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A STUDY ON THE FACTORS INFLUENCING THE INTENTION OF BLOG USAGE

- FOCUSED ON SOCIAL MOTIVATION -

ABSTRACT

Blogs are a new type of media that have recently become popular users on the World Wide Web and have influence throughout society. The purpose of this study is to examine social motivations influencing intention of blog usage.

Based on Technology Acceptance Model and Motivation Theory, This study considered perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, reputation, reciprocity, enjoyment of helping, social identity as the determinants of influencing the intention of blog usage. The purposed model was empirically evaluated using online survey data collected from 342 user of popular blog site in Korea (NAVER Blog , cyworld mihompy, daum blog, yahoo blog etc)

The results revealed that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, reciprocity, social identity affected directly the intention of blog usage. Also social identity has moderate effect via reciprocity and enjoyment of helping on blog usage.

This study contributes to a theoretical understanding of the factors as social motivation that affect the usage of blogs. Practically this study results provide blog service providers useful strategic insights and service guideline to enhance user's intention of blogs.

Key words : Blog, Technology Acceptance Model, Social Motivation, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, reputation , reciprocity, enjoyment of helping, social identity

1. INTRODUCTION

Blogs are recently expanding its influence on the overall society as they are widely used as new media after internet has risen as key media. In the United States, about 12 million adults, 8% of all internet users, have blogs and about 57 million adults, 39% of internet users, are reading blogs (Pew Internet & American Life Project Report, 2006).

The blog's explosive expansion may have originated from its characteristics (Herring *et al.*, 2004; Huffaker, 2004b), which includes 1) it is easy to use, 2) it can be used as a means to obtain information and knowledge, 3) a comment or feedback can be provided to each blog post, and 4) it can reach other bloggers based on online communities.

This study aims to identify by which factors and how blog users are influenced by social motivation in the perspective of society when they use blogs and to draw out and analyze the related factors as below.

First, it aims to analyze influence on blog usage made by perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, key factors in Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) which has been verified to be an adamant theory on technology acceptance of users.

Second, it aims to introduce reputation, reciprocity, enjoyment of helping, and social identity as social motivation as research variables based on examination of the previous studies and to analyze the influence on blog usage made by these factors.

Third, it aims to verify adjustment effects of social identity based on the previous studies under the expectation that social motivation that is different according to social identity has different influence on blog usage.

In order to achieve these objectives, this study established the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), analyzed data gained through online questionnaire surveys, verified hypotheses, and identified influence of factors on blog usage.

Results of the study tell that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, reciprocity and social identity directly influence intent to use blogs. Also it was found that social identity has adjustment effects on intent to use blogs in cases of reciprocity and enjoyment of helping.

This study is significant in terms of extending theoretical understanding on factors of social motivation that influence blog usage by identifying factors directly influencing intent to use blogs and adjustment effects of social identity. Also as for practical significance, the study provided companies of blog services with strategic information and a guideline to heighten users' intent to use.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses of the study

2.1 A study into Technology Acceptance Mode (TAM)

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) proposed by Davis (1986) is based on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) explaining that a man's concrete act is directly determined by intent to conduct a behavior and that the intent of a behavior is determined by attitudes and subject norms (F.D. Davis, 1989)

Davis presented 'perceived usefulness' and 'perceived ease of use' as important factors in acceptance of information and technology and maintained that an attitude formed through two factors affect a real act with the intent of act as a parameter. (F.D. Davis, 1986)

Later, many researchers verified that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use maintain a conceptual validity that is important to use of new information and technology and that two concepts are closely related. Also there have been various studies extending explanation or applicability of TAM by adding new variables to perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. (Davis *et al.*, 1992; Igbaria *et al.*, 1997; Gefen and Straub, 1997, 2000; Venkatesh, 2000; Venkatesh and Davis, 2000; Gefen, 2003; Hsu and Lu, 2004; Ong *et al.*, 2004)

According to Davis (1986), 'perceived usefulness' refers to the "degree to which an individual believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance" and in this study, 'perceived usefulness' can be defined as the 'degree to which an individual believes that using a blog would enhance his or her job performance'. As aforementioned theoretical background revealed that perceived usefulness influenced acceptance of technology of users based on many previous studies, unlike the existing one-directional homepages, use of blogs characteristics of new technologies such as RSS, trackback, etc. is expected to be influenced by perceived usefulness. Thus, in order to verify this, this study arranged a hypothesis as below.

