



Facebook as a toolkit: A uses and gratification approach to unbundling feature use

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ABSTRACT

Research on social network sites (SNSs) typically employ measures that treat SNS use as homogenous although the user-base, user practices, and feature sets of these tools are increasingly diverse. Using a uses and gratifications approach, we address this problem by reconceptualizing SNSs as *collections of features*. Survey data collected from undergraduate students at a large Midwestern university ($n = 267$) revealed that users' motivations for using Facebook predict their use of different features, such as status updates and Wall posts, but features that share similar capabilities do not necessarily share underlying motivations for use. When these results are contrasted against models employing a more unidimensional measure of Facebook use, we find differences between motivations for both general Facebook use and use of specific features of the site. This suggests that unidimensional measures of SNS use obfuscate motivations for using specific features. Theoretical and methodological implications of these findings and this approach are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Social network sites (SNSs) provide users with a variety of communication tools. For example, the SNS Facebook allows users to broadcast messages to large audiences using status updates and Wall posts, while also providing features, such as chat, for messages the user wishes to keep private. While the diversity of features available on SNSs allow for equally diverse forms of communication, previous research addressing the motivations for using SNSs have not fully considered the possibility that users may be attending to different features for different reasons.

One method for distinguishing among different kinds of Facebook use is offered by the uses and gratifications approach, a traditional mass media framework which enables researchers to study how users select media and content to meet their individual goals (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevich, 1974). In recent years, researchers have applied this approach to Internet use in order to identify a wide range of motivations driving the use of various online sites and services, including SNSs such as MySpace and Facebook (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008).

Although previous research has looked at how motivations affect general use of SNSs, often measured as overall time spent on the site, little is known about what motivates users to utilize particular site features. Given the wide range of activities possible on these sites, it is likely users' motivations for utilizing the various features

available will differ. This study explores the user motivations associated with the use of specific features of Facebook, enabling SNS scholars to move beyond measures of general usage and thus providing insight into the interaction between user motivations and the characteristics of specific features of technical systems that support social interaction.

1.1. Understanding Facebook use

A growing body of research explores various uses of Facebook. Early work showed how Facebook was used to connect with previously existing social connections, rather than make new connections (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2006). Furthermore, researchers have shown that Facebook provides features that enable these connections (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2007) and that the connections that are made reflect similar closeness of ties between online and offline ties (Gilbert & Karahalios, 2009).

However, central to the focus of this study, researchers have shown how Facebook use varies among users (Burke, Kraut, & Marlow, 2011; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, in press; Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2008). For example, users differ on measures of social capital and loneliness depending on whether they use the site actively or passively (Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2010). Research suggests that status updates can support offline student interactions (Barkhuus & Tashiro, 2010), be used to answer questions posed to the social network (Morris, Teevan, & Panovich, 2010), or can be mined to describe geographic "happiness" levels (Kramer, 2010). Other work examines differences in the use of SNSs in the workplace (DiMicco et al., 2008; Skeels & Grudin, 2009).

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Additionally, research has found that the manner in which people use Facebook changes over time (Lampe et al., 2008). Taken together, this literature shows that Facebook can support a wide range of social activities. Given the heterogeneous nature of these sites, and the diversity of users of these sites, it is likely that different users come to Facebook for different reasons and that these reasons may be associated with different types of use, such as connecting with strangers or interacting only with close friends.

1.2. Measures of SNS use

In this paper, we extend SNS research on Facebook use by specifically exploring users' motivations as they relate to use of individual features on the site, rather than use of the site as a whole. Facebook use has typically been measured through self-reported metrics such as assessments of time on the site (Joinson, 2008), number of friends (Tong, Heide, Langwell, & Walther, 2008), and the *Facebook Intensity* scale (FBI) created by Ellison and colleagues (2007) and used by others (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). FBI takes a number of Facebook-related metrics into consideration, such as number of friends, time spent on site, as well as Likert-scale items such as, "Facebook is part of my everyday life." While FBI does include multiple dimensions of use and is thus more nuanced than measures of time on site, FBI does not enable researchers to distinguish among different kinds of uses. These uses can range from participating in Groups where one is likely to interact with strangers to using other communication tools, such as chat, which are more frequently used to support interaction with Friends. These general measures of use may obfuscate outcomes associated with individual features because positive and negative trends may cancel each other out.

