Chapter 12

From Relationship to Information:
A Study of Twitter and Facebook Usage in Terms of Social Network Size among College Students

Chen Yang
Bowling Green State University, USA

Gi Woong Yun
Bowling Green State University, USA

Louisa Ha
Bowling Green State University, USA

Lanming Chen
Bowling Green State University, USA

ABSTRACT

By measuring social media users' online activities in terms of information broadcasting, information seeking and relational maintenance, this chapter aimed at investigating how college students' SNS usage patterns may affect their online social network sizes. Statistics in this chapter suggested that more information seeking leads to more Twitter followings while more information broadcasting results in a larger size of Twitter followers. The frequency of relationship management, however, did not predict students' social network size on either Twitter or Facebook. Implications of the study were discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Facebook and Twitter are two predominant social networking services (SNSs) in North America, especially among college students. The two SNSs differ from each other in many aspects including the way users' profiles are linked to each other. While Facebook users subscribe to other people's updates based on mutual agreement on being each other's friends, Twitter users can establish a one-way linkage to another user's profile without that person's consent or even notice. In other words, Twitter allows its users to have one-directional profile linkage so that individuals can follow others freely without being

followed and may also be followed by other Twitter users without having to follow them back. If two users establish a mutual following connection, it is similar to Facebook's "friends". As a result, there may be a wide range of differences between the sizes of a Twitter user's followings and followers.

The study in this chapter aims at exploring how college students' SNS usage patterns may be correlated to the sizes of their Twitter followings and followers and to the number of Facebook friends. This inquiry has both theoretical and pragmatic significance. First, not many studies have focused on the meaning of the exact numbers of individuals' social network sizes in their interpersonal communication and social life. This is partly due to the fact that, in a traditional social environment, relatives, friends and acquaintances people interact with on a daily basis are trivial and not easily measurable. Since SNSs have made the interaction among friends in their social networks visible and comparatively stable by presenting a chart of countable links, daily interaction dynamics can be monitored, recorded, and tabulated. It is important to investigate what these easily available numbers mean and what factors may influence the size of SNS connections. Second, this question will suggest new applications for the Uses and Gratifications theory in the field of social media. Although SNSs are best known as a virtual platform for people to interact with each other, students' usage of SNSs may go beyond the purpose of maintaining interpersonal relationships in an extended digital world. The current trend is more and more young people, college students in particular, are using SNSs for entertainment, self-promotion, job hunting, news feeding, references and others (Dunne, Lawlor, & Rowley, 2010; Sheldon, 2008; Urist, Dong, & Day, 2009). While it is yet to be discovered whether varied needs can lead to varied structures of social networks for users with diverse motivations, the intentional or unintentional strategies people adopt to increase the size of the network investigated here while dealing with relationship will provide some insights into this topic. Third, this chapter can contribute to the previous literature centering on the influences of individual characteristics on SNS usage patterns related to opinion leadership and opinion seeking in SNS (Shoham & Ruvio, 2008). Better conceptualization of the two constructs will help understand the structural differences of relationship among different social media services and uses.

BACKGROUND

Social Network Services

Social Network Services (SNSs) are web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile with personal stories in texts, pictures, and videos, as well as views and comments on other profiles within a certain online system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Cheung, Chiu, & Lee, 2011; Lewis & West, 2009). According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), the emergence of SNSs represents a breakthrough in the organization of online communities as these networks are no longer interest-based, but person-centered. Specifically, SNSs are structured around profiles which represent users' selves and visualize their social networks to others with the intention of contacting or being contacted (Gross, Acquisti, & Heinz, 2005).

Researchers reported that SNSs are particularly prevalent among college students whose main objectives of SNSs usage are social connection and interaction (Gross et al., 2005; Lewis & West, 2009). SNSs allow them to establish and manage their personal accounts, and to share information including status updates, links, and photos with others through the linkage between profiles (Lewis & West, 2009). Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) suggested that SNS usage might help users who have low self-

Related Content

Strategic Human Capital, Team Composition and Project Team Performance: The Role of Flexibility and Experience

Francesca Vicentiniand Paolo Boccardelli (2019). *Human Performance Technology: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 1319-1335).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/strategic-human-capital-team-composition-and-project-team-performance/226619

Anthropomorphic Feedback in User Interfaces: The Effect of Personality Traits, Context and Grice's Maxims on Effectiveness and Preferences

Pietro Muranoand Patrik O'Brian Holt (2007). *International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction (pp. 52-63).*

www.irma-international.org/article/anthropomorphic-feedback-user-interfaces/2912

Personal Information Privacy and Internet Technology

Edward J. Szewczak (2002). *Human Factors in Information Systems (pp. 83-92).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/personal-information-privacy-internet-technology/22433

Mobile Phones: News Consumption, News Creation, and News Organization Accommodations

Kristine Johnson (2015). *Encyclopedia of Mobile Phone Behavior (pp. 280-286).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/mobile-phones-news-consumption-news-creation-and-news-organization-accommodations/130148

Making the Paper-to-Digital Shift in India: Acceptance and Adoption of Electronic Health Records System (EHRs) by Physicians

 Jayaseelan R.and Pichandy C. (2020). *International Journal of Information Communication Technologies and Human Development (pp. 15-28).*

www.irma-international.org/article/making-the-paper-to-digital-shift-in-india/262577