

Chapter 5

Smartphones and Self-Broadcasting among College Students in an Age of Social Media

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the use of smartphones for self-broadcasting via social media among college students. Based on motivation and network externalities theories, our survey of a public university's college students confirmed our hypotheses that network size, years of experience using social media and the time spent on social media positively predict their frequency of self-broadcasting on their smartphones. The results suggest that 85.2% of college students self-broadcast at least once a month by updating their status on SNS and students are likely to self-broadcast within their network. Most students set their profile privacy setting as private or semi-private. But privacy setting does not affect self-broadcast frequency.

INTRODUCTION

Smartphones and social networking sites (SNS) are globally used and these gadgets are helping to modify the lives of people. These technologies provide access and connections to networks of people with convenience and the ability to share and receive information from a fluid and shifting Internet network (Enteen, 2006). Users are thus able to shrink time and space with these technologies by remotely connecting to friends, family, and business associates. Mobile phones continue to be tools that facilitate social sharing of information (Yang, Wang, & Li, 2013). From an information management standpoint, smartphones have immense self-broadcasting power (Bert, Giacometti, Gualano, & Siliquini, 2014) and SNS sites remain frequent destinations for smartphone users (Randall, 2014).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8450-8.ch005

Smartphones as self-broadcasting tools and location-based technologies have been studied by several scholars (Costa, Benevenuto, & Merschmann, 2013; Karikoski & Soikkeli, 2013; Kang & Jung, 2014). Other studies discussed self-presentation on social networks (Hilsen & Helvik, 2014; Michikyan, Subrahmanyam, & Dennis, 2014). Studies have also hypothesized the relationship between Facebook friends and social well-being (Indian & Grieve, 2014; Wang, Kosinski, Stillwell, & Rust, 2014). Past studies have also examined social capital and Facebook use (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Jiang & de Bruijn, 2014; Li & Chen, 2014). However, little to no research exists on the role smartphones play in self-broadcasting in relation to the number of friends that one has on Facebook. Scholars have discussed smartphone use (Cacho-Elizondo, Shahidi, & Tossan, 2013) and the motivations behind social network use (Ross, Orr, Sisic, Arseneault, Simmering, & Orr, 2009). Though Tong, Van der Heide, and Langwell (2008) have explored the relationship between the number of friends and interpersonal impressions on Facebook, they did not examine smartphone use in the same context. The Nielsen Company's *Social Media Report* reports the rise of SNS use through smartphones and digital technologies (The Nielsen Company, 2012). Young adults between 18 and 24 years spend 59% of their time using the applications on their phones to browse the Internet (Bryant, 2013). However, owning a smartphone does not mean all applications will be utilized (Verkasalo, Lopeze-Nicolas, Molina-Castillo, & Bouwman, 2010).

The present study seeks to fill the gap in research on the relationship between the use of Facebook through smartphones and how network size influences self-broadcasting intensity. The study builds on Wei's 2008 study on motivations for using mobile phones, which encouraged further examination of the mobile phone as a location-based broadcast device. From a technology and human interaction framework, this study offers a new way of conceptualizing smartphones as a self-broadcast medium for college students. The authors propose telephones have evolved from a point-to-point interpersonal communication medium to facilitating SNS broadcasting of information and news. The study employs motivation theory (Deci, 1975) and network externalities theory (Katz & Shapiro, 1985) as theoretical frameworks. Motivation theory explains what motivates an individual to adopt a technology, while network externalities theory determines the multiplier network value users gain from using mobile technology. According to a 2012 Pew survey and a 2012 Google survey, 55% and 39% of those surveyed reported they owned smartphones, respectively. Pew survey results in the same year also indicated that 67% of Internet users use social networking sites (Pew Internet Research, 2012). The following section presents a summary of relevant literature on self-broadcasting, Facebook, smartphones, gender and identity, self-esteem, and privacy online.

Self-Broadcasting

Self-broadcasting is a community communication style in which an individual self-projects her/his identity (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009; Underwood, Kerlin, & Farrington-Flint, 2011). Self-broadcasting may entail posting pictures on a SNS such as Facebook, composing and posting status messages, commenting on posts of others on Facebook, or checking into buildings or various places through smartphones.

Advantages of Self-Broadcasting

Amanda Lenhart (2013), senior research specialist at the Pew Internet & American Life Project, said that 84% of 18 to 29 year olds capture images with their phones and 68% record videos on the go. Lenhart also asserted that there are now more opportunities given the technologies at the disposal of young

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