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SNS User Engagement Behaviour: Uses & Gratification Theory Perspective of People on Media

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ABSTRACT

SNS – Social Networking Sites has turned the world into a transparent one bringing with it never known before public opinion on all activities surrounding businesses, products and marketing. Also the motivational forces/drivers influencing SNS user engagement behavior in the context of the newly evolving social networking sites needs a thorough examination. This information may enable the marketers to understand and identify motivators else they would be staring at the sun and get easily blinded. This study has identified and hypothesized the influence of socializing, information seeking, entertainment and self status seeking on SNS user engagement behavior. The study has found significant influence of age and information seeking on SNS user opinion giving style and education and entertainment on SNS user opinion pass along style. This exploration will shed more light to the marketing community.

1. Introduction

As new Social Networking Site (SNS) 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 stood at 326.1 million as of 2018 (This is only a small chunk out of its 1.237 billion population).It is projected that the total users may increase to 448 million by 2023. Also there are 250 million active social media users and 230 million active mobile social media users in India now. India has 2nd largest internet population after China & US is at number 3. India shows the highest growth rate of 11,100 % between the period of 2000-2019.Internet's contribution to our country's GDP was at about 5.6 per cent in 2015-16 and is estimated to grow to nearly 16 per cent (Rs 36 lakh crore) by 2020, Facebook has a user base of 241 million in India while Twitter has 23.2 million and LinkedIn has 42 million. A study finds that Facebook significantly impacted Indian economic activity by helping to unlock new opportunities through connecting people and businesses, lowering barriers to marketing and stimulating innovation in the form of USD 4 billion to our economy and 335,000 jobs (Facebook study, 2016).

Social networking tools like Facebook are ubiquitous in nature and their incredible power of word of mouth has been acknowledged by successful marketers from across the world and as consumers, we know that business associates, colleagues, friends and family can potentially influence us on the products and services we buy and the companies or brand we choose. No wonder we see marketers are increasingly ambushing on this tool to gain attention of its target group. Then there has been studies and articles of its increasing use in marketing. This then calls for understanding the underlying motivations for their usage by consumers so that its reach can be leveraged for better.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Definition of Social Networking Sites (SNS)

SNS can be briefly defined as web application tools that allow users to publish and broadcast content in order to open and invite participation in conversations. From the amount of commentary on social media it seems to be a very dynamic *ecosystem* (**Safko & Brake, 2009**) where marketing and advertising people have found a new opportunity: it provides an active conversation between the brand/business and its customers. The most attractive element of this channel is the potential for interactivity.

2.2 SNS Tools

There is a vast list of social media tools available and a few are briefly mentioned to get an overview of its diverse applications. The internet provides with a wide range of web applications that are similar to traditional media and the main categories can be established as *Publish, Photo, Audio, Video, Livecasting, Virtual Worlds, Gaming, Productivity Applications, Aggregators, RSS, Search, Mobile and Interpersonal, Microblogging and Social Networks* (Safko & Brake, 2009, pp. 25-32). A look into some tools includes Publish tools like email, Blogger, Slideshare, Wikia, Wikipedia. The photo category of social media refers to sites that allow users to sort, organize and share photos like *Flickr, Photobucket, Picasa, Randar.net ,Slide, SmugMug, Twitxr, Zoomr.* In audio category tools allow users to upload, download, and share audio content. Examples include: *iTunes, PodBean, Podcast.net, and Rhapsody* (Safko & Brake, 2009, pp. 493-517) , the video tool allows users to share video content like *Google Video and YouTube.* A similar function is provided by Livecasting tools which enable users to broadcast live video and audio streams to the network like *BlogTalkRadio, Live 365, Justin.tv and SHOUTcast.* Gaming tools like *World of Warcraft*rake, in the Productivity Applications there is a range of tools that can be used by businesses due to their functionality and productivity nature. Some applications include: *Acteva, AOL, Survey Monkey, Google Alerts, Google Docs, and Zoho.* Search refers in this case to *Search Engines* which allow users to search and

locate content by typing words or sentences. Few examples are: *EveryZing, Google Search, MetaTube, and Yahoo! Search.* People-to-people communication tools facilitate the interpersonal activity by allowing communication and contributions between users, some examples are: *Go To Meeting, Meebo, Skype, AOL Instant Messenger, and Apple iChat* (Safko & Brake, 2009, pp. 656-670).

