Applying Niche Theory to Measure Uses and Gratifications of Social Media in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Niche theory provides a comprehensive framework to measure uses and gratifications of social media in terms of competitive superiority and overlapping capabilities. Despite various researches conducted to measure how social media play roles of availability for tasks using media richness theory, there are not many researches conducted on the differences in the gratification of social media reflecting unique characteristics of social media. This study is designed to investigate how well social media can represent the characteristics of communication and how richness of media affects the communication on social media. It was observed that one type of social media does not completely replace another but rather becomes integrated in dealing with various communication needs. From the perspective of niche theory, the comparative utility of social media to fulfil users' needs and provide them with gratification opportunities is essential to its survival and growth in this industry.

KEYWORDS

Niche Theory, Social Media, Uses and Gratification

1. INTRODUCTION

The widespread use of social media such as Facebook, Utube, Instagram, and Twitter and their similarity opens an opportunity to compete each other and perhaps displace use of these social media for social and communication purposes. Over the decades, it is observed that the transition from the traditional communication methods to social media using internet and mobile devices are rapidly increasing. In Malaysia it is noticed that the usage of social media has been continuously increasing and social media is easily available as the internet is widely available and its speed has been significantly improved. Furthermore, thanks to its availability over portable mobile devices, social media has become a main tool for information sharing and communication. This trend has contributed to not only the flow of information but also the development of social relationship. This study is conducted to explore the relationship of competency among social media using niche theory. This study is carried out to identify market structure of social media in Malaysia and provide an

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opportunity for general overview of competency in social media market in the developing countries. This study examines the potential impacts by assessing the niches of Facebook, Utube, Instagram, and Twitter. This study replicates and extends previous researches examining competition between various types of social media. The outcome of this study which assesses the niches of Facebook, Utube, Instagram, and Twitter on uses and gratification aspects of social media can be utilized to enhance the performance of social media. This study presents comparative analysis of uses and gratifications of social media using niche theory. Niche theory employs niche width, niche overlap, and superiority to analyze the degree of competency of each social media based on four criteria such as information inquiry, social relationship, social presence, and media richness. This study is expected to identify unique characteristics of social media in Malaysia and can provide a general overview of competency in social media market in the South East Asian countries.

2. RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Basic Concepts of Niche Theory

The niche theory explains how various media compete each other and coexist in limited resource environments (Dimmick, 2003, Baek, Heon, Ha Jin Hwang 2014) by measuring uses and gratification of media. The niche of a medium is derived from its pattern of uses, represents its strategy for competitiveness and growth, and determines its position in a social media market. Measuring uses and gratification of social media allows users to deal with time and space constraints and, in effect, provides a framework to assess the ability to derive satisfaction from a social media. The gratification niche of a social media can be defined by its breadth on the gratification and gratification opportunities dimensions, the degree of overlap with other media, and its superiority in satisfying needs over other media under the same criteria. Three characteristics to understand a medium's niche can be summarized as follows. (Baek Heon et al., 2014, Hossain, 2019, Li Shu Chu et al., 2017)

1. **Niche breadth:** This is the degree to which a medium satisfies a relatively broad or relatively narrow spectrum of media-related needs. Niche breadth can be interpreted as relatively special media or relatively general media. Special media gratify a relatively narrow set of needs, and general media satisfy a broader spectrum.
2. **Niche overlap:** This is the extent to which social media are perceived as similar, indicated by the distance between their gratification niches. In another words, niche overlap is an index of the substitutability or complementarity of two media. High overlap indicates that two media can be substituted each other by serving the same needs. Low overlap indicates that two social media can serve different needs. Thus, low overlap indicates the complementarity of the media while high overlap indicates strong similarity or competition.
3. **Competitive superiority:** This is the extent to which one or the other of a pair of media provide greater gratification. Indices of superiority for gratification measures are defined as arithmetic means, and differences between two means on a dimension can be examined for significance using a t test. If the test results in a significant result, it is interpreted that the social media with the higher superiority score is better at providing gratification utility to users than the other social media.

2.2 Social Media and Social Relationship

In recent Social media is a kind of service over the internet and mobile devices, which enables users to share opinions, knowledge and information as well as various interaction and feedback over the social networks. (Statistica, 2018) Among many social media, this study is focused on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Utube. Facebook is one of the most popular social media which can allow people to upload and share photos, video, and audio files. (Dhir, A. and Tsai, C.C. (2017, Statista, 2018) It also provides communication capability through emails and instant messaging services.

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