

Young Female Users of Social Media and Internet Addiction

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Abstract

We profile addictive female users of Social Media in terms that are applicable to improving advertising message effectiveness and content transference. We use List of Values scales to profile addictive female users of leading Social Media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. We find these addictive female users of Facebook value being well respected above all other measures of values. In contrast, we find that addictive female users of Twitter value Personal Excitement above all other measures of values. These constructs load on actual usage of their respective social media environment and alone yield significant correlation value when trying to assess Social Media usage. Practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: Young; Female; Social media; Message; Communications; Internet addiction

Introduction

Social Media sites like Facebook and Twitter have proven to be massively popular tools for people to communicate to, and collaborate with, each other. Their rapid growth is reflected in both large number of users and number and frequency of postings. These communications tools dramatically ease person-to-person communications [1] and business-to-consumer communications [2], and these user generated content environments have been shown useful in a wide variety of communications settings [3]. However, with this popularity and rapid growth comes a darker side—online addiction [4-6]. What drives people to these sites is an open area of research. Research suggests that users are driven to such sites in an attempt to make new friends or locating old friends [7] and to enhance one's psychological well-being [8-10]. A growing concern is addiction to online services, and this concern has become so prevalent that it will be included in the 2013 edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). For the first time, the DSM-5 will include Internet Use Disorder, detailed as a "preoccupation with Internet gaming and withdrawal symptoms when the Internet is taken away." The DSM-5 is prepared by American Psychiatric Association (APA) to produce evidence-based diagnostics for Doctors/Care Providers as they diagnose and treat mental disorders. However, the 2013 inclusion of Internet Use Disorder in the DSM-5 is only to encourage further study, not to render an official diagnosis. But the very inclusion of Internet Use Disorder in the DSM-5 is a large step toward addressing and classifying the addictive behavior of online activities noted by both medical personnel and the casual observer. For example, young men flock to online gaming environments like Halo™, World of War Craft™ and Call of Duty™ at the expense of "traditional" modes of entertainment. Their addiction to these gaming environments is well documented [4]. However, the usefulness of Social Media sites is not limited to games or gossip, they are also seen as a windfall for advertisers trying to reach consumers. These networks also seem to shape perceptions of marketing communications [11,12]. The wide use and acceptance of Social Media sites combined with the involving nature of the communications makes them ideal for reaching existing and perspective consumers. Understanding the values and motivations of Social Media users is critically important for advertisers. The 'addictive' nature of Social Media, while allowing advertisers easy access to involved consumers, can cause problems when trying to convey complex messages [13].

In this exploratory research, we attempt to profile addictive female users of Social Media in terms that are applicable to improving advertising message effectiveness and content transference. While existing research into online environments has extensively focused on male users of online gaming services [4], we choose to focus on female users of Social Media sites. Our profiling parameters are based on well-established measures for online addiction [14] and measures used in market segmentation [15]. Specifically, we use List of Values (hereafter LOV) to profile addictive female users of leading Social Media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. We find these addictive female users of Facebook value being Well Respected above all other measures of values. In contrast, we find that addictive female users of Twitter value Personal Excitement above all other measures of values. These constructs load on actual usage of their respective social media environment and alone yield significant correlation value with Social Media usage. The organization of this paper is as follows. We position our study within the extant literature. This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical model used to guide the study and the specific hypotheses tested in this research. A detailed discussion of our methodology precedes our results and hypotheses tests. The paper closes with a discussion of the results and implications.

Literature Review

Online addiction

Addiction to online services is a very new field. The definition of Internet Use Disorder as a preoccupation with Internet gaming and withdrawal symptoms when the Internet is taken away (DSM-5, 2013) is important to this research because it classifies the addictive behavior of online activities seen by medical personnel. Addiction scales have been developed to help identify and classify this behavior [14]. Addiction

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scales have been developed based on the level of preoccupation with online activities as they impact the subjects everyday life activities, and Young's Internet Addiction Scale [14] is a well used example of one such scale.

While male addiction to the online gaming environment has been well studied [4], the addictive nature of Social Media is an open field. The wide use and involving nature of social media has been shown to allow advertisers easy access to involved consumers, yet one's addiction to these services can also cause problems when trying to convey complex messages [13]. Internet addiction can lead to more usage, but it can also lead to reduced cognition [16,17], therefore limiting the ability to communicate effectively [18,13].

