016). Having said that, research into understanding consumers' experiences with using and adopting MSM is scarce and fragmented. Studies around social media adoption and usage can be divided within the two main streams, technical in nature papers (Trusov et al., 2009; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Tsai and Men, 2013; Gamboa and Gonçalves, 2014; Moncrief et al., 2015) where social media technical and functional features of 'media' component are assessed and papers studying the 'social' component with a focus on understanding behavioural aspects of social media use, to name a few, social interaction, social ties, social identity (Kwon and Wen, 2010; Shiue et al., 2010) and the application of social media in both the consumer and the business contexts (Baird and Fisher, 2005; Eyrich et al., 2008).

In investigation of social behavioural aspects of social media consumption, however, technical side of SNS is also captured. In particular, Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis et al., 1989) has been adopted to examine the role of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness on individuals' attitudes towards the adoption of social media (Eyrich et al., 2008; Steyn et al., 2010; Hajli, 2014). Moreover, privacy and trust issues which usually lead to negative associations when adopting technology, have dual effect in the social media context where permission-based communication is enabled due to technical ability of SNS users to control their privacy settings (Ashley and Tuten, 2015). Other studies like De Valck et al. (2009) extended TAM by incorporating Theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) to investigate how SNS affects the decision-making processes of consumers. De Valck et al. (2009) found that social ties formed via SNS have a significant impact on consumers' motivations to engage with SNS. Social media word-of-mouth (sWOM) is proven to have higher impact on consumers' decisions and evaluations than offline WOM (Tursov et al., 2009; Kozinets et al., 2010). In studying the motives of consumers to use social media existing studies (Porter and Donthu, 2008; Johnson and Yang, 2009; Hughes et al., 2012) adopted the uses and gratification approach (Blumler and Katz, 1974). The most evident motives to use social media are social and informational (Johnson and Yang, 2009; Hughes et al., 2012). Informational motives refer to desire to obtain and consume content. Social motives are more complex and include rational motives of sharing information and emotional motives that include social connections and creating social dynamics (Krishnamurthy and Dou, 2008). Moreover, Leung (2006) have emphasised the impact of psychological motives on individuals' adoption and use of social media and in particular found that those users, which show signs of boredom, often retreat to social networking in an effort to satisfy their need of entertainment. In addition, numerous studies (Correa et al., 2010; Heinonen, 2011; Hughes et al., 2012) focused on classifying and categorising the social media used based on their psychological motives to engage with social media. These studies concluded that extraversion, neuroticism and openness are the main personality traits of the typical social media user.

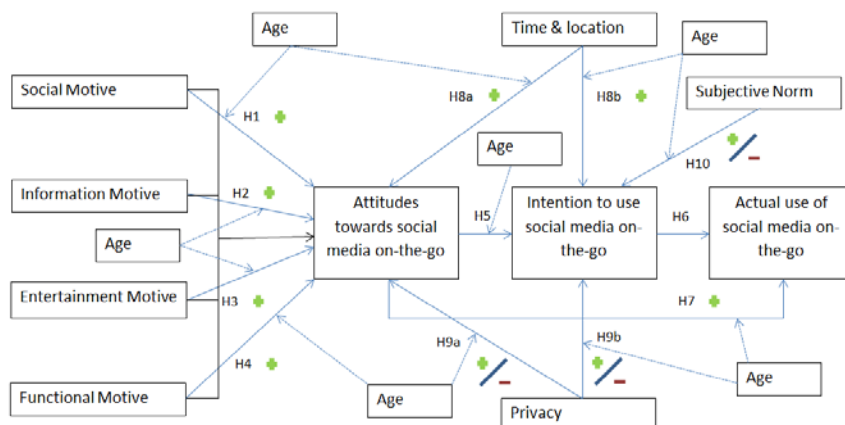
Although users' motives to engage with social media are extensively researched, little is known about individuals' motives to engage with MSM. In addition to entertainment, social and informational motives, mobile devices offer the users functional value – technical competencies of mobile technology such as transmission and exchange of content in various formats, ease of use of technical functions, multi-tasking functionality of allowing to combine voice conversations, text communication and web-browsing (Bolat, 2014). Hence, it rationale to assume that functional motives positively influence attitudes of individuals to use MSM.

Moreover, existing research on social media adoption (Vanslyke, 2003) has identified two generational groups, generation Y (aged 18-25) and generation X (aged 35-60) which have active use of social media, although their motives and attitudes towards social media differ.

These two groups were defined by Prensky as ‘Digital Natives’ (generation Y) and ‘Immigrants’ (generation X), describing the generational gap between the Internet users (Vanslyke, 2003). Existing studies demonstrate that two generational groups differ in the ways they consumer social media. Itom et al. (2008) discuss the impact social media has on the younger generation, for example communication, socialising skills and even self-expression, which are all enhanced through their use of social media platforms (Itom et al., 2008). Whereas digital immigrants adopt social media in order to engage connect with others to fill their need for companionship and to participate in new activities (Prensky, 2001). With the increased use of social media ‘on the go’, no existing studies have investigated the generational gap in the adoption and use of MSM.

Based on the above review of existing research, the following conceptual model and hypotheses are being proposed (Figure 1), which examines consumers’ adoption and engagement with social media ‘on the go’ (MSM), with particular focus on the role the consumer’s age plays in the adoption of MSM.

Figure 1. Conceptual model: Hypotheses Development



Methodology

The data will be collected using the mixed methods of data collection, the focus groups and the survey. Focus group will include exploratory phase of in-depth investigation on differences different age groups experience when using social media on the go by focusing on (1) mapping individual’s daily engagement with social media across devices and (2) asking individuals across two different age groups to ‘show and tell’ how they use and consumer social media on their mobile devices. Following focus group, the survey measurement instrument will be modified to capture results of qualitative data analysis. Data Collection and Analysis represent work-in-progress phase of this study.

Potential Contribution

This study aims to reveal the specific motives, attitudes and behaviours consumers of different ages express while engaging with social media on the go. Identifying these triggers/aspects will provide insights into how users of different generations perceive, react and engage with social media on the go – something academic literature failed to address so far. Moreover, understanding age-specific motives as well as MSM engagement across two

generational groups will enhance segmentation and targeting strategies of brands willing to communicate effectively with consumers of different generations.

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