2.3 Conceptual Framework - Motivations and Gratifications of using SNS

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 motivations and gratifications of the users of 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 as well as from a university level research scholars and faculty as sample units.

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 (U & G) differs in its approach of studying the impact of people on media rather than the other way. The audience was considered as 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 causes transcendence in user behavior. Also studies on motivations to join and engage in SNS are scarce. Understanding whether there is one major reason or multiple reasons for engaging gainfully on SNS is also at the fore front of this study.

2.4 SNS User Engagement Behavior (SNS USB)

Online engagement behavior on social networking sites may be operationalised using three specific behaviors of opinion giving/ leadership behavior to opinion seeking and opinion pass along behavior exhibited by them. While opinion seeking and opinion giving have been endorsed by past researches as a unique dimension of offline engagement style and opinion passing behavior is most likely to occur in the online social context and this warrants a thorough study (**Norman & Russell 2006; Shu Chuan Chu 2011**).

3. Objectives of the study

The major objectives of this study are: to summarize social networking site user habits, to understand the motivations and gratifications of SNS users and predict the sample units level of gratification on SNS user engagement behavior and hence make necessary implications for organizations to make better meaning out of their business interactions through SNS.

4. Methodology of the study

A self administered online survey using Google docs was used for data collection. The sample incumbents (University level academicians and research scholars) of 112 members were selected through volunteer sample method. The rationale behind choosing a specific sample unit was it allowed for the exploration and understanding of a particular phenomenon, SNS that needs to be documented within its real life context. This is based on what Robson (2002) suggests should be included in the research design. Further hierarchical multiple regression will be used and hence the sample size chosen for the study 112 also justifies the use of this method as it was greater than the sample calculator (106) suggested by Tabachnick & Fidell (2007) for using this method.

4.1 Measures & Reliability

The Table 1 below shows the scales that were adapted for the study from previous research work to measure the motivational factors predicting SNS user engagement behavior identified for the study.

Table 1

Construct	Scale adapted/modified from	No: of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Socializing			
To get peer support from others To meet interesting people To feel like I belong to a community To develop my career through group participation	On line groups participation/Uses & Gratification research –	5	0.780
Entertainment Because it is entertaining Because it is funny Because it is exciting Because it is interesting To talk about something with others	Lin HF (2006); Ridings CM et al (2004); U&G research (Lee et al., 2010;	5	0.897

Self-Status Seeking	Park et al., 2009).		
It makes me feel important when sharing news			
It helps me gain status when sharing news			
Information Seeking		2	0.828
To share information with others			
To learn from others			
To get useful information about product & services			
To keep up to date on the latest news and events			
It is easy to retrieve information when I need		5	0.873

(Source: calculated from primary data)

The uses and gratification of the respondents was measured using 16 statements derived from previous studies Ridings CM, Gefen DG (2007); Lin HF. (2006). The SNS user Engagement behavior was derived from past studies Shu-Chuan-Chu (2009); Barbara Lyons and Kenneth Henderson (2005). Likert scale with 1-7 ranging from strongly disagrees to strongly agree was used to measure the various items in each construct. Principle factor analysis was used on the motivational factors and the statements were loaded respectively. Thus the reliability of the scale measures was verified. Further the above table only shows the number of items included in the construct after principle factor analysis was done. In the case of self status seeking perception among the SNS users 5 items were identified in the literature but the study showed the presence of only 2 items and the other items were excluded.

5. Analysis & Results

5.1 Sample characteristics

The sample comprised of male respondents (60%) and female respondents (40%). Thus we can say that the sample is representative of the SNS users in India, as the typical social media user in India is a male (**IAMAI-IMRB, 2017**) Almost 86% of the respondents had an account on Facebook. This is in line with IAMAI – IMRB (2018) report on social media where Facebook emerged as the leading social media website with 96% of the urban users accessing it. The next most visited sites were YouTube, Wikipedia, Twitter and LinkedIn. The study included respondents not only in the younger age group (20-31 years, 39%) but also in the older age groups (31-40 years, 40%) and above 40 years (18%) too. The respondents were teachers of private or government universities (60%) as well as PhD research scholars (40%). The respondents have been using their most visited site for the last 3 years or more with a frequency of visit of 1-2 times a day on an average. The length of time spent on an average visit was about 30 minutes to 1 hour.

