



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Management

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES USAGE BEHAVIOUR: USES & GRATIFICATION THEORY PERSPECTIVE

KEY WORDS: uses & gratification theory; social networking sites; social motivation; non social motivation; social networking activity

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ABSTRACT

SNS is re-dimensioning how young people interact with their parents, peers as well as how and why they use technology. Audience attention is not free as multiple channels clamour for mind space. This calls for understanding the drivers behind SNS usage behavior so that a marketer may make the most of it or face being muted and at the worst, ignored entirely. We employ the framework of the Uses & Gratification Theory to unravel the pattern and motivation behind SNS usage behavior, as it studies the impact of people on media rather than the other way around. The paper examines social motivation, non-social motivation and activity to obtain insights on SNS usage behavior of rural college students from an economically weak background – constituting the changing face of India's youth in this flat world.

INTRODUCTION

Every day, social networking sites (SNS) swamp us with trending stuff and have exploded as a category of online discourse where people create content, share it, bookmark it and network at a prodigious rate. So often we hear friends speaking about a particular event being 'everywhere' or how a particular news story has 'everyone talking about it'. However the parody here is that marketers believe that SNS is free and just updating their timeline with what is trending now is a good thing to gauge audience attention. It is here that the marketer has to understand that audience attention is not free as multiple channels clamour for his mind space. SNS's are transforming the manner in which young people interact with their parents, peers as well as how and why they make use of technology. This transformational technology can assist young people to become socially capable as well as make them unwieldy and incompetent as well. This calls for understanding the usage behavior behind SNS so that a marketer may get all that he hoped for else he would be muted or worst ignored entirely.

USES AND GRATIFICATIONS OF USING SNS

As the social media tools keep emerging at a very fast pace, consumers preference to these new tools also seem to be encouraging as revealed by the various statistical data. There is an increase in the market size and growth that social media represents. Indian internet population has shown a steady growth from 233 million as of 2014 to 354 million in 2015. This is estimated to be 462 million by the end of the year 2016 (This is only a small chunk out of its 1.237 billion population). It may far exceed the projection of 500 million by 2018. India has 3rd largest internet population after China & US, it is projected to be 2nd largest by 2016 with 462 million users. Another interesting fact is that urban internet user's show a 71% year on year growth while its rural counterpart showed a 93% growth from December 2014 - December 2015. Indian digital sector is on the rise with 31% CAGR as opposed to other media. Facebook has a user base of 100 million in India while Twitter has 33 million, LinkedIn has 26 million, 5.5 million Pinterest user and so on.

The review of literature highlights that web 2.0 provides a high level of interactivity over the traditional media first, secondly new tools keeps coming up in the space and users embrace them and adopt them into their lifestyles, thirdly individual's use multiple media for communication rather than substituting one media form with another. It needs to be understood as to the uses and gratifications behind SNS which is the cause for quick adherence to these new communication tools. Though some studies have focused on the needs of the SNS users, no significant studies have been undertaken in this regard in the Indian context, especially taking a sample of rural students from a weaker economic class perspective per se – the changing face of India's youth in this flat world.

Elihu Katz opined that media effects only exist when effects fit users' demands (Katz, 1959). This has indeed paved a new

dimension with regards to the future of mass communication research, a shift of the central research theme from "the study of mass persuasion" to the study of media uses by an active audience, thereby shifting the focus of media effects from "what media do to people" to "what people do with the media" (Katz, 1959). Though the early theories on mass media communication views the mass media to have a susceptible influence on people and were unable to form their own opinions (hypodermic needle theory) as well as the magic bullet theory which relies on the influential role of media on people. This is where the Uses and Gratifications theory differs in its approach of studying the impact of people on media rather than the other way. The audience is considered active, discerning and motivated in their media use. According to the U & G theory people make use of media for their specific needs and it has a user/audience-centered approach (Xueming Luo, 2010). U&G theory scholars use audience as the point of departure rather than the communicator (Windahl, 1981). A few mass communications researchers have contended that uses and gratifications is not a rigorous social science theory but Thomas E. Ruggiero, 2000 in his article, argues just the opposite, and any attempt to speculate on the future direction of mass communication theory must seriously include the uses and gratifications approach. Also earlier U & G studies were based around TV and as new transformational technology has revolutionized the media platform, this calls for understanding what the motivations are and gratifications received by individuals from the new media forms that cause transcendence in user behavior. Earlier studies also have studied mostly the political implications of traditional media on audience groups (Berelson et al., 1954; Thomas E. Ruggiero, 2000). Johnson 2009 chose U & G theory as a theoretical background as it fits well in this new informational age to understand the uses and demands of Chinese SNS users. Also studies on motivations to join and engage in SNS are scarce. Understanding whether there is one major reason or multiple reasons for SNS behavior is also at the fore front of this study. Further this study will search for an answer as to how virtual communities like SNS have impacted a specific group of people's lifestyle in terms of social and media habits in one of world's largest media markets. Hence to fill this gap in the literature review, this study is done.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study will explore demand for SNS among the rural students coming from an economically weak background as penetration of internet users among the rural people is showing a tremendous growth rate from a uses & gratifications perspective. The research will examine i) What is the SNS usage pattern among the sample selected? ii) SNS vs other media usage pattern iii) What are the uses and gratifications of SNS user's? iv) Gender differences in SNS usage iv) To contribute to the U & G literature.

