Habit: How Does It Develop, and Affect Continued Usage of Chinese Users on Social Networking Websites?

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ABSTRACT

Most IS studies considered post-adoption behavior as a cognitive process but rarely took a habitual perspective. The present study developed a research model to investigate the antecedents and effects of users’ habit in the context of social networking websites (SNW). It used a two-stage survey and partial least squares (PLS) analysis to test the model. It found that a user’s habit of using an SNW is developed through his prior usage, enjoyment, social interaction ties, and satisfaction, and that his habit consequently affects his online self-presentation desire and actual continued usage of SNW. The model accounts for 46.5% of the variance in SNW habit, and 33.5% of the variance in SNW continuance usage, respectively. This is one of the first studies that integrate the essential construct of habit with traditional cognitive, affective, and intentional factors into an SNW continuance model. The findings not only contribute to the theoretical development of IS continuance, but also provide insights for SNW practitioners to understand users’ habit and develop sustainable strategies accordingly.

Keywords: Continuance Intention, Continuance Usage, Habit, IS Continuance, Online Self-Presentation Desire, Social Networking Website

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades research has largely focused on individual users’ initial acceptance of information systems (IS). Researchers developed, for example, technology acceptance model (TAM) and the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) to study the antecedents that motivate individuals to adopt an IS (Lee, Kozar, & Larsen, 2003; Sun & Zhang, 2006; Venkatesh et al., 2003). Adoption is, however, the first step toward the overall success of IS. The long-term viability of an IS, in particular, depends on users’ continued usage rather than initial acceptance of the system (Bhattacherjee, 2001; Ortiz de Guinea & Markus, 2009; Venkatesh, Speier, & Morris, 2002). Nevertheless, little research
provides insight into how and why people continue or discontinue to use IS after adoption (Jasperson, Carter & Zmud, 2005; Kim, 2009; Limayem, Hirt, & Cheung, 2007; Venkatesh & Goyal, 2010).

To address the question of IS continuance, two research streams have emerged and evolved recently. The first one adapts expectation-confirmation theory (ECT) from marketing literature to characterize post-adoption behavior as a cognitive process, that is, users consciously evaluate the IS for its value and usefulness (Bhattacherjee, 2001; Thong, Hong, & Tam, 2006; Liao, Palvia, & Chen, 2009; Limayem et al., 2007; Venkatesh & Goyal, 2010). Based on the perception and evaluation of the system, users then make decisions on intention to continue using the IS. The other stream of research, while recognizing the cognitive process in general, emphasizes that actual continued usage in certain IS is more likely a habitual and automated process (Kim, 2009; Limayem et al., 2007; Ortiz de Guinea & Markus, 2009; Wu & Kuo, 2008).

Social networking websites (SNW) are one of those IS, in which users’ habit might play an important role in continued usage. Unlike utilitarian systems used in workplaces, SNW provide personal online services that aim for realizing and enhancing users’ social value through self-presentation, self-expression, connection and interaction with familiar and unfamiliar people, and eventually self-fulfillment (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Cheung & Lee, 2010; Doring, 2002; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008; Strano, 2008). It is thus likely for users to develop a habit of using such an individual-centered, convenient communication system regularly.

The issue of sustainable success of SNW has enjoyed increasing popularity in both industry and academia in recent years. In spite of the overall fast-growing user base, many SNW face the challenge of how to build a sustainable business model in order to remain financially viable (Heidemann, Klier, & Probst, 2012). The scale of active users and their post-adoption behavior is thus more essential for the success of SNW. In other words, the long-term viability and prosperity of an SNW depends on its users’ continuance usage. Only if the current users continuously and actively use the online service will the advertising-based revenue of the SNW be stabilized and sustained. In academia, regardless of the recognition of continuance usage, extant research on SNW remains mostly at the adoption stage, with little on post-adoption behavior. It is thus the objective of the present study to apply the theoretical understanding of IS continuance in SNW, and shed light for SNW researchers and practitioners on the cognitive, affective, and habitual factors in the actual continued usage of SNW.

The present study investigates in the context of SNW: (1) what factors determine the formation of users’ habit of using an IS, and, in turn, (2) to what extent users’ habit influences their continued usage of the IS. We organize the rest of the article as follows. We first present the theoretical foundation on which we developed our research model. We then describe and discuss in detail the constructs and hypotheses in the model. We continue by presenting our research design and data analysis results. Based on our empirical findings, theoretical and practical implications of the study are provided in the final section.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

2.1. Habit and Post-Adoption Behavior

Habit is “learned sequences of acts that become automatic responses to specific situations which may be functional in obtaining certain goals or end states” (Verplanken, Aarts, & van Knippenberg, 1997, pp. 540). It is based on repeated learning processes, and performs automatically once established (Orbell, Blair, Sherlock, & Conner, 2001). The performance of habitual behavior essentially requires little conscious attention and minimal mental effort (Ouelette & Wood, 1998). Instead, habit is a learned response that is automatically triggered by stimulus cues in a familiar environment.
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