Thinking about the various features of the platform, it is possible that Facebook is more usefully conceived of as a *collection of tools* utilized in different ways to meet different needs. We define a "feature" as a technical tool on the site that enables activity on the part of the user. In this paper we focus on features that enable or facilitate communication among users. The features considered in this research include: status updates, comments, Wall posts, private messages, chat, and Groups. Status updates are short messages contributed by users that are visible to other users via the News Feed, a feature that aggregates the Facebook activity of one's friend network. Any piece of user-generated content on Facebook can be commented on, unless the owner of the content has used a privacy setting to restrict comments. The Wall is the hub of a user's profile and displays aggregated posts, photos, videos, and applications-related content from the profile holder, as well as comments and other content contributed by Facebook Friends. Each Facebook user has the ability to send private messages to most other users using a feature similar to email or can engage in synchronous communication using Facebook's chat (or instant messaging) service. Users can also join Groups, often centered around common interests.

2. Theoretical background and research questions

2.1. Uses and gratifications

Uses and gratifications (U&G) is a theoretical framework that is used to study how media, including social media, are utilized to fulfill the needs of individual users with different goals. Individuals distinguish between different forms of media based on the needs the user expects to satisfy through his or her use (Katz, Gurevith, & Haas, 1973; Perse & Courtright, 1993).

The U&G approach allows technology and media researchers to explicate users' various goals when engaging with media, allowing for a better understanding of differing behaviors, outcomes, and

perceptions. Katz et al. (1973) highlight the recursive relationship between user expectations and practices inherent in U&G approaches, which examine the "social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectations of the mass media or other sources, which lead to differential patterns of media exposure, resulting in need gratifications and other consequences" (p. 510). They emphasize that U&G studies have two distinct approaches: how needs are gratified by media and how gratifications reconstruct needs.

2.2. Uses and gratifications of social media

Scholars have employed the U&G perspective to answer foundational questions about the motivations for using social media. For example, Lampe and colleagues (2010) used U&G to explain motivations to contribute to a content-generation online community, and showed that different motivations for use were tied to different patterns of contribution by site members and to intentions to contribute in the future. Additionally, researchers have used U&G in order to better understand the extent to which users expect various needs and desires will be fulfilled by use of Facebook (Bumgarner, 2007; Foregger, 2008; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). These studies reveal various motivations for general Facebook use. More specifically, Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011) used factor analysis to extract nine distinct scales of motives for using Facebook: habitual pass time, relaxing entertainment, expressive information sharing, escapism, cool and new trend, companionship, professional advancement, social interaction and meeting new people.

Beyond providing an understanding of the motives for using Facebook, U&G has also been used to predict frequency of site visits (Joinson, 2008). According to this work, uses and gratifications related to photographs, social investigation (e.g., using the site to meet new people or find out more information about specific users), and status updates were all significant predictors of the frequency of Facebook visits.

These Facebook studies explain the different motivations that predict general use of the site and, in the case of Joinson (2008), predict the amount of time users spend on the site. However, previous research on traditional forms of mass media highlight the need for a more granular approach to the measurement of use, one that acknowledges that individuals attend to specific features or type of content (e.g., comedy) within a larger media framework (e.g., television). For instance, past research on television has focused not only on the motivations that predict media choice, but also the motivations that lead to *selection of specific content* in a given medium. Ferguson and Perse (2000) applied this approach to the World Wide Web and found that motives for use significantly predicted specific types of use. More recently, research addressing YouTube use has identified similar genre motivations when predicting engagement with specific types of content (Haridakis & Hanson, 2008). Shen and Williams (2011) employed a related approach to Internet and Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMO) use: the researchers identified different types of Internet and MMO use in order to better understand how specific types of use, in addition to a general measure of use, were related to psychosocial well-being (e.g., loneliness, family communication quality, and sense of community online). Results suggest that the way individuals use the Internet, such as for gathering information, meeting new people, and communicating with both geographically distant and close others, "contributes to the prediction of psychosocial outcomes over and above time spent online" (p. 20). Similar results were found concerning MMO uses, such as social motivation, achievement motivation, and immersion motivation. Likewise, we consider Facebook to be a collection of communication tools rather

than a single, one-dimensional medium used only in uniform ways, and our approach reflects this understanding.