METHODOLOGY

In order to evaluate the uses and gratification pattern of the SNS users selected for the study, an online survey was initiated through Google forms between August 1-6, 2016 in English language. The

survey was not random, which means results cannot be generalized to the larger population of SNS users. The findings of the study relating to the uses and gratifications that the survey respondents seek can be analyzed for consistency with the theory and with findings from previous studies. A pilot study was conducted to minimize any possible misunderstanding of the wordings used in the study. The survey questionnaire was developed and adapted from previous research studies (Curtois et al. 2009; Yacong Yuang, 2011).

Moreover, snow-ball sampling was used for this particular study: First, it fits the way information is distributed via social networks, which is based on individual ties and social capital the hardcore cohesive power of any SNS. The snowball distribution may have contributed to the strong response rate (Yacong Yuang, 2011).

FINDINGS AND ARGUMENTS

Sample Characteristics

Gender/Age/Student Status: Among the 51 valid responses included in the study 53.8% was that of male respondents and 46.2% was that of female respondents. The sample is close to **IAMAI & IMRB International report on internet users 2015** which observes that men account for 71% of the internet users in our country while women account for 29%.The age group profile represented was 69.2% in 17-20 years group and 30.8% was in 21-25 years group. This is in line with IAMAI & IMRB report, 2015 which points out that in rural India 75% of the Internet users are in 18-30 years group and 11% younger than 18 years group. The student status shows that 65.4% 'only study' while 30.8% 'work and study' as they are from an economically weak background and are also 1st generation graduates.

Usage pattern of SNS/Other media: The SNS usage pattern depicts 49% spend 0-1 hours on a typical session in a day while 27.55 spend 4+ hours, 17.6% spend 2-3 hours and 5.9% spend 3-4 hours. The sample thus is a representative of the average online time spent by internet users in our country which is about 5 hours a day (**IAMI & IMRB,2015**).It was interesting to note that 37.3% of the respondents spend about the same time on social media and the other media(TV, Online news portals, mobile phone etc). Independent sample t test was conducted to study if there was any significant difference in the two means i.e. the length of time spent online on SNS by male and female. It was seen that significant difference was observed in terms of the hours spent online on SNS by male and female as shown in table below:

Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Hours Online	Male	28	1.89	1.449	.274
	Female	23	1.22	.422	.088

Independent Samples Test										
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	F	Sig.	t	df	t Test for Equality of Means		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
						Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper	
Hours Online	Equal variances assumed	13.688	.001	2.159	49	.036	.675	.313	.047	1.304
	Equal variances not assumed		2.349	32.434	.025	.675	.289	.090		1.261

It was seen that male students spent more time online than the female students.

SNS known by name: The most prominent SNS known by name only is Facebook by 94.3% of the respondents which is also the SNS with the largest user base of 100 million registered users in India, The second most known by name is YouTube among 45.3% of the respondents, next is Twitter with 37.7% awareness and this accounts for 33 million users in our country, Google groups was known to 28.3% , Instagram was known to 18.9% of the respondents and the other SNS tools awareness level is significantly lesser.

Specific SNS usage: Further Independent sample t test was conducted to study if there was any significant difference in the usage of Facebook, YouTube and Twitter by male and female students and it was observed that significant difference was there only in the usage of Facebook by male and female as shown by the table below where male students used Facebook more than female.

Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Percentage of usage of Facebook	Male	28	84.29	25.845	4.884
	Female	23	35.87	26.995	5.629

Independent Samples Test										
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	F	Sig.	t	df	t Test for Equality of Means		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
						Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper	
Percentage of usage of Facebook	Equal variances assumed	.004	.950	3.830	49	.000	28.416	7.420	13.505	43.328
	Equal variances not assumed		3.813	48.241	.000	28.416	7.483	13.617	43.615	

Registered Users of SNS: The analysis of the data regarding registered users on the various social networking sites clearly shows that Facebook & Gmail had the highest registered users (89%) with a break up of about 55% registered since 2014 and 34 % registered from 2015 only on Facebook. Twitter shows an acceptance rate of 26.9% since 2014 and a majority of 51.9% doesn't have a twitter account. It was also observed that almost all the other SNS's had less number of students with registered account on sites like Instagram (11%), Google+ (11%) Yahoo mail (6%), LinkedIn (6%) while SNS like YouTube, Blogspot, Flickr, Blogger and word press had a visibility by name only but students had not registered an account with these sites. This clearly indicates the selective adherence to social media tools among the audience group

Motivations for using SNS:

Research Question: What motivates rural college students from economically weak background using SNS?

H₁: The rural college students from economically weak background are primarily motivated by Non Social Motivation.

