MOTIVATIONS BEHIND SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY ELDERLY PEOPLE

EDA ŞENCEYLAN
Boğaziçi University
Aysegul Toker
Bogazici University

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Motivations Behind Social Media Use by Elderly People

The present research aims to define and categorize the motivations shaping the social media attitude of elderly group, and understand the impact of social media use on this specific demographic segment's perceived psychological well-being. We not only offer fresh insights regarding their approach towards using social technologies through qualitative data analysis, but also explore the impact of social technology use with a conceptual framework. Having identified three motivations *Social Interaction*, *Social Influence,* and *Social Surveillance,* we define a new construct called *Reduced Perceived Obsolescence,* and investigate the relationship between social media attitude of older adults and their level of perceived obsolescence with data collected from the designed survey instrument. The constructs presented in our conceptual model serve as a basis to further explore motivational, emotional, and behavioral correlates of social media attitude of the elderly.

1. Introduction

With today's society becoming more connected and dependent on the internet, social media platforms flourished as immensely popular communication tools. Especially fast-growing social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram have consequences and implications both at individual and societal levels. Since social media use is known to be linked with the satisfaction of different basic psychological needs, recent studies on the use of social media have enhanced the understanding on the psychological motivations behind people's online actions and gratifications. However, these studies rarely focused on the elderly population which represent the people who are over sixty years old.

The world's population is rapidly aging. According to the United Nations' study "*World population aging, 1950-2050*", the global population aged 60 years or over numbered 962 million in 2017, which is more than twice as it was in 1980 (382 million). The number of older adults is expected to double again by 2050, and it is projected to reach nearly 2.1 billion. In line with the rapid diffusion of the Internet and smart devices, older adults are increasingly embracing social technologies, surprisingly advancing themselves by multiplying and diversifying the utilities they get from these technologies. In a study carried out in Lisbon, Neves and Amaro (2012) found that 72.4% of elderly people have a mobile phone; 13.2% use a computer, and 9.8% regularly use the Internet. Elderly people believe that technology makes it easier to reach people, stay in touch with their loved ones, and meet new people (Cotten, Anderson, and McCullough, 2013). Our new reality is that older adults gradually accept that the benefits of technology outweigh the costs and challenges of technology (Mitzner, Boron, and Fausset, 2010). Being one of the fastest growing online user groups (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011; Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2010), it is crucial that we understand the impact of the Internet on the elderly group (Hogeboom, McDermott, Perrin, Osman, and Bell-Ellison, 2010).

In the present study, having the research question of "What are the main motivations behind social media use by older adults?" we hypothesize that *Social Interaction*, *Social Influence,* and *Social Surveillance* are dimensions that have a relationship with *Social Media Attitude* of elderly people. We also propose a new dimension called *Reduced Perceived Obsolescence,* and hypothesize that there is a relationship between *Social Media Attitude* of older adults and their level of perceived obsolescence.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social interaction

Social interaction (Ko, Cho, and Roberts, 2005) is a predefined psychological need for reconnecting or improving connections with the outside world. During interviews, participants claimed that they use social media for socializing:

…I use social media to keep in touch with old friends, to interact with their children and grandchildren.

…I love to comment on my grandchildren's photos (even though they complain about it). It is great to hear from them, check their photos and videos when they are far away.

2.2. Social influence

Social influence is defined as the need for and trying the best to keep pace with the social environment (Joinson, 2008). Braun (2013) suggested that social pressures from family and friends to use social technologies have a positive effect on the intention to use them. Similarly, the study of Fulk, Schmitz, and Ryu (1995) showed that the use of technology within a user's social network predicts adoption. Venkatesh and Davis (2000) stated that the support for subjective norms is stronger for communication technologies. In the study of Mathur (1999), it was found that encouragement from younger family members positively influenced the adoption of new technologies in older adults.

In our study, social influence seems to be one of the motivations shaping the social media attitude of elderly people. Various participants offer the same reasons for using social media in different tones:

…Everyone has a Facebook account, what am I, chopped liver?

…My sister-in-law has Facebook, why wouldn't I?

…Why don't I have an Instagram page? You all have it!".