A research approach that links specific genres of content within a single media environment to user motivations seems particularly important when considering Facebook, which is essentially a tool-kit of features, each of which allow different activities to be performed. According to the research on media choice, user perceptions of the affordances of a tool will affect which medium users choose for a particular task (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987). While we are not measuring feature choice on a task-by-task basis, our approach is still informed by the understanding that user expectations about the nature of their interpersonal, informational, and other needs will influence their media choices. Within an umbrella service like Facebook, users will select the features that they believe will best meet their needs, much like television watchers tune into a genre of programming when they want to relax or Internet users frequent specific websites when they wish to be informed.

In light of the above, we ask which motivations predict the use of certain features of Facebook:

- RQ1a: What motives predict the use of status updates?
- RQ1b: What motives predict the use of comments?
- RQ1c: What motives predict the use of Wall posts?
- RQ1d: What motives predict the use of private messages?
- RQ1e: What motives predict the use of chat?
- RQ1f: What motives predict the use of Groups?

In the second stage of our analysis, we compare models predicting specific features to a model that predicts general use of the site. This comparison enables us to determine the efficacy of disaggregating different types of use and to test whether different motivations predict overall use versus the use of specific features.

RQ2: Are the motivations that predict general Facebook use different from the motivations that predict use of specific Facebook features?

3. Research methods

3.1. Data collection and participants

Our sample consisted of 267 undergraduate students from two entry-level telecommunication courses at a large Midwestern university. Students were invited to participate in an online survey about their use of SNSs. For their participation, students were offered extra credit. Participants were 65% male with an average age of 20. Most of our sample (90%) reported being residents of the state and 5% were international.

3.2. Measures

Information technology usage is influenced by individual motivation as well as characteristics such as age and gender (Kang, 2002; Lucas & Sherry, 2004; Valkenburg and Soeters, 2001). Accordingly, we included a number of demographic variables that have been used in prior research on Facebook (Ellison et al., 2007). We asked participants about demographic factors such as gender, age, year in school, affiliation with a fraternity or sorority, ethnicity, current residence (on/off campus), in-state/out-of-state, and daily Internet use, which we used as control variables. Use of specific Facebook features was measured by a set of items about frequency of use: "I use (name of feature) often." Respondents were asked to rank how much they agreed with this statement on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to

Table 1

Summary of the single items measuring Facebook feature use.

	Mean	SD
I update my status on Facebook often.	2.96	1.19
I use the comments feature on Facebook often.	3.62	1.06
I write Wall posts on my friends' pages often.	3.42	1.00
I use the private messages feature on Facebook often.	3.24	1.04
I use Facebook chat often.	3.32	1.29
I use Facebook Groups often.	2.53	1.04
I use applications often.	2.77	1.19

Note: All items shared a common prompt: "Indicate how much you agree with each option by marking the appropriate response" and were measured with a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

"Strongly Agree." See Table 1 for item wording and descriptive statistics.

Motives for Facebook use were assessed using scales developed by Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011). Items in the scales began with "I use Facebook. . ." Each scale and its respective items are described in Table 2.

4. Results

Previous research on Facebook from the U&G perspective has explored motivations for using the site (Bumgarner, 2007; Joinson, 2008; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011). Our approach disassembles Facebook use to explore the motivations that predict use of specific features as opposed to more global measures of overall use. To answer RQ1a–f, we ran six separate OLS regressions, each with use of different Facebook feature as the dependent variable (status updates, comments, Wall posts, private messages, chat, and Groups). As mentioned above, Facebook feature use was measured by a set of items about frequency of use: "I use (name of feature) often." The nine motives previously established by Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011) were used as the independent variables. Internet usage and the demographic items noted above were included as control variables.

