USES AND GRATIFICATIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA SITES: THE CASE OF PINTEREST

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays people are using Social Media Sites (SMSs) as a new way of staying in touch with each other. SMSs are very popular, and it is common that one person have active accounts in many of them, for example: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google +, Pinterest, Flicker, etc. Although the function of SMSs is being a platform that allows interchanging content and creating a social group, the specific characteristics of each SMSs bring different experiences to members. Some SMSs specialize in short messages other in professional contacts, etc. Pinterest is an online board that allows people sharing images they find on the Web. In the last year the number of members of Pinterest has grown considerably, being the number of female members bigger than the number of male members, maybe indicating a better identification with the female public. This study will use the Uses and Gratifications Theory as a framework to understand the members’ motivations for using Pinterest.

Keywords: Social media, uses and gratifications theory, gender differences, Pinterest

INTRODUCTION

Since its creation the Web has impacted how people communicate and share information. Although at the beginning of its evolution Web pages were only used to share information and users had not possibility of interacting with web pages, the number of web pages grew in a very important way. New advances of Web resulted in the possibility of users interacting with web pages, this is call Web 2.0. Web 2.0 facilitates the creation of new applications like blogs, wikis, and social networks (Grabner-Kräuter, 2009).

Social Media Sites (SMSs) are very popular among Internet users. The number of SMSs has been increasing during the last years. We can find several examples of SMSs such as: Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Google+. The number of users enrolled at this kind of websites has been increasing at very important rates with Facebook having more than a billion million active users at April 2013 (Facebook, 2013), Twitter having 500 million users, and Pinterest having 12
million monthly unique visitors (Pinterest, 2013). Although their primarily functions are basically the same, users find them interesting and join at many of them.

In this study we will use the Uses and Gratifications Theory to understand motivations for using Pinterest. Our proposed model is shown in Figure 1. We will also analyze motivational differences in females’ and males’ use of Pinterest.

![Figure 1: Proposed Research Model and Hypotheses](image)

**FIGURE 1. PROPOSED RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESES**

This study is organized in six sections including this introduction. In section two, we discuss previous studies about social media sites; we also elaborate the Uses and Gratifications Theory that is the framework of the study. Next, we develop our theoretical arguments and hypotheses for the proposed research model. This is followed by the procedures of testing the proposed research model empirically. Section five reports the expected results of the study and the discussion section includes a summary of findings, limitations and recommendations for further research.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Social Media Sites**

Boyd & Ellison (2007) define social network sites as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (p. 211).
Though there are no formal classifications for the SMs, we found one that adapts to this research. Fred Cavazza (2012) divides social media into 6 groups: publishing, sharing, playing, networking, buying and localization.

Publishing networks like Wikipedia, allow people to create content and modify it; sharing platforms let members distribute and share videos, pictures, products, links, music or documents; playing pages for online games; networking is for meeting new people or keeping in touch and for professional networks; buying pages offer the possibility of e-commerce and are also intended for sharing customers’ opinions about products; localization is mainly used through mobile devices which allow you to show where you are, upcoming events and maps.

**FIGURE 2. SOCIAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE (Cavazza, 2012)**

Social media sites have been studied from different perspectives: use of Social Media Sites (e.g. Clark & Roberts, 2010), social networks and trust (e.g. Grabner-Kräuter, 2009), cross-cultural impact on social networking sites (Vitkauskaite, 2010), corporate responsibilities in social media (Chen, 2009), and Social Networking: the business case of social networking (Wilson, 2009) among others.

**Uses and Gratifications Theory**

The Uses and Gratifications theory (UGT) has been used since the 1940’s to explain how people use mass media in order to fulfill their needs and wants. At the beginning UGT was used to deal with the consumption of radio and newspapers and through the decades UGT has been applied to different media, adapting its methodology to new forms of communication such as the internet.
Early studies were basically exploratory and tried to classify the audience responses into meaningful categories (Wimmer & Dominick, 1999). For example, research conducted during 1940s didn’t search for links between gratifications obtained and the psychological or sociological origins of the satisfied needs, they only studied why people engaged in such behavior (Ruggiero, 2000).

