Motivations using Social Networking Sites on Quality Work Life

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Abstract

Nowadays, social networking site (SNS) is one of the fastest growing Internet use. It is also one of social media platforms that encouraged social interaction in a virtual environment. Even several studies have focused on the motives behind the usage of SNS, less study has been conducted locally. Some studies exist, but their conclusions are still insufficient and sometimes even inconsistent. Hence, this conceptual paper attempt to discuss several factors of motivations using SNS towards the quality of work life which include i) interpersonal relationship and ii) personal health and well-being of the staff. It is expected that the discussion of this proposed study will assist to identify the critical motives of using SNS that lead to better quality of work life. In short, this study will provide significant contribution not only to the employees but also to the designers, developers, researchers, organization and society.

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1. Introduction

One of the fastest growing Internet uses today is the social networking sites (SNS). It is a popular platform where all the registered users share information with other registered users (Trusov, Bodapati & Bucklin, 2010). This popularity is mainly given by the fact that SNSs help to connect a person with other online users (e.g. friends, family members, colleagues), share information (e.g. blogs, photos, videos), and help individuals and organizations with other purposes (e.g. promoting new products, recruiting new members).

According to the Internet World Stats, the total estimated population for Asia in 2012 was 3,922,066,987 and...
total Internet users were 1,076,681,059 as of 30 June 2012. In Malaysia, the number of Internet users was more than 17 million as of June 2012. In December 2012, Facebook users in Malaysia increased to more than 13.5 million users. This figure is imperative as the number of active Facebook users were more than 901 million as of 30 April 2012, and more than 75% of users are outside the U.S. (Facebook Facts and Figures, 2011). Definitely, the figures will keep increasing from time to time.

Looking at the figure above, it seems to suggest that Internet users spend a lot of time on SNSs. Hence, it is very important to understand the motives behind the usage of SNSs among online users. Relatively, many researches are interested in assessing the motives of using SNSs. Bolar (2009) highlighted several important motives that contribute to SNSs usage; self-reflection and image-building (i.e. expression of oneself on the SNS), utility (i.e. using features and functionality of the SNS), information-gathering and problem-solving, networking, simply-spending time, revisiting-memories (i.e. search for old friends) and peer influence (i.e. a friend invites a person to register on an SNS). However, other relevant motives for joining SNS were; i) finding and connecting to people (Brouns, Berlanga, Fetter, Bitter-Rijpkema, VanBruggen & Sloep, 2009) ii) social support and friendship (Ridings & Gefen, 2004) iii) communicate with friends (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009) iv) to make new friends (Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007) v) looking for fun and enjoyment from using SNS (Goh, Lada, Muhammad, Ag-Ibrahim & Amboala, 2011). On the other hand, Wong, Lean, and Fernandez (2011) found that the main reason for SNS usage among youth is peer-to-peer communication. In fact, Boyd and Ellison (2008), Hemple (2005), Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calvert (2009), Hirst, Bednall, Ashwin and Icoz (2009) reported peer-to-peer communication is the main reason for SNSs rapid growth.

Even several studies have focused on motives behind the usage of SNS, less studies have been conducted locally. Some studies exist, but their conclusions are still insufficient and sometimes even inconsistent. In fact, research on the relationship between the motive on SNSs and quality of work life has not yet discovered. Many important questions regarding motives of SNSs have still not been answered adequately and conclusively. Moreover, the studies mentioned are mostly from the US environment and their applicability into the context of Malaysia is thus limited.

Therefore, this paper aims to investigate several factors of motivation using SNS towards the quality of work life. The motives of using SNS such as information, entertainment, social interaction, personal identity and self-disclosure will be examined as it is believed to affect the quality of work life. For instance; i) interpersonal relationship and ii) personal health and well-being of the staff.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Quality of Work Life

Quality work life (QWL) is a comprehensive, multifaceted concept and even though used in everyday language, maintains to challenge consensual definition (Haas, 1999). There have been over 4,000 published articles about QWL connected to health since 1993 (King et al.,1997). Analyzing the various articles related to QWL is not easy because of the multiple explanations and dimensions of QWL (Haas, 1999). Possibly, it is due to the fact that the phrase has so many different understandings and is so difficult that many authors do not describe the concept at all or measure related concepts (Bowling, 1995; King et al., 1997; Mast, 1995; Meeberg, 1993).