Social media

The Social Media world consists of a myriad of environments, but five major environments account for the vast majority of user traffic and user content (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, YouTube). Of these five, Facebook and Twitter have the lion's share of users and user activity. Facebook claims an estimated 955 million monthly average users (10-Q filing for the period ending June 2012). Twitter states they have an estimated 462 million users (February 2012). The wide acceptance of these social media environments offers a large and well-defined segment to the savvy marketer. While both Facebook and Twitter are members of the social media family, they are different in how they work and who they attract. Facebook, for example, is a content rich social media environment. Users follow 'friends' and often share intimate details, photos and videos about their lives to those they choose to let follow their activities. Friends respond to postings when they have time to do so in a more delayed manner. Originally, Facebook was targeted toward college students; however it has grown well past that original segment. Twitter on the other hand is a textual rapid and often immediate response type of social medium. Messages in Twitter are short, 140 characters max, and offer the user and their followers engagement in a "stream of consciousness" message environment. Originally Twitter was designed to offer news broadcasting abilities to the average person, an altruistic goal. But like Facebook, the user base of Twitter has moved away from this original goal and into every aspect of interpersonal communications where short messages can be used to convey content.

List Of values (LOV)

A "value" can be defined as "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence" [19]. Such a "mode of conduct" or "end-state of existence" may seem as an odd characteristic for Marketers to use to segment or describe markets, but research suggests that "values" are highly predictive when behavior is the desired dependent variable [20,21]. Unlike demographics, "values" are learned through socialization and are manifested by a set of norms that govern human behavior. Research suggests that "values" are both stable and dynamic, and they are shared by individuals of the same social group [22]. Hence their usefulness in segmenting markets-values are shared and they predict behavior.

Beatty et al. [23,24] note that Rokeach's [19] descriptions of value systems is the most common technique used to measure a value-system. Rokeach identifies two types of values: 1) Terminal values which represent individual or social goals (such as peace or liberty) and 2) Instrumental (ideal) values which represent ways of being or doing something (such as courage and honesty). Marketing researchers have used several methods to measure an individual's values, such as the

"Value and Life Style" system (VALS) and the "List of Values" (LOV) approaches. VALS is based on Maslow's theory of human needs and the concept of social character. VALS can be used to classify the individual according to their values and lifestyle and place the individual into one of the nine possible VALS categorizations. The LOV approach does not include life style characteristics and consists of measuring an individual's value-system on the basis of a list of nine values. LOV differs from Rokeach [19] in one notable way. Rokeach [19] "values" are characterized by a social orientation, whereas the LOV's nine categories of "values" are directed toward the individual [20,24]. Beatty et al. [23] suggests that most human behavior is oriented towards individual rather than social satisfaction. The LOV scale is also considered to offer more predictive accuracy than either the Rokeach or VALS approaches [23]. Additionally, because the LOV scale is based on only nine characteristics, it offers an easier scale for respondents. These differences make LOV useful to the Marketer as he/she segments or describe a market.

The nine LOV characteristics are: Sense of belonging, Excitement, Warm relationships, Self-fulfillment, Being well respected, Fun and enjoyment of life, Security, Self-respect and Sense of accomplishment. These nine characteristics can be broken onto two broad categories: internal focused and external focused individual characteristics. The six internal focused characteristics include: Excitement, Self-Fulfillment, Fun and Enjoyment of Life, Security, Self-Respect and Sense of Accomplishment. The three external focused characteristics include: Sense of Belonging, Warm Relationships, and Being Well Respected.

Hypotheses

H1: Facebook users will stress an externally focused value measure over an internal individual-based value measure.

H2: Twitter users will stress an internally focused value measure over an externally based social-interaction value measure.

Model description

The twenty-item scale developed by Young [14] contains various social settings and items and assesses one's level of preoccupation with each of these items. Scores are measured on a 1-5 Likert scale. Aggregate measures are then computed and the subjects in the top quartile are assessed as highly addictive. The nine LOV characteristics were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale. The resulting measures are treated as interval scale measures of each values measure. These will serve as independent variables in our regression analyses. Each Social Media measure was a self-assessment measure (Facebook and Twitter usage activity) and each was assessed on a 5-point Likert scale. The resulting measures are treated as interval scale measures for each social media environment. These will serve as dependent variables in our analyses.

