

An Empirical Study Examining Attitudes of active Iranian Internet users towards Cellphone-Based Social networks

Meysam Samband ¹

Abstract: In today's world, there is no doubt that cellphone-based social media networks are dynamically changing the way people share ideas and interact. Whether it be connecting with friends, sharing information with mass audience, participating in a collective dialogue about a topic, or utilizing one of the countless other features of these social networks, these empower users to communicate in new, dynamic ways unforeseen in today's society. The aim of this paper is to study the attitude of active Iranian Internet users towards cellphone-based social networks. The impact of gratification of social media, learning/pedagogy, motivation occurrence and interaction with others is tested through structural questionnaire. The sample consisted of 384 Iranian users in Kish Island. Data analysis shows that there is significant correlation between attitudes and gratification of using media, learning through using media, motivation of using media and Interaction with others.

Keywords: Cellphone-based social networks- attitude- gratification- learning- motivation- interaction

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¹ . Department of Media Management, Islamic Azad University, South Tehran, Kish International Branch, Email: m.samband@kishint.ac.ir

Introduction

Socialization is the process of becoming a member of the society. It follows a lifetime fellowship and membership based on one's caregivers, social groups, social events and mass media (Senemoglu, 2013). In addition to given social circles such as family, school, peer groups, and workplaces, virtual platforms, particularly social networking sites/programs are also recognized since it is the age of internet we are living in. Barnes argues that social interaction happens between people who are psychologically caring for each other (*cited in, Can, 2009*).

Studies focusing on social networking sites report that members of virtual communities participate to satisfy three types of needs:

- (1) Functional needs (to carry out certain activities);
- (2) Social needs (willingness to provide help and support, exchange ideas, etc);
- (3) Psychological needs (belonging to a community, membership, etc).

A study by Leung and Wei (1998) applies the Uses and Gratifications Theory framework to the context of pagers and identifies an additional motivation over other studies concerning the need to be fashionable. That is why adopters of certain innovations see them as symbols of status and social identity, helping them to reinforce their sense of belonging to a group. Social networking sites are both a

socialization tool and an expression of identity. Social networking sites enable users to share photographs, project or manage their desired self-image and keep up to date with the latest trends in their environment.

Users who participate in social networking sites can develop affective ties with other participants (Gruen et al., 2006), which in turn influence their attitude. The exchange of information in social networking sites also modifies participant’s attitudes (Soderlund and Rosegren, 2007). Thus, Lee et al. (2008) consider that negative comments from other users influence participant’s attitudes.

The hypotheses were formulated in order to explain attitude of internet users towards cellphone-based social networks.

H₁: There is significant correlation between Gratification of using media and attitude towards cellphone-based social networks.

H₂: There is significant correlation between Learning through using media and attitude towards cellphone-based social networks.

H₃: There is significant correlation between Motivation of using media and attitude towards cellphone-based social networks.

H₄: There is significant correlation between Interaction with others and attitude towards cellphone-based social networks.

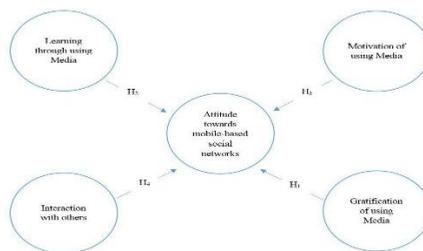


Figure (1) Conceptual Model

Method

Sample description

The study population were individuals over the age of 14, resident on Kish Island, who claimed to participate (be registered or be users) of at least one cellphone- based social network. Data were collected in the month of December 2015 to provide 403 valid questionnaires. A total of 19 questionnaires had to be eliminated because they were incorrectly filled in. The final sample size comprised 384 volunteers. In order to regard moral issues, the study procedures were described for all participants and all them filled out written consent. To meet the criteria of confidentiality, all the identity information of filled questionnaires transformed into randomly-generated codes.