4.1. Predicting use of features

In regards to RQ1a, which focused on predictors of *status updates*, expressive information sharing ($\beta = 0.182, p < 0.05$) ($R^2 = 0.263$) was significant, indicating an association between the motivation of expressive information sharing and the use of status updates. (Betas for scales are standardized. All others are unstandardized.) Results of this regression, and the others addressing RQ1b–f, may be seen in Table 3.

The model addressing RQ1b ($R^2 = 0.454$), concerning motives that predict use of *comments*, had three significant predictors: relaxing entertainment ($\beta = 0.333, p < 0.01$), companionship ($\beta = -0.174, p < 0.05$), and social interaction ($\beta = 0.214, p < 0.01$). In-state students ($\beta = -0.672, p < 0.01$) and students in the Greek system ($\beta = -0.290, p < 0.05$) were negatively associated with use of this feature.

The regression model for RQ1c ($R^2 = 0.329$) found three motives that positively predict *writing on Facebook Friends' Walls*: habitual pass time ($\beta = 0.276, p < 0.05$), professional advancement ($\beta = 0.229, p < 0.01$), and social interaction ($\beta = 0.220, p < 0.01$). Additionally, participants who were non-white were negatively associated with writing wall posts. ($\beta = -0.325, p < 0.05$).

The regression for RQ1d looking at *private message* use ($R^2 = 0.214$) showed two motives as significant predictors: professional advancement ($\beta = 0.179, p < 0.05$) and social interaction ($\beta = 0.168, p < 0.05$). Students in the Greek system ($\beta =$

Table 2

Summary of Facebook motivation scales and individual items.

	Alpha	Mean	SD
<i>Relaxing entertainment</i>	0.88	3.39	0.78
Because it's enjoyable.		3.67	0.88
Because it's entertaining.		3.71	0.84
Because it relaxes me.		3.13	1.01
Because it allows me to unwind.		3.16	1.03
Because it is a pleasant rest.		3.29	0.98
<i>Expressive information sharing</i>	0.86	3.41	0.75
To provide information.		3.45	0.96
To present information about a special interest of mine.		3.34	0.98
To share information that may be of use or interest to others.		3.45	0.89
To provide personal information about myself.		3.24	0.98
To tell others a little bit about myself.		3.57	0.87
<i>Escapism</i>	0.67	2.99	0.78
So I can forget about school, work, or other things.		3.20	1.02
So I can get away from the rest of my family or others.		2.41	0.96
So I can get away from what I'm doing.		3.37	1.03
<i>Cool and new trend</i>	0.82	2.95	0.94
Because everybody else is doing it.		2.95	1.11
Because it is the thing to do.		2.89	1.07
Because it is cool.		3.00	1.11
<i>Companionship</i>	0.77	2.78	0.91
So I won't have to be alone.		2.56	1.06
When there's no one else to talk or be with.		3.13	1.12
Because it makes me feel less lonely.		2.65	1.10
<i>Professional advancement</i>	0.79	2.57	0.83
It is helpful for my professional future.		2.71	1.01
To post my resume and/or other work online.		2.36	0.93
To help me network with professional contacts.		2.63	1.01
<i>Social interaction</i>	0.74	4.14	0.74
To keep in touch with friends and family.		4.14	0.84
To communicate with distanced friends.		4.13	0.81
<i>Habitual pass time</i>	0.85	3.61	0.78
Because I just like to play around on Facebook.		3.52	0.93
Because it is a habit, just something I do.		3.57	1.00
When I have nothing better to do.		3.68	1.02
Because it passes the time away, particularly when I'm bored.		3.65	1.01
Because it gives me something to do to occupy my time.		3.60	1.01
<i>To meet new people (single item)</i>		2.99	1.18

Note: All items shared a common prompt: "Indicate how much you agree with each option by marking the appropriate response" and were measured with a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

Table 3

Predictors of Facebook use by feature.

