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Perceived Relationship Quality by Rural Women in Online Social Networks: Study of a structural equation model with PLS

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Contribution

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Sociability and communication are the growth engines of social networks. Different reports results that are periodically held in Spain, such as the Report on Results of Monitoring Social Networking 3rd wave (BBVA, February 2011), indicate that the rate of participation of women in social networks equals and may even have a slight predominance in front of men, both in terms of the volume of participation, as interactions and the nature of them (Junco, Merson and Salter, 2010). While it is true that the age variable increases the differences between women (the older, more differences with the younger), the gender gap of 16 to 25 years is not significant. However, as the age increases, from 30 years, extending the gender gap and the digital divide (Caldevilla, 2010). These general problems are particularly pronounced when studying specific populations of women such as women in rural areas. The focus of our research is the perceived relationship quality by women, which is one of the explanatory variables of social support in online networks. Within this, we try to solve a problem of measuring the quality of the relationship, while we hope to link a new dimension to the measurement process. To do this, we apply the PLS analysis in order to explore and validate a model to explain the new measure supported in two ways:

a) The research of Perceived Relationship Quality related to certain Internet services (Sánchez-Franco, Martín-Velicia y Rondán, 2010; Sánchez-Franco, Martín-Velicia y Villarejo, 2009), based on previous studies (Crosby, Evans and Cowles,

1990; Garbarbarino and Johnson, 1999, Smith, 1998; Vazquez et al., 2002) linking the extent of "Perceived Relationship Quality" with three fundamental dimensions: "satisfaction", "trust" (Crosby et al., 1990, Dwyer and Oh, 1987) and "commitment" of women in online networks (Morgan and Hunt, 1994); and,

b) Another way to investigate the interaction of discursive procedures as regulators of intersubjectivity, following authors such as Wertsch and Hickmann (1987), Saada-Robert (1994), Lacasa y Herranz (1994), Rogoff (1990). Thus, it includes the dimension "perceived regulatory interactions" (García-Pérez, 2001; Garcia-Pérez, Buzón y Barragán, 2008), picking up the possibilities of external regulation (control, guidance, affection), joint regulation (consultation, verification, monitoring) and regulation for herself (self-regulation) that women perceive within their activity in online social networks.

Our main objective is to confirm a structural equation model, which explains the hypothesized relationships between each dimension of the construct "Perceived Relationship Quality". Thus, we provide results on: 1) Reliability and validity of the measurement model of perceived relationship quality, and 2) assessment of perceived relationship quality by rural women in online social networks.

Method

This is a correlational study, based on interviews "face to face", very structured, which are performed on women who use social networks. Their responses are recorded using Likert scales (0-4). Interviews are conducted by the staff of the Council of Seville in PIMs (Points of Information of the Women) distributed through the towns of rural territory. There have been 478 women interviewed in 30 rural municipalities of the province of Seville. It applies a quota sampling, considering age ranges (18-25, 26-39, 40-54 and 55-65) and the educational level of women. We assume a sampling error < 5% (95.5%, $p = q$). Likert scales are used to measure the dimensions: "Satisfaction", "confidence", "commitment" and "Regulatory Interactions". For data analysis we used SPSS (Ver. 18) and also combine exploratory and confirmatory analytical techniques, using Partial Least Squares (SmartPLS 2.0).

Expected Outcomes

As the study results we obtain a structural equation model confirms the hypothetical set of relationships between the 4 dimensions. Also, we obtained high indicators of reliability and validity for the measurement model. Finally, we describe results on perceived relationship quality in online networks for women in rural areas. We can advance that relational quality levels usually show a medium-low profile that need improvement. In addition, there are variables such as age and education level significantly related to the scores of the construct "Perceived Relationship Quality". Younger women and the most educated women get higher scores on perceived relationship quality. The results obtained allow us to develop plans and make decisions on how to support women in rural areas to conduct a more profitable use of their interactions in social networks.

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