Furthermore, Emerson (1985) defined quality work life “as the satisfaction of an individual’s values, goals and needs through the actualisation of their abilities or lifestyle.” This definition is consistent with the conceptualization that satisfaction and well-being stop from the degree of fit between an individual’s view of their intention condition and their needs or desires (Felce & Perry, 1995).

2.1.1. Interpersonal Relationships

For the past 20 years, scholars across a variety of disciplines have disputed how online communication influences the quality of interpersonal communication (Walther & Parks, 2002). Furthermore, history also suggested that the adoption of a new communication technology often raises concerns about harmful effects on the quality of interpersonal relationships (Fischer, 1992; Kraut et al., 1998; Nie, Hillygus & Ebring, 2002) and the emergence of Facebook is no exception to this trend (Henry, 2007; Tilsner, 2008).
On the other hand, Ledbetter, Mazer, DeGroot, Meyer, Mao and Swafford (2011) debated that a balanced approach to Facebook communication must acknowledge the existence of relational outcomes that are both positive and negative as well as healthy and unhealthy. By understanding individual motivation to communicate via Facebook may explain such outcomes.

2.1.2. Personal Health and Well-Being

Health and well-being of QWL refer to physical and psychological aspects of an individual in any working environment (Rethinam & Ismail, 2008). Studies by Burke, Marlow and Lento (2010) confirm previous survey-based findings that greater SNS use is associated with increased social capital and reduced loneliness. Apart from the relationship between consumption and increased loneliness, engagement with Facebook is correlated with greater overall well-being. This association speaks to a number of potential design enhancements for encouraging communication over inactive commitment (Burke et al., 2010).

A study by Achat et al., (1998), examined the association between social networks and aspects of mental functioning (mental health, vitality and role-emotional functioning) and the relationship between social networks and mental functioning in the presence of stressors. Although evidence suggested that social networks reduce the risk of mortality and are negatively associated with severe mental disability, little is known about their relationship to everyday functioning and health-related quality work life (HRQWL). Compared to the most socially integrated, women who were socially isolated had reductions in mental health and vitality scores of 6.5 and 7.4 points, respectively and a 60% increased risk of limitation in role-emotional functioning. Social networks are positively associated with mental functioning in women. This association is strongest for women reporting high levels of home and work stressors (Achat et al., 1998). On the other hand, a study by Garcia, Banegas, Perez-Regadera, Cabrera, and Rodriguez-Artalejo, (2005) examined the association between social network and health-related quality work life (HRQL) in older adults and compared this against the association between HRQL and a disabling disease such as osteoarthritis.

In Garcia et al., (2005) study, data were collected through home-based personal interview and physical examination. HRQL was measured with the SF-36 health questionnaire. It was concluded that only a small proportion of Spain's elderly population lack frequent social relationships, yet low frequency of relationships with friends is associated with a decline in quality work life similar to or greater than that associated with osteoarthritis (Garcia et al., 2005).

2.2. Motives of Using SNS

The motivation essential in the use of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) and social interaction via SNSs may be different across cultures. Mediated communication in SNS, reveals that the prevailing values and codes of the culture came from which the users initiate (Boyd, 2008). Social networking sites are intended to encourage social interaction in a virtual environment. Generally, communication is made easy through information placed in the profile which normally consisted of a picture or photograph of the member and personal information telling his or her interests, both of which provide information about one’s identity (Pempek et al., 2009).

Goldner (2007) found that majority of adolescents communicated for about 74 minutes on social networking websites. This indicated the importance of examining the use of these websites within this group. Furthermore, Goldner also found that social support for the same gender friends was statistically significant in the relationship between self-disclosure on social networking website profiles and the quality of personal relationships of older adolescents.

2.2.1. Seek Information

According to McQuail (1987), information includes finding out about relevant events and conditions in immediate surroundings, society and the world. Besides, it also involves looking for advice on practical matters or opinion and decision choice, gratifying curiosity and general interest. Furthermore, learning, self-education and gaining a sense of security through knowledge are also a motivation of using SNS for seeking information (McQuail, 1987).
Studies have shown that people join a virtual community primarily for seeking information, social support, friendship and recreation (Ridings & Gefen, 2004). Similarly, people may use SNSs to obtain information, social/emotional support and a sense of belonging, encouragement and companionship not only from existing social relationships, but also from newly developed relationships based on similar interests, tastes and goals (Wellman & Gulia, 1999).

