I ♥ FB: A Q-Methodology Analysis of Why People ‘Like’ Facebook

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ABSTRACT

Virtually seductive qualities of identity sharing, content gratification, and ample social atmosphere have made Facebook the most popular social network, boasting 890 million daily users (“Facebook Reports Fourth Quarter,” 2015; Joinson, 2008; Orchard et al., 2014, Reinecke et al., 2014). Online social network studies largely overlook the individual, limiting the understanding of what exactly drives people to use, abuse, even become dependent on sites like Facebook. Based on the theory of uses and gratifications, Q methodology subjectively observes what draws users to Facebook, focusing specifically on Facebook user characteristics. Past studies neglect the existence of three of the four factor groups discovered in this study, making these effectually new discoveries for academia (Alloway, Runac, Quershi, & Kemp, 2014; Cheung, Chieu & Lee, 2011; Sheldon, 2008, Tosun, 2012; Yang & Brown, 2013). These findings increase understanding of online usage, even addiction, and will help cater future social networks to specific users.

KEYWORDS

Motivation, Online Identity, Relationship Building, Self-Gratification, Social Capital, Social Networks, Stalking, Uses and Gratifications

INTRODUCTION

Add. Like. Comment. Post. Message. Share. Judging by the sheer relatability and newfound universality of these words, it is obvious that the world “likes,” or rather loves, Facebook. But what is it about the Social Networking Site (SNS) that keeps someone up until the wee hours of the morning watching stupid videos? How is it that most “downtime” resorts in taking out the phone and seeing what others are up to on Facebook? Why must the phone be checked (every five minutes) to see how many people “liked” a funny comment that someone posted on his or her own wall? What keeps us connected virtually all day every day—even to the point of “withdrawals” when people can’t get their fix (Gray, 2011)? Some use Facebook for occupational reasons, others for romance, and others use
it simply to numb the brain after a long day (Lampe, Ellison, Steinfeld, 2008). But from whichever direction the situation is approached, it is obvious that most of the “connected” world cannot stop Facebooking—nor do they really want to.

But this is not just some small-scale social phenomenon. As of December 2014, Facebook is visited daily by some 890 million “friends” (Facebook Reports Fourth Quarter, 2015). Facebook profits greatly from these devout fans by generating, on average, at least $1 billion per quarter in advertising revenue, making the site worth more than $100 billion (Ritholtz, 2014). In just the last three months of 2014, Facebook reported almost $4 billion in revenue, making a modest $12.5 billion for the year (Facebook Reports Fourth Quarter, 2015).

Since its birth as a Harvard social-networking website just ten years prior, Facebook has seen exponential and unprecedented growth. Users enjoy the ability to not only post comments, photos, and videos of themselves and others, they can also play games, share music, post free classifieds, develop their own applications, and myriad other uses (Phillips, 2007). Some naysayers have predicted the end of the Facebook phenomena by as early as 2017; but current usage continues to increase, suggesting the SNS’s paradigmatic integration into the lives of humanity (Garside, 2014). However, the question is not when or where Facebook is going; the question is, given the hundreds of millions of Facebook users on the site every day, why do people like Facebook so much and how are they using it in their lives? Using Q-methodology this research will analyze attitudes, opinions, and motivations of the user to better understand the phenomenality, popularity, and love of Facebook.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The increased acclaim and motives for usage of Social Networking Sites (SNS) has been researched considerably in recent years, particularly and specifically focusing on Facebook (Joinson, 2008; Tufekci, 2008; Ross et al., 2009; Sheldon, 2008; Yang & Brown, 2013; Cheung, Chieu, & Lee, 2011; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2011; Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007; Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011; Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; Bachrach, Grepel, Kohli, Kosinski, & Stillwell, 2014; Orchard, Fullwood, Morris, & Galbraith, 2014; Reinecke, Vorderer, & Knop, 2014; Rhoads, Thomas, & McKeown, 2016). Because of its accessibility, attractiveness, voluntary and unprecedented following, most research has centered around the uses and gratifications of Facebook users and their intrinsic motivations for use (Joinson, 2008; Sheldon, 2008; Cheung et al., 2011; Orchard et al., 2014). While some articles tend to highlight the changes Facebook has caused in our society (Reinecke et al., 2014), others seek to promote Facebook use as a way to build much-needed social capital, and thus promote public progress (Ellison, Steinfeld & Lampe, 2007; Kalpidou et al., 2011; Orchard et al., 2014). While its attraction to the masses is fascinating and complex, of particular interest are the avid users—some even self-proclaimed “addicts” of Facebook and their various practices and reasons for choosing to be connected virtually all of the time.

Why Facebook?

First and foremost, Facebook provides its users with social connection, as evidenced in its categorization as a “social networking” site (Joinson, 2008; Kalpidou et al., 2011; Sheldon, 2008). The main functions of social networking sites, according to Boyd and Ellison (2007), include: (1) building a public or semi-public profile within a limited system, (2) specifically determining with whom to connect or share information, and (3) viewing and searching the list of connections and those made by others within the system. Because Facebook allows for the construction of a profile and the ability to determine with whom to interact, it is increasingly useful in identity sharing, content gratification,
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