

# Factors Affecting Loyalty of Mobile Social Networks' Users

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## ABSTRACT

Increasing world-wide trends of using mobile social networks and the rise of competition between different social applications makes it essential for social network providers and marketers to identify the key factors leading to user loyalty. The purpose of this paper is to identify the key factors that affect the loyalty of mobile social networks users. The proposed model was tested through structural equation modeling techniques and an online survey. The sample consisted of 388 mobile social networks users in Iran. The results indicate that sociability, entertainment and fashion are primary drivers of attitude toward a mobile social network. The results also show the significant role of attitude and satisfaction on consumer loyalty. This study helps both marketers and mobile social network providers know the key drivers of customer loyalty in order to tailor their marketing efforts and communication strategies.

## KEYWORDS

Attitude, Loyalty, Mobile Social Network, Satisfaction, Trust

## INTRODUCTION

Although, in the past, the internet was only a tool for searching for information, rapid development over the past decade has turned it into a source of huge opportunities for users - something far beyond the simple capability of information retrieval. Social networks are not limited to webpages; currently, mobile social networks are available on almost any smartphone.

Social networks allow people with common interests to create their own online societies, and mobile social networks allow users to be in touch anywhere and anytime via a smartphone. The significance of such networks and mobile applications is increasing as they enable people with common interest to interact through exchanging and sharing information, knowledge, experience, interests or needs (Chiang, 2013; Lin and Lu, 2011).

Increasing trends of social networking are observed all over the world, and it is not surprising that brands are engaging in both social media marketing and advertising to reach consumers (Campbell et al., 2014). Therefore, social networks have attracted companies as networks that can improve customer relationships and thus increase company sales and profitability. In fact, social media is an opportunity to communicate with customers via a rich and widely accessible tool (Thackeray et al., 2008) and a mobile social network is an opportunity to have contact with customers anywhere and anytime. In fact, there is a possible linkage between a company's presence on a social network and consumer loyalty (Camilo and Di Pietro, 2014).

The interactive nature of these digital medium allows the exchange and sharing of information between not only vendors and customers but also customers and customers. Via such tools,

companies are capable of turning a one-to-one conversation (i.e., vendor/customer) to a three-sided communication, in which the consumers have a significant relationship with companies and with each other (Lipsman et al., 2012) through electronic word-of-mouth (WOM). Thus, it is important for marketers to know the key drivers of loyalty in mobile social networks; therefore, they can choose the right social network for advertising and engagement.

Researchers have investigated the reasons behind people's use of social networks (Chiang et al., 2011; Lin and Lu, 2011). Previous studies show that attitude toward the social network is a key factor in the analysis of technology acceptance behavior (Davis, 1989; Davis et al., 1989; Kuo and Yen, 2009; Liao et al., 2007; Lu et al., 2009). Additionally, participation in social networks is very beneficial in terms of satisfying social position, sociability, and entertainment needs.

Investigation into the underlying reasons behind the use of social networks is based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Anderson and Meyer, 1975). It is a very influential theory for studying social media, as in contrast to other strategies, it leads to a better understanding of communication needs and gratification of the networks' users, including internet users.

The massive adoption of smartphones by internet users and the significant growth in social networks makes mobile social networks an increasingly important concept, especially in the mobile marketing context (Beach et al, 2008). Appearance of different mobile social media networks is a logical response to such a huge demand. There is real competition between different mobile social networks to keep audiences engaged and loyal. In fact, it is easy to move between different mobile applications; that is why keeping customers is important. Our study intends to clarify influencing factors, which can determine consumers' loyalty in this context.

The factors affecting loyalty of mobile social networks users are not only important for marketers, they are also important for mobile social network providers, as building loyalty plays a critical role in the success of a mobile social network. It becomes more important when it is understood that mobile social network providers put great effort and resources into developing and releasing a mobile social network (Gao and Bai, 2014). Considering this significant effort, it is necessary to identify the key factors of customer's loyalty in order to develop popular mobile social networks.

This paper focuses on the interactions between the users and the providers of mobile social networks. Considering the importance of the subject, the research question is: What are the factors affecting loyalty of mobile social networks users?

Based on the literature review, this paper first examines the impact of sociability, fashion, entertainment and trust on attitude towards mobile social networks. Next, the impact of attitude on satisfaction and loyalty is tested. To conclude, this study explains the results.

This study will help both companies and mobile social network providers to increase their knowledge about consumer preferences and behavior in mobile social networks.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Social Networks**

Several definitions have been proposed for social networks. Researchers define social networks as follows: "A content that is created by the audiences, or on-line tools and contexts that allow internet users to create content, share perspectives and experience, and communicate for business or entertainment purposes" (Comm, 2009); or "A set of internet based applications that are developed based on Web 2.0 and allow the generation and exchange of the content created by the users" (Strauss and Frost, 2009, p. 326). These networks increase social interactions (Wang et al., 2010).

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