

Chapter 8

Effects of Motives for Internet Use, Aloneness, and Age Identity Gratifications on Online Social Behaviors and Social Support among Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

The advent of new media technologies, such as e-mail, blogs, MSN, online games, mobile phones, iPods, MP3, PS3, NDS, video on demand (VOD), and DVDs, to name a few, has dramatically changed both the nature and number of social compensation and mood management devices available to most youngsters. Although previous research has examined how the Internet has become an important resource for information and entertainment, little research has focused on the ways in which individuals use the Internet for social communication and support. In particular, how personality traits, such as perception of aloneness and age identity gratifications, together with motives for Internet use impact Internet habits and perceived social support are much-neglected areas of research. This chapter investigates how differences in these constructs among adolescents and children influence their online social behavior (such as use of instant messaging, online games, and participating in forums).

INTRODUCTION

The advent of new media technologies, such as e-mail, blogs, MSN, online games, mobile phones, iPods, MP3, PS3, NDS, Wii, video on demand

(VOD), and DVDs, to name a few, has dramatically changed both the nature and number of *social compensation* and *mood management* devices available to most youngsters. Although previous research has examined how the Internet has become an important resource for information and entertainment, little research has focused on the ways in which

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individuals use the Internet for social communication and support. Online social network sites such as Facebook, Friendster, and MySpace allow individuals to present themselves, and establish and maintain relationships with others (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). How personality traits, such as perception of *aloneness* and *age identity gratifications*, together with *motives for Internet use* impact Internet habits and social support are, however, much-neglected areas of research. In this chapter we will examine how the Internet plays a role in influencing mediated social support and how these psychological variables motivate online social communication and behavior.

BACKGROUND

Motives for Internet Use

With the introduction of e-mail, instant texting technologies (such as ICQ, MSN, Messenger, Google Talk, and Net Meeting), the Internet and other computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies seem to ideally fulfill social deficiency needs. Increasingly, the Internet serves interpersonal utility functions (such as relationship building, social maintenance, and social recognition) as much as entertainment and information utility functions. Motivations for Internet use (such as for interpersonal utility, social bonding, social identity, and showing affection)—as found in studies into the motives for Internet use (e.g., Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Leung, 2003; Stafford & Gonier, 2004)—can also be collectively identified as motives for *social compensation* – similar to the motivations for television viewing.

As the Internet is becoming more and more like television, a second dimension of Internet motives can be conceptualized from the theoretical discussion on the role of arousal in television viewing behavior (Donohew, Finn, & Christ, 1988; Zillmann, 1985; Zillmann, 1988a, 1988b). These authors propose that the traditional motives of

relaxation, entertainment, arousal, and information seeking in television viewing compose a cluster of viewing motives on the basis of *human stimulation* needs. Grounded in Blumler's (1979; 1985) uses and gratifications framework, recent research into motivations for Internet use has found similar motives, (e.g., entertainment, surveillance, to pass time, and escape). In fact, the psychological basis for human stimulation needs is well documented and provides the grounding for high level elaboration in theorizing stimulus, arousal, human needs, and well-being (Berlyne, 1971; LaRose, Mastro, & Eastin, 2001). Because today's Internet has been transformed and possesses many functions that are similar to television, we could also use Zillmann's term, *mood management*, to describe the concept of arousal-oriented motivations for Internet use, including entertainment, information seeking, diversion, and relaxation.

To understand the relationship between the motives for Internet use and online social communication behavior, mood management theory can be applied to describe how individuals with different personality traits might use the Internet in a similar manner to television, to block anxious thoughts and replace dysphoric moods. Knobloch (2003) argued that the aim of mood management is to alter disagreeable moods, enhance mediocre feelings and to maintain pleasant moods. With the ubiquitous nature and a wide assortment of entertainment available on the Internet, its mood-regulating content is becoming more and more accessible and convenient. Such content affects human behavior such as thinking and memory (Ellis & Moore, 1999), perceptions of others and of the self (Forgas & Bower, 1987), and feelings about one's environment; therefore, the use of the Internet (such as online games, ICQ, chatrooms, or web searches) and its influence on mood and how mood affects Internet use is an important area of study. Past research has established current mood state to be a key factor for selective exposure to media, especially for entertainment choices (Knobloch & Zillmann, 2002; Zillmann,

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