

Chapter 72

The Tipping Point: A Comparative Study of U.S. and Korean Users on Decisions to Switch Social Media Platforms

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ABSTRACT

While previous researchers have addressed motivations to join and continue using social media, this paper focuses on why users quit certain social media and change their favorite platforms, such as the current shift from Facebook to Twitter to Instagram and Snapchat. Furthermore, this exploratory study seeks to build an understanding of social media usage and motivations for switching from a cross-cultural perspective by comparing findings from Korean and U.S. users. Findings from 19 focus group sessions ($n = 118$) highlight influences regarding modes of usage, user control, commitment, addiction, privacy, perceived relationships, self-construals, and social/cultural trends. Findings are further analyzed and compared in light of relevant theoretical frameworks and cultural differences.

INTRODUCTION

Popularity of social media platforms changes constantly, and there seems to be no infinite winner. For instance, MySpace was the most visited social networking site in 2008, attracting almost 80 million visitors a month (Robards, 2012); now its service has been discontinued. Cyworld used to be Korea's most popular social media site 15 years ago when it had 18 million members, which accounted for a third of

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the nation's population (Han, 2017). Its user base declined drastically and has been replaced by other services. Likewise, KakaoStory once had monthly active users of 42 million (Sprinklr, 2017), only to lose a significant number recently.

The trend continues on: Facebook, the most active and popular social media site in the last decade, is undergoing a decrease in the number of daily active users for the first time, dropping by a million users compared to the previous year (Wagner & Molla, 2018). The social networking service is losing users in the younger demographic, who are increasingly abandoning it for other social media sites such as Snapchat and Instagram (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Twitter also reported losing one million monthly active users in the second quarter of 2018, resulting in a 21% one-day plunge in stock prices (Shaban & Timberg, 2018).

While motivations for using social media have been well-studied (Park & Lee, 2014; Ross et al., 2009; Ryan & Xenos, 2011), there is relatively limited understanding as to why users decide to reduce their use of one social media *and* start another. We believe different cultural norms could influence reasons for discontinuing use of an SNS platform. Therefore, examining the role culture plays in social media usage would be important for establishing scholarly and practical foundations regarding why some platforms retain users and others do not.

To address these questions, the present study attempts to identify why people shift to other platforms by examining motivators and deterrents for using social media, and also by incorporating cultural comparisons. In so doing, this study presents an exploratory look into how cultural background influences the motivation to switch among platforms, resting on the interface of new media research coupled with a cross-cultural approach.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As social media have evolved, users have engaged with the platform, the content and each other, establishing a way of life as it pertains to online—a digital culture (Miller, 2011). Digital culture is unique in that it is shaped and reshaped so quickly, highly participatory and unpredictable (Deuze, 2006), and also because it is highly influential (Enli, 2017). Scholars and practitioners examine social media culture to understand trends (Chae, Stephen, Bart, & Yao, 2017; Jiang, Luo, & Kulemeka, 2016).

Digital culture influences the platform on which they engage, and vice versa. Digital users form virtual communities and culture (Wu Song, 2009). Members determine desired ways to interact with each other, including community-specific practices on word usage and adequate behavior (Sherman, Payton, Hernandez, Greenfield, & Dapretto, 2016). At the same time, the very online space on which users interact influences the usage and culture. That is, specific features and characteristics of social media platforms also determine a collective set of attitudes, behaviors and trends among users (Robards, 2012).

We focus specifically on how these attitudes, behaviors and trends have changed, particularly to understand why people switch to new social media. We believe that the “switch” behavior occurs in two ways: *Switching from a platform* and *switching to a platform*. Users may decide to move away from a platform due to deterrents in their current usage, but also to move toward a new platform due to incentives that attract them to do so. Drawing from pertinent literature, theoretical frameworks for understanding the decision to switch from or to a social media platform can be explained in two levels: 1) at the individual level, associated with the user's own approval (or lack thereof) and 2) at the social level, having to do with communal interactions or pressure/appeal based on such.

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