	Status updates	Comments	Wall posts	Private messages	Chat	Groups
(Intercept)	.306	1.060	1.089	1.242	2.087	2.003
Gender (Female)	.026	-.262	.178	-.004	-.573**	-.033
Age	-.059	-.021	-.029	.015	-.039	-.011
Year in school	-.078	.094	-.044	.100	-.183	.025
Current residence (on campus/off campus)	.260	-.291	.102	-.130	.164	.096
State status (from in-state or out-of-state)	-.026	-.672**	-.047	-.201	-.733**	.078
Greek (fraternity/sorority)	-.110	-.469*	-.023	-.547*	-.150	.203
Ethnicity (white/non-white)	-.065	.105	-.325*	-.390*	-.069	-.202
Internet use per day	.001	.000	.000	0.000	0.000	-.001
Habitual pass time	-.017	.174	.276*	.140	.194	-.046
Relaxing entertainment	.234	.333**	.179	.082	.220	.252
Expressive information sharing	.182*	.146	-.072	-.070	-.111	.358***
Escapism	.112	-.010	-.023	-.071	-.105	-.114
Cool new trend	-.006	-.078	-.057	.167	-.032	-.083
Companionship	-.084	-.174*	-.090	-.058	.157	.045
Professional advancement	.130	-.008	.229**	.179*	.069	.106
Social interaction	.121	.214**	.220**	.168*	.186*	-.194*
To meet new people	.006	-.014	-.070	-.028	-.057	-.100
R ²	.263	.454	.329	.214	.393	.238

* p < 0.05.

** p < 0.01.

*** p < 0.001.

Table 4
Correlation analysis of Facebook feature use.

	Status updates	Comments	Wall posts	Private messages	Chat	Groups
Status updates	1.000	.504**	.583**	.249**	.354**	.237**
Comments		1.000	.570**	.371**	.475**	.228**
Wall posts			1.000	.387**	.437**	.223**
Private messages				1.000	.320**	.310**
Chat					1.000	.212**
Groups						1.000

** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed).

–0.547, $p < 0.05$) and non-white students ($\beta = -0.390$, $p < 0.05$) were negatively associated with use of this feature.

Addressing RQ1e, the use of *Facebook chat* ($R^2 = 0.393$), social interaction ($\beta = 0.186$, $p < 0.05$) was the only motive that predicted use of the chat feature. However, gender ($\beta = -0.573$, $p < 0.01$) and state residence ($\beta = -0.733$, $p < 0.01$) were both predictors of using Facebook chat, as being female and an out-of-state student were negatively associated with using this feature.

The regression for RQ1f, predicting the use of *Facebook Groups* ($R^2 = 0.238$), found two significant predictors: expressive information sharing ($\beta = 0.358$, $p < 0.001$) and social interaction, which was negative ($\beta = -0.194$, $p < 0.05$). Thus Facebook Groups are used less by those who are motivated by social interaction, but more by those who are motivated by expressive information sharing.

To address RQ2, which asked whether the motivations that predict general Facebook use differ from the motivations that predict use of specific Facebook features, we ran an OLS regression with average time spent on Facebook per day as the dependent variable and the nine motivations as independent variables. Demographics and time spent on the Internet were used as control variables. As noted above, previous U&G studies of Facebook have conceptualized “use” as time spent on the site. Results of the regression ($R^2 = 0.315$) in Table 5 show that the motives of relaxing entertainment ($\beta = 0.270$, $p < 0.05$), expressive information sharing ($\beta = -0.203$, $p < 0.05$), and social interaction ($\beta = 0.190$, $p < 0.05$) are all predictors of overall use. Additionally, membership in a fraternity or sorority ($\beta = 1.503$, $p < 0.05$) and Internet use per day were also predictors.

4.2. Supplementary analysis

Correlations of dependent variables, presented in Table 4, suggest that the use of individual features is non orthogonal, consistent with prior studies looking at granular features of a medium (e.g., Chang, 2008; Yee, 2006). To determine if the different uses grouped together, a factor analysis with a Promax rotation, which reflects inherent correlations between the components (Cureton, 1975), was performed. However, the rotation could not be completed, as there was only one factor. We feel that the correlation between feature uses does not affect our main contribution, which is that differences between features are meaningful in how they are associated with use. Even with the one factor, that contribution remains relevant.