Hypothesis1: Perceived usefulness will influence intent to use a blog.

Also according to Davis (1986), 'perceived ease of use' refers to the "degree to which the prospective user expects the target system to be free of effort". Thus, this study defines 'perceived ease of use' as the 'degree to which the prospective user expects the blog to be free of efforts'. In order to verify if the relations between influence of the perceived ease of use on technology

acceptance of users and the perceived usefulness can be applied to this study which deals with blogs, the following hypotheses have been made.

Hypothesis 2: Perceived ease of use will influence intent to use a blog.

Hypothesis 3: Perceived ease of use will influence perceived usefulness.

2.2 Reputation

Primarily, the essence of reputation is a social one rather than an individual judgment. Reputation is a social construction collectively created through the process of social communication and is not confused by perception of an individual (Emler, 1990).

According to Emler (1990), people actually have reputation and expect acts to protect and recover their own unique reputation while at the same time trying to have own reputation known to others. Also it was emphasized that reputation is inherent expression of an individual as well as social expression of an individual. According to the social exchange theory, individuals are related to social interactions based on social compensation such as praise, status, and respect (Blau, 1964).

Thus, a potential way for an individual to obtain benefits through active participation is to raise his or her reputation within a network. Also reputation is regarded as an important asset that can be utilized to secure or maintain a position within a group (Jones *et al*, 1997). Also raising reputation works as a powerful motive for active participation (Donath, 1999). There was a study that participation takes place to construct and maintain reputation within a community as for development of open source software (Rheingold 1993, Raymond 1999, Gabriel&Goldman 2001).

Thus, this study established the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 4: Reputation will influence intent to use a blog.

2.3 Reciprocity

The social exchange theory assumes that people try to maintain a balanced relationship in terms of resource exchange, which is known as the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1964). There is a result from a study that reciprocity generates a sense of moral obligation that if an individual has provided resources to someone, the beneficiary shall repay with resources of a similar value in the near future and that when the amount of resources exchanged is not balanced it would be difficult to maintain the relationship (Neufeld & Harrison, 1995).

On the other hand, previous studies produced results that people sharing knowledge in an online community believe in reciprocity (Wasko &Faraj 2000). Furthermore, researchers have observed that those regularly helping others within a virtual community are faster helped when they need help (Rheingold 2000).

According to the social exchange theory, a participant in a virtual community expects mutual reciprocity that can justify time or efforts spent to raise their knowledge (Thibaut *et al*, 1959). Davenport and Prusak (1998) pointed out that reciprocity is one of factors leading sharing of knowledge and Kankanhalli *et al*. (2005) found that under conditions of weakly shared norms, there is a positive impact on the use of electronic knowledge storage by knowledge sharers.

Even if resource exchange in the electronic network is maintained through a weak coalition of strange visitors, a proof supporting reciprocity is present (Wellman and Gulia, 1999). There is a previous study that knowledge sharing in an electronic network is promoted by strong reciprocity and fairness (Wasko and Faraj, 2000). These provide a sufficient possibility in forecasting that reciprocity will influence the use of a blog.

Thus, this study presents the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 5: Reciprocity will influence the intent to use a blog.

2.4 Enjoyment of Helping

Enjoyment of helping others is closely related to altruism. Altruism exists when having internal enjoyment from helping others without wanting anything as a return (Krebs 1975, Smith 1981). As absolute altruism that never includes interest as a motive for an act is very rare, relative altruism generally affects (Smith 1981). A knowledge sharer can be motivated by relative altruism based on his desire to help others (Davenport and Prusak 1998).

As for previous studies into enjoyment of helping, it was studied as a factor influencing in the aspect of knowledge sharing in an electronic network. A knowledge sharer in an electronic network is satisfied with their inherent enjoyment of helping others (Ba *et al.* 2001; Constant *et al.* 1994). Also if an individual is happy with helping others or finds it exciting to help others solve a problem, he will want to share knowledge (Kollock, 1999). As intelligent pursuit and solving problems are challenging and fun, an individual is internally motivated to contribute for others with their knowledge (Wasko and Faraj, 2000).