During the following decades, researchers identified and operationalized social and psychological variables considered by Wimmer & Dominick (1999) as the precursors of various forms of consumption of gratifications. Mendelsohn (1964) in his study on how people listened to the radio, identified 7 main functions of this medium: companionship, bracketing the day, changing mood, counteracting loneliness or boredom, providing news and information, allowing vicarious participation in events and social interaction (Ruggiero, 2000).

During the following decades, UGT covered other media such as television, magazines, video games and more recently, social media.

In order to develop a proper and concise methodology for the UGT, Lundberg and Hulten (cited in Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973) described five elements that they call “Uses and Gratifications Model”.

1. The main statement of the UGT is that media users are active and therefore, seek those specific media that can satisfy their needs (Katz et al., 1973). The authors also present the idea that the origins of these social and psychological needs lead to different forms of media exposure resulting in needed gratifications and other consequences.
2. UGT cannot establish a cause-effect result since the choice lies in any given media user.
3. Due to the vast array of media, there’s always a strong competition among them for the audience attention, causing a diminishment in the attention span dedicated to each one of them.
4. Audiences can recognize their motives for media consumptions and therefore supply that data themselves.
5. Whenever research is conducted, value judgments must be suspended.

While researchers where trying to establish an interrelationship between the gratifications individuals sought in media and the gratifications they obtained from each of them, those two variables weren’t fully operationalized until Palmgreen & Rayburn (1985) cleared the concept and established what they called the GS-GO Model, (Gratifications Sought – Gratifications Obtained). Gratification is simply defined as a source of satisfaction or pleasure, but in terms of marketing, it expands its meaning to “need fulfillment, pleasure/displeasure, expectation-performance interactions, evaluation of the purchase/consumption experience, evaluation of the benefits of consumption, comparison of actual with ideal outcomes, and the attribute ‘deficit/surplus’ obtained from the purchase” (Oliver, 1981 p.27). The evolution of UGT research is presented in Table 1, which summarizes some relevant studies.
TABLE 1. EXAMPLE OF STUDIES THAT USED UGT IN DIFFERENT MEDIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)/ Year</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Uses and gratifications obtained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rubin (1981)</td>
<td>Television</td>
<td>Information, escape, passing time, entertainment, companionship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rayburn, Palmgreen and Acker (1984)</td>
<td>Television</td>
<td>Entertainment, exciting, human quality, information I can trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papacharissi, Z., &amp; Rubin, A. M. (2000)</td>
<td>Social networks</td>
<td>Interpersonal utility, pass time, information seeking, entertainment and convenience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheldon (2008)</td>
<td>Social networks</td>
<td>Relationship maintenance, passing time, virtual community, entertainment, coolness, companionship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park et al. (2009)</td>
<td>Social networks</td>
<td>Socializing, entertainment, self-status and information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though these aspects aim to explain the purchase experience they can also be applied to media consumption since they are considered products and the source of satisfaction. Therefore, UGT also focuses on the motivations individuals uncover while using media, the various factors that may influence motives and outcomes from media-related behaviors (Papacharissi, 2002).

At the beginning of this century, with the birth of social media, a new research perspective for the UGT was born, this new media showed characteristics never present before in the other media, such as the creation of content and the ability to share it instantly. In this regard, UGT usually considers two categories for media gratifications: process and content. Process gratifications emerge from the activity itself of surfing the internet, whereas content gratifications arise from acquiring information (Kayahara & Wellman, 2007). A third gratification, exclusive to the Social Media is Social gratification (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Song, Larose, Eastin, & Lin, 2004).

According to Miller (1996) online activity is motivated by the need for interaction, entertainment and escape. This may include chatrooms, e-mail and of course SMSs such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest or YouTube. Furthermore, Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) found that Social Interactions were the only way to determine internet usage.

These social interactions can be different from one social media to another, since social media can be classified in groups according to its purpose, Facebook would be considered as a social network, Twitter as a microblogging system and Pinterest as a content share media. Therefore one would presume that the characteristics of each of them determine the particular GS and GO.
Smock, Ellison, Lampe and Wohn (2011) developed a particularly interesting perspective, arguing that people do not seek gratifications for the entire site but to what they call “unbundled subsets of site features”. This means that even though a site like Facebook that offers media sharing, information, chat, updates, news, etc., is only utilized by a person for few or even for only one of its characteristics.