5. Discussion

This study extends past research exploring the relationship between expected gratifications and Facebook use by focusing on use of *specific Facebook features* as opposed to generic use of the site, suggesting that disassembling feature use is a productive strategy for SNS researchers. Our findings suggest that studying Facebook as a *toolkit* of features, each with a different set of affordances, as opposed to a singular *tool*, may provide more insight

Table 5
Regression model of general Facebook use based on time spent on Facebook ($N = 267$).

	Time on FB
(Intercept)	.897
Gender (Female)	–.136
Age	–.146
Year in school	–.149
Current residence (on campus/off campus)	–.182
State status (from in-state or out-of-state)	–1.173
Greek (fraternity/sorority)	1.503*
Ethnicity (white/non-white)	.231
Internet use per day	0.005**
Habitual pass time	–.035
Relaxing entertainment	.270*
Expressive information sharing	–.203*
Escapism	.143
Cool new trend	.146
Companionship	–.106
Professional advancement	.075
Social interaction	.190*
To meet new people	–.046
R^2	0.315

*** $p < 0.001$.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

into why people are using the site and what they expect to achieve through their use. Our findings begin to lay a foundation for future research that considers feature use as opposed to generic SNS use.

5.1. Comparing general use versus feature use

This granular focus on features can illuminate trends in use that would otherwise be obscured and which may provide insight into user perceptions and practices. Our findings indicate that motivations which significantly predict general use of Facebook paint an incomplete picture of motivations for using the site and obscure our ability to gain insight into user motivations of use. Only three motivations—relaxing entertainment, expressive information sharing and social interaction—significantly predict general use (see Table 5), but six motivations significantly predict use of specific features. This suggests that measuring Facebook use by the overall time that users spend on Facebook tells us little about the psychological processes that motivate media choice and usage. For instance, expressive information sharing was a significant positive predictor of use of status updates and groups. In the general use regression, however, this motivation was found to be a significant negative predictor of use. These results echo recent work by Shen and Williams (2011) which found that specific uses of the Internet and MMOs revealed relationships with psychosocial well-being that were otherwise hidden when use was measured by time spent.

As discussed above, SNS researchers examining social capital and loneliness have found differences among Facebook users associated with active or passive use of the site (Burke et al., 2010;

Kramer, 2010). Considered in conjunction with our findings, a growing body of work suggests that examining specific communication behaviors on the site, as opposed to aggregated measures of use, may enable researchers to uncover previously obscured relationships between SNS use, social capital outcomes, and loneliness.

5.2. Explaining predictors of feature use

Our approach to differentiating among features is consistent with scholarship that highlights the affordances of ICTs as a way to understand their use and impact (Resnick, 2001). Affordances refer to “the range of possible activities” a thing may perform (Norman, 1999) (p. 40). For example, affordances of email include the ability to engage in both one-to-one or one-to-many communication and asynchronicity. Considering the affordances of Facebook features may assist in interpreting the patterns of use and motivation uncovered by our findings.

5.2.1. Explaining expressive information sharing

Results show that expressive information sharing significantly predicts use of one-to-many communication features (such as status updates and Groups) but not one-to-one communication (such as private messaging and chat). Based on the prompt associated with the status update tool (“What’s on your mind?”), it is unsurprising that expressive information sharing is a predictor of its use; this feature is the easiest way to broadcast updates, requests, and information to one’s entire network. Doing so through chat or private messaging reaches a much smaller audience.

Additionally predicted by expressive information sharing, the use of Groups also allows for communication with a large audience. At the time of data collection, when a Facebook user joined a Group, their new affiliation was broadcast to their friends through the News Feed feature and also listed on their profile page. Moreover, joining a Group may provide the user with a forum for sharing information about a topic of interest with both his or her network (through the News Feed) and a larger audience of like-minded strangers. Of course, user practices that influence how information is shared (such as whether users post Group activity to their News Feed and whether the Group is open or closed) will impact user expectations and outcomes. Future research should consider variables such as privacy settings and include these in models of use.