Results from a study conducted by Urista, Dong and Day (2011) indicated that the openness and transparency of SNS is highly popular among users. Many participants stated that this transparency allows them to gain information about another use through SNS without that user’s knowledge (Urista et al., 2011). Apart from visiting websites for entertainment purposes, people can visit websites primarily for news and information. In prior research (Norris, 1996), watching news and information television programs was viewed as keeping in touch with the world at large. As such, the consumption of news and information appears to be positively related to more civic participation and interpersonal trust (Norris, 1996; Shah, McLeod & Yoon, 2001).

2.2.2. Seek Entertainment

Entertainment is often viewed as the predominant way to relax and to pass one’s spare time (Finn & Gorr, 1988; Rubin, 1984) especially when people have ample time (Knulst, 1999; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Song, LaRose, Eastin & Lin, 2004; Weiser, 2001). According to McQuail (1987), entertainment includes escaping or being sidetracked from problems, relaxing, getting fundamental cultural or artistic enjoyment, filling time, emotional release and sexual arousal.

However, Brandtzæg and Heim (2009) stated that entertainment would also include unspecified fun, time-killing and profile surfing (the interest of looking at other user profiles). On the other hand, Sheldon (2008) explained that entertainment factor had a high mean score which suggested that entertainment is a strong gratification sought in Facebook use. Generally, the findings of this study are also consistent with findings of Flaherty, Pearce, and Rubin (1998) that people use computers to please needs traditionally performed by media (i.e. pass time, habit, information and entertainment). This is also supported by LaRose, Mastro and Eastin (2001) in that the belief of finding enjoyable activities online predicted the amount of utilization (Sheldon, 2008).

2.2.3. Social Interaction

Social interaction and integration include gaining insight into conditions of others or social empathy. Identifying with others and gaining a sense of belonging, finding a basis for conversation are also part of social interaction. Having a replacement for real-life friendship, helping in carrying out social roles and enabling one to connect with family, friends and society are also part of social interaction (McQuail, 1987).

According to Brandtzæg and Heim (2009), one of the main confrontations for user research in this area is the swift change that is taking place in both technological developments and user inclinations. Thus, some of the major motivations or preferences may be stable over time because they connect to some basic needs among people, for example, the need for social interaction (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2009).

However, in another study by Brocke, Richter and Riemer (2009), the main motive of people using SNSs is to stay in contact with friends, followed by the intention to be informed about changes in the life of one’s friends and in gaining knowledge about newly made contacts. When it comes to old friends, users are mostly interested in new pictures and personal information (like birthdays). Nevertheless, they are also interested in changes in others’ relationship status, new friends and job changes (Brocke et al., 2009).

Typically most studies expected that people use networking sites to connect to others with whom they share an off line associations. Contrary to this, Brandtzæg and Heim (2009) found the idea that online social networks mainly are coupled with geographically bounded relations such as family, friends or students. However, the pleasure of meeting new people and making new friends is still the main reason in the use of modern SNSs. Therefore, SNSs seem to be the accessibility of cheap and easy many-to-many communication (Donath & Boyd, 2004).

According to Harter (1999), an important reason for the popularity of online communication technologies among adolescents is that they carry out certain social developmental needs. The need for social interaction is great during adolescence compared to any other point of their life. The potentials that online communication offers for
social interaction perform these needs, particularly IM. In addition, adolescents are very obsessed with how they come across to others, which accompanied by a need to explain who they are and to which peer groups they fit in (Steinberg, 2001; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959).

2.2.4. Personal Identity

Personal identity includes reinforcement for personal values, finding models of behavior, identifying with other values (in the media) and gaining insight into one’s self (McQuail, 1987). It is fascinating to note that self-presentation was not pointed out as a key personal driver for participating in SNSs, despite the fact that researchers name SNSs as a technology for personal branding and self-importance (Strano, 2008). Thus, contact with friends may be linked to a strong social feeling of belonging and a sense of shared or social identity (Brandtzaeg & Heim, 2009).