Following this line of research, Karnik, Oakley, Venkatanathan, Spiliotopoulos and Nisi (2013), explored the uses and gratifications of a music video sharing group on Facebook, getting as result four main uses and gratifications: contribution, discovery, social interaction and entertainment, supporting Smock’s thesis that the nature of the media shape the motivations that drive its use.

**THEORY DEVELOPMENT**

**Motives for Using Pinterest**

The basic proposition of uses and gratifications theory is that gratifications sought explain individual media exposure (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). Researchers along the time have been using the theory in different areas, so they have expanded the list of gratifications. The list of gratifications includes: entertainment, interaction, information, pass time, aesthetic experience, interpersonal communication, interactive, economic control, problem solving, persuading others, status seeking, personal insight, virtual community, and coolness among others (e.g. Karnik et al., 2013; Ko, Cho, & Roberts, 2005; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Park et al., 2009; Rayburn II et al., 1984; Sheldon, 2008; Song et al., 2004)

Based on the specific characteristics of Pinterest, this study proposes that there are five main motivations for using Pinterest: entertainment, interaction, information, pass time, and aesthetic experience. Social media use measures the amount of Pinterest use and the duration of Pinterest use as well as the frequency of updating the Pinterest boards (Sheldon, 2008). Entertainment speaks of enjoyment of Pinterest use as well as people’s lifestyle and the things they are interested in (Hemmah, 2009). Social interaction expresses motivations of people who may visit Pinterest to exchange ideas, communicate with friends or interact with other people (Ko, Cho & Roberts, 2005). Information –seeking- is driven by people’s desire to increase awareness and knowledge of one’s self, others, and the world (Shao, 2009) and in terms of social media, Bowman and Willis (2003) state than information seeking is also the process of learning how to make sense of things from their peers on just about any subject. The aesthetic experience is related to the design of the Pinterest platform itself and its relation to agreeable and emotional experiences (Song et al, 2004). Finally, the pass time construct, also called “killing time” by Dion Hoe-Lian Goh et al (2012) refers to the willingness of the user to seek content whenever they have free time, or create content when they couldn’t find anything else to do.

We expect that people with high degree of these motivations are more likely to stay longer on Pinterest. So we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 1:** Social Media entertainment gratification will have a positive effect on Social Media Usage
Hypothesis 2: Social Media social interaction gratification will have a positive effect on Social Media Usage

Hypothesis 3: Social Media information gratification will have a positive effect on Social Media Usage

Hypothesis 4: Social Media pass time gratification will have a positive effect on Social Media Usage

Hypothesis 5: Social Media aesthetic experience will have a positive effect on Social Media Usage

Gender Differences

In the literature we can find studies that suggest that males and females differentiate in the way they communicate in Internet. For example, Haferkamp et al. (2012) used a survey and content analysis of a set of users profiles in a social networking site (StudiVZ) to identify gender differences in self-presentation on the social networking site. Some of their findings include that women use the SMS more for comparing themselves with others and to search for information; and that men use the SMS to look at others people’s profiles to find friends.

In addition, Rose at al. (2012) analyzed a set of 300 Facebook profile pictures, and found differences in terms of how males and females present themselves across a number of traits selected to represent gender stereotypes (e.g. active, attractive, dependent, dominant, independent, and sentimental). They compared Facebook profile pictures associated with male and female subjects; among other findings, they found that Facebook profile pictures associated with male rated higher for the trait active; they also found that Facebook profile pictures associated with females subjects rated higher for the trait attractive.

In another study Sheldon (Sheldon, 2009) used a survey and focus group procedures to study the motivational differences in females’ and males’ use of Facebook. She found that females’ and males have different motivations for using Facebook.

These set of studies suggest that motivations for using social media sites are different for women and men. The study of these differences is very interesting in the social media site analyzed in this study: Pinterest, because the number of female users surpasses the number of male users. In this study we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 6: There are significant motivational differences in females’ and males’ use of Pinterest.
METHOD

A cross-sectional field survey will be conducted. Specifically, data will be collected from users of Pinterest.