Considering users’ self-presentational goals can also help illuminate why use of Groups and status updates are associated with expressive information sharing. Posting a message to a Group is a form of direct expressive information sharing with other Group members, but by broadcasting membership of one’s group affiliation to one’s Friend network (through the News Feed and profile page), users may feel Group membership provides a more reliable signal about their tastes, above and beyond statements in their profile. For example, a user may say in their “About Me” profile field that they like the band *The Shins*, but being a member of and contributing to a Shins-focused Facebook Group further evidences their affinity with the band. Although both these signals are relatively conventional (or cheap to produce), as interpreted through Donath’s (2007) adaptation of signaling theory, users may see additional cues as stronger evidence of self-presentational statements, an intriguing idea that warrants further research.

Communication directed at an individual while simultaneously broadcast to a larger audience, as is possible through status updates, is an example of *masspersonal* communication (O’ Sullivan, 2005), a conceptual lens that has not been applied to the SNS context. The term “masspersonal” describes communication utterances that span interpersonal and mass (broadcast) contexts, such as when an individual uses a channel traditionally associated with mass (broadcast) communication to convey a message that is

interpersonal in nature (e.g., calling into a radio program to wish a friend “happy birthday” on air). While examples outside of the social media genre (such as marriage proposals on billboards) are rare, Facebook’s Wall and comments features may represent more accessible opportunities for users to engage in masspersonal communication and thus may constitute an important research context for synthesizing interpersonal and mass media theories.

The ability of SNSs to enable masspersonal communication is a promising research focus. Some Facebook features operate at the nexus of interpersonal and mass communication, creating communicative possibilities around which norms are still developing. Additional research is needed to explain how tools that allow for one-to-many communication are perceived and used, and to what extent users’ conceptualization of the size of their audience influences their communication practices and outcomes.

5.2.2. Explaining social interaction & habitual passtime

The motive of social interaction, characterized by communication with friends and family, positively predicted commenting, private messaging, chat, and Wall posts. Wall posts were also the only feature predicted by the motive of habitual pass time. One of the norms of Facebook use is writing on Friends’ Walls with birthday greetings, a form of “social grooming” (Donath, 2007) on the site; writing these messages may be both a routine (or habitual) part of one’s Facebook experience and a form of maintaining relationships. Commenting, private messaging, and chatting are logical features to use to fulfill social interaction needs, especially since they facilitate more direct, one-to-one communication. Interestingly, social interaction negatively predicted the use of Groups. As discussed above, the only motive that positively predicted the use of Groups was expressive information sharing. Groups provide users with the opportunity to interact with others that might share a similar interest. In combination, these findings could be interpreted to mean that Facebook users view Groups as sources of information, not locations for social interaction. While the make up of Groups varies greatly, many Groups appear to be composed mainly of individuals without previous social connections to each other. Consequently, the negative association of social interaction with Groups could be a function of how Facebook is viewed by users: as a platform for maintaining social connections, not building new ones (Ellison et al., 2007). While social interaction may be occurring within Groups, users do not visit groups with the goal of engaging with others in a social manner. That appears to be a motive reserved for instances when the user is more likely to know those he or she is communicating with.

5.2.3. Explaining companionship

The use of comments was also the only feature predicted, although negatively, by the motive of companionship (characterized by behaviors related to avoiding feelings of loneliness), suggesting that those seeking companionship through their Facebook use are less likely to report use of the comments feature. Considering that comments are a form of asynchronous communication and that companionship – as measured by items such as “so I won’t have to be alone” and “because it makes me feel less lonely” – is more likely to be assuaged through synchronous communication, this finding is not surprising. However, use of the chat feature, which affords synchronous communication did not have a significant relationship with companionship ($\beta = 0.157, p = 0.85$). This may warrant further attention in future research, especially as previous work has shown an association between the use of stand-alone instant messaging applications and companionship (Recchiuti, 2003). Exploring whether the synchronicity of the medium affects perceptions of its ability to meet companionship needs is an area researchers should explore in the future, especially since recent SNS research suggests that Facebook can play a role in

providing users with access to emotional support (Vitak, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2011).

5.2.4. Explaining professional advancement

The motivation of professional advancement, characterized by behavior and perceived helpfulness related to professional goals, was predicted by use of Wall posts and private messages. This motivation to use Wall posts can be understood through a “strength of weak ties” perspective (Granovetter, 1973). As Ellison and colleagues (2007) suggest, college friends may be valuable sources for professional opportunities in the future. As such, it may be that our participants are using Facebook to maintain connections that they perceive will one day assist them in securing a job, and are maintaining these ties through the occasional Wall post (e.g., on one’s birthday), which enables them to publicly groom the relationship in a low-effort manner.