Methodology

Sample and community profile

The location of this study was a small Midwestern University. The approximate student population at the time of this study was N=12,000 students (2012 estimate). Surveys were personally administered and were part of a larger study. Our respondents were female undergraduate students from a variety of colleges. We obtained addictive respondents in a two-part data collection process. First, we collected a large random sample of female subjects (N=567) and assessed their level of internet addiction. Second, we analyzed these highly addictive female subjects regarding their levels of social media usage. The final sample size was 229 and data was collected in fall semester 2011. The top quartile

subjects (rankings based on the aggregate addiction score) show some interesting differences from the remaining subjects. We found that there is a more than two-fold difference in the scores between the addicted and non-addicted subjects for their willingness to choose their internet activities over interactions with others, their feeling of depression when they are offline, their failure to cut back on their activity when they try and in their attempts to hide their internet activity from others.

Analysis

As noted by Kahle and Kennedy [15], “Perhaps the most straightforward way to use LOV data is with correlation or regression analysis.” Therefore, following previous usage of the LOV data, we use Stepwise Regression to identify the most influential correlational variable(s) in each social media environment [23,24].

Results

The regression results for each social media environment are detailed in Table 1. Interestingly, we find that each model contains only one significant correlation variable. We find that for highly addictive Facebook users, Being Well Respected is the only LOV measure that was significantly correlated with Facebook usage (B=0.347, t=4.424). This finding is in support of H1. We further find that for highly addictive Twitter users, Personal Excitement is the only LOV measure that was significantly correlated with Twitter usage (B=0.249, t=2.389). This finding is in support of H₂.

Discussion

Our study findings indicate the only significant value or motivation for Internet addicted young females to connect with friends on Facebook is a need to Be Well Respected, which is an externally based social interaction LOV value. As Facebook offers an external social gathering or environment to participants, this finding is consistent with our expectations and supports H1. Our study findings also indicate the only significant value or motivation for Internet addicted young females to tweet on Twitter is “Need for excitement”. “Need for excitement” is an internally based LOV value or motivation. As Twitter is a textual rapid and often immediate response type of social medium, identification of “Need for excitement” which is an internally focused LOV, is not surprising and supports H2.

The significant variables we identified not only are correlated with Social Media usage; they also contribute to the addictive behaviors noted in the DSM-5. In some people, with online addiction, the drive to be respected [25] or the need for excitement [26] can be insatiable, further adding to the addictive nature of these media sites. Forty percent (229/567) of our study sample of young females exhibited significant Internet addiction traits. This confirms the Internet addiction concerns of mental health professional (DSM-5, 2013).

Conclusion and Implications

We find that for internet addicted young female’s users, the high usage rate of Facebook is correlated with the value measure for

the “Need to Be Well Respected” and the high usage of Twitter is correlated with the value measure for “Need for Excitement”. Previous research suggests that the social connections formed in online social media communities can translate into useful channels for marketing and advertising messages [27]. Therefore, these social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, can provide suitable platforms for all forms of product and service advertising [28,29]. The addictive nature of these online services, and the addictive nature of the values that contribute to high usage of these online services, can inhibit the ability of the Advertiser to communicate with its target audience. Internet addiction has been shown to reduce cognition [30] and re-focus attention [31]. Advertisers are not only interested in the popularity of Social media, they are keenly interested in what drives people there. Knowing why people use Social Media will allow the Advertiser the ability to better target users and deliver more effective advertising messages. We found that a small set of values is correlated with Social Media usage and that these values are well defined. For female users of Facebook, Being Well Respected is the only significant variable of Facebook usage. Advertising messages that appeal to Facebook user motivation’s for Being Well Respected are likely to be more effective with young females. For female users of Twitter, Personal Excitement is the only significant variable of Twitter usage. Advertising messages that appeal to Twitter user motivation’s for Personal Excitement are also likely to be more effective with young females.

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Dependent Variable	Independent Variable(s)	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.
Facebook User Activity	Being well respected	0.347	0.079	4.424	0.000
Twitter User Activity	Excitement	0.247	0.104	2.389	0.018

Table 1: Stepwise Regression results.

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