2.3. Social surveillance

Social surveillance is defined as "watching people or things or watching what others are doing". Title of this phenomenon comes from the studies by Shoemaker (1996), Kaye, and Johnson (2002), Joinson (2008), and Whiting and Williams (2013). Shoemaker (1996) claims that surveillance is used as a way to "monitor the world around us", and it has both cultural and biological origins. Individuals depend on surveillance to examine their immediate

environment and this can be effortlessly achieved on online social platforms with the help of status updates and news feeds.

Recent evidence suggests that interpersonal surveillance over online social platforms is a widespread practice. In the context of social technology use, Tokunaga (2011) describes it by defining Interpersonal Electronic Surveillance first: "*Interpersonal Electronic Surveillance (IES) is characterized as surreptitious strategies individuals use over communication technologies to gain awareness of another user's offline and/or online behaviors.*"

The present study aims to understand the tendency of elderly people for online social surveillance. In the interviews with our participants, there were numerous examples of social surveillance motivation. Participants indicated that they use social media for:
...gossiping on relatives' online updates, disseminating information among the family, seeing what grandchildren are doing.

On the other hand, they also stated an interesting function of social technology use in their lives:
My sister –apparently- was reproachful on the phone saying that "I saw your daughter's photos on Instagram today. She is here in my town. Why doesn't she visit me? She doesn't like her aunt I guess…" Of course, we together laughed away but I think social media provides us, the older ones, things to talk about.

2.4. Social Media Attitude

We created an umbrella term *Social media attitude* to measure not only how central or important social media is in an individual's life, but also the feelings of involvement (Zaichkowsky, 1985) towards social media as users.

2.5. Reduced Perceived Obsolescence

Obsolescence may be considered as a decrease in human capital and qualities such as knowledge, skills, capabilities, attitudes, and insights (Thijssen & Walter, 2006). It is a gradual loss of social integration, as well as a lack of competence to cope with modern and technological society.

Previous studies explored the digital divide which defines the difference between young and old in terms of percentage of users and the array of ways to use social media. However, there is a more exciting question: What is the impact of the Internet use on older adults' psychological well-being? Social technology use by older adults might affect their lives during a time in which they face

significant physical and cognitive changes, and feelings of dependency. Social technologies might play a role as important companions since they can provide assistance, support, and feelings of independency (Fozard, 2003; Caprani, Greaney, and Porter, 2006).

In order to reveal the possibility of social media affecting the feelings of obsolescence, the present study aims to measure the effect of social media attitude of older adults on their level of perceived obsolescence. Therefore, as qualitative data collected from in-depth interviews revealed three different dimensions predicting social media attitude of older adults, we proposed the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Social interaction motivation will positively relate to social media attitude of older adults.

Hypothesis 2: Social influence motivation will positively relate to social media attitude of older adults.

Hypothesis 3: Social surveillance motivation will positively relate to social media attitude of older adults.

Hypothesis 4: A positive attitude towards social media will predict a reduced perceived obsolescence in older adults.

3. Method

The present undertaking is a study using qualitative data collected from in-depth interviews with 12 older adults and survey data collected from 128 older adults who are over sixty and use social media. Only those who have a profile in at least one of the social media platforms were allowed to participate in the survey. To ensure equal sample sizes across different demographic groups, we contacted with different participants from different cities and backgrounds from major cities in Turkey.

We used five scales to measure the antecedents and consequences of the positivity in social media attitude of elderly people. We first conducted face to face in-depth interviews with 12 elderly people to collect insights on motivations behind their social media use and then created the survey instrument.

During the in-depth interviews, participants were asked to describe their personal experiences with social media, what they love about it, and the features that are important to them. Needs such as "keeping in touch with friends and relatives", "keeping pace with the

majority of the social environment", and "being updated on and even stalk relatives' lives online" were more frequently mentioned than any other type of motivations. These motivations distinguished themselves by emerging as constructs from the previous literature, as "Social Interaction", "Social Influence", and "Social Surveillance."