The use of private messages could also be for the purpose of maintaining a connection, but it may be that people are more comfortable discussing issues related to professional goals through channels that are perceived as more private. For example, asking about job availabilities or for career advice may be activities that an individual does not wish to broadcast to their entire network, especially if their network includes co-workers. Similarly, grooming a professional connection might be better done through a one-to-one channel that signals a targeted message and more focused attention, as opposed to a broadcast channel.

5.2.5. Demographic predictors

We did not find many differences in terms of individual traits and use. However, users who were out-of-state students reported less use of chat and commenting. Also, users who were affiliated with a fraternity or sorority reported less use of commenting and private messages than who were not. It could be that the social interaction needs, a predictor of comment and private message use, of fraternity and sorority members are being met by social functions of their respective organizations or the Greek system as a whole, resulting in less use of these features. Future research could explore the relationship between offline social interaction opportunities and the use of SNSs for meeting social interaction needs.

Additionally, females in our sample were found to be associated with less use of the chat feature than males. Other research has found gender to be a significant predictor of frequency of use of Facebook, such that females are more frequent visitors than males (Joinson, 2008). Prior work focusing on various forms of Internet use has also found a number of gender differences (Odell, Korgen, Schumacher, & Delucchi, 2000). However, it should be noted that these gender differences, as well as those revealed in our study, are based on perceptions of use, not measures of actual use. Future research addressing gender differences in Facebook use should strive to make comparisons between perceptions of use and actual use.

5.2.6. Limitations and future research

The research presented above is limited by a number of factors. Due to the use of a non-random sample, results cannot be generalized to other populations. We used existing motivation scales as opposed to open-ended questions about use; we therefore do not know if there are motivations for Facebook use that are not expressed through our measures. Future research should build and expand upon these scales in an effort to capture a greater diversity of motives for using different Facebook features. For example, additional items should be created for the “to meet new people” measure. This one-item measure, developed by Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011), could be expanded to create a scale measuring additional aspects of relationship development.

Additionally, future research should employ U&G to look at Facebook from a functional alternative approach. Facebook has many communicative features that are also available as stand-alone applications from other providers, such as email, instant messaging, and photo sharing. Future research should begin to untangle under what circumstances Facebook users rely on the features of Facebook for goal attainment and under what circumstances they seek other media to attain similar goals. Furthermore, in this study, we divided use according to feature; however, a cross-media study may reveal more overarching themes of use.

6. Conclusions

Research addressing SNS use has produced insights into predictors of use, user practices, and outcomes of SNS use, which continue to evolve at a rapid pace. Traditionally, SNS use has been treated as homogeneous, implicitly operating under the assumption that users are employing the same set of features in the same manner. The research reported here complements and extends these studies by using the motivations found by prior studies and examining how motivations predict specific feature use.

We found that Facebook use is not uniform across users, and that conceptualizing the site as a collection of features allows for a more granular understanding of why users are using site, uncovering patterns that would otherwise be obscured when SNS use is measured as a single item. This study not only advances the study of SNSs, providing alternative avenues for the measurement of social media use, but also contributes to extending U&G theory. The methods and resulting findings of this study expand the application of U&G in the study of new media. Unlike traditional media, new media such as SNSs are a convergence of various types of media, making this granular approach an important step in understanding use through the lens of U&G.

Additionally, this research is an important contribution to the study of SNS use. By comparing how motivations predict general use and how motivations predict use of specific features, this study suggests that measuring overall social media use instead of specific feature use obfuscates granular patterns regarding use: who is using what tool to what end. Our results indicate that dividing general use into different features accounts for a more detailed explanation of how motivations are related to use and, in some cases, pinpoints different positive and negative associations between motivations and uses that would not emerge in a study of general use. Consequently, the results of this study provide evidence indicating that significant insights into the use of social media can be gained by focusing on feature use instead of more unidimensional approaches.

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