In order to understand the motivations defining the SNS usage of the respondents and to examine the relationship between the variables chosen for the study namely social and non social motivations and activities on SNS, a summary of the descriptive statistics of each item in the three categories (social , non social and activities) is tabulated as below:

Table 1.1 Descriptive statistics – Social Motivation

Social Motivation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Let People know I care about their feelings	51	3.84	1.302
Stay in touch with people who understands me	51	3.73	.981
Talk about my problems	51	2.67	.931
Feel involved with what happens to others	51	3.51	.809
Stay informed on occasion and events	51	3.63	1.371

Valid N (listwise) 51

Table 1.2 Descriptive statistics – Non Social Motivation

Social Motivation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Keep Track of International news	51	3.31	1.435
Keep Track of Local news	51	3.67	1.381
Escape from my responsibilities	51	3.06	1.103
Postpone tasks that I should complete first	51	2.75	1.214
Amuse myself	51	3.22	1.346

Relax from pressure 51 3.76 1.242

Valid N (listwise) 51

Table 1.3 Descriptive Statistics - Activities

Social Motivation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Add information about myself so that friends can see	51	2.86	1.575

Check out friends update without sharing or responding to their updates	51	3.29	1.270
Look for friends update and share or respond to their updates	51	3.06	1.555
Initiate a personal interaction	51	2.92	1.623

Valid N (listwise)

The above items under social, non social motivation and activities were subjected to reliability analysis to examine inter- item correlations as shown in table 2.1 and the items 1, 2 and 3 were deleted and Cronbach's alpha showed a good value than in the earlier case .Three new variables total social motivation, total non social motivation and total activity was computed, summing the scores of these variables after deletion.

Table 2.1 Inter Item Reliability

Item	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach Alpha if item deleted	Cronbach Alpha (Reliability Statistics)
1. Feeling involved...	0.143	0.635	0.608 (Social Motivation)
2. Escape from responsibilities	0.111	0.600	0.553 (Non social motivation)
3. Postpone task	0.099	0.638	0.600 (Non social motivation)
-	-	-	0.839 (Activities)

Pearson's product moment correlation test was used to examine the correlation between total social motivation, total non social motivation and total activities. This will enable us to test the research hypothesis proposed for this study. From the SPSS output, it was seen that only modified non social motivation had a significant influence on activities of SNS users ($r=0.300, p=0.04$) while modified social motivation does not have a significant influence on the activities ($r=0.178, p=0.210$). However the influence of non social motivation was only moderate .This revelation is in line with the findings of an earlier research study (Yacong Yuang, 2011) that highlights that younger users tend to be more solitary and their age is associated with non-social reasons to use SNS. However, given the fact that 94.8% of survey participants used in that study included 20-29 years, the effect of age observed there might be limited by the lack of variation in the sample. This has been proved in this research study. Further this study shows that non social motivators like Cognitive needs, Tension free needs and Affective needs drive SNS users more so than Social and Personal integrative needs.

Further Pearson's product moment correlation test was used to examine the correlation between each individual item in modified non social motivation with total activity of SNS users. This is seen in table 3.1. It is also evident that Cognitive needs dominate SNS users of this group more than the Affective and Tension free needs. This result supports H1 and also answers to our research question.

Table 3.1- Correlation: Non Social Motivation vs Activity

U & G Needs	Cognitive	Cognitive	Affective Needs	Tension Free Needs
Non Social Factors	Track local news	Track International news	Amuse myself	Relax from pressure
Pearson's r	0.360	0.400	-0.181	0.141
P value	0.009	0.004	0.188	0.324

Further a strong correlation was found with respect to the length of time spent on a typical session using SNS with the activities of SNS users than with the social and non social motivations driving SNS usage ($r=0.511, p= 0.000$). Further by studying the strength of the correlation between each item on the activity scale to time spent in a session on SNS showed strong correlation with "add information about myself so that friends can see" ($r=0.549, p=0.000$) and moderate correlation with "initiate a personal interaction" ($r=0.329, p=0.018$) , "look for friends update &

share/respond" ($r=0.377, p=0.006$) and less correlation with "check for updates without sharing/responding" ($r=0.285, p=0.042$). This shows that all social activities are significantly correlated with the length of time spent on SNS. The dominating activities are mostly social integrative and personal integrative needs. The driving force however is non social motivations as the younger users tend to be more solitary, with their SNS usage.

CONCLUSION

This study brings forth the point that non social motivations dominate the SNS usage pattern among rural college students from economically weak background unlike a number of earlier researches which shows the dominating drive being social integrative and personal integrative needs. These researches were done on a mixed sample of college students and those in work force in varying age groups from 20-35 years. The finding from this study answer some unexplored questions in past researches and brings forth a new dimension to SNS usage that solitary motivations bring the target group to SNS. This is a clear domination of cognitive and affective needs driving SNS usage. For the motivation to track news, perhaps it is a very important way for them to exchange information in their social activity. Exchanging information is one way SNS allow users to strengthen weak ties (Chang & Zhu, 2011). Also they are at the economic bottom of the society and they are influenced by low level motivators before they get dominated by high level motivators as prescribed by Maslow's needs hierarchy theory too.

Another interesting finding in this study is the pattern of gender differences found throughout the research. Further the Uses and Gratification theory seems to explain the DNA behind the transforming media behavior of the generation next.

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