All constructs were measured with 5-point Likert type scales from prior research. Respondents stated their levels of agreement with these statements on a 5-point Likert-type scale (5 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree). *Social interaction* (Ko, Cho, and Roberts, 2005) motivation was measured by the *social interaction scale* (α=.690) which includes items from the studies of Joinson (2008), McKenna and Bargh (1999), and Wellman and Gulia (1999). *Social influence* motivation is measured by the *social influence* scale we adapted (α=.877) from the study of Braun (2013). *Interpersonal electronic surveillance scale* (Tokunaga, 2011), *social grooming scale* (Tufekci, 2012) and *FoMOs* (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, and Gladwell, 2013) are used to create the *social surveillance scale* (α=.877) for measuring *social surveillance* motivation.

In addition, two new constructs were suggested called *Social Media Attitude* and *Reduced Perceived Obsolescence*. *Social media attitude scale* (α=.899) included adapted items from social involvement scale (Kyle, Norman, Hammitt, and Jodice, 2007), Personal involvement inventory scale (Zaichkowsky, 1985), and different additional adapted items measuring how central social media is in an individual's life. *Reduced perceived obsolescence scale* (α=.895) included items from *Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (R-UCLA)-2*, *perceived obsolescence scale* (Kaspar, 2004), and additional items emerged from in-depth interviews.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis (KMO=.852). The maximum likelihood factor analysis with a cut-off point of .40, and the Kaiser's criterion of eigenvalues greater than 1 yielded a three-factor solution as the best fit for the data, accounting for 63.9% of the variance.

4. Major Results

The results of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) suggested a three-dimensional structure where the dimensions are *Social Interaction, Social Influence,* and *Social Surveillance*. After EFA, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis involving all multi-item constructs to assess the measures we used in our model, and the results are as follows: (x^2=248.266, df =195, x^2/df=1.273, IFI=.96, TLI=.96, RMSEA=.46, NFI=.86, CFI=.968). Results indicate that the fit indices demonstrated an acceptable fit to the model. Our proposed model's standardized

regression weights produced through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) are shown in Table 1.

Social media attitude was positively affected by social interaction, social influence, and social surveillance, supporting the Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, while reduced perceived obsolescence was positively related to social media attitude providing support for the Hypothesis 4.

Relationship			Estimate
Social Media Attitude	←	Social Interaction	0.226
Social Media Attitude	←	Social Influence	0.295
Social Media Attitude	←	Social Surveillance	0.273
Reduced Perceived Obsolescence	←	Social Media Attitude	0.673

Table 1. SEM standardized regression weights

The findings of the study extend the understanding on what makes elderly people use online social platforms. It elaborates on how social media attitude affects perceived feelings of obsolescence. The constructs presented in our conceptual model are created with the intention to serve as a basis for future research on motivational, emotional, and behavioral correlates of social media use by the elderly.

5. Conclusions and Implications

As online social networks emerged as new popular communication platforms, they become essential tools that organizations can use to communicate with their current and potential consumers. Especially in the relationship marketing area, social media gained significance since it is seen as the most effective and popular communication channel helping to boost mutual value creation and consumer retention by empowering the connection between organizations and customers. To utilize these social networks and implement effective relationship marketing strategies, it is vital for organizations to understand how consumers use social networking platforms, what attracts them towards communicating with organizations and fellow consumers on online platforms, and what motivates them to maintain these relationships in the long run. The contributions of our study to the marketing discipline are the classifications and definitions of this very specific customer segment's social media use.

Service providers who want a new way to reach out and communicate with older adults, and marketers looking to tap into this market with innovation, finding out how and why older adults use social technologies may benefit from the findings of this study.

The current study, while challenging the assumption that older adults lack the skills and motivation to engage with social technologies, aims to extend the knowledge about elderly people's expectations from social technologies.

Older adults' use of social media may also have the potential to lead to changes in social norms, and at the societal level, in domains such as civic and political engagement, privacy, and public safety. Present study seeks to provide an understanding on older adults' content creation, self-expression, and sharing behavior on online social platforms as much as what information they get from the online feeds.

Although the relationship between social technologies and older adults have recently been highly referred topics particularly within uses and gratifications dedicated literature, there are still many venues for further research and many unanswered questions regarding the motivations behind social technology use by elderly people and the impacts on their lives.

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