Measurement of the variables

To achieve the research objectives and verify the proposed hypotheses, an empirical study of the causal relationships was carried out with data gathered by personal interviews using a structured questionnaire. This questionnaire was initially revised by a small sub-sample of the population (users of social networking sites), a total of 50 individuals. This revision made it possible to ensure that the questionnaire gathered all the intended information; improve adaptation of some of the scale items to the study context; and avoid errors of interpretation and understanding of some of the questions. The measurement scales retained content validity. The scales used in

the questionnaire to measure the concepts were chosen from studies in the academic literature, all in the form of five-point Likert scales. The questions focused on the experiences of the interviewee's favorite cellphone-based social networks: 61.3 percent of the sample on the basis of their experience with Telegram, 30.8 percent with WhatsApp and 7.9 per cent with *imo*.

Results

Table 1 and 2 show descriptive characteristics of the study data gathered during administration of the structured questionnaire.

Table 1: Sample demographics

Characteristics	%
Gender	
Male	49.8
Female	50.2
Completed Study	
Primary	6.2
Secondary	40.8
University	53.0
Age	
Up to 25	20.0
25-40	50.4
41 and over	30.6
Job	
Student	5.5
Self-employed	8.1
Employed	42.5
Housewife	40.6

Table 2: Characteristics of the sample as cellphone-based social network users

Characteristics	%
Favorite cellphone-based social networks	
Telegram	61.3
WhatsApp	30.8
imo	7.9
How many cellphone-based social networks do you participate in?	
Only one	18.7
Two	36.7
More than two	45.6
How long have you been participating in cellphone-based social networks?	
Less than 1 year	8.0
Between 1 and 2 years	32.7
Between 2 and 3 years	44.4
Over 3 years	13.9
Frequency of connection to the social network	
More than 5 times a day	45.1
Once or twice a day	25.2
Several times a week	26.5
Less frequently	3.1

Connection time	
Less than half an hour a day	2.5
Between half and 1 hour a day	6.1
Between 1 & 2 hours a day	32.7
Between 2 & 4 hours a day	41.6
More than 4 hours a day	17.1

Table 3 shows the values of the standardized coefficients for the structural relations and the respective levels of significance for their associated t statistic.

Table 3: Hypotheses testing

Hypotheses	Structural relationship	Sig*	Spearman Coefficient	Contrast
H ₁	Gratification of using media → Attitude towards m-SN	0.007	0.482	Accepted
H ₂	Learning through media → Attitude towards m-SN	0.063	0.683	Accepted
H ₃	Motivation of using media → Attitude towards m-SN	0.059	0.754	Accepted
H ₄	Interaction with others → Attitude towards m-SN	0.06	0.549	Accepted

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Conclusion

Discussion

We live in an era where technology has come to play a very important role in our society. The advent of the Internet has taken over people's lives, enabled by the enormous growth of technologies that can be accessed very easily: whoever is interested in connecting to the web can do it whenever, everywhere and almost for free thanks to the extremely modern technologies that are nowadays accessible to most people (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

Social media followed shortly after: the number of people using these platforms has been growing very rapidly in the past few years and is changing the way people interact and communicate with each other. In 2018, it is estimated that there will be around 2.67 billion

social network users around the globe, up from 1.91 billion in 2014¹. These numbers are facilitated by Smartphones, applications and laptops. As a result, people use social media on a daily basis, as a part of their lives.

The rapid penetration of cellphone- based social networks in Iran has impacted all facet of life as these days face-to-face social interactions have been transformed into virtual social networking over Smartphones. This cellphone- based social networks increase human interaction in virtual places especially in Iran.

The findings of this study provide support to a significant amount of the current literature and existing research on social media networks. This study's results show that cellphone based social networks are connecting people in new ways. Cellphone based social networks users are motivated to use the social media network for entertainment, learning, and interactions with others but actually are most gratified in terms of entertainment, relational maintenance, and information seeking.

Limitations

Like all studies, this research study is not without limitations. First of all, accuracy of primary data is depended upon the authenticity of the information provided by the respondents. Furthermore, sample size of

¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users>

the study is confined to only 384 respondents only from Kish Island. The present study can be conducted with a larger sample selected from all the provinces of Iran. Along with it, a longitudinal study of cellphone-based social networks and attitude towards that can be taken up from childhood and adolescence. More robust research techniques such as Factor analysis could be used to examine the attitude of users towards this issue.

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