

Chapter 9

On the Relationship between Online Social Support and Users' continuance Intention: Evidence from Social Network Sites

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the online social support in the context of social networking sites (SNSs). The pervasive adoption of social networking sites has profound influence on society and enables a new way to provide social support. Social support has been considered a key social value that online users can obtain from social networking sites. Research has shown that social support may reduce stress and promote well-being among diverse populations. Despite its significance to society, the online social support in the context of SNSs has been surprisingly under-investigated. Some fundamental questions—such as (1) What are the dimensions of online social support on SNSs? and (2) How does online social support influence other factors such as the users' satisfaction and continuance intention to SNSs?—have not been answered. This chapter attempts to answer those questions. Specifically, this chapter aims to first identify the definitional dimensions of online social support on SNSs through an extensive review of the literature. Second, this chapter uses these dimensions to model online social support and test its effects on other SNS factors: user satisfaction and continuance intention. Eventually, the results support all proposed hypotheses. The theoretical contributions and managerial implications of the results are discussed at the end of this chapter. ¹

1. INTRODUCTION

The growth of social networking sites in recent years is phenomenal. As of January 2013, the numbers of users for the five largest social networks were 1 billion (Facebook), 800 million (YouTube), 343 million (Google+), 200 million (Twitter), and 200 million (LinkedIn) (Duggan and Brenner, 2013). If Facebook were a country, it would be the third most populous one after China and India (Austin, 2012). It also has more than three times the population of the U.S. (Austin, 2012). Many people have integrated SNSs into their daily life. Individuals, especially college students, spend hours on SNSs every day. In addition, the availability of social media applications on a variety of computing devices such as personal computers and smartphones allows users to logon social networking sites anytime, anywhere, which further facilitates the growth of SNSs.

The pervasive adoption of SNSs has profound influence on society. The massive amount of user generated content (UGC) on SNSs has formed a powerful force that is changing the existing structure of society and the business world. SNSs has created a situation where the traditional media no longer “own[s] the news” (Charron, Favier, & Li, 2006). Traditionally, institutions such as the government, media outlets, retailers, and manufacturers have been the primary drivers of societal change, information dissemination, and new products. However, in the era of SNSs, the traditional top-down driving forces have been replaced by the ones from bottom up. The individual Internet users, the grassroots, are integral to these activities through their more spontaneous and real-time participation.

The adoption of SNSs also impacts on individuals' life by altering the ways to provide social support. Social support has an important role in reducing stress and predicting good health among diverse populations (Brown & Riley, 2005; Davidson & Demaray, 2007). For example, when

social support exists, strain among Information Systems (IS) managers is significantly lower (Weiss, 1983). Social support has been considered a key social value that online users can obtain from social networking sites (Agarwal, Gupta, & Kraut, 2008). There are hundreds of SNSs, with various technological affordances, supporting a wide range of interests and practices. Most of these SNSs support the maintenance of pre-existing social networks, but others help strangers connect based on shared interests such as personal hobbies and political views. Such online social networks are not simply forums where individuals congregate. SNSs allow users to connect with each other by overcoming geographical and temporal boundaries and thus empower people to search for social support from a much larger cyberspace. Given the significance of online social support, we argue that it is crucial for researchers to better understand how online social support unfolds in the SNS context. However, we found that this area has been understudied by IS scholars. Even some of the fundamental questions—such as (1) What are the dimensions of online social support on SNSs? and (2) How does online social support influence other factors such as the user satisfaction and continuance intention to SNSs?—have not been answered.

This study is one of the first to attempt to answer those questions. Specifically, this study aims to first identify the definitional dimensions of online social support on SNSs through an extensive review of the literature. Second, this study uses these dimensions to model online social support and test its effects on other SNS factors: user satisfaction and continuance intention. Although these two factors have been investigated in a number of prior studies in the context of SNSs, few studies have examined how online social support affects them.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, we discuss the relevant literature and theories, from which we identified the three dimensions of online social support on SNSs and

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