Thus, this study, based on understanding that in blogs where social interaction is more active and diverse than information sharing, enjoyment of helping will influence the use of a blog as an inherent motive without wanting a return, establishes the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 6: Enjoyment of helping will influence the intent to use a blog.

2.5 Social Identity

Social identity is an individual self-concept originating from being perceived as a member of a social group (Hogg & Vaughan, 2002). That is to say, this refers to an individual perception on how 'we', related to the internalized sense of belonging to a group, is defined. Tajfel (2000) defined social identity as 'that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his membership of a social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to this'. Matthew *et al.* (2006) also maintained that social identity is closely related to the sense of community and that a customer belonging to the same group category or having a strong sense of community will have a high level of motive to share opinions in web-based boards.

Social identity appears as a group prototype describing and regulating belief, attitude, feeling and act to optimize the equilibrium between trying to minimize the difference within a group and trying to maximize the difference between groups. Also social identity will affect acts by adjusting roles of group norms (Terry & Hogg, 1996). According to the social identity theory, an individual would try to maintain and heighten reputation of a group where he belongs and will be motivated by potential needs for self-esteem (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Thus, an individual with a strong sense of identity with a specific group will put efforts to improve the status of the group to a higher level than any other groups (Riketta and Landerer, 2005).

The study by U.M Dholakia *et al.*, (2004) also revealed that social identity can increase contribution and potentials for participation of members within a virtual community.

Many researchers produced results that organizational commitment has positive effects on diverse acts such as achievement, participation, maintenance of belonging within an organization, intent to purchase sponsored products, and so forth in association with emotional organizational commitment related to social identity (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer *et al.*, 2002; Riketta, 2002; Zhang *et al.*, 2005). Sujin Yang *et al.* (2007) presented results from a study that in a transformed TAM, social identity has positive effects on students' attitudes to purchase products licensed by their universities online.

Thus, the following hypothesis can be presented based on the aforementioned concept of social identity and previous studies.

Hypothesis 7: Social identity will influence the intent to use a blog.

On the other hand, Younghwa Lee *et al.* (2006), by comparing self-identity as one of social factors with subjective norms, revealed that there is a difference of influence on acts to accept technology by a group that voluntarily introduced the technology from that by a group that was forced to introduce the technology. Further, they presented that studies into social identity are necessary. Thus, this study also can expect that there will be a difference in influence on the intent to use of variables that are different according to the level of social identity as a social factor. For verification of adjustment effects of social identity, the following hypotheses can be presented.

Hypothesis 8: Influence of reputation on the intent to use a blog will be different according to social identity.

Hypothesis 9: Influence of reciprocity on the intent to use a blog will be different according to social identity.

Hypothesis 10: Influence of enjoyment of helping on the intent to use a blog will be different according to social identity.

Thus, this study, based on TAM and the motivation theory, presented a research model as shown in <Figure 1>. Perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness of TAM as well as reputation, reciprocity, enjoyment of helping, and social identity introduced as social motivation are composed as factors influencing the intent to use a blog.