The online questionnaire was developed by adapting existing validated instruments with necessary modifications in order to fit the objective of this study. Table 2 shows the constructs, references, and the internal reliability of the scales used in this study. The online questionnaire will be distributed to a set of users of Pinterest who agree to participate in the study. These users will send the questionnaire to their followers, and will ask them to send the online questionnaire to their followers. Only questionnaires filled by members of Pinterest will be considered in the study.

### TABLE 2 MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENTS AND INTERNAL RELIABILITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Use</td>
<td>Sheldon (2008)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ordinal</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Song et al. (2004)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5-Point Likert scale</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-interaction</td>
<td>Ko et al. (2005)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5-Point Likert scale</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Papacharissi and Rubin (2000)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5-Point Likert scale</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic experience</td>
<td>Song et al. (2004)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5-Point Likert scale</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass time</td>
<td>Sheldon (2008)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5-Point Likert scale</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analysis of Data**

The analysis of data will consist of three stages: descriptive data analysis, structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis, and MANOVA analysis. SPSS 18 and AMOS 18 will be used in all stages.

**Descriptive Data Analysis**

Characteristics of the sample will be included. These include sample size and demographics.

**SEM Analysis**

To test the hypotheses, we will use SEM. We will follow the two-step approach recommended by (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Specifically, we will test the measurement model first followed by testing the structural model.
Measurement Model

To assess measurement model validity, we will evaluate goodness-of-fit and construct validity. Goodness-of-fit indices are classified in three groups including absolute measures, incremental measures and parsimony fit measures (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). Specifically, we will assess goodness-of-fit using three to four fit indices recommended by (Hair et al., 2006).

To assess construct validity, we will examine convergent and discriminant validity. To examine convergent validity, we will analyze factors loadings, variance extracted, and reliability. To access discriminant validity, we will compare the variance extracted percentages with the square of the correlation estimate, variance extracted estimates should be greater than the squared correlation estimate.

Structural Model

After the measurement model is validated, we will assess the structural model. Analysis of the structural model will allow us to test the hypotheses. First, we will evaluate model fit. Next, we will examine the individual parameter estimates that represent the hypotheses. Parameter estimates should be statistically significant (i.e., >.05) and in the expected direction. Finally, we will examine variance explained estimates for the endogenous constructs.

MANOVA Analysis

To analyze the motivational differences in females’ and males’ use of Pinterest we will perform a multivariate analysis of variance.

RESULTS

We anticipate the goodness-of-fit indices of the measurement model and a successful confirmatory factor analysis that will support the validity of the measurement model. Goodness-of-fit will be assessed using chi-square value and goodness-of-fit indices as indicated earlier.

Once model fit is assessed, we will analyze the structural model to test the hypotheses. The five paths between entertainment, social interaction, information, pass time, and aesthetic experience and social media usage are expected to be positive and statistically significant, supporting hypothesis H1 through H5. We expect that all the gratifications selected for this study will be significant predictors of Pinterest’ use. In addition we will identify which ones are better predictors of this use so we can develop a set of recommendations for improving the success of the website.

From the MANOVA analysis we expect to find differences in females’ and males’ motivations for using this social media site.
DISCUSSION

Uses and gratifications theory have been useful when assessing patterns of media exposure resulting in need gratifications. The study of the motivations of using Pinterest will allow us to increase our understanding of what online customers are looking for in social media sites. This study will also be useful to show that uses and gratifications theory continues relevant for studying new media.

Some of the limitations of the study include that the use of snow ball sampling may result in a sample not representative of Pinterest users. So in future studies we recommend the use of other data collection techniques. Another limitation of the study is that the gender differences analyzed are limited to the case of Pinterest, results may be different in other social media sites.

REFERENCES


Dion Hoe-Lian Goh, Chei Sian Lee, Guanghao Low, (2012),"I played games as there was nothing else to do": Understanding motivations for using mobile content sharing games", Online Information Review, Vol. 36 Issue: 6 pp. 784 - 806