Some researches showed that adolescents with certain personality characteristics experience different outcomes of online communication (Amichai-Hamburger, Wainapel & Fox, 2002; Gross, Juvonen & Gables, 2002; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2003). However, the study conducted by Schouten (2007), showed that certain personality characteristics are related to adolescents’ perceptions of the importance of computer mediated communication (CMC) attributes and that these perceptions explain individual differences in outcomes (Peter, Valkenberg & Schouten, 2005).

The methodology used in the study by Brandtzaeg and Heim (2009) may therefore have the limitations in taking hold of the personal identity issues. Thus, personal self-representation might be too abstract a perception for most users, who might not be aware of its presence as a motivational encouragement if not directly asked about its role (Brandtzaeg & Heim, 2009).

The self-presentational opportunities provided by social networking sites may fit in the social developmental needs portrayed by adolescents (Schouten, 2007). Furthermore, online communication makes it easier for adolescents to try out different identities, which may be useful to the developmental goal of forming a consistent personal identity (Harter, 1999).

2.2.5. Self Disclosure

The word “self-disclosure” was first coined by Jourard (1959), who did most of the early research on this concept. According to Jourard (1959), the more one self-discloses, the closer the relationships are. Jourard (1964) suggested that self-disclosure made one “transparent” to others and it helped others to see a person as a unique human being. Self-disclosure is generally private information and is not always negative. The position one has on topics such as child abortion, the close relationship with parents or grandparents, the proudest moments, sexual history, problems with drugs or alcohol would be considered self-disclosure by most definitions (Pearson, Nelson, Titsworth & Harter, 2011).

Furthermore, the capability to disclose intimate information about the self is essential to the development of friendships and romantic relationships (Buhrmester & Furman 1987). Gathering feedback from peers and strengthening the bonds of friendship are also part of the developmental challenges of emerging adulthood. In fact, some researchers argued that self-disclosure with peers may promote personal identity and intimacy (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995).

On the other hand, a study by Schouten (2007) showed self-disclosure to be higher in the CMC conditions than in face-to-face condition. Furthermore, it looks like online communication encourages self-disclosure. The study also revealed that more than half of all adolescents were able to disclose themselves online just as well or better than offline. In fact, even non-anonymous online communication technologies such as Instant Messaging (IM) may arouse self-disclosure (Schouten, 2007).
3. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 above shows the conceptual framework of this study. The dependent variable is quality work life. The quality work life includes interpersonal relationships and personal health and well-being. The independent variables are motives of using SNS. Motives of using SNS include seeking information, entertainment, social interaction, personal identity and self-disclosure.

3.1. Relationship between Motivations of Using SNS and Quality work life

According to a 2001 survey by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 48 per cent of online teens believed that the Internet has improved their relationships with friends. In addition, the more frequently they use the Internet, the more strongly they voice this belief. Interestingly, 61 per cent felt that time online does not take away from time spent with friends (Lenhart, Rainie & Lewis, 2001).

Another study by Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) reported that 80 per cent of the respondents used the Internet to maintain existing friendship networks. Participants who communicated more often on the Internet felt closer to existing friends than those who did not. However, this was only true if they were using the Internet to communicate with friends rather than strangers. Participants who felt that online communication was more effective for self-disclosure also reported feeling closer to their offline friends than adolescents who did not view online communication as allowing for more intimate self-disclosure (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008).

Furthermore, participants in a study of Hong Kong Internet users who were recruited from an online newsgroup, were asked about the quality of one offline and one online relationship of similar duration. Duration of relationship was likely essential because the longer the relationship, the chances for information exchange would be more and self-disclosure would be greater. Self-disclosure appears to be vital for relationship quality in computer-mediated communication. In fact, a study with college students found that participants who self-disclosed more in such communication also reported higher relationship quality (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Yum & Hara, 2005).

4. Conclusion and Implications

This paper will be able to help users in Malaysia who use SNS to increase knowledge on social development which may be affected by the increasing use of SNSs. Contribution to the body of knowledge in the field of SNS particularly self-disclosure as this is an additional variable added to the the model developed by (Blumberg & Katz, 1974; McQuail, 1987; Brandtzaeg & Heim, 2009).

In essence, the findings of this study will assist to identify which motivation for using SNS will lead to better quality of work life among the staff in academic institutions. More importantly, it can help to increase knowledge on the social development of staff, which may be affected by their increased use of the internet and SNS. In short, the findings of this study will be significant not only to the employees but also to the designers, developers, researchers, organization and society.
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