Who are the Heavy Users of Social Networking Sites Among College Students? [Slides]

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Who are the Heavy Users of Social Networking Sites among College Students?

A Study of Social Networking Sites and College Students

paper presented at Communication Technology Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Association Annual Convention, August 10-13, 2011 St. Louis, Missouri.
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Background

- SNS popularity: 7 out of the top 10 most visited Web sites worldwide are SNSs (Alexa.com, 2008)

- Extensive SNS usage among college students: 73% teens (12 – 17) and 82% young adults (18 – 29) use the SNS (Pew Research Center, 2011)
Introduction

• Demographic predictors of college students’ SNS usage

• How sociability gratifications and information-seeking gratification contribute to college students’ SNS usage

• The relationship between college students’ cell phone usage and SNS usage
Uses and Gratifications of SNS

• People select media or messages from an array of functional alternatives in response to their expectations and desires (Rubin, 2009).

• The assumptions of uses and gratifications underscore the role of audience initiative and activity (Rubin, 2009).

• Our study focuses on sociability gratification and news information seeking gratification.
Research Method

- Web survey of a public university in the Midwest from October 2010 to December 2010
- 476 students
- Students were asked about
  - SNS usage
  - Specific media usage—newspaper, television, radio, digital device
  - Demographic information
Demographic Differences

• **RQ1**: Are there significant differences by gender, residence type, household income, age, ethnicity among college students’ SNS usage?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td>13.2 hours/week</td>
<td>17.2 hours/week</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td>14.9 hours/week</td>
<td>19.5 hours/week</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sociability Gratification

• Sociability gratification definition

• Studies on the relationship between sociability gratification and SNS usage include Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Chen, 2011

• **H1**: Students with more friends in SNS are more likely to spend more time on SNS → *Generally supported*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Under 100 (n = 22)</th>
<th>101 – 500 (n = 193)</th>
<th>Over 500 (n = 194)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.8 hours/week</td>
<td>14.2 hours/week</td>
<td>19.1 hours/week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>6.36, p &lt; 0.01</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Complementary Relationship between Cell Phone Usage and SNS Usage

• SNS accompanied by cell phones

• Is the relationship between SNS and cell phone usage complementary or substitutive?

• H2: Positive relationship between time spent on cell phone and time spent on SNS. → Supported \((r = 0.29, p = 0.001)\)
News Information-seeking Gratification

• Limited number of studies on news information-seeking gratification of SNS usage

• Internet users also used SNS to seek news online from professional news to personal news (Pew Research Center, 2010)

• Students use SNS as sources of political news (Baumgartner and Morris, 2010)
News Information-seeking Gratification

- **H3a**: Students who follow Twitter or Facebook news feed for breaking news spend more time on SNS than those who do not. \(\rightarrow\) supported \((p = 0.001)\)

- **H3b**: Students who read soft news forwarded by friends spend more time on SNS than those who do not. \(\rightarrow\) generally supported \((p = 0.007)\)
News Information-seeking Gratification

• **H₃c**: Students who read political and social news forwarded by friends spend more time on SNS than those who do not. → generally supported \((p = 0.05)\)

• **H₃d**: Students who read personal or family news forwarded by friends spend more time on SNS than those who do not. → not supported
# News information seeking gratification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Breaking news follower</th>
<th>Breaking news non-follower</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>20.26 hours/week</strong></td>
<td>20.26 hours/week</td>
<td>11.47 hours/week</td>
<td>P = 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Soft news reader</strong></td>
<td>19.43 hours/week</td>
<td>14.66 hours/week</td>
<td>P = 0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political news reader</strong></td>
<td>18.98 hours/week</td>
<td>15.09 hours/week</td>
<td>P = 0.005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

• Females and minorities are the mostly likely intensive users of SNS

• SNS as an indispensable socializing channel of college students explains their intensive use in SNS

• News information-seeking gratification needs to be considered as an important reason to understand college students’ intensive consumption of SNS

• The popularity and widespread use of SNS is not related to SES and residence type