While analysis of the top 5 activities participated by the respondents on their favorite site showed that “I read online forum discussion groups” with M=3.37 & SD=1.015, “I read the users feedback/rating/online reviews” with M=3.36 & SD=1.161, “I update or maintain my profile” with M=3.21 & SD=1.052, “I watch videos from other users” with M=3.07 and SD=1.198 and at the fifth place is the activity “ I post comments/feedback/ratings of the videos I watch” with M=2.79 & SD=1.166. This is also consistent with IMRB (2017) report. Also the dissemination of product related information through SNS user engagement behavior is evident from the activity engaged by him.

5.2 Hypothesis Testing using Multiple Regression Analysis

A series of multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify and understand the motivational factors predicting engagement behavior of the target sample in social networking sites. First an independent sample t test was run to examine any gender differences existed in terms of the 3 SNS UEB of opinion giving, opinion seeking and opinion pass along behavior. The test statistics indicated no significant difference in gender towards the 3 dimensions of SNS UEB. Hence gender was not considered a factor contributing to the dependent variable in the study as also highlighted in an earlier study (Chu Chuan Shu, 2009). Separate regression analysis was conducted between the motivational factors and the 3 dimensions of SNS UEB namely opinion giving, seeking and pass along behavior. The average scores of the influencers of UEB were used as the independent variables namely Entertainment, Information Seeking, Self Status seeking and Socializing with each of the dimension of UEB variable as the dependent variable.

5.3 Predictors of SNS User Engagement Behavior

The overall multiple regression model was found to be significant only in the case of motivational factors influencing SNS user opinion giving engagement behavior where the adjusted R square = 0.152, $F(4,107) = 4.77$, $p < 0.05$ and opinion pass along engagement behavior adjusted R square = 0.112, $F(4,107) = 3.365$, $p < 0.05$. While with motivational factors influencing SNS user opinion seeking engagement behavior adjusted R square = 0.086, $F(4,107) = 2.519$, $p > 0.05$ was insignificant

5.3.1 Motivational Factors predicting SNS user opinion giving engagement behavior

Information Seeking ($\beta = -.302$, $t = -2.934$, $p < 0.05$) was only found to be significant predictor of opinion giving engagement behavior in SNS while entertainment ($\beta = -.130$, $t = -1.28$, $p > 0.05$), self status seeking ($\beta = .187$, $t = 1.754$, $p > 0.05$), socializing ($\beta = -.158$, $t = -1.507$, $p > 0.05$) did not cause any significant influence on opinion giving engagement behavior in SNS among the respondents.

5.3.2 Motivational Factors predicting SNS user Opinion pass along engagement Behavior

Entertainment ($\beta = 0.253$, $t = 2.439$, $p < 0.05$) was only found to be significant predictor of opinion pass along engagement behavior in SNS while Information seeking ($\beta = 0.093$, $t = 0.885$, $p > 0.05$), self status seeking ($\beta = .074$, $t = .680$, $p > 0.05$), socializing ($\beta = 0.000$, $t = -.008$, $p > 0.05$) did not cause any significant influence on opinion seeking engagement behavior in SNS among the respondents.

5.4 Hypothesis Testing using Hierarchical Multiple Regression

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics, Reliability and Correlations for all continuous variables (N= 112)

Variables	A	I	Edu	Etr	Is	Ss	S
Age (A)	1.000						
Income (I)	.464	1.000					
Education (Edu)	.351	.328	1.000				
Entertainment (Etr)	.150	-.081	-.083	1.000	.267	.400	.400
Information Seeking (Is)	-.344	-.196	-.107	.267	1.000	.437	.404
Self Status (Ss)	-.068	-.099	-.114	.400	.437	1.000	.404
Socializing (S)	.093	.014	.053	.400	.404	.404	1.000
Mean	2.84	2.80	5.48	4	5	4.3	4.2
Std Deviation	0.844	1.161	0.629	1.4	1.27	1.56	1.3
Cronbach Alpha							

(Source: calculated from primary data)

Hierarchical multiple regression was performed to investigate the gratification of motivational factors (Entertainment, Self Status seeking, Information seeking and Socializing) to predict levels of SNS User opinion giving and pass along engagement style, after controlling for demographic variables age, income and educational qualification. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. Additionally, the correlations amongst the predictor variables included in the study were examined and these are presented in Table 2. All correlations were weak to moderate, ranging between r = -.083, p < .01 and r = .48, p < .001. This indicates that multicollinearity was unlikely to be a problem (see **Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007**). All predictor variables were statistically correlated with SNS user opinion giving engagement behavior which indicates that the data was suitably correlated with the dependent variable for examination through multiple linear regression to be reliably undertaken. The correlations between the predictor variables and the dependent variable were weak to moderate, ranging from r = - .003, p < .05 to r = .30, p < .001.

