GRATIFICATION OR DISTRESS?
A DUAL FACTOR MODEL OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE USE

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Gratification or Distress? A Dual Factor Model of Social Networking Site Use
滿足還是苦惱？基於社交網站使用的雙因素模型

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally research on Social Networking Sites (SNSs) is mostly based on one side of human psychology, that is, gratification or gratification-based satisfaction that asserts that positive perceived benefits of SNS use determine users’ satisfaction and continued use intention. However, anecdotal evidence including academic research and popular media reports suggest that SNSs not only gratify users’ needs but they are also responsible for use-based distress in users. The evidence of positive and negative effects of SNS use implies the necessities of studying positive (i.e. gratification) and negative (i.e. distress) experience simultaneously to capture a richer picture of the post-adoption phenomenon in the Social Networking context. Considering this, this study aimed to study the key gratification and distress factors, and their impact on SNS use and future use behavior.

Prior research on the negative consequences of SNSs is mainly descriptive with few exceptions. Nevertheless, none of the empirical studies on the negative consequences of SNSs appear to comprehensively capture the broadness of the social networking stress phenomenon since these studies only considered a single stressor. The recent evidence suggests that other factors can create distress from using SNSs as well. Therefore, the study sought to create a comprehensive typology of factors resulting in gratification and distress that users experience in the social networking context.

To develop a typology of gratification factors, a literature search was carried out using **Uses and Gratifications Theory** (Blumler & Katz, 1974), and five factors were identified as the key determinants of Facebook use. On the other hand, without the comprehensive literature base concerning the distress caused by SNS use, a typology of distress factors was developed by adopting a technique from **thematic analysis** (Barun & Clarke, 2006).

Drawing on the **Rational Choice Theory** (RCT) (Becker, 1968) of human decision-making, the two contrasting belief factors, that is, gratification-based and distress-based beliefs were thus incorporated into a research model. The proposed model asserted that the gratification factors cause gratification-based satisfaction, yet their decrease or absence do not necessarily lead to distress-based dissatisfaction, while the distress factors are only responsible for distress-based dissatisfaction but their absence has no influence on gratification-based satisfaction. The model further assumed that
the gratification-based mechanism and distress-based mechanism of human decision-making have different levels of impact on users’ SNS use and future use behavior, and that the user behavior is determined by the trade-off between the gratification and distress experience of using SNSs.

A cross-sectional survey methodology was adopted to test the research model. A total of 425 data were collected by using an online crowdsourcing platform, namely the Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). PLS-SEM was used to analyze the data. The results from PLS analysis supported the assumptions and showed that both gratification and distress are significant predictors of overall satisfaction which in turn influence users’ SNS use and future use behavior. Of the 14 hypothesized relationships, ten hypotheses were supported. Of the gratification factors, entertainment was found to be the strongest predictor of gratification while the infringement of privacy was found to be the strongest predictor of distress of SNS use.

The results of the study also showed that distress had a few yet significant impacts on the satisfaction (overall) of using SNSs. Overall this study explored the different motivational mechanisms and offered a comprehensive understanding of post-adoption behavior. To the best of my knowledge, this was the first attempt to study dual factor mechanisms in explaining user behavior in a Social Networking environment. The study addressed several theoretical implications that might open up new research avenues for studying technology, particularly SNS acceptance and continuation. Based on the findings, the study proposed some practical recommendations that may influence managerial action to design and formulate strategies for the development of SNS platforms. More importantly, the key contribution of this study is to draw attention to, and realize the importance of, both positive (gratification-based), and negative (distress-based) affections in human decision-making processes with regard to technology use and continued use.
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