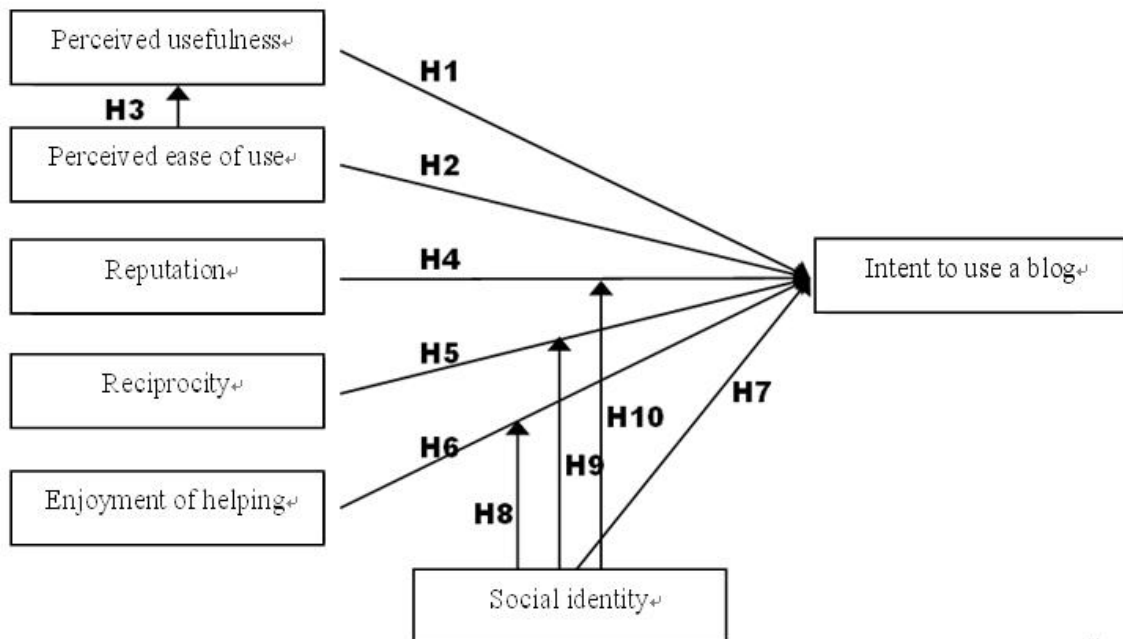


Figure 1. Research Model

3. Research method and data analysis

3.1 Development of measurement tools

While most of questions in the survey came from translated questions whose reliability and validity have been verified through the previous studies, questions on social identity have been developed by the author in reference to important concepts presented in the previous studies.

A preliminary study was conducted to secure validity of contents of questions based on the previous studies with 16 samples of seven graduate school students of HCI Research Lab, Yonsei University, one executive from a portal company (Yahoo), one team leader of the portal, two undergraduate students, and five salaried people.

The final questionnaire was composed of 24 questions with seven variables including six independence variables of 'enjoyment of helping', 'reputation', 'reciprocity', 'social identity', 'perceived usefulness', and 'perceived ease of use' as well as one dependent variable of 'intent to use'. For questions about each research variable, questions on enjoyment of helping, reputation, and reciprocity were referred from Wasko and Faraj (2005). Those on perceived ease of use were referred from Venkatesh & Davis (2000) while those on perceived usefulness were from Venkatesh and Morris (2000) and Moon & Kim (2001). Questions on the intent to use were referred from Agarwal & Karahanna (2000) and Venkatesh & Davis (2000).

3.2 Data collection

Questions were surveyed online to members of OK Cashbag Site (www.okcashbag.com), a point accumulating site with more than 20 millions of members. As a results of the internet survey, 342 samples, 68.4% of 500 respondents, were used as data for the final analysis based on error checks.

For descriptive statistics analysis, this study applied SPSS for window13.0 and for analysis of collected data, LISREL 8.50 version, a structural equation program, was applied. As for LISREL, the minimum sample number of 200 is generally required.

As for gender of 342 samples for the analysis, males took up 50.3% and females formed 49.7%, which tells that gender ratio is almost even. As for education, university graduates formed 56.4%, well over the majority, which was followed by undergraduate students taking up to 21.6%, which tells that overall level of education of respondents is high. On the other hand, the average age of respondents was 28.9 with 56.7% in their 20s and 43.3% in their 30s, which reveals little difference in the ratio between the 20s and the 30s.

As for occupation, office workers (38.9%) took the largest part followed by university students (22.5%), the self-employed (7.6%), housewives (7.6%), and so forth. Overall, the ratio of salaried people excluding undergraduate students, graduate students and housewives was 66.7%, which is high.

3.3 Data analysis

Based on the results from Confirmatory Factor Analysis, goodness of fit indexes were $\chi^2/df=2.55$, CFI=0.941, NFI=0.905, NNFI=0.930 and RMSEA=0.0674, which satisfies the recommended standards and others like GFI=0.874 and AGFI=0.837 showed numbers almost near 0.90, the recommended standard.

As for results from reliability analysis, reliability was estimated through internal consistency. Based on verification of reliability of the factors in this study, Cronbach's α coefficient for all 24 questions was 0.926 and Cronbach's α coefficient of each question was 0.8 and above, which tells that reliability was secured to the excellent level.

