

Chapter 15

An Examination of Factors That Influence Social Networking Community Participation Among Millennials

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates main and moderating factors that influence Millennials' intention to participate in a social networking community (SNC). The authors modified the unified theory of consumers' acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT2) to incorporate six main and two moderating factors to explain Millennials' SNC participation intention. By considering the implications of the unique characteristics of Millennials on their social networking behavior, the authors' model is better suited to answer what drives these tech-savvy individuals to participate in a SNC via such sites as Facebook. Specifically, the authors find that hedonic motivation, trust in technology, trust in community, and social influence are significant factors in influencing Millennials' SNC participation intention, with hedonic motivation being the most influential factor. In addition, gender and educational background moderate the main effects of these determinants in different manner. Theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed.

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to further our understanding of factors that influence Millennials' participation intention in a social networking community (SNC). Millennials are individuals born between 1981 to 1996 (Dimock, 2018) who grew up in the Internet age and are regarded as the always connected, social and tech-savvy generation (Pew Research Center, 2014). The integral use of information technology

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(IT) in the Millennials' social lives sets them apart from generations before them (Pew Research Center, 2010). Being digital natives, Millennials belong to a generation in which they have been immersed with everything digital since childhood. It is no surprise that Millennials are the first adopters of emerging technologies like tablets and digital wearables (Fleming et al., 2015). They are also avid producers and consumers of all kinds of digital contents – from blogs to video to photos to music to apps, with 55% of them posted a selfie on a social media (Pew Research Center, 2014). Over 75% of Millennials admit that they cannot live without their laptops or mobile phones (Brown, 2011). Social media defines their lives as 80% of Millennials are on sites like Twitter, Facebook and Weibo to chat, post comments, and send messages (Brown, 2011). Indeed, Millennials named “technology use” as what made their generation unique (Pew Research Center, 2010). Their technology use behavior has transformed social networking sites (where a group of people stay connected via social media) into SNCs (where a group of people interacting in social networking sites to fulfill their social needs and extend relationship building from family and friends to complete strangers), a phenomenon of interest in this paper. Note that unlike the formal-type of SNC such as Enterprise Architecture Group in LinkedIn, SNC here refers to an individual's personal group of friends and connections.

Millennials are also becoming a market segment of growing importance. They represent 25% of the world population, with 77 million in the US, 500 million in India, and 200 million in China (Brown, 2011). Millennials are the most educated generation with 33% of them having a college degree. They are highly optimistic about their financial future, with 53% believe they will have enough income to live the lives they want (Pew Research Center, 2014). Ten percent of them are already successful entrepreneurs and nearly 50% of them want to run their own business in the future (The Nielsen Company, 2014). A better understanding of the opportunities the Millennials present will equip business with effective strategies to reach, connect, and engage with this emerging economic power for long-term growth and success.

While much has been written about Millennials' beliefs, values, attitudes, traits and the like (e.g., they are multitaskers, open to change, adept with social networking, self-expressive, willing to share personal interests, opinion, and behaviors, community-minded, associate IT with information seeking and entertainment) (Moore, 2012; Seppanen and Gualtieri, 2012), there is a dearth of studies on exploring the implications of the unique characteristics of Millennials on their social networking behavior (Bolton et al., 2013). This is especially prudent as extant literature in information systems (IS) today focuses primarily on topics of IT acceptance and adoption from a utilitarian perspective in organizational contexts. We still know little about what drives individuals to SNC in particular, not to mention having to deal with a generation of individuals who are both avid providers and consumers of digital contents on SNCs. In order to fill this gap in literature, we argue for research that reexamines, challenges, and extends existing theories and models to better explain Millennials' participation in SNCs. As such, we develop a model based on Venkatesh et al.'s (2012) unified theory of consumers' acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT2) to do so.

UTAUT2 is an extension of Venkatesh et al.'s (2003) unified theory of technology acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) to predict behavioral intention and use of a technology in a consumer context. UTAUT2 shares the same impressive explanatory power as UTAUT in accounting for about 70% of the variance in behavioral intention and 50% of the variance in technology use (Venkatesh et al., 2012). We retain relevant factors in UTAUT2 and add new relationships in our model after synthesizing past literature on SNC participation. The resultant model has trust in technology, trust in community, hedonic motivation, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions as main factors and gender

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