In the first step of hierarchical multiple regression, three predictors were entered: age, income and education. This model was statistically insignificant F (3, 108) = 1.722; p < .001 and in the second step all the 4 motivational factors along with the demographic variables were entered and this model was significant F (4, 104) = 4.652; p < .01 and explained 19 % of variance in opinion giving engagement style. Age and information seeking only made significant unique contribution to the model. The introduction of motivational factors explained an additional 15% of variance in SNS user opinion giving engagement style, after controlling for the demographic variables (R2 Change = .145; F (4, 104) = 4.652; p < .01). In this final adjusted model, 2 out of 7 predictor variables were statistically significant, with age recording a higher Beta value (β = .238, p < .001) than the information (β = -.228, p < .001).

Similarly hierarchical multiple regression was run to investigate the gratification of the motivational factors on SNS user pass along engagement behavior. All correlations were weak to moderate, ranging between r = -.003, p < .01 and r = .47, p < .001. This indicates that multicollinearity was unlikely to be a problem (see **Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007**). All predictor variables were statistically correlated with SNS user opinion pass along engagement behavior which indicates that the data was suitably correlated with the dependent variable for examination through multiple linear regression to be reliably undertaken. The correlations between the predictor variables and the dependent variable were all weak to moderate, ranging from r = - .003, p < .05 to r = .31, p < .001.

In the first step of hierarchical multiple regression, three predictors were entered: age, income and education. This model was statistically insignificant F (3, 108) = 1.209; p < .001 and in the second step all the 4 motivational factors along with the demographic variables were entered and this model was significant F (4, 104) = 3.872; p < .01 and explained 16 % of variance in opinion pass along engagement style. Education and entertainment only made significant unique contribution to the model. The introduction of motivational factors explained an additional 13% of variance in SNS user opinion giving engagement style, after controlling for the demographic variables (R2 Change = .125; F (4, 104) = 3872; p < .01). In this final adjusted model, 2 out of 7 predictor variables were statistically significant, with entertainment recording a higher Beta value (β = .276, p < .001) than the education (β = .230, p < .001).

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Thus from the hierarchical regression analysis conducted to determine ability to predict SNS users opinion giving engagement behavior showed that information needs negatively and significantly predicted SNS user opinion giving behavior and age also influenced after controlling for demographics. Age influence was much higher in opinion giving engagement style and this is justified that experience influences opinion giving. Further the negative relationship

indicates that higher opinion giving style implies low opinion seeking engagement style and vice versa. This empirical study demonstrates the imperative role of social networks in the diffusion or distribution of products and services among consumers. Through social interactions in these personal networks, resources such as information, ideas, norms, emotional support, interpersonal trust, and cooperation, jointly known as social capital, are available to consumers (**Baker 2000; Coleman 1988**). It is also in line with the study (**Nyland R et al. 2007**) that increasing SNS use stems from information motivations and is more related to higher levels of social involvement than to entertainment purposes.

Further SNS user opinion pass along engagement behavior revealed that entertainment and education significantly predict it. This result is very much in line with the popularity of internet and SNS being the new entertainment platform for audiences. Studies also justify that web entertainment value was found to be the most important determinant of users' attitude toward the web, which may lead to more satisfied users and repeated use of the Web (**Hoffman, Novak, and Peralta 1999; Fukuyama 1995**).

This study has made significant contribution to the literature in quite a few ways. First, to the best of my knowledge, it is one of the very few studies intended to investigate gratifications of SNS user engagement behavior on the identified target group. Second, by using the hierarchical multiple regression model, this study supports the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity of various scales such as motivational factors predicting SNS UEB and uses and gratifications--entertainment, informativeness, socializing and self status seeking. Further research efforts are called for to validate the findings of this study. For example, further efforts may survey SNS users other than college or university level incumbents. As such, more research with other samples is needed to generate the current results and provide pivotal implications for building digital platforms for business that can ring in more cash to a company. Finally, given the important role of uses and gratifications theory (**Eighmey and McCord 1998; Herzog 1944; McGuire 1974**), future research is needed to explore the power of SNS in enhancing the engagement behavior of its specific audience group.

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