Discriminant validity means that there should be a clear difference between different concepts and it can be evaluated through the method presented by Fornell & Larcker (1981). In this study, measurement tools whose average variance extracted (AVE) was used with 0.5 and above in the model were found to have discriminant validity.

Convergent validity is related to ‘to what degree multiple scales measuring an identical concept are consistent’ and is to evaluate whether related observed variables measuring each concept show a high level of correlation. The loaded value of observed variables of each factor was all 0.6 and above and t-value was significant in the significance level of 0.01. Thus, measurement means of this study can be said to have convergent validity.

LISREL analysis (version 8.5) was conducted for all samples (n=342) collected based on online questionnaire responses to research factors influencing blog usage. Based on the results from analysis, overall goodness of fit indexes were CFI=0.923, NNFI=0.909 and RMSEA=0.0735, which satisfies the recommended standards. Others like AGFI=0.860, AGFI=0.821, and NFI=0.887 showed values almost near the recommended standards. Thus, this research model describing relations among factors influencing the intent to use a blog can be estimated to be valid.

3.4 Results from verification of hypotheses

Results from verification of research hypotheses are as follows. Hypothesis 1 providing that perceived usefulness will influence the intent to use a blog had the path coefficient (b) of 0.22 and t-value of 4.04 and was chosen at the significance level of 0.05.

Hypothesis 2 providing that perceived ease of use will influence the intent to use had the path coefficient (b) of 0.22 and t-value of 3.69 and was chosen at the significance level of 0.05.

Hypothesis 3 providing that perceived ease of use will influence perceived usefulness had the path coefficient (b) of 0.43 and t-value of 7.14 and was chosen at the significance level of 0.05.

Hypothesis 4 providing that reputation will influence the intent to use a blog had the path coefficient (b) of 0.05 and t-value of 0.82 and was discarded at the significance level of 0.05.

Hypothesis 5 providing that reciprocity will influence the intent to use a blog had the path coefficient (b) of 0.20 and t-value of 2.63 and was chosen at the significance level of 0.05.

Hypothesis 6 providing that enjoyment of helping will influence the intent to use a blog had the path coefficient (b) of 0.12 and t-value of 1.75 and was discarded at the significance level of 0.05.

Hypothesis 7 providing that social identity will influence the intent to use a blog had the path coefficient (b) of 0.14 and t-value of 2.55 and was chosen at the significance level of 0.05.

In order to verify the hypothesis that influence of research variables (reputation, reciprocity, enjoyment of helping) on the intent to use will differ according to the difference in social identity, based on the value of social identity, groups were divided into two, one with a high level of social identity with means of 5 and above and the other with a low level of social identity with means of below 5. (See <Table 1>)

Name of variable	Total (n=342)	Group with a high level of social identity (n=216)	Group with a low level of social identity (n=126)
Enjoyment of helping	4.85	5.10	4.42
Reputation	5.02	5.25	4.61
Reciprocity	4.92	5.15	4.51
Social identity	4.97	5.61	3.86
Perceived ease of use	5.00	5.22	4.60
Perceived usefulness	4.91	5.15	4.50
Intent to use	5.53	5.81	5.06

Table 1. Division of groups based on the level of social identity

To verify adjustment effects of social identity, regression analysis was conducted for the group with a high level of social identity (A) and that with a low one (B). (See <Table2-1 and Table 2-2>) As a

result, as for enjoyment of helping, the group with a high level of social identity had t-value of 2.296 and significance probability of 0.023 and was statistically significant at the level of $p < 0.05$ while the group with a low level of social identity had t-value of 0.897 and significance probability of 0.372 and was not statistically significant at the level of $p < 0.05$. Also as for reciprocity, the group with a high level of social identity had t-value of 1.045 and significance level of 0.297 and was not statistically significant at the level of $p < 0.05$ while the group with a low level of social identity had t-value of 1.991 and significance probability of 0.049 and was statistically significant at the level of $p < 0.05$. That is to say, based on the degree of social identity, there was a difference between groups in influence that enjoyment of helping and reciprocity have on the intent to use. On the other hand, as for reputation, either groups were not statistically significant.

