

Chapter 8

The Unified Model for Acceptance and Use of Health Information on Online Social Networks: Evidence From Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Online social networks provide a novel opportunity to improve public health through effective health information dissemination. Developing a dissemination strategy, however, requires an understanding of individuals' beliefs and attitudes about using both the technology and information. Previous research has focused primarily on either technology adoption or information adoption behaviors. This study aims to bridge the gap by developing a unified model of acceptance and use of information technology for predicting intention to use health information through online social networks. Empirical results show that Performance Expectancy, Facilitating Conditions, Perceived Emotional Value, Trust, Relevance, Accuracy, Understandability, and Source Credibility influence the adoption behavior. Also, individuals tend to accept health information regardless of their attitudes toward the communication channel.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the key factors of success in promoting population health is to effectively disseminate health knowledge to a broad spectrum of recipients (The first International Conference on Health Promotion, 1986). For recipients from a wide range of backgrounds, effective dissemination of health knowledge requires the information to be adequately personalized and well-targeted (Swan, 2012). The traditional means of disseminating health knowledge, such as print and broadcast media, may not suffice to facilitate the appropriate level of personalization. The advent of online social networks has provided a channel for more direct and personalized health information delivery (Moorhead et al., 2013). Specifically, the information providers are supplied with more details of characteristics of recipients, and hence are able to better adapt the information to the recipients' knowledge levels, needs, and interests (Uittenhout, 2012).

In view of the prospect that the use of social networking services to obtain health information could enhance and promote healthy living conditions and quality of life of individuals, it is of crucial importance for information providers to develop a better understanding of factors contributing to the behavioral intentions of social networking users toward acceptance and use of health information distributed through this channel. But, amidst the increasingly complex ecosystem of online social networking services, developing strategies to promote the behavioral intention requires a greater awareness of factors in the contexts of both information *per se* and technology by which information is delivered. The interconnected functional roles of the two contexts are, however, relatively understudied. Most of the existing theoretical and empirical research only considers one of the two perspectives. The objective of this study is to address this research gap by proposing and applying a comprehensive framework that bridges the divide between the two paradigms.

This study proposes a unified model to explain the acceptance and use of information on online social networks. The model incorporates factors traditionally considered to affect individuals' intention to use health information disseminated through this channel. These factors encompass both the technology aspect: performance expectancy; effort expectancy; social influence; facilitating condition; perceived emotional value; perceived price value; and trust, as well as the information aspect: relevance; timeliness; accuracy; comprehensiveness; understandability; trustworthiness; and expertise. The model was subsequently applied to data on the behavior of health information adoption in the online social networking environment.

By applying the proposed framework to the empirical data collected from Thai consumers, new insights into factors affecting the adoption of health information in social network settings are generated. The findings underline the importance of prioritizing quality of health information over strategies for enhancing technology acceptance. Health information providers in countries sharing similarities in cultures and technological infrastructures with Thailand can develop strategies accordingly.

BACKGROUND

Technology Adoption

Technology adoption can be broadly defined as the acceptance and use of a new technology or product (Agarwal, 2000). The study of technology adoption has long been widely considered by Information Technology (IT) scholars. One of the key studies is an empirical investigation by Venkatesh, Morris,

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