Group	Variable	Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t
		B	Standard error	Beta	
Group with high Social Identity (A)	Constant	2.15	.49		4.38***
	Enjoyment of helping	.16	.07	.16	2.30**
	Reputation	.43	.06	.05	.69
	Reciprocity	.09	.09	.08	1.05
	Perceived ease of use	.23	.07	.23	3.39***
	Perceived usefulness	.18	.08	.18	2.28**

Table 2-1. Results from regression analysis: group with a high level of social identity (** significance level of 0.05 and below, *** significance level of 0.01 and below)

Group	Variable	Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t
		B	Standard error	Beta	
Group with low Social Identity (A)	Constant	0.29	.49		.58
	Enjoyment of helping	.08	.08	.08	.90
	Reputation	.10	.07	.10	1.38
	Reciprocity	.20	.10	.18	1.99**
	Perceived ease of use	.24	.07	.23	3.35***
	Perceived usefulness	.44	.09	.40	4.91***

Table 2-2. Results from regression analysis: group with a low level of social identity (** significance level of 0.05 and below, *** significance level of 0.01 and below)

4. Discussion

This study was conducted for blog users in its aims to draw out important factors influencing the intent to use based on the motivation theory and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as basic theories.

As results from this study, reciprocity, social identity, perceived ease of use, and perceived usefulness were found to have significant influence on the intent to use a blog and additional regression analysis revealed that social identity works as an adjustment variable.

This study has theoretical and practical significance in terms of the following.

As for theoretical significance, first, this study additionally introduced factors of social motivation that considers social interaction characteristics of blog services as well as perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use that are used as key factors of TAM and verified whether there is influence and the influence itself. While there have been previous studies combining TAM and the motivation factor at the individual level, those discriminating motivation factors at the level of society and associating with this have been rare. This study, further from the individual level, included reputation, reciprocity,

enjoyment of helping, and social identity as social motivation. Thus, this study is significant in terms that it expanded applicability of TAM by considering characteristics of services.

Second, this study combined social identity with TAM and verified the influence of social identity on technology acceptance of a user. There have been studies into effects of social influence in terms of technology acceptance and the example includes studies verifying how acts accepting technology change differ based on difference of subject norm or self-identity but studies into social identity have been very rare. Thus, this study is significant in that it verified that factors influencing technology acceptance of users differ according to social identity.

At the same time, this study has practical significance as follows.

First, this study enabled internet companies providing blog services to establish service strategies that consider factors influencing the customers' intent to use by analyzing factors influencing users to consistently use blogs. Based on this study, internet companies such as portals will need to understand that not only usefulness or ease of use but also social motivation such as reciprocity or social identity are important and shall improve services with focus on them.

Second, as revealed through results from this study, as various factors presented as social motivation differently influence according to social identity, several concrete guidelines can be presented when developing or operating a blog system. For example, for users with a high level of affection to his/her blog and a high level of social identity such as familiarity, 'enjoyment of helping' is a significant factor. So if a function that can easily and actively help other blog users is provided, satisfaction with services will become higher and the use will be more active. On the other hand, as for users with a low level of social identity and influenced by 'reciprocity', it will be more effective to provide a function through which visible compensation can be made as a return when the user provided other blog users with tangible or intangible assets and where this can be fast perceived.

5. Limit of the study and the future research tasks

This study bears a few limits as follows.

First, in terms of methods of data collection, online questionnaire survey is pointed out that it has a problem of self-selection biases. Thus, any future studies shall consider direct offline data collection methods along with e-mail questionnaires or visiting a blog and leaving a message in a visitor's board rather than internet questionnaire surveys toward unspecified people.

Second, this study presented only four factors of reputation, reciprocity, enjoyment of helping, and social identity as social motivation, a factor influencing the intent to use a blog. However, as more motives other than these have a high probability to have an important influence on blog usage as social motivation, the future studies shall add these factors and verify them.

Third, this study identified influence on intent to use of blog users by excluding motives at the individual level and focusing on social motives. However, as blog usage is necessarily influenced both by social motives and individual motives, any future studies will need to add individual motives such as playfulness.

Fourth, in further attempts, this study needs to move from a cross-sectional approach further to a longitudinal one. Segmentation based on the period of blog usage will enable to draw out influential factors based on changes of behaviors of blog usage and the phase of use.

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